



Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

February 22, 2022, to September 15, 2022
and Index

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker



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The 30th Legislature
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Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, February 22, 2022

Day 1

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
 Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
 Government Whip
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
 Premier
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)

Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
 Government House Leader
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
 Leader of the Official Opposition
Orr, Hon. Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
 Deputy Government Whip
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
 Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
 Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
 Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
 Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
 Alberta Hansard

Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Jason Kenney | Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations |
| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy Acting Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Child and Youth Advocate Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Schow
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Goehring
Lovely
Nixon, Jeremy
Pancholi
Sabir
Smith
Turton

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Pancholi
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dang
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
Sweet
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Dang
Deol
Goehring
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Dang
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gotfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

3 p.m.

Tuesday, February 22, 2022

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Clerk: Good afternoon.

[The Clerk read the Royal Proclamation dated February 10, 2022, summoning the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to convene on this date]

The Clerk: Please be seated.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! Mr. Speaker.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Speaker, accompanied by the officers of the Assembly, entered the Chamber and took the chair]

Prayers

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

Ladies and gentlemen, I would now like to invite the Royal Canadian Artillery Band brass quintet to play our national anthem. I ask that in observance of the COVID-19 public health guidelines you please refrain from singing.

Please be seated. Well, good afternoon, hon. members. It's an absolute pleasure to see you back in the Chamber and distinguished guests and others. You know, there's something very special about hearing the Canadian national anthem played by the brass quintet here in the Chamber.

I'd also like to mention, hon. members, that you will have noticed a pin on your desk. The pin commemorates the platinum jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. While I will provide further remarks about this historic milestone later, I wanted to inform you that these pins have been provided to you by the Lieutenant Governor, Her Honour the Honourable Salma Lakhani. She will be joining us shortly, and on behalf of all members I would like to thank Her Honour for presenting each of us this special keepsake for such a memorable event.

I'd also like to now introduce a musical interlude by the RCA Band brass quintet. The piece performed is called *Grand Valley Fanfare* by Eric Ewazen.

Entrance of the Lieutenant Governor

[The Premier, the Clerk, and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Ladies and gentlemen, all rise.

Mr. Speaker, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

The Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

[A fanfare of trumpets sounded]

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Salma Lakhani, AOE, BSc, LLD, and His Honour Dr. Zaheer Lakhani, their party, the Premier, and the Clerk entered the Chamber. Her Honour took her place upon the throne]

Her Honour: Please be seated.

Good afternoon, everyone. It's such a pleasure to be here with all of you today. Before I begin the Speech from the Throne, permit me to make a few brief comments. Treaty relationships are an essential part of the Crown in Canada, and I am proud to honour them in my role as the Queen's representative in Alberta. In the spirit of meaningful reconciliation I would like to acknowledge all our First Peoples, who have called this place home for thousands of years and welcomed us here to make our own lives. May we always dwell together on these lands with peace, respect, and understanding.

I would like to offer my most heartfelt thanks to all members of this Assembly, to all elected officials, front-line workers and essential workers, and to my fellow Albertans across our province for your care and commitment toward one another and our shared communities. I'm truly proud of the strength and perseverance that Albertans have shown over the past two very difficult years, and I am confident that we can overcome whatever challenges the future may bring through hard work, careful thought, and mutual respect. While the pandemic has limited our ability to meet in person, I'm very much looking forward to meeting many more of my fellow Albertans in the months ahead. I am looking to the future with hope and optimism.

With that, I will turn to the business at hand.

Speech from the Throne

Her Honour: Hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly and my fellow Albertans: I open this Third Session of the 30th Legislature as Her Majesty the Queen's representative, doing so as we celebrate her platinum jubilee.

The Crown that I represent has always had a special relationship with the Indigenous peoples of these lands, so as we gather here on traditional Treaty 6 territory, we renew that relationship, rededicating ourselves to the spirit of the treaties and to the essential work of reconciliation.

For 70 years Queen Elizabeth II has lived a life of selfless service. Shortly before her accession to the throne, then Princess Elizabeth famously declared, "My whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service." Her Majesty has kept that commitment with dignity and grace, a stable symbol of enduring traditions and virtues in an ever-changing world.

When she spoke to this Assembly during Alberta's centennial, in 2005, Her Majesty said:

When looking back on the story of Alberta, we see it extend well before 1905 . . . Your First Nations Peoples inhabited the prairies over 10,000 years ago, living in harmony with nature – then, as they do now. By the 1800s, these first citizens, along with the Métis, were joined by explorers, homesteaders, and railway workers from all over the world.

They had a dream to build homes in a land where freedom reigned. They created a spirit of belonging to a bountiful country under the principles of "peace, order, and good government" and the unifying influence of the Crown. It is a fitting homage to these ancestors that your motto is *Fortis et Liber* . . . Strong and Free.

The government will introduce the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act as Bill 1 to create honours for Albertans who have done remarkable things caring for their communities, including the presentation of 7,000 medals to recognize 70 years of service. We have all witnessed many such acts of compassion and kindness through the great adversity of the past two years.

Much has been lost through the COVID era. Our lives have been disrupted in ways large and small. But the people of this province have risen to the challenge time and again, proving what it means to be Alberta strong. As restrictions begin to ease here and around the world and as the signs of economic renewal take hold, we can begin to sense the beginning of an Alberta spring. Winston Churchill once said, "Never, never, never, never – in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in." These words are hard-wired into Alberta's character. Albertans deserve a province that's just as resilient as they are, and we now have reason to believe that we are on the verge of those better days that once felt so far off.

We begin this session with Alberta leading the country in economic growth. For the first time in years more Canadians are now moving to Alberta than leaving. Our taxes are low, our economy is strong, and our quality of life is second to none. This has led to major investments from some of the world's largest companies, that will create good jobs for Alberta families. Our economy is diversifying, with record investment into technology companies, big film and television productions across the province, and record manufacturing sales.

The government will continue this positive momentum through Alberta's recovery plan, designed to create jobs, diversify the economy, and provide opportunities for every Albertan. Part of that plan will be a renewed effort to tell Alberta's story to the world, highlighting the many reasons why there is simply no better place on Earth to pursue a dream, raise a family, and build a life. This campaign will focus on attracting both job-creating investment and hard-working people from across Canada and around the world.

The important work of the new Environment, Social, and Governance Secretariat will be part of this effort, showcasing Alberta's achievements in lowering emissions and improving our reputation as a world leader in responsible energy production.

The government will continue to support the Oil Sands Pathways to Net Zero alliance to achieve their goal of net zero carbon emissions in the industry by 2050 while pressing the federal government to create strong fiscal incentives for investment in carbon capture utilization and storage technology.

Bills will be introduced to advance the vision of making Alberta one of the freest and fastest moving economies in North America. This will include a red tape reduction implementation act to enhance our regulatory environment and advance the goal of reducing Alberta's regulatory burden by one-third to attract more job-creating investment. A bill will be tabled to promote innovation in the financial services sector by allowing companies to test new products and services. As part of financial services modernization, legislation will make it easier to establish a reinsurer in Alberta, helping to reduce costs and spurring growth in our financial services sector.

To further diversify the economy, the government will create a Clean Hydrogen Centre of Excellence to help achieve Alberta's vision of becoming a major global hub in this future multitrillion dollar industry. And it will begin the process of dissolving the Balancing Pool to reduce costs on our economy.

The government's strategy to expand access to broadband Internet will bring high-speed connectivity to rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, ensuring they can participate in the digital economy.

New legislation will solidify Alberta's position as a modern electricity powerhouse and a magnet for investment in emerging technology like data storage and cryptocurrency as well as in traditional sectors like forestry and petrochemicals. The bill also clears the way for more self-generation of electricity, allowing major consumers to sell power to the grid, thus increasing supply and helping to lower prices for Albertans. And to protect consumers from higher utility costs, the government will introduce a natural gas consumer protection program similar to rebate programs used in the past.

The budget for fiscal year 2022-2023 will be tabled later this week, reflecting a dramatic improvement in Alberta's finances resulting from carefully reducing costs and from dynamic revenue growth across all sectors of the economy. It will focus on building health care capacity, getting Albertans back to work with the skills needed to succeed in the economy of the future, expanding the province's proven model of school choice, and making key investments to achieve a more diversified economy.

During the COVID-19 pandemic Alberta's health care system has often been under great stress. Our brilliant front-line health care workers have gone above the call of duty over the past two years. We all owe them a debt of gratitude. Despite having one of the best funded health care systems in the world, COVID has revealed shortcomings that we simply must address. First and foremost, that means building greater capacity while getting more value for our immense health care spending. To do so, the government will accelerate the Alberta surgical initiative, significantly increasing the number of surgeries performed in chartered surgical facilities in order to reduce wait times, that have grown during COVID.

Major capital investments will expand and modernize hospital capacity, including completion of the Calgary cancer care centre, a historic expansion of the Red Deer regional hospital, and expansion of Edmonton's Neuroscience and Mental Health Institute. The government will increase health care capacity by expanding intensive care while training and recruiting more key health care workers. This will make our system more resilient for potential future waves of COVID-19.

The government will improve care for Albertans with a new continuing care act, implementing recommendations of a recent review to make the system more responsive and sustainable.

A bill will propose sanctions for health practitioners who perform the misogynistic practice of female genital mutilation. It's part of the government's broader effort to protect vulnerable women and girls from sexual violence.

The government will implement the recommendations of a report from the Member for Peace River on improving access to palliative care. Patients facing end-of-life decisions must know that there are life-affirming options to physician-assisted suicide. Improvements will focus on beginning palliative care as soon as possible and keeping individuals in their homes and communities with support from those they know and love for as long as possible.

Keeping Albertans safe is as vital as keeping them healthy. Acting on recommendations from the Human Trafficking Task Force, chaired by Paul Brandt, the government will expand its efforts to combat the scourge of this modern form of slavery. This work will complement recommendations from the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Amendments to the Missing Persons Act will equip law enforcement with new tools to find victims of human trafficking and bring their captors to justice.

Many vulnerable women and girls have inadequate support during pregnancy, which can affect their child's health and life chances. To assist low-income mothers and improve health outcomes for their babies, the government will significantly

increase and expand prenatal benefits to mothers receiving AISH and income support.

The government will ensure full implementation of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and Motion 501 to simplify and accelerate the adoption process, connecting children with loving parents eager to be their forever families.

Upcoming changes to the Employment Standards Code will provide extra job protection to workers on two fronts. The three-day bereavement leave currently offered when a family member passes away will be extended to employees who experience a miscarriage or stillbirth, recognizing the pain and grief experienced by parents who lose an unborn child. The 20-day limit for unpaid military reservist leave will be removed, recognizing that reservists often train for longer periods. We must honour and support those who serve our country in uniform.

Amendments to the Police Act will address the recommendations of the Police Act review, strengthening local policing and holding officers accountable to the communities that they serve.

New legislation will broaden the services and supports for victims of crime, and a new regional approach will ensure that victims in all parts of Alberta can access support. Right-to-know legislation will allow more information to be shared with the public about individuals on bail, probation and parole, and criminals pending deportation. These measures will complement the implementation of Clare's law, allowing people to be informed if their partner has a violent criminal record.

The Minister of Education will introduce legislation to strengthen protection for schoolchildren, ensuring that staff who are found to have engaged in misconduct face the full force of the law. The bill will ensure that investigations into teacher misconduct are conducted by an independent body, ending the conflict of interest which allows the union representing teachers to regulate its own members. With this reform Alberta will join the rest of Canada and teachers will join all other professions in having an independent process for disciplinary issues.

Parents know what is best for their kids, and Albertans have long supported pluralism as a key principle in our education system. That is why the government will bring forward a package of regulatory improvements to help create new charter schools and better support existing charters to realize the promise of the Choice in Education Act. A growing number of Alberta families are choosing home-schooling as the best choice for their families, but many home-schooled children with special needs cannot access services that are available in the public school system. Access to specialized services will be expanded to home education families through a new program to ensure all children in Alberta, regardless of educational choice, receive the supports they need to be successful.

Alberta is a pluralistic society, united in its diversity. All Albertans deserve to live free of fear and prejudice, yet too often we see people from minority communities targeted by acts of hatred. To address this, the government will launch a review of recent apparently hate-motivated incidents, working with police to identify common patterns and to make recommendations on how better to prevent such crimes in the future. Last summer some 50 Christian churches in Canada, many of them in Alberta, were destroyed or damaged by arson, vandalism, and other forms of hate-inspired violence. These were attacks on the constitutionally protected freedom of religion and our belief in peaceful pluralism. That is why the government will more than double the size of the security infrastructure program, which was launched last year to upgrade security for community facilities targeted by hate crimes, including mosques, synagogues, gurdwaras, mandirs, and other vulnerable facilities.

Last October 62 per cent of voters endorsed a proposed amendment to the Canadian Constitution regarding equalization. The government will use that mandate to press for negotiations on equalization this year while also seeking the appointment of Alberta's elected nominees for the Senate of Canada.

Consultations will be completed on the prospect of an Alberta provincial police force, and the government will continue to examine a possible Alberta pension plan as potential reforms to strengthen the province.

The effort to build a strong, resilient Alberta will include a program to deepen knowledge of the province's past and appreciation for what makes Alberta unique. As part of this effort the Minister of Culture will table a bill creating a process for the designation of commemorative days and a bill recognizing ammolite as Alberta's official gemstone. The source of the sacred buffalo stone, or iniskim in the Blackfoot language, ammolite is a unique symbol of the province's natural beauty and history.

Strengthening Alberta's sense of identity means honouring those who have gone before us to build this remarkable place that we call home. That is why the government will launch an initiative to memorialize prominent Alberta historical figures by attaching their names to provincial buildings and infrastructure, beginning with the Terrace Building on the Legislature Grounds, which will be named after Chief Poundmaker, the great Cree peacemaker. The building lies near the site of the original Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Edmonton. It is fitting that a great chief who was a bridge-builder between the First Nations and European settlers would now dominate that historic site.

Recognizing our history also means facing the reality of past injustices. The Minister of Indigenous Relations will complete consultations with Indigenous communities and will establish a memorial on the grounds of the Legislature, forever to remember the victims of the Indian residential school system.

Hon. members, the last two years have tested us all, both as individuals and as a society. Together we have overcome those challenges. Thank you to Albertans for your perseverance and your courage in the face of the storm. Prosperity and opportunity are returning to Alberta. There is space again for big dreams, the kind of dreams that thrive where the prairies meet the mountains, where opportunities are limitless and everyone's full potential can be achieved. The clouds are breaking, and the sun is starting to shine through. A stronger and more resilient Alberta awaits for all of us.

God save the Queen, and may God bless Alberta.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please.

The Speaker: We will now be led in the playing of *God Save the Queen*.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Their Honours, their party, and the Premier left the Chamber as a fanfare of trumpets sounded]

[The Mace was uncovered]

[The Premier returned to the Chamber]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee

The Speaker: Hon. members and guests, I would like to make some brief remarks about a very important anniversary that we are

celebrating this year. As Her Honour so eloquently noted, this year is the 70th anniversary of the ascension to the throne of Queen Elizabeth II, and we are therefore celebrating the platinum jubilee of the reign of Her Majesty. Queen Elizabeth II ascended to the throne on February 6, 1952, becoming the Queen of the United Kingdom and the Head of the Commonwealth. Subsequently Canada and other Commonwealth nations passed legislation to recognize the Queen as their sovereign, and hence Queen Elizabeth II is not only the head of state, but she is the Queen of Canada.

The Queen's reign is the longest of any monarch in the history of the United Kingdom. This reign has been characterized by service and dedication to Her Majesty's people at home and abroad and to the fundamental principles that underpin our system of government.

On Coronation Day Her Majesty uttered these important words. "Parliamentary institutions, with their free speech and respect for the rights of minorities, and the inspiration of a broad tolerance in thought and expression – all this we conceive to be a precious part of our way of life and outlook." As we celebrate the platinum jubilee, let us be thankful for Her Majesty's continued service and dedication to the principles that we each hold so dear.

To commemorate and celebrate the jubilee, we have launched and dedicated a jubilee website highlighting information about Her Majesty and the history of jubilee celebrations. The site also provides an opportunity for Albertans to offer messages of congratulations or to share memories, videos, or photos of monarch moments that they, the Albertans, may have experienced over the number of years. I would invite each and every one of you to check out the website.

So in this jubilee year we are thankful for the 70 years of service to Canadians and to Albertans. God save our most gracious and noble Queen.

Hon. members, I have two brief notes before we proceed to the remainder of the Routine. As just a brief reminder, there will not be a reception held in the rotunda at the conclusion of today's events, as was noted in your program.

Tablings

The Speaker: I also have the honour of tabling a copy of the speech given so graciously by Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has the call.

Bill 1

Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 1, Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a first time]

Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the speech of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to this Assembly be taken into consideration on Wednesday, February 23, 2022.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader has the call.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to Her Honour congratulations on a well-delivered throne speech. A tremendous amount for members to digest.

As such, I move that we adjourn the Legislative Assembly of Alberta until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:54 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, February 23, 2022

Day 2

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
 Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
 Government Whip
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
 Premier
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)

Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
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Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
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Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60 New Democrat: 23 Independent: 3 Vacant: 1

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| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
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| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
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| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
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| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy Acting Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
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| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

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| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

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Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Child and Youth Advocate Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Schow
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Goehring
Lovely
Nixon, Jeremy
Pancholi
Sabir
Smith
Turton

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Pancholi
Reid
Sabir
Smith

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Allard
Carson
Dang
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

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Dang
Deol
Goehring
Long
Neudorf
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Williams

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Amery
Dang
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.

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Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Stephan
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Turton
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Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 23, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, please remain standing as it is our custom that we pay tribute to members who have passed away since we last met.

Today I would like to welcome members of the Campbell family, who are present in the Speaker's gallery.

Murray John "Jack" Campbell
May 14, 1931, to December 21, 2021

The Speaker: Murray John "Jack" Campbell served three terms as the Progressive Conservative Member for Rocky Mountain House from 1979 to 1989. Born in Drumheller, Mr. Campbell graduated from SAIT to work as an electrical lineman and a construction foreman. His career then turned to farming and real estate. Mr. Campbell was active in his local community, serving on a variety of agriculture and recreational boards and associations. His time in the Legislature: Mr. Campbell admitted to enjoying, quote, the people, the travel, the situations, the questions, and the answers. He described his approach as one of perseverance and understanding. Jack Campbell passed away on December 21, 2021, at the age of 90.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask that you remember Mr. Campbell as each of you may have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let the light perpetual shine upon him.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, with our admiration and respect there is a special gratitude that goes to members of the families who shared the burdens of public office and public service. Today I would like to welcome some of those family members. Members of the Campbell family who are present in the Speaker's gallery, please rise as I call your name and remain standing until you have all been introduced: son of Jack Campbell, Jeff Campbell, and his wife, Lee-Ann Simmonds; step-daughter Susan Manning and her husband, John Manning; granddaughters Abby and Kate Manning.

Hon. members, also joining us in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon is a guest of the Minister of Seniors and Housing, a familiar face around the Legislative Assembly, the minister of, I think, just about everything and the former Member for Calgary-Nose Creek, Mr. Gary Mar.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements Chamber Practices during the Spring 2022 Sitting

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would like to just provide a brief statement about the daily Routine prior to us proceeding to the remainder of the Routine. I would like to inform you that my office

received a House leaders' agreement on February 18, 2022, with respect to the Oral Question Period and Members' Statements rotations. The agreement modifies the rotation to address the in-caucus composition in the Assembly since the fall sitting. The Member for Edmonton-South, who now sits as an independent, is entitled to one question per week starting with question 9 on day 4 of Oral Question Period rotation, which will be Tuesday, March 8, 2022. In addition, the member is allocated one member's statement in the first week of the three-week rotation starting February 24, Thursday. The Members' Statements rotation is outlined in the projected sitting days calendar, which was distributed to all members last week as part of my procedural memo, which I'm sure you have all read thoroughly. I will table a copy of the House leaders' agreement at the appropriate time in the daily Routine.

I would like to also inform members that we will resume the regular distribution of documents in the Chamber this session. Pages will distribute copies of bills, motions, and amendments as they are introduced. They will also resume the delivery of notes between members and collecting from members documents that have been tabled and petitions that are presented. As members can see, the pages have also resumed regular water service at each desk and will provide coffee and juice upon request following the Orders of the Day being called.

Members' Statements

Speech from the Throne

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, in yesterday's throne speech the Lieutenant Governor laid out a strong vision for our Legislature to inspire hope and optimism across our province. After two difficult years Albertans are ready to move forward beyond the pandemic and into the next great chapter of our story.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is starting to feel like Alberta again. For the first time in a long time more people are moving to our province than leaving it. With lower taxes and massive red tape reduction Alberta is once again a global destination for workers, investors, entrepreneurs, innovators, and dreamers. We just had our best year of oil production and our highest agricultural receipts on record. Our economy isn't just growing; it's diversifying. Through massive investments in wind, solar, film, technology, hydrogen, and lithium Alberta's recovery plan is creating high-paying jobs in every corner of our province, including rural, remote, and Indigenous communities.

This won't just be a session focused on the economy, however. This session will also focus on protecting the humanity of our people, particularly our most vulnerable, by expanding our health care, continuing care, and palliative care capacity, increasing prenatal benefits, providing supports for bereaved parents, and simplifying the adoption process. Our Minister of Education will also move forward with legislation to end once and for all the conflict of interests that allowed the teachers' union to investigate and protect its own members in cases of gross misconduct involving our kids.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans sent this government to Edmonton to get the job done, and that's exactly what we're doing. It's been a tough two years, but we have so much to look forward to. Our economy is rebounding, our finances are in good shape, and I'm confident that Alberta's best days are certainly yet to come.

Postsecondary Education

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, in the last three years postsecondaries have seen cut after cut after cut. Adjusted for inflation and

population growth, the total cuts so far have been more than \$690 million, and that's before tomorrow's budget. This has led to staff cuts, program closures, steep increases to tuition, and fee hikes for students. These cuts are felt deeply by students and right across our postsecondary sector. We must be investing in our colleges, universities, and polytechnics. An investment in advanced education is an investment in our communities, in our future, our young people and future leaders of our province.

That is why our caucus has worked hard together with students, faculty, schools, industry leaders, and subject matter experts to develop a series of proposals to strengthen advanced education. Our suggestions centre around a well-funded postsecondary system that can provide all students, staff, and faculty with high-quality education and learning environments. We would address the extraordinary tuition increases that are causing students to pile up debt. We will comprehensively review the student aid system to ensure that every Albertan has the opportunity to participate in postsecondary. We will support students in finding valuable work experience, apprenticeships, and access to digital and other work-ready skills in addition to core programming. In this environment Alberta will be best equipped to undertake world-leading research, support growth in emerging industries, and support all Albertans in developing skills they need in the labour market of now and the future.

Postsecondaries are a key factor in keeping young people here in the province. Last year Statistics Canada reported that for the first quarter since 1988 we saw a net out-migration of 18- to 24-year-olds from Alberta. We must address this challenge. That's why we're proposing the future leaders council to work collaboratively to keep young students learning and staying here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40 COVID-19 Related Restrictions Removal and Postpandemic Reflections

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, as we begin the spring session of 2022, I want to take this opportunity in my first member's statement of this session to address the removal of provincial restrictions that take place just days from today. The past two years have been one of the greatest challenges for many within our province, and most importantly the impact on our youth is a toll that we have yet to fully understand. I hear stories from new moms and dads of deep concern that their two-year-old children cry when they see individuals removing their masks. Examples like this sit heavy on my heart.

The need for restrictions to end and for a return to normal is abundantly clear. Unfortunately, for many this has not come soon enough. But is the end of restrictions enough, Mr. Speaker? Is merely returning to normal enough for Albertans? There is now an apparent and growing concern that the normalization of the use of emergency powers is something that elected officials must address. As well, as Alberta MLAs we must address the mistakes and shortcomings of the past two years. Moving forward, the most important conversation is: how do we prevent a similar situation in the future? I am confident in the move to remove all provincial COVID guidelines and to allow our society to begin to heal from the impacts of COVID.

I also stress the need for everyone to put behind us the differences that COVID has created. We must remember that we are a community, a community that needs each other. More importantly, I feel that each and every one of us in this Assembly and all politicians across Canada need to address the changes that will provide confidence to all Canadians on how we move together forward. We must acknowledge the division this has created among

Albertans. We must listen to those concerns and make changes to build a better path for the next generation, because the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Government Record

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've spent a lot of time recently knocking on doors in Mill Woods and asking my neighbours about issues that matter to them and their families. I've heard from families affected by the health care crisis this government has mismanaged and worsened, from parents with great concerns about the UCP's unsupported and untrusted new school curriculum, and I certainly heard concerns about exploding utility and insurance costs at almost every door. As I walked around and talked to more and more people in Mill Woods, a theme emerged. We are all suffering from what I call conservative chaos.

Many of my constituents expressed concerns about the recent breakdown in law and order and this government's tolerance for and even encouragement of those who chose to unlawfully set up blockades, blockades that reduced quality of life, freedom of mobility, and had real economic cost for fellow Albertans and Canadians. While I understand and respect the right to protest, it was seeing members of this own government caucus cheerleading and even participating in these blockades that reinforced for me that what we are seeing is conservative chaos. While the Legislature was out of session, Albertans were outraged to learn that the Alberta Justice minister called a chief of police after receiving a ticket, and that member still sits on the government front bench today. It's no wonder Albertans are rapidly losing faith in this UCP government's ability to keep the peace and to ensure law and order are maintained.

So on behalf of the people of Edmonton-Mill Woods I'm calling on this Premier to end conservative chaos. Alberta is looking for real leadership, something it hasn't had since the last election and something it needs now more than ever. It's time to reinvest in Alberta's public health care, reinvest in Alberta's public education, scrap the unsupported and untrusted UCP curriculum. It's time to get Albertans' skyrocketing bills under control, and it's time to end this conservative chaos.

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

Federal Single-use Plastics Regulations

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With all that's been going on, it's easy for things to get lost in the shuffle. For example, did you know that consultations for Trudeau's single-use plastic ban end on March 5? To recap, this plan aims to ban the manufacturing, import, sales of everything from checkout bags to stir sticks. Many disability advocates note that necessary items like plastic straws are already in scarce supply. Interestingly enough, research from the Columbia University Climate School found that plastic bags actually use fewer resources than their other options. In fact, for a plastic bag's pollution to be zeroed out, a reusable bag would have to be used 7,000 times and a paper bag 40 times. When does that happen, Mr. Speaker? All in all, this is just another left-wing fad.

Without being forced by government, businesses already use less carbon-intensive options like biodegradable cutlery, take-out containers, and even straws. Local greenhouses have switched to cardboard packaging alternatives, and local recycling agencies have stepped up in huge ways.

Trudeau's plastic ban is yet another direct attack on Alberta's energy industry, a leader in responsible petrochemical production,

a leader in plastic production. Alberta's government has taken steps to support the work that Albertans have already started, and Environment and Parks continues to work on extended producer responsibility plans to reduce plastic waste at the source, a very worthwhile objective. In addition, throughout the pandemic we relied on single-use plastics heavily, and they will continue to play a role in our recovery. From face shields to rapid tests to masks and other PPE, petrochemicals protected our communities and our most vulnerable. Right now, however, medical grade plastics are already in short supply.

The federal government is making headlines for all the wrong reasons, Mr. Speaker, and I don't need to tell you that. It's hard not to see that they have more pressing issues than a desire for plastic straws at a restaurant. We all agree that we need to take care of our environment. Pollution is a very real problem that needs serious solutions, not needless virtue signalling.

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

Health Care Workers

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start today by thanking the hard-working, selfless health care workers in our province for their tireless work over the last two years protecting the health and saving the lives of Albertans. They fought on the front lines of a deadly pandemic that put pressure like we've never seen on our health care system and on them. They've had to put up with threats of violence, protests at their place of work, attacks on social media, and actual physical assaults simply for doing their jobs.

Sadly, they've also had to endure this while battling with a government that constantly undermined them, belittled them, mused about drastic cuts to their pay, accused them of holding knives to the throats of Albertans and more, a government whose incompetent management and lack of leadership nearly collapsed the health care system, caused tens of thousands of urgent surgeries to be cancelled, and caused wait times for ambulances to reach unacceptable levels.

No government in our history has done as much damage to our public health care system as the UCP, and now they're trying to blame the very workers who are left to clean up their mess. The Premier in recent days has ranted about union-run hospitals and talked about how more privatization would help address the huge backlog his government created. Mr. Speaker, unions don't run hospitals; they protect and support the tens of thousands of Alberta health care workers who do. Those Albertans are heroes, not the villains that this Premier and his government are trying to paint them as.

Only days ago our leader stood with two nurses who have seen the impact that this pandemic and the UCP government have had. They talked about the burnout, the stress, the long hours, the lack of time off or rest. They talked about how health care workers have given their all to protect Albertans. That's why it's deeply insulting to all Albertans to watch a Premier who attacks our public health care system and the incredible, hard-working people who kept it afloat after his government's incompetence nearly collapsed it.

To the Premier. During this pandemic health care workers saved countless lives, protected and provided support to countless more, and are owed our eternal gratitude. They deserve better than his insults and attacks. They deserve an apology.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Viking Cup

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the winter break many hockey games were played all around Alberta and the world, including just last week with the Canadian women's hockey team winning the gold medal at the Olympics. In the Camrose constituency we love our sports, especially hockey. In the past we have played host to an international hockey tournament called the Viking Cup.

A constituent in Camrose and former MLA, LeRoy Johnson, has written a book titled *The Viking Cup*. In the early days Camrose Lutheran College was challenged to compete in a hockey tournament with international teams. In 1980 it was their turn to host. This feat was accomplished with the international exchange program. During its 26-year lifetime the NHL successfully drafted 400 players from this talent pool. With his book Mr. Johnson has created a historical account of events with a vast collection of old photos and good memories. To borrow a quote from John Short, who prepared the forward for the book:

Here, you will read and sense the comfort of small, rural Camrose, Alberta, blended with the size and requirements of numerous nations, including Russia at a time when the world's political Cold War was an everyday reality. International politics, pure athletic competition, and large dollops of goodwill came together and created an event worth holding and a story worth telling.

I'm proud of the work LeRoy has done to preserve such a valuable piece of Camrose history. Thank you for all that you have done and continue to do for our community.

Speaking of communities, we have seen so much happen over the past few months. With the REP program gone and restrictions lifting, I look forward to getting back to normal. Alberta is well on the way to recovery, thanks to the Alberta recovery plan. As Alberta's swagger returns, everyday Albertans are top of mind, with record investments last year and a focus on getting Albertans back to work. I look forward to seeing what this year will bring to Alberta, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Private Health Care Services

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, public health care is our greatest gift to one another as Canadians, a fundamental right that we cherish, yet for our Premier it's something that he wants to carve up and hollow out. We've been through two years of stress, hardship, and heartbreak in our hospitals, Albertans who lost loved ones, Albertans still waiting in pain. Doctors, nurses, and front-line staff are burnt out. Retention is a challenge, never mind recruitment. To the Premier: who exactly does he believe is going to get to staff his private, for-profit hospitals?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, Alberta is spending more on health care than ever in our history. Alberta is the second-biggest spender on health care per capita in Canada. Alberta has more doctors and nurses working in our hospitals and system today than at any point in our history, yet we have faced very serious capacity constraints through COVID that we must forthrightly address. That's why in last year's budget this government added nearly a billion dollars to speed up surgeries through the Alberta surgical initiative. Tomorrow the Minister of Finance will make an announcement about another historic investment, and that started

today with the largest ever hospital renovation program, \$1.8 billion, in Red Deer.

Ms Notley: When it comes to Red Deer, no one will believe it until long after they've seen it with these guys.

Mr. Speaker, we do know that we need more capacity, but padding the bottom line of private operators is not the solution. It only leads to less integrated care, more patchwork in delivery, and higher costs as the surgical system becomes beholden to profit motives. A B.C. study found that knee surgery in a for-profit clinic cost three grand; in a public hospital, \$900. Why doesn't the Premier stop the misinformation, stop attacking health care workers, and start investing in our public, front-line health care supports?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, on the Red Deer hospital, in 2017 she got a report from AHS saying that there were serious shortages. She got a report saying that people were dying because of the lack of a cath lab in Red Deer, and you know what she did as Premier? Absolutely nothing. Not one cent for additional health care capacity in central Alberta. Today we made the largest ever taxpayer capital investment in the history of central Alberta, the largest ever single investment in a hospital renewal program, \$1.8 billion to \$190 million over the next three years to increase hospital capacity there by 54 per cent. But why was the NDP missing in action?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, we committed to that hospital at the beginning of 2019, and then the Premier did a few months later. Then the year after there was no money, and the year after there was also no money, just press releases. Everyone in Red Deer understands that the only thing they know how to do for that hospital is print press releases, and they have no trust that they can count on the Premier to deliver better health care in their city.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, they had the wheel for four years and not one cent invested in that hospital. Thanks to the hard-working central Alberta Conservative MLAs fighting for this project and thanks to this government getting our finances back in order by growing the economy, we can afford investments like this. When it comes to contracting out surgeries, I want to remind her that the NDP approved 42 private, chartered surgical facilities, was adding 40,000 private surgeries to Alberta every year, 15 per cent of the total. Apparently, it's fine when the NDP does it, but it's privatization when we do.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition. Second set of questions.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, tomorrow is budget day, but we know that the most important budget is the family budget. Under this Premier families have been hit with too many fee and tax hikes to count. With inflation at an all-time high this Premier's sneaky tax grab and his freeze on low-income benefits make things worse. Alberta families will lose an average of \$400 every year while seniors lose \$250, and an Albertan on AISH, the most vulnerable among us, loses \$1,000. To the Premier: will he reverse these bad decisions in the budget, or will he keep picking Albertans' pockets?

Mr. Kenney: What a question from the Premier who brought in the single largest tax hike in Alberta history, Mr. Speaker, the NDP carbon tax, that we repealed as Bill 1. Now, what crocodile tears to hear her raise concerns about the high cost of energy and of gas when she thinks that's a feature and not a bug. That's why the NDP

loves Justin Trudeau's carbon tax backstop. Why? It forces up the cost of heating your home and filling up your gas tank. The NDP wants to punish people for doing things like that, but we are opposed to those carbon taxes.

The Speaker: I just might remind both members to direct their comments through the chair. The member or the Premier using directly "he" or "she" creates the sense that it is a personal attack that either of you may be making on each other, and I know that wouldn't be the case.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, most of what the Premier just said is not true, but if he wants to play the blame game, fine. Who hiked tuition on students? He did. School fees on parents? That's him, too. Property tax hikes? That's because of his cuts to municipalities. Car insurance? He removed the cap on premiums. Power prices? Three times higher than the cap our government had in place. The Premier can't deny it. His reckless decisions have led to massive costs for Albertans. Will the Premier act now and reverse any of these bad UCP decisions that have hammered household budgets?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we did reverse the NDP cash grab, their carbon tax. We did fight their friend Justin Trudeau's carbon tax all the way to the Supreme Court with six other provinces. But here's the problem: the biggest government cost driver on the cost of living now is the carbon tax. It went up by another 10 bucks on January 1, and they want to do it again and again and again. They are aligned with Justin Trudeau wanting to move it from \$50 a tonne to \$170 a tonne. We will fight that every step of the way to try to reduce the cost of living on Albertans.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about utility bills. Last week, when the associate minister was asked about an Albertan's \$1,200 bill, his answer was to blame that poor woman for not asking for price protection. Seriously? Albertans should not be choosing between the power bills and the grocery bills. We want to talk about what's rising? How about a 300 per cent increase in electricity bills because they removed the price cap that was protecting Alberta families. When are you going to do something for those families?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons for higher electricity prices was the NDP's fiasco on the Balancing Pool, where because of their ideological zeal to shut down inexpensive and reliable forms of power production – guess what? – they passed on a \$1.3 billion bill to Alberta electricity ratepayers. I've got news for you. In the days to come we'll be keeping our platform commitment to release an independent audit into the NDP electricity Balancing Pool fiasco. It's going to throw a spotlight on how they drove up electricity prices.

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

Coutts Border Crossing Blockade

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, our largest border crossing was blockaded for 18 days. Not only did it blockade emergency vehicles and damage our economy to the tune of nearly a billion dollars; it also threatened public safety in Coutts as it contained an extremist cell stockpiling weapons. Simple question. Does the Premier believe it was okay for members of his caucus to support, participate in, attend, and negotiate with those blockading Alberta's economy and plotting violence? If not, will he remove those MLAs from his caucus today?

Mr. Kenney: Of course, the question is false, Mr. Speaker. Nobody was negotiating with these individuals. I was absolutely clear that the law should have been enforced, and ultimately it was by the RCMP.

Mr. Speaker, a member of the Legislature visiting constituents to hear their concerns is actually their job. I know the NDP doesn't believe that, and like Justin Trudeau they regard everybody – everybody – involved in all of these protests as just a bunch of Nazis and deplorables. It's that kind of language that has inflamed a combustible situation and is completely irresponsible. [interjections]

2:00

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, on January 29 the Member for Taber-Warner attended the blockade at Coutts. On February 1 the Premier said that he was, quote, concerned but that the member had apologized and wouldn't go back. For the next week the blockade stole \$40 million a day from Alberta's economy, but on February 8 – guess what? – that same MLA went back and called them inspiring on the same day the Attorney General called them illegal. To the Premier: why is this MLA still in his caucus?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the real question is: why didn't the NDP respect the operational independence of the RCMP? Why day after day did they shout, demanding immediate enforcement action, when the RCMP was in possession of intelligence of an extremely dangerous and combustible situation? All I can say is thank goodness the NDP wasn't in office during that situation because, like their friend Justin Trudeau, they would have made a bad situation much worse.

Ms Notley: Well, speaking to members of the police, the MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland openly posted a request to law enforcement to consider disobeying orders, orders that actually flow from laws made by democratically elected members of this House. Right as that MLA was encouraging sedition, RCMP seized body armour, 13 rifles, and high-capacity ammunition stockpiled in a plot to murder officers. Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: how on earth is the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland still in this caucus? What in heaven's name is he thinking?

Mr. Kenney: More deceit and division from the NDP. He did no such thing, Mr. Speaker. He called on law enforcement officers to respect their oaths, and you know what their oath is? To uphold and defend the law, and that's exactly what RCMP members did with great care and precision to deal with the situation at Coutts. Meanwhile the NDP is onside with Justin Trudeau's invocation of the successor law to the War Measures Act. The NDP used to stand up for civil liberties. Now they just lie down for Justin Trudeau like a rug.

Premier's Leadership

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we don't have to wonder why the Premier is defending these MLAs who were supporting illegal occupiers and blockaders or why he's making public health decisions based on his politics. It's because the Premier is weak and desperate and facing a leadership review he knows he may well lose. He's so scared that rather than working to address the many, many issues facing this province, he's dispatched his top and most senior staff member to campaign for his job. To the Premier: why do the lives and livelihoods of Albertans always come second to your issues?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I never saw the NDP so concerned about what Conservative political staff are doing. I can tell her this. This government tomorrow will present a moment of historic importance in this province, demonstrating the progress of our platform commitments, the Alberta recovery plan, and an amazing Alberta turnaround story. I know the NDP leader. She's angry. She's angry that we're lifting restrictions. She's angry that six-year-olds aren't being forced to wear masks. She's angry that Alberta's government is standing up against the invocation of virtual martial law. Albertans support the forward focus of this government.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the people who are angry are the 20,000 Albertans waiting for surgery, the 30,000 people in Lethbridge with no family doctor, the 32,000 Albertans who've been looking for work for over a year, the hundreds of thousands of families who can't pay their car insurance or their power bill. Why doesn't the Premier understand that those issues matter more than his leadership campaign, and why did he send his most senior official in his office to focus on his future rather than what Albertans are looking for?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what Albertans are looking for is economic growth, and what they're getting is a government that has led the country in economic growth last year and is projected to do so again this year. A hundred and thirty thousand net new jobs created last year, record investments across our economy, unprecedented diversification, the finances coming back in order: none of this would have happened if the NDP had continued their reckless spending, their job-killing taxes, their burdensome red tape, and their antibusiness attitude. Alberta is back on track.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's recap. The Premier who signed a public health guarantee is expanding private health care, the Premier facing a massive surplus won't stop raising costs on families, the Premier who preaches law and order allows his own MLAs to blockade the economy, and the Premier with a million problems is only focused on one, saving his own job. So here's a question to the whole front bench: will anybody who thinks that the Premier's office's biggest priority should be saving the job of the Premier stand up and say so?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that NDP leader: she's angry. She's angry still that Albertans fired her after the last election. She's angry that Albertans didn't agree with her carbon tax cash grab. She's angry that this government is not imposing a hard and endless lockdown on this province. She and her friends in the Federation of Labour and the Teachers' Association are angry that five-year-olds are not being forced to wear masks indefinitely. Albertans are happy to see these restrictions lifted, to see this economy recovering, to see a government that's keeping its word.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is next.

Road Construction and Maintenance in Fort McMurray

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all acknowledge that the oil sands are a key driver of Alberta's and Canada's economy, creating jobs and tax revenue, supporting social programs and infrastructure projects across the province and the nation. Unfortunately, we don't necessarily feel we get our fair share of government reinvestment in Fort McMurray. I still drive 190 kilometres on a single-lane highway to go home. To the Minister of Transportation: in this upcoming budget how much will you be investing in ensuring that

our road infrastructure is taken care of considering the economic contributions from this region? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member for this question. Public safety is a top priority for Alberta's government and is considered in every single decision we make. Priority is given to highways with higher volumes, including our economic corridors, and that includes Alberta's oil sands. Budget 2022 will be tabled tomorrow, but I can tell you that Alberta's government will continue to invest in road safety improvements across the province.

Mr. Yao: It is given that, Mr. Speaker, the freeze-thaw cycle affects our roads every year, creating kilometres of pothole-ridden highways. Compounding the situation is the fact that so much heavy machinery traverses these highways, further damaging the roads. I drive these highways, and my vehicle is getting absolutely destroyed by the sheer size of these potholes and ruts as I drive back and forth between Edmonton and Fort McMurray. Can this government give me assurances that these highways will be maintained? Do they hold these contractors accountable and ensure that they do a good job?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Transportation has and will continue to invest in highway maintenance. Highway conditions are closely monitored to ensure a safe and reliable transportation network. That includes having crews filling potholes, crack sealing, and line painting. Thank you to highway maintenance contractors for the work they do to keep Albertans moving safely on our roads.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, it is given that road infrastructure is vital to the prosperity of a region, allowing access to resources as well as services, and as an escape route when the occasional wildfire passes through an isolated community. During the wildfires of 2016 lives were at risk because we only had one escape route out of the city, highway 63. In 2017 in Portugal 62 people died under very similar circumstances on the highways. Can the minister tell me if they will be investing in or at least investigating investments in road infrastructure for Fort McMurray?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, as someone who worked in the oil and gas industry for over 20 years, I'm very cognizant of and sensitive to the importance of the oil sands to our province, and my government colleagues would agree. Alberta Transportation is investing in critical infrastructure that northeastern Albertans can rely on. My department is in the designing phase of a twinning project on highway 63 north of Fort McMurray. We hope to have more to announce this summer. We have also undertaken extensive paving projects in the region over the last few years worth \$27 million.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has a question.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week Albertans can expect to hear the Finance minister crow about his fiscal genius when the budget is tabled. But the truth hurts, and the fact is that Albertans know that with oil prices where they are, a traffic pylon could balance this budget. Rather than unseemly gloating and swaggering, will the Finance minister explain whether he will use this opportunity to invest in Alberta families, or will he continue to add to the cost of living as he has done since taking office?

Specifically, will he take action now on out-of-control electricity bills? Now.

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

2:10

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the hon. member; the Finance minister is brilliant. As the member knows, the budget will be presented tomorrow by the Finance minister, and it will be a good budget for Albertans. My prediction is that the only Albertans that will be really unhappy are the ones across the aisle, because they don't put Alberta first. On this side of the aisle we do.

Ms Phillips: Given that under this government Albertans have dealt with a sneaky income tax hike, higher property taxes, higher school fees, higher insurance costs, higher electricity bills – the list goes on – and given that for the last two years it's been the UCP MO to reward their friends and insiders with billions while Alberta families watch their cost of living rise, will the Finance minister admit that the billions he's given away to the already wealthy have done nothing to help ordinary people and that that is why his Premier remains so deeply unpopular and no one trusts this government?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, people distrusted the NDP government so much that they fired them after one term. You know what? When the hon. member talks about ordinary Albertans, you know what would help them pay their bills? A job. Their business being successful. This government has put policies in place that have brought in record investment, high numbers of job growth. Those are the things that allow Albertans to pay their bills. It happens under this government. It never would have happened under the NDP. They made it worse and worse and worse, piling on costs and showing disrespect for job creators. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that a good way to test the minister's theory would be to call the election now and given that balancing this budget does not have a single thing to do with any decision made by this Finance minister, will the Finance minister rise where the Speech from the Throne has fallen and commit to action on cost of living, solving real problems like electricity and car insurance, and commit that this one-time windfall will actually be invested in our people and province for the long term? Or is it just short-term politics to get the Premier through his April leadership review? Albertans want a real plan.

Mr. McIver: The hon. member thinks that the Finance minister isn't concerned with balancing. Apparently, she agrees with Justin Trudeau that the budget will balance itself. Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. On this side of the House we understand that. Our Finance minister has worked very hard and diligently to put a responsible plan in place, supporting Alberta's families, growth, jobs, investment, all of the things Albertans want, all of the things we're concerned about on this side of the House, and the things that the folks on the other side never cared about, which is why they got fired after one term. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Red Deer Regional Hospital Expansion

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Almost exactly two years ago the Premier stood in the Red Deer regional hospital and

promised \$100 million to redevelop it, but there was only \$5 million for that hospital in the entire 2020 four-year capital plan. The promised \$100 million didn't show up in the 2021 capital plan either. The UCP was back in Red Deer today, but Albertans know they can't be trusted. The Premier has never delivered on a tiny fraction of any of his promises in 2020. Why on earth would a single Albertan or the residents of Red Deer believe him today?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. I was very pleased to be part of the announcement today, a historic announcement in Red Deer, \$1.8 billion for a new hospital, and I thanked the folks at AHS, our front-line health care workers, who have been working incredibly hard in doing the detailed budget, the plan for actually increasing capacity. We know that we need to increase capacity. We made a commitment in this government to increase capacity. We made that commitment today in Red Deer, and we're going to make that commitment to Albertans and do it across the entire province.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that it's lovely that this minister also got a chance to reannounce the same thing that the government didn't follow through on but given that when it comes to the Red Deer hospital, the Premier said in 2020 that the bottom line is that construction work will begin on the expansion refurbishment of the Red Deer hospital next year, in 2021, and given that that construction work did not start in 2021 – as recently as December Alberta Health had no idea when it might – and given that the UCP broke their promise to the people of central Alberta, why should anyone believe this new pack of promises that they're claiming to make today?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased that as part of this \$1.8 billion historic announcement – and this is the largest amount announcement, the largest infrastructure project in the central zone in the history of health care and actually in the history of all infrastructure projects of the government in the central zone in the history of the province – we announced that this project will provide up to 570 beds. That's an increase of 200 beds; 54 per cent. This announcement – and we confirmed today about three more operating rooms and a cath lab. We will provide better services for Albertans in health care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government can wrap itself in its promises but it's clear to Albertans that these emperors have no clothes, given that the Red Deer hospital is only a few minutes' walk from the hotel ballroom where UCP members will gather in six weeks to decide whether or not to remove their leader and given that the Premier is so desperate for votes that he's sent his own chief of staff away on unpaid leave to find them, isn't it true that this Premier is simply repeating the same promise that he broke and failed to follow through on two years ago in a desperate bid to save his political career?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This historic announcement that we made today, \$1.8 billion for the Red Deer regional hospital, a commitment that we made – as indicated by the Premier, the other side didn't make such a commitment, but we made this commitment. Not only is it \$300 million over the next three years, but the commitment on the books, \$1.8 billion to deliver on the

infrastructure project, is about our commitment to deliver increased capacity in health care for our entire province. This is the start, and you'll hear more about this tomorrow in our budget. We are going to deliver on surgeries. We're going to deliver on better access for Albertans because that's what Albertans deserve, and that's what they're going to get.

Hydrogen Industry

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is coming back stronger than ever. Throughout 2021 our province saw billions of dollars in investments. Our government is focused on diversifying our economy to support up-and-coming industries like hydrogen and carbon capture while reducing carbon emissions. Many of these investments were made in the capital region and in Alberta's Industrial Heartland. To the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity: what do these kinds of investments mean for Albertans in the capital region in this new year?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is absolutely correct. We have seen an incredible amount of interest in the Industrial Heartland. We have seen Air Products. We've seen ATCO and Suncor. We've seen the largest private-sector investment in 15 years: Dow Chemical. These are mortgage-paying jobs for Albertans. And do you know what the NDP had to say about these investments? Absolutely nothing. The silence was deafening.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that we see increasing investments in various industries – some of these industries are brand new to Alberta – and given that hydrogen has played a significant part in our economic diversification and will place Alberta as a leader in emissions reduction, can the minister elaborate on how investment in hydrogen will benefit Albertans in the short and the long term?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. While the opposition has proven that they are agnostic to investment, I am proud to say that we are not doing that on this side. We have embraced the hydrogen industry because we know it's going to be a 2 and a half trillion to 11 trillion dollar industry by 2050. It's going to create tens of thousands of jobs for Albertans. It's going to diversify our economy. It's going to create royalties for the government. I look forward to revealing more information as we continue to roll out the hydrogen road map in the very near future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Alberta's hydrogen road map came out in November 2021, outlining a plan to increase clean hydrogen production, increase exports, and expand the use across the province and given that Air Products will build the world's largest net zero hydrogen energy facility in the capital region, to the minister: what is the total capital expenditure that this project brings, and how many jobs will be created right here in the capital region?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. I am thrilled to tell members of this House that the expected capital investment for Air Products is \$1.3 billion. We anticipate 2,500 skilled trades during peak construction. This project is so exciting. They're actually going to be using autothermal reforming. It will capture 95 per cent of the carbon emissions from this facility. It's a made-in-Alberta technological advancement that will help create generational wealth for Albertans.

2:20 Calgary Downtown Revitalization

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, the government claims that yesterday's throne speech offered a vision for Alberta as it comes out of the pandemic and charts a course for the future. Well, you wouldn't know it if you're a Calgarian. Calgary was mentioned one time in the speech – once – and that was the Calgary cancer centre, which, to be clear, the NDP government funded after a decade of Conservative neglect. Will the Minister of Finance explain why he has no plan for Calgary's future? Why hasn't he created any jobs for the people of my city, and why has he failed to provide any plan to revitalize the downtown?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, the hon. member may be spending too much time in Edmonton, because if he spent any time in Calgary, he would notice that beside the cancer centre there's a little thing called the ring road under construction. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of good-paying jobs. There's the green line LRT, that the government's committed to. Listen, it's all good that he wants to support Calgary, but he may need to pay attention to what's happening there. My advice: go home. Have a visit. Look around. You'll see lots of good stuff being done there.

Member Ceci: Given that it was the Minister of Finance who claimed that it wasn't his job to revitalize Calgary's downtown and given that this government has stalled on major infrastructure projects like the Calgary green line, which, by the way, would transport Calgarians downtown, and given that the Premier is a representative of Calgary himself and has sat by and done nothing as the unemployment in the city topped all major cities in Canada and we saw record vacancy rates in downtown Calgary, my question is simple: will somebody on that side of the House apologize to the people of Calgary for failing them over and over?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member actually finds time in his busy schedule to visit Calgary, where he lives, he might also note that the Deerfoot needs fixing, and our government has committed to a major project to do that. It's well known. For someone complaining about nothing happening, you can hardly look around from the top of any hill in Calgary without seeing more than one major project that this government is performing right now. I guess it'll probably hurt the hon. member's feelings when we see the budget tomorrow, because there's lots of support for Alberta projects and for Alberta families, including Calgary.

Member Ceci: Given that Alberta's NDP is working on a strategy to bring new life into downtown Calgary and given that our proposal will include funding for building retrofits, a renewed focus on affordable housing, and a push to establish new faculties and a postsecondary campus in downtown Calgary and given that the UCP government has produced nothing even close to a plan despite having a full year and all the resources of the public service at their disposal, will the minister of economic development commit to

reading my proposal when I release it next week and adopting the ideas since he can't come up with anything original himself?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm out of breath talking about all the things this government is doing in Calgary and area. The downtown is obviously always a support. It's historically been a driver of economic activity. Our government is well aware of that. We will not take advice from the other side. The biggest thing they did was to promise \$10 billion worth of stuff just before they lost government two and a half years ago, none of which was funded, none of which would have been done. No promises were kept. We've cleaned up the mess. We got things better, on the right track, which they never did.

Government Policies and Women

Member Irwin: For women across the province the throne speech was yet another disappointment. Women in Alberta are powerful pillars of their communities as advocates, caregivers, business leaders, and so much more. Shamefully, this UCP government continues to repeatedly treat women as the most vulnerable in our society, women in need of saving. We, the NDP, know that as women thrive, society thrives, the economy grows. We acknowledge the critical role that women play. We're listening to Alberta women. Why aren't the UCP, and why are they ignoring the lived realities of women?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's interesting. I could have sworn that I spent the entire summer doing nothing but travelling the province and listening to women, listening to their lived experiences. Then do you know what I did? I came up with a plan to deal with issues that women face every day, like appointing a parliamentary secretary to deal with elder women issues, to deal with women in STEM. That's what I've done, and that's what I'm going to continue to do. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. When the Speaker stands, you're welcome to wait, and then I'll provide you the time remaining to conclude your answer once I can hear your answer.

The minister has eight seconds remaining.

Ms Issik: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've listened. I've worked a plan. I'm going to continue to work a plan to deal with the lived experiences of women in this province. I'm going to continue to do it.

Member Irwin: Given that women are looking for concrete action – they're not looking for committees; they're not looking for parliamentary secretaries – and given that there are countless women who need support in our province and many of them are still being ignored by the UCP and given that AISH and income supports under the UCP have declined and that the costs associated with children only increase after giving birth, to the minister apparently responsible for status of women: why is this government only providing nominal support to prenatal mothers, and why are they refusing to provide support, resources, solutions for low-income women and parents when they need the help the most?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm guessing that perhaps there was some gap in somebody's memory somewhere where we missed the entire announcement about child care in this province.

Our Minister of Children's Services put together an amazing deal that has helped parents to make sure that child care is available to every single parent in the way families need it. It's an Alberta plan. She worked hard on that plan. I can't believe it seems to have slipped their memory.

Member Irwin: Given that that's an excellent segue, let's talk about child care. We know that child care has long-term positive impacts for workforce participation, for the economy, for education outcomes, and given that we lost 20 per cent . . .

The Speaker: I would remind the member – and I know that it's the first day back after a break – that the preamble after question 4 is not allowed. I think it's difficult to make the case that starting your question with "That is a really great segue to talk about something else" isn't a preamble. I appreciate that you might disagree, but that's not correct. You're more than welcome to continue your question without a preamble.

Member Irwin: Given that we lost 20 per cent of our child care workers in the last few years due to low wages, especially in areas like Fort McMurray, that saw wages decrease by up to \$1,000 per month by this government, to that same minister: does she agree with the Minister of Children's Services that the low-income workers in this sector, many of them women, don't deserve the same wage security that workers in other provinces are getting?

The Speaker: That was much better.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to talk about our made-in-Alberta child care plan any day and compare it to their record and their plan, which would have left out 70 per cent of those licensed child care spaces across Alberta. We listened to parents. We listened to operators. There is \$300 million earmarked to support educators. We have been rolling out this plan. Child care fees have been reduced by half already for parents in every single licensed space right across this province, not just centres or spaces of our choice like the members opposite chose to do. Why? Because we listened, we learned, and we're rolling this out right now. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Hospital Emergency and Obstetric Services in Northeast Alberta

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I recently received an e-mail stating that the Cold Lake emergency room will be closed for 45 eight-hour time slots due to physician shifts needing coverage between now and March 31. In addition, Bonnyville is losing their obstetrics department because of a shortage of nurses for the entire month of March. My constituents are worried about the inconsistent coverage in the ER, and they are worried about expectant mothers being unable to deliver their newborns close to home. To the Minister of Health: what are we doing to address the current and severe shortage of ER physicians, nurses, and anesthesiologists in the northeast?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Emergency room disruptions are an all too frequent reality in rural and remote parts of our province. Rural doctor coverage is a problem across the entire country and something that we are taking head-on. I can confirm that at Cold Lake

nursing staff have been on-site providing triage and assessments. EMS emergency calls have been rerouted to the surrounding health care centres to ensure local residents continue to have access to emergency services that they need. Meanwhile AHS continues to work to secure locum coverage and recruit additional doctors to the Cold Lake health care centre. We are working on this, and we will deliver on it.

2:30

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Minister, for the answer there. Given that Cold Lake has continuously seen shortages in ER doctors and given that their current compensation for doctors is being negatively affected by the hospital being classified as urban despite their 293-kilometre distance from the Edmonton metro region and given that the Ministry of Health recognizes Cold Lake as rural enough to permit the department as eligible for rural education supplement and integrated doctor experience program, to the minister: where are we at with the redesignation of the ER department in Cold Lake hospital from urban to rural?

Mr. Copping: Thank you to the hon. member again for the question on this topic, and I want to thank the hon. member for his support of the RESIDE program. As I announced a couple of weeks ago, RESIDE will provide 20 medical residents per year for the next three years for health care in 15 rural communities across Alberta, including Cold Lake. RESIDE is part of our \$90 million commitment to recruit and retain rural doctors in Budget 2021. Now, our review of Cold Lake's ER department is ongoing, Mr. Speaker, but I want to commit to the member that we will keep him and the residents in his community aware of any decision on this matter, and we are committed to providing service across the entire province, including . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the rural, remote, northern program is in place to ensure that all Albertans receive proper medical care in the right place and at the right time and given that Cold Lake is 293 kilometres from Edmonton and that their variable fee premium is currently at 9 per cent and a community only 146 kilometres from Edmonton receives 21 per cent and given that Cold Lake's ER department is currently struggling to provide the care my constituents deserve, to the Minister of Health: what steps are we taking in regard to the variable fee premium to ensure Cold Lake and Bonnyville residents are receiving proper care by making them more attractive in terms of recruitment?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows, we're providing \$57 million through Budget 2021 to directly compensate physicians who practise in underserved areas in the province and, particularly, northern Alberta, and that's part of one of the most generous rural recruitment and retention programs in the entire country. Now, under the rural, remote, northern program high-percentage premiums are in place to attract physicians to more remote communities based on a number of factors, including the availability of GPs and specialists, proximity to regional centres, and proximity to Calgary and Edmonton. The more remote a community, the higher the premium. We'll continue to look at the premiums along with the ER designation . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has the call.

Teacher Retention

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, a recent survey revealed that a third of Alberta's teachers probably won't be teaching in our province next year. Two years of the pandemic, mishandled by an unsupportive and uncaring government, has left them exhausted and anxious. Teachers are seeing cuts to the education budget, unmanageable class sizes, and a failure of this government to prioritize the safety of staff, students, and their families during a global pandemic. Will the government admit that their attacks on public education and teachers are to blame for this morale and staffing crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I disagree wholeheartedly with what's just been said. In fact, we have supplied school divisions with over a billion dollars of supports so that they could address the pandemic. We continue to supply supports for our students and our teachers, and we recognize the invaluable work that our teachers have been doing each and every day. They have the best interests of their children at heart, and we value our teachers, and I just can't say enough good things about them. In fact, we will continue to support our teachers and our schools to the highest level.

Ms Hoffman: Given that many teachers are finding it unbearable to work with this UCP government, like Patricia Mosby, who says that even on the hardest day she still loves her job but that for the sake of her own physical and mental health she will be leaving Alberta, and given that there are many reasons teachers like Patricia are feeling disrespected by this government – like having to pivot between in-person and online, losing their educational assistants, managing COVID with no supports, paying for classroom supplies personally – will the minister admit what Albertans already know, that the UCP can't be trusted with public education?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the ATA and the NDP's claims are based on a survey where approximately 1,300 K to 12 teachers, representing only 2.8 per cent of 46,000 teachers in Alberta – a very small sample. Of that percentage that was asked, 16.4 per cent of respondents indicated that they are retiring, approximately .5 per cent of all teachers in the province. This is in keeping with what happens in retirement each and every year.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, given that that scientifically sound, peer-reviewed survey shows that a third of teachers have lost faith in serving this minister, this UCP government, and given that teachers feel disrespected every day by this government, who tries to seize their pensions, force a disgraceful curriculum on them, underfunds classrooms, ignores concerns about safety – and still these teachers are professionals. They stand up in front of their classrooms each and every day with calm confidence, a smile on their face, because that's what kids need. Today is Pink Shirt Day. We're supposed to stand up to bullies, so will the government apologize for the bullying that they've done to so many teachers and their profession?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I could say the same to the member opposite, but I won't.

This was a poll survey of a self-identified group of teachers who indicated that they will participate in surveys from the union, so this does not represent a random sample of teachers and does not paint an accurate picture of the more than 46,000 teachers in our province who do an amazing job each and every day and who I have heard

from directly thanking us for the great work that we're doing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

AISH and Income Support Indexation

Ms Renaud: The added cost pressures of inflation are hitting Albertans with the least money the hardest. Rising costs, from utilities to groceries, are the difference between being able to pay for a place to live or not. For so many people receiving AISH and income support, this is the reality. The NDP government indexed benefits to inflation so people could meet their needs. The UCP pretended to support this, the current Premier promised he would never cut it, but the Premier and the UCP broke that promise as soon as they could. Will the minister of social services commit to tying benefits to inflation so all Albertans have a fighting chance?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government continues to help Albertans with permanent disabilities to meet their daily needs and help them live independently and reach their full potential. At about \$1.3 billion the AISH budget is the highest in Alberta history. The monthly AISH benefit of \$1,685 is the highest in the country. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Luan: Shame on the opposition; they can't behave themselves.

Mr. Speaker, the \$1,685 monthly AISH benefit is the highest in the country. We are very proud of the strong stand we took in this government. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I see lots of finger pointing across aisles from various individuals. I can assure you that that rarely helps decorum.

Ms Renaud: Given that high oil prices provided the UCP with an opportunity to present a balanced budget tomorrow, given that the most vulnerable in this province have never really had a voice in this government – in fact, the Premier went out and gloated about cutting AISH in his first budget and has never apologized since – and given that while the Premier continues to gloat, when factoring in the cost of living and inflation, his broken promise will cost Albertans on AISH nearly \$1,000 a year by 2023. This isn't a funny, laughing matter. I don't know what the government finds funny. Will you reindex AISH?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, sometimes it feels like the opposition is falling on a deaf ear. Not only will this government continue to be there, to protect the most vulnerable, but also we will create every opportunity to help vulnerable Albertans to reach their full potential. As we unveil the budget tomorrow, stay tuned. There is more good news for Albertans.

2:40

Ms Renaud: Given that the UCP's ridiculous, stale talking points of AISH and income support are profoundly false and all the stats they throw in mean absolutely nothing when poverty and homelessness increase in this province, to the minister: why does your government continue to ignore calls and pleas of the most vulnerable in this province, who simply want to pay their rent, put food on the table? Why are Albertans with disabilities living in poverty still and are continually ignored by this government?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, what's ridiculous is that the opposition never understand the fundamentals. When we increase our economy,

when we have wealth added to Alberta, when we have the money to help the most vulnerable: those are tangible ways how we protect most Albertans. I will ask the opposition to stay tuned until we release our budget tomorrow. We have more good news on the way for Albertans.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River has a statement to make.

Prime Minister of Canada

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canadians are watching. They are watching as their own Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, plays political games and brinkmanship and cynical politics with our political and parliamentary institutions. The truth is that I can't use the kind of language my constituents are using in the constituency about the Prime Minister; it's unparliamentary. To be honest, it's, appropriately, words that rhyme with "trucker." Never in a million years would I imagine living in a Canada where leaders call their own citizens, simply because they disagree, racist, misogynist, Nazis. Never could I imagine those Members of Parliament sitting in the Chamber of our House of Commons in Ottawa listening to that same Prime Minister accuse Jewish opposition members of standing with those waving swastika flags. Embarrassing and inappropriate, Mr. Speaker. These are not the actions of a leader, and Canadians are starting to catch on to Justin Trudeau's game.

The Coastal GasLink suffered yet another extremist attack on the pipeline and its equipment. We hear nothing from the Liberals and the Prime Minister. Is it not worth condemning as well? Are these oil and gas workers who are threatened not worthy of acknowledgment from our Prime Minister? Clearly, the answer is no. Mr. Trudeau has no interest in supporting Canada's most prominent industry.

Canada's economy continues to inflate like a balloon, and Justin Trudeau is losing support and doing nothing to stop it. Alberta has the solution, Mr. Speaker. In fact, Alberta is the solution. Our oil and gas industry is the beating heart of Canada's economy, and it is what is going to fix our problems. It would be best if the Prime Minister stopped trying to kill it every single day when he woke up.

While Mr. Trudeau has long passed his opportunity to support Alberta and support our oil and gas industry and support the economy that is going to bring Alberta back and Canada back from the edge of oblivion in this inflation that is creeping up, I do look forward to a day when he is not Prime Minister, when we have a leader that can bring people together, empower Canadians, unite Albertans to the rest of the country, knowing that Alberta will be the recovery, and lead this country forward. Mr. Speaker, we've had enough.

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

University of Calgary

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Did you know that according to research Infosource's latest list of top 50 research universities for the first time the University of Calgary is ranked in the top five of Canada's best research universities? This is an important acknowledgement of the great work that's taking place at the University of Calgary, especially as Alberta is diversifying and growing its economy. The university is helping to pave the way. In

addition, the university's Faculty of Kinesiology was ranked number one in Canada for the third consecutive year. I am excited that the dedication and excellence at the University of Calgary is being recognized nationally.

In just five years Creative Destruction Lab, housed at the Haskayne School of Business, has helped participating ventures generate well over \$1 billion in equity value. Programs like this support the diversity and innovation we see in our job market and our economy.

Lastly, I wanted to talk about the monumental partnership between the University of Calgary and Mphasis to launch the Quantum City Centre of Excellence. This initiative will create up to a thousand jobs and solidify Calgary as a hub in the emergent quantum sector.

In my riding of Calgary-Klein there are 577 students, 5,184 alumni, 351 staff at the University of Calgary. I wanted to thank the hard work and diligence of students and staff throughout the last two years. Undoubtedly, there have been challenges, and they have overcome these obstacles, stronger and more resilient than ever. I'm excited to see the impacts that the University of Calgary students and new graduates will continue to have on our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has the call.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future I'm pleased to present on behalf of the committee its report on the presentation by Radicle Balance on December 9, 2021. I would like to thank Radicle Balance for taking the time to present to the committee. This report will be posted on the committee's public website shortly.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide notice pursuant to Standing Order 42 that I will be moving a motion at the appropriate time which reads as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly acknowledge (a) the importance of the border crossing at Coutts to Alberta's economic security; (b) that aiding the blockade of the border crossing at Coutts from January 29, 2022, to February 15, 2022, represented, according to the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, a direct loss to the economy, particularly in the agriculture, oil and gas, manufacturing, forestry, and retail sectors, of \$44 million per day in trade, for a total of almost \$800 million; (c) that the government of Alberta has the authority and resources to prevent and dismantle a border blockade of an economic corridor such as the one at Coutts, including resources that can be mobilized through the Provincial Operations Centre under the authority of the Minister of Municipal Affairs; (d) that the government of Alberta, particularly the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General and the Minister of Transportation, did not carry out any of the following actions in respect of the border blockade at Coutts: (i) apply for a court injunction in respect of any activities associated with the blockade, (ii) invoke the Emergency Management Act for the purpose of marshalling resources, and (iii) use existing authority under the Traffic Safety Act to revoke commercial licences of those participating in the blockade; (e) that on February 5, 2022, more than a week after the Coutts border blockade began, the Minister of Municipal Affairs, being the minister responsible for the Alberta Emergency

Management Agency, rather than take other actions available to him, wrote to the federal ministers of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness requesting personnel and equipment to assist the government of Alberta in moving the blockade.

Be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government of Alberta to apologize to the people and businesses of Alberta for failing during the period of January 29 to February 15, 2022, to effectively mobilize resources or take any effective action to disperse, relocate, or otherwise abate the border blockade at Coutts.

Be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly order (a) that the Standing Committee on Families and Communities meet for the purpose of questioning the members of the Assembly representing the electoral divisions of Taber-Warner and Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland in respect of their activities during the border blockade at Coutts, which may have encouraged or otherwise abetted the disruption of trade and traffic at that border crossing and (b) that these members appear before the standing committee to answer those questions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have the appropriate number of copies when needed.

2:50 **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika and Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(3) I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of the 2022-2023 main estimates schedule.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with section 20(1) of the Auditor General Act it's my pleasure as the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices to table the following report from the office of the Auditor General: Alberta Advanced Education Report on Post-secondary Institutions 2021.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings?

Seeing none, I do have a tabling today. I rise to table six copies of the House leader agreement which was signed February 18.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Hon. members, at the appropriate time the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall gave oral notice of Standing Order 42. He will have up to five minutes to briefly describe the urgency for such a motion. Having said that, given the short period of time between his providing of notice and the distribution of the motion, I will allow the pages about 30 seconds to make sure that the appropriate members of the House have that motion, and then I'll call upon the member momentarily.

Hon. member, we just need you to provide your original signature on the document. Then once we have that back, we'll proceed.

Mr. Sabir: That was with a black pen but the original.

The Speaker: Sorry. I couldn't hear you. Go ahead. You can rise and speak.

Mr. Sabir: They wrote with a black pen, but I think I signed one with this pen. But there was the original copy included with that one.

The Speaker: Okay. One second.

It's fine. You can sign that document again, and it will become the original. Then we'll proceed.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Coutts Border Crossing Blockade

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I provided the notice of Standing Order 42, and it was my first opportunity to rise in this House and provide notice in relation to what happened starting on January 29. There was one of the most significant incidents that I have witnessed as a member of this House, where a group of people, in the name of protest, blocked Alberta's major economic corridor. Those blockades were related, and they also happened elsewhere in Canada – on the Ambassador Bridge and in Ottawa – and essentially the whole country was shut down by these protesters. That was a significant event, and I would say that that was a significant attack on our democracy, where the writ of the state was challenged by these illegal blockades, and we had a government sitting here in Alberta whose caucus members were participating in and cheering on those illegal activities.

That's why it's important that we debate this motion and that this Assembly order those members to come before the Families and Communities Committee and explain why they think that it was okay for them as part of the government caucus to cheer on those illegal activities that cost Albertans \$44 million to \$48 million every day, that caused significant problems for many Albertans who were trying to move around, who were trying to exercise their Charter rights, mobility rights. People were not able to attend their family funerals because of those activities, and members in the government caucus were cheering on those activities.

It's important that we talk about this blockade, that we talk about what we could have done differently, and that we talk about what resources we have available should there be similar blockades in the future, because those blockaders have not gone away, and this Legislature, as the representative of Albertans, needs to take that threat seriously and discuss this. That's the first opportunity that I had to raise this issue. I hope that all members of this Legislature take this motion seriously and stand up for Albertans who were impacted by, threatened by these illegal blockades and activities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 42(1.2) a member of Executive Council has up to five minutes to respond to the request for the SO 42. I see the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and address what's before us. The member opposite said lots of words, and none of them indicated any need for urgency on this matter. It's an important matter. That's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that the blockade is gone and has been since February 14. It is now more than a week after that, so there clearly is no urgency.

Mr. Speaker, let me just say the important things that Albertans and Canadians had to think about during this period of time. One is that the Charter rightly protects Canadians' right to protest things that they may be happy or unhappy about. I hope we can all agree on that. That is what happened, but that's not the only thing that happened. Also, there were illegal activities: blocking roadways, blocking border crossings. None of that is okay. Those two things need to be kept separately. I hope all members of the House can agree that the right to protest is protected. The right to block a road is not part of that right to protest. When you block a road, you're no longer protesting; you're breaking the law.

The police dealt with it. Some may complain that they didn't deal with it fast enough, but the fact is that it's certainly my opinion that the RCMP did their jobs. They obtained, as I understand it, some information about caches of firearms and intentions to do harm to police officers and others, for which I understand now there are

charges laid, and the courts are the right places to dispose of those charges, not this important room.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important issue, but the blockade is gone. I guess there's no guarantee that somebody in the future won't decide to try to re-create it, but I think the police and many others have learned what they can from what occurred. None of us can predict the future for sure, but I believe the police are better situated to prevent a reoccurrence at this point than they were a month or two ago, before this all happened.

So, Mr. Speaker, I won't be supporting the debate of this. The issue has been resolved. I certainly don't want to downplay how important this is. Millions of dollars of trade were stopped daily. Our government certainly took it seriously, worked co-operatively with the police. Thankfully, due to the professionalism of the police and the activities that they took, the arrests were made on February 14. On that day there was an agreement to take down the blockade, and that's what happened.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 42 is a request for unanimous consent to do away with the remainder of the business of the Assembly to proceed immediately to the motion as proposed.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

2. Mr. McIver moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve into Committee of the Whole, when called, to consider certain bills on the Order Paper.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a nondebatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(a).

[Government Motion 2 carried]

3. Mr. McIver moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a nondebatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(a).

[Government Motion 3 carried]

Committee Membership Appointments

5. Mr. McIver moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the membership of the Assembly's committees be replaced as follows:
 - A. on the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices that Mr. Dach replace Ms Sweet;
 - B. on the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills that Ms Sweet replace Mr. Dang;
 - C. on the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services that Ms Gray replace Mr. Dang;
 - D. on the Standing Committee on Families and Communities that Mr. Dang replace Ms Pancholi;
 - E. on the Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee that Mr. Sabir replace Mr. Dang.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(h). Are there any members that would like to provide additional comment, question, or engage in a debate this afternoon?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 5 carried]

Child and Youth Advocate

6. Mr. McIver moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Child and Youth Advocate Search Committee tabled on February 14, 2022 (Sessional Paper 974/2020-22), and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that Terri Pelton be appointed as Child and Youth Advocate for the province of Alberta for a term of five years effective April 1, 2022.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Is there any member of the Assembly that wishes to join in the debate?

Hearing and seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

Evening Sitings

7. Mr. McIver moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) and for the duration of the 2022 spring sitting of the Third Session of the 30th Legislature the Assembly must meet to consider government business on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings unless, during Notices of Motions in the daily Routine or before 6 p.m. on a sitting day, the Government House Leader notifies the Assembly that no evening sitting is required on that sitting day.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Government Motion 7 is not debatable pursuant to Standing Order 4(1).

[Government Motion 7 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Amendments to Standing Orders

8. Mr. McIver moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, effective July 1, 2021, be amended as follows:
 - (a) in Standing Order 5
 - (i) in suborder (1) by striking out "20 Members" and substituting "10 Members" and
 - (ii) by striking out suborder (2) and substituting the following:
 - (2) If, during a sitting of the Assembly, a question of quorum arises, the Speaker must, on determining that a quorum is lacking
 - (a) order that the bells be sounded at the beginning of a 15-minute interval and during the last minute of that interval,
 - (b) on conclusion of the 15-minute interval, conduct a count of the

- Members present in the Chamber, and
- (c) if, on conclusion of the count the Speaker determines that quorum is still lacking, the Speaker may declare a recess or adjourn the Assembly until the next sitting day.
- (b) in Standing Order 7(8) by striking out “or member of the Executive Council” and substituting “or member of the Executive Council or Deputy Government House Leader”;
 - (c) in Standing Order 52.01
 - (i) in suborder (b) by striking out “Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women” and substituting “Culture and Status of Women” and
 - (ii) in suborder (c) by striking out “Agriculture and Forestry” and substituting “Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development.”

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These changes update the names of two government departments which changed last year. It clarifies that the Deputy Government House Leader is able to extend the daily Routine past 3 p.m. if needed. It also clarifies the process for a quorum call, and by extending the division bells to 15 minutes, it allows MLAs in the Federal Building the opportunity to return to the Chamber.

Finally, we are making a permanent reduction in quorum to 10. This change comes as a result of the temporary changes that had been made during COVID to reduce quorum and allows greater flexibility for MLAs to take a phone call while the Chamber is in session. I would note that this reduction isn't out of place with other Canadian jurisdictions. For example, quorum in B.C. is 10 out of their 85 MLAs, Ontario quorum is 12 out of 107, and the House of Commons is 20 out of 338.

In closing, I would ask all members to support these changes.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Government Motion 8 is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(j). I see the Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On Government Motion 8 I want to speak specifically to section (a), the changes to quorum, as the Official Opposition has no concerns with sections (b) or (c). But the change to quorum, I think, deserves a little bit of discussion because, as the member opposite has put it forward, the change to 10 is a result of COVID and provides greater flexibility. When we are thinking about quorum, when we are thinking about the business of this place, quorum should be an accurate reflection of the number of people you can reasonably expect to attend a regular meeting. Quorum should be based on: how many people does it make sense to have in this space in order to make good decisions that are well rounded and balanced?

3:10

The Official Opposition objects to quorum being reduced from 20 down to 10 and suggesting that it could be tied to COVID. Specifically, there's a serious issue with trust when it comes to this government. The change in quorum is going to allow this government to have fewer MLAs attending in this Chamber to conduct business.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, in his introduction of Government Motion 8 the hon. minister did talk about the quorum levels in other provincial jurisdictions, and that is appropriate to enter into this debate, but he neglected to mention that none of the other provincial jurisdictions

allow for 15-minute bells so that someone in the Federal Building counts as the quorum for the business of the Legislature here. That is completely out of step with the Canadian norm. That is out of step with what other provinces – B.C. doesn't have a 15-minute bell for MLAs to be doing work somewhere else and then to arrive here at the last moment for a vote.

Having, out of 87 elected members, 10 as the minimum for important decisions – when we think about the bills that are debated, when we think about the budgets that are passed in this Chamber, I believe strongly that Albertans expect more from their elected representatives and do expect to be able to count on their elected representatives to be here. I am certainly not suggesting that all 87 members must be in the Chamber at all times. Quorum is important as a minimum, but we also, I would suggest to you, Madam Speaker, have not had issues with quorum even during COVID, so the logic as to why this government is now choosing to drop that from 20 down to 10 does not make sense to me and again brings up the issues that I and many of my constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods and others across Alberta have when it comes to trust in this government. Making this change really, in my view, lets the government caucus focus on things other than the business that's happening in this Legislature during the times that we are sitting.

As a member of the Official Opposition I certainly do not support the change to this quorum rule that we see here. As well, Madam Speaker, I would suggest that all members would reject Government Motion 8 because, again, there has not been a good reason for this change to be put in and the government seems to have deliberately ignored the change and the difference in Alberta of having that 15 minutes. We are literally talking about 10 people being in this room for a vote or a decision. Why do we need 15 minutes to achieve that minimum threshold? Is the government intending to have all of their MLAs work in the Federal Building while the Legislature is sitting? Like, it just logically does not make sense. Again, I certainly object to the way that this change has been brought forward into this House.

I believe I've made my main point, which is that I don't trust why this government has brought this forward. They have not provided a reason for why the 15-minute bells are so different here than other jurisdictions. The minister did mention people coming from the Federal Building. Why the government does not have 10 MLAs here in the Legislature Building, especially when so many of their Executive Council members have offices in this Legislature Building, raises great questions for me. So I would recommend that all members vote against this change, and certainly I know that all members of the Official Opposition will be voting against this change, Government Motion 8.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to join the debate on Government Motion 8?

[Government Motion 8 carried]

Physical Distancing in Legislature Chamber

9. Mr. McIver moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:

Be it resolved that despite Standing Orders 13(7), 16, and 32(4)(b) and for the duration of the 2022 spring sitting of the Third Session of the 30th Legislature a member may sit in and speak from any seat that has not been assigned to that member provided that the member immediately relinquishes that seat upon the request of

 - (a) the member who has been assigned that seat or
 - (b) the Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join the debate on Government Motion 9?

Seeing none, I will call the question on Government Motion 9 as moved by the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs on behalf of the hon. Government House Leader.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Williams moved, seconded by Ms Lovely, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To Her Honour the Honourable Salma Lakhani, AOE, BSc, LL.D, the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would like to first note that I am happily and proudly a monarchist. I believe in our constitutional monarchy that we have in Canada and that Alberta has a direct relationship with Her Honour the Queen, as outlined in the BNA Act and our Constitution. The reason I'm so proud, contrary to what many of my good republican friends think, having a monarch does not mean a dictatorship or a tyrant relationship. Throughout the history of the English-speaking world, beginning with Alfred the Great and then moving on to Magna Carta in 1215, the truth is that the entire history of our Constitution as we have it today is passed down with rule by consent between the monarch and the people.

I think it's important that we understand that it's a relationship of service between the monarch, developed into now service for us in this parliament and especially for Executive Council, to the people. It's my pleasure now to be able to address what Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor brought forward to us in this speech and why I wholeheartedly support it and encourage the Chamber to support the speech as well.

Now, one thing more important than the other is this government's focus on average families and making sure we fulfill our commitment to look out for jobs and the economy. That, I think, was laser focused in that speech right from the very start. While the pandemic has disrupted many plans, it's clear our province has persevered and is back on a path of normality, balance, and prosperity. Alberta's nation-leading economic recovery, highlighted in the throne speech, can be felt in every corner of our province, including a northern constituency like mine, where families are going back to work in high-paying jobs after two challenging years.

In my riding in particular oil and gas but, even more so, forestry is our largest employer. It isn't just back to normal; it's booming. We have not seen forestry levels like this for the price of lumber in, I think, the history of the industry. That's good, that we see that our biggest problem now is a demand on labour. I think that that is something that I'm happy to try and deal with. It's a challenge in my constituency, and I know many of my colleagues are dealing with the same. It's much better than the problems we had in years past, especially under previous governments, where unemployment was much higher, and they had no pandemic to deal with. This economic boom is what is going to be creating jobs, and that is going to put a roof over the head and food on the plate for average families in each of our constituencies. No matter who you voted for,

no matter what part of the province you're in, this tide will raise all boats with the boom that we're seeing.

But the recent good news in our energy sector isn't just for the sole reason of a vastly improved economic picture that I expect to see in this budget next week. As the Finance minister said, to get into the position we're in today, the government has had to bring its per capita spending in line with other provinces and keep its net debt to GDP ratio under 30 per cent throughout the pandemic and re-establish a time frame to get back to balance in our budget. I'm very optimistic with what the Minister of Finance is going to be bringing to this Chamber tomorrow for us to be voting on.

I'm sure it wasn't easy, Madam Speaker, to get to this point. I know the minister has worked hard, but I think Albertans are about to see the payoff of the hard work that they have put forward, collaborating with rule by consent with our government to make sure that we are fiscally responsible and that we are looking after the interests of Albertans today and into the future. This is something we never would have seen under previous governments, which lost hundreds of thousands of jobs, including in my own constituency. We saw in the year the first budget came out in 2015, under the NDP, Carmon Creek effectively shutting down. We saw Shell pull out of my constituency and across the province because of decisions made by former governments.

3:20

The truth is that Alberta has had a tough couple of years going and has been battling over the last two years, but it's starting to feel like our provincial motto again, *Fortis et Liber, strong and free*. Mr. Speaker, this isn't coming out of nowhere. The truth is that our strength comes from our freedom. The truth is, for example, that our economic freedom, the decisions we made early in our term to support industry, to support businesses that employ families, that work in our communities are exactly why we have the strong, booming economy that we're seeing right now.

It has been carefully built on a foundation of strong conservative principles that embrace Albertans' entrepreneurial and free spirit and launch new ideas into fruition. We saw more businesses open up in the downturn than we've seen in many, many years past because Albertans are entrepreneurial and cannot be held down. Their strength and their freedom are built into who they are, hard-wired into our nature.

The Alberta being built today is reminiscent of the past and recent province of Alberta where it was a global destination, either at our foundation or even just a few years ago, before the NDP, where immigrants, entrepreneurs, skilled workers, and job seekers and dreamers alike all sought out the province of Alberta to get the best education with the best opportunities for their families and the best chance of being able to have a lifelong career in the industry of their choice and continue to provide for themselves and for their communities.

As our Lieutenant Governor said, for the first time in a long time more Albertans are coming to Alberta than leaving it. I think this is a sign, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is a sign that Alberta is back and we're moving in a direction where people want to be a part of our economy and our communities again. If I don't know what's a signal of our growth and that we're doing something right in this government – other than that, I'm not sure what could be a better advocate for our province and for our government's policies.

Alberta is already leading Canada in economic growth, but I believe the legislation initiatives outlined in the throne speech will only further accentuate and enhance the momentum we're currently seeing in our economy. This is more than just a session focused on economic prosperity, Madam Deputy Speaker, however. The throne speech has confirmed that this upcoming sitting of the

Legislature will have a strong focus on the dignity of every single Albertan and particularly those who are most vulnerable.

One of my favourite quotes from Karol Wojtyła says: we will be judged by how we treat the most vulnerable. I know members opposite have a deep heart for the vulnerable, and I know we would disagree sometimes on how to achieve that, but I think it's important that this throne speech highlighted, above almost any other aspect, the dignity of every single individual Albertan and the fact that the vulnerable deserve the protection and support of our government and our society.

Among other things, I'm very humbled that the report that I helped produce in my review of palliative and end-of-life care was used to bring forward initiatives. The truth is, Madam Deputy Speaker, that when I started that report, I was asked by the Minister of Health to begin a month-long review to see where we're at, not only to fulfill the \$20 million above and beyond any previous commitment, that this government made in its election campaign for palliative and end-of-life care, but also provide a road map for where we should go in the future and how we can highlight this.

Madam Deputy Speaker, every single Albertan or a family member is going to pass through palliative or end-of-life care. It is not a sexy, hot topic and is not the kind of thing that is going to get many front-line headlines, but the truth is that it is important. It is important for those individuals who go through it to have dignified and loving, charitable, caring support for them as they pass away. It's also important for the family members to know that those supports and offers are there.

I did not know when I started that my own mother was going to be diagnosed with a very aggressive form of terminal cancer halfway through the report. I did not know before I finished the report that my mother was going to pass away. I was very, very grateful to have what we have in Alberta, being a leader internationally when it comes to palliative care.

I mentioned this at the news conference with Minister Copping, how important it was for me to make sure that we got this right. I think that no matter who you are, you should be supporting access to charitable, loving, and dignified care in our end-of-life and palliative care to make sure there are options for families, for caregivers, for support of their family members who are passing away.

It will come for us all, Madam Deputy Speaker. It's a sad reality, but it's a true one. It's important that we as a province and a society face that head-on. That's why I'm so happy that the government has taken the initiatives that I worked with with the minister and, more importantly, with thousands of average Albertans who work in the field who are almost exclusively volunteers in many of these communities, especially when it comes to hospice centres and societies across the province. It's important that we heard them and listened to their key recommendations, and the Speech from the Throne, that the Lieutenant Governor offered, did highlight a number of these and two of them in particular, one of which is early access for palliative care.

The reason that's so important is because no matter why someone is feeling sick, we have to know that their pain can be alleviated. No matter what you have, we have the ability to be able to alleviate the most aggressive pain. We can do the work that we need to do to make sure everyone can pass away in comfort and do so with dignity intact. It's important that we continue moving forward on this initiative, Madam Deputy Speaker, because without this we will end up in a society where we're not caring for the most vulnerable, those who often are dealing with end-of-life crises, who have life-limiting illnesses, who will end up passing away perhaps not knowing that these services are there, not knowing that the

province and our medical community can continue to support them even in their difficult days.

I hear members opposite talking about those on AISH. This applies to every single Albertan. These are supports that'll be accessible no matter who you are, and that's rightfully so. It needs to be that no matter who you are, you know you can have access, because the fear of passing away in pain and alone, without support, the fear of being unwanted is one of the saddest things that I contemplate in my job as an elected official that I had to consider head-on. But the good news is that for Albertans who otherwise would feel sad and alone and isolated, because of the supports that we can give them, because of the volunteer networks and the average Albertans there, they can move forward knowing that they have the comfort provided by the province. I'm very, very grateful for that, and no matter who you are, what side of the House you're on, I believe that those individuals and their family members will be grateful for that as well. It's important that we recognize that no matter what we do, we have to be held accountable to the Albertans we serve.

Another important initiative brought forward in the throne speech, Madam Deputy Speaker, is bereavement leave, currently offered for a limited time, three days, but now is going to be expanded for those women who have had miscarriages or stillbirth. A few weeks ago, when my hon. friend the Member for Sherwood Park presented this as a private member's bill, I rose in the House and I spoke to how important it was. I had just, by providence and chance, gotten off the phone with one of my constituents. This young woman had had seven miscarriages, and she had the fear every single month that she and her husband might not have a child. She so desperately wanted to be able to raise her son or her daughter, hold and kiss and love that individual child. She couldn't. She also was afraid that maybe she would be pregnant but that it would end in another miscarriage, and that was unbearable. She was afraid to continue trying to have a child for all the hardship and pain that she had.

This is probably one of the most emotionally difficult situations that any young mother can find herself in. It is hardship month after month, either being afraid that there is no child or that if there is a baby, that unborn baby is lost. We have to recognize the dignity of that baby but also the mother who suffers. We have to recognize that that is real loss, and I think not only is it important that we pass this law but that we in this Chamber all speak to those young mothers, recognize that they are mothers, that nothing can take that away from them no matter what, that they are mothers even if they've had miscarriages, that those are just as real losses as any other. I think it's important that this bill passes to afford respect to those young women, and I'm so very happy that it seems we'll have bipartisan support for this, from what I could gather in the last debate.

Further to this, I am pleased to see that the 20-day limit for unpaid military reservists for leave will be removed as reservists often train for longer periods of time. This government is very happy to support our armed services, and I know every single member that I've spoken to is very, very supportive of the work that they have done, both past and present, to ensure that Canada is the great country that it is. I know that it is also the envy of many other countries in the world, and it's in large part due to the sacrifices men and women have made to defend this country, including, especially, those volunteer reservists, who maintain their day-to-day lives, who still raise their children, who work in their communities, who participate in civil society but, on top of that, know that they have a service to our country as a reservist.

I'm proud to know that the government will be tackling the scourge of human trafficking, which is tantamount to modern-day

slavery, Madam Deputy Speaker. By acting on recommendations from the Human Trafficking Task Force, this work will be completed by implementation of recommendations from Alberta's Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. It is so important, especially for those of us who have communities with high numbers of First Nation and Métis, that we do tackle this problem and we tackle it seriously. They have been deeply harmed and grieved because of the violence committed against their individual women and their communities at large.

3:30

We need to take action as a province and defend these individuals. Yes, at times they're vulnerable, and we have to take the responsibility as a province to look after them. My riding, Peace River, has one of the highest First Nation populations in the province. I know that without initiatives like this, my riding will suffer because of that more than any other.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The government is also smart to move forward with right-to-know legislation, which will allow more information to be shared with the public about individuals on bail, probation, and parole and criminals pending deportation, as well as Clare's law, which will allow Albertans to be informed if their partner has a violent criminal past. This is an incredibly important initiative, again, for protecting women and those who are vulnerable. Now, those two are not always overlapping groups, but all Albertans at some time can be vulnerable, whether it is a mother who has a miscarriage, whether it could be an elderly or sometimes even a young individual with a life-limiting illness that needs palliative care. That could be an individual who is stuck in a difficult position and is faced with sexual violence in my communities.

The work that this government is doing, announced in the Speech from the Throne, prohibiting and fighting against female genital mutilation, a barbaric, tragic practice that has unfortunately made its way into our province in some communities – we must fight against it. We must recognize the dignity of those young girls who are being abused and who are being tortured and manipulated, to be perfectly frank, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important that we stand up and we voice that in this Chamber loudly and clearly, united, that we as Alberta's Legislature and the government, with its legislation, oppose that kind of barbaric practice.

As you know, my constituency has also been affected by the scourge that is rural crime, increasing all the time, spiralling out of control. I'm happy this government is bringing forward legislation that will broaden services and supports for victims of crime and support new regional approaches so that my constituency and my communities can find tailor-made approaches that will work for our communities. We do not need to have a one size fits all across the province. This is not just an issue in my own constituency, Mr. Speaker; all of my colleagues, many rural and urban both, fight with this problem. These problems are, sadly, unique and widespread, but with the kind of tailor-made solutions that we're offering, we are hoping to see solutions that will be able to reduce rural crime and bring security and comfort to communities that are afraid of the kind of violence that can happen and the threat to their private property. A government has no higher quality than protecting the lives of its people, and the throne speech has confirmed that this session will have a strong focus on the dignity and lives of Albertans.

As my time here comes to an end, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that it's been an honour to speak to the Legislature on behalf of the people of Peace River. It's been an honour to move this thanks of the accepting of the throne speech from Her Honour Salma Lakhani, the

Lieutenant Governor of our province. After these two difficult years that we've been through as a province, I want families and businesses across this province and in my riding in particular to know that we are moving forward, that better days are ahead, that this Conservative government cares about your dignity and your communities. We will fight for, yes, freedom, economic and otherwise. I will continue to do that, but we also care about the dignity of you and the social lives that you have. We want them to be improved. We care about the most vulnerable in our communities.

This Speech from the Throne articulates a broad vision of Alberta moving forward that is inclusive and welcoming to those who come, whether it's for economic opportunities because of where they're coming from or fleeing tyrannies and a lack of economic freedom or because they come here for the opportunity to practise their faith and religion as they see fit. Whoever they are, Alberta will be that place and a beacon of hope for the rest of the country to lead forward with these values that are infused into every single Albertan and infused into our past, the past that has made us and brought us to where we are today.

It may be the beginning of a new chapter in Alberta's story. I believe it is, but we have to understand that it's one chapter in a longer book. My grandparents moved to Canada from Poland, and they settled one quarter section in what was the edge of the wilderness at the time in my colleague from Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock's constituency. From that quarter section there are pipefitters. There are janitors. There are doctors. There are journalists. There are members of the Alberta Legislature. There are a number of different Albertans who give back in their vocation, in civil society, in their faith communities, and by raising families.

This new chapter that we're embarking on today with our throne speech is a continuation of that book. It might not be another quarter section across the province. It could be a fintech company coming to Calgary. It could be the opportunity provided by a young girl who knows she does not have to be threatened by female genital mutilation because of the work that we've done, or that an elderly couple knows that they will have the opportunity to die with dignity that is bestowed upon them by having the opportunity to have palliative care accessible.

This is the Alberta that I believe in, and I'm very grateful that I've had the chance to accept the speech from the Lieutenant Governor.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and second the motion to accept the throne speech presented by Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta. I'd also like to extend my gratitude to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor for putting forward her vision for the Legislature and the province we all hold dear. This week's throne speech clearly laid out the core priorities that this government will seek to achieve in the upcoming legislative session.

After two challenging years marked by pandemic, Alberta is ready to move forward into a bright and prosperous future. Alberta is leading Canada in economic growth. Investment is coming back in our communities, and our people are going back to work. This session will ensure that the momentum we have seen in our economy continues and that our province comes out of this pandemic not just strong but stronger than ever.

It's ridings like mine, the beautiful constituency of Camrose, where the rebound in the economy can be felt in traditional industries like energy and agriculture. But our economy is diversifying as well, with record private investment being seen in burgeoning industries like technology, film and television,

hydrogen, and renewables. The basis for this strong recovery has been and will continue to be Alberta's recovery plan. Strengthening the workforce, growing our resources, building for the future, helping everyday Albertans, and diversifying the economy: these are the pillars upon which the brightest chapter of the Alberta story will be written.

The government is trusting in time-tested conservative philosophies of fiscal restraint and responsibility, but it is also looking forward to the jobs and the economies of the future. I'm inspired to know that the government is telling Alberta's story and that investors across the world are taking note. Alberta is back, and we are once again the best place to live, work, play, start a business, or raise a family in the entire world.

The legislative agenda ahead is robust and will benefit our entire province. As a rural legislator I am proud to see the government expanding access to broadband Internet to rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. This will ensure that all Albertans can participate in the digital economy and achieve their full potential as citizens.

As we move past this pandemic, it is important that we nurture the entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans. That is why I am also proud to see the government continuing its red tape reduction efforts, which have already reduced Alberta's red tape burden by 21 per cent and saved taxpayers an impressive \$1.2 billion. Well done.

We know that Alberta could be a global hub for renewable power, which is why I'm pleased to see the government continuing to work towards diversification in the energy sector, pledging to create a clean hydrogen centre of excellence to help Alberta become a major player in this multitrillion-dollar industry.

I'm also pleased to see the government acting to protect consumers from higher utility costs by introducing a natural gas consumer protection program and by bringing forward new legislation to modernize the electricity market and further fix the \$2 billion electricity boondoggle that the disastrous previous government left behind.

As we have learned, we must ensure that our health care system is strong and resilient for future crises. Despite our health care system being one of the best funded in the world, I'm happy to know that the government is investing further towards building capacity in our health care system, in part by accelerating the Alberta surgical initiative. Further, I'm happy to know that the government is making major investments in infrastructure to expand hospital capacity, like completing the Calgary cancer centre and a historic expansion of the Red Deer hospital. This will also help ease the burden on our system and deliver high-quality patient care to every Albertan that needs it.

There is no higher duty of government than protecting its people, particularly its children. As a mother I'm beyond grateful to hear that the government will be taking steps to protect Alberta children by ending the egregious conflict of interest that allows the Alberta Teachers' Association to investigate its own members in disciplinary matters. This follows high-profile cases of abuse that have shocked our province and fuelled calls for change.

3:40

I'm also grateful to note that the government is taking steps to expand education choice, and I am overjoyed to know that the government will be increasing prenatal financial aid to mothers receiving AISH and income support, as we must do all we can to support our most vulnerable in this fragile time of our economic recovery.

The throne speech, presented by Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, outlined a long list of actions that this government is taking to make life better for Alberta workers and

families. As a proud Albertan I was particularly proud to see that the government will continue our province's fight for a fair deal in federation, following a first-of-its-kind referendum in which Albertans called for major changes to Canada's broken equalization system. With 62 per cent of Albertans endorsing a proposed change to the Canadian Constitution regarding equalization, I hope to see the government use this mandate to press for serious negotiations on equalization with Ottawa.

The throne speech laid out our pathway to opportunity, prosperity, and balance. As we enter this new session of the Legislature, I can confidently say to the people of Alberta that our province is rebuilding the Alberta advantage for all and that this session will be a continuation of that work. Soon we will learn the details of the budget, which will likely reflect a dramatic improvement of our province's fiscal fortitudes, resulting not only from increasing commodity prices but careful fiscal management and restraint. I look forward to learning more about the budget and how it will help to boost our economy and recovery.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is coming back stronger than ever. Just as previous generations did, we have preserved through challenging circumstances and we are ready to be leaders. We were born to be. We will not succumb to the politics of fear or cynicism. We will move forward to the next chapter of the Alberta story with the fortitude of those who came before us. I want to thank each and every Albertan for their courage and sacrifice over the past two years. The government is working tirelessly to ensure the benefits of our rapidly growing economy affect every one of them in a positive way today and for generations to come. With that, I'm pleased to have this chance to second the throne speech.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to now adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

(continued)

Emergencies Act

10. Mr. Kenney moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon: Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly
 - (a) condemn the unnecessary invocation of the Emergencies Act by the government of Canada as the Assembly is of the view that this is a measure which infringes upon the constitutionally guaranteed rights of Albertans and all Canadians, including the right to due process and natural justice;
 - (b) is of the view that the government of Canada has failed to demonstrate that the present circumstances meet the threshold that the law requires to invoke the Emergencies Act and that, as demonstrated in Alberta, governments and law enforcement agencies already have adequate authority and resources to end illegal blockades and restore order; and
 - (c) is further of the view that this invocation of the Emergencies Act constitutes an unnecessary intrusion into provincial jurisdiction under the Constitution of Canada.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to one of the most obvious overreaches of government power in my lifetime and, I believe, in modern Canadian history: the recent invocation of the Emergencies Act by the government of Prime Minister Trudeau.

Mr. Speaker, I note that the Prime Minister, just 90 minutes ago, announced that the application of the Emergencies Act has been suspended. That, however, does not change at all the profound

concerns of Canadians, of Albertans, of this government and this Assembly with this unnecessary, unjustified, and disproportionate use of arbitrary police power in our own time with no good reason, so we will proceed with this debate.

I can inform the Assembly, right at the beginning, that Her Majesty's Alberta government intends to proceed with an application for a judicial review about what we regard as the unlawful application of the Emergencies Act before the judiciary, Mr. Speaker, because while the act may no longer be in operation, the rights of Canadians and Albertans have been violated. Provincial jurisdiction has been violated, and a dangerous precedent has been created, so Alberta's government will give the independent judiciary the opportunity to speak to these critical issues and we hope, in our pleadings, will result with clear limits around the exercise of these emergency powers to constrain such arbitrary application of them in the future.

Let me begin with some historical context. In the First World War some 9,000 Canadians, largely of eastern and central European origin, were unjustly detained as, quotes, enemy aliens, the majority of whom were people of Ukrainian ethnicity, and their detention was under the War Measures Act. These were loyal Canadians from communities that had a disproportionately high level of volunteerism to defend Canada in the Great War, yet because they had arrived in Canada as subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, they were regarded as suspect by the then authorities at a time of popular xenophobia against Galicians, Ruthenians, and other then-pejorative expressions for people of Ukrainian origin. Nine thousand were interned between 1914 and 1920, many pressed into forced labour. Now, Mr. Speaker, we now recognize the historical injustice of this. As the Canadian minister for multiculturalism I signed an agreement with the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association and the Ukrainian Canadian Congress to redress that injustice.

From 1939 to 1945 thousands of Canadians of Italian origin were unjustly interned under the War Measures Act for precisely the same reasons, an injustice which led to a formal apology by the former Prime Minister the Rt. Hon. Brian Mulroney.

In 1970 the same law, the War Measures Act, was invoked by a different Prime Minister Trudeau to roll tanks and soldiers into the streets of Canadian cities and to arbitrarily arrest thousands of Canadians because of their suspected political affiliations during the October Crisis. Now, undoubtedly, Mr. Speaker, there was a serious risk to law and order and to national security with the violence of the Front de Libération du Québec, but there is now, I think, a clear historical and political consensus that invocation of the War Measures Act, thousands of detentions, and the use of the military in our streets was a massive and unjustified, disproportionate overreach and a shameful mark in modern Canadian history.

3:50

In fact, that consensus was so strong that even Pierre Trudeau subsequently recognized the overreach, which is one of the reasons that he campaigned so hard to patriate the Constitution and write into it the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982. That is further why Prime Minister Mulroney's government was elected on a commitment to repeal the War Measures Act, as they did in 1988, replacing it with the Emergencies Act. The new Emergencies Act sought to remove some of the extraordinary martial powers of the War Measures Act yet, of course, retained truly extraordinary powers.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, that in a truly extreme context the state must have extraordinary powers to deal with potentially overwhelming context of warfare, civil war, insurrection, of situations of mass violence and gross social disorder, of anarchy. Every sovereign state governed by the rule of law must have access

to certain extraordinary powers for extraordinary times, and that was the purpose behind the 1988 Emergencies Act.

Mr. Speaker, I submit that the recent invocation of this extraordinary and arbitrary police power by Prime Minister Trudeau's government is completely unjustified, totally disproportionate, without precedent, and that it will not pass the test of our courts nor the test of history. I think this has been a grave and shameful mistake.

Casting back to the earlier Prime Minister Trudeau's application of the War Measures Act in 1970, the late leader of the NDP famously said in his principled opposition to that decision that it was the equivalent of using a hammer to crush a peanut. You know, Tommy Douglas was speaking against the popular sentiment at that time. His was a minority view, but it was a principled defence of civil liberties, something that we used to be able to expect from the NDP and the Canadian left but no longer, Mr. Speaker, as they've shamefully and cravenly folded to the political whims of Justin Trudeau to invoke arbitrary police powers in trampling civil liberties. Whatever happened to that principled NDP? They sold out. They gave away their soul as a principled voice of civil liberties.

Mr. Speaker, let's move the analysis to recent events. Over the past two years we have seen extraordinary applications of government power, unprecedented certainly in our lifetimes, to deal with the challenge of COVID-19, and these unprecedented applications of government power, at least unprecedented for a hundred years, have caused great social division and discord. We must admit it, and that is true in Alberta as elsewhere across Canada and the entire world.

Mr. Speaker, no government has had a textbook about how perfectly to respond to a new and unknown pandemic of this lethal nature, and every government has sought to respond in a way that would avoid mass deaths but also a catastrophic situation in their hospitals. That is what we have sought to do in Alberta while also seeking to minimize the damaging effect of restrictions on people's lives and the limitation of people's normal rights and freedoms.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a loud and dynamic and at times divisive debate in this Assembly, in this society, about how to strike the right balance. I don't believe any government got it right. I think all governments in all parts of the world were facing impossible choices often with only bad options. In all of that, many of our fellow citizens have become deeply frustrated with the impact of these impairments of rights and freedoms and their economic well-being, the disruption to their ordinary lives. I am one of those citizens who has been frustrated deeply by all of this, so I understand and sympathize. [interjections]

I'm being heckled by the opposition because they don't seek to listen. They don't seek any empathy for the people whose lives have often been turned upside down by the last two years here and across the world. The thought of them with their hands on the levers of power during this time is chilling, Mr. Speaker. The total disregard they would have had for the negative impact of restrictions would have meant that this province was under a hard and sustained, devastating lockdown for most of the past two years. Thankfully, they weren't.

I would argue that Alberta sought to approach restrictions as a last and limited measure, being criticized by the NDP, by many in the media for having been reluctant to bring in restrictions and eager to lift them, as we are now. But the context is this. We have a large number of our fellow citizens who are deeply frustrated and are saying to those in leadership that we must find a way out of the disruption that COVID has had on our lives. They have every right to do so, Mr. Speaker. In fact, in our democracy I think citizens have a responsibility to speak out when they feel so strongly,

particularly about the impairment, albeit justified I believe, of rights and freedoms.

That is what led to the trucker convoy movement recently, Mr. Speaker. But the more immediate cause was the bloody-minded decision by Prime Minister Trudeau and his government to impose a vaccine mandate on cross-border truckers. Now, let's put this in context. That decision was made at the end of January, after the policy of a vaccine mandate for cross-border workers had been announced in the fall as a bilateral policy between Canada and the United States.

But exemptions were granted – why? – because those two national governments recognized that it would have a negative impact on essential commercial traffic which is key to the integrity of our supply chains at a time of growing inflation. With so much stress on the economy they implicitly recognized that it would be counterproductive to introduce this vaccine mandate on cross-border truckers, so for four months they granted an extension after an extension. But suddenly, Mr. Speaker, that all ran out at the end of January, just when we in North America were beginning to move past the peak of omicron COVID-19 infections, just when governments around the world began to announce their plans to ease and eliminate public health restrictions.

So we had this bizarre situation – it's not just Ottawa – where the two national governments decided to apply this pointless and counterproductive policy at exactly the wrong time. If they thought this had any putative public health benefit, they would have introduced the measure at the beginning and not the end of the omicron COVID-19 spike, Mr. Speaker.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

You know, as somebody who has had to defend difficult and painful restrictions in order to slow viral spread and prevent a catastrophe in the hospitals, as somebody who's had to study closely the data and the international experiences of COVID measures, I can say with confidence that the trucker vaccine mandate has and will have zero measurable public health benefit. This is nothing but bad public health theatre. It is not public health science; it is political science, Madam Speaker.

Right now, as we speak, it is reasonable to infer from confirmed active COVID cases across North America that we currently have millions and potentially tens of millions of current active infections. That was certainly in the tens of millions between Canada and the United States when this policy came in at the end of January.

4:00

Now, according to the organizations representing truckers, over 90 per cent of cross-border truckers have received the safe and effective protection of vaccines, and I say to them: thank you for stepping up to protect yourselves and to help us protect our hospitals. Madam Speaker, it would appear that we have less than 10 per cent of the cross-border trucker workforce who are not vaccinated, and that would within Canada constitute a few thousand people. A few thousand people. And how do they work? They work in the isolation of their truck cabs. These are people who don't go out and party in casinos and attend superspreader events. These are by definition some of the most isolated workers that you can find, and they are also some of the most important workers that you can find. Regardless of vaccination status let us all come together to say a huge thank you to the truckers on whom we have depended more than ever over the past two years.

You know, Madam Speaker, I remember I was chairing the inaugural meeting of our Alberta economic recovery council in the second week of COVID, in March of 2020. It was some of the leading thinkers from the Alberta business community, organized

labour, and others. I'll never forget what Clive Beddoe, the founding CEO of WestJet, said to us on that call as we were trying to figure out: what is going on? What are the implications? What are the stress points? How do we have to respond to this unknown crisis? Mr. Beddoe said: keep an eye on the supply chains. He said: if this virus takes the truckers off the road, we'll be starving in Canada in two weeks. I'll never forget when he said that.

It raised the alarm for me and, I think, decision-makers that at all costs we had to keep those supply chains moving, that we had to keep those semis coming north, filled with groceries and food and essential goods, without which we could not survive in our modern, complex, cold northern Canadian economy here. You know what, Madam Speaker? While so many others were able to stay at home, the laptop class, and work in the safety of their homes, those truckers went out there every single day, day in, day out, the long-haulers, keeping our economy running, keeping our grocery store shelves full, and we should all be deeply grateful for them and what they did.

Madam Speaker, the point is this. When they bring in this vaccine mandate for the truckers, you've got tens of millions of active omicron infections across North America and a few thousand unvaccinated, isolated cross-border truckers. If this really was a public health emergency, if they actually constituted a serious threat of widespread viral transmission, then they could have been asked to take a negative rapid test, like other workers have been, like we've had in this Assembly for a period. There are practical workarounds that would have kept them rolling and working. But, no, the government of Canada had no consideration whatsoever. This was bloody-minded. It was in bad faith. As I say, it was political theatre.

It was done for one reason, I believe, because the Prime Minister won a plurality of seats, not a majority. He won a plurality of seats with less than a plurality of the popular vote in the last federal election by running on a campaign of COVID fear, by using COVID, like the NDP here, relentlessly as a divisive wedge, to promote fear and hysteria in our population. The Prime Minister has done this consistently. He's the one who said that people protesting, expressing a concern about public health policies were, quote, a small fringe element in this country that is lashing out with racist, misogynistic attacks, unquote. Misogyny means hating women, Madam Speaker. The Prime Minister claiming that tens and tens of thousands of Canadians expressing their concerns and their fears were just a bunch of mouth-breathing racists and misogynists and hateful people. How dare he.

Now, I have no doubt that some of the people who have shown up at some of these protests do harbour extreme views, as is the case with every social movement. The NDP doesn't mind hanging out there at rallies with Greta Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion, Madam Speaker, that promote violence and blowing up pipelines. They never apologize for that extremism of the far left that they fraternize with. But nor do we say that everybody who shows up at – I believe the vast majority of people who participated in these protests in recent weeks and months are normally law-abiding Canadians who have deep frustrations, are hard-working people who simply want their voices heard. And you know what? Maybe they don't have a professional left-wing PR shop to refine their messages for media, for CBC consumption. Maybe sometimes they say things a little inelegantly, and it must be said that some did cross the line and break the law, but that does not justify what has happened in recent days.

That is the context. The Prime Minister lit the fuse of the crisis which he has now bungled. He lit the fuse with the vaccine mandate. By the way, just a little coda here, a little note: when the government of Canada announced that they were removing the

exemption from truckers for the vaccine mandate, actually that same day the Canada Border Services Agency announced that the exemption was going to be extended. A few hours later the government came out ham-fistedly and said: “No. We’re actually wrong. It’s a mistake, a misunderstanding.”

Now, as someone who has sat around the federal cabinet table and, by the way, was partially responsible for CBSA, Madam Speaker, I can tell you that I think I know what happened there. I think a decision had been made – I’m going to go out on a limb here; it’s a hypothesis – by a cabinet committee that this didn’t make any sense, that they should extend the exemption, and CBSA didn’t want to enforce it because it didn’t make any sense. They’ve got bigger fish to fry than harassing a bunch of unvaccinated truckers. What happened was that the PMO saw this. They put the hammer down. They said: “No. This is a great political wedge. Stop the exemption. To heck with the truckers. We’re going to make them pay. We’re going to make an example out of them, and we’re going to set a trap for the Conservatives to fall into defending these” – well, Hillary Clinton would call them deplorables, I guess, Madam Speaker. Justin Trudeau would call them racists and misogynists, a fringe group of racists and misogynists. Political theatre, not public health policy: that’s what brought us to the beginning of the freedom convoy.

While I sympathize, while I agree with the participants of the freedom convoy that the vaccine mandate on truckers is unjustified and counterproductive, all it did was put further pressure on supply chains, further increasing food inflation in our country without any public health benefit. While I agree with their broader frustrations with public health measures and policies, it must be said, Madam Speaker, that many of the participants did cross the line from legal and peaceful protest to breaking the law. I am sworn, as are all members of this place, to uphold the laws, and we must, without favour or fear, all consistently support and defend the equal application of the rule of law. I think that what we have been facing here is, in part, a longer term failure of the rule of law.

What do I mean by this? Well, the people who parked trucks on streets in downtown Ottawa, at the Coutts and Windsor border crossings, you know what they have observed over recent years? They have observed radical left eco protesters blocking pipelines and railways, highways, roads here in Edmonton and other critical infrastructure without enforcement, without penalty, without charge. What they have seen, in some cases for 40 days or longer: the largest railway in the country at various points being blockaded without effective law enforcement. What they have seen is court injunctions, for example, against illegal protests around the oil refinery in Burnaby not being enforced by local law enforcement agencies. In other words, what they have seen is a growing trend to violate the rule of law, and I believe the chickens have come home to roost, Madam Speaker, because of this approach.

4:10

This should be a wake-up call for all of us, and I say to our police agencies that, yes, I understand that they have a job to do, and we respect that. They have intelligence. For example, we know about the sensitive issues at Coutts, and they need to have some tactical flexibility about how they deal with the situation. But at the end of the day citizens must depend on the equal application of the rule of law. Again, I think many frustrated people saw the lack of law enforcement against environmental protesters in recent years as a new standard of nonenforcement. That is a problem.

But, Madam Speaker, now we come to this. The protests occurred. We had initially a hundred and then 40 trucks intermittently blocking the border crossing at Coutts. Now, the good news is this. The government of Alberta – and I want to

commend Minister of Transportation, Municipal Affairs, the Solicitor General, and their officials who were working very closely with the CBSA, with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency, with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and with the RCMP. We all worked very closely together to ensure that five of the six Alberta-U.S. border crossings stayed open and unimpeded. We were able to move U.S. meat inspection facilities to different border crossings, to extend hours, to work with the truckers, to work with the livestock producers to minimize the damage and inconvenience.

To those who were involved in the Coutts blockade, really, Madam Speaker, I would just say to them that I think what they did was unnecessary, it was illegal, and all they did, really, was create inconvenience for other truckers, for livestock exporters, and for law-abiding motorists. I hope they’ve learned that lesson and won’t repeat that kind of illegal protest. We would urge them to engage in lawful and peaceful protest to make their point.

Madam Speaker, the point is this. Despite all of that, that matter was resolved. It was resolved with the use of ordinary law. There was no lack of law. There was no need for the extraordinary measures of the Emergencies Act. Alberta never sought its application. In fact, there’s been something made of the fact that the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs, in his capacity as the minister responsible for emergency preparedness for Alberta, wrote to his federal counterparts seeking some logistical assistance from the government of Canada, which is the conventional thing to do, because the RCMP had been unable to acquire heavy tow equipment and operators.

You know what the federal response was? “No.” The federal government would not step in to support Alberta in a request for some additional equipment. We did obtain about 40 additional RCMP officers but not thanks to the government of Canada, not as a result of that request but through going through the Canada-Alberta police services agreement and having officers transferred here from E Division in British Columbia on a bilateral basis, with no thanks to the federal Minister of Public Safety.

When we went to Ottawa to seek a little bit of assistance to safely apply the law, we were told: go away, Alberta; we’re not going to help out. We never asked for the power for the federal government arbitrarily to freeze people’s bank accounts, to seize their assets because of who they donate to. We never sought any of those powers. We didn’t need them, and neither did the government of Ontario in addressing the devastating border blockade at the Ambassador Bridge between Windsor and Detroit.

The Ambassador Bridge was cleared on February 12. The successful RCMP operation in Coutts began late on the night of February 13 and was completed early on the morning of the 14th. The Prime Minister invoked the Emergencies Act later on February 14, after those operations had been successfully prosecuted by provincial police authorities. Yes, the RCMP is a federal agency, but in this respect it acts on behalf of Alberta. We didn’t require these emergency powers.

Nor did they require these powers to clear the streets of Ottawa. Madam Speaker – guess what – it is illegal to park a truck in the middle of a road in Ottawa or in any other Canadian city. It is illegal to do that, particularly for two weeks. There are countless offences that the police can use for ordinary law enforcement here in Alberta. I made it plainly clear to the RCMP that they had not just the highways act but the rules of the road regulation, various provisions of the Criminal Code, and, helpfully, the defence of Alberta critical infrastructure act, under which they did lay one charge. But they had no shortage of law. What we had was a lack of enforcement in Ottawa using the ordinary legal tools that were available. They did not need extraordinary legal tools.

Now, having said all of that, on the 14th the Prime Minister invoked sections of the Emergencies Act. Let me read from section 3 of that act.

For the purposes of this Act, a national emergency is an urgent and critical situation of a temporary nature that

- (a) seriously endangers the lives, health or safety of Canadians and is of such proportions or nature as to exceed the capacity or authority of a province to deal with it, or
- (b) seriously threatens the ability of the Government of Canada to preserve the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of Canada

and that cannot be effectively dealt with under any other law of Canada.

Let's walk through this, Madam Speaker, because with our forthcoming application for judicial review the courts will be walking through this. Was this a national emergency? I would argue no. Two intermittent border crossings that were periodically blocked and trucks on the streets of downtown Ottawa: I don't think that meets any standard definition of a national emergency.

Did it seriously endanger the lives, health, or safety of Canadians? No, Madam Speaker, with one possible exception. We did receive intelligence, of course, that there was a group, who is now under detention, at Coutts who allegedly had violent intent and stockpiled weapons to jeopardize the lives of police officers. That matter was dealt with through diligent police work, intelligence gathering, and tactical operations without resorting to the extraordinary powers of the Emergencies Act. Was it of such a proportion or nature as to exceed the capacity or authority of a province to deal with it? Well, no, as I just pointed out.

Did it seriously threaten the ability of the government of Canada to preserve the sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity of Canada? No once more, Madam Speaker. Are we seriously going to say that a few dozen trucks parked on Ottawa's streets were a threat to Canadian sovereignty or territorial integrity? No. It was a law enforcement challenge. It was a logistical challenge. It was not, as some have argued, an insurrection.

Could it have been effectively dealt with under any other law of Canada? Yes, and it was at Coutts. It was at the Ambassador Bridge. It was at Emerson, Manitoba. It was at the Surrey border crossing. It was in Quebec City. It was in downtown Toronto, where police effectively prevented these kinds of blockades. It was in almost every instance but, ironically, downtown Ottawa, where I would argue there was just an enforcement failure, not in enforcement of the law but in the application of the law.

So I believe that on the face of it the invocation of the Emergencies Act did not meet any of the key statutory criteria outlined in the law.

4:20

But, Madam Speaker, what was the consequence of it? Well, we still don't fully know, but the federal government arrogated to itself the power to seize and freeze bank accounts on unclear criteria. I do know this, though. The federal Minister of Justice, Mr. Lametti, said on television last week that, quote, if you are a member of a pro-Trump movement who is donating hundreds of thousands of dollars and millions of dollars to this kind of thing, then you ought to be worried, unquote, about having your bank accounts frozen. So the top law enforcement officer of Canada actually said – like, this isn't a conspiracy theory. He actually said on the record that if he doesn't like your political views and you make a donation he disagrees with to some pro-Trump organization – what does that have to do with it? I mean, what about a pro-Clinton organization? This is the problem. The rule of law must be impartial. It can't be based on what U.S. politician you support or oppose. This is an

admission of not impartiality but partiality in the application of extraordinary police powers.

Some will say: well, it wasn't like the FLQ crisis, the October Crisis; we didn't have thousands of detentions. But our lives are now inextricably bound up in the digital world. You can't get a telephone, can't get heating for your home, can't function in modern society without a bank account, and if that bank account can be frozen and seized arbitrarily, without recourse, without judicial review, through the extrajudicial application of police power – and you don't even know who's doing it. Is the bank doing it because the government told them to? Is the government doing it themselves? Which government agency? To whom do you appeal? Madam Speaker, this is a widespread, invasive violation of fundamental rights that has occurred in our midst, in our time, setting a very dangerous precedent for the future.

Madam Speaker, another issue that counsel on behalf of the Alberta Crown will be raising in our judicial review application is that this is a gross and obvious violation of the Canadian Constitution with respect to provincial jurisdiction. Under the Canadian Constitution provinces are responsible for ordinary law enforcement. This essentially was a usurpation of our constitutional jurisdiction over law enforcement by the federal government.

Now, the act requires that provinces be consulted, and, yes, the Prime Minister convened a teleconference with the 13 provincial and territorial Premiers on Monday last week, which lasted for about an hour. I spoke strongly against the invocation of this power, and while I can't reveal what others said in that private call, I can say – it's a matter of public record – that six other provincial Premiers have joined me in stating their opposition to the use of this act. It requires consultation with the provinces; 70 per cent of the provinces said: no; this is unnecessary; it's unjustified; it violates our jurisdiction; it's counterproductive.

Madam Speaker, I refer the Assembly to the letter that I wrote, in formal response to the Prime Minister, laying out our arguments in this respect, arguments that will form the basis of our application for judicial appeal in addition to potential intervention in support of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and the Canadian Constitution Foundation and their pending judicial applications.

Madam Speaker, let me wrap up by saying that this is a fiasco. The Prime Minister lit the fuse. He then inflamed the situation not by seeking to deconflict it, but when tempers were rising and the protests were growing, what did the Prime Minister do? Did he act as a responsible national leader and appeal for calm? Did he show a shred of humility? No.

What he did was to pour gas on the flames of this conflict with his irresponsible comments. He said, well, just last week – I mean, he said on January 28: this is a troubling, small, but vocal minority who are lashing out at science, at government, at society. He said that the people of Ottawa don't deserve to be harassed by the inherent violence of a swastika flying on a street corner. He said on February 16 – last week a dear friend of mine, the Member of Parliament for Thornhill, Melissa Lantsman, who is the descendant of Holocaust survivors, asked the Prime Minister why he was dividing Canadians, and here was his answer: "Conservative Party members can stand with people who wave swastikas. They can stand with people who wave the Confederate flag," et cetera.

Instead of seeking to calm the country, the Prime Minister sought to inflame the conflict. He created the conflict unnecessarily with his vax mandate on truckers. He inflamed the conflict with these comments, and then – and then – as a diversion, a cynical diversion from the disaster that he created, he goes and invokes the son of the War Measures Act.

Madam Speaker, this, I believe, will go down as perhaps his legacy. Perhaps he'll be remembered for it, because I don't know

what else he's done of merit. This will go down in history as a central mark on his premiership. This will go down – look at how Canada and his government have been the subject of international ridicule. The same Prime Minister who used to be the toast of the liberal international media is now the laughingstock of the same global media because of this gross and unjustified overreach, this violation of civil rights to deal with a few dozen trucks parked illegally. If this is how he acts in that kind of a situation, imagine how he would react to something like an FLQ crisis.

Oh, how about this? I think maybe we have a test case, Madam Speaker, because last week armed, machete-wielding eco terrorists attacked a group of blue-collar workers and security guards at a Coastal GasLink construction camp, threatened their lives, set the equipment on fire, and literally terrorized those workers, many of whom are Indigenous Canadians. If you go up to those camps, Madam Speaker, you'll see that most of the security guards, many of the construction workers are hard-working members of the First Nations, and they were terrorized largely by left-wing, urban, southern, Caucasian eco terrorists. Actual violence, potentially lethal violence, that happened a week ago. The Emergencies Act was in effect. I didn't see the government of Canada springing to freeze the bank accounts of those associated with that act of eco terrorism.

Again, this is a dangerous precedent. This is the partial application of law, not the impartial application. This is a precedent that apparently he's willing to use against a few dozen truckers illegally parked but not against people wielding machetes, threatening lives, and setting equipment on fire dangerously. So how can he and how will his government ever be able to deal responsibly and credibly with real threats to national security? Madam Speaker, I don't think that that government can do so.

In closing, let me say that this is a shameful moment in our history. It is an echo of the 1970 use of the War Measures Act, and it is an echo of the kinds of injustices that that same law was used to apply in the First and Second World Wars. It must never happen again. That is why this government will go to the wall using every legal means at our disposal. Yes, the application of it may now have been suspended, but the legal issues raised, the rights that have been violated, the provincial jurisdiction that has been interfered with are still very much live issues.

4:30

Finally, Madam Speaker, what a shame that in all of this the once-great New Democrat Party has gone from being a champion of civil liberties to a lapdog for Justin Trudeau and his abuse of power. You know, they and their NDP friends in Ottawa have enabled and facilitated this gross power grab. Maybe the NDP in Alberta have been distracted because they've been more focused with their friends in the Alberta Federation of Labour and the teachers' union on forcing five-year-olds to wear masks indefinitely. That's their priority right now, not defending civil liberties like the NDP did so courageously in 1970. But this government will defend those liberties, will defend the Constitution, and will go to the Supreme Court using every resource at our disposal to defend law and order as the basis of our democratic society.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to this motion regarding the federal government's invocation of the Emergencies Act. Let me say this first. I respect and support everyone's right – every Canadian's right, every Albertan's right –

to protest and disagree with their government and their right to peaceful assembly. I note that the Emergencies Act has been lifted by the federal government, but here we are debating that because this government and this Premier needs something to deflect from their failure to act in the matter of the Coumts blockade. That's why we're debating this.

I'm deeply disappointed that this is the situation that we face as a province and as a country. We never should have gotten to this point, and I'm frustrated that once again the UCP government is choosing to play politics rather than show leadership. Earlier the Premier was talking about political theatre. That's exactly what this government is engaged in.

What Albertans have seen over this past month has been the failure of multiple levels of government. When these blockades first started, Albertans looked to the government and the Premier for leadership. Hundreds of millions of dollars lost due to the border blockade. People stranded for days with no food, washrooms, or access to medicine. Communities in southern Alberta were isolated. Many of those who were stranded on the border also live in the northeast part of Calgary. There are many who are in the trucking industry. None of them were part of this illegal blockade. They were impacted by these blockades.

Security experts have reported that the Premier's weak response was emboldening the protesters, and I couldn't agree more. People expected that their government, that claimed to champion law and order, would do whatever it took to end these unlawful blockades. But, instead, what did they see? They saw UCP MLAs taking part in the illegal blockade and celebrating and endorsing illegal activities at Coumts. The Member for Taber-Warner attended the blockade, and if the Premier wants Albertans to follow the rule of law, he must say something about his own caucus member participating in an unlawful, illegal blockade. When that member went back to participate in this protest multiple times, the Premier did nothing. Not one UCP member said anything about their colleague participating in unlawful, illegal activities. When the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland publicly encouraged law enforcement to break the law, to essentially create their own laws, the Premier did nothing.

Mr. McIver: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

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

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Mr. McIver: Under 23(h), (i), and (j). The hon. member just accused another member of the House of saying what his intentions were, making false allegations against another member. You just heard it. It's as plain as day. Would you please instruct the member, respectfully, Madam Speaker, to not do that anymore?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was listening to my colleague speak, and my colleague was speaking factually about the attendance of a member at an event that has been deemed illegal. I did not hear an accusation or a point of order, but I look forward to your ruling.

Mr. Sabir: Further to my colleague, I was referring to a statement that was made by the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

I'll also ask those in position of law enforcement, as well as military personal to remember your oaths that you have taken, the country that you represent, and the citizens that you are to protect.

I want you to consider that, when the orders are delivered to you in the coming days.

That's the statement I am referring to, and I don't think it's a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I think this is probably a good time to start by expressing caution throughout the course of this debate about illegal activities and members' involvement or noninvolvement and what may invoke anger in this Chamber. Certainly, there is a fine line between accusing a member of something that they may or may not have done and reading a quote, for example, that a member may or may not have posted on social media. I can appreciate that we might be in this form of points of order throughout the course of this debate, and I think that knowing that, I'm going to lay out a general caution for all the members in this House to be aware of the words that they say that can inflame anger in this Chamber.

This is your opportunity. For every single member in this House right now, this is our opportunity to – sorry. Hon. Member for St. Albert, do you have something you'd like to say?

Ms Renaud: No. Over to you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. I can appreciate, you can certainly appreciate that when the Speaker is standing, the Speaker has the floor and not the individual members of this Assembly. That would be most helpful.

I'm giving caution to all members in this Chamber that we are to respect one another as elected representatives for the people that sent us here, and that will be the tone of this debate as we proceed throughout the course of the day. I think that's what Albertans expect of us, and we all know that. That is how we're going to move forward.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has the floor.

Debate Continued

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the caution. I will try to be respectful, but at the same time I think that facts are facts. Whenever I'm describing those facts, I will try to describe them with the utmost respect.

Let me start with what the acting Justice minister said about this blockade. She said that it's illegal. She said that it's intolerable. That was the description coming from this government of this blockade, that it is illegal, that it is offside, although she also did nothing about it at all.

4:40

Our caucus encouraged the government, encouraged the Justice minister to go to the court, seek an injunction, and look at other tools that you have at your disposal such as suspending commercial drivers' licences and more. These were concrete steps to show that the government supported the rule of law and would stand with law-abiding Albertans against the lawlessness at Coumts. Instead, the government did nothing and even continued to stand with their colleagues who proudly defended the blockaders, saying that they inspired nations or called them good folks. Then the seriousness of the situation became clear: 13 long guns, handguns, a machete, multiple sets of body armour, 21 rifle magazines for semiautomatic rifles, and other stockpiles of ammunition. All of that was seized at Coumts, and four of them have now been charged with conspiring to murder RCMP officers.

The acting Justice minister stood up with the RCMP, who were the target of this vile plot to murder law enforcement personnel, and has still refused to condemn her colleagues' reckless and selfish

actions. The fact that the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland would suggest that the police side with the protesters and stop enforcing the laws that a democratically . . .

Mr. Getson: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Getson: Yeah. A point of order, Madam Speaker, under 23(h), (i), and (j), soliciting false motives, causing disorder. We just went through this. I take exception to the member opposite continuing to reference me with causing disorder, eliciting any illegal behaviours or activities.

Again, given that the Liberals and the NDP voted in an Emergencies Act, which is going to be proven in a court of law to be unequivocally – unequivocally – out of line for what that context was, the simple statement that I made for people to remember their oaths of who they swore to protect in this country: that is sedition? That is sedition according to the socialist opposition. It is not a seditious act to make people remember. I might add, Madam Speaker, that I would also say the same thing to that member opposite now. Remember your oath and who you swore to protect. Remember those flags and those colours and who you should be patriotic to. If that's sedition, I'll say that all day long.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I may caution the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. While I will deal with the point of order, it is certainly not appropriate to speak directly to another member in this Chamber. Words like "you" and pointing are definitely not helpful, and maybe I should have broadened my earlier caution to include such things.

Having said that, the opposition to respond and then the Government House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I understand the point of order was under 23(h), (i), and (j). While I continue to listen to my colleague's remarks and he has made an effort to enter into the record the facts of the matter, I do not believe this to be a point of order and look forward to your ruling.

Mr. McIver: Well, Madam Speaker, you get to caution us. We don't get to caution you, so I won't do that, but I will point out the historical fact that when I asked you to rule that what the hon. member said a few minutes ago was out of order, you chose not to, which is your right. But now you have a second chance because the hon. member has continued to do exactly what you cautioned him not to do, under (h), (i), and (j), create disorder in the House. This is the disorder: to accuse, to impute false and unavowed motives to another member, which he did to the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, and to make allegations at another member. Madam Speaker, it's your wisdom that we depend upon. Might I respectfully say that the sooner you rule this out of order, the less time we'll probably spend having these conversations, because I promise to stand up every time that they do this.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. minister, I certainly don't think you were challenging the Speaker on a ruling.

Mr. McIver: No. Not at all.

The Deputy Speaker: I would expect that the way that was worded will not happen again, because that would be most inappropriate, as you would know.

While these matters are sensitive and while I believe there are different perspectives on what has been said or posted or whatever outside of this Chamber, that doesn't make it not true. That, therefore, makes what is being said a matter of debate and not a point of order. However, we know that this type of language is not helpful. We've all known that before this debate even started. Now we're here for the second time in a very short period of time.

I would ask the hon. member to tailor his remarks to the motion at hand, which is about – you can certainly read it for yourself. I think that if we stick to the matter at hand as opposed to other things, we can have a good, fulsome debate in this House. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has heard my words and will proceed in such a manner.

Debate Continued

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am trying to keep my remarks to the motion at hand, which is about the invocation of the Emergencies Act in the context of these blockades, in the context of what this government did or did not do, in the context of what the member of this government caucus did or did not do. Certainly, the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland would have the opportunity to explain what he wrote, but I was exactly trying to comment on the public statement that he made, and that included that he wants law enforcement to consider their oath when the orders are delivered to them in coming days. That's, in my opinion – the member can, again, get up and disagree when it's his turn . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, and I can appreciate that you're trying to defend the things that you've said. That time has passed. I have made a ruling, and I would ask that maybe we move to your next point. While I certainly don't want to tell you what to say or what not to say, I am making a very strong suggestion that we move past this and really stick to the matter at hand, which is the motion.

Mr. Sabir: I am not trying to defend what I said. I am trying to make the point that the presence of a member who makes a statement in government caucus worries me because at the end of the day that's the government for all Albertans. It worries me because of the fear of the influence that that member may have on the Premier, with the cabinet, and whether the Premier didn't do anything because of that influence about all of this situation. We know that the UCP did nothing to condemn these statements from government caucus members.

4:50

Like, we heard from the government, we heard from our acting Justice minister that these are illegal blockades, that these are illegal activities, but we didn't hear from the government why their caucus members participated in those illegal activities. Earlier in question period today the Premier was defending those members, and the UCP has defended their colleagues who made multiple visits to that illegal blockade, where there were people plotting to murder police officers. So it's absolutely disgusting hypocrisy from this government. Clearly . . .

Mr. McIver: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

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

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. McIver: Under 23(h), (i), and (j), imputing false motives. The hon. member just suggested that members of this caucus supported the idea of shooting police officers. It's what he inferred. Clearly, that is intended to create disorder. I once again implore you to rule it out of order. I know how much you enjoy me standing here talking to you, but maybe you don't enjoy it enough to want me to do it all the time, particularly when this is so obviously out of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This is not a point of order. I listened incredibly closely to what my colleague was saying. He did not imply motive. He did not say anything that should create disorder in this House, because these are factual things. We know that at the Coutts blockade there were those planning the murder of officers. This is on the public record. We know that UCP MLAs attended these blockades. My colleague has simply put on the record here in this Assembly, where we should be able to have a factually based discussion of these things, the occurrence in this situation, and it is incredibly important and relevant to Government Motion 10.

I suggest to you, Madam Speaker, that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is being incredibly sensitive and is trying to curtail the debate in this House, is trying to influence it, and I do not think that there is a point of order. My colleague continues to address this respectfully and, I believe, should be able to continue his remarks, because he has not said anything incorrect, unfactual, or accusatory towards another MLA.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, I thank you for your remarks. I have two thoughts to say on your argument in particular, hon. Official Opposition House Leader. This is not a point of order. However, this is getting to be very off topic. The motion – and perhaps we could provide a copy to all members of this House who don't have one – is fairly clear in a direction, and while I can appreciate that there are certain arguments to be made to make your point as a whole, this debate is becoming about something that this motion is not. This is not a point of order, but it is becoming off topic and will become a point of order in a different matter and which the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs is arguing at this point.

Hon. member, please proceed with the debate on Government Motion 10.

Debate Continued

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In our view, in my view, this motion is entirely about politics and not about serving Albertans. Also, the Emergencies Act has been revoked, but still this Premier, who is facing a review of his leadership in a matter of weeks, insists on using people's concern and fear to play politics.

[The Speaker in the chair]

All I am suggesting to the government here is this. If the government wants to be taken seriously, if the Premier wants to be taken seriously, I'm asking this government to take some action about those colleagues within their caucus who put a spirit in this or who cheered on or supported this illegal blockade. That's all I'm saying.

Mr. Hunter: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I make a point of order under 23(h). Specifically, it says:

23 A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member . . .

(h) makes allegations against another Member.

Specifically in this case, the member just made an allegation that I attended and was participating in a blockade. Mr. Speaker, it is on record – and I have also put out a press release stating it to Albertans and to the world – that I was never there when there was an illegal blockade going on. That is public knowledge, and that is the truth. This member knows full well that that's the case, yet he continues to make these allegations that are false. This is a point of order, in my opinion, because the member continues to do these unavowed motives and also makes the allegations against this Member for Taber-Warner.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(h), making allegations against another member, the member of my caucus has been responding to Government Motion 10 and has entered into the fact what is on the public record about members of the government caucus, including the member who has just spoken, attending and visiting blockades and participants there. This is on the public record. I don't believe that he is intending to make allegations but, rather, connecting these events to Government Motion 10, specifically because the invocation of the Emergencies Act is related to how this government and its MLAs handled the situation here in Alberta. I do not believe that it is a point of order, and I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You have wisely said in this House many times that you can't do indirectly what the rules don't allow you to do directly. The speaker from the other side has said that the blockades were illegal, and he's right about that. I agree with him on that. He also said that our member was participating in the blockade. Now, he has accused our member of committing a crime. He's done it indirectly. Your wisdom, which I agree with, is that you can't do indirectly what you can't do directly. I think we just saw a textbook example of that, and I would implore you to rule it out of order.

The Speaker: Well, I am prepared to rule. I've also said many times that we may have to accept two versions of the facts because both hon. members will be stating what they believe to be the facts. What I will say is this. I have listened to the debate intently. I also know that the Deputy Speaker has had much to say about this particular issue. The debate on Government Motion 10 is going to be a debate which invokes a significant amount of passion as both sides of this particular issue view the world very differently.

If members of the government would like to see the Speaker intervening at every opportunity when a member of the opposition makes a claim or a statement that isn't specifically related to Government Motion 10, then in return, when members of the government make statements that aren't specifically related to Government Motion 10, in the future of the debate the Speaker will have no option but to be interventionist, and my sense is that members of the government or otherwise would find that displeasurable. When members of the opposition make claims about the government that are displeasurable, while I may or may

not agree with those statements, they are entitled to make them. Now, I don't believe that the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall was claiming that the Member for Taber-Warner committed a crime. He merely stated his presence at an event, which the member has also acknowledged. The member has specifically and on the record stated the times at which he was there, which indicate he did not attend an illegal event. We will accept that as fact.

5:00

The member of the opposition is equally entitled to make a statement based upon his version of the events that have taken place. It doesn't necessarily mean he's making an accusation that the member committed a crime, because that would be against the rules. I intend for the rest of the evening, whenever possible, to apply the rules fairly and equally, but because the member – I will provide caution. I know that the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has been cautioned now on three separate occasions about making these accusations. He knows it's unhelpful. He knows it's created disorder, yet he continues to do so. There is a significant amount of opportunity to debate many issues to do with Government Motion 10, and he ought to be doing just that.

The hon. member.

Debate Continued

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I will try to wrap up fairly quickly here. I think that the Premier is moving this motion because he is more interested in politics than serving Albertans. This is all a big sham. The Premier likes to claim he knows best, but the Ontario Premier, also their Conservative bro, Doug Ford, has supported the use of the Emergencies Act because he knows the situation in Ottawa was very serious. Also, we know and Albertans know that the people organizing these blockades are all interconnected. That's why I think Albertans don't trust this Premier when they say that this motion is somehow about invoking the Emergencies Act. That's not true. The Premier claims to be defending Albertans and defending the rule of law, but really this is a hollow political stunt. The Premier always puts his political fortunes first. He'll put saving his job over his duty to the people of this province. That is what has driven the disaster at Coultts over the past several weeks.

Again, if the UCP was serious about defending the rule of law by taking action against these illegal and criminal blockades, I think they will start looking at their own actions. They will start looking at what they have been doing to disperse this blockade, how their members have behaved. Until they take this basic step to support the rule of law, Albertans see this motion and this government for what it is: playing political games rather than serving the people they were elected to serve. Shame on this Premier, shame on this government for putting our economy, the safety of our residents, the rule of law at risk to ensure the Premier keeps his job. I've never been more disgusted in this government, and that's saying something with this group.

Alberta's NDP supports the right to protest, respects the right to protest and to peaceful assembly. We support the rule of law. The UCP supports neither. The only people standing for the Premier are those who would stand for the Premier. Thankfully, Mr. Speaker, that is fewer and fewer Albertans. I suspect that, come 2023, Albertans will get a government that has a real leader, a Premier that relies on her values and on what she hears from Albertans, and I can't wait.

Thank you.

The Speaker: My, so much interest in debate today. The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis, and then we will assess the situation.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk on Government Motion 10. I want to start by just quickly reading the first part of it.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) condemn the unnecessary invocation of the Emergencies Act by the government of Canada as the Assembly is of the view that this is a measure which infringes upon the constitutionally guaranteed rights of Albertans and all Canadians, including the right to due process and natural justice.

I'll stop there, reading part of Motion 10.

It is necessary for this Legislative Assembly to speak with one voice in denouncing Justin Trudeau and the government of Canada's authoritarian imposition of this Emergencies Act. Absolutely. Even though it's been revoked, considerable damage, the unintended consequences, will reverberate through our country, our province, and our economy for a long time, maybe forever.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a time for politics as usual. This is a time to put Albertans first. This is a time for taking real action to defend Albertans. Even though it's been revoked, it is still the time to do that. I agree; Justin Trudeau clearly acted in bad faith. I agree with a previous speaker that, clearly, the federal government did not need these powers to clear blockades or break up occupations.

The predecessor to the Emergencies Act, the War Measures Act, used in World War I and World War II and the FLQ crisis, with bombs in the Montreal stock exchange and mailboxes and murders and kidnappings – my goodness, the overreach from this government. Mr. Speaker, do you know what's ironic? By invoking the far-reaching emergency powers and then attempting to make these powers permanent, Trudeau has proven himself to be everything that the freedom convoy participants travelled thousands of kilometres to protest against. He proved them right.

Mr. Speaker, also, though, from the beginning Alberta's Premier and this government failed to grasp the urgency of the situation. The fact that the Premier put his throne speech ahead of passing this motion when the Emergencies Act was still in effect is clear evidence of this. When will they put Albertans first? You know, look at how the world has noticed the draconian overreach, the imposition, the seizure of bank accounts. Think of what that's going to do for our investment confidence, our tourism, our immigration, all those things that have made Alberta and Canada so great. Just think of what this overreach is going to do to all those things.

5:10

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, I want to give a shout-out to how Albertans and Canadians spoke up. My constituency office and, I bet, everyone's in here was inundated with people that wanted to peacefully speak up, peacefully demonstrate, people that were worried about the seizure of their money in the bank account even though they had just wanted to support a peaceful, legal demonstration. I saw on BNN Bloomberg this morning that \$7.8 million were seized by Canadian banks. It sort of sounds like a lot, but can you imagine if it was your money? Can you imagine the stress and fear that goes with that at the same time of the two years that we've been through? Many, many Albertans, many, many Cypress-Medicine Hatters reached out to my constituency, worried about their civil rights, their Charter rights, their legal right to peacefully and legally support, and our Prime Minister blew it.

Do you know what it was also nice to see? An independent MLA in Ontario. I don't know if it was his petition or if he was just promoting it. Almost 90,000 Canadians signed the petition asking

the Senate to vote against the Emergencies Act, and he peacefully and properly put it out there and, my goodness, got the attention of Canadian Senators, although I think we never got to that point, in just 48 hours. That's an incredible accomplishment for Canadians, for Albertans to peacefully and legally get involved in our system and have effect.

I want to give a shout-out to the Premier of Saskatchewan, who was the very first one, initially, that started to remove the mandates as omicron moves to the endemic stage. I've stood up in this House and I've talked so much about the mental health crisis, the economic crisis, and the physical health crisis that Cypress-Medicine Hatters have gone through. The inconsistency from this government, the flip-flops have been a big factor in the stress level and a big factor in what happened, so hopefully this government can use that as a learning experience in the time that they have left.

I know it's been revoked, Mr. Speaker, but there are still things that we can do as an Alberta Legislature to have one voice and to put Albertans first, to prioritize Albertan families. Why don't we have a motion or a law – ATB. It's a Crown corporation, wholly owned by the province. Steps must be taken to prevent seizure of account holders' assets under future, similar situations. Let's do something to prevent the overreach from Ottawa.

Secondly, the province regulates vehicle insurance and registration. Why didn't this government take steps to prevent the cancellation of registration of insurance of Albertan vehicles? Hard-working truckers, and so many have said it: we owe so much to them for the last two years, you know, supplying our goods, stocking our shelves, bringing us our fuel, doing all those things that make our last-in-time inventory system work and allow us to feed our families and live our lives. We didn't defend them. We didn't stick up for them when we could. That was a huge mistake.

Thirdly, the province has a duty to defend Albertans' property rights. Any attempt by the federal government to seize or conscript Albertans' property must be stood up against and prevented. I had constituents, I had Albertans e-mail me asking if it was possible that the Alberta government temporarily cover any money seized by Ottawa, temporarily protect Albertans' civil liberties, Albertans' right to live in a full and a free democracy. We heard crickets from this government. We did a throne speech instead of this motion. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker – I've said it before – Albertans are tired of hearing this Premier's excuses for failing to take real action on this, on many other issues with Ottawa's overreach, and it forces Albertans to wonder where this Premier's allegiances truly lie.

Mr. Speaker, I started by saying that it was a shameful time, a shameful time that the government of Canada overreached, you know, into our civil liberties, into our right to live in a full, fair democracy, and hurt our quality of life and hurt our reputation going forward. But it's also a historic time. Hundreds of Albertans stood outside of my constituency office on the two or three Saturdays in a very legal, peaceful protest, waving Canadian flags, waving Alberta flags, sticking up for their neighbours, for Alberta to be free and strong. Unfortunately, they heard crickets from this government, but that's what it was about. I absolutely support and applaud all of those who exercised their legal right, their civic rights for peaceful and legal demonstration, and I applaud their effectiveness. Let's use this opportunity to continue to make Alberta the freest and most prosperous place.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is such an honour to rise today in this House and speak to this motion declaring Alberta's

opposition to the imposition of the Emergencies Act. I want to thank government leadership for putting this motion forward on behalf of every single Albertan in this province today. There is a lot of important work that we as legislators undertake within the walls of this House, but there are truly very few moments in our history that hold such significance as this one right here and now. To be able to use the voice that God gave me to speak to this motion and address the events of the past week in our country is an honour.

Now, I understand that Justin Trudeau recently rescinded the Emergencies Act, conveniently right before our debate started in this House today, but that does not negate the need to have this debate today and to discuss the matters of the past week and ensure that they never happen again in our country. As I said, Justin Trudeau's unilateral invocation of this Emergencies Act is not something to take lightly. It needs to be talked about today, it needs to be debated by all members of this House, and we need to do everything in our power to ensure that the events of the past week do not happen again in our Canada.

This was not an elected official merely making use of a piece of legislation to take care of ordinary business. Mr. Speaker, this was an attack on our values, this was an attack on our Canadian identity, and it was an attack on our way of life. This was the declaration of a culture war that has been brewing beneath the surface of our nation for years. Will Canada continue to be a free country, where our citizens are able to speak freely and express their support or opposition towards government policies without fear of reprimand and imprisonment and where citizens can work, save, spend, and donate their life savings wherever and however they choose? Or will Canada become a police state, governed not by the rule of law but by the will of a functioning tyrant whose only ability to govern is propped up by the votes of socialists who, by their very ideological nature, are too reliant on that government to think critically and make decisions for themselves appropriately? Anyone who believes that the latter could not become permanent in Canada best revisit the events of Venezuela short years ago.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, these are moments in our history that we must not allow to pass us by as though life will just carry on tomorrow as usual once the police raids and arrests of innocent people are over. We must not allow that to happen, because even if we wish to stick our heads in the sand and pretend as though it were possible and it never happened, that's not possible. The events of the days ahead will set precedents in defining our nation for a generation. These are the defining moments for us as Canadians, who were once known for our peaceful and friendly nature, and one which the entire world is watching. Will our maple leaf stand for freedom, or will it fall to oppression?

The Emergencies Act gave the federal government the power to bar Canadian citizens from travelling to or from specific areas, to deport others, to confiscate private property, to spy on our every private communication in whichever form they deemed necessary and appropriate, and even to freeze the private bank accounts of our citizens, and the power to do all of these things not just for the reasons related directly to matters at hand, which in this instance was the freedom protests against the government lockdowns and health mandates, but for suspicion of any other dissatisfactory behaviour that the leader of the government may not like in the moment.

The Justice minister of our nation went so far as to declare, on national television, as was noted by our Premier earlier today, that if you are, quote, part of a pro-Trump movement, you should be worried about having your bank account frozen by the government. End quote. You heard that right. The Justice minister of Canada just

declared on national TV that anyone who supports the former leader of a political party politically maligned to his own should know that their assets are at risk of seizure by his government.

Mr. Speaker, let's all put our political opinions about Donald Trump aside in this moment, because I know that many people listening will have big opinions about that man. Let's really think about the implications that such a position taken by our Justice minister against a political opponent of his could have on the future of our supposed free and democratic society in Canada. Further, when asked which powers within the act the government planned to use, the Prime Minister himself declared: everything is on the table. This should terrify all of us.

Mr. Speaker, this act was first introduced over a hundred years ago, in 1914, for the sole purpose of declaring a war or investigation under the name of the War Measures Act. The act was then later amended, in 1960, to legislate that anything done under that War Measures Act could not be an infringement or abrogation on any right or freedom outlined in our Canadian Bill of Rights. The irony.

Today the current version of that act, the Emergencies Act, is legislated so as only to be used for the purposes of combatting espionage or sabotage; foreign-influenced activities; threats or use of serious violence for political, religious, or ideological objectives; or covert acts intended to undermine the constitutionally established government. To put that last point into simpler terms, these would be acts to topple the very existence of Canada's constitutional monarchy and democratic institutions, not acts of the day to undermine electoral outcomes. So very serious offences that this act is intended to be used for in 2022. None of the events at the freedom protests constitute a breach of any of these four criteria or even anything close to a breach of these four criteria. To be frank, the single only threat undermining the constitutionally established Canadian government is Justin Trudeau and his Liberal caucus.

I should remind everyone watching and in this House that this is not the Emergencies Act. I want to be very clear that this is the rebranded War Measures Act from 1914. The fact that Justin Trudeau tried to use the powers of this 100-year-old War Measures Act under the guise of the Emergencies Act without any justifiable reason to do so, other than to make his actions more palatable and relatable to Canadians and to set a precedent that such actions and power could become commonplace for the use of any ordinary, present-day event that the Prime Minister may consider to be a threat to his sovereignty, is repulsive, it's disgusting, and it is flagrantly dishonourable to the people, the values, and the historical events that built our nation. Make no mistake; this was the former War Measures Act, and when it was first written, it was meant for war times only.

Mr. Speaker, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines democracy in two profound ways, which, when put into context of this year, 2022, are very profound. The first definition is common people constituting the source of political authority, and the second is an organization or system in which everyone is treated equally and has equal rights. Those definitions in today's context should give anyone the shivers. The events of the past two years, especially the decisions of our Prime Minister in Ottawa this past week, are an absolute affront to our way of life. The thousands of Canadians who rallied in their towns and communities in the name of freedom from government overreach and tyranny understood these definitions, and they understood that they were no longer being upheld in our nation.

Throughout the demonstrations there was not one statue toppled down, not one flag defaced, one piece of private property set ablaze, nor one business window smashed. Instead, the people stayed up all night to man the National War Memorial and ensure the monument was respected. They cooked and distributed meals for the homeless. They shovelled sidewalks for small-business owners and jubilantly

flew our country's maple leaf with pride as they demanded better for their children and our future.

The majority of these individuals participating in the protests were not anarchists or radicals. Rather, they were our friends, our neighbours, our dentists, and our hairstylists, ordinary good people pushed to the brink by pandemic restrictions and left bewildered, wondering what became of the free and compassionate country they once called home but feeling as though they had a moral obligation to do something about it rather than sit at home complaining and wishing for someone else to take charge for them. These were patriotic people who cared about their country and embodied the most Canadian principles of all: compassion and equal treatment for their fellow citizens and self-determination over reliance and dependency on the government. Our Prime Minister may divisively refer to these individuals as racists and misogynists. But, Mr. Speaker, do you know what I refer to these people as? People; human beings with a voice who deserve to be heard, deserve to be listened to, and deserve to be represented by their government. Perhaps Mr. Trudeau should remember that.

The past two weeks I went and actually hung a huge Canadian flag on my front balcony, something that I've never done before. It's duct-taped in place in true redneck fashion, so it doesn't quite look as pretty. It doesn't have quite as much curb appeal as perhaps it could, but it's the thought behind the flag that matters and the message that it sends. The freedom fighters across our nation have reminded me why I'm so proud to be Canadian. I've never in my life been more proud to support the maple leaf than I am right now and to see it turned into an emblem of freedom and democracy all across the world. We cannot let Justin Trudeau take that away from us, and we will not. Our elders gave their lives and sacrificed so that we as present-day Canadians could live peaceful lives, free from tyranny and free to think, believe, speak, and vote with our own consciences.

To every Albertan: this government stands opposed to Justin Trudeau's imposition of the Emergencies Act, and this government will continue to defend you against this attack on our very way of life. To every Canadian living outside of our province, especially those in provinces with Premiers supporting the imposition of this legislation: this Alberta government will continue to defend you as well from halfway across the nation. There is no more important time than right now for Canadians to rise up and use the power of their voices to alter the trajectory that our country is on for the better. Our Canada can be saved, but we as citizens need to save it.

Mr. Speaker, I will close this speech with the ever-fitting quote by Ronald Reagan, which I know that I've cited in this House before but becomes more relevant by the day.

Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like . . . [when] men were free.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South has the call.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to thank my friend the Member for Banff-Kananaskis for her wise words. I appreciate listening to her. Even though I'm a much older man, she is wise beyond her years, and I really appreciate her words.

The members opposite said that the government did not show leadership. Mr. Speaker, what is the best way to show leadership to Albertans? I would suggest that the highest and best way to do it is to get rid of destructive restrictions, to listen to Albertans. I know that there's still a little ways to go, but I appreciate that we are

moving in the right direction. That is the best way to bless the lives of Albertans.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, about a month ago I had the opportunity to attend the trucker convoy rally near my home, in Gasoline Alley. It was packed with friends. It wasn't an angry gathering. It wasn't a lawless gathering. It had a positive atmosphere filled with hope. Why is that the case? Why was this a positive atmosphere? I'll tell you why. Men and women and families had felt voiceless. They had felt disenfranchised by federal and provincial governments, but now they had a voice in the trucker convoy. That was cause for celebration. They had not felt listened to. They had felt ignored.

I think all of us to some extent can understand that feeling. I've felt it myself. Too often we have seen a top-down, command-and-control approach that treated adults as children, not respecting and trusting them to govern themselves and their families in respectful ways. What I have witnessed, what many of us witnessed offends my core values as a public servant. I never want to see this again. Many Albertans feel the same. In the end the truth will prevail, and I'm so grateful for that. History will show that across-the-board vaccine passports and mandates were gross errors and in many cases caused more harm than good, especially for young adults and children.

Mr. Speaker, I have sorrow. Public health authorities undermined their own authority with biased reporting and using fear and coercion as a tool. I've spoken on this before, and I will be bringing forth a motion in this Legislature for there to be a comprehensive public inquiry into COVID, including a full cost analysis of COVID restrictions, mandates, and passports, especially on children and young adults. The truth must prevail. The truth produces hope, and it produces healing.

Mr. Speaker, in respect of the trucker convoy we know what the Prime Minister did. He went into hiding, and then he sought to cancel and delegitimize the protesters, calling them a fringe minority, labelling them as racists and misogynists. That is not leadership. That weakens the public authority of important institutions.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition here sits in a thoughtless stupor. If they do not vote in favour of this, they are shameful. I don't use that adjective very often, but it is shameful, actually. Perhaps they agree a great deal with Canada's first NDP Prime Minister. That is what he is. While perhaps he belongs to a different party, his actions speak for themselves. He is Canada's NDP Prime Minister. Their false ideas are lies.

Over the past two years Albertans have seen for themselves the results of too much government in our lives. We should resist government taking away our freedom and prosperity and get them away, get them out of our lives.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there were a few protesters who did blockade public roads, and I do not condone that. I have spoken against this with Extinction Rebellion. It is always wrong to break the law. I do not believe, like some, that the ends justify the means. Even in a cause that is just, it is not right to blockade. It undermines the moral high ground of a just cause. I sorrow that that would ever occur.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister enacted the Emergencies Act. While he has just revoked it out of political expediency, why did he do it in the first place? This was not an emergency, but this is a very serious matter. The Emergencies Act is a nuclear option – it is a nuclear option – and should never be used as a political tool, attacking an entire movement of Canadians, including Albertans who felt disenfranchised, whose crime was disagreeing with government. It labels an entire movement which disagrees with government as a public danger, an emergency, a voice that must be

stomped out and silenced. This is very dangerous. This is not leadership. This is certainly a very bad precedent. What will the government do when there is a real emergency? Will citizens need to look over their shoulders if they support causes that an insecure, unprincipled government feels threaten maintaining their power and position?

Mr. Speaker, I visited with the protesters yesterday outside the Legislature. Many of them are principled men and women who just want government to leave them alone, to get out of their lives, to stop dividing them from their families and friends. They are rightly concerned that government has been so destructive to the national fabric, posing a threat to their freedom and prosperity and of all Albertans. Government is supposed to protect freedoms that support prosperity for its people. In many cases they have done the opposite. There is cause for concern. Turbulence is on the horizon; in some respects it is already upon us. There is an urgency to prepare. These men and women are not breaking laws – and I appreciate their leadership – who are raising voices of warning and, with the truth, inspiring hope in so many where government failed to do so.

This political use of the Emergencies Act demonstrates that our federal government is rudderless. It is a morally and fiscally bankrupt government that acts as an enemy to Albertans' freedom and prosperity, and I condemn it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Perfect. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Government Motion 10. I'll read a condensed version into the record so that people following along can understand what we're discussing this afternoon.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) condemn the unnecessary invocation of the Emergencies Act by the government of Canada . . .
- (b) [that the Legislative Assembly] is of the view that the government of Canada has failed to demonstrate that the present circumstances meet the threshold that the law requires . . . and
- (c) [that the Legislative Assembly] is further of the view that this invocation of the Emergencies Act constitutes an unnecessary intrusion into provincial jurisdiction under the Constitution of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important that we work to try and understand how we got to this point. Over the last two years we have seen that, time and time again, governments throughout Canada, throughout the western, developed world, most of the world have asked their citizens to trust them as the governments attempted to address the uncertainty around the COVID-19 pandemic.

5:40

Over these two years we've learned a lot, a lot about the threat of COVID-19 and a lot about the effectiveness of various responses trying to minimize the consequences from the disease. Mr. Speaker, early in the pandemic there was little known about the threat, but two years in we have gathered a lot of information, made vaccinations and various treatments available for individuals, and are now able to move on, away from government dictates. With that, governments from around the world have moved in a direction away from mandates and restrictions.

Meanwhile, Mr. Speaker, the federal government of Canada chose to move in a direction of requiring truckers travelling to the

U.S. to be vaccinated at a time when it was obvious that vaccination status has little bearing on whether an individual could be considered free from infection of COVID-19. We have over the last, well, pretty much two months now, with the omicron variant circulating within North America, recognized that the vaccination status of an individual did not necessarily show that the individual was healthy and free from spreading the virus. But the federal government, in putting forward a restriction, a guideline, a mandate, a vaccine mandate, on the truckers, moved in a direction where I believe they needed to use some common sense, recognize that the pandemic was swiftly coming to an end, and also realize that the free world was moving on. They were beginning to remove COVID restrictions, and the federal government needed to refrain from implementing a completely unnecessary public health policy at the time, the trucker vaccine mandate.

Introducing a vaccine mandate currently, at this point in time in the pandemic, really makes no sense. We've learned over the last two months, with the prevalence of the omicron variant, that we now have viral spread occurring throughout our population. I know many people within my community, vaccinated, unvaccinated, that have been exposed and infected with the omicron variant. We also see that currently in our hospitals about 70 per cent of the people in hospital with COVID-19 have been vaccinated. So we are at a point in time where I believe we can move in a direction where we allow the individuals to take responsibility for their decision-making, and then we move away from government dictates.

But I believe the Prime Minister, Prime Minister Trudeau, ignited this emergency. He added fuel to the fire by name-calling those that opposed his choice to implement the trucker vaccine mandate and now expects Canadians to just trust him with their future. Sure, they've now revoked the Emergencies Act, that they just put in a couple of days ago, but I believe that they invoked it irresponsibly. I do not believe that, as is stated in the motion, they had met the threshold that the law required. To invoke the Emergencies Act to essentially deal with a parking problem in Ottawa: it's a serious stretch to say that that met the conditions for invoking the Emergencies Act. I would argue that it did not.

I think the Prime Minister and the federal government introduced a completely unnecessary vaccine mandate on truckers, who largely are, at their workplace, isolated from everyone around them. They're largely by themselves in their truck going up and down the highway delivering goods. The Prime Minister added fuel to the fire. Those that opposed the policy: he called them names, called them a fringe minority, racist, misogynist. That leads us to no good. To resort to name-calling because people did not agree with the health policy that was being introduced was irresponsible, unnecessary. I think that that did not help.

Now the Prime Minister pretends over the weekend that there's a national emergency, a national threat to our democracy, and has used the Emergencies Act to address the parking problem in Ottawa, essentially the equivalent, I would suggest, of using a firehose to put out a candle.

Mr. Speaker, we know that in this country the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is in place to protect individuals, their rights from government tyranny. We also understand that it is up to government to demonstrably prove or provide evidence when it is necessary to interfere with those freedoms that Canadians hold so dear. I believe that after two years of individuals being willing to restrict their freedoms for the good of all, citizens of this country – I believe that they were at the point that they felt that now it was their turn to actually be responsible for their decisions, for their future, for their families' future. I truly respect the ability of Canadians, of Albertans to be able to make those decisions based off the information that they now have.

The trucker vaccine mandate is bad policy. I think the Prime Minister felt that it was a health policy that was necessary. I don't understand his logic based off the experience that we've had over the last couple of months. I think that when we take a look at how the western world was moving away from restrictions and then to introduce this specific policy, I believe that it was an unnecessary restriction and simply an egregious expression of abuse of power by the federal government.

At this time I think it's imperative that governments move in a direction to help our society heal, that governments move in a direction to understand what was done, what could be considered done well, the things that were maybe not so good, and the things that should never happen again. I do believe that we need to have a full evaluation of whether or not the cure was necessary in regard to government mandates and restrictions and lockdowns or if we have opportunity to see that we maybe could have handled the emergency in a better way.

Currently I think in our society we have largely a social issue. Division within our society has grown, and we need to be able to address the need to heal within our communities, within our families, within Alberta, within Canada. A lot of healing takes place in society when individuals feel like they are free, living within their responsibilities, and able to collaborate together with others around them. For future prospects, for the ability to have hope for the future, it largely hinges on their ability to feel free within their society.

5:50

Instead of liberty I believe the federal government chose even more restrictions, and instead of freedom our federal government chose to grab even more power and control through the Emergencies Act to essentially address a problem of their own making. I believe that, like in Motion 10, item (c), the "invocation of the Emergencies Act constitutes an unnecessary intrusion into provincial jurisdiction under the Constitution of Canada." I condemn the use of the Emergencies Act at this time. Prime Minister Trudeau ignited this emergency, added fuel to the fire, and now expects Canadians to trust him with their futures.

I think it's time to move on. I am very glad that the federal government has decided to revoke the Emergencies Act. I think that as we move forward, history will show that it was an abuse of what the intention of the Emergencies Act was and that we should take this as a precedent of when not to use it, not as a precedent of when to use it.

With that, I conclude my remarks, Speaker, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak to this important item.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for recognizing me here today. I will most certainly be speaking in favour of Motion 10 today. I don't know if I've ever seen a more tumultuous time in my lifetime. For two years I have watched as communities, church congregations, and families have fought and argued about what they individually think is the right path with this COVID pandemic. Should there be restrictions? Shouldn't there be restrictions? What restrictions should there be? Should only the cities be restricted and the rural communities not be restricted?

Then what about the moving goalposts? First, it was just two weeks. Then we were debating what businesses were essential. Then we shifted from saying that all health care workers and truckers were heroes to saying that only the vaccinated health care workers and truckers were heroes. Now we have a Prime Minister

that invoked the War Measures Act, now called the emergencies measures act, which allows him to freeze bank accounts of anyone who donated to the freedom convoy. And some wonder why the people are upset.

Mr. Speaker, the difference between democracy and dictatorship is that in a democracy individuals have the right to peacefully protest actions that they do not agree with and that they are allowed to do so without the fear of persecution from the government. Weeks ago many courageous truckers and everyday Canadians decided to take a stand against government overreach that violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is completely irrelevant whether the Prime Minister agrees with the protesters or not. They have the right to peacefully protest decisions that they feel make them second-class citizens. These protesters are not the fringe minority that the Prime Minister repugnantly stated they were. Instead, they represent the silent majority of Canadians that are fed up with the changing goalposts.

For two years Canadians have jumped through every hoop they were asked to jump through: weddings missed, funerals of loved ones viewed only on Zoom, parents not able to attend their kids' hockey games, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. One grandfather called me up a year and a half ago and told me that he didn't want to live if he couldn't see his grandchildren. He lives in a seniors' home and wanted to go out and visit his grandchildren. When he tried to leave, the staff told him that they couldn't stop him from leaving but they could stop him from coming back. He had nowhere else to go, so, in his own words, he said: I went back into my room, sat down in my overstuffed chair, and turned on the news, just to be more depressed by watching who was being bombed and murdered.

People wanted their lives back and got tired of waiting for politicians to get their ducks in a row, so they did what any frustrated individual would do. They peacefully protested. This movement represents the majority of Albertans that want their lives back. They want normal back. They are sick and tired of being unable to go about their lives without having to constantly show a QR code.

Now, to be clear, Mr. Speaker, I have always stated that I don't support the illegal protests. The rule of law protects our entire society. I am a lawmaker, not a lawbreaker, as some in this House have stated in the past.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has constantly shown that he will meet with pretty much any controversial figure. He has met with the likes of Joshua Boyle and Greta Thunberg. Yet when a bunch of hard-working Canadians come calling, the Prime Minister not only refuses to meet with them but abdicated his responsibility of leadership and went into hiding for weeks. When the Prime Minister finally did emerge, he decided to go from zero to a hundred by invoking the emergencies measures act for the first time in Canadian history.

Now, Mr. Speaker, for the vast majority these protesters were peaceful: bouncy castles for the kids and singalongs for the adults. I never saw them looting stores or burning cars like we saw a few summers ago from another group of protesters who were not being peaceful. How do these peaceful protesters represent a threat to our country? Instead, it would appear that the Prime Minister's use of the emergencies measures act is just a heavy-handed approach aimed at punishing the protesters and their supporters by seizing their bank accounts and assets.

Mr. Speaker, I have received calls from single mothers who gave \$20 to the freedom convoy GoFundMe account that they have their bank accounts frozen and are unable to buy groceries for their children. Jagmeet Singh's brother-in-law gave \$13,000 to the freedom convoy. I wonder if the NDP in this Chamber have asked their federal cousin if he thinks his brother-in-law's bank account

should be frozen as well, or are they working a double standard? Is it that everyone but the Liberals and NDP should be held to this law?

I have other questions that the NDP and every Albertan should be asking themselves. Seeing as only \$1 million of the GoFundMe money was actually disbursed to the freedom convoy organizers and the rest was returned or kept by governments, whose bank account should be frozen? Should only those who were part of the \$1 million that was disbursed have their bank accounts frozen, or should everyone who had the intent of donating to the freedom convoy be frozen as well? And how do we even know which people's money actually got through?

Mr. Speaker, you can see the incongruity with the NDP's and their best friend Justin Trudeau's approach. No, this is just complete bollocks, and the NDP-Liberal overlords know it. Perhaps that's why just this afternoon the Prime Minister revoked the implementation of the emergencies measures act, which I'm sure Canadians are elated to hear, but it brings up a few very interesting questions. ATB is a provincial Crown corporation owned by the Alberta government and the hard-working taxpayers of Alberta. What steps would have been taken to protect Alberta's bank and their assets from Trudeau's overreach?

Also, recently Chrystia Freeland spoke about cancelling the insurance of those in the freedom convoy. Insurance and vehicle registration, as you know, Mr. Speaker, are provincial jurisdictions, yet I'm hearing from people losing their insurance and registration.

How are we going to protect our provincial jurisdiction in this matter and make sure that those Albertans get back their insurance and registration?

The emergencies measures act retroactively determined that these protesters were illegal and that anyone who had donated to the cause was committing an illegal act. Think about that, Mr. Speaker. The law was implemented before it was passed. What happened to due process? It allows for the punishment of individuals who decided to donate small amounts to a cause that was not initially illegal. The peaceful protesters have left on their own accord, and those who are left have been cleared from Ottawa, the Ambassador Bridge, and Coutts.

Mr. Speaker, I will be voting in favour of Motion 10, and I think that it is the duty of all elected representatives in this House to stand up to protect the rights of peaceful protest and to send a strong message to the Prime Minister and to everyone that we will not allow Albertans' freedoms and liberties to be eroded ever again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner has timed his remarks very appropriately because the time is now 6 o'clock, and that means that the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, February 23, 2022

Day 2

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Independent: 3

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 23, 2022

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Government Motions

Emergencies Act

10. Mr. Kenney moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly
- (a) condemn the unnecessary invocation of the Emergencies Act by the government of Canada as the Assembly is of the view that this is a measure which infringes upon the constitutionally guaranteed rights of Albertans and all Canadians, including the right to due process and natural justice;
 - (b) is of the view that the government of Canada has failed to demonstrate that the present circumstances meet the threshold that the law requires to invoke the Emergencies Act and that, as demonstrated in Alberta, governments and law enforcement agencies already have adequate authority and resources to end illegal blockades and restore order; and
 - (c) is further of the view that this invocation of the Emergencies Act constitutes an unnecessary intrusion into provincial jurisdiction under the Constitution of Canada.

[Debate adjourned: February 23]

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry. The hon. Member for Peace River is the first to catch my eye.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I'm very glad to rise on Government Motion 10 tonight. It's an interesting circumstance we find ourselves in. This morning the government of Alberta had written a motion we planned to debate. By this afternoon the federal government had decided to reverse course on the implementation of the Emergencies Act.

Now, I wanted to talk a bit, before we get into the content of my concern, about national institutions. Institutions have many rules, and they take many different forms. But two important criteria that I believe institutions must have, whether it be the family as the foundational building block of our society, as the most fundamental institution, or about Parliament itself and cabinet and the Constitution which we have inherited from tradition that came before: every single institution needs to have wherewithal, needs to have some ability to exist beyond the manifestation of one individual or one time in one place that exists over time, continuing to keep a culture and a sense and a purpose and, secondly, institutions must be formative. These institutions must be able to have people and society and groups enter one way and come out another.

That's why families are the most fundamental institutions. Children go in blind and ignorant to the world outside of them; they come out, hopefully, mature, responsible children, graduating from their home, out of their parents', to raise their own families. We respect the institution of the military for a reason. These impressionable young men and women go in; they come out with a set of virtue and discipline, able to accomplish something greater than they did before. Our schools are institutions that do this.

Well, it's also true of our national political institutions, our constitutional institutions, that they have existence over time. Whether or not one Prime Minister does something one day or another, the institution needs to still last past an individual, past an individual government, and it needs to be formative.

My concern right now, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that the institutions that we've inherited are being eroded by the current federal government, and that's no small matter. These institutions are the institutions that fundamentally, when all is said and done, guarantee civil liberties, guarantee the ability to have solidarity as a collective society to accomplish something greater than we could as individuals. It's these institutions that protect us from the tyranny of a majority or tyranny of a dictator, tyranny of any kind, being imposed upon us. These institutions are foundational and fundamental to who we are as Canadians.

Our institutions are not American institutions; they're Canadian. They're decidedly, distinctively, uniquely, descriptively Canadian. My fear is that what is happening right now, what we saw today from the start to the end, is a grave blow to the institution of the rule of law, a grave blow to the credibility of the institution of the government, the executive itself, and to the legitimacy of Parliament. Now let me explain, Madam Deputy Speaker, why I think it's so concerning.

The Emergencies Act is, by definition, not meant to be used in normal times. It must be extraordinary measures. If normal means could deal with it, it must, as the Premier pointed out in his opening speech this afternoon, and should be dealt with with the laws that we have on hand. It's interesting to note that in Alberta the illegal activity going on at the Coutts border crossing was dealt with within the law, without needing to go into what used to be the War Measures Act, now in its manifestation the Emergencies Act. It must be reserved for extraordinary circumstances. If ordinary circumstances could deal with it, they ought to. The truth is, Madam Deputy Speaker, that they did and could in Alberta and in B.C. and in Ontario. I have no idea why the federal government and cabinet believed it was necessary to implement the Emergencies Act. I think they did not meet that standard.

But that's not what I'm focusing on tonight. What I want to focus on tonight is the fact that they went through this, and within the seven days legally required, according to the act they must vote on it within Parliament. Parliament, Madam Deputy Speaker, as everyone knows here as a member of the Legislature, is given the authority of the sovereign, represented by our mace, just like the mace in Ottawa, to govern. That mace used to be a weapon. It has the authority of the monopoly of violence. Folks don't pay their taxes? Folks don't follow the rules? Folks want to break the law? We will use that authority to maintain civil order, to maintain ordered liberty in our society. Now, if we abuse the power that we get from our sovereign, Her Majesty the Queen, and her vice-regal, our Lieutenant Governor, as we saw here just yesterday, or the Governor General in Ottawa, then that severely damages the credibility of this as a body.

Let's be clear. What the federal government did, under Justin Trudeau, is implement an extraordinary, unprecedented implementation of an act reserved for situations of terrorist attacks, wars, other dramatic situations because there was a political group protesting against his preferred political direction; froze bank accounts of hundreds, it seems, average citizens who politically opposed; and then decided without allowing the vote to continue through Parliament. Parliament is not just the House of Commons, as you know; it's a bicameral system in Ottawa. The commons themselves voted; the Senate had not.

Before that vote could happen to ratify the use of these extraordinary measures, taking away civil liberties, taking away the

right to have property – Madam Deputy Speaker, the right to have property is fundamental to the right to have a conscience, to the right to have a personal life, the separation between public and private, for families to organize, civil society to be able to move forward. The right to have property is instrumental to the right to be able to protest. If protesters are allowed to gather but are not allowed to control their own bank accounts, not allowed to control their own vehicles, then that's not much of a political protest. It's a pyrrhic protest. It's not real in a meaningful sense in terms of opposition to a government.

Inherent in our system is to be able to oppose a government. I just visited a protest yesterday, Madam Deputy Speaker, here in front of our Legislature Building. I was very glad that our government has done nothing so draconian, dramatic, and tyrannical in its nature as to limit their ability to protest by taking away their own private property, their means of being able to achieve that end and make that voice heard. Now we're in a spot where the federal government has implemented, done its deed, and not allowed the voice of the people, the ultimate sovereign authority, the authority that grants cabinet its own authority, the Parliament, to speak on it.

Now, I do not know the answer to the question I'm about to ask, but I wonder if it was true that the Senate was going to vote against Justin Trudeau's, you know, radical implementation of this act. If that is the case, it makes this all the more nefarious, Madam Deputy Speaker. The fact that the government of Canada, the executive that is meant to be there to serve the people, circumvented Parliament in the most extraordinary use of government powers that the government of Canada has used in decades, probably since Trudeau Sr. implemented the War Measures Act in the FLQ crisis – I think it is absolutely concerning, no matter what your political affiliation, that this happened.

I know that members opposite are highly politically motivated when it comes to issues that we would differ on. If the shoe was on the other foot, would they be rising making speeches? I should hope so, but I would as well. I would be there with them saying that the government of Canada under a Conservative government, hypothetically, that would implement the Emergencies Act without a ratification after they had done the work of clearing any kind of protest, without allowing Parliament to have voted to support it – no matter who the group is, that is fundamental to who we are as a society.

I understand, just as I know any rational Canadian would, that if it can be done to me or can be done to you, it can be done to them as well. What would be the categorical difference if there were a radical environmentalist group blocking a pipeline? There needs to be consistent application of the rule of law. That is inherent in the rule of law, predictability, as a criterion for the rule of law to work.

This is why I opened my speech talking about national institutions, because they are increasingly broken. They're broken because the west feels left out; equalization doesn't seem fair. They're broken because we see situations like this, where the credibility of the media has gone out the window for many people sitting on the right side of the aisle, where the credibility of Trudeau and his cabinet has been lost. But now increasingly there's a concern that Parliament itself, the body meant to be the representative of the people and to hold the cabinet accountable, is no longer able to do its job. That fundamentally, Madam Deputy Speaker, is striking at the heart of who we are as a democracy. Those individuals who sit around the cabinet table in Ottawa, who are members of Trudeau's cabinet, ought to be terrified of what they bring.

I think, in my closing comment, of one of my favourite pieces of media. I think it was a 1966 film, *A Man for All Seasons*, where the chancellor of England, Sir Thomas More, found himself in an

awkward position with his liege lord, King Henry VIII. Everyone knows the history of King Henry VIII. There's an important moment articulated by Thomas More, where he would give the devil the protection of law, arguing against his new-found son-in-law. The reason he would give the devil the protection of the rule of law is because once you've gone and cut down every tree in the land and every law – not God's law; man's law – then where will you have to hide when the winds of the devil and evil blow against you? You've cut down all the trees. It's a plain. It just comes right back at you.

7:40

The law is there for the protection of everyone, man's law that we implement here, that the Constitution guarantees. The consistency of the rule of law is inherent in allowing any function of the law to work. If it seemed to be inconsistent in the most dramatic and necessary of times, it will not have credibility in the smallest of times either. This collapse and trust in the rule of law, that we've seen throughout this COVID pandemic, has maybe climaxed for many Canadians and Albertans in this moment, where we see Justin Trudeau's cabinet taking the rule of law and fiddling with it, toying with it, twisting it into contortions to fit his political purpose and ends.

That, Madam Deputy Speaker, is why we must guarantee the rule of law, why we must all stand regardless of political affiliation or how much you sympathize or don't with the truckers or any protest. If we give this up – this – it's all for naught. It serves no end and serves no purpose. It doesn't have any purpose at all if we do not agree that there is consistency in that application. What Justin Trudeau has done by circumventing the ability for the Senate, the full Parliament to vote on the Emergencies Act and its implementation for a so-called national crisis is shameful. More than shameful; it's scary.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Government Motion 10. I considered asking for an emergency debate on this issue but wanted to make sure there would be some action that came as a result of our debate here. With emergency debate there isn't any motion or any action that comes of it.

That's why we announced by press release that I'd be bringing forward a motion in the Assembly at the earliest opportunity, which is today. Interestingly enough, the Premier, three hours later, tweeted out that he would also be bringing forward a motion in the Legislature regarding this issue. Then we sent a letter to the Premier on February 18 regarding a number of issues with the Emergencies Act, including it violating the rights of Alberta jurisdiction and suggesting that the Alberta government take specific actions to protect Albertans' rights. The following day, on February 19, the Premier, again by tweet, shared a video where he mentions provincial jurisdiction. Now, I truly appreciate the Premier following our lead on this issue, though Albertans may be more impressed if he communicated to them on a platform other than Twitter. Regardless, the most important thing is that we are here today discussing this important issue.

I want to point out that I was the only MLA in this House to travel with the convoy to Ottawa and spend two days on Parliament Hill at the rally. I did that to see first-hand what was happening there and so I could talk to people and get a feeling and understanding of how they felt and what they were asking for. I was sure glad I did. On the way there my wife described the trip as a 14-hour-a-day parade, where people lined the streets, people came out on the

highways to wave their flags and cheer on the convoy as it went by. There was so much joy. There was so much pride. There was so much patriotism.

Now, what happened is that after two days on Parliament Hill at the rally I sat in a home in Ontario listening to the news. I didn't recognize what I'd seen on TV. I thought maybe it was at a different rally. I thought maybe there was something else going on. The Prime Minister's comments that day were filled with hate. He name-called. He made horrific accusations. A man that can't remember how many times he dressed in blackface accused hundreds of thousands of people of being racist. It was deplorable. It was disgusting. At that time the media called me from Alberta here wondering what I'd seen. I guess they didn't like what I said about how the media reported the events because they didn't use any of my quotes in the article the next day. The only hate I saw or heard was from our Prime Minister.

I was there. I never saw the Prime Minister there. I never saw the mayor of Ottawa there. I didn't see the NDP leader there either. I was there. I got to see and feel what was happening on the ground there; they didn't, but they all had an opinion afterwards. That was just horrible to see, what those people said about that event.

So how did we get here? How did we get to this point where we have a Prime Minister invoke the Emergencies Act? All of this was caused by the Prime Minister when he demanded vaccines instead of testing for truckers crossing the border, riding alone in their trucks. There is not a lonelier occupation than a truck driver. This is a Prime Minister that called them heroes in the past. Those were just words full of hypocrisy. The Prime Minister's vaccine mandate was a border blockade by policy. It restricted thousands of truckers from hauling goods across the border. That, by definition, is a blockade. Unvaccinated truckers go from Victoria to St. John's, from Inuvik to Coutts, but for some reason beyond my understanding the piece of highway between Coutts and Sweetgrass and other similar pieces of highway across Canada are a no-go zone unless they are vaccinated. A negative test was not good enough.

There are consequences to policies. We see that here with an emergency order that was brought forward by that Prime Minister. The pains of Canadians were caused by the Prime Minister. His response was to lash out viciously and use the media to try to portray a change of events, events that didn't take place. Now, the problem is that we in Alberta are in no position to resist these draconian measures. We had a Fair Deal Panel report, that's been out for almost two years now. I was there at the Fair Deal Panel meetings. I heard Albertans. I know what the people were saying. But now, after almost three years of this government being in power, nothing.

This Premier has done nothing but talk. We expected from this government a bulldog towards Ottawa, but in fact we got a lapdog. Seizing bank accounts: banks are seeing their accounts drained from lack of trust. That's not good for our economy. We have the Alberta Treasury Branch in Alberta. Why can't we push back on this federal intrusion? But we see nothing from this Premier. I even heard a federal Liberal talking about this on the news the other day, talking about: how do we get tourism back in Canada? Well, I tell you one thing: this doesn't help. This is very hurtful. People around the world are looking at this situation that we're in and they're looking at it with disappointment and dismay. We had the federal NDP leader support this Emergencies Act and then go on to say: oh, except maybe Quebec and then, like, the protesters that I support; we wouldn't want to use that on them. I mean, that's pure hypocrisy.

Now, I know the Premier never asked the Prime Minister to invoke the Emergencies Act, but it appears there's a great comfortableness between the Premier and the Prime Minister.

There is no daylight in between them until Albertans respond. Then he answers with words. No action, just words. His heart is not in it. His heart is on winning the leadership review. That's it. As many of the members of this Assembly are certainly aware, we are dealing with a Prime Minister who is clearly acting in bad faith. The federal government did not need these powers to clear blockades or break up rallies. They're using these powers to seize bank accounts, confiscate property, and punish Canadian citizens who do not break a single Canadian law other than to have a different ideology than the Prime Minister. They are doing all of this without due process.

It also appears that the government is using the sweeping powers it has granted itself to retroactively search out justification for invoking these powers in the first place. Justin Trudeau was searching Canadians' private financial records, desperately trying to justify his arrogant and authoritarian overreach. This is not acceptable. The blockades are gone and the rallies have ended, yet police and government officials continue to threaten Canadians who choose to exercise their constitutionally protected right to support and take part in peaceful protests. Obviously, this is about ideology and crushing ideology that doesn't align with the Prime Minister's.

Using the Emergencies Act is an affront to the Constitution of Canada, including the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Without the rights and freedoms delineated in the Charter, things like freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of religion, Canada ceases to be Canada. By invoking far-reaching emergency powers, the Prime Minister has proven himself to be everything that the freedom convoy participants travelled thousands of kilometres to protest against. The question before this Assembly is: what are we going to do about it? We need to denounce Justin Trudeau's authoritarian imposition of the Emergencies Act and call for it to never happen again. The Government House Leader has offered up a motion on this matter, one that we're discussing right now, that denounces Trudeau's use of the Emergencies Act.

7:50

Let me be clear. Denouncing it is not enough; we must act. Albertans are sick and tired of this Premier's elbow-bump diplomacy with Trudeau. This is a time for taking real action to defend Albertans. Unfortunately, from the beginning this government has failed to grasp the urgency of the situation. The fact that the government put the throne speech ahead of passing this motion is evidence of how seriously they're taking this situation.

The government has indicated it will begin a legal challenge against the imposition of the Emergencies Act. The hypocrisy of this government, under the leadership of this Premier, officially requesting help from Justin Trudeau in ways that the Emergencies Act would facilitate and then suing the federal government for passing legislation to facilitate that help: it is an astounding display of hypocrisy. That has made the Premier the laughingstock of the Canadian Parliament. Again, the Premier didn't ask for the Emergencies Act, but he sure seems to be willing to use it when it suits him.

We have asked for debates in this House regarding the emergency powers that the Premier invoked under the Public Health Act. This Premier has invoked vaccine mandates that have caused job losses, livelihoods to be lost, and now this Premier has the audacity to speak against the Prime Minister's mandates in this Emergencies Act. There have been rallies across Alberta against the Premier's mandates also. At least the feds had a chance to vote on it. We never had that chance in this House. It appears that the Prime Minister believes in democracy more than the Premier does. I agree that this is necessary, but it won't help the lives and livelihoods of Albertans

who are having their assets frozen and property seized now, in real time.

The government must immediately take steps to protect and defend Albertans from the long arm of Trudeau's authoritarian government. The government of Alberta can and must exercise its jurisdiction in several key areas. First, ATB Financial is a Crown corporation wholly owned by the province. Steps must be taken to prevent seizure of account holders' assets. Secondly, the province regulates vehicle registration and insurance. Steps must be taken to prevent the cancellation of registration and insurance of Albertan vehicles. Thirdly, the province has a duty to defend Albertans' property rights. Any attempt by the federal government to continue to seize or conscript Albertans' property must be opposed and prevented.

Of course, I'm open to any and all other potential ideas for protecting Albertans. However, simply denouncing the federal government while taking no action to defend Albertans is not acceptable. This is the coward's way out.

Thank you.

Ms Phillips: Both overpolicing and underpolicing are lethal to our civil liberties. I may be alone in this House and maybe even in terms of parliamentarians in terms of the depth and breadth of the extent to which I have been a target and a victim of overbroad police powers and abuse of authority. I certainly have felt alone often.

This has been recognized by both parties, on both sides of the House, the Premier, and the Attorney General. As someone who has been surreptitiously photographed, unlawfully surveilled, all by in-uniform officers – those are agreed-to facts – as someone who has had officers make memes of me on work time and with work resources that have been described to media as toxic, humiliating, and offensive, as someone who has had their records unlawfully accessed by police, all at the hands of the Lethbridge Police Service, all to do with my political affiliation and daring to exercise my basic democratic rights under section 3 of the Charter, I cling tightly to my civil liberties. I am fundamentally, ca-te-flippin'-gorically uninterested in broadening state powers over the individual any more than absolutely necessary.

I have always held a more civil libertarian view in terms of the social democratic family, but my view of state authority has only been cemented by my own experience of years of documented intimidation – attempted intimidation: they did not succeed, Madam Speaker – and harassment by armed agents of the Crown. In fact, the first lines of my last appeal submission to the Law Enforcement Review Board quotes the *R. v. Mann* 2004 Supreme Court decision:

Absent a law to the contrary, individuals are free to do as they please. By contrast, the police (and more broadly, the state) may act only to the extent that they are empowered to do so by law. The vibrancy of a democracy is apparent by how wisely it navigates through those critical junctures where state action intersects with, and threatens to impinge upon, individual liberties.

By February 1 we were at such a critical juncture that the Supreme Court wrote about in that decision.

On the weekend of January 28 to 30 southern Albertans were no longer able to exercise their right to peaceful enjoyment of property. They were no longer able to engage in trade and commerce; \$44 million a day was being stolen from them by the blockade at Coutts. The week of February 1 I received e-mails from families close to the blockades in southern Alberta. I will not give any more identifying details than that because people are terrified. Their e-mails said that their kids weren't going to school, that their groceries were not being bought, that folks were not going to work.

Southern Alberta farmers texted me concerned about the underpolicing happening at the border. Nothing was being done, nothing at all.

Economic Development Lethbridge spoke out publicly during that first week, indicating that shifts were beginning to be cancelled at the plants of some of their members. Product from manufacturers in the Lethbridge industrial park was piling up as trucks could not be booked. On the Sunday a UCP MLA visited the blockade. On the Monday we should have had a clear indication, two or three days into this thing, from the province about what they were doing to clear the blockade. Twenty-four hours of closure of an international boundary should have been enough. It was a clear matter of national security by this point, and that should have been enough for a former Minister of National Defence, who is the Premier, to take that oath for public order seriously. By midday on the first Monday of the blockade the province ought to have been in front of a judge seeking an injunction. Later that day we should have had a Premier who treated this crisis as the national security risk that it is and an indication of any localized state of emergency powers that cabinet could invoke.

There should have been an indication of any ministerial orders on commercial or farm vehicle licensing that were imminent, any potential orders in council that cabinet was considering with respect to commercial or farm vehicle insurance policies, and even any statutory measures that they were examining. There should have been resolute leadership at the helm. There should have been a willingness to recall the Legislature early if statutory changes to licensing or insurance were required. There should have been a clear indication that the province was examining civil liability for the operators of the large equipment that was being used for the blockade and causing millions of dollars of harm at the border.

All of this should have been communicated swiftly: break the law, and there will be consequences. It's not difficult. Certainly, anyone using civil disobedience for the aims of social change understands this chain of consequences and are prepared for it, and that should have been day 1 of the occupation of Coutts. That's what it should have looked like, but the consequences never came. There were no consequences on day 2. There were no consequences on day 3. There was no indication that there was a plan, but there was UCP action. Let me explain.

After day 1 of the occupation, after the war memorial was urinated on, after the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was danced on, after a homeless person was beat up, after a shelter was threatened for not giving the occupiers food, after residents were subjected to their first 24 hours of three weeks of street harassment and sonic torture, after all of the flags and the conspiracy theories about globalism, after all of that, there was UCP action. One of them went to Coutts and supported the occupation of Ottawa. They made excuses. They cherry-picked from the Charter, and they did not care about any of the harm they caused.

Instead, it was as if the terrorized people of Coutts and Milk River did not even exist. It was as if the \$44 million, the day of economic theft by the blockade, did not exist. It was as if the cattle producers awaiting live cattle imports or those waiting to ship boxed beef south did not exist. It was as if the manufacturers who couldn't book trucks or had to cancel shipping contracts out of the U.S. ports did not exist. It was as if this was simply a minor skirmish, a disagreement over a few parking spots, not a massive national security crisis. Can you imagine, my fellow Albertans, what would have happened if a border blockade had occurred in the aftermath of 9/11?

They blockaded a border not for an hour, not for a day. Instead, it was left to build, to fester, to grow into, as the Hip once sang, Gord Downie of the Tragically Hip, "something we could no longer

contain.” Given that this was a Canada-wide crisis, Madam Speaker, I’ll lean in on one of our best poets for some inspiration here. After a few days it became clear that the border blockades were not going anywhere and that the poor behaviour was just getting worse. This was the time when grown adults should have said to themselves, to quote Gord Downie from the same song again: this is horrific; I’m embarrassed; I don’t endorse that; I don’t want this.

They did nothing of the sort. They shamelessly followed lawlessness, encouraged it, feted it, held it up as an expression of our values when it is the opposite. The blockade then spread. The highway was blocked off at the Nobleford roundabout. The highway was blocked south of Fort Macleod, the road onto the Blood reserve, with two school buses of children waiting in the February cold. For what? The overthrow of the government? The Governor General to get back to people on their e-mails? It is here where we pause on the stated objective of the blockades because their stated motivations have been flattened and ironed out of the narrative given as they are quite unsavoury.

8:00

The blockade organizers are calling, in the first instance, for interference in the decisions of private companies to mandate that private capital capitulate to their interpretation of occupational health and safety and an end to vaccine requirements for business. The blockade organizers are calling for removal of vaccine requirements in municipal facilities. Finally, perhaps parenthetically, they are calling on the Canadian government to unilaterally renege on a cross-border agreement with the Biden administration.

The blockade organizers, in their manifesto, also are calling for the removal of the currently constituted House of Commons, the suspension of its authority to pass, amend, and review legislation, and the replacement of our elected Members of Parliament with a committee of self-selected Facebook uncles. These were the stated terms of negotiation. Somewhat parenthetically as well, the organizers at Coutts threw in some demands of the provincial government. By the end of the first week they had achieved those goals because the Premier capitulated, a hostage at his own cabinet table. But it didn’t matter because it wasn’t ever really about the vaccines, was it? The Coutts occupation remained.

The blockade organizers do not take any responsibility for the economic harm they have caused. None at all. I listened to the main Coutts organizer in a radio interview. He did not express any sympathy for the almost billion dollars of economic damage or the fear experienced by the residents of southern Alberta, those parents who have worked hard to keep it all together during the pandemic, who have behaved responsibly, got vaccinated, and resisted the urge to fall down an antiscience, antivaccine disinformation rabbit hole.

All of this was greeted by capitulation from our Premier. He removed the vaccine requirements for restaurants and other public spaces at midnight. Was it the right decision? It could have been, but we don’t know. They have not released any evidence that it was the correct decision. I would be happy to see the evidence, but it disappeared like Cinderella at midnight due to the wish casting of a fairy tale that antivaccine, antigovernment insurrectionists can be appeased in this matter. They cannot. They were not. The blockade continued.

It is about this time, it appears, that far-right extremists began running stockpiles of weapons to the border. It’s not entirely possible for this to have happened on day one if the organizers are to be believed that they had no knowledge of this new group’s plans. The guns came primarily from two people in Lethbridge, and their stated purpose was to kill police officers, officers who would

have been empowered to clear out the blockade on day one had the province shown some leadership. The guns came from Lethbridge, from behind doors that I could easily have knocked on. They came from people with very dangerous ties to the far right, the Diagonal movement, a white supremacist accelerationist movement. We know about these ties from the Canadian Anti-Hate Network. The guns came from doors that my canvassers could have easily knocked on. They came from radicalized people who live next door.

Now, I pause for a moment to take on a spurious line of reasoning that I have heard the Premier indulge in, that he cannot direct police. Okay. We understand that: not directly. Executive Council cannot ask law enforcement to target an individual or even a group. Executive Council can talk to a police chief about public safety and does. Executive Council can talk to them about resources. They can’t ask them to do one specific thing, like interfere in one person’s proceedings, but Executive Council is well within its rights to ask questions of or give direction to and solicit advice from police services. There are informal discussions for this and formal consultation forums. More formally, cabinet can direct policing standards. That’s in the Police Act.

Here’s a quote from Bill Sweeney, the director of law enforcement, on Tuesday, April 6, 2021, on the topic of directing police services. “We’ve had many conversations with the chiefs and authorized employers where we were encouraging a measured approach to enforcement.” He’s talking here about public health orders. “Given that the pandemic is a rather unique situation for all of us . . . the intent was to inform, to educate, to warn, and, only as a last resort, to charge. That was an approach we encouraged . . .” That’s a quote.

Now, as I have demonstrated, the provincial government did not undertake any of its options, not one. Not an injunction. Not the many administrative penalties that could have been levied. No additional resources were sent to the border. In other words, we live in a province that actively abdicated its responsibilities and vacated its own jurisdiction over public order.

We come to the Emergencies Act. After the Coutts insurrectionists were left to set up shop and their rot was allowed to spread, it is quite possible that intelligence agencies had information that other cells were doing the same. It was not at all clear that anything was going to happen in Manitoba at Emerson or even at the Ambassador Bridge. Conservative provincial governments were dithering there, too.

In all those instances you had provinces who either did not want to or could not or felt they would not appropriately enforce the Traffic Safety Act, and the federal government had its own jurisdictional responsibility for trade and commerce, border security, not to mention firearms, intelligence services, and counterterrorism to uphold. I, too, was extremely concerned – I am still – about the Emergencies Act until I read the perspective of Perrin Beatty, one of the Conservative framers of the act, and Ed Broadbent, the NDP opposition leader at the time, who voted against the War Measures Act but whose caucus brought in dozens of thoughtful amendments to the Emergencies Act in the 1980s in order to ensure that it does not inappropriately infringe on our fundamental freedoms.

Now, I share the Premier’s reticence on section 8. I share his reticence on section 7. I have had those rights infringed upon, Madam Speaker, and I do not want to live in a country where that is the norm.

I wholly support any of the occupiers charged under the Emergencies Act to vociferously defend their Charter rights, too. But this was less about the Emergencies Act and our Charter rights and more about jurisdiction. In the end, it was the requirement for better integration of the Ambassador Bridge, a more coherent antiterrorism approach, and the clearing of the sonic torture and

systemic harassment of the residents of Ottawa that were the impetus for this act.

There was the problem of FINTRAC not capturing crypto and crowdfunding technology, an oversight that I believe Conservatives would enthusiastically support redress for if it concerned jihadi terrorist threats but evidently not if it concerns those who would shut down our economy, a strange double standard for them to indulge. Regardless, it is appropriate for FINTRAC to be able to capture those cross-border transactions and those new technologies, and it is doubly appropriate when there is evidence of cross-border flows of money to finance the blockading of our borders and to shut down and paralyze our capital city.

Even those actions, though, should be challenged and reviewed, and I am pleased that Parliament will be doing so. I actually don't mind the Premier's desire for a legal review to best flesh out how his inaction led to the Emergencies Act. I would welcome an inquiry by a judge to examine all of the evidence and why this province did not uphold its constitutional responsibilities to provide local policing and take all available public safety measures in order to ensure peace, order, and good government.

I welcome an articulation of part 1 in this context. What are the reasonable limits to federal powers when provinces simply refuse to govern because they are in the midst of a political crisis that they believe forces them to capitulate to an armed minority of people?

I conclude my comments with some thoughts on the future of liberal democracy, and I am not particularly hopeful, in particular because I am seeing Conservatives falling into two camps. [Ms Phillips' speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: Apologies, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Motion 10, which reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) condemn the unnecessary invocation of the Emergencies Act by the government of Canada as the Assembly is of the view that this is a measure which infringes upon the constitutionally guaranteed rights of Albertans and all Canadians, including the right to due process and natural justice;
- (b) is of the view that the government of Canada has failed to demonstrate that the present circumstances meet the threshold that the law requires to invoke the Emergencies Act and that, as demonstrated in Alberta, governments and law enforcement agencies already have adequate authority and resources to end illegal blockades and restore order; and
- (c) is further of the view that this invocation of the Emergencies Act constitutes an unnecessary intrusion into provincial jurisdiction under the Constitution of Canada.

Madam Speaker, the right to protest is a fundamental freedom in any democracy. It is what sets us apart from the dictatorships of the world. Three weeks ago many Canadians decided to take a stand against vaccine mandates and other measures they feel violate their freedoms. Everyone is entitled to their beliefs, and whether or not we agree with the position, it is that person's right to peacefully protest, and this right must be upheld.

These protests took place at many different locations in the country. It caused a shutdown of roads in Ottawa's downtown core and allowed blockades at vital border crossings such as the Ambassador Bridge from Windsor to Detroit and the Coutts border crossing here in Alberta. Let me be clear that we do not support the blockage of vital transportation and infrastructure. In fact, our government passed Bill 1, the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act,

in order to make blockades illegal if they can cause significant public safety, socioeconomic, or environmental consequences.

8:10

We all know that the Prime Minister has shown a willingness time and time again to meet with many controversial people of his liking – and this includes the likes of Joshua Boyle – yet he is unwilling to hear and meet with Canadians who hold different viewpoints, just like his refusal to meet with the truckers. Instead, he went hiding for days.

Madam Speaker, when the Prime Minister finally did emerge, he decided that it was necessary to invoke the Emergencies Act, for the first time in Canadian history, to deal with the protesters. It does not matter that the Prime Minister has revoked the Emergencies Act this afternoon; he should have never invoked it to begin with. For the most part these protesters were peaceful and were only taking advantage of their right to protest government actions that they did not agree with.

The police have always had the tools to deal with the unlawful protesters and are responsible for their own operational decisions. We have demonstrated in Alberta that we have provincial law enforcement agencies which are able to deal with these illegal blockades without extraordinary federal powers to seize assets. The Emergencies Act added no relevant additional powers or resources to deal with these blockades. In fact, Madam Speaker, the protests had been cleared from Coutts and the Ambassador Bridge in Ottawa. Instead, the Emergencies Act was a heavy-handed approach aimed at punishing the protesters.

The original intent of the Emergencies Act was to give the federal government additional resources to deal with dire national emergencies. This could be instances of war or domestic terrorism. Madam Speaker, I think we all can agree that these protests did not represent the original intent of the act against threats to our country. Using this act to deal with the most peaceful protesters was a heavy-handed overreach which was no longer needed since the blockades had been cleared.

For all these reasons, the Prime Minister was forced to change course due to the outcry of many Canadians who were opposed to the act. For these reasons, I'm willing to vote in favour of the motion to condemn the unnecessary invocation of the Emergencies Act by the government of Canada and encourage all members of this House to do so. Let's stand up and support Canadians' right to a peaceful protest.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. This is a government that claims to care about the economy, that claims it understands rural Alberta, that it understands agriculture and how we get food from our farmers to our kitchen tables, yet when the people of rural Alberta needed the Premier to lead, he hid in the United States while his Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development was silent. The Premier sat on his hands for more than two weeks while the Coutts border crossing, Alberta's only 24-hour border crossing and the only Alberta crossing that allows live animals to pass through, was blocked. Albertans know how damaging this was for Alberta's economy. The UCP know how damaging it was to the economy. The ministers knew exactly how damaging it was going to be to our economy, yet they did nothing.

The UCP, this government, made a choice to choose the party voting base over the livelihoods of farmers and our agricultural producers. This government's divisive politics are hurting our rural

communities. The government is asking for leadership from the federal government, yet they've shown none themselves.

The fact that I'm standing here talking about the Emergencies Act, when the federal government today announced that it would no longer be used, is clearly a demonstration of this UCP's political stunts. We shouldn't be doing this, but some people in this province need to have a voice because clearly the government is not listening. They're not listening to the people who don't agree with them. They're cheerleading for certain people within a small minority group and ignoring the rest of what Albertans are saying.

For the beef producers who couldn't get their livestock to market or who couldn't get their feed from the United States and for many of our other producers who couldn't export their products, this government was silent. Now the government plays games instead of offering real support. I'm not surprised. They have ignored our agricultural sector during the pandemic, and they ignored them during the drought. They ignore agriculture all along.

This government claims to care about the economy. Well, here's the number that I care about: \$864 million. I'll say it again; \$864 million is what our economy has lost because of the Coutts border blockade, the illegal blockade that this government chose to do nothing about. This blockade hurt all of our economic sectors in Alberta, but it hit agriculture the hardest. Delays at the border meant cattle had to wait to be transported. JBS and Cargill, which process two-thirds of the nation's beef, cut their shifts, delayed shipments, and delayed purchasing.

This government should stop cheering on those who illegally blocked our trade corridors. They should actually just stand in this House and apologize to Albertans and then pledge to do better. It's time for real leadership. This is a time for this government to start unifying Alberta instead of picking a select few, picking the special interests of a small group and putting it over the best interests of all Albertans. Hope comes from the top, Madam Speaker. For the people of this province to have hope, they have to see it in their leadership. That starts with this Premier. We are at a time that will be reflected on as a very historical moment for Alberta and for Canada, a moment that can lead to the unity of a province or a nation or a moment that will be used to further divide us. The most important part of democracy is the value of public trust, to know that those who are responsible for being the leaders are actually going to lead, that they're going to lead with honesty and with good intent.

Clearly, our democracy is at risk. We know that Albertans are exhausted by the emotions of COVID, by the uncertainty of the future and the economic impact that it's had on all Alberta families. That exhaustion brings fear for the future, a feeling of constant uncertainty, creating a desire for people to gain back some sort of control of what is happening in their lives. Honestly, I can say that I believe that for those who attended the rallies, even outside the Legislature recently, that's what they're trying to express, trying to get some control back into their lives. However, the 18 days at Coutts was not a rally; it was an illegal blockade that furthered the uncertainty for all Alberta families, that furthered the economic impact that families are already facing and created more uncertainty than it did bringing us together.

For Albertans to feel they have some control in their lives, this government needs to step up, address the fear that Albertans are facing, lead, and start giving them some more certainty in their lives, something that they continuously, continuously fail to do. It's time for the government to reconsider the direction that they're taking. It's time to return to the basic ideas of our democracy, bring faith back into our democratic process. I honestly could care less about the UCP leadership review. I don't care about the Premier's fight to save his job because the reality is that he made the mess. But what I do have an issue with is the fact that he thinks that

Albertans now have to clean it up for him because he refuses to do it for himself.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Madam Speaker. For many years Canadians, including myself, have been proud to call themselves one of the greatest democracies of the world. Under this current federal government that seems to be changing very quickly. Since coming to power, the federal government and the Prime Minister have done nothing but cause division within our country.

The most recent example of this is the invocation of the Emergencies Act. Thankfully, the public's outcry has forced their hand to revoke this ridiculous, power trip fuelled move. When the federal government invoked this act, it showed their incompetence by failing to listen to people's concerns and using force to get their way. What's more, they thought that depriving Canadians of expressing their constitutional freedom of free speech would go unnoticed. This is not the only instance of division and chaos we have seen under this current Prime Minister.

8:20

Since 2015 all their government has done is overspend on programs that are focused on advancing their ideological agenda. This overspending goes back to pre-COVID times. We all remember: the budget will balance itself. Obviously, that still appears to be the theme of this current government. Their 2019-2020 spending was \$24 billion higher than the original plan. They used COVID as a way to throw Canadians \$314 billion further into debt. Among a myriad of fiscal issues, the overspending and overborrowing by the current Prime Minister means that hard-working Canadians now have to pay the consequence in the form of increasing interest rates. While many may not realize it, such poor economic policies cause a great divide among Canadians, this with the threat of higher costs in our economy looming.

The Prime Minister's sleight of hand does not end there. The current federal government is obsessed with control to the point that Canada is beginning to look more like a dictatorship. For example, Canada already has stringent gun control laws. Still, the Prime Minister decided to take things one step further and push his party's agenda to tighten that gun control, practically moving toward banning them altogether. Current advertising that we witness on media and social media continues to spew the rhetoric that we've mentioned many times in this Assembly.

As bad as his evident thirst for control has been for Canadians, it is nothing compared to the horrible cover-ups and ethics violations that have been used strategically to distract the public from what is really going on in Ottawa. The Prime Minister and his loyalists are so obsessed with control that they have now decided that they need to control the Internet. Under the guise of protecting consumers, they passed Bill C-10, giving his regime the power to regulate any content posted online. Of course, we would expect this behaviour from dictatorships, not here in Canada. This bill is so incredibly controlling that even Google's president and chief legal officer for global affairs voiced his concerns and cautioned about how this could impair people's online experiences. As Canadians began to speak up against Internet control, the federal government distracted the public by making headlines as they promised \$400 million for four years to make CBC less reliant on advertising.

Since assuming office, our current Prime Minister has been charged with three ethics violations. Many will recall that in 2019 he received a \$500 fine for exerting influence over the former

Attorney General in a matter relating to criminal prosecution. This small fine may lead some to believe that the issue was not a huge matter of concern. However, it is essential to note that \$500 is the maximum monetary penalty for public officials guilty of violating the Conflict of Interest Act. Can you imagine the uproar his party would have made had another person committed an ethics violation of such a degree?

What is worse is that he didn't learn from his mistake when he violated the Conflict of Interest Act when he vacationed on a private island owned by the Aga Khan, again to a penalty of \$500, the maximum. What I've mentioned today are the actions of a person who does not think of anyone but himself and will do everything in his power to distract people from his constant attempts to sow division among Canadians.

By invoking and revoking the Emergencies Act, they've failed to respond to the people's concerns. The tyranny and lack of accountability are the concerns that need to be addressed. I condemn what is happening in Ottawa under this current regime, and I will continue to ask people from coast to coast in our great country to hold them accountable for everything, including their intrusion into this recent provincial jurisdiction.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and join the debate tonight on Government Motion 10. As we all know, this is just more political theatre from this government and the Emergencies Act itself has been revoked by the federal government, but tonight's debate still allows us to talk about the failures of this government to stand up for southern Albertans, the trucking industry, and the working Albertans they effectively abandoned. Like my colleague from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, I'm disappointed that this is where we find ourselves as a province over the past few weeks.

As the Official Opposition critic for Transportation I am and remain profoundly disappointed by the actions of this provincial government during these illegal blockades. Watching members of the UCP caucus going forth to join the protest, to celebrate with them, to praise those who were breaking the law and hurting Albertans was unthinkable. Watching as well this government that flatly refused to take action and do the simple things that would have supported the truckers and working people who were just trying to do their jobs and who got caught up in these convoys – some were stranded for days with no food, no water, no access to washrooms or medicine. I heard about shipments that were lost, spoiled, and some had to be thrown away. Businesses lost revenue. Workers lost employment. These workers lost money, lost employment, saw delays, and dealt with more than I could possibly list here today.

But the people in the trucking industry that I've spoken to are upset with the government's lack of response to the crisis that they and their employees faced. I've heard the stories from truckers in the South Asian community who faced instances of racism, disgusting comments from those illegally blockading our border. These are individuals who stood up and worked to keep our supply lines strong during a pandemic. Madam Speaker, they deserved better.

Their government refused to stand up for them because they were too busy standing with those who were illegally blocking our border. The Member for Taber-Warner repeatedly visited these illegal blockades. It wasn't a secret. It wasn't a mistake. It was deliberate, and he bragged about it. He told people holding our border hostage that they had inspired nations. There were individuals who travelled to bring those stranded on the other side

of the border food and supplies while the government sat on their hands. They could have revoked the insurance of those who were illegally blockading the border. They could have revoked commercial drivers' licences of those who were openly breaking the law. They could have done this simply. Instead, they did nothing.

They didn't see a need to go to court to request an injunction, as my friend from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall and I urged them to. They equivocated, fudged, and pussyfooted for weeks with the illegal blockaders until the RCMP found a cache of weapons and ammunition and charged 13 people who were part of the blockade group with serious offences. The balance of the blockaders promptly abandoned their blockade, claiming to just then realize that they had been co-opted by bad people with ulterior motives and disavowing any connection with them. They further expressed surprise that the RCMP had allowed the blockade to continue as long as it did.

Now, this government, Madam Speaker, is very low in the polls, with a Premier who is facing a leadership review, who has failed to support Albertans when they needed his support and is now playing political games rather than doing the work to support Albertans. At a time when we need to be bringing Albertans together, the Premier and his MLAs, through their actions and statements, have only divided communities.

Well, Madam Speaker, let's reel this in a little bit. Let's throttle back and really ask ourselves what this is all about. Think of the number 36,000, give or take: 36,000 COVID deaths. During World War I 61,000 Canadian soldiers died in battle. Now 36,000 have died during the pandemic versus 61,000 in World War I; 60 per cent of the number of people who died in World War I in service to Canada died during this pandemic and counting. In World War II 45,400 Canadian soldiers died versus the 36,000 Canadians who have died so far in this pandemic. That's 80 per cent of the number of people who died during World War II in Canada as Canadian soldiers have died as a result of this pandemic.

Let's reel it in, and let's talk about what we're really, fundamentally trying to get our hands around, and that is to prevent further deaths at the hands of this pandemic in this country. We have a duty to do that. Now, people who, indeed, were conscientious objectors in World War I and World War II had certain consequences. There were consequences to their conscientious objection. Indeed, with those who refuse to accept that a society has a right to protect itself from a vicious disease, there are consequences as well for not getting vaccinated. There are mandates, and a society has a right to do that.

Madam Speaker, insofar as this pandemic is concerned in Alberta, there have been over 3,830 people dead and counting. The social responsibility that we seem to be forgetting, this necessity to look out after each other, reminds me of a story I've heard my grandfather tell me about. He was born in Quebec, but his family moved out here in 1911, when he was seven. At the age of 14, on the homestead, he worked out for a number of months in the fall of 1918. On the way home, making his way home after being away for a number of months, a farmer with a wagon pulled by a horse picked him up, and on the way home, a little further, another young fellow was picked up. They didn't talk a whole lot, but close to the farm gate the farmer slowed down. Both the boys got off. My grandfather was a bit perplexed. He hadn't been home in a number of months, and he didn't recognize that it was his younger brother, Phillippe, who was getting off with him because Phillippe was wearing a mask, Madam Speaker.

8:30

North of Edmonton about 60 miles, in the village of Thorhild, before cars were running around Alberta, in the horse-and-buggy era, we knew well enough to protect each other with a mask during

a pandemic like the Spanish flu in 1918. Albertans are rightly asking: what in the world has gone wrong with us since then? Why can't we, as a matter of social responsibility, realize what they knew in 1918 and accepted without so much as a howdy-do? Why are we railing against vaccine mandates? That is what 90 per cent of Albertans are asking. We have an obligation to protect one another in this war on disease and the public health emergency. My grandfather Napoleon LaBelle is probably rolling in his grave. I'll say that again. Shame on this government.

To conclude, I urge this Premier to take a step back, realize the harm his weak leadership has caused, and apologize to the Albertans he failed to support time and time again and to hearken to the real spirit of Alberta. For over a hundred years Albertans in times of crisis have fully accepted their duty to help one another, whether building a barn, fixing a flooded county road, or wearing a mask to protect each other from a deadly virus like the Spanish flu or now COVID-19. We forget this crucial duty of self-preservation at our peril.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I count it a privilege to be able to rise tonight and to speak to Government Motion 10. We have a long history in Canada of a vibrant and thriving democracy that has grown out of our deep ties and our history with the British Crown. It has endured through war and the strains of economic hardship and the stresses of a growing and diverse multicultural nation. Our democratic institutions have proven to be a wiry, tough, old soldier, stronger and wiser and more adaptable than many of us could have foreseen. Yet democracies can also be fragile.

Our parliamentary democracy is built upon some very important foundation stones that help to keep the ship of state functioning in the interests of its citizens: free and fair elections, representative and responsible government, separation of powers, the rule of law, Charter rights and freedoms, a free press, independent judiciary, trust in our institutions. All and more of these foundation stones combine to ensure that the government is a reflection of the will of the people and that it respects minority rights. When these foundation stones are abused, ignored, or set aside, the democracy can become weak, the people can lose trust, and it may ultimately fail.

COVID has divided our nation, and it has made the divisions that were already there deeper and more serious. It has begun to create a people who are visibly frustrated and distrustful of our political institutions and prepared to challenge the very laws and the institutions that govern them. Our nation has been divided before – divisions between French and English, divisions over conscription policy, divisions between east and west – yet we have seen past political leaders in this country rise to the occasion, listen, and eventually address the divisions and develop a unique Canadian consensus that heals the wounds and rebuilds the people's faith in democracy. This can happen again, it must happen again, but it will only happen again if the political leadership at all levels and the people across this nation take a step back from the abyss of anger and mistrust and start to listen to each other.

There have been some consistent themes that I have heard over and over from my constituents as we have had to live and adjust our lives through the COVID pandemic. One is the expectation that we will do our best to protect the vulnerable from COVID. Another has been that our COVID policy must respect the individual rights and freedoms of our citizens. It cannot be one or the other. Any government action must pursue both policy goals.

The invocation of the Emergencies Act allows the government to rule by emergency decree. It is not about listening, dialogue, and developing consensus; it is about action and power. It provides the government with unparalleled power to set aside the checks and balances that are integral to a democracy. Under this act the government would control the regulation or be able to prohibit any public assembly that may lead to a breach of the peace. It can control travel to and from any specified area. It can control the use of specified property. The government can evacuate people and remove property. It can requisition, use, or dispose of property. It can direct any person to render essential services, and it can regulate the distribution and availability of essential goods, services, and resources. The government is given extraordinary powers that they would never normally have. Therefore, the Emergencies Act should only be invoked in the most extreme of national emergencies.

Built into the act are thresholds that must be met before the act can be invoked. The emergency must threaten the security of Canada and be a national emergency. The emergency must be of such significance that the government clearly needs the power to protect and preserve the government of Canada, the sovereignty, and our territorial integrity. We are talking about a scenario like a war or a threat of war or insurrection. It must be a serious threat that endangers the lives and the health or the safety of Canadians, and it must exceed the capacity of the province or the state to deal with it.

So the question that must be asked and must be answered is: were the thresholds for the invocation of the Emergencies Act actually reached? I believe that most Canadians would reasonably say no. I believe that the courts will ultimately conclude that the protests have not come close to meeting the thresholds set out in the Emergencies Act. There is no territorial threat to Canada. The protests may have broken the law, but they did not reach a level of violence that would constitute a national emergency. This was not World War I or World War II. These protests did not come anywhere close to the national security threat of the FLQ crisis. People were not being kidnapped, buildings were not being blown up, and banks were not being robbed to finance terror. The protests were not made up of revolutionaries but of ordinary people who believed their rights were being abridged by a policy of mandatory vaccination, and they wanted their government to listen to their concerns.

What has been remarkable has been how respectful and how nonviolent and how peaceful these protests were. Property was respected, and they even policed themselves, stopping any protesters who were about to cross the line. Even in Courts the protesters showed their commitment to peaceful protest. When the police arrested a small handful of radical protesters who appeared to be willing to use violence, it was then that the leadership of the protesters said: "Okay. We'll pack it in. We don't want our message to be associated with any kind of violence."

Yes, people were inconvenienced, and, yes, there is evidence that the protests were breaking the law. There is no doubt that the protests hurt the Canadian economy. Yes, the rule of law needed to be applied, but the fact that the arrests were delayed so long in Ottawa was the result of federal political incompetence and a police force in Ottawa that seemed utterly unprepared to uphold the law. The blockading of ports of entry was very serious, but did the provincial and federal governments have the necessary law to be able to deal with the situation? Yes.

Clearly, in my opinion, the thresholds for invocation of the Emergencies Act were not reached, yet it was invoked, and its use prior to today's announcement has at times degenerated into something of a farce. Look at what many protesters in Ottawa are

being charged with: mischief or counselling mischief. Those were the charges that were needed to gain control of this national emergency? I feel like Allen Iverson when I say: mischief? I mean, we're talking about an emergency of such national importance that the charge is mischief? You mean mischief? Not treason but mischief? We needed to invoke the Emergencies Act for the first time in Canadian history so we could charge protesters with mischief? I'm just saying: mischief?

Yet for all of its farcical overtones, the invocation of the Emergencies Act was very serious stuff. By refusing to meet with the protesters and by trying to use wedge politics and heated rhetoric, the Prime Minister made a bad situation much worse. Rather than trying to build a consensus for how to move forward, as he has with so many progressive causes, he tried to demonize these totally average Canadians and use the sledgehammer of the Emergencies Act to make them behave. In so doing, he has sown distrust and alienation among a significant base of Canadians.

8:40

While other provinces, including Alberta, had been removing COVID restrictions, the Prime Minister appeared to be doubling down by mandating vaccinations on truckers. The Prime Minister's action and his rhetoric and the invocation of the Emergencies Act have done more to endanger our democracy and our respect for its institutions than anything the protesters could have done.

As a result of the invocation of the Emergencies Act, many Canadians feared that a small donation to the truckers or the purchase of a T-shirt in supporting the convoys could have resulted in the freezing and the seizing of their bank accounts. Basic civil liberties were lifted. People who funded a perfectly legal protest could have broken the law retroactively.

It is crucial, therefore, that we determine that the thresholds outlined in the act were actually met. A precedent for the act's further use has been set, and I believe that it is critical that a court rule on whether the thresholds were actually reached. If we want to draw this nation together, if we desire to live in a democracy where the foundation stones are strong, if we want to ensure that the government rules with the support and respect and trust of the people, then we must support this motion.

Today we stand in this Legislature as elected representatives of the people of Alberta. We have the opportunity to be statesmen, to look at what is in the best interests of the people and our democracy. The answer is clear, and I believe our duty is clear. We must vote in support of this motion, and then I would argue that the government of Alberta should challenge the invocation of the Emergencies Act in a court of law to determine whether or not it has met the thresholds of invocation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members joining the debate? The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, as we all have heard today, earlier this month the Prime Minister had brought in the emergency measures act, and just a few short days ago he forced a confidence vote to defend its use in Parliament. Today he has announced that he is rescinding the use of that act, which is probably embarrassing for those members of his government who were defending it just hours before. Even as protests were cleared, the Prime Minister continued to defend the use of these powers. As public pressure mounted, it came from the sources that Trudeau fears the most, the progressive news sources of the *New York Times*, for instance, who are criticizing his government for its use. That

criticism came from Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and other countries.

The NDP state that their support of the emergency measures act comes with the stipulation that it can't be used on First Nations protests, climate or environmental protests. The NDP support significant government powers to be utilized only to pursue protesters that they disagree with. If this blockade in Ottawa or in Coutts or elsewhere in this country was about pipelines, the NDP or the Liberals federally would never have gone through with the emergency measures act. They never would have done it. You can see this because it wasn't that long ago that a blockade of a rail line lasted 19 days. It took several injunctions, just to show the uselessness of injunctions. It took two injunctions to try to get the police to move in. The government did not invoke the emergency measures act for that because it was about something that they agreed with.

The NDP have been on the front steps of this Legislature protesting pipelines. The NDP Party has endorsed the protests of the Coastal GasLink. Recently workers there have been violently attacked with axes, threatened with heavy machinery. One worker had their vehicle set on fire, I believe, while they were still in it. And it doesn't matter to the NDP. They would not have supported the emergency measures act for that protest.

At this time, Madam Speaker, when parts of the world are on edge, for instance, about war in eastern Europe, the decisions of a weak federal government really come to light. Not only will they use extraordinary powers to quell opposition voices, but they are propped up by the NDP, who only want to use extraordinary powers on certain people. Decisions made on natural gas and oil infrastructure, that could have been used to help supply Europe with energy, have left the continent receiving about a third of their energy use and supply from Russia. People in Europe will still use oil and gas, and the federal government has ensured one thing. The supply from Canada is not an option; they must rely on Russia.

Here in Alberta we have of course had situations recently with the blockade at the Coutts border crossing, and what we have shown is that these protests can be resolved with regular policing and the laws that are already available. In no way was it necessary or acceptable to invoke the Emergencies Act. The NDP tried to use, I believe, political pressure, directly or indirectly, on the RCMP to act, and that was an incredibly volatile situation which the RCMP dealt with. I understand that you might want to have this go faster and you want it to be over with quicker, but there are times where you have to have some patience. It's just an unfortunate fact of policing. I have been at standoffs. I have done this, same with other members in this Chamber, where patience is important, right? You get trained not to rush some of these situations because of how volatile they can become. Would the NDP still be pushing for action to have happened if the RCMP moved too quickly and it became a shootout? We've seen that there are clearly guns on both sides and a lot of innocent people trying to protest, sure, trying to get their voices heard. That's a lot of crossfire. Sometimes you have to take time with these things.

There have been a lot of firsts, Madam Speaker, over the last two years. Lots of lessons, of course, to learn, but even as we come out of these restrictions and see a chance to move forward, I think that the instinct of the federal government was not to diffuse the situation with dialogue, but it was to inflame the situation with government overreach, and it was a desperation to politicize the pandemic for political gain. I've heard loud and clear from my constituents in Leduc-Beaumont about their disbelief in the Prime Minister. They, like many Canadians across the country, ask: when does this end? They've also asked: what opinion do they have that's going to result in their bank account being frozen? I think that that's

a question that many have on their mind, and maybe you don't consider that until it's on your doorstep that it's happening.

Like, I would get calls over the last years on restrictions, and many times it was the first time the government had ever done something to restrict someone's freedom, so they challenged it, and so they should challenge it. The government should never feel comfortable restricting people's freedoms, and how lackadaisical the NDP are with people's freedoms is unbelievable to me, that they feel that if they get questioned on this, you're clearly just against overall public safety or you don't care about your neighbour. That's just not true. You're taking away people's freedoms to do something. The government should never feel comfortable doing that, and frankly a lot of Canadians, lots of people in my constituency have had enough. They and with a lot of other Canadians, of course, have voiced their opposition to the Emergencies Act. Today due to the tremendously large outcry from Canadians across the country opposing the Emergencies Act, Justin Trudeau is forced to revoke it. However, the fact that he brought in the Emergencies Act in the first place is still a problem. It is still very concerning.

The Prime Minister said that invoking the former War Measures Act was the responsible and necessary thing to do. Madam Speaker, I would strongly disagree with this. In fact, invoking the Emergencies Act was an irresponsible thing to do. Justin Trudeau put Alberta in a state of emergency when there, in fact, was no emergency to justify this. The Emergencies Act took away civil liberties and democracy and gave the Prime Minister all kinds of new power.

Over the past couple of years citizens have endured a tremendous amount. Some have lost their jobs or businesses. Others have lost the right to be able to participate in things that they love: sports, in-person education, socializing with friends, visiting family members, funerals, weddings. All have been curtailed, and it is to deal with a common problem of a pandemic, but this still puts a lot of stress on people, and when that stress turns to demonstrations and protests, it is best for political leaders to listen, to reassess the situation, to have a dialogue with people and come together to make the best decision on the path forward.

It is not a time to inflame the situation, and just because Trudeau doesn't agree with those protesters does not mean that he should have the power to put in the emergency measures act to stop them. Consider the precedent that this sets for the future. These protesters just wanted to be heard, and while we heard them, Justin Trudeau, Madam Speaker, tried to silence them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

8:50

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to kind of start a little bit unconventionally just because I saw that Russia has officially declared that it'll be going into Ukraine tonight. I think that's a sobering moment for every single person in this Chamber regardless of the debate that we're having. There are some pretty crazy things going on in the world right now, and I just wanted to send my – as a provincial politician I'm not sure what else I can do, but I just wanted to send my prayers and say that my thoughts are with the people of Ukraine tonight as they brace for potential terror. I just can't imagine what they're feeling right now. So to start off with saying that just because I think it's important, no matter how crazy things get in this Chamber, to remember that there's always more.

Completely unrelated, I guess, I will move on. I was pretty struck by what was going on in Ottawa. I mean, it was, I think, a Monday morning. I was driving to Brooks. I'm from Medicine Hat. My

riding is in both places, of course, Brooks-Medicine Hat, but Brooks is about an hour away from my house. So for those who don't speak in time and actually use kilometres, it's about 100 kilometres, for those of you who don't really venture down to that side of the province.

As I was driving, I noticed just a really large number of people out for 7 o'clock in the morning. I went to grab my coffee. I left McDonald's, I crossed the highway, and all of a sudden there were trucks and people and Canadian flags and families all over the highway. I mean, like, we could be hyperbolic and say that there were tens of thousands, Madam Speaker, but there were literally a thousand people, I bet, between Brooks and Medicine Hat that day. It seemed like the entire city of Brooks was out. Half of Medicine Hat must have been out. And that was early. I think the truckers were expected to come through Medicine Hat at, like, 10:30, and I'm not even sure they came through till 1 o'clock, but people just kept piling on. I saw families, like I said. I saw people that I knew through church. I saw people all over the place, and it was really compelling to see just ordinary people – as we know as politicians, not everybody engages in politics the same way – severely normal Albertans, the Henrys and Marthas, if you will, and their kids coming out in large numbers to wave to the truckers.

I think it's worth saying, you know, that just because you were out there doesn't mean that you support every single aspect of what they were talking about. I mean, this grassroots movement, which is something that I think every politician – if there are that many people lining the highway in your riding, you better stop and take note. So that's exactly what I did. I pulled over, and I was waving as I saw it. All of a sudden a bunch of trucks started coming through. I mean, they were going at highway speeds, so it was hard to read everything that was on the trucks. But it was just – there were things like: I want my freedom back. There were things like: stop the mandates. I didn't see anything really vulgar, quite honestly. I mean, there was some colourful language about the Prime Minister, sure. I mean, it's not as bad as I've heard in my riding about the Prime Minister, but it was colourful nonetheless.

Of course, they should be parliamentary, but I think what was shown that day was just how angry people really are and how they're, you know, at the point where you just can't get blood from a stone anymore, Madam Speaker. They wanted change. They want something done. They see this as a never-ending battle, as something that they are never going to get out of, and I understand because for the past two years it has felt like it was never-ending, and I say that as a government MLA who – it feels like every time you come into work, there's something else that has to be dealt with for a problem that we thought was going to be solved months ago, a year ago. Heck, I was hopeful it would have been way sooner than that, but here we are – right? – still talking about the same darn thing.

You know, I really thought: this many severely normal people out on I think it was a Monday morning, out to cheer on a bunch of truckers, like, somebody's got to listen to them. Lo and behold, nobody did. These truckers came to Ottawa. They set up shop, and their intention was to lobby the Prime Minister. Their intention was to ask the Prime Minister, with gusto, of course, to end the mandates, to support them, to recognize their autonomy, and recognize that they want to live their lives.

What did the Prime Minister do? Well, he did what his father did but with words. He gave us his version of the Trudeau salute. Let's put it that way. You know, I will say – I've heard hon. members asking what the Trudeau salute is. I think the railcar has been preserved that the Trudeau salute took place in. So without being unparliamentary, I would just say: google it.

The protest, of course, started garnering a lot of national attention. It started garnering international attention as it had gone

on for quite a while. I was, of course, horrified to see that there were some very disturbed people who decided to co-opt such a peaceful movement by displaying such hateful symbols. I'm glad that the convoy organizers immediately denounced them. I'm glad that politicians of all stripes denounced them. I do as well. Of course, we know that those symbols have absolutely no place in Canada. They have absolutely no place in any sort of peaceful protest. Hate symbols of any kind should not be allowed.

[The Speaker in the chair]

But I do find it ironic that we can see hammers and sickles, the symbols of communist oppression, with Greta Thunberg and every single protest, eco justice protest, and the CBC doesn't write one story about that. But one person, a terrible person with a horrible symbol – I'm not excusing that, and I want that on the record over and over again. That same photo will receive countless hours of media coverage. I guess that's what happens when you get \$600 million, isn't it?

You know, I don't support illegal blockades. Never have, never will. I was heavily criticized because I actually put forward Bill 1, the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act. It was supposed to be my private member's bill, but the Minister of Justice at the time liked it so much that it became a government bill. I support that bill a hundred per cent. I did then. I do now.

We need to have those kinds of tools at our disposal, and we can't be inconsistent, and we have to remain principled, that a blockade is a blockade is a blockade. When a peaceful protest turns into the blocking of critical infrastructure, it does need to be dealt with, so I understand that.

However, what I don't understand and what I fail to understand is why it ever had to get to that point. If we didn't have a Prime Minister that is so derelict in his duty to lead, we would have never gotten here. If the Prime Minister would have stopped the unscientific, unwarranted mandates, allow people real freedom of choice, not compelling them, not coercing them, we would have never . . .

An Hon. Member: Bullying them.

Mrs. Frey: He bullied them. Exactly.

We would have never gotten here if he wouldn't have gone out instead of listening to people and said – if he would have just gone out and said, "Hey, I'm here; I've met with every other controversial figure in the world; why can't I meet with you?" and just said for a moment: "I hear you. I understand. You must be in pain for you to come out here, all the way out of your way, to spend time on my doorstep."

If he would have just given them a moment of his time instead of immediately resorting to calling them racists and misogynists and every other name out of the book, we would not be here right now, but we are. This Prime Minister: even members of his own caucus and the Senate, I believe, have said that he is stoking division in this country at a time when western alienation was already high.

You know, I've heard many people enhance the calls for separation, which is something that I don't support. I'm a monarchist. I love this Confederation. I love Canada. My great-grandfather fought in World War II. He'd be turning in his grave right now knowing what's going on here and what our Prime Minister has done. He didn't like the first Trudeau, and I'm assuming he wouldn't like the second one very much either. But, you know, I refuse to let Justin Trudeau kick me out of my own country. I refuse to be alienated and refuse to feel like that is my only resort.

I want to thank the Canadians who are going there and protesting. I want to thank them for their bravery in speaking out against the Emergencies Act, and I want to thank our government for giving me the opportunity to do that as well.

9:00

I've also noticed in the last few days, or the last week or so, that the word "freedom," which I think to be a wonderful thing and something that we should be yelling from the rooftops, has now become a curse word according to the left. You know, I saw the CBC article a while ago about the 18 words we need to remove from our vernacular because they're offensive and everything else, and of course we should be mindful of how other people feel, but the word "freedom," Mr. Speaker? Since when did that become a dirty word? We have people who fought and died so that we have the right to say that word, and I bet there are people around the world right now who wish that they could be as proud of a nation as we are to be Canadian. I'm so proud to fly that maple leaf, and I will be every day till the day I die.

You know, when we see Liberal MPs getting up in the House and making any kind of equivalency between the words "honk, honk" – I mean, I thought, when I was young, it was a duck sound; now it's a symbol of a movement – for them to equivocate that with "heil Hitler" just goes to show you the lengths to which the Liberals and the left are willing to go to alienate and further divide Canadians. It's pathetic, Mr. Speaker. It's despicable, and it's unbecoming of anyone who holds elected office. Shame on them.

I heard colleagues of mine today. The hon. Member for Taber-Warner said: you know, I'm a lawmaker, not a lawbreaker. I'll stand by that as well, because we are. We are here to make laws, but we also have the obligation to know when we've gone too far and not do that. The Prime Minister, instead of pulling it back last night, held on to power for a second longer. He didn't even vote on it, from what I understand. He implemented the Emergencies Act only to rescind it today. I wouldn't like to be a Liberal MP right now, Mr. Speaker – although I wouldn't ever, I wouldn't like to be a Liberal MP right now especially – because they just spent the last however many days with a confidence vote, a matter of confidence in a minority government situation, defending that kind of gross overreach. It blows my mind that that is what we have come to in this country.

You know, for the Prime Minister, the man who doesn't even know how many times he's done blackface, to run out and accuse people of being racist misogynists and part of a fringe minority: that's pretty rich. This is also the same guy who goes out and makes these defamatory statements about everyday, ordinary people, some of which were from Brooks-Medicine Hat. He calls them everything under the sun. His MPs call them everything under the sun, including terrorists. This is the same guy who paid \$10.5 million to Omar Khadr – the same guy, Mr. Speaker – and he wants to lecture us about who the bad guy is here. We have a responsibility as lawmakers to know when we've gone too far. Unfortunately, I feel like the moral compass has gone on this Prime Minister. It was gone a long time ago.

But all I have to say to my constituents is this. I hear you. I support you. We have to keep our eye on the ball here, which is getting Justin Trudeau out of office at the earliest possible moment, but we can't divide ourselves in the process. Right now you see so many people – Conservatives, Liberals, otherwise – turn on each other because it's a heightened, awful political environment in which we live. I want my constituents to know that I stand behind them, that even though sometimes I might vehemently disagree with them, sometimes I might think that the methods that they've gone to are not the most effective, I hear them.

This has been an awful two years, Mr. Speaker. It has been hard. It has been long. There have been people who have lost their lives, their livelihoods, their homes. I mean, now they're losing access to their bank accounts. And we are coming out on the other side of this. I hope that this week, starting with the throne speech, is a point

of a new beginning, and I hope that we can put this behind us once and for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Government Motion 10. The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has the call.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for this opportunity to my colleagues, too. It's been really a pleasure to hear everybody tonight. We have heard it all before, and we're going to hear it again, because the last few years – and I think it's worth repeating again – have been absolutely horrible and some of the most trying times for our nation and our province, our friends and our families. But I'd like to start off, first, by commending Canadians and Albertans for their strength and their resilience and their spirit. It's really, really hard when we see our leaders take a different direction, especially when that direction goes to undermining the feelings and values of our own citizens.

If you think about it, so many of us, right across this beautiful province and across Canada, have been through so much – the trials, the losses, the stress, the isolation – and every citizen in the nation and globally has experienced this collectively. Then we see leadership go in a space where they are attacking the democratic rights of our people, and they've already been through so much. We've asked them to restrict their freedoms and their rights, and you know what? For the most part, Mr. Speaker, we understood those restrictions, and people sacrificed being with their loved ones, their businesses – it's been said before, but I'll repeat it again – birthdays, weddings, funerals to help each other, to keep our citizens safe, and especially to keep our health care systems working. Thank you so much to the thousands of health care and front-line workers who have kept us safe throughout this pandemic. There are just not enough words of gratitude.

When you are a leader of a nation and you are at a time when your nation is hurting and you have this amazing opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to unite us and the opportunity to actually sit for the first time and listen to regular, everyday folks and hear their pain because they've assembled at their House in Ottawa – it belongs to them just like this Legislature belongs to the people of Alberta. Instead of hearing the good, honest folks – and I'm not talking about the ones that were there to undermine the messages but the real everyday Canadians – who needed to know at that time that the leader of their country cared enough to have a conversation with them and instead used this opportunity to exploit powers that could limit everything from rights on housing, finances, and faith.

Not only was it completely undemocratic – I have to say that I am so grateful to have seen the Prime Minister change his direction – but despite the revocation of the act as of earlier today, we have to ask the question, and I think we have to get back, fundamentally, to why we're asking this question about exercising grave measures of power upon the citizens of the nation and where the Emergencies Act is only supposed to be used. I mean, the circumstances have to be really serious, Mr. Speaker, and it has to be challenging the lives and health and safety of Canadians and compromise the government's ability to be able to preserve the sovereignty and security and territorial integrity of Canada. It comes with a pretty major caveat, too, that it can only be invoked in circumstances that cannot be addressed by any other law in Canada. It's very, very difficult to understand that the government proposed an order to open up the Emergencies Act when there are many other opportunities to be able to talk about critical infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, protests are a pillar of democracy, and they are meant to bring attention. They're a plea from the citizens who have a feeling of being marginalized and who, when they've had their

freedoms restricted like this – and I realize that there were massive disruptions and the attention, but we have to ask if those protests warranted the enforcement of this authority. They did not threaten the lives of Canadians. They do not threaten the well-being of Canadians. They do not harm the nation. I want to be clear. I will never support illegal blockades, shaming, censorship, or bullying. I have close friends in my riding, too, that lost serious money because of the blockades. We really need to make sure that we all understand where we all sit with this.

9:10

I will never support voices that invoke racism or bigotry or discrimination from anyone, but the question we fundamentally have to ask, Mr. Speaker, is: why specifically did we need the Emergencies Act? I mean, let's look at the facts. Blocking critical infrastructure violates the Criminal Code. Both provincial and municipal governments have any number of tools through the RCMP, from impounding vehicles to arrest. Police can already freeze bank accounts under the Proceeds of Crime (Money Laundering) and Terrorist Financing Act if the blockade continued. You can even call in the military without the Emergencies Act. The National Defence Act allows the army to be called out with any disturbance to the peace that overwhelms the normal police resources, and we can always call upon our Mounties, both provincially and federally, to come in as reinforcements.

We have to respect democratic safeguards. We have to respect and properly consult with our provinces and territories. We must make sure that we are not invoking legislation that acts callously and reacts so quickly, and we must always, when we're invoking control on citizens and encroaching on their lives, not also encroach on provincial legislation and jurisdiction. We also have to have faith in our law agencies and the committed groups to handle these situations. It just screams that it did not require this level of overreach in order to be able to attain the needed desire to remove these blockades.

I want to make sure that we all understand that the Prime Minister never had the legal justification to invoke that act, and when you have this level of authoritative power move on to the people just because they disagree with his policies, we have to ask the question of a failure in leadership. We are a democratic nation, Mr. Speaker, a peaceful nation where we thrive on the ability to be able to express ourselves and coexist. We cannot at this time, when we are hurting so much, when there's so much pain, look to divide the nation.

I wanted to also highlight that in the federal House of Commons the vote was 185 to 151. There were only 34 votes that actually separated the vote at the federal Parliament. My goodness. That is awfully close to make a decision to invoke the Emergencies Act when so many people are asking the same questions that we were.

Instead of being divisive and taking away democratic spirit, we have to question leadership. We have to question whether or not the leader of our nation has the capacity to talk to everyday people and reassure them that they understand where they're coming from. It is time for us to unify and to come together and to work together. Isn't that what our federal government said? It's what we've been saying, for sure.

I think what was really interesting is that the federal government had spoken about not keeping the act in any longer than necessary. Then why, after seven days, did they go back to make a motion to extend the act? This is another fundamental question we need to ask.

I mean, the struggle is real, isn't it? So many people have spoken about it in here, and I think that if we take the time to honestly reflect back on what we've all been through, there is not a single

person that any of us meets every single day that hasn't been impacted by this. All of us in here have to change our rhetoric, and we have to work together to make sure that we're actually here for the people of this province and not working against each other.

If we're going to get back to that day one day where we can look at whatever that normal looks like, we also have to begin to heal, Mr. Speaker, and that healing can only happen if we lead by example and we show that we are there for the people that need us in a time of crisis. That's true leadership. It's being willing to listen and to respond, to be able to take in that information and participate with your fellow Canadians. It doesn't matter whether you agree with them or not. The Prime Minister didn't need to come out and say that he agreed with people. He just needed to listen to them. You don't run away from difficult conversations, and you don't allow the bullies and the keyboard cowboys or the trolls to rule your behaviour.

Showing up to a protest is fundamental to democracy. I am as disgusted as anyone about the racist comments, the flying of swastikas, defacing of statues, and any other inappropriate and, frankly, concerning behaviour in those instances is deplorable and should absolutely be called out, but as gross as those actions and behaviours are, you have to answer the question: was the Emergencies Act the right intervention to that behaviour? That's the question.

Again, I'm grateful that the federal leadership has changed the direction of where they went with this. Quite frankly, there's no judicial oversight in that government section of that act. That's very, very concerning.

I ask this question, too: how can we become a nation stronger and more united when we are compelled to jump into emergency acts as a normal part of our privilege? I would like to quote, from the *National Post*, an article by Tristin Hopper.

[The] Freedom Convoy blockade is now gone, and it notably occurred without any Emergencies Act assistance. After RCMP arrested 13 people and seized a cache of firearms, traffic is now flowing freely at the Coutts, Alta. border crossing for the first time in two weeks. In a strange development for a police operation that saw the seizure of a large arsenal of high-powered firearms, the Coutts blockade ultimately ended with hugs between the police and blockaders and the joint singing of "O Canada."

Again, while I am grateful for the revocation of the act, justice prevailed, and injustice was put to rest although this does not change the fact that our leader saw an opportunity and erroneously saw an opportunity to overreach into a space that was not necessary, justified. After some of the most enduring and most difficult and hardest years that Canadians and all of us have experienced globally, it is time to unite Canada and unite us in democracy and peace. It is going to take a true leader, one who understands Canadians, to truly see us there.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others on Government Motion 10? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to start. I'm not going to speak for long because I would just be repeating what many have said in the Chamber this evening. I wanted to thank all the Canadians who stood up against this abuse of power, all of you right across the country. I just want to say thank you for standing up for democracy, for standing up for freedoms, and for standing up for accountability and transparency in government.

The Emergencies Act is in place to be used in situations where the lives, health, or safety of Canadians are in critical condition. Since this obviously was not the case, the Prime Minister has

already revoked the use of the act. Evidently, it was not needed at all. I think that's become very clear to the Prime Minister and to his cabinet, and I suspect it's become very clear to others that are watching. Other countries, as had been mentioned by previous speakers, have spoken out against what's happened here in Canada. It's been embarrassing.

But it's been a proud moment for me as a proud Albertan and Canadian to see Canadians stand up and say: we've had enough; this is not okay. I just wanted to stand and thank them for that, Mr. Speaker.

I really don't need to say much more other than to say that once again the Prime Minister was wrong in what he did. It was a gross overreach. It was a gross abuse of power. I think that's become clear to everybody, and I hope that he's learned something from this experience. I hope other governments will be watching with great interest to see what comes next, and I hope he pays a price for it in the future elections. That's my hope. I believe that Canadians have spoken loud and clear that they're not going to accept this kind of behaviour. I think that we will see some changes in governments as a result in the future. I think that's the good news, that people have said: we've had enough. It goes without saying, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, I'm going to be very brief, and I will. I'm more than happy that this motion is no longer needed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. the Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak up in support of Motion 10, which says essentially:

Be it resolved that the ... Assembly ...

- (a) condemn the unnecessary invocation of the Emergencies Act ...
- (b) [further] that the government of Canada has failed to demonstrate that the ... circumstances [even met] the threshold that the law requires ...

Essentially, they broke their own law.

- (c) [further that it's]... an unnecessary intrusion into provincial jurisdiction under the Constitution of Canada.

9:20

Mr. Speaker, it's time for Canadians to awake. Canada has changed under our noses. Without a doubt, the events of the last few days have shaken many of us to the core, at least the ones who like to live in a free and fair society. Louis Riel stood up for his people, and the Ottawa elite hanged him, and then later, in 1998, the government of Canada apologized for having done so. Canadian Prime Ministers have apologized in Parliament for the abuses of the War Measures Act, employed during World War I and World War II.

But there was no war in Ottawa this time. There was no foreign invasion, yet he invokes the War Measures Act, which is now called the Emergencies Act. There were no tanks in the street, Mr. Speaker, just food delivery trucks and furniture delivery trucks. There were no rocket launchers to be seen anywhere, just Canadian flags. There were no Navy SEALs. There was no airborne assault, just children with their parents, waving flags and trying to speak their voice and to be heard. There was no war in Ottawa streets, and there hasn't been, so what is the threat? Harmless, happy Canadians with flags waving, arriving in Ottawa to try and speak their mind, to try and be heard, and Trudeau, on the other side of Ottawa, running like a chicken with his head cut off, feathers flying, scared to death. Run; the fringe minority are coming. Head for the COVID bunker. What's the threat?

The only threat is to Trudeau's delusion that Canadians should obey his every command. Nobody should question him, and anyone

who dares to disagree should be assaulted by the police. Their bank accounts should be frozen. They should be thrown in jail, and they should be denigrated as subhuman. The real abuser is Trudeau himself and his chicken Liberals, who refuse to stand for what they know is right. Any Canadian who votes for the Liberals or the NDP after this supports tyranny and the abuse of power and needs to give their head a shake. Canada is a democracy, and I will never support turning it into a socialist police state. The Canada I knew is one of freedoms. They have made it into a dirty word. Alberta will be free. I warn you that one person's freedom gone today is yours gone tomorrow.

All Canadians need to wake up to this, especially the members across the aisle. Kelly McParland reported in an article in the *National Post* a few days ago that the leader of the federal NDP Alberta party – it's all the same party – would support, was willing to grant the Trudeau Liberals extraordinary powers against ordinary Canadians on the condition that it not be used against Indigenous land defenders, climate change activists, workers fighting for fairness. Really? And why not? On what moral or legal grounds? The barrier has been broken down. Now the truth is out: some Canadians deserve more protection than others. Protections have now become politicized according to a person's personal viewpoint.

Mr. Speaker, a Canadian is a Canadian, and I genuinely want to know if Alberta's NDP is onside with their federal leader. Can they say right here and now that the character and protection of our rights applies to all of us equally and not just those we agree with? Or is it okay to attack construction workers on pipelines with axes to destroy equipment, to burn their vehicles and their buildings? I didn't hear a word about that, not one whisper of condemnation of that, because they actually support it. They actually support that kind of violence.

Do only people who have acceptable views deserve protection in an overzealous federal government that has literally no idea how to govern, who is literally willing to trample Charter rights, the freedom of assembly and the freedom of speech? We are back to the future of *Nineteen Eighty-four*, truly. Are we actually living in such a country that if you do not share the same beliefs as your government, you will go to jail? We will make sure of that. The sad reality seems to be yes.

I call on all Canadians to rise peacefully, to assemble, to speak up every day, to assemble as often as you have to. Wake up. Canada is changing, and this cannot be allowed to continue. I know Trudeau revoked the act a few hours ago, another panicked reaction by him. I hope we never ever forget as Canadians how easy it was for him to enact that, to trample on your personal rights, your personal freedoms, the guaranteed Charter rights of our Constitution. To him, the Constitution apparently means nothing. I hope we never forget that. The federal government will tell us that it was a last resort, but it wasn't. It was a political action. They have politicized the Charter of Rights. This is a historic, irresponsible, and colossal overreach and abuse of power against all Canadians. The federal Liberals now think that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is just a suggestion that they can do or not do if they want to. The precedent has been set by Trudeau. There are no rights left according to what he has done this week.

Mr. Speaker, this is an embarrassment on the world stage. I don't care if you tune into the news in India or Africa or Asia – I've tried to listen to them all lately – Europe. Everywhere you go, they mock what's happening in this country. It's a shameful, shameful moment in Canadian history.

There is no greater task than defending the rights and the civil liberties of our fellow Canadians. There is a sense of pride in supporting democracy. Trudeau and his supporters have failed their leadership. They have failed Canadians. They have failed Canada,

and the members across the aisle join and stand with him. There has been no respect, co-operation, or partnership, only disrespect and antagonism.

Mr. Speaker, I love this country, and I'm proud to be an Albertan, and as Albertans and Canadians we have to stand together during attacks on our fundamental Charter rights and freedoms and on a fair and democratic society that we have worked so hard to build. The price of freedom is eternal vigilance. We will fight for it. Don't let it go. The denial of rights to one Canadian is a denial of rights to all of us, and we must never let this become the norm. We must look out for Canada and for one another and never become complacent in our own democracy. Canadians, wake up.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has the call.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue that we face today is one of misuse of power, the erosion of trust in the government, and the careless destruction of the rights of Canadians. I never would have thought that in my time as an elected representative, a Canadian, and, most importantly, an Albertan we would have to speak on these topics, but due to the power-grabbing actions of the Liberal government with support by the NDP, sadly we are here to do just that.

A little under a month ago we saw an unnecessary implementation of restrictions targeting one of the most important sectors of our country and our economy, truckers. While we were already experiencing a trucker shortage across the country, our federal government chose to hurt Canadians and Albertans even more, causing more shortages and increasing inflation on consumer goods like groceries. What started off as a peaceful protest of people protecting their livelihoods and supporting other truckers alike turned into a national and international movement of people wanting their own livelihoods and freedoms back as the pandemic started fizzling out.

But as most large movements come and go, there will always be a few bad apples in the bunch that attach themselves to a movement to do more than just peacefully gather. With this, we've seen the blocking of critical border crossings and the blocking of the downtown area of Parliament in Ottawa.

Sandy Williams, a constituent of mine from Kinuso, proudly took three of his children and a big truck and embarked with the convoy to Ottawa. He updated me every few days and remained peaceful and focused in what he was trying to set out to do, to try to put an end to the restrictions.

9:30

Trudeau refused to acknowledge the harm he was bringing to the trucking industry and to the country. He instead refused to listen to them. He compared them to Nazi-flag-holding white supremacists and even went as far as to accuse a Jewish Conservative MP of standing by the swastika. It is sad to see that we are in a time where our Prime Minister could make such a comment.

Going against the consultation of many Premiers across Canada, he decided to enact the Emergencies Act, not because there was a national emergency or grave threats to national security. It was enacted for specific tasks: to increase his power and to suppress the rights of those who oppose him. Provinces already had the power to clear blockades on their own even right here in Alberta at the Coutts border, where we were able to peacefully end the blockade without the use of the Emergencies Act.

I have had the distinct pleasure in my life to be a class 1 certified truck driver for over 30 years. I've been a member of the trucking

industry for a great deal of time, and I have met many awesome people in it I call my brothers, sisters, and my friends. These are the people that constitute the heart of this very nation. The majesty of this Assembly we see every day only carries the weight it does because behind it are the constituents, the people who work day in and day out and have passions and dreams and stay focused and work hard. A government cannot help its people achieve these dreams acting against them in the way the federal government has done, but these very people are what this is all about.

It has been the privilege of my life to serve my constituents, and they tell me, very sincerely, that the invoking of this act is wrong, that the pretense under which it is enacted is wrong, that the politics that have led to its implementation in Parliament are wrong. The way the Liberal government implemented the Emergencies Act has done a tremendous disservice to Albertans, Canadians, and the rule of law. Canadians and Albertans have seen this gross misuse of powers, and they have made their voices heard along with added pressure from your Alberta government, as has been applied through our courts.

I would like to say thank you to all Canadians and Albertans. Thank you for your work. We have caused the Liberal government and their NDP supporters to cave as they were caught in this unlawful grab of power. Just this past afternoon we have seen them hastily rescind the Emergencies Act before the Senate could even finish debating. This shows their cowardice to allow the courts and the highest offices in the country to rule on the legality and legitimacy of the implementation of this democracy-eroding act. They know they had no foundation to implement it. They did it to take the rights away from everyday, law-abiding citizens that protest peacefully, and they did this just because they oppose the Liberal and NDP agenda.

It's interesting to see them rescind it so quickly as an attack happened at the Coastal GasLink site. This shows a double standard as some of these protesters who have done nothing but stick around and stand up for their rights and freedoms have had swifter actions taken against them than the defence of our own natural resources.

It is on this basis, Mr. Speaker, that I ask both my colleagues in the government and my colleagues among the members opposite to send a firm message from Alberta to the Prime Minister and his cabinet that our great province treasures dearly not only our inherent freedoms but also the rationality that makes our society one of the rule of law. Without it, we will find ourselves remarkably astray.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Government Motion 10, are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 10 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:35 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

The Speaker: Hon. members, a division has been called on Government Motion 10, but prior to calling that division, I wanted to give members of the Assembly the opportunity. Pursuant to Government Motion 9 all members are required to be in their seat for divisions. Again, happy to provide members the opportunity to shuffle around the Chamber should they be required to do so.

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|
| Aheer | LaGrange | Reid |
| Allard | Loewen | Rowswell |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Madu | Rutherford |
| Copping | Neudorf | Sawhney |
| Ellis | Nicolaides | Schulz |
| Frey | Nixon, Jeremy | Shandro |
| Glubish | Orr | Smith |
| Hanson | Panda | Yao |
| Horner | Rehn | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|-------|----------|-------|
| Dach | Feehan | Sabir |
| Deol | Irwin | Sweet |
| Eggen | Phillips | |

| | | |
|---------|----------|-------------|
| Totals: | For – 26 | Against – 8 |
|---------|----------|-------------|

[Government Motion 10 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. deputy government whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m., Thursday, February 24, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:53 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, February 24, 2022

Day 3

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
 Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
 Government Whip
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
 Premier
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
 Government House Leader
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
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Orr, Hon. Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
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 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60 New Democrat: 23 Independent: 3 Vacant: 1

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Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

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Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

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Pancholi
Sabir
Smith
Turton

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

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Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

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Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Pancholi
Reid
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Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, February 24, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, please remain standing for the playing of *God Save the Queen*.

Recording:

God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble Queen,
God save the Queen!
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the Queen!

Members, I ask that you please remain standing.

Statement by the Speaker

Ukraine

The Speaker: As Speaker of the Alberta Legislature, the province with the largest concentration of Ukrainians in Canada, in a country with the second-largest diaspora of Ukrainians in the world, I say that today we are all Ukrainians because we believe that all peoples of the world should be able to choose democracy over tyranny, and for that reason the Legislature of Alberta is with Ukraine and prays for peace.

As the saying goes in Ukraine and, even more importantly today, for those confronting the Russian aggressors and protecting their families: [Remarks in Ukrainian] Glory to Ukraine. Glory to the heroes.

I ask that you remain standing in solidarity with the people of Ukraine as we play the national anthem of Ukraine.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, today I'm very pleased to have a face that many of you will remember and know and appreciate sitting in my gallery today, Wayne Drysdale, the former Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti. I think everyone will agree, all of our favourite Drysdals; his wife, Sherry, is also joining him.

They are joined by Vaughn Bend, the CEO of Aquatera Utilities. Please welcome them.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, also seated in the gallery of the Speaker today are Mountain View county councillor Alan Miller and the Laubenstein family: Scott, Heather, Gunter, Martin, and Linea.

Today in the public gallery are special guests of the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. Please welcome Her Worship Elisa

Brousseau, mayor of Bonnyville. Welcome. Thank you for joining us.

Ministerial Statements

Ukraine

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I stand on behalf of the government of Alberta to express our solidarity with the people of Ukraine, for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the great modern democratic Ukrainian state. As you eloquently noted, Alberta has been built in large part thanks to the contribution of hundreds of thousands of Canadians of Ukrainian origin. We owe much of our own freedom and prosperity to people of Ukrainian descent who have built our own society, so there is a special, deep, and abiding relationship between Alberta and Ukraine and indeed between Canada and Ukraine.

We are all shocked and horrified to see the images of a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine by the forces of Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation in what constitutes the largest act of military aggression in Europe since 1945, the scale and consequences of which are unthinkable: the loss of human life, the deprivation of security and basic freedoms, the dislocation potentially of millions of peaceful civilians in what can only be described as a brutal and horrific war crime.

Mr. Speaker, this did not begin yesterday. Vladimir Putin's aggression against Ukraine began eight years ago with his invasion of Crimea and his de facto invasion, through Russian separatist forces, of the Donbas region in the provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk. Canada proudly has played a role in supporting Ukraine and its military in better responding to these challenges to its sovereignty. As Minister of National Defence I was proud to deploy Her Majesty's Canadian Forces to Ukraine in Operation Unifier, which for the past seven years has trained over 60,000 Ukrainian troops, modernizing them and improving their tactics to prepare for, sadly, this inevitable day.

But the story of Russian aggression against Ukraine did not begin eight years ago. Indeed, for centuries there have been efforts to obliterate Ukrainian nationality, language, and its distinctive culture, an effort that reached its apogee during the Holodomor famine genocide of 1932 and '33, when some 10 million Ukrainians were victims of a genocide planned and executed by Vladimir Putin's predecessor in Moscow, Joseph Stalin.

When we as Albertans stand to remember the victims of the Holodomor, what we are doing is remembering a lesson of history about the underlying aggression that has long existed with Muscovite expansionism and Russian imperialism, which today is wreaking havoc on the streets of Ukraine.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, we express our most profound solidarity with the women and men and children of Ukraine at this moment of great adversity. But we also express confidence in the Ukrainian spirit to overcome this violent effort to obliterate the Ukrainian nation by Vladimir Putin, who for too long has been allowed to develop the wealth, the military strength, the policy of aggression, not only in Ukraine but elsewhere. His participation in the Syrian civil war was simply one part of the path to this day of horrific aggression.

I believe I speak on behalf of all hon. members when I call on the government of Canada and indeed the entire civilized world to stand together in unity and strength and solidarity with the people of Ukraine. To do otherwise is to invite further aggression. I am encouraged to see that article 4 consultations amongst the NATO member states have begun today. We are encouraged to see the provision of humanitarian equipment to Ukrainian civil society by

the government of Canada, to which the government of Alberta is making a contribution.

Mr. Speaker, more must be done. The world must impose a hard and immediate sanction on all Russian energy imports. It is an unpardonable scandal that Russia should be able to continue to fill its treasury to finance this act of mass violence through its global energy sales. That must end immediately with the hardest possible and broadest economic sanctions on Russia, that must be co-ordinated by all peace-loving countries around the world. We call on the government of Canada to lead the way in that respect.

Mr. Speaker, I further call on the government of Canada and our allies around the world to be relentless in freezing the assets of and making life impossible for the billionaire plutocrats of Putin's Russia, his enablers, who have assets here in Canada and all around the world, who have profited from two decades of corruption and aggression. We must make it clear that Vladimir Putin and his gang of thugs are personae non grata throughout the democratic world.

Mr. Speaker, let me close by saying that we are all moved by the scenes that are emanating from Ukraine, but I have been to Ukrainian military bases. I have seen our Canadian troops equipping them with world-class knowledge and skills. I, for one, have confidence that the people of Ukraine will valiantly defend the promise of their freedom and independence that has been so hard fought and hard won.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Ukraine are also people of a profound faith, so I join with so many others in praying for the intercession of the Theotokos for the protection of Ukraine and her people. [Remarks in Ukrainian] [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: I believe the hon. the Premier has a special request for unanimous consent.

Mr. Kenney: At this time I wish to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 39 in order to provide notice of a government motion in support of Ukraine.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I now rise to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7 in order to proceed immediately to consideration of Government Motion 11.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Motions

Russian Actions in Ukraine

11. Mr. Kenney moved:
- Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly
- (a) condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine as an unprovoked and illegal act of aggression;
 - (b) affirm the solidarity of Alberta with the people of Ukraine and Albertans' support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine;
 - (c) call on the government of Canada to impose the strongest possible sanctions on the Russian Federation and to provide with the greatest urgency generous humanitarian support to Ukraine.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Government Motion 11 is debatable. Is there anyone wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 11 carried unanimously]

Ministerial Statements

Ukraine (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to respond to the ministerial statement on behalf of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Bilous: [Remarks in Ukrainian] As our eyes and hearts are fixed on Ukraine, it is vital that we come together in support of those impacted by the atrocious actions of Vladimir Putin, condemning in the strongest possible way these brazen attacks on a sovereign, democratic nation. Alongside the 245,000 in our province, I am also an Albertan of Ukrainian descent. For so many of us, this invasion has a deeply personal impact.

Alberta has the largest population of those with Ukrainian heritage in our country. We have brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, friends and loved ones who are now living through horror I cannot imagine. I'm reminded of our parents and grandparents who came to Canada, in many cases, to escape these types of horrors who may be looking back at their own histories, reminded again of the harm caused by tyranny and egregious, unprovoked attacks. My heart goes out to each and every one of you.

Ukraine has been explicit in their desire for peace and harmony with their neighbours. The NDP caucus stands proudly with those supporting Ukrainian sovereignty and independence. By choosing to instigate a catastrophic, unprovoked, and unjustified attack, the Russian Federation is infringing upon the rights and freedoms of a democratic nation, violating international law and bringing on catastrophic loss of life and human suffering. We must all come together in our province, in our country, and across the globe to support Ukraine and its people's rights to determine their own future, protecting the democratic institutions and values we hold dear.

Now more than ever the world needs to respond swiftly and firmly, holding the Russian Federation accountable in a united and decisive way. We must show solidarity with the people of Ukraine and provide whatever help we can as individuals and as institutions. We must show compassion to those who are living in fear for their lives or the lives of their loved ones who are experiencing loss and devastation on an overwhelming scale.

I alongside my colleagues unequivocally condemn Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine and their blatant violations of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the right to self-determination. [Remarks in Ukrainian] [Standing ovation]

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has the call.

Ukraine

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I, like so many Albertans, have been horrified to see the violent actions of the Russian Federation President, Vladimir Putin. I feel for the many, many Ukrainians living here in Alberta who are watching with horror and worried about the safety of their loved ones. I do know the government provided \$1 million in humanitarian aid yesterday for the Ukrainian community, and I want to thank the Premier for that. Can the Premier tell the House what else is being done by the government of Alberta today to assist Ukrainians in our province, and what support has he committed to the federal government to aid in this humanitarian crisis?

1:50

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his eloquent statement and his thoughtful question. Last night I hosted a round-table meeting including His Excellency the consul general of Ukraine in Alberta, former Premier Stelmach, and leaders of the Ukrainian-Canadian community to seek their input on exactly that question. At that meeting we announced a million dollars of monetary support for the Canada-Ukraine Foundation to provide humanitarian relief to Ukrainian civil society, and I've indicated that we would like to receive input on what additional practical support the government of Alberta could provide.

Mr. Bilous: Through you, Mr. Speaker, thank you for that answer. Alberta's NDP reaffirms our solidarity with the people of Ukraine, and we believe diplomacy, not conflict, is the best way forward. Still, the situation before us is largely out of the control of this Legislature. What we can control is how we support those struggling to locate loved ones in Ukraine. Will the Premier begin establishing specific supports to help Albertans with family in Ukraine reconnect with their loved ones in the country?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the member is right to be concerned about this. In fact, there is a member of my office, the Premier's office staff, who was speaking to his mother in Kharkiv last night as bombs were falling, audible on the telephone. Our hearts go out to all of those Albertans who have loved ones who are being so directly affected by this. The question that the member asks is the responsibility of the consular section of the Department of Global Affairs, but we will provide any necessary assistance to connect Albertans seeking Canadians or relatives to ascertain their well-being.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Premier. Our government was so pleased to celebrate the opening of Alberta's Ukrainian consulate and to declare Ukrainian-Canadian Heritage Day on September 7 – each year we mark this important occasion – but while those decisions were important and I was proud to play a role in them, they provide little comfort to those seeking some reassurance, some hope in these dark days. People need that comfort here and now. Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier, I'll be attending and speaking at a rally outside of the Legislature this evening in support of Ukrainians here, across Canada, and back home. Will the Premier join in a show of solidarity and unified support of this House at tonight's gathering?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I commend the member for that, and I encourage all members, as I did with the government caucus earlier today, to attend events such as that, which likely will be happening all across the province. As I mentioned, I hosted the event last night, and if I'm able to, I will certainly be present at the function here. I expect that in the days to come, we can see Albertans of Ukrainian origin, but I hope this is a moment for solidarity outside of the Ukrainian community. I hope that all people of goodwill in this province will find a way to express their voice of revulsion at the military aggression of Vladimir Putin, because if it can happen in Europe today, it can happen anywhere.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has the call.

Private Health Care Services

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For two long years Alberta's public health care workers have worked tirelessly, heroically to shield their communities from the COVID-19 pandemic. Sadly, at every turn they've been failed by a UCP government that's more interested in protecting its own political interests than the health of Albertans and their families. Now, instead of taking responsibility for their failures, the UCP is bent on dismantling the public health care system that served us so well. Every dollar spent on profit and shareholding dividends is a dollar not spent on maintaining or staffing public hospitals across Alberta. Why is this Premier doubling down on his plan to funnel health care dollars into the pockets of the UCP's wealthy friends?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that is just completely ridiculous. Under the NDP 15 per cent of surgeries insured by Alberta Health were performed in privately operated chartered surgical facilities. We are simply proposing to increase the percentage in order to perform more surgeries. The NDP's preference, I guess, now that they're not in government, is to create a complete monopoly for surgeries only to be performed in government hospitals, which would only have the effect of lengthening the surgical wait times, forcing people to live in pain as their physical condition deteriorates. That is not compassionate.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking of lengthening wait times and people waiting in pain, the Premier likes to tout Saskatchewan as his model for private delivery, and that example is actually very instructive because surgical wait times in Saskatchewan are longer today than they've ever been. They poured tax dollars into a scheme that definitely made a few people very rich but completely failed patients and families in Saskatchewan. Why won't the Premier tell Albertans the whole story about this failed experiment with for-profit health care that he's determined to force on patients and families in Alberta?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, under the current NDP government in British Columbia there is significantly greater private provision of surgery and other care than is the case here in Alberta. In Saskatchewan the Saskatchewan NDP has said that they will not reverse the Saskatchewan strategic surgical initiative because it has been successful, and here in Alberta, under the NDP government, they approved 42 private chartered surgical facilities, adding 40,000 private surgeries to Alberta's capacity, 15 per cent of the total. Why was it okay under the NDP, but innovation is bad under a Conservative government?

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, data from the Saskatchewan health authority, published in the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix* today, shows that more than 35,000 people are currently waiting for surgery, almost three times as many as were waiting in 2015. Saskatchewan is the third-worst province in Canada for getting knee replacements done on time, the second-worst for hip replacements. They trail Alberta badly on every measure, so why is this Premier so obsessed with imitating this expensive, failed experiment in for-profit health care and imposing higher costs and longer wait times on Alberta patients and families?

Mr. Kenney: I appreciate the question from an expert on surgical wait times, because while he was in office, Mr. Speaker, open-heart surgery wait times increased by 50 per cent in Alberta. Cataract surgery wait times increased by nearly 30 per cent. Hip replacement wait times increased by nearly 30 per cent. Knee replacement wait times increased by 23 per cent. The percentage of patients from the

emergency department treated and admitted to hospital within hours had declined from 46 to 44 per cent. We will not accept the NDP's failed record of longer surgical wait times. We're taking action to get the problem under control.

Utility Costs

Ms Ganley: Despite the rosy tweets and videos this government has been sharing, Albertans have been struggling to make ends meet because of skyrocketing utility prices. Yesterday the MLA for Lethbridge-West and I illustrated the choices facing many families, like whether to buy food or keep the electricity on. The Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity dismissed the struggles of these families and blamed them for not seeking price protection. Will the Premier today commit to standing up for these families, or does he share the views of his associate minister?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that coming from a member, first of all, whose government spent \$4 billion on new transmission infrastructure, forcing up electricity rates, that shut down in a rush the lowest source of electricity in Alberta, our baseload thermal coal plants, that brought in a massive carbon tax and wedded it to Justin Trudeau's \$170 carbon tax plan, that completely screwed up the Balancing Pool, costing Albertans over a billion dollars. If there is problem with electricity prices in Alberta right now, those are the culprits.

Ms Ganley: Since this Premier took office, electricity prices have nearly tripled, and the Premier ruled out any sort of supports for those who are now scaling back on food in order to keep the lights on during an Alberta winter. There are multiple options to help struggling families, but the UCP won't consider any of them. Combined with the UCP's increases to income taxes, park fees, tuition, property taxes, and more, it's making life unaffordable for Albertans. Is the Premier really fine with making families choose between paying their electricity bills or buying diapers for their babies?

Mr. Kenney: No, absolutely not, Mr. Speaker, and that's why Bill 1, passed by this government, was the carbon tax repeal act. That's why we told the power companies that if they wanted to continue to generate power with coal until 2030, they could, unlike the NDP's plan that forced them off the grid. That's why we have stopped new transmission infrastructure, which the NDP overbuilt, that has forced up power prices. If they want to know who's responsible for unreasonably high electricity prices, to coin a phrase, the NDP, well, they should look in the mirror.

Ms Ganley: Last session, when asked about supporting these families, the associate minister proudly bragged to this House that their plan was to do nothing – nothing – as Calgarians are seeing bills increase by up to \$460 over last year and nearly half of Albertans report they're having difficulty feeding their families due to these rising costs. Alberta families should never have to choose between putting food on the table and keeping the lights on. Premier, one last time: what are these families supposed to do? Eat in the dark?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the minister said no such thing. Secondly, will the member rise and admit – admit – that the NDP ideology supports higher electricity prices, higher power prices, higher gas prices, higher heating prices? That's the whole darn point behind their carbon tax. They are trying to make energy less affordable so that people then – what did they say? – take the

bus to work. Their carbon tax, their Trudeau carbon tax is what's punishing people. Will the NDP join us in fighting it? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Coutts Border Crossing Blockade

Ms Sweet: Forty-four million dollars per day; \$864 million in total. That's how much the illegal Coutts blockade cost the Alberta economy. This blockade hurt all economic sectors in Alberta but hit agriculture the hardest. Delays at the border meant cattle had to wait to be transported. JBS and Cargill, which process two-thirds of the nation's beef, had to cut shifts and delay payments, causing a decrease in auction prices. What will the Premier do to support farmers who've experienced economic loss as a result of this illegal blockade? Will he be providing compensation?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Coutts blockade was an illegal action that was a violation of the rule of law, which is why the RCMP enforced the rule of law. However, while there was great inconvenience, particularly for livestock exporters, the truth is that we worked around the clock to keep the five other ports of entry between Alberta and Montana open and operating with extended hours, with U.S. livestock safety checks. We got the job done to continue with traffic for exports.

Ms Sweet: The UCP should have taken action to stop the illegal blockade, yet instead of acting quickly, and fanning the flames, they didn't. Multiple members of the UCP supported the illegal blockade online, and the Member for Taber-Warner even went to the front lines of this illegal blockade and claimed to be inspired. The supply chain was disrupted greatly over the past few years, and this blockade made those challenges so much worse. Why did the minister of agriculture stay silent while members of his caucus supported illegal blockades which hurt the law-abiding farmers trying to transport their goods? The Premier needs to remove both MLAs out of his caucus and do it today.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, no member of the government caucus supported illegality. A member visited his constituents because that's a member's job. You know one thing that has disturbed supply chains in Canada and in North America? It is Justin Trudeau's ridiculous vaccine mandate for cross-border truckers, that is supported by the NDP, just like his arbitrary use of extraordinary police powers in the Emergencies Act. Why is it that instead of standing up for Albertans, the NDP always stands up for Justin Trudeau?

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, the Coutts border crossing is our only 24-hour border crossing, and a single day of it being closed is too long. There are many actions the government could have taken: seeking a court injunction, suspending commercial operator licences of people blocking the border. But, of course, the minister of agriculture did not want to support those ideas because he never once expressed condemnation of the illegal protest. What were the priorities of this government and the minister of agriculture? Was he concerned with the financial hardships of the agriculture industry, or did he just give up?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we've made very clear our expectation that the law had to be enforced. But while the NDP was screaming, demanding imprudent law enforcement, the government was in the possession of sensitive intelligence from the RCMP about a group of individuals who could lead to potential violence. The NDP would have

pushed the RCMP into a provocation that could have led to a violent situation. Thank goodness they were not in office. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South is the only one with the call.

Red Deer Regional Hospital Expansion

Mr. Stephan: Yesterday the Premier, joined by ministers, including of Education and the Member for Red Deer-North, announced a monumental expansion of the Red Deer regional hospital. The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and I were also very happy to attend what my mayor called a “monumental day.” To the Premier: could you please share details about this monumental investment and how it will bless families and individuals throughout central Alberta? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you to the Member for Red Deer-South, Mr. Speaker, for his question but, more importantly, for his diligent work on behalf of his constituents, together with the Member for Red Deer-North and all members from central Alberta, who have fought for years together with the community for this critical renewal and expansion of hospital capacity in central Alberta. Yesterday: the single largest capital investment in the history of central Alberta, the single largest hospital expansion in the history of Alberta health care, \$1.8 billion investment, that will increase by 54 per cent the number of beds in the Red Deer hospital.

Mr. Stephan: Given that the NDP did jack squat, given that we know that an expanded hospital is only as good as the services it provides and the health professionals serving in it and given that there are perpetual, chronic shortage issues for health professionals at the hospital and in other locations, can the Premier share how this government plans to address the ongoing AHS shortages of health professionals required to provide health services at the hospital? [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. Order. My only guess is that “jack squat” is very close to the edge of parliamentary language.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can inform the hon. member that there are more nurses and doctors working in our health care system today than ever before, and the member will be pleased with additional investments to expand our health care workforce and capacity.

But in 1997 the NDP received a report saying that the Red Deer regional hospital was under massive pressure and needed urgently an expansion, and do you know what their response was? The square root of nothing. Not a dollar. Not a dime, Mr. Speaker. Why did the NDP abandon the people of central Alberta?

Mr. Stephan: Given that the NDP occupies seats doing nothing, given that for too long residents of central Alberta have experienced reduced service, even diversions, because of AHS, the NDP, and growing demand and population at the hospital, can the Premier tell the Legislature why he thinks it took AHS so long to get to this day and why this government decided to make this a priority?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I share the hon. member’s frustration at how long these projects take, but we must avoid – we must avoid – a repeat of the Grande Prairie hospital situation that

took several years and went twice over budget. I’m just saying that he sympathizes, not that he’s responsible. I know that the hon. the Finance minister is very focused on making sure that we do this right, and the Minister of Infrastructure will work with the Member for Red Deer-South to make sure that it’s done on time and on budget.

The Speaker: I know that the Premier would never bring a member of the public in to the debate here on the floor of the Chamber.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Member for Edmonton-South West

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans were rightly concerned when they learned that the former Minister of Justice, now the Member for Edmonton-South West, called the chief of police after receiving a distracted driving ticket. Actions like this are completely unacceptable and violate the rule of law that all Albertans follow on a daily basis. While a report into this serious matter has been completed, it has been hidden from the public, who deserve to see it. Will the Premier, while leaving, commit to releasing the full report today? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you know it’s a point of order to mention whether a member is in the House or not or anything about that, which just happened.

But the hon. member also knows – and he’s only right about one thing – the report has been received, and in due course, which won’t be too long, there will be a report coming back to this House, and that would be the orderly way to resolve this issue, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: My hesitation was that I thought that perhaps someone was referring – I just didn’t hear it quite correctly, and that would be a point of order if he was referring to the presence or absence of a member. I’m sure he won’t be doing it again.

2:10

Mr. Sabir: Given that during the week of lawlessness we saw at the Coutts border crossing, Alberta had a part-time Justice minister and given that Albertans didn’t see any action from this government except that members of their caucus were encouraging law enforcement to break the law and others in the government caucus were actually breaking the law themselves by joining in the blockade, would the minister without title, the Minister for Nothing perhaps you might call him, have done anything different to end the illegal blockade?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy and the Acting Minister of Justice.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite that barrage of insults against me, I’d like to affirm to the room that our government took action with respect to the Coutts blockade. It became very apparent partway through the border blockade that there was a very dangerous system and a very dangerous element of people down there. While the NDP was tweeting about getting an injunction, we were cautious. We let the police do the work. It wasn’t escalated. There was no violence. There was no violence, and the border was cleared.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the Member for Edmonton-South West, the Minister of Nothing, is still a member of Executive Council and given that Albertans who are working longer and harder to deal with a government that has made life harder and more expensive for

families have a right to know what a member of this cabinet is doing to support them, can the minister without a responsibility from Edmonton-South West explain what exactly he is doing these days in Executive Council? Be specific, Minister of Nothing.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

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

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The way that question was asked was below the hon. member, really based on attempts to make personal insults, which I suppose is the NDP way of doing things. This issue will be resolved in due course. As the hon. members have noted, there's a report forthcoming. It will come to this House shortly, and that is the proper way to deal with this, not through personal insults, which seem to be what the other side is up to today.

Coal Policy Committee Report

Mr. Schmidt: Speaking of reports that we're waiting to see, Mr. Speaker, it's been 57 days since this minister has had the coal report dropped on her desk for review. Fifty-seven days is a long time. In 57 days you can sow and harvest a crop of carrots. In 57 days you can study and train to get a pilot's licence. In 57 days you can, arguably, sail around the entire globe, but for some reason this minister has not been able to review and release the coal report presented to her 57 days ago. My question to the minister is simple. What's the holdup?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. We'll be releasing the coal report in the next couple of weeks along with our answers to their very, very thoughtful recommendations. We'll be taking action to ensure that the eastern slopes are protected.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that this coal committee spent months putting together their findings for the minister to review and given that multiple other reports have been completed on coal mining in the eastern slopes in that time, including a wide-ranging analysis from the University of Calgary concluding that the net economic benefit of coal mining in these areas is minimal, and given that even in the initial survey from the coal committee the very first step concluded that this government must immediately stop coal exploration in the Rockies, why is the minister dragging her feet to review the hard work of this committee and answer Albertans? Does she simply not agree with their findings?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, I share the member's concerns and his love of the eastern slopes. Every place in Alberta is beautiful, but the beauty in the eastern slopes is unparalleled, and that's why we will be releasing the coal report with a series of measures to ensure that the eastern slopes are protected now and for future generations.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that in an update to the High River town council earlier this year the mayor described the Premier as, quote, a full-on, unapologetic supporter of coal mining, end quote, and given that this minister's backpedalling after rescinding the 1976 Loughheed coal policy made it very clear that this report was to look for ways to responsibly mine coal in the Rockies even after Albertans have made it clear that they want zero coal mining activity, when is the minister going to finally listen to Albertans and

stop this government's attempts to mine coal in the eastern slopes? Just say that you'll ban it.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The coal committee heard from Albertans over a period of about five months. They've made some very thoughtful recommendations, which I'm looking forward to implementing. We'll be releasing the results from the Coal Policy Committee in the next couple of weeks, with steps to ensure that we will be protecting the eastern slopes. That is something that you'll be hearing from more in the future. There's nothing more beautiful than our eastern slopes, and our government will protect them.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Barnes: The theme of this week's Speech from the Throne was self-congratulatory rhetoric, proving once again this government couldn't be any more tone deaf. With unemployment above the national average and runaway inflation destroying savings, Alberta families are worse off today. A speech claiming that "our economy is strong, and our quality of life is second to none" doesn't change the harsh reality Alberta families are facing. At 2,500 words the throne speech didn't mention inflation once. To the Premier: exactly how detached from reality is your government?

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. Our economy is strong, and our quality of life is second to none. Our very skilled, talented, and hard-working Finance minister will rise in this House this afternoon to lay out our plan going forward, which will be in the interest of all Albertans, will strengthen the economy, will strengthen the quality of life, will strengthen the investment in Alberta, will strengthen the health care system, and will strengthen the way that Albertans will want to be here forever, because that's the great job he does.

Mr. Barnes: Given that in the Speech from the Throne the government is trying to claim, as he did, that Alberta is in great economic shape and given that the government is also doubling down on corporate welfare in some misguided scheme to fix the economy and given that far too many Albertans are struggling to make ends meet while inflation destroys their savings, again to the Premier: if you truly believe Alberta families are better off under your leadership, why are you doubling down on Liberal-style corporate welfare and NDP-style tax-and-spend schemes?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, the Finance minister is going to be making his presentation here momentarily to highlight the improvement to the fiscal situation here in the province of Alberta, and I'm excited to hear what he has to bring to this Chamber. On top of that, 130,000 jobs created last year alone in this province, recovering all the jobs lost during the pandemic. Alberta is going to continue to lead the entire country in growth, more diversified than ever.

Mr. Barnes: Given that it is obvious by the throne speech that this government has become completely disconnected from the realities facing Alberta families and given that in December Albertans paid 4.8 per cent more for goods and services and given that meat prices are up 13 per cent, electricity prices are up 34 per cent, gasoline prices 37 per cent and given that prices continue to rise – some restaurants now are writing their prices in temporary marker – my

question to the Finance minister: how much does a jug of milk cost Albertans?

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

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry the hon. member is so offended by 130,000 new jobs. I'm sorry the hon. member is offended by the investment, the job creation, the things that'll actually allow Albertans to afford that jug of milk, the things that'll allow Albertans to support their families, the things that'll allow Albertans to pay their mortgages. I know the hon. member is offended by the success of this Finance minister and this government in helping Alberta's economy come back. We're guilty of that good work.

Children and Youth in Care

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, every year the office of the Child and Youth Advocate reports progress made by ministries that serve youth and children on implementing the advocate's recommendations. These recommendations come mainly from mandatory death reviews, which identify the circumstances that led to the death of a child or former child in care, and have their roots in policy and procedure, yet the UCP government allowed 21 recommendations to close last year due to lack of progress. Can the Minister of Children's Services explain to this Assembly what work has been done on improving child intervention under her watch? Clearly, that work did not address the recommendations of the advocate.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do actually appreciate the question from the member opposite. We are absolutely committed to continuously improving our child intervention services and the programs that we offer children and youth in care. The Child and Youth Advocate is a valued and respected partner in this work and adviser, and I do want to thank him, as I know his retirement is upcoming, for the very important work that he does and the relationship that we've built over the last two years. We do review all recommendations that come out of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to determine whether or not changes to current policies or practices are needed to help improve safety for children. We will continue to do that.

2:20

Ms Pancholi: It's a lot of talk and no action. Given that the 2018 Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention recommended enhanced accountability for youth-serving ministries, reviewing the annual report of the Child and Youth Advocate is part of that and given that all those reviews have taken place under this government and that each time the UCP has used their majority to refuse the advocate's calls to hear from relevant ministries on the work that they've done to address these recommendations, to the same minister. This is a pattern of dodging accountability. Are UCP committee members acting to protect the government because there are no answers, or is it because no work is being done by this government?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell you – and I've committed to this a number of times in this House – is that unlike the members opposite, part of the reason why members on our side of the House called for an all-party panel on child intervention was because there was absolutely no transparency and no accountability under their government. That is not the case. In

fact, every time we receive recommendations from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate, we do look at those recommendations, we respond, and those responses are in fact posted publicly online. We can send the link if she needs it.

Ms Pancholi: Well, here's the minister's chance to prove she's committed to accountability. Given that when the Legislative Offices Committee met in January to review the Child and Youth Advocate's annual report, the Member for Calgary-Currie said that that committee wasn't the right forum for the government to answer questions about its work, if any, to protect children and youth in care and given that last week I wrote to the chair of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities asking her to call a meeting to hear from all ministries with outstanding recommendations from the Child and Youth Advocate, will the Minister of Children's Services commit today to supporting this call for public accountability to ensure improved outcomes for children and youth in care?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite would know, I can't speak to what had gone on at committee, but what I can tell you is this: we are absolutely committed to looking at every single recommendation that comes to not only Children's Services, but I do know that my colleagues in other ministries, whether that be Justice, Health, Community and Social Services, mental health and addictions, take those recommendations seriously, and we will absolutely respond with changes, whether they be to legislation, to regulations, or to policy and practice, where they're needed.

Seniors' Benefit Program

Ms Sigurdson: Cost of living is increasing for all Albertans, and seniors are feeling the hit. Insurance has skyrocketed, and utility prices are out of control because of this UCP government. As inflation continues to increase, it's harder for seniors to afford their basic needs. As minister I was proud to index the seniors' benefit to the rate of inflation for the thousands of seniors who require it so that when the cost of living increases, so does their support. Will the Minister of Seniors and Housing commit to tying the seniors' benefit to increases in inflation so seniors are supported?

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

Ms Pon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, of course, we always protect seniors, and we provide a number of programs, services to seniors and make sure they stay healthy and connected in the community. It's just wonderful, your record. Every year the Minister of Health and myself and other ministries provide \$8.6 billion in service and support for investing in seniors. We will continue to look after our seniors.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that many seniors are desperately in need of affordable housing – in fact, over 45 per cent of seniors spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing – and given that as the cost of living continues to increase, seniors are worried if they'll be able to remain in their own homes, for seniors in need of affordable housing the seniors' benefit is crucial. Will the minister explain why she thought cutting the seniors' benefit was a good idea, and will she commit to reversing this cruel decision?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, in fact, we have been building up to 15,000 units so far in two and a half years, way more than the NDP built in the last four years. We will continue to build more affordable housing for seniors, for the most vulnerable, who need housing the most.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that seniors have been disrespected by this government as they were neglected throughout the pandemic, as their pensions have been attacked, and as those on the seniors' benefit are forced to make ends meet amid skyrocketing costs and no government support and given that if the seniors' benefit was reindexed to inflation, a couple would have \$350 more to help them – I know for many who have been reaching out to me, that would make a real difference in their lives – can the minister explain why the UCP is so committed to ensuring that seniors have less? Why is she forcing many to live in poverty?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, in Alberta most of our seniors are enjoying the highest benefits across Canada, and we have the lowest poverty for the seniors, so we will continue to do that. But I remind you that I don't understand that the NDP in the last four years hasn't done much for the seniors, and now they question this government. But I remind you to wait till you hear the budget for later on this year, and then you'll know how much we support our seniors in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Digital Economy Program and Rural Internet Service

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. COVID-19 has created numerous challenges for small businesses. As people become more reluctant to shop in person, the digital marketplace is increasingly important. Many small and medium-sized businesses do not have a business website, mainly because of the lack of technical expertise or high costs. In order to help these businesses overcome these hurdles, our government provided funding to ShopHERE, powered by Google. Can the Minister of JEI advise this House on the objectives of this program and its eligibility criteria?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for the question. Small businesses during the pandemic were disrupted, and more and more activity was happening online, so we want to help small businesses across Alberta digitize and get on there so they can access their customers through the web. So we have partnered with ShopHERE, powered by Google, as well as a digital service squad to have those free services to Alberta-based businesses with 50 or fewer employees to help them get online and serve their customers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that it's become increasingly important for small and medium-sized businesses to take advantage of digital marketplaces to get their goods in front of customers and given that this program is an important tool to help business owners set up and manage their online store, can the Minister of JEI update this House on how many small and medium-sized businesses have applied for this funding and what the application deadline is?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to that member for the question. Over 1,000 small businesses from across Alberta have taken advantage of this program to get online or improve their online presence. Applications remain open. Go to Digital Main Street. Just google Digital Main Street. You'll be able to get there in order to access those programs.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance of a larger digital presence for small businesses for their growth and recovery and given that many small businesses in rural communities, like those in my constituency, do not have reliable connectivity and given that that digital divide can make it difficult for small-business owners to access services of the digital economy program, to the Minister of Service Alberta: can you please tell us what the government is doing to eliminate the digital divide so that small-business owners in rural Alberta can take full advantage of these programs?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it's a great question. You know, there are so many reasons why access to reliable connectivity, reliable high-speed Internet, is so important to help Albertans and Alberta businesses reach their fullest potential. That is why I am so excited that our government was able to announce last summer a \$150 million commitment to building high-speed connectivity infrastructure in rural Alberta. Furthermore, I was even more excited to be able to announce that we had negotiated with the federal government to convince them to match our \$150 million. That's \$300 million, and now we're working with the telcos to get that number even higher. We'll be announcing many projects in the very near future.

Coutts Border Crossing Blockade

(continued)

Mr. Dach: I've heard many tragic stories from Alberta's trucking industry about companies impacted by the criminal blockade at Coutts. I've heard of truckers stranded for days with no access to food, water, or even washrooms. These truckers lost work, money, and in some cases entire shipments were spoiled and had to be thrown away, real impacts hitting working people hard. But the UCP has done nothing to compensate them for these hardships. Can the Minister of Transportation please tell this House what specifically she did to support these workers, or was she joining her caucus colleagues in cheerleading for those who held the border hostage?

2:30

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, I had heard those same stories as well. In fact, I have a number of truckers in my constituency. One of the things that we did was that we made sure that we had extended hours at other border entries across the border to ensure that alternate routes were available for truckers. There were a number of other measures that were undertaken, but ultimately clearing that blockade, that illegal blockade, was within the purview and realm of the RCMP.

Mr. Dach: Given that the blockade in Coutts lasted more than two weeks and cost the Alberta economy at least \$864 million and given that the MLA who in theory represents Coutts could care less about

the harm caused and given that he said that the illegal blockaders were, quote, inspiring nations, given that statement, will the minister rise in this House and tell him and others in the caucus that supported this illegal blockade that they were wrong? Will she then join me in calling for them to be removed from the government caucus?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I had gone on my social media and clearly articulated that the blockade was illegal, and I had called for law enforcement to do their very best to ensure that the border was cleared. In terms of what we did as government, we supported the RCMP and law enforcement to the best of our ability, but ultimately it was within their purview to take care of the situation.

Mr. Dach: Given that independent truckers were especially hard hit by this illegal and intolerable blockade and given that one company owner reported that he missed out on nearly two weeks of work because of the blockade and given that this same employer reported that the blockade was having a trickle-down effect on the pay of warehouse workers and delivery drivers – the inaction and lack of support from this government for the people who work to keep our supply chain open is shameful notwithstanding the comments of the minister – does the minister regret not standing up against her colleagues who supported the blockade? What will she do to make amends for this failure? Again, tell the Premier to kick these MLAs out of . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I have no regrets around the efforts that the government of Alberta undertook to help clear that blockade. Ultimately, it was within the realm of law enforcement to take care of it. I have been in touch with truckers who have been impacted, and we have had many conversations. Yes, the supply chain was disrupted, but we mitigated it by making sure that we had other border entries that were open with extended hours.

Rogers Communications

Member Ceci: In the last election the Premier promised his corporate tax cut would fill the office towers in downtown Calgary. A year later the Premier accelerated the tax cut and told companies that they would be irresponsible for not moving to Calgary. Since then the number of head offices went from 117 to 102. Now the downtown office vacancy rate sits at record-high levels, with a third of the office space sitting empty. Now another head office is about to leave as the Shaw-Rogers deal goes through the regulatory process. What is the government doing to ensure this deal won't hurt Calgary's downtown even further?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, it's a great question even if the hon. member is ill informed, who ought to know because it's been explained to him and others in this House numerous times. There are head offices moving to Calgary on a regular basis. The economy is being diversified at a rate higher than ever before in Alberta. Investment is at record levels. That's how you fill up the towers. That's how you get the head offices in here. Those folks raised the corporate taxes, collected less. We dropped them, and now businesses are coming back.

Member Ceci: The numbers are the numbers, Mr. Speaker.

Given that before the pandemic investment dropped, our economy shrank, 50,000 full-time jobs were lost, and companies packed up and left and given that Calgary already had the highest unemployment rate in the country among major cities and given

that Rogers has promised to maintain the jobs in Alberta but has gone through a transition at the top, what guarantees does the government have from Rogers that the promise to maintain jobs hasn't changed with the new leadership at the company?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, it's time to give a little bit of a legacy tour again on the NDP. Their Energy minister literally told Albertans to go to B.C. to get a job. In 2021 a hundred thousand jobs were created in Alberta. Venture capital records: under the NDP just a nugget of \$100 million in venture capital; five times that in 2021 in Alberta. We're more diversified than ever, and we're going to come out of this pandemic stronger than ever. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Ceci: Given that Rogers initially promised to create a fund to connect rural, remote, and Indigenous communities to high-speed Internet and given that combining these two companies has led to concerns about decreased competition that would lead to higher cellphone and Internet bills at a time when Albertans are already struggling to make ends meet due to the rising costs under the UCP and, once again, given that Rogers has gone through a leadership change, what guarantees does the government have that the promises of increased access to broadband and affordability will be maintained? Please be specific.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, Rogers is dedicated to establishing a western headquarters in the city of Calgary and, in addition to that, creating a 500-person engineering hub as well on top of that. We'll make sure we continue to work with them to make sure that that commitment is fulfilled. They're also promising to invest billions of dollars into the province of Alberta, creating thousands of jobs. We're going to make sure we hold them accountable to those commitments. On top of that, we're creating the best possible investment environment, period. Rogers wants to be here because of the talent that we have and the jobs that can be created.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Alberta Health Services

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The past two years have brought to light the need for accountability in health. The Department of Health and Alberta Health Services, a government-funded organization, have ultimately been the source of information from which Executive Council received recommendations on responding to COVID-19. Can the Minister of Health tell the House about the process for receiving information from AHS and Alberta's Department of Health which was used to determine the types of public health measures implemented here in the province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged governments world-wide. Alberta's government continues to rely on Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health to share information, as we have throughout the entire COVID-19 pandemic, including data, trends, and information related to the pandemic's impact on the health care system. In addition, the AHS Scientific Advisory Group provides research and evidence-based advice to Alberta's government on a number of pandemic-related issues, concerns, and trends. This is in addition to the public updates by AHS leadership, Alberta's chief medical officer of health as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta Health Services' vaccine mandate led to rural Alberta losing access to health care to the point that our government had to intervene and given that those who returned to work didn't feel welcome as a result of their earlier vaccine mandates, that placed hundreds of nurses and doctors on unpaid leave, can the hon. Minister of Health tell Albertans why the United Conservative government felt the need to step in on this workplace vaccine mandate?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the hon. member for the question. I can tell this House that I heard directly from the hon. member and many others regarding the challenges created by the AHS workplace vaccine policy and the impact that it could have on providing health care services during the fifth wave, particularly in rural Alberta. That's why Alberta's government took steps to ensure that Alberta Health Services employees would have the option to submit a negative test every three days so that they could continue to work and provide services to Albertans during the fifth wave.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the minister. Given that our government had to put in restrictions to protect the health care capacity and given that these restrictions have led to negative impacts on Albertans' lives and livelihoods and given that AHS is responsible for ensuring that the system has sufficient capacity, to the Minister of Health: what is the government doing to ensure that we have capacity in the future and that there will be an assessment of AHS's response, including leadership, to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on our health care system?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are continually reviewing AHS's programs and processes, and that will always be a part of our effort to improve the health care delivery system here in Alberta. The audit completed by Ernst & Young in 2019 informed that initiative, augmented by the lessons we have learned throughout the pandemic. As we have committed, we will review the whole-of-government approach to COVID-19, which includes AHS, and as affirmed in the Speech from the Throne and as we'll hear later in this budget, our government is committed to increasing our hospital capacity, lowering surgical wait times, and ensuring the continued care of Albertans no matter where they are in the province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. There will be no break between now and when we move to Members' Statements as we will have a recess at 3 o'clock, where members can prepare themselves for the Budget Address.

2:40

Members' Statements

Calgary Downtown Revitalization

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, like more than 30 per cent of Albertans, I'm proud to call Calgary home. Calgary is a wonderful place to live, full of ambitious, forward-looking people, but there is no denying that our city has faced tough times in recent years. From the oil price crash to the pandemic, we have been hit by one crisis

after another. Calgarians know we need new ideas and bold leadership to come out of this time stronger. That's why I was shocked that in the entire throne speech, a speech in which a government outlines its core priorities, Calgary was mentioned just once.

Mr. Speaker, let's be honest. Calgary has never been this Premier's priority. He promised to fill Calgary's office towers, but the latest CBRE figures show the vacancy rate at 33.2 per cent, the highest ever recorded for a major Canadian city. When it was finally announced, after years of UCP obstruction, that the green line would go ahead, the Premier didn't even bother to show up to the announcement. The truth is that this Premier won't be looking an inch south of Red Deer until after his leadership review in April.

Well, I'm glad to say that the Alberta NDP caucus is picking up the slack. We have been undertaking consultations with Calgarians, elected officials, and industry experts, and we have formed a plan that will bring new energy into Calgary's downtown. Our plan includes the creation of an innovation district in downtown Calgary, encouraging collaboration among postsecondary students, entrepreneurs, start-ups, and business incubators, all located within blocks of each other. It includes establishing new postsecondary campuses and supporting the city of Calgary's downtown office conversion plan. We are proposing storefront revitalization grants, the reinstatement of Alberta's investor tax credit, and the creation of a new venture fund for Albertans to help them invest directly in early-stage companies, start-ups, and scale-ups. We will be releasing our plan in the coming weeks, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. I'd just remind members during Members' Statements to keep all of their private conversation as quiet as possible or discreetly move it to your respective lounges.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has a statement to make.

Ukraine

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I was humbled to participate in a round-table with the Premier and key representatives from Alberta's Ukrainian community. I'm a descendant of the first Ukrainian settlers to Canada, and I'm proud to be part of the 350,000 Albertans of Ukrainian descent. Ukrainians have made untold contributions to our province and to our country. Our beautiful culture stands in stark contrast to the horrific roads we've walked. The unbridled evil we are witnessing in eastern Europe is all too familiar to Ukrainian people.

My maternal grandfather, Mike Huley, left Ukraine in the early 20th century due to the famine inflicted by the evil Communist regime of Joseph Stalin. He came to Canada with his brother at the age of 17, never to return to his homeland again. There would be nothing to come home to as his father and brother were killed by the Russians and his mother and sisters were forced off the farm. Later in life a priest gave him a picture of an elderly woman begging on the street. It was his mother. He would send her money, only to have it seized. He sent her babushkas, which she sold on the streets to survive, and this is how she spent her final years.

Last night many Ukrainians lost their lives at the blood-soaked hands of Vladimir Putin, and this is just the beginning. Just as I did when I wrote the Prime Minister on January 21, I am again calling for the Canadian government and democratic governments across the world to impose the strongest sanctions possible on Vladimir Putin and his regime. History will not be kind to Vladimir Putin, and it will not be kind to those who fought against energy security for the free world. But there will be a time and a place for those conversations. Right now my thoughts are with the people of

Ukraine. A humanitarian crisis is unfolding, and democratic nations must stand together and unite to protect the innocent, peaceful, and beautiful Ukraine.

God bless Ukraine.

Economic Diversification

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to diversifying Alberta's economy as we work to create jobs, opportunity, and prosperity for all, and it's working. In 2021 it was a record-breaking year for Alberta's exports, and we saw significant investments in tech, film and television, energy, and record investments in venture capital.

Alberta is now home to more than 3,000 technology companies. To support this growing momentum and strengthen our workforce, we've introduced the accelerated immigration pathway for the tech sector. This initiative aims to attract highly skilled tech professionals and will help tech employers grow their businesses while bolstering the skills of the wider Alberta workforce.

We're also diversifying and growing through Alberta's booming film and television industry. In 2021 alone we had nearly \$1 billion in production costs. *The Last of Us*, which HBO shot right here in Alberta, was Canada's largest ever film production. With high-budget, high-profile projects putting Alberta on the map, we hope to attract even larger projects moving forward.

At the same time, this government is dedicated to investing in clean, renewable energies. We have developed strategies to capitalize on opportunities in hydrogen and essential and rare-earth minerals, which are critical to supporting a low-carbon economy. As a result, Alberta is already among global leaders in emissions-reducing technology. At our current pace we are set to fully transition from coal-powered electricity by the end of 2023, six years ahead of the federal target and despite the pandemic.

Furthermore, in 2020 we broke an all-time record for venture capital investments, closing \$455 million in deals. As of September 2021 we had surpassed that record by 5.5 per cent, and just this past month the Alberta Enterprise Corporation announced \$31 million to help Alberta technology and health innovation companies grow.

Mr. Speaker, against all odds Alberta's economy is growing and diversifying. I'm excited to see the new and diverse opportunities for my constituents from Calgary-South East and for all Albertans.

Thank you.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Carson: This UCP government is hammering household budgets for Alberta families every single month. Thanks to the UCP, Albertans are paying more income tax, more property tax, more school fees, more tuition, more interest on student debt, more for camping, more for car insurance, and more for utilities. We can all see what's happening at the grocery store as well. The same basket of groceries is getting more and more expensive every month.

In a recent Angus Reid poll 47 per cent of respondents in Alberta said that it was difficult or very difficult to afford enough food for their family. Now, when in government, the NDP put a cap on auto insurance rate increases. The UCP, of course, removed that cap to pander to insurance lobbyists, and now Albertans are reaching out to me with bills that have spiked by 40 per cent or more when they are barely even driving their vehicles. We've heard from Albertans who've had to abandon their car they used to go to work because they can't afford the insurance.

The UCP dismantled the price protections that the NDP built into the electricity system, and now Alberta families are paying hundreds

of dollars more every month. Yesterday my colleagues showed what that means in real terms. A shopping cart stacked full of food and diapers: that's being taken away by these soaring costs. Young Albertans are being hit with massive hikes to postsecondary tuition and have had to pay higher interest on the debt they're piling up to pay them.

Seniors and vulnerable Albertans can afford less and less food every month because the UCP uncoupled their benefits from inflation, something they specifically promised they wouldn't do. Even the child and family benefit buys less and less every month, making it harder and harder to raise a family in Alberta.

Instead of fixing these mistakes, the UCP wants to press ahead with more expensive vanity projects that Albertans don't want and gamble away their pension savings. This UCP government, simply put, is incompetent, Mr. Speaker, and they are completely out of touch with the punishing monthly costs they are forcing on Alberta families.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Utility Costs

Mr. Rowsell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently Albertans have seen significant increases in their utility bills, and some of my constituents have written to me asking: what can be done? A few repeat the opposition canard that the removal of the NDP price cap is entirely to blame. By using the Alberta consumer advocate comparison tool, I have demonstrated to several constituents that the cap removal is virtually an irrelevance. It is also important to recognize that all this price cap does is mask the true cost and move the burden from ratepayers to taxpayers, who are often the same people.

I also pointed out that while distracting consumers with their price cap, the NDP simultaneously gouged them with an unnecessary carbon tax. We made it our first order of business to remove this tax. I have spoken previously in the House regarding the incomprehensible ideology that believes a carbon tax will save the planet. These taxes disproportionately harm the poorest in society, a group the NDP claims to champion. The true cause of the price increases is threefold: increases in distribution and transmission charges due to infrastructure development and maintenance, a steep increase in the federal carbon tax, and global market conditions.

2:50

Not to mention that the NDP made matters worse by prematurely closing coal-fired power stations. They celebrated this phase-out without ever mentioning to Albertans that moving away from that reliable and affordable power source would inevitably mean that bills would increase. They didn't warn Albertans. They didn't have a plan to mitigate the negative effects of their policy. The closest thing that came to a plan was hiding behind a rate cap, which they also did not share the true cost of.

Mr. Speaker, among the many thankful announcements in the throne speech, I was delighted to see the government give notice to introduce a natural gas consumer protection program. While this is good news, it is incumbent upon this House to seek to remove carbon taxes on personal utility bills and find more sustainable ways to fund vital energy infrastructure.

Law Enforcement and Public Safety

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, I want to express my deepest condolences to the family and the community of Latjor Tuel. Last week Latjor

Tuel was shot in a confrontation with Calgary Police Service. His death is a reminder that the use of force must always be the last resort and is not a substitute for trauma-informed care and mental health support. Racialized communities deserve better care and compassion from institutions, including the police.

I stand before you today to advocate for those who see themselves, their family, and their communities reflected in Latjor. As elected officials it is our moral responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of the people we represent. As part of that responsibility, the NDP caucus consulted with hundreds of Albertans on the issue of public safety. The communities we have met want to take an approach to public safety that extends beyond policing. Participants told us that they want better and deeper consideration for how social determinants of health impact public safety, more wraparound services, and community-centred approaches to law enforcement.

That is why I am calling on this House, this Legislature, to take action to strengthen citizen oversight processes and bodies to address and investigate complaints against law enforcement; to ensure ongoing antiracism, cultural knowledge, sensitivity education, and trauma-informed training for law enforcement; creating cultural and diversity liaison positions to integrate better the needs of communities in policing; building and supporting trauma-informed mental health supports for vulnerable populations; and, lastly, I am calling for a special antiracism panel to be involved in a review of the Police Act that would specifically bring a report with recommendations on improving policing and the broader justice system.

As we navigate through the challenges of this modern world, I hope this Assembly can work together to make Alberta better for all.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has a statement.

Ukraine

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As this House meets today, Ukraine is being attacked from the air, sea, and land, from the north, south, and the east by the Russian superpower in a blatant act of imperial aggression. The armed forces and the people in Ukraine are resisting the invader. It is clear to this MLA that it is time for this Legislature to place this issue before God. I would like to read the 23rd Psalm and ask the Legislature to use the remaining time of this member's statement in silent prayer for the people of Ukraine.

The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul, and He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me. Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me in the presence of mine enemies. You anoint my head with oil, and my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Mr. Stephan: Amen.

Red Deer Regional Hospital Expansion

Mr. Stephan: Mr. Speaker, the Red Deer regional hospital serves about 400,000 throughout central Alberta. In 2017, in response to negligence by AHS, NDP governments, citizens formed the Society for Hospital Expansion in Central Alberta, or SHECA. SHECA forced, through FOIP, AHS data showing that the central zone was ignored and neglected over the past decade, receiving only about one-tenth of health funding compared to the rest of the province. In

the result, residents of central Alberta were forced to Edmonton and Calgary for services that should have been available locally. Sometimes they died in the process of doing so such as from heart attacks.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP were aware of this unfairness, but what did the socialists do about it? They did nothing. They were too busy forcing an NDP drug site on Red Deer, but we should remember that throughout this unfairness one variable remained the same: AHS. AHS needs to be dismantled and built back better.

Nevertheless, yesterday marked a transformative day for the hospital and for central Alberta with a \$1.8 billion expansion. I am happy for community leaders like SHECA, who advocated for fairness based on merit and need. Thank you. But, most important, I am happy for families and individuals in central Alberta, who will be blessed by this monumental investment with better health services and outcomes as they live and work in our communities.

Speech from the Throne and Red Tape Reduction

Mr. Nielsen: This week we heard this government's throne speech, and for those Albertans watching, it's clear that the speech was more about saving this Premier's leadership than putting forward a vision for Albertans. The plan for our largest city: not present. A plan for agriculture: nowhere to be seen. A plan to make life more affordable for Albertans: not this government's priority, apparently.

Instead, Albertans heard the same thing they've been hearing since this government took office, including promises of more red tape reduction, which, sadly, is the closest thing this government has to an economic plan. Their trophy: a pair of golden scissors. But the pain experienced by Albertans: that's what really cuts deep. While the Premier spends \$10 million to \$12 million on this ministry, Albertans are left wondering: what exactly are they getting for this? Some of the, quote, red tape that the UCP cut includes a corporate handout that went towards creating jobs in Newfoundland, Wisconsin, and others but not in Alberta; firing the Election Commissioner, who was investigating the UCP leadership race; cancelling environmental monitoring during the pandemic; lifting the Loughheed policy designed to protect the eastern slopes from being torn down for coal mining; selling parks; trying to steal the pensions of teachers; raising income taxes; slashing supports for the most vulnerable; cutting education funding; and more.

As they've hinted at, I'm sure Albertans can expect to see the next great red tape initiative from this government to be a headlong drive to privatize our health care system.

After nearly three years of this UCP government, Albertans deserve a real plan, a plan not based on dated buzzwords and the Premier's failed priorities but one that reflects the priorities of Albertans and builds the future. Even though Albertans didn't get that in this plan in this throne speech – and many doubt that they will see that in today's budget – rest assured that in 2023 they will have a plan and a leader to build Alberta in the future.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, the daily Routine has not been extended, and now that it is 3 o'clock, it concludes the daily Routine.

We will take a 15-minute recess as the Minister of Finance, budget officials, media, and others prepare for the Budget Address. The House will reconvene at 3:15.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:59 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: Members, prior to moving to the Budget Address, I'd just like to invite members of the Assembly. Immediately following adjournment, for those that would like to join the Speaker here around the dais, we will be taking a picture as members of the Assembly in support of the people of Ukraine. Completely optional. I know that many people have many responsibilities immediately following the address, but you would be welcome to join me. We will be prepared to do that immediately following the address.

Transmittal of Estimates

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've received certain messages from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise.

The Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province of Alberta for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the government of Alberta for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023, and recommends the same to the Assembly.

Please be seated.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the 2022-23 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2022-23 government estimates. In addition, I also wish to table the 2022 to '25 government of Alberta strategic plan and the Budget 2022 ministry business plans.

Government Motions

(continued)

Budget Address

4. Mr. Toews moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I now wish to table the government's 2022-25 fiscal plan and move Government Motion 4.

Mr. Speaker, it is truly an honour to rise in the Assembly today to present Budget 2022. This is the fourth budget I've presented on behalf of Albertans, and although each one was unique in context and at times extraordinary, the overarching themes in all have remained steadfastly unchanged. We remain relentless in our focus to position our province for not just economic recovery but long-term exceptional economic growth. We're unwavering in our support for health care, with record-high investment to support key system capacity, and we're committed to responsible and sustainable fiscal management, tethered by three key fiscal anchors.

I want to pause, Mr. Speaker, and begin to unpack these tenets. Why does any of this matter? Do we discuss fiscal anchors or economic growth and job creation to pat ourselves on the back or to tick a box in our list of goals? Is this just a procedural exercise and the shuffling of numbers on a ledger? The fact is that behind

every number I present and every principle I set forth is the life of an Albertan.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, behind every job created is dignity and independence for an Albertan. Behind every thriving small business is the opportunity to impact a family, a community, our province. Behind every dollar that we don't add to our deficit stand our grandchildren, free from carrying the burden of a debt they did not incur. It is the real-time, everyday impact in the life of Alberta families, both now and in the generations to come, that makes these numbers matter.

It is with this in mind that I begin with our fiscal progress. Our government was elected on a platform committed to responsible fiscal management. To that end, we established three fiscal anchors to inform policy and guide decision-making. The first anchor was getting our per capita spending in line with comparator provinces. In 2019, when we took office, as per the MacKinnon report we inherited a government that on a per capita basis spent \$10 billion more per year than similar provinces. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, the previous government's operating spending was increasing by 4 per cent per year. Had we stayed on this trajectory, many of the programs and services essential to Albertans would have simply become unsustainable and out of reach.

Over the last three years I'm pleased to announce that we have brought that 4 per cent annual operating spending increase down to less than half a per cent per year, and if we exclude health spending increases of nearly 2 per cent per year, our operating spending has essentially remained flat over the term. Winston Churchill once stated, "In finance everything that is agreeable is unsound and everything that is sound is disagreeable." Mr. Speaker, yes, we've made some difficult but, I believe, necessary choices, and by doing so, we've kept our promise to be accountable to Albertans. The commitment to ensure that we receive the best possible value for our tax dollars has been honoured.

In Budget 2022 I'm pleased to report that we have arrived. As a province we have done the heavy lifting. Our costs to deliver government services are now within the range of those comparator provinces. We're no longer an expensive outlier, and that is tremendous news for our province and the sustainability of the programs and services we provide to all Albertans.

The government also established an anchor committing to keep Alberta's net debt-to-GDP ratio below 30 per cent. Abiding by this principle preserves our net financial position; in other words, ensures a strong balance sheet. Our projections for the net debt-to-GDP ratio have continually improved over this last year. In Budget 2021 the ratio was estimated to be 24.5 per cent but with an improving fiscal picture is now forecast to be 18.3 per cent at the end of this fiscal year. Alberta has one of the lowest net debt-to-GDP ratios in the nation, and a responsible fiscal management will maintain that strong position. With increased economic and fiscal capacity and by maintaining discipline in our spending decisions, our fiscal future as a province is vastly improved, the positive effect of which is significant and tangible for Albertans today and is of exponential value for the Alberta of tomorrow.

It is no exaggeration, Mr. Speaker, to say that our government has been unrelenting in its focus on investment attraction, economic growth, diversification, and job creation. Our broad-based economic recovery plan creates sustainable economic diversification. When I say broad-based, I mean fostering a competitive, predictable business environment where market signals and the essential tension between sector competitiveness is maintained and where capital deployment decisions are not distorted.

Mr. Speaker, at this juncture in our history we have the benefit of observing two recent very distinct economic approaches taken

when dealing with an economic shock or downturn. The previous government took the approach of increased spending, increased taxes, and increased regulation. In spite of fiscal challenges they increased government spending well in excess of population growth and inflation. They increased personal taxes, corporate taxes, and introduced a carbon tax, making life more expensive for all Albertans. What followed was an exodus of investment, economic decline, massive job loss, and perpetual deficits.

Mr. Speaker, when faced with an historic economic challenge, our government took the opposite approach. We doubled down on investment attraction, economic growth, and job creation. We relentlessly pursued red tape reduction and regulatory modernization, and we significantly reduced our business tax rate. While we ensured Health had all the resources needed to battle the pandemic and we increased capital spending in a targeted, countercyclical manner, we continued to be disciplined in operational spending, ensuring we were not building in permanent entitlements.

In less than a decade we have two case studies on how to respond to an economic crisis, and the results speak for themselves. Investment is pouring into this province across regions and sectors, and more jobs have been created than lost in the downturn. Moreover, economic growth is creating expanded fiscal capacity, resulting in additional government revenues. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we will collect \$400 million more in annual corporate tax revenue at an 8 per cent rate than the previous government did at 12 per cent, which speaks to the incredible investment climate we've restored in the last three years. Disciplined operational spending is reducing our need to take on additional debt, and all of this is putting the province on a more sustainable fiscal trajectory.

I visited with business leaders, small-business owners, and entrepreneurs. There's an overwhelming agreement that a nimble, predictable, outcome-based regulatory environment is critical to business competitiveness, economic growth, and diversification. Mr. Speaker, it is for this reason, led by the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, we have intentionally and persistently worked to modernize our regulatory environment from the first day we took office. While this work will be ongoing, I'm pleased to report on our progress. We have materially improved Alberta's regulatory environment, eliminating more than 20 per cent of the government's requirements and saving Albertans, business, and government more than \$1.2 billion. Many initiatives directly address recommendations from industry and the public, and we've seen our efforts pay off.

In 2021 Canfor moved substantial capacity from B.C. to Alberta by purchasing three Alberta mills while shutting down four in B.C., explicitly stating that their decision was due to our province's business-friendly regulatory environment.

Another key part of our recovery plan was a strategic and countercyclical approach to infrastructure investment, as reflected in our capital plan. Our focus included projects that would improve our competitiveness and productivity, projects that would position the province for job-creating investment attraction. This includes a \$390 million investment in rural broadband, leveraging an additional \$600 million of federal and industry funds, ensuring all Albertans have essential digital connectivity.

Mr. Speaker, these carefully constructed government policies are working. There's a great deal of global capital finding a safe home in Alberta because we've created, by a wide margin, the best environment for investment in the nation. In fact, the Conference Board of Canada, Desjardins, and TD all have Alberta leading the nation in economic growth in 2022. Last year Alberta broke its venture capital record for the third year in a row. Billions of dollars of private investment are pouring into our province in the agriculture and agrifood industry, the petrochemical and hydrogen

economy, as well as the technology and aviation sectors, to name a few.

Amazon Web Services has announced a \$4.3 billion investment in Alberta with the creation of a new computing hub near Calgary. Infosys and Mphasis are adding thousands of tech jobs in this province. RBC is creating a tech hub in Calgary with 300 seats. EY chose Calgary for its Canadian Finance Centre of Excellence, creating 200 positions. We had a record year in film and television. Lynx Air, Canada's newest low-cost airline, will join Flair and WestJet as Alberta-based airlines. Dow Chemical has announced the world's first net zero ethylene cracker to be built in Edmonton's Industrial Heartland. There have been five hydrogen project announcements, including Northern Petrochemical's \$2.5 billion project in the MD of Greenview. Bunge is working to build a \$650 million canola-crushing plant near Lamont, and Fortune Minerals is investing \$200 million for a refinery near Edmonton, citing the province's corporate tax rate as a key reason for choosing Alberta.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on. It would take literally hours for me to list all of the new business investments and expansions that are under way or have been announced in this province.

Meanwhile in January, while Canada lost 200,000 jobs, Alberta's economy gained over 7,000. This is in addition to the more than 130,000 jobs gained in 2021. In fact, we've not only fully recovered all the jobs lost since the pandemic, but we've added an additional 33,000 jobs as of January, and in 2022 employment is expected to grow by a further 4 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, we're seeing broad-based investment and economic diversification at rates I may not have seen in my lifetime. Over the next few years this increased investment will create job and career opportunities in a host of occupations and professions. This matters for every Albertan who is unemployed or underemployed, and this matters to the next generation, offering them greater freedom as they pursue their career aspirations.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as we work to increase diversity in our economy, I also want to celebrate the strengths of our foundational sectors, and key among them is our energy industry. For our government the energy industry is not about binary choice. It is not either/or. It is not either energy or diversification. It is both. It is not either the protection of the environment or the development of natural resources. It is both. Alberta is a global leader in emerging energy and emissions reduction technologies. This is evidenced by our ongoing investment in carbon capture and storage and a \$40 million investment in a clean hydrogen centre of excellence.

But even as we lead in energy transition, global oil demand is expected to exceed prepandemic levels in 2022, and many expect it will continue to increase for the next several decades. Alberta is the ethical choice to satisfy that demand. We are a world leader in sustainable and responsible resource development, with the highest ESG performance among oil-producing countries world-wide.

Mr. Speaker, a lack of pipeline capacity has limited our energy industry, at times resulting in crippling Alberta price discounts. However, I'm pleased today to say that there's significant progress on that front. The Enbridge line 3 replacement was completed in 2021, adding 380,000 barrels per day of increased capacity. In spite of the fires and floods in B.C., the Trans Mountain and Coastal GasLink pipelines continue in their progress. Within the province the NOVA Gas Transmission line, the Pembina Peace pipeline expansion, and the Keyera liquids line are all moving forward. When completed, these projects will eliminate the bottleneck of Alberta energy and provide essential additional capacity to export markets. The much-improved, very narrow discount currently applied to Alberta heavy oil reflects the increased pipeline capacity

already achieved. All of this is very good news for the future of the Alberta energy industry.

Now, while some are operating under the belief that hasty divestment of oil-producing assets is a positive move, they're mistaken. Premature divestment is contributing to a global energy crisis that will have very real consequences environmentally and for the most vulnerable globally. Given the increased demand for oil and the geopolitical events we see unfolding in Europe today, we have an opportunity and, Mr. Speaker, indeed a responsibility to maximize production from Alberta. The most principled, productive, and innovative energy investments are right here in our own backyard, and we remain committed to support initiatives that ensure the ethical supply and export of Alberta energy for decades to come.

Mr. Speaker, increasing energy prices and commodity prices generally, combined with excessive federal stimulus and supply chain disruptions, have resulted in inflation rates not seen in decades. This is pushing up costs for Albertans, and it's elevated concerns over the costs of utilities. To alleviate the fear of spiralling utility costs and to allow Albertans to benefit from an owned resource, Budget 2022 implements a consumer price protection mechanism similar to the measure Ralph Klein put in place in 2003. If natural gas prices exceed \$6.50 a gigajoule, a consumer price measure will be triggered. This means that Albertans needn't fear a run-up in natural gas prices of the variety currently experienced in Europe and Asia.

While Alberta is not immune from the effects of inflation, we offer a more affordable province to live than virtually any other Canadian jurisdiction. Albertans earn more than Canadians in any other province, and this is true in both the energy and nonenergy sectors. Albertans have some of the lowest home prices and rents among Canadian urban centres. In fact, Albertans are able to purchase at least two homes for every one home purchased in Toronto or Vancouver. Our gasoline and diesel prices are the lowest in Canada, owing in part to low fuel tax rates and no provincial sales tax.

Advantageous tax rates are not just for corporations. Albertans continue to pay less in overall taxes than any other province, with low personal income tax and no provincial sales tax, payroll tax, or health care premiums. We also have the highest basic personal exemption amount among provinces, allowing individuals to earn more before they have to pay any provincial income tax. In fact, Mr. Speaker, 40 per cent of Albertans do not pay any provincial income tax at all. That, combined with our status as the highest earners, means that the after-tax incomes of Albertans are the highest in Canada. Canadians are taking notice and voting with their feet. In the third quarter of 2021 Alberta led all provinces in interprovincial in-migration, attracted to abundant opportunities and a lower cost of living. During times of inflation the most beneficial and durable government response is to spend less, borrow less, and tax less.

Mr. Speaker, as our economy grows and jobs are created, there's a new challenge on the horizon. In fact, in many ways the challenge is already upon us. It is a labour and skills shortage. It is difficult to understand that in an economy with an unemployment rate of over 7 per cent we could experience a labour shortage, but this is indeed the situation we find ourselves in, and our government is working hard to address this complex and unique challenge.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's workforce is facing a unique pressure on a number of fronts. The unprecedented challenges presented by COVID-19, a global recession, and energy price collapse overlaying a job market still struggling from the 2016 investment exodus resulted in extraordinary job loss. The very real challenges of getting back to work after being out of the market for a sustained period of time are legitimately overwhelming for some.

I want to tell you the story of Larry. Larry has been a pipefitter for over 30 years. He has always enjoyed working, being able to provide for himself and his family, connecting with colleagues, the rhythm of 10 days on and five off. In early 2020 he, along with many others, lost his job due to the economic downturn. He accessed the financial supports available to him, but he was only surviving, not thriving. Family and friends expressed concern over his social isolation and declining mental health. He considered retraining in a different field – he just wanted to get back to work – but he felt quite paralyzed as he thought about learning something new. Was he even capable of retraining? Who would hire him at his age?

I think Larry's story resonates with many people right across our province. Mr. Speaker, our core needs, to be independent, competent, productive, and socially connected, are often met through our work. Extensive research has shown that periods of unemployment can have detrimental impacts on both personal health and socioeconomic outcomes as well as broader family and community impacts.

3:40

Beyond personal well-being, Albertans contribute to the well-being of this province with every paycheck. They help pay for health care and education. They pay for the many programs that exist in Alberta to help the most vulnerable. They contribute to salaries, pensions, and benefits for our public-sector workers, and they give generously to a wide array of community and not-for-profit organizations. So, Mr. Speaker, our focus now must be to ensure that every Albertan has the opportunity to secure adequate and meaningful employment.

For those Albertans who need a hand up in order to get onto that path, this budget provides new and additional funding with the goal of eliminating barriers to work. For those who want to upgrade their skills and improve on their current work situation, we're designing a new program of bursaries for low-income workers. For those re-entering the job market but unable to meet all the job qualifications, we're providing targeted supports, from work equipment to training to microcredentialing.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize the need to create pathways to success for all Albertans regardless of where they are on their career path. Budget 2022 provides over \$600 million in incremental funding over three years to help create those pathways. We've developed the Alberta 2030 initiative, a 10-year strategy to develop a highly skilled and competitive workforce within an already world-class postsecondary system, one that enhances connections between programs and the needs of employers, is highly responsive to labour market needs, and contributes to an innovative and prosperous Alberta.

I'm pleased to announce that we're providing \$170 million over the fiscal plan to expand enrolment in areas with skills shortages. Approximately 7,000 seats will be created in areas such as high technology, finance, agriculture sciences, health, and aviation. We're also making a generational investment at the University of Calgary to expand the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. This \$59 million investment will address a critical emerging shortage of large-animal veterinarians in rural Alberta. Budget 2022 designates \$30 million for enhancing apprenticeship programs and programs that enable students to acquire skills linked to emerging technology sectors.

This budget also reflects Alberta's agreement with the federal government to support the expansion of the accessible child care that gives families the choice they need.

Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it significant challenges for all Albertans in every aspect of daily life,

and nowhere has this been more evident than in health care. Throughout the pandemic and out of necessity Health responded to the fluctuating need for ICU spaces. I would like to thank my colleague the Minister of Health and his predecessor for pushing AHS to find capacity to deal with the pandemic pressures. I would also like to thank the nurses and doctors and front-line health care workers who sacrificially served Albertans over this last year. Your contribution did not go unnoticed, and on behalf of all Albertans: thank you.

The past two years have exposed a systemic lack of margin within our health care system, and while this has at times put considerable strain on our hospitals and front-line workers, it has been exceptionally instructive and brought into sharp focus the areas of deficit, specifically surgical, ICU, and critical care capacity. By identifying and addressing these challenges, we will substantially improve our ability to not only cope with future health care crises but to more effectively address the ongoing basic health needs of all Albertans. Mr. Speaker, the budget I'm presenting today includes a record-high health care investment in response to these identified urgent needs. Budget 2022 will support the implementation of findings from a review of health system capacity, with the goal of creating the ability to better deal with COVID and future inevitable health care challenges.

In January of this year the United Nurses of Alberta membership voted 87 per cent in favour of a new collective agreement that, in the words of UNA President Heather Smith, "will benefit our members and [is] . . . fair to the people of Alberta." This agreement ensures that our nurses remain the highest paid in Canada while reflecting Alberta's fiscal reality. It acknowledges the remarkable contributions of our nurses during the pandemic, and again I want to personally extend my appreciation for their sacrificial service over these past two years.

Along with providing stability to our health care system, this agreement also addresses rural health care challenges. We're allocating \$5 million per year for nursing recruitment and retention strategies in rural and remote areas of the province and another \$2.5 million a year for relocation assistance. AHS continues to pursue international and domestic physician recruitment opportunities, and Alberta continues to be among the highest in overall physician compensation in Canada. Alberta's government is spending \$90 million this year to address rural physician recruitment and retention. The rural education supplement and integrated doctor experience, or RESIDE, provides benefits to new family physicians to practise in rural Alberta communities of need.

Budget 2022 includes \$64 million for EMS to address capacity needs and other pressures within the system and \$20 million over four years to improve access to palliative care and caregiver support for Albertans and their families. Mr. Speaker, the government spends approximately \$1 billion annually on mental health and addictions, and Budget 2022 invests an additional \$20 million to further implement a recovery-oriented system of care that builds on the strengths and resilience of individuals, families, and communities.

A number of significant capital investments in health care capacity are also included in this budget. We're accelerating our work to build a new hospital in Red Deer. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Education, the MLA for Red Deer-South, and their colleagues, who have been effective advocates for this new hospital. Budget 2022 also provides \$50 million to begin construction on the University of Alberta hospital brain centre neurosciences intensive care unit and \$133 million for the Alberta surgical initiative, expanding surgical capacity right across the province.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's ongoing economic and fiscal contributions to Canada play a vital role in driving and sustaining the national economy as well as in funding the federal programs upon which all Canadians rely. While Alberta's economy is showing real signs of life, the Canadian economy continues to struggle with tepid productivity growth and competitiveness challenges. This is reflected in ongoing weakness in business investment, which remains well below 2014 levels.

When the federal government posted their fiscal update, late last year, it was my hope that Canadians had taken a close look at the fundamentals driving the good news in their revenue forecast. It was us; it was Alberta. When the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board posts their annual results, it is always my hope that Canadians take a close look at the fundamentals that have driven its growth. It will be us; it will be Alberta. As Alberta once again leads the nation in economic growth, I hope all Canadians will be watching to see how our shared standard of living is maintained. It will be us; it will be Alberta. Mr. Speaker, simply put, Canada needs a strong Alberta.

Now, while I've already addressed two of our fiscal anchors, there is a third. We committed to Albertans that as we got through the pandemic and global economic crises and when we had additional economic clarity, we would provide a timeline and path to a balanced budget.

Now, Mr. Speaker, standing here one year ago, presenting Budget 2021 as we were just beginning to recover from the depths of the pandemic-driven economic and energy price crisis, the prospects of a balanced budget seemed so distant, so foreign to the fiscal reality of the day. So it is that context that makes what I am about to say so incredible. We've worked hard across ministries to make responsible fiscal decisions and have relentlessly positioned this province for exceptional economic growth and expanded fiscal capacity, and it gives me great pleasure today to present Budget 2022, a balanced budget. [some applause]

3:50

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Toews: While it is immensely gratifying to have fulfilled such a significant election promise during these extraordinary times, to check another box on our promise made, promise kept list, Budget 2022 is ultimately about making life better for every single Albertan.

No doubt, Mr. Speaker, there will be some who say that the rebound in energy prices is the only reason for the balanced budget I've tabled today. To respond, I would say two things. First, yes, it's true that we're seeing a significant increase in resource revenue projections, and without a doubt it is helping our bottom line. But we're seeing dynamic revenue growth across the entire budget, not just resources, and that is a direct result of this government's relentless pursuit of progrowth open-for-business policies.

Second, balancing the budget requires more than good fortune; it takes discipline and leadership. Mr. Speaker, the previous government increased spending by 4 per cent every year. Even factoring in the energy price projections in Budget 2022, we would be tabling a \$6 billion deficit this year if we had continued on the previous government's rate of spending. This government has made the difficult decisions, decisions that weren't always popular but decisions Albertans sent us to this House to make and decisions that have put us on a much stronger fiscal path for future generations.

Oh, Mr. Speaker, Larry the pipefitter, out of work for almost two years with declining mental health, rusty skills, and lost confidence: well, about four months ago, in his words, he got the call. With an improving economy and employers hiring again, Larry was called

back to work, back to the ability to provide for his family, back to community, and back to a hopeful future. He says that he's never been more excited to go out on a job. Budget 2022 is for Larry and every Albertan that needs a hand up. It is for the entrepreneurs that have a vision not only for their business but for their community. It is for future generations who may never know the choices we made today so that they have greater opportunities tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, it is ultimately Albertans who deserve the credit for this achievement. This belongs to the health care workers, the truckers, the oil field and grocery store workers, and every Albertan who went to work every day serving Albertans in spite of the pandemic. It belongs to the farmers and ranchers, the entrepreneurs, the thousands of Albertans with a vision to see opportunity in hardship. It's the moms and the dads, the pastors, the volunteers, and neighbours who cared for the least of these, bringing a bit of light into dark times.

Budget 2022 and the long-term economic trajectory of our province is not an intellectual or accounting exercise; it is a blueprint for strength, for prosperity, for hope to rise again in the province for years to come. Thank you.

The Speaker: The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, March 7, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:56 p.m. to Monday, March 7, at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 3rd Session (2022)

Activity to Thursday, February 24, 2022

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act (\$) (Kenney)

First Reading — 4 (*Feb. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 7, 2022

Day 4

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
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Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
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Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
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Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
 Premier
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
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McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)

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Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
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Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
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Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
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Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
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Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
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Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
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Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
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| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

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| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
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Rosin
Stephan
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Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

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Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 7, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, as is our custom, let us pay tribute to former members who have recently passed.

Mr. Graham Lisle Harle

December 9, 1931, to February 9, 2022

The Speaker: Graham L. Harle served for four terms as a Progressive Conservative Member for Stettler from 1972 to 1986. He was the minister of consumer and corporate affairs from 1975 to '79 and the Solicitor General from '79 to 1983.

Mr. Harle was born in England, and his family moved to Edmonton when he was a teenager. He completed his bachelor of science in agriculture and then a law degree at the University of Alberta. Called to the bar in 1960, Mr. Harle practised law for a short time in Edmonton before establishing his own practice in Stettler in 1961.

Mr. Harle reflected on his accomplishments in the Assembly with pride and appreciation. He noted the challenge of balancing the needs of the whole province against those of your constituency.

Graham Harle passed away February 9, 2022, at the age of 91.

Mr. Dennis M. Barton

September 14, 1939, to February 27, 2022

The Speaker: Dennis M. Barton served one term as the Alberta Social Credit Member for Lesser Slave Lake from 1971 to 1975.

Raised in Barrhead, Mr. Barton moved to Slave Lake in 1965 to open the town's first pharmacy with his wife. There he became involved in local organizations, including the chamber of commerce, the Lesser Slave Lake development corporation, the Native Friendship Centre, and the Slave Lake developments.

Mr. Barton devoted his time and efforts to projects that built schools, roads, housing, and even hospitals. He was deeply committed to his community and to development. Dedicated to his work through public service, he was fondly referred to by many as Mr. Slave Lake.

Mr. Barton passed away on February 27, 2022, at the age of 82.

In a moment of silent prayer and reflection I ask you to each remember Mr. Harle and Mr. Barton as each may have known them.

Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them.

Please remain standing for the singing of *O Canada*, led by Ms Brooklyn Elhard.

Hon. Members:

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

We stand on guard for thee.

God keep our land glorious and free!

O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's with our admiration and respect that there is gratitude to the members of families who have shared the burden of public office and public service. Today I'd like to welcome members of the Barton family who are present in the Speaker's gallery. Please rise as I call your name and remain standing until I have introduced you all: Dennis Barton; his wife, Wendy Barton; his daughter Laura Barton and granddaughter Emma Jean Rideout; sister-in-law Dr. Sandra Hobbs and brother-in-law Dr. Brian Hobbs.

Please welcome these members to the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, also joining us in the Speaker's gallery today is Martine Carifelle, constituency assistant for Lesser Slave Lake and a good friend of the Barton family.

I'm also pleased to introduce to you, my great pleasure, my nephew David. He brought along his friends from school today, the Rimbe Christian School, located in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Along with David are his teachers: Paul Payson, Wendy Dolman, my brother Jeremy Cooper. They are all seated in the members' gallery. If they would please rise.

Also, guests joining us who participated in the CNIB lunch at the Legislature: Alexandra Halloran; Zachary Michael Abdalla and his dog, Elsy; Gabriel Pigeon with his buddy dog, Maggie; Ariono Arturo Frattin.

I would also like to welcome a guest of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, Aurora Ramsamy.

As well, last but not least, Pamela Rath, the Calgary Catholic trustee, a guest of the Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary-Klein.

Education of Blind and Visually Impaired Students

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to welcome our friends from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, CNIB, to the Legislature today. They have met with many MLAs today to discuss educational outcomes for students with sight loss. I wanted to be able to touch on a very important topic, and that is that education is a key predictor of future employment and quality of life for the blind and partially sighted community. Put another way, we need to increase the supports available for students with sight loss now to save the province money in the future but also help ensure a better quality of life for these folks.

We have a parent of a student with sight loss visiting us here today, Krista Lee Frattin, who said that in her eight years of experience with a child in the education system she has yet to meet an educator that has experience teaching a visually impaired child. We also have a young student here today who I had a chance to talk with, Gabriel Pigeon, who said he wants to know why his parents must supply the things that he needs to have a basic education.

Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, sending your child to school every day knowing that their educators are ill equipped and ill prepared to teach your child? Can you imagine having to provide the tools that your child needs just to have an equal chance at an education with their sighted peers? As a government we need to allocate funds specifically to provide resources, training, and technological services for the blind and partially sighted in the K through 12 school system. This is an issue that is important to our government, and I look forward to talking to the Minister of Education about the need for this funding.

1:40

Once again I want to thank our friends from CNIB, who are in the gallery, of course, here today, for all their hard work, for their advocacy. It has not gone unnoticed. Together we can work to ensure all students, including those with impaired vision, can have a strong education in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Budget 2022

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, 234 pages is the length of the UCP's budget. Two hundred and thirty-four pages and not a single aid for Alberta families. No natural gas rebate despite promises from the Premier; instead, we got a fake program that is unfunded and one that the vast majority of Albertans will never qualify for. Two hundred and thirty-four pages and not a single program or benefit to help off-set school fees, property taxes, tuition, and student loan interest, all of which have gone up under this government. There's nothing for car insurance, which has increased by 30 per cent or more for some drivers. There's nothing in there for small businesses hammered during repeated incompetent decisions by this UCP government during COVID-19. Two hundred and thirty-four pages and there's little hope, mostly just boasting a balanced budget, but is a budget really balanced if most of the needs people aren't getting enough for? If this budget is passed and there is nothing added to help them, is it really worth boasting about? No is the answer.

Mr. Speaker, financial help for these families cannot wait any longer. Less money in the pocket of Albertans is less money that goes back into the local economy. Not a single family in Alberta should be forced to choose between paying their bills or putting food on the table. This is a complete mess, and I demand that the UCP acknowledge their mistake and start to help the very Albertans that elected them. It's the right thing to do, and it's what they were elected to do. Have they forgotten about all that as they've been too busy with infighting and using government resources to save their Premier's jobs? Have they forgotten that it's their job to serve all Albertans, to help them in their times of need? On this side of the House our Official Opposition cares about Alberta families, and we're going to show up every day to do our actual jobs, to help Alberta families in their times of need.

Thank you.

Ken Albrecht

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, in a recent group meeting in my constituency I was able to spend some time with Ken Albrecht. I was saddened to learn that on February 24 he passed away at the age of 80. Ken was a well-respected pillar in his community and spent his life serving government in different roles. He was a councillor for improvement district No. 14, now known as Yellowhead county, from 1983 to 1989 and the district's chairman from 1989 to 1994. Ken also served as a board member of the

Alberta Workers' Compensation Board and the tire recycle management board of Alberta. After improvement district 14 was incorporated into the municipal district of Yellowhead in 1994, Ken was elected as the first reeve and held the position through 2001.

In addition to his work in government, Ken was always actively involved in the community. His dedications include his involvement with the Yellowhead county Jerry Vanderwell Memorial Park, facilitating the creation of McLeod Valley recreation area, establishing the annual Gold Dust Daze, which is a point of pride in Peers, Alberta, and serving on numerous boards and committees for the betterment of Yellowhead county residents. Steadfast on improving his community economically, he was also involved in many entrepreneurial pursuits such as logging and heavy equipment hauling.

Ken Albrecht was a selfless and devoted man who was committed to a life of service: service to his family, his community, and province. Ken's contributions improved the lives and communities he worked faithfully for and served throughout his lifetime. I want to express my heartfelt condolences to his friends, his family, and his community. May he rest in peace.

Budget 2022 and Rural Alberta

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, this budget should have been an opportunity for this government to show that they support rural Albertans. Instead, once again we see this government ignoring and abandoning the people and the communities of rural Alberta. Instead of supporting rural communities to grow, diversify, and build on the already existing economic drivers they possess, this government plans to punish rural communities by making it more expensive to build needed infrastructure, at the same time hiking property taxes of the residents. This is a time to work with rural communities to build this critical infrastructure, and instead this government is actively adding barriers and blockades. It's a shameful abandonment of who should be their rural partners.

The UCP's reannouncement of rural broadband still hasn't even been costed to where it needs to be costed, which means that rural Albertans once again will have to wait for this much-needed and essential service because, again, this UCP stalled for three years, ignoring the concerns of rural Albertans and, again, taking their voices and their votes for granted. While rural communities are preparing and concerned to deal with another flood or drought in the future, the UCP is refusing to show the leadership expected of a provincial government and is actually committed to providing less support than they should be when it comes to natural disasters. While the Finance minister and the Premier travel, celebrating a balanced budget, rural Albertans are left struggling to make ends meet under the weight of crushing utility bills. This budget was an opportunity to support those dealing with skyrocketing bills. For too many, even turning the lights on is an expensive choice.

Instead, this UCP continues the UCP track record of raising and hiking every fee, every tax, increasing costs, and doing the most to make life more and more expensive. Rural Alberta deserves better than a government that views them only as a cash cow and not the economic driver and vibrant communities that they are. They deserve a government that focuses on them year-round and is committed to forming a real partnership with them, and in 2023 they're going to get just that when we're elected into government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has a statement to make.

Utility Costs

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans have noticed the prices in their utility bills skyrocketing, as we are still feeling some of the effects of the NDP government today. This is because when the NDP were in power, they did not care about the long-term effects their decisions would cause. They just wanted a quick fix that would mask the problem at hand. The NDP's electricity rate cap was just that – it was a mask – and in under two years it cost taxpayers over \$108 million. The NDP created long-term problems that will cost Albertans for years.

During 2015-2019, the years that the NDP were in power, \$7.5 billion were spent on building out their transmission system, and where does that \$7.5 billion come from, Mr. Speaker? Well, it has to be paid by ratepayers; it has to be paid by Albertans.

Today Alberta is making tremendous progress in making its energy system more affordable. Since 2020 only \$100 million was spent on new transmission, and in the past year zero dollars were spent. Compare this to the 7 and a half billion that were spent when the NDP was in government. Because of the way the NDP handled Alberta's electricity system, it led to an additional \$1.3 billion loss that Albertans will be repaying on their utility bills until at least 2030, Mr. Speaker. These high utility prices are taking a toll on many Albertans. Citizens need basic utilities in their day-to-day lives. They need to be able to heat their homes in the winter, they need to be able to turn on the oven, and they need electricity to survive and to run their households. They have to pay these utilities, and these prices are placing a financial pressure on many Albertans.

This spring new legislation will be tabled that will increase competition in our energy system and improve available market supply. We are making changes and progress to bring these prices down and to make these bills more affordable for Albertans.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Standing Order Amendments

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we proceed to Oral Question Period, I would like to point out to members that copies of the amendments to the standing orders that were approved by the Assembly on February 23, 2022, have been printed on green paper and placed on the members' desks for ease of reference. I encourage you to – I'm sure you'll be reading them intently.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has the call.

Budget 2022

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Booming oil prices are usually good news for Albertans, but instead this UCP budget was a huge bust for Alberta families: no real plan for economic diversification, 1,000 fewer teachers, more private health care, less community infrastructure, and more debt for students. Right now Alberta families are asking for more help with out-of-control costs, and businesses need support to recover from COVID. The Premier used to blame the low price of oil for his failure to support Albertans. What's his excuse this time?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member is right in one respect, that Albertans need help with the rising cost of living. The question, then, is: why does the NDP support Justin Trudeau's

planned April Fool's Day joke on this whole country with another carbon tax hike? Why does the NDP cheer on the federal Liberal plan to triple the carbon tax? This is the government that scrapped the NDP carbon tax, and this is the government that is leading today by eliminating the Alberta gas tax on fuel and providing a rebate for electricity prices, real action for Albertans.

1:50

Ms Hoffman: If the Premier wants to spend his time asking the NDP questions, he can stop musing about it in the media and he can actually call an election, and we'll see which side of the House everyone is sitting on.

Sneaky tax increase: that's what the Premier was told by his former employer, the CTF, about the budget increases and the hikes to personal income tax. Let's talk about that. The Premier had a chance to put back the \$400 he's taking from families. He didn't. He could have put back the \$350 he's taking from seniors. He didn't. He could have put back the \$1,000 he's taking from people on AISH. He didn't. What does the Premier have for his excuse now?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government inherited the fiscal and economic catastrophe of four years of NDP. This government inherited an \$8 billion NDP structural deficit, four years of economic decline and stagnation, hundreds of thousands of unemployed Albertans, and this is the government that, working through multiple crises, has balanced the budget for the first time in eight years, that is presiding over the strongest economic and job growth in Canada. Why? Because we had our eye on the ball, attracting job-creating investment, showing that Alberta is open for business, and getting our finances back in order.

Ms Hoffman: Let's have a little recap here. Under this Premier Albertans are paying higher income tax, higher property tax, higher school fees, higher tuition, higher car insurance, higher power bills. When Albertans need help paying the power bill, why is the only power that the Premier is concerned about the power he holds in his office?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, imagine the NDP talking about higher taxes when they imposed the single biggest tax hike in the province's history, the carbon tax. Now, we repealed that as Bill 1. Promise made, promise kept. Unfortunately, their ally Justin Trudeau then imposed his carbon tax on us. Today we have announced effectively the reverse carbon tax by eliminating the gas tax on Alberta consumers, just when the NDP wants to increase gas and fuel prices on April 1. We won't let them. We're going to cut those taxes instead.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora for her second set of questions.

School Construction and Modernization

Ms Hoffman: Alberta students deserve good schools and good teachers close to home. Alberta is growing, and so are our communities. We need more schools to keep up with demand. That's why our NDP government started catching up from years of neglect under former Conservative governments. We funded about 60 projects every year; the UCP, less than a quarter of that. Why is the UCP failing kids in need of new schools and modernizations right across this province?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy that as a result of our fiscal discipline, getting our finances back in order, we can invest in more

public services. We can invest in 15 new schools and school refurbishments. We can increase the support for our schools in the operational budget. We can increase the Health budget by \$600 million, on top of \$900 million last year. We can build the new Red Deer hospital and the new cancer clinic in Calgary, the cancer care centre. Record investments in public services: why? Because the economy is growing, and our finances are back on track.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the list of school capital has some massive holes in it: nothing for Edmonton public, no new schools for Lethbridge or St. Albert, and after two years of nothing for public or Catholic kids in Calgary, they're getting a whopping two schools. The UCP believes that classrooms with 40-plus kids, with desks in the hallway is a feature, not a bug. For the first time ever the government presented a budget that refused to tell Albertans how many students they expect to be going to school next year. To the Premier: how many more new students will be going to school in Alberta schools next year? It's the first time they've never told us or that any government hasn't told us.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the member is that with the new schools and the revamped schools already under way as part of Alberta's economic recovery plan, in addition to the 15 additional schools that we announced last week, that's 65 new schools and refurbished schools under this government, more than the 60 done under the NDP.

Ms Hoffman: If the Premier doesn't know or if he doesn't care how many kids are actually going to be going to school in Alberta, he could let the Assembly know, and if he would actually put a little effort in, he could find that number and bring it back to this place, because there are going to be thousands more kids going to school next year, Mr. Speaker. At a time when more kids than ever will need help, the UCP's plan is to have bigger class sizes and fewer teachers. Edmonton public students need Delton school replaced, a junior high in McConachie, a junior-senior in Glenriding Heights; Fort McMurray needs a francophone school; Calgary Diefenbaker needs a renovation; and we need a Catholic high school in the west end, just to name a few of these projects. Why do the UCP . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows perfectly well that schools are prioritized in terms of capital investments based on complex metrics. In the case of the Edmonton public school board, they submitted as their top two priorities schools that are below 70 per cent current utilization. The minister is committed to working with that board to bring forward new school projects in this city where there is dynamic population growth and that are being underserved, but . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The Premier has the call.

Mr. Kenney: I apologize for the NDP, Mr. Speaker. For some reason, they're angry. They're angry that Alberta is opening up, they're angry that the economy is strong, they're angry that we're dropping the provincial gas tax, but I think Albertans are pretty happy. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Utility Rebate Program

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans who can't afford to pay for their heating bill in January were encouraged when this Premier told

them that he was going to offer a rebate, but as usual with the UCP you have to check the terms and conditions. His natural gas rebate doesn't apply this winter, and even if it did, the prices are set too high, so most Albertans wouldn't qualify. In other words, the rebate is fake. I've spoken to Alberta families who feel misled by this Premier's promise. Why didn't he follow through?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, psychologists have a term called "cognitive dissonance." It means: when you hold two completely contradictory ideas in your head at the same time. It perfectly explains NDP policy, because on the one hand they want higher gas prices, they want higher fuel prices, and they want higher electricity prices. That's their goal. They want to punish people for heating their homes. This government doesn't. That's why we put in place a natural gas rebate and have eliminated the excise tax for fuel and are providing a rebate to electricity consumers.

Ms Ganley: First, the carbon tax came with a real rebate, not a UCP fake out. Second, this Premier has raised the cost of living in every single one of his budgets. Third, Albertans are struggling right now, today. The UCP could help them and is choosing not to. Is this Premier too busy fighting for his own political career to listen to Albertans? Where are his priorities?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP carbon tax came with higher gas prices, higher home heating prices, higher prices for groceries, higher prices for everything, and, by the way, four years of economic devastation. They sucked \$1.3 billion out of the pockets of Albertans on a tax they never ran on. Today we have delivered, on an annualized basis, \$1.7 billion of relief to Alberta families.

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, Celina Thibault is a mother of two. She lives in Calgary on a fixed income and must regularly travel for medical care. Quote: I feel the choice some days is whether I can pay my utility bills or go to Edmonton for my treatments. I know a lot of people who thought the UCP saw this as a problem and were prepared to act. Instead, Albertans got nothing and no help. What does this Premier have to say to this Albertan, who feels betrayed by his budget? Does he think she deserves an apology?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have this to say, that the NDP forced up these electricity prices through billions of dollars of unnecessary costs in infrastructure, by their fiasco on the PPA that cost us \$1.3 billion, by shutting down in a rush the coal plants, through their carbon tax. Those are the folks responsible for high electricity prices, but the problem that they created is a problem that this government is solving. Now, will they stand and admit that they are cheering on their ally Justin Trudeau to raise the carbon tax on April 1? I know that Albertans certainly aren't doing that.

2:00 Calgary Downtown Revitalization

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, in the UCP's budget all they could muster for Calgary's struggling downtown was a paltry \$5 million. The reviews are in, and they're not good. The CEO of the Calgary Chamber called it, quote, absolutely inadequate, and the mayor said that it was a pittance amounting to only 2 per cent of what was requested by the city. Meanwhile even allies of the Premier said that it was, quote, not enough; it's symbolic rather than an investment. Calgary doesn't need symbolic noninvestments. It needs real action. How could this government come up so short of what's needed and fail Calgarians?

Mr. Kenney: What classic socialist economics. They think that you revive an entire civic economy – by the way, hammered by the

NDP. They think that you revive that with a few million dollars in grants, Mr. Speaker. They miss the point. The entire central point of this government is to bring back job-creating investment so that we can revive the downtown core of Calgary and our entire provincial economy. They derided the job-creation tax cut. They said that it was going to cost us \$4.6 billion, but in fact we are raising \$400 million more at an 8-point rate than they did at a 12-point rate because of new investment in Calgary and elsewhere.

Member Ceci: Let's talk about that corporate handout. In the last election the Premier promised that his corporate tax handout would fill the office towers in downtown Calgary. He even accelerated his giveaway and said that companies would be irresponsible for not relocating in Calgary. Since then the number of head offices went from 117 to 102, Mr. Premier. In contrast, our leader released some of the key planks of our platform in her speech to the Calgary Chamber. We promised to match a hundred million dollars in city funding for office conversions as well as support small businesses to move downtown and revitalize their storefronts. How can the Premier tell us that . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: NDP economics: tax people more. When they stop moving, regulate them more. Mr. Speaker, what they did was wreck this province's economy, especially the economy of Calgary. Tens of thousands of energy workers put out of work while – what? – they were cheering on Justin Trudeau killing Northern Gateway and Energy East, bringing in their carbon taxes. Calgary is benefiting from the largest boom in diversification and high-tech, digital jobs in its history. The largest tech investment in the history of Canada: \$4.3 billion from Amazon Web Services. That's in Calgary.

Member Ceci: Let's talk about what is actually going on in Calgary. It has the highest unemployment rate amongst major cities in Canada, Mr. Premier. The latest investment figures show that Calgary is falling further and further behind our other cities but for attracting capital in the tech sector. We need to make diversification a priority, not a luxury. That's why our plan for downtown will focus on economic diversification, the creation of an innovation district through the relocation of postsecondary institutions in the downtown core. Can the Premier please tell Albertans how far \$5 million will go in bringing down that office vacancy rate not seen since the Great Depression?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Calgary's downtown office vacancy rate has finally started to come down after a four-year climb because of the NDP. Calgary has the fastest growing high-tech sector in North America. The NDP devastated investor confidence. Tens of billions of dollars of investment fled this province. That is turning around now in the greatest economic recovery this province has ever seen, leading Canada in economic growth, leading Canada in job growth. I know that the NDP thinks the solution is to give a mayor tens of millions of dollars to hand out in grants. We know the solution is to get investment back in Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

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

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we can all clearly see that budgets don't simply balance themselves, nor does taxing and spending your way to prosperity. Fiscal conservatism, disciplined spending, reduction of taxes, and, quite frankly, a strong demand

globally for energy as we break free of the COVID pandemic: Alberta is literally just beginning to take off, and we're finally getting a tailwind. However, with the high inflation, poor federal fiscal policies that are causing inflation to rise, unseen in generations, Albertans are really feeling the strain of increasing utility and fuel prices. To the Minister of Finance: please advise any plans that can help Albertans off-set these costs of energy.

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. In Budget 2022 we announced the natural gas rebate program, that protects Alberta consumers from rising natural gas prices such as we're seeing in Europe. Moreover, to deal with energy price increases, increases of gasoline and diesel, unlike the members opposite, we're not raising taxes; we're cutting taxes by 13 cents a litre effective April 1, which will provide more protection for Alberta consumers and trade-exposed industries.

Mr. Getson: Amen, Mr. Speaker. That's all I got to say to that, Minister. Thank you.

Given that the previous NDP policies and regulatory uncertainty led to the premature shutdown of coal-fired power plants, raised the cost, a \$1.5 billion boondoggle building out of the breaking of contracts, the overbuild of the transmission infrastructure, what specifically is going to be done, to the Minister of Finance, by the current government to combat the high electricity prices? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The Minister of Finance is the one with the call.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta consumers are certainly dealing with bad policy choices by the previous government, and they're dealing with that on their electricity bills today. The members opposite overbuilt the transmission system. The members opposite prematurely moved from coal to gas, costing Albertans \$1.3 billion. On top of that, they brought in a job-killing carbon tax that added costs to every Alberta family and household and every Alberta senior. We're bringing relief on utilities and energy costs today.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the minister: thanks again for the history lesson of what the NDP did in my area.

Mr. Speaker, given the rising overall cost of goods and services, what other measures can be or has the government taken to reduce the cost of living for Albertans? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. I know the member likes me to correct other members when they use a preamble in this Assembly. Perhaps that was a good example of one as well.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. In fact, Budget 2022 included a number of affordability measures for Albertans. In Budget '22 we're providing relief for low-income students in high-demand programs with \$15 million in nonrepayable supports, relief for parents of young children with \$666 million this year to bring child care costs down, and relief for Albertans in rural or remote locations by making affordable, accessible broadband a reality in rural Alberta.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Labour and Immigration Minister

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this year we learned that the minister of labour attempted to interfere in the administration of justice when he called the Edmonton police chief about a ticket he received. That is in black and white on page 15 of Justice Kent's report; there's no other context required. It is clear that the minister of labour has no business sitting around the cabinet table in any capacity after so brazenly trying to break the rule of law in Alberta. Can the Premier explain why he is ignoring the findings of the Kent report and rewarding the former Justice minister with a new cabinet post?

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

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member actually is not accurately quoting the report. The report made it clear that the minister of the day did not interfere with the administration of justice. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Municipal Affairs is the only one with the call.

Mr. McIver: The report clearly says that the minister did not interfere with the administration of justice. The report did have other complaints about the minister. The hon. member knows that and should stop trying to say things that are not in the report.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the minister has not read the report and, like the Premier, is ignoring two out of three findings of Justice Kent's report when justifying why the labour minister should remain in cabinet after attempting but failing to interfere in the administration of justice and given that the labour minister should have been shown the door and fired from the cabinet instead of being rewarded with another new portfolio, what message does this send for law-abiding Albertans who watch a minister that tried to interfere in the administration of justice get a new job in the cabinet?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows what was in the report and what wasn't. The hon. minister is in a different portfolio. [interjections]

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the folks across are pretty bold talking this way when they haven't revealed what they knew about their member from south Edmonton, that was potentially criminal charges. They're pretty quiet about that, yet what's public and everybody knows they're complaining about. All the while they hide what they knew, which is potentially criminal.

2:10

Mr. Sabir: Given that Alberta should not have a single cabinet minister found to have attempted to interfere with the administration of justice or investigated by the RCMP and given that the Premier stated that if it was found that the minister interfered with the administration of justice, he would have immediately removed the labour minister from cabinet and since Justice Kent found clearly that the labour minister attempted to interfere in the administration of justice, one last time, will the Premier honour his words and Justice Kent's report and immediately remove the labour minister from cabinet?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To be very clear, the report concluded that the minister did not interfere with the

administration of justice, and it is rich for that hon. member to even raise RCMP investigations in this . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. You may not like the answer, but the Speaker needs the ability to be able to hear the answer.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it is rich for that member to raise RCMP investigations in this place when an NDP member of this Chamber has had a search warrant served on his place. What did that member know about the Member for Edmonton-South? Did the Leader of the Official Opposition know what was taking place? Yes or no? The NDP need to explain the actions now. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: You can always count on me to restore calm and order in this place, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I think the best thing for decorum at this point in time would be the hon. member to continue immediately to the question that he's prepared.

Mr. Schmidt: As always, great advice, Mr. Speaker.

Coal Development Policies

Mr. Schmidt: On yet another Friday afternoon the UCP released their latest report. This time it was their coal report on the so-called path forward on coal mining in the Rockies. In it they recommended a ministerial order banning certain coal mining activities and the reinstatement of the 1976 coal policy. However, it was this government that rescinded the coal policy, on the Friday afternoon of a long weekend, that led to the widespread backlash from Albertans. What assurances can this government give to Albertans that they won't try this once again, to rescind the policy when they think that Albertans aren't watching?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I can say on behalf of the Minister of Energy that this government is very happy to have been able to fix the mess that the NDP made with the 1976 coal policy, when they sent out a letter paving the way for coal mines to be built on some of the most sensitive landscapes inside our province. The Minister of Energy has been able to move forward to be able to fix that with the reinstatement of the 1976 coal policy, and I'm happy to report to you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to the entire Chamber, that the department of environment will be working forward to be able to make sure that that is enshrined in land-use planning to finally fix the NDP's mistake when it comes to coal.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, given that no one trusts this government, not when it comes to our mountains, our provincial parks, or really anything for that matter, given that a ministerial order gives the minister full discretion to rescind it at any moment with the stroke of a pen and given that the UCP already did this once, when they removed the coal policy in the first place, and given that this government has shown that they are more willing to listen to the coal lobby than to Albertans whose drinking water and jobs are threatened by coal mining in the Rockies, will the government promise to never remove this ministerial order?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Energy has already said, my department, the department of environment, will be moving forward with putting the 1976 coal policy into the eastern slopes policy of our province, where it will stay until each land-use plan is completed, and then it will move over into each land-use plan across the eastern slopes going forward. Again I want to reassure the House that the problems that have been created on coal in the eastern slopes by the NDP have been fixed. That hon. member was part of a government that made four coal mines in the eastern slopes while he was in power, one for each year, but we have been able to provide clarity for investors as well as for Albertans, and we're going to make sure that our precious eastern slopes are protected from the NDP when it comes to coal.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, given that it's been three years and we've seen no action on any land-use plans and given that the UCP has already rescinded the coal policy once without consulting Albertans and given that a legislative ban would require any changes to be debated in this House in front of Albertans and not negotiated behind closed doors with coal lobbyists and given that it stops short of what's really needed, a legislated ban on coal mining in the eastern slopes, will the government support our bill, the Eastern Slopes Protection Act, this session to enshrine a coal mining ban in legislation and protect our mountains from the UCP?

Mr. Jason Nixon: The NDP continues their anti-industry stance, Mr. Speaker, trying to block all industrial activity. The hon. member is completely incorrect about no land-use planning being completed underneath this government. This government is proud to move forward with subregional planning when it comes to caribou, that saved 75,000 jobs. Emergency protection orders that would have seen the destruction of the entire forestry industry inside northern Alberta, which that hon. member and his party tried to do – but we've been able to use an effective land-use process to protect one of our largest industries and, again, to stop the NDP from sterilizing our landscapes.

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

Premier's Office Staff Political Activity

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every member of this Assembly understands the need for keeping party business and government business separate. Taxpayer resources must not be used for party business, and even the appearance of government members offering favours for political support is a crime under the Criminal Code. The Premier's chief of staff oversees all of the operations of the Premier's office and is currently on a leave of absence to shore up votes for the Premier's leadership review. With this in mind, would the Premier tell Albertans what steps are being taken to avoid the mixing of party and government business?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier's office has been clear on this. Staff that are working on his campaign full-time have moved out of government business for the time, have taken a leave of absence to work on the campaign, which is a normal process as you head into political activities along those lines. Again, I think this is rich coming from the hon. member who has been travelling around the province with staff, not defending or sticking up for his constituents and instead spending his time playing junior high games, which is the ineffectiveness of his ability to be able to represent the people of Central Peace-Notley. He has a lot to explain, I think, going forth.

Mr. Loewen: Given that prior to the UCP's AGM last fall, the public learned that senior officials within the Premier's office were in fact calling corporate leaders, seeking assistance in stacking the convention with attendees who support the Premier and given that at least one corporate leader jumped at the opportunity, stating that they could, quote, leverage that into further meaningful dialogues with cabinet, unquote, and given that I have written to the RCMP seeking further investigation of this matter and that we know that the Premier's chief of staff, that oversees all operations in the Premier's office, is currently on leave, campaigning for the Premier for the leadership review, why is the Premier so comfortable with the appearance of influence peddling?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the member opposite would like to distract Albertans from the good things that are taking place in this province. I was privileged to rise in this House approximately 10 days ago and deliver a budget that was a balanced budget, the first balanced budget in eight years. But it was much more than that. It was a budget that ultimately revealed the fiscal progress this province has made and revealed the incredible investment attraction policies that are leading to jobs, job creation, additional opportunities for small businesses, and increased government revenues.

Mr. Loewen: Given that that's deflection right there and given that, of all of the possible campaign managers, the Premier has chosen his chief of staff to take a leave of absence and given that the Premier has stated on multiple occasions that his priority is governing – and there is a lot of governing to do right now, and the government has numerous pieces of legislation to present to the Assembly, not to mention a budget to pass – and that if government business is truly the top priority of this Premier, why is the Premier's most senior official taking time off to campaign for his leadership at this time?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's kind of shameful to see the member across trying to besmirch the reputation of a citizen of this province, one that has done things properly, according to the rules. If you want to do political activity, you have to take time off from your job and not get paid. That's exactly what's happening. I wonder if the hon. member is meeting that standard. I wonder if he's put in expense accounts for the last few weeks that he's been travelling across Alberta to campaign against the Premier. I'll tell you that there are some people that should be careful when they throw stones.

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

2:20 COVID-19 Vaccines and Health Care Workforce

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that vaccines have been a vital, important tool in our fight against COVID-19 and remain so. While hospitalizations from COVID are still at the highest point they have been in recent waves, I was disappointed to see the Premier say that he wants to remove this vital, important tool from the staff at Alberta Health Services. Those people who are ill in hospitals, especially vulnerable populations, should have the assurance that the front-line staff caring for them have all of the tools available to them to help fight against this virus. Why is this Health minister ending vaccine requirements for staff at Alberta Health Services?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The hon. member is quite correct. Our focus is actually on protecting Albertans and protecting our health care system. We have supported the widespread use of vaccines across the province. I'm very pleased that over 90 per cent of people are vaccinated. Now, in regard to the policy of AHS – the Premier said this last week – we have asked AHS to review the policy by March 31, and this was a directive that was provided by our government and by myself. We are waiting for the input to come back to us, and we'll be making a decision in the near future in that regard.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that the facts are that this government has continuously spread misinformation about COVID-19 and the efficacy of vaccines, which has led people to have more questions and confusion, and given that this misinformation has caused the Premier himself to flip-flop within his own caucus on vaccine messaging, leading us to believe that these decisions are being based more on politics than science, and given that Albertans rightfully expect a unified message on vaccination from the leaders in their province and to answer their questions and set a good example, can the Health minister explain where these recommendations have come from, what data he has to support them, and if AHS supports this decision?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our government has been very clear that vaccines are the best tool for us to be able to combat COVID-19. I announced last week in terms of measures to be able to get more vaccines out to kids ages five to 11 so that parents could have better access to clinics after school, and we've also provided kids' vaccines to family physicians. We're looking at additional measures to be able to roll out in terms of supporting vaccines. Let me be clear. In this government we are very supportive of vaccines, and we know that is the path forward to be able to not only protect against omicron but to protect against severe outcomes.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this minister waited weeks, months to take those steps when he could have taken them far earlier to protect children and given that Alberta has one of the lowest rates of third-dose boosters compared to the rest of the country, doses that are proven to help with adverse effects from the virus, and given that continuing to use tools such as boosters will help insulate our already stressed and overburdened health care system from being overwhelmed again and given that public health experts from across the country have advocated for the effectiveness of mandates to ensure the safety of our vulnerable populations and our health care capacity, what message is this Health minister trying to send to Albertans by removing that line of defence for health care workers?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I've already said, we support vaccines, and vaccines are an incredibly important tool. As mentioned by the Premier, you know, vaccines have protected significantly not only through the delta wave but through the omicron wave against severe outcomes. Now, admittedly, two doses of vaccines have not been as effective against omicron in terms of transmission but incredibly effective against severe outcomes. It's very important that we support vaccines to be able to protect against severe outcomes, and we'll continue to do so. In

regard to the AHS policy decision we'll be making that in the near future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood has a question to ask. Oh, wrong Sigurdson. Of course, the use of any name in the Chamber for any reason would be wildly unacceptable. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is next.

Affordable Housing and Budget 2022

Ms Sigurdson: The need for affordable housing is increasing as more Albertans struggle through these tough economic times. Municipal leaders, housing providers, and business communities all want to see investment in housing. While the UCP receives revenues of high oil prices, they made no significant investment in the affordable housing budget. The UCP is leaving hundreds of millions of dollars from the federal government on the table untouched. Can the Minister of Seniors and Housing please explain why she is yet again neglecting substantial investment in much-needed affordable housing?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was so proud to introduce our stronger foundations 10-year affordable housing strategy back in November of last year. This strategy will increase households by an additional 25,000 to serve our Albertans. We are continuing to support our Albertans. We have a plan, we have a vision, and we are executing it.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the mayor of Edmonton called this budget a slap in the face and said that it is being balanced on the backs of vulnerable Albertans and given that the city has yet again not received help in operating their permanent supportive housing and given that much of this concern was also shared by the mayor of Calgary, highlighting the devastating impact on low-income households by reducing funding by 23 per cent – at press conferences the minister has no problem standing with municipalities, saying that housing is important. Why is she so comfortable ignoring their requests once she leaves the podium?

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

Ms Pon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opposition member should well know that the whole affordable housing system wasn't working for tens of thousands of Albertans: wait-lists, a 65 per cent increase in their four years; and no growth, no matter what the investments were from the government. That's why our government is working closely with all levels of government, including the federal government, with local leader experts so we can build new affordable housing, including helping the homeless. We will support all of the homeless.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP claimed to have a plan to support new units of affordable housing, yet the budget shows that the UCP will build fewer than 4,000 units within the next three years, nowhere near their claim of 25,000 units, and given that at this pace the UCP would only create half of what their intended goal is and given that the federal government has available funding and that municipalities are ready to act – the only people we're waiting for are the UCP – why is the minister not investing to ensure that all Albertans are part of the economic recovery?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned before, our plan of stronger foundations includes an additional 25,000 households by the end of 10 years, and we will continue to do that. I'm so proud to continue to work with the stakeholders, municipalities, and the federal minister. As I mentioned, that particular rental supplement: we are so proud to say that we are working with the federal government and cost matching for \$222 million for the rent supplement, a benefit to all Albertans who are in need.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted by the Deputy Government House Leader at 2:28.

The hon. Member for Camrose has a question to ask.

School Construction and Modernization

(continued)

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP seems to think that Alberta's government is not taking school infrastructure seriously, yet it's my understanding that the minister has released a very exciting capital plan as part of Budget 2022 that includes 15 priority projects, including a new Catholic school in the Camrose constituency. Given that the NDP only wants to talk about projects that were not prioritized this time, could the minister please share with us what kinds of projects are receiving funding and how much the government is spending on these projects?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so proud that Budget 2022 and our capital plan include \$2 billion over the next three years to support new projects, modulars, maintaining existing schools, charter school infrastructure, including collegiate programs. This \$2 billion investment includes more than \$251 million over three years for 15 much-needed new school projects on top of the over 50 school projects that are currently under construction. The new construction funding includes new schools in Calgary, Edmonton, Camrose, and Manning, school modernizations in Acme, Cochrane, Evansburg, and Milk River, design funding . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose is next.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Minister. We've heard from some school divisions who feel they were left out of this budget. Given that there are 63 public and separate school divisions in the province and given that our government has committed to keep spending under control to balance the budget, can the minister explain to the House how the ministry selects priority capital projects?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. We have a very robust gated process used to select school capital projects. This process was actually brought in in 2018 on the recommendation of the Auditor General, who felt the process could be improved to greater transparency. Each year school boards are required to submit their three-year education plan to Alberta Education that outlines their capital needs. They are then evaluated, and priority projects are selected based on health and safety, enrolment pressure, building condition, functionality in programming, and legal requirements. Mr. Speaker, we are investing in school infrastructure for our students under a balanced budget. Promise made, promise kept.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Minister. Given that many schools around the province still have aging school infrastructure and some require upgrades but may not have been prioritized for a project this year based on needs around the province, could the minister please tell us what other resources are available to schools who need to upgrade, maintain, or replace the infrastructure in their schools?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. The capital plan also includes \$209 million over three years to support the maintenance and renewal of existing schools, building through the capital maintenance and renewal program. It also includes \$300 million over three years in school authorities' self-directed capital projects. If a school authority is experiencing enrolment pressures, there is also \$118 million over the next three years to support the continued implementation of the modular program. As well, Mr. Speaker, there's over \$249 million sitting in capital reserves by school authorities to address emerging issues.

Child Care Funding

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, last year the federal government made a record investment in Alberta's economy by investing in affordable quality child care. However, this UCP government seems intent on making sure that that investment fails Albertans. In their budget there isn't a single additional provincial dollar invested in child care. Why does that matter? Because without it the UCP will not reach the goal of \$10-per-day child care for all families across this province, and the UCP knows it. Why isn't the Minister of Children's Services investing any additional money into child care to ensure that all Alberta families will have access to this life-changing support?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The agreement that we signed with the federal government is great news for Alberta parents and Alberta kids right across this province. Unlike the members opposite, who had a system where they picked and chose winners and losers when it came to parents and centres, we did not do that. We learned from their failed pilot and took that feedback from Alberta parents and child care operators to make sure that every single licensed space in all day homes and licensed centres and preschools was included in this plan. A billion dollars being invested to support working parents this year is good news.

Ms Pancholi: And almost none of that is provincial funding. Given that Alberta lost 20 per cent of our early childhood educators from the workforce, leaving the sector extremely short-staffed and unable to offer families spaces, and given that the UCP was one of the last to sign a deal with the federal government, leaving \$268 million on the table in Ottawa last year which could have been used to recruit and train staff that are desperately needed to open new spaces for families, and given that no matter how many new spaces this government claims it will create, they're no good to parents if operators don't have staff to open them, to the minister: why is she refusing to increase wages for educators to attract more workers when Albertans need that so badly right now?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I have said a number of times in this House, we're not. This agreement with the federal government does in fact commit to looking at the wage top-

ups that we provide early childhood educators. Why? Because we know that quality staff drives quality programming, and we need to keep early childhood educators in this system. I'm happy to say that our educator workforce is nearly back up to prepandemic levels. This is good news. There's \$300 million in this agreement to support the workforce, and we're going to continue to take feedback from operators and educators on how best to roll that out.

Ms Pancholi: Given that Tracey Manuel, a new mom in Fort McMurray, put her family on a waiting list while she was pregnant and still doesn't have a child care space as she heads back to work in two months and given that Matt Beauchamp in Calgary has been searching for months to find spaces for his two kids but is facing wait-lists of up to 50 families and given that the continued ambivalence of this government to affordable, accessible, quality child care is costing these families money, causing them stress, and threatening their participation in the workforce, why is this minister refusing to invest a single new dollar into child care to make sure Albertans like Tracey and Matt and thousands of others can access quality child care now?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, if the members want to talk about families not being able to access affordable high-quality spaces, they don't have to look back further than three years ago, under their pilot program, to see what type of disruption that created for parents who absolutely could not access those spaces. We did . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services is the only one with the call.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we learned from their pilot program. That is why we fought for a made-in-Alberta deal that included all licensed spaces, so that if parents need access, they can access a space of their choosing and still have affordable child care in their community.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this UCP government continues to gut postsecondary education here in Alberta. Since they took office, there's been a system-wide cut of more than \$690 million. Funding is unstable, forcing postsecondaries to increase tuition and cut programs and faculties. Under the UCP everyone is paying more and getting less for postsecondary education. To the Minister of Advanced Education: why has this UCP government allowed record tuition increases and forced higher interest rates for students to repay their loans?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's a good opportunity to inform the House that as we stand here today, tuition levels in Alberta are comparable to other jurisdictions. They actually continued to remain below the national average despite what the members opposite like to scream and yell about. Further, I encourage the members opposite to take a very close look at the budget. There's \$171 million over three years to create 7,000 additional spaces in our postsecondary institutions and \$15 million to create new bursaries for low-income students. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, in 2019 students owed a total of about \$2.5 billion in debt. Given that this year the UCP's budget said that that number will pass \$3.7 billion, by 2025 we expect that Alberta students will owe more than \$5.3 billion, more than double what it

had been in the past. How does this government expect Albertans to seek further training to grow our economy if they can barely afford to go to school, much less start a business after or plan for the future, without the looming spectre of unmanageable debt?

Mr. Nicolaides: Again, Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite needs to take a close look at the budget. He'll see there a \$249 million increase to student loan funding, which equates to \$1,000 more per semester and an increase of \$10,000 per student to their lifetime limit. Again, as I mentioned earlier, there's \$15 million over three years to create new bursaries for low-income students; as well, \$12 million over three years to support our scholarships that continue to exist. If the member is so concerned about prices, why is he working with Trudeau to jack up the fees?

Mr. Eggen: It only gets worse, Mr. Speaker. Given that the UCP is imposing billions of dollars in additional debt on Albertans pursuing a postsecondary education, given that they have forced postsecondary schools to hike up tuition, given that they themselves have increased the interest rate on student debt to above the already increasing prime rate, given that this means that the UCP is actually making money off students and their debts, how can this Minister of Advanced Education stomach the fact that this government is turning a profit on the backs of struggling Alberta students?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, if he's so concerned with the cost of living and affordability, why is he siding with his ally Trudeau to jack up the carbon tax on April 1? That's what I want to know. Where's the answer to that? I haven't heard that at all from the members opposite.

As I said, Budget 2022 contains \$15 million in new funding to create new bursaries for low-income students; as well, \$12 million over three years to expand our scholarships that already exist; as well, as I mentioned, \$171 million over three years to create 7,000 additional spaces so that families and students right here in Alberta can find the spaces that they need in our incredible postsecondary institutions.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of the daily Routine.

2:40

Members' Statements

(continued)

La Francophonie Albertaine

Ms Renaud: Je suis née au Québec, mais ma famille a beaucoup déménagé quand j'étais jeune. Afin de bien m'assimiler dans ma nouvelle communauté, j'ai perdu beaucoup de ma culture francophone. C'est devenu plus important pour moi de renouer avec la riche et belle culture francophone et de renouer mes racines.

Je suis extrêmement reconnaissante envers les organismes francophones qui travaillent si fort pour assurer que la langue et la culture françaises soient préservées et protégées. Les organisations comme l'ACFA travaillent à unir les forces vives et les sociétés afin de protéger les acquis, faire progresser les droits, la vitalité de la communauté francophone en Alberta.

L'Alberta possède un riche patrimoine francophone. Un bon nombre des premiers colons étaient des Canadiens français. Aujourd'hui nous avons plus de 30 communautés francophones à travers la province : Falher, Grande Prairie, Legal, Plamondon, Lac La Biche, Miette, Beaumont et St. Albert, la communauté que je suis chanceuse et fière de représenter. Un Albertain sur 10 est d'origine française ou canadienne française. Les nouveaux arrivés

de l'Europe, de l'Afrique, et d'ailleurs ont la possibilité d'intégrer aux communautés françaises florissantes. En 2018 Alberta a déclaré le mois de mars le Mois de la Francophonie Albertaine. C'est une occasion chaque année de souligner l'énergie que la francophonie apporte à l'Alberta. Je vous souhaite à tous un excellent Mois de la Francophonie Albertaine 2022.
Merci, M. le Président.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Economic Recovery Plan and Budget 2022

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over this last year Albertans have ridden this roller coaster of good and bad news. I'm happy to say that we can finally exit that ride and enter an amazing new year. With all the record investments Alberta has seen just this past year, employment numbers have returned to pre-COVID levels while we see an increase in the diversification of our economy. This shows that the Alberta recovery plan is working and is working for all Albertans.

I've also had the pleasure of seeing investments made by our government throughout Lesser Slave Lake through the municipal sustainability initiative into the rehabilitation of gravel roads and the replacement of a roof on an administrative building. Just over the past couple of weeks our government released their budget, where all of us have not only worked hard together over this past year to get it balanced but succeeded, as we have a surplus of \$500 million, the first balanced budget in seven years. It is packed full of great announcements for Albertans and constituents of Lesser Slave Lake. Broadband investments will increase accessibility to services with more stability to individuals in Lesser Slave Lake. There are many in Lesser Slave Lake whose livelihoods depend on the reliable service of this connection. I'm also happy to see that our government is putting a focus on recruiting 50 new Crown prosecutors. This is great news as this will increase the efficiency in dealing with crime and our legal system. It is also great to see that \$90 million has been provided towards programs for family physicians to practise across rural Alberta.

Lastly, I would like to take a moment to offer my sympathies and support to the Ukrainian people. They're facing an unprecedented attack by Russia. The rest of the world should not give up. We need to continue to be there for the Ukrainian people as they continue to show an overwhelming amount of courage and tenacity in their fight for freedom. I will continue to advocate for the rights of their . . .

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

Social Workers

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you. Each day Alberta's 9,000 social workers show up for work. Their service is essential. They may be serving people experiencing homelessness by connecting them with permanent supportive housing. They may be offering mental health services to youth at school. They may be meeting with community members regarding concerns in their neighbourhood. They may be presenting workshops on diversity or supporting seniors to navigate the challenges created by COVID. Or, like me, they may be elected officials advocating for social justice in government policy.

Sadly, Albertans are experiencing tremendous challenges due to the decisions of this UCP government. Despite significant revenues the UCP continues to prioritize profitable corporations over Albertans, keeping taxes low for them and increasing taxes for the rest of us. In addition, each one of us is paying more out of pocket

for essential goods such as utilities, insurance, and groceries. In tandem the UCP is depleting public programs.

Seniors' programs received no funding increases. The Alberta seniors' benefit was deindexed when the UCP became government in 2019. With revenue flowing into the province and the escalating cost of inflation, now is the exact time to index the Alberta seniors' benefit to inflation. Tragically, the UCP looks the other way, choosing to take care of their elite corporate interests at the expense of seniors on fixed incomes. Instead of seeing the real need for support due to circumstances beyond the control of any individual, the UCP celebrates, patting themselves on the back as if their wise policies put Alberta in the black. This is ridiculous.

Despite all this, social workers show up for work each day. They work to mitigate the negative consequences of uncaring UCP policies. They do this because they stand for fairness and justice. They do this because it is the right thing to do. They do this at a cost to their own well-being.

Thank you to each one of Alberta's 9,000 social workers. Happy Social Work Week.

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

Utility Costs

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government and others have said that the best way to support our seniors is to help them stay in their own homes and communities for as long as possible, and I couldn't agree more. Unfortunately, more and more seniors are telling me that they are worried about being able to stay in their own homes on fixed incomes because of the drastic increases to utility costs. They're not alone. Many of my constituents have reached out to me, worried about increases in utilities, some doubling and even tripling over the last few years. My own power bill doubled over last year. They aren't complaining about the cost of the electricity or the natural gas they consumed. No. What they can't accept is the extra cost due to the carbon tax and transmission and distribution charges. These are the majority of their bills. I have one bill that was \$118 for gas, but the total was \$332. I understand their anger.

My understanding is that other provinces, like Quebec, use the profits from selling energy, like our royalties, to reduce the burden on their residents' and businesses' utility bills. At the same time they reduce their provincial revenue to the point that they qualify for – guess what? – equalization payments funded by provinces like Alberta. I have suggested to our government that we do the same. We should use a small part of our significantly increased oil and gas royalties – you know, the oil and gas resources that actually belong to Albertans and not governments – to reduce the massive burden being experienced by Albertans and their businesses.

These very high transmission and distribution charges came about because of poor decisions by previous governments, both the NDP for their meddling in the power purchase agreements and early closure of our cheap and clean coal power plants and the PCs for their transmission overbuild. Our residents and businesses are not responsible for poor decisions by previous governments and should not be expected to pay the price. It's time for us to step up and use Alberta's royalties to reduce the burden that previous governments have stuck them with. If we do it right, we might even reduce the equalization payments from Alberta that get sent to other provinces that block the development of our natural resources.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice of the following bills: Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance; Bill 3, the Special Days Act, sponsored by the Minister of Culture; Bill 4, the Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Government Motion 7 there shall be no evening sitting tonight.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

2:50

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide notice pursuant to Standing Order 42 that at the appropriate time I will move a motion, which reads as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly acknowledge the following: (a) Albertans are facing rising gasoline prices in excess of \$1.55 per litre; (b) electricity rates per kilowatt hour are more than double the rate cap put in place by the previous government, with the current government failing to provide relief to Albertans in respect of these rising costs; (c) the government promised to provide relief to Albertans in respect to skyrocketing natural gas prices through its 2022-23 budget but failed to do so by introducing an unfunded program that only comes into effect in October, for which the vast majority of Albertans will not qualify. Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta call on the government to consider immediately providing each of the following types of emergency relief to Albertans: (a) in respect of rising gasoline prices, a suspension of the 13 cents per litre provincial tax, to be reassessed on a reoccurring three-month basis; (b) in respect of rising electricity rates, either a rebate program to take effect immediately to off-set the rising costs or a re-establishment of the rate cap of 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour, that was put in place by the previous government; (c) in respect of rising natural gas prices, a rebate program that takes effect immediately and for which eligibility threshold is lower than the \$6.50 per gigajoule threshold proposed by the government's current program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have the appropriate number of copies when needed.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has a tabling.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I actually have three tablings today. The first is a copy of a Quebec hydro bill for power and heating, where they have just the cost of power plus their harmonized sales tax. It's all they get charged.

The second tabling is a copy of an Alberta power and gas bill, where in addition to the cost of the fees for power and gas we pay an administration fee, transmission charge, distribution charge, Balancing Pool rider, deferral rider, transmission trace up rider, municipal franchise fee, interim shortfall rider, rider B property tax, and transmission service charge. I can't even explain what some of those are.

Of course, being that we're in a new session, I would like to table five copies of the Leap Manifesto, the favourite document of the NDP.

The Speaker: Are there any other tablings? The hon. Member for Highwood is on his feet.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table, as provided to me by the reeve, Delilah Miller, on behalf of the Foothills county and residents, a petition conducted online in which 1,127 residents are requesting that Foothills county be removed as a member from the Calgary Metropolitan Region Board.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has a tabling.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table a February 14 comment I made on Facebook, that the opposition had gone after me nonstop for making comments for people to remember their oaths when they evoked the emergency measures act. I would like very much for everyone to read that at home, as well as the opposition, to get the full content of that.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Toews, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act the Members of the Legislative Assembly pension plan annual report for the year ended March 31, 2020; pursuant to the Insurance Act the Alberta Automobile Insurance Rate Board annual report 2021, for the year ended December 31, 2021.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I wish to advise the Assembly that the point of order from 2:28 has been withdrawn.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: At the appropriate time the Member for Calgary-Mountain View gave the Assembly notice of Standing Order 42. The member now has five minutes in which to make their argument for why unanimous consent should be granted.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Fuel and Utility Costs

Ms Ganley:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly acknowledge the following: (a) Albertans are facing rising gasoline prices in excess of \$1.55 per litre; (b) electricity rates per kilowatt hour are more than double the rate cap put in place by the previous government, with the current government failing to provide relief to Albertans in respect of these rising costs; (c) the government promised to provide relief to Albertans in respect to skyrocketing natural gas prices through its 2022-23 budget but failed to do so by introducing an unfunded program that only comes into effect in October, for which the vast majority of Albertans will not qualify. Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta call on the government to consider immediately providing each of the following types of emergency relief to Albertans: (a) in respect of rising gasoline prices, a suspension of the 13 cents per litre provincial tax, to be reassessed on a reoccurring three-month basis; (b) in respect of rising electricity rates, either a rebate program to take effect immediately to off-set the rising costs or a re-establishment of the rate cap of 6.8 cents per kilowatt hour, that was put in place by the previous government; (c) in respect of rising natural gas prices, a rebate program that takes effect immediately and for which

eligibility threshold is lower than the \$6.50 per gigajoule threshold proposed by the government's current program.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to unanimous consent to proceed with this SO 42. I'll begin by addressing urgency.

Mr. Speaker, this matter is incredibly urgent. It is urgent to all the families out there right now choosing between buying groceries and heating their homes in the middle of an Alberta winter. We're hearing from more and more Albertans who cannot afford skyrocketing energy bills.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Last week gasoline prices spiked to over \$1.55 per litre. The current government promised action on natural gas prices but then presented a budget with a fake program. The rebate would not come into effect until October, it's currently unfunded, and it sets a threshold that few, if any, Albertans will ever qualify for. In fact, their plan depends on things getting considerably worse.

Meanwhile Albertans have been sending us copies of utility bills in excess of \$700, and that's in addition to the other decisions the UCP government has made that have hammered household budgets. They've increased income taxes, property taxes, tuition, student debt interest, car insurance – and the car insurance, Mr. Speaker, I might add, without even requiring the documentation that we asked for proving that those costs were increasing at greater than 5 per cent a year. Even camping fees are all rising as a direct result of the decisions of this government.

This is completely unsustainable for many families. It will force many to park their vehicles or to pile debt on to their credit cards. Mr. Speaker, this cannot go on. We have heard the Premier announce some measure of supports, but Albertans need a complete set of measures, as set out in our motion, in order to support them. This government needs to take responsibility for the impact that it is causing on household budgets.

[The Speaker in the chair]

We heard the government today: Albertans will need to wait 24 days to see relief at the pumps. This is obviously an important step, but it's insufficient. We're hearing as well about massive increases in bills and many with outstanding bills. Mr. Speaker, the government certainly announced that they would be providing families with a rebate of \$150, but many families are facing arrears of hundreds or even thousands of dollars. These are forcing them to make incredibly difficult choices between basic necessities like food and rent and heat. Many are at risk of being disconnected. In 2021 the average Alberta family had to pay an additional \$250. That's \$100 more than the government is offering without the increased cost of transmission or distribution.

Mr. Speaker, I think the actions that we saw today from this government are inadequate to address the concerns of Albertans, and I would urge the House that this matter is urgent. I can only imagine that members on all sides are getting the same e-mails that we are getting on our side, of Albertans struggling, reaching out to us, saying that they can't afford the cost of their utilities at the same time that they pay for their medication or for their food. These are decisions that no Albertan should ever have to make. These Albertans need action immediately.

We know the government's actions are insufficient to support Albertans, so I think, Mr. Speaker, that every member of this House owes it to their constituents to engage today in a real debate about how we can help these Albertans struggling with costs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do agree with the hon. member that something needs to be done about the unfortunate mistakes that the Official Opposition made when they were in government when it comes to both our electricity system as well as their catastrophic policies like the carbon tax impact on fuel prices. That's why today the government has already announced, in fact, some of the stuff that is asked for in the hon. member's motion. It includes more than 13 cents per litre of the gasoline tax being removed and \$150 in electricity rebates for Albertans that are experiencing high prices right now from this winter. That's in addition to this government that removed \$1.3 billion from the NDP carbon tax, which was on our economy.

These are very serious issues which the government is taking seriously, which is why they took action today, and we need to continue to take action in the days to come to help Albertans. But here are the biggest things that we could also do right now. We can continue to fight against the federal government's carbon tax when it comes to the impact on fuel costs. That member and her party, the Official Opposition and the NDP party, continue to support Justin Trudeau and his job-killing carbon tax. In fact, they support the increase in gas taxes that will come from the federal carbon tax in just a few days, on April 1.

If we are going to debate this issue in the Chamber, I think, Mr. Speaker, we should start with that member and her party standing up and apologizing to Albertans for bringing in a carbon tax that they never told them about when they were in government and for the catastrophic impacts of that tax on the people of this province. They should stand up and apologize for continuing to support Justin Trudeau with his job-killing carbon tax and join this side of the House right now in calling on the federal government to remove the job-killing carbon tax on our economy inside our province.

3:00

Second, they should stand up inside this House and apologize to Albertans for their boondoggle that they made when they were in charge of our electricity system, Mr. Speaker, that is impacting the very Albertans that she spoke about today, that is impacting Albertans who are struggling to pay for their bills because of the Official Opposition and the NDP's mistakes. That's what that member should do, stand up and apologize for that today.

That said, Mr. Speaker, the government is taking action today. We're going to continue to take action, and they can rest assured that we will continue to be here to defend them against the NDP and their Justin Trudeau allies, who are doing everything they can to continue to cost Albertans money. Our side of the House is going to lower taxes, make things easier for Albertans going forward. Their side of the House, if they ever get to this side of the House again, will continue to do everything that they can to tax Albertans, kill jobs, and make investment flee this province. As such, because clear action has been taken today, I'd ask everybody in this Chamber not to support this motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 42 requires unanimous consent of the Assembly.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: As such, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika and the opposition deputy – the Deputy Government House Leader.

Drug Abuse Prevention

501. Mr. Schow moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue working to combat the impacts of drug abuse in Alberta and urge the government of Canada to make all efforts in conjunction with its allies to prevent the export of lethal and highly addictive opioids, including but not limited to fentanyl and carfentanil and related chemicals from which these opioids are formed, from all foreign countries, including the People's Republic of China and Mexico.

Mr. Schow: We got there, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. Thank you for that.

It is my honour to rise this afternoon and speak on Motion 501, my motion, a private member's motion. Now, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion regarding the ongoing opioid crisis in Alberta. The import of dangerous and illegal drugs must end, Mr. Speaker. These drugs continue to affect thousands of Albertans every year, resulting in the destruction of lives and livelihoods, and in some instances – in fact, in many instances – causing death.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful and honoured to work with my government colleagues as we strive to assist in the recovery of these addictions. It is important to recognize that those who sit on this side of the House are opposed to the methods that the opposition would take to combat this. We may not see eye to eye on these issues regarding drug abuse in Alberta, but I think that this motion is a good motion and a step in the right direction, and I would hope that all members would support it. That being said, I deem it very unlikely that members opposite wouldn't support a motion that urges both the provincial and federal governments to stop the export of illegal drugs from countries across the world.

The United Conservative government is committed to finding the best treatment options to help free people from the cycle of addiction. Unfortunately, the NDP members continue with their tunnel vision in claiming that if we as the government were to supply the drugs, there would be fewer fatalities. Recently organized was the Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply. Mr. Speaker, in this committee each member had the opportunity to hear from experts in the addiction field as well as some first-hand experiences regarding addiction in the province of Alberta. The organization of the safe supply committee was further to the work that the hon. Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions has already done, my good friend.

Just a couple of months ago the United Conservative government doubled up on the original 2019 commitment of 4,000 addiction treatment spaces and announced an additional 4,000, giving Alberta 8,000 addiction treatment spaces. Our government has also eliminated user fees for Albertans who need access to these treatment spaces. Mr. Speaker, with thousands of people who are trapped in addiction, I think that we can do better than simply handing them the very substance that has controlled their lives to the point that they see no future for themselves. Recovery is possible, and our government is committed to putting forward the

necessary resources. Individuals who are trapped in addiction are worth more to their friends and families and to society than the cost of the drugs they're addicted to.

Our economy is on the verge of – it is booming, Mr. Speaker. Our economy is booming, and though members opposite may suggest otherwise, I don't know what their definition of booming is – it certainly isn't what we believe on this side – simply giving money away. We have a labour shortage across Alberta. When those that are suffering from addiction receive help, they will have the opportunity to get a job and create a much better life for themselves. Albertans have never asked for a handout; they've only asked for a hand up.

There is hope for these people, but our government as well as the federal government must work together to first stop the import of dangerous drugs into our communities. Each year thousands of 911 calls are made in Alberta to respond to drug overdoses. In Edmonton and Calgary alone roughly 200 overdose calls are made each week. Mr. Speaker, continuing to give dangerous substances to those who suffer from addiction is irresponsible. There must be more done. For that reason, there must be strong attention given by governments at all levels to ensure that these substances do not make their way into communities, cities, and even our homes.

Representing the constituency of Cardston-Siksika, I would like to share with the House some of the things that I have concluded when it comes to drug abuse. It is important to recognize that this is not just a city problem. This is a problem that affects all Albertans, and it is very likely that we each know a few if not many individuals that suffer from dangerous addiction. Even the south, the place I love so dearly, is not immune to addiction. I see it regularly, and it is very unfortunate, and those people who are struggling and caught in the cycle of addiction are asking for help. I believe that we are doing the right thing in expanding treatment spaces for those individuals because I believe that we have a great opportunity in this province for everyone to become meaningful contributors, and that's what people want. There is dignity in that, Mr. Speaker. There is dignity there.

In my riding there are two of the largest First Nation reserves in Canada, namely Blood Tribe and Siksika. Thus, last summer it was brought to light, the horrific tragedies that took place at residential schools. These residential schools caused severe trauma for thousands upon thousands of individuals, and the trauma is present today and largely contributes to substance abuse that takes place on reserves. Mr. Speaker, I have hope for these individuals. I have hope that they will take the opportunity and accept the help and overcome their addictions as well as those who are not on-reserve, because we're all Albertans and children of God. Our government is committed to reconciliation. Although there have been many ceremonies and memorials that have taken place following the tragic discoveries of the unmarked graves, there is more work to be done to reconcile and build a positive relationship between the government and Indigenous communities.

As part of this, the Legislative Assembly must recognize the damage that is caused by countries allowing the export of dangerous drugs such as fentanyl and carfentanil as that is the first opportunity to stop them from making their way into Alberta. For that reason, we must be urging the government of Canada to make all efforts preventing countries such as the People's Republic of China and Mexico from exporting these opioids. Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend my gratitude to law enforcement across Alberta, that has worked together with the government of Alberta to bring safety to Albertans and responsibly enforce the law upon those who have brought drugs into our country. It is crucial that our government and all Legislature members in this House support the prosecution of those who are responsible for supplying Alberta with

dangerous drugs that have caused death and destruction to families and communities. The act of supplying these drugs should have no tolerance in our province as the consequences are made clear by the sheer number of addictions that they are fuelling.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to sponsor a motion that will move Alberta even closer to overcoming the opioid crisis that we face. There is certainly action that must be taken if this motion should pass, and I look forward to contributing to that work on behalf of my constituents and all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join debate on this very serious issue here in Alberta. We know we are in a crisis situation regarding the opioid crisis. It is so sad to say that four to five people die each day in our province from an opioid poisoning, and certainly I want to extend my condolences to all of the families who have lost loved ones due to this very difficult situation.

I, certainly, want to say that, you know, this caucus, the NDP caucus, is extremely concerned about this issue, and when we were in government, we did significant work to expand harm reduction services across the province that we know are evidence based and support people where they're at, which is really crucial to addressing this issue. Sadly, the UCP have a different view, and a lot of those services are being closed, not expanded, not supported, and what we're seeing is that more and more Albertans are dying from this. We're on record in 2021, although we don't have the statistics for the last two months of that year, to have the most deaths from drug poisoning ever since they've been recorded. Obviously, the policies of the UCP aren't helping. The crisis is out of control. So many vulnerable Albertans' lives are being taken from this.

I would like to present an amendment, Mr. Speaker. I do have the original here and copies for other members.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Should any member wish to receive – are we handing them to everybody? Everybody will receive a copy of the amendment. Look at that; it's like the good old days.

If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview could please read the amendment in for the purposes of all those at home and for the benefit of *Hansard*. As well, this will be referred to as amendment A1.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm putting forward that Motion Other than Government Motion 501 be amended by striking out “to prevent the export of lethal and highly addictive opioids, including but not limited to fentanyl and carfentanil and related chemicals from which these opioids are formed, from all foreign countries, including the People's Republic of China and Mexico” and substituting “to prevent the illegal importation of lethal and highly addictive opioids, including fentanyl, carfentanil and related chemicals from which these opioids are formed, from all foreign countries.”

May I speak to the amendment?

The Acting Speaker: You can absolutely continue, and there's about seven minutes and 20 seconds remaining.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying before I presented the amendment, the UCP government has dramatically

stopped the funding supporting harm reduction services across the province, and that's a key service, a key support for vulnerable Albertans, because what it does is that they support people where they're at, which is fundamental because this is a very vulnerable population. A lot of times they may have distrust certainly for, you know, any kind of law enforcement service. They may distrust health care. I mean, they're involved in an activity that could put them in jail, but they're not criminals. They are people who have trouble with substance use.

But what's happened over the last few years is that that substance on the street has become more and more lethal, so people are dying. They don't want to die. Yes, they use drugs, but using drugs shouldn't be a death sentence for people.

It's really important for us as legislators to look at that from “How can we fix this problem?”, not what we think, you know, righteously, these people should do. It shouldn't be sort of an ideological decision that, well, they just need to quit drugs, then. These are vulnerable people who are sometimes under the control of these very powerful drugs. In order to support them, we must start where they're at. We must be there for them in their communities.

One of the significant evidence-based services is supervised consumption services across our province, and those we expanded when we were government. That was making a difference. We had seen a reduction in opiate poisoning deaths just before the election, and the UCP came in and they reversed those decisions. They closed the busiest supervised consumption site in the province when they closed ARCHES in Lethbridge, and they did it with a red herring. They made up some financial concerns about the organization and said: this is why we're closing it down; they're not using funds correctly. Then it came to light that that actually was false. That wasn't even an honest fact that the UCP was using to make the decision.

Over and over we must know that we need evidence-based solutions. Certainly, if you talk to physicians, if you talk to experts in this area, if you talk to front-line workers, we know – the front-line workers, these experts, medical professionals know that harm reduction services make a key difference.

Now, I'm not saying that we don't need a plethora of services. We do. There is no panacea. It's not just one thing. There is no panacea. It's a complex problem, and we need support right from harm reduction services all the way to having treatment and recovery beds, which is where the UCP is focusing most of their attention. That's a good thing. We want them to expand treatment beds – that's great – but not at the expense of harm reduction services.

In the summer of last year, to address this significant issue, we called for an emergency action plan and said that we need the expansion of supervised consumption sites, drug checking, and safe supply. Safe supply is pharmaceutical alternatives to highly toxic drugs. This is a sad piece of rhetoric that the UCP uses as they say, “Oh, these are NDP drug sites” or that we're going to go give free drugs to everybody. That's just to confuse citizens. That's not what it is at all. This is very carefully done, and we want to make sure that people are supported.

Oftentimes with safe supply, you know, these are prescriptions that people get, and it's oftentimes for people who have had repeated difficulty being able to stabilize. Nothing else has worked for them, and it helps them. It keeps them on the planet. It keeps them safe, and it helps them function. Certainly, I've heard many stories from people whose lives have been able to turn around because they had safe supply, and it made such a significant difference for them. Please, let's have this on the record very clearly

that we know there is no panacea and that there is a broad range of services, and recovery beds only will not help.

3:20

We must actually understand that there are many things that are needed. Certainly, the social determinants of health are also a key piece. Again, this UCP government isn't really looking at that at all. Affordable housing: we know that we have about 2.6 per cent of affordable housing in our province available, and the national average is more like 4.9 per cent. So many people who are vulnerable: they need a house, they need a place to live and a place to stabilize and be supported to do that, but instead, you know, the UCP is not investing in those kinds of fundamental services to help vulnerable people. You can't just fix this very complex problem by only one solution, so it's very important that we have an array, a continuum of services, and the big, key issue that the UCP is neglecting is the harm reduction model.

This amendment is certainly important. We need to have law enforcement. We need to make sure there are government policies that are making sure that toxic drugs aren't coming to our country. But I guess one of the egregious things about this motion, that the amendment addresses, is that the United States and many other countries – here in Canada toxic drugs are being created. Why are China and Mexico being singled out? This should not be.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, we are on amendment A1, and I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the opportunity to speak to amendment A1 to Motion 501 from the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika. I appreciate both this motion and this amendment. Any time we have a chance to speak about the opioid crisis that we are experiencing here, not just in the province of Alberta but right across the country and indeed in many parts of the world, I think it's very important for us to not just remind the public about the severity of this epidemic but to remind ourselves about what our responsibility is in regard to trying to mitigate this crisis, which is killing and destroying the lives of so many people here in the province. As we've heard many times – I'll say it again – we have between four and five people dying here in the province of Alberta every single day from opioid overdoses.

Mr. Speaker, I mean, this is a crisis that, if we equate it to any other number of activities by human beings, we would, you know, call an emergency and swoop in to turn it around using all means necessary. Four or five people dying every day, not to mention how many people's lives have been ruined. Their health has been ruined by addiction to opioids, and I think we cannot just ignore this. We have to take decisive action using as many of all means which we can throw at this crisis to reduce death rates, reduce addiction rates, and to try to save lives and get people back on track to living a more productive and healthy life.

As the previous speaker from Edmonton-Riverview said very appropriately, we have to use a plethora – I just wanted to see if I could say that, and I did – of different ways to approach this crisis. Certainly, not one particular approach would be a panacea – I did it again; got it – that would solve this issue but, rather, a combination thereof.

I know from my own personal experience with members of my own family that work in addictions centres around the province, safe consumption sites and treatment centres as well, that, one and two, they will often work hand in hand with each other in order to, first, make a connection with an individual perhaps through

the safe consumption site and then moving that person to the treatment that they need over a number of weeks or months or, you know, perhaps for a good deal of their life afterwards. Those things can work together. In fact, they must work together because in between is where you have those deaths occurring every single day.

One of the misconceptions, of course, of this epidemic is that, you know, people are dying on the streets, that they're homeless and they're dying in bus shelters and so forth. That is true – I mean, there are people certainly living a very difficult life and circumstance as houseless individuals – but the vast majority of overdoses and deaths are occurring in homes where people live, in fact, because they are not with somebody and taking the drugs which are unstable and not regulated and often very crudely mixed. If you're doing that alone, then the chances of overdosing and then not getting any emergency treatment through naloxone and so forth – that's where the majority of the deaths are occurring across the province and across North America today.

So we need to kind of aim at all of those things, and the first thing that I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that we all need to do is to get onboard, on the same page and not use this crisis as a political wedge issue, suggesting that, you know, we're just trying to foist and give drugs to people and whatever, right? I mean, that's all just peripheral to dealing with the actual problem.

What we do need to do, as we, you know, try to do with other emergencies, is to focus as a single unit and work with health professionals and members from across the aisle to find out what the best thing is, the best place to go is, and so forth. That's why I said from the beginning of my remarks that I appreciate both this motion, because it brings attention to something we need to deal with right here, right now in this House, and the amendment, which I think would help to clarify the language that the hon. member brought forward in this motion in regard to the source of opioid drugs and particularly synthetic opioid drugs.

I mean, although I'm not an expert, certainly, I know that it is a home-grown product, right? You can make fentanyl and carfentanil and all of the different versions of that right here in Alberta, and they are made right here in Alberta. If they're not just from that source here in this province, then they will be coming from different provinces in Canada, and if they're not coming from different provinces, they'll be coming from the United States of America, a very large country to the south of us that has a similar opioid crisis taking place in their country. I think just removing and changing the motion in regard to talking about foreign countries, including China and Mexico – I mean, singling that out, I think, is just a bit of a reductive element to this motion that takes away from the laser focus that we should try to work with to talk about the opioid crisis here in Alberta.

One of the things I know that I've learned besides targeting the product itself – because it's very porous, right? It's like trying to hold water back with your hands. If you do perhaps find a source and shut down a source of synthetic opioids, then it will come from other places. So while you'll need to do that, for sure, chasing down dealers and sources of the drug, you're not going to stop the crisis just by doing that. You need to have addiction treatment centres that are available and that are in easy proximity to where people are using the drug. As I said, people are using it in their homes, and this is all over the city, all over the province, but being able to have easy access for treatment, addiction treatment centres, I think, is absolutely necessary.

The reason I bring this up is that I'm very concerned about the movement of a treatment centre downtown, just a few blocks from here.

3:30

In April they will be moving it up to Alberta Hospital, and while, you know, we need to use space and have access to treatment for all people in all parts of the city, I just am wondering why we would move a treatment centre from downtown, where there's easy access with buses and affordable housing and so forth and more people, quite frankly, that are using synthetic opioids, up to the far north part of our city. I mean, correct me if I'm wrong, hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, but is there a bus that goes to the actual Alberta Hospital? Maybe, kind of, sort of, probably not, right?

Ms Sweet: No.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Exactly.

You have to kind of work with what you have, but then you always have to assess: what is the best for the people you're trying to serve? Again, I'm just speaking out on this issue of Alberta Health Services' choice to move an addiction centre out of the downtown and many, many kilometres away in the far north, to Alberta Hospital.

Yeah, you know, if we're looking for ways by which we can reach over the different approaches and views towards this issue around addictions and the opioid crisis that we are experiencing here, here is a small way by which we can do it. I'm saying here now that this motion shows some promise. I think that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is saying the same thing because she took the time and the effort to help clarify the language around this same motion to make sure that if we are aiming at the sources of production – right? – the places where these drugs come from, then we have to make sure that we are acknowledging that they come from all over the place, including right here in our own province, manufactured illegally, across the country, across North America, and indeed around the world, not just China and Mexico.

Thank you.

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

Just prior to seeing anyone else with regard to discussions on A1, I would just draw to the attention of all those here that sometimes it can be difficult to have amendments go through during private member motions like this. However, just for the benefit of everybody here, this amendment was approved by Parliamentary Counsel, and as well the sponsor did see it in time and was provided notice. Therefore, it is in order.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary . . .

Mr. Jones: South East. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that clarification. I agree with the member opposite that the motion has promise. I'm not sure I see the need for this amendment.

The overprescription of medication was a popular topic of conversation in the early 2000s, and unfortunately over the last two decades this trend has not only increased but has also turned into an epidemic. The opioid epidemic has gotten out of hand so rapidly that Canada is facing a national opioid overdose crisis. This crisis has devastated communities and families as their loved ones are harmed and lost to opioid use. While we can't know the exact mortality rate from chronic high doses, in 2015 the Canadian Medical Association admitted that our available numbers may have severely underestimated the fatalities. Unfortunately, this remains true to this day.

What we are faced with today is more than the undisciplined, unstructured, and arbitrary use of opioid prescriptions. Instead, it is the replacement of drugs such as OxyContin with more potent opioids such as fentanyl and hydromorphone. We are also seeing a boom in street heroin and street fentanyl. As a result, Canada is now

the second-highest per capita user of prescription opioids globally, second only to the United States. In Alberta we have witnessed and continue to see the overwhelming effects of drug abuse in our communities. We continue to hear about it on the news, and increasingly Albertans know someone who has been negatively affected by opioids.

We also have data from the Public Health Agency of Canada on opioid-related harms. The most recent data, from January to June 2021, is disturbing. According to this report 90 per cent of all apparent opioid toxicity deaths during that timeline occurred in B.C., Alberta, and Ontario. Between April and June 2021, 1,720 apparent opioid toxicity deaths occurred. That is approximately 19 lives lost to the opioid crisis per day, and to better put the severity of the issue in perspective, this is a 66 per cent increase compared to April to June 2019. Sadly, our young and middle-aged people, primarily males, are disproportionately impacted, with most deaths occurring among individuals age 20 to 49; 30- to 39-year-olds alone represented 31 per cent of accidental opioid toxicity deaths by fentanyl between January and June 2021, and males accounted for an astounding 75 per cent of accidental apparent opioid toxicity deaths in that period. Now, "fentanyl" is a name we've all heard and are familiar with, but what many may not know is that 87 per cent of accidental apparent opioid toxicity deaths in 2021 involved fentanyl.

To combat drug use in Alberta, including fentanyl, the government has introduced three different pathways to healing, focusing on prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery. This approach allows Albertans and their loved ones to choose a path that makes sense to them. Alberta Health Services also has resources available for harm reduction under the DrugSafe initiative. This initiative focuses on saving lives in the event of an overdose by teaching individuals how to spot an overdose, what to do when it's spotted, and how to respond to opioid poisoning with a naloxone kit. Naloxone kits, introduced in Alberta in 2015, can be a temporary antidote, acting to reverse an overdose until help arrives. These kits are free of charge at pharmacies, and individuals do not need to present a health care card, ID, or prescription to receive them.

Aside from overdose prevention, Alberta also has a range of treatment housing, including recovery housing for both pre- and posttreatment, intensive residential treatment, opioid agonist therapy, and support for families. In each of these pathways dedicated, licensed professionals provide treatment services focusing on providing safe and effective treatment options for addiction.

In addition to these services, those struggling with opioid addiction now have access to Sublocade and Suboxone to treat opioid addiction. These medications stay in a person's system for 30 days, providing stabilization, reducing cravings, significantly enhancing protection against overdose, and helping with maintaining treatment in an outpatient setting. The benefit of this medication is that when properly prescribed and dispensed, a person on either medication can function more normally, with reduced drowsiness and withdrawal symptoms. Both of these medications are safe and can be utilized long term once prescribed.

With voluntary and confidential services such as these available, more than ever before it is vital for the government to continue working to combat the impacts of drug abuse in Alberta. Although Alberta has been tirelessly battling the harmful effects of opioids and other drugs, this is not a battle that we can win alone. Furthermore, it's not an Alberta-specific issue, which is why I also want to call on national and other provincial governments to work together to prevent the export of lethal and highly addictive opioids from foreign countries.

Currently fentanyl and cocaine are the most used illegal drugs in Alberta. Fentanyl, which can be a hundred times more potent than morphine, is often transited into Canada from China and Hong Kong through the U.S. while most of the world's cocaine is produced in just three countries: Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru. However, its main entry points into Canada are also the Caribbean islands, the U.S.A., and Mexico.

Since January 2020 Canada and the United States have been involved in a bilateral initiative to find solutions to the opioid crisis affecting both nations. Currently the focus of their action plan is combatting opioid trafficking. This includes fentanyl and other synthetic opioids. Additionally, they are seeking to address the health consequences of problematic opioid use through the means of institutional co-operation through public health, law enforcement, and border security as well as through information-sharing and best practices.

This collaboration is a great first step. However, given the severity of the issue, it is paramount for Canada to continue to build partnerships and work with domestic and international partners to not only stop the flood of fentanyl, cocaine, and other highly addictive drugs but also to ban the chemicals that make up these substances.

We've experienced two very difficult years. Based on recent data from the National Health Service and further research conducted by Alberta Health Services, the University of Alberta, and the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, we know that several factors contribute to the worsening of the overdose crisis. These include an increasingly toxic drug supply, increased feelings of isolation, stress, and anxiety, and limited accessibility to services for people who use drugs.

Aside from the negative societal impact of these highly addictive drugs, the opioid crisis has resulted in significant economic losses. Canada lost an estimated \$4.7 billion in labour productivity as a result of this crisis between 2016 and 2019. Between 2007 and 2014 Alberta's estimated economic costs of substance use sat at roughly \$1,300 per capita compared to \$1,100, roughly, for Canada. However, in 2017 alone that number rose in Alberta to nearly \$1,600 per capita compared to Canada's \$1,250.

We know that this growing issue requires immediate intervention, which is why the 2021-2022 operating budget for Mental Health and Addictions has been increased and is focused on recovery-based services. I support these investments and the focus on recovery, and I would like to thank the government, the Minister of Health, and the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions for their work to address the opioid crisis.

I encourage all members of this House to support the motion, and I will not be supporting this amendment. Thank you.

3:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen on amendment A1.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the amendment, which has been a little bit forgotten here. But I do want to say that I actually appreciate the speech that we just heard from the Member for Calgary-South East. I appreciate the inclusion of significant amounts of quite reasonable arguments and good information. Nothing in what he was saying, you know, raised my concern, and I really appreciate that, because that's not the case with the member who actually moved the motion in this case, who presented a number of facts which I think are demonstrably arguable.

You know, this is too important to be using it as an opportunity for dog whistles and, well, really, mildly racist comments. I'm very concerned that we have a crisis in this province, but of course what we do know is that we have a crisis in the western world. It isn't just in the province of Alberta that we have high rates. Alberta is just one of the worst examples, and of course it seems to fit into a number of other areas of concern we have around things like domestic violence and so on. We seem to have a culture in Alberta that somehow supports some of these negative behaviours, and I'm very concerned about it, and I certainly would love to be able to stand up and support this government in taking a number of steps to address those issues that are causing the underlying structural drivers that lead to these kinds of negative outcomes in the province.

I guess I want to say that I support this motion, because, of course, I do, but I really think it is very important that we approve the amendment. The primary thing that is being changed in the amendment is the reference to two particular countries who have people with brown skin, to the neglect of all the other countries with people that are producing these kinds of drugs. To single out two countries is simply a racist dog whistle, and I don't understand why it's in this particular motion. The concern that we have here is one that is quite substantial and is one that I actually believe everybody in this House is very concerned about. Nobody wants to see this number of deaths in society. You know, to undermine the good work of trying to address an important crisis like this with these kinds of dog whistles is very disconcerting.

I also just want to point out that we are in this position for many complex reasons, but one of the things I want to point out to the House and that the House should remember is that it was actually under the Conservative Prime Minister Harper that the Canadian border services were reduced in April 2012. In fact, the government at the time said that there were about 1,000 members of the CBSA, the Canada Border Services Agency, that received letters with potential job reductions and that about 250 people actually lost their jobs. At the time the president, John Pierre Fortin, the national president of the Customs and Immigration Union, said, quote: these proposed budget cuts would have a direct and real impact on Canadians and our communities across the country; more child pornography entering the country, more weapons, illegal drugs will pass through our borders, not to mention terrorists and sexual predators and hardened criminals. Close quote. I just want to remind the House that our current Premier was a member of the government that actually made those reductions.

I guess I just want to make sure that people in the House understand that there are a number of things that need to be done here. A complex response to the crisis is very important, and, you know, doing these anti-union busts, the dog whistles like were done under the government that our Premier was a part of, making comments about particular countries because the colour of the skin of those people is different than ours – whereas we know that these kinds of drugs are produced significantly in both Canada and the United States and need to be stopped.

So I guess I would like to return to the essence of the actual motion itself, which is that we need to actually take responsibility as a society to look at what the structural drivers are that have moved people toward drug use and have resulted in that drug use having such a devastating effect on them. When we do look at those kinds of drivers, we see that they are largely people who are disenfranchised from the successful aspects of life: people who have been struggling because of unemployment, people who have been victims of violence and other forms of trauma like residential schools, those kinds of things.

We know that if we really want to stop drug use, we have to address all of those kinds of things. That includes a complex array of responses that deal with them in primary and secondary and tertiary ways; that is, that prevent people from moving in that direction, that identify people who are involved in drug abuse and get them out of the system, and, finally, a system that looks at the ways in which we can ensure that anybody who has been involved in drug abuse is able to recover and return to society in a good way. That includes a number of responses. Of course, it includes things like mental health services, addiction services. It clearly, if anybody reads the research at all coming in from around the world, includes supervised consumption sites. It's one of the most studied mental health interventions that we've seen in the last 10 years, and the research is absolutely clear that they have an important role.

I'm always discouraged to hear members on the opposite side somehow reframe that as if what they're about is giving drugs to people who are using them illegally just in order to yet again blow another dog whistle when that is not at all what the research says and not at all what has ever been proposed in this House. We know that they're bringing up these items in order to mislead the public and put that kind of information in *Hansard* juxtaposed in such a way that would make people think that somehow that was proposed or that that's ever happened in the province of Alberta, and it has not. And if they suggest that it has happened, I can tell you that they are engaging in intentional misdirection of the people of the province of Alberta.

Now, what we do know is that supervised consumption sites are absolutely not enough to resolve this kind of a problem, and they never were proposed as such. What they intend to do is that they intend to keep people alive so that the other aspects of intervention can be brought into place.

Now, there are likely to have been some complications with the supervised injection sites that we have in this province because it is new, comparatively, only in the last 20 years. But that doesn't mean that we should get rid of them. That means that we should actually have a government that spends some time trying to understand what the complexities are, what the problems are, and to resolve those problems. It's very discouraging when we see the government, instead of taking a responsible position around trying to make things right, take this irresponsible position and say that we should get rid of them.

Anybody who took cancer treatment in the 1970s will tell you that often the treatment received for cancer was dramatically worse than the cancer itself in terms of its effect on your body and so on. But we didn't say: let's get rid of cancer treatment. We went on, and we said: we must be able to do these kinds of things better. This government has been taking the ridiculous position that somehow, because there are problems with something that has been demonstrated by research to be effective, we should throw out the baby with the bathwater, and I think it's because they just want to, you know, blow that dog whistle that works with people who have not had the opportunity to be informed about the information that comes out from the research. It's really unacceptable that we find ourselves in this place.

I certainly hope that they will support this amendment, because the racist undertones here are completely unnecessary.

3:50

Mr. Williams: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order has been called.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I rise under Standing Order 23(h). For the third time in the speech the member opposite has now implied that either members generally or particularly, as his first reference, the Member for Cardston-Siksika, his, quote, mildly racist comments – I find this absolutely inappropriate. It is below the member opposite. He understands that this good debate ought to be continued without drawing into question and disrepute the member's credibility and his care for all people no matter who they are or where they come from. It is unparliamentary. It is causing disruption, and the member ought to apologize.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has risen to respond on the point of order.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. It's certainly not a point of order. The member's words may have hurt members' feelings, but what the member said is that this motion has undertones which are racist. As a person of colour, as a person of Asian descent I understand when things were used such as Wuhan virus, China virus, how that has impacted communities, in particular Chinese communities and others from Asian countries. What the member said, that's factual. I understand that you don't experience it that way, but the member specifically referred to the motion having undertones which are racist, not to any member of the House.

The Acting Speaker: All right. Thank you very much for those arguments, hon. members.

At this stage I am going to err on the side of believing that this was a matter of debate. Now, with that stated, I think that it is clearly obvious that the words that the hon. member has been choosing during the course of this debate have, if anything, directed this Assembly towards perhaps a bit of disorder. I would use this opportunity to recommend that the hon. member choose perhaps some less controversial language for the last 30 seconds of his time allotted.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

Debate Continued

Mr. Feehan: My point has been made, and that is that the inclusion of these two countries has caused disorder in this House, and therefore if you actually believe that we should not cause disorder in the House, you should vote for the amendment in order to be consistent.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has risen.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today to speak to Motion 501, opioid crisis, introduced by my colleague the Member for Cardston-Siksika – thank you – and address the amendment brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Now, in regard to the amendment we as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta can only speak to those things within our jurisdiction, which is why I believe the Member for Cardston-Siksika put forward the language that he did in his original motion to prevent the “export.” Those are within the realms of our government and our jurisdiction to do, and that's why I do support his motion.

When the opposition member changes that to “import,” that moves into a different jurisdiction. The government of Alberta does not have control over the national borders. That is a federal government jurisdiction and/or including international governments and their jurisdiction, which is why I will not be supporting this amendment, though I do understand what they are trying to do and would love to support the removal of that kind of trafficking of illegal drugs around the world. But we do have to stay within the jurisdiction that we have governance over. That’s why I fully support what the Member for Cardston-Siksika brought forward. Just to repeat it for my speech and to readdress the debate today:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue working to combat the impacts of drug abuse in Alberta and urge the government of Canada to make all efforts in conjunction with its allies to prevent the export of lethal and highly addictive opioids.

This addiction crisis continues to have a devastating effect on many communities within Alberta, particularly Lethbridge. That’s why I believe that this is such an important topic. It continues to affect individuals all across our province and throughout all of Canada. Last year, in July, I had the honour of touring recovery and support homes in and around Lethbridge with the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. I wanted to take a moment to recognize these programs and organizations and talk about their remarkable impact on the community in Lethbridge. For one, counter to what may have been stated by the members opposite within the NDP caucus, Lethbridge’s mobile safe consumption site is a temporary and ongoing solution that is part of the continuum of care. We did indeed as a government close down the ARCHES-run supervised consumption site for many reasons, including a lot of inappropriate financial transactions, which I don’t think I’ll get into here, but I will acknowledge that . . .

Mr. Feehan: Because they were disproven.

Mr. Neudorf: No. They were absolutely proven, including many personal trips to Spain and Las Vegas and Denver and all kinds of things, raising their personal wages from \$80,000 a year to \$300,000 a year, all kinds of things that were proven even if not, quote, unquote, illegal.

An Hon. Member: It’s the NDP way.

Mr. Neudorf: Exactly.

It directly resulted in a huge increase in illegal trafficking of drugs, a huge increase in crime. And, as the Member for Edmonton-Riverview said, one part of the solution isn’t everything. There are multiparts needed, but that government only did one part and left Lethbridge in a huge mess. So I’m very proud to be part of a government that brought additional funding for treatment, for recovery, to continue that care and not just abandon them to a life lost in addiction. Whether they can go somewhere inside or outside to consume those drugs is not the point. The point is that we didn’t abandon those people. Our government sought treatment to make sure that they could get out of that cycle of addiction, and I’m very proud of the investments that we have made to continue that, which is why I’m proud to stand with the Member for Cardston-Siksika in his motion so that we can continue urging the government to continue those kinds of treatments.

Back to my other comments. Southern Alcare Manor is a 25-bed residential recovery treatment facility for individuals who have a sincere desire to abstain from alcohol, drugs, gambling, or any other addiction and get the stable living environment that they need during their recovery. Streets Alive offers recovery-focused programs for men and women in separate housing, including

emotional counselling and postaddiction support while being Christ centred. Lethbridge Housing Authority strives to provide safe, secure, and affordable housing for many people who need it in the community.

Fresh Start Recovery, originally named Napi Lodge and established in 1976: they are still operating, Mr. Speaker, and after a name change to South Country then in 2020 combined with Fresh Start Recovery Centre in Calgary. The friendly acquisition sought to combine Fresh Start’s programming and leadership with South Country’s history and facilities, making for a recipe for successful long-term addiction recovery in Lethbridge. Some of our government’s funding will increase that bed count up to 100, with an additional 75 beds within Lethbridge. Their treatment program follows the disease concept. We see addiction as a progressive illness and often fatal if untreated. This illness is a chronic brain disorder with many contributing factors. The good news is that with treatment and a recovery program you can live a healthy, happy, and productive life. Recovery is real, attainable, and sustainable.

The Blood Tribe spirit home detox centre. The director of Bringing the Spirit Home, Jacen Abrey, said: it was last year, which was 2018, in November when we began seeing a real spike in overdoses; it was a revolving door, and we need to change that. One of the elders explains that we need to put a stick in the spokes, which is to stop the wheel from turning. They have done an incredible job bringing their culture and their heritage into the treatment for individuals of First Nations, Métis, and other backgrounds as well, including sweats in their traditional sweat lodge.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to explain a little bit about one experience I had to go through, their cultural experience that they use to help those who are caught in addiction get back to their roots. I joined it with a number of First Nations individuals and did a sweat, and it was quite an incredible experience. They took the time to explain how they build their lodge. They took the time to talk about the significance of the wood that they used, the willow branches and other branches from other trees that are sacred to them, how they cover it with hides. Then you go inside. It’s completely dark inside, and they bring in rocks approximately the size of your head, a number of them in the middle of the pit, and those rocks are extremely hot.

They did a very mild sweat, but it was pretty hot to me, Mr. Speaker. They would put that in there. We would come in. Basically, you’re just in a swimsuit kind of idea because it gets pretty warm. Then they do a little bit of their knowledge sharing and their wisdom from their elders. They talk about their stories of creation. They talk about their stories of healing. They talk about being in touch with nature and their surroundings. They close the doorway, that’s hide covered, and it’s completely dark and completely silent. They add water, sprinkle water on top of those rocks, and you can actually hear the water sizzling. Sometimes you can hear the rocks expanding and contracting. But that’s it. Silence can last from 30 minutes to 90 minutes or something like that, and they take that time to meditate and contemplate what they’re there to do, what they’re there trying to achieve, and to connect to the spiritual source of their religion. It’s a very powerful time, Mr. Speaker. I was honoured to have taken the time to join with First Nations on that journey.

4:00

Each of these organizations and programs makes a tremendous impact on the lives of so many people who live in Lethbridge. These programs meet people who are often at the lowest points of their lives, and they help to provide hope and opportunities. I’m so proud of the work they continue to do to support the recovery of these

individuals throughout the community of Lethbridge. I look forward to further conversations on improving our collaboration and efforts across the province and in partnership with other provinces in our fine country to support individuals suffering from addiction.

I also want to talk about our Alberta government's steps to support individuals who suffer from addictions. Alberta's government has committed to an investment of \$140 million over four years to implement these new addiction and mental health strategies that will improve access, as I said before, to the continuum of health care services, including \$40 million specifically committed to addressing the opioid crisis. [A timer sounded]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

That does mean that this motion has received 55 minutes of debate. Therefore, under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of the motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika to rise to close.

An Hon. Member: What about the amendment?

The Acting Speaker: Yeah. Just for clarity we've looked into that. The process is that there'll be a close of debate, and then we'll vote on the amendment, and then we'll vote on the motion other than a government motion after that.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will keep my comments brief. I will start by saying that I will not be supporting the amendment moved by the members opposite. I believe that they have failed to make a compelling argument as to why we should support it, and frankly I disagree very much with the arguments they have made and the way they've made them. Taking their level of decorum down to simply throwing insults across the aisle, like calling members on this side of the House, myself included, racist, is simply not an appropriate way to make an argument in favour of your amendment. While that member, specifically the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, is looking to use inflammatory language so he can clip that and put it on his Twitter for his 30 Twitter followers . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Schow: . . . we're in here actually taking concrete steps to . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. A point of order has been called by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. The hon. member.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(h), (i), and (j) I will explain what the member said. That's part of the *Hansard*. The member was clearly imputing false motives, that he wants to clip it or something. For many of us it's an important issue. [interjections] It's not a matter of laughing at all. Not at all. We are debating a serious issue: 1,000-plus Albertans have died because of drug overdose. I personally know people who have died of drug overdose. We do want to help this government. We do want to participate in this debate. Accusing other members, especially their intentions: that's false. That's offside these rules and should be ruled out of order.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has risen, I believe, in response on this point of order.

Mr. Schow: That is correct, Mr. Speaker. It's not a point of order. I'm not imputing false motives. It's a matter of debate. If that member takes offence to me suggesting that he's clipping something for 30 Twitter followers or more, then that's certainly his prerogative. But throwing insults across the aisle and calling us racist I would find to be far more offensive and creates significantly more disruption within this Chamber, yet that point of order was certainly ruled down by yourself and understandably so. So I would say: not a point of order, a matter of debate, and let me finish my closing arguments.

The Acting Speaker: I'm actually surprised at the turn that this point of order took. It was argued slightly differently than I anticipated. What I will say, though, just to wrap it up: I believe that this is not a point of order at this stage. What I would say, though, is that previously I had said a warning with regard to the language used. I would say that if that language – we all know what we're talking about right now – has the ability to create disorder, well, then that doesn't really lead us to effective debate. What I would do is that I would give the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika the rest of his time, 4:13, and ask him, like I did with the previous member, Edmonton-Rutherford, to potentially choose some words that may not lead towards disorder in this House.

The hon. member to please continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, I will be brief. In closing, I just want to say that things like fentanyl, carfentanil, and the chemicals used to make these kinds of drugs are not dangerous because they're illegal; they're illegal because they are dangerous. It is on us as members of this Legislature, those who are making laws on behalf of this province, to support any effort necessary to stop the import and distribution of these chemicals and these drugs.

I support this motion; I do not support the amendment. I believe that the spirit of this motion is to better the lives of all Albertans, and as someone who lives in the south in and near communities that are being devastated by opioid addiction, it is incumbent upon us to take action. I believe that this is one of many steps that we can do to take that action, and I encourage all members of this Chamber to vote against the amendment and in favour of the motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

That concludes the debate.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 carried]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Williams moved, seconded by Ms Lovely, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To Her Honour the Honourable Salma Lakhani, AOE, BSc, LL.D, the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate February 23: Ms Lovely]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Are there any members wishing to join on consideration? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen.

Ms Sweet: I guess I will. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and speak to the Speech from the Throne, the speech that shared the vision that this government has for the province of Alberta. Now, I will say that it was definitely long on words but very short on details, full of rhetoric to speak to the government's base and ignoring the majority of the needs of Albertans. There was not a single program or offer to help Alberta families struggling to pay their monthly bills, put food on their tables, and fill their vehicles with gas so that they can go to work. The vision that this government has presented to the people of Alberta has not inspired confidence and is so far from the reality that Alberta families are facing.

The people of Edmonton-Manning expected more. The Premier may be celebrating that his latest budget is back on track, but Albertans are not because they're not seeing the benefits of this budget. My constituents are not running surpluses, their children aren't running surpluses, and in fact, based on the decisions made by this government, they're falling farther and farther behind.

Our health care heroes, who've been working throughout COVID to keep our communities safe, are not seeing their work conditions improving. They are not seeing more doctors or nurses entering into our health care system to help out with the overburdened workload. As more and more first responders are burning out, taking a leave of absence, or leaving the profession altogether, we are not seeing replacements to come and help those working around the clock.

Parents who have children attending schools that are over capacity and are not able to have space to learn are afraid that their children are falling behind. This Premier's throne speech and his budget do nothing to address any of those concerns. In fact, we will see over 1,000 fewer teachers compared to the previous government. While students and teachers have been facing huge uncertainty in K to 12 education, switching between in-person and online learning, growing class sizes, and reduced supports for students with disabilities, our schools need more teachers and more supports rather than less. This, of course, is on top of the increased school fees that just came out, increased educational property taxes, and asking schools to find revenue in other places.

[The Speaker in the chair]

These are real concerns that the government likes to label as divisive politics when, in fact, it is the direction that this government has taken that has created those very concerns. It's not politics to care about our neighbours and our children. It is not politics to want to take care of our communities and realize the responsibilities that communities have to take care of each other. The fact that the government does not recognize these concerns speaks to the disconnect that this government has to the people of this province.

4:10

My constituents still want to see a strong public health care system that is properly funded, with access to health care professionals that have the support that they need when they need it. The lack of doctors in rural Alberta, to the point where many Albertans do not have family doctors, should be concerning for this government. To know that ambulance services are not available to provide emergent care should be a concern to this government, yet we didn't see that discussed in the throne speech. Well, Mr. Speaker, if making sure that rural Albertans have access to doctors and to ambulance services is something that this government wants to continue to ignore, then I'm proud to be on this side of the House.

This government needs to take our public health care seriously. To ensure that Albertans have access to public health care should be this government's priority. However, we don't see it.

We see a government that likes to continue to go back to their old conservative talking points. They've forgotten about the needs to diversify the economy, to get off the royalty roller coaster, and to properly support our emerging industries. Albertans are tired of waiting for this government to wake up and realize that there is so much more economic opportunity. This could include properly funding our postsecondary institutions so that we know that they are the engine of our province's economic future and the economic lifeline of our communities. We may have seen seats increase in the recent budget, but we see none for our agriculture postsecondary, our technologies related to agriculture, and anything that would help support rural Albertans staying, learning in postsecondary institutions, and then continuing to live in their local communities.

There is no money to restore postsecondary for the first time, and in fact more than half of the funding for universities, colleges, and polytechs is coming out of tuition, so out of students' pockets, one more downloading of costs onto Albertans at a time when this government continues – I'm sure they're going to do it right now – to talk about the fact that they have a surplus. Edmonton-Manning constituents are tired of their tax dollars being wasted on useless war rooms, bogus inquiries, and on long-lost court cases instead of being used to help get well-paying jobs and to grow our economy. Alberta families are tired of dealing with the mountains of debt and record utility bills while this UCP government continues to ignore them.

The throne speech and this budget were a farce, Mr. Speaker. A balanced budget is not balanced when Albertans are paying more everywhere else. It is like asking Albertans to give money to a friend from their savings to pay their expenses while their friend puts that money into their own savings account and hopes that maybe their friend will come over and help them shovel their driveway, similar to hoping that we should trust this government that if they pay their taxes, they'll actually get the services that they deserve when, in fact, we know that they keep cutting them. It is a consistent theme with this government to download costs onto Albertans and continue to ignore the economic potential of this province.

It is time to acknowledge that talking about diversification and supporting all industries should be the priority. We know that our world is changing, that technology drives all economies, from oil and gas to agriculture to education. We need people who have the expertise to move forward in our changing economy. That is why it is important that we attract companies that are set up for the technological economy that is coming, and we also need to make sure we're educating our future leaders to take on those roles in diversifying our economy. This can only be done when there is a commitment to understand the needs of those technologies, encouraging companies to set up, be job creators, and promoting students to be educated and then stay and work in Alberta.

That is why we called for the reinstatement of the Alberta investor tax credit. That program was a huge success, and without it businesses have and continue to state that they're looking at moving elsewhere, meaning that the jobs and investments will leave with them. That's a disappointment. It should be a disappointment to this government, it should be a disappointment to Albertans, and I know it's a disappointment to an emerging and growing industry.

This industry will help increase office capacity in Calgary, but instead we see again this government leaving Calgary behind. Calgary has already hit a grim new high under this government of 33 per cent for office vacancies. Mr. Speaker, there is so much potential in Alberta to build a diverse and vibrant economy, an

economy that Albertans want to be a part of. I was hoping that during this throne speech we would see that vision, yet once again we didn't.

In closing, I ask the government to stop increasing costs onto Albertans while inflation is at a record high, stop undermining our public service and protect our public health care, and stop ignoring our economic potential, our economic future. Not one of my constituents has brought up the fact that the UCP has balanced the budget, but countless have sent me their utility bills to show me how much more they're paying. Not one rural Albertan has pointed out to me that we have a surplus, but they have shared with me their experiences travelling hundreds of kilometres to get a routine treatment that is no longer offered in their community or the struggles they're having about getting a family doctor. Not one farmer has told me that not running a provincial deficit is good for their business, but I regularly hear them talk about the supply chain issues that haven't been addressed and the inflation that is driving up their operational costs.

Albertans are struggling, Mr. Speaker, and the throne speech and the budget that was tabled by this government fail to acknowledge any of it. Albertans want to see their communities invested in. They want to see support in growing new economies. They want to see real help with their utility bills and their insurance costs. They want to see solutions to the issues facing our health care system. We needed solutions today, but once again we are looking back and asking ourselves: why didn't this government do more?

The Speaker: Are there others? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in response to the throne speech. Let me begin by saying that last year has been very difficult for many Albertans. We have seen the fourth and fifth waves of COVID-19 hit Alberta and ongoing hardship because of its impacts on our economy. Many small businesses, including a few in my riding, were shut for good, and far too many families have lost their loved ones due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Tens of thousands of surgeries were cancelled or delayed, and far too many Albertans, losing their family physicians, were not getting the care they needed because of the pointless battle with doctors and health professionals started by this government.

Now we are seeing record inflation and a steep increase in the cost of living and the same inaction from this government. Albertans are facing rising costs on pretty much everything, from car insurance to energy bills to tuition, postsecondary fees. In fact, electricity and natural gas prices have doubled, and for so many Albertans they're becoming unaffordable.

4:20

Over the last few weeks I have heard from a number of Albertans, a number of my constituents about those rising costs. Many people in my riding are on fixed incomes, and their budgets are really hit hard. Just picking up groceries, even the basics, is more expensive. The cost of everything, from milk to rent, is at a record high. Certainly, we can agree that Albertans need help, and they deserve a government focused on making life affordable for them.

This government and the Premier could have used this as an opportunity to take tangible steps to help Albertans and Alberta families. They could have helped by reinstating the cap to insurance rates, reindexing income tax brackets so Albertans will have more money in their pockets on payday, and they could have reindexed the assured income for the severely handicapped, AISH,

benefit. They could have reindexed seniors' benefits, and they could have taken meaningful steps to alleviate the pressures on Albertans' utility costs.

Mr. Speaker, we didn't see any of that. Instead, we saw a budget that increases park fees, increases school fees, increases property tax, increases income tax, and has a phony gas rebate that will never help a single Alberta family with their utility bills. Instead of helping Albertans who are coming out of this two-year-long pandemic, this government is forcing Alberta families and businesses to go further into debt.

I constantly hear that the changes to the fleet insurance and the removal of the insurance cap are affecting northeast Calgary really hard. Many cab drivers who have been hit hard from COVID are now paying thousands more in insurance because of changes the UCP government brought in.

If you go to northeast Calgary – Mr. Speaker, it's the most beautiful part of the city – you will see that there are still many homes that are waiting for repairs from that hailstorm that hit northeast Calgary. You will see people driving hail-damaged vehicles from that hailstorm. We didn't see anything to help those in northeast Calgary. At least they expected that there may be a school in the budget for the growing communities in northeast Calgary. We didn't see that in the last budget. We didn't see that in this budget.

People expected that the government would present a real plan to create jobs, diversify the economy, and set our province on a long-term and sustainable recovery path and not just double down on their failed economic policies. As we all know, our economy is tied to the price of oil, and the increase in revenue that we are seeing now is because of that increase in global oil prices. We are seeing prices north of \$100, \$112, \$113, that were last seen in 2008 or '09, and on these prices a traffic cone could have balanced the budget. Instead of helping Albertans with their budgets, instead on building, hiring, and growing our local economies, most companies are now passing the money directly in dividends to the shareholders, many of whom live outside of this province.

When we talk to small-business owners and Alberta families, it is clear that they are not feeling the prosperity and the boom this government is claiming are in Alberta. The truth is that many families, many Albertans are telling me and telling my colleagues that they're falling further behind. Inflation is driving up the cost of everything, from ground beef to gasoline to their groceries, and the policies of this government are driving up many more costs, are adding costs to already struggling Albertans. We are paying more in income tax, the bracket creep thing, property tax, school fees, tuition, more interest on student loans, more camping fees, and vastly more for car insurance and utilities, all thanks to the UCP.

Meanwhile the cash boom is doing wonders for the provincial treasury. As expected, we see a significant surplus, which will grow with the price of oil. But let me say this again. Balancing the budget with 100-plus dollars a barrel of oil is easy, but it's tough to do when putting Albertan families' budgets first. The government fails when they put the province's budget in the black by making Albertans' household budgets go into the red, and that is exactly what this Premier is doing, what this government is doing.

Instead of reattaching the personal income tax bracket to inflation, the Premier chose to take more money out of Albertans' pockets, 800-plus million dollars. That's a significant sum of money. This Premier used to rage against the federal Liberals for their policy of bracket creep. The Premier called these policies enormous, insidious, vicious, and God knows what else. These are the ways to hike income tax in a sneaky way, but now it's a perfectly good policy when balancing his own budget.

Also, I mentioned earlier that there is a range of benefits that Albertans rely on that the UCP has made cuts to. The UCP has disconnected them from inflation, which means that for some Albertans, the most vulnerable ones, their real buying power will shrink with the rising cost of living. The child and family tax benefit, the seniors' benefit, income support benefit, assured income for the severely handicapped benefit: they are all deindexed by this government and devalued by inflation, again, thanks to this UCP government's policies.

4:30

So Albertans who receive AISH are surviving below the poverty line, and the UCP policy will take about \$1,000 worth of yearly buying power away from them by 2023. Again, this could have been reversed, but instead the UCP chose to balance the budget and pat themselves on the back while they were balancing it on the backs of the most vulnerable in this province. I think that these are the kinds of policies, these are the reasons that Albertans can no longer trust this government to govern this province, to manage our health care, to manage our education system, or to manage the services that are so critically important and that Albertans rely on every single day.

They are making students fall further behind. COVID-19 was the largest disruption to our K to 12 education system ever seen, and we needed investments to make sure that students have safe schools to go to and that they have resources to catch up and are prepared for the future, and we are not seeing that from this government. We will instead see 1,000 fewer teachers now than under the previous NDP government. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, the UCP is also driving up school fees, education property tax, and asking schools to find other sources of revenue. This means that \$117 million more are being downloaded on Alberta families.

In short, this government's direction is not . . .

The Speaker: On consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's throne speech are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1

Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Culture on behalf of the Premier.

Mr. Orr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly my honour to rise and move second reading of Bill 1, the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act of 2022.

Mr. Speaker, Her Majesty has devoted the past 70 years to leading her people and the Commonwealth of nations. Her example has inspired countless Albertans and, quite frankly, people around the world to devote their time to building a better province and a better world. Their leadership, their volunteerism, community spirit has made Alberta the greatest place to live, work, invest, and raise a family in Canada, truly a unique and incredible place and people.

Twenty twenty-two marks Queen Elizabeth II's platinum jubilee, the 70th anniversary of Her Majesty's accession to the throne. What an achievement, to serve in a public role for 70 years. Now think about this. The average MLA serves eight years. Very, very few

would make it past 20, and Her Majesty has served 70. Truly, we must congratulate her and hold her up with respect.

Her Majesty has said that she wants her platinum jubilee celebrations to inspire a sense of togetherness and to help us look to the future with confidence, so that is part of what we want to try to accomplish here. This milestone gives us the opportunity to celebrate all of the ways that Albertans have exemplified the leadership that Her Majesty has modelled. It gives us the opportunity to tell the stories of Albertans who are a part of that story. I'd like to share one of those stories with you now, a connection that an Albertan has had with Her Majesty and the Royal Family and part of the Commonwealth.

I tell you the story of one Bill Collins. He's actually been inducted into the Ponoka-based Canadian cowboy hall of fame. Bill Collins was inducted on May 9, 1996. He's played a major role in the preservation of western Canada's ranching history and the tradition as a cutting horse and rodeo judge, a trainer, and a prize-winning competitor. One of those naturals who are born to the saddle, he has been an unofficial ambassador for Canada, sharing his rodeo skills and enthusiasm with equestrians around the world, particularly young people. He demonstrated cutting horse practice to Prince Philip in 1962, and this encounter led to an ongoing relationship with Prince Philip and ultimately to a three-month royal cutting horse tour and demonstration across Great Britain in 1964 with Prince Philip as the event's patron. Alberta has many such connections. That's just one small story, part of our relationship as Albertans to Her Majesty and to her service and to the good that she's done in our province and our world.

Supporting young people is the key to building this province's future. It's some of what Bill Collins has done, some of what Her Majesty has contributed to, and by establishing awards and scholarships in honour of the Queen's platinum jubilee, we would celebrate students' contributions and help them pursue further education and other opportunities. These awards and scholarships will replace the awards and scholarships that were created in recognition of the Queen's golden jubilee, 50 years. We're just updating those existing awards to reflect that it's now 70 years of Her Majesty's service. The monetary value of the medallion and scholarships will be increased to \$7,000 in honour of Her Majesty's 70 years of service from the previous \$5,000 at the 50-year celebration.

In addition to the new awards for students and young people, a one-time Queen's platinum jubilee medal will be awarded to 7,000 deserving Albertans in 2022. The medallion will recognize a broad range of achievements – I should say "medal," actually – from volunteerism to reconciliation efforts and other noteworthy contributions. We are expecting that the first set of medals will be presented to the Queen's platinum jubilee weekend on June 2 to 5, and the medals will continue to be awarded to nominees throughout the rest of this year.

Finally, this act would also designate all past, present, and future members of Alberta's Executive Council as honorary members upon their retirement. Generations of dedicated public servants have helped shape the course of this province's history. Allowing them to continue using the honorific of the position is just a small gesture in appreciation for their devotion to Alberta, and in the spirit of togetherness it's completely nonpartisan. It applies to all parties now and in the future and is something that I think is just a small recognition of the service that members of council do contribute. I should say that there is no monetary benefit to this, that there are no executive powers attributed to it; it's purely a recognition as we recognize all regular Albertans for their service.

Looking to the past 70 years of the Queen's reign and our province's history helps us to appreciate the progress we've made,

how far we've come in 70 years as a people here in Alberta. It also helps us reflect on the future that we want to build. We need to do that by recognizing that the strength of this province has always and will in the future lie in the people who live here. This legislation will help inspire all of us and support the next generation in reaching new heights and creating a new future. So, Mr. Speaker, I am asking all members of this House for their support of Bill 1, Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act of 2022.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is second reading of Bill 1. Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the Member for Camrose should time allow.

4:40

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 1, Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act. I would like to start by saying that I think it's wonderful any time we have the ability to honour young people in the province. Being able to give them credit and acknowledgement is so important.

I do have some concerns with this. I would start by saying that this bill is clearly – clearly – another example of how out of touch this UCP government is with Albertans. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when I'm talking to people in Edmonton-Castle Downs and all across the province, no one was asking for Bill 1 to be a piece of legislation that gave the honorary title to members of this Legislature. This does nothing to focus on jobs or our economy. It's just confusing why their number one priority is using this Assembly to honour their friends and their supporters leading up to the election and then giving themselves access to a fancy title.

I think that the fact that this piece of the legislation is included in something that is intended to honour Her Majesty and to honour children and youth in this province – why it's being coupled with this honorary title doesn't make sense. It absolutely does not make sense. It takes away from the young people of this province who should be receiving recognition, not your friends that need to have these letters after their name and the honorific title.

I find it pretty rich that the Premier believes that his scandal-ridden cabinet is deserving of being called honourable. In everything that's happening currently, that this was brought forward . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called. The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika and the Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Insulting Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically: uses language which is abusive, insulting, creates disorder. The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs just suggested that the Premier's cabinet is not honourable at all and that, in fact, they are quote, unquote, scandal ridden. This is not language that in any way benefits Albertans and, frankly, causes disorder within this Chamber. To suggest that the Premier's cabinet is scandal ridden and not worthy of the title "honourable" is in itself dishonourable to say. This is language that creates disorder within this Chamber, and I would ask that member to apologize and retract.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, (h), (i), and (j) do not apply to this, as the Speaker can be in this room and see that it's the very opposite of anything resembling disorder. In fact, it's a matter of debate and definition in regard to language that the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs chose to use.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule. What I would say is that this isn't a point of order. It's a matter of debate. The only thing that moves close to a point of order is implying that a minister of cabinet is not honourable, because, of course, that is their title here inside the Assembly. But having some discussion around what cabinet is or isn't of course is a matter of debate. I don't know the exact words that the member used with respect to referring to members of cabinet as being not honourable. If she did that, then that is a point of order. However, the remaining portions of the comments are definitely a matter of debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Debate Continued

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess this is a touchy subject when it comes to the title "honourable" for life. This piece of legislation is doing just that. It's providing a space to have the title for life alongside building up students and recognizing their contributions to the province. It just seems ridiculous that the two of these things are going together. I have some concerns about why this would be slipped into something that is clearly easy to support. When we want to acknowledge young people in this province doing some incredible things, that is something that I think Alberta should continue, and we should be able to acknowledge and hand out recognition in ways of scholarship, in ways of medals, in ways of medallions. But to link that portion of the Queen's jubilee in with the title "honourable" for life just doesn't make sense.

I think it takes away from the young people of our province, from the individuals that are doing great work in this province and deserve recognition. To lump former members of cabinet into this is confusing, and it doesn't make sense. I think there are quite a few questions that I have when we get into further debate, specifically around Committee of the Whole, regarding the medal specifically, some of the questions I have around that, but at this time I will take my seat and listen to the rest of the debate.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose if she still would like to speak to the matter at present.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour as an MLA to serve the people of Alberta and to have taken my oath to the Queen. I find it quite astonishing that our Queen is the first British monarch to mark a 70th anniversary, 70 years of service, and Her Majesty is still determined to get up every day and serve. She makes one amazing role model for all Canadians.

This is a very welcome update to a similar bill, that was passed over 20 years ago, that recognized Her Majesty's 50 years of service. This update is also a great example as to why old bills or motions need to be amended or removed. Times change, and we need to stay committed to ensuring that we are reflecting what is current and reflects best what Albertans are experiencing in current or future life.

During the 70 years of tenure Queen Elizabeth has done a lot for Canada and the people of Alberta, and this bill is a perfect way to honour her loyalty and continued service to Alberta and the rest of the Commonwealth. During these years Her Majesty has been with us through it all as we have faced uncertain times and hardships like

recessions, world threats, pandemics, and so much more. Just like many of us have had to manage and navigate the ever-changing landscapes of time with a bright and exciting future in store, I can't wait to be there to experience newer and more exciting milestones ahead. By recognizing this historic milestone as Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II celebrates her historic 70 years of reign, it's amazing to see that the government anticipates that \$70,000 in funding will be provided through this program to recipients.

These recipients are normal, everyday Albertans going above and beyond the call to action. These Albertans are hard-working individuals who have helped change this province for the betterment of all current and future Albertans through volunteerism, public service, and community leadership. Every day I hear about young leaders making a difference within our various communities, and this bill is just another way we can pay them back and recognize all of their hard work that they have done for their communities. These awards and scholarships will go towards helping these young individuals further their goals, aspirations, and will give them a form of accomplishment they can be proud of and use as support to further their goals of making Canada and Alberta a better place for everyone.

I remember that when I was a girl at the age of six, I wrote a letter to Queen Elizabeth as I was enamoured with her at that tender age. The lady-in-waiting wrote me . . . [interjection]

Mr. Williams: I'm remiss to interrupt the hon. member. I have two purposes for the intervention. Number one, truth be told, I really just wanted to use the prop of Her Majesty behind me, and I'm positioned perfectly with the lens for the viewers at home to see her radiant beauty many years ago. Now, the second purpose and the question: as you were about to explain about when you were a young lady – perhaps this ties in well – could you talk a bit about some of the virtues that you see Her Majesty the Queen having that would be good as a role model for young Albertans today? Thank you to both of you.

4:50

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Member. I do appreciate you pointing out the fact that this beautiful portrait is here of Her Majesty. It's one of my favourites. I mean, we have two, but they're both equally favourites, and we're very fortunate to have this portrait here. Some traits that Queen Elizabeth possesses: I mean, there are so many great things about her. She is steadfast; she is constantly steadfast under pressure. We can always count on the Queen because she has such a great sense of responsibility, as comes with her role as Queen. For me, I think that's the most important one, and I do look forward to a further dialogue with you because I know you, too, have great admiration for the Queen. Thank you, Member.

As I was saying, when I was a girl at the age of six, I wrote a letter to Queen Elizabeth as I was enamoured with her at that tender age, and the lady-in-waiting wrote me back. I'll never forget that moment when I opened the letter. I encourage those who have been hesitant to write letters to their leader to do so because you just may get the same excitement and surprise that I still hold dear to this day.

It is also encouraging to see that Bill 1 will designate all former, current, and future Alberta cabinet ministers as honorary members of the Executive Council. As ministers serve in a higher capacity, it's welcoming to know that their years of past, current, and future work for this great province and its people will be honoured.

As we continue to honour our future leaders, I hope and share the same sentiments as all my other colleagues when I say that it has been a great honour to serve under the Queen for what is now the 30th Legislature, and I will continue to show pride and honour as

Her great Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, continues to reign, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Bill 1, are there others? I see the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo has risen.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I humbly recognize that I stand here today within the capacity of an elected leader. However, I couldn't be more ordinary than any other Albertan with the desire and hope to witness positive outcomes within their community. That's why I entered the world of politics in the first place, to effect meaningful, positive change.

Effective leaders are not as popular culture would have it: standing up on a pedestal, pointing fingers, and telling people what to do. Through my life's experiences I can tell you that the most effective leaders are not the ones who impose their will on people. This stems from an offshoot of entitlement, one which, unfortunately, we witness so often today. We certainly see that with our current Prime Minister here in Canada, someone who doesn't demonstrate the qualities of leadership that so many people truly want to see. He represents a level of populism, popularity, someone who just goes with the wind and supports whatever he thinks is popular. But as we go through life, we're going to understand that what's popular is not always right and that what's right is not always popular.

In the United States we saw that with their previous President, who was popular because he was a TV personality and because he had a lot of money and was very outrageous. It's unfortunate, because the Republican Party in the United States had a lot of good candidates out there, and it's disappointing that we didn't quite get that quality shining through. In this House we see across the way a group that attempts to get into government, a group that supports socialism, and a group that probably secretly idolizes what is going on in Europe right now and supports these atrocities that are happening . . .

The Speaker: I would just provide caution about implying members of the Assembly . . . [interjection] Order. If the hon. Member for Peace River wants to call a point of order, he can rise to his feet and do that, but if he wants to try to chastise the Speaker from his chair, there will be consequences.

I think that we should be cautious when implying that members of the Assembly may be sympathizers with those who are creating and committing massive atrocities in other parts of the world at present light.

The hon. member.

Mr. Schow: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: I didn't call this while you were standing, of course, because I respect the Speaker standing.

Before you stood, a member opposite said, "Take your medication, man" while the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo was speaking. I believe it was the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had said that. That, of course, would be language that would create disorder, under 23(h), (i), and (j). I suspect you may have heard it, but if it is in fact true, I would think that that is a point of order.

The Speaker: Well, I would agree that if the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford did say “take your medicine,” that would be a point of order. I will be the first to admit that I didn’t hear that comment, and it’s impossible for the Speaker to rule on comments made off the record. If he did, he should withdraw and apologize. If he didn’t, we’ll proceed back to the member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. No. The Deputy Government House Leader is mistaken. It was not the Edmonton-Rutherford MLA; it was me, and I said “change your medication,” not “take your medication.” I do apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: I accept the apology, and we will consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Debate Continued

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I probably digress – I do probably mix up their support for regimes in Venezuela with the support for what is happening in Europe – but I guess my point is that real leaders listen. They spend most of their time engaging with the population that they represent. They foster a culture of openness, transparency. They allocate resources to areas where they are rightfully needed, and, mostly importantly, they serve. That is why I encourage members of this House to back Bill 1, because not only does this bill celebrate Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II’s platinum jubilee; it also seeks to put our money where our mouth is by supporting and recognizing the various upcoming leaders in this province effecting positive change, a quality that all members of this House know that I hold in high esteem.

Acts of community leadership, volunteerism, public service must not go unnoticed, and, quite honestly, Mr. Speaker, the Queen has been by far and wide the most successful leader of the modern day. She’s demonstrated for decades her quality in leading western democracies to the success that they hold today, and we see that fight continue on now in Europe. We need to recognize and acknowledge her for her success. The Queen’s platinum jubilee medal recognizes and awards up to 7,000 individuals that serve Alberta, making it a better place to live. Various scholarships such as the jubilee citizenship medallion and the Premier’s citizenship award reward younger generations of Albertans, encouraging and inspiring their continued service in our communities. So despite some of the members across the way saying that this does not impact or affect Albertans, I dare say that it does, because we are recognizing Albertans in her name.

Such recognition goes a long way in fostering an environment of individuals filled with appreciation, camaraderie, togetherness, and selflessness, qualities that are essential in forming top-tier leaders, qualities that we as current leaders of today hope to instill in our children, sculpting them to become the most ambitious, successful, and enduring leaders of tomorrow. On top of that enduring leadership, Mr. Speaker, I think I can speak for all in this House by saying that we can all draw inspiration from the resilience of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II; 70 years of selfless service to the United Kingdom, Canada, and the rest of the world is by no means a simple feat.

Her Majesty has been no stranger to challenging and adversarial times, serving the Auxiliary Territorial Service, back then a women’s branch of the British army. Her Majesty valiantly contributed to the efforts resulting in the Allies winning the Second World War. Not only that, but Her Majesty served through and witnessed several

global events of gravity, from the Great Depression to the Cold War, from the United Kingdom joining the European Union to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the devolution of the United Kingdom, various financial crises, to the European migrant crisis, Brexit, a global pandemic. Recently she’s dealt with the loss of her beloved husband, His Royal Highness Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, and now a Ukrainian refugee crisis.

Through it all our Queen has stood tall and mighty. Her Majesty has diligently led the Commonwealth of Nations, remained the head of state of some of the strongest global democracies, upholding tenets of free speech, equality, representative governance, and freedom of thought and expression.

5:00

Her Majesty has also demonstrated dedication beyond measure, service above self, and a commitment to upholding Canadian values. Before Her Majesty’s silver jubilee in ’77, in ’73 during a Canadian tour, Her Majesty nobly stated, “I want the Crown in Canada to represent everything that is best and most admired in the Canadian ideal. I will continue to do my best to make it so during my lifetime.” Her Majesty has lived up to these words, and we couldn’t be more honoured by Her Majesty’s service to our country.

I sure hope that my fellow House members can join me in supporting this bill and celebrating the platinum jubilee of Her Majesty’s reign. It is an achievement that is unparalleled by any other, and today we must honour Her Majesty’s service above self, unwavering dedication, and commitment to both Canadians and the people of the world. These depict a rare type of quality that we as a province aim to emulate in ourselves and instill in our children now and for generations to come. God save the Queen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

The hon. Minister of Culture to close debate.

Mr. Orr: I’ll waive. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader is rising.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m., March 8, 2022.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(1.1) and the 2022-23 main estimates schedule the Assembly momentarily, after we vote, will stand adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30.

Legislative policy committees will convene this evening and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. Tonight the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Service Alberta in the Grassland Room, and the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the main estimates for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs in the Rocky Mountain Room.

Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Children’s Services in the Grassland Room, and the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Treasury Board and the Ministry of Finance in the Rocky Mountain Room.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:03 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 8, 2022

Day 5

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
 Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
 Government Whip
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
 Premier
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)

Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
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Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
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Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
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Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
 Deputy Government Whip
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
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Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
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Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
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| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
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| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
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| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
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| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Ganley
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Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

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Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 8, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

It sounded to me a lot like during the prayer there was a member that received a text message. Unless that was from God Himself, I'm sure you'll be paying a fine to the charity of your choice and owning up to it, like all hon. members would be.

Statements by the Speaker

International Women's Day

The Speaker: Hon. members, today marks International Women's Day, a global celebration of the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. Given that we are here in this impressive Chamber, it is perhaps most suitable that we focus on the latter, the political achievements of women in Alberta. During the Assembly's first meeting here in the Chamber, in 1911, there were 41 members of this Assembly, and none of them were women. Today 25 women sitting in the Chamber make a difference every day while representing hundreds of thousands of people who trust them as their elected representative.

Irene Parlby, who became the first female cabinet minister in 1921, said:

If politics mean . . . the effort to secure through legislative action better conditions of life for the people, greater opportunities for our children and other people's children . . . then it most assuredly is a woman's job as much as it is a man's job.

International Women's Day serves as both a celebration and a reminder that it takes collective action and shared ownership to achieve full equality. Today we honour the achievements of those who came before us with the aim to inspire collective action to address the many challenges that women continue to face both here in Alberta and around the world. I'm sure all members will join me in celebrating International Women's Day.

50th Anniversary of Alberta Hansard

The Speaker: If the Assembly will permit, I would like to make a note of another special day, in particular for your Speaker. Hon. members, in 2020-2021 more than 6 million words were spoken here in the Assembly and/or its committees; 6,453,127 words, to be exact. I know this because that's how many words were transcribed by our amazing *Hansard* staff.

Today marks a very special anniversary for *Hansard*. It is today that marks the 50th anniversary since *Hansard* was first published, following a motion on March 8, 1972, to establish

a printed record of the deliberations and proceedings of the sittings of the Assembly to be known as the "Alberta *Hansard*" which shall be compiled, edited, printed, distributed and administered under the direction and the authority of the Speaker, in accordance with this rule.

More than 30,000 words will be spoken on an average afternoon sitting like today. *Hansard* staff, including input editors, copy editors, proofreaders, and other professionals, work together to create a largely verbatim record of what is being discussed in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Prior to 1972 a collection of historical newspaper clippings, known as scrapbook *Hansard*, provides a glimpse of the proceedings between 1906 and 1971. The introduction of *Hansard* marked a new era of transparency in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. All transcripts from 1972 to now as well as the scrapbook *Hansard* collection are available on assembly.ab.ca, providing an in-depth resource of the discussions that have shaped this province since its inception.

A happy 50th anniversary to *Hansard*.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us in the galleries today is Marisa Maslink, a guest of the Minister of Infrastructure.

Also joining us today, please welcome Aurore Ramsamy, a guest of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. Aurore is a social work student joining us in recognition of Social Work Week.

I ask you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

International Women's Day

Member Irwin: A government's budget says a lot about their priorities. Let me tell you that this government's priority is certainly not women. Last year the UCP didn't mention women once in their budget address. This year they threw in a few fleeting references just so they could check the women box. What an incredible opportunity this government was presented with. Skyrocketing oil prices meant that they could have taken visionary actions that would have had tangible positive impacts on the lives of women. Instead, they boasted about balancing a budget on the backs of Albertans, and at every opportunity when they've had the chance to invest in and support women, they've chosen not to.

On International Women's Day I can't help but reflect on just how much this UCP government has failed women. I talk to women a lot. I love talking to women. I ask them: what issues are top of mind? What keeps you up at night? Let me tell you what they say: paying their bills, securing good employment, well-funded schools, strong public health care, a healthy planet, to name just a few issues.

These aren't earth-shattering revelations. They're not radical ideas. International Women's Day should compel us to act, should compel us to do better as legislators. It's not good enough to sit back like this government is doing and dismiss the lived experiences of women. They've failed to act, and they've failed women. But enough about them.

There is hope. We can elect a government that makes women a priority; that acknowledges that women are key to a strong economy, that if women thrive, society thrives; that supports all workers, including low-wage women workers, who this government has repeatedly left behind; that invests in health and knows that mental health care is health care; that ensures child care is universal, accessible, and affordable for all; that tackles misogyny, racism, and gender-based violence; and that protects, not attacks, reproductive rights.

None of these things are out of reach, and with so many unapologetic, unrelenting, fierce-as-heck women in Alberta speaking out and stepping up, I'm more hopeful about what we can accomplish together.

Happy International Women's Day.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose has a statement.

International Women's Day

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. March 8 marks International Women's Day around the globe. Today is a time to celebrate the women in our lives and all they do to build our communities. Alberta women have always been rugged pioneers, committed to making life better for future generations.

Henrietta Muir Edwards, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Emily Murphy, and Irene Parlby, the Famous Five, fought for women's suffrage and for the right of women to run for the Canadian Senate and to sit on the Supreme Court of Canada. Violet King Henry was the first Black woman lawyer in Canada and the first Black person to be admitted to the Alberta Bar. She was also a champion for civil rights. Bertha Clark-Jones, a Cree-Métis woman, who joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1940, became a fierce advocate for Indigenous veterans in Canada.

Those are only a few of the women who have helped create a vibrant and diverse Alberta. Alberta's government continues to support women's economic recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Today we announced \$1 million to support women pursuing postsecondary education in science, technology, engineering, and math. This is in addition to the STEM scholarship for women that is already in place.

1:40

Women in Alberta are second in the nation with a 60.6 per cent employment rate, while unemployment across the province has dropped to its lowest rate since before the pandemic. Alberta's government has also successfully negotiated a plan that will see licensed daycare fees drop by an average of 50 per cent for Alberta families.

There's more work to be done, but with so many driven and talented women in Alberta, I'm confident we'll reach our goals together. Happy International Women's Day.

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

Utility and Fuel Costs

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past couple of weeks gasoline prices have gone higher than ever in Alberta. At the same time, many of my constituents are reaching out to me about their unusually high utility bills. Both Joginder and Balraj have said that their natural gas and electricity bills are so high that they're struggling to afford them.

Our government has instituted a natural gas rebate program and offered a \$150 electricity rebate. Not only that, but we also dropped the 13 cents per litre provincial tax on fuel. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Premier and all of the cabinet for putting forward a plan to help Albertans. Of course, I can't say the same for Justin Trudeau and his allies.

At the same time our government is dropping taxes, the left-wing Liberals have committed to hiking their carbon tax even higher come April 1, all with the support of the NDP. When the members opposite were in the government, they misled Albertans. They worked with Trudeau to tax Canadians for simply heating their homes and driving their cars. A deceitful plan to tax families at \$20 per tonne of CO₂ is turning into \$50 on April 1, and by 2030 Canadians will be paying \$170 per tonne. That means 40 cents per litre just for the federal carbon tax.

As the UCP offered relief for the cost of utilities and fuel, Justin Trudeau increased the carbon tax. The NDP stays silent in defending Albertans from Justin Trudeau. In fact, they cheer for

him. They defend his policies. They claim that carbon tax has little to do with our current situation, but, Mr. Speaker, every little bit helps. Thank you to the Premier for easing the burden for Albertans. With any sensitivity, Justin Trudeau and his allies should be trying to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living

Ms Gray: This government is completely out of touch with Albertans. As I knock on doors and talk to my constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods, I hear it loud and clear. A week after introducing their budget, this government is celebrating, completely unaware of the struggling Albertans they've left behind.

Utility bills are outrageous. We're hearing daily from Albertans who are facing bills in excess of \$700 – some owe thousands – Albertans who feel they have to choose between paying their utility bills or buying food for their family. Instead of hearing these concerns and responding with compassion, this government offers them \$50 for electricity in a fake natural gas rebate that will never support Albertans, because it's for next year and the rates that the government's own budget suggests will never be hit.

Property taxes are up and likely to keep going up because this government would rather download costs to towns and cities instead of invest in them. Insurance bills are up because the Premier's insurance lobby friends are more important to his team than the Alberta families who can no longer afford to drive their cars. Income taxes are up because this Premier says one thing but does another, and he has reintroduced the very bracket creep that he once railed against.

This budget uses increasing inflation as an opportunity for the government to pick the pockets of Albertans during a pandemic. Tuition is up because the government views students as cash cows rather than the future leaders of Alberta, and this government even anticipates making billions more in student debt, in part because they raised the interest rates on that debt.

This budget provides no relief for struggling Albertans. Instead, it takes advantage of them, raising fees wherever they can, secretly hiking taxes, lifting caps in place to protect Albertans, and then shrugging away the concerns that they hear from families. It's shameful, but it's what Albertans have come to expect from this UCP government.

Mr. Speaker, my message to those Albertans is: hang on; keep your eyes forward. Alberta's NDP is on your side. We care about you, and we will come to work every day fighting for your family.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ukrainian Refugees

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. As I stand here surrounded by safety on Treaty 6 territory, Métis region 4, women and children in Ukraine are being sent to other countries to protect them from attacks on their sovereign nation. The displacement of these peaceful people will most definitely see Canada and Alberta stepping up to support Ukrainians as they seek safety and perhaps permanency. Ukrainian pride is exemplary, and former Canadian journalist Nathan VanderKlippe of the *Globe and Mail* reported that as people in Odessa bagged sand to protect them from attack, opera singers sang an anthem, and it translates to: "Ukraine is not yet dead, nor its glory and freedom."

To those fleeing from war in hopes to return to their homes when it's safe: we can be your safe haven, and if you choose to stay, we would be all the richer to have you. Mr. Speaker, by Sunday

morning more than 1.5 million Ukrainians had fled their sovereign nation, and we must be ready to find them homes, provide speedy integration into our communities, expedite resources of necessity, and surround them with compassion and support. This will be instrumental in welcoming and accommodating all those who've experienced trauma and loss and tremendous upheaval. Our government will have to prepare our health care system, expand our education system, and offer safe shelter to relatives who need to stay together.

Nonprofit and nongovernment organizations catch everything that public policy doesn't catch such as settlement needs, health and mental health supports, self-care, and accessibility. Nongovernment organizations in Alberta that are part of the NGO council, like the Red Cross, are getting constant updates on these needs, and this is the type of expert intel that we need as Alberta opens her arms wide to all those who need her. We must fund those NFPs and NGOs that go beyond the basics of food and shelter. Everyday Albertans are also ready to help. Alberta-based volunteerconnector.org is a nation-wide digital portal that matches volunteers and organizations.

Together, through our government working with these compassionate and experienced Albertans, Alberta will show the world once again what the power of community and kindness and generosity can accomplish, where Ukrainians can call this their home away from home.

United Conservative Party

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, yesterday Albertans got to witness the most confusing sight: UCP staff in the Premier's office were attacking the UCP's Fort McMurray by-election candidate for the extreme views of his supporters. Albertans aren't surprised to hear that the Premier's office is more focused on saving the Premier's job than addressing the many policy failures this government has delivered. His chief of staff, his most senior political adviser, has already taken a leave to go to Red Deer and organize against the UCP's own members.

While Albertans are not surprised to hear that a UCP candidate has extreme views or is supported by those with extreme views, they are surprised to hear that the UCP suddenly cares about this. The UCP didn't care when their MLA for Taber-Warner chose to visit an illegal blockade where present was a group plotting the murder of RCMP officers. The Premier even said that he was doing his job. The UCP didn't care when the Premier's speech writer was found to have written sexist, racist, and homophobic remarks. The Premier failed to care when the former Justice minister was found by a judge of attempting to interfere in the administration of justice, and it goes on and on.

All of what I've just gone through is why Albertans from far and wide no longer trust this Premier. They don't believe he genuinely cares about them, but I know that the Leader of Alberta's Official Opposition is ready. She will work to bring Albertans together, not drive them apart. She will hold her fellow caucus members accountable. She will call out hate and corruption. She will show that, yes, she truly cares about Alberta's families. Our leader is fighting off COVID right now, and I wish her well. I know that she's still working to serve Albertans from home, and, Mr. Speaker, I can't wait to serve in her government again come 2023 or sooner if it comes to that.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has the first question.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by wishing the House a happy International Women's Day and to let you know that all of our questions today will be coming from the women in our caucus.

School Fees and Property Tax Education Levy

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, this budget is barely two weeks old, and the Premier is already rewriting it. Yesterday he said that if global oil prices stay high, Alberta may stumble upon billions of dollars in additional revenue, so today I'm asking the Premier and the UCP to sincerely help Alberta families. Budget 2022 raises school fees and education property taxes by \$117 million. Will the Premier reverse those fee hikes today?

1:50

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to talk a little bit about Budget 2022. In Budget 2022 effectively we report our fiscal progress for three years. We've managed to keep operating expenses flat during three years at a time when we inherited cost increases from the previous government of 4 per cent per year. What that would have meant to Albertans had we stayed on that trajectory was inevitable tax increases for Albertans today and future generations. We've been responsible. We've avoided that.

Ms Hoffman: To any of the parents watching, I just asked about education property tax hikes executed by the UCP government. I asked them to stop those tax increases and the school fee increases, and the Minister of Finance said no. Mr. Speaker, these fees come out of the pockets of parents who are trying to pay their bills. They're trying to buy food and clothing to make sure that their kids get a great education. The Premier thinks they should pay more in school fees, but what will they get in return? Not more teachers, because in this budget there are 1,000 fewer teachers than there were under the NDP. Will the Premier rewrite the budget and put more teachers back into the classroom?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows full well that it is school boards who charge school fees. In fact, they're doing it as they are putting more dollars into their reserves. We went from \$363 million to \$464 million as of August in operating reserves. The member opposite, when she was the board chair for the Edmonton public school division, raised school fees three years in a row: \$28 million in 2011-2012; \$29 million in school fees, 2012-2013; \$31 million in 2013-2014; oh, and \$37 million in 2014-15. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows full well that under Conservative budgets that failed to increase funding for education, many boards were put in a position where they felt they had to do that. The member opposite also knows that she repealed a bill that capped school fees and refused to increase them. The member opposite also knows that she is responsible for the legislation that's hiking up school fees. If the members opposite want to ask questions of the NDP, they can call the election.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I don't think everybody heard me earlier, so I will repeat what I said. The member opposite as board chair raised fees three years in a row for the Edmonton public school division: over \$28 million in fees for 2011-2012, \$29 million in 2012-2013, \$31 million in 2013-14, and \$37 million in 2014-

2015. These fees are for extracurricular activities, field trips, facility rentals, and so much more. These are absolutely the purview of school boards.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora for the second set of questions.

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living

Ms Hoffman: Oh, Mr. Speaker, let's take a look at what the UCP has done with the family budget. John and Jane make an average Alberta income. They have two kids. They get by, but times are getting tougher. This year, because the Premier increased their income tax and reduced their benefits, they're going to lose \$400. That's \$400 not going towards groceries or bills or activities for the family. To the Finance minister or the Premier: why won't they rewrite the budget to actually put this money back in the family budget?

The Speaker: The hon. the Finance minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I absolutely reject what the member opposite is asserting. We have not increased income taxes in this province. A person earning \$50,000 this year will pay exactly what they did last year. But had we stayed on the trajectory that the previous government left us, we would have had no choice but to raise taxes. In fact, a future government would have had no choice but to raise taxes, like the members opposite did when they brought in the carbon tax.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, they did raise taxes. The Premier is making life harder on families, and he has no plan to stop. It's clear that he doesn't care. Martin and Mary are seniors. They live on a fixed income, but costs keep going up, and their seniors' benefit does not. This year they will lose \$360 compared to what they would have received if the Premier simply recognized that inflation is hurting every Albertan in this province. Will the Premier rewrite the budget to support seniors living on a fixed income? Yes or no?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we have the highest seniors' benefits of any province across the country. The top payment in this province is \$285 a month. The average of similar-sized provinces is \$60 a month. We have not reduced that amount. I reject the assertion in the member's question. But what we've done: we've brought in a utility rebate for January, February, March of this month, a \$150 rebate for all Albertans paying an electricity bill.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the UCP wants to talk about running a rebate program. I don't think most Albertans would trust them to run a bath, let alone a rebate program. The question was about seniors' benefits, and if the government cared enough, they would pretend to answer it. Heather is living on AISH. She's severely disabled. She's been betrayed by a party that promised to inflation-proof her benefits, and then they shamefully broke that promise. If the UCP kept their promise, Heather would have \$1,000 more this year to help her make ends meet. Will the Premier rewrite his budget for her, apologize to Albertans on AISH, and finally keep his word and do the right thing?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we have maintained AISH benefits, which are \$400 higher than the next-nearest province, and we've done it because we believe this government should support the most vulnerable. We believe Albertans have a priority of supporting the most vulnerable. Had we continued on the trajectory we inherited from the previous government, we would not have been able to

deliver programs for future generations. We brought fiscal responsibility to the province, which will ensure delivery of efficient programs in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has the call.

Ms Phillips: Albertans are having a hard time paying their bills. I'm hearing it from my constituents, and I know the Finance minister is hearing it, too, because at a recent town hall a woman was trying to ask him for help with her electricity bill: \$1,900, Mr. Speaker. The minister's response: he dismissed her concerns, claiming rebates only cause inflation and hurt the economy. Fast-forward to today, and it's quite the rewrite. Does the minister really think that \$50 on a \$1,900 bill is going to help that Albertan and that constituent of his?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I find it very rich coming from the members opposite when they talk about affordability. The members opposite, when they were in government, jacked taxes on personal income tax, increased corporate income taxes, introduced a carbon tax, which added costs for every Albertan. We're delivering efficient government, keeping taxes low. We've come out with a utility rebate, and effective April 1 we're eliminating the fuel tax for three months.

Ms Phillips: For the folks watching at home, some clear evidence that the minister doesn't want to talk about your electricity bills.

The minister then had the nerve to tell his constituents that he was in the same boat. He claimed that he couldn't pay his own power bill on his comfortable salary, but no one feels sorry for him. This morning he admitted that he's raising personal income taxes by a billion dollars without batting an eye. Why doesn't the minister reverse that change and actually help families with their bills?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we are not raising income taxes. I completely reject the member's assertion. The only folks in this House who raised taxes were the members opposite. They raised taxes on individuals. They raised taxes on corporations, sending tens of billions of dollars out of this province. They introduced a carbon tax, one they did not even campaign on. We're delivering efficient government. We're ensuring Alberta will be the lowest taxed jurisdiction in the nation.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:59.

Ms Phillips: For the folks watching at home, the minister also doesn't want to talk about the billion dollars he's pickpocketing in personal income tax.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Phillips: So let me give the minister some free advice. Inflation-proof personal income tax to protect the family budget. Put back the billion dollars he's taking. Stop the hikes to school fees, tuition, and property tax. Put the cap back on insurance premiums and electricity rates. If the minister is truly struggling to pay his own bills, why doesn't he pick one of his own bad policies and reverse it?

2:00

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, again I find it very rich that the members opposite would look to give this government advice on financial matters. The trajectory they were on: by raising taxes on everything that moved in this province, by creating additional regulatory

burden, they chased out tens of billions of dollars of investment with the job opportunities. We're delivering efficient government so we can keep taxes low so we can make strategic reinvestments in health, in education, and to ensure that every Albertan has the ability to increase their skills.

Utility Rebate Program

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, the government promised Albertans relief from sky-high natural gas rates. Then they produced a fake program. Now they're only giving \$50 back for electricity bills that have climbed into the hundreds. Robyn shared her bill with us and how it rose from \$350 last month to \$700 this month. What does the Premier have to say to Robyn? Does he really think that a \$50 cheque is real help with her \$700 bill?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Only the NDP could be so unaware that they would actually be personally involved in driving up the electricity prices in the manner in which they did and then have the audacity to complain that the help that we're giving Albertans is not big enough. We're giving more support to Albertans than the NDP did, and we will continue to look at ways that we can modernize the electricity grid and also to NDP-proof the electricity grid so that we don't have to suffer these things in the future.

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, real Albertans are choosing today between groceries and their electricity bill, and that minister thinks he deserves a pat on the back for a \$50 rebate.

Robyn is not alone. Kelsie also wrote to us. Her bill has doubled to over \$600. She is concerned about paying her other bills. All this government can offer is a rebate she likely won't qualify for and \$50 off hundreds of dollars in new costs. Is this really the best that the Premier has to offer to Albertans like Kelsie who are struggling as a result of his government's decisions?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we do have high electricity costs in this province, and that's why we've offered a rebate for the months January through March. But again I find it very rich that the members opposite would raise this issue because it was their failed policies that put us in this situation. They spent 7 and a half billion dollars on transmission costs that consumers are now paying for. They overbuilt the system. They prematurely paid out power purchase agreements, costing Albertans \$1.3 billion, that Albertans are paying today. And they introduced a carbon tax that cost every Albertan and Alberta senior higher costs in . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Ganley: These are real people, Mr. Speaker, real people who can't afford their medication, and all that minister has for them is bluster.

Deborah also wrote to us saying that her bill has increased over the past few months, and the most recent one was nearly \$1,000. She is worried about how she can continue to keep the lights on and keep her house warm. Is this Premier really satisfied with telling Albertans like Deborah that \$50 in a fake rebate is the only thing they're willing to provide? If they can't do better, can they at least apologize to Albertans for lying to them?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the NDP were grossly negligent. By the way, when I say grossly negligent, I don't mean when the NDP

ethics critic was investigated by the RCMP cybercrimes unit; I mean when they overspent \$7.5 billion in transmission and then they hung those costs on the ratepayer. They also brought in additional policies that drove electricity prices up. Yes, we gave a rebate to Albertans, and we're going to continue to look at ways that we can modernize the system and protect Albertans from further NDP hangovers. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Women's Postsecondary Education Supports

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is International Women's Day. This is a special day to recognize the important role women play in the development and success of our province. Our government has taken a number of steps to improve the lives of women throughout the province. Can the Associate Minister of Status of Women tell the House what the government has done recently to help women thrive in our economic recovery?

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

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know the important role women play in the development and success of our province and focus on ways to support them in writing the next great chapter in our Alberta story. Just today Alberta's government is investing \$1 million in bursary programs at Bow Valley College, NorQuest College, and Yellowhead Tribal College. We also recently invested \$1.9 million to an Amazon Web Services pilot program that will assist up to 40 women with training and connections to the local IT and cloud-computing sectors because we know how important it is to support women in tech. Investment like this is making a real . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the response. Given that we know education is a valuable tool which helps foster economic growth in our province and given that we see more women and girls interested in careers in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, STEM, to the associate minister: what is the government doing to help support women who want to study STEM?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, as I just mentioned, we just announced today a million dollars in bursary programs that will ensure women have the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education in STEM at Bow Valley College, NorQuest College, and Yellowhead Tribal College here in Edmonton. Every little girl in Alberta today has the potential to do great things. That's also why we've offered scholarships for STEM of \$150,000, and we will be doing more on this. You know, these funds help more women every day pursue fulfilling and in-demand careers that will help them support themselves and their families.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that women in Alberta work across many different sectors, including those who are looking at building rewarding careers in the skilled trades, and given that many tradeswomen are leading the way in everything from welding to hairstyling, to the associate minister: what is the government doing to help women build a rewarding career in the trades?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. Skilled trades offer a rewarding career, and our government is proud to support organizations like Women Building Futures, for which there was a \$10 million investment, and we're proud to support these types of investments to help ensure women get the hands-on experience that they need to become seasoned professionals and hit the ground running. Skills work contributes so much to our economy. It is an investment in Alberta's future to support women entering these fields.

Support for Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, another day, another announcement from this UCP government to try to fix what they broke. This time it comes after causing years of anguish for young people aging out of government care, an age group where we've seen two and a half times the number of deaths since 10 years ago. Now, after announcing that she would cut young people age 22 off necessary emotional supports two years ago, the minister is saying that she will reinstate them. Will the minister finally admit that cutting these supports for these young people was wrong in the first place, and why is she still providing \$10 million less in supports for them?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, the changes that we announced in Budget 2019 are still included in the budget today. [interjections] At that time, when we made changes to the age of eligibility for support and financial assistance agreements, we made those changes, and then we made it clear that changes needed to be made to that program to better support young adults that were transitioning out of care and into adulthood, and that is exactly what we did. We took some of the best parts of the advancing futures program, which are the social and emotional supports that young people need to succeed, and we brought those into one transition to adulthood program.

The Speaker: I'll just provide some caution that unparliamentary comments made off the record are still unparliamentary.

Ms Pancholi: Given that the opposition has been raising concerns about these changes to the SFAA program since it was first announced two years ago and given that these same concerns have been raised by youth, the Child and Youth Advocate, including members of the advocate's youth council, and given that this new transition program essentially puts back in place the dedicated caseworker that these young people already had and that the only reason the UCP is reversing course is because one young, brave woman came forward to take them to court about it, my question is: what will it possibly take to get this minister to admit that she was wrong and apologize to the young people in her care?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, this program is exactly what we committed to. We had a program that basically was focused on monthly allowances, and we needed a program that really walked through the supports and skills that young people needed to transition out of care and successfully into adulthood, and that is exactly what we have now. We are taking the best of both programs, wrapping them together. We're increasing the monthly allowances that these young people will receive. We're focusing on positive transitions either into adult programming or adulthood. This is exactly what we committed to and exactly what we did.

2:10

Ms Pancholi: Well, given that today in budget estimates and again right now the minister is trying to pretend as though a dedicated caseworker for youth aging out of care is somehow new and given that the minister appears to be ill-informed about the supports these young people were receiving, which may explain why she had no problem cutting them in the first place, and given that people in the sector were e-mailing me today during estimates to fact-check the minister in real time, contradicting her, my question is: after all of this how does the minister expect Albertans, particularly the very young people she is responsible for, to trust her?

Mr. McIver: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:10.
The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do, in fact, very purposefully understand the changes that we made to this program, because they were exactly what we heard from caseworkers and young people who were transitioning into adulthood. They are changes that are being made in other provinces across this country, and they're exactly what we committed to. I'm happy to quote young people like Spencer, who said, quote: there's just so much to manage when you start out, like budgeting and taking care of yourself; I'm glad that young adults will have additional supports to help them through this challenging time. We've also had young people reach out to say: a program like this helped me out to become independent. That is the purpose of this program.

Budget 2022 and Vulnerable Albertans

Ms Renaud: While the UCP cheer on their hollow budget, those in the most vulnerable situations in this province see nothing to celebrate. The UCP will claim they're not making cuts, but a flat budget for those on income support and AISH is forcing them to stretch their limited income even more as the cost of living increases. The budget is most certainly not balanced for them. Can the Minister of Community and Social Services please explain: if the price of gas, utilities, the cost of groceries, rent, insurance, and the government's revenue are increasing from sky-high oil, why aren't supports for the most vulnerable going up, at least indexed...

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the opposition for raising a very good question. As the Minister of Finance has already addressed, we are having a rebate program. We are eliminating the fuel taxes as a way to mitigate the inflation issue. About the AISH program, let me tell you this. With Budget 2022 we have increased the AISH budget to \$1.37 billion, again, the highest in Alberta's history.

Ms Renaud: Given the increasing amount of poverty and homelessness across the province and given that even before costs for everything shot up, communities were pleading for additional homeless supports and given that the province has kept the funding for homeless supports the same this year as they have for the last two years, I'm frustrated that the UCP has not learned anything from mistakes. They're not providing enough, and communities are tired of the patchwork. It's just reactive. With costs of living pushing more people into poverty and making it more expensive to deliver services, why is the UCP making the same mistake and underfunding supports for homeless people?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, we're not taking advice from a one-term failed NDP government. Homelessness is a complex issue. We shared in the House that we established a homeless task force that is aiming at taking a structurally different approach to address this issue. We're focusing on housing first. We're also looking at a recovery-oriented continuum of care so that we provide a comprehensive, co-ordinated response to homelessness. We have a better solution for Albertans.

Ms Renaud: Given that the mayor of Edmonton said that this budget was balanced on the backs of vulnerable Albertans and given that rural communities outside of the large cities are seeing drastic increases in homelessness and poverty but are receiving no increased supports from the UCP government or are not even getting a listening ear and given that this government received more revenue from high oil prices and they continue to completely ignore the most vulnerable in Alberta – on this side of the House we want to live in an Alberta where everyone is supported, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. How can this minister sit by and do nothing? Explain to vulnerable Albertans why you don't give a damn.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member who just said that nobody talks to them, I can tell you that I spend largely many hours every day talking to municipal leaders and listening carefully to their concerns, passing them on to my colleagues, who react responsibly and in a timely way.

Mr. Speaker, we have our ear to the ground when it comes to municipalities, and we will continue to do so because they're a very important source of information for us, and we will continue to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living (continued)

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has been unrelenting in our focus on investment attraction, economic growth and diversification, and job creation. Alberta's business-friendly recovery plan has positioned Alberta to lead all provinces in economic growth. We're also seeing a surge in net interprovincial migration, further evidence that word is spreading that Alberta is the best place to be, and the Alberta affordability advantage greets workers when they arrive here. To the Minister of Finance: what are some of the affordability advantages these families can look forward to when they arrive in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's true. Alberta does have an affordability advantage today, and part of that advantage is the lowest tax structure in the nation. We have the highest basic personal exemption of any province, allowing more Albertans to earn more before they pay a dollar in provincial income tax. In fact, 40 per cent of Albertans pay no provincial income tax at all. If you have a family of four living in Alberta and if we moved them to Ontario, they would pay \$3,800 more in personal income tax with \$75,000 worth of income.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that Albertans typically earn more, pay less in overall taxes, and generally enjoy lower food and

transportation costs and given that Budget 2022 makes Alberta an even more affordable place to call home, to the same minister: how does Budget 2022 help grow the Alberta affordability advantage?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we do have an Alberta affordability advantage. This budget, Budget 2022, adds over \$600 million for child care to ensure that families can obtain accessible, affordable child care in this province. We're adding \$15 million to low-income students to support their education endeavours, and we're investing \$390 million over four years to ensure that everybody in rural Alberta has world-class digital connectivity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that global energy prices have increased significantly and given that Alberta families are now faced with rapidly increasing fuel and utility costs and given that Alberta consumers need reliable energy to survive the challenges of living in a northern climate, to the same minister: what is this government doing to help families reduce the financial pressures they are faced with due to these rising energy costs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that energy costs are creating affordability issues for Albertans even though we have an affordability advantage, and to that end we are halting the collection of the fuel tax. That's 13 cents a litre for Albertans. This program will be in place all year, re-evaluated every quarter. On top of that, we are rebating every Albertan who has an electricity bill by \$150 for January through March of this year, and we have a natural gas consumer price protection measure in place as well.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Speaker, Alberta families are seeing their cost of living soar. Inflation is up, gas prices are up, utility bills are up, and even taxes are going up. Given that Albertans have been hit with an increase in insurance costs and inflation yet this government is doubling down on nickelling and diming Albertans through sneaky personal income tax hikes and increasing user fees, why is this government piling on instead of making life more affordable?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is working very, very hard as we bring forward a balanced budget, lowering the cost of taxes for Albertans, and bringing in rebate programs for both electricity and gas.

Again, Mr. Speaker, to this hon. member: he needs to explain to this House what was taking place at his home when the RCMP raided it recently and what the Official Opposition knew about the investigation that is being undertaken into him and them.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it seems like this government is ignoring the cost to families and given that Alberta families are still recovering from the effects of the pandemic and given that rising energy prices and rising food prices are driving up the cost of living for Albertans and my constituents, why is the government continuing to raise property taxes through increases to the mill rate?

2:20

Mr. Jason Nixon: Again, Mr. Speaker, we are working very, very hard to bring in rebate programs that can help Albertans as we go through these tough times. But this hon. member must address this issue with the House: what did the Official Opposition leader know about his actions, why has the RCMP served search warrants on his personal home, and why has the Official Opposition completely abandoned him? He should stand up in this House and explain what's gone on. Albertans deserve to know what is taking place, and they deserve to know what the NDP knew about it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.
The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems like this government is doing nothing about affordability. Given that Alberta's purchasing power has inarguably taken a hit and that this budget is balanced on the backs of hard-working Albertans, will they just admit that this is a terrible budget and that they have nothing good to say?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we brought Budget 2022 forward, a balanced budget. We brought fiscal sustainability and responsibility back to the province. That allows this government to make strategic reinvestments in health care, in education. The issues that the member opposite raises – the affordability issues, particularly in utilities – are a result of failed policies implemented by the members opposite. We're correcting the fundamentals that have led to those increased costs, and we're providing relief in the meantime.

Budget 2022 and Job Creation

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, Calgary's unemployment is the highest in the country. The cost of living is becoming unbearable for many, and this government has missed its job targets by 130,000. That's 130,000 Albertans who are making no money right now and are being faced with skyrocketing utility prices, gas prices, property taxes, school fees; you name it. My first question is simple: why would the minister of economic development stand in this House every day and celebrate when so many are struggling? Is he really that tone deaf?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, 130,000 jobs created last year; in the first month alone, 7,000 new jobs. When the rest of the country lost 200,000 jobs, Alberta gained jobs. The best thing that we can do to help people pay their bills is make sure they have employment. Under the former government, under the NDP, they told Albertans to leave this province to get employment. We're going to do everything we can to make sure Albertans have high-paying jobs.

Ms Goehring: Given that one bright spot for Alberta amid all of the incompetence from that side of the House is the film industry but given that this government promised stakeholders that it would reinstate the NDP's interactive digital media tax credit – that critical program was nowhere to be found in the budget – and given that that credit would create more jobs in the film industry in areas like animation and postproduction, can the minister explain why he once again failed stakeholders despite promising to do better in what turned out to be a bogus provincial budget?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we are so proud of the film and television industry. The NDP failed – failed – the film and television industry for four years. Right now we have the largest TV series in Canadian history right here in Alberta because of the steps this government took, and we have effectively zero per cent unemployment in the tech innovation space. We're more diversified

than ever. We're winning for Albertans and diversifying our economy.

Ms Goehring: Given that we need to provide proper education to be ready for jobs in film and digital media – if we don't train them, the jobs will go elsewhere, and our future leaders will leave, too – but given that the UCP is putting 1,000 fewer teachers in our K to 12 schools, has cut postsecondary funding by more than \$600 million, and is ramming in a curriculum that puts students out of step with film, digital, and tech industries, can the minister tell this House if he supports such devastating cuts to education and moving forward with a curriculum no one supports? If he does, how can he possibly claim to care about job creation . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, the budget that this government introduced includes \$600 million to make sure we address labour shortages in Alberta. Yes, labour shortages in our province: who thought we would have had that challenge in the middle of this pandemic? But this province is bouncing back faster than anyone could have imagined. We have a long way still to go to help make sure we support people. But, on top of that, maybe the member opposite missed the fact that Bow Valley College just this week announced the fact that it's opening up its school in this exact area.

Electric Power Prices

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, my constituents have reached out to me upset and shocked at their high utility costs. As a power engineer who ran a power plant and a large industrial consumer of electricity, I'm very familiar with ideological decisions made by previous governments that have led us to this point. Most recently the NDP decision to rapidly transition from coal while subsidizing major corporations with hundreds of millions of dollars from taxpayers is one example of poor ideological decision-making. To the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity: could you explain what you're doing to help reduce the impacts of these poor policies? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, in 2015 Albertans elected an accidental government with paper candidates. Now, when they descended on the Legislature with nothing more than their hopes and dreams, they then proceeded to oversee the largest overbuild of the transmission system in our province's history. They broke the electricity system, and we're going to fix it. We are going to bring fiscal restraint and accountability to electricity in Alberta, something that the NDP is just not capable of doing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that from 2015 to 2019 the rapid expansion of utilities came with a \$7 billion price tag and a whopping \$1.3 billion was lost on the Balancing Pool, a bill we all will be repaying until 2030, and given that I only have 35 seconds and it would take 35 years to tell of all the mistakes the NDP made with our electricity market, can the same minister explain what he is doing to address these failures? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, when the NDP asks about the high cost of electricity, it's ironic, not as ironic as the NDP ethics critic being investigated by the RCMP cybercrimes unit, but it is ironic nonetheless. Now, we are bringing forward some solutions that are going to help Albertans. That includes the \$150 rebate. We're also bringing fiscal accountability to the transmission grid. They spent \$7 billion in four years on transmission; in the last two years we've spent \$100 million. That's fiscal accountability, and we will continue to look at ways that we can drive down prices and NDP-proof the electricity grid.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that the rate cap masks the true cost of energy by shifting the cost from the ratepayer to the taxpayer and given that many Albertans are worried about future and current costs, once again to the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity: how are we continuing to encourage a diversified grid without spending unnecessary taxpayer dollars?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that the path forward for lower electricity prices is increased competition and more choice, so we are creating long-term solutions and encouraging competition with our commitment to the energy-only market. This approach is working because we have 4,000 megawatts of generation that are going to be coming online shortly and are at different phases of approval in front of the AUC. We're going to do all of this without hanging increased costs on the ratepayer. They broke the electricity grid; we're going to fix it.

Women's Economic Equality

Member Irwin: On International Women's Day let's reflect on some important facts. Women are the key to every aspect of a healthy economy and a healthy community. Data shows that when women entrepreneurs are financed, they are extremely successful, which benefits the broader community. Research also shows that women-founded and -cofounded start-ups tend to perform better than all-male ones, and businesses founded by women in general are shown to be significantly better financial investments. Why has this government not prioritized the economic empowerment of women in Alberta? Do they not want to support some of the strongest drivers of our economy?

Ms Issik: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the members across want to talk about the economic empowerment of women. Let me tell you about how they empowered women. Tens of thousands lost their jobs while they were in government. Every single woman paid higher bills because of their carbon tax. Every one of them faced higher personal income taxes. Thousands and thousands of women entrepreneurs lost their businesses during their term. There was a mass exodus of women from this province. And you know what? This government, on this side, has done everything to reverse that.

2:30

Member Irwin: Given that advancing gender equality in economic and social spheres is not just the right thing to do but is also the smart thing to do and given that this is an evidence-based way to increase the prosperity of industry as a whole and that investing in women's economic empowerment sets a direct path towards gender

equality, poverty reduction, community safety, and inclusive economic growth, why does this government ignore the data, ignore the clear indicators, ignore the very women of Alberta, and diminish what could be a major economic ministry into an associate role with barely a mandate or any capacity to enact change?

Ms Issik: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, we could talk about how governments should and can support women. I can tell you that this government – this government – has done more to support the equality of women by making sure that the women in this province have access to affordable daycare. The previous government across: you know what they did? They managed to put together a pilot program that didn't deliver daycare to even the most deserving and most needy of it. I've got to tell you that this government has done a way better job on that.

Member Irwin: Given that women make enormous contributions to economies, whether in businesses, on farms, as entrepreneurs or employees, workers doing unpaid care work at home, and given that women not only work but so often are expected to take on second, third shifts associated with household work and caregiving and given that women remain disproportionately impacted by poverty and are often limited in their ability to work due to the need for child care, where this government has let them down once again, why is this government so set on making it even harder for women by raising costs on absolutely everything and making life less affordable?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, wow. You know, the members opposite, when they were in government, raised the cost of everything for women in this province by instituting the carbon tax. We on this side of the House eliminated the carbon tax. We reduced taxes. We're eliminating the fuel tax for three months. We're doing rebates on electricity. I'm sorry, but I think that this side of the House knows exactly how to help women.

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living

(continued)

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, for two years front-line workers in hospitals, restaurants, schools, essential businesses, and more have gone to work in uncertainty. They feared getting COVID-19. Many did, and some are still recovering. Now, we all hope the pandemic is ending, but these workers are facing a new crisis: massive increases to their personal cost of living, many coming as a direct result of decisions from this UCP government. Can the minister of labour explain to these front-line heroes why his government won't provide real relief on utility bills and reverse the decisions that are driving up their costs after all that these workers have done for us during the pandemic?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. In response to COVID-19 Alberta's government has taken a number of actions to protect and support Albertans through these challenging times, including job-protected leave, deferring WCB premiums when businesses needed it most, and paid vaccination leave. We know that there is much to be done, and that is why Alberta's Budget 2022-23 will go further in delivering for Alberta workers.

Ms Gray: Given that I hear from many people in my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods who need their vehicles to get to and from the office – and for many of them their vehicle is the office: they drive cabs, delivery trucks, trades vehicles, and so much more

– and given that this government pulled the 5 per cent cap on insurance rates after being lobbied by their insurance lobby friends, can the minister tell this House for the record how much the average Albertan's insurance has increased since this government took office, and can he tell them why he won't restore the cap and end these ridiculous increases that are hurting families in all of our constituencies?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell this House is that the reforms that we brought forward in Bill 41 last fall around automobile insurance seem to be working. These were reforms that dealt with the fundamental, systemic issues that were pushing up automobile insurance rates, issues that the members opposite simply didn't deal with. I can report to this House that automobile insurance premiums are flat to declining, and that's good news for Albertans.

Ms Gray: Given that answer and that Bill 41 hasn't helped my constituents and given that my colleague the Member for Lethbridge-West and Official Opposition Finance critic confirmed today that the UCP's sneaky bracket creep scheme is costing Albertans \$1 billion in taxes and given that this UCP billion-dollar tax grab is going to hurt my constituents and all Albertans – it's frankly shameful – Minister, my last question is simple: how can you possibly stand there and pretend to care when you're taking another billion dollars from our constituents, all Albertans, a billion dollars they don't have, while everything is getting more expensive?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I want to talk for just 35 seconds about caring for Albertans. As we consider the next generation of Albertans, I believe it's critically important that we put this province on a sustainable fiscal trajectory by making disciplined financial decisions, by positioning the province for disproportionate investment attraction, economic recovery, and growth. That's what we're doing. That's what this budget does. This leaves the next generation for a prosperous Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Construction Industry Prompt Payment Framework

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, previously Alberta had no specific rules or regulations for payment timelines in the construction industry. If not directly addressed by a contract, these timelines were left ambiguous. Bill 37 amended the Builders' Lien Act and became the new Prompt Payment and Construction Lien Act in 2020. This act addresses these issues by introducing a clear timeline and regulations for payment and liens in the construction industry. Can the Minister of Service Alberta talk about the specific regulation changes individuals in the construction industry can expect to see upon implementation?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As our economy continues to recover, to grow, and to diversify, Alberta's government is protecting jobs by bringing its prompt payment legislation into force. Members in the construction industry had been advocating for this framework for many, many years. While the NDP sat on this for four years, we have taken action and worked with the industry at every level to create legislation and regulations that make sense. These regulations will solve so many problems, including dealing with the administration of an adjudication process

for dispute resolution as well as dealing with lien holdback payment protocols and the transition . . .

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that the construction industry is a multibillion-dollar sector of Alberta's economy that creates thousands of jobs for Albertans, employing approximately 1 in 10 Albertans, and given that this new legislation will act to protect contractors, subcontractors, labourers, and suppliers who have provided labour and materials for a construction project, to the same minister: can you identify the specifics of how this legislation will seek to protect labourers and suppliers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great question, and I'm happy to tackle that. We know that over the last number of years the average time for payment in Alberta's construction industry has increased from within 45 days to well over 70 days. That's just the average; in many cases it's well over 100 days. That is why this prompt payment framework was so important and why I was so proud to work with the construction industry to develop it. The legislation will address, first and foremost, ensuring that when a proper invoice has been issued, payment will be issued within 28 days. That's going to move the needle in the construction . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you to the minister for that answer, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are numerous changes to the original Builders' Lien Act and given that there has been collaboration with construction industry representatives to create supporting regulations and to develop specific processes and further given that the Prompt Payment and Construction Lien Act, the builders' lien forms amendment regulation, and the prompt payment and construction lien regulation will come into force on August 29 of this year, 2022, to the same minister: what can workers expect to experience during this rollout transition?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right. We have had so much collaboration on this issue over the last year and a half. We've been working so closely with members of the construction industry since 2019 to develop these new rules that will be in place this summer in Alberta. Over the next six months what they can continue to expect from us is that we will continue to work with industry very closely on education and on training and to establish the tools needed for this adjudication system to ensure a seamless transition when the act and regulations come into force on August 29.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will continue to the remainder of the daily Routine. If members are exiting the Chamber, I ask that they do so quickly and quietly.

2:40

Members' Statements

(continued)

Energy Industry Environmental, Social, and Governance Standards

Mr. Yao: Virtue signalling: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister of Canada is a master at this. But he can do so much better. He can

demonstrate honest virtue by supporting Canada's energy industry, that ranks high in environmental, social, and governance measures. He can advocate on behalf of our industry to the international community and stop reliance on nations like Russia. Environmental measures weigh how a company performs as a steward of protecting nature. Social aspects examine how it manages its labour standards, its customers and their communities. Governance deals with a company's leadership and financial aspects.

Despite the negative reputation of Canada's oil sands, environmentally we retain a quality that virtually no other jurisdiction in the world can advertise. We reclaim used lands back to their original state. No other energy sector has financially invested in research and development to reduce carbon emissions as much as operators in Canada's oil sands. They have brought emissions levels initially witnessed with the first oil sands operations down to quantities currently seen around the world with conventional oil operations. Socially, employees of Canada's oil companies are well treated and support a society that is tolerant of all. Governance: we can rest assured that investors in Canada and her energy industry contribute back to pensions and other causes benefiting our lives.

Exxon is losing \$4 billion, Shell \$3 billion, and BP a whopping \$25 billion by exiting a nation that has demonstrated hostility to a democratic nation. Admittedly, our Prime Minister created a regulatory environment that is difficult for these companies, but he can repair this. The world is witnessing the consequences of relying on energy from unethical regimes like that of Russia. Meanwhile western democracies are attempting to voice their disagreement by imposing economic sanctions, which ultimately serve as nothing but virtue signalling since the international community continues to purchase Russian oil and gas.

The left will say that now is the time to invest in windmills and solar panels, but we know these to be unreliable sources of energy. This Prime Minister and the world need to embrace Canada's energy industry, that has high environmental, social, and governance ratings, and quit their hypocritical virtue signalling.

Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion Project

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, on February 18 Trudeau pulled a fast one, announcing a halt to public funding of Trans Mountain. That's right. The federal government's mismanagement of this project caused a \$9 billion deal to turn into a \$21.4 billion boondoggle, and the project is only half done.

Now, let me outline the details of this public disclosure because they are very intriguing. Trudeau, after invoking the Emergencies Act, announced TMX's demise amongst chaos. He did this while arresting peaceful protesters, freezing bank accounts, running over elders, and pepper-spraying citizens. He did this in the wake of a violent eco terrorist attack at the Coastal GasLink Pipeline site in B.C., where 20 assailants wielding axes terrorized employees and used explosives to destroy construction trailers, including an attempt to set fire to a vehicle with workers inside.

He did this while a madman amassed troops along Ukraine's border, beginning an onslaught to kill innocent people in a ruthless attack having the potential to start a world war. But Trudeau looks at this turmoil as an opportunity, an opportunity to divest of a pipeline he had no intentions of completing, to fulfill his misplaced vision of destroying Alberta's fossil fuel industry, an ethical industry that could replace Putin's tyrannical oil, paralyze his funding, and make Canada the world's preferred supplier of clean energy.

Mr. Speaker, the Emergencies Act authorizes the federal government to take extraordinary measures in responding to national emergencies. It replaced the War Measures Act, with war

characterizing the severe nature of its invocation. Its use should not be taken lightly. If absolute power corrupts absolutely, with this megalomaniac in charge, Canada appears absolutely corrupt.

Thank you.

Addiction Treatment and Recovery

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, Judy came into my office a couple of years ago and shared a heartbreaking story. She showed me pictures of the drug paraphernalia laying in her granddaughter's room that she had received from injection sites. It was enough to last a month. Judy told me her granddaughter was going to die because no one cared. People were enabling her in her addiction. Judy wanted me to remember her granddaughter as we focused on trying to make sure that other people did not lose their loved ones. A few months later, sadly, Judy was right. Her granddaughter Judaine passed away.

This story is heartbreaking and is all too common in our province and our country. Mr. Speaker, people living with addiction are exactly that, people. They are sons, daughters, grandkids. They are siblings, parents, and grandparents.

Our government cares deeply about this issue and is committed to fostering a healing journey and removing barriers so individuals can access help. Recently we expanded the 4,000 new recovery spaces that were planned to 8,000 spaces dedicated to detox, treatment, and recovery. Alberta is also the first province to eliminate all user fees for publicly funded treatment. We've also launched the Digital Overdose Response System, a mobile app that can help prevent overdose deaths. If a user of the app becomes unresponsive to a timer, EMS is dispatched to save their life.

We recently announced that Alberta will be the first province to provide an injectable opioid treatment drug, Sublocade, at no cost. Sublocade provides the client with 30 days of protection from overdose and reduced cravings so they can pursue recovery. We also recently announced \$1.4 million to expand and create a low-barrier division of the virtual opioid dependency program. Thanks to this program Albertans anywhere in the province can get same-day access to evidence-based opioid treatment medications.

Mr. Speaker, addiction ruins lives. It destroys communities, and it tears families apart. I'm proud that our government is providing the help necessary to help recover from addiction to improve lives, rebuild communities, and strengthen families here in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice to Government Motion 12 to be put on the Order Paper in my name as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly (a) recognize that the current air travel restrictions imposed by the government of Canada have no measurable public health benefit and continue to impact hundreds of thousands of jobs in the air travel and tourism sectors and (b) call on the government of Canada to revoke (i) its proof of vaccination requirements for airline passengers and (ii) its predeparture COVID-19 testing requirements for international airline passengers entering Canada.

Mr. Speaker, finally, I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Government Motion 7 there shall be no evening sitting tonight.

The Speaker: You can extend the Routine if you choose. The other thing, though, I just wanted to check with the Government House

Leader: are you comfortable that the motion that you read is, in fact, the motion which you desire on the Order Paper?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, I'll read it one more time, Mr. Speaker, if you like.

The Speaker: No. If you have, it's fine. I just want to make sure that you have what you want.

Mr. Jason Nixon: No. I think we're good.

The Speaker: Okay. If you want to extend the Routine . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yeah. I will extend the Routine, please, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 2

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

This bill consists of several legislative amendments which support government's commitment to responsible financial management and respect for Alberta taxpayer dollars. The bill also enacts several specific tax changes and supports red tape reduction by harmonizing federal and provincial tax legislation. If passed, these measures will help ensure efficient use of Albertans' tax dollars and protect valuable public services today and well into the future.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I move first reading of Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

2:50

Bill 4

Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, being Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022.

The proposed changes, Mr. Speaker, to the MGA will ensure municipal bylaws align with the provincial approach to public health issues. Let me be perfectly clear. The changes proposed in this bill are extremely narrow and are strictly focused on public health requirements related to COVID-19. If passed, the legislation would require municipal bylaws relating to masks to prevent the spread of communicable diseases or COVID-19 vaccines be approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs in consultation with the chief medical officer of health. That's it. This approach will limit the ability of municipalities to pass bylaws that contradict public health policies and rules enacted by the province, again, only specifically related to COVID-19 or similar communicable diseases.

For example, the proposed changes would prevent local governments from imposing mask bylaws on private-sector operators such as grocery stores and retail businesses. These changes otherwise

would have no impact on the day-to-day operations of Alberta municipalities. Most municipalities, Mr. Speaker, already comply with public health requirements for COVID-19, so the proposed changes will have zero impact on the vast, vast, vast majority of Alberta municipalities. Local governments would continue to have the authority to implement masking bylaws for the operation of municipal facilities such as recreation centres, public transit, and other municipal buildings and places that they actually own. Individual Albertans and Alberta businesses should have the option of whether or not to wear masks or to require their customers to wear masks, and the proposed amendments to the MGA will ensure that they have that choice.

These changes will come into effect upon receiving royal assent. If passed, Mr. Speaker, this bill will ensure that Alberta has one clear public health policy as we move together on a path, we hope, towards normal. I say "we hope" because no one can predict what this virus will do next.

The Speaker: I had almost mistaken that for a second reading speech.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

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

Bill 202

Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce a bill, that being Bill 202, Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022.

Bill 202 will allow medical officers of health, cabinet, and the Minister of Health to make and issue health orders as needed but with the added transparency and accountability that can be provided by the MLAs in the Legislature so they can represent the views of their constituents, which, of course, is the role they were elected for.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 1:59 the Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Referring to a Member by Name

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rose because the Member for Lethbridge-West and our Official Opposition Finance critic – while asking her questions, the Government House Leader was heckling her by saying, "Shannon, hey, Shannon," and questioning how she was asking her question. It is a long-standing precedent in this House not to use first names, and heckling in that manner seemed to be a very deliberate attempt to throw her off her leader's question in this place. I call a point of order because using first names in this way seemed particularly malicious.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I confess I can't recall if I used the hon. member's first name. Certainly, it would be a point of order if I did, and as an abundance of caution I'd be happy to withdraw and apologize if I did use the hon. member's first name.

The Speaker: I consider this matter dealt with and concluded. I, too, did hear you use her first name, so I appreciate the apology.

At 2 o'clock the hon. Government House Leader rose on a point of order, and is someone from the government side wanting to argue this point of order? I'm not sure who – the Government House Leader himself.

Point of Order
Allegations against a Member

Mr. Jason Nixon: Yeah, absolutely, we will rise. At that time the hon. member, whose name evidently I did use, from Lethbridge . . .

Mr. Schow: West.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you very much.

. . . West heckled to the Minister of Finance that he – he, Mr. Speaker – was pickpocketing Albertans in her question. Actually, it was not a heckle. I have to rephrase. That is certainly an inappropriate thing – so I will rise on 23(h), (i), and (j) – and not something that an hon. member of this place should be accused of.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the benefit of the Blues. Certainly, if the hon. member had referred to him as an individual, then that would be unparliamentary, and if that was the case, I would apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: Well, I appreciate the apology and withdrawal because I do have the benefit of the Blues, and it says: "For the folks watching at home, the minister also doesn't want to talk about the billion dollars he's pickpocketing in personal income." In fact, that would have been a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded. The statement is withdrawn and apologized for.

At 2:10 the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs rose on a point of order.

Point of Order
Oral Question Period Practices

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm truly hopeful this won't take long. It may not be the worst sin committed here, but it was fairly blatant. Under 23(l), "introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly." At that point the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud stood up and said something very close to: I received a text right here in question period that said this. Now, I refer to you the comments you yourself have made in this House and, more specifically, to the memo that you sent at the start of the session in which you wrote, and I quote: "Members may use their mobile devices during Oral Question Period but only use

them as reading devices and not for streaming, sending or receiving messages. All connectivity, including Wi-Fi and mobile data services, must be turned off during this time (i.e., airplane mode on and Wi-Fi turned off)." I just believe that if it was important enough to you to put it to us in a memo, it might be important enough for you to rule against us doing what you warned against in the memo that you took the trouble to send.

The Speaker: The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister was very excited about calling this point of order, but he did not hear correctly. The member very clearly was talking about e-mail she received during estimates, when the minister was providing information that stakeholders patently disagreed with and were taking the time to watch the estimates and correct the government through e-mails to the Official Opposition, something that all ministers should be aware seems to be happening more and more often. I don't believe this is a point of order.

The Speaker: Why, thank you. I appreciate the submissions.

I do have the benefit of the Blues, and what the member did say is: "And given that people in the sector were e-mailing me today during estimates to fact-check the minister in real time . . ." Now, this isn't a point of order, but I might just add that I am very excited that someone did in fact read the procedural memo. So from the very bottom of my heart to you, sir, thank you. Thank you very much.

Hon. members, this concludes the daily Routine. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) and the 2022-23 main estimates schedule the Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

Prior to rising, it is important to note that the Legislative Assembly policy committees will convene this afternoon and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. This afternoon the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Infrastructure in the Grassland Room and Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance in the Rocky Mountain Room.

Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Education in the Rocky Mountain Room and the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the main estimates for the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Innovation in the Grassland Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 9, 2022

Day 6

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
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 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
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Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
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Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60 New Democrat: 23 Independent: 3 Vacant: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk | Nancy Robert, Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Committees | Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms |
| Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk | | Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms |
| Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary Counsel | Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary Programs | Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms |
| Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and Director of House Services | Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i> | Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms |

Executive Council

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Jason Kenney | Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations |
| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gottfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gottfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
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Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 9, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to introduce a group of trustees from southwestern Ontario who are visiting Alberta for the Rural Education Symposium. They are guests of the Minister of Municipal Affairs as they hail from the Thames Valley school district, where the minister grew up. I'm hoping they could perhaps provide me some tips on keeping the minister in line. Please welcome the school board trustees to the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Oil and Gas Pipeline Development

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The terrible situation in eastern Europe has shone a light on why we need to build energy infrastructure in Canada and increase our energy exports to the rest of the world. Alberta is a rights-respecting democracy with the third-largest energy reserves on the planet. We can be a major force for global stability by displacing conflict oil from Russia and other dictatorships. The world needs oil. The world needs Alberta oil.

Unfortunately, we have seen activists and misguided politicians standing in the way of us building the pipelines that we need to get our energy to market. Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. Alberta can cut off Vladimir Putin's war machine and others by building pipelines, building them fast, and building them right now. Alberta stands ready, willing, and able to supply the energy needed to displace Russia from global markets. But one thing, though: we need Ottawa and Washington to stop killing our pipelines.

On that note, the NDP members across the aisle should also stop standing in the way of pipelines. Let's not forget their record. They surrendered on Energy East, they opposed Northern Gateway, and they opposed Keystone XL. Then they appointed radical anti-oil activists like Tzeporah Berman to important positions overseeing our energy sector.

Albertans agree that this nonsense has to stop, but just recently we saw the NDP pass a resolution endorsing illegal protests along the Coastal GasLink pipeline in B.C., this despite the fact that all 20 elected chiefs and councils along the Coastal GasLink pipeline support the project. When the resolution passed, the NDP supported their radical members with one word, "solidarity," Mr. Speaker. Solidarity with whom, though? United Conservatives stand in solidarity with the elected Indigenous leaders along the Coastal GasLink pipeline and encourage Indigenous participation in the resource economy. The NDP, meanwhile, will continue to support

radical activists who want to shut our pipelines down, who are now engaging in violence.

The world is waking up to the necessity of building pipelines and getting Alberta oil to market, and our government is getting the job done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living

Mr. Schmidt: Albertans own the resources, and they should get more faster: that's the late Peter Lougheed in a 2006 interview expressing concerns that Albertans aren't sharing in the prosperity that comes from our vast resources. He went on to say about oil and gas royalties, "It is wrong in my judgment, a major wrong, and I keep trying to see who the beneficiaries are. Not the people in Red Deer, because everything they have got is costing more."

Fast-forward to 2022. We have oil at \$120 a barrel. There are reports of heavy profits coming in from all over the province. CNRL reported nearly \$3 billion in earnings in the fourth quarter of last year and raised its dividend by almost 30 per cent. Suncor netted almost \$2 billion. TC Energy earned over \$4 billion last year.

Billions in profits, Mr. Speaker, and what do everyday Alberta families get? They get record high gas prices. They get utility bills in excess of \$700 a month. They get to hand over another billion dollars to this Premier as a result of his sneaky budget creep tax scheme. They're paying more for groceries, school fees, tuition. Heck, this government even raised the fees for families trying to go camping this summer. My constituents in Edmonton-Gold Bar can't make ends meet, and similar hardship is being felt right across the province. The Finance minister has a constituent whose utility bill was \$1,900. And his response? A measly 50 bucks – 50 bucks, Mr. Speaker – while oil and gas companies earn billions on top of the billions in tax cuts that this UCP government gave to them. Tax handouts for corporations, massive tax hikes for Alberta families.

Enough is enough. Albertans deserve a bigger slice of the pie. They're wondering why the rich get richer and they have to decide between buying groceries and putting gas in the car. They're left worrying that their utility bill will be sent to collections, that their kids will be forced to give up on their dreams of a postsecondary education. It is time for a change, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East has the call.

Budget 2022

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to share that for the first time since 2014-2015 Alberta's budget is balanced, with a projected surplus of \$511 million. And it doesn't end there. Surpluses of \$900 million and \$700 million are targeted for 2023-24 and 2024-25, respectively. As a member of Treasury Board it has been an honour and privilege to work with the Minister of Finance and my Treasury Board and government colleagues to fulfill our government's commitment to balance the budget in our first term.

Favourable commodity prices certainly helped, but balancing the budget was also the result of growing the economy, financial discipline, and responsible government. To see this, consider that the previous NDP government raised spending an average of 4 per cent per year. At that rate of spending, even at projected commodity prices and assuming their policies hadn't harmed businesses or our energy sector further, Alberta would have a \$6 billion deficit this year, a \$7.5 billion deficit next year, and a \$9 billion deficit in 2024.

The previous NDP government also significantly increased taxes and regulatory burden. This year Alberta will collect approximately \$400 million more in annual corporate tax revenues at our 8 per cent rate than the previous NDP government did at 12 per cent. Our government also has cut over 21 per cent of red tape, saving Albertans and businesses an estimated \$1.2 billion while making Alberta a more desirable place to invest.

In Budget 2022 Health and Education continue to be funded at the highest levels in Alberta's history. Advanced Education, Children's Services, and social services are also seeing increases to meet the needs of Albertans.

With a growing and diversifying economy, Alberta is the best place to start a family, find a job, or build a business. Albertans have every reason to be optimistic, and with continued responsible government and financial discipline, we can avoid burdening our children so they can share in that optimism.

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

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, yesterday Albertans got to see exactly how out of touch this government is from their needs and concerns. The Finance minister, in responding to a question from his own caucus, decided to take the opportunity to boast about the Alberta affordability advantage that he claims all Albertans get to take part in. Seriously.

He said this as Albertans are facing skyrocketing utility bills. Some owe thousands in outstanding payments. He said this as Albertans are bracing for this government to take a billion dollars in higher income taxes because of the bracket creep. He said this as Albertans are facing higher school fees, higher property taxes, higher insurance bills, higher camping fees, and the list goes on. And guess what? All of these cost hikes come as a direct result of the policy decisions of this government.

Can the government be any more tone deaf? There is no affordability advantage for Albertans right now, not for my constituents being forced to choose between putting food on the kitchen table and keeping the lights on, not for those staring down bills for school fees that they'll never be able to afford, not for those who are being forced to park their vehicles because gas is more than \$1.60 a litre and their car insurance has shot up by more than 30 per cent.

It is insulting for this government to talk about an affordability advantage when they have done everything in their power to make life unaffordable for Albertans. For Albertans to have a real affordability advantage, it will require a change in government. We need a government that actually cares about Alberta families and making life affordable for them. My message to my constituents in Edmonton-Manning and to all Albertans is that help is on the way. They just need to hang on a little bit longer because in 2023 the government is changing.

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

1:40

Budget 2022

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great time for Albertans and residents of my riding of Spruce Grove-Stony Plain. Last month MLAs returned to the Legislature. When they did, this government unveiled a budget that for the first time in eight years will be balanced. This budget will help Albertans look forward for the future of this province.

One of the key pillars is going to be health care. We all know the challenges faced during this pandemic, and our government is committing a total of \$3.5 billion for health facilities, equipment,

and IT systems to expand health care capacity for Albertans no matter where they live. This includes \$133 million over three years to upgrade and expand hospital operating rooms and departments.

I'd also like to highlight that annual corporate tax revenue is expected to be \$400 million higher than the previous government's with a rate that is 4 per cent lower. Had we kept tax rates where the NDP had them, we would have had much less revenue because these crucial businesses would have gone elsewhere. COVID did make the fiscal situation challenging, but I want to thank Minister Toews for making our province an ideal place to do business.

Furthermore, on top of this budget, we have shown fiscal restraint. In comparison, if we kept spending increases at the same rate as the previous NDP government, then Albertans would be facing a massive \$6 billion deficit this year. This would take limited tax dollars to pay interest payments on debt compared to programs and services that Albertans require.

Another point that is important to my riding is our ongoing supports for youth and their journey towards a better education. We will be providing \$600 million for the Alberta at work program. Now, this new initiative will help prepare the future generation of youth for the workforce through skills training and knowledge for K to 12 and postsecondary students.

This budget is great for Albertans and residents of Spruce Grove-Stony Plain. Thanks to the hard work of our government, we can all look forward to more great things to come in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member is aware that the use of proper names for any reason is unacceptable, and he'll govern himself accordingly in the future.

The Very Reverend Bill Phipps

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, in Calgary and across Alberta people are mourning the loss of the Very Reverend Bill Phipps. Bill was an extraordinary man who embodied so much of what is best in our province. He was a leader, he was a man of faith, and he was the prophet in a baseball cap. He was a fierce advocate for LGBTQ2S-plus rights and economic justice. He founded organizations such as Faith & the Common Good and Greening Sacred Spaces. He was so passionate about climate change that he went on a week-long hunger strike and what he described as, quote, a prayer of courage for political leaders.

Mr. Speaker, Bill was a relentless advocate for the marginalized and dispossessed. He also had a wicked sense of humour, and he knew how to enjoy life. He loved to camp and watch baseball. He threw out the very first pitch at the Blue Jays game in 2000.

He knew what was great about Canada, but he didn't shy away from harsh truths about our history. When he was the United Church of Canada's 36th moderator, he offered one of the first apologies to First Nation peoples on the role his church played in the residential school system. His words are worth reflecting on today.

We know that many within our church will . . . not understand why each of us must bear the scar, the blame for this horrendous period in Canadian history. But the truth is, we are the bearers of many blessings from our ancestors, and therefore, we must also bear their burdens.

Mr. Speaker, right up until the end of his life Bill Phipps was a passionate, thoughtful, unyielding force for positive change in Alberta, Canada, and the world. I admired him deeply. On behalf of everyone in Alberta's NDP caucus I want to offer my deepest condolences to his partner, Carolyn, his family and his friends, and the entire United Church community.

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

Federal Emergencies Act

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shakespeare wrote his plays for everyone and often commented on the conditions facing ordinary citizens who were deemed by some to be the underclass, you know, the fringe minority of his time. When he wrote *Hamlet*, he said: there's something rotten in the state of Denmark. He was commenting on the lack of leadership in his own country, not in Denmark. Albertans and the vast majority of Canadians have been saying for some time that there is something rotten in Ottawa.

The PM of the present invoked the Emergencies Act against us, legislation that historically has been used to declare war. Under the guise of safety he gave his government powers, including the ability to seize private property and monies of everyday citizens that were protesting against him. Hard-working, law-abiding citizens' rights were trampled. They had to endure the onslaught of character assassinations by the PM and other elected officials, the media, that justified his draconian use of powers typically reserved for times of war. The overwhelming majority of the protesters of the freedom convoy were peaceful despite being painted quite the contrary by a number of other leaders and, like the NDP here, members at home.

Peaceful protest is a constitutional right in this country. Everyone must protect this, not crush that right with draconian use of this power, as we've recently seen. While we've seen legislation used during the pandemic at many levels of government limiting the rights and freedoms of Canadians, nothing compared to the gross overreach by the PM or his divisive language. His actions were condemned across the world, including by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. Here at home only the NDP supported him, their federal friends voting in the act to make it come into effect. At home the NDP said nothing while the whole country was crying foul as they sought to trample the constitutional rights of many Albertans taking place or participating in that convoy.

Leaders have pushed people too far. Everyday folks came together in a common cause, forcing changes to be made, freedoms to be restored, and made us all consider the quality of our leaders of the present day. There is indeed something "rotten in the state of Denmark."

Utility Costs

Mr. Dang: Life is getting more expensive for Albertans thanks to the short-sighted policies of this government. My constituents are reaching out to me directly with their worry and outrage over the lack of relief for consumers to their skyrocketing utility bills. People are asking why this government dropped the utility rate cap to pad the bottom line of already-profitable utility companies at the expense of everyday Albertans.

Albertans are doing their best to trim household expenses wherever they can, but, Mr. Speaker, they can only do so much. One constituent had to make the decision to pull their child from daycare to make ends meet and pay their nearly tripled utility bill. Another constituent shared with me, quote: I'm on fixed rates and have done everything in my power to be mindful of my consumption; I cannot afford to keep paying these ridiculous amounts and still afford food, my mortgage, and clothing for my children, you know, the basic necessities of life; I'm okay paying \$200 of gas we use to heat our home, but the other \$250 is carnage. End quote.

We're facing inflation of over 5 per cent. Albertans have seen a zero per cent increase in their wages. This means that Alberta families are dipping into their savings and going further into debt to just get by. People across the province cannot keep trying to pay more with so much less. Albertans and Alberta families should not

have to choose between buying food and keeping their houses warm during the winter. The government has promised a nearly useless utility rebate. The rates needed to trigger this rebate are highly unlikely. Relief is not coming, so as it stands, Alberta households will not see a dime of relief from this government for their rising utility bills.

They say that actions speak louder than words, and this government's inaction when it comes to keeping life affordable for Albertans is loud and clear.

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

United States Oil and Gas Imports

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the U.S. banned Russian oil. For those watching, right now, as I speak, Russia is killing civilians in Ukraine. Putin's unethical war machine is murdering children. If you buy Russian oil, you finance war crimes. By any reasonable standard Russian oil is unethical, and I applaud President Biden on his decision.

But how will they make up this loss of supply? The obvious choice is, of course, us. Canada is a global leader on ESG indexes, which include human rights, climate change action, and reconciliation. But who is Biden actually talking to? I'll tell you: Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Really?

Venezuela. In 2018 independent experts concluded that there were crimes against humanity happening: murders, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions, and torture. And how do they treat Indigenous people? Two words: Kumarakapay massacre, Venezuelan troops shooting and torturing Indigenous people in just 2019.

Saudi Arabia. Did we all forget about Jamal Khashoggi? How is the media not upset about this? And, further, do you support LGBTQ2S-plus rights? In Saudi Arabia you can be stoned to death just because of who you love. It is terrible.

And Iran. Come on. In the streets they chant: death to America. In what upside-down world are we living where you would rather send money to, and thereby strengthen the military of, people who want to kill you? You can't make this stuff up.

Mr. Speaker, through you to President Biden, please, sir, do not jump out of the frying pan into the fire. You are a champion of human rights, of LGBTQ2S-plus rights. You support Indigenous reconciliation. The choice is clear. Put your money where your values are. You may even be surprised at just how fast we can ramp up production, and, hey, we also have a net zero pipeline pretty much built in Keystone XL.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has question 1.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's postsecondary institutions can be the engine of our economic recovery, preparing our future leaders for the world of tomorrow, but how about today? Those future leaders now are struggling because of this UCP government's tuition hikes. I have a document from the University of Alberta showing that the minister personally signed off on tuition hikes in engineering, medicine, business, and other areas, some as much as 104 per cent increases. A simple question: does the minister believe somehow that higher education also means sky-high tuition rates?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Postsecondary institutions are required to consult with students regarding acceptance of tuition increases. My assumption is that they have already done this consultation prior to coming to the Minister of Advanced Education. This is just more misinformation from the NDP without any reference to the actual facts. According to Stats Canada the average undergraduate tuition in Alberta is \$6,567, and the national average is \$6,693. Alberta remains below the national average in tuition cost, and we have added millions of dollars in financial supports to ensure all Albertans have the opportunity to attend postsecondary.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this government is pushing our future leaders out of this province with these extraordinary hikes. According to StatsCan 2021 was the first year since 1988 that Alberta has a net negative migration of young people aged 18 to 24. The U of A Students' Union indicated that 61 per cent of students think that there is at least a 50-50 chance that they will leave the province, with 14 per cent already deciding to pack their bags. Why would the minister drive young people out of the province with these ridiculous tuition hikes, which are outrageous?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I believe the member opposite forgot that there was COVID and that that's probably why there wasn't migration to and from the province in postsecondary. Again, I want to reiterate the actual facts. According to Stats Canada the average undergraduate tuition in Alberta is \$6,567. That is well below the national average of \$6,693. Again, misinformation.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, for all the students out there watching this minister floundering around today, I want you to know that the NDP has your back. Let me explain how it works for you. You can stop these cuts, actually support your ambitions and desire to succeed to build a better economy. Our proposal strengthening postsecondary for a resilient future is online at albertasfuture.ca. Check it out. My question to the minister is that I can send around a copy to her office afterwards. I would be happy to do so.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Looked a lot like a prop from here. Tough to know for certain, but that's what it looked like from here.

The hon. the minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I failed to hear the question in there, but what I did want to share with everybody: you know what will keep Alberta students in Alberta or people coming to Alberta? Jobs. Jobs will keep them coming to postsecondary. They will keep them coming to Alberta. I know it's something that in K to 12 our students are looking forward to. They're looking forward to going to postsecondary. They're looking forward to going to in-person classes once again when they're able to graduate, but at the end of the day we need jobs here for Alberta students.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has the call.

Budget 2022 and Cost of Living

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the UCP government why they refuse to give Albertans back more of their income when inflation rises, or as the Premier once called it, income tax bracket creep. The Finance minister, in response, went on a bit of a space-walk, refusing to acknowledge his billion-dollar pickpocketing of the family budget. This year alone UCP inflation creep will take \$400 from families, \$350 from the seniors' benefit, and more than \$1,000

from Albertans living on AISH. I'll try again. Will the Premier reverse his inflation creep and help struggling Albertans? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government just announced the other day a 13-cent rebate on fuel taxes as well as rebates on people's electricity bills. That's a sharp contrast to that party across from me, the NDP, who brought in the job-killing carbon tax and continue to support Justin Trudeau's ridiculous carbon tax increases. Will that member stand up in this House and join the government to call on the federal government to get rid of the carbon tax once and for all and to stop punishing hard-working Albertans?

Ms Phillips: Well, for the folks at home, the UCP is recycling old talking points because they don't want to talk about how they're raising your costs, your taxes, taking money from your budget. That's my message to Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier himself as an MP in Ottawa raged against these sneaky tax increases. I'll ask the same verbatim question the Premier asked the Chrétien government. When is the Premier going to "stop this destructive tax on inflation, or will they continue to be known by Canadians as the bracket creeps?"

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this government is lowering taxes. The reason the hon. member is so upset is that she's upset about a balanced budget and the fact that we've been able to fix the tremendous damage that the NDP did when they were in power. That hon. member used to be the environment minister who oversaw a carbon tax coming in on Albertans that raised the costs on everything and continues to support the federal government bringing carbon taxes on the province of Alberta and the people that live here. Again, will that member finally stand up to Trudeau, or is she going continue to sit with him?

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, we hear every day from Albertans who must choose between buying groceries and a tank of gas to drive to a medical appointment. No rebate off-sets the UCP's billion-dollar income tax bracket creep. None. But every day this week the minister and the government refuse to acknowledge their billion-dollar tax increase. I'll ask, again, the exact verbatim question the former MP for Calgary Southeast, now the Premier, asked. To the Premier: "Why is this government telling Canadians they will get tax relief when in fact they will end up with less money in their wallets at the end of the day?"

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this side of the House will never be lectured by the NDP when it comes to taxes, particularly that member, who brought in a carbon tax on this province that they never campaigned on, that they hid from Albertans, that raised the cost of everything inside our society. This government got rid of that carbon tax, got rid of the NDP carbon tax, and continues to stand up to the federal government when it comes to the carbon tax. When is the NDP going to do the right thing for Albertans and join this government, stand up to Justin Trudeau, and get rid of the carbon tax inside this country?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the next question.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, with revenues flowing into government coffers, all this government is willing to offer Albertans is a fake

natural gas rebate and 50 bucks. Meanwhile TransAlta reported that 2021 was a, quote, record year. It earned \$1.26 billion over 12 months. Shareholders and CEOs are making off with massive profits while people in Calgary and right across the province watch in horror as their utility bills skyrocket. As this government and utility corporations are earning billions in revenues, don't Alberta families deserve more than \$50?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the NDP truly cared about the high cost of electricity, they would not have cancelled the cheapest form of electricity that our province had to offer. If they cared about the price of electricity, they wouldn't have allowed \$7.5 billion worth of transmission, much of it not needed, to be built in their term. Enough with the manufactured outrage on the part of the NDP. They should apologize to Albertans for making everything more expensive.

Ms Ganley: That minister may be unwilling to talk about the pain Alberta families are facing, but it's real. Rural Municipalities of Alberta reported that delinquent oil and gas companies owed municipalities \$253 million in unpaid taxes. The government claimed that it was bringing in a legislative hammer to force the companies to pay last year, but it hasn't worked. In fact, municipalities actually owe more this year. Can the minister explain why companies are netting billions of dollars in profit but Alberta municipalities aren't seeing any of that money, even dollars they've been owed for years?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.
2:00

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We brought in legislation last year to help municipalities collect taxes from oil and gas companies. The oil and gas companies were happy. The municipalities were happy. Everybody was happy except the NDP. Now, they're not wrong in that we need to do more and to do something else, but when they fought us on what didn't work, gosh knows how hard they're going to fight us on what we have to do that's stronger. They didn't support the municipalities the first time around. They are not on the municipalities' side. They showed that when we brought in this legislation.

Ms Ganley: More bluster from a government that admits its own program doesn't work.

One of the first actions this government took after coming into office was to hand out \$4.7 billion to already-profitable corporations. They claim that the massive giveaway was necessary to create jobs. It didn't create jobs. This government is still 130,000 jobs short of where it should be. Families are struggling, and this UCP government is nowhere to be found. All they have to offer are fake rebates and empty promises. To the government: why did corporations get billions and families got 50 bucks?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, what a ridiculous question coming from the NDP. Again, this government will not be lectured, when it comes to taxes, by the NDP, who never saw a tax increase that they did not like. Again, that side of the House has brought in carbon taxes, supported the federal government on carbon taxes. Carbon taxes have raised gas prices by 40 cents to date, 40 cents a litre. Again, will that hon. member stand up and apologize to the people of Alberta for supporting those ridiculous taxes and join this side of the House in calling on the federal government to get rid of all carbon taxes inside this country?

The Speaker: I just want to provide a very brief caution to all members of the Assembly. This is a great time to do it because every individual who had the opportunity to ask a question or answer a question took that opportunity to really point at other members of the Assembly, and I'm just not convinced that that helps raise the level of decorum. I am more than happy for you to direct your pointing at me. I have no feelings and no heart, so please feel free to do so.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

COVID-19 Vaccines and Health Care Workforce

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the direction of the provincial government: those are the first words of Dr. Verna Yiu informing her medical colleagues that there is no longer a requirement for AHS staff to be vaccinated against COVID-19. It's a clear message that under the UCP clinical decisions are made by desperate politicians, not health care professionals, yet another reminder that Albertans can't trust the UCP with their health care. Why is the Premier pandering to an extremist fringe of his own caucus instead of protecting Albertans who are sick enough to be in hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to state for the record that I do believe that you actually have a heart.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank all health care workers for actually getting vaccinated. Just under 98 per cent of full-time and part-time health care workers working for AHS got vaccinated and 99.8 per cent of doctors, so I want to thank you. Our focus throughout the entire pandemic has been on ensuring that we can protect our health care system to provide health care services for Albertans. We are balancing the risk in doing that, the risk of measures being put in place with the risk of people getting infection. This calculation has changed with omicron. We've made some changes to go along with it, and I'll speak more on that in a second.

Mr. Shepherd: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, this minister made the decision, not the health care experts.

Albertans recovering from surgeries who are struggling against a life-threatening disease have a right to expect that the people providing care to them have been vaccinated against a highly contagious disease that has killed almost 4,000 Albertans. Immunocompromised health care workers deserve protection, too, but the UCP isn't listening to them. They're listening to the people who blocked the border at the Coutts border crossing, caused almost a billion dollars in damage to our economy, and conspired to murder police officers while UCP members cheered them on. I'll ask the Premier again: why is he putting the safety of critically ill Albertans at risk to pander to a violent, extremist fringe group?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I reject the entire premise of the question. Our entire government's focus is on protecting the health of Albertans. As I indicated before, the calculation of the risk has changed. As the hon. member knows and as this whole Chamber knows, there is a shortage of health care workers. We need all the health care workers that we can get to be able to deliver the services that Albertans need.

The highly transmissible nature of omicron, Mr. Speaker, and the fact that two doses aren't as effective as they were against delta

have changed that calculation, as has the need for us to be able to provide services. We made this change, just like Manitoba did, just like Quebec did, because we're focused on providing health care to Albertans.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, the critical staffing shortage is in part because this government failed to protect the health care system and repeatedly pushed it to the limits because they put politics ahead of public health. Albertans know full well that this decision isn't about health care; it's about a weak and desperate Premier whose political career is on life support. Every single decision this government makes is an attempt to save his job on April 9 in Red Deer even if that means making hospitals less safe for Albertans battling cancer. Can the Premier tell this House how many votes he thinks he'll get in Red Deer thanks to his irresponsible meddling in Alberta's hospitals?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on providing health care and health care outcomes for Albertans. We made a choice yesterday, looking at all the evidence, and it's the same choice that was made in Quebec. It was the same choice that was made in Manitoba. We are focused on expanding the capacity for health care. In our budget we provided an additional \$600 million this year, \$1.8 billion over the next three years. We committed \$3.5 billion into infrastructure to expand our health care. We are focused on providing the best health care for Albertans, and that is what we'll do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Rural High-speed Internet

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a great day for rural Alberta, with the government of Canada matching our government's historic investment in rural broadband expansion. The combined public investment now stands at an impressive \$780 million, with more money likely coming from the private sector. The NDP committed not one red cent – or should I say “orange cent”? – to broadband expansion when they were in office, which made no sense. To the Minister of Service Alberta: why was it so important for the government to deliver where the previous government failed and bridge the digital divide for rural Albertans? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, thank you for that great question from my colleague. Yes, today I was so excited to be able to announce that Alberta's government has secured a matching agreement with the federal government for every single dollar of our \$390 million commitment to rural broadband. That means \$780 million of public-sector funding will be going to build much-needed, critical broadband infrastructure in rural Alberta. The NDP in their four years in government did absolutely nothing on this. We are taking action today. That is so important. We know how important it is. This is a priority. We have released a comprehensive and credible strategy on how to get there. And guess what? That is a funded plan.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. This is very welcome news for rural Alberta. Given that our government committed a historic \$390 million over the next four years to bring high-speed Internet to rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Alberta and given that the federal

government has matched this commitment, again to the Minister of Service Alberta: what kind of support do you anticipate seeing from the private sector now that the government has stepped up to the plate on broadband funding?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a great question, and you know what? We've always said that we need to work with all levels of government as well as the private sector to solve the broadband problem, and that's exactly what we're doing. As I said, we've got \$780 million between the Canadian government and the Alberta government that is going towards this important infrastructure. And guess what? It's going to be private-sector companies like telcos and Internet companies who will be building much of this infrastructure, and they are going to have to have skin in the game, too. Part of my job is to negotiate the maximum amount of dollars from them in exchange for the public-sector funding. I am confident that we will be able to push the total commitment north of a billion dollars.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister again for that answer. Given that our government recently released our rural broadband strategy, a plan to close the digital divide for Albertans by 2026, and given that there is a tremendous economic need to ensure all Albertans have access to reliable high-speed Internet by this time, again to the Minister of Service Alberta: how do these recent funding announcements affect the timelines for connecting all Albertans to reliable Internet services?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, another great question from my colleague and one that is so important for rural Albertans. What I'm really pleased to say is that we have been working very closely with the federal government throughout all of our negotiations on the matching funding that we announced today, and we are very close to being able to announce the first tranche of co-investment into the first projects that will see shovels in the ground this year. That is going to bring immediate relief to Albertans this year. While the NDP love to talk, we're taking real action, committing real dollars, and working with all of the stakeholders, municipal leaders, the federal government, and the private sector to get the job done.

2:10

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake, do you have one more? No?

Mr. Rehn: No.

Mr. Jason Nixon: He'll take one more.

The Speaker: Yeah. Missed his chance.

Utility Costs

Ms Renaud: Today I stood with Nora Yaghi, who runs a home-based floral business in my constituency of St. Albert. Nora, like too many Albertans, is being hit by sky-high utility bills and recently saw her bill climb over \$140, more than the same time last year. Nora found the fake natural gas rebate and the \$50 cheque offered by this government laughable. Will the minister explain to Albertans like Nora why they promised relief on skyrocketing utility bills in this budget but then delivered virtually nothing?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to say that we are as equally frustrated as Albertans are with the high cost of electricity. Our electricity market is an open and free market, and

it's a product of supply and demand. Unfortunately, the previous administration had a series of policies that drove the cost of electricity up. I would encourage anyone that is struggling or at risk of having their utilities cut off to please contact the Utilities Consumer Advocate, where there are supports that can help them.

Ms Renaud: Given that the Finance minister promised Albertans like Nora there would be relief coming for Albertans to ease the soaring monthly cost and given that the only acknowledgement of the raging-high bills in this no-help budget was the so-called natural gas rebate, which turned out to be a fake, and given that this won't do a thing to support business owners like Nora coping with these sky-high costs, will the minister explain to Albertans when the real rebate is coming, and if he can't, I assume Albertans just aren't going to see a dime this year?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's so sad when the NDP finds someone who is struggling. Their first thought is to turn on the camera. If I could just encourage the members opposite to spend less time politicizing vulnerable Albertans and encourage them to contact the Utilities Consumer Advocate. There are real supports that can help people like Nora have lower electricity bills. I would encourage them to certainly let those constituents be aware of those supports that are available to them.

Ms Renaud: Given that real people have real concerns they want real answers to, not bluster, and given that these costs and lack of supports from this government mean that small-business owners, real business owners, real people like Nora, are forced to pass on costs and forced to re-evaluate their whole lives – this is serious; this isn't about politics – will the Finance minister apologize to Nora and her customers for their action, actually lack of action, and then more bluster today? Answer the question. They need help today.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, this is going to come as a surprise to the hon. member, but facts are bipartisan. They can repeat these statements as often as they want – they can even put them on Twitter – but that doesn't make it true. Everything the NDP did for four years was to make life more expensive for Albertans. They did it to the electricity grid by raising prices, and then they brought in the biggest tax in our province's history, making everything more expensive, the carbon tax. The best thing that we can do to keep electricity prices low is to make sure that they never get close to the electricity grid ever again. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is the only one with the call.

Budget 2022 and Seniors' Expenses

Ms Sigurdson: The cost of living is having a significant impact on seniors. Utility costs are making some question if they can remain in their homes. Increases to groceries and property taxes are pushing seniors to the brink. I know the UCP claim their tax reduction on gasoline is the answer, but it means nothing for seniors who don't drive. For those who do drive, the UCP allowed insurance to skyrocket after removing the rate cap. They care more about their corporate friends than they do about seniors. When will the minister start making life more affordable for seniors?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So untrue, all of the statements she makes. Let me be clear. I'm pleased to share with you my ministry budgets, that have received a 4.2 per cent increase over last year, to bring the grand total to over \$701.2 million. With this funding we will continue to keep the seniors' benefit... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. I'm trying to call the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall to order. The minister is making it a little bit difficult. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall will come to order.

Ms Pon: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I just get so excited when I talk about seniors, so I'll just keep going. I just want to let you know that this is very important, to provide safe, stable housing for families, seniors, survivors of family violence and that those keep them healthy and safe.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that seniors with low incomes used to be able to turn to the seniors' benefit and special needs assistance for help and given that the UCP deindexed these benefits, meaning they won't keep up with skyrocketing costs, and given that we have called repeatedly for the UCP to reverse these cruel and heartless decisions, would the minister explain why she is willing to stand by and ignore Alberta seniors?

Ms Pon: Well, I don't know why the member says that I'm ignoring them. I just mentioned that this year we increased close to 4 per cent our budget and provided more service to our seniors. By the way, our seniors' benefit is one of the highest programs across Canada, and we have the lowest poverty rate for seniors. We have been looking after seniors. We will continue to do that. It's not like the opposition party. In the four years they did nothing for seniors. This government takes action and looks after our seniors.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP's budget does nothing to address affordability for seniors and given that seniors are not getting any new support – if the UCP had continued to have the seniors' benefit indexed to inflation and the cost of living, a couple would be receiving over \$350 more; this is a significant amount of money for people struggling to meet their basic needs – and given that the minister's answers are vague and unhelpful, if the minister won't do anything to help seniors, should she continue to be the minister?

Ms Pon: Yes. I am. I should continue as the Minister of Seniors and Housing. Mr. Speaker, we did pause indexing seniors' benefits while we want to get our fiscal house in order. We are so proud to present our budget in the black. We have a surplus. The opposition party in four years just increased the deficit year after year. They hate to hear that. I just want to let you know that we balanced a budget this year. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake has another question.

Rural Health Care

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the pleasure of going to High Prairie hospital a few weeks ago to commemorate the opening of the newly added dialysis facility. I've heard from many constituents these past couple of years about the need for dialysis treatment to be more available. I'm happy to see its completion. To the Minister of Health: what does this new dialysis facility mean for

the hospital, the constituents, and the health care system of Lesser Slave Lake?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Alberta's government has invested \$5.2 million to build the new dialysis unit at the High Prairie health centre. This six-station unit will treat up to 12 patients daily and will be open three days a week. It also means that High Prairie area residents like those from Whitefish First Nation won't have to travel hours to either Slave Lake or Peace River to receive this life-saving treatment. This investment directly improves the quality of life for the residents of High Prairie, the surrounding area, and all residents of Lesser Slave Lake.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that there have been questions on the number of rural doctors and especially the availability of doctors in the Wabasca area and Lesser Slave Lake as a whole, people are worried that this will have an impact on the level of health care that they will receive in the area. To the same minister: are there any plans to increase the number of rural doctors available for rural Alberta, especially in the areas of Lesser Slave Lake like Wabasca? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The focus of Alberta's government is on ensuring equitable access to health care across the entire province. This is a challenge not only in Alberta but across the country. I've spoken directly with our counterparts in AHS to ensure that recruitment efforts are prioritized for Wabasca. AHS is currently assessing a few candidates in the area right now. Wabasca will also be one of the first communities in need to receive a new medical graduate under the rural education supplement and integrated doctor experience, or RESIDE, program. Albertans deserve quality health care no matter where they are in the province, and we're focused on delivering it.

2:20

Mr. Rehn: Thank you to the minister. I know many in the Wabasca area that will be pleased to hear that. Given that there has been an increase of services provided in the area, many have been asking for the increase of services to keep coming and given that rural Albertans can find it difficult to access the health care treatment they need in their communities, to the same minister: what is the ministry working on to continually improve the quality of health care available for rural Albertans like those who live in Lesser Slave Lake?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I want to thank the hon. member for the advocacy for his constituency. Ensuring the continuity of care in Alberta's health care system is a cornerstone commitment of our government. The Speech from the Throne affirmed this, as did the commitment that we made in Budget 2022. By focusing on our overall hospital capacity, lowering surgical wait times across the board, and addressing the issues facing our continuing care facilities and many other aspects of health care, Alberta's government is committed to improving the quality of service to rural Albertans and to all Albertans. We are here to build capacity and serve the health care needs of Albertans.

Women's Workforce Participation

Member Irwin: Two hundred and thirty-two pages in Budget 2022 and barely a mention of getting women back to work. Women have been hit hard during the pandemic, and the government's signature postbudget announcement for women was worth \$1 million, a whopping .001 per cent of the government's projected spend this year. This UCP government ignores jobs for women, and they're determined to increase utility bills, car insurance, income taxes, tuition fees, camping fees, and more. Why were women left out of this government's jobs plan, and how can this province succeed when half the population is left behind?

Ms Issik: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you about how the members opposite, when they were in government, left women behind. Tens and tens of thousands of women became unemployed as they destroyed our entire Alberta economy. I'll tell you what we've done just in the last couple of days: \$1 million in bursaries announced yesterday for women in STEM at NorQuest College, Bow Valley College, and Yellowhead Tribal College; a \$3 million investment supporting women who are looking for career opportunities in the transportation industry just yesterday. I can tell you that we've taken action.

Member Irwin: Given that this government's job plan ignores women – it really does, Minister. Take a few minutes; read it. Given that this government is clearly unconcerned about women, with extensive commentary in the budget about the challenges men face in the labour market, and given that the employment rate for women is 7.7 per cent lower than it is for men in Alberta – and I'd argue that a competent government would care about ensuring that all Albertans can participate in the economy so that every Albertan can succeed and pay their bills – is this associate minister really comfortable with having fewer women employed than men? Does she care at all about doing her job?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'm really glad that the member opposite has brought up how women are being treated because I'd like to talk to you about how the NDP treats the former CA president from Calgary-Bow. It's with misogyny. It's with racism. Let me quote some of the things from the member from the constituency of Calgary-Bow.

I was warned about speaking out – that I would be a pariah, that I would be “finished” . . . Recent events with the party have demonstrated to me an unwillingness by [my] party staffers to act in good faith, act respectfully, and act with decency.

This is how they treat their own members. God knows how they're going to treat other Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Member Irwin: Given that I'm hearing from women every single day who are struggling, struggling to re-enter the workforce – and this is how this government is responding. This government brags about labour force participation even though the rate is 69.9 per cent, far below the 76.5 per cent rate they inherited when they took office. This government goes on at length about how tough the labour market is for men when it is dramatically worse for women on every single metric. Minister, admit it. This government doesn't seem to care whether women will get back to work. Where is the jobs plan for women? Where is the action?

Ms Issik: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, it's amazing to me how the members opposite seem to play with numbers. We have a 60.6

per cent employment rate amongst women in this province. I'm going to tell you that that's pretty remarkable in this country. I'll tell you what else. You want to know what we're doing to make sure that women can re-enter the workforce? It's called \$1 billion in child care, \$1 billion. When they were in power, I can tell you what that government did, a \$25-a-day pilot project that wasn't even accessible to most Albertans.

Rental Housing

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling to pay their bills. Even this Finance minister, who receives over \$250,000 in compensation, claims he can't afford his utility bill. For Albertans who make far less, it is even more severe. The spiking price of utilities, groceries, fuel, and insurance is making renters question if they can remain in their homes. To make matters worse, home prices and rent are skyrocketing, too. The *Globe and Mail* reported that the average price of a single-family home jumped 11 per cent between January and February. I'm wondering: what is the UCP doing to ensure that Alberta renters can remain in their homes?

Mr. Schweitzer: It is rich coming from the NDP when they want to talk about the economy, when they chased away thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of investment for this province. The number one thing that we can do for people to help them pay their bills: you want to know what that is, Mr. Speaker? Make sure they have a job. The NDP don't know anything about the economy or what it takes to attract investment. This government is leading the way. Alberta is going to lead the country in growth. We're diversifying our economy, leading the way in tech, film and television, agricultural value-add, manufacturing. The list goes on and on for Albertans.

Mr. Carson: Given that even with an increasing supply of homes in Calgary the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has noted that the affordable supply for the lowest fifth of income earners is decreasing – only 9 per cent of homes in the city are affordable for 20 per cent of the population – and given that the Calgary Real Estate Board has said that investors from other parts of the country are planning to buy property in the city this year, rent could spike even more. What will the UCP do in the wake of this to ensure that all renters can access homes that they can afford?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the NDP has been accused of many things, but peddling in the truth is not one of them. That is the caucus that made everything more expensive for everyday Albertans. They did that by bringing in the carbon tax, the largest tax in our province's history. Then they did the exact same thing by cancelling cheap coal-fired electricity, and they never bothered to tell Albertans that their electricity bills were going up. They turned a blind eye as they overbuilt the electricity grid by \$7 billion, again raising people's electricity bills.

Mr. Carson: Given that this UCP government has left the majority of struggling renters to fend for themselves through the pandemic and given that two years ago the residential tenancy dispute resolution service processed 91 per cent of urgent cases in 15 days but only processed 50 per cent of those cases in the same timeline last year and given that this is a drastic drop in ensuring that people with the most urgent needs and potentially living in dangerous situations can seek justice and resolution to rental disputes, the Minister of Service Alberta must tell Albertans why he is letting wait times get longer when renters need more support now.

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, we know that at this point in time our turnaround times on RTDRS dispute resolutions are a little bit slower than normal. That's understandable given all of the challenges that Albertans have been through in the middle of COVID, but the good news is that we're coming out of that. The good news is that Service Alberta's budget in Budget 2022 continues to financially support the RTDRS. We have increased the RTDRS budget compared to when the NDP was in power, and we are making sure that we will be able to get back on track to ensure that everyone who needs a dispute will have it heard in a timely manner.

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

Red Tape Reduction

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government made a commitment to reduce red tape by a third because we knew that unnecessary and redundant red tape was bad for business. I'm just wondering if the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction can give this House an update on her success, our success, in removing red tape in this province. [interjection]

2:30

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. associate minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has cut more than 21 per cent of red tape, saving Albertans and Alberta businesses over \$1.2 billion to date. Our efforts have been recognized by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, who recently awarded our government with the golden scissors award for Bill 49, the Labour Mobility Act, which makes it easier to recognize out-of-province certifications in regulated occupations, including optometrists, dental assistants, pharmacists, firefighters, veterinarians, social workers, accountants, engineers, and so much more. Incredible work is being done to save Albertans time and money and attract jobs and investment back to Alberta.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her efforts. Given that our energy sector is so important to our economy and getting Albertans back to work and given that the NDP, during their time, strangled our energy industry, can the minister outline relief red tape efforts for our energy sector and her success in that area?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Commingled well abandonments have been enabled, meaning that only one approval is needed to abandon multiple produced pools at the same time, saving industry \$584 million and speeding up reclamation. Switching from CCIR to TIER has saved industry 450 workdays and over \$330 million. We established a competitive royalty rate for helium, helping to attract investment and create jobs, and the Alberta Utilities Commission is able to approve certain natural gas fired power plants in as little as 12 days.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that red tape is not just limited to our economic sector and given that we're about keeping our promises in this government and given that other

sectors have had their fair share of red tape through numerous forms, applications, and other requirements, can the minister detail any red tape reduction reforms to other sectors in Alberta that have helped make things better for everyday Albertans?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have set a 28-day timeline for project owners to pay invoices to general contractors and have set a seven-day timeline for contractors to pay subcontractors after receiving payment. We're improving AISH by streamlining and simplifying the steps for accepting and processing applications, including the automatic enrolment of people into seniors' financial assistance programs upon turning age 65. We're also allowing municipalities to establish entertainment districts, which will revitalize communities and support tourism.

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

Utility Costs (continued)

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While this government continues to brag about their budget and make laughable claims that they're creating an affordable advantage, the reality is that they're leaving Albertans behind, like my constituents in Edmonton-Manning. For months I've been getting messages from my constituents who are struggling to cope with these skyrocketing costs. Yuri wrote to me about his utility bill that doubled to more than \$600 last month. What does the minister of economic development have to say to Yuri, whose life is unaffordable because of this terrible government?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, right now we have, around the world, a geopolitical crisis that's happening. The cost of living is going up because commodity prices are going up due to a conflict in Europe where Russia has invaded Ukraine. But the NDP continue to take advantage of crisis after crisis after crisis. When you take a look at how they handled the pandemic, there wasn't a day that went by when they didn't try and exploit an emergency. Right now we're dealing with a geopolitical situation. Alberta has the resources the world needs. We have to communicate effectively with the world about that situation.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that only months ago the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity stood in this House and bragged about how the government wasn't going to do anything to help Albertans with their skyrocketing utility costs and given that Robert wrote to me about how his bills have climbed to over \$600 each month for his family of three and that this government is only offering a measly \$50, which means he will still owe \$550 when it used to be \$250, can the minister clarify if the plan is still to do nothing to support families? Is that really what the associate minister meant?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I can say that in our province's history there was once an NDP MLA that told the truth. Now, I don't know who it was, and I don't know when it was, but I know it wasn't anybody over there. I would encourage the members opposite that when they find Albertans struggling with the high cost of utilities, put the cameras down, refer them to the Utilities Consumer Advocate. Put Albertans first. That's what we're doing on this side of the House.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: I know that the associate minister likes to be as creative as possible, but I can tell him that that was beyond the point of creativity and into the point of unparliamentary language, for which he'll apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Nally: I retract and apologize.

Utility Costs (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that while this government is hammering families with their unaffordability agenda, they're also hurting local businesses and given that Janelle, who owns a farm in my riding of Edmonton-Manning, is not eligible for the agricultural rates, meaning that this government's do-nothing approach to utilities is actually putting her livelihood at risk, and given that even if she did qualify for the fake natural gas rebate and a cheque for \$50, it's not going to help her farm, will someone, anyone on that side of the House stand up, apologize to my constituents, and promise to do better?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development has risen.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so glad to be talking about electricity. I'm so glad to be talking about rural Alberta. I've been taking phone calls on electricity in rural Alberta every day that I've been elected, and so did the person that sat here before me when they were in government. It is punitive, the carbon tax that they brought in, that their friend in Ottawa has put on us. It's punitive to agriculture. It's punitive to rural Alberta. If they want to do one thing good for rural Alberta, they should join us, ask to repeal the carbon tax. It makes everything more expensive. It accelerated the coal phase-out. It's wrecked our electricity system. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Bill 4

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, it's another day and yet another reason why Albertans can't trust the Premier and his UCP government. Last year the Premier ducked responsibility for public health decisions and said, quote, these decisions are better taken locally. In fact, he encouraged municipalities to implement their own public health measures due to the diverse needs across the province. Now the UCP government is contradicting themselves and taking the decision-making power away from municipalities through their changes to the Municipal Government Act. To the minister: why the flip-flop?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, COVID has been going on for two years, and we just heard the NDP admit that they haven't learned a thing in the last year and a half. On this side of the House we have, and consequently new information leads to new ideas. The fact is that there wasn't 90 per cent of people vaccinated a year and a half ago, there wasn't 65 per cent of people with two vaccinations a year and a half ago. This is ending. The only people I know unhappy that COVID might be ending are the folks across the aisle. The rest of Alberta can't wait. Get onboard, folks.

Member Ceci: Given that these powers currently exist under municipal authority but the Premier is now saying that he will directly target them for his own political reasons in an attempt to save his own skin at his leadership review and given that this government claims it's a grassroots party and that this Premier even signed a grassroots guarantee but now he's launching a direct attack on local democracy and the wishes of Albertans and given that these decisions should be made at the local level between democratically elected leaders and their voters, why is this government imposing a top-down governance style and usurping local democracies?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, there's so much to say to knock that down. We're all anxious to do it. It is so easy. The fact is that we are doing what Albertans want. Even in the city of Edmonton 68 per cent of the citizens of Edmonton don't want a mask bylaw. Council was told that. It's us that are onside with the people of Edmonton. We wish the NDP would get onside with them. They've elected NDP people, and they don't listen to the people of Edmonton. They should come over here because we do. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Ceci: Given that this government has repeatedly shown disdain for municipalities, their democratically elected leaders, the voters who elected them – and, in fact, the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland recently described municipalities as, quote, the children of the province and said that it's time for someone to get spanked – and given that this is the same government that constantly warns of federal government overreach but is now doing the exact same thing they accused Justin Trudeau of doing, why does this government constantly contradict itself at every step, providing further proof that Albertans just can't trust them?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the hon. member that in estimates couldn't come up with a Municipal Affairs question five times in a row, after formerly being the Finance minister. We do listen to municipalities. I'm going to blow my horn here, and I might regret this, but in fact, Mr. Speaker, I was the one called talented and lovely by the municipal leaders this morning. I was the one called their BFF several times in the bear-pit session. Now, I am far from perfect, but I can assure you that we listen to municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

2:40

Capital Plan

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Schools are essential parts of our communities, and they're an influencing factor in attracting and retaining families and businesses. The Foothills composite high school has recently been modernized but unfortunately was not expanded and is facing capacity pressures. Alberta Education considers a good capacity for a school to be between 80 to 85 per cent. Okotoks composite high school is currently at 102 per cent. To the Minister of Education: what is the plan for building new schools and addressing pressures for smaller rural communities? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member LaGrange: Thank you to the hon. member for that question. Mr. Speaker, under Budget 2022 we are investing \$2 billion over the next three years to maintain and enhance existing schools, continuing work on the 51 previously announced projects, and to support building 15 new school projects. We understand that schools are community hubs in rural communities in particular and that they are facing growth pressures, which is why nine out of the

15 school projects were announced in rural Alberta, including Camrose, Raymond, Milk River, Evansburg, Acme, Bow River, Manning, Penhold, and Valleyview. We continue to recognize the need for new school projects.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that prior to Alberta Education approving a new school, Alberta school boards and municipalities invest substantial amounts of money to run services to a location to qualify for a new school and given that the Minister of Infrastructure released a 20-year capital plan outlining the importance of a high-performing education system and given that providing details within that plan could provide more predictability for planning, to the Minister of Infrastructure: can you provide details on how your capital plan will be utilized in decision-making for future projects?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just last week we announced 15 new school projects right across the province, and there are 66 schools in planning, design, tender, or construction, and 22 of these schools will be completed in 2022. As the member pointed out, continuing to build world-class schools is a major component of the 2022 strategic capital plan. We are looking at creating solutions to address the issues raised about allocating lands. I know that my hon. colleague will continue to advocate strongly . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. Given that my constituency, much like many others, continues to grow each year and given that an essential piece to economic recovery is improving capacity in our infrastructure such as schools, water pipelines, and roads and given that the Alberta government just announced the 2022-23 fiscal budget, which allocates \$6.7 billion in capital spending over the next three years, to the Minister of Infrastructure: what assurances can you provide to communities like Highwood and constituents that investments will keep up with the community's rate of growth?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I am proud that Alberta Infrastructure will be spending \$4.8 billion over the next three years to build vital public works projects. Calgary and Edmonton will receive about a billion dollars each, but \$1.3 billion will go to other areas. Another billion and a half will go to capital maintenance and renewal all across the province. The Infrastructure Accountability Act provides the framework by which capital projects are evaluated. We're not making political decisions, but we are making sure that every region gets their fair share of funding, including NDP ridings.

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

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to rise and advise the Assembly that pursuant to Government Motion 7 there shall be no evening sitting tonight.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture.

Bill 3 Special Days Act

Mr. Orr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this very special day. I request leave to introduce Bill 3, the Special Days Act. I have the copy here.

Throughout the year Alberta's government recognizes many dates that hold significance for the people of this province, whether it's a celebration of heritage and history such as Black History Month or currently Francophonie Month or a call to take action on important social issues such as Sexual Violence Awareness Month. These dates all help us build a better province.

Mr. Speaker, there are several ways that Alberta's government currently acknowledges special days, weeks, and months. Most commonly, currently, we use proclamations or declarations to recognize their significance and share them with Albertans. However, neither of these methods have any legal protection, and also they're not easily tracked, leading to confusion and repeat requests and people not sure of what's going on. If passed, Bill 3, the Special Days Act, would be a housekeeping and good order and governance bill that would introduce a simple solution and help us more effectively recognize these special days. It would give ministers the authority to issue ministerial declarations through ministerial . . .

Speaker's Ruling First Reading of Bills

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member and the Minister of Culture as I know he hasn't had the opportunity to introduce many pieces of legislation, but first reading of a bill isn't a debatable reading. It seems to me like there's significant and perhaps very good content, but the purpose of first reading is to introduce the bill to the Assembly. The Assembly can then go on, and you can make as many additional comments as you like in further readings. So I just provide some caution. I know that we've seen this happening a little bit more in recent days, that ministers are using the opportunity to debate the bill at first reading. It's not the purpose, so I encourage the member to get to the presentation of it as quickly as possible.

Bill 3 Special Days Act (continued)

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not intending to debate, just give a brief summary so that members understand what the bill is being tabled.

Anyway, it would just give ministers the authority to issue ministerial declarations through ministerial orders. Using mechanisms to recognize special days in Alberta will reduce our red tape and standardize the future requests for approach. All ministerial declarations will be tracked on a central web page, helping to raise awareness and designating a place where people can find the details. It's a straightforward change that will not affect how Albertans submit requests; however, it will help draw greater attention to these causes, cultures, and milestones that these dates represent.

I look forward to discussing the bill in more detail in the Legislature. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this special moment.

The Speaker: My pleasure. I'm certain that a brief summary can be done in less than a minute.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has a tabling.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of a postcard that was created by Moms Stop the Harm in response to the drug poisoning emergency in our province, advocating for safe supply, supervised consumption sites, and harm reduction.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'm pleased to rise and table the requisite number of copies of five separate documents that I mentioned in estimates this morning so that everyone can have a look at them. The first is a chart from the choice in education survey in 2020 outlining the income of respondents in the survey by educational choice.

The second is a chart that is available on the Alberta Education website outlining projected and funded head counts of school divisions. It shows that despite overprojections due to COVID, boards have continued to be funded based on a higher student number than actually attending.

The third is a chart outlining student enrolment growth from 2007 to 2022.

The fourth is a table from the fiscal plan, which shows the projected increase in educational staffing for the '22-23 school year.

The fifth I look forward to speaking more about this afternoon in estimates. It outlines project approval for the 2015 to 2018 time period. During this period the previous government approved between 17 and 18 projects per year.

I would suggest that all members have a viewing of these documents. Thank you so much.

2:50

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women has a tabling.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By your permission I wish to table the requisite copies of the 2019 Alberta Labour Force Profiles showing that, in fact, in 2019, when the NDP left government, the participation for women in the labour force in Alberta was 66 per cent and not 76 per cent.

The Speaker: Hon. members, points of order. At 2:04 the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives Addressing Questions through the Chair

Mr. Schow: Indeed, I did, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and bring this point of order to the attention of the Chamber under Standing Order 23 (h), (i), and (j). At the time that you had mentioned, the Member for Edmonton-City Centre was speaking, asking a question to the Minister of Health. At that time he insinuated – I shouldn't say that. He outright said that members of the UCP were cheering on the blockaders down at the border that had cost money to the Alberta economy. Now, I find that comment, first, to be misleading, but, more importantly, he specifically pointed to the hon. Member for Taber-Warner, immediately to his right. While you cannot do things directly, you also can't do those things indirectly.

I would first say that that was a point of order because the language he used was certainly imputing false motives against

another member, and it was language that was likely to create disorder. Second to this point is that you did mention to all members of the Chamber that pointing is not something that we should be doing going forward. I respect that direction. Clearly, the Member for Edmonton-City Centre does not. So I would ask that that member retract the comments suggesting that the Member for Taber-Warner was in fact cheering on when he was down there listening to his constituents, which is his job and duly elected to do so.

The Speaker: The opposition House leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is not a point of order but a matter of debate. Certainly, it is a matter of public record that members of the UCP did cheer on and support the blockade, the same blockade that caused almost a billion dollars of damage and included people conspiring to murder police officers. This government caucus loves to use similar language to accuse the NDP – they delight in it, actually – of supporting various groups. We hear it constantly in this Chamber. In this case I would suggest that we are hearing some well-deserved embarrassment rather than a point of order. I believe this is a matter of debate.

To the Deputy Government House Leader's secondary point, I would simply note that your caution around pointing was delivered well after the Member for Edmonton-City Centre spoke. I know all members of this House will be thinking and reflecting on your caution and trying not to point going forward.

I do think this is a matter of debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you for your interjections. I agree. This is a matter of debate and not a point of order.

With respect to the pointing, listen, I'm not making an outright ban on something. I'm just suggesting that it is generally less helpful than more helpful, and if members can keep it in mind, we'll all be better served.

I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Hon. members, the daily Routine is now concluded. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) and the 2022-23 main estimates schedule the Assembly will stand adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. This afternoon the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Education in the Rocky Mountain Room, and the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Innovation in the Grassland Room.

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

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:55 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, March 10, 2022

Day 7

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 10, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of *God Save the Queen* by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. I would invite you to participate at your choosing.

Hon. Members:

God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble Queen,
God save the Queen!
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the Queen!

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's my great pleasure to introduce a number of guests to you today. Seated in the members' gallery today is Elizabeth Delos Trinos, the constituency assistant for the hon. Member for Edmonton-South West. Today, I might add, is a very special day for her and her family as today they became Canadian citizens, and I couldn't be happier for them.

Since we're all celebrating happy days together, seated in the Speaker's gallery is Emma Hopper. Emma works for the United Conservative Party caucus, and it is her birthday today.

Equally as important, and I'm unsure if it's their birthday or any other wonderful day in their lives today other than being here, seated in the galleries are Darrick Graff, president of the Fort Saskatchewan firefighters association, and Glen Rae, president of the Spruce Grove firefighters. They are guests of the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Presumptive WCB Cancer Coverage for Firefighters

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, we may not agree on much in this Chamber, but I know that all members of this Assembly can agree that incredible bravery is shown by the men and women across our province who choose to fight fires. While doing their job, firefighters are routinely exposed to burning chemicals and other toxins. In just a typical residential structure fire there can be over 265 known carcinogens. Because of these exposures, cancer is the number one cause of firefighter line-of-duty deaths.

I was proud to be part of the NDP government that updated the list of cancers that are presumed to be job related so that firefighters could be sure to get the support they need. With that update, Alberta had the most comprehensive coverage in Canada based on the

science we had at the time. Since then several more cancers have been linked to the profession, and jurisdictions like Yukon and Manitoba have extended protections beyond what we have here in Alberta.

Representatives of the Spruce Grove and Fort Saskatchewan firefighters are here with us today as part of a new lobby by the Alberta Fire Fighters Association to see improvements and expansion of presumptive cancer coverage for firefighters in Alberta. I want to thank them for their work. One of my immediate family members is a firefighter, one with a young family, and I'm extremely grateful for the advocacy work happening today.

Those who've heard me talk in this place a time or two, both when I was the labour minister and now as the opposition critic for labour, know that a safe and healthy workplace is incredibly important to me. Every worker deserves to come home safely at the end of their day. When injuries happen or occupational diseases develop because of their job, workers should get the help they need to recover and the support of our workers' compensation system.

I urge the government to update the cancer supports for Alberta firefighters by adding thyroid, pancreatic, larynx, penile, mesothelioma, and soft-tissue sarcoma to the list of presumptive cancers and to work towards improving data collection for the firefighting occupation.

I hope all members will meet with the firefighters. On behalf of this Assembly, thank you to Alberta's firefighters.

Federal Carbon Pricing

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, we all know that Canada is facing a serious inflation problem of a kind we have not seen in decades. Thanks to the inflationary money-printing policies of the federal government, rising energy prices, and increased costs for housing, it's now tougher for Canadians to make ends meet. What's worse is that at a time when Canadians and Albertans actually need relief, the federal government is once again making life more expensive. Every Albertan who receives a paycheck should be aware that Ottawa is taking a bigger share of their earnings with the 2022 CPP payroll tax hike. The Trudeau government had the opportunity to take advice from Alberta and others to cancel this tax hike, but they chose otherwise.

Now with April 1 approaching, the Trudeau Liberals are about to spring another monumental tax hike on Albertans and all Canadians. This is no April Fool's joke. On April 1 the Trudeau carbon tax is set to go up again, raising the cost of home heating, gassing up, fuelling up, further driving up the cost of groceries and every product that is transported to store shelves. The cost of fuel and heating is already rising due to global instability and demand, but the Trudeau government is still intent on sticking their hands further into the pockets of Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that Alberta's government is standing with everyday Albertans and calling on the Trudeau government to stop the carbon tax hike. I'm standing here wondering if the folks across the aisle might have the courage to do the same. Will the NDP finally stand and admit that their carbon tax was so wrong for Albertans? Will they apologize for driving up the cost of energy? Albertans are watching. Now is the time. Instead of the NDP pretending they care about inflation, they need to admit their hypocrisy, put the interests of Albertans first, and call on their close friend Trudeau to stop the tax hikes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ukraine

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ukrainian people know the meaning of turmoil. They've lived it for centuries. When Putin and his communist, socialist regime unleashed to attack Ukraine, he underestimated the sheer grit of the Ukrainian people. He has the bigger, more powerful military, but he is grossly miscalculating Ukraine and its will to protect its sovereignty and democracy. Ukrainians are tenacious underdogs, fighters, and survivors.

I am concerned about the humanitarian crisis unfolding before our eyes. Homes are being bombed, and hungry, desperate people are fleeing for their lives. Yesterday heavy fighting in Mariupol forced a humanitarian convoy to turn around. Putin's army attacked a maternity and children's hospital in Mariupol, killing innocent people. Sick children, women in labour were amongst the injured and killed. I have one question. How does the Putin regime see these women and children as a threat? I think about Ukrainian fathers and sons at war worrying about their families. Are they okay? Are they safe? Where are they? Do they have food? It sends chills down my spine.

Colleagues, we have a humanitarian crisis. The Ukrainian people have not only lost their homes; they've lost their cities. They've lost their families. People are breaking into stores in search of food, melting snow for water, and hiding in their basements without heat and electricity. Ukraine is living in survival mode.

Mr. Speaker, in the past two weeks 2.3 million people have left Ukraine. Many people, groups, and governments are stepping up, including ours. I'm proud that our Premier and government see the humanitarian need in Ukraine and are providing \$11 million in humanitarian aid, \$350,000 for local organizations involved in the aid programs. This will help provide much-needed initial aid for the people of Ukraine.

Mr. Speaker, Ukraine will continue to stand strong against the tyranny of Putin. Ukrainians are strong, resilient, and will continue to fight for freedom. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

1:40 Personal Income Tax Deindexation

Mr. Nielsen: This year the government will take \$1 billion in higher income taxes from Alberta families. While the Premier and Finance minister try to tell Albertans that they are not, the facts are, sadly, not on their side. Using deindexation of the income tax bracket, this government has raised everyone's income taxes through a strategy known as bracket creep. Now, many of you watching at home may be asking: what is bracket creep? A very good question, for which I will quote an expert on the subject, an expert who for years railed against this sneaky, billion-dollar pickpocketing of taxpayers, who had strong words to describe bracket creep and the impact it has on Albertans, powerful words that I will read today.

Bracket creep is a hidden tax grab, an enormous, insidious tax grab, an insidious tax on inflation that will mean Albertans pay more. It is a destructive tax on inflation, a pernicious, invidious tax. It is the heartless and insidious bracket creep that taxes the poor and forces low-income people onto the tax rolls. It is a tax grab that taxes people without their knowing.

This once principled individual fought against bracket creep for nearly a decade. He accused those supporting it of possessing a twisted logic and called them bracket creeps. One only wonders what harsh words this individual would have for the Premier and Finance minister, who have become the biggest defenders of bracket creep and who lack the courage to even admit it. I have to imagine that the career opponent of bracket creep would be angry,

Mr. Speaker. He would be disappointed. He would be shocked, sickened, confused to see this. The individual I'm quoting today knows that what I'm saying about bracket creep is the truth. Each and every quote I said today came straight from the mouth of the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Through you to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: what happened to you?

The Speaker: While I do provide the widest possible leniency inside a member's statement, I did provide some significant comments just yesterday or the day before around referring to an individual as pickpocketing. I'm pretty sure that's what happened in the member's statement, and I'm sure it won't happen again.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Budget 2022

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After eight long years Alberta's budget is balanced. With our balance sheet back in the black, the lowest taxes in Canada, and essentially all restrictions now lifted, Alberta is truly starting to feel like Alberta again. We have the fastest growing economy in the nation, and our people are going back to work, with more than 130,000 net new jobs created in the past year alone. We are also seeing major private-sector investment in every corner of the province that would not be possible without this economic turnaround.

Budget 2022 is just more great news for Alberta's economic recovery, with significant investments in health care capacity, education, infrastructure, diversification, continuing care, and more. Albertans are celebrating this well-earned good news across the province. "This is one incredible budget," said *Calgary Herald* columnist Don Braid. "Boom, not gloom," said *Edmonton Journal* columnist David Staples. Alberta's Good News Budget Shows UCP Policies Work and NDP's Were a Disaster, said *Calgary Herald* columnist Corbella.

It's true that the only Albertans who aren't happy about this budget are the members across the aisle. The NDP is downright furious and chalking our balanced budget up to just high oil prices, but – get this, Mr. Speaker – if oil prices were exactly where they were today, those reckless members would've posted a disastrous \$6 billion deficit this year due to their out-of-control and reckless spending. We got here because our government established and followed a new set of fiscal anchors to get us back to balance. This included bringing our per capita spending in line with other provinces and keeping our net debt-to-GDP ratio low. And get this: we cut taxes, and we're bringing in more tax revenue than the previous government.

This makes the NDP mad, Mr. Speaker. They're mad that we balanced the budget through fiscal responsibility and restraint. They're mad that Albertans are going back to work and earning more money. Well, the NDP can just stay mad, because Alberta is moving forward. Our economic recovery is under way, and our greatest days are just ahead.

Thank you.

Police Services

Mr. Dach: Alberta municipal leaders have voted overwhelmingly that they do not trust the Premier and his UCP government to manage a provincial police force. Who is to blame them? Let's just look at their track record and see. The Premier made it clear what he thinks about independent investigations when he fired the Election Commissioner investigating members of the UCP caucus and the UCP leadership race, the same UCP leadership race that had been under a multiyear RCMP investigation for voter fraud, an

investigation that saw multiple ministers, MLAs, and staff interviewed by the RCMP. Not a great start, Mr. Speaker.

The previous Justice minister felt that it was okay to directly call a police chief to discuss a \$300 distracted driving ticket. This government's own report found that he tried to interfere with the administration of justice and, as a result, was no longer able to remain Justice minister and was shuffled to that labour portfolio. Instead of losing his ministerial position and being relegated to the backbenches, as one would expect in a parliamentary democracy, this minister still gets to sit in the front row and collect his \$181,000 salary.

Another prime example of how poorly this government handles justice and enforcement issues was the Coutts blockade. Our province was losing over \$44 million a day in economic revenue, crippling our supply lines and stopping our own products from getting to market, just so this government's MLAs could appease the far-right base of the UCP.

On top of the UCP's failures, the provincial police would cost hundreds of millions of dollars more annually to Albertans. This will be on top of the millions already downloaded onto municipalities in previous budgets, something this government has been refusing to acknowledge.

Albertans can't trust this plan, because they cannot trust this government, who have shown throughout their time in office that they are more focused on themselves than serving the people who elected them. Albertans need a government that respects the rule of law and will fight for justice. They will get it in 2023 from the NDP.

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

Budget 2022

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in this Assembly to highlight the importance of the balanced budget presented last month. Not only has this government's fiscal prudence set Alberta on a course for a bright future, but with this balanced budget the government has been able to fund the Alberta at work initiative, which is aimed at strengthening Alberta's workforce.

In Budget 2022 the Alberta government highlighted the need to create more opportunities to enter, participate, and thrive within the workforce to underrepresented groups such as women, Indigenous people, and individuals who belong to visible minority groups. Through the Alberta at work initiative this government will invest \$600 million over a span of three years to assist people from all walks of life to enter and to succeed in our workforce.

Mr. Speaker, this new investment is particularly important to the people of Calgary-Cross as the communities encapsulated within this great constituency represent some of the most ethnically diverse communities in Alberta. The announcement of the Alberta at work initiative is welcome news and will ensure that Albertans are given the life opportunities they need to thrive and to prosper in our great province.

All Albertans should have the same opportunity to engage in the workforce no matter their race, religion, gender, or background. Creating more space for underrepresented members of our society to engage in the workforce is a key step in ensuring that Alberta is an economic workhorse that allows people from all over the world to come to this province and prosper. Alberta has always been a beacon of hope for so many people around the world looking for a better life. With this investment in the Alberta at work initiative, Albertans can rest assured that this government has their back.

Thank you.

Budget 2022

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's finances are back in the black with a \$500 million surplus. Now, for the past two years we had heard the NDP cry that our cuts were too deep and our tax policies too radical, that reduced taxes would leave a gaping hole in the budget that could never possibly be recovered, yet two years later, when our government – surprise – delivered a balanced budget with a surplus, what did the NDP have to say about it? That it happened by accident.

Well, Mr. Speaker, judging by the NDP's very own claims over the past two years, even they know that this budget wasn't balanced by accident. Yes, even through the toughest of economic times our government was careful to bring Alberta's spending trajectory down, to keep our debt-to-GDP ratio below 30 per cent. We even brought our per capita spending to rival that of other provinces, and we forecasted the budget safely upon \$70-per-barrel WTI, despite prices now peaking above \$120 per barrel, just to be safe and ensure we weren't hedging Alberta's money.

Despite lowering the corporate tax rate to one of the lowest in North America, which the NDP swore would forfeit \$4.7 billion of revenue, we brought in \$5.1 billion of revenue because business and jobs from all over the world have flooded to our province because of this government's pro-business policies.

Even the CBC recognize that Alberta's financial position was no accident. To quote them: the simple reality is that the Premier can say that his government's hard work to control spending is what balanced the budget. Mr. Speaker, had fiscal prudence not been exercised, even with today's high oil prices this government would have run a \$6 billion deficit.

Albertans know the importance of fiscal responsibility. They know that every dollar a government spends beyond budget limitations will inevitably be paid back through high inflation, devalued currency, or crippling taxation, and that's why they elected this government on a promise to balance our budget after years of tax-and-spend policies. Now, one year ahead of schedule, we can say: promise made, promise kept.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Question 1 goes to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Content on Ukraine in Educational Curricula

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, this morning I wrote to the Minister of Education asking her to change course on her draft curriculum and to keep Ukraine – the country of Ukraine – in the elementary social studies curriculum. I am a Ukrainian Albertan, and I know full well that the choice to use the country of Ukraine in grade 3 social studies was deliberate. I strongly believe that we need to continue to educate young Albertans about Ukraine as an independent country with a rich, vibrant, and resolute history. To the Premier: will you please commit, right here and right now, to leaving the country of Ukraine in grade 3 social studies?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, of course there will be content on Ukraine throughout the school curriculum. The current draft is a high-level outline. It does not include every specific, every single point of information that would be presented to Alberta students. Ukraine is, of course, an important country to be taught about just in general terms, but it is of particular importance to Alberta, to the settlement of this province, and to its future. I hope we don't end up

politicizing what I believe is a nonpartisan consensus in support of the people and the sovereignty of Ukraine.

Ms Hoffman: I appreciate the remarks that the Premier has made in the past about Ukraine and the importance that we make sure that we support Ukraine. One of the best ways the Premier could do that is to right here, right now, today, stand up in this House and say that he will leave the country – the country – of Ukraine in grade 3 social studies. It's been taken out of his draft curriculum that everyone has discredited. Just commit right here, right now. Will the Premier please undo this horrific mistake – I'm going to hope it was just a mistake – and put the country of Ukraine, which is taken out of the elementary school social studies curriculum, back in for grade 3? Yes or no?

Mr. Kenney: I already answered the question, Mr. Speaker. This is a scope and sequence document. It's high level. It doesn't mention all of the content. Of course there will be content on Ukraine, so please take yes for an answer.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has done more to demonstrate concrete solidarity with the people of Ukraine than any province in the country, perhaps any subnational jurisdiction in the world: \$5 million to buy nonlethal military equipment, \$6 million in emergency humanitarian support. I just met this morning with the president of the Canada-Ukraine Foundation. He said that the supplies that we are funding are already on their way to Kharkiv, to Kiev, and to Odessa.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I'm giving the Premier a third chance. Absolutely, I have to say as a Ukrainian Albertan that I appreciate his words. I think that one of the most powerful things we can do is make sure that kids have an opportunity to learn about the country Ukraine. Yesterday I had to have a teachable moment to explain why we don't say: the Ukraine. It is a country. It is a nation. That is not its official title. Premier, please help teach elementary children about the history, about the current role, about the country Ukraine, which you have taken out of your draft curriculum. It's wrong.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, nothing has been taken out.

My record on these issues could not be more clear. As the federal multiculturalism minister I provided a \$10 million entitlement fund to their endowment – excuse me – to the Ukrainian Canadian Foundation of Taras Shevchenko to teach about the reality of Ukrainian-Canadian history and the internment of Ukrainian Canadians. As Minister of National Defence, Mr. Speaker, I deployed the Canadian Armed Forces to Operation Unifier to help to train and to modernize the Ukrainian military, an operation that has been extraordinarily successful in preparing Ukrainians for this fight to defend the sovereignty of their country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Corporate Taxation and Investment Attraction

Mr. Bilous: In the last election the Premier promised that his corporate tax handout was the silver bullet for our economy. He said that all we had to do was cut the corporate tax rate, and investment would come flooding back to the province. But even before the pandemic investment fell, the economy shrank, and 50,000 jobs were lost. In other words, it failed. In estimates yesterday the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation said that the corporate tax cut wasn't enough to attract investment and that they had to provide additional incentives to attract them to Alberta. Will the Premier finally admit that his corporate tax handout and his economic plan are a complete failure?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that's called leading with your chin, because that's the member who claimed that there was a, quote, \$4.7 billion corporate tax giveaway. Here's what actually happened. When the NDP raised the business tax rate by 20 per cent, revenues plummeted because investment fled the province. When this government decreased the business tax rate by one-third, guess what's happened? Revenues have increased, \$400 million more revenue from our eight-point corporate tax than the 12-point tax generated by the NDP. That's what growth does.

Mr. Bilous: Overall investment according to your own figures is lower than under the NDP government. Despite the UCP's corporate tax cut failing, the Premier doubled down on it and accelerated the cut. He said that companies would be, quote, irresponsible for not moving here. Since then, the number of head offices in Calgary has fallen from 117 to 102. Roughly one-third of office space continues to sit empty, and now capital investment is below levels seen under our government. Will the Premier, much like his jobs minister did yesterday, finally admit that his corporate tax cut has failed to attract the investment he promised Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, after the NDP's job-killing business tax hike, which was informed by their class warfare socialism, guess what happened? We saw a huge flight of businesses and investment and jobs from this province, and they were only bringing in \$2.4 billion on the corporate tax. I am pleased to report that, based on the dynamic growth of this economy across all sectors and regions, we are now projecting \$4.9 billion in corporate tax revenue.

Mr. Bilous: The fact is that our capital investment in 2018 was almost \$6 billion higher than your projections for this year, Premier.

In the last election the Premier promised that his corporate tax handout would lead to tens of thousands of jobs for Albertans, but before the pandemic 50,000 full-time jobs were lost, and in every budget they've revised their job projections downward. They're now expecting 130,000 jobs less. Calgary has the highest unemployment rate among major cities in the country. His plan has failed to produce the results he promised. Does the Premier understand that no one trusts him anymore with our economic future?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, last year Alberta: second-fastest job growth in the country. A hundred and thirty thousand net new jobs created January of this year. Two hundred thousand jobs lost across Canada but 7,000 more jobs created in Alberta. In this budget: a projection of 4.5 per cent employment growth, which is the average of private-sector projections. Best year ever in tech, best year ever in ag, best year ever in film and television, best year ever in oil and gas, best year ever in forestry, best year ever in petrochemicals: this Alberta economy, under our policies, is taking off like a rocket. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West is next.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, under this UCP government costs are rising in every way possible. If there's a way that they can make life less affordable for Albertans, they seem to find a way to make it happen. The Minister of Advanced Education signed off on an unacceptable tuition increase at the University of Alberta. It's also been confirmed that he approved increases at the University of Calgary. Extreme tuition increases like a 32 per cent increase in engineering, 25 per cent for an MBA, 15.7 per cent for tuition for

medical students. Why does this Premier – what does he have against students? Why is he allowing such outrageous tuition increases?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that future graduates from Alberta colleges and universities have a strong economy in the long run, and that won't be the case if we burden them with tens of billions of dollars of debt, which is exactly what would happen under the NDP's reckless spending plans. We had to bring control back to Alberta's spending, and, yes, that meant we challenged our universities to operate as efficiently as universities in B.C. and Ontario. They've done that. We congratulate them. But for the NDP to raise cost of living – they're cheering on their ally Justin Trudeau to increase the carbon tax on April 1.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this Premier needs to know that actions have consequences, and certainly his government just doesn't seem to understand that. Skyrocketing tuition fees have long-term implications. Alberta already falls short of other provinces in offering financial aid. Higher upfront costs create barriers for our students. If students think that the increases are just not worth the money or if they can't afford it, they just won't go to school, or they'll move out of the province. Why would this Premier support extraordinary tuition increases, decreased competitiveness, risk the option of people leaving Alberta, and create long-term disastrous consequences?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: In fact, Mr. Speaker, according to StatsCan the average undergraduate tuition in Alberta is \$6,500, and in Canada it's \$6,700. Those students also pay lower taxes here. They don't pay a sales tax. They have much lower housing costs. Why would somebody pick up and move to Toronto or Vancouver and pay three times the housing costs and pay a sales tax and pay more to heat their homes while the NDP is cheering Justin Trudeau on to increase the cost of energy? When it comes to issues like the cost of living, taking a lesson from the NDP is like taking a lesson from an arsonist in putting out a fire.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this government's claim that the tuition in Alberta is lower than the national average simply isn't true. Universities, colleges, and polytechnics are scrambling to keep the lights on. Tuition increases are not the solution. Why would this Premier approve exceptional tuition agreements with our largest universities, download the costs onto the backs of students, who are already suffering as this UCP government makes life unaffordable for Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the reality is this. Had we continued with the NDP's reckless spending track of 4 or 5 per cent annual growth in spending, we would still have a \$6 billion deficit and then in two years an \$8 billion deficit. Those very same students would have to pay back that debt through their taxes plus interest. Getting our finances under control is essential for the long-term stability and growth prospects of this economy, that will benefit exactly those young Alberta students, who'll be graduating into the most dynamic economy this province has seen in many years.

Bill 4

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, today I spoke to the Alberta Municipalities spring leaders' caucus, and, boy, was there frustration in the room caused by a UCP government that is willing to use the legislative hammer to override the authority of local governments. This isn't about masks or who should be able to make health decisions. This is about a Premier picking yet another fight to shore

up his failing leadership, and that's very sad. Why doesn't the Premier withdraw his offensive Bill 4, apologize, and pledge to restore trust with Alberta's elected municipal leaders?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, what he's talking about is the NDP's desire to force Edmontonians against their wishes to continue to wear masks, just like the NDP sent out the NDP labour federation to sue the government to force five-year-olds to wear masks indefinitely, just like their allies at the teachers' union, who threatened to sue us to force kids to wear masks. Then their NDP allies on Edmonton city council tried to force Edmontonians to wear masks. Guess what. Sixty-eight per cent of Edmontonians said no, and we support them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. According to an Ipsos poll only 20 per cent of Albertans think the Premier should even stay on as Premier. That's how badly he's damaged public trust in this province. Mayors and reeves across Alberta are telling me that they don't trust this government because of endless cost downloading, forced changes to police funding, a massive cut to MSI, and heavy-handed, top-down legislation. Why won't the Premier reverse his approach and start working with municipal leaders as partners?

Mr. Kenney: We have, and we do, Mr. Speaker. You know, I had a number of municipal mayors and councillors come up to me today and say: "You know what? Thank you for giving a positive speech to us without attacking the opposition." They said, "We wish the NDP had done the same." It's always divide and attack. Just like they want to divide Albertans on public health policy, they want their NDP allies on Edmonton city council, who have no competence in public health policy, no jurisdiction in that, to force the city to wear masks while the rest of the province is not. Why doesn't the NDP stand up for the citizens of Edmonton?

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, municipalities are our partners in improving the lives of Albertans and recovering our economy. They create jobs and provide essential public service, yet that's not how many in the UCP caucus see it. The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland made that clear in an interview. Speaking to the media, he said that municipalities are, quote, children of the province, and sometimes children need to be spanked. That's incredibly disrespectful and wrong-headed. Does the Premier agree with his member, and if he doesn't, why does he keep that member around?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, as we move on, getting our lives back to normal, Albertans want this province to be united, and they want consistency when it comes to public health measures. What the NDP wants is continued division and complexity. They want the NDP hard-core members of Edmonton city council to improvise their own public health policy against the clear wishes of Edmontonians. We are providing a very limited limitation so we can have one clear, consistent, and united provincial approach to this question.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Prenatal Benefit for Women Receiving AISH or Income Support

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The prenatal period is the most important period for a child. This time period

influences child development through to their formative years. As the overall cost of living continually rises, expectant mothers on income support and AISH are desperately in need of support during this period. To the Minister of Community and Social Services: how will you provide support for vulnerable expectant mothers?

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for this great question. Our government understands that women with limited resources often face a number of challenges during pregnancy. Therefore, today the Premier, myself, and the Associate Minister of Status of Women announced a new prenatal benefit for pregnant women on AISH and the income support program. Starting at their second trimester, they will receive \$100 additional prenatal benefits until the baby is born. This demonstrates a tangible, common-sense way we're helping Albertans . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the reply. Given that prenatal support is critical for vulnerable women throughout their pregnancy and given that income supports and AISH provide a one-time natal benefit of \$256, again to the minister: can you explain how this new prenatal benefit will add to the existing program?

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently we have a one-time special diet program for prenatal mothers to use. That is \$256. With this new addition of \$600 on top of that, \$856 will place Alberta as the highest jurisdiction in Canada to provide prenatal benefits for our vulnerable Albertans. We're very proud of this strong stand we're taking.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for the response. This benefit enables a mother to purchase the much-needed necessities for her baby. These necessities can be anything from car seats, cribs, strollers, blankets, and diapers. Again to the same minister: in what way will today's announcement of the new natal benefit improve lives?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again for the great question here. As we know, when we have the added benefits for expectant mothers, they can use the money for nutritious food, vitamins, cribs and clothing, and safe and healthy infant care. Research has repeatedly shown that good nutrition and a low-stress home environment set the baby up for success. Can you imagine, with this added benefit to expectant mothers, when the baby is born healthy, when they go to school, when they get a job, what a fantastic future it will be?

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

Utility Costs

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is for the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity, and it's quite simple. What is the average monthly rate Albertans are paying for natural gas and electricity right now, and how does it compare to the same time period last year?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, how embarrassing for the members opposite. This is pure NDP economics. The first thing they do is that they cancelled the cheapest form of electricity this province has. Then they ring up the transmission bill to the tune of \$7.5 billion, which our economy could not support. They lose a further \$1.2 billion on the Balancing Pool, and then they implement the carbon tax, the biggest tax in our province's history. Then they ask why electricity prices are going up. What a shame.

2:10

Ms Ganley: Given that the answer is that both electricity and natural gas have nearly doubled in that time period and given that the minister doesn't seem to have a clue and given that he really wants to blame his problems on everyone else – the truth is that the price for solar power is considerably lower than many other sources of generation – and given that the Official Opposition would bring in a real rebate program, can the minister tell families why he thinks it's just the system working when they're paying so much more? This minister has been in charge for three years. How about a little responsibility?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, first of all, we are a leader in Canada in market-based renewable energy, and we're very proud to embrace that power source. Let me just say that the NDP actually got what they wanted. They brought in the first carbon tax, and everybody knows that the goal of the carbon tax is to increase the price of everything. Well, now they got their wish. It's more expensive to drive your car. It's more expensive to heat your home. Everything is more expensive because of the NDP, and they have the audacity to ask why.

Ms Ganley: Given that the minister should be embarrassed to be spewing that level of misinformation in response to a simple question and given that when I asked him in November whether he would do anything to help Albertans, he proudly rose in this House and said that he planned to do nothing and given that even now, after months of struggle, all he has provided is a fake natural gas rebate and 50 bucks, can this minister explain to families how \$50 is going to make a difference when they're drowning in thousands of dollars in debt?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I will set the record straight so the member opposite can stop embarrassing herself. I was asked if I would be interested in bringing in a market price cap, and I said no because consumers can already have a rate cap. All they have to do is call the Utilities Consumer Advocate, and anybody who wants the benefit of a price cap can have one now. Again, you know, we are dealing with high . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The associate minister has a very verbose way of answering questions, and still it's difficult to hear him.

The hon. the associate minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm trying to get over my shyness and speak a little louder.

I will say this. We recognize that it was poor policies on behalf of the NDP government, and we are bringing in solutions that will help bring down costs long term, Mr. Speaker.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

(continued)

Ms Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, it would be laughable if it wasn't so serious, listening to this government talk about the respect they have for postsecondary education. Yesterday we learned that the Minister of Advanced Education was signing off on hikes of 16 to 184 per cent, which will add significant costs to students. These costs will add stress and could even push students to leave Alberta altogether. So rather than talking about how this government values students, would the minister explain why he thinks a student facing a 104 per cent tuition hike will be better off?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite should know that answer because it was their government that wrote the regulation that permits exceptional tuition increases. Under the regulation – the regulation is very clear – exceptional increases are only allowed if they demonstrate improvements to the quality of the program. All of these programs will see significant quality improvements. The universities will be able to increase work-integrated learning opportunities, hire more faculty, and create a higher quality experience for the students.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that at a time when more mental health supports are needed, this government is doubling the cost to become a counselling therapist, from over \$4,000 to over 8 and a half thousand dollars per year, and given that there is currently a massive unmet need for mental health supports and given that one of the biggest obstacles is access to mental health providers, how can the minister justify making it more difficult to become a counsellor, especially when there is so much need?

Mr. Nicolaides: Another one, Mr. Speaker, the member should know the answer to. The details are in the regulation as well, that stipulates that these increases must go directly to improving the quality of education. However, apart from that, in reviewing these increases, it was important for me to ensure that a portion of the revenue was being used to create additional student assistance. In fact, that is the case. All of these increases of revenue are being set aside to ensure that there is additional assistance for students in those programs.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that this pandemic has been stressful for students, who have had to make multiple transitions from in-person to online learning amidst other stresses, and given that this government talks a big game about how they support mental health but is limiting access, with higher costs for students and doubling the cost to become a counselling therapist, can the minister explain how making it harder for students to enter the mental health field addresses the mental health crisis they claim to care about? Will he reverse the hike?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, Budget 2022 includes \$171 million over three years to create 7,000 additional spaces in our postsecondary system, more spaces than they ever created in our postsecondary environment. As well, it also includes \$12 million over three years to expand our existing scholarships. It also includes \$15 million over three years in funding to create new bursaries to support low-income students to ensure every Albertan can access postsecondary education. I know the Member for Edmonton-North West thinks that StatsCan is lying, but tuition fees today are lower than the national average.

Tax Policies

Mr. Barnes: In 2018 UCP members voted for a policy to restore Alberta's flat tax, explicitly instructing the UCP not to wait until the budget was balanced, but, in an I-hold-the-pen move, the flat-tax policy was removed from the UCP's platform, saying that the government would further improve Alberta's tax competitiveness once the budget is balanced. Guess what? Energy prices balanced the budget. To the Minister of Finance: why can't you respect the democratically expressed wishes of your own members and make our flat tax government policy?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're so proud of the budget that our Finance minister brought in, the first balanced budget in years, with a forecast for brighter days ahead for Alberta. This government is focused every single day on attracting jobs, attracting investment into this province. Our economy is more diversified than ever. It's a team approach, and our Finance minister is doing an amazing job at that.

Mr. Barnes: Given that not only has this government failed to make good on the flat-tax promise – it actually nailed Alberta families with a sneaky, backdoor income tax hike – given that deindexing tax brackets from inflation has cost Alberta families hundreds of millions of dollars and that the minister has refused to accept any firm plan to end this bracket creep tax hike, citing that economies need to improve, and given that the minister has hundreds of millions for unbudgeted announcements just two weeks before the leadership review, can the minister tell us when he will stop his sneaky, backdoor taxes on Alberta families?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, as that member knows – and he ran on the platform to make sure we restored balance to Alberta's books. Mission accomplished for Albertans. Our Finance minister has done an amazing job getting that done. On top of that, we have done everything possible to get Albertans back to work, 130,000 jobs created last year, and when the rest of the country lost 200,000 jobs in January, Alberta added 7,000 jobs. Just because that member is bitter that the economy is turning around, it doesn't mean that we're going to lose focus on making sure that we provide jobs for Albertans.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, in estimates this week the minister responded to a question from the opposition, asserting that bracket creep tax increases are a fiscally conservative policy. That must be news to the Premier, who once wrote a column in the *Calgary Herald* describing bracket creep as a "hidden and regressive tax grab." To the minister: can you please explain to Albertans how a hidden and regressive tax grab is United Conservative fiscal policy?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:19.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has the lowest taxes in Canada, period. Our Finance minister has done an amazing job balancing the books of Alberta. It's a testament to the entrepreneurs of this province, the fact that Alberta's economy is rebounding more diversified than ever. Agriculture is seeing record years. We've got manufacturing, logistics investments, film and television that's happening in this province, record years, technology and innovation. Alberta's economy is stronger than it's been in a long time, and there are brighter days ahead.

2:20 Edmonton Federal Building Use by Premier's Office

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, there's perhaps no greater evidence of how entitled this government is than their use of the 11th floor of the Edmonton Federal Building, better known as the sky palace. You know the sky palace. It hosted the Premier's illegal white tablecloth budget whisky dinner last year while the rest of us did the responsible thing and just stayed home. I know the Premier has been using the sky palace while getting his office remodeled and renovated. Can the Infrastructure minister tell this House how much money went into moving in and out of the sky palace and whether any renovations were done at all?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, as you see outside of the Leg. Building, there are repairs going on. That's why, when the Premier's office was being impacted by those repairs, we moved them to the Federal Building and brought them back. We only spent less than \$8,000 on that move.

Member Loyola: Given that Albertans are struggling with the cost of living and that this government just doesn't care and given that I would hope that everyone in this House would agree that a better use of money would be supporting struggling Alberta families rather than sprucing up this Premier's preferred dining establishment on the 11th floor of the Federal Building so he can host more secret gatherings with his closest allies, can the minister table in this House by the end of the week every single receipt from expenses related to renovations of the sky palace and hosting in the sky palace? If he won't produce them, what is he hiding?

Mr. Panda: I'm not hiding anything, Mr. Speaker. I look the same, with clothes or without clothes. I'm as transparent as possible. I already answered that question at budget estimates. I already shared that information. We haven't spent any extra money in that office to accommodate the Premier. We already said that many times. I'm repeating it again.

Member Loyola: Given the depths that past Conservative Premiers and Infrastructure ministers have gone to to conceal the construction of a luxury apartment in the sky palace and given that the last thing Albertans want to do is wake up and find that while this government won't lift a finger to help them pay their skyrocketing bills, they shoveled money into the sky palace, will the Minister of Infrastructure agree and commit that he will go before a committee reporting to this House to develop a clear set of rules for use of the sky palace moving forward? Mr. Speaker, no one trusts this Premier or anyone in that UCP.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I already answered. If that hon. member wants to tour that office with me, I'll give him a tour of that office, how that office is being used. This member is spreading misinformation. He can come and take a first-hand view of that office. There is nothing to hide about that office. It's available for use for government purposes. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Racism and Hate Crime Prevention

Mr. Deol: It's tragic that Albertans are seeing an increasing number of racist incidents and hate crimes being faced by racialized and minority communities in this province. We have seen racialized Albertans being harassed, subjected to racist and disgusting language, and even assaulted. Every Albertan has a right to live in a province free from racism, hatred, and intolerance, and they

deserve a government that will take action to address it. It is concerning to see that not a single dollar in this budget is targeting the elimination of racism in Alberta. My question to the Minister of Justice: why is his budget silent on fighting racism?

Mr. Shandro: Well, first, let me, through you, thank the member for the question. This is a very serious issue that the government takes very seriously. But the premise of the question is false. We actually have. We're over doubling the funding for the Alberta security infrastructure program to \$5 million per year to increase safety for Albertans served by facilities that are targeted by hateful violence and vandalism. Unfortunately, his question is incorrect. We have doubled this funding, and we will continue, through my hon. colleague the associate minister of multiculturalism, to work with communities to address their concerns.

Mr. Deol: Given that the UCP government has done nothing more than lip service when it comes to supporting the racialized communities of our province even as racialized communities and community members are calling for action and given that this government has delayed for too long the release of the Anti-Racism Advisory Council recommendations, leaving many Albertans concerned that addressing the growing number of hate crimes in Alberta is not a priority for this government, what message does this Justice minister have for the racialized communities of Alberta, who expected support in this budget and got nothing?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the questions. Albertans from all backgrounds deserve the freedom and protection they need to live and worship safely and free from threats of violence and destruction. This government has done so much for newcomers that I'm so proud of, including from credential recognition to the fairness for newcomers office, to grants for funding for places of worship and multiculturalism, and we have \$620,000 in our ministry, from the Ministry of Culture, to support our efforts.

Mr. Deol: Given that the growing number of hate crimes was acknowledged in the government's throne speech but then nothing was offered in the budget to help and given that this government has dragged its heels over and over and given that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre will bring forward legislation this session to establish a process for collecting race-based data, does the Minister of Justice support collecting race-based data, and if he doesn't, can he explain his reasoning for not supporting something critical to combatting racism that is being done in other provinces?

Mr. Shandro: First, let me supplement my hon. colleague's answer and confirm that we also have provided emergency grants of various amounts to be able to show the communities throughout the province that we take these issues very seriously. We support law enforcement and targeted groups to keep vulnerable Albertans safe, Mr. Speaker, and put criminals behind bars. It's important for vulnerable Albertans and those who would target them to see that the government will not tolerate these actions. We're proud to have the support of our compassionate and caring communities behind us.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

17th Avenue S.E./Chestermere Boulevard Capacity

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Within my riding, the community of Chestermere, there is a very busy road that extends from Calgary at the east end of 17th Avenue and transitions to the west end of Chestermere Boulevard. In 2019 *MacLean's* reported that Chestermere was the third-fastest growing community in Canada, and with this population growth came an increase in traffic that now accommodates approximately three times the amount of traffic that the road is built for. To the Minister of Transportation: would the government consider expanding this road to two vehicle lanes in each direction to better accommodate thousands of commuters?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that question. Before answering the question, I'd like to take the opportunity to speak to all Albertans and everybody in this Chamber and wish them a happy belated International Women's Day. I was pleased to make an announcement a few days ago announcing a \$3 million investment to help support women who are seeking job opportunities in the transportation sector.

Now, in answer to this question, Mr. Speaker, 17th Avenue and Chestermere Boulevard is a local road that is a responsibility of both the city of Calgary and the city of Chestermere. Alberta Transportation has not communicated directly with the city on the topic of . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the city of Calgary completed their options evaluation input summary on the 17th Avenue S.E. corridor, receiving input from partners, including surrounding landowners, community associations, and government representatives, would the government, then, complete a similar consultation and evaluation with the process and the residents and stakeholders of Chestermere and surrounding area who are deeply affected by the capacity limitations of this road?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, my department is aware of the local road network in and around the city of Chestermere and is in contact with the city and county officials. While Alberta Transportation is responsible for the provincial highway network, local roads and streets are maintained by various counties, municipal districts, towns, and cities. I'm confident that the city of Chestermere will engage with residents on ways to improve Chestermere Boulevard if that's what the city council decides to do. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, if you'd like to have a private conversation, there are lots of places to do that. The Chamber isn't one of them.

The hon. the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I'll have to listen to you in *Hansard* later.

Given that the need for the increase in capacity of this road is apparent and if the consultation process between stakeholders and government agencies occurs to identify and determine with certainty that this road expansion will require this, would the government be able to give some potential help with the future of this project?

2:30

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, as the member mentioned earlier, Chestermere is one of the fastest growing communities in Canada, which creates challenges in respect to their commuter networks.

There is no process in place for Alberta Transportation to fund roadwork on 17th Avenue, Chestermere Boulevard because it is a local road. However, the city is able to use its MSI or federal gas tax fund to address upgrades on this road or in any other community.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has the next question.

Residential School Gravesite Identification

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. "The grief we felt when discovering our stolen children has opened fresh wounds." Mr. Speaker, that's Chief Sydney Halcrow of the Kapawe'no First Nation, who last week announced the discovery of 169 graves at the former St. Bernard's residential school site. They did this on their own dime as they did not want to wait any longer for provincial support. To the minister: what funding is the government of Alberta providing to this First Nation to complete and accelerate their work to confirm and discover the graves of their children?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I know the member has a great heart for the Indigenous people, so I appreciate the question. Actually, we did come up with what we call the community research grant. It was an \$8 million grant, and I'm happy to say that we went through all the numbers this morning, and everyone that applied for a grant did get one. Up in the Kapawe'no area they actually went together, four groups as a joint application, and we did give out that grant. They did receive the grant, and I'm so happy that they were able to utilize that.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. Given that the government announced the \$8 million last June to support First Nations who want to lead this work in their communities, I was concerned to hear the chief say that they didn't want to wait for provincial funding and that they chose to proceed on their own. Can the minister explain what is happening? Why are there delays to funding promised to assist in finding the unmarked graves of children in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again for the question. As soon as we heard about the discovery in B.C., we got into action right away. I was so proud of the other ministries that stepped up and helped us put the grant together to aid the communities. The group went together. We put a group together in our ministry and started working on it right away, and I'm happy to say that they were able to meet the demands that all came in. There's also a federal grant process, that I've been in contact with the federal minister about, to aid if there's any additional monies that need to be spent.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. Given that this is an extremely sensitive and painful process for Indigenous communities and it must be led by communities and given that the province's role is to ensure that resources are readily available to support the search for remains or the commemoration of the loss, will the minister accept responsibility for the unfortunate delay in releasing funds and commit to doing a better job in the future? There's no doubt we will

find more of these burial sites, and the government promised to help. Where is the help?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. You know, our hearts do go out to the communities. I was actually on-site at Kapawe'no when they started the ground-penetrating radar, and I walked the grounds there, so I understand the intergenerational trauma that's happening out there. That's why I was also happy that mental health stepped up and provided a grant as well for mental health assistance with those communities. We were able to provide two grants, and those grants have gotten out the door. Like I say, there is other help available, and we'll walk that walk with those communities, because it is such a sensitive issue.

Thank you.

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

Calgary Cancer Centre

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After decades of Conservative announcements, cancelled announcements, and more delays, our government committed to and started the construction of the Calgary cancer centre. That was wonderful news for the people of Calgary to see that project, that had been used as a prop by past governments, finally get under way, but after watching this government fight with and undermine our front-line health care workers for years, now many are still concerned about this government's actual commitment to this critical project. Will the Health minister commit that the Calgary cancer centre will be fully staffed when it opens, and if so, why is it not funded in this budget?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. Mr. Speaker, as you know, the Health budget here has 600 million more dollars this year than last year in terms of budget and another \$1.8 billion over the next three years. We are also contributing \$3.5 billion into capital, including completing the Calgary cancer centre. I can actually tell the hon. member across the way that our government is committed to be able to staff this, get it up and running, when my hon. colleague the Minister of Infrastructure will be able to turn over the keys to Alberta Health. Then we'll be able to get the staff in there.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that I appreciate those words but I do not see in this budget where they are in fact planning for the staffing of the cancer centre and given that most people in health care would tell this government that getting the building ready is only half the battle and given that I know this government has had a troubled relationship with the Calgary centre, given that it possesses members, even ministers, who worked hard at cancelling, moving, or delaying that project in past governments, can the Health minister promise that every single bed will be open and ready to receive patients when the facility opens? Will Albertans have to wait until the NDP are back in government to see this project brought to life?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said in my previous answer, we are committing to be able to staff – you know, there'll be staff moving within the Foothills campus over to the new

Calgary centre. This will be one of the top centres for dealing with cancer patients not only for Calgary but for southern Alberta and across western Canada. I am very much looking forward to the tremendous work being done by my colleague the Minister of Infrastructure in completing this and then turning the keys over to us so that we can actually start ensuring that we have the equipment ready on time, we can train up the staff, and we can get that fully staffed and be able to provide services to Albertans.

Mr. Shepherd: Given that I appreciate the minister's commitment that some existing staff will be moving over but that we're talking about all of the staff that will be needed and given the actions of the Premier, the Finance minister, and the former Minister of Health have meant that front-line health care workers have felt attacked by this government since day one and given that during the pandemic they tore up agreements with doctors, threatened to slash the pay of nurses, created a hostile atmosphere that drove health care workers out of Alberta for friendlier places and given that, again, we are not seeing in this budget specific allocations to fully staff the Calgary cancer centre, is that perhaps because this government has made it so difficult to attract and retain health care workers in our province?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to hiring and ensuring that we have the health care staff providing the health services that Albertans need. Not only have we committed an additional \$1.8 billion on the expense line in our budget; we have hired additional staff over the last number of years. AHS has had over 1,700 more RNs compared to February 2020. We have the highest level of RNs that we've ever had in our history. In addition, we continue to attract doctors in the province. That number continues to go up, and we're going to continue to work to make sure we have the staff we need to deliver . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East has a question.

Emergency Medical Services

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A strong, steady, and dependable EMS system is crucial to the Alberta health care system. It's important that every community in Alberta can access emergency medical response in a reasonable time. Over the last couple of years Alberta's EMS system has been under great strain. It is not meeting the needs of Albertans, that they deserve. Given that our government has recognized this challenge and has taken big steps to improve Alberta's EMS system, can the Minister of Health please give us a progress report on improving Alberta's EMS system?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the hon. member for the question. We've had multiple conversations on this particular issue, particularly in relation to Airdrie. Alberta's EMS workers provide life-saving services to so many people in the province. I want to thank them, through you, for all the tremendous work they've done, particularly through challenging times through COVID and the increase of the call volume. As a government we are acutely aware of the challenge, and that's why we're taking action in Budget 2022 by increasing EMS funding by 12.2 per cent. That's an additional \$64 million, an increase that goes directly to adding more ambulances and crews and addressing issues that we have with recruiting and retention of paramedics throughout the province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. That's great news.

Given that the lack of ambulances in Airdrie caused one of my constituents, who suffered a pediatric cardiac arrest, to wait over 20 minutes before an ambulance arrived and given that another one of my constituents that had a blood clot move to their lungs, causing them to pass out, had to wait on the floor for 28 minutes before an ambulance arrived and given that these are not the only serious incidents in my constituency, can the minister tell us what they are doing to improve EMS in Airdrie?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker, for the question, and thank you to the member. I have some excellent news for the people of Airdrie. Budget '22 is moving forward with our plan to strengthen EMS. We'll be adding a new ambulance in Airdrie over the next month. We are also adding 10 new ambulances in Calgary in the next two years to ease the pressure on Airdrie's EMS. We also rolled out elements of the metro response plan on February 7, and that is having results. This plan has reduced more than 43 per cent EMS services going to neighbouring centres from Airdrie . . .

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, on behalf of Airdrie. We're very grateful.

Given that health care is the number one issue in Airdrie and that I've heard loud and clear from my constituents about their concern with the lack of treatment spaces, doctors, and standard treatment and given that Airdrie has a population of over 75,000 people and is the fastest growing city in Canada and, further, given that the people of Airdrie deserve to have the same quality of health care as other Albertans, can the minister please tell us what steps are being taken to improve health care at the urgent care facility in Airdrie?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget '22 is about building health capacity. This government is listening to Albertans about the pressures on our health care system, including the advocacy of the hon. member. We're moving forward with the Alberta surgical initiative. We're spending \$133 million to build new surgical spaces. We're also spending \$100 million to add up to 50 ICU spaces across the province. Alberta's government is moving forward to provide every patient with the surgery they need within the wait times medical experts recommend. We'll continue to look at new ways to expand health care capacity, including in Airdrie.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

Federal and Provincial Energy Policies

Mr. Barnes: The war in Ukraine, just a couple of weeks old, is reshaping global economics and politics in real time. As an increasing number of countries around the world move to ban imports of Russian oil, global demand for energy products continues to rise, yet Alberta is set to miss out on what could have been the biggest boom in a generation. Instead, billions will flow to dictators and authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, Africa, and

even Venezuela. The world's worst abusers of human rights will be richly rewarded while Alberta workers struggle with unemployment and empty office towers.

Let's face it. Canada's energy policy is an abject failure. Our province is home to some of the largest energy reserves in the world. Our labour force is young and well educated. We develop our resources in a way that meets with the highest safety and environmental standards. Yet even in a world begging for energy, we have very little capacity to increase production and meet this demand. Instead of being part of the solution, we are part of the problem. How did it come to this?

Ottawa's hostility to Alberta energy is well known. Policies like the carbon tax, the no-more-pipelines bill, and the tanker ban have made it impossible for private-sector investors to proceed with major projects. Even now, with the price of oil well over \$100, TC Energy has stated again that they will not revive the Keystone XL pipeline. Yet if we're being honest with ourselves, we can't dump a hundred per cent of the blame on Ottawa. For the past three years Alberta's government has offered no consequences for Ottawa's encroachment on provincial jurisdiction. And like the NDP before it, this UCP government has wasted untold millions trying to buy social licence. But what good has it done us, and what good has it done the world around us?

Instead of virtue signalling on issues like net zero or the Paris accord, it's time to get back to what actually works for our province. Albertans don't succeed because of government; we succeed despite government. Alberta can and should be the freest and most prosperous place.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I request leave to present, in accordance with Standing Order 98(2), two petitions that have been received for private bills: the petition of Shannon Doram, president and CEO of the Calgary Young Men's Christian Association, for the Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022; and the petition of Janet McCready, board chair, and Josh Traptow, general manager of the Calgary Heritage Authority, for the Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:19 the hon. Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Preambles to Supplementary Questions

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief on this point of order. This point of order was called when the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat was speaking, delivering his second supplemental. It is common practice in this Chamber that the second supplemental be in the form of a question and not include a preamble. That member's second supplemental did the complete opposite. It was, in fact, a contravention of the procedures of this place. If we refer to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, if you'd like to, "In 1975, Speaker Jerome stated that a supplementary question arises from the Minister's response and should be put in precise and direct terms without any preamble, prior statement, or argument."

This is a member who has been in the Chamber for a number of years, once affectionately referred to as the dean of caucus. I expect

a higher level of understanding of the procedures and practice and ask the member to improve the level of his questions going forward and apologize for contravening the procedure of this place.

The Speaker: The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is not a point of order. Again, I'll end with the question: can you please explain to Albertans how a hidden and regressive tax grab is a fiscally conservative policy? Now, I appreciate why the member may have been confused, but my first sentence ends with "asserting that bracket creep tax increases are a fiscally conservative policy." It's the same statement just carried throughout the 20 seconds; that's all that this question took. Again, like the Premier, who some time ago was dead set against bracket creep and the regressiveness and the unfairness to families – and we had a change on that. In this case the first sentence is actually part of my question. This is a regressive tax on families, and both of my sentences include that statement. Thank you.

The Speaker: I appreciate the submissions. As many members will know, the preamble rule here inside the Assembly is one of the most difficult rules to create clear guidelines on. I know that the Deputy Government House Leader, while I appreciate the reference from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, also knows that the House of Commons has essentially completely departed from such a rule as the preamble rule, and there are fewer and fewer Legislatures who continue to use such a rule although we do here. Perhaps *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* isn't the best reference to use because they no longer have the rule apply at all.

I would say and I have said that for independent members, who get one question a week and have no other forum, we have applied this rule quite liberally. Perhaps a poor choice of words. We have applied this rule very broadly, and as the member has pointed out, there is clear tying from the first portion of the question to the end of the question. I don't think that this is a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Williams moved, seconded by Ms Lovely, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To Her Honour the Honourable Salma Lakhani, AOE, BSc, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 7: Mr. Neudorf]

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an absolute pleasure and honour to serve the people of Edmonton-Ellerslie over the last six, going on now seven years. I grew up in this part of the city, and I feel a special connection to it. I remember as a child having moved into the area, having so many beautiful memories that I continue to carry with me to this day, memories about the people and activities we used to do as children. For example, my friends and I would jump on our bikes and go and explore new areas of Mill Woods that were

still under construction. It was like we were going on our own little adventure to unknown lands.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Edmonton-Ellerslie is home to so many different ethnic and community cultural groups. In fact, 50 per cent of the population of Edmonton-Ellerslie is from an ethnically diverse community. Having come to this country, as many of them have, I have so much in common with the people of these communities. Growing up in Edmonton-Ellerslie was an opportunity to learn from people of so many different backgrounds. As I often say in this House, we have a lot more in common than we have different. We all care about our families, putting food on the table, taking care of the ones that we love. Every day the people of Edmonton-Ellerslie get up, go to work, and do what they have to do in order to support their families.

2:50

It very much is a working-class neighbourhood. Of course, there are many small-business owners that call Edmonton-Ellerslie home as well, who are working hard to provide for their families. They're doing their very best to not only make sure to put food on their own table but to leave a legacy for their loved ones and especially their children.

I think about all the people that I've interacted with and come to know over the last six years because of the role that I've played. For example, I recall the wonderful volunteers of the Millhurst, Southwood, Horizon, and Ellerslie community leagues. I'll give you the example of Lianne. Lianne lives in Southwood, but she's also a volunteer for the Millhurst Community League. I remember meeting Lianne for the very first time. She had a smile on her face but also that look like: we don't talk politics around here. Because, of course, for the community league it's about building unity through service to community. I guaranteed her that I'm a person that she could trust and that ultimately, no matter what my role or affiliation, I was there to work with her and the rest of the volunteers to build a strong community. What was at first a skeptical look over six years ago has become a kind embrace every time we see each other.

Regularly attending community events over the years has given me that opportunity to be able to connect with the everyday Albertans that are my constituents, to understand the real-life issues, concerns, and problems that they're going through. Many a time has been spent at a community league event, sitting and chatting with a constituent about a problem that they are experiencing in their life. Sometimes it's something very simple, and other times it's something as serious as a death in their family. It's through these conversations that I gain insight into doing my job as the MLA for Edmonton-Ellerslie. To me, making sure that life is affordable is one of the most important aspects when it comes to representing people inside of this Legislature. As I've mentioned so many times, these people are the salt of the earth, hard-working people. They don't earn exorbitant salaries, but they're happy to be contributing to their community and to this province that we all love.

I mentioned the ethnic diversity of Edmonton-Ellerslie, and I can tell you that the many community cultural groups indeed keep me busy with all the events they plan. Even during COVID I had many Zoom community events to attend, celebrating important festivals and days of religious observance, of course, for many different religions. These are also an opportunity to learn.

I remember – and I'm thankful – that very early on someone in my life told me that other people's rules and customs are different. As children you often hear children say: oh, that's weird. But I

learned to recognize that these customs are just simply different. Although they weren't my own, I could still understand the meaning and significance, both cultural and religious, behind certain customs, and although they weren't my own, they were just as important and valid for the people who observed them. Again, even though we have a diversity of philosophy, religion, and perspective, we have much more in common than we have different.

These aren't the only opportunities to connect with my constituents. Right next to my office is a charming little neighbourhood pub which is actually called The Pub, and most days, especially during the spring and summer, there's always a group of people outside just hanging out. It provides for me the opportunity to actually connect with them, hear their concerns, field their complaints about certain provincial matters, on which they are very, very informed. Many a summer day I've been leaving my office, closing up for the day, and as I exit the office, one of these constituents will strike up a conversation with me sometimes that will last for hours. I really don't mind because I've always enjoyed listening to people and learning from their perspectives and gaining insight from experiences that they've had in their own lives.

As I said, Madam Speaker, I'm very honoured and privileged to serve the people of Edmonton-Ellerslie, because I get a lot out of it. My father used to tell me that there's a big difference between getting an education and going to school. Now, of course, he and my mother pushed me to go to university but at the same time taught me that getting an education is not just something that happens inside of a classroom. It happens by actually sharing experiences with one another. Early on I learned that we are all students and teachers at the same time. Through all of these conversations that I've had with my constituents on a regular basis, I know that, at the end of the day, what's important for the people of Edmonton-Ellerslie, like most in Alberta, are their families and the ones that they love, making sure that we have a society and an economy that serves the people.

Yes, many of the families that I represent actually work in the petroleum industry. Many are subcontractors, skilled labourers, and some engineers. In conversations with them we can all agree that Alberta needs to diversify if we are to move forward as a province. No matter which door I knock on, everybody agrees that this should be the priority of the government of Alberta. I often hear statements like, "It's a no-brainer" or "I've been saying that for years," and they can't help but wonder why this hasn't been the plan all along, Conservative government after Conservative government.

Now, when we were in government, we created tax credit programs in order to provide an incentive to actually diversify and move Alberta forward. Many of those decisions were reversed when the UCP government came into power, Madam Speaker, and only a year or two later they reimplemented some of them as if they were a creation of their own. Of course, the fact that they would reimplement an Alberta NDP policy decision makes me happy, it makes the people of Edmonton-Ellerslie happy, but what this government is doing is not enough.

A lot of the families in Edmonton-Ellerslie have children going to postsecondary. They're all feeling the crunch of the higher tuition fees. Students in several programs at the University of Alberta, for example, will be facing staggering tuition fee increases this fall after the UCP Minister of Advanced Education signed off on hikes of 16 to 104 per cent higher, as the Member for Edmonton-North West expressed just yesterday in this House. I hear from many of my constituents about how postsecondary is becoming unaffordable. It's absolutely essential that postsecondary education in this province be affordable and accessible to all. I know that my colleagues and I on this side of the House will continue to fight for that, especially for all Alberta families.

Of course, Madam Speaker, this isn't the only increased cost to Albertans. When the UCP government decided to take the cap off insurance, I heard from so many constituents about how their insurance rate was going up, for some as high as 30 per cent. Even during this devastating time of the COVID pandemic, I remember early on hearing from a couple of teachers saying that because of the pandemic they're staying home. Their cars are in their garage. They're not driving that much, maybe to go to the grocery store and back, yet their insurance is skyrocketing. To date this government has done absolutely nothing to alleviate the pain of such a high cost of insurance for the people of Alberta.

Of course, as we heard in the last few weeks, utility bills are just completely out of control. It is the talk of the constituency. I can't tell you the number of e-mails and messages that I've received from constituents because of their utility bill. One lady, a single mom, told me that all of her income goes to pay for rent and electricity and that she has to be very selective when going to the supermarket because life has become unaffordable for her and her daughter. This is completely unacceptable.

I had another lady contact my office just the other day telling me that she's on income support and that she can't pay her bills. She has a child, she has a chronic illness, and she received a notice from EPCOR that her power is going to be shut off in just three days. Now, of course, I'm doing everything in my power along with my staff to make sure that that doesn't happen, but I want you to imagine the stress that this lady is going through when she gets a notice from EPCOR that her power is going to be shut off in three days.

3:00

Why does that even have to happen? This is a sign of the failure after failure of this government to provide a strong economy that includes everybody here in Alberta. These are both some of the examples of how life has become so unaffordable for so many. I would argue that the economic disparity here in Alberta continues to grow, and this is an absolute shame. I know for a fact that the Alberta which my constituents want to be a part of is one where everybody has the opportunity and everyone is treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve, where they are the focus of an economy that makes sure that no one is left behind. Unfortunately for the people of Edmonton-Ellerslie and all the people of Alberta, this government is failing to deliver on exactly that.

I want to take an opportunity to address the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the work that we all need to do in order to create spaces to have a meaningful and genuine dialogue regarding the social injustices of the past and how Indigenous people have been treated. This is something that we cannot continue to ignore, and the government of Alberta should be front and centre in recognizing these injustices and making sure that they don't happen again. But, unfortunately, we have a system that has more Indigenous children in care now than there ever were children in residential schools or picked up by the '60s scoop.

With a group of Edmonton-Ellerslie constituents that actually care about this matter, we're addressing the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Last year for Canada Day a group of my constituents decided to do a solidarity walk for all the children whose bodies were being found in mass graves at residential schools across Canada. It started because someone decided to put Canada flags on people's lawns without their consent. Now, as many of you know, southeast Edmonton used to be known as Indian reserve No. 136 of the Papaschase band. Many of the descendants of Papaschase continue to live in the ridings of Edmonton-Ellerslie, Edmonton-Mill Woods, and Edmonton-

Meadows, and it was some of these constituents, these descendants of Papaschase, that organized with other non-Indigenous constituents that same solidarity walk that I was speaking of earlier.

After the event I decided to reach out to the organizers, and what they really wanted to do, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, was to hold regular opportunities to bring Indigenous ceremony into Edmonton's southwest. We have been meeting for a few months now, and we've had one really successful event to celebrate the winter solstice. Now, when I was helping the group organize the event, one of the objectives was that it was going to be an opportunity for non-Indigenous people to learn about Indigenous ceremonies, but when the actual event was implemented, we found that Indigenous descendants, especially youth, were the ones that ended up coming to the event. They expressed that they didn't have many opportunities to engage in ceremonies and that they were so grateful that they could come to a ceremony that was actually in their area of the city. This is but just one small step.

Many of you may know of the community of Frog Lake and what happened there so many years ago. It is said that one of the warriors, Wandering Spirit, who was hung because of what happened, when asked for his final words decided to sing a love song to his wife. Now, I don't want to be misunderstood. I would never condone hurting, injuring, or killing anyone. What I am trying to point out is that what we have in common is a deep love for the people that surround us, our families and our friends.

Now, that was a very frustrating time for Indigenous people. Some would argue that it continues to be a frustrating time, but all the more reason that we need to work together to make sure that Alberta has an economy that serves everybody so that people don't get to the point of frustration when they feel like they have no hope left.

I want to thank Denise, Camille, Meera, and Alana, who are the main . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that and the words from Edmonton-Ellerslie. I would just like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 1

Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act

The Chair: I would like to recognize the hon. Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I do have more to say about this. You know what? It is incredible. For most Albertans – I would venture to say everyone in this room – Queen Elizabeth II is the only monarch we have ever known. My goodness, she's been on the throne 70 years. During her reign our province and our country have grown up. We've experienced incredible change and growth. Alberta is a place where tradition is respected and progress is embraced – one of the great things about Alberta – where anyone

from anywhere, literally, can succeed with hard work and determination. Alberta's greatness is demonstrated every day by its people who work hard, who capture the beauty and soul of the province through their many creative endeavours, and especially by people who have helped lead this province through hard times and good times, and we've experienced both.

The Queen's platinum jubilee gives us the opportunity to celebrate everything we have achieved together in the past 70 years and to tell the stories that connect everyday Albertans, like Lorna Smith from the village of Alix, to the Royal Family. When I knew her, she was retired there with her husband, but here's the interesting story: Lorna's mother served as the personal secretary to Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. As a girl Lorna and her mother both had HRH pins, Her Royal Highness pins, that granted them access to actually enter the palace at any time.

When she was about 13 or 14 years old, she tells us, she was invited with her mother to have tea with the Queen Mother in the palace ballroom. I think it was one of those kind of employee recognition kind of moments. One of Lorna's memories about that day was that the Queen Mother came in in a mauve dress and actually served them the tea. Oh. I forgot one piece: they were actually picked up by one of the palace limousines. Very challenging for a 13-year-old girl to be picked up and go to the ballroom. She didn't actually want to go at first, but her mother made her go, and she said later: I'm glad she did.

What I'm getting at here is that the jubilee is grand and many of the events and the pageantry that come along with it, and the people of Alberta are intimately connected with that. It's a part of our life and part of our history in different ways. That's part of the reason we feel we should celebrate this. Across the province you will find that some everyday Albertans have an interesting connection or memory to the Royal Family. I encourage people to share their stories of that.

Most importantly, the Queen's jubilee gives us the chance to thank the Albertans who have made it all possible here in Alberta. The Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act is Alberta's way of honouring Her Majesty's legacy and the Albertans who have embodied her commitment to community service and, indeed, world service.

Under this legislation a series of awards and scholarships will be established to help recognize people who have changed this province for the better. There are two levels of awards. There's the Premier's award. The awardees are selected, one from every high school in Alberta, and they will be recognized for their citizenship and their contribution to the province. The process then would be: out of that pool of recipients – let me get this right here – a review panel will select the recipients of the Queen's platinum jubilee award, which will also have with it a series of financial awards or scholarships. There are two of those. There's the citizenship one, and then there are also two awards and scholarships that will be for the visual and performing arts, which reward youth who have demonstrated outstanding ability in the visual and performing arts. These awards will be \$7,000 each, increased from the \$5,000 of the previous ones. It's an increase fitting, really, to the recognition of Her Majesty's 70 years of service, but it will also help students pursue their goals and do what they need to do in their education.

3:10

These awards will replace the Queen's golden jubilee awards, which were created in 2002. For the past 20 years recipients of the Queen's golden jubilee award have moved on in life. They have become business leaders, talented artists, community builders, contributed immensely to our province and to the building of Alberta. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts will continue to be

responsible for selecting the recipients of the Queen's jubilee scholarship for the visual and performing arts. The others will be, as I mentioned, by a review panel. These Albertans have all represented Alberta well, made their communities proud. The new iterations of the Queen's awards will carry on the tradition of celebrating young people who have a future in this province.

Although it's important to invest in young people, there are so many other Albertans who deserve recognition and achievement and contributions. That is why Bill 1 includes the creation of a medallion, a new one-time Queen's platinum jubilee medallion. The medallion will be awarded to 7,000 Albertans over the course of 2022. The eligibility criteria for this award will be broad so that the medal can recognize a wide range of accomplishments in many areas. For example, this could include people who have been heroes through the pandemic response or who have worked towards reconciliation in their province or who have just been community builders in amazing ways. To streamline the process, nominations will be accepted from nonprofit organizations, elected officials, and representatives from provincial organizations. This will ensure that recipients can be selected and recognized during the jubilee year, and we hope that the first medals will go out on the weekend of June 2 to 5, when we celebrate the platinum jubilee.

The final piece of this legislation is intended to recognize the efforts and impact of members of Alberta's Executive Council. All of us here know how much effort and time and hard work Executive Council members on both sides of the House over the years have put in to serving the people of Alberta. Their contributions since the creation of Alberta have helped build a vibrant and dynamic province for us. Bill 1 would designate all past, present, and future members of Executive Council as honorary members of Executive Council upon their retirement. This is a small gesture when compared to the monumental contributions they have made throughout Alberta's history, and it's a call to them to actually continue with a lifetime of service. Serving on Executive Council is a step, but it calls for a lifetime of service.

In conclusion, Madam Chair, I just want to say that the platinum jubilee recognition act will help celebrate the reign of Her Majesty in the spirit that she has expressed; a spirit of unity, the spirit of working together. More importantly, it will show Albertans how much their contributions and leadership have been valued in this province.

I would like to end, Madam Chair, with a small quote from Chris – oh; I have it here – Chris Robertson. Twenty years ago he wrote of Canada – I think it's most appropriate for this particular time. Chris Robertson wrote that: we have to develop a spirit of pride where we celebrate everything Canadian; let's pay tribute to every great Canadian, glorious Canadian deeds, and Canadian trailblazers, whatever their accomplishments; we need to put humility for our nation in the back seat; we need to shout for joy, celebrating Canada at every turn in life; we need pride that will allow us to steer our ship of Canada safely through the toughest crises of nationhood; I want to live in a country where Canadians get goosebumps every time they see the maple leaf. That's the kind of spirit for Alberta that this act seeks to encourage, and I encourage every member of the House to continue to support it.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for outlining some more of the details in regard to Bill 1 here in Committee of the Whole. Yeah, I think that the Official Opposition has generally a positive view of this bill. I think there are places within it by which we can sharpen the focus, I believe,

where it needs to be, which is with young people. The 7,000 potential nominees for a platinum jubilee medal: we should think with first consideration to young people because, of course, it's a reflection of what we hope to do, which is invest in the future. People who are going to live longer and serve longer as Albertans, in all ways possible, could of course carry that honour with them for the rest of their lives.

The other element of this, which is the scholarships: again, that's a good reflection of a focus on young people. I think that we just have to make sure we can use the medal part as a recognition for young people first and foremost as well.

Another element of it. I remember, having been in the Legislature longer, that there was a centennial medal during our 100th anniversary of the province, and one element of the government of the day for distributing those centennial medals was to try to make sure we have both a geographic spread of the honours throughout the province and a specific focus on local recognition, people who know those places in each corner of the province and can reach in and give a high-quality, perhaps, nomination and so forth for someone to get that kind of recognition. What the government of the day did with the centennial medals is that they did a lot, a certain amount of those centennial medals, to each of the 87 constituencies in the province for distribution and for nomination.

I mean, a constructive suggestion to the minister and to the government is that if we can have a way to use the natural geographic reach that we have here in the Legislature, with each of us representing 87 areas in the province, we could use that as a template for distribution and, of course, MLAs making nominations to citizens that they know that are doing a great job in each of our constituencies. I know I gave a number of medals out in my constituency, and it was really great. I still see those people today, right? It certainly makes a big impact.

The only other element of this bill, before I just wanted to make a few brief comments, is just, you know, around it being Bill 1. Traditionally, what we see: Bill 1 for each term or each session is sort of a signature piece of legislation that's driving the agenda of the government forward. I mean, while this is all great and certainly it's a worthwhile thing, the issue that I was really hoping was that Bill 1 could talk about affordability, because, of course, Madam Chair, we all know that inflation is almost unprecedented here in the province of Alberta, and it's affecting all of us in the broadest possible way. Certainly, it stems from energy prices, but it was happening even before that as well, with supply issues and things that – I don't know – some people just were not even understanding, that we're still just learning about.

So I think it's incumbent upon all of us to look to address this affordability issue head-on for all of our constituents and for the whole population of Alberta, because, you know, it's hitting hard, and it's hitting fast, and we need to be pre-emptive and not reactive to help people out. The price of gasoline, for example, is going up every single day, right? I was informed by my wife at about 8 o'clock in the morning that she had taken the bus, which I hadn't heard about for an awful long time. She said: "You know what? I wanted to fill up the car, and it was, like, \$1.70 a litre, and I just took the bus." I mean, there are ways by which we can deal with that, but lots of people in Alberta can't even take a bus because they live in places that are not served by buses and so forth.

You know, the price of food is really going up fast as well and then all of those other sundry things that people need, essentials for living: electricity, natural gas, the cost of renting an apartment, and so forth. Just everything is going up, so, yeah, I mean, while I do welcome the spirit of this bill and working through to recognize Albertans and young people especially who are making extraordinary contributions to our society, I just wanted to express that

as well. Let's not forget what the central purpose of our session is here and how we need to address, first and foremost, number one, the whole affordability issue.

With that, Madam Chair, I will take my seat. Thank you very much.

3:20

The Chair: Wonderful.

The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to express my support for this significant legislation, Bill 1, the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act. I would like to firstly express my appreciation to the Lieutenant Governor for recommending the same to the Assembly. I applaud the Premier for sponsoring this bill, that will recognize the amazing contribution Albertans have made to this beautiful province.

Madam Chair, before I express my support to this bill, I would like to recognize all the hard efforts and contributions that have been made to ensure that Albertans were protected and supported during the pandemic.

As we mark the 70th year of Her Majesty's sovereignty, the proposed law will honour Albertans who have contributed to the betterment of the province through exceptional volunteerism, public service, and community leadership. Madam Chair, everyone who wants to make a difference would pursue a job in public service. It entails prioritizing the public good over personal gain. Many public employees claim that they choose public service to give back to their communities because they love doing so, making a profession out of meaningful pursuit. Money, status, and power aren't the only factors. Working as a public servant entails putting in long hours for a great cause and being committed to your everyday duties of serving the public.

I as well commemorate Her Majesty for taking time out from her busy schedule to visit, tour our beautiful province back in 1951, 1959, 1990, 1973, and 2005. In 2002 the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Recognition Act was passed by the Alberta government, commemorating the 50th anniversary of Her Majesty's accession to the throne by establishing special awards and scholarships to recognize Alberta youth who demonstrate excellence in citizenship through leadership, community service, and volunteerism as well, Madam Chair, as exceptional ability in the visual and performing arts.

Her Majesty has governed for longer than any other monarch in British history, and she has earned world-wide love and respect. Her exceptional reign has seen Her Majesty tour the world more than any previous queen. Making several significant trips, the Queen has been an important figurehead for the U.K. and the Commonwealth through times of enormous social change. Known for her sense of duty and devotion to a life of service, Madam Chair, one of the most significant aspects of the Queen's job is public and voluntary service. Her Majesty has ties with approximately 600 charities, military groups, professional bodies, public service organizations as royal patron or president, her outstanding contribution in World War II. These range from well-known world-wide charities to tiny organizations focused on a specific issue or operating solely on a local level. Her Majesty continues to engage in a busy schedule of engagements, including visits to charities and schools, entertaining foreign heads of state, and leading the country in remembrance and joyous events, all of which are supported by other members of the Royal Family.

Madam Chair, Her Majesty has always been supporting and encouraging achievement from all walks of life through an annual program of investitures, in which she bestows honours on members

of the public, garden parties, receptions, and other awards given in her name, which allow her to express her gratitude to all those who have contributed to the nation's well-being.

Madam Chair, in recognition of the efforts, Bill 1, Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act, will contain awards, a scholarship, plaque, and a \$7,000 award, which is a \$2,000 increase over the Queen's golden jubilee awards. It is intended that 10 Albertans will receive this prize or a scholarship each year for a total of \$70,000 to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's reign of 70 years.

The Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act would also make all previous, present, and future Alberta cabinet ministers honorary members of Alberta's Executive Council. This award celebrates the numerous accomplishments made by Alberta Premiers and ministers to our province.

Madam Chair, in Alberta there have been many initiatives and awards awarded to Albertans for their significant contributions in the province such as the Albertan citizenship awards, Alberta northern lights volunteer recognition program, Great Kids award, heritage awards, minister's seniors service award recognition, volunteer recognition awards, and Stars of Alberta volunteer awards. Many of these outstanding awards pay tribute to the unsung heroes that make a difference in communities around the province, from deserving youngsters to adults who have done amazing things while facing adversity, to a person, group, company, or municipality for their work to conserve, preserve, and promote Alberta's history. As well, Alberta recognizes individuals, corporations, and charitable organizations who have a positive impact on the lives of seniors, and the communities should be honoured. These awards honour Alberta volunteers who contribute to the development of recreation in our province and community.

Our government is commemorating the numerous people who have contributed to the well-being of this province. Bill 1 would also assist the next generation in reaching new heights of leadership and instilling a feeling of responsibility and service. Giving back is also an excellent way to get to know your surroundings. Working with others who are likewise concerned about the environment can help expand networking as well as assist you in better understanding the conditions of other community members. Being an effective, empathic citizen requires having a broad, open-minded perspective of the various walks of life that surround you. You will never regret giving your time to help a cause that you are passionate about. It will enhance your life, introduce you to your community, introduce you to people and ideas that will have a good influence on your outlook for the rest of your life. Volunteering in your community allows you to grow as a person and gain a deeper understanding of how you fit in the world.

Madam Chair, volunteerism, public service, and community leadership have all contributed to making Alberta one of the greatest places to live and work. I encourage all members to support this Bill 1, Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act, which will promote and recognize the many people who have given back to this amazing and beautiful province we call our home through awards and scholarship. Again I thank the Lieutenant Governor and Premier for recognizing the amazing contributions made here in Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

3:30

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 1, Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act.

This nation is a young nation as far as its sovereignty is concerned. As a nation we don't have a huge amount of history in comparison to a lot of other nations around the world. But, in fact, our attachment to the monarchy is actually much longer and much deeper than the roots of our Canadian sovereignty. It imbues the whole depth of our Canadian fabric as it predates the creation of this great nation by many centuries.

Canadians, I believe, understand the importance of the monarchy and the role that it has played in the history of our country. The monarchy has united us, and historically it has provided a haven for those who wanted to live under a parliamentary system of democracy. In the 1700s the United Empire Loyalists, some of whom were members of my family, joined with the other colonists that were in British North America to create the colonies of British North America. It was our respect for the monarchy and our support for the parliamentary form of government that spurred the British North American colonies to unite against the Americans in the War of 1812 and even against the Fenian raids prior to 1867.

The monarchy and our parliamentary form of government have provided its people with a strong and a stable and a productive government capable of meeting the needs of its people. Indeed, in 1867, with the passage of the British North America Act, the British colonies of North America peacefully transitioned into what we would call a self-governing colony under the monarchy when we became the Dominion of Canada.

Canada, like a young person who grows into adulthood, slowly evolved into a sovereign state. World War I served as a pivotal moment as our service in World War I proved to both Canadians and to the monarch and to the British Parliament and to the rest of the world that the citizens of Canada were capable and prepared to control not only their domestic affairs but also their foreign affairs.

By 1931, with the passage of the Statute of Westminster, Canada was prepared to make decisions regarding its foreign affairs, so in 1939, when Europe and Britain and indeed the rest of the world was threatened by the expansion of fascism, Canada was prepared to defend its democracy, its monarch, and its historical mother country and indeed the rest of Europe. My grandfather and several great-uncles fought in World War II. One of them died in defence of this nation. Indeed, on VE day in the VE day parade in my mom and dad's small hometown of Shaunavon, Saskatchewan, my mother led the Victory in Europe Day parade, carrying the Union Jack, and the people proudly sang *God Save the King*.

Canada has continued to evolve, and while we have distanced ourselves from some of the symbols of our colonial past, we have maintained our close alignment with the monarchy. Our present monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, was born in 1926, the first-born child of King George VI. Her Majesty was crowned in Westminster Abbey on June 2, 1953, upon the death of her father, King George VI. In 1953 the Canadian Parliament passed the Royal Style and Titles Act, which formally made Elizabeth the Queen of Canada. It's one of the things that I had to remind my students of when I was a teacher. When we talk about the Queen, we are not talking about the Queen of Great Britain; we're talking about the Queen of Canada.

Like most Canadians, I've never known another monarch. Canada has changed a great deal over my lifetime, and many of the symbols of the monarchy have disappeared. We now have our own flag, and most Canadians today have not learned to sing the words of *God Save the Queen* in school. The royal insignia is no longer seen on every mailbox across this nation. But the one constant that has remained throughout my life is that of Queen Elizabeth II. She still reigns.

It has in recent years become progressive to question the need for having a monarchy. I will start by saying that I have to admit that I

am a monarchist. I'm a monarchist for many reasons. Our entire parliamentary system of democracy is dependent on a monarch. Technically, the power of government is derived from the monarch. The monarchy is above the ebb and the flow of everyday politics. The monarch is the head of state and is, in the sense of party politics, apolitical. The monarch serves the people as the head of state. She is not the head of government. Governments come and governments go. Political parties and issues come and go. The monarch, especially this monarch, has remained: remained as a stabilizing influence, remained above politics, remained to guide and provide advice, remained to remind us of our past and of our history and of who we are, remained to provide us with a symbol of government that can speak to all of us, above the waves and things that will divide us.

It doesn't matter whether you're a Conservative or whether you're a Liberal or whether you're a member of the NDP; Queen Elizabeth, the Queen of Canada, and her representatives, the Governor General or the Lieutenant Governors at a provincial level, are apolitical. They are symbols of unity that help to transcend our differences as Canadians.

Bill 1 not only recognizes the importance of the monarchy in our nation but, significantly, the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. This bill recognizes the truly remarkable reign, the 70-year reign, of Queen Elizabeth II. Her service began long before becoming our monarch. She helped to fight fascism. She helped to guide us and transition us from the end of the British Empire into the vibrant community we are part of called the British Commonwealth of Nations. She has dedicated herself to a life of service. She is a part of over 600 charities, 36 of which are in Canada. For all of my years I have looked forward to the Queen's Christmas message. I, like many Albertans, remember her visit to Edmonton during the Commonwealth Games.

Bill 1 recognizes this long reign, this life of service, the longest reign of any British monarch and of any Canadian monarch. This platinum jubilee recognition bill is going to create several ways of recognizing and celebrating the service of this monarch. The platinum jubilee is a chance to celebrate her legacy and the service that she has given to her people.

3:40

Queen Elizabeth II platinum jubilee awards and scholarships will recognize young Albertans who are leaders in their communities and in the arts. The Queen's platinum jubilee citizenship award and scholarships would include a medallion and a \$7,000 prize in appreciation for the contributions of those individuals. The Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act would also designate all former, current, and future Alberta cabinet ministers as honorary members of Alberta's Executive Council. This is to honour and recognize the many contributions that Alberta's premiers and ministers have made to the province. A one-time Queen's platinum jubilee medal has been created to recognize 7,000 worthy and dedicated Albertans throughout 2022. The act establishes three awards and scholarships: the Queen's platinum jubilee citizenship medal, the Premier's citizenship award in recognition of the Queen's platinum jubilee, and the Queen's platinum jubilee scholarship for the visual and performing arts.

Members of the Legislative Assembly, I would conclude by saying this: the platinum jubilee recognition act is a good bill to bring before this Assembly and to pass. In light of the 70 years of service of Her Majesty, it appears to me to be an appropriate way of recognizing a truly great and memorable monarch and a monarch that is worth recognizing and celebrating. God save the Queen.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 1 in Committee of the Whole?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 1.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 1.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. Monday, March 14, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:44 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 3rd Session (2022)

Activity to Thursday, March 10, 2022

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act (\$) (Kenney)

First Reading — 4 (*Feb. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 94-97 (*Mar. 7, 2022 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 140-44 (*Mar. 10, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 2 — Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 3 — Special Days Act (Orr)

First Reading — 124 (*Mar. 9, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 4 — Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022 (McIver)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 202 — Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022 (Loewen)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 14, 2022

Day 8

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
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Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
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Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
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Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
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Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
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Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
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Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
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Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
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Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
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Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
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| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
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| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
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| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

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| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Frey
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Williams

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Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 14, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. I would invite you to join in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Members, please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Commonwealth Day

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would like to note that today is the second Monday in March, which means it is Commonwealth Day. Commonwealth Day is a special occasion as it is on this day that we join parliaments from 54 countries comprising 2.5 billion citizens from around the world in celebration of the great institution of the Commonwealth. Commonwealth Day 2022 is especially significant in that it coincides with the platinum jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Today the Queen of Canada has provided the Commonwealth Day message, 2022, which I have taken the liberty of having placed on members' desks. In it Her Majesty renews her long-standing promise of dedication to service of her people, which, of course, includes Canadians and tens of millions of other Commonwealth residents. The Queen of Canada writes about family of nations continuing to be a point of connection, co-operation, and friendship, a place where citizens can come together to pursue common goals and common good, providing everyone the opportunity to serve and benefit and to draw strength and inspiration from what we share. Her Majesty's words are a timely appeal for unity and co-operation during these difficult times plagued by division and strife. Let us all thank Her Majesty for her inspiring words.

God save our most noble and gracious Queen.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, seated in the Speaker's gallery today is a very dear friend to all here in the Assembly, the hon. Laila Goodridge, MP for Fort McMurray-Cold Lake, accompanied by her

husband, Niall, and perhaps more importantly their son Eoghan. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Members, joining us in the galleries this afternoon, I'm pleased to introduce Tina Petrow, a councillor from the city of Airdrie, as a guest of the Member for Airdrie-East.

I'm also very pleased and honoured to have a number of Canadian Armed Forces veterans joining us today. On behalf of all members of the Assembly we thank you for your dedicated service to our country: veterans Shaun Arntsen, Mike Rude, Dave Bona, Bruce Given, along with Dene clan mother Noeline Villebrun. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

Prenatal Benefit for Women Receiving AISH or Income Support

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and share some good news. Alberta's government is now enhancing its supports for vulnerable pregnant women on AISH and income support with additional monthly support to promote healthy outcomes for both mother and child. The new prenatal benefit, which pregnant women on AISH and income support can access at the beginning of their second trimester, will provide eligible clients with \$100 per month until the baby is born, for a total of \$600. This is in addition to the current one-time prenatal benefit of \$256 for these expectant mothers at 36 weeks. These benefits will continue and are intended to support new parents with the cost of preparing for their child.

At \$856 we now have one of the highest prenatal benefits in the country. As a mother of three myself I wholly support this. Women with limited resources and income often face several additional challenges during pregnancy. This new benefit will provide these mothers with more funds to put towards their health and wellness. Research shows providing early support in a woman's pregnancy can result in healthier pregnancies and better long-term outcomes for both mother and baby. The province's children and young people are Alberta's most valuable resource, Mr. Speaker. When they thrive, this province thrives.

Alberta's government continues to support women's social and economic recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Women in Alberta are second in the nation with a 60.6 per cent employment rate while unemployment across the province has dropped to its lowest rate since before the pandemic. What does this mean, Mr. Speaker? It means we're well on our way to leading the nation. Alberta's government also successfully negotiated a plan that will see licensed daycare fees drop by an average of 50 per cent for Alberta families. I'm proud to be part of a government, this government, that not only recognizes the importance of supporting Alberta families but is acting on our promises to the province's women and children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Utility Costs

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, did anything stand out in your utility bills this month? For far too many Albertans there was a nasty shock in the mail when they opened their bills: price of car insurance, up; electricity bill, up; gas bill, up. I've been hearing from Albertans

around the clock who are faced with these skyrocketing rates and who don't know how they'll pay their bills as well as buy their groceries. The silence of the UCP government members speaks worlds about their position on this crisis they're allowing to grow. While the government members are silent, other Albertans are far from surprised. They are angry. They are scared. They are frustrated. All Albertans are raising their concerns about these increasing prices. Business owners, families, students, single parents: all of them were abandoned, left with little to no answer by their government.

What does the UCP government do to attend to rising utility bills? They blame others for their mistakes. They introduced a rebate program that won't start until next fall and which is triggered at such a high price that no Albertan will qualify, and for those facing a \$700 or more utility bill, the UCP is offering a \$50 cheque. These Albertans will not pay their bills with 50 bucks and empty promises, Mr. Speaker. These Albertans are facing massive debts if they do not get the support needed to pay these cost increases. Albertan businesses might be forced to shut their doors due to these overwhelming bills. That includes small bus lines serving rural Alberta. The UCP is not providing the solutions that people need. They offer only excuses and half measures. They won't even put a Band-Aid on a gaping wound they've inflicted on Albertan families.

To anyone facing these outrageous bills, the NDP caucus is hearing your concerns. Albertans are looking for leadership they can trust. They are tired of constantly being let down and betrayed by this government, who refuses to help those in need, and while 2023 is still far away, it's coming fast. For those members opposite who want to keep their jobs, they need to start offering solutions instead of silence. Trust takes years to build, a moment to break, and forever to repair.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East is next.

1:40 United States Oil Imports

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering the attacks and invasions that Russia has been imposing on Ukraine, no country in good conscience should be supporting oil from them. As our Premier has stated, "Every barrel of Russian oil sold in the world today is filled with Ukrainian blood."

Mr. Speaker, by putting a stop to the Keystone pipeline, Joe Biden has shown unfair criticism to Canada's natural resources and therefore increased his country's reliance on Russian oil. Not only did this decision backfire and put America in an energy crisis, but it helped fund Russia's invasion and attacks on Ukraine. Now that U.S. President Joe Biden has finally banned all oil imports from Russia, America is in need of more oil supply while Alberta, being the third-largest oil reserve on the planet as well as being right next door to the United States – naturally, we should be the solution to this energy crisis. The U.S. needs to stop trying to import oil from other dictatorships such as Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. These countries are not the solution.

After what has just happened, you would think that our national leaders would want to change direction on importing oil from unstable dictator regimes and turn toward more stable and secure options such as Alberta. [A baby cried in the gallery] Alberta oil is reliable and responsibly produced. These other countries – Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, and Iran – are not the safest, certainly not the most reliable resources to be importing oil from. The real question is: why isn't Justin Trudeau calling up U.S. President Joe Biden and making a deal to increase oil production and strengthen energy security in North America? As long as these two leaders

keep putting billions of dollars into importing oil from insecure dictatorships, North America is going to continue to struggle with their energy policy.

It is time to stop taking away energy investment from Canada and putting it in the hands of some of the world's worst administrations. Alberta oil is safe. Alberta oil is ethically sourced. Alberta oil, Mr. Speaker, is a solution.

The Speaker: Don't worry, Eoghan. Sometimes the members make me cry, too.

Broadband Strategy

Mr. Carson: Following the last election, the UCP promised to deliver Albertans a broadband strategy. After years of promises they failed to deliver anything of the sort, so we in the NDP released our own broadband strategy last November. Our report was the result of consultations with Albertans, organizations, and Internet providers on how we can connect every single Albertan to high-speed, affordable Internet and build a more resilient and diversified economy. We know how important this is to rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, so we were happy to see the UCP finally release their own broadband strategy earlier this month.

While the UCP's plan borrows a lot of the same ideas from our proposal, it also falls short in several areas. First of all, it relies on the federal government to deliver funding through an application-based system that, by definition, picks winners and losers. In contrast, our plan would deliver funding through a competitive market-based system that guarantees we are getting the most value for taxpayer dollars. Despite hearing throughout consultations that easier and quicker access to infrastructure will be needed to build broadband, there's no mention of that in the UCP's so-called plan.

With the UCP's plan lacking details and ceding control to the federal government, this could lead to even more delays under this government. In fact, the government has made four broadband announcements since last summer but have not yet connected a single house in the process. As a result, we are already seeing delays. Just a few months ago the Service Alberta minister said that Albertans would be connected by '23-24. Now they've already pushed that back to '26-27, Mr. Speaker.

It's time for this government to stop with the self-congratulatory press releases, stop the delays, and finally deliver high-speed Internet to all Albertans. If they're looking for ideas on how to achieve this, I would be happy to share a copy of our plan with them, or they can visit albertasfuture.ca.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Front-line Health Care Workers

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past two months I have been observing first-hand the incredible job our front-line health care workers do day after day as they cared for my dad. I cannot express it in enough words, my gratitude for our valiant medical staff working in Livingstone-Macleod and throughout Alberta. The steadfast dedication and unwavering courage that our fantastic paramedics, nurses, doctors, and support staff have shown over the past two years have been nothing short of remarkable.

It's not like their jobs were easy before the pandemic. They work in one of the most demanding and stressful industries imaginable, and even the minor decisions they make could mean life or death. This stress can be harmful to mental health, so I hope our health care workers take some time to care for themselves and utilize the resources available to help them. I am hopeful that this will improve

with the supporting health in first responders grant program, for one instance.

Despite the stresses that you face on a regular basis, the pandemic has added many more difficulties. Extra processes were put into place to keep you and your patients safe. These consumed more of your time out of a busy health care worker's day already. Labour shortages and sick co-workers also added to the strain and the stress. These extra processes and staffing difficulties are important to recognize because they disrupt the essential routines, but these folks continue to push through. You've seen the impacts of the virus each and every day affecting those in your community, and still you come into work determined to do your part to make the situation better. This is truly heroic.

One of the things that my dad taught me is that it's better to give than to receive, but when you do receive, always say thank you. So to my dad's nurses, his LPNs, his physiotherapists, his physicians, the food service and janitorial folks, and all who serve in these roles and many others in our health care system: from the bottom of my heart, thank you, thank you, thank you. You have all been incredible on the front lines, bringing care to our families and to our communities. From everyone here in Alberta's Legislative Assembly: we say thank you.

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

Front-line Health Care Workers

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time." That's Maya Angelou. This government tried for so long to pretend that they actually supported our front-line health heroes, the people who administered the life-saving vaccines, who did the swabs, ran the tests, did the contact tracing, supported those who were sick or who lost loved ones, and so much more. These people did so much to get us through multiple waves of this pandemic. They are heroes. They deserve respect and our gratitude. On this side of the House we offer our deep and unequalled thanks to each and every front-line worker who stepped up and worked themselves to exhaustion for their neighbours, families, communities. On behalf of the Official Opposition, thank you. The province owes you a debt we can never possibly repay.

Their thanks from this government, this Premier, and this Health minister? Immediate wage cuts: for pharmacists, a 5 per cent cut in pay; for pharmacy technicians, nearly 11 per cent; respiratory therapists, 8 per cent; health information management professionals, 7 per cent; social workers, 11 per cent; and speech language pathologists, an 8.7 per cent cut. A significant number of these workers, Mr. Speaker, are women. A slap in the face to these dedicated public servants.

But it shows us once again what the true colours are of the UCP. We all remember, on the eve of the UCP's best summer ever, how the Premier immediately launched a plan to slash the pay of nurses, the same nurses who then went back into hospitals under pressure, facing harassment and threats, saved countless lives, and prevented the total collapse of our health care system. And now, just like then, the UCP is turning on health care workers again. This Premier claims to support these workers. He claims to respect them and be thankful to them, but those are hollow words. It astonishes me that he can say it with a straight face. Health care workers know that they can't trust this government, who uses one hand to pat them on the back while the other reaches into their wallets. These heroes deserve better, Mr. Speaker. Shame on this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today and in the recent past there is and has been a historic increase in calls being placed to emergency services in Alberta. In turn, there has been a significant amount of pressure placed on emergency services and their abilities to dispatch first responders such as EMS to Albertans.

Therefore, the Alberta government has engaged in meaningful dialogue with Alberta Health Services and has now dedicated \$64 million to increase access to emergency medical services to all communities across Alberta. This new funding will aid in the increase of ground and air EMS services, extend ground ambulance contracts to assist in interfacility operations and transfers, and an increase in funding to address the hours of work initiative that aims to address EMS crew fatigue. This new funding for emergency medical services will assist in creating the necessary infrastructure needed to ensure effective emergency response across our province. It is an honour to mention and thank the tireless efforts put in day to day by our provincial heroes that work in the emergency medical services, Mr. Speaker.

Every day, come wind, rain, or snow, Albertans can depend on EMS to come to their aid in their most desperate hour. The tasking work of emergency services has a large toll on mental health and strains the personal life of emergency response staff, and their work cannot go unrecognized. Mr. Speaker, through you to all emergency services personnel across Alberta who have previously served Albertans or currently serve in emergency response teams, sincerest thanks.

Thank you so very much.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Health Care and Social Service Worker Wages

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, throughout this pandemic we have all relied on front-line caregiving Albertans like social workers, pharmacy techs, and respiratory therapists. But what's the UCP's thank you to those workers? Wage cuts and rollbacks. This as the Finance minister secretly signs off on raises for AIMCo executives of 20 to 40 per cent. Why does this Premier believe executives earning healthy six-figure salaries deserve a raise but respiratory therapists helping folks breathe deserve a rollback?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. First, I want to start off by thanking all health care workers for the tremendous work that they've been doing, particularly over the last two years and managing through the pandemic. As the members opposite know, AHS and HSAA are in the stages of bargaining. The current agreement expired on March 31, 2020, and they began bargaining last October after a mutually agreed upon suspension. The two sides tabled opening positions recently. The employer has tabled a set of specific offers based on their analysis, on the conditions, and so has the union. This is bargaining.

Ms Notley: Well, where were those bargainers when they sat down with the executives at AIMCo, Mr. Speaker? Let's take a closer look: speech language pathologists, 9 per cent cut; AIMCo executives, 29 per cent raise; pharmacy techs, 11 per cent cut; AIMCo managers, 27 per cent raise; social workers, 11 per cent cut;

AIMCo directors, 20 per cent raise. Why is this Premier giving AIMCo executives cushy double-digit raises while respiratory therapists keeping people alive have to give back 8 per cent? What is wrong with you?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, these are initial positions in bargaining. As the hon. member knows, bargaining positions are put on the table, and as the hon. member also knows, through this exact same process AHS was able to reach an agreement with UNA, which was ratified at a significant percentage rate. For example, the HSAA has put a request on the table for a 15 per cent increase over four years. Again, these are opening positions. I am hopeful that the parties will be able to negotiate through this and reach a fair agreement, just like was done with UNA.

Ms Notley: Alberta nurses got nothing close to the 20 per cent that these folks gave to AIMCo executives. Now, to all the Albertans watching at home, this is exactly why you can't trust the UCP government. At a time when so many people are struggling, this Premier takes the opportunity to give big raises to executive money managers while cutting the wages of essential front-line workers in health care and social services. The people who administer our medication when we're sick, who help us breathe when our lungs are full, who coax speech out of autistic children: those are the people they want to cut. Why doesn't this Premier start dealing with all Albertans fairly?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to be clear. Our government is investing in health care. We added \$600 million to the budget this year. There's another \$600 million the year after, the year after that. A total of \$1.8 billion we're investing in health care on the expense side, \$3.5 billion on the capital side, and we are hiring. The numbers in AHS are going up. AHS staff are targeted to increase by more than 3 per cent in '22-23, from 81,600 to 84,400. We have more doctors. We have more nurses. We have more paramedics. We are focused on increasing our staff. We are focusing on increasing our investment in health care, and we'll deliver.

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

Ms Notley: And AIMCo executives have 30 per cent more money.

Utility and Insurance Costs

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the UCP raised the cost of living with their bracket creep policies and their steep hikes to school fees, to car insurance, tuition, and more. Meanwhile Corrina is a single mom. Her Enmax bill was \$800 in one month. She begged for relief, and all she was offered was the chance to make installation payments going forward. That means another \$100 to \$200 on a bill she still can't pay. Why doesn't the Premier realize that for Albertans like Corrina his \$50 rebate just doesn't cut it?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the NDP got exactly what they wanted. They were successful in making everything more expensive for all Albertans, because that's the goal of the carbon tax. Drive up the cost of heating so you can't afford to heat your home. Drive up the cost of gas so people can't afford to drive their cars. We actually are perplexed on this side of the House why they would bring in a carbon tax and then drive up the price of everything only to then throw up their hands and say: why are the prices going up?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I understand that last week that member was perplexed about the cost of energy at the time.

But I also heard from people like Liz in Calgary. She said that she was appalled at the increase in her bill in insurance, but she was even more concerned about her 73-year-old neighbour who was forced to cancel her car insurance and her home insurance because she couldn't afford them. If hail strikes her home, she can't make a claim. Why is the Premier allowing massive insurance premiums at a time when Albertans are struggling? Why doesn't he start actually standing up for Albertans instead of big insurance companies?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this side of the House will not be lectured by that member, who, when she was Premier, told Albertans to take the bus when they started to complain about the drastic increases to the costs of their daily lives from her job-killing carbon tax. She stood side by side with Justin Trudeau and continues to to this day. Will that member finally stand up and apologize to Albertans for the devastation that she's caused this province?

Ms Notley: The member wants me to answer questions, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to trade places. I'm sure many people would like to see that happen, too.

Meanwhile Angela wrote to me, and she said, quote: it was already difficult to pay for necessities, but now I'm solely dependent on the food bank. That's hard to hear. Experts have said that the UCP's paltry rebate programs won't do enough to help Albertans like Angela. Why doesn't the Premier go back to the drawing board and put some thought into consequential relief for low- and middle-income families? If he's really here for families, why won't he just walk the talk finally?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the NDP chased \$100 billion out of this province when they were in office. They brought in the biggest job-killing, investment-scaring-away tax in this province's history, the carbon tax, and they succeeded in making everything more expensive. Well, we are bringing in short-term programs to provide relief to Albertans, things like the natural gas rebate, that would prevent a European-style energy crisis. We're bringing in an electricity rebate, and don't forget the 13-cent-a-litre gas tax that we are going to get rid of. We will protect Albertans from the NDP.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has a question.

Utility Costs

Member Ceci: Over the weekend I joined Pat MacIntyre, owner of the Ironwood Stage & Grill in my beautiful constituency of Calgary-Buffalo, to raise concerns about skyrocketing utility prices. Pat thinks the UCP's fake natural gas rebate and the \$50 electricity rebate are a joke. He said that that tiny amount of money would barely cover a case of beer and does nothing for utility costs that are now over \$3,000 a month. Pat said, quote: at the end of the day, we're struggling to make ends meet, keep payroll going, and keep everyone employed. Why is this Premier failing Alberta businesses so badly with his phony utility rebate?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, we are equally frustrated by the higher cost of electricity, but you know what's not helpful? It's not helpful when the Member for Calgary-Mountain View stands outside of a restaurant this weekend and proceeds to give everybody the wrong price of electricity. That's right. The hon. member told Albertans it was 50 to 100 per cent higher than the true cost. She was quoted as saying 15 cents. In fact, it's 10 and a half unless you have a contract. Then it's 7 and a half. I have to ask the question: do they truly not know the cost of electricity?

Member Ceci: We capped it at 6.8. I remember that.

Businesses like the Ironwood have also suffered greatly during the COVID-19 pandemic. They've endured through repeated shutdowns with little or no warning from this Premier. COVID support funding from this government was often too little, came far too late. Businesses that are actually staying open and serving patrons are drowning in thousands of dollars of debt from skyrocketing utility bills. Will the Premier admit that he has failed small businesses repeatedly over the past two years, will he admit he is failing them now again, and will he apologize and step up to the plate and do something today?

2:00

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, isn't it a good thing the NDP weren't in office for the last three years? It would have devastated businesses across Alberta, but instead right now in Alberta we're forecasted to lead the country again in growth: in the last year 130,000 jobs created, in the first two months this year 15,000 jobs created. The NDP plan would have been simply just to grow the size of government, hire more people in the government in an unsustainable way. We balanced the budget, and businesses are coming back.

Member Ceci: There may be job growth now, but this government has put so many people out of work, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Official Opposition and the Energy critic from Calgary-Mountain View asked the associate minister of energy if he could tell the House what the current rate of electricity is and how it's compared to the rate under the NDP – 6.8 cents, remember? – and the minister stood up, shrugged, and didn't have an answer. He didn't have a clue last week. Let's see if the Premier knows exactly. What is the rate of energy for families in Alberta now, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I have said in this Chamber many times that the NDP refuse to be encumbered by the truth, and this is one more example. First, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View tells Albertans that the price of electricity is 50 to 100 per cent higher than it really is. Well, when the hon. member is not embarrassing herself misquoting the true price of electricity, they're also telling Albertans that they're only getting a \$50 rebate on their electricity bill when the hon. member knows it's \$150. It's just one more example of the NDP not being encumbered by the truth.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Member Irwin: While this Premier boasts about this province having its swagger back, Albertans are struggling with skyrocketing bills, and nearly 10,000 full-time jobs were lost last month. This is the second month in a row that Alberta has lost full-time jobs, and not a single word of acknowledgement or sympathy from this government or this Premier. Will the Premier put down his celebratory champagne – maybe his whisky, too – and show some real empathy for Albertans by apologizing to those who lost their jobs or saw their pay cut while he partied?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, it is a testament to the entrepreneurial spirit of this province, the rebound that this province has seen, going from an \$18 billion forecasted deficit to balancing the books this year. That's not because of government. The NDP would have grown government. It's because of entrepreneurs: 130,000 jobs created last year and also 15,000 new jobs created this year alone, close to 150,000 jobs since the beginning of 2021. That's a record we'll stand behind.

Member Irwin: At the same time that this Premier is allowing nearly 10,000 full-time jobs to vanish, he's also doing absolutely

nothing to address the very real concerns of the people we represent. Eliza is one of my constituents. She works hard in the construction industry, but, like so many Albertans, she can't get ahead. She just got a rent increase. The reason given: skyrocketing utility rates. This Premier is hammering Albertans at a time when they can least afford it, thanks to his failure to take meaningful action on utility rates. Why isn't this government listening to people like Eliza? Why, at every opportunity, do they put profits before people?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is taking utility rates very, very seriously, working towards rebates to be able to help Albertans. But the number one thing that we can do to help with utility rates and the cost-of-living increase in our province is to call on Justin Trudeau and the NDP's close allies in Ottawa, the federal Liberal government, to scrap their carbon tax once and for all. So, again, Mr. Speaker, through you, to them: will the NDP finally stand up for Albertans and tell the federal government to get rid of their ridiculous job-killing carbon tax?

Member Irwin: Well, if this minister wants to ask those questions, I suggest he call an election, because this government clearly doesn't care about the loss of nearly 10,000 full-time jobs in February, just like this Premier clearly doesn't care about the impact of the pernicious inflation tax that he is using to take a billion dollars more in income taxes. This comes at the exact same time that this government is doubling down on their policies of higher utility bills, insurance bills, school fees, park fees, higher tuition. The list goes on. Can this Premier please tell me how he can boast about his bad-news budget for working Albertans? Is making struggling Albertans pay more to get less really a fair . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, this side of the aisle is proud of the fact that Alberta's budget is balanced. We're proud of that fact, and you know why our budget is balanced? It's the entrepreneurial spirit of this province. Alberta is more diversified than ever when you look at manufacturing, when you look at logistics, when you look at the technology and innovation space, film and television. Oh, and I haven't even gotten to the industry the NDP don't even like, the oil and gas industry. Big rebounds are coming. Alberta is back. We're proud of that record.

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

Security Infrastructure Program

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend we learned that the government is more than doubling its commitment to protecting places of worship from hate crimes and vandalism through the Alberta security infrastructure program. This is good news for groups at risk, who only want to live, raise their families, and worship in peace. To the Minister of Justice: how much funding has already been given out by Alberta under this program, and when can we expect the next round of applications to be submitted?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, through you, to the hon. member, thank you to him for his advocacy on this issue, for speaking with me about this as well as the previous Minister of Justice about this issue. Thank you for that tireless advocacy.

While we don't want to be too specific on the number of organizations so that we can protect the information of vulnerable Albertans and vulnerable applicants, more than 110 applicants were approved for funding so far. That's over \$1.2 million in grants that have already been approved through the Alberta security infrastructure program. We look forward to opening up the next set of applications this spring.

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that many places of worship know the pain of being targeted by hate-motivated violence and given that many of the victims of these attacks are new Canadians who speak English as a second language, can the Minister of Justice please explain what kind of organizations are eligible to apply for funding?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a great question. It was one that was asked a few times on the weekend, when both I and the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism and the Premier announced this at a church, actually, that was firebombed this summer. The grant applications are open to registered nonprofit agencies who operate a facility that belongs to or is primarily used by communities at risk of hate-motivated crimes or incidents. That could include facilities like places of worship, temples, mosques, synagogues, gurdwaras, churches, or private educational institutions if they have a diverse student body, or other facilities that . . .

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for that answer. Given that more faith-based groups and organizations will now be able to qualify for the Alberta security infrastructure program and given that there are specific criteria for the kinds of improvements the government is seeking to assist with, again to the Minister of Justice: what infrastructure upgrades would qualify for the improvements under this program?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. So far, through the emergency Alberta security infrastructure program, to just use those as an example, those have been used for security measures such as hiring security guards, security system installations, surveillance cameras, motion detectors, window guards, tempered glass windows, and fencing. Those are some of the examples through the emergency program that have already been approved. Our commitment is to stand up to intolerance, to keep all Albertans safe, and to forcefully prosecute hate crimes, and that remains as strong a commitment as ever.

Coal Development Policies

Mr. Schmidt: Albertans don't want to see coal mining in the Rocky Mountains. Indigenous leaders, municipal leaders, ranchers, environmentalists, country music stars, and thousands of Albertans with signs on their lawns and stickers on their bumpers have been very clear that they are not happy that this government rescinded protections for these distinctly Albertan landscapes. To ensure that they're protected, our leader will be introducing a bill to ensure their viability for generations to come. The UCP claim they want to protect our mountains, but we can't trust them to keep their word.

Will the minister put her money where her mouth is and vote to pass this bill?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's what we've done; we've protected the eastern slopes. We've fixed the NDP loophole so that they can't do a workaround on the 1976 coal policy. We've fully reinstated the 1976 coal policy, we've extended it to include categories 1 to 4, we've hard-wired those restrictions into the AER, and that's where it will remain. Land-use planning will be done, and those restrictions will be incorporated into land-use planning.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the coal policy was rescinded by this government quietly on the Friday before a long weekend and given that a ministerial order, which for some reason the government has decided is adequate in this scenario, can also be removed just as easily and given that this government has given Albertans no indication that they're against open-pit coal mining in the Rockies and no indication that they're serious about putting our drinking water ahead of coal exploration, will the minister get serious for a moment and vote to enshrine these protections in legislation, not these half measures that she's put in place, that can be removed with the stroke of a pen?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's already done, and in fact we've hard-wired those rules into the AER, and they will be incorporated into land-use planning, which is legislation. We did exactly what Albertans asked us to do. We are protecting the eastern slopes. We have removed the NDP loophole. The NDP did a complete workaround on the 1976 coal policy when they told a proponent to go ahead and develop a mine and ignore the '76 coal policy. We're protecting . . .

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

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the Coal Policy Committee's report clearly shows that Albertans overwhelmingly oppose coal mining in the eastern slopes and given that their justified and loud opposition started because this government tried to remove these protections when they didn't think Albertans were paying attention and given that it's clear that Albertans can't trust this government to not try and pull the same move again, will the minister promise today that there will not be a single piece of additional coal mined in the Rockies while she's minister, and if she won't, will she urge the Premier to call an election so that we can finish the job?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, we have fully protected the eastern slopes, and we've hard-wired those restrictions into the AER. Nobody is going to touch those. Nobody is going to remove them. Nobody is going to remove that ministerial order. The '76 coal policy has not only been fully reinstated; it's been extended, and nobody is going to touch that. Land-use planning will be completed. That's the appropriate process, it's the appropriate legislation, it's the framework, and we're protecting it in legislation under appropriate land-use framing.

School Construction Capital Plan and Edmonton

Ms Hoffman: Our space crunch has heightened; it means larger class sizes, it means long bus ride times, it means more schools having to go through a lottery process, and it means greater

uncertainty: those are the words of the Edmonton public chair, Trisha Estabrooks. The UCP abandoned Edmonton families in this budget. Students for years to come will be impacted by the decisions that this government has made rather than stepping up and the Education minister doing her job. Rather than looking at her notes and telling everyone how many schools the NDP built in Edmonton, will the minister at least look in the camera and apologize to the families that she failed in this budget?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to address the question by the member opposite. The member opposite knows full well that school authorities put forward their capital plan each and every year, and they prioritize what is important to them. In Edmonton public they actually prioritized the top two schools, that didn't need to be replaced, where they had 69 per cent utilization, and they also didn't have any health and safety issues. We have about 400 asks a year. These didn't rise to the top of the list.

Ms Hoffman: Given that there were five projects in the year 1 needs assessment and given that the minister has refused, to date, to come and tour those schools that she says are in just great shape, will the minister come to tour Delton, to tour Spruce Avenue? Will she ride the bus that the kids in south Edmonton have to take to get to the closest high school? Will she ride the bus that the kids in northeast Edmonton have to take to get to the closest middle school? Mr. Speaker, will the minister at least apologize to the families that she's clearly ignoring here in Edmonton public?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the record I just want to share that Edmonton public has received many schools over the last little while: 2016, five schools completed; 2017, 10 schools completed; 2018, three schools completed; 2019, two schools completed; 2020, three schools completed; and as of August 2021 there are currently six projects under way right now; 131,746 spaces when their projected enrolment for Edmonton public is 107,000 students, 20,000-plus student spaces more.

Ms Hoffman: Given that both the Premier and the Education minister have claimed to support school choice and given that if that were true, they would have funded construction or modernization, anything for public students going to school right here in Edmonton, the fastest growing school division in the country – but instead the budget does nothing to address the shortages for Edmonton public or put even a dollar into francophone school construction anywhere in the province either – and given that many Edmonton students are in overcrowded classrooms with long bus rides, will the UCP do the right thing and fund public and francophone school construction here in Edmonton, or will they admit that this is one of the reasons why Albertans just can't trust them?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The francophone school community has had six projects given over the last couple of years that they are working through right now and that are coming online. Edmonton public, as I said, has 131,746 student spaces. That doesn't even include the 23 modulars that we allocated to them when, in fact, their projected enrolment for '22-23 is 107,000 students. We continue to follow the prioritizations of school

authorities. When they prioritize those projects, they get to the top of the list. Unfortunately, they didn't prioritize in high enrolment areas.

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

Northern Development

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to community and northern development, one of the top priorities for folks in Central Peace is seniors' housing. It is vital that local seniors be able to remain in the communities they helped build. Communities greatly benefit when seniors remain engaged and active. We need them volunteering, we need their knowledge, we need their perspective, and we need them to share the benefit of their experiences. We need families connected. My understanding is that along with the seniors' project in Spirit River, DeBolt and Fox Creek are also in the approval process. To the minister: can you confirm for us that these other projects are upcoming and share your perspective on why these projects are important?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for asking some very important questions. As seniors helped us to build this great province as it is today, it is critical that they can remain in the community of their choice. Aging well in the community is very important. We will continue to support seniors to do that. This is why I'm so pleased to share with the House that these projects are approved and that we are working with the community on these projects and their announcement.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Minister. Given that to enhance northern development, Grande Prairie Regional College has been seeking to become a true polytechnic for many years and given that that approval was announced last week – and this is good news because it means new spaces, new programs, and new opportunities for students of all ages in the Peace Country – and given that I attended the convocation last week in my constituency at the Fairview campus and that I can't say enough positive things about the good people who work and study there, to the minister: can you tell us how the creation of Northwestern Polytechnic will benefit community and northern development in Fairview and all across northern Alberta?

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

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The transition of Grande Prairie Regional College to Northwestern Polytechnic, of course, just finalized last week, and I had the honour and privilege of being there in person for that with students, staff, and faculty, which was great to see. The move to a polytechnic will allow the institution to continue to maintain trades programming and apprenticeship education, which is vital to the local community. It'll also give them a greater ability to offer more applied degrees to help ensure that students in the community can get access to the programs that they need right in their own communities and, as well, help to strengthen a focus on technology.

Mr. Loewen: Given that when it comes to community and northern development, there is some bad news as well – and that is that the community of McLennan recently learned that ATB is closing its local branch, leaving residents with no bank – and given that this community is the hub for the local region and is home to the local hospital and businesses that provide important services and given

that services like ATB help attract people to communities and that closing it can have the opposite effect, to the Finance minister: does your government understand the realities faced on a daily basis by rural Albertans and that northern development means not reducing important services?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

2:20

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank that member for the thoughtful series of questions that he's asked here today. When it comes to ATB Financial, obviously it's a Crown corporation with a presence across our province. Its history actually goes back to the Peace Country, way back into the 1930s, and the need for banking across Alberta. We'll continue to work with them on the quality services that they provide, but it also highlights our investment in rural broadband. More and more banking services are going online, and we have to make sure as well that every single Albertan has access to broadband. That's why our historic partnership, that should attract over a billion dollars in investment in rural broadband, is important.

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Funding

Member Loyola: P3s have been a disaster in Alberta, but this UCP government appears committed to repeating mistakes. A market-sounding package for the \$2 billion south Edmonton hospital is literally begging for a P3 option. Alberta taxpayers: they'll be paying the price. The government is openly admitting that price isn't the key consideration. Instead, they'll score a winning bid in whatever fashion best doles out billions to UCP insiders. To the Minister of Infrastructure. Albertans don't trust this government. Is he really asking taxpayers to blindly trust this government with another P3 gamble, this time with health care?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, Albertans trusted the UCP campaign platform, which mentioned about building capital projects utilizing alternate financing, including P3s, and that's what we are going to look at. During that process we assess value for money for taxpayer investment. If there is a case for a P3 delivery option, we'll proceed, including the Edmonton hospital.

Member Loyola: Given that the last time Alberta went down the P3 road to building schools, the Auditor General gave them an F and given that the Auditor General warned Albertans that these P3 projects lacked transparency – good news for UCP insiders, bad news for Alberta taxpayers – and given that in the past the private-sector P3 model nickelled and dimed the taxpayer, to the minister: did this government learn nothing from the 2013 P3 disaster, and why is this government so committed to making another disaster, this time out of the south Edmonton hospital?

Mr. Panda: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows well that in the past P3 delivery methods, in fact, Albertan taxpayers saved millions of dollars. The Auditor General, in fact, validated the process of assessing value for taxpayers. We are going to continue that. Whether it is schools or hospitals, whatever is a taxpayer-funded project, we're going to look at P3 options.

Member Loyola: Heaven help us.

Given that the last time Alberta went down the P3 path for major government projects, it turned into a tire fire for taxpayers and given that the government of Alberta commissioned a Deloitte study that literally called the P3 model a mess and given that we are talking

about \$2 billion of taxpayer money and that the only key message of this UCP government is, "Trust us; we're great and competent managers," to the minister. The government must realize that Albertans don't trust them and that they don't trust P3s. One more: why go down this failed path again and leave taxpayers holding the bag?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, Albertans trusted our policy. That's why they elected us to the office on that platform. The only people that don't like it are the NDP, because of their ideology. Attracting private investments into Alberta's economy is a good thing. P3s are attracting private investments. That will provide more taxpayer dollars for more infrastructure, vital infrastructure, hundreds of projects in construction right now, including 66 schools.

Poverty Reduction Strategy

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, my first question to the Minister of Community and Social Services today is a simple one: how many Albertans are living in poverty today?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, our government is continually committed to supporting our most vulnerable Albertans. As we released in Budget 2022, an additional \$12 million has been added to the AISH program. Last Thursday the Premier and I announced additional benefits for pregnant women who are on income support and AISH. We're on top of that.

Ms Renaud: Given that the number of Albertans living in poverty is 400,000 and given that that number has increased significantly under this UCP government and given that the cost of everything is going up under these guys, from property taxes, to utilities, car insurance, school fees, tuition, and on and on and on, and given that this minister doesn't seem to have a clue and doesn't even know basic facts about the poverty problem, is the problem that he just doesn't care?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, what the opposition doesn't have a clue on is that you have to create wealth first before you have money to take care of people. I'm proud that with this government we've got investment coming in. We maintained our core social safety net programs, and we increased the AISH budget. That speaks louder than political cheap shots. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Renaud: Given that Alberta's NDP called for AISH to be restored, given that we called for the seniors' benefit to be brought back, given that the mayors of countless cities and towns are seeking more funding to stem growing homelessness, and given that not one of these critical calls was addressed by this UCP budget, my question is this: what exactly was the minister doing during budget deliberations? Sleeping? Why won't he wake up and realize that children are going to school hungry and . . .

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

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, we spent three hours answering every question from the opposition. I still don't know what question she's raising today. What we're doing is that not only do we provide the social safety net for Albertans by maintaining our core services; on top of that, we provide an additional \$34 million for employment support services. We've taken every first opportunity to empower Albertans who are vulnerable and get them to work so that they can reach their full potential.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has a question.

Energy Industry Update

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Energy security matters, but receiving that energy from ethical sources should defy often rampant hypocrisy. Thankfully, Alberta is a global leader in environmental, social, and governance initiatives amongst energy producers. Unfortunately, it seems that many jurisdictions and even political leaders in our own country prefer to source their oil and gas from despotic regimes infamously renowned for authoritarian leadership and human rights abuses. To the Minister of Energy: what is our government doing to encourage our neighbours, friends, fellow Canadians, and U.S. allies to look for more ethical sources for their energy needs?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I just recently returned from a trip to Houston, Texas, to attend the CERA conference, where that was exactly the discussion in all the sessions and in the corridors, a discussion and a conversation about energy security, a conversation that's been missing in energy policy for a very long time. I was able to convey the clear message that Alberta can be the solution. We can be the solution in the short term and the long term. In the short term we can provide an additional 200,000 to 400,000 barrels a day of oil to the United States. In the longer term, with building more infrastructure, we can be the supplier of choice.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Minister, through the Speaker, for your response. Given that energy revenues should go towards powering people's homes and lives, not funding wars and destroying them, and given that revenue generated through purchasing foreign oil supports numerous countries engaged in domestic human rights abuses and despicable military aggression against sovereign nations, to the minister: what is our government doing today to encourage domestic oil and gas production and consumption, directly creating jobs, generating wealth, and supporting social programs for all Canadians?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is focused steadfastly on increasing cross-border trade with the United States. That includes getting more conventional oil, more heavy oil, and more synthetic crude across the border to each and every market in the Midwest, on the west coast, on the Gulf coast. The Gulf coast: that takes a heavier blend; they're looking for Alberta oil. The only replacement for that is Venezuelan oil, Mexican oil. We have the supply in Alberta. We just have to be able to get it across the border, and that's what we're doing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given the unfortunate impact of geopolitical strife and supply chain disruption on North American energy supplies and global pricing and given the impact on economic stability and consumer affordability, particularly in fuels and utilities, once again to the Minister of Energy: as per your recent CERAWEEK conference attendance and what I'm sure were conversations with government and industry leaders, do you see a renewed focus and conversation

on North American energy security and sustainability now and into the future?

2:30

The Speaker: The minister.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, energy security has entered clearly into the North American energy dialogue. The other message that we heard very clearly at CERAWEEK is that governments need to start treating our oil and gas reserves as a strategic asset – a strategic asset – not a liability. Our energy production is something we should be proud of and support and not demonize, and that has gone on for too long in western democracies. As a result, it's shifted production and wealth and emissions over to places like Russia.

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

Agriculture in 2022

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, producers and ranchers have overcome a lot of challenges in the past year. The recent drought was one of the worst on record. The COVID-19 pandemic has sprung much uncertainty through the entire supply chain, which was also disrupted by the floods in B.C. and now the invasion of Ukraine. Farmers are recovering from the losses of the last year and are paying skyrocketing prices in fertilizer and feed. There is no need to put more cost pressures on producers right now; however, the UCP are increasing crop, hail, and livestock premiums by \$37 million. How can the UCP justify taking \$37 million away from farmers after they've done so much?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of agriculture and forestry.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to say that the member opposite is not wrong. It's been a heck of a year for our ag community. The drought has been terribly difficult for both farmers and cattle producers. What she doesn't know is that the changes to our insurance program reflect the need to replace the fund, and they also reflect the change in commodity prices. The compensation levels have increased greatly. This may be the most expensive crop ever put in the ground in the prairie provinces, but it'll also have the most upside for Canadian farmers.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I'm very aware of the commodity prices and given that the UCP has refused to do the work necessary to obtain the tens of millions of dollars available from the federal government through signing on to the interim deal for AgriStability even though producers overwhelmingly agreed on the need to sign it and given that some farmers don't have the upfront capital to purchase seed, fertilizer for this upcoming season, why in the world is the UCP jacking up premiums for farmers by tens of millions of dollars while leaving available federal money untouched? Why is the budget being balanced on the backs of farmers?

Mr. Horner: That's certainly not the case. We're very proud of the business risk management suite that's offered through the Canadian agricultural partnership, part of which is the AgriStability program. The AgriStability program has a very low uptake. Around 20 per cent of producers are enrolled in the program, and an even smaller amount are able to trigger the program. The consensus we have from the prairie provinces is that we need to make the program work better for more people before we throw more money at it, and if we

did throw more money at it, the money would come from another part of the suite. It would be taken from a program that . . .

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that fertilizer prices have already skyrocketed and that they could go up even more due to the sanctions towards Russia – many producers have already paid more than they were expecting for fertilizer, and some simply can't afford it – and given that Ukraine is the fifth-largest exporter of wheat in the world and there is uncertainty of what will happen to the wheat market and given that I recognize that those changes from the global conflict are out of control for the UCP but that jacking up premiums for the people who feed our province and our communities around the world isn't, will anyone on that side of the House who believes that farmers and ranchers deserve to be paid more . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture and forestry.

Mr. Horner: These insurance programs follow actuarial principles. That's how insurance programs work. We can't just bust out our crayons and make it what we want to make it. The fertilizer prices: we're lucky in western Canada. Two-thirds of the nitrogen-based fertilizers are made right here in Alberta. It's globally priced at the New Orleans port. It's a huge advantage to us. The fertilizer companies would come here and build more if it wasn't for the carbon tax that you and the federal NDP are propping up with the federal government. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Child Care Funding

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, over \$3.8 billion in federal child care funding should mean that low-income Alberta families are seeing the greatest reduction in their child care fees – after all, the minister herself has said that these are the families most in need – yet a study by the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care shows that low-income families are seeing the least benefit from the UCP's funding model. In Calgary fees for families making \$40,000 per year are only going down 13 per cent, far from the 50 per cent reduction that the UCP promised. Can the Minister of Children's Services answer why low-income families are such a low priority for her?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I just want to remind this House that that \$3.8 billion investment in child care over the next five years, fighting hard for a made-in-Alberta plan, is excellent news for parents right across this province. I do want to point out that one of the tenets of that plan, as put forward by the federal government, is to reduce child care fees for all families. Instead of picking and choosing certain centres or parents who got to be part of that plan, unlike the members opposite, we aimed to not only reduce fees for all parents by 50 per cent but then add additional subsidy for low- and middle-income families.

Ms Pancholi: Given that low-income families paid zero dollars per month under our plan and given that, in fact, child care operators and parents are reporting to the ministry that some low-income families are actually paying more for child care fees than they were before, like the parent in Bonnyville paying \$30 more per month and the parents in Jasper and Edmonton paying \$150 more per month than they were before, and given that during estimates the

minister said that these claims were “misinformation” and accused the opposition of playing politics for asking about it, yet during that same meeting several child care providers e-mailed me to say that they've raised these very concerns with the ministry and received no response, perhaps the minister would like to respond to these parents now to explain why they're paying more for child care.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I did encourage the member opposite to put politics aside and raise issues when they come to her office because we are happy to help. My officials did confirm that we have not yet found an example where a family is paying more. Sometimes that's because when you roll out a new program, there are some things to work out on the back end, and we happily help operators to make sure that this works with parents.

Mr. Speaker, let's talk about this rollout. Please let me quote from one parent named Jacqueline, which I'm going to have to do in my next response.

Ms Pancholi: Sounds like the minister has some e-mails to check.

Given that Albertans across the province are deeply concerned about the rising costs of living, their ability to make ends meet, and given that low-income Albertans are feeling the impacts of increasing utility costs, insurance costs, and so much more under the UCP and given that it's clear that the UCP is not prioritizing affordability for Albertans, particularly not low-income Albertans, since the minister doesn't seem to even believe these families or child care operators, can she provide advice to them on what they should cut to afford their increase in child care fees? Groceries, heat, transportation to and from work: which is it, Minister?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Through you to the member opposite, I did ask her to pass on the names of those parents and those operators so that we could look into it – we've reached out to the ministry to ask them to look and make sure that we have contacted at least all of these operators who have reached out to us – but she hasn't reached out to me yet. I do encourage her to do that. We are reducing fees, on average, by half for parents right across this province, with many low-income families already paying far lower than \$10 a day and, in fact, many vulnerable teen parents also accessing child care for zero dollars a day.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has a question.

Utility and Fuel Costs

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have endured a tough couple of years. COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have taken a toll on our daily lives. Putin's invasion of Ukraine has caused fuel prices to soar in recent weeks. The rising costs of necessities like food and fuel have put economic pressure on individuals and families across the province. I hear about gas prices in Calgary-Currie all the time now. To the Minister of Energy: what measures are being implemented to reduce the price Albertans are paying at the pump?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Last week the Minister of Finance announced that as of April 1 we will stop collecting the provincial fuel tax, and that will drop the price of gasoline and diesel by 13.6

cents per litre. Stopping the collection of that provincial fuel tax keeps more money in the pockets of Albertans. This is especially important at a time when costs for everyday goods are going up. The one thing that could be added to that, that would improve the affordability of fuel, is reducing the federal carbon tax that's going up to 50 bucks and then \$170. That's got to be . . .

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the cost of electricity has continued to rise in recent months, mainly due to the failed policies of previous provincial governments, and given that our UCP government is taking action to provide relief on electricity prices, to the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity: what measures are being implemented to help Albertans who have faced and continue to face high utility bills?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. member for the question. The number one issue on Albertans' minds right now is the cost of living. Despite that, the NDP Energy critic can't even tell us the cost of energy in this province. You know, the NDP brought this same attention to detail with them when they came to government in 2015. It's why they spent \$7.5 billion on infrastructure when our economy couldn't support it. It's the same reason they cost Albertans a billion dollars, because they forgot to read the fine print on the PPAs. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the provincial UCP relief measures, like help at the gas pumps and the electricity rebate, are helping Albertans through a tough time when almost everything seems to be getting more expensive and further given that the factors driving up prices are external or baked in by past governments and, of course, the Trudeau Liberals and their job-killing carbon tax, to the same associate minister: to the best of your knowledge, how long can Albertans expect the UCP relief measures to be in place?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. You know, we're frustrated, obviously, by the higher cost of electricity, which is why we are providing all Albertans, small businesses, farms with a \$150 rebate to provide relief on their electricity. We've put in a similar program for natural gas to prevent Albertans from having to suffer through a European-style energy crisis. We will continue to do everything that we can to keep the NDP away from the electricity grid because that is the number one thing that we can do to keep prices down. We will modernize the grid, and we will NDP-proof the grid. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

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

Members' Statements (continued)

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

Calgary Beltline Area Protests

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have the right to protest. They also have the right to live free from intimidation. They have the right to be able to get to and from their home safely. They have the right to run their businesses and for their customers to access those businesses. They have the right to drive on streets and walk on sidewalks. Over the past several months – months – thousands of my constituents have lost those rights. The protests in Calgary's Beltline area have gotten out of hand. They are being conducted without permits and, seemingly, without a cause. We need real leadership to resolve this matter.

The UCP Minister of Justice brushed off questions about these protests over the weekend. He deferred the matter back to the city of Calgary. That's really cute – isn't it? – coming from this government, the same government that is actively stripping away powers from municipalities when it suits their political need. Now they dump the responsibility back on to municipalities when they don't have the backbone to stand up and do what's right. This is shameful leadership. It's incompetent, and it's indicative of a government that only cares about themselves, a government being led by a Premier that only makes decisions these days to appease those attending his April 9 leadership vote.

The vast majority of my constituents clearly don't support this Premier, but that doesn't mean their concerns aren't equally valid. Mr. Speaker, 17th Avenue S.W. is the boundary between Calgary-Bufferlo and Calgary-Elbow. I'm here today calling on this government to get involved in restoring some law and order to Calgary's Beltline, and for the MLA for Calgary-Elbow to also get involved. The situation is out of control. This UCP absentee government is part of the problem. They need to step up, do their jobs, and be part of the solution.

Thank you.

Federal Emergencies Act

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, the invasion and war on Ukraine is highly despotic. Nations around the globe are condemning the actions taken by Russia and are standing in solidarity with Ukraine. I am proud of our nation and province for supporting and standing with Ukraine. Our Prime Minister has specifically spoken against the antidemocratic actions of Russia. He's quoted in Global News saying, "Democracy is always stronger than authoritarianism." I would agree, but it is the Prime Minister's own actions, with the invocation of the Emergencies Act on peaceful protesters just four weeks ago, that highlight the hypocrisy in his claim.

The authoritarian way Prime Minister Trudeau acted to deal with a parking problem in our nation's capital shows how out of touch he is with the statements he claims to believe. If our Prime Minister is going to speak of democracy, he must practise what he preaches on all levels in every circumstance. Democracy must be unwavering. We must be consistent in our support of individual rights and freedoms. Ideals and principles of democracy should remain strong no matter the gravity of the situation.

The parking problem in Ottawa did not require the extreme powers granted through the Emergencies Act and sets a bad precedent going forward. Justin Trudeau exercised extreme authoritarian powers and overreach through enforcing the Emergencies Act onto the citizens of Canada. Instead of working with Canadians, ensuring that they were heard, the Prime Minister verbally attacked protesters with name-calling and doubled down by invoking the Emergencies Act. These are not actions of a leader who supports democracy.

Mr. Speaker, for Justin Trudeau to defend democracy around the globe, he must be upholding democracy in our own nation without

hypocrisy. I will always stand in defence of democracy and believe leaders must be firm in their stance and in their actions to support individual rights and freedoms within the countries they lead and around the globe.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Government Motion 7 there shall be no evening sitting tonight.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Bill 201 Eastern Slopes Protection Act

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise and request leave to introduce the bill, the Eastern Slopes Protection Act.

Albertans are overwhelmingly opposed to coal mining in the eastern slopes. The government's own coal committee, coal report, and public consultation concluded what Albertans knew already. An unprecedented number of Indigenous leaders, municipal leaders, ranchers, environmentalists, country music stars, and just a vast majority of Albertans overall have said: do not mine the eastern slopes. Don't lop off their tops, don't strip-mine them, don't threaten our sensitive and increasingly scarce waters with selenium and other contaminants.

Albertans said this when the UCP first rescinded the 1976 coal policy and again last spring when I first introduced this act, and they've been consistent. Now, the Minister of Energy will say that she's listened to Albertans and put an order in place, but this order can be rescinded without notice to Albertans and without consultation. It also allows several new mining projects to advance. Albertans want more than this minister saying, "Trust me," Mr. Speaker; they want a guarantee of transparent legislative oversight. This bill will protect sensitive lands. It will uphold Indigenous treaty rights, it will cancel all coal exploration, it will ban coal mining in categories 1 and 2, and it will prohibit in 3 and 4. It is my sincere hope . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt. However, as I did on two occasions last week for the government and reminded them that first reading of an introduction of a bill is not debatable, I would suggest that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is making lots of statements of opinion, not describing what the bill may or may not do. I encourage her to expediate this introduction as I like to play it fair for both sides of the Assembly.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will simply conclude by saying that it is my sincere hope that if the Minister of Energy and the UCP are truly listening, if their plans really are to protect our Rocky Mountains, then they should embrace the chance to say so through legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition has risen.

2:50

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that Bill 201, Eastern Slopes Protection Act, is identical to Bill 214 from the previous session and has already been through the committee process and

approved, I ask for the unanimous consent of this Assembly to waive Standing Order 74.11 and for Bill 201 therefore to proceed immediately to second reading. May I speak briefly to this request? Oh.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has a tabling.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite five copies of an article I referenced in debate, which highlights that on top of the high utility bills, the bracket creep, the insurance taxes, the COVID ridership drop, and no support from the province, now high fuel prices in Alberta are forcing reduction in intercity bus service and increasing ticket prices and threatening the survival of rural bus lines.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Shandro, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, the Alberta Human Rights Commission annual report 2020-21; pursuant to the Statutes Repeal Act the 2022 list of legislation.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Copping, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the College & Association of Respiratory Therapists of Alberta annual report 2020-21 and the Alberta College of Paramedics annual report 2020-21.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: Standing Order 8(1.1) provides for the Assembly to proceed to Motions Other than Government Motions earlier than 5 p.m. if no other items of private members' business remain on the Order Paper for that day. If the motion is called early, the Assembly proceeds to government business after the vote on the motion unless the Assembly agrees to proceed to the next motion in accordance with Standing Order 8(1.2).

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie – I'm sorry. Were you rising?

Mr. Schow: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane.

Antimalarial Treatments

502. Mr. Guthrie moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to:

- (a) support research into the adverse effects of the antimalarial drug mefloquine, sold under the brand name Lariam;
- (b) work with the federal government and other provincial governments to encourage the adoption of safe antimalarial treatments; and
- (c) express support for Canadian veterans suffering with the effects of posttraumatic stress disorder resulting from the use of mefloquine.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, because it's important that we use accurate terminology, I've worked with a colleague to put forward an amendment to this motion to make a correction. I'm hoping for a little bit of patience here from my fellow members to establish this change, and then I'll save my speech until after that member has introduced the amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane for bringing forward this important motion today, and I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to it in urging our government to press the federal government to stop administering the use of the antimalarial drug mefloquine, also known as Lariam, to the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mr. Speaker, quinolines are neurotoxic drugs, including mefloquine, and mefloquine first started being prescribed to the Canadian Armed Forces in 1992. Service members did not have a choice in taking this drug as they did not know the side effects that it would cause, and at the time it did not seem that anyone did. Mefloquine seemed more efficient at the time and cheaper to its counterparts since it only had to be taken once a week compared to every day.

Mr. Speaker, soldiers were being deployed to areas that were high risk for malaria, and of course malaria is a serious parasite-caused disease. The parasite spreads between humans via mosquitoes, and of course it's simple when a mosquito can move the parasite from one person to another quite easily. Malaria symptoms usually take anywhere between seven to 30 days to appear, but in some cases it can take up to an entire year for someone to start showing signs. Symptoms are a flu-like illness, high fever, shaking, chills. Those who contract malaria usually become very, very sick, and it can even be fatal.

Mr. Speaker, we can see the need for an antimalaria drug to keep our soldiers as safe as possible and prevent them from contracting malaria. However, with the benefit of time we now know that mefloquine has proven not to be the answer, that it can cause a debilitating neurological disease known as quinism.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to propose the following amendment. Do you want me to read it now?

The Speaker: If you can just help us by passing it through to the page, then they can deliver it, and then after I get a copy, if you'll proceed. I've paused the timer for you.

Hon. members, this amendment will be referred to as amendment A1.

Hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, you have eight minutes remaining.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Motion Other than Government Motion 502 be amended in clause (c) by striking out "posttraumatic stress disorder" and substituting "quinism."

I'll continue on. Neuropsychiatric quinism, or just quinism, is a lasting disorder that results from chronic encephalopathy and brain stem dysfunction caused by quinoline toxicity of the central nervous system. This is caused by quinoline drugs, including quinacrine, chloroquine, and mefloquine. Some of the quinism side effects include dizziness, vertigo, visual disorders, lasting tinnitus. Additional side effects include hallucinations and nightmares, aggressive behaviour, anxiety, paranoia, insomnia, psychotic behaviour, debilitating cognitive dysfunction, and thoughts of suicide.

Among military veterans, many of whom were prescribed quinoline antimalarials during combat deployments, the lasting symptoms of neuropsychiatric quinism are often mistaken for those of posttraumatic stress disorder. Many of these veterans are being diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder when, in fact, it is quinism, which could have been avoided had they not been prescribed mefloquine.

Mr. Speaker, our soldiers and our veterans have put their lives on the line and have done so much to serve our country. The last thing we want is for them to suffer the horrifying side effects of a drug that we are prescribing them. Since malaria is a very serious, potentially life-threatening disease, the use of a medication to prevent it is critical, and our government needs to work with the federal government as well as other provincial governments to encourage the adoption of safe antimalarial treatments. We need to stop giving our soldiers this drug.

While many may think that the chances of having serious side effects from the prescribed drugs are rare, Mr. Speaker, and that there are many other drugs that also have side effects on the label that most consumers don't experience, we need to recognize that the military, the Armed Forces, is a unique population in a unique situation. They are put into vulnerable environments that could increase their risk factor, predisposing them to the side effects of mefloquine. In fact, more recent research confirms that nearly 1 in 7 of those who have been exposed to mefloquine experience nightmares or other abnormal dreams, and further more than 1 in 5 of those who complain of nightmares report that the symptom has lasted more than three years.

Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I'd like to share the devastating story of a former Canadian soldier who had suffered immensely from the effects of quinism. Richard Schumann said that ever since he was a little boy, it was his dream to join the military. While learning more about mefloquine, I came across Richard's story. In 2005 Schumann was on a mission in Afghanistan and was ordered to take mefloquine. Almost as soon as he began, side effects from the drug caused him to have terrifyingly vivid dreams. In one of these instances Schumann was dreaming that he was attempting suicide. Well, little did he know, he was acting out his dream in real life. Thankfully, Schumann's fire team partner, who was close by, had heard the sound of Schumann cocking his firearm in time to wake him up and stop him. There he was with a round chambered and on the edge of his bed with his gun, potentially ready to take his own life, all while dreaming. Richard Schumann goes on to say that it wasn't the Taliban that was going to kill him. Rather, he almost killed himself, and he attributes this to the drug that the government forced him to take.

This is not right. This is unfair and wrong. These veterans did not choose to have these side effects. They did not choose to have to deal with the consequences for the rest of their life of being forced to take an antimalaria drug. Mr. Speaker, not only does the federal government need to put an end to the administering of mefloquine and find a better solution to protect our soldiers against malaria; they need to provide support to our veterans who have health issues, who have been dealing with these serious side effects relating to mefloquine.

3:00

In the United States Veterans Affairs accepts the link between quinism and mefloquine. Veterans in the United States are being treated on a case-by-case basis. In Canada Veterans Affairs has not even accepted that quinism is caused by mefloquine. Mr. Speaker, our veterans deserve better.

Just last week we debated Motion 501. We heard the devastating stories of consequences that dangerous and illegal drugs can cause.

Just as we need to keep in mind the possible dangerous outcomes that other such drugs, even prescribed, can cause as well, we need to keep in mind the serious side effects that these drugs can cause, especially in the case of mefloquine. These consequences and side effects prevent the victim from being able to live a normal life.

Mr. Speaker, I hope, with the support of this House, to see action taken from our government to pursue and pressure the federal government to stop giving mefloquine to our soldiers, to provide support for those suffering from quinism, and do all we can to keep our Canadian Armed Forces safe. They deserve it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as the member moved an amendment, it's reasonable to allow the mover of the motion to reply. I will go to the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane, followed by a member of the opposition should they choose to provide some additional comment.

The hon. member.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for the opportunity to speak to the amendment on Motion 502. We wanted to be precise with the wording, so thank you for the procedural understanding. I'd like to also thank members of the House and all Canadian Forces members who have served Canada in the line of duty.

Mr. Speaker, in 1994, at the age of 17, a young man named Shaun Arntsen joined the Canadian military, ready to do whatever it took to protect our country. It's incredibly admirable for anyone to join the forces and to do it knowing full well that one day they may pay the ultimate price. Shaun and many other soldiers did this for love, honour, and respect of Canada. In February 2002, after eight years of service, Shaun was deployed to Afghanistan, where, upon arrival, he and his fellow soldiers were directed to take a weekly dose of an antimalarial drug called mefloquine.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There were no warnings about the drug or its side effects. He was ordered to take it, and he did. There was no option. It was mandatory, but like many he served with, they trusted that the drug was safe, and as he would tell you, they had much more urgent and fierce things to worry about serving in a war zone with an enemy trying to kill you. An antimalarial drug was the last of his worries.

That said, the effects of the drug were immediate. It began with insomnia. If you did sleep: vivid night terrors, anxiety, and mood swings. But, for Shaun, were these the effects of mefloquine or the intense conditions in which he was living? From his perspective at the time, it was hard to know what to attribute these symptoms to. Other soldiers were experiencing similar things, some much worse, including paranoia, hallucinations, panic attacks, and suicidal thoughts.

Shaun left the Canadian Forces after serving 10 years. He took 33 doses of mefloquine, and his life, and many others before and after him, was changed forever. You see, Mr. Speaker, Canadian soldiers were used as part of a clinical trial. Mefloquine's first use by CAF, Canadian Armed Forces, was by troops deployed in Somalia in 1992, where industrial quantities of the drug mefloquine were supplied. Unfortunately, CAF did not participate in the safe monitoring study since guidelines were not compatible with operational requirements, the benefit for the east African and future operations being that the drug was prescribed once per week, which was preferred to the daily dose treatment available at the time.

Canadian Forces members were compelled to take the prescription to protect against malaria, but it was administered without documenting the informed consent of their soldiers and without systematic monitoring of the side effects. It was clear to

many that the behaviour of some military personnel was suspicious, and questions about its relationship to mefloquine were raised. That said, in 1993, under the brand name Lariam, the product was approved by Health Canada for general public use. Since then various medical practitioners have warned of the side effects, and research began into the consequences of its consumption.

In June of 2019 Chair Neil Ellis released a report from the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs entitled *Effects of Mefloquine Use among Canadian Veterans*. In that report renowned expert Dr. Remington Nevin provided a diagnosis of mefloquine toxicity syndrome, renamed quinism, to establish a term for the adverse effects of the drug. His work is the first to recognize the long-term detrimental impact of mefloquine, but many others have since followed in this field of research.

Dr. Nevin has raised concerns about outcomes such as depression, tinnitus, dizziness, and vertigo, and these may continue for months, years, and even permanent damage as a result of mefloquine's use. He states that a patient must discontinue use if signs of anxiety, depression, or confusion occur and that Lariam's continued use could potentially lead to more serious events such as the development of psychiatric and neurologic symptoms leading to potential long-term disability.

In 2013 the U.S. army banned mefloquine for use by its special forces. In autumn of 2016 the U.K. military followed suit, as did Australia after a parliamentary inquiry revealed that mefloquine can cause permanent side effects and brain damage. From that Australian inquiry, recommendations were made, with 14 ailments outlined to have a connection to soldiers and their medical conditions, including cataracts, anxiety, bipolar disorder, depression, seizures, heart block, hearing loss, schizophrenia, suicide, and many other severe responses. Still, the side effects are downplayed, but fortunately the drug's use has decreased significantly because of its reputation.

In 2017 the Canadian Armed Forces stated that mefloquine will now only be recommended for use if a CAF member requests it. Now, the reduction of this prescription is a very good development, but it doesn't deal with 25 years of mefloquine's ordered use by Canadian troops. In the United States personnel are treated and compensated on a case-by-case basis, but in Canada the government has not directly addressed issues associated with mefloquine. In fact, they avoid mentioning the drug by name. The chief medical officer at Veterans Affairs Canada stated that compensation is not based on cause but based on a diagnosed medical condition. It was stated that to receive a disability award, all veterans require is a record of having been deployed and a confirmed diagnosis by their treating physician. The problem is that damages are not well studied nor well known to physicians.

Additionally, those that suffer may suffer alone, and if they are diagnosed, they are typically misdiagnosed with PTSD and receive treatment that has no benefit to them since quinism affects the brain in a completely different fashion. To be effective, sufferers require appropriate supports that are designed specifically to deal with their symptoms. The purpose of this motion is to increase awareness but also for government to recognize mefloquine toxicity, or quinism, as a valid injury and to support research into its adverse effects and to find suitable treatments. As recommended in the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs report, a systematic screening program for military personnel and veterans who may be experiencing the long-term effects of mefloquine toxicity should be conducted and, in my opinion, done so by these established experts.

Unfortunately, Canadian veterans are not feeling the love. In 2018 a class action suit was dismissed for delay. Since then a mass tort was initiated by CAF members and veterans so that veterans could claim damages against the Canadian government to get the required help that they need. Since then I understand that the federal

government launched proceedings against the mefloquine manufacturer yet at the same time, wishing to absolve themselves of their responsibility, brought forward a motion to stay this mass tort. Madam Speaker, if veterans are not going to get the support from the Trudeau government, then Alberta should begin an advocacy campaign to show our dedication to those who served and still serve and to recognize quinism as a neurological disorder requiring our aid for treatment research.

3:10

Right here in Alberta, Madam Speaker, we have expertise. We have a renowned physician at the University of Alberta working with this very issue. Dr. Keith Zukiwski has 20 years of experience in quantitative EEG brain mapping, and he is currently accepting veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces to help determine the cause of their symptoms. With various types of brain-focused treatments such as neurofeedback Dr. Zukiwski and others look to target areas of the brain to improve and normalize function with the goal of reducing or eliminating debilitating symptoms. It would be wonderful if our government could support this research.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the House for the opportunity to bring forward this important motion, and I look forward to hearing from my colleagues to advance this debate with the ultimate goal of helping our constituents and all Canadian veterans who gave so much to us in the line of duty.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. [Standing ovation]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I want to also begin by expressing my appreciation to the members of the Armed Forces who are here today as well as everyone who serves our country so nobly. Also, I want to thank the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane as well as the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for bringing forward both the motion as well as the amendment for our consideration here today. I really love days where we can give each other advanced notice and come together. This is something that our side of the House is very excited to come together, working with the government private members who brought this work forward today.

I want to say that any time we have an opportunity to stand in support of the folks who support us each and every day as Canadians, I think, is a good day. I regularly reflect upon the service of two of my grandparents many years prior to my birth and how when people enlist and they are part of serving their country, they need to be able to trust that those who are in positions to make decisions on their behalf are taking the best information into consideration. They need to be able to trust, whether that's somebody who's sending them into a battle or somebody who's prescribing medication for them. I can't state enough how grateful I am to the members of our Armed Forces who've made and continue to make significant sacrifices for our country to protect the lives of people throughout the world. We are grateful, and we know that for many these acts of service can frequently have long-term, lasting impacts, including quinism and PTSD.

On this side of the House we believe it's important to support and address mental health issues. I'm sure that the members who brought this forward today do as well. We've consistently called for increased access to mental health supports for all Albertans, and we want those to be made available cost free. In 2016 a member of our caucus, my colleague from Edmonton-Castle Downs, introduced and we passed the Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Awareness Day bill, which I think was a step in the right direction.

I think today is a further step in the right direction. The Canadian Forces' rates of PTSD have doubled in just the course of 10 years, and I think it's important that we talk about the causes of these impacts, including causes that many researchers have shown can be correlated to medications that have been prescribed to those who've enlisted. Doing so will assist in developing treatment for those who've been negatively impacted and who are living with quinism, I believe, and conversations like the debate we're having today, I think, are one very small piece.

I really appreciate that the motion sort of has three parts. The first one, of course, is supporting research into the adverse effects; the second one is calling on partners to do something about it; and the third one is specifically, as amended, the naming of quinism. Thank you to my colleagues for doing that and for parceling it in sort of three very clear ways. When we talk about neurological diseases and disorders and mental health issues, we normalize these discussions and it works to remove stigma for all, a stigma that through the work of advocates and survivors and so many who are living with these illnesses, I think, gives us a better understanding as a society. So this motion, I believe, will assist with that as well as members in the Armed Forces who've been personally impacted by quinism, of course, to see themselves reflected in this Chamber.

The loved ones will know that we as representatives of Albertans, we as members of this Assembly are listening, that it is a big part of our job to be able to reach across the aisle and find opportunities for common ground to hear the concerns and to find ways as elected representatives to work to represent all. Again, my gratitude to the individuals who are present here today, those who are enlisting at home and abroad, of course, and to the member for using this time. It's not every private member who gets an opportunity to bring forward a motion or a bill. There's literally a lottery, and only a few of us ever have an opportunity to do it. I want to thank the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane for choosing an issue that I think we can all get onside with and be able to do something to make a difference for Albertans who've enlisted.

Thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers on the motion on the amendment?

Seeing none, let's vote on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank my friend the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane for introducing this important motion and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for proposing the amendment we just voted on. Malaria is a potentially life-threatening and parasitic disease present in many tropical and subtropical areas of the world, and it's a real risk to individuals that travel to endemic areas. Preventing malaria relies on a number of tactics, including utilizing repellent and nets to avoid being bitten by infected mosquitoes and taking malaria medication to eliminate parasites that enter the body through bites.

Mefloquine was first created in the early 1970s by researchers affiliated with the United States military's Walter Reed Army Institute of Research and was popularly marketed under the brand Lariam. Members of the Canadian Armed Forces that were deployed to regions with high malaria infections between 1992 and 2002 were given mefloquine. This controversial medication has now been shown to potentially cause serious side effects, including anxiety, depression, hallucinations, paranoia as well as nervous system issues like vertigo, seizures, tinnitus, and insomnia. Also known as neuropsychiatric quinism, mefloquine-related chronic

symptoms may mimic several psychiatric and neurological disorders, including PTSD.

Decades ago early prelicensed studies on mefloquine were conducted predominantly among male prisoners, military personnel, and in third-world country populations. Although vertigo and nausea were commonly reported in these early trials, at the time the drug was presented as free of severe psychiatric side effects. Since mefloquine was viewed as a miracle drug at its discovery, initial reports of severe psychiatric symptoms, including amnesia, confusion, and psychosis, were frequently dismissed as coincidental. Later on these symptoms would be blamed on the stresses of overseas travel, recreational drug use, or pre-existing mental illness.

Despite continued reports of severe psychiatric side effects, it was only in 2001 that mefloquine's psychotropic effects became more widely known. In addition, later trials showed that specific neuropsychiatric symptoms such as nightmares, anxiety, and psychosis during use are at least 100 times more common than previously reported. More recently reports of suicide, suicide ideation, and acts of violence tied to the drug's use have heightened concerns.

In October 2016 many veterans made complaints to the Canadian government, stating that they believed they were suffering from health problems related to mefloquine, that they were required to take during missions. Despite these complaints and concerns, the Canadian Forces continued to offer mefloquine as the first option for specific deployments until a Surgeon General Task Force report was released in 2017. It is worth noting that mefloquine was not pulled from the Armed Forces' malaria prevention; instead, it is viewed as a less preferred agent.

Madam Speaker, learning about the risk factors of medications years after initial usage is unfortunately not a novel phenomenon, but since the task force's report many studies have examined the long-term effects of mefloquine in veterans who took the drug. Even though the studies have had mixed results, most of them have highlighted the need for additional research. Aside from further research into mefloquine, now more than ever before, there was a need for supporting Canadian veterans suffering from the effects of quinism.

Additionally, there is a considerable need to explore whether mefloquine-induced quinism has contributed to veterans' PTSD diagnoses. Misdiagnosis of mefloquine toxicity as PTSD without considering the potential confounding effects could result in long-term treatment mismanagement of affected individuals, potentially worsening their symptoms rather than relieving them. We owe it to our veterans to provide them with answers and appropriate additional supports. As their mental health continues to suffer, so does every other part of their lives, and so many of them have lost so much after sacrificing so much for us and our country.

3:20

Madam Speaker, the men and women who enlist to serve our country do receive excellent training, but veterans continue to face considerable challenges transitioning back to life at home, including financial, vocational, emotional, physical, and psychological hardships. Failure to adequately recognize these challenges, including the potential for quinism to cause or exacerbate them, is a disservice to those that served. Many veterans who took mefloquine as part of their mandatory deployment medication feel as though they have been abused, ignored, and abandoned. Unfortunately, their concerns about the drug's long-lasting effects have often been dismissed as trauma-caused issues. In cases where neurological symptoms are present and mefloquine exposure can be confirmed, a correct diagnosis of mefloquine toxicity, or quinism, is critical to determining the most appropriate

and effective treatment. In addition, it is possible to identify symptoms associated with mefloquine toxicity that are not usually present in other common psychological or neurological syndromes experienced by military personnel.

This is why we must work with the federal government and other provincial governments to encourage the adoption of safe antimalarial treatments. This joint effort needs to ensure that any medications offered are genuinely well tolerated by healthy people and further must determine tolerability under actual conditions of use. Mefloquine was created and approved by the FDA at a time when there was an urgent and immediate need for new antimalarial drugs. Now decades have passed, and this drug, that can cause issues with as little as one dose, continues to be on the market. Medications should help, not harm, so developing and adopting truly safe antimalarial treatments is necessary.

Madam Speaker, in my view, how the situation has been handled and how our veterans have been treated is unacceptable. I would like to again thank the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane for raising this important issue and for putting forward this motion and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for proposing the amendment we just voted on. I hope that all members of this House will support the amendment and the motion's three important calls to action: to support research into the adverse effects of the antimalarial drug mefloquine, for the federal government and other provincial governments to encourage the adoption of safe antimalarial treatments, and to collectively express our support for Canadian veterans suffering from the effects of quinism resulting from the use of mefloquine.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members to speak to Motion 502 as amended? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to begin by thanking the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane for the motion and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for the amendment. As citizens of Canada we are lucky to live in a place where climatic factors, including rainfall, temperature, and humidity patterns, do not support the anopheles mosquito, which spreads malaria. In Canada, where the average year-round temperature is below 20 degrees, the Plasmodium falciparum parasite causing severe malaria is unable to survive.

We have also been lucky to develop different medications, thanks to innovations in the pharmaceutical sector, to combat this horrible sickness globally, one of them being mefloquine. Just like we trusted science to create this medication, we must follow science in understanding each aspect of mefloquine, both good and bad. Mefloquine is a synthetic derivative of quinoline, which science has proven to be a highly effective drug against the malaria parasite. For that, we are grateful.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, there is more to this story. Mefloquine is a pharmacological name of an ingredient in a medication pharmaceutically known as Lariam. This medication was trialed in 1975 as the need became apparent that a new malarial drug would be needed in the aftermath of the antimalarial therapy chloroquine becoming less effective against the parasite in such areas as sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. With the waning effectiveness of chloroquine, Lariam stepped up to the plate and was used both within prophylactic capacity and treatment during infection.

However, while this drug proved effective in many senses, it had some serious side effects. One of these detrimental effects, widely noted since the mid-1990s, was its ability to cause neurotoxicity,

highlighted by several observed neuropsychiatric events postuse. Such events have been identified by prominent health institutions, one being the WHO's Uppsala Monitoring Centre, an independent drug safety monitoring organization. In addition to this, well-known health institutions such as the FDA and the previously known Committee on Safety of Medicines, now better known as the Commission on Human Medicines, have issued warnings to their doctors to caution their patients about such neuropsychiatric events. But that is not where the buck stops, Madam Speaker. Several studies indicate that mefloquine toxicity, or what's commonly known as quinism, results in a flurry of additional side effects ranging from insomnia, anxiety, depression, vertigo, visual impairment, among a long list.

However, the big question is: why are we relaying all this information here today? Well, first and foremost, the FDA has acknowledged symptoms of vertigo, dizziness, to be directly caused by mefloquine. The FDA also requires documentation of medication, including mefloquine, to state that such symptoms may continue for several years and may be permanent. In addition, symptoms like anxiety, hallucinations, paranoia, or depression may render long-term psychotic behaviour continuing for months and years.

Secondly but most importantly, Madam Speaker, our brethren in the uniform, our veterans, have reported suffering from such side effects from mefloquine, which they were ordered to take during their deployment to malaria-affected states. In an article titled *Treated Like Lab Rats: Malaria Drug's Dark Side Effects Haunt Canadian Vets*, the CBC documents that several of our soldiers, including one veteran named Greg Janes, stated that they were not told the side effects of the medication. Janes even referred to the weekly dosage of mefloquine on Tuesdays as psycho Tuesday due to the sheer severity of the side effects. The Canadian Auditor General condemned Lariam's prescription containing mefloquine at the time as an abuse of protocol. Our soldiers were forced to take this medication for Somalia in 1992 and 1993 and did so with Lariam, still unlicensed in Canada.

Madam Speaker, this speech is more than just standing with our medically affected vets who put their lives on the line to defend our country; it's a call to action for the Canadian government and the Canadian Armed Forces to partake in a thorough vetting of this medication. The Surgeon General Task Force inquiry report on mefloquine stunningly falls short of evidence-based analysis. In that report it is concluded that no evidence was found to support a causal link of the neurological impacts of mefloquine on long-term medical health. However, the same report also identifies applying strict exclusion criteria to the studies it considers. In fact, the report states that the studies from which they derive their analysis and conclusions are of "low to very low quality." How is anybody expected to take the conclusions drawn from such a report as an objective standard with which key decisions regarding the health of our soldiers are to be made? We can do better, and we must do better.

This is all to say, Madam Speaker, that I cannot sit by silently on the sidelines when I know full well that some of our brethren in uniform are in pain and torment. Greg Janes, who I had earlier referred to, indicated that even more than 23 years later some of his fellow soldiers, including himself, still suffer from nightmares, irritability, and insomnia. Military soldiers are already at the forefront of facing all types of horrific scenarios, placing them at a higher risk of experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder and quinism. Several of Greg Janes' colleagues, himself included, have reported suffering from quinism. Several veterans subject to mefloquine treatment deployed in other areas of the world such as

Rwanda and Afghanistan are undergoing the same unfortunate predicament.

Over the recent years more details of the damaging effects of mefloquine have started to emerge. Now the CDC acknowledges that mefloquine can confound the management and diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder. Health Canada even goes as far as to advise people with schizophrenia, general anxiety, psychosis, and depression to avoid mefloquine.

3:30

As an elected leader I want to take this moment to speak directly to the veterans. Dear veterans, I acknowledge your pain and express my heartfelt sympathy to all you brave men and women. I stand here today and call for both the federal and provincial governments to issue a more in-depth inquiry in the meantime, substituting mefloquine as an antimalarial and providing suitable alternatives.

To all the members of the House, I urge you to support this amendment and motion. We need transparency, informed consent, and extensive drug testing to better protect our soldiers and veterans, who protect our freedoms in this great country.

I yield the floor back to you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thanks to members on both sides speaking to this wonderful motion put forward today. It's with a heavy heart, I know, that the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane brought this forward. Again, as one of the other members mentioned, as a private member to get a motion is kind of a big deal. You know, some folks hunt. It's like getting that moose draw that you've had to wait around for a while. The fact that the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane brought this forward is quite admirable. He's a man of his word, a man who made a commitment a while ago, when we first went to this thing – it actually was the first event.

It was the first event that came across my desk when I was newly elected, to attend an event called Walk for Veterans. It was Chance Burles that was at the top of the letterhead. It was the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont and myself and one of the parliamentary members. Dane Lloyd is his name. I think I can say that in here. We were the only ones that attended this event. It was kind of neat to go there and talk to folks. A gentleman by the name of Mr. Kennedy was one of my constituents. It was at that point that myself and I believe my colleagues really heard about the mefloquine injuries, the things that had taken place, quite frankly, the sheer horror stories that this caused.

You know, they put so much on the line, our members that join to serve. They give up rights and freedoms that most citizens don't realize that they have. Quite frankly, to be treated like this is reprehensible. The fact that they go through – they walk through hell in a number of circumstances to do the right thing so that we can enjoy the rights and freedoms we have. It was something. I really appreciate the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane getting his one shot as a motion. It took us three years to get here. Hats off to you, sir, for doing that.

I'm going to read the motion just to make sure that everyone at home knows that I can read, number one, and, number two, so that I'm not rambling too much. I am getting to that age where I need to have my reading spectacles on, Madam Speaker, so please don't laugh, because I feel awkward enough as it is most days.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to:

- (a) support research into the adverse effects of the antimalarial drug mefloquine, sold under the brand name Lariam;

- (b) work with the federal government and other provincial governments to encourage the adoption of safe antimalarial treatments; and
- (c) express support for Canadian veterans suffering with the effects of [quinism] resulting from the use of mefloquine.

With that, let's talk about some of the things that these poor folks had to undergo. Again, it was issued. They didn't really have a choice in this. A bunch of other countries now have pulled it off the shelves. They don't issue it to their soldiers anymore. They've recognized the issues and the damages. Our country has yet to do this, hence the reason why we need to encourage that and, as Alberta, to step forward once again to lead the charge on that.

Here from *W5* – and I'm not going to get into all the technical data, because other folks have done that way more eloquently than I have, but let's just talk about real people and real things – are some of the feelings that were expressed by some of the soldiers: that they had been poisoned, that the government had poisoned a generation of their own soldiers. They believed that it led to extreme rage, left their lives in shambles. There are 900 Canadian vets who have signed up for legal action on this for a drug that nearly killed them. They felt like guinea pigs.

Soldiers had nicknames for the days of the week when they were administered this. We were told by some of the folks at that Walk for Veterans that typically they weren't deployed on the same day. They were given a couple of days after they had had their treatment. When you have days that are called, like, Manic Monday, Terror Tuesday, Wacky Wednesday, and Fearful Friday, it's not laughable. These folks were experiencing dreams so violent and haunting that it caused troops to lash out, night terrors, rage, paranoia, psychosis, searing stomach pains. They were never told by their superiors of the side effects. They didn't know that these could have long-lasting harms that would follow them around.

This came out in 1984, and it's been issued to our troops since '91. Dr. Remington Nevin is a world expert on mefloquine toxicity from Johns Hopkins University. He calls it the horror movie pill. Let's let that sink in. A medical professional with that type of background is literally talking about the effects that it has on people as a horror movie pill.

Roméo Dallaire is the highest ranking soldier to sign on to this with legal action. He felt memory loss, stomach cramps. It impacted and affected his operational ability. Our government so far – our Canadian government, that is – isn't stepping up, quite frankly, Madam Speaker; hence the reason for this motion, to compel them.

If there's something that we can do in Alberta – the Member for Airdrie-Cochrane had stated that we have a U of A doc. He's in this area. He's willing to do it, work on brain mapping. At that event and a subsequent one that the MLA for Airdrie-Cochrane and I also attended in downtown Edmonton – it was the year after, I believe – I heard some of the stories and about some of the comrades that had been lost, not from direct combat action but afterwards, when these folks are reaching out to each other to check up on each other, folks that are suffering from these long-lasting ramifications, to make sure that your buddy is okay. I'd overheard that a couple of times. They had grave concerns – they hadn't heard from a member down in southern Alberta – and were trying to be there, and I've seen that comradery.

These guys and members of the community step up for each other. There was one member from my community who was knitting blankets and quilts to give to these soldiers to let them know that people still care about them, that when they were in tight spots and they were suffering and they couldn't reach out to fellow comrades, this blanket was wrapping around them to make sure that they knew that they weren't forgotten about and that they had some support there. It kind of tugs at the heartstrings.

Australia pulled it. They don't even use it for second-line defence anymore. The U.S. has used it as a drug of last resort since 2013. It's only to be used if there are no contraindications. Ireland has taken it completely off the market. In Canada: well, it's still available for the general public. If you go under the brand name Lariam and you happen to be going travelling and you go to one of those jurisdictions or those regions, you just might be taking the same thing that, in that one doctor's statement, is the horror movie pill. It's not only just our soldiers – not to say "just." They were the ones that had no choice. People at home: how often do they go and read the back of the labels?

The labels, Madam Speaker, on some of these drugs – let's see. Here you go: depression, generalized anxiety disorder, psychosis, schizophrenia, major psychiatric disorders, convulsions. How close do you read the fine print? If you're going over for a nice vacation, maybe you give this to your kids. Maybe you take it a little longer than you should. That's not quite the vacation I'd be signing up for or having anybody else sign up for, especially with these long-lasting effects.

It was first used over in Somalia. I'm not going to go into the events there out of respect for our soldiers who served, but talking to the guys at that walk leads me a lot to believe that maybe things would have been different if our soldiers weren't receiving those medications. Maybe things would have turned out differently. It really hearkens to the question: maybe our government had something to do with that.

With that, I'm not going to take up much more time on this. Looking at the number of reports that have taken place, you know, there was a Surgeon General Task Force report on mefloquine saying that

military personnel [are] a unique population with specific risk factors that might predispose them to adverse effects potentially associated with mefloquine, e.g., neuropsychiatric harms.

So if you and I happen to be – I'm not saying that you and I are going, but if you and I, Madam Speaker, as an example, were going on a trip and were heading somewhere for a good time, it's a heck of a lot different than being deployed and put into stressful circumstances and to have this additional stuff added to you, especially with the frequency and the time that they're in field and that it's not supposed to be taken any more than eight days and that these folks are deployed for a heck of a lot longer than that, eight months at least, depending on the circumstance, maybe even longer.

3:40

It hearkens to the question that when all these experts are doing these things, speaking out against it, when we have witnesses and testimonies right here in your face – and if you want to, watch that *W5*. There were two episodes on it. If it doesn't bring a tear to your eye or it doesn't make you think, then you haven't watched it. I don't think there's anybody in this Chamber or out in the general public that can't put themselves in that circumstance or doesn't know someone in their area or their family that may have been exposed to that. Maybe it will help you understand a little bit more what's happening to these folks.

In 1998, as part of a series of Parliamentary questions regarding mefloquine use in the [Canadian Forces], the following question, labelled as Q-138, was asked:

Of those members of the Canadian Forces who were administered mefloquine since 1992, how many have attempted suicide or committed suicide; in what year; in Canada or abroad; and if abroad, name the country.

The question was never answered.

The methodology consisted of a crude listing of the attempted and completed suicides reported to the military police.

Again, we can administer these things, but we don't track them in the proper way, and we don't even know the cause or effect or harm.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to join the debate on Motion 502 as amended?

Seeing none, I will ask the hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane to close out debate.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Over the course of this afternoon's debate we heard about the detrimental effects of mefloquine toxicity, or quinism, as it relates to Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans. One of those veterans, whose story was discussed earlier, Shaun Arntsen, wanted me to make clear that quinism is not something that is exclusive to the military. In Canada Lariam became available for public use in 1993. Citizens here as well as around the world used it for the intended purpose, but they may have no idea about the impact that this drug has played in their lives.

Madam Speaker, in 2002 on a camping trip to central America my wife, two friends, and I were prescribed Lariam to prevent malaria. All four of us developed insomnia and during intermittent periods of sleep experienced very vivid dreams. When awake, it felt as though you were in a high state of anxiety, like you had just drank an entire pot of coffee, and you felt that way all the time. Now, as we all know, our body requires sleep, so when deprived of it, of this necessity, it begins to take its toll on our body and on our mind. For us, something didn't feel right. Something was off. So after only a few weeks of taking mefloquine, my wife and I decided to discontinue its use, and we did not finish the prescription.

For myself, in a matter of a few weeks I felt back to normal, but that was not the case for my wife, Tracy. She felt jittery, high strung, and anxious for months after. Within two weeks of arriving home, she went to our family physician to learn that she had suddenly developed an arrhythmia. This was obviously shocking for a healthy woman in her 30s with no history of heart problems. Now, fortunately, as the effect of the drug dissipated, the arrhythmia went away, but for years she had periods of sleep apnea, unexplained dizziness, and bouts of vertigo that created a lot of stress for her. As a byproduct of this anxiety, my wife developed thyroid disease, for which she takes daily medication and will for the rest of her life. Now, can all of this be attributed to the use of mefloquine? Well, quite frankly, I'm not certain, but that's the very reason we require government support to conduct the necessary research to help veterans and constituents who are suffering.

Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank all my colleagues for their efforts here today, and I'd like to thank all veterans, those currently serving in the forces today, and all those who lost their lives in service to our country. Thank you in advance for your support of Motion 502.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 as amended carried unanimously]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 4

Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs to move second reading of Bill 4, the Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022.

These amendments to the Municipal Government Act, or MGA, are needed in order to achieve clarity of public health policy for Albertans across the province. As we're all aware, Alberta's government removed many restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic over the last several weeks. Alberta Health has been taking a thoughtful, methodical approach to both the implementation of public health restrictions and to the removal.

As Albertans have grappled with COVID-19, the Premier and Minister of Health have spoken at great length and with informed expertise about what it means for Alberta to move beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, and I'll try not to emulate their words today. What I will say is that I believe it is clearly in the best interests of all Albertans and all Alberta municipalities to have a clear and consistent set of public health requirements in place as we continue to manage COVID-19 and move past the pandemic. With this objective in mind, we are proposing to amend the MGA to ensure that municipal bylaws align with a provincial approach to public health issues. The overall approach will be to grant the Minister of Municipal Affairs with appropriate oversight and approval of municipal bylaws related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The changes to the MGA are extremely narrow and strictly focused on management of a public health crisis that is properly within the government of Alberta's jurisdiction. If the amendments pass, municipal bylaws requiring masks to prevent the spread of communicable diseases or relating to COVID-19 vaccines will need to be approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The proposed changes would also require the Minister of Municipal Affairs to consult with Alberta's chief medical officer of health to approve the bylaw. For example, the proposed changes would prevent local governments from imposing masking bylaws on private-sector operators such as grocery stores or retail businesses. Local governments would continue to have the authority to implement masking bylaws for the operation of municipal buildings such as recreation centres, public transit, and municipal buildings. These changes would have no impact on the day-to-day operation of Alberta municipalities. Since most municipalities already comply with public health requirements for COVID-19, these changes will have zero effect on them.

Specifically, a new section, section 7.1, will be added to the MGA that will accomplish several things. First, section 7.1 will specify that a municipality cannot pass a bylaw about masking to prevent communicable disease or proof of vaccination requirements unless the bylaw has been approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs after consultation with the chief medical officer of health. Upon the coming into force, the new section will also repeal any of these types of bylaws that are currently in place. It's also important to know that the section states that enforcement efforts made while the masking or vaccination bylaw was in effect are still valid. This means that prior enforcement activities will continue to be valid even though the bylaw will be repealed when this legislation comes into force. Finally, the new section specifies that this exception does not apply to bylaws that focus on property owned or leased and operated by a municipality.

Our government is well aware that there are some Albertans who have some concerns with these proposed amendments. I would like to take a moment to address some of them. First, some people will say that the proposed government is overreaching its jurisdiction and that the proposed amendments create a precedent whereby the government can impose its judgment on any municipal bylaw. To that point, I would note the narrow scope of the amendments, which

are clearly designed and limited to address public health measures related to COVID-19. The government is not interested in infringing on municipal jurisdictions any more than is absolutely necessary to ensure consistent public health policy, which is most certainly within the province's jurisdiction.

3:50

As for precedent, I would note that there are many other instances in Alberta law where ministerial approval of a municipal bylaw is required. For example, the Municipal Government Act does not allow municipalities to pass bylaws to close roads within their jurisdiction without approval from the Minister of Transportation. All we are doing here is ensuring proper provincial oversight of public health policy, which is clearly the responsibility of the provincial government.

Second, some people will say that the government previously allowed or required municipalities to create their own bylaws in order to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. It's true that Alberta's government has allowed flexibility for municipalities to develop and implement their own public health measures when appropriate in response to COVID-19, but that was during the middle of the pandemic, when Alberta did not have such a robust vaccination rate and it made sense for local governments to take local measures under certain circumstances. Those circumstances have changed. As the Premier and Minister of Health have said, Alberta has a high rate of vaccination among adults, and there is no public health rationale for continuing certain restrictions such as masking requirements in indoor public spaces.

Of course, Albertans may continue to wear masks for personal health risks at any time that they wish, and this choice must be respected. But there are no longer sufficient grounds for the provincial government to require masking as public health policy; therefore, there are no grounds for municipal governments to do so either. The proposed amendments will create consistency for Albertans on this point.

Finally, some people will say that Alberta's government has not consulted with Alberta municipalities about the proposed amendments. Well, Alberta's government engages with municipalities a great deal on a great number of policy initiatives. It was just not necessary for the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions. As soon as the public health data allowed for the easing of restrictions, Alberta's government acted in the interests of Albertans because that's what we were elected to do.

Individual Albertans and Alberta businesses should have their option of whether or not to wear masks or to require their customers to wear masks, and the proposed amendments to the MGA will ensure that they have that choice. The approach we are recommending will restrict the ability of municipalities to pass bylaws that contradict public health policies and rules enacted by the province. Our goal is to ensure Alberta has one clear policy as we move together toward a path towards normal. Albertans and Alberta municipalities deserve a clear, consistent, and unified approach that the proposed amendments to the Municipal Government Act will provide.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Member Ceci: Thank you to the associate minister for the second reading introduction. I appreciate that. I did have some concerns, though, with some of the things that I heard the associate minister speak to. For clarification's sake, every municipality in Alberta is now following what is in Bill 4. The city of Edmonton rescinded their mask and vaccine passport bylaw last week. So it's not that most are following it; everyone is following it. I guess the first question I would have is: if everyone is doing what Bill 4 identifies,

why are we even spending time here today going forward with this bill? Why isn't this bill removed from the Order Paper, and why don't we spend time on other things that are important for this province?

The other thing that was mentioned by the associate minister, before I get into talking about the bill itself, was the narrow scope and how the province was surgical in its efforts to get into the MGA and, you know, to amend it with this Bill 4. I guess I would wonder: if it was clear, if it was narrow, why didn't they take time to talk about it with municipalities through their organizations like RMA and AM? If it's that clear and if it's that necessary, why not take the opportunity to discuss it? It doesn't prohibit them from talking about negotiating and being involved with representatives of municipalities, but they chose not to do that.

Further, the associate minister said, you know, that consultations weren't necessary. Well, that perhaps depends on whose ox is being gored, because municipalities believe it was necessary for consultations. It's all fine for the associate minister to stand up in defence of the government and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and say: we thought it over; we're going to do a little thing; it's not going to be a problem. That's not what we're hearing from municipalities. For instance, the president of the Alberta Municipalities says: I believe in a collaborative approach to government, and I believe this is the exact opposite. She goes on to say: it sets a precedent for future legislation changes when all of a sudden a municipality and the government of Alberta disagree, and that's a precedent we don't appreciate. Again, it's depending on your point of view, and the point of view, obviously, of the government is, "No biggie; we're doing what we were elected to do or we're doing to make things clear for all municipalities" when they're hearing back from municipalities, through their representatives, that what they're doing is frankly not appreciated.

[Mrs. Aheer in the chair]

Another quote from President Heron: Alberta's principal piece of legislation governing municipalities, without prior consultation, was changed. End quote. I just want to put those things on the table first to say that the point of view from the associate minister and others that I've heard, particularly the minister, is that it's not a big deal. "We did something that we're able to do; we're sticking to our lane; municipalities have to stick to their lane" even though when you look at the bill, it speaks to the kinds of responsibilities municipalities have. "A council may pass bylaws for municipal purposes respecting the following matters," and letter (a) is: "the safety, health and welfare of people and the protection of people and property." So municipalities were within their rights to do what they were doing. That was Edmonton, for instance, and Calgary and others that had masking bylaws and vaccine passports required or checking vaccines for people going into establishments both city and private. They were within their rights to do those things.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This government, this Premier, asked municipalities, back several months ago, over a year ago, to do these things. You know, "You have the power to do it," and they did. Now the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the associate minister are changing that power, and they're doing so without the involvement. That's another day and another reason why Albertans really can't trust this Premier and his government to act in their best interest. Municipalities are finding that out, Madam Speaker. As I said, last year the Premier abdicated responsibility for public health decisions, and he said that those decisions – and this is a direct quote – are best taken locally. And we know that municipalities did that. He encouraged

municipalities to implement their own health measures due to the diverse needs across this province, and we saw that take place. Now this government is directly contradicting what they originally asked municipalities to do, and they're contradicting themselves by taking decision-making power away from municipalities in Bill 4 and the locally elected leaders that were exercising those powers.

4:00

As I mentioned, with section 8 – no, not section 8; section 7 in the MGA, those powers currently exist under municipal authority, but the Premier is directly targeting them for his own political reasons, we believe on this side, attempting to save his own skin from the leadership review that is coming up in Red Deer on April 9.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The actions of the Premier – and I put this in my speech that I did on behalf of the hon. Leader of the Opposition to Alberta Municipalities last week. I believe that the Premier believes another fight with another group will improve his leadership odds, make him look like, you know, a tough leader who can get his way, whether it's with municipalities, whether it's fighting with doctors and nurses and teachers and unions. I could go on, apparently. We have seen this repeated over and over and over again, unfortunately.

The repetition provides Albertans with an opportunity to see through this for what it is: a cynical ploy to, again, improve leadership possibilities. We've seen this since the election of the UCP in May 2019. This was a government that claimed, Mr. Speaker, to be a grassroots government, to listen to the grassroots and to do the things that the grassroots were asking. The Premier even signed a grassroots guarantee, but the locally elected leaders now, not only in the city of Edmonton but all locally elected leaders, are being minimized and put off to the side with regard to something they hold very dearly, and that's the Municipal Government Act. It's an enabling piece of legislation that we should rightly be proud of in this province. It's a significant piece of legislation, and as some of the people I talked to at last week's Alberta Municipalities conference mentioned, you know, it's not something to be trifled with; if you're going to open it up, for goodness' sake, involve us.

The interference with local decision-making, imposing a top-down governance style is something that's very, very problematic. On this side of the House we respect local democracy. They are legitimate local governments across this province. Counties, summer villages, cities, towns: they are a legitimate, democratically elected order of government. They are not a lesser order of government. They are an order of government, Mr. Speaker.

What they get from the other side is not respect for who they are. They get told – and the Member for Lac Ste. Anne- . . .

Member Irwin: Parkland.

Member Ceci: Parkland. Thank you very much.

The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has said that, you know, local governments are children of the province. I can tell you that that phrase, that idea went over like a lead balloon at Alberta Municipalities, and it's going to go over the same way at RMA. They are not children of the province. That Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland went on to say that, you know – and I think he was directing this at one municipality in particular – if they don't get in line, like children, they deserve to be spanked to put them in line. Again, Mr. Speaker, that's not respectful, not appropriate, not the kinds of words one expects from a member in this House. We don't believe that local leaders and our communities are simply children

of the province. We don't believe that they need a spanking if they set up bylaws that they have the power to do under the MGA.

If we're going to succeed as a province, we need to work in partnership with each other. That's how we'll get over the huge challenges in this province. Picking fights with fellow Albertans who are democratically elected is not the way to do this. This legislation is nothing less and nothing more than a deeply cynical ploy to divide Albertans and to crush local democracy, starting with the city of Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to take a few minutes to go over some of the things I heard the minister say to the Alberta Municipalities conference when he made a speech. He talked about how this bill and its actions were, quote, a slight diminishment of local power.

It goes back to what the associate minister was saying, you know, that they feel like they were narrow in scope, and they're just making things consistent around the province, that they have the flexibility to do this, that there is nothing prohibiting them from doing it. So when the minister says that this is a slight diminishment of local powers, I just know that he's talking from his perspective, not from the perspective of democratically elected local governments around the province. They don't believe it's a slight diminishment when you change the MGA without involving them.

In fact, it's been raised by people at local government, you know: if they can change this, is this the thin edge of the wedge? Will they not involve us in talks about future changes? Will they change the MGA without our involvement in the future? I have to say to that: probably. They did it this time. What's to stop them from doing it in the future?

If you believe in a collaborative approach, Mr. Speaker, then that means talking to the stakeholders that you have empowered, that are involved, said that the work they do is important. It means engaging with them and coming up with a solution, not keeping it quiet, not saying nothing about something you're planning to introduce and then essentially they have to eat it because they don't have the power like we do here, like the government does when they have a majority, to push through bills that they want to push through.

I don't know if I read this statement. I'll do it now. Perhaps I have. I don't think I have. It is again from the president of Alberta Municipalities. We'll see what the president of RMA thinks about all of this in the next day or two, Mr. Speaker, because that's when their conference is taking place. The president of AM said to the media last week: we are concerned that the government of Alberta is setting a troubling precedent by amending the MGA – I did say this last part – Alberta's principal piece of legislation governing municipalities, without prior consultation.

You have to wonder: why didn't the government consult? I mean, they had time. Somebody could have picked up the phone. There's lots of staff, hundreds of staff in Municipal Affairs. They could have picked up the phone, but instead they're acting unilaterally and picking fights with municipalities. You have to wonder what other measures this government is considering with municipalities, to change the MGA. I don't know. We'll have to see. Those obviously are some of the concerns this side has with this bill and the actions of this government.

4:10

We heard from the associate minister with regard to some of the aspects or changes to the MGA that'll take place. Ministerial approval is necessary for any alteration of the MGA once this is passed. The minister has to be involved and, he says, with the backup of the CMOH at that time. This repeals existing bylaws. There are no existing bylaws in the province at this point in time.

We know that Edmonton was the only city with bylaws in place, and those were repealed last Tuesday.

Private properties can still require vaccine checks and proof and masking. That's not going to be changed by this. If a venue, for instance, like a theatre wants to continue with masks in place, like the one I went to a couple of Saturdays ago in Calgary – there were masks in place, and people had to show their proof of vaccine. There was 50 per cent occupancy by that theatre's desires. They can still do that with this bylaw. That's a good thing, that the government isn't railroading private properties in that case. Local governments can still, on their own property, in their own facilities, require masking bylaws.

Mr. Speaker, this is another day, as I said, yet another reason why Albertans can't trust this Premier or his UCP government. Last year the Premier abdicated responsibility; now he is taking responsibility away from municipalities without their consent. I think that's wrong, and Bill 4 should be dropped.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, second reading of Bill 4. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I consider it a privilege to be in this House every time we're in session and every time we have a sitting. I count it a privilege to be able to speak to Bill 4 today, the Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022. I think I can speak for probably everybody in the province, at least in this Legislature and probably in every level of government across the country, when I say that the last two and a half years have been difficult on everybody as we've tried to deal with this pandemic, this COVID. You know, it has been an issue of discussion, I think, probably at every kitchen table and in every Legislature, whether it's municipal or provincial or federal.

It has not always been easy. It's not been easy because in a lot of ways we're dealing with some really important principles in how we try to live our lives and how governments address our lives. We're dealing with principles that go down to some really basic freedoms. How can we best protect our society? We're trying to balance freedom to be able to make our own choices and to be able to make our own decisions, especially those on health issues, versus the control that we need to try and protect those in our society that are vulnerable, those that could be severely affected by the COVID pandemic and by the virus.

I think all of us have had to grow and to consider this attempt to balance the ideas of freedom and control.

For myself, I don't know how other people have sort of arrived at trying to figure out when we should and when we shouldn't, but I know that in my own life as the MLA and in listening to my constituents and dealing with the phone calls and dealing with the conversations in the grocery store or on the street or dealing with the e-mails, I've come down to two or three things that have sort of guided my way of thinking, principles that I've used to guide myself when we try to balance this issue of freedom versus control.

The first is that I think we have a duty as citizens and as legislators to ensure that the vulnerable are protected. That's a given, and I don't think I've met anybody in my constituency, when I've had a conversation with them, that would disagree with me on the need for our society to organize ourselves in such a way and to have legislation and regulation that would allow us to protect the citizens of this province.

The second one is that I think that in almost every case, when we talk about it, we need to live in a society where we also protect the livelihoods of the citizens of this province.

The third one, that has grown over the last two and a half years, has been that we really do need to protect the liberties of the citizens of this province. As we've been dealing with COVID, we've tried to bring forward legislation that has protected the vulnerable, protected the livelihoods of our citizens, and protected the liberties of our citizens. I know that there's been disagreement on that at times, and I think that we're now at the point, after two and a half years, where we need to chart a course towards a post-COVID world, a world where we now are moving beyond the need for restrictions. It's now time for individual Albertans to be able to decide for themselves how best to address COVID and their health issues surrounding that virus. I believe the emphasis now needs to switch from the need for societal control more towards one that allows for individual freedom of choice as they make their decisions about how best to protect themselves and to live in a world where there's going to be COVID.

Bill 4, the Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022, addresses this issue of moving the province from a focus on the need to protect the vulnerable and to have control to the need to transition to a post-COVID Alberta where our traditional freedoms are restored. It does so by addressing masking and vaccination mandates and clarifying the roles of the province and the municipalities.

As we have addressed COVID over the last two and a half years, Albertans and all levels of government have struggled to figure out just how best to safeguard the vulnerable while protecting our freedoms and our capacity to make choices in this society. Masking was one policy direction that was pursued, and proof of vaccination was another. We've had to deal with these and try to figure out where that balance lies.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that a mandatory masking policy restricted individual choice and that a proof of vaccination policy, you know, did impact people's individual and personal liberty. When trying to make a decision about these kinds of issues where there's individual choice or societal control, often the best decisions are decisions that provide and put forward the least amount of personal restrictions and provide the most amount of personal freedom and where the decision is made at the most local level. Often people most affected by a public policy are the people that should probably be deciding on the implementation of that policy. If it's going to be affecting them most importantly, then they should be the ones and probably are the ones that are making those decisions about whether they're going to have that placed upon them.

Now, during COVID that was often best done at the municipal level as they could monitor the local conditions and the need for restrictions to protect the local population that was vulnerable. By allowing local municipal decision-making, the vulnerable could be protected where and when necessary while those parts of the province not yet affected by an increased case level of COVID could remain free of masking restrictions or free to be able to make more personal choices.

4:20

But when it became clear that COVID had spread across the province to the point where the province needed to step in with provincial mask mandates or with other restrictions, you know, it became obvious that we needed to do something in order to protect the vulnerable at a provincial level, so the government took on that responsibility.

Today the province can and has started to remove those restrictions because it's safe to do so, and that's what the science is telling us. Bill 4 addresses this reality by reinforcing and by clarifying the need for each level of government to remain within

their lanes and to remain within the capacity to develop policy that is going to be best for the province and allow us to move forward together as a province.

Mr. Speaker, Canada – I'm going to use this example – is a federal union where the power to govern is divided between different levels of government. The Constitution Act outlines in section 91 and in section 92 the powers of the federal government and the powers of the provincial government. The federal government can, within our Constitution, make a law in areas where the provinces are restricted from being able to make and pass law. We do this for a number of reasons. We're the second-largest country in the world; we have a relatively small population of about 35 million, 37 million people. We want to be able to have a federal system of government because it allows provinces to be able to make decisions about more local issues at the provincial level, and in the federal government we have a national government that can now make decisions on law that are going to be best for the nation as a whole.

The federal government makes laws in areas like defence, our borders, foreign treaties, monetary and fiscal policy, the environment because these are areas in which the nation as a whole is going to be impacted and where we need a national government making those kinds of decisions. Section 92 outlines the provincial powers, things like health care, education, natural resources, et cetera. We set our country up this way because we recognize that the local decisions need to be dealt with at the local level and that national issues need to be dealt with at the national level. This principle is called subsidiarity. It is valuable, and it's important, and it has ensured that this nation functions relatively smoothly and in the interests of the people.

Our country functions best when the federal government drives in its lane and the provincial governments pass legislation that stays in their lane. Now, we would not function nearly as well if a province had the capacity to declare war or to print money or set interest rates. Now, our national prosperity and our national freedom are best addressed when each level of government makes laws that constitutionally it has the right to pass and enforce.

Bill 4 speaks to this issue provincially. The municipal level of government is founded upon a provincial piece of legislation called the Municipal Government Act. [interjection] No. Thank you. The province is responsible for public health, and they can, in addressing a public health issue, decide if subsidiarity needs to be followed or if a province-wide piece of legislation is necessary. Bill 4 simply clarifies that on this issue of masking and proof of vaccination, it is best addressed today, at this time, at the provincial level with oversight by the minister. Bill 4 recognizes that it is now time to move forward towards individual freedom, with fewer COVID restrictions, while still protecting the health of Albertans.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, many, many of the people in my constituency have e-mailed my office, they've phoned me, and they've talked to me on the street clearly saying that it is time now – in many cases, they believe, long past time – for this province to have removed restrictions. My constituents don't want a patchwork of restrictions on their freedom to make individual COVID restriction choices depending on where they happen to be in the province at any given moment in time. They are fine if someone wants to wear a mask as an individual choice, and they are supportive of an Albertan who wants to be vaccinated, but they are clear that it is time to move past COVID as a province, and if that means that we need to have provincial legislation that will move us together as one province towards that freedom, they're supportive of it.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 4 brings clarity, I believe, for Albertans across this province as we move towards a post-COVID society, and it will therefore have my support. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, second reading of Bill 4. Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert has risen. [some applause]

Ms Renaud: Feeling love this afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

It's my pleasure to rise and speak at second reading of Bill 4, which is the municipal government amendment act, 2022, which is really about face masks and proof of COVID-19 vaccination bylaws. You know, this is another day, another reason why Albertans can't trust this Premier and this government. It was really alarming to me, and I'd like to go back to talk about some of the things that happened last week and some of the public reporting that all of us, I think, in this House were able to see about what happened at the Alberta Municipalities meeting last week. Unfortunately, we had budget estimates preparation and then estimates themselves, so I was unable to be there to hear the comments live and to see what was happening, but it was incredibly disturbing and alarming to read what happened after the fact.

Now, one of the things that struck me, after some comments were made by the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, was seeing some of the comments of the mayor of St. Albert, who is also the president of Alberta Municipalities, on social media. I could see, just in the language that she was using, the incredible amount of frustration at the disrespect that was being shown to her as a leader, as a municipal leader, but also to all municipal leaders across the province, not just mayors and reeves and councils. It was actually sort of sad to see that, Mr. Speaker.

I've been very fortunate to work with Mayor Heron and now President Heron for over six years. What I can tell you about this particular mayor is that she is very even. I think she works very hard every day, and I've watched her do it. She works very hard every day to listen, to listen to her constituents, to listen to her councillors, to listen to her colleagues, and she's incredibly measured. I have seen issues in front of her that were very heated, that people clearly had a lot of passion about, one side or the other. This is a leader that maintains focus and that is very even keeled. This is a person that has said repeatedly that she is willing to work with anybody. It doesn't matter sort of what position they have staked out. She's willing to listen, and she's willing to work with people. That doesn't mean she's always going to agree or not, but it means she's willing to listen. Those aren't just empty words, Mr. Speaker, because I've seen her do that. I have seen her do that very thing over the many years that I've been an MLA watching her in public service.

So it was incredibly frustrating to know that one of our colleagues here in this Chamber decided once again to make a statement that was just so inflammatory that it almost begs the question, Mr. Speaker: is that the purpose of the statement? Is it just to make himself feel better or to maybe, you know, create a bit of an audience? I'm not sure what the reasoning was, but the end result was that it was incredibly disrespectful. It sends a disrespectful message to that level of government from all of us in this place. Although we didn't say it – hopefully, most of us don't support it; I know I certainly don't – it's incredibly disrespectful that a Member of the Legislative Assembly would choose to use that language.

4:30

Now, for those of you at home that are paying attention to this bill debate, what I would like to say is that I would like to repeat some of the words that the member chose to use. The MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland said that he's glad the UCP is stripping local

government powers because municipalities are the children of the province and it is time for someone to get spanked. Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm pretty sure that most of us in this place understand how important it is to choose the words that we use carefully. I know that we're repeatedly admonished in here for unparliamentary language, so we learn that language and the words that we use are important. I know in the sector that I used to work in, where people with disabilities are regularly called words that I won't repeat and language is used about them that I won't repeat – I understand the damaging impact or the harm that words and language can cause, so to hear a Member of the Legislative Assembly refer to municipalities as children is disrespectful.

But to take it even a step further and to talk about corporal punishment is just shocking to me. It's absolutely shocking to me that this member would choose to talk about corporal punishment in that way, that it is something that is legitimate and should be used by the provincial government. I thought we were past that, Mr. Speaker. I really thought that in 2022 this was not language that we would use and that this was not even something we would consider. [interjection]

Ms Pancholi: Yeah. Thank you to the member. I just wanted to take a moment to intervene on a couple of points. First of all, I'm really glad you brought up the issue of language because that is so incredibly important, and we're seeing the use, I believe, of incredibly inflammatory language and dismissive language towards not just our fellow representatives, right? That's really what municipal elected officials are. They work in partnership with provincial, with their school boards, you know, with the federal elected representatives. It is a partnership to work together, so that language is incredibly dismissive.

I wanted to actually go back because you were speaking about the tone, really, of the mayor of St. Albert, who's somebody that I have not had the opportunity to meet in person, but I have also followed her work. Given the member's role as being the, you know, elected official for St. Albert and having worked with Mayor Heron for as long as you have, I believe that you probably know her in some ways... [Ms Pancholi's speaking time expired] I didn't get to my point.

An Hon. Member: One minute is not long enough.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. No, one minute is not long enough. I think I understood where the member was going with the question. The point is that Mayor Heron, like so many other municipal leaders, absolutely is the closest to the people. I think back to debate that we've had about different levels of government in this Chamber. I thought we could all agree that municipal governments were so important because they truly were the closest to the people. They had a sense of what was going on in the community far faster, far sooner than we did at a provincial level and then far sooner, far faster than federal politicians did because they're right there on the ground. They're dealing with the potholes and the speed limits and service delivery on a very basic level. These are politicians, these are elected leaders that know more from individual constituents, sadly, I think, than any of us will because that is the function of their role. For this government to just summarily dismiss them, to say that they know better – they know better – than municipal governments is truly insulting.

When I saw the angry response – you know, it was really a passionate response from Mayor Heron, who is someone who is so incredibly even keeled and so focused on listening to as many sides as she can in a debate. To see that anger told me that this was a pervasive problem. I'm quite sure that most municipal leaders right

across this province feel the same way that she does. It's so disrespectful. The fact that none of these members, Mr. Speaker – none of them: not the Premier, nobody on the front bench, none of the backbenchers, not one person – has stood up and said that they condemn the comments made by the MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is very, very telling.

Let's talk about the danger of dehumanizing language. This is what we're hearing from this government. Because we've not heard any other members stand up and say that they disagree or they condemn, this leads me to believe that everybody is okay with it on this side, that they're okay with comments made that municipal governments, duly elected Albertans, are like children and deserve to be spanked. Like, come on. We know the dangers of dehumanizing language. It is often justification to treat people differently, and by differently I often mean badly. We have seen this government and their staff go after people on social media, and then we've seen the fallout after. People are threatened. People are harmed. We have seen that language. We have seen what that language does. [interjection]

Ms Pancholi: Thank you to the member. I wanted to follow up on that because I note that at the Alberta Municipalities we had the Minister of Municipal Affairs stand up and speak and seem to struggle to get any support for his statements. He certainly had that opportunity at that point to condemn the language used by the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland right there in front of municipal leaders from across the province. Of course, the Minister of Municipal Affairs did not take that opportunity, which, I agree, tends to imply that he agrees with it.

You know, I wonder what you think that means for relationship building, because we also know that under this government we have seen multiple Municipal Affairs ministers who have struggled to develop that key relationship, and when we have members from the government caucus making statements like that, that have not been condemned by ministers, what does the member believe the impact will be on that ongoing relationship with municipalities and the provincial government? I actually think that's a pretty key part, that relationship building between municipalities and the provincial government. I'd love your thoughts on that.

Ms Renaud: Good. Okay. Thank you. Absolutely, I think that it is incredibly important to build solid relationships with municipalities. You know, what is a little bit shocking in all of this is that I guess I believed that this government, this leader of this government would figure out that the vast majority of Albertans and municipal leaders have zero trust in them. Like, none. Zero trust, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] No. Thank you. What leads me to believe that they would actually...

Mr. Orr: Interjection?

Ms Renaud: No. N-o. No.
What, again...

Ms Pancholi: No means no.

Ms Renaud: No always means no.

Mr. Speaker, going back to this, I want to talk about the fact that I actually believed – and maybe that's just delusional thinking on my part – that this is a government that would recognize that Albertans don't trust them – do not trust them – don't trust what they say, don't trust what they do, don't trust what they say they're going to do, all of it. I actually thought that this would be a government that would start to focus some energy on rebuilding that trust, and the first opportunity that they had to do that, it seems to me, would be at a gathering like Alberta Municipalities to talk

about the way forward, recovery from COVID. That would be: let's work together; let's build a stronger community; let's work together to get to where we want to be. No. Instead, we're right back to insults from backbenchers like the MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

I want to go back to the comments that I was making. You know, I can hear some of the chatter across the way when I talk about the dangers of dehumanizing language. I do think it's really important that we talk about this because hateful rhetoric causes problems all over the world. We know this. We know that divisive politics leads to things like violence. We know that language is the seed that starts all of that. We understand that, yet here we are with a government that is unwilling to even say one word about one of their colleagues who has summarily decided that duly elected municipal leaders are like children and deserve to be spanked. That is just incredibly vile. It is so incredibly vile.

You know, I hear members opposite regularly stand up and talk about the dangers of domestic violence, the dangers about harm for children and families and how COVID has caused so much stress, has caused so much damage to our collective mental health and to individual mental health and how important it is that as we recover, we recognize all of these things that have happened over the last two years, that have escalated, that have caused all kinds of trouble. Instead, we have a government that is willing to look the other way when one of the backbenchers throws a little fuel on the fire. Just when we don't need a division between different levels of government, what this UCP government seems really intent on doing is creating as much division as possible.

Now, am I surprised, Mr. Speaker? Absolutely not, because I know what's coming up in April. I know exactly what's coming up in April.

4:40

An Hon. Member: What's coming up in April?

Ms Renaud: Let me tell you what's coming up in April. There is a review of this Premier's leadership, so whatever is going on with their shenanigans or going on behind the scenes – I think we've seen their behaviour in leadership races before. I think that we can safely assume that there's some stuff going on. But I think what we see on the front is that we see division, and we see a government intent on pointing fingers over there: "Oh, look over here. There's a problem over here. Look over here." Like, that's what they do, Mr. Speaker. We've seen just ineptness. We've seen bills that really don't need to be debated in this place because they're essentially useless at this point. We have seen rhetoric, divisive language again, again, and again. Why is that? This isn't about good governance. This isn't about good leadership. This isn't about building a stronger Alberta. This is about saving some political bacon. That's what this is about. [interjection]

Ms Pancholi: Thank you to the member. I'm not sure how much time we have left, but I'd like to just build on that if I may, ask the member to share her comments about what this is really about and the breaking of trust, because we've certainly heard from this Premier – at times, when it suits the Premier, it appears that he's willing to lean on and, in fact, download responsibilities onto municipalities, school boards, locally elected bodies and then, when it serves his purpose, rein them in to look tough, perhaps for an upcoming leadership review in April. Then, of course, we get a totally different side of the Premier. It seems to me that we've seen this flip-flopping back and forth a number of times during COVID in particular but on a number of issues, which I think leads to some Albertans' mistrust of any decisions that this Premier makes

because it's always about serving political interests. I'd like to hear the member's thoughts as to how this current flip-flopping – and we know this is an about-face from two months ago – leads to that mistrust.

Ms Renaud: Thank you for that. That's a great question, and it has been political flip-flopping. We've seen so many examples of it over the last couple of years. We've seen this UCP government push the decisions, difficult political decisions sometimes, onto groups that are not themselves, whether that is school boards, whether that is municipalities, and they'll say: "Well, it's not us. It is not us. We are not responsible for this. It is the municipality. It is the school board." Yet when it suits them for whatever reason, whether it's to save their political bacon or not, they're quite happy to impose rules on other people, in this case municipalities. This is all about self-serving governance.

You know, I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but when I think about the kind of governance that I want for Alberta, I want honesty, transparency. I want a government focused on Albertans. I want a government that can work with other levels of government as opposed to trying to throw bombs at them. That's the kind of Alberta I want. That's the kind of governance I want. That's the future that I'm working for, and that is not what we see here today. We have not seen examples of it. I keep hoping that something is going to get better, and it just keeps getting worse.

Today the fact that we are spending precious time – we have very little time to debate bills in this place, particularly to deal with private members' business. Anyways, this isn't that. What is incredibly frustrating is that we are now forced to do this when it is essentially useless. It is useless. We know that all municipalities – there are no longer any bylaws that are going to be taken care of, but that doesn't seem to matter. I find it incredibly sad, a government so willing to pass the buck to municipalities when it suits them and then inflict all kinds of harm by reducing the revenue they receive, increasing the costs that they download – it just goes on and on and on – and then literally treat them horribly and allow members to say really derogatory things about them and then nobody says anything to correct the record. Nobody.

So you let it stand. You're complicit. To say that somebody needs to be spanked is just gross. It is truly gross, and it would be lovely if somebody would stand up and condemn those comments and then put on the record that municipal leaders should be respected. We should work with them, not call them names and inflict harm.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. You know, I find it entirely one sided, what I've been listening to from the other side here. All through the COVID pandemic many, many, many rural municipalities requested that the province would adopt a regional process, would allow them to have a different policy than the major cities. Throughout that process the province continually said no to them. So if we want to be fair, if we want to treat municipalities with equality and work for unity, let's not forget that part of the process. They were told the same thing that the city of Edmonton was told here: it's a provincial jurisdiction; it's a provincial authority. [interjection] No. Thank you.

I would like to include that, you know, I think the NDP need to quit trying to make conflict out of something that isn't conflicted. I notice that even the city of Edmonton has moved on. I was at the Alberta Municipalities. The mayor of Edmonton – and I respect him for it – sitting at the table with the Premier, was not wearing a mask. He's accepted it. He's moved on.

I would also say that, quite frankly, they should also know that there's more than one side to this story. I had one of the mayors from my riding phone me explicitly to tell me thank you for putting the city in its place.

While the NDP want to make a big deal out of this, there needs to be fairness and equality to all municipalities and respect for all municipalities within the limits of the legislation.

There are two sides to this story. Very clearly, the NDP don't want to accept that. I think it's just time that they need to accept it. We should move on. There are people in Alberta who just simply don't agree with them.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to our colleagues, for the opportunity to engage in debate on what the government has deemed their number 4 top priority this session. Number 1 was, of course, around giving recognition to local folks and honouring the Queen, and there are a couple of others. But this is, like, the first few days of legislation. The government comes in here to try to bring in a bill – you know, they have a massive majority; they will probably be able to ram this through – to take away powers from municipal partners.

I really appreciate the revisionist history that we keep hearing from folks on the other side. For the longest time the government refused to show any kind of leadership on public health, which is, of course, a provincial responsibility – public health is – and downloaded local decisions around how to respond to the public health crisis that we were facing onto individual municipalities, including county councils as well as cities and towns. The same government that's here today with this bill felt just fine delegating or being derelict in their responsibility and counting on local leaders from a variety of different communities, including school boards as another order of government.

I want to be very intentional. When I say, "Order of government," I do that because I know that some people, particularly on the other side, talk about levels, saying that there's one level and then another level and another level, which implies – which was actually articulated by the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland – that this government believes there is a hierarchy. They do. They believe they are the subjects of Justin Trudeau and the federal Liberals, by inflection upon what they have just said, to draw that continuing connection.

4:50

I have to say that it continues to be the height of hypocrisy for the government to change the argument at a whim at any point in time because they happen to read a poll that they agree with at that moment in time. You know, leadership is about stepping up when times are tough as well as taking credit when times are less tough, but it seems to be that this government has no interest in being there and that Albertans very clearly can't trust them to be there when times are tough. And when times are good, they continue to make times tougher on ordinary families.

So while we could be here debating a bill that actually returned a rate cap for electricity, that found ways to make power bills more affordable, the government seems very keen to try to blame today's bills on decisions that prior governments made instead of the government today and the minister today stepping up and bringing a bill into this House to actually do something to make electricity costs more affordable for ordinary families. And then they seem so intent in question period to try to play word salad, to try to say: oh, well, you say that it's \$50, but it's \$150. You know, like, that does

not pass the nod test for any ordinary person who's struggling to pay a bill that has doubled over the last few months. Many constituents in Edmonton-Glenora and in all parts of this province are raising significant concerns about the lack of affordability, and one of those areas is around power prices.

For the minister responsible to come into this House and say, "Well, people have individual responsibility; they could sign up for a fixed-rate plan" is kind of like last year, when the government said, "Well, individual mayors and reeves and county councillors and municipal councillors can make their own decisions about how to protect their citizens." [interjection] I'm very happy to give way to my colleague.

Mr. Deol: Thank you for the chance to actually make the intervention on this. It's not surprising to see the government start in this House by bringing in Motion 10 and condemning the federal government in a passion. Their views weren't really different not long ago, three weeks ago. Now they have brought this bill in to take the capacity and the powers away from the elected municipal governments. I just wanted to raise a question. If the member can really expand on why this government is showing the hypocrisy and flip-flopping on this issue. Are they trying to divert attention from people's anger? As I see in communities, people are so angry on the rising cost of utility bills.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to my colleague for highlighting yet again the lack of trust between what this government is choosing to prioritize and what ordinary families are facing in terms of their immediate pressures. Of course, yes, as was mentioned, utility bills, specifically power bills, are a very big one. Another very big one for a lot of families is the cost at the grocery store. I know many families who say to me: you know, we used to be able to spend . . .

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is called. The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to call a point of order under 23(b)(i). I think there's been a lot of discussion so far today that has gone well beyond the scope of this bill, and I would like to see the member actually get focused on the bill and not relitigating question period or electricity prices.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just because we are at second reading, because we are talking about a bill that has really raised a lot of issues of trust in government – I've certainly heard that quite a bit in the responses so far – I don't think this is a point of order. I think that the member is trying to connect these related thoughts at second reading. I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: This is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Debate Continued

Ms Hoffman: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that the Member for Calgary-Klein doesn't want me to talk about electricity prices, but that is a significant issue for a lot of Albertans. There, of course, is a relationship to the Municipal Government Act here. We

have a government that's choosing to bring forward amendments to this because they want to, you know, swing a big hammer and claim that they are in the best position to be able to make decisions around individual municipalities' behaviours around bylaws.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

But they refuse to do anything to protect individual consumers from the significant price gouging that they are facing as a result of the current government lifting the rate cap and really only caring about profit margins for corporations, not about bank balances for ordinary families that are struggling to make ends meet.

Absolutely, Bill 4, which is an amendment to the Municipal Government Act, could have been prioritized on focusing on finding ways to make life more affordable for ordinary families. Instead, what the government has done is try to create an opportunity for them to force a massive wedge and to create a greater sense of frustration for municipalities and other orders of government. Instead of coming to this place and working to make life better, working to make life more affordable, working to make sure that we are providing quality public health care, something that should be an objective for multiple governments – obviously, there's a federal role under the Canada Health Act but also the provincial government, being responsible for the delivery of health care – and then, of course, working with local partners on the actual administration of that, the government tries to come in here and swing a big hammer and talk about scolding children and spanking them. That is the underlying tone of this legislation as opposed to one of finding common ground and one of finding ways to address the most pressing issues facing Alberta families right now.

Of course, one of those significant issues is around affordability and, specifically, power bills. That is one of the reasons why, instead of bringing in this municipal government amendment act, an act to essentially do what's already been done and try to create a political wedge... [interjection] Happy to cede way to my colleague and give way for his comments.

Thank you.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Member, for the opportunity once again. You talked about the member for Lac Ste. Anne. Is that how we say it?

Ms Hoffman: Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Deol: Parkland. Yes. Thank you.

With the way he described his level of understanding of democracy and the level of institutions and their contributions in a democratic society, I would ask the member to expand on: how concerning is it that none of the government members really differentiated from that statement from the member, not in the House, not publicly, not in the media, and not even during the debate? I would ask the member if she can just really expand on this, how this is really concerning for democracy in this province.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you to my colleague from Edmonton-Meadows. If I'm to think back on my educational training, specifically on opportunities where we were focusing on how to prevent bullying and how to create safe and inclusive school environments, one of the biggest lessons that I remember aspiring teachers being taught was that your silence signals your consent. If you see somebody doing something wrong, if you see somebody behaving in a wrong fashion, whether it's in school, whether it's in the community, whether it's in the Legislature, and you sit back and

you say nothing, you are implying that you consent to that behaviour, that you think that that behaviour is okay.

It really doubles down when somebody uses threatening language towards another elected official – threatening, physical language towards another elected official – and says that they deserve to be spanked. Madam Speaker, it is the height of disrespect, of arrogance, of bullying, and of consenting to the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland's language and therefore his intent behind that language. This UCP government is implying and saying, by saying nothing, that they are absolutely fine with the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland threatening physical violence towards other orders of government and, therefore, elected officials. It is...

An Hon. Member: Shameful.

Ms Hoffman: It is shameful, and it is disrespectful. It does not belong among adult discourse, let alone among the discourse of elected officials. Adults shouldn't speak that way about or to one another. They just shouldn't.

I remember when I was a young child going to school and my dad was my principal. I remember snooping through his desk after school one day, when he was trying to keep me busy while he was working, and finding in the back of one of his drawers the strap. I remember having a conversation with him – we certainly didn't have corporal punishment in our household, and there was a symbol of it in the desk at the school – about why it was that that was there. Because the government hadn't acted yet to end corporal punishment, it was left to individual school divisions. It was. It was really left to individual school divisions to step up, one after another after another, and say that that behaviour – it is not positive role modelling, when a child is acting up, to hit them. It is not telling them that that's the way that you behave in a civilized society. I will say that the behaviour and the language from the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland is not positive role modelling. If he wants to say...

5:00

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I'm just going to take the opportunity to maybe refocus your remarks back on the bill instead of members of this Assembly. There's certainly been an adequate amount of time given in that regard. I would just ask that you focus your remarks so that you can stay on this bill and keep order and decorum in this House.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks, Madam Speaker. So when members are speaking to legislation and they say things that are highly offensive and disrespectful and threaten violence towards one another, I think that as members of the Assembly, as it relates directly to legislation and the opportunity we have to model good behaviour – and I appreciate your guidance. It should be followed.

I also want to say that other orders of government include school divisions, and while this is specifically about municipal governments, I want to talk about the way that the government has been treating other orders of government, whether it be the federal government, whether it be municipal governments, or whether it be school boards. There is definitely – and I get it. The Premier was very successful in the last election campaign in fighting against the federal government as his primary message to voters – right? – and creating conflict between the provincial and the federal government. I totally get it. He was absolutely given a mandate at that time to fight the federal government on some issues.

He did not say that he was going to fight with municipalities. In fact, the UCP said that they were going to respect the big-city charters, the charters that had been reached with the cities of

Edmonton and Calgary, and then very quickly after the election broke that promise and rescinded that legislation. That was probably the first example where we could have anticipated that we would see further behaviours along this path.

Then the current government decided, again in relationship to municipalities, to not pay their taxes fully – right? – the grants in place of taxes. They just said: “Well, we’ll just cut those grants in half. So be it.” Could you imagine if a regular ratepayer decided that they wanted to cut how much they were paying in tax unilaterally, with just: “I’m only going to pay half my property tax this year. I know the government is jacking up my educational property taxes, but I’m only going to pay half of what it was last year. I’m not going to actually pay what the assessment is for this year.” That simply wouldn’t pass, and that’s because, through you, Madam Speaker, through the Municipal Government Act we have a delineation of authority and powers, and it should be up to every order of government to respect the orders and powers of other orders of government.

When I think about the complete lack of respect shown to democratically elected school boards in the province of Alberta when they are given the task of creating, for example, their capital plans and submitting their needs assessment for what they believe is necessary to provide a quality education to the students registered in that school district – it flows from legislation very much modelled on the Municipal Government Act. It flows from the School Act – right? – and the Education Act to be able to guide the local, elected, closest to the ground on those specific issues politicians in working with administration to create a nonbiased, evidence-based submission. Of course, what we’ve seen under the current government is a complete refusal to fund the vast majority of those projects that were submitted based on a needs assessment and criteria that the government helps work to set and establish when they’re communicating to their partners, what should be their partners, local school authorities.

For example, again in the city of Edmonton we’ve seen a refusal to fund any public school projects at all. I am relieved that there are at least two for the Catholic school board, but that certainly isn’t anywhere near enough projects for a city growing at our rate. With the Edmonton public school board seeing their enrolment grow at the highest rate right now in the country, for the province that says that they honour choice to refuse to actually give that same level of appreciation, respect, and capacity to a board seeing such growth pressures I think again speaks to this current provincial UCP government’s complete lack of respect for local government.

Again, here through the municipal government amendment act we have yet another piece of legislation that speaks exactly to how the UCP can’t be trusted to keep their word, full stop. [interjection] To my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie, please. Or Edmonton-Meadows, rather. My apologies.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Member, once again for the opportunity to raise my concern. In the last year the Premier basically abdicated his responsibility. He was looking at the municipalities and said that public health decisions – and I’ll quote: these decisions are best taken locally. That was the Premier’s view. The Premier encouraged municipalities to implement their own health measures due to diverse needs across the province. But a year later, when the Premier is taking a 180-degree turn, it seems to be more to do with UCP politics instead of really serving Albertans or for the sake of the safety of everyday Albertans. I would appreciate it if the member can expand on this, taking a U-turn from what the Premier believed in last year and what he is doing now.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to the member for the question. Certainly, one of the things that I look at regularly – and I’m sure many Albertans do – is modelling and data and tracking trends, and I think that we were all hopeful a few weeks ago that we would see a significant decline in the rate of infections and spread. We have seen a bit of a decline, but I will say that the rate isn’t anywhere near as rapid a pace as the increase was that led to the current rates.

Thank you to the member for highlighting the discrepancy between the Premier’s words and actions during this public health crisis over time. Some people have said that they are concerned – and I would love to have clarification from the government if that’s not the case – that one of the reasons why the provincial government has decided to push a one-size-fits-all model is because they don’t want there to be regional differences between the data to show that the government could have done more to protect citizens if there are huge spikes in some parts of the province and not in others, because, of course, if you uniform behaviour, then you can’t have local analysis based on intermunicipal jurisdictional behaviours and how that impacts the data.

I know that the government has made a number of decisions to try to make it more and more difficult for people to have the information; for example, how difficult it is right now to actually get a PCR test when at the very beginning, when cases were a fraction of what they are today, we were all able to get PCR tests if we had any concerns, whether we were a close contact or not, whether we were symptomatic or not. The government at that time, about 20 months ago, decided that they wanted to have Albertans have as much individual information as possible with their own personal health, and at that time one of the arguments was that individual Albertans can make decisions about how to support themselves, support their families, support their communities, and protect one another.

This government has worked so aggressively to try to reduce the amount of information that individuals have and therefore their ability to make informed individual decisions, right? You hear it from comments like the one just given from the Minister of Culture, where he doesn’t hear what municipal leaders are saying generally; he notices whether or not they’re wearing masks, right? That’s the comment, that because the mayor of Edmonton took off his mask when he sat down with him, he respects him. Like, the language and the duality of saying, “It’s about individual choice and individual responsibility” but then saying, “I respect somebody because of their behaviour and how they interacted with me given the fact that we said that it’s individual choice and responsibility, and therefore he chose to follow my lead” just isn’t respectful of the role of individuals. Again, it’s individuals who comprise local municipal governments.

We are debating Bill 4, the municipal government amendment act. I have to say that the fact that the government continues to try to stay on a path of division . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Happy to rise this afternoon to join debate and talk about legislation that’s been brought forward to the House. Always excited to talk about what the legislation says, what the legislation doesn’t say but, more importantly, what is being said about that legislation that’s tabled before us and how it governs debate. As you can imagine, throughout the debate this afternoon I’ve been taking notes and listening very, very carefully to what everybody is saying, and I hate to say this. As usual, what I’m finding is that what’s being said

about the legislation isn't quite lining up, which – I hate to say it – tends to be not only a consistent but a persistent problem by the government.

5:10

I think that what I will start my comments with on Bill 4, the Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022 – it appears to me that this piece of legislation is a solution that is frantically looking for a problem to try to solve. Now, you're probably wondering why I'm saying that, Madam Speaker. One of the comments that I heard just a little bit earlier from the Minister of Culture was talking about how it seems that the municipalities have moved on. Well, if that is indeed true, if the municipalities have moved on, why hasn't the government? Why hasn't the government moved on? That means: why are we busy with Bill 4 if the municipalities have moved on? That part of it isn't quite lining up.

Some of the other things that I heard – and I appreciate the minister of gas bringing forward the comments from the Minister of Municipal Affairs to open up a debate. One of the things that concerned me on that was, you know, hearing that – and I'm paraphrasing here; I'm sure it's not exactly accurate – the government is not interested in infringing on municipalities unless absolutely necessary. I always love these little catch-all phrases that get put in all over the place and things because it allows for that one little moment in time where, if you really do want to infringe on them, then all you have to do is come up with a reason for it to be necessary. I'm curious, you know: who decides what's necessary in terms of infringing upon those? [interjection] I see my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud, and I'm happy to let her intervene for a moment.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you to the member. I want to follow up on what I believe you were just about to comment on, which was, you know: what really is the precedent that this is setting, right? I think that's what we were hearing very much from the president of the Alberta Municipalities and from many other local councillors. The provincial government has decided that when it sees fit, without consulting with municipalities, without actually speaking to the diversity of people around the province who may have different views on this but particularly the local councillors who are on the ground and understand what's happening in their communities – does this not now open up the potential that any time they want to, the provincial government or this provincial government, let's be clear, will intervene and amend the act and that even when it's no longer necessary, for example like right now, they're flexing their power to sort of show, "We will always impose our views upon your local constituents"? That is a precedent that I think is deeply concerning to all of us. I'd love to hear the member's comments on that.

The Deputy Speaker: Just a quick intervention that even interventions are to be directed through the chair.

The hon. member.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll make sure to direct the answer through the chair as well. No. Thank you for that, and, yeah, you did. You kind of read my mind as to where I was going around that because, you know, I'm sure, just like the government caucus members who attended the Alberta Municipalities and were chatting with the municipal leaders – I, of course, did so as well, and that was one of the things that came up in conversation. I mean, their president, the one that municipalities have duly elected, had said: we are concerned that the government of Alberta is setting a troubling precedent by amending the MGA, Alberta's principal

piece of legislation governing municipalities, without prior consultation. Again, things aren't adding up. I'm hearing: well, we're consulting with municipalities. The president just said that you weren't on this. So which is it? Are you consulting, or aren't you consulting? Are you making it up, or what's going on here?

When I had the opportunity to speak with municipal leaders, that was one of the things they kind of pointed out: "Okay; we understand you're maybe doing it for this, but then what's next? Are you willing to take it further, or is this just, really, kind of the end of it?" Like I said, going back to the opening comments of second reading in this debate, when we heard that the government is not interested in infringing on municipalities unless it becomes necessary, again I'll reiterate: who decides what is necessary, and how far are you willing to go? Again, it's that little bit of troubling piece of information.

When I think of that, also one of the comments brought up in the opening part was around how this bill is very limited in scope. Of course, I'm always one to go through the language and see, again, what it's saying, what it isn't saying, things like that. When I hear about this, limited in scope, I can't help but have to direct people to page 2 of Bill 4, right at the top. Of course, it starts over here on page 1, "an individual to wear a face mask," but it goes on to say, you know, "the spread of COVID-19." Now, here's the catch-all phrase that everybody just loves to throw in there as their little rip cord, their chance to hit the ejection seat and get out of what they're saying, "... or any other communicable disease, as defined in the Public Health Act."

So really what you're saying is that this isn't just about COVID-19. This is about whatever else that shows up in the Public Health Act as a communicable disease, and if you decide that it's necessary, you will overrule municipalities. Again, it's that standard, catch-all phrase that just allows you the chance to get out of things. I hate to say it. When you say that it's very limited in scope, the language in the legislation says otherwise. Again, it's always that head-butting of things. I think the concern that we're hearing from municipal leaders – and I'm sure we're probably going to hear the same from the rural Alberta municipalities as well, from their leaders – is: what's next? What else could come up?

My colleagues have certainly gone on at length about some comments that were made about municipalities. I'm just going to leave it at: that is unprofessional. These are duly elected leaders by the people of Alberta, the same ones that elect all of us. To come up with comments like that is simply unprofessional, and you need to do better, not to mention any of the other stuff.

You know, my good friend from Calgary-*Buffalo*, who is also the critic for Municipal Affairs, when he was talking a little bit about how this was supposedly a government that was built by the grassroots, run by the grassroots, things like that – I couldn't help but catch that comment a little bit earlier. I hate to say it, but your actions over the past couple of years clearly have said otherwise. It sounds like the grassroots just got – you know when you're mowing your lawn, Madam Speaker, and you catch a dip in the lawn, and the lawn mower falls down and just shaves that grass, like, right off down to the dirt? It seems like that's kind of what's happened with your grassroots. You've kind of shaved it right off, and it's right down to the dirt. These heavy-handed approaches, like we're seeing here in Bill 4, speak something different than what you're saying is actually going on.

You know, when it comes to trying to build the province of Alberta, when you're trying to create a strong team, fighting with your partners does not make that job any easier, and if anything, for every step that you try to take forward, you end up taking two steps back. Again, kind of going back to the unprofessional comments that I was talking about a little bit earlier, if you want to be able to

build that relationship with municipal leaders so that they trust you, you have to be involved with them as partners, not just seeing them as some lower level of government. [interjection] I see my friend from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

5:20

Member Irwin: Thank you, Member. You've touched on so many things, and one of the things that just spurred me to jump up there was your comment about lack of trust. It seems to me – maybe it's the former social studies and English teacher in me – that we can see a theme arising of lack of trust in this government, and I think you and I and any of our colleagues on this side of the House who've been talking to Albertans are hearing that a lot as well, right? While Albertans are struggling with so many things – paying their bills is an example – they've got a government that they simply can't trust to do the right thing to address these issues. I would love for the Member for Edmonton-Decore to just talk a little bit more about this and expand a little bit on the lack of trust that Albertans are expressing in this government. This bill, Bill 4, is just one of countless examples, in fact, that we're seeing from this government. If I had more time – well, it's true that I'll be able to speak to this bill shortly to just talk about some of these grave examples of mistrust in this government.

Thank you.

Mr. Nielsen: Yeah. Thank you for that question. Again, it's funny how it always comes back to legislation presented: what does it say, what doesn't it say, and what are you saying about that? You know, I always see the government standing up and saying how they're trying to make the lives of Albertans better, trying to make it more affordable. If you're trying to make it better, then why would you bring forward, say, for instance, legislation that would change who's controlling their pensions, just as one example? Or perhaps you start to bring forward red tape legislation that reduces an Albertan's ability to be as safe as possible in the workplace. I'm referring to changes around health and safety committees. We've certainly had this argument before, how, like I said, the worker at the ice cream plant can't tell the worker how to work safely at the milk plant.

You see these examples of, you know, things being said to make their lives more affordable, yet it's becoming more expensive. I mean, a quick example of that, Madam Speaker, would be all of a sudden charging them to go to a park that they've never had to be charged before to attend. To more directly answer that question from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, it's those kinds of things that people see, and it doesn't add up to them. So you start to see this distrust.

I mean, for that matter, Madam Speaker, I could go all the way back to the very beginning of the 30th Legislature, you know, even before that, when the Premier promised Albertans that he would disclose his donor list from the leadership. That hasn't happened. That shakes trust in people. You've promised to do that. You said, "I will disclose this," and then you don't, and then you wonder why people distrust you.

Here you have a bill that is interfering with municipal leaders' abilities to make local decisions in their area. You're starting to interfere with that. I should point out something that I know this government has been very vocal and disdainful about, what they feel has been an infringement from the federal government on their ability to be able to do things. Yet all of a sudden now it's rolling downhill, and you have the province doing that to municipalities. Again, I will point out that it's that case of trust where you have these elected representatives, as I mentioned, who said: well, it's funny; I didn't hear anything until the bill hit the table. That shakes

trust. Then you have a situation where it's very, very hard to work with these democratically elected individuals in order to move the lives of Albertans forward in a positive and growing way.

I guess, as I was saying a little bit earlier, in order to do that, the last thing you want to be doing is starting to pick fights. We've seen this throughout the last several years, where the government seems content on picking fights with, well, quite frankly, just about everybody. It's getting hard-pressed to be able to find somebody that they're not picking a fight with. You know, we saw the government picking fights with doctors, and we saw them picking fights with nurses, and then we saw them picking fights with chiropractors and physiotherapists around removing their ability to order diagnostic imaging so that their patients could get timely and effective care. So it's not surprising that even when I'm in my chiropractor's office, I hear from residents that are saying: this wasn't what I signed up for. These are your supporters telling me: this isn't what I signed up for.

Now they have something like Bill 4, that's interfering with the ability of these municipal leaders, voted for by these individuals, all of our individuals, saying: well, we don't like that decision. We're surprised, as we've heard in some of the comments during opening and a couple of other times, you know: how far else will this end up going? What's the next thing that's going to come up? Yet there seems to be almost some surprise as to why that thinking is there. I mean, this isn't original thinking on my part; this is just what I've heard from people and from leaders. [interjection] I see my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you to the member. I'm curious. I find it kind of interesting, because I know the member referenced the fact, you know, of hearing from local municipal leaders. I'm certain every member in this – well, I know that every member in this Assembly, of course, represents areas that also have local representation, and therefore they must also be hearing from local councillors on these issues. I'm wondering, through you, Madam Speaker, whether or not the member could speak to perhaps his surprise that none of the government members are standing up and speaking out against what is clearly a limit on local authority. I seem to recall that that seems to be a primary tenet of much of traditional conservative ideology – it certainly has been abandoned wholeheartedly by this government, this idea of support for the grassroots and the local representatives – yet we're hearing no members of the government caucus stand up and speak for the rights of local representatives.

Mr. Nielsen: Yeah. Thanks for that question. I mean, I guess I'm sounding like a broken record here a little bit, Madam Speaker, but again referencing just one example that we all know – it's public; it's out there – the president of Alberta Municipalities: we are concerned that the government of Alberta is setting a troubling precedent by amending the MGA, Alberta's principal piece of legislation governing municipalities, without prior consultation. So what is it? Is she accurate, or did you not hear it, or something else? There's at least one example out there. I know there are more. I was in the room. I heard it for myself. It's kind of like when our offices, our e-mails get bombarded from, you know, all kinds of different areas of the province and we're all CCed on things. I find it very, very difficult to believe that not one single member of the government or government caucus has heard from a municipal leader that Bill 4 is not a great idea. If indeed they're all happy go lucky and heading off into the future, why aren't you guys, then?

5:30

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to speak to this bill on behalf of my constituents, Bill 4, Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022. I will say at the beginning of my comments that I do strongly oppose this bill.

This is another day and yet another reason why Albertans can't trust this Premier and they cannot trust this UCP government. The reasons are obvious. It was not long ago, just last year, when Albertans were expecting leadership from this Premier on very similar issues that the Premier and the UCP government are claiming to address under this bill, the safety of our constituents and the safety of Albertans. That was then. The Premier said that public health decisions are best taken locally, the Premier encouraging municipalities to step up to implement their own health measures due to the diverse needs across the province. Those were the Premier's exact words and the reasoning the Premier was giving behind his statement. A year after, the government is totally and directly contradicting themselves from that exact view by taking decision-making powers away from municipalities and locally elected leaders.

Local municipal leaders are, similarly, elected by their constituents, as we are in the provincial Legislature, for their mandates. It was more disturbing to see the way the government House member tried to express his feelings or tried to support the bill, the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland constituency, saying that municipalities are children, not elected governments but children, of the provincial government and that they deserve to be spanked.

Many read this statement – and I was looking for the information where I would encourage the member to really go back and look at this. He really needs to develop his understanding on what he was proposing. An article published in the *Atlantic*: How Spanking Affects Later Relationships by James Hamblin. I'll just read a small excerpt of the article.

For years, the American Academy of Pediatrics has been warning against spanking, and many countries have laws against it. A 2007 UN convention has said corporal punishment violates the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which protects children from “all forms of physical or mental violence,” and should be banned in all contexts. Psychologist Alan Kazdin, the director of the Yale Parenting Center and former president of the American Psychological Association, has admonished that spanking is “a horrible thing that does not work.” It predicts later academic and health problems: Adults who were spanked as children “regularly die at a younger age of cancer, heart disease, and respiratory illnesses.”

This is the article. It goes on and on. They do also study around this issue, how it contributes to family violence and child human rights.

I'm so surprised the member did not only jump to explain his view and explain this very piece of legislation we are discussing in this House, but none of the government House members just, you know, differed from that member's view even through second reading of this bill as well. [interjection] Oh, thank you. I'll give way in the intervention to the hon. member for the north Edmonton constituency.

Member Irwin: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Deol: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Thank you.

Member Irwin: Thank you. It is a long riding name.

Yeah. You know, I just wanted to jump up on the Member for Edmonton-Meadows' concerns about, which many of us have raised today, the incredibly disrespectful – “disrespectful” doesn't even seem like a strong enough word – comments from Lac Ste.

Anne-Parkland. While we've heard a bit of heckling from the other side, we've not, as that member said, had any of them stand up and either defend or apologize for those remarks. Always the optimist, I'm hopeful that someone from that side will stand up and join debate. They're so passionate about this bill; it's strange that they're oddly silent about it. I would just love the member to speak a little bit more about the just absolute lack of respect from that member and what message comments like those send to Albertans. Yeah, as he was . . . [Member Irwin's speaking time expired]

Yeah. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll take this opportunity for my own intervention before this debate starts to become about a member in this House and not the bill at hand. I can appreciate and I hope that every member in this House appreciates the wide latitude which has been given in that regard, but those are the cautions that I have for you while you continue your debate.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for giving me the opportunity to expand on some of the information as I was already actually focusing on these very disturbing views. It's very, you know, sad, I would say, to see, when we are discussing a very important piece of legislation, how that is going to affect the democratic powers of the elected governments, the members of this House, the government members, tried to explain it to very – I don't know. I'm struggling to find a reasonable word for that.

I know Madam Speaker has warned us to stick to the purview of this bill, but I respectfully, through Madam Speaker, wanted to say that we absolutely do not have intentions to bring, you know, how to say – to divert from the intentions and the proposals of this bill that we are discussing in the House, but those comments are seriously troubling. I've seen that the government House members participated in the debate on this bill – we are debating this bill in second reading – but it's very troubling to see that I'm not seeing any member coming up with the improved level of understanding of what this bill exactly is proposing, how this bill is going to affect the governing of the local governments and the relationship between the provincial government and the local governments. Instead, the member stood in public and made comments in public. As of today it still seems like the government House members support those views if they do not deflect, if they do not differentiate from that member's view, and that is very, very troubling for me.

5:40

You know, I never claim, myself, to be a hundred per cent; it's a learning curve. We all learn something new every day. The views that were expressed by this House member are very sad for not only government members but all House members if we do not really, you know, come, stand up, and condemn those views and ask the members to go back and please help yourself and get some better understanding of the views he proposed when he was supporting this bill.

I will try to stay on the bill, what exactly this bill is proposing. These powers this bill is trying to weigh currently exist under municipal authorities, but now the Premier is directly targeting them first. That is obvious. This is happening due to a clear political reason. We all know that April 9 was not the date; April 9 was really decided under pressure and what's happening within the governing party, and this bill specifically is introduced in this House to continue to help gain support for the Premier's coming meeting. We have seen the pattern. We have seen the information for the past many months that is continued on the decline, that every single

information keeps coming; the Premier is struggling to get Albertans' trust, the way he dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic for the past two years, and the way he's still dealing the Alberta Health orders and the way . . . [interjection] I will give it to my hon. member for – I will say the constituency this time.

The Deputy Speaker: Just really quickly, hon. member, there is no need for you to remember the other member's riding name. You can just simply make way.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just remembered. I was going to say – thank you for your help, anyway.

The Deputy Speaker: It will be easier.

Member Irwin: Well, it is Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, and I will say it proudly every time until he masters it. [interjection] Again, I'm hopeful that Cardston-Siksika will stand up and join debate if he's so very passionate over there heckling me. Again, it's very odd to hear such silence from this government when they claim to be passionate about this bill, apparently, so hopefully they will stand up and join debate.

What was I even talking about now? Yes. The member mentioned trust. As I shared with the Member for Edmonton-Decore, there seems to be a theme emerging here with this government, and it's about lack of trust. We're hearing that. We are all, believe it or not, out on the doors and talking to folks across Alberta, not just in our own ridings. I've been in a few of your ridings, in fact, and people are talking about the lack of trust in this incompetent government. I would love for the Member for Edmonton-Meadows to talk a little bit more about just how the actions outlined here in Bill 4 lead to further mistrust in this government.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Member, once again, and thank you, Madam Speaker, for your help. You know, I know it's not mandatory to remember your colleague's riding, but I think this is good practice, to remember your fellow colleague's riding if you can. I will just keep working on it.

I just wanted to read this statement, views coming from Alberta Municipalities' president Cathy Heron, what she said to the media: we're concerned that the government of Alberta is setting a troubling precedent by amending the MGA, Alberta's principal piece of legislation governing municipalities, without prior consultation. This is a key word; I will repeat it again: Alberta's principal piece of legislation governing municipalities, without prior consultation. Why didn't the government consult, pick up the phone instead of picking fights? What other measures is this government considering in their war with the municipalities?

We have seen this pattern since the UCP government took office in 2019. I wanted to reframe to say why government could learn from their own things, why this government even ended up having three different municipal ministers in three years. There is miscommunication. There is a disconnect. What the Premier said during the election – this is the Premier who signed the grassroots guarantee. He may be the only political leader – I don't know of any political leader in the history of, you know, provincial elections or the province's political history that has signed the grassroots guarantee in their campaign by promising Albertans how he will always respect their fundamental rights, and now under this very Premier and the UCP government municipalities actually witnessed attack after attack, attack after attack.

When it comes to taxes, you know, they forced municipalities to raise property taxes in many ways to even keep their services ongoing, and a number of municipalities stood up and said, like, that it's not even possible for themselves. The way this provincial government has been dealing and treating those municipalities, to keep the municipal status,

the municipalities are forced to increase taxes in billions of dollars, and the students in municipalities are facing skyrocketing tuition fees and increased interest rates. The student debt in this province is going to be historic under this UCP government.

We have seen in this budget, that is still under discussion, that's still going to be voted on, that government did not even deliver near, not even close to, not even 5 per cent of what the municipalities were asking this government to support in order to have their projects going, in order to have those municipal governments able to serve their own constituents under the mandate they were elected on. We have seen the municipalities lose 33 per cent on MSI, and we have seen the municipalities come in with added telephone user fees, and that was the government that promised they will – actually, I think they are doing it. They said that they will treat municipalities differently, but hopefully that didn't mean that government is treating differently – I'm sure that it didn't mean, but now truly the actions speak louder than . . .

5:50

The Deputy Speaker: The bell is not working, but your time is up, hon. member. A glitch.

The hon. Member – this is why I get you guys not to remember the names – for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues who have taken the time to speak at second reading of Bill 4, municipal government amendment act. I'd also like to note the quiet response and lack of advocacy for this bill from the government members.

In fact, that's actually what I'd like to target my comments to today because I think that when I look at Bill 4, which is designed to basically revoke the powers of municipalities to make decisions on public health for their own constituents, what's remarkable about this action at this time in particular is that once again, I believe, not only are the Premier but also his caucus members hoping that the hypocrisy and flip-flopping that they have taken will not be noticed. They're hoping perhaps that Albertans will have forgotten – in fact, I'm going to bet that they're counting on Albertans forgetting – about the way they've handled COVID from the very beginning when it comes to the next election. I think that's the only way that they can hope for re-election, that Albertans will completely have amnesia and forget how they've conducted themselves, but many Albertans, most Albertans, especially those who have had, unfortunately, the tragedy of having lost a member of their family to COVID or someone in their community or a colleague, certainly won't forget.

One of the things that I remember and many Albertans will remember is that during the second wave of the pandemic, in late 2020, this Premier was the last Premier of any province of Canada to bring in a provincial mask mandate despite the fact that every other province was doing it and that public health officials were calling for it and doctors were calling for it. This Premier stood his ground and dug in his heels and refused to bring in a provincial mask mandate well past the time when everybody knew that it was absolutely required to get those numbers under control, and the basis for that argument was because of the local interests of local communities. He said: municipalities across the province were affected differently, and they should be allowed to make those decisions. He was very clear on abdicating his responsibility to lead during a public health crisis by putting that down onto local municipalities. In fact, he said: this is a very, very big and diverse province, and every local municipality should be making that decision on their own. That was his rationale for doing that.

Now here we are, two years later, and all of a sudden the Premier – we're not surprised at this point that the Premier changes his mind

depending on the way the political winds are blowing – doesn't care about local municipalities.

But what I am surprised about, Madam Speaker, is that there were a number of MLAs in the government caucus who signed letters, who spoke to the importance of: "Let's not have province-wide health requirements because certain regions were affected differently. My constituency was affected differently. Make sure those rules don't apply to me because it's different out here in rural Alberta. It's different out here in my community." They resisted. They signed letters. They spoke out. There was all the knifing each other that was happening – it's still happening to this day in this caucus – from government members who were insisting upon defending the rights of their local municipalities and regions to make their own decisions.

But now all of a sudden those same MLAs are quiet. Now all of a sudden they don't seem to have an issue with the Premier imposing his views on their local constituents. What's remarkably clear is that principles do not guide the decision-making of this government. They do not only not decide the decision-making; they don't even guide the day-to-day actions of the caucus members on that side. They seem to be guided just by their own political interest at the time. When it suits their purpose, local decision-making is the number one issue that drove them into politics. I seem to remember the Member for Peace River saying that local decision-making was so important, yet silence from the government caucus in defending local decision-making right now. In fact, they seem to be very happily throwing their local municipal councillors, their city councillors under the bus and saying: you're children.

Now, let me be clear. I don't know why the members on that side can't seem to do it, but I completely renounce the statements made by the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. I don't actually even think that needs to be discussed anymore. It's so abhorrent a statement that we should all be able to say that. We on this side of the House have no problem saying that. It seems to be a problem for the government members.

When I think about this government's position now, that apparently we need all this consistency, the Premier says – I had to take phone calls and conversations. I know many of my colleagues had to do that with school board officials, for example, who were left hung out to dry during successive waves of this pandemic by this government, who refused to provide any clear direction on how they should handle things. They were left on their own – how many school years? At least two school years began with almost no supports from this government.

I remember school board trustees saying to me that they were having to field questions from parents about: "Should we wear masks? Should we not wear masks?" And they were saying: "I'm a school board trustee. I was elected to implement local education programs that meet the needs of my constituents, and I can't get an answer from this government." They did, though. They did their best. They managed the interests of their students, of their teachers, of their parents, and they tried to guide a way for the community that they served through the pandemic. Now this government is saying: oh, well, we don't trust local decision-making.

This is very clear, Madam Speaker, that this bill is only about politics. It's only about the leadership review of the Premier. Once again, just like every other decision that has been made by this government through this pandemic, it has not been driven by evidence. It has not been driven by data. It hasn't been driven by consultation with those who are most affected and those who are most knowledgeable. It's been driven by politics, which is why the trust is broken, which is why when this Premier stood up and said he was going to be listening to . . . [interjection] No, thank you.

Mr. Schow: I'm trying to participate.

Ms Pancholi: No means no. I know that's a difficult concept for the male members of that caucus to understand. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Language Creating Disorder

The Deputy Speaker: You have to withdraw.

Ms Pancholi: I withdraw, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: And apologize.

Ms Pancholi: No. I withdraw, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, perhaps we're maybe halfway there. We could make it all the way there and continue on with debate, or we will debate a point of order.

Ms Pancholi: I apologize and withdraw for the sentiments of the members across the way. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: So concluded. Hon. member, please proceed with your remarks.

Debate Continued

Ms Pancholi: As I was saying . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, only the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has the floor. That should be the voice that I hear in the debate. If you have something to say about the rules and the debate in this House, you may stand on your feet and call a point of order, and we can have . . . [interjections] Order. If members wish to have conversations with one another, perhaps this Assembly is not the place to do it. The member has apologized and withdrawn her remarks, and it has been accepted. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has the floor and a very short time left.

Please proceed.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I was saying, I sincerely hope that the members of the government caucus will stand up for what I believe they claimed are principles that they have and stand up for local decision-making. If that were the case, these government members should have no problem standing up and saying that they reject this government bill. Instead, we can't even hear them actually defend this bill. Instead, they're willing to throw local decision-makers under the bus to make public health decisions in the abdication of responsibility that they've shown throughout successive waves of this pandemic. They've downloaded that onto school boards. They've downloaded onto municipalities.

Now they stand up and they say that those members of local government cannot be trusted. That is insulting not only to those officials, who have been managing through a very difficult pandemic, but it's insulting to Albertans to think that once again this government cannot be trusted. They cannot be trusted. They don't mean what they say, and they don't say what they mean. They only say what they need to say to win leadership reviews, local nomination races maybe, the things that they need to do, that they think they need to say to get re-elected, but they don't run on principle. That is what we have all been suffering through over the last few months of this pandemic, Madam Speaker. I look forward to an opportunity where Albertans are treated with the respect that they deserve by a government that actually runs on principles.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the clock strikes 6. The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 15, 2022

Day 9

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, today we are joined in the galleries by seven social work students from MacEwan University. They are guests of the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

I also see a friend of the Legislature, Mr. Doug Brinkman.

Please all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Ukraine

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, for weeks now the world has been forced to witness heartbreaking scenes coming out of Ukraine: families fleeing, bombs hitting Ukrainian cities, homes, even hospitals as Vladimir Putin continues his illegal, unjustifiable, and evil invasion of peaceful, democratic Ukraine, with millions of refugees fleeing violence being wrought solely on the whim of a tyrant with no respect for human rights or care for the suffering he's inflicting on a sovereign people. It's tragic, it's wrong, and history will record it as such. Today I watched as Ukrainian President Zelensky addressed the national Parliament in Ottawa. He spoke about how 97 children have lost their lives in the invasion, a devastating statistic.

I speak today as a proud Ukrainian Canadian, one of hundreds of thousands of Albertans who are members of the Ukrainian diaspora. Alberta is home to the largest Ukrainian diaspora and the largest Ukrainian population outside of Ukraine and Russia. The contributions of the Ukrainian community can be seen in every corner of this province.

This province has come together to support Ukraine. Albertans, whether of Ukrainian descent or not, have risen to give what they can to offer support to the Ukrainian community. The universities are offering financial support to Ukrainian students impacted by the violence. But there's more that we must do. We need to ensure that Alberta is a welcoming place for Ukrainians fleeing this unfathomable violence. We need to ensure that this province gives all the support it can to support the Ukrainian people now and into the future. We need to be there to support Ukraine's people now, during this brutal, senseless attack on a democratic country and the very pillars of democracy. We must be there for them now and when Ukraine recovers from the atrocities of this invasion. I know that Albertans will continue to be there for the Ukrainian people.
[Remarks in Ukrainian]

Canmore Nordic Centre

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, when most people think about Alberta's primary industries, they tend to think of oil, gas, agriculture, and

forestry. Seldom is tourism or sport thought of as a primary economic driver for our province despite the pride that most Albertans take in having the most incredibly majestic Rocky Mountains just outside their back door. As our province emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic and looks to our future, it's critical that the government not simply make routine capital investments but that we strategically make capital investments into projects that will grow and diversify Alberta's economy.

That's why last week our government announced a \$17.5 million investment for upgrades to the Canmore Nordic Centre. This announcement signalled to the people of our province and literally the entire world that our government recognizes the important role that Alberta's tourism industry plays in Alberta's greater economy and that we recognize the important role that tourism will continue to play in Alberta's economic future.

These \$17.5 million upgrades will solidify Canmore as a top international destination for sport and recreational tourism, and they will make Canmore, Alberta the single, only Biathlon World Cup host destination in all of North America. Major international events, including the 2024 International Biathlon Union World Cup and the FIS Ski World Cup, are already planned in town. This upgrade will help us to attract even more.

World Cup weekends help support our local tourism and hospitality businesses while also lending free air time to Travel Alberta in key European markets. The economic impact of these kinds of major events is huge and can be \$5 million to \$7 million for a single weekend, seen through hotel stays, restaurant sales, retail purchases, and experiences. These events also typically garner international viewership of over 30 million people.

This major capital investment, funded in full by the funds generated from the Kananaskis conservation pass, is an investment in Alberta's sport-tourism industry, an investment in our province's economic diversification, and an investment in Canmore. Our town is already home to more Olympians per capita, and soon we'll be welcoming even more.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Minister's Senior Service Award Recipient

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize Benita Galandy, a recipient of the minister's senior service award, from my constituency of Grande Prairie, for her work and dedication at the Elders Caring Shelter. Since the beginning of the pandemic Benita has dedicated almost 8,200 hours to the Elders Caring Shelter in Grande Prairie, where she developed a framework to ensure that seniors in her community had access to the supports they needed and had stability and safe shelter. Moreover, before the shelter was well established, Benita went so far as to live in a camper on the property so she could dedicate as much time as possible to the seniors she served.

I, personally, first became aware of the shelter years ago as a small-business owner in Grande Prairie. My team was so inspired by the leadership and dedication of Benita that we began sponsoring a Christmas celebration for the shelter's residents. The shelter was originally built in 2003 and focuses on Indigenous cultural programming. While there are other seniors' homes in Grande Prairie, Métis local 1990 wanted to ensure that the lifestyle, nutritional, and cultural needs of Métis seniors would be served. Although the Elders Caring Shelter is geared towards those of Aboriginal descent, they take all applications of men and women over the age of 55. The shelter has been so well received that a second shelter is being built by the Métis local. It will have 34 beds and assist in housing additional seniors.

Mr. Speaker, the compassion demonstrated by Benita is one that should be celebrated. She is highly regarded within the Grande

Prairie Indigenous community and has become a role model for many. I am proud to be wearing handcrafted jewellery today that was made by a resident at the shelter. This resident shared his work with me and explained how Benita encouraged him to pursue it. He donates the proceeds from sales of his crafts and jewellery to support the shelter and says that it's one way he's learned to give back.

Benita Galandy restored hope in those who had none and demonstrated outstanding service to Alberta seniors while also fostering a sense of community among those seniors at the shelter. To Benita I say: thank you, and congratulations on this well-deserved recognition. It is people like you that make our world a better place.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Social Workers

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the gallery today I have invited some dear friends of mine. They're social work students from the social work program at MacEwan University. They are the next generation of Alberta social workers. I congratulate you on all of your hard work in the program, and I thank you for your sense of duty and answering the call of supporting our community.

Last week was Social Work Week, a time to show appreciation to those who carry the emotional labour of the province when Albertans are in need. This UCP government chose to acknowledge social workers during Social Work Week with an announcement of wage rollbacks of almost 11 per cent for the profession. Eleven per cent. This is how this UCP government shows their appreciation for the sacrifices so many social workers and other health care professionals have made to help Albertans get through one of the darkest times in Alberta history.

Social workers are known for working in the most complex of situations and oftentimes need to be creative and resourceful, a task that can go unseen and most often forgotten as a tangible aspect to the crisis. This UCP government clearly does not value the social work profession. This UCP government may not value the gravity and stresses felt by those as we slowly look to climb out of this devastating pandemic, that has cost so many so much. This UCP government may not value the true plight of Albertans at this time.

Our team does value the social work profession. We do understand the severe impact that this pandemic has had and continues to have. We stand with Albertans as we continue to navigate out of these stressful times for Alberta. We are in this together.

Thank you to all social workers wherever you are. Though this government doesn't respect you or value the work you do in protecting lives and making this province a better place, you are making a difference. Our NDP caucus is committed to ensuring that you get the respect that you deserve.

Thank you.

Agriculture in Southern Alberta

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, there are exciting things happening in my riding that will benefit the whole region of southern Alberta. Southern Alberta is blessed with warm days and cool nights, which makes for the best sweet corn in the world, but we grow many high-yield, high-margin specialty crops such as sugar beets and potatoes. We have some of the best water in the world, which flows out of the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Consumers today are demanding to know where their food comes from and what is being

put into it. Here in southern Alberta we have the best ingredients in the world. Seventy per cent of all of Canada's irrigation system is located in southern Alberta. It is a testament to the forward-thinking farmers of years past.

1:40

Almost two years ago we announced the long-awaited twinning of highway 3 between Taber and Burdett. This \$150 million project is part of a broader strategy our government is implementing to develop between Lethbridge and Medicine Hat into Canada's agrifood corridor. Our government will be adding over 260,000 irrigated acres. Last July we announced the first of the irrigation expansion projects, 60,000 irrigated acres with the Chin reservoir expansion. We will be making sure that there is potable water and proper utilities along this corridor to facilitate expansion of new and existing agrifood processing companies. We will be making that corridor a preapproved agrifood processing zone. This means that we will be doing much of the environmental, transportation, and municipal affairs work that needs to be done beforehand. That way, when businesses express interest in setting up or expanding their businesses, government can move at the speed of business rather than at the speed of government.

Due to our government's work, southern Alberta is on the verge of one of the greatest and largest growth expansions in generations, Mr. Speaker. The south will no longer be called the forgotten south; instead, it will be called the fantastic south.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Renaud: Far too many Albertans are struggling today, dealing with skyrocketing utility costs, insurance rates, school fees, property taxes, and so much more. This government enacted a sneaky plan to take a billion dollars in income taxes from the pockets of Canadians using a backdoor inflation tax, a policy that the Premier used to oppose; now embraces. They are cutting supports for the most vulnerable, taking money from the disabled and claiming that it wouldn't be onerous, ignoring the consequences of their actions, and relying on talking points to avoid addressing the suffering they're causing. Simply put, the UCP doesn't care. They don't even know how many Albertans are currently living in poverty: 1 in 10, Mr. Speaker.

As we watch this Premier more focused on keeping his job past April while too many Albertans are forced to choose between buying groceries or turning the lights on, it's clear who the real priorities for this government are. It's not the people struggling under the financial burdens this government keeps piling on them. It's not the people who are coping with the reduced government supports that mean that their lives are getting harder while the UCP celebrate their no-help budget. It's deeply insulting to these people to have their concerns about the 10,000 full-time jobs lost last month shouted down by the jobs minister or to watch the associate minister of natural gas ignore the requests for help from those dealing with skyrocketing utility bills.

This government's true priorities have always been on their wealthy friends and insiders, the ones who convinced them to lift the insurance cap even though the UCP knew that it meant that families would get hit with hikes of 30 per cent or more, the ones who convinced them that Donald Trump was worth a billion-dollar investment, that those Albertans who are facing utility bills of nearly a thousand dollars are only worth 50 bucks.

Albertans need a government focused on their jobs, not on the Premier's job, and in 2023 Albertans will get a government that finally puts them first.

Lethbridge Update

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, we recently concluded the 2022 brier in Lethbridge. After two long years of the pandemic, being able to enjoy curling live and in person was fantastic. To host teams, supporters, and families from all across Canada in my hometown right here in Alberta was awesome. Curling, country music, and beer: let's get this party started. Canada is truly the best country in the world. The only hardship was Alberta not claiming the title at the very end, losing to team Newfoundland; however, I guess it depends on where you're from. But no matter whom you cheered for, the curling was sensational.

This kind of event and the economic benefits of attracting thousands to our province were also key pillars in our recent budget. Additional investments into health care, the attraction and retention of doctors, and EMS are critical. Alberta's government is investing \$1.8 billion for the redevelopment and expansion of the Red Deer regional hospital. Additions include a new cardiac catheterization lab.

As the MLA for Lethbridge-East I hope Lethbridge is next on the list for these same services so that we can also continue to support the growth of nearly every sector in Alberta's third-largest city. This growth, especially in agriculture and agrifood, also makes the planning, engineering, and feasibility of the third bridge in Lethbridge even more critical. While we were excited about the infrastructure investment in our Exhibition Park, our airport, a new school in west Lethbridge, new boilers at the U of L, research at the college, and more to come, we still have plans to make so that we can continue to manage the growth and service area of Lethbridge and southern Alberta. Lethbridge is a vibrant city with one of the most diversified economies in the province. We have affordable living and are the hub for everything from health care to tourism, trucking to advanced education, and we're Canada's premier agricultural gateway. It's no wonder we're Alberta's third-largest city and growing. We need the investment to match.

United States Oil Imports

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, we're all watching a humanitarian crisis unfold in front of our eyes, and what this crisis has made obvious is that we must stop indirectly funding unethical dictatorship countries. Until just recently the United States imported an average of 709,000 barrels per day of petroleum products from Russia. That is extremely ironic considering that Biden cancelled Keystone XL, a pipeline that would have carried 830,000 barrels of Alberta oil per day to the U.S. This project could have prevented their reliance on Russian oil to begin with.

Let us not forget that the NDP has formerly supported eco radicals protesting pipelines. They also sat back and did nothing while Trudeau cancelled Energy East, all of which cripple Canada's ability to support our allies to boycott Russian oil. The NDP, Trudeau, and Biden continue to hinder Alberta's ability to provide ethical energy stability in the world. To be clear, Alberta is the solution to stability, and, Mr. Speaker, we all could use some stability right now.

Alberta oil represents human rights. It represents responsible environmentalism. It represents Indigenous opportunities. The lack of support from the NDP opposite, Trudeau, and Biden on supporting Alberta energy is nothing more than irresponsible complacency that provides strength to Russia. They obviously are aware that a continued global reliance and buying of oil from some of the world's most unstable regimes directly helps fund unjust wars. They also cannot think that Canadians will accept that Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, or Iran is an acceptable alternative to Russian oil. It's time for everyone to recognize the critical need for Alberta to gain more

access to world markets so that we can prevent the indirect funding of unstable world leaders.

While the NDP opposite, Trudeau, and Biden feel that it's more important to stand in support of their eco radicals, this government and I stand with Ukraine and everyone opposed to Russia.

Pacific NorthWest Economic Region

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, as president of the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region, or PNWER, I rise to share with my learned colleagues some background and some exciting news. Formed with leadership from the government of Alberta in 1991, PNWER is a nonpartisan, binational, public-private partnership focused on strengthening cross-border relationships, finding solutions to common challenges, and joint advocacy around common regional interests. PNWER includes Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, and Yukon, and the U.S. states of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington: our closest neighbours, friends, and allies, indeed, particularly important during these times of geopolitical unrest.

PNWER seeks to build trust and enduring relationships amongst stakeholders around regional collaboration, competitiveness, and reduction of trade and regulatory barriers, making the region one of the most diverse, resource rich, and innovative in the world, with a combined GDP of over \$1.5 trillion. Within PNWER's active cross-sectoral working groups we address issues and opportunities in such diverse disciplines as agriculture, forestry, water policy and invasive species, economic development, workforce innovation, trade, transportation and tourism, energy, environmental leadership, mining, and disaster resilience. PNWER also manages several high-level regional and national programs, including the Legislative Energy Horizon Institute, of vital importance to Alberta as the largest energy producer in the region.

Mr. Speaker, it's now time to mark your calendars as Alberta proudly hosts PNWER's 31st Annual Summit in Calgary, July 24 to 28, bringing over 500 legislators from across the province, policy-makers, industry, and thought leaders from across Canada and the U.S. It will be an opportunity to showcase all that we are proud of, from ESG to energy security and so much more, as we engage with regional and national decision-makers right here in Alberta. Don't delay, and register today as we proudly share our great province, our great future, and renewal of the Alberta advantage with the Pacific Northwest region and the world.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has question 1.

Utility Costs

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, a recent Angus Reid survey found that 60 per cent of Albertans can't keep up with the cost of living. That rate is the highest in the country. A recent *Edmonton Journal* project found that 86 per cent of respondents cited skyrocketing utility prices as the most common major cost pressure. I have two questions for the Premier. Is he really proud of the job he's doing when 6 in 10 Albertans can't make ends meet, and does he really think that his measly \$50 electricity rebate is going to make a difference for those families?

Mr. Kenney: Well, first of all, it's \$150, not \$50. She got it wrong by a factor of three. On top of that is the elimination of the fuel tax.

The real question for the NDP is: why are they cheering on their friend and ally Justin Trudeau to raise the cost of living by increasing the cost of home heating, electricity, and fuel on April 1? Why does the NDP support the Liberal April Fool's Day joke that will make life even more expensive because of their ever higher carbon taxes?

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is in charge. He's done nothing to help these families, and he knows it.

It gets worse. According to Angus Reid half of Albertans surveyed said that they're now unable to handle an emergency expense of \$1,000 or more, and about half said that they can't afford their car insurance payment either, because the government pulled the cap. Is this really what the Premier thinks recovery looks like, families living paycheque to paycheque, one emergency away from going under?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling with the cost of living, which is exactly why they gave this government marching orders to scrap the carbon tax. I regret that the NDP opposed that. I regret that the NDP backed up Justin Trudeau all the way to the Supreme Court. I regret that the NDP wants to further increase carbon taxes on April 1. Albertans also regret their power purchasing agreement fiasco that passed \$1.3 billion of additional costs on to electricity consumers, their rushed shutdown of coal that has forced up higher power prices. When it comes to high power costs, the NDP is the arsonist, not the fireman.

Ms Ganley: Forty-six per cent of Albertans report having too much debt. Many can't afford to keep vehicles on the road, are putting necessary expenses on two or three credit cards, and owe thousands in back pay to utility companies. Some fear they will have their utilities shut off altogether. As of April 15 it will be legal for utility companies to do just that. Today I have drafted legislation to extend the ban on utility shut-offs for six months to provide Albertans some relief. Will the Premier support this move to protect Albertans? He sure isn't doing anything else.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this is the only government in Canada that is acting to reduce the cost of living, the only government out of the federal government and nine other provinces that is not just reducing fuel taxes but eliminating them. This is the only government providing a rebate for high electricity prices. This is the only government acting. This government will be putting forward a motion calling on Justin Trudeau not to proceed with his scheduled April 1 increase in carbon taxes. Will the NDP stand with Trudeau or with Albertans in opposing that hike?

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

Health Care Worker Wages

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP continue to tear down and undermine the public health care system that we all rely on. For two years front-line health care professionals put their own physical and mental health on the line to protect the lives of others. They saved lives during a global pandemic. How does the UCP say thanks? By pushing to slash their wages. It's unconscionable. How can this Premier look these health care heroes in the eye and tell them that they're overpaid?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, let me introduce the member opposite to the concept of collective bargaining negotiations. That's exactly what's happening. We certainly intend to proceed with that in good faith, while that particular union is asking for a 15 per cent increase.

There will be a good-faith negotiation. The NDP froze nurses and all health care workers with zero increases for four long years. This government came to an agreement with the nurses' union with a significant increase in their compensation for the first time in nearly a decade, because, unlike the NDP, we respect our front-line health care workers.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, let me introduce this Premier to the raises of up to 40 per cent that he is handing to executives at AIMCo at the same time as he is demanding cuts from workers like Holly, a respiratory therapist in Red Deer. She works at the bedside, inserting breathing tubes, managing ventilators, literally keeping dying people alive. The UCP wants to slash her wage by 8 per cent. Today she said:

Behind the proposed wage rollbacks are humans. We worked tirelessly through the most demanding and stressful moments in our careers. It's not just the eight per cent, this negotiation feels like [the Premier] has devalued our worth to society.

Will this Premier apologize to Holly . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, these are opening positions in collective bargaining negotiations. The opening position of one of these unions is an increase of 15 per cent, which we don't believe can be afforded by taxpayers.

Now, Mr. Speaker, workers like the one just referenced were put on a wage freeze for four years under the NDP. This government came forward with an adequate settlement with our nurses that both protects the need for fiscal responsibility for taxpayers but also recognizes the very hard work of our nurses. We're proud to have achieved that agreement. We'll continue to negotiate in good faith.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, after two years of attacks and mismanagement I invite this Premier to ask those workers their opinion of our government compared to his.

Holly goes on to say:

The moral injury repeatedly caused by this government is real and I feel it. The healthcare system will not go unharmed by the way the UCP government has treated healthcare workers. It will take strong leadership to repair and return dignity to our broken systems.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier refuses to answer my questions legitimately, so I'll just say this. On this side of the House the record is that we provide support for health care workers. We're ready to provide strong leadership, repair the damage done by this government, and treat workers . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier has the call.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the former member of a government that froze nurses for four years just said that we should go and ask the nurses what they think about the collective bargaining agreement. They were asked. They ratified it overwhelmingly, because, unlike the NDP, we didn't continue the NDP's four-year-long freeze.

Mr. Speaker, how dare they stand up and pretend to be the party of the working person when all they were was the party of unemployment and economic devastation of this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

School Construction Capital Plan

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP is deliberately withholding funding from one of the largest and fastest growing

school divisions in the country. Edmonton public needs replacement schools for Spruce Avenue and Delton, and they also need a high school for Glenriding Heights and a new junior high in McConachie. To the Premier: will you please walk the halls of Spruce Avenue and Delton? Will you ride the bus with the kids in the northeast who need a junior high? Will you ride the bus with the kids in the southwest who are travelling long distances to overcrowded schools? Or will you at least acknowledge that your budget is ignoring the needs of Edmonton families?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government's \$2 billion capital plan to modernize our schools means that there are 66 new schools being built or refurbished, more than the NDP. That's over three years. They did 60 over four. We're doing 66 over three years, and 24 of those schools are in the Edmonton area. Six of them are Edmonton public schools. Just today we announced capital funding for a new charter high school here in Edmonton, for the Aurora Charter School, about academic excellence, responding to parental choice and diversity in our education system.

Ms Hoffman: The NDP built over 240 schools in four years, so that's about 60 per year, Premier, and what you are saying here makes no sense.

Alberta families know that what you're doing isn't true, that if you were actually a believer in school choice, you would support construction for public schools in Edmonton or francophone schools, really, anywhere in the province of Alberta. Will you finally admit to francophone families across Alberta who have been shut out of this budget that it's a no-help budget? Will the Premier or the Education minister admit that they're failing francophone families across Alberta? This budget proves it.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Edmonton public schools has six new schools under construction right now, as we speak. This government is building 66 new schools or substantial refurbishment of others with a \$2 billion capital investment, more than the NDP put forward.

But more than that, I know that the NDP oppose school choice. They hate the idea of parental responsibility in the education system. That's one of the reasons they were thrown out of office. It is also one of the reasons this government brought forward today a historic \$47 million capital investment in new charter schools, to amplify our tradition of school choice.

2:00

Ms Hoffman: So the Premier clearly doesn't care about franco- phone families anywhere in Alberta given that answer.

We also know that he doesn't care about the families in Edmonton public because he's refusing to fund a single project for kids in desperate need in the city of Edmonton. In Calgary over three years: only one new public school and only one new Catholic school. Is the Premier honestly going to try to convince Albertans that what he's doing is actually putting kids first or building for the future? Clearly, his budget puts in black and white that the Premier doesn't care about families in Edmonton or Calgary or anywhere in Alberta.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, only the NDP could characterize a \$2 billion investment in new and refurbished schools as nothing. In Edmonton the board didn't bring forward a priority project with more than 69 per cent utilization. Now, the minister is going to sit down and work that out with them.

M. le Président, quand on parle des écoles francophones, nous sommes en train de construire six écoles francophones en Alberta depuis – parce que nous sommes dédiés à l'éducation francophone ici en Alberta.

Fuel Prices

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, Albertans were very interested to hear this government announce that they would stop charging the 13-cent gas tax on fuel in response to the sky-high prices in Alberta. At the time of this announcement the Premier was asked how the government would ensure this relief actually makes it down to Albertans and isn't just pocketed by retailers. The Premier did not have a very good answer, so I'll ask him again today. What specific guarantees will the government give that Albertans will actually see lower prices for gas?

Mr. Kenney: Well, once again Team Colonel Sanders is concerned about the welfare of the chickens, Mr. Speaker. The NDP doesn't just want to keep the 13-cent gas tax in place; they want it to go higher with an ever higher carbon tax. But this Conservative government is eliminating the 13-cent Alberta fuel tax on April 1. Will he stand in his place next week and vote with us to call on the NDP's ally Justin Trudeau to abandon his higher carbon tax planned for the same day?

Mr. Dach: I was just trying to ask a serious question, Mr. Speaker, on policy issues that Albertans are watching closely. How will this gas tax reduction work? Albertans are looking for an actual guarantee that the prices will go down 13 cents and not just be absorbed by retailers. That's all. It should be pretty simple, but it sounds like there really isn't any guarantee. Go figure. Now, as the Premier pointed out at the time, many retailers had already purchased their fuel orders before the announcement. Presumably, this means any price relief might be delayed. Can the Premier guarantee that prices will drop 13 cents on April 1, or is it just an April Fool's joke? Will he stake his job on it?

Mr. Kenney: The answer is yes, Mr. Speaker. While we would have preferred to have the 13-cent cut implemented last week, the truth is that we needed to give the retailers time to run through their current inventory, where the fuel tax has already been assessed, and to give Treasury Board and Finance time to reimburse them for any current inventory they have as of April 1 so that they can then pass on the full 13-cent savings to all Albertans. But here's the weird thing. It's only the Conservatives who actually want to cut those taxes, and the NDP want to increase them.

Mr. Dach: Well, Mr. Speaker, it sounds like the government doesn't know when or even if Albertans will see that drop in gas prices.

Now, the Premier at the time was asked why he didn't just do a rebate instead. He told the media to go talk to people at the pumps, and CTV did just that. They found more Albertans were in favour of cash in their pockets. Why didn't the Premier just provide blanket relief to families instead of these paltry one-off programs, or, better yet, why doesn't the Premier stop raising their costs in the first place? Will the Premier plainly say yes to all Albertans, that they will see the Alberta price drop by 13 cents on April 1?

Mr. Kenney: Well, yes. On April 1 their Alberta fuel tax will go down by 13 cents. But, regrettably, the NDP is supporting Justin Trudeau's tax increase. [interjections]

The Speaker: The Premier has the call.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Justin Trudeau will raise his carbon tax by 3 cents on the same day. If the NDP actually wants to see 13 cents of relief on April 1, will they join us to call on Justin Trudeau to stop his job-killing carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood has a question.

Charter Schools

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has a successful history of providing parents choice in regard to their children's education. Charter schools offer unique programming that focuses on a learning style, teaching style, or an approach that isn't already offered in a school division. This is a great option for students whose needs differ from what traditional public schools can offer, but many parents in my riding are confused, and they feel that there may be expensive tuition fees or maybe not an option. To the Minister of Education: can you please explain the difference between an independent and a public charter school?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Public charter schools are autonomous, nonprofit public schools that receive the same base instruction funding as traditional public, separate, and francophone school authorities. A public charter school cannot deny enrolment to any student if they have enough space, and they cannot charge tuition fees. That said, they may charge fees and costs in alignment with the Education Act, just as any other public school authority. They also are accountable to the public taxpayer for the dollars that they do receive, and just like any other public school, they are providing accountability for what they get.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that public charter schools cannot deny access to any student if their school has sufficient space and resources available and given that parents wanting to enrol their children at a public charter school face a long wait-list and further given that the single biggest issue charter schools face is finding the space they need to accept more students, to the Minister of Education: would you please explain what you're doing to address the lack of student spaces available in public charter schools?

Member LaGrange: Thank you to the member for the great question. Yes, you're right. There are thousands of students waiting for a charter school space. Mr. Speaker, under Budget 2022 we're investing \$25 million in operating funding and \$47 million in capital investment over the next three years to support charter school expansions and new charter schools and collegiate programs in Alberta's education system. This funding will support leases and facility improvements so that existing public charters can grow, new public charters can expand and have the spaces they need to deliver educational services to the students who want them. [interjections]

The Speaker: I just might remind members of the opposition that they have more time to ask questions than any other group in the Assembly. Perhaps they might ask their questions when it's their turn, not when it isn't.

The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for that answer. Given that students who are engaged in their education are more likely to succeed in the long term and given that public charter schools offer unique programs for students with more specialized interests, and further given that leased facilities only provide a short-term solution for lack of spaces in public charter schools, to the minister again: will you please explain what a charter campus model is and how this concept could be used to strengthen the public charter school system in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are committed to strengthening choice in education, and that means finding long-term solutions to the lack of space that public charter schools are facing. A charter campus model would allow several public charters to be housed in a single facility. This concept would support the shared use of specialized spaces such as CTS spaces, career and technology studies, science labs, or gym spaces. This would offer a more permanent and cost-effective solution for public charter schools than leased spaces can offer. We're happy to do this for charter schools.

Social Worker Wages

Ms Sigurdson: The UCP have continually left the most vulnerable behind. They are not providing the funding necessary to affordable housing to address growing problems of poverty and homelessness. They are neglecting scientific evidence on the importance of harm reduction policies to address the deadly drug poisoning crisis. Workers on the front line, including social workers, have filled in the gaps of the UCP's neglect, but now the Minister of Health wants to cut the wages of social workers by 11 per cent. He should be ashamed. How does he justify such a cruel cut for Alberta's heroes?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As already said in this House, this is a set of negotiations. We respect the work that all of our health care workers have done over the last two years. Negotiations have been ongoing with HSAA. Last week both parties were able to put their first offers on the table. The HSAA put a 15 per cent increase, and AHS is looking to address certain overmarket positions, but this is a set of negotiations. They will proceed, and we were very pleased to be able to, through this process, reach an agreement with the United Nurses of Alberta, which was ratified by a healthy margin. I'm sure that these negotiations will proceed in a similar manner.

2:10

Ms Sigurdson: Given that social workers are vital to helping Albertans living in poverty and given that the Minister of Community and Social Services, who also used to be in charge of the mental health and addictions file, proudly talks about his career as a social worker and given that while the UCP are cutting wages of social workers, they are planning to increase the wages of staff at the province's investment company, AIMCo, by 39 per cent, what is the minister of community services doing at the cabinet table? Does he truly think part of the answer to addressing widespread poverty and mental health challenges is to cut the pay of workers on the front lines of the crisis?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, you're hearing comments from the other side, and they're talking about that the government is mandating these cuts. I want to be perfectly clear. There are issues that AHS has brought to the table, and there are issues that HSAA has brought to the table. This is a set of negotiations. We respect the tremendous work that all health care workers, including social workers working in the AHS system, have done over the last two years. This is a set of negotiations. It goes through a process. We are hopeful that they will be able to reach an agreement, just like the UNA did, that was ratified by a resounding amount. I'll look forward to seeing those results.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that as a registered social worker for 30 years I've had the opportunity to work with many incredible women – in

fact, the majority of social workers are women, as are most of the allied professionals that the UCP wants to pick the pockets of – and given that there is already a significant disparity between the wages of men and women in this province, what does the minister of status of women have to say to all the women in social work regarding why they deserve to make less while the cost of living is skyrocketing? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to stand in this House as a former social worker and the Minister of Community and Social Services. We support social workers across the province. Not only do we support our female social workers, but we support male workers like myself, too. Budget 2022 not only balances our books but will increase our investment in housing, social services, including investment for women. I am proud to be the minister of this government. I'm proud to support women social workers across the province.

Support for Small Business

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, Alberta small businesses have moved from one hurdle to another and are still fighting for survival. They went from a roller coaster of public health restrictions that limited their ability to operate to record inflation and runaway costs on essential supplies needed to operate. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: why is there not one dollar in the new budget to help small businesses recover from the pandemic and deal with record inflation? Did he really need to build a surplus on the backs of Alberta's small businesses?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the pandemic we provided billions of dollars of support to small businesses throughout this. Right now those entrepreneurs across this province have created hundreds of thousands of jobs for Albertans getting back on their feet, leading the province forward. Now, the NDP's plan, when they were in office, was to grow a bloated government, to literally hire people to screw in light bulbs in your home, to then tell people, for job advice, to move to British Columbia, and, on top of that, to chase away billions of dollars of investment. That's not our approach. We want those entrepreneurs in Alberta to be successful.

Mr. Bilous: Given that the NDP cut the small-business tax by a third and given that far too many businesses were disqualified from accessing the small and medium-sized relaunch grant or waited six months to receive a dime from this government and given that Tracey, owner of a nail boutique in Edmonton, was unfairly disqualified from SMERG because she used the wrong browser or Ciara, a sole proprietor, waited over seven months for a pittance that didn't even cover the cost of interest from the debt she accrued or even of half of one month's rent, to the minister: why didn't he at least help businesses he left behind with his faulty program with additional support in this budget?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we helped thousands upon thousands of small businesses in real time through multiple ways. We had numerous opportunities. We followed up with every single applicant numerous times. Thank goodness it was the UCP government that was in office during that pandemic. The opposition would have shut down businesses for months and months and

months. When will they be with us to start moving forward and start cheering on those entrepreneurs instead of cheering against Alberta, which is what they do every day?

Mr. Bilous: Given that small-business owners are facing utility costs three to four times higher than in previous years – the additional costs for many are in the thousands every month – given that a number of small businesses view this government's fake natural gas rebate and \$50 electricity rebate as a joke and given that earlier today we proposed a piece of legislation that would prevent businesses' utilities from being shut off so that they can operate throughout the summer to pay down their debt, why won't the minister stand in this House and do something to support small businesses?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I think it's time for a little trip down legacy lane. When it comes to the NDP's legacy on supporting businesses in Alberta, their strategy for jobs: grow government. Their strategy for people that want to work in the private sector: move out of Alberta. That was their plan. Unless you wanted to go to somebody's house to screw in a light bulb; then the NDP had a job for you. That was their jobs plan. Not our government. We believe in the private sector: the film industry, the tech sector, when it comes to manufacturing, the oil and gas industry. Yes, the oil and gas industry. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Child and Youth Well-being Review Recommendations

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Child and Youth Well-being Review Panel made 10 recommendations to the government in December 2021. The fourth recommendation from their report is to "recognize and enhance the essential role of schools in interdisciplinary wraparound services and supports for mental health and well-being of students." To the Minister of Education: what initiatives are under way, including through Budget 2022, to support students' mental health and well-being?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government funds school boards directly through the specialized learning supports grant, which accounted for \$596 million this school year. This includes \$48 million towards student wellness programs, which allow for psychological and social-emotional supports, access to mental health workers and other wellness supports as needed. As well, we all know that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted the mental health and well-being of our students. To further help, Alberta's government is providing \$110 million in targeted funding over the next three years to address pandemic-related mental health issues.

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her answer. Given that the eighth recommendation of the Child and Youth Well-being Review is to "explore and activate ways to better track, measure, and understand the learning impacts of the pandemic and inform decisions to strengthen school capacity to respond," to the Minister of Education: what initiatives are under way, including through Budget 2022, to address this important recommendation?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are confident that school authorities have the supports they need to provide a safe, world-class education to their students. Last spring we implemented a new literacy program for kindergarten to grade 3 students to help measure how classroom disruptions caused by the COVID pandemic are affecting student learning. In the fall of 2021 we announced we would be further expanding that program and investing \$45 million for learning disruption interventions.

Mr. Speaker, it doesn't end there. We know that early intervention is key, and we will continue to ensure that students who are struggling receive the supports they need. I look forward to sharing more details on this in the very near future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister for her answer. Given that food security issues for families directly impact children and youths' health, well-being, and development and given that the sixth recommendation from the Child and Youth Well-being Review is to "support existing and implement new province-wide efforts where necessary to support food security for children, youth, and their families," to the Minister of Education: what initiatives are under way, including through Budget '22, to address food insecurity?

Member LaGrange: Thank you for the question. We recognize that good nutrition positively impacts student learning. We are maintaining funding for the school nutrition program and will provide school authorities with over \$15 million for the program in the '22-23 school year. Funding for school nutrition is provided directly to school authorities, who have the flexibility on how to address local needs. Often they partner with nonprofit organizations or community organizations. This funding provides daily nutritious meals to more than 58,000 students in a school year. We're happy to continue doing and providing what we need.

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

Provincial Park Fees and Coal Development Policies

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The cost of everything is going up these days, and nearly all of the increases are a direct result of the UCP's policies. What seemed like one of the last affordable activities in our province has come under attack from the UCP. After they already found a way to tax inflation and increase camping fees last year, they've now found a way to get Albertans coming and going from our parks by doubling the fees to change or cancel a camping reservation. Why is this government so intent on increasing the cost of living for Alberta's families?

2:20

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is confused yet again or not encumbering himself with the truth.

Anyway, park fees . . .

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: . . . have not been doubled in this year's budget. There have been some changes to reservation fees associated with cancellations to be able to make sure that people, actually, who are reserving sites actually use them and people don't arrive on the long weekend and see the best sites sitting empty. But other than that, we continue to move forward with the award-winning Kananaskis

conservation pass and the largest investment in our provincial parks system in the history of the province.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that I'm happy to compare my track record of speaking the truth to that minister's any time of day and given that income taxes, property taxes, tuition, interest on student debt, utilities, and car insurance have all increased under this government and given that camping fees haven't been spared either – they've increased camping fees across the board and also introduced a \$90 fee just to set foot in Kananaskis Country, an area that belongs to all Albertans and has been free for all of us to enjoy for decades – and given that this government has already tried to sell off parks, why is this government relentlessly . . .

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to stand in this Assembly each and every day and brag about the award-winning Kananaskis conservation pass. Last week I was in Kananaskis with the MLA for the area and the Premier announcing a record investment in the Canmore Nordic Centre inside Kananaskis, just one of many investments that are coming forward inside Alberta's largest park. But that member is the environmental critic for the NDP, and he wants to talk about the cost of living, and he continues to support Justin Trudeau and his job-killing carbon tax. Shame on him.

Mr. Schmidt: I'm sure the Member for Banff-Kananaskis enjoyed visiting the riding for once.

Given that this government rescinded Lougheed's 1976 coal policy with the stroke of a pen on the Friday afternoon of a long weekend after being lobbied by the coal industry and given that this move would have destroyed the amazing scenery in our parks, that attracts people from across the world – let's face it; nobody wants a front-row seat to an open-pit coal mine – and given that this would have cost Albertans jobs in the tourism industry, why is the government so intent on giving our parks away to corporate interests while increasing costs for Albertans to access them?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the real question is: why is that member content to continue to make things up each and every day?

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: First of all, Mr. Speaker, through you to the hon. member from Canmore, thank you for all of your tireless work advocating for Kananaskis. We are proud to continue to deliver for Kananaskis, and we're fixing the mess that the NDP made when they were in government, where they never invested in our parks system. They never made sure there were proper conservation officers. They never made sure there were proper parking lots. They never provided adequate services for Kananaskis. Shame on them, but we're getting it fixed.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order is noted at both 2:20 and 2:22.

I owe the hon. Member for Edmonton-South an apology as we missed his question, but now the hon. Member for Edmonton-South has a question.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we learned that the Minister of Advanced Education has approved exceptional tuition hikes for over a dozen programs at the province's biggest universities. We know that an educated workforce is critical to Alberta's prosperity, yet despite this, Albertans are paying more every day for

everything from utilities to income taxes to property taxes because of this government. Will the minister admit that approving these hikes is a short-sighted, job-killing decision?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, good. Another opportunity to inform the House that tuition in Alberta is below the national average. I know that the Member for Edmonton-North West the other day said that that was inaccurate. I'd encourage him to visit a website called Stats Canada. It's usually pretty reliable, and the information there is pretty objective and independent. You know, the information is very clear there for him to take a look.

But, you know, again, Mr. Speaker, what's concerning: April 1 we have a carbon tax increase from the federal Liberal government. The members opposite are supporting the Trudeau Liberals to jack up the carbon tax on April 1. We're trying to make life more affordable; they're making it more expensive.

Mr. Dang: Given that students who are mid-program have less than six months to contend with huge tuition increases, in some cases double-digit percentages, and given that Alberta lags behind other provinces when it comes to providing student aid and given that after-degree earnings for school counsellors have not doubled recently, does the minister even care that he is approving outrageous tuition hikes that students cannot afford and that may chase them out of their programs and out of this province?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, a lot of what the member opposite just said is inaccurate. All students that are in programs that have been approved for exceptional increases are grandfathered in at their current rates. They won't see any increases in those programs where there have been exceptional increases.

When it comes to student aid, we provide \$167 million in just this budget alone for student services. That's student aid and scholarships. Budget 2022 includes \$12 million for new scholarships and \$15 million in new funding for new bursaries as well.

Mr. Dang: Given that this minister has overseen drastic cuts to postsecondary education and given that this government's strategy for postsecondary appears to be downloading costs onto students without regard for the quality of the programs, will the minister just stop and finally admit that these hikes have nothing to do with enhancing the quality of the postsecondary education system he's responsible for and that, instead, he is trying to balance this government's budget on the backs of students and families?

Mr. Nicolaides: Again, Mr. Speaker, the information the member is providing is inaccurate. Again, I'd just like to remind the House that the NDP wrote the regulation that allows for exceptional tuition increases, so they should know the regulation full well. The regulation is clear, and it stipulates that increases can only be approved if the increase will improve the quality of the program. Under those parameters the increases were approved. As well, in those increases I also sought to ensure that new revenue is going to enhance student aid in those particular programs as well.

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

Child and Youth Well-being Review Recommendations

(continued)

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the second recommendation of the Child and Youth Well-being Review is for the government to "review effectiveness and alignment of existing child and youth mental health and well-being programs and services

to inform enhanced resource allocation" and given that the third recommendation calls for the creation of "streamlined and universally accessible pathways to connect children, youth, and families with mental health services and supports," to the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions: what initiatives are under way, including through Budget 2022, to address this recommendation?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. Of course, the well-being of children is a top priority for this government. I'd like to thank the member for his service on that panel and the Minister of Children's Services for her work on this as well. We're focused on a recovery-oriented system of care for children. Just an example of some of the things that we're doing for children: we're expanding youth and mental health hubs, expanding phone and virtual support, and, of course, expanding access to services in school across a continuum for the youth of Alberta.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. The fifth recommendation of the Child and Youth Well-being Review is to "create more opportunities for children and youth to have improved access to cultural, sports, arts, and recreational activities." To the Minister of Culture: what initiatives are under way, including through Budget 2022, to address this recommendation? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, it is important to keep kids active and truly get them back into sport and culture for their mental and physical health. Alberta has incredible youth organizations like the Alberta Schools' Athletic Association, KidSport, Free Play for Kids, and we're working in partnership with them to create an agenda for kids to return to play. We also have a number of capital projects that are our response to the fifth recommendation, supporting the Active Communities Alberta Society, Repsol Sport Centre, Telus World of Science, McMurray Métis Cultural Center, and others. There are more initiatives on the way, and I look forward to being able to announce them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to that minister for his answer. Given that Internet access is not yet universal across Alberta and that children and youth without adequate Internet access can have difficulty learning, maintaining relationships, and accessing supports and given that the ninth recommendation of the Child and Youth Well-being Review is to "improve broadband internet service and access to devices to address difficulties related to remote education and virtual mental health supports," to the Minister of Service Alberta: what initiatives are under way, including through Budget 2022, to improve broadband Internet service?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for the question. I'm so glad that the youth and well-being review had this recommendation, because you know what? They're

right. We need to work towards universal connectivity. And here's the good news: Alberta's government has committed \$390 million over the next four years to get us to universal connectivity. And not just that. We successfully negotiated with the federal government to get dollar-for-dollar matching for 100 per cent of our commitment, bringing the total public-sector funding up to \$780 million compared to the NDP's track record of zero dollars. Not just that, but by the time we're done, we will have hundreds of millions in private-sector funding to go . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is next.

2:30 Municipal Loan Interest Rates

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, life is getting more expensive thanks to this UCP government. Utility bills are skyrocketing, insurance bills are rising, income taxes, school fees are all rising. This government doesn't seem to care. When faced with the increasing cost of living, the Finance minister is standing by a plan to further hike the cost on Albertans by secretly making it more expensive for municipalities to operate. The minister is hiking borrowing rates for municipalities, which will result in higher property taxes and reduced services. I know that this minister loves to download costs to municipalities, but when will he realize that this is a mistake and cancel the interest rate hikes on municipalities immediately?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government has made a commitment to bring spending in line with other comparable provinces as per the MacKinnon report. Fair municipal funding is part of that commitment. It's important to remember that MSI was not designed to be a long-term program and was initially scheduled to end after 10 years. Municipalities have long asked for a funding formula that is predictable and consistent, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs is working on that.

Member Ceci: Considering that I was asking about borrowing and given that the Finance minister deindexed income taxes, meaning that Albertans will pay higher income taxes, and given that he deindexed benefits for seniors and the disabled, meaning that they will get less as costs go up, and given that now the minister is making it more expensive for municipalities to borrow money for capital projects at the same time as this UCP government has slashed a billion dollars from the MSI and given that this will only result in Albertans paying higher property taxes, will the minister explain why he's so focused on making Albertans pay higher and higher costs while he delivers less?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government delivered exactly what we said we would do. We committed to implementing a predictable funding formula which will allow municipalities to effectively plan for the future. That is why in '24-25 the local government fiscal framework will replace the municipal sustainability initiative, with municipalities receiving \$722 million. Funding in future years will rise or fall based on changes in provincial revenues, ensuring that municipalities share in provincial revenue changes.

Member Ceci: The questions are about borrowing, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has stood silently by while his colleague has hiked borrowing costs on municipalities and given that this isn't the first time that this government's selfishness has resulted in higher property taxes for Albertans and given that all Albertans have come to expect from this Finance minister is increasing costs and many are waiting for the other shoe to fall, since the Minister of Finance won't undo his latest secret tax hike on Albertans, will he at least promise that this will be the last time he picks the pockets of Albertans this year?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would say that the members opposite obviously want to ask about borrowing. That's something they know an awful lot about. What they don't know a lot about is how to balance a budget and how to live within our means. The new funding levels and ties to provincial revenue changes ensure funding is sustainable for the province given our current economic circumstances and the economic circumstances at the time. Our government is engaging with municipal stakeholders to gather input on the design of this funding formula and detailed program design of this framework, which the minister and our colleagues are doing all week, obviously, as we meet with municipalities from across the province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Justice System Delays

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are over 3,000 cases in Provincial Court alone that are at risk of being passed over for unreasonable delay. Those are the facts from the Alberta Crown prosecution service. Strangely, though, the Justice minister doesn't agree, telling the mayor of Edson last week that no court cases are at risk of being thrown out because of his incompetent management. Can the minister please inform this House how he was so badly briefed on this and what the actual number of court cases at risk are?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you to the member, for allowing me the opportunity to clarify my comments. The Alberta Crown prosecution service tracks all criminal cases, well, both in Provincial Court as well as in QB to ensure that matters proceed to trial within the time limits that are specified in the Jordan case. Indeed, there are Jordan cases that are in courts across the country, and that includes here in Alberta. The issue of Jordan applications, though, is complex and has – my comments related to the overall situation here in Alberta were on the basis that the current number of successful applications is less than .1 per cent of all . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the previous Minister of Justice showed a deeply concerning lack of respect for the administration of justice and given that the Alberta Crown Attorneys' Association described the minister's comment to the mayor of Edson as inaccurate and stated that there are 1,281 cases involving a serious and violent nature that are beyond the 18-month threshold as of December 31, 2021, and they could be thrown out, will the minister apologize and commit to regular public reporting of these numbers so that Albertans can trust the information that he provides?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, as of February of this year there are more than 47 more trial prosecutors that are working for the Alberta Crown prosecution service than in 2019 under the NDP, and work is actively under way to fill any outstanding vacancies. Now, for matters regarding exceeding the time limits, the delay is not necessarily attributable in whole or in part to the Crown. Our government has made good on its commitment to add the 50 new prosecution positions in '22-23, and we have ongoing job competitions as well, and we've increased the size of our articling program to ultimately grow the ranks . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Given that defence lawyer Andrea Urquhart spoke to the media about the Justice minister, saying, and I quote, he really is on an island of his own in terms of what is going on day to day inside courts, end quote, and given that Alberta deserves a Justice minister who faces facts and then works to solve problems, will the minister get off his own island and get back in touch with the people of Alberta, who are concerned with the situation in our courts that this UCP minister is desperately trying to hide?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's also remember that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the adjournment of cases has been considered by a number of courts in Alberta and across Canada. Although the final ruling in each case has been dependent on the specific facts that are arising, generally speaking, courts have interpreted the COVID-19 pandemic to fit squarely within the exceptional circumstances provided for in the Jordan case. We also will be bringing forward legislation as well, because the member has asked about legislation and public reporting, and we look forward to having the right to know act . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Rural Crime Prevention and Law Enforcement

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural crime has been a rising issue for my constituents and across the province. Albertans are looking for direction on how they can legally protect their property. Rural residents continue to grow frustrated with the catch-and-release system of these criminals. In some cases constituents have been victimized by the same criminals who were previously caught on their property. To the Minister of Justice: what can be done to support those who have fallen victim to rural crime?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to the Member for Camrose, Alberta's government brought forward Bill 18 to set up Alberta's very own provincial parole board, and as a member of the national parole board I can say that having an Alberta Parole Board means a fair, faster, and more responsive justice system that helps to end the revolving door concern that the hon. member has brought up, because all Albertans deserve a justice system which protects them, protects their loved ones, and protects their property.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Budget 2022 includes funding for 50 more Crown prosecutors who will help reduce the strain on our justice system and given that this will lead to more timely court proceedings, reducing the number of those who are caught and released, to the same minister: how soon will we see this increase, and how will these additional prosecutors be utilized?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. To bolster the justice system, our government remains committed to recruiting prosecutors. As you know, as of February of this year, as I said to the previous question, we have 47 more trial prosecutors working in the Crown prosecution service than in 2019 under the NDP, and work is actively under way to fill any outstanding vacancies, as I said. We've increased the number of articling students from eight to 20 to help recruit lawyers who will ultimately work as Crown prosecutors, and as a government we will continue to prioritize placing new articling students in locations other than in just Edmonton and Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there has been a greater pressure put on officers who are responding in rural areas from both concerned residents and bolder criminals and given that there is a growing concern for organized crime and safety in rural communities, to the same minister: are there plans to assist with the challenges that officers face in these rural areas as well?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government introduced a program that's called RAPID response. RAPID stands for rural Alberta provincial integrated defence, and this is a program that's meant to help tackle rural crime by giving provincial peace officers the authority to respond to a wider range of calls. This involves over 400 officers from the sheriffs and fish and wildlife, many of whom work in rural areas, and this helps to assist and free up RCMP officers to respond to and investigate serious matters. Let me say that during the first five months of RAPID response, sheriffs took nearly 1,000 impaired drivers off our highways.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

In light of the remainder of the daily Routine we will continue immediately to the Routine.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Government Motion 7 there will be no evening sitting this evening.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At approximately 2:20 the Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you have no objection, I'll just combine the points of order called at 2:20 and 2:22 because they are

essentially the same thing. You had given this House a great deal of guidance around the language “deliberately misleading the House” as well as the clarity that you cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly. In this case the Government House Leader accused the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and said that the member is “not encumbering himself with the truth” and then again at 2:22 said that the member continues “to make things up each and every day.”

Mr. Speaker, you’ve ruled very specifically on the Government House Leader continuing to accuse the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar of deliberately misleading the House. I call your attention to June 11, 2020, November 16, 2021, and I suspect that with more time with the Speakers’ rulings database I could find other examples. I believe this is a point of order.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Nope. A matter of debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, I’m not sure that I agree, and I think that there are additional cases, including April 12 and November 2, but I will just provide some additional caution to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. In his supplemental question he made comments that reflected: I’ll put my track record of speaking the truth against your track record of speaking the truth. Unfortunately, I don’t have the benefit of the Blues. It’s reasonable to assume that he has done the same thing that the Government House Leader has done.

Mr. van Dijken: Shame.

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock will come to order.

But I think that in this case an apology and withdrawal is acceptable as we have had lengthy discussion on this issue over periods of time.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw and apologize for the demeanour of the members opposite.

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

Point of order 3, which was called at approximately 2:33. The Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). At the time the Member for Calgary-Buffalo was speaking, referring to the Minister of Finance, but I believe the hon. Minister of Children’s Services was taking the questions at the time. He said, “Promise that this will be the last time he picks the pockets of Albertans.” Of this, of course, you have made many mentions in this Chamber, about picking pockets, specifically referring to a member, not the government as a whole. I think it’s a bit of a gutless comment to make, and I’d ask that the member apologize and withdraw.

Ms Gray: On behalf of the member I apologize and withdraw.

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

Hon. members, we are at Ordres du jour. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) and the 2022-23 main estimates schedule the Assembly will stand adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30.

The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon and tomorrow morning for consideration of the main estimates. This afternoon the Standing Committee on Families and Communities will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Health in the Rocky Mountain Room, and the Standing Committee on Alberta’s Economic Future will consider the estimates for the ministries of Culture and Status of Women in the Grassland Room.

Tomorrow morning the Standing Committee on Alberta’s Economic Future will consider the estimates for Advanced Education in the Rocky Mountain Room, and Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for the Ministry of Indigenous Relations in the Grassland Room.

Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:45 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 16, 2022

Day 10

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Party standings:

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New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gottfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gottfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 16, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us in the galleries today are several guests who are in Edmonton for the Rural Municipalities of Alberta spring convention.

First of all, seated in the Speaker's gallery are family friends of mine, councillors for Cypress county Robin Kurpjuweit and Keith Ritz.

Also in the gallery today is the reeve of Lethbridge county, Tory Campbell. He is a guest of the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Federal Fiscal Policies and Inflation

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, this morning Statistics Canada released the latest data on the inflation rate in Canada as of February 2022. Unfortunately for Canadian families, the inflation rate continues to increase, moving from 5.1 per cent in January to 5.7 per cent last month. The inflation rate for Alberta is also concerning although thankfully it remains below the national average.

Mr. Speaker, inflation isn't just an issue for academics and economists. It's an issue that impacts ordinary Albertans and families right across our country. It means it costs more to fill up your tank of gas and more to fill your grocery cart at the store. While some will write this issue off, claiming that it's all due to rising global energy prices and supply chain challenges resulting from COVID, it is important to recognize that government policies have an enormous impact on rising prices, and in Canada's case the inflation rate is being driven up by a host of bad policies set by the Liberal government.

For one, they need to get their spending problem under control. Over the last two years the federal government has racked up hundreds of billions of dollars of debt with no regard for the consequences. How does this relate to inflation, you ask? It is the way in which the federal government is paying for this debt. In order to finance hundreds of billions in Liberal spending, the Bank of Canada has printed an enormous amount of money out of thin air and then is using this money to buy the feds' debt. Mr. Speaker, it's a pretty simple economic principle. When you rapidly increase the supply of something, the value goes down. In this case, it is the value of Canadians' money that is going down, meaning that the price of basic goods and services goes up. This is inflation or currency devaluation.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is more than that. On April 1 the Trudeau government is raising the carbon tax, hiking the already high prices

of energy even more. Every day the Liberals are deliberately making life more expensive. It is high time that they stop and bring their fiscal house in order.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to stand in this House every day as the representative of Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. I want to inform this House that I intend to run again to keep serving the people of my beautiful constituency. There has never been a more important time for good people to come forward and serve in Calgary and right across this province.

Families are struggling. I hear from them every day. The cost of living is unbearable for so many; 6 in 10 Albertans report being unable to keep up with their utility bills. Most have massive debt and little financial flexibility should an emergency occur. This government knows all of this, and still they have moved to hike property taxes, school fees, tuition costs, camping fees, even car insurance. Many in my constituency drive for a living. They drive trucks; they drive cabs. Insurance increases spurred by decisions of this government are crippling.

What's more is that they are hiking costs while also failing to deliver on the jobs they promised. Calgary has the highest unemployment rate among all major cities in Canada. They have cut funding for education, and they have ignored public health during the greatest public health challenge we have ever faced. We still have nothing to help with the cost of natural gas and a measly \$50 for electricity bills, that are soaring over \$700 per month. And northeast Calgary still doesn't have a new school, a needed school. To those on that side of the House, there's a reason why you have lost the trust and confidence of Albertans. It's because you have failed them over and over and over.

Come 2023, or much sooner given how this Premier's job prospects look, Albertans, I pledge to you this. We stand here in this House ready to serve you. We stand ready to support your families, create good and sustainable jobs for you, and we will never waver in our support for public education and public health care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose has a statement to make.

Rural Veterinarians and Budget 2022

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past few years as an MLA I've had the distinct pleasure of being able to work alongside educators and practitioners of veterinary medicine. Our collective aim is to bring awareness to the lack of rural veterinarians and the dire need our communities face. This shortage affects not only our province but the entire world. This need was officially recognized by Alberta's Legislature by unanimously passing my Motion 524, which states:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to recognize the important work of rural veterinarians and explore ways to increase the number of veterinarians serving rural communities.

After drawing attention to this shortage, I was ecstatic to learn that Budget 2022 includes \$59 million to expand the University of Calgary's Faculty of Veterinarian Medicine. This is an example of the steps we are taking in Budget 2022, the first balanced budget since 2014, to make life better for Albertans.

Since my motion has passed, I've heard from the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association as well as the University of Calgary veterinary medical college. They are ecstatic, to say the least, and they have a plan to move our province out of the peril we are in with the veterinary shortage. This plan includes students from our rural communities. Advocating for our Alberta youth is something that I'm extremely passionate about. Ensuring our youth have a bright future was one of the main reasons why I campaigned to be an MLA. We also have a place for those who wish to immigrate to Alberta to start their practice and raise their families in rural Alberta.

As we proceed on our path to normal, we will continue to expand health care capacity, get rural broadband to 400,000 Albertans in 200,000 households to bridge the digital divide, and get even more Albertans working. These are among the reasons why I'm proud to serve as the Camrose constituency MLA.

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, there's not a day that goes by that I don't hear concerns about this government's curriculum. Parents, teachers, students, principals, superintendents, territorial governments have expressed deep concern with the draft proposed. Rather than listening, the Premier and the Education minister reject the premise of concern and push on ahead. It took nearly a year of pressure to get them to drop the fundamentally flawed and racist social studies curriculum. Even though it was rejected by Indigenous groups, francophones, school boards, and virtually every teacher in this province, the Premier was defending and insisting that it would be imposed on Alberta's students. Even now I just don't trust this Premier not to try to sneak it past Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear to everyone that this curriculum is beyond saving. The Premier and the Education minister have zero credibility on this issue. A real government, a government interested in listening to Albertans, would accept failure and start over. Instead, Albertans are being subjected to sham consultation, a consultation that doesn't mean anything because if this government was actually interested in what Albertans think, they would have listened to them when they rejected the draft the first time. A prime example of this was the six prerecorded videos instead of the e-tutoring hub that the government promised. Shameful.

It's beyond clear that this UCP just doesn't care about what Albertans think. It's obvious that they are only working to ensure that one voice seems included in this curriculum, and that is the Premier's, the Premier who puts his friends in charge of writing the drafts that ended Alberta's decades-long curriculum partnership with the Northwest Territories.

We need to get this right. That's why our leader has promised that, should we form the next government, within 100 days we would start over with a real consultation and build a curriculum that Albertans would be proud of, a curriculum that reflects Alberta and its people, communities, and history, not a curriculum that reflects the whims of this Premier. We deserve much better.

1:40

Ranching

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, it's bull sale season. My riding may be known for its mountains and charming towns but also consists of beautiful rolling hills and prairie fields, where some of Alberta's oldest cattle ranches are nestled into the foothills. Alberta's ranching heritage dates back generations, and our province is now home to 47 per cent of Canada's national cattle herd, and that has accounted for 2.2 per cent of Alberta's overall GDP.

Today our ranching community represents so much more than just dollars, cents, and statistics. The western ranching ideals that took root in Alberta generations ago now manifest themselves in every area of our modern-day culture, not just in cowboy hats and boots and big belt buckles but in a much deeper and more meaningful sense. The Albertan spirit is one of resiliency and adaptability. No matter what comes our way, whether it be drought or rain, sunny days or early winters, an eternal optimism shines through. When times get tough, solutions are found even if they're a little bit muddy, and there is no conflict or business deal that a strong handshake can't settle. Whether through young graduates working 12 hours a day in their office towers, new mothers welcoming community children into their day homes, or neighbours running fresh baking next door, the traditional western values of hard work, self-determination, and compassion for those around us are a part of who we are.

The past two years have brought unimaginable hurdles. The cattle industry swung from financial strain caused by packing plant backlogs to soaring meat prices and from a strong calving season to severe drought conditions, causing a shortage in feed supply. Yet through it all our ranchers pushed on to ensure the world can continue to bring food home to their tables.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's small farms and independent cattle ranchers play such an important role in our homegrown food supply chain, but their history and heritage play an even more important role in defining who and what our province and our people continue to be. Through even the toughest of times the western ideals instill in us an unwavering belief in better days ahead and a belief that strength is always found amongst each other.

Agricultural Concerns

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, those who work in the agriculture and agrifood sector feed the world and deserve to be celebrated. They have continuously overcome the challenges that have been thrown at them for the past few years. However, for agriculture to thrive through these uncertain times, the provincial government must start listening to the needs of agriculture. With the ongoing invasion of Ukraine, who is the fifth-highest exporter of wheat, there is further uncertainty in the wheat market. This comes after the challenges of severe drought and poor growing seasons. The shortage of Alberta crops led producers to be more reliant on international feed this year, and the problems with rail capacity and blockaded borders made it challenging for producers to secure feed for their livestock. Farmers are trying to make up for the loss of last season and are facing cost pressures like they've never seen before such as fertilizer and utilities.

A global conflict, devastating drought, and a pandemic are out of the control of the UCP. However, the UCP's absence of leadership is making the situation worse. Due to the UCP's delay in getting drought payments out, ranchers are left wondering how they're going to pay their bills. Unfortunately, I've seen nothing in the budget to learn from last year's mistakes or the last drought and to prepare for the emergencies of the future.

The province could be better prepared to ensure economic stability year over year if they maximize the amount of available federal money by signing on to the AgriStability proposal. Even though producer groups have aligned on this, the UCP still refuses. Instead of securing tens of millions of dollars from the federal government for insurance, the UCP are jacking the price of premiums. The rise of the premiums of crop and livestock insurance by 10 per cent will obtain nearly \$40 million off the backs of farmers. There is no need to do this while the government rakes in royalties on sky-high oil

prices. Agriculture has had enough challenges. Instead of creating more, the UCP should start addressing them.

Thank you.

Oil Sands Development and Fort McMurray

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, \$10.3 billion – \$10.3 billion – in resource revenue from bitumen deposits. While Budget 2022 is great, I think it's fair to say that it wouldn't be balanced without the endowment from Alberta's northeastern region and, quite specifically, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, the home of the biggest players in Alberta's oil sands. In 2020 our provincial revenue from bitumen royalties was just \$2 billion. Now we are forecast to produce a whopping \$10.3 billion, a major contribution to Alberta's nonrenewable resource revenue from Fort McMurray as well as the Cold Lake region.

These revenues go a long way in financing the province's key development projects such as revitalizing the Calgary and Edmonton downtown cores to attract corporate investment, constructing educational institutions to invest in our youth, and redeveloping and expanding our health care infrastructure, as witnessed in Red Deer.

The actions of Russia have highlighted the need for Canada's hydrocarbon sector. With real solutions needed for energy demands and windmills and solar panels being exposed as unreliable, it's time our government starts investing in northeastern Alberta.

Ordinarily we'd see communities form around industries in remote locations. Instead, we witness approximately 10,000 workers commuting from across the country to work in the oil sands. These workers commute using jet airplanes, which are extremely carbon intensive. They also work shift schedules that interfere with their circadian cycles and are away from their families for extended periods.

The current situation dictates that people leave Fort McMurray to attend universities and colleges that provide more options than our local community college. The state of the local hospital dictates that citizens will travel about 46,000 times a year to Edmonton and other areas to visit health care specialists and professionals.

With strategic investments in institutions in Fort McMurray like additional funding and support for Keyano College and the Northern Lights health centre along with releasing Crown lands for future growth and affordable housing, not to mention finishing the twinning of the highway, Fort McMurray could grow to attract these 10,000 workers and build a prosperous community that contributes even more to Alberta.

Deaths of Children in Care and Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Pancholi: Last fall I stood in this Assembly and asked for this government to take action on a very serious crisis facing our province: an alarming rise in the deaths of children and youth in the child intervention system. At that time the heartbreaking number was 30, and the largest increase was in youth transitioning out of government care. Mr. Speaker, that number, a few months later, is now 45; 45 children and young people have died since last April. Forty-five: 20 young people transitioning out of care, 18 under the age of 12, 80 per cent of them Indigenous, two and a half times the number who died 10 years ago.

Last fall the Minister of Children's Services claimed she had reached out to the office of the Child and Youth Advocate and advised her ministry staff to do a review of policies, but three separate FOIP requests show there are no records, zero, that the minister spoke with the advocate or even her own deputy minister

about the support and financial assistance agreement program last year, the very program that 20 of these young people were on.

Efforts to follow the Child and Youth Advocate's recommendations for greater accountability by government ministries in their responses to his recommendations to improve outcomes for children and youth in care have been shot down at every opportunity by the UCP, as recently as in estimates last week by the Minister of Children's Services.

The child intervention budget shows no increase in funding, no increase in front-line staff, and, shockingly, \$10 million less for youth transitioning out of care. Insultingly, the Minister of Children's Services has claimed that reinstating a dedicated caseworker, the only consistent support in these young people's lives, two and a half years after she cut those supports was somehow the plan all along.

Mr. Speaker, I am at a loss. I don't know what it will take to make the UCP understand the gravity of this situation and how deeply they are failing their responsibility for the very children in their care. In the words of Cindy Blackstock: when governments know better and they don't do better for children, that amounts to negligence.

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

Alberta's Sister Relationship with Hokkaido, Japan

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take some time this afternoon to talk about the relationship between this province and a region in Japan. Hokkaido and Alberta will celebrate their 42nd anniversary of being sister provinces this year. For those who don't know, Hokkaido is an island province located on the northern part of Japan. Its capital, Sapporo, is the home of the alcoholic beverage with the same name. Hokkaido shares much of the same economy as Alberta as its focus is on agriculture, forestry, and food processing.

In 1980 these two regions became sisters, and along with it came many great cultural and educational opportunities. For over a decade Alberta and Hokkaido have partnered in high school exchange programs, where students from Alberta and Japan develop their international language skills by spending eight weeks in each other's homes and schools. The Hokkaido Sports Association and the Alberta Sport Connection have also regularly signed an agreement for a friendship sport exchange between the two provinces, and Alberta has played a key role in helping Hokkaido develop into the curling capital of Japan.

In 1985 Stony Plain and Shikaoi were also named sister towns. This year the two communities will celebrate 37 years of friendship, which is the second longest lasting relationship between Alberta communities and those in Hokkaido. This mutual understanding and respect is key to showcasing the culture and lifestyles of our respective communities. In Stony Plain students have been able to take part in the Shikaoi exchange program. It gives kids from both regions a chance to take in the unique perspectives each community has to offer. Another great example of this relationship can be found in the heart of Stony Plain, which hosts a beautiful Japanese garden filled with ponds and flowers named after Shikaoi.

These types of relationships are essential to not only international relations with Japan and the province of Hokkaido, but it also serves the quality of life of residents and kids living in Stony Plain, who get to learn, live, and breathe Japanese culture. [Remarks in Japanese] As translated: Japan and Alberta will always be friends.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Premier's Leadership

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's priorities these days are, shall we say, askew. The Premier thinks the best way to recover from COVID is by cutting the wages of health workers. His response to Albertans struggling to pay their bills was a budget that raised their income tax. His efforts at utility relief are in shambles. Meanwhile the person who should be giving him advice in all this is out campaigning against many of his colleagues to save his struggling leadership. Why is the Premier's top priority fighting with his own party instead of fighting for Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, let me just say that it's nice to see the hon. the Leader of the Opposition back, and I'm glad to see she's in good health.

Mr. Speaker, this government: every day our priority is fighting for Albertans. In fact, we have fought our way to the strongest economy in Canada, the strongest job creation in Canada, and we are fighting for Albertans dealing with the rising cost of living with \$1.7 billion of consumer relief on an annual basis. That's even more than the NDP was taking out of their pockets with the carbon tax. This is the government that has brought in the strongest economic renewal that this province has seen in many years, and the future is looking bright.

Ms Notley: That's money that didn't find its way into the budget because, of course, it was something they came up with about three days ago.

Meanwhile instead of working for Albertans, this UCP government is collapsing into its own infighting, melodrama, and power struggles. The whole government's focus on this Premier's leadership comes at the expense of Albertans. In fact, I have a note that's been sent to all political staff calling on them to start phoning for their boss at 4 o'clock. Mr. Speaker, staff leaving at 4 p.m. is not a sign of a government firing on all cylinders. Why is the Premier's leadership campaign the top priority of this government? Why do Albertans rank so low on the UCP list?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, while the NDP is always talking down Alberta, this government continues to build investor confidence, to create jobs and growth, to keep our election commitments. We have now implemented 88 per cent of the 372 commitments on which we were elected. The Minister of Finance just came back from selling Alberta's amazing turnaround story to investors in New York and financial institutions in Toronto. Just last week the Minister of Energy and I were in Houston fighting for increased exports of Alberta energy, because we are the solution to global energy supply and security issues. Every day on the job fighting for Alberta's economy.

Ms Notley: Now, Mr. Speaker, to all the Albertans watching at home: this is exactly why you can't trust this UCP government. Now, our NDP team is united, strong, and putting forward actual policies to help your family make ends meet and come out ahead. Meanwhile in UCP land the Premier's top adviser is campaigning for him. The Premier's staff are campaigning for him. The Premier's newest MLA is campaigning for, well, himself. Premier, is there anyone over there who's actually campaigning for Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP has never stopped campaigning for themselves since the day after they were kicked out of office by Albertans. While this government has passed more legislation than any in Canada through the COVID crisis, we never downed tools. In fact, this was the only government in Canada to come out with a comprehensive economic recovery plan in the first three months of

COVID, and the benefits are now clear as we lead Canada in economic growth, in job growth, in diversification, the best year ever in tech, in film and television, in manufacturing, in exports, and, yes, in oil and gas.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition for question 2.

Utility Costs

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, if there's one team effort over there, it's the UCP raising costs with their bracket creep, hikes to school fees, car insurance, taxes, more, all this as utility bills are through the roof. Now, I've heard from Alberta families who say that the Premier's rebate crumbs are not enough. These families may face losing their heat in a month, but we can't let that happen in this building. Speaking of legislation, our caucus has drafted a bill that would prevent shut-offs from April until October. Will the Premier work with us to get that passed, to finally do something real to help Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government is putting forward \$300 million of relief for electricity consumers through a \$150 rebate to deal with the mess left by the NDP. They increased transmission costs by \$7.3 billion. They had to pay out \$1.3 billion to coal generators. They brought in their carbon tax, and they're cheering on Justin Trudeau's increase of that on April 1. People's power prices are higher today because of mistakes made by the NDP. We're trying to help people out with \$300 million of relief.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, people's power prices are up because these guys took the cap off.

Now, we're hearing from Albertans. Monty wants that price cap back. Hamdi is stretched beyond capacity. Karrie is overdue every month. Stephanie has to choose between power and groceries. Niki is so tired of the Premier's excuses. Safia worries that she and her son will be in the dark because they can't pay their bills. These are real Albertans. We're offering a solution. We could work today to make it happen. Why won't the Premier do that?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's take on this canard about this so-called NDP rate cap. It applied only to a minority of electricity consumers and then only a minority of their costs for generation, not transmission. Altogether it represented \$108 million of notional relief for taxpayers. The rebate that this government is delivering is three times that. It's \$300 million of relief. On top of that: \$1.4 billion of relief by eliminating the fuel tax, where the NDP brought in their carbon tax. All of these costs were made worse by their shutting down coal and imposing their carbon tax.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, it's really simple. Justine is on maternity leave. She wrote to us. Her last energy bill was more than \$500. She says: we have to resort to credit cards and a line of credit to cover our utilities; I fear for how we're going to be able to get out of this debt. No one should have to put the gas bill on their credit card to avoid getting their utilities cut off. Why won't this Premier work with us to pass a bill to bar people from being cut off their utilities while these prices are so sky-high?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, if the NDP was concerned about folks like Justine and their ability to pay for their power costs, then why did the NDP rush to shut down the cheapest and most reliable form of electricity production in Alberta with our coal plants, putting thousands of people out of work? Why did they impose over a billion and a half dollars in costs on people like Justine through their

carbon tax? Why are they cheering on Justin Trudeau's plan to raise that carbon tax on April 1? Why did they build \$7 billion of additional transmission, that people like Justine are having to pay for? Why did they push so many Albertans into energy poverty? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the UCP is spreading mistruths about the education budget. Yesterday the minister claimed that funding was exceeding student population growth over the last 15 years. Well, this is wrong. When enrolment increases by 24 per cent and inflation increases by 26 per cent, you have to add them together to come up with the real cost that Alberta schools are facing. To the Premier: is it that your UCP Education minister doesn't want to tell the truth, or is it that she doesn't understand inflation and basic addition?

Mr. Kenney: Well, as we expect from that member, of course, being unparliamentary, Mr. Speaker.

Albertans know that we have to operate more efficiently, which is exactly what we've done, while investing more in education. Under the budget tabled last week, Mr. Speaker, the total Education budget is going up to \$8.54 billion from the 2020 budget of under \$8 billion. If you look over the past decade, the increases in investment in the Education budget have consistently outstripped enrolment growth, population growth, and inflation growth. We are right to invest in education but also to challenge our partners there to do it more efficiently.

Ms Hoffman: The Premier is wrong. You have to add population growth plus inflation. The incompetence gets much worse. The UCP claims that it doesn't even know how many students are enrolled in school this year. That's right. We're more than halfway through the school year, and the UCP minister can't tell us how many kids are going to school. It's either the most secretive government in Canada, because they won't share the enrolment numbers, or the most incompetent, because they don't even know. Does the Premier really think Albertans will trust the UCP with K to 12 education when his minister doesn't even know how many kids are going to school? If I'm wrong, if she actually does know, will the Premier stand up and tell us right now?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Well, in fact, we're funding 730,000 kids in the education system, Mr. Speaker, in this year versus 716,000 last year. Those are fully funded positions. Yesterday we announced equal funding for charter schools that the NDP underfunded with respect to special-needs kids. We're letting them finally grow and expand, so the Aurora charter here in Edmonton will be able to build a high school. Since 2007 we have seen a 48 per cent increase in educational operational funding versus a 26 per cent increase in inflation and a 24 per cent increase in enrolment. Spending has outstripped inflation and enrolment.

Ms Hoffman: Those numbers the Premier just said are still estimates. They're on the website as estimates.

What we do have is big money going to construction and funding of charter schools. The NDP government offered stability for charters, but our priority has always been public schools, where the vast majority of students learn. The UCP shows disdain for public education when they refuse to fund a single project for kids in

Edmonton public or Lethbridge public or St. Albert public or many other public districts right across Alberta, so the Premier bangs his drum for charter schools but snubs public school families. Premier, why do charter schools get more teachers, better career path funding . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. In fact, right now 66 schools across Alberta are being built or substantially refurbished, including six with the Edmonton public school board, but more broadly, in the Edmonton region there are 24 of those 66 projects. Yesterday we announced another one, allowing Aurora charter to build a new high school. Here's the great thing. We're making these record investments in education and in building schools, building hospitals, building infrastructure while doing it with a balanced budget.

Deaths of Children in Care and Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, once again I must rise in this House to bring to this government's attention the absolute tragedy occurring in our child intervention system. As I first raised last November: more children and youth in the system have died this year than any year on record, and the year isn't even over yet. The numbers today now exceed the worst year on record by more than 30 per cent, 45 children and youth. These are children, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. Their lives matter. Can the Premier please tell this Assembly, in light of knowing about this trend for almost half a year, what concrete new actions his government is taking to address this devastating issue.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for raising such a profoundly important and serious question and for her evident concern for children in care, particularly as we see those terrible fatalities experienced last year. Undoubtedly, much of this has been connected to the dislocation, disruption of COVID, that has seen an increase in domestic violence as well. I can say that Children's Services reviews all deaths to determine what happened and if it could have been prevented. Rigorous follow-up is required and happens in every single instance, and several mandatory reviews must happen whenever there is a case involving the death of a child . . .

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

Ms Pancholi: That's a deeply unsatisfactory answer, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Children's Services assured us that action was being taken. Since that time deaths have increased by 50 per cent; 15 more young people have died, five more children under the age of five, six more young people transitioning out of care. In 2017 two youth transitioning out of care died, and the NDP established the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention. This year that number is 20, yet the UCP refuses to convene an all-party panel, and they refuse to allow government ministries to report to this Assembly on how they're implementing recommendations from the advocate. Will the Premier call an all-party panel immediately to address . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it is truly regrettable to see efforts to politicize such an issue as this, such a tragic issue. Last fall, I can report, Children's Services commissioned a report to investigate the rise in deaths, and from that report we will use the data to inform

how best to improve the system. We're continuously improving that system to support the safety and well-being of children. We're also investing additionally in youth mental health recovery programs, including \$7 million in the expansion of youth mental health hubs, \$1.25 million for the youth recovery program at Hull Services, and many other important investments to support kids facing crises.

Ms Pancholi: This is not about politics, Mr. Speaker. This is about keeping children and youth safe.

For three years the UCP government has refused to take responsibility on this file, and Albertans no longer trust them. The Minister of Children's Services didn't consider the consequences of removing access to caseworkers for youth transitioning out of care. There was no new funding for child intervention or to hire new front-line caseworkers. Funding for youth transitioning out of care has actually decreased. The government refuses any accountability or transparency. What will it take for any member of this cabinet – any member – to stand up and to take action to protect the children that are in your care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do hope the hon. minister will be able to deliver this or respond to further questions on this critically important issue. As I said, action is being taken. A report has been commissioned as of last fall on exactly this issue. Additional investments are being made. We're also launching a new suicide prevention grant program that will provide \$3 million over the next two years to organizations supporting youth mental health and suicide prevention. But I think all of this underscores the need for us, together as a society, to move on beyond the dislocation and often the mental and emotional stress imposed by the COVID era.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a question.

Capital Plan

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today at the RMA spring convention I was pleased to hear that the Premier committed a historic \$20.2 billion towards building the infrastructure of Alberta: the roads, the bridges, the schools, the health care facilities, and more; the things that Albertans need. As a rural MLA for Livingstone-Macleod I was particularly proud to know that rural and remote Alberta communities will be sharing in significant portions of this landmark capital investment. Through you to the Minister of Infrastructure: why was it so important to ensure that both urban and rural communities shared in this historic public investment?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the member for his strong advocacy for rural Alberta. Alberta Infrastructure alone will spend \$4.8 billion over the next three years, with about a billion dollars each for Calgary, Edmonton, and municipalities outside the major urban centres. I know that the one-third, one-third, one-third principle isn't just the case for Infrastructure but right across the government. This government recognized the importance of rural Alberta. That's why we are investing billions of dollars in irrigation, rural broadband, and maintenance projects.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that this historic capital investment includes 66 school projects in every corner of the province, in communities like

Camrose, Calgary, Valleyview, Penhold, Edmonton, Cochrane, Slave Lake, and more and given that building this educational infrastructure is critical to Alberta's recovery plan and our economic future, again to the same minister: how were these school projects chosen, and what steps has our government taken to take the politics out of building new schools?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, we passed the Infrastructure Accountability Act to ensure that we are evaluating every project based on objective criteria. The member listed a number of individual school projects, but let me update this House. As of January 31 there are 47 school projects under way in rural Alberta, including new projects in this year's budget. Of the 47, there are 14 new and expanded schools and 33 modernizations and replacements, and 126 rural school projects have been completed over the last seven years.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that following the pandemic our capital plan makes historic investments in expanding health care capacity for our province and given that Budget 2022 commits a total of \$3.5 billion for health care facilities, equipment, and IT systems to quickly expand health care capacity for all Albertans, no matter where they live, again to the Minister of Infrastructure: how will this historic \$20.2 billion capital plan ensure that all Albertans have access to the quality medical care and facilities that they need when they need them?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, there are eight health care projects within rural municipalities out of the 24 currently under way, and we completed four health projects in rural municipalities just last year. Obviously, major facilities in the cities, like the new Calgary centre, will also serve patients from rural municipalities. COVID exposed the limitations of our current health infrastructure. That's why this budget expands the health care infrastructure budget in a big way, including the Red Deer hospital, which will serve rural Albertans.

2:10 Child and Youth Advocate Recommendations

Mr. Feehan: Mr. Speaker, this government, particularly the Minister of Children's Services, keeps asking Albertans to trust them, but the problem is that the facts tell a different story. Again the Child and Youth Advocate has renewed his calls for accountability and transparency in addressing issues prevalent in the child intervention system, calls that the minister keeps denying all the while the percentage of Indigenous children in care grows. These youth now account for 68 per cent of cases and 80 per cent of deaths. Will the Minister of Children's Services commit today to a public forum to report on the progress of the recommendations of the Child and Youth Advocate?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the questions about this very important topic. What I would say is that the process that is in place right now in terms of how we respond to the office of the Child and Youth Advocate's recommendations when it comes to child intervention services and support services for youth actually came out of the last all-party panel on child intervention. Those changes were made just a couple of years ago. That is the process that we follow. There is absolutely a transparency report on every single recommendation that is made. In addition to that, I asked for another report to detail what we need to do when it comes to policy and practice to better support . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton–Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Given that we are in the midst of the worst year on record for deaths of current or former youth receiving services under the Ministry of Children’s Services and given that we have raised this issue multiple times on this side of the House and the Minister of Children’s Services refuses to do anything other than again ask us to trust that actions are being taken, to the Minister of Indigenous Relations. Indigenous youth are dying under this government’s watch. How many more lives will be tragically lost before this government admits that they are failing Indigenous youth?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I do just want to remind the members opposite that they left child intervention underfunded when they were in government. We came in, and in our first budget we not only paid for funds that they encumbered, that they hadn’t budgeted for, in child intervention; following an all-party panel we fully funded child intervention. We are committed to making changes where they need to be made. We are working with Indigenous communities on transitioning the responsibility of child intervention to their care, out of provincial government care. I think that that is an opportunity to greatly improve outcomes for kids and youth. We know we need to do better in this area, and we are doing exactly that.

Mr. Feehan: Given that over the last three years both the Child and Youth Advocate and the NDP have called for ministers to appear in committee to report on progress of recommendations only to be consistently denied by the UCP government and the minister and given that each time the excuse is due to a lack of scope – reviewing the annual report is out of scope, the standing committee is out of scope, and last week the minister said that estimates was out of scope – can the minister of either Indigenous Relations or Children’s Services tell this Assembly what venue is in scope for public accountability on actions to reverse these troubling trends?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, this is a great concern for our government, and this is something that we have committed not only to take action on but to be transparent about. Again, the process by which we respond to recommendations that come from the advocate are posted online. I’m happy to speak about our action on those items, but I also asked for an additional report to be done to outline exactly what we need to do, whether there are changes that need to be made to policy, to practice, to legislation, to regulations. I’ve also committed to be transparent about it, something those members opposite did not do when they were in government.

Health Care Worker Wages

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, it feels like déjà vu in the worst possible way. This government throughout the pandemic paid lip service to thank health care workers and then turned around to undercut and disrespect them. We’ve seen the government privatizing health care jobs during a pandemic and insultingly deride, quote, union-run hospitals instead of respecting the people who run them. Now the government is looking to slash the pay of a number of different health care workers, including respiratory therapists, who saved countless lives. Will the Minister of Health apologize to respiratory therapists for the insulting proposal and commit to pulling it today? If not, will he admit his recent words of thanks to health care workers ring hollow?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we’ve spoken over the last couple of days in regard to the bargaining that is going on between the HSAA and AHS, this is just that, bargaining. Negotiations have been going on for some time. Last week both parties put their first positions on the table in regard to the monetary items. AHS put a position in regard to concerns in regard to certain professions and being at market, and HSAA put a 15 per cent increase over four years on the table. This is part of the process, where parties put positions on the table. They negotiate, and we are hopeful they’ll reach an agreement, just like UNA did.

Ms Gray: Given that respiratory therapists, paramedics, pharmacists, and many more did so much to save lives during this pandemic and rather than offer them support and thanks for their Herculean efforts to protect Albertans from COVID-19, this government is moving to slash wages, given Holly Champney, a Red Deer respiratory therapist, stated that it “feels demoralizing to be offered a wage rollback” after all she and her colleagues have done, does the minister understand the harm these wage proposals cause, why these proposals appear to punish Alberta’s health care heroes?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I want to thank all of the health care workers for the tremendous efforts that they have done throughout the pandemic and they continue to deliver for Albertans. As we indicated, this is part of a normal bargaining process. It’s the same process that was used with UNA, and an agreement was reached through that process, which was ratified at a very high level. I am very hopeful that the same process will reach agreement between AHS and HSAA, and then we can begin to move forward.

Thank you.

Ms Gray: Given that during the second wave of COVID-19 the UCP asked people to cancel their Christmas plans while the UCP flew off to Hawaii and Vegas, given that during the fifth wave the UCP threw a Christmas party for their members hours after telling Albertans to cancel their own plans, given that these are just some of the hypocritical actions that have absolutely shattered Albertans’ ability to trust this government, will the minister rise in this House and explain why any Albertan should believe him when his government claims that these cruel wage cuts are appropriate? Why are you trying to cut the pay of those who did dangerous work through the pandemic while your Premier wined and dined on the sky palace?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I already indicated, this is part of the bargaining process. I am very optimistic that the parties, using the same process, will reach an agreement just like was done with UNA, which had increases in their agreement. Our government respects the work of all health care workers, and we’ve recognized that through payments, you know, that the Minister of Labour and Immigration made last year in recognition of their tremendous work.

Mr. Speaker, we are investing in our health care capacity. We are investing \$600 million this year and for the next two years an additional \$600 million. We’re investing \$3.5 billion in infrastructure. We are investing in health care for Albertans and for health care workers.

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

Agricultural Concerns

Mrs. Frey: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta experienced a record-breaking heat wave last summer that saw temperatures climb to over 35 degrees Celsius. Many municipalities, including in the south, faced extreme agricultural drought. Recovery is a slow and difficult process, especially when the land has suffered previous droughts, and we all know that. Between not being able to produce enough crop and not being able to support sustainable pastures for livestock, Alberta's agricultural producers were faced with immense financial burdens. Can the minister of agriculture please explain what aid is available for farmers and livestock producers that are dealing with climate and drought complications in Alberta? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. minister of agriculture and forestry.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree. Last summer was a difficult one for our farmers and ranchers, and they're still feeling the devastating impacts. Fortunately, we acted quickly with the help of the federal government, created the Canada-Alberta livestock feed initiative AgriRecovery program, which made up to \$400 million in much-needed relief available to drought-stricken livestock producers and beekeepers. The first phase alone saw 14,000 applications on over 2.1 million animals, totalling \$180 million in payments. The second phase so far: 11,000 applications . . .

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

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that CP Rail is essential to the farming industry, in which grain is its largest transport and given that CP Rail is vital to the global cattle feed market and further given that livestock producers are expecting feed deliveries very soon, to the same minister: what is Alberta's government doing to prevent CP Rail from striking, and how are we handling arising concerns from agricultural producers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture and forestry.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I just took this question at RMA this morning. It's front of mind for the entire livestock sector. Currently we're heavily reliant on feed grains, namely U.S. corn. We're seeing about six unit trains of corn coming into the province a week, another one of DDGS, distillers grain. There simply isn't the grain supply in the south country, where most of these cattle are fed. I've been doing daily phone calls with the ag ministers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba and working closely with our counterparts to make sure the feds know that this is critical.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that rural veterinarian care is scarce and a number of people in my riding have to travel an hour or two in order to find a clinic to find proper and adequate care for their animals and given that Alberta is still in need of hundreds of qualified veterinarians and that rural Alberta faces serious challenges when it comes to attracting new vets, can the minister confirm steps that we are taking to resolve this shortage and what is being done to encourage growth in the veterinarian sector in Alberta?

2:20

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Horner: Yes. Thank you, and thank you to the member for the question. The vet crisis in rural Alberta, especially on the large-animal side, has snuck up on no one. This has been an issue for a long time. I am very excited to see in Budget '22 the addition of \$59 million going towards U of C to expand the seats from 50 to 100, and that is just the first step. More things will need to be done. It's about a four-to-six strategy approach from the dean at the U of C around recruitment, retention, changing the admission requirements, and making sure that we have vets in rural Alberta.

The Speaker: I just might remind members that interacting with those who are observing in the gallery is largely frowned upon. I encourage folks to not be doing that.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Calgary Beltline Area Protests

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each weekend it's chaos in Calgary Beltline communities. I represent them, but due to the ongoing Saturday protests, that have no end in sight, I've heard directly from businesses reporting revenue losses of 20 to 36 per cent. Residents can't get to and from their homes without being harassed, shoved, or worse. This isn't right. I'm not going to get into the purpose or cause of these protests because something needs to change. What I want to know is why the UCP government hasn't lifted a finger to bring order to this chaos.

Mr. Shandro: As the member knows since he ostensibly lives in Calgary, we have a municipal police service in Calgary, the Calgary Police Service. I understand that they are working with the community to bring order and to police. We do not have a provincial police force that the UCP would be directing, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to if the Calgary Police Service has any questions for us or the Calgary Police Commission. If there are any resources or any help that we could provide as government, I look forward to receiving those requests from the Calgary Police Service.

Member Ceci: Given that that answer is woefully inadequate and that the police are not doing anything in Calgary, given that the city councillors in Calgary are expressing a feeling of helplessness as the protest seems to be intensifying, and given that this UCP government has no problem running over municipalities when it suits them politically, why is this government now doing absolutely nothing and providing no support to find a compromise or properly enforce laws in Calgary's Beltline communities?

Mr. Shandro: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, everybody in Alberta has the right to participate in a democratic and peaceful protest, and we're respectful of that. The Calgary Police Service, like all police services in Alberta, makes operational decisions about deployment and enforcement tactics. I know that the NDP have the impression that governments and politicians should be directing law enforcement in certain situations. That's not the case. We look forward to making sure that if we get any requests from the Calgary Police Service or the Calgary Police Commission – I'd also point out that those councillors are also members of the Calgary Police Commission.

Member Ceci: Given that the UCP government also did nothing to resolve the illegal blockade at the Coutts border crossing for weeks and given that members of the UCP caucus actually cheered on those with the illegal blockade even after it surfaced that some involved were stockpiling weapons and plotting to kill RCMP members and given that we're lucky that no one was seriously hurt

or worse at Coutts but again we find the government sitting on its hands, is it really going to take someone getting seriously hurt in the Beltline protest for the Justice minister to do his job?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's focus on the Coutts situation and the response from the acting minister at the time, who used prudence and deference to law enforcement to ensure that every single member of law enforcement made it home to their families safe every night, as opposed to the NDP . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
The minister.

Mr. Shandro: . . . who are advocating imprudence. Putting those lives at risk is shameful behaviour. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung is next.

Coutts Border Crossing Blockade

Mr. Dach: Hard-working Albertans have been hurt by high prices and shipping delays, and in estimates yesterday, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transportation defended her inaction and could not even provide an accurate figure for the taxpayer cost of the 18-day Coutts border blockade. The Canadian manufacturers and exporters put the cost at \$44 million a day to the Canadian economy; the federal government at \$48 million a day. The minister claims that these are just, quote, numbers that have been highly thrown about and that the costs weren't as high as projected. Unquote. Is the minister really telling Albertans that she has no clue what the illegal Coutts blockade cost, or will she finally provide a real figure?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you for that question. Mr. Speaker, the reality is that those numbers were based on assumptions, and, in fact, in Transportation with JSG we did significant work in diverting traffic to the Del Bonita border entry, and that resulted in a lot of traffic actually getting through across to the border. The numbers that were thrown about were just based on assumptions. They haven't been quality checked, and we will do that estimation within Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Dach: Given that alongside these missing costs, Mr. Speaker, we're also trying to understand the lack of action from the Minister of Transportation and given that while truckers were left stranded at the border and the cost of the blockade hit Albertans' wallets, Albertans called on the minister to take real action to reopen the border and given that the minister claims that she didn't have the time or the ability to suspend commercial licences or really to take any action and that instead her most innovative solution was to create a WhatsApp chat to talk to truckers, does the minister recognize that she had resources at her disposal to end the blockade, or was a group chat the best she could offer Albertans?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member clearly mischaracterized my statements, and, in fact, the tools that were at our disposal like suspending commercial licences would not have withstood a constitutional challenge, so that was something that we couldn't do. Any other changes that we were looking at required changes to the Traffic Safety Act. In fact, we did significant work, working with CBSA and the U.S. border services, to divert traffic, which actually mitigated the economic impact, so we are proud of that work. Most of that response was within the purview of the RCMP.

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, a WhatsApp group. It may surprise you to hear this, but it makes me think of Meryl Streep's famous line in that scene from the movie *The Devil Wears Prada*: "Florals, for spring? Groundbreaking." That is to say, a chat group app was not innovative and certainly not sufficient. Let's try one more time. What were the costs of the blockade, and if presented with similar disruptions of key trade corridors in the future, what actions will the Minister of Transportation take to protect Alberta pocketbooks and businesses?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, I didn't even understand . . .

Speaker's Ruling Preambles

The Speaker: I was very, very curious to see how the member was going to tie a *The Devil Wears Prada* quote into a question that didn't include a preamble. Unfortunately, he was unable to do that. That is a very clear example of a preamble, and I encourage him to govern himself accordingly in the future.

The hon. minister.

Coutts Border Crossing Blockade (continued)

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, as I was mentioning, I didn't quite understand some of what was mentioned by the member opposite. We took significant efforts to communicate with commercial truck drivers. In fact, I have received nothing but positive feedback. We alerted them to border crossings and timings and days that they were open and days that they were closed, and we have received much positive feedback from that communication. That was the entire intent, to make sure that commercial truck drivers had the information that they needed so that they could cross the border, and it was well done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Alberta Energy Regulator

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Energy Regulator is a hugely important part of the production of energy in the province of Alberta. It's an integral piece of the puzzle working with energy companies to ensure that we have one of the most efficient, profitable, and environmentally responsible energy industries in the world. As part of its mandate the AER oversees pipeline development, reclamation, drilling, well approvals, et cetera. To the Minister of Energy: how much of the provincial GDP is being overseen and regulated by the AER? [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.
The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for his question. The AER regulates oil, oil sands, natural gas, critical minerals, geothermal, and I can tell this House that that industry produces \$78 billion to Alberta's GDP. It's great to hear the NDP excited about the AER for once. When they were in government, there were four independent investigations because they weren't watching it. It's great to see they're interested in it now.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the AER oversees a huge portion of the GDP of the Alberta economy and given that it is very important that the oversight of this industry is built upon a system that is allowing for a constant flow of information between the government, the AER, and industry stakeholders and given that it is in the best interests of all Albertans to have an efficient, profitable, and environmentally responsible energy industry with appropriate oversight by the AER, to the Minister of Energy: what metrics has the Minister of Energy set up to ensure that the AER is fulfilling its mandate in the interests of the people of Alberta and the industry stakeholders?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The business plan in the Department of Energy includes metrics for all of our agencies for effective management of our resources. The metrics for the AER include targets, targets related to timelines, and these timelines are being met. It also includes red tape reduction, and those targets are being met. [interjections] I can hear the NDP heckling over there, and, again, it's so great that they're finally taking an interest in the AER, because they didn't when they were in government, and the AER went outside of its mandate and ended up with four independent investigations. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are thousands of wells in my constituency alone that are at the end of life and need to have downhole abandonment and reclamation work done and given that oil and gas companies are coming out of the worst recession in Alberta history, where many feared for their very existence, and given that a new directive overseen by the AER is setting mandated spending by energy companies on end-of-life well cleanup and given that this could have a huge impact on practitioners, landowners, and industry, to the Minister of Energy: what kind of feedback loop is going to be set up to encourage industry to provide timely and effective feedback to the AER and the government?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to liaise with the AER and the industry and other stakeholders across the province to better understand the regulatory concerns impacting the whole industry, and we've made substantial progress on addressing those concerns. Take directive 088, which is part of the liability management framework announced in the summer of 2020. Under that framework there are mandatory minimum spends for cleanup of inactive oil and gas wells. We're taking a problem that's been developing for decades and fixing it. We're cleaning up inactive wells.

Automobile and Trucking Industry Insurance Costs

Mr. Sabir: Alberta truckers kept our supply chains open throughout this pandemic, working long hours under tough conditions. They deserve our thanks, but they are getting none from this government. Insurance costs are skyrocketing, and many owner-operators can't make ends meet. They are unable to pay for all the cost increases forced upon them by this UCP government. To the Minister of Finance: where is insurance relief for the trucking industry, and why won't this government do anything to help Albertans struggling to pay your skyrocketing insurance costs?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do have a hard insurance market in Alberta. We actually have one right across the country and on the continent. That's resulting in increased upward pressure on insurance premiums. But we have taken real action in Bill 41, that we introduced and passed last fall. Bill 41 dealt with the systemic issues that were pushing up costs, resulting in higher automobile insurance premiums. While the members opposite simply put in a cap, a cap that resulted in lower products, we brought in a real solution that's dropping premiums.

Mr. Sabir: Given that insurance costs have skyrocketed for all drivers because of your Bill 41 and the sellout by this UCP government to the insurance industry and given that this insurance crisis has made insurance out of reach for Albertans, including the tens of thousands of truck owners and operators, and given that it's essential we keep truckers in the industry and our supply chains open, to the minister again: how can this government possibly justify double-digit increases in insurance costs on these hard-working Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member's concern over the great trucking industry, transportation industry in this province, but while the members opposite put a cap on insurance rates in a competitive market and did not deal with the systemic cost issues that were driving premiums, premiums went up by 5 per cent per year under their watch. At the same time, products were being pulled back. Consumers were having less choice and fewer options. We brought in fundamental reforms that deal with these cost pressures. Insurance premiums, in fact, have flattened and are coming down. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Sabir: Given that insurance costs are out of reach for Albertans and Alberta businesses and that instead of taking action to address their concerns, this government is talking them down and given that this government appears more focused on the Premier fighting to keep his livelihood rather than the livelihoods of Albertans and their businesses and given that my constituents are feeling left behind and ignored by this government, can the minister point to a single insurance relief program in Budget 2022 that will help lower insurance costs for my constituents and the trucking industry?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the members opposite simply focused on caps and did not have the courage to deal with the real systemic issues that were driving up premiums, we dealt with those issues in Bill 41. That has resulted in a reduction of cost pressures. Insurance premiums for the automobile industry have flattened. In fact, we've seen a number of companies offering premiums in decline. We've seen reductions between 2 and 7 per cent by a number of insurance providers. Our policies are working. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Kananaskis Conservation Pass Revenue

Mr. Schmidt: Kananaskis Country is an area that belongs to all Albertans and was free to access for decades. But it isn't just

Albertans who enjoy K Country. It attracted people from around the world and supported jobs in our tourism industry. The UCP has never seen a user fee that they didn't like, so they put one on nature and brought in a \$90 fee for Albertans to access Kananaskis Country. The UCP promised that this would bring in revenue to support maintenance in the area, but Albertans haven't seen it. I'm still hearing from people about the poor state of trails and facilities. Where is the UCP's K Country fee going? Albertans sure aren't seeing it.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm always happy to rise in this place and talk about the award-winning Kananaskis conservation fee, which has been in place for half of a season, going into its first full season. Just the other day I was there with the member from Canmore announcing the new Nordic Centre, a significant investment in that community. We're going to continue to invest millions of dollars in Kananaskis going forward. Yes, sadly, it's going to take years to fix that hon. member's mess when he was in government.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the cost of everything is already going up under the UCP – income taxes, property taxes, tuition, interest on student debt, car insurance, utilities, and, of course, park fees – and given that Albertans aren't seeing any of the promised improvements to the area and that, instead, they're using the money to backfill previous cuts or fund previous announcements and given that the fee has only raised \$11 million after the UCP promised \$15 million, why are Albertans paying more but getting less from this government, and how many more cuts or cost increases will Albertans continue to see due to this shortfall?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the Kananaskis conservation pass last year was not for a full year. Yes, it came in at \$11 million. We anticipate that for a full year it will come in at \$15 million.

In addition to the \$70 million investment the other day in the Canmore Nordic Centre, I have another announcement I can make today, Mr. Speaker. On Friday I'll be at the graduation for 20 new conservation officers, armed conservation officers that will be on the landscape. Another promise fulfilled to Albertans and going out of our way yet again to clean up that hon. member's mess when he was in government when it comes to Kananaskis.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that Albertans aren't seeing any of the promised improvements from the UCP in K Country – it's just another broken promise and another reason that Albertans can't trust them to manage our parks – and given that nobody seems to know where the money from the K Country pass is going and given that we proposed an amendment that would ensure that all the revenue actually went back into K Country but this government voted it down, will the government now bring in an amendment to protect Albertans' money from the UCP, or will they continue to operate their slush fund without any accountability?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's already the law for that money to be spent in Kananaskis, which is being fulfilled. I've already announced just in this question period alone more than the entire Kananaskis conservation fee, which is just part of the investment that we're making in our parks system across the province. In capital alone this year: \$70 million going into our parks system. We're dedicated to fixing the mess that the NDP left us in Kananaskis and making sure that we not only protect Kananaskis

but that we invest money in our parks system from north to south, east to west so that Albertans can enjoy their backyard.

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

2:40

Canada Pension Plan

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All of us are concerned about out-of-control inflation. This year CPP for businesses and workers increased to as high as \$3,500 each. In only one year CPP went up more than 10 per cent. Higher payroll taxes punish businesses for each and every employee, and Alberta workers take less take-home pay for their families. To the minister: how can we reduce the damage of huge CPP increases on Alberta businesses and workers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Red Deer-South is right to raise that issue of competitiveness. We know that when we provide a very competitive business environment, it results in increased investment attraction, job opportunities, and expanded fiscal capacity. That's why we immediately brought in the job-creation tax cut. That's why we focused on red tape reduction, regulatory modernization, and we're seeing the response, with billions of dollars of investment returning to this province, resulting in job opportunities, opportunities for small businesses, and economic growth.

Mr. Stephan: Given that the NDP likes to tax anything that moves and breathes and given that under an Alberta pension plan rates for Alberta businesses and workers would be much lower while maintaining the same benefits and given that with lower payroll taxes this could produce a new, competitive advantage, with Alberta businesses hiring more employees, with Alberta workers taking home more of their paycheques to their families, to the minister: what is the delay in pursuing this game-changing competitive advantage to benefit Alberta businesses and workers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. An Alberta pension plan is a very complex issue. We are continuing with econometric work, actuarial work so that we can be fully informed and so that Albertans can be fully informed in making future decisions around an APP. We remain laser focused on ensuring we have the most competitive business environment in this province. That's resulting in billions of dollars of investment flooding in, thousands of job-creation opportunities, which is putting Albertans back to work.

Mr. Stephan: Given that five years ago it was estimated that CPP contributions by Alberta businesses and workers were about \$3 billion more than benefits paid to Alberta retirees and given that since that time Trudeau has been jacking up CPP so that this subsidy from Alberta is bigger, in excess of \$4 billion each year, to the minister: why are we leaving this on the table and not getting out of the CPP, which would save billions for Alberta businesses and workers each year?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the member is right to raise this question as we focus on competitiveness in Alberta. Again, this issue is complex. The issue of an Alberta pension plan has much complexity. We're doing the econometric work, actuarial work to ensure that we're well informed and so that

Albertans can be well informed to make future decisions. In the meantime we continue to do all we can to attract investment, create job opportunities, and we're seeing a tremendous response. We're seeing Albertans go back to work. We're seeing Alberta small businesses experience additional opportunities. Our plan is working. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

Given the estimates schedule only 45 minutes away, I ask that members exit the Chamber as quickly and as quietly as possible as we will be continuing immediately with the daily Routine.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills has reviewed the following petitions that were presented to the Assembly on March 10, 2022: the petition of the Calgary Young Men's Christian Association for the Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022, and the petition of the Calgary Heritage Authority for the Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022. I can advise the Assembly that both petitions comply with standing orders 90 to 94.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to move the following motion.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur that (a) residential farm and small commercial electricity and gas utility consumers in Alberta are experiencing record-high utility costs, (b) the government of Alberta's proposed \$150 rebate over three months is likely not sufficient to prevent Albertans from being unable to afford these costs, which will result in disconnection of these customers' service, (c) the current rules under the distribution tariff regulation and rules established by the Alberta Utilities Commission will allow for service providers to disconnect these customers' utility services starting on April 15, 2022, and (d) the legislated protection for residential farms and small businesses in Alberta is necessary to prevent these Albertans from being forced into undue hardship and further turmoil through the loss of their utilities due to unaffordable utility costs.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Bill 5 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 5, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022.

This bill will improve safety on our roads and highways for roadside workers and enhance existing safety rules for first responders. People who work on or near roads have a higher risk of being injured or killed as a result of passing vehicles. These new requirements will apply to any stopped commercial vehicle that is

permitted to have flashing lights such as emergency vehicles, roadside workers, snowplows, and others. Albertans who work along our roads deserve better protection so that they can return safely home at the end of each shift. Bill 5 proposes the necessary changes to the Traffic Safety Act to improve protections for these workers and make Alberta's roads and highways safer.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Hon. members, at the appropriate time the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View rose and gave oral notice of a Standing Order 42. The hon. member now has up to five minutes to explain the urgency of such a motion.

Utility Costs

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do think this matter is extremely urgent. The cost of everything has gone up under the UCP. Income taxes, property taxes, tuition, camping fees, park fees, car insurance, and utilities have all gone up. These are a direct result of UCP policies, and right now the soaring cost of utilities is making it increasingly difficult for Albertans to make ends meet.

This matter is urgent, Mr. Speaker, because people are suffering right now. I've heard from Albertans whose utility bills have gone up hundreds of dollars, and with the extra costs the UCP has piled on in other areas, Albertans are struggling to pay their bills. Many report that they owe thousands to utility companies.

Over the winter Albertans are spared from any disconnection due to a regulation that prevents utilities from being cut off between October 15 and April 15. However, April 15 is fast approaching. It's less than one month away today, and I know many Albertans are looking at that date with fear after the UCP failed to provide them real relief for utility costs. The UCP natural gas rebate turned out to be a fake. Their electricity rebate amounted to only \$50 a month for three months, and it's inconsequential for those facing bills of more than \$700 in any single month.

Today I rise to call on the government to extend the ban on utility disconnections over the spring and summer until it comes back into effect in the fall. Albertans are struggling. They've had a tough two years. They have had difficulties, and now costs are rising. They deserve to know that the fridge won't be cut off over the summer while they struggle to get their feet back under them. This will effectively give Albertans another year knowing their utilities can't be disconnected, and it will give them a real chance to catch up on their bills.

2:50

The government has passed similar legislation before. The draft bill that I proposed yesterday was partially designed from the legislation passed in this House during the first wave of COVID-19. We worked together and passed that legislation, protecting Albertans from undue hardship and stress and preventing the suspension of services from March 18 to June 18, 2020. We need to come together to get this done again. The Legislative Assembly can set aside the work this afternoon that it would normally be doing, because this matter is extremely urgent, and it is impacting Albertans all over the province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a member of Executive Council has up to five minutes to respond to the Standing Order 42. Is there

anyone wishing to do so? The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity has risen.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, there's one thing that I do agree on with the other member, and that's that the cost of everything has gone up. There's no doubt. We find ourselves perplexed on this side when they complain about the cost of everything going up, because that's exactly what they asked for. The whole purpose of a carbon tax is to make it more expensive to heat your home. The purpose of a carbon tax is to make it more expensive to drive your car. So they're getting what they asked for. They brought in the first carbon tax. And guess what? Things are more expensive.

Yes, we are equally frustrated by some of the actions that the previous administration has taken, Mr. Speaker. I will say that we are concerned, and we're frustrated when we see the price of utilities going up. Transmission fees on people's utility bills are going up substantially as well, and it's directly from the previous administration's poor policies. They spent \$7.5 billion. That's right; I said "billion," not "million." They spent \$7.5 billion on transmission – much of it was not needed – at a time when our economy just couldn't support it, and then they throw up their hands and say: why are utility bills so expensive?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I just want to put that \$7.5 billion into a little context. In 2020 we spent \$100 million on transmission – \$100 million – in one year compared to their \$7.5 billion over four. In 2021 we didn't spend any money on transmission. It's called fiscal restraint, responsibility. We are extremely frustrated on this side when we see Albertans struggling with the high cost of utilities that are inflated for one reason and one reason only, and that is the Alberta NDP.

Now, here's the good news, Mr. Speaker. The good news is that we have demonstrated that we will have the backs of Albertans, and we will take care of Albertans that are struggling. We demonstrated that on day one when COVID first hit, and we came out with the utility deferral program that was designed to help Albertans that were struggling, because we did not want Albertans to have to choose between groceries or paying the utility bill. I can tell you that the Energy department moved heaven and earth to get that program implemented in place so that we could have Albertans' backs, and I can say that that has not stopped, nor will it.

For a number of weeks now I have been trying to bring to the attention of the opposition some programs that are out there to help Albertans. Now, as everyone in this House knows, when I begin to speak about these programs, they start lighting their hair on fire. They're hysterical, they're heckling, and nobody can hear. Mr.

Speaker, I'm going to share with you why this legislation that the NDP wants to do is not necessary. We don't need to write legislation for something that already has the programs in place.

For example, we have very strict rules about disconnections in this province, and there can be no disconnects over the winter months. If we have anyone that has a disconnect that has occurred, then we have programs in place to reconnect before it gets cold. Mr. Speaker, do you know what else we have? Supports for Albertans that are struggling. Low-income seniors that are suffering from utility insecurity: we have programs that will pay their bill and help them. We have the exact same program for low-income Albertans as well.

I have also been having ongoing conversations with the presidents and the CEOs of these utility companies, Mr. Speaker. Let me just tell you that I could not be prouder to be an Albertan with companies like this that are helping us manage the electricity grid, because they were wonderful in demonstrating restraint with Albertans. The one thing that we asked of them is to show restraint, and they absolutely have.

Mr. Speaker, the last thing that I would leave with Albertans is that if anybody is struggling with utility insecurity, please speak to your utility. The utilities have made it clear to me that if Albertans are working with them, they will then, in return, work back with them, and they will come out with reasonable programs that will allow them to continue to pay their bills and to keep their lights and their power on. All they have to do is reach out to the utility.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for the responses to the Standing Order 42. This is a request for unanimous consent to set aside the business of this afternoon, which would include the committee meetings that are scheduled to sit.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the daily Routine.

Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) and the 2022-2023 main estimates schedule the Assembly will stand adjourned until this evening at 7:30. The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon for the consideration of the main estimates. The Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship shall consider the main estimates for the Ministry of Energy in the Grassland Room, and the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future will consider the main estimates for Executive Council in the Rocky Mountain Room.

Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:57 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, March 16, 2022

Day 10

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
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| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Barnes
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Frey
Irwin
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Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

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Frey
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Stephan
Yao
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Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 16, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health on behalf of the Government House Leader.

COVID-19 Air Travel Restrictions

12. Mr. Copping moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly
- (a) recognize that the current air travel restrictions imposed by the government of Canada have no measurable public health benefit and continue to impact hundreds of thousands of jobs in the air travel and tourism sectors and
 - (b) call on the government of Canada to revoke
 - (i) its proof of vaccination requirement for airline passengers and
 - (ii) its predeparture COVID-19 testing requirement for international airline passengers entering Canada.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, we're in transition to living with COVID as opposed to responding to it as a pandemic emergency. All provinces recognize this. Medical and scientific experts in Canada and other countries recognize it. The Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health of Canada recognized it a month ago. They said in their statement that public health measures need to reflect the risk at a point in time. They need to change as the risk changes. As we've said from the start, restrictions need to be a last and limited resort, balancing the risk from the virus with the very real harm caused by the restrictions themselves. Restrictions should be imposed only when necessary, and they should be removed as soon as possible when the situation warrants.

In the case of the travel industry the harm from restrictions is obvious. These travel requirements are continuing to throttle a whole industry for no valid public health reason at this point in time. The Canadian public recognizes this, with polls showing overwhelming support for lifting restrictions right across the country. The question is: why is it taking so long for the government of Canada to recognize this?

Here's one of Canada's most prominent COVID experts, Dr. Zain Chagla, infectious disease physician and associate professor at McMaster University.

COVID-19 testing at the border does not make any sense; travel is no more risky than [any] other activities and there is no scientific reason to single it out... When first put in place, Canada's travel rules were designed to keep COVID-19 out of the country. Now that the virus is here and community spread is responsible for approximately 99 per cent of all infections, the rules governing travel are obsolete.

Another quote, from Dr. Dominik Mertz, division director of infectious diseases at McMaster: "There are higher risk, domestic settings that vaccinated people can access without testing than travelling internationally. The travel barriers... [simply do not] make sense."

Here's another. Dr. Irfan Dhalla, co-chair of the federal advisory panel on COVID-19 testing and screening:

I'm not sure I understand the rationale for testing travellers who are going to the U.S. for a very short trip... Even if we were going to require tests from these travellers, a test taken in Canada, before the trip even starts, would not be helpful.

Mr. Speaker, the federal requirements reflect a situation that has passed, when the COVID virus posed a different threat and our ability to manage it and respond to it was different. The reality now is that the omicron variant has spread widely enough to make our previous test, trace, and isolate regimen simply obsolete. More importantly, we're in a different situation in terms of our ability to live with the risk posed by the virus, at least in its current form, because of our very high vaccination rate in addition to the growing availability of new treatments. We now have more than 90 per cent of Albertans aged 12 and over with one dose of the vaccine, nearly 87 per cent with two doses.

Given the level of risk we currently have, Albertans are able to live their lives more or less normally. We've been able to enjoy life in a different way than we have over the past two years, with the reduction in restrictions as we moved into phase 2. Now, with the majority of these restrictions lifted, Mr. Speaker, we've gathered with loved ones, we've visited restaurants, we've played sports and made our own decisions about masking outside of settings like health care facilities, where they're still required.

As I reported this afternoon, it does not appear that easing measures has caused an uptick in numbers since we entered step 1 on February 8. We continue to see a decline or plateau in both our lagging and our leading indicators. There's been some variation in the positivity rate for PCR tests, but overall since step 1 began, it has dropped by 7 per cent. There is also a continuing and steady decline in our most important lagging indicator, hospitalizations. Today hospitalizations are down to 989, including 70 in ICU. Both those figures are down by approximately 40 per cent from when we began easing measures. It will take time for hospitalizations to get down to the level before the fifth wave, but that's where we're headed.

Now consider how discordant it is for Albertans when they encounter the current federal restrictions on travel. Those restrictions reflect a completely different assessment of the current risk and a completely different response to it. They reflect a virus that is a critical risk to the average traveller when the average Albertan today knows that the risk assessment is no longer accurate. They reflect an approach that puts a critical importance on identifying and isolating every case based on the goal of minimizing spread. Again, the average Albertan understands that those are no longer valid assumptions for public health policy. Mr. Speaker, we're living our lives more or less normally and, again, with the confidence that that's appropriate based on the evidence of the risk posed by the omicron variant today and our high levels of vaccination. Living our lives normally should include travelling normally. The requirements for travel should reflect the same risk and the same public health response that the average Albertan encounters in the rest of their lives.

It is time for the federal government to catch up with the evidence, with the views of infectious disease experts, with the views of our chief MOHs, and with the views of Albertans and other Canadians. I urge everyone in the House to support this government motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Government Motion 12 is before the Assembly this evening. Is there anyone wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know and many of my colleagues know, I used to be a WestJet. In fact, I truly believe that once you're a WestJet, you're always a WestJet. I share this with you because tonight I want to speak to Government Motion 12 because I understand how important air travel is for Alberta's economy and Albertans in general, for business, for recreation, to reconnect with family and friends after two long years of isolation.

Our airlines move people and goods to places they want and need to go. To do this day after day requires thousands of people, thousands of people that have been laid off, put on leave, or terminated altogether in the last two years. Many of them are friends of mine. The current federal imposition of pretesting and vaccination proof prevents these very same people from returning to work, feeding their families, and contributing to the recovery of our province and our country. At a time when we are seeing every province and almost every jurisdiction in the world eliminate restrictions related to the pandemic, the federal Liberals continue to be painfully disconnected and are failing to put forth policy that will allow us to effectively recover from the COVID pandemic. These restrictions limit the movement of goods.

Prepandemic, the visitor economy here in Alberta contributed \$8.2 billion. These restrictions are a barrier to those who wish to visit our amazing province before they even arrive here. The time and expense for a family looking to visit Alberta become prohibitive, and they no longer want to choose Alberta as their destination of choice. These individuals that fly to work camps across the north are also prevented from earning their livings. Those looking to travel internationally here to Alberta to invest and create jobs face a blockade. How do we expect to welcome these international travellers if we are putting up a roadblock before they even step foot on Canadian soil? Now is not the time we want to be pushing people away. Right now we want as many travellers as possible to keep coming and keep our economy growing as we navigate out of COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, these restrictions were put in place to limit the amount of people who are unvaccinated from potentially spreading the virus to others, but here in Alberta and across the country the overwhelming majority of people have already been vaccinated, so why do we continue to impose unnecessary restrictions on people who already have immunity? These restrictions now have no logical benefit to health. We don't need to motivate people to get vaccinated, and we don't need to limit those going to events or restaurants or to bars or to sporting events, so why do we continue to do this for air travel? The science shows that once an individual receives two doses of vaccine, just two weeks later they are considered to have full immunity. Just two weeks. Yet the federal Liberals want to keep infringing on the rights of Canadians. By having proof that they are vaccinated, we are creating an unnecessary and unneeded barrier that has been long overdue to be removed.

Other jurisdictions around the world, including our southern neighbours, are lifting restrictions and learning to live with COVID. I'm curious why it feels like we are still steps behind from where we should be. We have seen restrictions lifted here in Alberta with the removal of mask mandates, the removal of the vaccine passports for restaurants, events, and other venues. This same mindset needs to be applied to air travel. Restrictions imposed by the government of Canada must be removed. This Assembly needs to come together and recognize that these restrictions have no practical health benefit anymore and continue to impact hundreds of thousands of jobs in the air travel and tourism sector. I ask my colleagues here this evening to join me in supporting Government Motion 12.

Thank you.

7:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Government Motion 12 are there others? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I would like to speak to Government Motion 12.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) recognize that the current air travel restrictions imposed by the government of Canada have no measurable public health benefit and continue to impact hundreds of thousands of jobs in the air travel and tourism sectors and
- (b) call on the government of Canada to revoke
 - (i) its proof of vaccination requirement for airline passengers and
 - (ii) its predeparture COVID-19 testing requirement for international airline passengers entering Canada.

Mr. Speaker, most of the provinces have moved past the vaccine mandates. Alberta has limited mandates left. Other provinces have removed most of theirs, too. Just recently here, probably in the last few weeks, I heard a federal Liberal politician talking on TV about the lack of tourism: what have we got to do to get tourism back into Canada? At that time, that was about the time that the Emergencies Act came into effect. Obviously, things like that don't help, when people around the world get to watch the spectacle of Canada with the Emergencies Act invoked by the Prime Minister.

These restrictions on travel obviously are a barrier for tourism also. First, we have viruses on both sides of the border here between Canada and the U.S. We have COVID across Canada. There's no reason why we shouldn't be able to travel without these mandates. Many scientists now have spoken that this is not accomplishing any health benefits or any health protection. Our economy needs to move on. The benefits of tourism, which has been suffering greatly through this whole pandemic – we need to get back on track and get that tourism back to Canada so that our tourism operators can feel the benefits of an opening of airline travel. Again, there are business opportunities that are being lost because of this, too. Any type of restrictions obviously causes an opportunity for business to be lost.

Most of the world has moved on, and it's time for us to move on here in Canada, too. Let's get back to normal. Let's drop these restrictions and get the movement of air traffic, people going across borders so people can do multiple things like travel for business, travel for holidays, travel here for tourism. Let's get these businesses back to normal and move on.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to rise to speak to Government Motion 12. I know that you often say that we shouldn't have props in the House here today, so I've brought jet engines instead on my cufflinks here, no turboprops, no props, but some jet engines to just have this aviation discussion.

Mr. Speaker, with all levity aside on that, this is a very serious issue for us in Canada and particularly in Alberta. Like my hon. colleague from Livingstone-Macleod, I also served for almost two decades in the airline industry. Not only is it near and dear to my heart in terms of being an industry, but in Alberta we are so blessed that we have always punched above our weight here, with a proud history of our bush pilots back in the day of the pioneering of aviation to the time that we spent with the British Commonwealth air training program here. Again, a proud history for Alberta. The fact that we are now continuing to have many major airlines –

WestJet is the largest, and Flair and Swoop and Lynx Air and others – operating out of Alberta is highly important to the Alberta economy and to Albertans in terms of both inbound and outbound travel.

We all know that through this pandemic there has been no industry harder hit than the aviation and tourism sectors and those related industries in tourism and hospitality, so this is a time for us to step forward. This call for us to move ahead and beyond these restrictions, which we've done with the best of intentions to try and control this pandemic – but, Mr. Speaker, now is a time for us to really look forward, to start the healing and to start the movement to get our economy rolling, to get people back in the air, to literally spread our wings not only within this country but around the world.

Mr. Speaker, I reflect back on the fact that we are blessed to have international air services from our province from carriers like WestJet, Air Canada, KLM, Eurowings, and Edelweiss Air. Domestic carriers and those operating out of Calgary: WestJet, Air Canada, Flair, Swoop, and Lynx Air. Probably missing a few as well, some of the smaller: Central Mountain Air and Pacific Coastal Airlines. International and U.S. airlines like Alaska, American, Delta, United, which really create an opportunity for us to thrive, to be able to fly around the world, to be able to have those air services.

Mr. Speaker, that's why this motion is so important, the removal of the restrictions. Dr. Zain Chagla, who is an infectious disease specialist, said that he's "glad that we're aligning with many of our partner countries and dropping this [kind] of testing in order to really make sure that travellers feel secure in their travel and aren't necessarily subject to more expense or inconvenience," more expense and inconvenience in a very difficult time. We're trying to create a resurgence, a relaunch, of our airline industry, that has been so challenged and is facing other challenges, which I'll reference. What Dr. Chagla said was: "All it did was create inconvenience, all it did was discomfort the traveller . . . It really put an excess burden on the traveller without any significant yield locally." That is really something that we have to focus on here.

The Canadian Travel and Tourism Roundtable met in Calgary on February 28, an industry group in tourism, hospitality, aviation. It called the testing requirement a "non-science-based" obstacle undermining the sector and a "significant deterrent, discouraging international companies from resuming travel into Canada." To try and relaunch and restart this industry, that has been so damaged by this pandemic, Mr. Speaker, we need to move ahead with that.

As I look at the clauses of this motion, I'm going to actually speak to clause (b)(ii): "its predeparture COVID-19 testing requirement for international airline passengers entering Canada" is being removed. Now, we heard on the news today that that will be removed on April 1. We'll wait and see. We've seen some flip-flops before, in the past, from our federal government, but we're hearing that that announcement should be made on Thursday for that to be removed from requirements at the end of the month. So April 1 will be the day. Let's hope that that's not an April Fool's joke, Mr. Speaker.

The federal government will, however, continue to randomly test travellers upon arrival, but we've heard that the random testing has really not achieved a whole lot. In fact, Dr. Chagla said, "Once the Omicron wave hit Canada, the disease was so widespread that testing at the border became essentially useless." So we're moving getting rid of a useless requirement here, Mr. Speaker.

You know, it's also interesting, and I want to touch base here with some other industries within our province, the travel agency community, Mr. Speaker. Many of us have dealt with travel agencies in our own communities. They are small businesses or

small-business people who have bricks and mortar operations, and they're at great risk.

I'm just going to mention Lesley Keyter. They call her the Travel Lady. She happens to be one of my constituents and is on the board of ACTA, the Association of Travel Agencies. She's referenced this as a big challenge for their industry. Of course, when people are not travelling, they don't need travel agents. It's very sad to see that that is happening. She was quoted as saying that she hopes the federal government will not only remove testing requirements but also continue financial support programs for those in the travel industry beyond March. Mr. Speaker, the travel agents in our community are an embedded part of our community in the urban areas but even more so sometimes in the rural areas, where those people often will run a travel agency, and maybe next door will be an insurance or registry business. Those people are very, very much a core of our communities across this great province. I think it's time that we listen to those people and move forward.

The first clause is calling on the government of Canada to revoke its proof of vaccination requirements for airline passengers. Mr. Speaker, it's time. The government's mandate for domestic and international flights departing will remain in effect at this time, and I think it's something that we need to continue to advocate for. I just wanted to point out that in Europe on March 11 the Airports Council International, based in Brussels, and the International Air Transport Association, based in Geneva, called for all remaining COVID restrictions applying to intra-EU and Schengen area travel to be dropped, including all testing requirements, the need to present proof of vaccination or to complete a passenger locator form. This includes dropping mask wearing for travel within or between the EU states, where it is no longer required in other indoor environments. It's the same as what we have now here in Alberta, for the most part, as well. It's time for us to align, for us to move ahead and to heal the difficult times we've had in this province individually and specifically for our businesses and industries.

It's time. We're seeing this movement around the world, in the EU, who have been leaders not only in the front end of this, possibly in terms of putting in some of the requirements and the vaccination passports and restrictions, but they're now moving beyond that, as I believe we should here as well.

7:50

Mr. Speaker, the National Airlines Council represents Air Canada, Air Transat, Jazz Aviation, and WestJet. They represent over 60,000 people and carried over 80 million passengers just between those airlines. They support over 630,000 jobs in the transport and tourism sectors. They are also calling for us to move ahead through these restrictions.

I'm just going to close, Mr. Speaker, by referencing a comment that was put to us here from our new WestJet CEO, Mr. Alexis von Hoensbroech. He is brand new – I think he's only been in Canada now about two or three weeks – but he is going to set the path forward for WestJet and make sure that it continues to be a Calgary-based company that is going to grow and spread its wings globally. He said: emerging from the pandemic, our summer schedule marks a significant milestone in WestJet's recovery as we restore service to 94 per cent of our prepandemic routes; we are making significant investments network-wide, getting close to prepandemic capacity, to best serve our guests; as our industry rebuilds from the pandemic, Canadians and visitors to Canada will have endless options for summer travel with WestJet service to 43 domestic, 23 transport, 16 Caribbean, and 18 trans-Atlantic

destinations, with 600 daily departures; we look forward to seeing you back in the skies.

Mr. Speaker, we look forward to seeing Albertans back in the skies, Canadians back in the skies with the removal of these restrictions. We need to support our tourism sector here. We need to tell people to come to Alberta. We need to tell Albertans to get on planes and fly to other places. We need to support an industry that deserves to be supported, that is a huge part of our economy, our economic engine, our global connectivity. I'll be supporting this motion, and I encourage everybody in this House and all Albertans to speak out in favour of this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education, followed by the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today to speak to Government Motion 12. I think, as all members know, Government Motion 12 is an important one before the Assembly. Unfortunately, I don't think I've heard too many members from the opposition speak tonight, but hopefully they will, because I think we can be on the same page when it comes to useless restrictions, and I think this is a clear example of useless restrictions. [interjection] To the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall: I'm happy to take interjections at any point, so if he wants to jump in, I'd welcome that.

Just getting back on topic here, Motion 12, as we all know, just to highlight it again, says:

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And I think the latter has just happened recently. I think that speaks volumes to the effectiveness of the government motion as we're debating it and putting pressure on Ottawa to remove unnecessary restrictions. Maybe they're listening – I mean, I don't have a lot of belief that they are, but hopefully they are – and not just, of course, to the incredible people here in the Alberta Legislature but to many of the other experts in the domain of public health.

I know the hon. the Minister of Health spoke earlier and provided great insight into what national leaders are saying as it relates to COVID-19 policy and the need to move forward in removing unnecessary measures. I want to thank as well the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for his strong comments with respect to the airline industry. [interjection] I think the member wants to interject. If he does, happy to take an interjection.

Mr. Long: Thank you for giving way. I just heard your words about no measurable impact. I was wondering if you would like to take a brief moment to compare the cost of the restrictions for airline travel on the economy and the lack of measurable impact with the NDP-instituted carbon tax. I know that we've had that conversation a number of times about lack of measurables, about the cost on the economy. I was just wondering if you'd like to make comment on that.

Mr. Nicolaides: Yeah. I think that's a great example of something that's pretty useless, (a) the NDP carbon tax and (b) the travel restrictions that are in place currently. Of course, there's some

belief, I believe, from the federal government – and we know there was from the NDP – that their carbon tax and the federal rules regarding travel would have an impact, but we knew that that was not the case with the NDP carbon tax, and that's also the same case here as it relates to these travel restrictions.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to go on for too long, so I'm going to try to be really succinct, and I'm just going to try and summarize my thoughts on the federal travel restrictions in as simple a way as I possibly can. When I think about the travel rules that are in place, one word, actually, comes to mind: pointless. I think that that's where we're ultimately at with these travel restrictions. I think they're ultimately pointless. We've seen data from around the world that the worst of COVID is behind us, so let's look objectively at the data.

Let's look at what's happening with respect to case numbers. I know the Minister of Health earlier provided the House an update. If I remember correctly, he said about 989 people in hospital and 70 people in ICU. I think that as we look at those numbers and we look at case numbers not just here in Alberta but around the world, we can see objectively that indeed the worst is behind us, and it's time to focus on getting our lives back to normal. [interjection] I'm happy to give way to the member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. To the minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, as the member also holds the title of Minister of Advanced Education, I wonder if he could speak to the impact of these ongoing restrictions in the realm that he oversees, advanced education, how that has had quite a significant detrimental effect on enrolment for our universities and colleges, our postsecondaries in general. I wonder if he could speak to their requests for stability so that they can begin to plan, hopefully, a much better year next year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing this intervention.

Mr. Nicolaides: Indeed, and thank you to the member. I think it is perhaps a good opportunity to provide some more information to the House. Many if not all of our postsecondary institutions – I don't have all the information in front of me at the moment; the member will have to forgive me. Most of our postsecondary institutions have taken similar steps as the government of Alberta has taken and as other jurisdictions have taken internationally in removing their restrictions. We've seen many of our postsecondary institutions remove their vaccine passport requirements, remove mask requirements because they understand and they see as well that it is indeed time to get back to normal.

As the member noted, I think it has been a challenging time for many students in our postsecondary system who have not been able to continue their studies or have faced disruption in their studies as a result of vaccination policies and rules. I know those individuals are eager to re-engage back into their academic learning and into their programs and get back on track. But, as well, many students are also interested in ensuring that we have a safe environment on campus, and that is indeed important.

I know of self-reported data from both the U of A and the U of C as examples. They did surveys and collected thousands of responses from their students and their faculty. In those surveys they noted incredibly high vaccination rates – 97, 98 per cent vaccination rates – so I think we can be very confident that we'll see safe and healthy campuses while at the same time not limiting others in progressing in their careers, in their lives, and in their academic journeys.

Again, to summarize, Mr. Speaker: pointless. These restrictions that the federal government has in place are nothing more than that. It is indeed time that we move forward. It's very clear that these

measures have no measurable public health benefit for Albertans or for Canadians. You know, there are a number of other experts who have attested to this, as the Minister of Health mentioned.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if you know, but do you know who Dominik Mertz is? I suppose it's a little bit of a rhetorical question. Perhaps the member from Lethbridge knows. Anyway, he is the division director of infectious diseases at McMaster University. In fact, I think that the Minister of Health mentioned him a little bit earlier. He's pointed out that PCR tests often deliver positive results for weeks after a COVID-19 diagnosis. Of course, when we're talking about prearrival COVID testing, you can see that there can be some challenges there. Again, I'm happy to see that the federal government has removed that element. We're down one, with one to go, and that's the removal of vaccination requirements for airline travel.

8:00

As well, that position that I just mentioned was reinforced by Irfan Dhalla, co-chair of the federal government's COVID-19 Testing and Screening Expert Advisory Panel. He noted that it simply doesn't make, quote, scientific sense to keep widescale omicron testing at the border.

Mr. Speaker, I always like to defer to the experts. I always like to look at the objective information. It seems as though everywhere we look, the experts are saying that these rules don't have any measurable impact, that they don't make sense, that we don't need them anymore. I'm always happy to defer to people who are smarter than me. These people certainly are. I have very little knowledge as it relates to infectious diseases. I know the members opposite will probably have a fun time with that statement. But I have very little knowledge when it comes to infectious diseases, so I'll listen to the experts, and I'll take their advice when it comes to putting COVID-19 policies in place or removing them, as many experts around the country are suggesting that we do.

However, the federal government seems to not want to listen to these experts. Why? I don't know. Maybe one of my colleagues or even members of the opposition, if they want to engage in debate this evening, can provide an answer to that question. I'm still searching for an answer to that. Why, in the face of this mounting evidence and this overwhelming consensus within the scientific community, does the federal government continue to have these rules in place? The only thing, regrettably, that comes to mind is politics and that the Trudeau Liberals want to try to use COVID-19 and travel restrictions and other measures for political purposes, which I think, if that's the case, is incredibly troubling.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know if you know who Perrin Beatty is either. Perhaps not, but I'm happy to give you that detail: the Canadian Chamber of Commerce president, who called on the federal government to offer a clear timeline for removing travel restrictions for fully vaccinated travellers and their children, including test isolation requirements and blanket travel advisories. In fact, in an interview he was on record saying, "Blanket warnings about travel at this point are unjustified." That's, again, the president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, someone who I think understands full well the impact of COVID restrictions on Canadian businesses.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps I can have a quick time check. I'm not sure how much time I have left.

The Speaker: Seven minutes and 30 seconds.

Mr. Nicolaides: All right. Well, with seven minutes to go, I think I've made my point, so I don't know if I'll continue on, unless the member opposite – I see some members opposite I think want me

to continue on, so perhaps I will. I still have some notes here that I haven't fully gone over, but I think I have made my point broadly.

Again, this comes back to the main point here, which is the real challenge. Why do we continue to have these measures in place? Why do we continue to see the federal government continue to impose these measures when so many provinces in Canada and other jurisdictions around the world are removing their COVID-19 measures and moving towards getting life back to normal? Unfortunately, we see the federal government continuing to enforce these measures.

As I mentioned before, Mr. Speaker, I keep searching for an answer. I keep searching for the rationale as to why these measures are still in place. Maybe the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has the answer to that. [interjection] I see the Member for Calgary-Klein wants to interject. Maybe he has the answer. I'm happy to give way.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: I don't know if I do have the answer, but in the spirit of the minister's comments earlier about ceding to somebody that might know more than him, I'm glad that he ceded to me for a few moments.

I guess just my thoughts were that this really isn't the first time that we've seen the federal government, this Prime Minister, go too far and kind of exceed his limits there. You know, I think maybe if we could go down kind of the path of where the Prime Minister has gone too far in the past, especially in the past couple of years, maybe if we went down that path, kind of exploring that in a little bit more detail, we might start to come to the idea of what his motivation might be and how offside he truly is.

Anyway, I'll give it back to the minister at this point. I do appreciate his comments so far.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, I appreciate that. That's a really helpful and interesting perspective. You know, it really helps to reframe things, and when you think about so many of those other pieces that we've seen come out of the federal government, perhaps the puzzle pieces start to fall into place.

Of course, we saw, as it relates to the federal government and their use of the Emergencies Act in an environment that was completely unnecessary and unjustified, that it was, I think, very concerning. I know that for many members on this side of the House it was a very concerning use of power and authority. I'm not sure about the members opposite. I know they're really close friends and allies, so I'm sure they would have been onboard, which is concerning, as I know the members opposite are on onboard with many of the other things that the federal government is doing currently, again, not listening to the experts and not listening to individuals, which comes with a carbon tax. As we all know, the federal government is slated to jack up the carbon tax on April 1, making life more expensive indeed.

Mrs. Allard: Jacking up fees.

Mr. Nicolaides: As the Member for Grande Prairie is stating, they never see a fee that they don't want to jack up, Mr. Speaker, and this is a clear example of it, especially with the carbon tax. I mean, if there's one thing that they can do, jack up the carbon tax, they'll do it. It's a top priority for the federal Liberal government.

We'll see that increase coming on April 1. I haven't heard a lot from the opposition when it comes to speaking out against that. It's really interesting because I do hear the members opposite talk at length about the cost of living and increases to bills and increases to costs of fuel and gasoline and many other things, but they never once have said that they will lobby the federal government to stop

the carbon tax hike that is slated to take effect on April 1. I mean, I'd love to see some consistency. If they're really concerned about the cost of living, one of the things that they can do is to work with us to call on Trudeau and the federal government to stop the carbon tax increase on April 1. It's pretty simple, it's pretty straightforward, but I haven't heard any of that from the members opposite, which is unfortunate.

To help address some of these things and to help address the issue of affordability, of course, we're removing the provincial tax, which will equate to 13 cents in savings per litre, as well as providing a rebate of \$50 per month for three months to households to help off-set some of the increasing costs of utility bills.

Mr. Speaker, I think I've highlighted the key points that I wanted to address this evening, so I'll end my comments there. Again, I just want to summarize overall my views on the matter and what I think about the restrictions and the measures that the federal government has in place: quite pointless. It's time to move on. It's time to look at the evidence, look at the signs. It's clear that we can move forward. It seems indeed that the worst of COVID is behind us. Let's get back to living life normally.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm sure that the hon. Minister of Advanced Education would be aware of chapter 7 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, that specifically speaks about the Speaker and other presiding officers of the House. They ought not be brought into the debate about what they may or may not know, who they may or may not know, certain experts or otherwise. I'm sure that the member knows and is very familiar with the chapter of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* that would imply that doing such things wouldn't be as appropriate as it may or may not be.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has risen.

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry. I was going to give it over to my lovely friend in the pink jacket across the way there, but I'll go first.

I just wanted to say thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this motion. It's wonderful to be amongst my colleagues in here, to be able to breathe and to be together. It's been a long haul for people, especially those who have not been able to travel and see their families. I know that my colleague the Minister of Infrastructure and I both go to India every year to visit our families. We've missed funerals and weddings, moments of being able to mourn with our families and celebrate, see babies come into the world. It's a huge part of who we are. I don't mean to speak for the minister, but we're very, very connected that way, especially to our families overseas.

The ability to be able to do that and, you know, as we've come back together in our lives and in caucus and out in the world – I'm a musician, and I had my very, very first live concert in front of people two and a half weeks ago.

8:10

About a week before that, I was at another concert, of brass and strings, and it moved me to tears, Mr. Speaker, because that venue was full. It was full of people, just like how we sit beside our colleagues in here, shoulder to shoulder again now. I forgot what that felt like, and I hope that none of us ever have to go through that again.

As it relates to what's happening with respect to how we fly even within our country, we have to always think about the fact that right now we have large venues. We have hockey games that are sold out in our NHL. We're able to see our families play sports again and go

to ballet. I have tickets to *La Traviata*, that's coming up here, to the opera and whatever else I can get my hands on. The Rocky Mountain Symphony Orchestra is having their series coming up. If you like *Star Wars*, they're going to be playing *Star Wars* at their Balzac spot at the Polaris Centre. All of these things that I took for granted, that literally bring me to tears – and we are shoulder to shoulder, elbow to elbow in venues with singing, with horns playing, all sorts of things that have lots and lots of mist in the air from our breath, and we are so grateful to do that. We're so grateful to sit beside our colleagues.

We've been travelling for a long time in airplanes. If you think about how big Canada is relative to other countries, the distance that it takes to fly across our country and that our families have been separated for such a long time and about the mobility and the ability to have that mobility and the things that are stopping families from being able to see each other right now, we really have to consider what it is that we're doing.

I'd have to agree with my colleague the Minister of Advanced Education about what the experts are actually telling us now and also about something that we talk about and that is absolutely imperative and something that our associate minister of mental health and addictions has done this week, too, within the budget, which is funding mental health. The mental health shadow pandemic is something that we're going to be dealing with for years and year and years, more years than the pandemic ever cost us, and we have to take all of those things into consideration when we're making these rules and when we're making legislation.

What my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek was talking about, when I came into this debate, was that fear itself is the biggest deterrent to our ability to see our best days ahead of us, and the economic needs of our province are one piece of it. But the reason why people come to Alberta, aside from our beautiful places and the people, is because our tourism is beyond imaginable. If you've ever had – and I've mentioned this before in the House, Mr. Speaker. I've had family come from India, and we've taken them to the hoodoos, and we've taken them to Banff. But we've also taken them to B.C., and we've taken them to see Saskatchewan. We've been blessed to be able to go out east and be able to visit that. We've never been able to take them out to the east coast, but that's definitely on my bucket list of things to do.

It's really, really time, Mr. Speaker, for us to be able to reconcile the great work that Canadians have done, what is necessary for our country to be able to see us see not only economic growth but growth as human beings and to find our humanity again. If it's fear that is going to stop us from seeing that success, then we really have to question our reasons for doing it.

When we look right now at what is happening in other parts of the world – and, again, I think we have to look at the fact that so many of our spaces are wide open. How is it that we define that COVID is going to be in one place and not in another? That's always been a very interesting question for me, because it doesn't really know any boundaries, as far as I know. If you look at the airline industry, for example – and, again, my colleague from Calgary-Fish Creek can speak to this much better than I can – the sector has done absolutely everything physically possible to keep their people safe, their clients safe. They're not even clients; they're family. If you talk about organizations like WestJet, many of the people who actually fly are also owners. There's so much that goes into that.

But consider this, Mr. Speaker. The airline industry, the travel industry, our tourism industry: they have been disproportionately impacted, obviously, by what has happened to us. But consider this: whose best interest is it in to keep us grounded, and whose best

interest is it in to stop our economy from bouncing back? If you think about it from that perspective, the airline industry and the sectors that are being most impacted have the most to lose. Why would we do more to impact them when they've done absolutely everything that they possibly can to keep us safe?

If there's more that needs to be done, I'm quite certain that the folks that are trying to keep us all safe, similarly to our restaurants, similarly to other sectors that were deeply impacted by restrictions to people's freedoms – why are we not having discussions about what they can do to open up as opposed to discussions as to why to keep them closed? It's a simple flip of the discussion and having a really, really honest discussion about how it is that we move forward. Really, that's what it's about. If we continue to live in fear and if we continue to use that as our justification for spreading that fear, the ones that will actually and truly be impacted by that are the people and particularly the people of Alberta.

I know I am – I can't speak for anybody else – extremely grateful for what we've all been through and how we have navigated this together. I've said this many times. For all of the frustration and rhetoric that we hear and what we go through, one of the most compelling things that I experienced throughout this entire pandemic was the grace, kindness, compassion, and understanding of the people of Alberta.

I have never seen – we created something called the Alberta VolunteerConnector, and that connector, when we lost our volunteers that were in our seniors' groups, because obviously they're a vulnerable population, especially through the initial waves, saw an influx of over 75,000 people come to the table to volunteer. This was before we had a vaccine. This was when we were just figuring things out. They put themselves into spaces in order to be able to help each other out. That is a spirit that you cannot create. That is one that has been grown here, that comes from generations of people, from those who've been here since time immemorial to those who just got off the airplane yesterday. [interjection] Oh, I'm so sorry. Thank you. He was waving at me, and I . . .

Mr. Neudorf: That's right. Thank you, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member opposite. The member is obviously very compassionate. She speaks very highly of volunteers, as is right. I would ask that she share a little bit more of her experience and how that ties into the very nature of Albertans, the Alberta spirit, so to speak, that when things get difficult, we often see them rally together and come out in incredible numbers, donate incredible value both in physical goods and financial means. She's very connected, that member, to that community. I believe she was starting to share about that. I would just ask if it would be all right for her to share a little bit further on those experiences and how that helps everyone in this Chamber feel incredibly proud to be Albertan because of the very nature of the people that live and work here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much for that intervention. I appreciate that so much. If we think about what the benefit is of our contributions to community, there is so much about what we do personally, how we give back, but the people who are impacted – I remember when we were just in the first and second waves. We were in Edmonton, and we'd gotten a call from the mosques here in Edmonton who were putting together baskets and organizing around their communities because Ramadan was coming up. We had declared the emergency, and then we were shortly into Ramadan after that. And we were doing – I can't even say we

because it wasn't us here in the Legislature; it was regular, severely normal Albertans out there that were seeing their elders feeling isolated. They had families that were being impacted by COVID. There was a tremendous amount of fear, and all of us, I think, in this House really felt that move towards wanting to be able to help out.

I'm just using the mosques as an example; there were churches and temples and gurdwaras and everything. It just kind of exacerbated, in the best way possible, where people were actively posting when somebody needed something from the store – I don't know if you remember this – and they would put Post-its out on their doorsteps. Somebody would come from one of these organizations, pick up the money from their little envelopes – the faith-based organizations are the ones that are coming to mind to me at first – and then go to the grocery store, grab their milk and whatever, and then come back home and leave it on the doorstep for the person to come out and get. Or do you remember when the grocery stores would open an hour early for seniors and then open an hour later? Then some of us were being engaged by our community members to go to Costco on behalf of – do you remember that fellow who was doing calisthenics outside of the Costco when there were those huge lineups going around the Costco?

8:20

I know that we've suffered so much, but those are the beautiful memories that I take with me. The reason I bring it up and why it's relevant to what we're talking about today is because to dampen that spirit and who we are as human beings and our humanity because of fear will do nothing other than continue a downward slide of mental health and will do nothing to help our economy, which by virtue ends up helping all of us to be able to do what we're supposed to do, whether that is protecting our vulnerable, whether that is people who are in isolation.

I remember in early July – I think it was Canada Day – when I was allowed to go into a seniors' home and visit. We were sitting all together when we had reached, I think it was, 70 per cent vaccination in the province. I remember all of those seniors sitting there. This was in Strathmore at Sagewood. They were all sitting there thinking: oh, my gosh; our families are going to be able to come visit us. It was a very telling moment because I'd been very lucky. I get to live and work here. I get to see my people. I was still out and about, but the people that we were protecting had been so isolated. The smiles on their faces that they were going to be able to see their grandbabies not through a window and then stopping us from being able to do that within Canada, not being able to see our nieces, our nephews, our grandbabies, our friends' children because of fear – lookit, Mr. Speaker, we all know what we've all been through.

I would hope by now that we understand the process. I have to have faith in the organizations and the corporations that are taking care of all of us that they're going to follow whatever protocols and necessary interventions that have to happen in order to keep the public safe. We've learned that. I think it's time for us to put faith in what we've learned, in the people who have been impacted, in the organizations and the corporations that are tasked with keeping us safe, whether we're up in the air or we're sitting in a restaurant with people. There is a deep learning and a deep respect and deep humility that comes from that kind of isolation that we've all experienced over the last little while. I think that taking that for granted and assuming that people are not going to take care of each other – the assumption has to always be that our first inclination would be to take care of each other.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, thank you. What you said is just so resonating with me, to the member, to hear your stories about the seniors' facilities and being able to get together with people. I know that you're also very engaged with the ethnic communities certainly in your community but across Alberta. You know, for myself, having been in the airline industry, having worked with communities, with the South Asian community, the Filipino, Vietnamese, you know, Chinese communities, the ability for them to travel back to the countries – this is their home country now – of origin for many of them is something that is, I think, if you've come from somewhere, made a new home, but you still have roots back where you came from, important for people. I talk to people in those communities all the time that have not been able to see their family. Maybe they go every year or every two years or every three years. But maybe they were just ready to go for that third-year trip, and now it's five years.

Thank you. Maybe just a few comments on that.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I will respond. Well, it's interesting that you mentioned that. This is where the confusion comes in. We all know how confusing the protocols are. I have a friend who just travelled back. I saw them two days ago, and they were wearing masks in an event. I thought maybe they were nervous or, you know, they were sick. So I wasn't actually asking them about their masks, but they came up to me and they said: we have to wear masks because when we came in from overseas, we were told at the airport that we had to quarantine or we had to wear masks for 14 days. I remember thinking to myself, "Well, I thought that stuff had been lifted," but nobody knows the rules. There's so much fear, and there's so much concern.

I said to them, because I was obviously concerned that they weren't feeling well or that they were worried about the crowd of people that we were – I wasn't sure. Everybody has a right to wear a mask. Obviously, that's just fine. But when they told me that they were wearing masks because the rules had been stated to them literally two days ago as they entered into Canada, which is now their country of origin, that they had to wear masks and were potentially threatened with quarantine – this is why this is so important. I think motions like this are really, really imperative because it reinforces for all of us where we're standing and what needs to happen.

Lookit, all of us in this House understand how fuzzy the rules can be. We've all been caught up in various pieces of it. All of us have had questions at one point or another as to why the rules were the way they were. We have to be at a point now where we can provide some clarity to the people of Canada, especially, to my colleague's point, those who have been separated from their families for years now. None of us are getting any younger, and the children that are being born into our families and around the world, around the country, even, and all of those of us who sit in here – time is so precious. I say this with tremendous compassion. I have a friend who died three days ago from a pulmonary embolism, 61 years old, absolutely just out of the blue. Time is precious, folks.

I appreciate very much the difficult choices that all of us have had to make, and I'm especially grateful to the medical experts that have led us and have been guiding us along the way. But I just want to add that there is a fine balance, and at this point in our lives, where we are right now, nobody knows what their days are or where we're going to be tomorrow. I just personally – I must speak from my heart that it is imperative for me, my neighbours, my friends, my family, our province, across the country, the people that we love that we start putting our communities and ourselves back together, because it's going to take every single one of us to do that.

We can get lost in politics and rhetoric and language and who said what to who and what's going on – all of that is very reasonable at times – but at the end of the day that's not what we're going to remember. I certainly don't want to be defined by two years of what has happened and the absolute pain that people have gone through at that time. I would love for all of us to be able to be defined by seeing the light at the end of the tunnel and being able to see that and trusting the institutions and the organizations that we have tasked with keeping us safe up to this point.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Government Motion 12, are there others? The Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening and join in the conversation around Motion 12. I'm just going to remind the Assembly what the motion says, that we

- (a) recognize that the current air travel restrictions imposed by the government of Canada have no measurable public health benefit and continue to impact hundreds of thousands of jobs . . .

I'm going to say that again: and continue to impact hundreds of thousands of jobs.

- . . . in the air travel and tourism sectors and
- (b) [that we] call on the government of Canada to revoke
 - (i) its proof of vaccination requirement for airline passengers and
 - (ii) its predeparture COVID-19 testing requirement for international airline passengers entering Canada.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I have heard it in my constituency. I have talked to Albertans right across the province about some of the decisions that they've made. I think of seniors in my constituency that want to go and see a new grandbaby that's born. It's a barrier for them. It's a financial barrier for them to have to have a COVID test to go see their new grandson in Montana. It's stressful. It's the unknown. Some of these people don't travel very often, and I think it just adds another layer of complexity to an already stressful time.

I think that if the advice from officials was different, we would be in a different conversation right now, but there's large agreement, for the first time maybe in two years, that we need to learn to live with this and we need to move into the endemic phase of COVID. I'm grateful for that. I hope that we are able to collectively do that in a collaborative frame, but I think it's really important to recognize and to underscore not just the impact to industry and to those working in the sector, which is critically important, but also to the families that are affected.

I'm thinking of a family, actually, that I know. I won't name names, but I've talked to this family several times as an MLA in my constituency, and they're labelled as antivaxxers. I don't want to get into the whole debate about that. That's not really what I want to talk about. But one of the things that's heartbreaking is to hear the story behind some of those stories. This particular family: the husband had a vaccine a few years ago – I think he had a flu shot – and he came down with Guillain-Barré syndrome.

8:30

I don't know if anybody in this House knows what that is. I was unaware of what that was until my constituent educated me, but Guillain-Barré syndrome is a very critical illness that often occurs after a vaccine. There's more that they're studying to understand it. Guillain-Barré is no joke. There are people that die from it every year. It's incredibly debilitating. Within hours his lungs were filling with fluid. It can be very challenging for the doctors to diagnose.

Anyway, all of that to say, that long story – his doctor has told him that he cannot get the COVID vaccine because of his health history. He's told the children of this family – they have three teenage children – that they also cannot get the COVID vaccine. Now, this family, who has no choice, can't fly in their own country. They cannot get on a plane from Grande Prairie and go to Calgary. That doesn't make any sense. It's my understanding that there's no exemption. We've looked into it. We've tried to work with this family. To me, that doesn't make any sense, particularly now, when we know that there is large protection from vaccination right across our country and certainly right across our province.

I would like to thank the health care workers for their great work throughout the pandemic and working to help people make that decision in the best interest of their own individual health histories. But I think of families like that, who are caught in the crosshairs of policy like this, that is no longer defensible. We've heard the Minister of Health, we've heard the Minister of Advanced Education and multiple other members in this House tonight stand up and speak about where we're at and that there's no measurable reason or rationale to continue with this. Now, I never thought I'd say this in this House, but I will give the Trudeau government credit that today they did lift – or it's reported that they are about to lift the restriction to have a test before you enter back into Canada, and I think that's a step in the right direction. I think, as the Minister of Advanced Education pointed out, that's hopeful, that maybe they're listening to us tonight. I'm hoping that that's the case.

I wanted to quote Perrin Beatty. He's the president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and he's the co-chair of the Canadian Travel and Tourism Roundtable. He says:

We've seen the collapse of our international tourism and convention business over the course of the last two years . . .

The utter collapse.

. . . and were on the cusp of losing the summer tourist season [again] as well.

He's so thankful that these changes are happening. I don't think, if we had him here tonight, he'd be wanting to do anything but support this motion not only for the sector but for all those families that are affected as well. [interjection] Oh. I see the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to interject, I wonder if the member would – going back to some of the seniors and families that she knows, I know I've had some of these seniors in my constituency. When they go to travel, they don't have smart phones. They don't have apps. They don't have that ability to download the ArriveCAN app. Then they're really stuck because they're penalized by just not having that level of technology, not having the financial capability to buy a brand new smart phone and understand how to download these apps or codes or even upload their vaccination status. They're willing to comply. They want to comply, but it's a real hardship. I wonder if the member has members of her community that she could speak about that also have these kinds of challenges going forward with the restrictions put on by the federal government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you. Thank you to the member for the interjection. I think it's a really good point. I mean, I spoke about one barrier, a family that really had no choice.

But I have witnessed actually first-hand, so I'll tell a little story about that. I was travelling for my role as an MLA. I was travelling actually to advocate for Alberta's energy back in the fall of 2021. There was a kerfuffle at the airport. I don't know what exactly was

going on, but there were a number of people in the lineup trying to get on this flight that were visibly stressed. One lady was in tears: I'm going to miss my flight. She didn't know what to do. She had a smart phone. But the ArriveCAN app, as it turns out, was glitching that day. By hook and by crook we figured it out, but this whole lineup of people was not going to be allowed to board the plane. I felt for the airline employee, who was dealing with an elevated level of stress already, dealing with restrictions that she did not impose, trying to help people be compliant and be COVID responsible and then having people screaming at her that they were not going to be able to board their flight and they were going to miss their connection or whatever else.

In some cases, to the member's point, to the member's question, you've got people who don't travel often. Maybe they've saved up to go see their new grandbaby, and maybe they've gone on their first trip in many years, and the technology and the demands and the shifting COVID restrictions and the lack of clarity – I think, to the point from the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, that sometimes people just don't know what the rules are. It was very confusing and very stressful, and I witnessed it first-hand in that airport, people just at the brink. I think about all that stress and all that we've been through collectively as a society over the last two years, which I'm not blaming anybody for – it's a pandemic – but now that we're coming out the other side, I think that we can be compassionate, and I think we can move more quickly.

I wanted to talk a little bit about the impact of tourism as a sector on our economy. You know, we've talked a lot in this government . . . [interjection] Oh. I apologize. I see another intervention, Mr. Speaker. I'm so popular tonight.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Member, for giving way. Actually, I hoped that you were actually going to share a little bit. I know that Grande Prairie Regional Tourism recently rebranded. They had a new kickoff, and I know they have some exciting events planned, including an air race upcoming. I hope that I didn't interrupt what you were about to say, but I was hoping that you would discuss a little bit about how the thinning of the border is very important for your region in particular and the great work that is being done with Grande Prairie regional tourism.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the member for that great intervention. I wasn't going to speak about that specifically, but I'm happy to. I'm happy to speak about their rebranding and to thank the good folks in Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association for their hard work and their resilience in the face of the challenges over the last two years and how difficult it's been, yet just like the good people of Grande Prairie do, they have risen to the occasion. I'd like to thank the member who intervened as well for joining me at the unveiling of their new strategic plan and their new logo. It's a very exciting time for them as they feel hopeful. You know, they feel hopeful for the first time, probably, in two years. They feel hopeful about the future. They feel hopeful about the possibilities and that they can actually make a difference in the economic reality of tourism in our province.

That said, back to tourism as a key sector to our economy. You know, in May 2020 the unemployment rate in the tourism sector in Alberta hit just shy of 30 per cent, which is a shocking, shocking statistic. Thankfully, to the member's point, it's only due to the hard work and ingenuity and resilience of those in the sector that it wasn't higher, quite frankly. They've seen some slow, slow gains, but it's not enough. I mean, they're still bleeding out. The reality is that with these restrictions the sector will continue to suffer and for no gain on the public health side. I think that's the point of the

motion. If there were tangible, measurable gains in public health, it would be defensible, but we are past the point where this is defensible.

You know, as we talk as a government about Alberta's recovery plan and, I would argue, by extension, Canada's recovery plan – I mean, if Alberta's got a sniffle, Canada's got a cold. I really believe that it's incumbent upon Alberta – as we recover, we're going to help Canada out of this challenging, challenging time of these last two years. It's incumbent that we fight for these jobs in this sector as well, not just for Alberta jobs but for Canadian jobs.

I mean, I would be remiss, especially given the last intervention, if I didn't talk about some of the beautiful places in Alberta that we would love to highlight to the world. We believe that the federal government needs to support the opportunity for others to partake in the beauty of Alberta and Canada. People from all over the world would love to fly here to see the beautiful views of the Rocky Mountains, to ski at Sunshine Village, my personal favourite, although I think that if you say that I'm skiing, you're being very generous. I fall down a mountain rather ungraciously, but I get there.

8:40

You know, there are people who could get married at the Fairmont hotel in Jasper, in the member's constituency, or go visit the biggest mall in North America. It actually isn't the biggest mall in North America anymore. If you go to Minnesota, they will tell you that. But we were the first biggest mall in North America, and that's what matters. We're still historic.

Mr. Speaker, I understand why these measures were originally implemented. I understand that COVID has been a fluid reality. I understand that it has been a challenge for every government, including this government, to manage because it has been fluid and dynamic and challenging. I understand that there still could be challenges ahead. I understand that. I also believe that we have to weigh that, as I believe this government has tried to do, with the viability for citizens. We have to be compassionate in the measures we impose, and they have to be defensible. I would argue that we are no longer in a place where they're defensible.

I would like to quote, actually, the federal Health minister, Jean-Yves Duclos. He says that Canada is looking to adjust restrictions, which is also, I think, good news. But why? Well, he says, "these tools," because they have more tools to deal with the pandemic now, as all governments do, after two years of managing this. We have more understanding. We have more scientific data. We have more research. We have more institutional knowledge about what works and what doesn't, what is the most effective in terms of treatment and intervention. He talks about these tools. He says:

These tools include the strong surveillance system, a highly vaccinated population . . .

Which we also have here in Alberta. Thank you to Albertans who've participated, who've been able to participate.

. . . continued access to vaccines, access to therapeutics both in and outside our hospital system and increasing access to rapid tests.

All of these things paint context around this motion. All of these things are part of the reality as . . . [interjection] Oh. I see the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you to the member for allowing an intervention. You talked about some of the businesses in your area, and I was just reading an article here from the IATA, the International Air Transport Association. They're predicting that the world's airlines will lose \$200 billion over the duration of this pandemic, wiping out nine years of profit. The IATA director

general, Willie Walsh, told a gathering of chief executives from the airlines: "People have not lost their desire to travel as we see in solid domestic market resilience. But they are being held back from international travel by restrictions, uncertainty, and complexity." When we secure that number, that \$200 billion, nine years of profits – maybe you could just reflect. You were talking about Grande Prairie tourism and some of your local tourism operators – I'm expecting that they're seeing that same thing, wiping out of nine years of profits and now having to get back on their feet – and how important these economies are to us. I'd like to hear your comments on that.

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you again for the intervention. Mr. Speaker, I don't think I've ever been this popular, but I appreciate all of the interest in what I have to say this evening. I take the member's point. I really do. I'm a small-business person myself for the last 30 years. We know – right? – that when times are tough, as small businesses you eat that, and you hope to compensate that with the times that aren't so tough. But it's been hard, as an elected member governing through this challenging time, to watch businesses grapple. You know, I've had business owners in my constituency office really grappling with having to lay off employees. Like, that's devastating when they become your friends and they become people that you take a personal responsibility for, to think about how you're going to impact their families. That's just the personal level.

But at the macro level, which the member was talking about, billions of dollars on the table – I mean, I fundamentally believe that government's job is to create predictability and stability, to be as small as possible, and then to get out of the way. Unfortunately, with COVID-19 we haven't really had the luxury of predictable or stable. As I said earlier, it's been very, very fluid. We haven't had the luxury of being as small as we would like because there's been so much going on in terms of protecting our health care capacity.

You know, I actually hope and believe that we collectively, all 87 members of this Legislature, will come together in the name of learning from this pandemic. I believe the members opposite are interested in that and I believe that we are, too. I hold hope, Mr. Speaker, that we can work together to come up with what we learned and what we could do better going forward to leave a bit of a template for future administrations.

Further to that, I believe that it's incumbent upon us, as I was speaking earlier about Alberta's recovery plan, to fight for this sector as well. This sector in Alberta, tourism, is an important industry. In 2019 we generated around 6 and a half billion dollars, but from 2019 to '21 we've seen occupancy rates decline by 25 per cent and employment in the tourism sector decline by 14 per cent, and in one year, one statistic I gave, it was over 30 per cent. In Edmonton alone there was the generation of almost \$2 billion in 2019 for tourism. By 2021 this figure dropped by about 70 per cent. That's an astounding number. As a businessperson I cannot imagine facing a 70 per cent reduction in my revenue in a year. Canada's tourism sector was hit even harder.

I'll go back to the motion, Mr. Speaker. There's so much more that I could say. I'm shocked at how much I could talk about this because I really didn't think I could stand up here and talk this long, to be honest with you, but I really believe that I'm grateful for the strides and for the changes that the federal government has started to make. I just believe that this motion – it's incumbent upon us here in Alberta to call on the government to be more responsive and to be more expedient. There are jobs on the line. There's a whole industry and sector on the line.

I am proud to stand here as an elected member of Alberta's Legislature and support this motion and support the good men and women that work in the tourism sector. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On Government Motion 12 are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 12 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:47 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|---------|--------|----------|
| Aheer | Long | Orr |
| Allard | Lovely | Panda |
| Barnes | Luan | Reid |
| Copping | Madu | Rowswell |

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Ellis | McIver | Sawhney |
| Gotfried | Neudorf | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Hanson | Nicolaides | Smith |
| Issik | Nixon, Jeremy | Stephan |
| Loewen | | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------|--------|-------|
| Carson | Feehan | Sabir |
| Eggen | Loyola | |

| | | |
|---------|----------|-------------|
| Totals: | For – 25 | Against – 5 |
|---------|----------|-------------|

[Government Motion 12 carried]

The Speaker: Perhaps the chief government whip has a motion to make.

Ms Issik: I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. Thursday, March 17.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:04 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, March 17, 2022

Day 11

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
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Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
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Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
 Official Opposition Whip
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Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
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Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
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Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
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Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
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Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
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Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
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Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

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Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
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Reid
Sabir
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Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

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Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
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Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 17, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of *God Save the Queen* by the Minister of Children's Services. I know that she's asked especially for us to join in with her today.

Hon. Members:

God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble Queen,
God save the Queen!
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the Queen!

The Speaker: With a voice like that, she's going to get put on full-time.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'd like to bring your attention to the media gallery. It seems that they're all here today. I'm not sure what's happening.

Hon. members, it's my great pleasure to introduce a familiar face around this place. He's the former Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin and the current Member-elect for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche. I would like him to rise. Welcome, Brian Jean, to the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would also like . . . [interjections] Order. Order. Order. I would also like to give a very special welcome to 115 grade 6 students along with their teachers – Ms Wilson, Ms Burke, Ms Dollimount, Mr. Saïpe, and the most fantastic, as I've been told, Mr. Jackson – who are joining us online today at C.W. Perry school in Airdrie. Please welcome the students joining us online.

Members' Statements

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

Government Policies and Economic Recovery

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. COVID has caused a couple of tough years in our province. The pandemic, the restrictions, the economic challenges, the collapse in oil prices: all of these things have challenged our people and our government, but now things are looking up. Spring is just around the corner, and Alberta's recovery is well under way. We are past the worst of COVID. Almost all restrictions are gone, and our province is returning to normal.

Our economic prospects are better than they have been in many years. It's not just our traditional industries that are surging, but Alberta is also seeing remarkable progress on diversification and emerging industries. In recent months we've seen thousands of jobs, billions of dollars of investment announced in Alberta's tech sector. In fact, Alberta's tech boom has been so remarkable that some people have commented on the prospect that Alberta has the opportunity to become home of Silicon Valley north. From film and television to agrifood processing to petrochemicals, everything is on the rise. Mr. Speaker, Albertans know that it is the policies of this government that have made much of this economic good news possible.

Speaking of good news, just a few short weeks ago this government tabled the first balanced budget in eight years. The government is delivering for Albertans. We are delivering on our promises.

Colleagues, Albertans are noticing. If you take a moment to remove yourself from this building, the media circus, the petty political nonsense, you will hear Albertans sending messages of approval of the direction of this government. Albertans approve of moving beyond COVID. They approve of our pro-growth, pro-enterprise economic agenda. They approve of our fiscal prudence. The opposition won't want to hear this, but if an election were held today, the United Conservative Party would be re-elected with a majority. Friends, if we stay the course, if we remain united and we continue to focus on the priorities of Albertans, this momentum will continue through to 2023, and Albertans will reward this government with a renewed mandate to continue to build this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Executive Council Main Estimates Consideration

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, real leaders aren't afraid to debate, and there is no one in this House more up for a debate than the Leader of the Official Opposition. She owned every decision she made as Premier and was willing to debate policy decisions and choices made by the government she led because that is what a leader does. A leader is unafraid to stand up and debate the issues facing Alberta and the solutions for them.

But there are exceptions, Mr. Speaker. Last night the Premier figured that since he is unable to defend his budget and policy decisions, he avoided debating them with her directly. He wasn't willing to take questions on the chaos in his office, which has seen massive turnover. He even claimed that he didn't know how many of his own staff were on leave campaigning for him. He wasn't willing to debate his fake natural gas rebate or explain why he thought 50 bucks would address a \$700 utility bill. He wasn't willing to take questions on why he abandoned his decades-long opposition to bracket creep, the inflation policy being used by him to take a billion dollars from Alberta families. He refused to debate the tragic news of deaths of children in care, which have reached record levels in recent years.

He couldn't tell me why he failed to support my constituents who were devastated by the 2020 hailstorm. He couldn't tell me why my constituents of northeast Calgary, who were blamed by this Premier for spreading COVID-19, were denied the school and infrastructure they need. In a rare instance of forthrightness, this Premier actually admitted that he was unaware that his government was hiking borrowing costs for municipalities. The Premier's no-help budget leaves many Albertans behind, and he wasn't brave enough to debate his budget. Albertans deserve better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Energy Security and Affordability

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Without fail I have constantly emphasized that it is vital to produce affordable energy for all. I have also repeatedly stated that pretending to care about the poorest in society while enacting policies that drive up energy costs and destabilize secure energy sources is disingenuous. I say all this because it is becoming increasingly evident that the true cost of the green agenda is not so sustainable concerning energy affordability and security.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Case in point: the cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline permit based on an idea of preventing climate change, a virtue signalling notion resulting in reduced oil transportation, efficiency, and safety. Time and time again the pipeline cancellation trend applauded by the carbon dioxide alarmists has resulted in less investment and slowed our growth in energy production. In a time when energy security and affordability should be our top priority, the federal government continuously enacts policies undermining such. Despite soaring inflation, another hike in the federal carbon tax, to \$50 per tonne of carbon, is due on April 1.

Energy reliability, abundance, affordability are not qualities that green technologies are well known for. As the unfortunate energy crisis in Europe unfolds, it has never been clearer how such traits, which amount to establishing a reliable energy distribution system, are of utmost importance.

Alberta holds the ability to provide Canada with energy independence and sovereignty. However, the incessant campaign to shut down our fossil fuel industry while importing oil from despotic nations around the world such as Venezuela, Iran, and Russia does not only reek of cognitive dissonance, but it is unfortunately making it more expensive for regular folk. This could be our chance to step up and expand our energy market penetration, serve the needs of individuals both at home and abroad securely and affordably.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

1:40 Deaths of Children in Care and Youth Transitioning out of Care

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This year started with tragic news. Yesterday it was revealed that a record number of children in government care have died. We also learned that the fatalities were almost entirely young Indigenous people. This is devastating news, and I want to take a moment to express the unbelievable grief of our caucus for this senseless loss of life and potential. This is not a political issue. This is a devastating human issue that should command the immediate attention of this government. These kids are not numbers. They are not statistics. They are not budget line items. There's no talking point or budget line that can justify the simple fact that we as a province are failing these most vulnerable youth.

Yesterday the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud and I asked questions to the Premier and the Minister of Children's Services to work with us to solve this issue and present a plan of action. In response, this call for action and leadership was called politicizing the crisis by the Premier and only received vague promises for a

report to come in the future from the Minister of Children's Services.

I beg this government to try leading with compassion and empathy. Be open, honest, and transparent with the people of this province, who are stunned at the unfolding tragedy. This government is doing its best to prevent this topic from being discussed in an attempt to avoid the hard discussions that need to happen if we're going to do right by these youth.

This is not about the budget. This is not a contest about what line item increased or decreased. It's about saving lives. It's about whether or not this government has the political will and strength and courage to work with us and every other stakeholder to ensure that this tragic year is the last one. The people of Alberta care about this. They feel the pain of these losses, and they want action taken. They won't forgive a government that obstructs, hides, or ignores the crisis.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Bishop Desmond Tutu and Ted Byfield

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Recently two men passed away, one of whom was internationally famous and the other an influential Albertan that I once had the opportunity to meet. Both men shared a faith in God. One was a bishop in the Anglican church and the other had Anglican roots. Both believed that their faith in a loving God had to make a difference, and both of them, by the content of their character and support of democracy, helped to change their nations.

Bishop Desmond Tutu was the moral conscience of South Africa as he spoke against the apartheid regime. His job was not done when the system of apartheid collapsed. Through his work on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission both victims and the oppressors had the opportunity to meet, listen, and, most importantly, to ask and grant forgiveness. It was his faith, compassion, and sense of humour that helped his nation to peacefully transition to democracy.

I heard him speak in Edmonton, and it was electric. He started by imitating a hug as he said to the Canadians in the crowd: thank you, thank you, thank you. It was heartfelt and moving as he recognized the contributions Canadians had made in pressuring South Africa towards rejecting the evils of apartheid and to become a democracy.

The second man, Ted Byfield, helped to articulate for my generation how we could better our democratic institutions by instituting a triple-E Senate, citizen-initiated referenda, and the right of recall. He helped to create the Reform Party and to clarify that what the west really wanted was to be an equal partner in Confederation. His magazine editorials, his compendiums of western Canadian history and the history of the Christian faith helped to set some of the foundation stones in my life.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Respect is not built upon the foundation of perfection but upon the character of a person and the impact of their lives on us. I am glad that I had the opportunity to ever so briefly rub shoulders with these men, and I will always be grateful for what I learned from their principled lives.

Premier's Leadership

Mr. Loewen: The past two years have been incredibly difficult, and there hasn't been a single life left untouched by this Premier's mismanagement. Tens of thousands of Albertans have lost jobs, and multigenerational businesses have closed. This government has

seized churches and businesses, dragging Albertans through the courts for violating the very same health restrictions that this Premier and members of his cabinet personally violated. Then, ignoring this hypocrisy, the Premier has repeatedly demeaned and vilified Albertans, pushing mistruths and half-cocked facts. In true Alberta style, though, Albertans didn't give up on their principles, and they darn sure didn't stop fighting for a better tomorrow. Their out-of-touch Premier, however, in a bid to cling to power, continues to fatally divide Albertans and his own party.

Here are the facts. The Premier has trailed in the polls for 15 months. He's being out fund raised by the NDP 2 to 1. He is one of the least popular Premiers in Canada, and the majority of people who voted UCP in 2019 want to see him gone. Under this Premier we are divided, we are split, and it's not because of the people but because this Premier has gone back to the old ways of the PCs.

With an election set for 2023, the former base Kenney has so callously dismissed is fed up and is not buying this Premier's fake 180-degree turn just weeks before a leadership review. This Premier keeps claiming that anyone who opposes him is not a mainstream Conservative, yet the vast majority of Conservatives oppose him.

We need to reset the Albert agenda with an inclusive conservative vision that unites our movement and our province. Change is coming one way or another. The people are ready for leadership options, and there will be good ones. I am calling on all Albertans who have suffered under this hypocrisy, I'm calling on all Albertans who want to prevent a return of the NDP, and I'm calling on all Albertans who want to give this province the fresh start we all deserve: buy a UCP membership today, register for the SGM, come to Red Deer on April 9, and vote this Premier out of office once and for all. It's time for a little spring cleaning, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I'm sure the hon. member will know that the use of proper names for any reason is unparliamentary, and he'll govern himself accordingly in the future.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Political Labels

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some politicians label those who agree with them as mainstream and those who disagree with them as fringe minorities, extremists, or threats undermining stability. Some politicians say: of course, we can have unity if only you would agree with me. That is not unity; that is ridiculous. We are governed by laws, not by individuals, and our paramount loyalties are to principles, not to office holders. Some politicians say that those who disagree with them have unacceptable values or beliefs. That is for God, not them, to judge.

Dividing and labelling others only produces contention and destroys trust. That is not leadership. Great leaders lead in love and inspire the best in those they serve. Conflict is inevitable. Contention is a choice. Good leaders understand the difference.

Large groups should not be condemned and labelled by the actions of a few. Some seek to destroy a person's reputation by interpreting and sometimes twisting a person's words in the worst possible ways, calling them names such as racist and extremist. That is unfair to them, their spouses, and their children.

There is a better way. A loving God views all of us, His children, by our eternal possibilities and in our best possible ways. Our shared heritage as children of God transcends all other labels and is a label that produces peace. Let us be loyal to the truth and speak the truth in love. We will be happier and better.

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

Holi

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Holi is a wonderful custom and celebration that symbolizes the flowering of love at the end of the winter and the beginning of the spring season. It's a day for meeting new people, laughing, playing, and enjoying the great celebration of colours. Holi is a joyful and rich celebration that fills the entire atmosphere with vibrant colours and creates a positive environment where everyone is soaked in the colours but more in the spirit of Holi.

Holi is celebrated all around the world for its vibrant colours, which educate people to rise above, forgive, and greet others with a positive attitude and great affection. As well, Holi is a great time to enjoy the delicious traditional sweets and food with one another. The happy occasion is also incomplete without the breathtaking traditional folk music that creates a positive environment for everyone to enjoy. It is the world's most exciting and joyful celebration.

This celebration commemorates the triumph of good over evil. The festival's core theme is love and compassion for one another. On this special day we should put aside any grudges towards one another and promote joy. It is celebrated by people all around the country on the basis of many myths and tales; however, regardless of one's views, the spirit stays the same. It announces the start of spring, the season of hope and happiness. Nature is bursting at the seams with fresh leaves and blossoms. As a result, there is a lot of happiness all around.

I'm really delighted to be able to name this lovely province my home as a devoted Hindu. My desire for many of you throughout the world is that you have a happy and joyful Holi. Happy Holi, everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Deaths of Children in Care and Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, when we asked the Premier about the historic jump in deaths of children in government care, he tried to suggest that it was entirely about COVID and not his own government's heinous abdication of responsibility. In the middle of last year the UCP cut \$40 million from child intervention. In addition, the so-called review remains hidden, unfinished, and it's been five months. Once again, what exactly is this Premier going to do to change course and do better preventing the deaths of Alberta's most vulnerable children?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do appreciate the question. As I have said, the death of any child who is or has been in care is a tragedy, and it is a call to action. We are absolutely looking into each and every case to determine if there are changes needed to policy and practice. However, in the meantime we are still making changes as recommendations come forward. We respond to the recommendations that come from the OCYA, and we have committed to be very transparent and accountable and make changes where they're needed, as I said. Our transition to

adulthood program is one example of how we're working to address what we're seeing in this data.

Ms Notley: Well, speaking of that, Mr. Speaker, 20 of those we lost were young people over the age of 18. Now, the UCP went to court to defend their decision to scale back eligibility for benefits from age 22 to 24, arguing that they had a right to save \$10 million. Meanwhile in B.C. we see an NDP government battle the same kind of crisis by expanding benefits for these youth from the age of 24 up to 27. Will the Premier admit that these folks got it wrong, and will he reverse this cruel decision and start focusing on supporting these young people?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, as I said in this House in 2019, after these changes were made, we identified that there were gaps in transitions for young people who were transitioning into adulthood. We had a program that was in place. While there were caseworkers dedicated, we needed to do a better job of transitioning young people into adulthood, making sure that they had the natural supports in place so that they could be successful in their futures. We now have that. It was announced two weeks ago. We wanted to take the best pieces from advancing futures and make sure we support a successful . . .

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, that answer is a clear example of why we can't have an honest discussion about the deaths of these 45 children in a 35-second exchange.

Now, when we were in government, we put together an all-party committee to have real discussions, and, yes, some good came out of us working together. Today it's clear that circumstances have changed, like, for instance, throwing a whole bunch of people off benefits, and there are new challenges. Will the Premier take this crisis seriously and re-establish that committee?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the members opposite back to the last term. The all-party panel was created because there wasn't, in fact, a lot of transparency or any accountability from the members opposite when things went wrong in child intervention. We are now working under those new processes. We have, I have committed to be completely transparent, to make sure that these reports are available to the public because we take this seriously, and so, too, should the public. We are going to take action. I know, obviously, the transition to adulthood program, which I've spoken about already, is one step, and I anticipate more changes will be coming soon.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition for question 2.

Ms Notley: You kicked a whole bunch of kids off benefits, and you cut \$40 million last year, and you didn't put it back this year.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling. Yesterday the inflation rate hit 5.7 per cent, the highest since 1991. Now, the Premier might remember because it was back when he became the head of the CTF and started railing against government bracket creep. For the folks at home, bracket creep is when the government keeps more and more of your income even as inflation drives costs up. I want the Premier to remember 1991 and explain: why is he taking . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

You certainly can have private conversations, but doing private conversations across the bar never works out for anyone.

The Leader of the Opposition, from about 10 seconds ago if you would like.

Ms Notley: I'd like the Premier to remember 1991 and explain: why is he now taking a billion dollars from Alberta families through his bracket creep budget?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to be clear. The only members in this House that have raised taxes during their term in government are the members across the aisle. They raised taxes on everything that moved, on individuals, on corporations, driving billions of dollars out of this province, leaving tens of thousands of Albertans looking for jobs, looking for work. We have brought fiscal responsibility back to the province of Alberta. We presented a balanced budget. Shame on them for raising these issues.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this government has taken the tax burden off high-paid corporate CEOs and moved it to regular Alberta families. That's what they've done. The point is that the Premier's decision to ignore sky-high inflation has now gone from an annoyance to a billion-dollar tax grab. Families lose \$400 in a year. A vulnerable person on AISH: well, they lose \$1,000. The Premier once claimed that that loss of income wouldn't be onerous. Well, it is onerous. Why doesn't he recognize that inflation is a problem? Albertans need them to act now.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we are acting. We're bringing in relief measures for Albertans. We're reducing and, in fact, eliminating fuel taxes as energy prices go up. That's what this government is doing in contrast to the members opposite, who increased taxes on everything that moved, brought in a carbon tax that added costs to every Albertan, every senior, every family.

Ms Notley: As the minister knows, Mr. Speaker, that gets rebated. What doesn't get rebated is a 100 per cent increase in tuition, a 30 per cent increase in auto insurance, a 50 per cent increase in utility bills, increases in school fees, increases in property taxes, and a billion-dollar tax grab through bracket creep. Why won't this minister stand up and fix the mistakes that he is making towards the people of this province? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, when the members opposite were in government, they increased taxes on every Albertan, on every business, on every senior, on every family. They put this province on an unsustainable fiscal trajectory, leaving our books \$10 billion out of balance relative to similar provinces. We brought fiscal stability back to the province of Alberta. That means a future for future generations. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

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

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what this government did was stumble into a windfall, and that's it.

Premier's Office Staff

Ms Notley: Now, yesterday I had the chance to ask the Premier some questions about his office also stumbling, an office that appears to have some very serious problems. Stakeholders we talk

to say that turnover is so high in the Premier's office that they never know who to talk to. It's a miracle anything gets done when no one sticks around. More than a 50 per cent turnover in one single year. A simple question: can the Premier explain why so many of his staff don't want to work with him?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, what a ridiculous question coming from Alberta's worst Premier. Here's a question I'd like to ask the former Premier of Alberta: how has she still not apologized to Albertans for bringing in the largest job loss in the history of the province? Let's start there. How about for not campaigning on her carbon tax, that caused economic devastation across this province? When is she going to apologize, though, for telling Albertans to take the bus?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier claimed that it's all actually about burnout and natural turnover in his office, but if that's true, we wouldn't be seeing so many of those former staffers actually taking the time to torpedo the Premier. One has to wonder if it has anything to do with the extracurriculars his staff have been assigned: his top adviser is off the job, serving Albertans in order to – and staff are being told to take off work at 4 o'clock, all to save his failed leadership. My question is: should I be even asking him questions anymore, or maybe should I be talking to the guy who's sitting right up there?

2:00

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, that's a ridiculous question. It's a distraction. We will not be distracted. We are focused on Albertans' business, and . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. You asked a question; you can hear the answer.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, that business is about positioning this province for increased investment attraction. That business is about increasing job opportunities and opportunities for every small business in every region of this province, and our plan is working.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, look up the word "distracted" in the dictionary, and you'll see a picture of that whole group over there.

Now, half the Premier's Calgary office left last year, too. The scarcity of life rafts really tells us something about the state of the ship, Mr. Speaker. We actually do have big issues to manage in Alberta, but this Premier's number one priority is saving his own job, saving himself from his party, from his MLAs, from the guy up there. Why doesn't the Premier realize that even though it's called the Premier's office, it's actually there to serve Albertans, not his political future?

Speaker's Ruling Referring to Party Matters Referring to the Galleries

The Speaker: I know that the Leader of the Opposition knows that this period of time is to ask questions about government business, not about external party matters. I also know that the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows that she ought not be engaging, as I reminded members of the opposition yesterday, with members in the gallery or otherwise.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

Premier's Office Staff (continued)

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One bad poll and that's all it takes for that leader to jump the shark. Her close,

personal alliance with Mr. Jean seems to be quite obvious. I noticed the other day that he suggested to put her into cabinet, a Leader of the Official Opposition who has said she will go door to door to force vaccinations on Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Besides the plan to go door to door to every Albertan that the Leader of the Official Opposition has put forward to force vaccinations, I guess the question becomes: does Mr. Jean want to go door to door and force vaccinations as well?

Health Care Worker Wages and Cost of Living

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, Albertans work so, so hard, and so many have stepped up, gone to work every day to perform essential services even as we faced an unprecedented public health threat and most of us were told to stay home. They cared for the sick. They stocked grocery store shelves. They taught in classrooms. Put bluntly, they were there for us, and now we need the government to be there for them. Why is the government cutting wages for front-line workers, any front-line workers, even as we see the highest rate of inflation in 30 years?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. As the hon. member knows – we've actually talked about this issue for the last four days in question period. I assume that the hon. member is talking about the bargaining between AHS and HSAA. You know, as indicated previously, these were opening positions. That's how bargaining works. Both parties put positions on the table. AHS put positions on the table, raising concerns about payment of certain professions. HSAA put a position on the table of a 15 per cent increase over four years. I am hopeful that they'll be able to reach an agreement, just like we did with UNA.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, because of this government the cost of everything is rising. Car insurance is costing hundreds more per month. Tuition is doubling for some students. School fees are up. The government is even hiking camping fees. Do they hate summer fun over there? On top of all that, they're hitting families with a \$1 billion tax grab, and this government and this Premier know that as inflation goes up, so does the UCP tax grab. Families that already can't make ends meet are paying for that. Premier, right here and right now put an end to this. Will he commit to ending the insidious tax grab on the backs of families?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to reiterate that this government is not raising taxes. It was the members across the aisle, when they were in government, that raised taxes on everything and everybody. What we are doing: we're providing a utility rebate to Albertans to off-set the horrible utility policy brought in by the members opposite that pushed up utility rates for everybody. We're also coming forward with a holiday on the fuel tax, which will make Alberta fuel the cheapest across the nation.

Ms Gray: Alberta families are struggling. Many are facing utility bills verging on \$1,000 per month, and there's no end in sight. They owe thousands to utility companies already, and they are now being threatened to have their heat and their electricity turned off. Yesterday my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View brought forward legislation to ban utility shut-offs, and the government ignored it. The UCP continues to ignore Alberta

families. Will the Premier commit that not a single Albertan will lose heat or power in their home while they're dealing with a cost-of-living crisis not seen in 30 years? Will he have any real solutions for families?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we have brought real solutions: a utility rebate, a fuel tax holiday. I want to speak to the underlying reasons why utility costs are high. It was the members opposite, when they were in government, that added 7 and a half billion dollars to our transmission system. The members opposite, when they were in government, hastily went to gas from coal, creating a \$1.4 billion liability for who? Alberta consumers. Moreover, they brought in a carbon tax that added costs to every Alberta family.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a question.

COVID-19 Related Travel Restrictions

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's so disappointing that the NDP is desperately trying to keep the COVID issues alive. Last night in this very Chamber they even voted against a motion calling on the federal government to drop pointless COVID travel restrictions, including screening requirements and proof of vaccination for air travel. Once again they voted with their friend and ally Justin Trudeau against the majority of common-sense Albertans. To the Minister of Health: can you explain to those across the aisle and those in Ottawa why it is safe to drop these pointless travel restrictions?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. As the member and this House know, we removed the vast majority of our restrictions over a month ago because it was safe to do so. In fact, total hospitalizations have dropped by over 600 since we lifted the restrictions exemption program on February 9. Federal predeparture screening requirements don't limit the spread or reduce severe outcomes. Dr. Zain Chagla, an infectious disease physician and associate professor at McMaster University, says that for PCR tests "the yield for this type of testing is very, very low for a significant amount of cost and anxiety to the traveller."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that United Conservative MLAs voted to drop these pointless travel restrictions that only make life harder and more expensive for Albertans and Canadians and given that despite leaving them in place for far too long, even the federal government is starting to lift restrictions for travel, again to the Minister of Health: how will the government push back against the NDP's campaign of fear and misinformation about COVID and travel when the virus is clearly no longer the threat that it once was?

Mr. Copping: Thanks once again to the hon. member, Mr. Speaker. Our transition to an endemic phase means learning to live with COVID and lifting the unnecessary barriers that harm both Albertans and our economy. It also means listening to partners like the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, whose president, Perrin Beatty, said that "blanket warnings about travel at this point are unjustified." Of course, we'll continue to watch COVID-19 trends closely, but we're continuing with our return-to-normal plan because it is working, because omicron is different, and because Albertans shouldn't have to put up with restrictions that no longer

make sense, restrictions that are supported by the other side of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has been clear that it's time to drop these pointless COVID travel restrictions, a view shared by the majority of Albertans and given that the NDP believes these travel restrictions should remain in place indefinitely, again to the Minister of Health: when do you expect all of these travel restrictions to be fully removed, allowing Albertans to get back to their normal lives?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, the federal government this morning announced that they will remove the pretesting requirement for fully vaccinated travellers as of April 1; however, it's tough to say when this federal government will realize that it needs to do the right thing and remove travel restrictions entirely for all Canadians. They should follow what interim president of the National Airlines Council of Canada, Suzanne Acton-Gervais, has stated: "Other countries have moved to eliminate pre-departure testing requirements entirely, and the latest scientific evidence suggests now is the time for Canada to consider doing the same."

2:10 AISH and Income Support Payments

Ms Renaud: The decision to deindex AISH will leave recipients with \$1,000 less to buy essential items. That's groceries, clothing, that's transportation, that's medical supplies. We are seeing inflation that we haven't seen since 1991. Some of the vulnerable Albertans that I'm hearing from weren't even born the last time things were so tough. They've never experienced this kind of hardship. Why is this government doing nothing to make life better for these Albertans?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, Budget 2022 continues to maintain the core funding for social services. In addition, we increased funding for AISH. We increased \$36 million for employment support services. We not only function as a social safety net for those vulnerable Albertans, but we also help them to get jobs.

Ms Renaud: Given that the minister claimed earlier this week that he couldn't act until he generated wealth but given that this government has already shoveled money to their friends in the form of a multibillion-dollar handout and can't be bothered to even keep funding for those on income support at pace with the skyrocketing cost of living and given that no one from these communities can get time with the minister or the Premier or anyone even willing to listen about the devastating impact of these horrible, cruel, UCP government policies, will the government admit that they only care about their rich friends?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, with our commitment we're not only working with our nonprofit sectors here; we added another \$6 million under the civil society grant. We're working hand in hand with our community partners to make sure Albertans' lives are getting better through our support to them.

Ms Renaud: Given that I'm here begging – actually begging – for this government to listen, given I devoted my life to fighting for Albertans who are vulnerable and struggling to make ends meet, I am actually heartbroken that there is no compassion and support from this sitting government. I want the voices of vulnerable Albertans to be heard. Will the minister and the Premier come to a

town hall with me to listen to these vulnerable Albertans who are struggling and hurting right now because of your policies?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, we're listening to Albertans. I'm travelling around the province, and when I have the time, I talk to families, I talk to parents. Through our support thousands of vulnerable Albertans have been getting the support they need from us. We're committed to providing the safety net for vulnerable Albertans, but more than that, we're an empowering mechanism that will give people support so they can have a hand up.

Technology Industry Development

Mr. Bilous: Later today I'll be tabling a bill that will establish a venture fund that'll invite Albertans to invest in Alberta's future. The fund will directly invest in the growth of Alberta's tech and AI sectors and exclusively support early-stage companies, start-ups, and scale-ups. Investing in the fund would provide Albertans the opportunity to earn returns themselves and support economic growth, diversification, and the creation of good jobs and the long-term economic well-being of the province. The Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation has said in the past that this issue should be nonpartisan, so will he join me in supporting this bill, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member opposite's interest in creating the most competitive business environment and an environment where we see the tech sector thrive in this province. That is certainly our goal, and we've been very pleased to see venture capital rush into this province, setting records year after year. In order to continue that momentum, we've included \$90 million in Budget 2022 in an Alberta technology and innovation strategy. There will be key components of that strategy rolled out in upcoming weeks. I know that the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation will be pleased to be transparent with Albertans on the great opportunity of that plan.

Mr. Bilous: Given that our economy is in the midst of a generational shift brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, a crash in oil prices, and an energy transformation that's changing how we power our economy and given that these challenges have highlighted the need to build a more resilient and diversified economy – we need to set the right conditions in order to compete in this highly competitive market – given that this government has cut several programs designed to support our tech sector, causing us to lose ground to other provinces, if this government won't support the bill, will they at least reverse their decision to cancel the investor tax credit and the digital media tax credit?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I appreciate the member's efforts and interest in positioning the province for growth in the tech sector. We talk about energy in this province, the importance of energy, and there is an energy transition taking place, but I need to underline today the importance of Alberta's traditional oil and gas industry. It's never been more important as we consider North American energy security. It's never been more important as we consider what we can do to get LNG into Europe to our geopolitical allies.

Mr. Bilous: Given that technology underpins every sector, including oil and gas, and given that the bill will also create an

advisory council to provide advice and research to the minister on innovation and technology as well as support crossgovernment initiatives related to innovation and given that this idea, just like the venture fund, the investor tax credit, and the digital media tax credit, came from industry and has support from venture capitalists to private-sector organizations like the Council of Canadian Innovators, will the government finally listen to the tech sector and support the idea of an advisory council?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're working hard to ensure that we have a very attractive business environment for venture capital, for growth in the tech sector. Something that we did early days: we brought in the innovation employment grant, which is a grant that ultimately rewards incremental research and development activity. There has been a great response to that grant, but we're not done yet. As I noted, we've announced \$90 million in this budget, Budget 2022, for additional initiatives. These initiatives will be targeted at AI, machine learning, and quantum computing. The tech sector is important to this province, and we're acting.

Election Recall, Citizen Initiative, and Labour Relations Legislation

Mr. Barnes: The Premier campaigned on strengthening grassroots democracy. One of this government's key initiatives was MLA recall. The Premier even stated, and I quote: Albertans should be able to hold their officials accountable throughout their term. This bill received royal assent 273 days ago, yet the bill has still not been proclaimed into law. To the Premier: why has your government chosen to disregard the will of this Assembly by refusing to enact Bill 52, the Recall Act?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. As everyone in this House knows, we passed the Recall Act to ensure Albertans could hold officials accountable throughout their term, not just at election time. It will allow voters to petition to remove elected officials from office, including MLAs, mayors, municipal councillors, and school board trustees. We are committed to strengthening democracy in Alberta and making sure Albertans have an even more powerful voice when it comes to matters that impact their lives. We've made a commitment that we would pass this legislation and will put it in place, and we are doing so. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Barnes: Given that I can think of two UCP nomination candidates, Jodie Gateman and Tim Hoven, who might dispute the idea that this government cares about grassroots democracy and given that Bill 51, the Citizen Initiative Act, received royal assent exactly eight months ago, can the Premier explain why his government has ignored the will of this Assembly again and failed to enact into law the Citizen Initiative Act?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We make no apology for vetting candidates through the nomination process. We believe it's important that candidates are able to uphold a certain acceptable bar and hold views that are consistent with the views of Albertans. Again, we make no apology. We will continue to vet nomination candidates.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that this government wants to campaign on grassroots democracy but not provide it, given that there's a third example of grassroots manipulation, the Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, 2020, with its raved-about provision to opt union members out of political spending, and given that this bill received royal assent 626 days ago yet union dues won't be opt-in until July 31, 2022, again to the Premier: if you won't respect the wishes of grassroots Albertans, UCP members, or even this Assembly, why should we trust you?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I am proud... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

2:20

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, I am proud of Bill 32. It will actually restore balance in Alberta's labour legislation. I can assure that hon. member that there's a time frame legislated for that particular bill to take its course, and I am confident that before the end of the year that would happen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Agricultural Concerns

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very concerned about the pending decision from CP Rail to lock out 3,000 conductors and locomotive engineers. The impact for the agricultural industry could be catastrophic, so I sincerely hope there is a resolution. Farmers have had to navigate through a global pandemic, a scorching drought, floods in B.C., illegal blockades on Alberta's only 24/7 border crossing, skyrocketing inflation, and now the uncertainty of the invasion of Ukraine. Why aren't the UCP doing anything to support the agriculture sector through our supply chain disruption?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I honestly don't know what that member is talking about. Our government, like every other prairie province government, has done everything that they can to help their farmers and ranchers through the current drought, whether it's through our robust business risk management strategies, the AgriRecovery program, or us advocating for the CP lockout to end quickly, whether that's with binding arbitration or back-to-work legislation. Where does that member stand on that?

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the cost of fertilizer was skyrocketing before the invasion of Ukraine and continues to increase and that many producers do not have the upfront capital to afford to buy fertilizer early and given that livestock producers have become reliant on American feed due to the shortage in Alberta and given that in the midst of these cost pressures and uncertainty the UCP wants to balance their no-help budget on the backs of farmers and increase crop and livestock insurance by 10 per cent, why is the minister still going through with this?

Mr. Horner: Two-thirds of all nitrogen-based fertilizers made in Canada are made in Alberta. When I meet with the fertilizer companies, they say: "We would love to come here. We love your APiP program, we love the cheap natural gas feedstock availability,

but we can't because of the carbon tax, so we're going to build the plants in the U.S., and we're going to freight them across the border." We're lucky we have enough fertilizer in Alberta for the spring plant.

Ms Sweet: No, we don't.

Mr. Horner: Yes, we do. The price will rise. We'll get it in the ground.

The Speaker: I might remind the minister that perhaps if he was answering through the Speaker, it would make for a much smoother transition.

The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the pandemic, a global conflict, and a national labour dispute are out of the control of the provincial government but given that the UCP are, however, in control of how much they charge farmers to access insurance and that it is going up under this government and given that the UCP are also ignoring the request of producer groups to access tens of millions of dollars available through the federal government – again, no surprise that the UCP are ignoring the sector – and given that farmers are facing so much pressure right now and they want to plant seed and they have enough issues with trying to access feed, why is the UCP so committed to making life harder for farmers by jacking up the premiums?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the formula that sets the premiums for our great insurance program is based on your regional risk, your farming history risk, the value of the commodity, and the premium rate. The premium rate is increasing. It's capped at a 10 per cent increase to rebuild the fund because we paid out \$2.8 billion from the fund. The fund did its job. [interjections]

The Speaker: I'm sorry. I couldn't hear the last 10 seconds of your answer. Please feel free to deliver it to me.

Mr. Horner: I just said that if there are any crayons left over there, I'll take it offline and show them how the formula works. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Premier's Office Renovations

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, this government has had two separate occasions to report to this House on how much the work done for the Premier's office cost Alberta taxpayers. At the Infrastructure budget debate the minister said that he did not have the cost handy, and the Premier was also unable to give the total cost at the Executive Council budget debate. Since so many Albertans are asking and since he's had over a week to get that number, will the Infrastructure minister share the total cost that went into renovating and upgrading the Premier's office at the Legislature, and if he can't, could he explain what he's trying to hide?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, not only on the floor of this House but also during budget estimates I told him I'm not hiding anything. In fact, I showed him everything and would like to show him everything. On Twitter my office has posted how much it cost to move the Premier's office due to the work being done at the Legislature office. I'm sure the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction can vouch for it. Right now there is work going on at her office, and she has been asking me the last few days: how long will it take? She's looking for, actually, a temporary move.

Member Loyola: Given that Albertans are living through an affordability crisis right now – and that is the sole fault of this government, that piled on costs and removed protections for families – and given that while I appreciate the need to maintain and protect Alberta’s history, including the people’s Legislature, Albertans should be assured that while they are being told to pay more, this government isn’t attempting any luxurious upgrades or improvements, as were seen under the former PCs, will the minister table today a full list of all improvements or alterations done to the Premier’s office in addition to the full cost?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, this member opposite is trying to create a story that doesn’t exist. It was clarified time and again. We would rather focus on issues that matter for economic recovery and growth, but these socialists will never get that. Like the minister of social services said the other day, we have to create wealth to spend on things. This guy is looking for stories that don’t exist, unfortunately.

Member Loyola: Given that sitting on the government benches is a minister who served in a cabinet trying to build a luxury penthouse on top of the Edmonton Federal Building and given that Albertans lost trust with that government after this revelation and given that in order to build trust with Albertans, this government should be up front with taxpayers about how their money is being spent, will the minister agree that any money spent on upgrading, improving the offices of highly paid government officials, including the Premier and his staff, should be publicly disclosed and approved by a committee of this Legislature? Surely, this minister . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, since the member opposite will try to twist things anyway, I would ask you to accompany me on a tour of that place the government is using.

To be specific about the expenditure: electrical expenses were \$1,968; plumbing was \$565; electronics, \$807; movers, \$4,106; painting, \$800; carpentry, \$250. If the member can’t add, the total is \$8,946, which is in the public domain. It’s posted on Twitter.

United States Oil Imports

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, 50 per cent of the Russian government’s budget is funded by oil, making them a true petrostate. As Putin continues his war on Ukraine, any continued reliance by NATO allies on Russian oil and gas is directly financing his invasion. I’m grateful that North America has banned imports, but the world needs to do more. I also understand that our Premier and the Energy minister went to Houston last week to represent Alberta’s energy industry on the international stage. To the Minister of Energy: in Texas what was your message to the global energy and political leaders?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, there were a number of us that were representing Alberta and Alberta energy on the global stage last week. Our Finance minister was in New York talking with major investors and fund managers to tell Alberta’s story and to talk about the importance of our energy sector. The Premier and I were in Houston to talk about the importance of our energy sector to North American energy security. We have to weed out Russian barrels from not only North America but from global supply. It’s conflict oil. It’s unconscionable to be buying it, and

that’s what we were talking about. We were talking about Alberta as the solution.

2:30

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

Ms Rosin: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the United States and European countries seem to recognize the importance of ending their reliance on Russian oil and gas imports but they’re struggling to permanently do so given that previous attempts to secure energy security in North America have failed at the hands of short-sighted political decisions, to the same minister: what progress was made in Texas, and how was Alberta’s message received?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Throughout my trip to Texas I heard from leaders and energy leaders and CEOs from around the world who want to see Alberta continue to be a key player to answering global energy issues. We’ve now run headfirst into the fact that, over the last several years, Canada’s and the United States’ federal governments have put energy security on the back burner. What that’s allowed is for Russia, places like Russia to ramp up their production while we have been unable to build ours. It’s a reminder of the importance . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that President Biden is so desperately on the hunt to secure gaps in his oil imports that Russia once filled that he is now conversing with and considering travelling to countries like Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, with whom his country originally imposed oil sanctions on years ago because of their poor human rights standards, yet the same President rejected Alberta’s own Keystone XL pipeline on his very first day in office, which would have enabled their trusted Canadian ally to meet United States’ demand, to the same minister: what do you think that this says about the priorities of President Biden at this time, and what needs to change?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s terribly frustrating to see the U.S. government now scrambling to increase supply from some of the world’s worst regimes, places like Iran, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, when we’re right next door and we’re already the largest supplier of energy to the United States. We sit on top of the third-largest reserves in oil, and we are proud of it. It’s time that we start treating our oil reserves as a strategic asset to be proud of, not a liability to demonize, and that requires a rebalancing of an energy security discussion, and that’s what we’re doing.

Culture and Status of Women Budget 2022-2023

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, during estimates with the Culture and Status of Women ministry the minister was asked about the lack of increase in his budget to meet the targets set out by this ministry. It was clear when the budget was released that what was allocated was insufficient to meet those goals. In fact, the minister indicated that he asked for more money, advocated for more money, and was denied by his own government, so my question is for the Finance minister. Why doesn’t he feel that supporting women or Alberta’s Culture ministry are important?

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, I did advocate for more money, and I got it, \$268 million. They like to string a story that isn't true. I got substantially more money. I look forward to the days when I'll be able to increase the grants to nonprofits and civil societies, the ones who actually do real work and aren't involved in identity politics and trying to create trouble.

Thank you.

Ms Goehring: Given that the minister clearly cannot get adequate funding from this government to meet the needs of Albertans he represents and given this budget comes after a time when those represented by this ministry were hit the hardest – the arts and culture industry saw the biggest reduction in revenue due to the pandemic – and we know that women were disproportionately affected by job loss and economic downturn and given that this minister claims he advocated to the government to support these areas properly, my question is simple: where exactly do women and culture fall on the Finance minister's priority list? We're talking about half of the population.

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm not going to take any advice from the members across about how much they care about women because I'll tell you about another industry that's dominated by women. That's the tourism industry. Those members opposite stood up last night and voted no to the government motion to remove federal restrictions on travel, which are keeping that industry down and keeping women unemployed. If they care about women, they've got to care about them in every industry. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Goehring: Given that this government has failed to get Albertans back to work at the rate they promised – they're 130,000 jobs short, Mr. Speaker – and given they're now moving to slash the wages of front-line health care workers in fields with far more women than men and given those health care heroes were on the front lines of the pandemic every day while UCP ministers and caucus members flew off to Hawaii, hosted drunken white tablecloth dinners, and held Christmas parties literally hours after telling all Albertans to cancel theirs, is anyone in this government really going to claim they've checked into reality and that they understand the many challenges facing women?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was a lot in that question, but we're positioning this province for opportunity for every Albertan, including all Alberta women and Alberta families. That's why we supported businesses, businesses in the service sector disproportionately, at levels not supported by any other government across the country. That's why we're positioning this province for disproportionate investment attraction, job creation, and economic growth. All Albertans are important, including women.

Education Concerns in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood

Member Irwin: Delton school is in my riding. It's a lovely school, but it needs replacing, and the students in our community would be better served with a new school. It was at the top of Edmonton public's priority list, but the Minister of Education, who thinks she knows better than community members, refuses to fund it or any public school in Edmonton. Minister, good news: it's not too late to

do the right thing and support Edmonton public schools like Delton. Will she join me and our Education critic for a tour of Delton school to see just how short-sighted her decision is not to replace it? And, please, just say yes.

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a process, a very defensible data-based process when we approve capital projects in this province. With respect to education, we actually take priorities that school boards deliver through the Ministry of Education, and then after that the ministry writes those requests and provides a priority. With respect to the Delton school, it has a utilization rate of only 69 per cent, with no health and safety concerns.

Member Irwin: Given that I hope that was a yes and that the minister will join us to hear the concerns of my constituents who've been left behind by this no-help budget and given that my constituents also feel ignored by this government when it comes to the discredited, the disgraced, the inappropriate, the racist curriculum, and if the minister is actually interested in what Albertans think, she'll go back to the drawing board and she'll consult with my constituents, Indigenous groups, francophone communities, and more, and she'll make a curriculum that we can be proud of, not one that she has to force onto teachers and students. Will the minister take this feedback from me, or does she think that she still knows better than the people I represent?

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

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, every member of the government caucus, every cabinet minister, and certainly the Minister of Education is taking feedback on the curriculum. We're listening to the feedback of all Albertans, including education stakeholders, francophone groups, and Indigenous communities. We've given out a million dollars in grants to education and community partners so they can provide their detailed feedback. We are listening.

Member Irwin: Given that if the minister was actually interested in listening to the people of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, she would be investing in public education, not trying to undercut it as this budget does and given that she and others are using technicalities to deny my constituents, in the fastest growing school division, the school that they deserve, it's clear that the minister or all of the ministers have been spending too much time in their offices and not enough time with the people of our province. I've got some constituents who have some thoughts on how this minister and government are faring. I would love to set up a meeting with them. Will she attend, or is the only voice that she serves . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I outright reject the assertion that we, in fact, have cut Education. That is simply not the truth. We've maintained Education funding throughout the plan, this year increasing it by 1.7 per cent, at the same time bringing forward a more efficient formula that brings resources right into the classroom. We are delivering world-class education, with more bang for our buck, and, in fact, this year increased the budget by 1.7 per cent.

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

Highway 28 and 881 Capital Plan

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My constituents are concerned about the condition of roads that connect us to neighbouring communities and to the capital region. They rely on these roads on a daily basis to go to work, school, or even to access emergency services, not to mention the huge benefit to the economy this corridor provides. In 2018 the previous government recognized the need to assess these roads and conducted a highway corridor study from Edmonton to Cold Lake for highway 28. To the Minister of Transportation: what did this report indicate, and how are we acting on these results?

2:40

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, a safe and reliable highway network across the province is critically important to Alberta's economic recovery, which is why in Budget 2022 we are investing \$7.29 billion over three years in Transportation's capital plan. The report the member is referencing recommended several improvements to the highway, including intersection upgrades, curve reconstruction, and passing lanes. Many of those factors are taken into consideration when assessing all Alberta roads.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Highway 28 is a core route in Alberta's northeast. It connects Edmonton, Gibbons, Smoky Lake, Bonnyville, and ends at Cold Lake. My constituents are constantly travelling on this highway. Some travel this road to Edmonton to deliver babies since we do not have that service available in our area. Highway 28 connecting Edmonton to Gibbons recently saw \$43 million of upgrades, but the Smoky Lake to Cold Lake section has not seen upgrades in many years. To the Minister of Transportation: can you let us know what work is currently being done on highway 28 between Smoky Lake and Cold Lake?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Transportation is currently monitoring and assessing traffic volumes and the condition of highway 28. My department will use the data collected to determine if any passing or climbing lanes need to be built. At the moment there are no projects planned for highway 28 in the department's three-year provincial construction plan; however, ongoing maintenance like pothole repair is taking place. In fact, we have an additional \$30 million for highway maintenance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that the northern section of highway 881 is another extremely key route in the northeast and given that this highway is filled with potholes and frost heaves – and I thank the minister for coming for a ride with me when she came out to visit our area – and given that the Ministry of Transportation just released the 2022 capital construction program, which indicates major capital projects, and given that in this program the Minister of Transportation recognizes that 881 needs significant work to improve safety, to the Minister of Transportation: what is the future plan for 881?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, the condition of all Alberta highways, including highway 881, is constantly monitored by maintenance contractors and department staff to ensure safety-related issues such as potholes and pavement repairs are addressed in a timely manner. Highway 881 is an important route for those Albertans who rely on it to get to

work and to school, and many have told us that they want the road widened. Currently highway 881 is not in the department's three-year construction program, but the road will continue to receive ongoing maintenance, and we'll continue to have conversations.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

In 30 seconds or less we will continue to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

School Construction Capital Plan and St. Albert

Ms Renaud: I value the importance of education. My constituents in the beautiful constituency of St. Albert value the importance of education. A strong education system that invests in students, in communities will yield untold returns for the future of this province. The fact is as simple as: one plus one equals two. Apparently, this is a fact the government just cannot seem to grasp as they failed to make the needed investments for the students of St. Albert.

St. Albert public needs the creation of a high school in St. Albert. St. Albert Catholic requested the modernization or replacement of Legal school and the replacement of l'école Father Jan, a K to 9 school. And which of these critically needed projects for St. Albert did this government deliver on? Not a single one. Just like Edmonton, Lethbridge, and more, my constituents were told that their education priorities are not this government's priorities. Disappointing but not surprising for a government that has never ever considered education a priority.

This Premier and Education minister, who cruelly fired tens of thousands of educational assistants in the first wave of the pandemic, hurting students with special needs; who underspent the Education budget rather than investing to make sure schools would remain safe and open; who, rather than listening to teachers, parents, students, and experts, is still driving a curriculum that will set our students backwards. This government, no friend of education, clearly has its own priorities, which include gambling a billion dollars on Donald Trump, a war room that has done nothing but embarrass Albertans, taking a billion dollars from Alberta families through bracket creep, and making life harder and more expensive for Albertans with disabilities. Albertans have had three long years to get a glimpse of the UCP priorities. They see precisely that this government is not focused on them, their children, or their communities. It's disgraceful. But, thankfully, Albertans will get to elect a government that actually shares their values; 2023 is coming. Change is coming.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do rise to put a motion on the Order Paper in my name as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Canada to immediately invoke provisions to declare rail transport an essential service and implement back-to-work legislation to prevent any disruption or CP work stoppage to ensure Canada's economy remains uninterrupted.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to move the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly acknowledge that (a) Statistics Canada announced yesterday that the national consumer price index for February 2022 had increased to 5.7 per cent, year over year, being the highest rate of inflation within the last three decades, due to current price pressures on consumer goods and services, and (b) the government's proposed Budget 2022-23 is based on an expectation that the consumer price index for 2022 will increase by only 3.2 per cent, a full percentage point below the Bank of Canada's latest monetary policy report issued in January of 2022.

Be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government to revise and amend its expectations in respect of the rate of inflation set out in its proposed Budget 2022-23.

Be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government to implement strategies within its jurisdiction to reverse anticipated inflationary price increases for goods and services.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture.

Bill 6

Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 6, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022.

Ammolite is a beautiful gemstone as unique as Alberta is. The iridescent gemstone comes from ammonite, the fossilized shell of mollusks that lived in an inland sea that is now southern Alberta. Plains First Nations have collected ammonite shell for millennia and continue to do so today. Ammolite is also part of Alberta's economy, mined and used in jewellery for more than a century. Currently there is no official provincial gemstone. Bill 6 will designate ammolite as an official emblem alongside 11 others.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Bill 203

Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise and request leave to introduce a bill, the Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act.

This bill is an idea that comes from entrepreneurs and would help Alberta build a world-class innovation environment. Bill 203 would invite all Albertans to invest in Alberta's future and in companies in our own backyard. It would provide Albertans the opportunity to earn returns themselves and support economic growth, diversification, the creation of jobs, and the long-term economic well-being of the province.

History tells us that when Albertans are given the opportunity to bet on themselves, great things are possible; in fact, this venture fund is inspired by examples in Alberta's history that helped build our oil sands into the economic driver they are today. Based on Alberta's long history of entrepreneurship and innovation, I'm confident that Alberta can grow an environment for technology and AI that will attract and grow our innovative companies and make Alberta a leader in the new innovation and knowledge economy. I hope that all members of the House will support this major diversification effort and the growth of our technology and innovation across Alberta by supporting Bill 203.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

2:50

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: At the appropriate time the Opposition House Leader rose and moved a Standing Order 42.

Budget 2022 and Inflation

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've already read the motion, I will not reread it, but I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the urgency of this debate within the Assembly today. I am asking, pursuant to Standing Order 42, that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to debate this motion because of its urgent and pressing nature. It has been distributed to the members, and while Standing Order 42 requires no notice, my office did provide advance notice to the Speaker of my intention to introduce this motion under the appropriate standing orders. As well, we sent advance copies of the language of this motion to the Speaker, the government, and the independent members of this Assembly. As my colleagues have frequently pointed out, Standing Order 42 is an important opportunity for all members of this Assembly, specifically private members, to ensure that matters that are important to our constituents and of an urgent nature are debated in this House. I'll briefly outline this motion and its urgency today.

We have reached generational levels of inflation. Statistics Canada reported yesterday that inflation is running at 5.7 per cent, the highest in 30 years. This is deeply concerning for Albertans. Buying power is being eroded as we speak. Specifically, everything is getting more expensive, and that is what inflation is doing to Alberta families, families who are already struggling to make ends meet with soaring costs left, right, and centre. This becomes a matter of urgency because understanding and correctly forecasting inflation is an essential part of provincial budgeting. Expectations of inflation affect every program, every service, every benefit, every capital project, and every decision the government makes.

Today is meant to be the final day of the estimates process. What we've learned so far is that the government has deeply miscalculated. In January the Bank of Canada released its Monetary Policy Report indicating that inflation was expected to be 4.4 per cent for 2022. In late February the government tabled its budget and lowballed the expectations for inflation, putting them at only 3.2 per cent and coming in a full point below that bank. Yesterday with the release of Statistics Canada data we learned that the inflation is even worse than even the Bank of Canada projected, and we learned that the government was out by nearly a factor of two.

This motion, if adopted by the Assembly, would send a clear signal to the government that they need to adjust. They need to take inflation seriously, and I would call on the government to revise and amend its inflation expectations and budget and, accordingly, implement strategies to help deal with that lived reality. Without accurately projecting inflation, government fails to account for so many factors.

Now, to further speak to the urgency, Mr. Speaker, two quick scenarios or examples. First, based on Budget 2022 assumptions, a person living on AISH will lose over \$1,000 of purchasing power this year because the government deindexed benefits from inflation. With inflation running much higher, AISH recipients, the most vulnerable in our society, will be pushed further into poverty. It's clear the government has not accounted for this because the inflation is so much higher than estimated in Budget 2022.

The second example, Mr. Speaker, is that Statistics Canada has told us that food costs increased by 7.4 per cent. Now, one may ask: how does that affect Budget 2022? Well, in the Ministry of Justice

and Solicitor General they have a budget specifically to feed prisoners. There are basic caloric and nutritional requirements the government must meet, so with rising food inflation, that is an unavoidable and rising cost for this ministry that hasn't been accounted for.

Mr. Speaker, there are many other examples. I only wanted to raise a few to speak to the urgency and why we believe this is worthy of debate in the Assembly right now. Certainly, there are a number of articles being written. Constituents are reaching out to me about this inflation increase, about the rising cost of food and services. Certainly, it is urgent in nature to those Albertans. I won't provide any further examples, but I will say that the budget is deeply miscalculated. The timing right now for us to adjust the budget is perfect, making this Standing Order 42 really urgent at this point. Albertans will pay the price if we do not course correct.

As we come to the close of estimates, it's clear, in our view, that generational levels of inflation have not been accounted for in the budget. That makes this an urgent and pressing concern that should be addressed. I hope all members of this Assembly will support this motion so that we can ensure to Albertans that all Members of this Legislative Assembly understand the impact inflation is having, how expensive things are getting, and that we are taking it seriously and debating that here in this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 42 a member of Executive Council has up to five minutes to respond to the request for unanimous consent. I see the hon. Minister of Finance and the President of Treasury Board.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to speak in opposition to this motion. I certainly acknowledge that we are in a time of inflation, as the member opposite rightly points out, but I do want to note that Budget 2022 does consider the specific cost pressures that we're going to be experiencing in the upcoming year. We do that within each ministry.

I do want to point out as well that while there is, no doubt, some uncertainty around where inflation will truly land, inflation rates in Alberta have been below the national average throughout this last year. Last year, in 2021, inflation came in at 3.2 per cent. That was back-loaded, Mr. Speaker, so inflation rates were higher in the latter months than in the former, and we're expecting at this point that inflation will be higher in the earlier months of 2022, declining into the later months.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to point out that we've identified and in fact have included in our appropriation bill contingencies of \$750 million for Health to deal with any COVID pandemic pressures as well as \$1 billion in disaster contingencies that can be used for unexpected eventualities, so we do have contingencies in this budget.

I do want to also point out that we inherited a government that spent \$10 billion more than comparator provinces on a per capita basis. Mr. Speaker, that spend trajectory was going up 4 per cent per year. It was simply unsustainable. If left on that trajectory, we would simply be robbing future generations of their prosperity, and that is completely unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, over the last three years, beginning in Budget 2019, we have done the heavy lifting, Albertans have done the heavy lifting, to bring our spending back to sustainable levels. We simply have to remain fiscally disciplined. We have to continue to bring discipline to every spending decision. That will mean that ministries will have to continue to be innovative and creative when they experience cost pressures throughout the year that perhaps were unanticipated.

I do want to talk a little bit as well about the fiscal anchors that really informed our fiscal decisions over the course of the last three years. We identified the importance, in fact the anchor, of keeping our net debt to GDP below 30 per cent – very critical – to ensure that we would maintain a strong balance sheet relative to the size of our economy. Mr. Speaker, that's really a picture of our ability to service debt and ultimately recover fiscally after the pandemic. I believe the most important fiscal anchor that we identified was in fact to bring our spending to sustainable levels, to bring our spending in line with similar provinces, and I'm very pleased to again report today that in the upcoming budget year, in '22-23, we will have arrived. To continue on a sustainable trajectory, we will need to exercise fiscal discipline. That is a must for all members of this House.

Mr. Speaker, to that end, I encourage all members to vote against this motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 42 is a request for unanimous consent to put aside the regular, ordinary business of the afternoon and proceed immediately to the motion as proposed by the Opposition House Leader.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Transmittal of Estimates

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

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I've received a message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, and recommends the same to the Assembly.

Hon. members, please be seated.

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

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now wish to table the 2021-22 supplementary supply estimates along with an update to the 2021-22 fiscal plan, as required by the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act.

Russia's war of aggression started the very day I tabled the 2022 budget. Alberta's government is contributing \$11.4 million in support of Ukraine, \$10.4 million of which will be supported by this bill. This is now captured in the supplementary estimates and the fiscal plan update that I'm tabling today. The documents I'm tabling today also show a spending increase under Alberta Energy to provide electricity rebates and offer real relief to Albertans struggling with high utility costs.

Mr. Speaker, in total the supplementary supply estimates will allow additional spending by five government departments as well as the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. When passed, the estimates will authorize an approximate increase of \$1.2 billion in expense funding and \$1 million in capital investment funding for the government. Of this funding, the two highest

expenses are \$726 million for health, primarily for the pandemic response, and \$231 million in federal funding for the Canada community-building fund, which Municipal Affairs will redistribute to municipalities.

Thank you.

Government Motions

13. Mr. Toews moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2021-22 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Government Motion 13 is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(i). Are there any members wishing to speak? The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to debate Government Motion 13. This motion is asking us to expedite estimates on supplementary supply to committee. The Official Opposition would like to ensure that the estimates reflect the priorities of Albertans through this process, so we have asked the government to provide six hours of debate on these estimates, which we believe is more appropriate for the expenditure of such a substantial amount of public money. As the Minister of Finance has just outlined, it is \$1.2 billion of expense funding as well as \$1 million of capital funding going to five government departments as well as the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

We have seen, time and time again, government budgets that do not match Albertans' expectations. Albertans have asked the government to listen to them at this point, specifically around relief to make ends meet right now. This year particularly, while bills are unmanageable – in fact, we were just speaking in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, about the rising cost of inflation, rising costs of food, rising costs on all Alberta families. It is the Official Opposition's position that the Legislature deserves the time to scrutinize government spending to see if it reflects the priority of Albertans right now. There are a lot of actions that we believe the UCP could be taking in supplementary supply to help Albertans, but there's certainly a deficit of trust at this point, and that's where the Official Opposition believes more time is necessary.

Certainly, the Finance minister has referred to some of the supplementary estimates reflecting rising utility costs. It is the Official Opposition's strong position that immediate utility relief is necessary and has not been adequately included within this estimates process as well as considerations like capping auto insurance increases, reindexing AISH and seniors' benefits to reflect the current fiscal situation here in the province. We believe that the estimates should be evaluated against these priorities.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

As well, given the concern that we have with the amount of time that will be allocated for the debate of this, given that deficit of trust that I have referred to, I believe that it's prudent on behalf of all members of the Official Opposition that we will not be supporting rushing through inadequate measures with inadequate oversight. We would be happy to work with the government to get this work right and to continue to support Albertans. I appreciate the opportunity to enter into debate on Government Motion 13 at this time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Are there any members wishing to join debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question. However, I will give the opportunity, should they so choose, to the hon. Minister of Finance on behalf of the Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Toews: Waived.

[Government Motion 13 carried]

14. Mr. Toews moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the 2021-22 supplementary supply estimates for three hours on Monday, March 21, 2022.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to – this is actually under, I believe, Standing Order 61(2). This is actually not debatable.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 1

Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act

The Acting Speaker: Are there any – I see the hon. Minister of Culture has risen.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and move third reading of Bill 1, Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act.

Over the past few years and through the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen Albertans step up by volunteering and giving back to their communities in so many ways. From grocery deliveries to those in isolation, virtual events to keep the loneliness at bay, and the dedication of front-line workers, countless everyday heroes have gone above and beyond to help out. I continue to be inspired by the community spirit and leadership that Albertans show every day.

On the occasion of Queen Elizabeth II's platinum jubilee we have the opportunity to celebrate her legacy and the efforts of Albertans across this province. Mr. Speaker, I am again asking all members of this House for their support of Bill 1, the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act. The platinum jubilee is a celebration of all the extraordinary progress we have experienced during the 70 years of Queen Elizabeth II's reign. From technological advancement to social development and cultural growth, Albertans have led the way into the future.

This legislation's greatest impact would be on the young leaders who are making a difference across Alberta. Increasing the monetary value of the Queen's jubilee awards and scholarships from \$5,000 to \$7,000 will help students who are demonstrating excellence in leadership, community spirit, and the arts pursue those opportunities. This legislation will also help recognize the efforts and achievements of Albertans more broadly through the brand new Queen's platinum jubilee medal, of which 7,000 will be minted and awarded.

In addition, the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act will recognize the great public service of past, present, and future cabinet ministers. Allowing them to continue to use the honorific "The Honourable" is but a small gesture of recognition for the role they have played in shaping Alberta, no matter which party they have served under. It comes with no financial benefit or authority; it is simply an honour of recognition. However, it does align with the spirit of celebrating public service and community

spirit in the recognition of the Queen's platinum jubilee. Her Majesty the Queen has served as an incredible example of steadfast leadership in the face of challenge and change for over 70 years.

3:10

If I might digress just a little bit, it's just like our province's namesake. The province is named after the ancestor of the Queen Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, who was, in fact, an artist, a professional sculptor. She made her own jewellery. She was not somebody who thought that she should be treated differently just because she was the daughter of a queen. In fact, her father made a point of training his children in farming and practical skills. Quite frankly, here in Alberta we often say: it doesn't matter where you come from or who your father is; it matters how hard you work. She had a reputation of being unconventional and determined, in many ways the perfect namesake for a province like Alberta.

Returning to Queen Elizabeth II, this legislation will acknowledge how she has inspired generations of Albertans to become leaders in their own right, just like our namesake and her aunt, while giving the many people who have helped shape this province the recognition that they deserve.

Thank you to all members of the Assembly for the debate on Bill 1 up to this point. I encourage all members once again to support this legislation so that we are able to fully recognize the incredible achievements and efforts of so many Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join? I see the hon. member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for introducing this bill in third reading. This is my first opportunity and will be my last opportunity to speak to Bill 1, the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act. As I believe has been said by my colleagues in the House, we do support this bill. We understand that it establishes, of course, the Queen's platinum jubilee medal being awarded to 7,000 worthy Albertans as well as the establishment of a number of awards and scholarships: the Queen's platinum jubilee citizenship medallion; the Queen's platinum jubilee scholarship for the visual and performing arts, which I believe is a scholarship up to the amount of \$7,000; as well as the Premier's citizenship award in recognition of the Queen's platinum jubilee.

In my time, Mr. Speaker, as an MLA I've had an opportunity in the past to meet with constituents who have received similar recognition through the Queen's jubilee awards, and it's been an honour to learn about the work that they have done and that they are being recognized for. I certainly welcome the opportunity to recognize the great Albertans in our communities who are doing this remarkable work and to recognize, of course, the Queen as well for her long service as the Queen for us. I do appreciate that, and I'm certain that members of this side of the House will be supporting this bill.

However, I do feel it's important for me to note that there is one provision of the bill that, you know, I'm a little bit troubled by – that this is identified in Bill 1 seems a little bit out of place with respect to the rest of the bill – and that is, of course, the granting of the honorary honorific to any present or past member of Executive Council. While that sounds, I guess, pretty generic, it really sounds like the government caucus is more interested in sort of pumping their own tires and giving themselves pats on the back, which is not really the mood of a lot of Albertans right now.

Certainly, when I look at Bill 1, we've had the first throne speech, last month, in a while from this government, and to see as their priority Bill 1, which usually is the bill that establishes what the government's top priority is for the months and session ahead – I'm quite shocked to see that this is the government's priority, granting themselves the honorary term to the members of their Executive Council for life, when that's certainly not what I'm hearing is the top priority from Albertans in my constituency but across the province. When they think of what their top priority is for this year coming ahead, right now it's really just making ends meet. It's really being able to afford the costs of their insurance and their property taxes and their rising utility costs and school fees and tuition and all the various things that have become more expensive for them.

Getting through the pandemic and getting on to the next stages of our growth certainly is – diversifying our economy is certainly the top priority for our government. It's about making sure that all Albertans are elevated and have an opportunity to succeed, not a race to the bottom but elevating all Albertans. That's certainly our caucus's position and priority for this year ahead.

Certainly, rebuilding our education system and the reputation that we had for so many years, that has been undermined by this government with respect to our public education system, and the curriculum that used to be world renowned and is now being shunned and is an embarrassment and unfortunately is going to be partially imposed on students come this fall: that's certainly a priority when I talk to the constituents in my riding. They're certainly concerned about the fact that they have no school space. South Edmonton is certainly an area of the city that has been growing exponentially for quite some time. We will be completely out of high school space in Edmonton public schools in 2027. That's five years from now. I have constituents who are concerned that they can't send their children to the high school across the street because they're going to a lottery because they're at capacity.

These are the concerns that I'm hearing from my constituents, and it's not reflected in Bill 1. I certainly don't hear my constituents saying: I really hope that the current members of this cabinet get to call themselves honorary for some time going forward, forever going forward. That's certainly not something that anybody has raised to me as their top priority. I certainly think it's coming at an interesting time, considering that there are a number of members of the current cabinet who are having their qualifications and their expertise and their temperament questioned, certainly their judgment. Certainly, the minister of labour has recently been found to have attempted to interfere in the administration of justice, and now we know that this government's priority is to make sure that that minister gets to be called honorary from this time going forward. I think that's at odds with what most Albertans believe in terms of what honorary means, and it's an interesting timing on this government's part.

I certainly do support the idea of recognizing the Queen's platinum jubilee with these medals – I certainly take no issue with that – but certainly the timing and the priorities of this government seem to be grossly at odds with the priorities and concerns of Albertans at this time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join debate on this? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has risen.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to rise today in support of Bill 1, the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act. You know, some of us in this

room probably are old enough to remember singing *God Save the Queen* in our schools, and I'm so glad to see that practice and that habit back here in the Chamber, because it does remind us of the honour and the service that the Queen has given to us as our monarch.

The Queen's reign has been truly historic. She is the first British monarch and, I suspect, one of the first in history to celebrate 70 years on the throne. For many Albertans, she is the only monarch we have known – in fact, I would say for most in this room – in our adult lives most certainly, and during her reign she's been a constant in service, grace, decorum, and humility in an ever-changing world.

In her 70 years on the throne she has seen wars, recessions, and pandemics while also celebrating personal joy and suffering personal loss. Commercial television was first broadcast in the U.K., humans landed on the moon, the Berlin Wall came down, the computer was invented, the European Union was created and, in some cases, pulled apart, and social media, which has changed the world for anyone in the public eye, has certainly emerged during this latter part of her reign as well. She has reigned through 13 Canadian Prime Ministers and has visited our great province five times, and I remember many of them myself as both a child and as an adult.

On her 21st birthday she addressed the Commonwealth and dedicated her life, whether it be long or short, to the service of others. Ever since she has been steadfast in keeping her promise, a promise valued by Canada as a constitutional monarchy and the entire Commonwealth in an ever-changing and evolving world. Her Majesty is a patron of more than 600 charities and organizations world-wide – thirty-six of these are in Canada – and we see that service also in her offspring. On top of this, the Queen continues to champion public and voluntary service with grace and global leadership in the farthest reaches and most rural and remote regions of the planet.

In 2002 the government of Alberta passed the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Recognition Act, recognizing the 50th anniversary of Her Majesty's accession to the throne. We mark the occasion by designating special awards and scholarships that honour Alberta youth who demonstrate excellence in citizenship through leadership, community service, and volunteerism and who demonstrate outstanding ability in the visual and performing arts.

That act, back in the 50th jubilee, established three awards and scholarships: the Queen's jubilee citizenship medal, which was rebranded as an award in 2021; the Premier's citizenship award in recognition of the Queen's golden jubilee; and the Queen's golden jubilee scholarship for the visual and performing arts. Currently the government provides \$50,000 – fifty years – through this program, which consists of eight citizenship awards and two scholarships valued at \$5,000 each.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, under the proposed legislation the government will increase the amount and provide \$70,000 through this program for eight citizenship awards and two scholarships valued at \$7,000 each, with their longevity now also being reflected in addressing the associated inflation that keeps these financial awards both meaningful in their impact and in supporting the awardees' academic pursuits. What better way for Alberta to celebrate her remarkable 70-year reign than to honour this historic milestone by recognizing Albertans who have helped change their province for the better through volunteerism, public service, and community leadership.

This is what Bill 1 achieves, Mr. Speaker. Bill 1 will establish the Queen Elizabeth II platinum jubilee awards and scholarships, which

will recognize young Albertans who are leaders in their communities and in the arts. The Queen's platinum jubilee citizenship awards and scholarships would include a medallion and \$7,000 in appreciation of their contributions, an increase of \$2,000 from the jubilee awards. It is expected that 10 Albertans would receive these awards or scholarships each year, for a total of \$70,000, in recognition of 70 remarkable years of Queen Elizabeth's reign.

Bill 1 will also create a one-time Queen's platinum jubilee medal, which will recognize 7,000 worthy and dedicated Albertans who have given back to our province throughout 2022. The recipients of these awards and scholarships are everyday Albertans, hard-working individuals who go above and beyond to make our province a better place through their service.

Mr. Speaker, all of us in this House have heard many good-news stories of young people in our ridings who have worked hard to make our communities a better place. These young people exemplify the spirit of Her Majesty, and these scholarships and awards will reward their initiatives and will help these young individuals achieve their goals and inspire them on to bigger and better things and inspire those around them.

For these reasons, I will be voting in favour of Bill 1 in honour of the Queen's platinum jubilee and to recognize and reward hard-working Albertans who go above and beyond each and every day. Mr. Speaker, I would further encourage all members of this House to do the same in recognition of a most incredible reign and longevity, and as the song and Albertans' wishes go, long live our noble Queen.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of Bill 1. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is the Commonwealth's longest serving monarch, and as Albertans and Canadians so many of us have a strong respect for the Crown. I'd like to just take a few minutes and thank the member opposite for what he recognized during the Queen's reign, the changes that we've seen over the 70 years since she ascended the throne.

I'm very pleased to say that I have really enjoyed the current series out there called *The Crown*, where it articles and describes much of the Queen's life and what she's had to bear over these 70 years. I think it speaks very directly to the character, the role, the responsibility, and the weight put on her shoulders as a young woman of only 25, when she received that responsibility after the passing of her father. I think it is amazing to me that around the world she is as dearly loved today, after 70 years, as she was when she first ascended the throne.

Her Majesty's platinum jubilee is a perfect opportunity to recognize Albertans who contribute so much to their communities as they emulate the service that she has done for so much of the globe. I think it's only fitting that we recognize those accomplishments. The Queen's platinum jubilee citizenship medallion creates a great opportunity for recognizing outstanding community service. I can think of several people in my constituency of Lethbridge-East who would be great candidates for this prestigious honour. Mr. Speaker, I feel confident when I say that all my colleagues in this Chamber, regardless of what side of the floor we are on, can think of deserving individuals who are pillars in our various communities.

Something that excites me is that a student who receives the Queen's platinum jubilee citizenship medallion would be awarded \$7,000. I think that this money would go a long way in allowing them to continue their education, and I appreciate how the

opportunity for this type of recognition would encourage students to get more involved in their communities. Leaders are not born. They are made through their experiences and their selfless contribution to their communities. I, for one, think it is great to offer this kind of opportunity to recognize those that go above and beyond to make their communities better, to reward those that seek to serve their community and to give them the benefit of their efforts to further those, and to set them above others as an example to many others for the work that they could do and achieve as they give back.

Mr. Speaker, I also support the creation of the Queen's platinum jubilee scholarship for the visual and performing arts. The recipients would also be awarded \$7,000. This government has shown its support for the arts. Through this legislation we are training the next generation of great artists right here in Alberta. I also strongly believe that this will encourage more young Albertans to get involved in the blossoming visual and performing arts industry throughout our province.

Under this act the Premier's citizenship award will be granted each year to one high school student. Mr. Speaker, I know I sound like a broken record, but like the other points I've made before, this will continue to encourage more students to get involved in their communities. Our communities are as strong as the people who live in them, and this will inspire the leaders of tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, it is fitting that these awards are in recognition of Her Majesty's platinum jubilee. In her 20s, following the tragic passing of King George VI, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth rose to the challenge, that would be difficult at any age, let alone the tender age of 25. Seventy years later here we are recognizing the longest serving monarch in the Commonwealth. I feel it is very appropriate to tie youth accomplishments to Her Majesty's platinum jubilee.

The Queen has also taught us that when it comes to public service, age is only a number. Her Majesty will turn 96 in a little over a month and continues her service to the Commonwealth with an infinite amount of wisdom and grace. She continues to live a life of service each and every one in this Chamber can look up to. Given the age that we live in now of social media and other scrutinies of those who are in positions of influence and authority, especially the Royal Family, to have looked over those 70 years and hardly a speck or a blemish on her character or her record is uncommon, and I think it should be highly regarded and seriously respected by everyone in this Chamber and in every Chamber across our fine country.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, my message of support for Bill 1 is that it recognizes the importance of selfless service to one's community. From when the Queen ascended the throne all the way to today, I think we can all agree that the world has changed significantly. Again I thank the member opposite for his comments earlier noting many of those changes. She has met every challenge with civility and with humility, and we can all admire and call her our Queen. I also believe that the link between the recognition of the platinum jubilee and the recognizing of the service and community achievements of Albertans is a great way to recognize this momentous occasion. I encourage all of my colleagues to support Bill 1. May God save the Queen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand and speak in support of Bill 1. All of us have been inspired to be better by unselfish, good men and women. With growing challenges, we all benefit from seeing good examples. All of us need that. This bill recognizes those who have rendered great service: outstanding young men and

young women, our sons and our daughters, and other Albertans who have made significant contributions to society. I support that.

When I think about the spirit of this bill, I reflect upon a scripture that I was taught as a young person. It says, "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." Now, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that not everyone in this Chamber and this Legislature is a person of faith, but I hope that we can all appreciate the principle that this scripture expresses much better than I can. All of us are better as we seek to remember that principle, that the value of a person or their contribution is not a function of their position or title; it is a function of their heart and their conduct. Often politics or the world does look on the outward appearance, but the Lord's way is different. A person's conduct in public and in private is a manifestation of their heart.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, think for a moment about your own life. Who is it that has made the most significant contribution to you? Where did it start? Your mother was first. The vast majority of mothers will never be recognized with a Queen's platinum medal, but they do not care. They serve out of love. When I think of significant contributions to society, I think of mothers, many of them, including and often especially single mothers, who are also heroes. While I appreciate those men and women who receive the Queen's platinum jubilee medal, I wish to close with a short statement honouring mothers for their significant contribution to society, that the Lord both sees and honours.

Mr. Speaker, families are a fundamental unit of society, and it is our mothers who are on the front line for families, unselfishly loving and serving their spouses and their children, that hold families and communities together. Too often mothers love and serve their children alone, without fathers. What makes a hero? Does one's position or job confer hero status? No. In a final analysis, it is less important what a person's work is and more important how a person does their work. Mothers are not paid for their work, often receiving little or no formal recognition for it, but mothers serve for a higher and better purpose. The motivating force of a mother's work is love. What is more noble, more heroic than the selfless love a devoted mother has for her child? Some women are not mothers. Nevertheless, many of these women demonstrate innate strengths and gifts as they unselfishly serve and love others and our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I began with a scripture, and I will end with one.

And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

The unselfish sacrifice of our mothers humbles me. We love our mothers, and we revere them. Without mothers there is no society. I want to thank all Albertans who make great contributions to our society, including our mothers. Thank you for your unselfish, significant contributions.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to offer the Minister of Culture the opportunity to close debate on behalf of the Premier.

Mr. Orr: I will take that – thank you, Mr. Speaker – briefly. I'd just like to, in final conclusion here, point out what is the priority of this bill and why this bill expresses the priority of our government. It's

so that we will recognize the great work of the Queen and the Commonwealth heritage that we share with 160-some nations around the world. It's so that we will be positive and move forward in a celebration of who we are and what we have become and what we can be. It's so that we will celebrate all good work and inspire the next generation to a life of the same thing. It's so that we will be proud Albertans not ashamed of good service.

I ask everyone in this House to join this government and start a tidal wave of goodwill so that we shall be united, free, and strong to carry us through the next 70 years. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Williams moved, seconded by Ms Lovely, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To Her Honour the Honourable Salma Lakhani, AOE, BSc, LL.D, the Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate March 10: Mr. Rutherford]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: It threw me, too.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to have this opportunity to speak to the recently presented Speech from the Throne. The last few years have been particularly stressful for many Albertans, and many of us will be living with the consequences for years into the future. Alberta has experienced some of the worst unemployment levels in the country, and significant numbers among us who have maintained their jobs have experienced disruption in their employment and career paths. Students have lost the experience of gathering to learn with the support of peers and the personal touch of face-to-face instruction. Families have missed important milestones such as celebrating a birth or mourning the death of a loved one. Thousands of surgeries have been delayed, resulting in extended suffering, and the sense of general dis-ease weighs heavy on us all.

Yet Albertans have demonstrated qualities of strength and compassion. The vast majority of us have participated in a great social demonstration of our commitment to each other. We have, most of us, taken to wearing masks, washing our hands, standing at a social distance, and taking a vaccine to keep ourselves and our neighbours safe from a devastating pandemic. No one welcomes the intrusion in our lives, but we reach for a greater good. We understand that citizenship is like adulthood. You don't get to do everything you want to do. You don't get to have your way and ignore the needs of others. You cannot twist the expectations placed on you as unreasonable just because it gives you difficult feelings. The world has invited from us the best that we can offer, and it calls upon governments to lead us with a vision of how we as a community can survive that which has been thrust upon us with thoughtfulness, proficiency, and empathy. Unfortunately, we have not had a government that was willing or capable of rising to the challenge.

Right from the beginning this UCP government has acted last and acted least to protect the citizens of this province. When calls were

put out to protect the children in our schools, this government did nothing. Worse than nothing; they fired thousands of teachers' aides in an effort to profit off the pandemic and to this day have failed to ensure appropriate protections such as air filtration systems in the schools. Rather than work closely with teachers to build a wall of security around our school-aged children, they continued a legacy of vilifying the very public servants who are most knowledgeable and most engaged in providing our children the tools for a successful life. This government attacked teachers through their pensions, through their professional association, and through the media.

Indeed, the government has been employing countless strategies to undermine the very nature of public education, shifting dollars from the public system to private schools, introducing a destructive, politicized curriculum that has been rejected by over 95 per cent of the school boards, and reducing the rate of school construction by 75 per cent from the pace of the last government. To this day we see a stressed and demoralized school system beleaguered by an ideological and uninformed government.

What we have seen in the education system has been repeated and magnified in the health system. At a time when we have been most dependent on the highly skilled and hard-working medical experts and staff of our universal health care system to keep us safe from a virus that has killed over 4,000 Albertans and has left thousands more with lifelong health complications, we see this government repeatedly attack the very people we should be honouring as heroes in this time of need. Just as with education, this government has pursued an agenda of undermining our public system at exactly the time we need it most. This government fought the wages of nurses and had to be forced to arbitration to recognize their worth. This government single-handedly cancelled the contract with doctors and has led an abusive public campaign against them, which has led to hundreds of doctors making plans to leave the province. This government has begun the slow process of shifting medical care away from our public institutions to the beginning of an American-style, pay-as-you-go medical model that will leave thousands of Albertans subject to a less accessible and less resourced secondary health system.

3:40

At the same time as this government has undermined our schools and our health care, so too have they undermined our postsecondary institutions with deep cuts, politically motivated attacks on university independence, and the reckless disregard for the role of our advanced education system as a driver of our future, both socially and economically. Under this government we have lost hundreds of the best researchers and instructors, who were devoted to enhance the knowledge we need to create a better world. With tuition increases up to 100 per cent and significant increases in class sizes, Alberta students face a reality of paying more and receiving less.

It is clear that what this government is doing is undermining the very structures of our society that have over the last 100 years raised millions of Canadians out of daily misery to one of the best places in the world to live, but not only are they destroying the legacy of our past; they are limiting our future. At a time when we should be reading the trends and setting ourselves to be in the right place at the right time in industry and civil society, this government is doing all it can to resist the global movement toward a cleaner environment, a compassionate economic system, and a society built on fairness and opportunity for all.

From their first bill the UCP have sought to slow down investment in clean energy and have been determined to remove incentives for diversification, which was motivating record-setting

growth. In failing to legislatively protect our eastern slopes, they have failed to protect the headwaters of the rivers from which we drink. In the tech industry this government killed the very programs, such as the digital tax credit and the investor tax credit, that would have enabled our province to get in front of the most significant economic driver of the future.

At the same time, the UCP have been making life hard for everyday Albertans, who saw their insurance rates double and triple when the cap on insurance was removed. Tuition rates and school fees rise with the UCP's systematic defunding, and the cost of enjoying our parks and natural areas increase. When the UCP killed the cap on electricity prices, many people suddenly found themselves in significant debt that could take years to repay. At the same time, the government has deindexed personal income tax, resulting in a billion dollars of increased taxes on Albertans, and people depending on AISH have been pushed farther into poverty. In many areas of the province citizens will also see dramatic increases in property taxes because of downloading fees and reducing grants from the provincial government.

Life under this Conservative government is harder, more expensive, and less hopeful. Albertans simply cannot trust this government to keep their best interests at heart. Time and time again we have seen the polls that reveal a deep dissatisfaction with the action of the UCP. While record profits are flowing to major international corporations, everyday people are falling behind. Windfall profits are accumulating in the hands of the few while most of us have had little progress in our personal wages and wealth over many years.

We do not and cannot trust this government. They continually seek to destroy the public good that we and our ancestors have created because of a right-wing ideological model that has repeatedly been shown to fail the average citizen. Under this government we live precarious economic lives in a culture of disrespect and disregard for the lives of the majority of us and our children. I look forward to a day when we have a new government in place that will prioritize people over elitist wealth accumulation, a government that ensures our health system and our education system are focused on the goals of enhancing the well-being of all citizens, a government led by a leader who is passionate, thoughtful, dedicated, and empathetic, a government led by Rachel Notley.

Speaker's Ruling

Referring to a Member by Name

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I will ask you to withdraw and apologize for the use of a proper name.

Mr. Feehan: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker: I do consider the matter to be closed.

Debate Continued

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I have quite a bit I'd like to say today, so I'll just let my colleagues know in advance that I will not be taking interventions so that I have the opportunity to see my thoughts through.

You know, a Speech from the Throne is a grand narrative, a story that a government gets to tell about its vision for the province. Indeed, it reveals much about how a particular government sees the province and its people. A Speech from the Throne delivered

towards the end of a government's mandate in particular is often used to present how a government views how things have gone and the decisions they've made, and we certainly see both here. In this speech we see the UCP government acknowledging these significant challenges that our province has faced but also working very hard, I think, to avoid any discussion of the quality of their response to those challenges and to claim that those challenges are largely behind us. I'm not sure that a majority of Albertans would agree.

You know, the speech begins. They talk about our lives having been disrupted in ways large and small, how the people of the province have risen to the challenge time and again, proving what it means to be Alberta strong, and talk about how, as restrictions ease, there are signs of economic renewal and hope for a sense of the beginning of an Alberta spring, and talk about how Albertans deserve a province that's just as resilient as they are.

The speech pivots then to the most significant challenge of the last few years, the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on our health care system. It talks about how during that pandemic our health care system was under great stress and speaks of our brilliant front-line health care workers, who've gone above and beyond the call of duty over the past two years, and how we owe them a debt of gratitude. Now, certainly, I agree, Mr. Speaker, that our front-line health care workers deserve our thanks. They've shown incredible commitment and sacrifice. They went above and beyond. They risked their own health and lives. They sacrificed time with their families.

But let's not forget that so much of what they endured, so much extra strain, stress, chaos, anxiety, was a result of this UCP government, that repeatedly chose to push those workers to their limits and beyond for the sake of ideology and politics. Let's not forget the multiple UCP MLAs who called to end all public health measures even as the third wave was rising in our province, a wave that cost hundreds of Albertans their lives. Let's not forget that that was followed by this Premier's best summer ever, an attempt to end even the most basic measures – testing, tracing, and isolation – even as the fourth wave was beginning to rise, or that as it did, this government went radio silent, politically paralyzed, and refused to act as they fought amongst themselves behind closed doors.

In the words of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, they "clearly had 30 days notice that a crisis was looming . . . [and] nothing was done while we lacked any leadership at the helm." He warned that it would cost lives and said that he was gutted by the lack of responsiveness to unequivocal advocacy and clear warning signals, advocacy and warning signals that came from the same health care workers this government purports to thank, who they ignored and who were then left to deal with the resulting crisis: hospitals and ICUs that were overwhelmed; over 20,000 surgeries cancelled; over a thousand lives lost.

Let's not forget that going into that fourth wave, they demanded a wage rollback for nurses, about 5 per cent, and only backed down in the face of public outrage. But somehow they failed to learn their lesson as now, as the fifth wave fades, the UCP is trying to push for rollbacks as high as 11 per cent from other health care workers.

The speech goes on to talk about how despite having one of the best funded health care systems in the world, COVID revealed shortcomings that must be addressed. They talk about building greater capacity while getting more value for our immense health care spending. Mr. Speaker, if Albertans got anywhere near the value from the work of this government as they had from those public health care workers in our public health care system, we'd be in a much better place. But as I've just abundantly made clear, our health care didn't fail Albertans; this government did. Albertans have good reason to question whether a government who has so

badly abused our health care system can be trusted to improve it, let alone repair the incredible damage they've done to it.

Now, as the speech noted, Albertans are incredibly resilient, and certainly no one has demonstrated that as vividly as our front-line health care workers. But, Mr. Speaker, they are tired and exhausted after repeated waves where this government pushed them to their limits by acting last, acting least, and putting politics ahead of public health. Sadly, the message this government chooses to send as they race to attempt to put that abominable record behind them is one of disrespect for the value of the work these Albertans do, by calling for many of them to take such a significant wage rollback even as these health care workers don't get to go back to normal or celebrate better days because they're left to deal with the fallout of the pandemic, a massive wave of deferred care, the new chronic illness of long COVID, a significant backlog of surgeries, all of which have been made worse by this government's decisions.

3:50

While we do see that this government is using the good fortune that they've stumbled into in resource revenues to make some investments in health care capacity, it's mainly focused on areas like orthopaedic surgery, EMS, and ICU capacity, that have rightfully, in many cases, been areas of very public criticism and indeed are worthy of investment. But we see next to no additional investment in crucial areas of support like acute care or family physicians, this despite the fact that many hospitals continue to face serious pressure. Talking to doctors at the Royal Alexandra hospital about how acute care has been at 130 per cent capacity for the past week, or the fact that tens if not hundreds of thousands of Albertans have no family doctor, Albertans have good reason to question whether this UCP government is using the damage they've caused as grounds to accelerate their drive to force more private profit into our public health care system.

Ultimately, this Speech from the Throne seems to have a clear intent to declare its view of what it means to be Albertan. They talk about end-of-life decisions, and they talk about how patients must know that there are life-affirming options to physician-assisted suicide and talk about investments being made in palliative care. You know, Mr. Speaker, it is disappointing to hear this government, particularly one that so frequently claims to be an ardent supporter of personal choice, to use condescending, moralistic language like this. I've had a number of Albertans who've heard it write to me to express the same. Medical assistance in dying is no less life-affirming a choice than any other. Many have chosen to affirm the worth and value of their life by choosing to end it on their own terms, with dignity and with their loved ones by their side.

I support and I applaud investment in palliative care, and I manage to do so without denigrating anyone else's choice. But I would note that when this government first launched its war on Alberta doctors, in 2020, I heard from a number of physicians who provide palliative care, largely in rural areas, about how the changes this government intended to force through would have hurt their ability to do so. Indeed, this use of language by the government flies in the face of its own statement in the speech that "Alberta is a pluralistic society, united in its diversity." But I do believe that is largely the case. There's work to do.

But on that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak to some of the speech's commitments regarding the statement "All Albertans deserve to live free of fear and prejudice" and acknowledging that too often we see people from minority communities targeted by acts of hatred. Now, I certainly welcome any support for groups that are facing acts of hatred. I recognize that there is much more work for us to do, and improving security for buildings is a valuable but single step.

This speech declares a renewed commitment to tell Alberta's story to the world, highlighting the many reasons why there is simply no better place on Earth to pursue a dream, raise a family, build a life. It contends that this is a space for big dreams where opportunities are limitless and everyone's full potential can be achieved. Well, Mr. Speaker, we need to take every step that we can to ensure that's true for every Albertan, and that means we need to address the inequities we know exist and that have been acknowledged by members on both sides of this House.

There are many opportunities to take additional substantive action to support Albertans from racialized communities and address both the roots and the impacts of racism in all its forms, whether it's that which flows from overt and intentional words and actions of individuals or that which is baked into policies and processes in our systems and institutions. Now, many of those steps are laid out in the recommendations from the Anti-Racism Advisory Council, which remain available on all of the government ministers' desks, and it's my hope that we will eventually see some action. Indeed, it's those recommendations that inform my own private member's bill, the antiracism act, that I'm looking forward to introducing next week.

The speech goes on to say that this government intends to embark on a renewed effort to tell Alberta's story to the world, highlighting the many reasons why there is simply no better place on Earth to pursue a dream, raise a family, and build a life. But, Mr. Speaker, there are so many Albertans whose stories this government continues and chooses to ignore, like those struggling to get by as so many essential costs rise with inflation. Here in my constituency I continue to hear from seniors, folks who depend on social supports like AISH and income supports about the challenges they face with the rising costs of food, utilities, other essentials while this government refuses to reindex those supports to the cost of living, leaving those Albertans, many already living in poverty, with as much as \$1,000 less buying power every year. Those struggling with substance use and those who love them, the communities around them as members of this government continue to use toxic rhetoric about harm reduction supports that help those struggling stay alive until they're ready and able to seek help even as this government undermines supports that were already in place.

But nowhere is this government's ideological drive to impose their vision of what it means to be Albertan clearer than in their highly ideological curriculum, that a vast majority of Albertans have clearly stated does not include or represent them or what they want to see for their children. First Nations and Métis groups, francophones, members of Black communities and LGBTQ2S communities, and many others have made it clear this curriculum does not tell their stories or represent them as Albertans.

But much as with the majority of Albertans who oppose this government's plans and efforts to allow coal mining in the eastern slopes or impose an Alberta provincial police force or continue considering forcing them out of the CPP into an Alberta pension plan, their voices are simply ignored and, in fact, not only ignored but openly mocked and attacked, even by the Premier himself on the floor of the Legislature, on social media, by other ministers of government, by UCP MLAs, and endlessly by staff in the Premier's office and employed by the government caucus. Indeed, I don't think our province has ever seen a government that has gone so far out of its way to attack, demean, and insult Albertans that they were elected to represent or being so aggressive at attempting to impose its will, to demoralize its critics, or intimidate them into silence. This from a Premier who repeatedly claimed as recently as in estimates yesterday that he wants to improve the decorum and the quality of debate in our province.

Well, Mr. Speaker, despite all this, I do see some hope for our province, for the many, many Albertans who do not feel represented

or heard by this government, and it flows from the quote that's provided at the end of the Speech from the Throne, where it says, "Winston Churchill once said, 'Never, never, never, never – in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in.'" Now, that's only a partial quote. The full quote was, in fact:

Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never – in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in, except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force.

Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.

Now, to be clear, while I absolutely believe that in so many areas of policy this government is not acting in the best interests of Albertans, I don't view them as an enemy of myself or the people of Alberta. I certainly don't encourage anyone else to do so either, but the essence of that quote rings true. I truly believe the majority of Albertans are people of honourable conviction and good sense and that that is what lies behind their frustrations with and opposition to so many of the policies, decisions, and behaviours of this government, and to them I echo the heart of Churchill's words. Never yield to the political forces brought to bear to make you feel small and unheard, to feel your voice doesn't matter, to feel that you are alone. Never yield to the feeling of hopelessness they try to make you feel, that there's no hope for change or for a government that truly represents your values and your voice.

To every one of those Albertans, Mr. Speaker, I say: you deserve better, much better, and you can have it despite what this government and some of its supporters may want you to believe. We're here to help you fight for it. We're here to bring that back in 2023.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Are there any members wishing to join debate?
Seeing none.

[Motion carried]

Government Motions *(continued)*

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. government whip has risen.

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

15. Ms Issik moved on behalf of Mr. Kenney:
Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the hon. Premier to move Government Motion 15.

4:00

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion. Are there any members wishing to join debate?
Seeing none.

[Government Motion 15 carried]

The Acting Speaker: I believe I see the hon. Associate Minister of Status of Women has risen again.

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Assembly adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, March 21, 2022. [some applause]

The Acting Speaker: Order.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:01 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 3rd Session (2022)

Activity to Thursday, March 17, 2022

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act (\$) (Kenney)

First Reading — 4 (*Feb. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 94-97 (*Mar. 7, 2022 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 140-44 (*Mar. 10, 2022 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 230-34 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 2 — Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 3 — Special Days Act (Orr)

First Reading — 124 (*Mar. 9, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 4 — Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022 (McIver)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 163-177 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 5 — Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022 (Sawhney)

First Reading — 202 (*Mar. 16, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 6 — Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022 (Orr)

First Reading — (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Eastern Slopes Protection Act (Notley)

First Reading — 156 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill 202 — Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022 (Loewen)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill 203 — Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act (Bilous)

First Reading — (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 21, 2022

Day 12

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
 Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
 Government Whip
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)

Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
 Government House Leader
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
 Leader of the Official Opposition
Orr, Hon. Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
 Deputy Government Whip
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
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Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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| | |
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| Jason Kenney | Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations |
| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

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Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Barnes
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Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Sigurdson, R.J.
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Dach
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Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
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Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 21, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. I invite you to join in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, this afternoon we have our very first in-person, post-COVID School at the Legislature group joining us. They are from the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford, Rideau Park elementary school. Also joining us in the gallery today are two guests of the hon. Member for Highwood, Pat and Kim McCarthy. Would you all please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore is first.

Walmart Fulfillment Centre in Rocky View County

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta, thank you so much for your resilience and optimism. Today Walmart Canada announced a new 430,000 square-foot fulfillment centre in beautiful Rocky View county. This landmark \$120 million project will create hundreds of goods, construction, and engineering jobs through the course of the building phase and will support 325 full-time positions once it opens. This modern facility is capable of shipping up to 20 million items to Canadians every single year and will be powered by cutting-edge logistics and robotics technology, diversification at its finest.

This is good news for Alberta workers and Alberta producers. Walmart produces more than \$1.3 billion worth of products from suppliers based in western Canada every year, including approximately \$200 million worth of products from 47 Alberta-based suppliers. Walmart is also growing its focus on local goods, as they should. In 2021 Walmart added more than 100 new

Canadian suppliers, including a 9 per cent increase in Alberta-based suppliers. This will get more Alberta-made products into the homes of Albertans and Canadians in the years to come, and that's great news for everyone.

In their announcement this morning, I was so proud to hear Walmart cite the competitive advantages of doing business in Alberta. This landmark investment follows similar major investments from companies like Amazon, HBO, Dow Chemical, Air Products, and Northern Petrochemical. With our budget balanced and the lowest taxes in Canada, Albertans are our advantage and our most beautiful resource, and investors are taking notice. We should feel so optimistic. Thanks to you, our province continues to be a top destination for private-sector investment. Alberta is the heartbeat of diversification, and Walmart's investment and others show that our province now wears many hats and will continue to compete in the economies of the future.

Thank you so much to all Albertans. Happy International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and happy Nowruz. Thank you to all Albertans. Our best days are ahead.

Racism and Hate Crime Prevention

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, today marks the 55th anniversary of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This day was proclaimed in 1966, following the Sharpeville massacre, where peaceful protesters protesting against racist laws in apartheid South Africa were fired upon, leaving hundreds killed and injured. Every year on this tragic anniversary we must commit ourselves to taking action to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination in our society.

Tragically, we have seen growing instances of hate crimes here in Alberta: racist language being thrown at racialized Albertans, people being assaulted in the streets in broad daylight, religious communities being threatened. In a racist society it is not enough to be nonracist; we must be antiracist. In order to ensure that we fulfill our mission to eliminate racial discrimination, we need proactive action, not words.

My colleagues and I have heard loudly and clearly the concerns of racialized Albertans, who are worried that this critical priority is being missed by this government. Even though the throne speech acknowledged this increased trend of hate crimes in Alberta, the budget fails to invest in tackling the cause of racism. Our caucus is hard at work proposing policies and actually consulting with the communities to hear what they are feeling and what they need. I'm proud that our caucus will table important legislation later this week that will take real action to combat racism. We will still have a long way to go to ensure that we live in a province and a country that is totally free from all forms of racism, discrimination, and intolerance.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Country Music Alberta Awards

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just this very weekend I was invited to the 11th annual Country Music Alberta awards to support some of the incredible musical talent we have from Lesser Slave Lake. It was wonderful to see so many folks living their passion and expressing it through music gather to recognize the distinction of their peers across Alberta. The show was amazing, with musicians performing multiple genres of country and even yodelling. Musical romantics certainly would have found their niche last night with the performance of the song *Looking For A Lockdown With You*.

I would like to congratulate Berlyn Broadhead. She is a young woman from Slave Lake that has had a passion for singing since she was nine years old. She was nominated for the youth horizon award and the fans' choice award at the 11th annual Country Music Alberta awards and is a fantastic and refined vocalist. I hope that she keeps up the awesome work. I wish her well and good luck in her bright future ahead.

I would also like to congratulate Mat Cardinal from Wabasca. He has an amazing voice and is the lead singer for the band The Prairie States, who ended up winning the group of the year and also album of the year. Without a doubt, despite being a sparsely populated constituency, Lesser Slave Lake packs a big punch in the Alberta musical scene. I'm truly honoured to represent such a strong constituency, that loves to support local talent with amazing turnouts at every local event.

The Alberta Country Music awards continues to support Alberta and its musicians. I would like to encourage all of my colleagues here and also all fellow Albertans to get a membership to support such a great organization. Then, hopefully, next year I can give them a warning that all of my rowdy friends are coming over tonight.

Thank you.

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

Utility Costs

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is working around the clock to convince Albertans that they are taking action on the cost-of-living crisis facing them, but Albertans see this government's words and claims for exactly what they are: empty, hollow, and meaningless. I along with my colleagues have been hearing the concerns of those who are finding life unaffordable for weeks and months: Calgarians who are now forced to choose between groceries and turning the lights on, between medical treatments and keeping the heat on; small businesses who, after two years of the pandemic, are finding that these bills are driving them further into debt and forcing them to lay off employees.

This government's solution to these skyrocketing bills? A fake natural gas rebate – it won't even come into effect till next fall and comes in at a level that means that most Albertans won't qualify – and a \$50 cheque to off-set electricity bills in the hundreds of dollars. This isn't support; it's an insult to those who are struggling to feed their families and pay their bills, and that's it.

1:40

Alberta's NDP has been raising these concerns with the government, only to be dismissed at every turn. Instead, Alberta's out-of-touch Premier is touring this province bragging about the historic support to Albertan families. The Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity proudly boasted to this House that their plan to deal with the huge increase in utilities was to do nothing. My constituents, my fellow Calgarians need real support and a government that understands their needs.

That's why I was proud to join our leader and my Calgary colleagues on Friday to commit that we will put money back into the pockets of Albertans. An NDP government would undo the UCP's billion-dollar tax grab, and we would ensure that critical programs like AISH and seniors' benefits keep pace with inflation. Mr. Speaker, it's simple. This side of the House doesn't look at the rising cost of living as an opportunity to take more from Albertans; we see it as an opportunity to help. Friends, colleagues, and fellow Albertans, help is on the way. A government in waiting is on this side. We're going to be here for you.

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

Alberta Voters and Government Policies

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Who's the boss? Some political leaders think that they're the boss. Many think that the Prime Minister or the Premiers are the boss. Some leaders and Premiers in the past were convinced of that. The last PC Premier – may he rest in peace – and his party thought he was the boss. In May 2015 we found out that that was not the case. In May 2015 the NDP leader and her party thought she was the boss. In April 2019 we again found out otherwise.

So who really is the boss here in Alberta? Mr. Speaker, it's Alberta voters. The voters were angry at the PCs in 2015, and, believe me, I heard it loud and clear at the doors. On May 5 their voices were heard. On April 16, 2019, the real boss spoke again, giving the new UCP a resounding victory. The boss passed out pink slips to some and bonuses to others.

Unfortunately, our boss, the voters, is angry again, as angry or more than I remember them in 2015 and 2019. They are angry about access to health care, and they don't want it blamed on COVID; it's been an issue for decades. In 2016 my own mom spent five days in an ER waiting for a bed to open up. They are very angry over ever-increasing utility costs, that are forcing seniors from their homes because they can no longer afford to live there on fixed incomes. Tenants are angry because rent keeps increasing to keep up with the rising cost of utilities.

I've suggested using our fantastic royalty surplus, that belongs to Albertans, to pay for mistakes of previous governments that have resulted in these increases. Let's reduce the burden on all of our consumers, stop making them pay for the mistakes of others. I would suggest that the leaders in the province on all sides better pay attention to the real boss, the voters in this province, or prepare to follow the exit signs.

Supply Chain Capacity

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, the past two years have been extremely hard on Alberta producers and industry, from the supply chain disruptions that came as a result of COVID-19 to massive heat waves, prolonged cold fronts, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and the illegal Coutts border blockade. Barely a week goes by when producers aren't grappling with challenges caused by issues well beyond their control, and now there is much uncertainty with the CP Rail labour dispute. These disruptions have been global, and I will not blame the UCP for them.

However, in the last two years there have been challenges. I've never seen the UCP proactively plan for addressing future problems and increasing supply chain capacity and making the economy more resilient. In fact, I've seen the opposite. When Alberta's only 24/7 border crossing was being illegally blockaded, the UCP actually cheered them on. When agriculture industry groups were stating their concerns on the devastating impact of the Coutts blockade, the UCP did nothing.

Now, today, the CP Rail dispute: we see them demanding federal back-to-work legislation despite knowing clearly that one of the sources of contention is the amount of rest time for CP Rail employees. We need to keep Canadian rail lines open – there's no doubt – but we also need them to be safe. These workers have served Albertans and Canadians throughout the pandemic and helped fill our grocery stores with food, gotten fuel to businesses, and taken our grain and feed to market.

Let's work on solutions, let's push for a fast settlement, and let's go back beyond that to look at bigger challenges that we face. I stand in this House today calling on the UCP government to strike a bipartisan committee to study the way that Alberta can increase supply chain capacity and hear directly from Albertans on what they want to see. There's no reason not to do this. This isn't a political stunt; this is a real proposal to develop best practices and provide real supports. If the UCP won't accept it, it'll be clear that they don't actually care about Alberta workers who rely on our supply chain to make a living. It'll be clear that this is all about politics for them and about saving their own jobs. I'm here today to try to save the jobs of Albertans. The government needs to get onboard with this, because there's no excuse not to.

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

Winston Churchill High School Girls' Basketball Team

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am thrilled to rise today and tell the House about an extraordinary accomplishment in Lethbridge. For the first time since 2012, the Winston Churchill high school girls' basketball team made it all the way to the 3A provincial tournament in Red Deer, finishing in third place. The Griffins showed championship spirit this entire season. These young women stepped up with a 13 and 6 record in the 3A deep south division.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the pandemic created extremely challenging circumstances for everyone, but our students and young athletes were directly impacted, with less practice time and the cancellation of games. These young women showed something I like to refer to as the Alberta spirit. I define the Alberta spirit as using our skills that we develop and learn over time combined with the grit and passion to accomplish something great. The Winston Churchill Griffins and the coaching staff are prime examples of the Alberta spirit. They faced challenges both on and off the court, but they never wavered in their dedication to winning a championship and going to the provincials.

I want to recognize the coaching staff – Omar Kadir, Aaron Becking, and Kacie Bosch – and the parents and volunteers who helped put the games together. I also want to congratulate the athletes: Nataeya Black Water, Rylen Bowes, Phoenix Clarke, Abigail Crown, Tamara Joseph, Dawson Lashley, Brooklyn Lesko, Morgan McLaren, Jayda Morrison, Olivia Needham, Jenna Nilsson, and Didi Zuidema. Teamwork, hard work, and a never-say-die attitude led them this far, and I believe it will serve them well in their future endeavours, whether they be athletic, academic, or whatever possibilities and opportunities they decide to pursue in their bright futures.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I feel confident when I say that all of us in Lethbridge are Griffins fans. Go, Griffins, go.

Utility Costs

Mr. Nielsen: Yesterday the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction bragged on social media about how this government is handling the utility crisis, and for a moment I thought she was joking. This government has done less than the bare minimum to address the cost-of-living crisis they've created. Ask the families who expected the natural gas rebate that the Premier promised, only to get a fake program. Ask the businesses who are seeing their bills climb in the thousands and are being told that \$50 is all the help that they're going to get. They'd think this was a joke if it wasn't their livelihoods on the line.

Albertans deserve better than this government. My constituents, all Albertans are being hammered with the outrageous cost-of-living increases. These are real people with real stories dealing with real consequences of a government that simply does not care about what they are going through. Mr. Speaker, in my entire life I've never ever seen a government so unwilling to step up and support Albertans during a crisis. I've never seen a government so proud of doing nothing while families are slowly being costed out of basic necessities like heat and power.

This government has tried constantly to shut down our calls to support these struggling Alberta families and businesses, so I have a message for the members opposite and the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, who claim to be fiscal masterminds while Albertans pile on debt just to heat their houses. Helping people is not red tape. Supporting families during an affordability crisis is not a red tape burden. Doing the right thing for the constituents you claim to represent is not red tape. It's actually your job.

We are in this Chamber to listen and to address the concerns of Albertans, not come up with excuses to ignore them, as this government is so willing to do. That's why Albertans are looking for a change, and in 2023 they'll have an opportunity to vote out this self-centred government that does not care about making life easier for any of them.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Personal Income Tax and Benefit Deindexation

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, all Albertans are seeing their costs rising while their paycheques stay the same. Last week StatsCan reported that inflation will be even higher than predicted, 5.7 per cent, the highest since 1991. This means that the Premier's billion-dollar tax on inflation, his bracket creep, will get even worse. Now, we reran the numbers, and by 2025 families will be losing \$500 every year. Why doesn't the Premier fix his bracket-creep budget to put more money back in the pockets of Albertans?

1:50

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this government is acting with much greater ambition than any in Canada to address the cost of living, particularly fuel inflation. That's why on April 1 we are eliminating Alberta's fuel tax. It's why we're providing a \$150 rebate for electricity prices this winter. It's why we've capped gas taxes at \$6.50, with a rebate if it exceeds that level. But at the same time, the NDP is cheering on their ally Justin Trudeau to raise the carbon tax on April 1 and then to triple it from \$50 to \$170 a tonne to drive hundreds of thousands of Albertans into energy poverty.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, 50 bucks for power and a fake gas rebate is not a plan. It's a pittance. It's a disappointment.

Let's talk about the gas tax. The Premier claims it will cost \$1.3 billion, but that means that he expects WTI to stay above \$90 all year long, and that's billions and billions of dollars of extra revenue. So the Premier is actually making the case for me: he doesn't need to keep taxing inflation; at this point it appears that he's doing it just for fun. Will the Premier give this House time to debate and change that plan?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP came in with their hidden agenda to impose the biggest tax hike in Alberta history, the job-killing carbon tax. In its first year they were taking \$1.3 billion of revenue. In one fell swoop this government, to address cost-of-

living issues, has eliminated the gas tax. If gas prices stay high, that would be an annualized savings of \$1.4 billion. How can the NDP possibly stand up here and talk about the cost of living when they want to increase it further by more than tripling the carbon tax?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact is and the Premier knows that that particular program comes with a real rebate, unlike the false one in his budget.

Now, while the Premier is taking \$500 more from Alberta families, he's also giving many of them less in benefits. For Albertans on fixed incomes, it adds up fast. By 2025, in real terms a senior couple will lose \$750 per year while Albertans living on AISH will lose nearly \$3,000. Why doesn't the Premier take action today to fight the growing cost of living by reindexing these important benefits?

Mr. Kenney: Another opportunity to talk about the NDP's phony fiscal policy, Mr. Speaker. They talk about indexing AISH, but they were elected in 2015: no indexation of AISH; 2016, no indexation of AISH; 2017, no indexation of AISH; 2019, no indexation of AISH. They didn't do it until they were leaving office. What a phony fiscal policy from the same government that raised income taxes, raised business taxes, and imposed the job-killing carbon tax on Albertans.

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

Ms Notley: Everything the Premier just said is absolutely wrong.

Premier's Office Staff Political Activity

Ms Notley: Now, meanwhile not only does he have more important priorities than getting the facts right; he also has more important priorities than the rising costs facing Albertans, like, say, what they are instead: surviving his leadership review. Let's talk about who in this House is working for Albertans. Last week we presented draft legislation to prevent utility shut-offs for Albertans who are struggling to pay their bills. The UCP? Their staff are punching out at 4 o'clock so they can campaign for the boss. Why is the Premier more concerned with saving his own job than standing up for Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, she just denied the facts. I just looked it up. Their so-called indexation of AISH started on January 1, 2019, after they had been in office for three and a half years. And now they're shedding crocodile tears about the cost of fuel when the NDP's desired outcome is to make fuel unaffordable. That's why they want to triple the carbon tax. Will she stand in her place this week to vote with us on a forthcoming motion calling on Justin Trudeau not to raise the carbon tax?

Ms Notley: Now, Mr. Speaker, in fact, when we reindexed, we reindexed retroactively to 2015. Do your homework.

Now, last week, more recent history, what we did was that we presented an Alberta venture fund that would allow Albertans to invest in themselves and their neighbours. It would exclusively support Alberta early-stage companies, start-ups, and scale-ups. Last week what did they do? Well, at the end of the day, they took Friday off, the entire Premier's office staff, to campaign for their boss. Why does the Premier have his staff working for him instead of Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it was such a priority for them to index AISH that they didn't get around to it until the dying days of their

government. Once again, why won't the NDP just fess up that their entire desired policy is to make gas more expensive, to make home heating more expensive, to make electricity more expensive, to make the transportation of goods and therefore food more expensive? Why won't they admit that that is exactly why they want to get back into power, to cheer on Justin Trudeau in more than tripling the punishing carbon tax at the worst possible time?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, there is a reason right there why Albertans do not trust a word coming out of the mouth of that Premier. There could not be a clearer difference in priorities between that side and this side. We put forward ideas to help people with their bills, to protect their mountains, to lower tuition, to grow our economy, to protect them from inflation. All these things would make life better. Meanwhile the Premier's chief of staff is out campaigning. His director of communications is out campaigning. His staff clock out early so they can go campaigning for the Premier. Why does the Premier think Albertans deserve part-time government?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, when I go to Washington, DC, to fight to lift the trucker vax mandate, to fight for Alberta fuel energy exports, what is the NDP leader doing? Campaigning for the NDP. When I go to Texas with the Minister of Energy to fight for North American energy security, what is the NDP leader doing? Campaigning for the NDP. She's right about the difference in priorities. This government eliminated the carbon tax, and that party wants to more than triple it because they want to punish people for filling up their gas tanks, heating their homes, and driving to work. Shame on the NDP. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Personal Income Tax and Benefit Deindexation (continued)

Ms Phillips: Insidious, pernicious: those are the words this Premier used to describe deindexation. One of the first acts of this UCP government was to introduce a new tax on inflation. That plan sucked more than a billion dollars out of the pockets of hard-working Alberta taxpayers even as they struggled to make ends meet. Today this House will vote on a motion calling on the government to end this insidious and pernicious policy, so to the Premier. Let me quote the Premier when he asked verbatim in the 1990s: "When will [this government] stop this destructive tax on inflation, or [are they going to] continue to be known . . . as the bracket creeps?"

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, here's the reality. The NDP created an economic and jobs crisis in this province unlike any we've seen in our modern history. The NDP created a fiscal crisis that this government inherited, an \$8 billion structural deficit. Thanks to difficult but necessary decisions made by this government and, yes, some modest sacrifices by Albertans, we now have brought order back to Alberta's finances . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West asked a question. I think it's reasonable for the House to hear the answer.

The hon. the Premier has 10 seconds remaining.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we have now brought Alberta's finances back under control with the first balanced budget tabled in 14 years, and that means we can further cut taxes as Alberta's economy takes off, leading Canada and Europe.

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, we just heard that a billion dollars in new personal income taxes and \$2,000 a year in real buying power for AISH recipients is just a modest sacrifice, according to this Premier. Now, that is what I call a pernicious and insidious policy agenda, so to this Premier: why did this government bring in such a regressive and repulsive plan that targets the most vulnerable in society?

Mr. Kenney: You know, Mr. Speaker, the most important social program is a job. Last year 130,000 net new jobs were created in this province, and just this morning in Calgary I was happy to announce 325 new permanent jobs being created by Walmart, on top of 15,000 jobs created in Alberta already this year, and do you know why? Because this province is open for business. They raised business taxes. We cut business taxes. They raised fuel taxes. We cut fuel taxes. They created a huge deficit, and we balanced the budget.

2:00

Ms Phillips: Inflation is at a 30-year high. Albertans are feeling the pain, but trust in this Premier and his popularity: never so low. Now, under this government's pernicious and insidious attacks on inflation, the average two-income family will lose \$500 a year just because our taxes aren't rising with inflation on top of skyrocketing utility costs, insurance costs, tuition fees. Those continue to hit the family budget hard. This Premier doesn't care. No wonder Albertans don't trust him. Simple question: will the Premier end his bracket creep?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, subtle as always, coming from that member. You know something? Forty per cent of Albertans, thankfully, do not pay any provincial income tax, but for the 60 per cent that do, they ended up having to pay more under the NDP when they increased income taxes. Now, you know what? The balanced budget offers us the opportunity. If the economy continues to grow ... [interjections]

The Speaker: The Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I have terrible news for the NDP. If the economy continues to grow, we may be in the position – I don't know; no decision is made yet – to reverse the NDP's income tax increases and let Albertans keep more of their own money. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, I was proud to stand with my colleagues in Red Deer this morning in support of Alberta families. We've seen the UCP's harmful policy decisions hammer household budgets. We know the devastating impact that this has on families and children, record-high inflation and UCP policy decisions that make matters much, much worse. Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids says that it's anticipating much greater need among students looking for a nutritious meal in the months ahead. Food bank use is already rising. Can the Premier tell this House why Alberta families and children have to literally pay for his bad choices?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I'm afraid I couldn't hear the question. If the member is talking about children, for example, I can advise her that the budget for the Department of Children's Services has increased by 18 per cent since 2018. Particularly, for children in care has had a funding increase well above both inflation and population growth. This government has prioritized the vulnerable while at the same time bringing overall government costs under control to balance the budget so that programs like that are sustainable in our long-term future.

Ms Pancholi: I think Albertans would appreciate if the Premier actually listened to the questions that they're asking rather than just spouting out answers without doing that.

Mr. Speaker, this Premier hopes that Albertans will blame somebody else other than him for all of the costs that they are now facing. Let me run down some of the figures for him. Because of the UCP's decisions families will pay \$500 more on their taxes alone. Due to deindexation a low-income senior will lose out on \$750 per year. A vulnerable Albertan relying on AISH could be out \$3,000 per year. It gets worse from there. With this government the cost of school fees has shot up, car insurance has gone up, the cost of tuition will more than double. I could go on. Will the Premier stand in this House for Alberta families ...

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Again, there's so much there, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what to unpack from that waterfall of words except this, that the NDP made life more expensive for parents with kids. [interjections] The NDP made it more expensive for parents to drive their kids to hockey practice.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Kenney: The NDP made it more expensive to buy groceries for families with kids. The NDP made it more expensive to heat homes for families with kids. The NDP made everything more expensive with their carbon tax, but they're not satisfied with that. They want to more than triple the carbon tax on families with kids. We won't let them, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:03.

Ms Pancholi: Well, Mr. Speaker, unlike the Premier, this morning our side of the House committed to real support for Albertans. We were joined by Red Deer resident Joanne Buehler. She was injured severely in a workplace accident six years ago and relies on AISH. The huge increase in the cost of living and the UCP's decision to deindex AISH have forced her back to work while in excruciating pain. Even then, she can't make ends meet. Joanne said this morning, quote: I feel like I'm damned if I do and damned if I don't; put simply, I need more help from my provincial government. Why won't this Premier stand in this House right now and actually help Albertans like Joanne?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, if she's asking about AISH, that benefit is 40 per cent higher than the average of other provinces, \$400 a month higher than in other provinces, and in Alberta our cost of living is substantially lower. For example, cost of housing. [interjections] Many of those other provinces that provide less generous benefits in the same respect ...

The Speaker: Hon. members, it's becoming increasingly difficult to hear the Premier. He has the right to the floor.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we also have the most generous tax treatment for low-income families. Forty per cent of Alberta families pay no income tax. We have the most generous social benefits broadly, and we're delivering all of that in the context of a balanced budget and a growing economy.

CP Rail Work Stoppage

Mr. Sigurdson: At the worst time possible a CP Rail labour dispute has turned into a back-and-forth blaming game with the company and union pointing fingers at each other for causing the strike and subsequent lockout. CP Rail is an essential service. Albertans,

Canadians, and our entire economy will suffer if CP trains continue to sit idle. The pressure is on the federal government to find a solution. To the Minister of Transportation: what is the Alberta government doing to urge the federal government to immediately get the trains back on track?

Mrs. Sawhney: The CP Rail labour unrest is deeply concerning and will have a major impact on the movement of goods in and out of Alberta. On the weekend I sent a letter to the federal ministers of Transport and Labour with support from my government colleagues. We are calling on Ottawa to immediately invoke provisions to declare rail transport as an essential service in hopes that any damage to our economy is minimal.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that we cannot allow our province's economic recovery to be interrupted by union politics and given that we've already dealt with everything from supply chain disruptions, B.C. floods, illegal blockades, port congestion delays, and now the Russian invasion of Ukraine, to the minister: can you update the House on the importance of Alberta rail transport and what the possible impact of this strike will be on our economy? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. the Minister of Transportation is the only one with the call.

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, rail transport is critically important infrastructure that supports Alberta's economic recovery. Many industries rely on CP railcars to ship their goods to market, including oil, petrochemicals, plastics, and wood. Agricultural products, machinery parts, iron, and steel are also imported by rail. This work stoppage is undermining Alberta and Canada's economic competitiveness. I fear that the impacts will be devastating.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and once again thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that Alberta farmers and producers should be focused on getting ready for spring seeding and given that, unfortunately, many of them are fearful of what might happen since farming heavily relies on CP Rail for essentials like fertilizer and feed shipments, to the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development: what impact can we expect this labour dispute to have on agriculture?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of agriculture.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Transportation clearly outlined, this is impacting many sectors and industries across the province. It's having a profound potential impact on the ag sector. Central southern Alberta relies on CP Rail for movement of goods both in and out in a very severe way. For example, our cattle feeding industry right now is heavily reliant on U.S. corn. After the drought, you know, the bins are empty. There isn't an alternative right now in the south. We're doing everything we can to make sure it's addressed.

COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the response of so many Albertans who stood up to support their friends, neighbours, and even strangers during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis that sadly took the lives of over 4,000 Albertans. Their compassion, however,

contrasts with the Premier's indifference when asked this weekend if he took any responsibility for his catastrophic response during the fourth wave. He said, and I quote: I don't feel responsibility for the fact that COVID has been circulating around the world. End quote. Today would the Premier perhaps like to try again, show some sign of actual compassion and humility, or does he really believe he has no responsibility for his failure?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. Our government has reacted throughout the entire pandemic to be able to put measures in place to be able to protect Albertans to the greatest extent possible. We spoke before in this House that we didn't get it perfectly right. We moved to the endemic phase too early during the summer, but we reacted, we put measures in place during the fourth wave, and then we saw the numbers coming down. We reacted again for dealing with the fifth wave, and we're seeing the numbers coming down. I'm pleased we're moving to the endemic phase. We're continuing to protect Albertans and provide services . . .

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

2:10

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, given that during the fourth wave the Premier and this minister and all the other members of the government vanished, refused to communicate with Albertans as case numbers rose, our ICUs filled beyond capacity, and hundreds lost their lives and given that even the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was apologetic to Albertans, admitting that Alberta lacked leadership from this government, and given that when given the same opportunity to make an admission on his radio show, the Premier chose an indifferent response, deflecting any responsibility for his catastrophic failure, why doesn't the Premier have the same respect for Albertans that some of his members do? Will he take this chance to apologize . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has reacted to the pandemic. We moved quickly in September to be able to put in measures, and I want to thank all of our health care professionals for stepping up. We were able during the fourth wave to significantly increase our ICU capacity, and we met the demands, not having to send anyone out of province, and again during the fifth wave, when non-ICU was being hit hard, our AHS responded and all of our front-line health care workers. I want to thank them for the tremendous work that they're doing. I'm pleased we're now moving into the endemic phase.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that those very health care workers were pushed to their limits because of the lack of leadership from that minister and this government and given that there are Albertans who lost family members or friends due to COVID and given that there are countless others suffering from long COVID and given that there are tens of thousands whose life-saving surgeries were cancelled and postponed, many who still haven't gotten the care they need, is this Premier, this minister really going to stand in this House for a third time and refuse to apologize to Albertans for their marked failure, the worst pandemic response in Canada?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, my heart goes out to all Albertans who have been impacted by COVID or got COVID, long COVID, who had their surgeries postponed, but our government is focused on

responding to COVID and the pandemic. We are focused on building capacity within our health care system, and I am personally focused on ensuring that we can get caught up on surgeries. Albertans deserve the best health care in the world, and we are investing to be able to deliver that.

Opioid-related Deaths

Ms Sigurdson: One thousand seven hundred and fifty-eight Albertans died due to drug poisoning in 2021. It's the deadliest year on record. On average five Albertans were taken from their family and their community every single day. Each one of those deaths was preventable, but instead of working to keep people safe, the UCP has reduced access to life-saving health care for Albertans who use substances. Will the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions take responsibility for the appalling loss of life that is happening under his watch?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, each life lost to addiction is one too many. My heart goes out to all families who have lost loved ones or have been impacted by this disease. As the hon. member knows across the way, our government is taking this seriously. We are investing in additional resources for mental health. We're making significant investment over the last two years, \$140 million. Over this year, in this Budget 2022, we are investing an additional \$20 million, over 8,000 new annual spaces, the removal of user fees, the expansion of the virtual opioid dependency program, that allows any Albertan anywhere in the province to get the same-day access to medication-based treatment . . .

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

Ms Sigurdson: Given that we all know people with substance use may continue to use before they're ready or willing to enter treatment and given that relapse is an extremely common occurrence to people who use substances and given that there are numerous health care interventions that are proven to keep people alive until they are ready to go for treatment, why is the government intent on making substance use a death sentence for so many by denying them these life-saving services?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on addressing this opioid crisis. I've already indicated that we've already invested \$140 million over the last two years. We're investing another \$20 million this year. We are focused. We are increasing access to treatment while removing barriers such as user fees. Alberta is the first province to completely eliminate user fees for all funded treatment spaces. Addiction costs all families, and we are focusing on supporting Albertans to be able to recover from this terrible disease.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the number of lives lost in the drug poisoning crisis has more than doubled since 2019 and given that the crisis in Alberta is getting worse and that each of the last four months we have data for has set a new record for the loss of life, I ask the associate minister again: will he stop his self-congratulatory talking points, confront the sheer number of Albertans who have died on his watch, and admit his approach is a catastrophic failure?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our \$53 million COVID mental health action plan is actually helping to address people who have been impacted. We know that the opioid crisis has been made worse due to COVID, and that's why we're investing and we continue to invest additional dollars to support the mental health of Albertans, \$140 million over the last two years, an additional \$20 million. We are actually putting in a range of supports to be able to support

Albertans throughout their entire process to try to deal with this serious issue and help Albertans recover.

Premier's Leadership

Mr. Loewen: Influence peddling is a Criminal Code violation. I published my letter to the RCMP to make it clear that activities of the Premier's office in advance of the UCP's fall AGM warranted investigation. The Premier's office didn't get the memo. Leaks this weekend make it clear that Secure Energy, who is allegedly seeking \$1 billion in government favour, is pressuring their employees to come out for the Premier at the SGM. There is a line between communicating with government officials, as permitted by the Lobbyists Act, versus selling influence by government officials, prohibited by the Criminal Code. To the Premier: is influence peddling becoming government policy?

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

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure that it's government policy that somebody is taking a position in a public electoral process. There's no surprise there. There's a public electoral process. Some people are on one side; some are on the other; some won't participate. The member is treating this like news. People taking a position in an electoral contest: it's interesting; it's important. I'm not sure it's shocking.

Mr. Loewen: Given that I hope the RCMP will find the facts, because it might be tough to find them here, and given that this weekend a spreadsheet was exposed by journalist Janet French tracking senior staff's weekday volunteer commitments to the Premier's leadership review and given that this spreadsheet is owned by an employee of the lobbying firm Wellington Advocacy and given that this lobbying firm boasts of close connections to the Premier's office and given that it appears that the spreadsheet being used to track how committed senior ministry staff are to the Premier's success in the leadership review was filled out during government office hours, to the Premier: is it government policy for lobbyists to run this province or just current practice?

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

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think you would agree with me, if I was to remind the member, that the question wasn't about government policy, as it's required to be.

But, Mr. Speaker, no one should be surprised that in a political contest people take a position: some for, some against; some are indifferent; some will stay home. Now, if the hon. member really thinks that something is wrong, he should call the RCMP. He's mentioned them twice. It's not government policy. There's a political contest, and people are participating.

Mr. Loewen: Given that I can't seem to get a straight answer today, I'll try it one more time. Given that the only pipeline this government is focused on is the pipeline between jobs in the Premier's office and jobs at the Premier's favoured lobbying firms and that Albertans are left wondering who runs this government, the Premier or his favourite lobbyists, and given the huge number of staff taking leave from ministries, as made evident by the lobbyist's own spreadsheet, all to save the Premier's failed job, to the Premier: is focusing this government's energy on the leadership review government policy or just current practice?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to set the record straight. This government is solely focused on jobs for the benefit of Albertans. We look back at the last year. There have been over 130,000 jobs created. We have thousands more jobs available for Albertans today than we did pre-COVID. We're seeing billions of dollars of investment come into this province, creating opportunities for Alberta entrepreneurs, opportunities for Albertans needing a job, expanding our fiscal capacity, leading to a balanced budget.

Education Policies

Ms Hoffman: Alberta had a reputation as one of the best public education systems in the world, but this UCP government is determined to sabotage public education in Alberta by refusing to fund desperately needed schools in Edmonton and Calgary. When we were in government, we didn't ignore the fastest growing districts in the province. We built and modernized about 60 schools a year. This year under the UCP: only 11. Will the Education minister tell Albertans why her government is ignoring families in Edmonton and Calgary? There are students in south Edmonton – some are sitting in the gallery – who desperately need a high school on the south side. Why won't you fund it, Minister?

2:20

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to answer that question. I had a very good meeting with the board chair and the superintendent of the Edmonton public school division, reinforced the gated process that the Auditor General themselves approved. It's a 10-step process, and when those school authorities put those priorities at the top of the list, they rise higher. We get just about 400 requests a year for new schools and major modernizations, and Edmonton public now understands how they go through that proper list.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the minister is taking no responsibility for her failure to meet the needs of Calgary and Edmonton families and given that the heartless UCP government displayed its disrespect for disabled children when they cut PUF funding and given that the government's no-help budget, with record revenues, ignores the needs of these children and refuses to reverse the cruel cuts brought in under the UCP, will the Minister of Education explain to the parents of three-, four-, and five-year-olds who have disabilities why she continues to cut funding for kids when they rightfully need it?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again I want to draw to your attention that Edmonton public schools has, actually, six new projects on the go right now to address concerns. They have so many more spaces than actual students, and I'm really confident that, having had that meeting with them last week, they are actually going to prioritize their list and make sure that growing areas are at the top of their list.

In terms of PUF funding we have addressed PUF funding. We have modified that program. We've tiered it, and in fact we added a new code.

Ms Hoffman: Given that when we were in government, there were a thousand more teachers in Alberta schools than there are today and given that the UCP's mission to sabotage public education has a third of Alberta teachers planning on either leaving the province or the profession and given that this government's lack of respect for teachers and the work that they do is clearly reflected in the wide rejection of the curriculum that the UCP is trying to force on Alberta

schools, will the minister admit that the biggest problem facing education is the UCP government? It's clear you can't trust the UCP with public education.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, there's a reason that the voters of Alberta fired the members opposite, and it's because they knew we needed responsible government. In fact, we are going to have 160 more teachers and staff next year in the classroom as per the statistic. I don't know why it's so difficult that they can't actually look up the numbers. They're online. They're there. They can look at them. In fact, they would have me go against an Auditor General's request and advice in terms of putting forward capital. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The only one with the call is the hon. the Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Utility Costs

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, last month callers phoned in and jammed lines during a radio talk show I was on about the rising cost of utilities in Alberta. A caller told me that after calling for help, a service provider told him that perhaps instead of using heat, he could wear a hoodie. This government's policies have made costs unaffordable, and their fake rebate is not helping Albertans under stress. Will the associate minister stop bragging about doing nothing and commit to helping my constituents who are being told their only solution is to turn their heat off and put on more clothing?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After four years of NDP malaise on the electricity system, all Albertans are paying more for their electricity. Now, the historical revisionists on the other side of the House would have us believe that they're not to blame, but those are the members that got rid of the cheapest form of electricity, spent \$7.5 billion on transmission at a time when we could barely afford it. We are bringing immediate relief to Albertans at a time when they need it while we look for longer term solutions to get rid of the NDP hangover.

Mr. Deol: Given that this government is to blame for this affordability crisis and given that last week the associate minister blocked debate on a motion to ensure that people suffering from these high utility prices did not have their power cut off and given that an Albertan who was told to wear a hoodie instead of using heat stated that his bills were so high that he couldn't pay and that even his credit cards were full, why is this government okay with these constituents and so many other Albertans drowning in credit card debt while they sit on their hands doing nothing?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the NDP experience on the electricity grid is littered with unintended consequences. They got rid of the cheapest form of electricity, and the prices went up. They brought their ideological agenda to the Balancing Pool . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Nally: . . . and prices went up. They implemented the carbon tax, and prices went up on everything. Now, this is just one more example of unintended consequences, because the Energy critic, who, by the way, doesn't understand the price of electricity, actually would raise the price . . .

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

Mr. Deol: Given that this government's so-called relief is a sham and that it won't help anyone and given that they are refusing to act during this crisis, which is harming the physical, mental, and financial health of the people they are pretending to represent, and given that no one in this province should be in a situation where they can't afford to heat their homes, will the associate minister commit to sitting down with my constituents, listening to their concerns, and then taking emergency action to prevent utility shut-offs and provide real rebates to help with skyrocketing costs?

Mr. Nally: Again, Mr. Speaker, it's a case of unintended consequences by a caucus that doesn't even know what the price of electricity is in this province. If we would have accepted the NDP solution, all that bad debt would get put back into rate, and they would raise the price of electricity for every single ratepayer in this province. Now, my question is: why would we come out with a government solution when industry has already resolved the issue? Industry has told me that they will work with any ratepayer that works with them. They will come out with flexible payment plans for all ratepayers. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Seniors' Supports in Spruce Grove-Stony Plain

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our seniors have contributed so much to our society and economy throughout the decades. They deserve a restful and fulfilling retirement, but with rising costs caused by inflation and other pressures, this is becoming more difficult. We have incredible seniors' housing in my riding, with the Meridian foundation, St. Michael's, Copper Sky, and others. Despite this, more spaces are needed and long overdue. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing: what are you doing to support future housing initiatives and funding in Spruce Grove-Stony Plain? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. the Minister of Seniors and Housing.

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. In Budget 2022 we committed \$118 million over three years to fund various projects across the province. Our communities' needs assessments identified communities' individual needs for developing seniors' affordable housing. I thank the member for his advocacy, and I look forward to working with him to bring the necessary housing for seniors.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Meridian foundation is actively looking for a new location to build a larger facility and given that St. Michael's is also planning to expand their facility to address this growing need and given that my riding is identified as a high-priority area for seniors' housing, with demands only increasing, and given that population growth in Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, and Parkland county remains high and that additional units will be needed in the future, can the same minister please let us know: what is being done to encourage more nonprofits to invest in seniors' housing?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the wonderful questions. The stronger foundations strategy depends significantly on partnerships with major organizations like nonprofit organizations. We are working on a comprehensive

partnership framework that will attract more partners by enabling innovative funding and delivery models. We will increase the supply of affordable housing, and this 10-year framework will achieve that target.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her answer. Given that many seniors in my riding are dealing with mental health and social struggles and given that many require assistance when it comes to accessing mental health supports and programs and given that we want to provide support for our seniors who have called this area home for many years, if not decades, to the Minister of Health: can you please let my constituents know what programs and services they can access if they require additional assistance?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We are always striving to improve access to resources that help seniors improve their mental wellness in the community. One of the initiatives that our government is working on and being led by my colleague the minister of mental health and addictions is a province-wide, home-based support program for seniors that will deliver a range of mental health supports to seniors when and where they need them. This is one of the initiatives we're moving forward with to improve access to care for seniors in Alberta. We're investing in the mental health of Albertans: \$140 million over the last two years, another \$20 million this year for all Albertans, including seniors.

Calgary Beltline Area Protests

Member Ceci: For over a year there has been chaos caused by illegal protests in Calgary's Beltline. Every Saturday protesters have disrupted the lives of residents and businesses in the area. In the past few weeks the protests have grown in intensity. It's gotten so bad that Calgarians were afraid to leave their houses out of fear of being verbally harassed by so-called freedom protesters, yet this UCP government has said and done nothing. The former and current Justice ministers are silent. The local MLA to the south of 17th Avenue, who is a minister, is silent. Why is this government nowhere to be seen and heard from when Calgarians and businesses . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows, the Calgary Police Service, like all police services in Alberta, makes operational decisions about deployment and about enforcement tactics. They make those decisions independently of governments. They are responsible and are accountable to the Calgary Police Commission in Calgary, who, in turn, are accountable to the Calgary city council. I encourage the member to speak to the Calgary Police Commission and Calgary city council.

Member Ceci: Given that this government has gone into hiding, refused to take a stand or offer support to the Beltline protests, just like they did with the illegal Coultts blockade, and given that, just like Coultts, the Beltline protests have hurt the local economy and that many businesses in the Beltline have reported being 50 per cent down in their revenues on that day and given that, just like Coultts,

this government has done nothing to help impacted businesses – once again they point the fingers instead of lifting a finger – will this government provide support to the city, to businesses, and to residents impacted by these protests?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, none of that is true at all. We trust our law enforcement agencies throughout the province to exercise their authority lawfully and to take action when they have evidence and reasonable grounds to do so. We trust them to be able to do that. We know that they can do that. I understand, from previous questions as well as today, that the hon. member has advocated for imprudent actions to politically intervene at the Coutts border crossing instead of the prudent support and deference to our law enforcement that the acting minister provided to our law enforcement agencies at that time.

Member Ceci: Given that this government has done nothing to support the residents and businesses in the Beltline and given that members of their caucus likely support the protesters, who are disrupting the lives of Calgarians and hurting local businesses – after all, they had members in their caucus join the illegal Coutts blockade with zero repercussions – and given that this government has been silent about these protests, if they won't stand up and help those who are impacted, will they at least stand up and denounce these protests, or does the Premier need the people involved in these illegal acts to vote for him in his leadership review?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Premier has said himself, everybody in Alberta has the right to participate in a democratic and peaceful protest. We are respectful of that. As the Premier has said, when somebody is doing that illegally, though, then that is a concern. I understand that arrests were made this past weekend and that this matter is a priority for the police service in Calgary. I encourage them to continue to do their work.

Francophone Education

Ms Renaud: Yesterday was Journée internationale de la Francophonie. With that in mind, all my questions today relate to our Charter responsibilities as clarified by a recent Supreme Court decision on the right to a francophone education. There are students in the Edmonton catchment area who have to travel two and a half hours per day to their designated French public school, which is overcrowded. The UCP capital plan failed to address this significant need, and as a result families are forced to make decisions that force assimilation. Is that the plan?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 2019 our government has invested in six new capital school projects for the francophone school authorities right across this province. We continue to recognize the need for a new school project across Alberta, and the projects that were not approved for funding in Budget 2022 will be considered again in subsequent years. We get roughly 400 asks a year, and we can only do so many with the dollars that we have.

Ms Renaud: Given that what francophone families need are schools but the only thing this UCP government has announced for Gabrielle-Roy and Michaëlle-Jean students is a delayed plan for a plan, given that the Premier left these families, who have a Charter right to equal access to education in a minority language, to fight in court instead of sit in a classroom, M. le Président, est-ce que le gouvernement pense que c'est normal de non financer ni les plans

ni les écoles? Les étudiants et les familles ont besoin des écoles dans leurs communautés, pas à deux heures de chez eux. Expliquez-ça, s'il vous plaît.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We take our section 23 obligations very, very seriously. Last year I announced three new schools across Alberta for francophone communities, six in total since 2019, 20 in the last decade. We always take this very seriously, and we will make sure that those students have good new spaces to learn in.

Ms Renaud: Given that the funding formula for education in Alberta is broken, le Conseil scolaire Centre-nord is growing and opening new programs, but because the UCP insists on using weighted moving averages, they're projecting a million-dollar deficit. C'est pas durable, M. le Président. Cette formule ne marche pas pour les écoles francophones. Given that it is starting to look like the true goal of the UCP government is to force assimilation on francophone families, please explain how this disastrous Education budget does anything but force assimilation?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is just absurd. I've never heard anything so absurd in my whole, entire life. In fact, we have added an additional \$700 million over three years to increase funding for education . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. You had your opportunity to ask a question. If you want another opportunity, perhaps that will come later, but for now the Minister of Education has the call.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seven hundred million dollars over three years to add to all of education right across the province. We were the ones that introduced the Choice in Education Act so that parents can choose the type of education that they want for their children, including francophone education. The fastest growing francophone community in all of Canada. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Energy Industry Opposition

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, the tool identified in the Allan inquiry involves activist groups litigating organizations to tie up their assets. This tactic is called lawfare. The Minister of Energy knows all too well how lawfare works, facing it a multitude of times when fighting for the Gateway pipeline, a pipeline that, if operational today, would help displace Russian oil that is currently being used to fund Putin's war on Ukraine. To the Minister of Energy: are we seeing lawfare play out against the energy sector in an effort to distract companies from their core business by tying up their assets?

Mrs. Savage: Well, Mr. Speaker, what these types of activist campaigns have done is to make it difficult to grow energy production here, and it made it almost impossible to build infrastructure to get our resources to market. Their goal is to lock our resources in the ground, which allows places like Russia to get more out of the ground there. Energy resources account for approximately 43 per cent of the Russians' economy, and it's being used to fund their war while places like Canada have been unfairly targeted by environmental activism. Does anybody think even for

one minute that Russian state-owned companies like Gazprom and Rosneft . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Cochrane.

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that lawfare is becoming commonplace amongst activists and given that these frivolous anti-Alberta pursuits will continue from far-left organizations like Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion and given that this damages the livelihoods of hard-working Alberta families and entrepreneurs, to the Minister of Energy: is there any regulation or legislation that your department could consider to discourage activists and support companies who find themselves a victim of this tactic?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you. As I was noting before, does anybody here think for even one minute that Russian state-owned companies like Rosneft and Gazprom have to contend for a single minute with the type of environmental litigation, fossil fuel divestment, clogged regulatory processes, and environmental activism that we contend with here? Mr. Speaker, we sit on top of the third-largest reserves of oil in the world, 166 billion barrels, and it accounts for 25 per cent of the free-world, non state-controlled production. This is a large part of why Alberta is targeted, so, yes, we are taking steps to counter these activists' campaigns.

2:40

Mr. Guthrie: Thank you again, Minister. Given that Albertans are tired of ideological groups like Extinction Rebellion trying to destroy our resource sectors and given that this government is committed to the fight against nefarious activists and their shameful attacks such as what took place at Coastal GasLink Pipeline and given that last October in this House the minister and I discussed the possibility of forming a special committee to subpoena and question those named in the Allan report, to the minister: will you commit today to an investigative committee of the Legislature to continue the work that Steve Allan began?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we now know is that what happens when we can't get our resources to market – it means that other jurisdictions like Russia are able to leverage this dysfunction in Canada. Every barrel of oil left in the ground here is taken out of the ground in some place like Russia. I can hear the NDP cheering on Russian energy production right now. That's shameful because that's not only a transfer of production to places like Russia; it's a transfer of wealth and it's a transfer of GHG emissions. We will always continue ways to fight this, and, yes, there is merit in another . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

In 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Métis Jigging Dance Event in Calgary-Cross

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to highlight an amazing event that took place in my constituency last week. Last Friday the Marlborough community association held a Métis jig dance session. This session was put on by the Métis community leaders looking to highlight and share the beautiful and rich culture of Métis people in Alberta with their neighbours. Métis jigging originated in Red River, Manitoba, where the influence of Indigenous, Scottish, and French-Canadian cultures helped shape this festive dance, which is done at nearly all Métis events. Jigging is a key cultural pillar within the Métis community, and I was both honoured and excited to see this traditional dance being celebrated within my constituency of Calgary-Cross.

Mr. Speaker, this event not only showcased Métis culture, but it was also meant to draw attention to the serious and tragic discovery of increasing numbers of unmarked graves of residential school victims. It is important to recognize the atrocities of the past so that we can learn and we can heal together as a community. The residential school system continues to be one of the blackest marks in Canadian history, and its impacts are still obvious to this day. I would like to thank the Marlborough community association for helping organize this event. It is key for community associations to ensure that various cultures have the space and the resources to celebrate and engage with the community at large.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues in this House and all Albertans to learn about Métis culture as it is a rich and vibrant one and should be celebrated every day, not only in my constituency but across Alberta.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of a bill to be introduced, which I will sponsor, that being Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings to do. The first tabling is the article from Janet French expressing the pressure put on government staff to take leave to save the Premier.

The second one is the volunteer – or I should say volun-told – spreadsheet for the leadership review owned by a Wellington employee, with proof it was filled out during office hours.

Number 3, a list of lobby firm Wellington Advocacy employees, including Brittany Baltimore, owner of the spreadsheet used by staff.

And, number 4, the post exposing Secure Energy putting pressure on staff to attend the SGM to support the Premier.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that brings us to points of order. The point of order at 2:03 has been withdrawn.

Ms Gray: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: A point of order is called by the hon. the Opposition House Leader.

Point of Order

Rules and Practices of the Assembly

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I called this point of order because I was so looking forward to debating the point of order that was called earlier, and it was withdrawn. I think that's unparliamentary, and I was quite disappointed that I didn't have that opportunity. I had excellent arguments prepared, and I would appreciate you ruling on this.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: I've got to give credit where credit is due, Mr. Speaker. That was a smooth move. But I don't find that this is a point of order, and I'd like to move on to the daily Routine. I'm very anxious to hear the Member for Lethbridge-West's speech on Motion 503. You're lucky.

The Speaker: I think I've provided lots of commentary around extending debate through the use of points of order. I think that's a very clear example of what ought not be done. It's not a point of order. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Indexing Taxes and Benefits

503. Ms Phillips moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly

- (a) acknowledge that the government's decision to stop indexing the provincial personal income tax system to account for inflation may result in Albertans collectively paying approximately \$1 billion more in additional income tax between 2019 and 2025 than they would have paid if this decision had not been made,
- (b) acknowledge that the government's decision to stop indexing the Alberta seniors' benefit, benefits provided under the assured income for the severely handicapped program, and other benefits and income support programs to account for inflation significantly reduced their purchasing power, and
- (c) urge the government to immediately reverse these decisions by
 - (i) re-establishing the indexing of the provincial personal income tax system to account for inflation and
 - (ii) re-establishing the indexing of benefits and income support programs to account for inflation.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for this opportunity to join the House from some long driving this morning. I am here to propose that the Legislative Assembly acknowledge that the government's decision to stop indexing the provincial personal income tax system to account for inflation may result in Albertans collectively paying more than a billion dollars over the

course of the government's fiscal plan, between 2019 and 2025, than they would have paid if this decision had not been made.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The motion goes on, Mr. Speaker, to call for the government to reindex the seniors' benefit and the assured income for the severely handicapped program, ensuring that those benefits account for inflation, and re-establish those benefits' ability to keep pace with the cost-of-living increases and re-establish their purchasing power with those benefits.

The fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that we proposed this motion because indeed the cost of living is the number one issue on Albertans' minds right now. The number one issue on Albertans' minds is not the internal palace intrigue of the UCP leadership. The number one issue on people's minds is not whether the leadership is going to be moved from the Cambridge Hotel to the Westerner and not about in-person voting. People are worried about their bills. People were significantly challenged by their January and February electricity and natural gas bills – there were significant increases, particularly on the electricity side, given that the pool price spiked considerably for people after the removal of the cap – because they came on top of a number of other challenges to people's cost of living.

Now, there is no question that anyone who has darkened the door of a grocery store recently has seen that the price of everything has gone up, and there's no question that we are seeing these inflationary pressures across the industrialized world and pretty much everywhere as the world exits from the pandemic and supply chain challenges, particularly in auto parts and other raw materials, that are experienced everywhere. However, the fact of the matter is that for every single spot where this government could use the levers of public policy to make life more affordable for Albertans, they have chosen not to do so and, in fact, done the opposite.

2:50

There are a significant number of things that they could do to make life more affordable for people. The fact that they haven't I think speaks volumes about why Albertans do not trust this government to be able to look out for them. They do not trust them to put people first. They certainly cannot trust them to rebuild the health care system after the pandemic, and they do not trust them on the cost-of-living increases either.

Now, one of the first acts of this government after the 2019 election was to deindex our income tax system and benefits from inflation. That means that every year people are paying more income tax and seeing their benefits reduced. The UCP is taxing inflation, plain and simple. Now, this had been described in the House of Commons throughout the 1990s as bracket creep, a "pernicious [and insidious] tax grab." Those are quotes, and they are quotes from the Premier, who in the 1990s objected strenuously to this tax increase, but one of the first things he did in his first budget was to deindex those brackets.

With inflation hitting a 30-year high, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are seeing their hard-earned income not going as far as it used to as people struggle to make ends meet. It is not just electricity bills and natural gas heating bills that have spiked through January and February. Albertans are also seeing a number of changes as a result of the rising cost of insurance, because this government chose to listen to lobbyists rather than ordinary people trying to pay the bills, and people's insurance has gone up for their vehicles by about 20 and 30 per cent. A clean driving record: no changes there, yet their policies are going up considerably. People are also getting larger bills for school fees for the simple act of sending their children into

the public school system. Student loan interest and tuition are also going up.

But the destructive impact of inflation on the tax system and benefits cannot go unremarked, and that is why it is important for this Legislature to signal to the people of Alberta that they either care and are going to reverse this considerable challenge to our cost of living or that they are going to continue to thumb their noses at Albertans' number one priority and indeed continue to tax inflation and, effectively, ensure that more and more of our income goes towards personal income taxes because of the sneaky, pernicious, and insidious bracket creep that this government has brought in.

Now, what does that mean, actually, for people? Well, the basic personal exemption in 2019 was \$19,369. That's the amount of money that we don't pay taxes on. Then we pay taxes in brackets according to our income at certain percentages after that. Now, the basic personal exemption in 2025 under the UCP government is \$19,369. That's what you get in terms of your nontaxable income: \$19,000, the same in 2025 as 2019. Now, if that amount was indexed to inflation, it would be \$22,219 of tax-free income. So every single one of us, regardless of how much money we make, is paying more money in taxes than we would have otherwise. We are paying taxes on \$3,000 more a year in income.

You know, it's complicated, and that's why this government did it, because they expect that people won't notice. But here's the thing. No one trusts this government to stand up for their cost of living, so it does not come as any surprise to any ordinary Albertan when there's a sneaky and complicated way that this government has also put their hand in people's pockets. No one doubts that this is the case.

I just spent eight or nine hours on the doorstep over the weekend, Mr. Speaker. I can reliably report to this Chamber that people are very, very worried about their rising cost of living. They are very, very worried, from the hours of canvassing I did on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, about how they are going to make ends meet after those massive bills that they received for January's and February's utilities, after the increases in insurance, after the increases in school fees, in tuition, and so on.

Layer on top of that the fact that it does not matter: on the left, on the right, in the exhausted middle no one trusts this government to do the right thing. People are exhausted with the chaos, with the uncaring, with the disconnection, with the idea that this government would just focus on themselves and their own problems to the detriment of leading this province for a post-COVID recovery, towards economic diversification, towards rebuilding our health care system after the massive challenges and chipping away at the public education system and chipping away at the respect for our public-sector workers over the last two years. No one actually expects this government to reverse some of these decisions that they have made, particularly around reindexing the personal income tax system, but the government should. If they understood what was actually happening out there, they would take this action as a good-faith indication that they're thinking about someone other than themselves.

Now, they can start that by passing this motion, Mr. Speaker, and it will be instructive, to coin a phrase, when and if this government does not support this motion. They should. It should be obvious that we're putting money back in people's pockets. It should be obvious that we are not scooping thousands of dollars a year out of AISH incomes. That should be a very clear public policy position of this government, particularly after the UCP caucus supported the 2018 legislation that actually indexed these benefits in a retroactive fashion, just to, you know, provide a little fact-checked footnote on what happened in question period today. It should be obvious to just, you know, go back and do what the stated intent was and

actually do something for a change that is on the level in this Chamber and that actually helps people for a change. They could do that by supporting this motion, and it'll be really interesting to see if the government actually takes this as a priority.

There is no question that people have suffered a lot over the last couple of years, there is no question that people have seen the chaos in the pandemic response, the chaos that has been created in the education system in particular. That was considerable. And there's no question that people want to see action. This government could take that action today.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next member who caught my eye is the hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in opposition to Motion 503. I think what Albertans need to understand is that our government inherited a fiscal train wreck. Had we not taken action on a whole number of fronts, we would have robbed subsequent generations of the prosperity that we enjoy today.

I want to digress just a little bit. I want to talk a bit about what we inherited. Mr. Speaker, we inherited a government that was spending \$10 billion more per year than comparable or similar governments on a per capita basis, and that trajectory was going up by 4 per cent per year. Had we continued on that trajectory, we would not be projecting a \$500 million surplus, but we would be projecting a \$6 billion deficit. Let me tell you why that matters. This matters to the next generation of Albertans. This matters to our children and our grandchildren. We simply cannot place irresponsible fiscal decisions today and burden the next generation with the results of those decisions.

So, yes, Mr. Speaker, we as a government had to take some serious action. As we in Treasury Board considered in 2019 our approach to a four-year fiscal plan that would bring responsibility back to the province's finances, we were guided by this principle, that Alberta can no longer afford to be an outlier, because we had been a high-spending province brought on by high revenues in the past. But decisions taken during those years of surplus revenues resulted in the province's finances being wholly unsustainable going forward.

Mr. Speaker, as we considered the principle of ensuring that we were no longer an outlier, ensuring that we could live within our means, we made a series of decisions. One thing I can say is that while the personal income tax exemption is deindexed at this point in time, Albertans will not pay any more personal income tax this year than they would have last year. I need to set the record straight. We have not raised taxes.

3:00

Another important fact, Mr. Speaker, is that Alberta has by far and away the largest personal exemption with respect to our personal tax system. Alberta's exemption is \$19,369, meaning that 40 per cent of Albertans pay no income tax at all. When we were considering our options that first year, in 2019, we chose not to reduce that personal exemption. We chose to maintain it even though we were an outlier, ensuring that low-income Albertans would continue to not pay any tax at all. The next-closest province with respect to their personal exemption is Saskatchewan, and they're over \$3,000 lower than Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk a little bit about affordability because it's very important that this House, all members of this House, and all Albertans know some of the background, some of the systemic issues that are creating very high utility costs. Utility

costs are going up and have been going up. While we hear from the members opposite their concern about affordability, I would suggest that the most significant reason for increased utility costs, electricity costs today is bad policy when the members opposite were in government. They overbuilt our distribution system, our transmission system to the tune of \$8 billion. Who pays for that? Consumers today.

Mr. Speaker, they hastily – hastily – moved from coal to gas, a transition that we were going to make, but they did it hastily. Who pays? Alberta consumers, Alberta households, Alberta seniors. That irresponsible move cost Alberta consumers \$1.4 billion. Moreover, they added a carbon tax that increased electricity charges, increased utility costs, increased food costs, the cost to heat their homes, the cost to drive their cars. Who did that? The members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, ultimately, we've been focused on ensuring that Albertans have more opportunities. We've been focusing on the economy, ensuring that we have a very competitive business environment, an environment that will result in increased investment attraction, increased job opportunities, and that is happening today. That is happening today. Tens of thousands of Albertans have been able to find a good job. Tens of thousands of Albertans, Mr. Speaker, who were underemployed are able to find a new job in perhaps an occupation that didn't even exist 10 years ago.

All the while we're focused on affordability. That's why on April 1, as energy prices are high, we will be eliminating our fuel tax – that's 13 cents a litre on every litre of gasoline and diesel fuel purchased by Albertans, purchased by Alberta businesses – because, Mr. Speaker, I'm convinced that the best thing governments can do during times of inflation is spend responsibly, borrow less, and tax less, and we're following through with that measure.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I will say that in 2019, when we paused indexing, we were clear and explicit that when we improved our fiscal house, when we ensured that responsible decisions have led to a stronger, healthy balance sheet and a sustainable fiscal trajectory, we will begin reindexing. I can commit to this House, as I have committed to Albertans, that as we see our economic and commodity price assumptions that we identified in Budget 2022 realized, we will reconsider whether it's time to reindex. I make that commitment to members of this House; I make this commitment to Albertans.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude with this, where I began: this government inherited a fiscal train wreck. This government inherited a fiscal scenario that was completely unsustainable, a scenario that would have burdened future generations with billions and billions of dollars of debt for services that they did not appreciate, that did not benefit them. I find that wholly unacceptable.

We've made hard decisions to bring our fiscal house in order. The good news is that we're reporting a balanced budget this year and for the following two fiscal years, and that gives us options. That gives us options to make strategic reinvestments in our health care system to expand capacity. That gives us options to ensure that future generations of Albertans can reskill, pursue an education in occupations that matter, in professions where there's great demand. Mr. Speaker, that's why we're adding \$600 million to the fiscal plan over the next three years to reskill Albertans, to provide additional opportunities for Albertans to move from poverty to self-sufficiency.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members to oppose this motion.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The next member I see is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this very important motion because, as we all know, life under this Conservative government has become harder, more expensive, and less hopeful because of these types of strategies. I'm very interested to hear the Minister of Finance actually publicly admit that he understands that the deindexing is a hit on the people, so much so that he has just promised, minutes ago in this House, to re-examine it when he feels like doing it. But he is promising to re-examine this reindexing in the future. That means that he understands that it indeed is a tax increase, no matter what else he says. He has just stood up in this House and made our point for us.

This is an over \$1 billion hit on the people in this province who can least afford it. The people that are being affected by this are the people who are receiving AISH, the people who are on the seniors' benefit, and, of course, all the people in this province who pay personal income taxes. If this government had not made this choice, all of these people would see a minor increase in their disposable income.

Now, you ask: why should they get an increase in disposable income? I can tell you that part of the reason why is that there is money available in the system in many other ways, in many other places. We know, for example, that government revenues are significantly up. This government got lucky. The international price of oil, over which they have no control, has increased significantly the revenues in this province, and they pretend that somehow that's allowed them to balance the budget, because they were somehow magic. Well, it turns out that the revenues are increasing in every other state, not just this state.

They didn't plan for it. We know they didn't plan for it because the amount of money that they were predicting to come in in their past budget was not the same as the amount of money that actually did come in, so we know that it was a lucky windfall. This government, if they had the integrity to tie those things together, would be able to say that no matter which government was in, they would have gotten that same lucky windfall. Of course, what they do is that they constantly repeat that somehow if the NDP government had been in, we would have a greater deficit. The only way they can do that is that they can ignore the truth of what they just said. They say one thing; then they ignore it and say the opposite thing, because they have no internal consistency in their planning. They got lucky, and they're using it as a chance to kind of pull the wool over the eyes of the people in this country.

We know that government revenue is up. We also know that corporate profits are dramatically up over the last little while, and we know that CEO compensation is up. All we're asking is that somehow the rest of Albertans be able to gain some of the benefits from all of this largesse that we are experiencing in this province. Again, this government doesn't really care for the average person in the province. They have a very small, narrow group of people who they are very concerned about, and we know that because of the fact that we do see that government revenues are up; we do see that corporate profits are up; we do see that CEO compensation is up.

3:10

In fact, this government, at the same time that they're asking for up to 10 per cent back in terms of wages from some of the people who took care of us during the pandemic, like respiratory therapists and social workers and so on, is agreeing to give up to 39 per cent increases to people in AIMCo who, in fact, lost significant amounts of money for us. It's not based on integrity. It's not based on

performance. It's based on who this government likes and who this government doesn't like, and I can tell you that they do not like you if you are not rich in this province. That's the underlying truth here.

What we have is a situation where people who rely on government understanding their circumstances and taking care of them are not experiencing anything from this government that would come close to empathy or an understanding of the nature of economics for people who are not wealthy. It's really disconcerting to hear that, and we know that the minister has just admitted that he understands that, that he is making a hit on average people, because he just said: maybe later, when more rich people have gotten even richer, we'll consider the possibility of taking this hit back. He just admitted that in the House, that they're going to reconsider that.

So here we are. We have a government that got lucky and therefore is strutting around the barnyard like a rooster, pretending that somehow they've done something big when, in fact, it was just sheer chance that they happened to be in government at the time that the international price of oil went up so extremely high compared to what was predicted even by them in their own budget. They can't pretend that they knew the future, because they didn't put it in their budget. We have the numbers.

What we have is a government that has made life more difficult for every single person in this province. They have put in policies that have resulted in the increase in school fees. They put in policies that have resulted in dramatic increases to utilities, some people paying two or three times as much as they would have if the rate cap was on. They've put in policies that increased our insurance rates for our houses and our cars, people often seeing double or triple the rate that they were seeing when there was a rate cap on.

We see that this is a government that has started to increase postsecondary tuition costs, in some cases up over 100 per cent of the actual cost. I mean, this is a minister who just moments ago said that they would really like to see people retrain to get back into the economy – “reskill” I believe is the word he was using – yet he's actually making it more expensive, in some cases 100 per cent more expensive, than it was before this minister got in.

We have a minister who is taking advantage of extreme luck and the fact that there are some people that are doing really well and pretending that all Albertans are doing really well when, in fact, the evidence is that that is not true. This side of the House brought in a bill to try to protect people who were going to lose their benefits or lose their houses because of their inability to pay for the utility bills and to stop them from having the utilities shut off, and what did this government do? They said that, no, we can't even do that simple thing of just allowing them to continue to live in their own homes. This is a government that has really made absolutely no decision to act on behalf of average Albertans. As long as, you know, the group of oligarchs who are making lots of money at this time continues to make money and make more money, they say that Alberta is doing well. But Albertans are not doing well. A very small segment of the province is doing well.

We've seen what happens when this government engages in these types of policies. We saw it, for example, when they gave away \$4.7 billion to international corporations, some of whom actually used the money to move their headquarters, their head offices, out of Alberta into foreign countries. We see this kind of thing happen all the time, that the government makes a decision and all it benefits are these large corporations who are already profitable. It wasn't like they were even helping companies to make decisions to stay. In the example of the \$4.7 billion they did absolutely nothing to ensure that that would derive a benefit for the province of Alberta. They didn't say: would you please make sure that you hire people in the province of Alberta? In fact, they didn't. We saw job losses after they did that, 50,000 job losses in the province of Alberta, and

we're still behind in terms of full-time jobs three years later in this province. Now they put in a gas rebate, which they say is going to help Albertans, with absolutely no guarantee that that gas rebate will be passed on to the consumers. They've done nothing but make sure that the profitable corporations can take that extra 13 cents and tack it onto their profits, because there's nothing to actually require them to pass it on to citizens in this province. Again, what we have is this government who are constantly looking for ways to make the rich richer and to ignore the fact that the poor, by nature, are becoming poorer. That's what we see happening all the time.

A responsible, proper government would have a preferential option for the poor, always looking for ways they can shore them up and try to bring them back into the economy to make sure that they're doing well, but they have shut down the ways for people to get out of poverty and to move into a middle-class lifestyle by increasing tuition, by increasing other costs, and making it almost impossible for people. We see people who are on AISH, people who are reliant on the seniors' benefits and, of course, all Albertans, through their personal income tax, losing their money and losing their purchasing power.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members? The next member who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's good to be able to speak to this motion. I'd like to thank the member for proposing it; however, I am interested in understanding the rationale. That member was the environment minister when the carbon tax was introduced into this province. I remember. I was sitting as an opposition member at the time, thinking about the cost that will be bringing forward to every Albertan, whether it be through heating, through their gas, through their food prices. I guess it's a little rich coming from the member that actually brought in the largest tax increase in Alberta's history to be now talking about this issue. The hypocrisy in this House sometimes astounds me.

But I want to talk to you about: the last member that just spoke from the NDP talked about how this government is – basically, in my words, he said that this government is heartless, that we don't care. I want to remind the member of the history of conservatives in this province. I want to remind him that it was a Conservative government that made sure that AISH recipients received the highest in Canada out of all the provinces, in fact, to the point where we actually pay over \$400 more than the closest jurisdiction in Canada. Mr. Speaker, that was not an NDP government. If the member's assertion is that conservatives are heartless, it was not the NDP government that did that; it was a Conservative government that did that in the past.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to remind the member that in this province almost 40 per cent of those who could pay taxes don't pay provincial taxes in this province. Who did that? Was that an NDP government that actually did that, or was that heartless conservatives who did that? No, it was conservatives that did that. Conservatives actually recognized that this should be a place where people can come, work hard, get out of poverty, get themselves in a position where they can provide for their family, start a business, work hard for their future.

In this province Conservative governments of the past have done a great job of being able to provide for opportunities for Albertans, have done a great job of recognizing that people come here from other countries in abject poverty, come here with just an opportunity. They're just looking for an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, and this is the place where they provided it. Past Conservative

governments did that, not the NDP; not a past socialist government but a Conservative government. So when the member stands up and says that we're heartless, conservatives are heartless, let's remember what history has shown us, that conservatives have actually done a fantastic job.

Now, remember, Mr. Speaker: how could we do this? Was it only because we had oil and gas? Well, there's actually oil and gas in Saskatchewan. There's oil and gas in other provinces as well. So why is it that Alberta did so well? It was because of the Alberta advantage. The Alberta advantage was low marginal tax rate, lower regulatory burden than other jurisdictions, and this is really how we were able to get to the point we're at right now, because we recognized that the best social program is a great job. The hon. Minister of Finance said that. I think that's absolutely true and sometimes lost on the NDP, that really there's no way that someone on a fixed income, someone on AISH is going to survive very well. Even in rich Alberta, in a place where we are giving the most that we can give, it's very, very difficult for them to be able to make ends meet. I get that.

3:20

But let's talk about another issue, the other issue of inflation. Mr. Speaker, one of the biggest drivers of inflation is the cost of goods going up. That cost of goods going up obviously is carbon tax. The NDP and their close ally Justin Trudeau want to take our carbon tax from \$50 a tonne to \$170 a tonne, a threefold increase. Do you think that that's not going to create inflation, that that's not going to create a burden on our vulnerable in our societies? Do you not think that the cost of that is going to be borne by the poorest of our societies? If the NDP took a look at their arguments and recognized that a tax is a tax wherever you are but that it's worse borne out on the poor, and a consumption tax, which is basically the carbon tax because it affects everything – let's be clear. You can't live anywhere in this province without having things trucked to you. It has to be trucked if it's going to be – your food or whatever you have, whatever you bought, it was trucked here, and that carbon tax is a price on that.

So when we add that cost to those who are poor in our society, that is not compassionate. How can the hon. members really believe that that is a compassionate approach? In our approach of past Conservative governments here we recognized that someone should not be taxed until just under \$20,000. Now, our federal counterparts, the Liberals, don't believe that. They're taxed at, I think, \$9,000. That's when they start being taxed. Mr. Speaker, I think that their close friends and allies the Liberals in Ottawa should recognize, if they're really compassionate, that they should choose to start taxing at just under \$20,000, but they don't.

This is why the hypocrisy of their argument is difficult to be able to swallow, and that's why most people in the province don't buy into this concept they have that they're the compassionate ones. They recognize that – you know what? – when it comes to government programs, there's always, always a scarcity, Mr. Speaker, and that scarcity is very difficult to be able to find a way to be able to get to everybody who needs it. We recognize it. That's why societies in the past that have thrived have recognized that that is not the solution. The solution is to be able to help businesses to prosper, to be successful so that they can actually pay their employees more, and we've done that. In fact, that is the reason why we have that Alberta advantage, because people can come to this province and get paid more.

Mr. Speaker, we give \$20 billion to Ottawa that doesn't come back every year. Where does most of that money come from? Not transfer payments. That comes from income tax. We are able to pay our people more in this province because we did something right

here historically. The NDP want to discount that, but it is because of that, because of that approach that we took in Conservative governments of the past, that we're in a position now.

Do you know that before the NDP got in, Mr. Speaker, we had no debt? We had no debt. We had the ability to provide so much more for our people. What was their strategy? Spend more; tax more. Then we got into a situation where it was \$60 billion, \$70 billion, \$80 billion of debt. They put us in a precarious situation. This is why we had to make the difficult decisions that we did. But the hon. member the Minister of Finance has said that this is a temporary fix. This is something that we need to be able to work through, and as we get ourselves in a better situation, we will work through it.

But, Mr. Speaker, this motion is virtue signalling. When the members opposite had the opportunity for four years to be able to get rid of deindexing, they didn't. That's the reality. Yes, they've said that it was retroactive, but what about those three years that it wasn't retroactive? What about those three years, three and a half years, where they didn't do it? The reality is that they had to live those three and a half years. If they were concerned so much about the issue of affordability, they would have done it on day one, wouldn't they have? But they didn't. They did it three and a half years later, and you can make that retroactive, but for those three and a half years they had no ability to be able to virtue signal that they were actually helping those people who are suffering, those who are poor and struggling in this province. They didn't do it until they were close to the election. This is the reason why people do not buy into the arguments that they've brought forward.

I want to just finish with this, Mr. Speaker. The real reality that the NDP are looking for is that they're looking for a universal income. They want to make sure that they actually bring forward as much as they can for everybody, and actually this is what they're really looking for, a universal income.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next member who has caught my eye is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Lethbridge-West for bringing the motion to the House and before us so that we could debate it. I have to say that it's displeasing to hear the members from the other side speak when it comes to actually working for Albertans. You know, day after day coming here into this House, into this Legislature during question period we see a Premier and his cabinet continuously just spin – spin – just full of rhetoric. We have absolutely no substance in terms of what this government is doing to actually work for Albertans and actually protect Albertans, right?

They continue to fail Albertans. They continue to fail Albertans, and a prime example of that, Mr. Speaker, is the \$1.3 billion gamble on the Keystone XL. Waste of money, just a complete waste of taxpayer dollars when it comes to – and that's what this government does. It's like gamble after gamble after gamble. Anything that they can do in order to pass the buck when it comes to actually protecting Albertans and making life more affordable for Albertans, this government just decides to pass the buck. The Premier continuously does that during question period, just passes the buck.

Now, you know, the members on the other side like to complain about the carbon tax. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? The carbon tax had a real rebate in it, not like what this government has decided to provide Albertans, which is a completely fake program that doesn't even come into effect until next year. Now, that is incredulous right there in terms of, like, the rhetoric that comes out of this government. They like to say that they're doing something,

that they're investing in Albertans, but the reality is that nothing could be farther from the truth.

Through the budget that we see before us, Mr. Speaker, we see nothing but cuts and more cuts and more cuts, but they have no problem giving \$4.7 billion to corporations in the province of Alberta. Some of these corporations actually just – you know, it's this whole outdated and antiquated economic approach known as trickle-down theory. Albertans are getting sick and tired of Conservatives in power presenting austerity budgets time and time again, austerity budget after austerity budget, which cut more and more programming that actually benefits Albertans, yet they provide large tax breaks to big corporations.

3:30

I find it absolutely shameful that the Premier would actually come into this House and boast about jobs at Walmart as his major accomplishment. Now, don't get me wrong, Walmart is fine, Mr. Speaker – Walmart is fine – but that's not full-time, mortgage-paying jobs that Albertans deserve. The Premier should be ashamed that that's all he can refer to when it comes to actually creating jobs here in the province of Alberta. Part-time jobs: that's what Albertans get out of this government and this austerity budget, yet another austerity budget for Albertans.

You know, the members on the other side of the House continue to chirp over there as I'm speaking, Mr. Speaker, because they can't take it. They can't take that I'm actually speaking the truth in this House when it comes to the type of government that they are and that they're not actually putting Albertans first.

Now, the other big gamble that this Premier and cabinet decided to take was the fact that they were going to take the whole concept of the carbon tax to the Supreme Court, and they lost, Mr. Speaker. You know, we took the approach that this carbon levy is going to come into effect whether we like it or not because we do need to address the whole issue of climate change. Unlike on that side of the House, where there are members who refuse to believe that climate change is real, we on this side of the House know it's real, know that we've got to do something about it and that we're actually protecting the lives of Albertans when we do so.

The members on the other side of the House: Mr. Speaker, you see, they fail to recognize that when it comes to economic decision-making, there are such things called externalities. And the thing is that down the road those things are going to impact and actually have a negative effect on the economy if they're not addressed right now. If we do not address climate change, the economic impact, we're going to feel it later, and that's what this government fails to realize. We're going to have to pay for it later.

Now, what did we decide to do, Mr. Speaker? We decided – you know what? – if the federal government is going to impose a carbon tax on Canadians, then we might as well implement a program that's going to benefit Albertans and put Albertans first. The federal government was going to do it anyways. So we created a program that actually had a real rebate in it. So, yeah, people were going to have to be paying a little bit more, but for those that were at a certain threshold, they were going to get a rebate. And that was over 65 per cent of Albertans that were actually getting a real rebate, unlike the fake program that this government is actually presenting to Albertans right now.

Now, on top of that, the gamble that this Premier and this here cabinet took, Mr. Speaker, was that they crushed the Alberta plan, and now we've got to pay that same carbon tax, but we've got to pay it over to the federal government whereas our program was actually reinvesting in Albertans. We were actually investing it, diversifying Alberta's economy, moving forward, because Albertans were asking

for that. [interjections] Chirp all you want. Chirp all you want. Go ahead. I'm actually speaking the truth here.

Now, they claim that everything is going up for Albertans. Well, everything was going up because of the carbon tax, but 65 per cent of Albertans were getting a rebate. Unlike with this government, Mr. Speaker, they decided to take the cap off insurance. A 30 per cent increase on insurance on Albertans. Utility fees: it was unbelievable. There are constituents that I have heard from, and when their utility bills came in, they're paying over \$800 when they were used to paying \$200. This is the reality that Albertans are experiencing under the poor and bad management of this here government.

They're failing Albertans, and here we are bringing a motion into this House that will at least try to rectify some of that, Mr. Speaker, especially when it comes to those who are most marginalized in our society. And, yes, I'm talking about seniors. I'm talking about people on AISH. That's the sad thing about all of this, that this government is actively debating in this House, where here we are being propositional, trying to bring in a positive piece of legislation, trying to bring positive debate into this House here so that we can actually stand up for Albertans, and the members on the other side are kiboshing the whole plan. They want to continue to make life less affordable for Albertans and especially those most marginalized.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next individual that I see is the hon. Minister of Community and Social Services, with in and around five minutes remaining in the allotted time.

Mr. Luan: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for allowing me to chip into the debate here. As the Minister of Community and Social Services the AISH program is directly under my ministry. I'd like to share some facts so that they can be contributing to the debate here. The Alberta government continues to help Albertans with permanent disabilities meet their daily needs and live independently and find employment at their first ability. The assured income for the severely handicapped program, AISH, that we often talk about, provides financial and health benefits to eligible adult Albertans with permanent medical conditions that prevent them from earning a living. AISH coverage may include a monthly living allowance, health benefits, personal benefits for the clients and spouses and partners and dependent children.

Let me share some facts here so that we can be on the same page. Mr. Speaker, with Budget 2022, we increased \$12 million into AISH to the point of \$1.4 billion. That is the highest in Alberta's history for AISH benefits. That's fact number 1.

Fact number 2 is that \$1,685 per month for the AISH benefit today remains the highest among the provinces in Canada. That's a fact.

Fact number 3, Mr. Speaker: just this month, as part of Alberta's recovery plan, the Premier and I announced an additional income support program for prenatal families where people are receiving AISH and income support. With an additional \$600 added to that, the total of \$856, that, again, is the highest prenatal benefit in the country.

Mr. Speaker, we work day in, day out with tangible actions and provide support services to Albertans, for those who are under my ministry. Oftentimes we call them the most vulnerable Albertans. We have actions followed with actions for tangible changes made to their lives. That is a fact. You know, I'm proud that my ministry provides the social safety net for our most vulnerable Albertans, as I stated in all those facts.

Not only for that part; in Budget 2022 we also added \$34 million to help people who can get a job to get the job. Those of you know that when you have the ability to reach your full potential to get a job, it's more than just finance. Your mental health, everything else, your condition increases significantly.

Those are the facts on the table that I want to contribute to the debate in the House. You know, the NDP can be good at playing all the political cheap shots, but it remains a fact that when they were in government, they didn't accomplish what we did. That is the reason that I want to urge all members in this House to vote against this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next individual who caught my eye was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, with a very short amount of time.

Ms Sigurdson: A very short time. Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I'd like to speak, obviously, in favour of this motion. Certainly, you know, this Conservative government likes to say that the best social program is a job. But guess what? What if you're retired, if you're a senior living in this province on a fixed income? That program is not available to you, and that program is not for all Albertans either.

There are a few things government does, and I'll just help the members understand one aspect of that. One aspect of that is actually lifting the floor, that you support people who are vulnerable through public programs, and – guess what? – that redistributes the wealth, and that helps people who are pretty vulnerable. It seems like this UCP government doesn't get that. It doesn't understand what social programs are all about.

We know that there are so many things that they have cut. This \$1 billion that they're getting extra by not indexing the income tax system is just one of the many, many, many things that this UCP government has done. I want to talk about the Alberta seniors' benefit. The fact that that is not indexed – they wilfully stepped in and pulled that back. We know that there's a 5.7 per cent increase in the cost of living, I mean, that's extraordinary, and it's very difficult for seniors to be able to manage that. But guess what else they've done? They cut grants in the seniors ministry. We used to have \$2 million going out to community agencies to support seniors in their community.

They say that they want seniors to stay in their communities, but they're stripping those community supports. Now it's only \$900,000, and – guess what? – they have \$118 million in the capital housing plan, which is like a drop in the bucket. Our government had \$1.2 billion. It's appalling how much the UCP has cut back so many programs. They cut the Seniors Advocate completely. That's \$1 million. They said that it's all in the Health Advocate, but – guess what? – I asked in estimates, and there's no report.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview; however, under Standing Order 8(3), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of the motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would like to invite the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West to do just that.

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have heard that the government's stated intention is to move forward with an extra \$500 a year in personal income tax for an average family. We have heard this government say that they are going to move forward with taking \$500 a year out of people's child benefit. We have heard this government commit just now that it is A-okay by them that Alberta

seniors' benefits will be reduced by \$800 a year over the life of their fiscal plan. They have just committed that they are fine with taking \$3,000 a year away from people who are on AISH benefits.

Now, that is their commitment, to continue to far more than nickel and dime average taxpayers, to take money away from folks who are getting child benefits or seniors' benefits. That's their position, and that's their commitment to the people of Alberta, but – you know what, Mr. Speaker? – we have also made a commitment to the people of Alberta. We will stop this pernicious and insidious – and any other big word that the Premier might want to use to make himself sound smart – attempt to take money out of people's pockets and raise their taxes. We will stop this tax on inflation. We will reindex the tax system. We will make sure that all benefits keep pace with inflation because it is the right thing to do. That's our commitment.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. We've also committed to making sure that we've got action on electricity rates, on car insurance, on school fees, on student loan interest, on tuition, on property taxes, by ensuring that we've got the right balance that puts people first. Here's the thing. Albertans trust this side of the House to do those things, to put them first.

This vote this afternoon on this motion, when this government rejects our offer to make sure that we are not raising people's personal income tax by 500 bucks a year, taking \$500 a year out of their child benefit, when they reject our offer to take simple, concrete actions to defend people's pocketbooks and to ensure that we are taking action on cost of living, will just be another indicator that people cannot trust this UCP government. They cannot trust them to take action on affordability. They cannot trust them to manage the health care system. They cannot trust them to put in place a reasonable curriculum for K to 12 education. They cannot trust them to ensure that we are attracting new investment and diversification and keeping pace with a 21st-century economy.

They cannot trust them to even tell the truth about what they might do in their budget given that these budget documents that we have before the House don't even accurately represent inflation, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is called. The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You have asked us to exercise a lot of caution in the ways that we use the words "truth" and "lying" or getting around the truth or misrepresenting the truth. The Member for Lethbridge-West clearly just said that these members can't be trusted – you know, I don't have the benefit of the Blues – certainly was insinuating that we cannot tell the truth, that we were lying on this side of the House. I know that's unparliamentary, and I ask that member – I know she was on a roll with whatever that was, but certainly it's unparliamentary, and I ask her to apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that nothing could be further from a point of order, what the Deputy Government House Leader suggested. The Member for Lethbridge-West was saying

that Albertans can't trust this government, and she listed a number of things. We have said that before. It's not a point of order at all.

The Speaker: Well, I'm prepared to rule. You're correct in your assertion that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West did provide a number of reasons why you can't trust this government, but the problem here is that she also made specific reference to them not being able to tell the truth, which, if attributed directly to an individual inside the Assembly, is definitely unparliamentary. A case could be made that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West did use unparliamentary language when referring to them as members, so I would caution her so. I've provided much commentary on this particular language inside the Assembly, and I expect that she will govern herself accordingly.

Debate Continued

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that guidance. I mean, where I was getting to is that the fact of the matter is that these budget documents that we have before the House currently do not accurately represent the inflationary expectations of the Bank of Canada, and certainly that inflation has reached a 30-year high at 5.7 per cent on an annualized basis. Nowhere do we find that accurately represented in these budget documents, showing again that this government would prefer not to talk about the cost of living and inflationary pressures on ordinary people.

I think that what we can expect them to do is continue to oppose efforts to make life more affordable for Albertans. No one is surprised by this anymore, that they are singularly focused on their own internal drama and not on the drama of the kitchen table, of trying to pay bills and get ahead. That, Mr. Speaker, is what the government of Alberta should be focused on, and that is our commitment on this side of the House going forward.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 503 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:49 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p> Eggen Feehan Loyola </p> | <p> Nielsen Phillips Sabir </p> | <p> Schmidt Sigurdson, L. Sweet </p> |
|--|---|--|

Against the motion:

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p> Copping Fir Frey Getson Hanson Horner Hunter Issik Jones LaGrange Lovely Luan </p> | <p> Madu McIver Nally Neudorf Nicolaides Orr Pon Rosin Rutherford Savage Sawhney Schow </p> | <p> Shandro Singh Stephan Toews Toor Turton van Dijken Walker Williams Wilson Yaseen </p> |
|---|--|---|

Totals: For – 9 Against – 35

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 lost]

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation on behalf of the Government House Leader.

Canadian Pacific Railway Service

16. Mrs. Sawhney moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Canada to immediately invoke provisions to declare rail transport an essential service and implement back-to-work legislation to prevent any disruption or CP work stoppage to ensure Canada's economy remains uninterrupted.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon. As you are aware, on March 16, 2022, CP issued a lockout notice to those employees represented by the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference while TCRC provided a strike notice to CP. This weekend a work stoppage began, and CP moved to complete a safe and structured shutdown of its train operations. Alberta businesses rely on rail transportation, including services offered by CP, to ship their goods throughout the province, to the United States, and through gateways such as the port of Vancouver. This could not come at a worse time. Supply chains have already been disrupted by the pandemic, floods in British Columbia, cold weather, rail service issues, illegal blockades, and port congestion.

As Minister of Transportation one of my duties is to serve as the current chair of the Western Transportation Advisory Council, or WESTAC. WESTAC members represent the private sector, government, and labour and work collectively to resolve the constraints and inefficiencies that undermine the performance of western Canada's supply chain and transportation sector. At our recent conference in December the discussions reflected a range of dynamic factors that are influencing the transportation and logistics sector. We discussed the wide recognition that the goods movement sector must rethink how things are done from the planning stages, which need to be bold and reflect a range of pressing implications around emerging technologies as well as a focus on resilience and risk management. Resilience requires planning for extreme weather events, multifaceted cyberattacks, and the security of goods or means of conveyance. To quote from the meeting report: "factoring shifts in global trade and the flow of goods, the complexity facing transportation today is unparalleled."

Another duty of mine was to recently co-chair a meeting of the Council of Ministers Responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety. To quote from my remarks delivered at that council meeting, like other jurisdictions, the efficient movement of exports to other markets is a priority of the government of Alberta. As a landlocked province Alberta depends on well-functioning infrastructure, carriers, and logistics both inside and outside the province to move its exports and bring products to Albertans. A common theme is the resilience of Canada's transportation infrastructure to events such as severe weather. Recent flood and wildfire events in British Columbia have shown how vulnerable our supply chain can really be.

Now our Alberta businesses are faced with a labour disruption at CP, which will disrupt the movement of a broad range of goods and likely lead to increased costs for many Alberta businesses. I have already heard concerns from several sectors such as grain, livestock, forestry, fertilizer, and oil and gas regarding a work stoppage at CP. Here are just a few samples of what we have heard from our stakeholders on this situation.

4:10

From the Western Canadian Shippers' Coalition: we have ascertained that collectively, revenue losses would be in the range of \$498M in the first week of a work stoppage or lock-out, \$1.05B for 2 weeks, and by week three, \$1.56B. It is also worth pointing out that for every one week of strike or lock-out action, there is a four-week recovery period.

The effects of a work stoppage or lock-out will reach beyond CP's network to other railways, because it will preclude the normal interchange of traffic between CP and other railways that is essential to the operation of the national transportation system.

From Purolator:

Should a work stoppage of any kind occur, the fundamental supply chain driving the Canadian economy will suffer adverse effects that will significantly impact all Canadians and international partners who rely on our vital transportation systems.

From the Food, Health & Consumer Products of Canada, who copied me on their letter to the federal government:

We want to underline the need for a solution to this situation to avert the serious consequences that this strike could have.

We respectfully ask that you pursue all avenues within your authority to help bring the talks between Teamsters Canada Rail Conference and CP to a rapid successful conclusion. This includes strongly encouraging the two parties to enter into voluntary binding arbitration.

And from the Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association: last year's drought resulted in a significant lack of feed grain in western Canada. As such, cattle feeders are relying heavily this winter on feed supplies from the U.S. Multiple supply chain issues with transportation have reduced feed availability, and farmers have been managing their animals' needs on a day-to-day, train-by-train basis. There's no buffer in the system. If strike action occurs, feed supplies will run out in one or two weeks, causing a serious animal welfare issue.

The labour disruption at CP could result in the shutdown of production facilities, which would impact workers, the economy, and the supply and demand for Canadian products. From an export perspective for Alberta, a rail stoppage means disruption to the movement of oil by rail to refineries in the United States. Producers of oil, natural gas, and petrochemicals may have to curtail some production if they cannot ship by rail and do not have sufficient capacity to store products on-site. The CP Rail movement stoppage, if it continues, will cause significant port backlogs, with additional costs for the manufacturing and food sectors.

As much of Alberta's southern agricultural production is exclusively served by CP, this shutdown in service will negatively affect our agricultural producers. It would impact spring crop and fertilizer planning and have immediate adverse impacts on Alberta's cattle-feeding industry. Alberta's cattle-feeding industry is currently reliant on imported feed corn and dried distiller grains from the United States to provide daily rations to over 1 million head of cattle in Alberta's Feedlot Alley. CP is the sole rail transporter of U.S. feed corn and dried distiller grains into southern Alberta, and any disruption to delivery would have serious consequences for Alberta's cattle feeders. This would adversely affect western Canada animal feed supplies, which are severely limited following drought during the 2021 crop growing season.

The effects of a work stoppage will reach beyond CP's network to other railways due to the normal interchange of traffic between CP and other railways. In the Vancouver area only CP can perform the final delivery of traffic originating on CN's network to many of the terminals on the south shore of Burrard Inlet while only CN can perform the final delivery of traffic originating on CP's network to terminals located on the north shore.

We know that CP is a federally regulated railway, and the government of Canada has exclusive purview over federal labour relations between class 1 railroads, like CP, and railway workers. My ministry monitors any developments regarding our transportation network, including railways, to assess the severity of the situation and impacts on Alberta's businesses. In light of recent supply chain challenges and the impacts that a CP work stoppage will have on Alberta businesses, our government is advocating to the federal government to take action to minimize the impacts of this labour disruption at CP. The federal government can implement back-to-work legislation, as they have in the past. In 2021 a strike at the port of Montreal was stopped when the federal government passed back-to-work legislation days after the strike began.

It is my view that given a disruption of this magnitude stacked on an already stressed system, it is imperative that the CP work stoppage end quickly. That is why we are calling on Ottawa to intervene. To avoid further aggravating an already suffering supply chain, we ask that the federal government take immediate and effective measures to ensure that service on CP's critical rail network resumes as quickly as possible.

The government of Canada should immediately invoke provisions to declare rail transport an essential service to ensure that Canada's economy remains uninterrupted. The government of Canada should also consider implementing back-to-work legislation to bring an immediate end to this work stoppage. Inaction will lead to negative economic consequences for Alberta and Canada while damaging Alberta and Canada's reputation as a reliable supplier to international customers.

I have sent a letter to my federal counterpart, Transport Minister Alghabra, and to Labour Minister O'Regan outlining our concerns. I know my colleague at agriculture, forestry and rural development has also sent a letter to Ottawa. Allow me to quote from my letter, Mr. Speaker.

Dear Ministers Alghabra and O'Regan:

I am writing to raise concerns about the potential labour disruption at Canadian Pacific Railway (CP). On March 16, 2022, CP issued a lock-out notice to those employees represented by the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC), while TCRC provided a strike notice to CP. A labour disruption could take place at 12:01 a.m. ET on March 20, 2022 if CP and TCRC cannot come to a negotiated agreement or agree to binding arbitration.

Alberta businesses rely on rail transportation, including services offered by CP, to ship their goods throughout the province, to the United States (US), and through gateways such as the Port of Vancouver. Supply chains have been disrupted by the pandemic, floods in British Columbia, cold weather, rail service issues, illegal blockades, and port congestion. Alberta is now faced with the potential labour disruption at CP, which could shut down CP's network and disrupt the movement of a broad range of goods, while leading to increased costs for many Alberta businesses.

Alberta has already heard concerns from several sectors such as grain, livestock, forestry, fertilizer, and oil and gas regarding the potential impact of a strike or lock-out at CP. A disruption of this magnitude,

as I had mentioned earlier and will emphasize once again, stacked on an already stressed system, would be severe.

This is also a critical time of the year for crop producers and fertilizer shortages resulting from a strike or lock-out would jeopardize primary production. A rail disruption would also further stress livestock producers who are relying on imported feed from the US, as a result of the drought conditions experienced this past summer. Any of these additional adverse impacts on feed supplies would, in a matter of days, result in significant animal welfare issues, affecting millions of heads of

cattle across western Canada. Crop and livestock production and the associated value-added processing is critical to Alberta and other provinces.

To avoid further aggravating an already suffering supply chain, we ask that the federal government take immediate and effective measures to ensure that service on CP's critical rail network resumes as quickly as possible, if a lock-out or strike were to occur. The Government of Canada should immediately invoke provisions to declare rail transport an essential service to prevent any disruption or CP work stoppage to ensure Canada's economy remains uninterrupted. Inaction will lead to negative economic consequences for Alberta and Canada while damaging Alberta's and Canada's reputation as a reliable supplier to international customers.

That is an excerpt from the letter that I had sent.

Our Premier, along with his provincial colleagues Premier Moe from Saskatchewan and Premier Stefanson from Manitoba, has also shared concerns on this matter with the Prime Minister.

Let me assure you and all Alberta producers and businesses that we will continue to pressure Ottawa and urge that they take the appropriate action to ensure that goods continue to move. This is too important for all those involved to let it just play out.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Government Motion 16 the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has the call.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise this afternoon to add some comments around Government Motion 16 and what it's proposing that we advocate for as a province. You know, I guess I'll start with that I would like to really, sincerely believe that this motion is about protecting the supply chain. The problem is – and I guess I should even add that I'd like to even think that it's about protecting the workers, the unionized workers, that are there, but I have a hard time believing that. The reason is that members of the UCP have made very, very clear their views about unionized workers and unions, so I doubt this is about potentially protecting the workers.

The reason I call into question whether they're looking to protect the supply chains: I would like to remind members of the House that, quite honestly, there really hasn't been anything done by this government in terms of supply chains and securing those supply chains. I would bring attention to the failed response to keep goods and services and cattle and things like that moving across the border for 18 days over at Coutts this winter. As a matter of fact, we've even had members of the UCP cheering them on not only in this House but on location as well. So if there is such a concern about the supply chain, why then those actions, those words which would be counterproductive to that?

There have been other causes for concern around protecting the supply chains here. I would certainly bring forward the example of the meat-packing plant. During, you know, one of the heights of one of the waves of COVID we had a meat-packing plant shut down because appropriate steps weren't taken to protect those workers in that plant, which thus protected the supply chain. Again, just one example. Obviously, we saw that meat wasn't able to be produced, which rolls down to the farmers, their cattle, and whatnot.

Fair enough. I mean, we've seen some very, very unpredictable situations that have disrupted things during the pandemic: for farmers, you know, severe drought in Alberta – I think that was even mentioned by the minister in the opening comments – the floods in B.C. wiping out key transportation, not only rail but roads as well, thus making it even harder. But, again, you know, we didn't see any real, concrete actions by the government to try to mitigate

those situations, which is why I'm standing up here saying that I'm doubting the intentions of this motion and what they're saying they're trying to achieve here.

If you're truly wanting to protect the supply chains, you also need to protect the workers as well, hence why we're seeing some head-butting here going on between the two. But I will point out, though, Mr. Speaker, that we are in a position of a lockout, okay? The company has locked out the workers. I noticed in the comments from the minister very carefully dancing around using the words "work stoppage" or "lock-out." At the heart of this motion it's about bringing in or advocating to be brought in back-to-work legislation. When you look historically at what back-to-work legislation is, it's about forcing the worker back despite any concerns they have. I've never actually seen one back-to-work legislation forcing the company back to the table to relook at things.

I find this motion to be quite counterproductive. You know, we hear the words from the minister about how they want to see an amicable agreement between the two parties, but amicable for who? I think there's a better way that we could be wording this motion to try to encourage both sides to come to an agreement that not only is in the best interests of all of the producers and businesses in Alberta to be able to get their goods and services moved across the country, bring in supplies so they can continue to do their business, but at the same time we need to protect the workers. When you have workers that are injured on the job, that ultimately affects the supply chain. When you have workers that are tired, that ultimately will lead to supply chain issues because they're not getting the job done. It's like asking a person to run a mile and then right after that mile you ask them to run that mile again, but you're not giving them any extra time because they're tired.

Mr. Speaker, I think there's a better way to do that. I think we can improve the language that's in the motion. Therefore, I do have an amendment to present to you. I will pass that up and await your instructions.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this will be referred to as amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Government Motion 16 be amended as follows: (a) by striking out "urge the government of Canada to immediately invoke provisions to declare rail transport an essential service and implement back-to-work legislation" and substituting "call on Canadian Pacific Railway and the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference to reach a negotiated settlement urgently to resolve the contract dispute" and then (b) by striking out "any disruption or CP work stoppage" and substituting "further work stoppage."

Mr. Speaker, as I said, this is about trying to encourage both sides. Again, just levelling back-to-work legislation: historically this is always about forcing the worker back despite any of the concerns they might have. Everybody might remember that we recently had a CN strike that was going on. The number one concern that I kept hearing every single time from those workers was safety. I know the track record for the government has been, shall we say, a little spotty with regard to treating Alberta workers' safety with a higher level of concern.

Honestly, I have no idea what it would be like to try to work around some of those trains and the things that are involved, but certainly some of the things that I heard are very big causes for concern. The number one, I think, thing that I heard was the number of hours sometimes workers are having to put in. Again, as you get tired, you start to make potentially mistakes. It's not like you woke up in the morning and looked in the mirror and said: well, let's see

how many mistakes I can make on the job and make CP or CN's life miserable. I doubt that that conversation takes place. The reality is that as you get tired, the decisions you make maybe aren't quite as good as if you were fresh. What we're hearing around some of the concerns that members of the teamsters are saying about their work site is safety. We all know, at the end of the day, that when you have too many workers off that are injured or just simply burned out, that will affect our supply chain. If you are truly trying to advocate to protect the supply chain, the first easy place you can start is with the workers and protecting their safety and their ability to perform their jobs.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, I would certainly advocate to all members of this House that they accept this amendment, and hopefully we will see the supply chain protected. We do want to see Alberta businesses get access to their supplies, the materials they need to move their business, to move their materials across the country, providing services to not only Albertans but all of Canada. Just simply dropping legislation to force them back I don't think is the best way to go, but I'm certainly, you know, waiting to hear some of the debate that will occur. Again, I hope that members will accept this amendment in good faith. This is about protecting the supply chains. This is about protecting the workers, and they will both help each other in complement with that happening.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-Decore has moved amendment A1. Is there anyone that would like to speak to the amendment? I see the hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development has risen.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. Honoured to rise and give a little clarity to the House regarding this amendment. I think it's important to know that some of what the member opposite just said is untrue, unfortunately. We are looking at strike action that was taken. This was not a lockout.

For a bit more colour, the TCRC took strike action unilaterally and prematurely in advance of the deadline, 1 p.m. after midnight Sunday, March 20, as per their strike notice. To be clear, CP did not initiate a lockout of its employees, as stated in the newly released issue by the TCRC. In fact, CP was still at the negotiating table in Calgary with the federally appointed mediators, where we have been since March 11, 2022 – these are their words – awaiting TCRC's response to CP's last offer presented at 8:45.

I think that with that being known by this House, I would just like us to vote against this and get back on Motion 16. Thanks.

The Speaker: Are there others who would like to speak to the amendment? I see the hon. the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of this very important amendment. I want to start by saying that supply chains are important. It's important to have those supply chains open and moving efficiently. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. If members would like to have private conversations – or perhaps I think it would be valuable for them to join in the debate following the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. That's the great thing about the Chamber; everyone has equal opportunity to bring their points to the Assembly. I just ask that they do it when they're on their feet and not seated in their chair.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has the call.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this important caution. How much time do I now have left?

The Speaker: Well, I didn't take any of your time, because the clock stopped. You have 13 minutes and 40 seconds.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. I was talking about the importance of supply chains and how it's important to keep them moving in an efficient way. I think what we have seen from this government is that they tend to pick and choose what suits their political needs, and that becomes the issue of the day, and for what doesn't, then they don't do anything. They don't care about supply chains.

The case in point is that the Coutts border was blockaded for 21 days. There were many things within the purview of this government. There were many things they could have done to disperse those blockaders, who were illegally blockading Alberta's only 24/7 border point, yet I didn't see the Minister of Transportation write a letter advocating anything on that one. I didn't see the minister of agriculture writing a letter that that's our only border that is used by the agriculture industry for livestock and all those things. I didn't see any letter. Instead, what they were doing was cheering on those blockaders, and some of them participated in that blockade, went there three times. That's what they were doing with that important supply chain corridor when that was illegally blockaded by this government's supporters and friends. That was squarely within the jurisdiction of this government to handle.

Earlier the Member for Calgary-Buffalo told the Minister of Justice that there are protesters who are disrupting lives and businesses in the Beltline and that they've been doing it for a while now. The answer from this government is that, no, they can't do anything; it's within the jurisdiction of the city and city police and all that. Again, businesses are getting disrupted, lives are getting disrupted, but the government so far has chosen to do nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Now that they see this as an opportunity to play politics and please their base, they come out swinging that the federal government needs to start with the most heavy-handed tool and most unconstitutional tool to end this dispute. Just as a reminder, the Supreme Court of Canada, in the Health Services and Support – Facilities Subsector Bargaining Assn. versus British Columbia, 2007, decision, Supreme Court of Canada number 27, recognized that collective bargaining is a constitutionally protected right under section 2(d) of the Charter. Any suggestion that the government should start with violating that Charter right with back-to-work legislation is prima facie unconstitutional unless it can be protected under section 1 of the Charter. The government suggesting to another level of government to, I guess, intervene by breaching the Constitution, the highest law of this land, is not helpful.

This amendment recognizes that there are two parties, important parties, to this dispute. One is Canadian Pacific Railway, and I do recognize the importance of Canadian Pacific Railway, the role it plays in our economy, the role it plays in the Canadian economy. That's one of the key players in this dispute, and the second one is Teamsters Canada. They are exercising their right as the bargaining unit, their constitutionally protected right. What this amendment is doing is essentially calling on both the parties, who should be working together, to make sure that there are no disruptions in the supply chain. They should be bargaining in good faith. They should be talking to each other, getting back to the table to make sure that this dispute can be resolved without resorting to unconstitutional back-to-work legislation and all those things.

4:40

I don't think that we can support this government in advocating to the federal government to use unconstitutional means to resolve

this dispute. We need to stay in the Constitution, we need to protect our rights under the Constitution, and both parties at the table need to understand that they need to work together in the interest of all involved to urgently resolve this dispute. We need these rail lines open. We need them safe. We need them staffed with skilled workers who are well trained and who have a decent amount of sleep so that they can keep them safe. All they're asking for are safe working conditions.

I know that rail lines have served the Canadian economy. I know that rail workers have served Albertans and Canadians throughout this pandemic and helped fill our groceries, get fuel to our businesses, and take our grain and crops to market. During this time . . . [interjection] I think I will utter the word "no" so that they may understand. During this time we also know that CP made significant profits, and those profits represent the collective hard work of those workers who keep these trains running, and all that those workers are asking for are stable jobs, adequate rest time, decent pensions so that they work long term at these jobs and keep taking goods to market and keep things going.

I will urge all members of this House to first urge their government to take things seriously which are in their jurisdiction. For instance, if I still ask them to do anything about the Beltline protest, they will read me the entire Charter about how protest is listed in the Charter, and then they will read me another section from the MGA about how municipalities are a separate creation who have separate jurisdiction and how the municipalities have acted and created the Police Commission and how the Police Commission hires police and how far removed this provincial government is from anything to do with the Beltline even though there are many things that they can do.

When it suits them, Mr. Speaker, they might even pick up the phone and call the police chief to discuss their own tickets. That's how far they can go. But when it comes to issues facing Albertans, whether it's in Beltline, whether it's at the Coutts border, you won't see any action. You will see just dithering, and even in the letter they will write later on, they will try to kind of wash that away: no, no, that was something different we were writing. They'll even try to hide that letter. In this case now they're playing politics and asking the federal government to do something completely unconstitutional.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, largely because if the member was speaking to the main motion, I would be happy to provide as much leniency as possible; however, over the last 10 minutes or so he hasn't made very many references or even tied his remarks back into the fact that we're speaking to amendment A1, which was moved by his colleague from Edmonton-Decore, that speaks more specifically to a number of issues that are contained within the motion. I might encourage him. He may have other opportunities to speak to the main motion, but if he wants to speak to the amendment now, that would be much more appropriate.

Mr. Sabir: Good. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just trying to bring back my remarks. Why I think this amendment is important is, one, that it is in line with what's needed to be done, that there are two parties that need to be at the table. They need to take this issue seriously, and they need to bargain in good faith. And it takes out any suggestion that this motion was initially making, that the federal government should engage in any unconstitutional activity or behaviour like back-to-work legislation. It takes that out. That's why it's important.

It respects collective bargaining rights as recognized by the Constitution of Canada. I think playing politics doesn't help, but if we call on these parties who actually can do something about it, that

would be more helpful. That's why I'm urging all members of this House to support this amendment. This amendment, I guess, is the right call for the parties who are involved to get back to the bargaining table and settle this dispute so that our rail line can keep going and so that workers can have stable jobs, safe working conditions, adequate rest time, better pensions so they can keep those trains running.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that members will vote in favour of this amendment and not in favour of any unconstitutional, heavy-handed action from the federal government.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment A1 to Government Motion 16 is there anyone else wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I welcome an opportunity to speak to amendment A1 of Government Motion 16. I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore for bringing forward this amendment. I think it's useful in a couple of ways. You know, I think it speaks to not just a change in wording but back to the first principle of why and how important it is for us to maintain the integrity of our rail system generally in Canada and CP Rail's system specifically.

We all know how important it is to move goods and services. We've seen different versions of disruptions in supply chains, really, all around the world. I think it should be a way by which we can learn lessons to improve the efficiency and the integrity of those transportation systems that support our supply chains not just in Canada but around the world.

Looking at CP specifically – and some knowledge I have of the CN line as well, which runs through my constituency and has its western Canada headquarters just right in my constituency as well, is that for quite a number of years now these rail lines have been running very hot. There's a lot of demand on those rail systems, and the companies, Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Rail lines, have just been continuing to expand and build their capacity, which is fine, but not if you're doing it without supporting the workers who actually run the system and the infrastructure that you are relying on.

4:50

From time to time when you see a labour dispute like this one – right? – I think it is a point in time to learn lessons about: what is the state of function of CP right now? They're doing very well. You can see that they're making record profits and so forth, but are they making sure that they are maintaining the integrity of that system? Key to the integrity of that system are the workers and the conditions in which they run and work from day to day.

Clearly, there's something wrong – right? – at this moment with CP and their relationship with those workers, who are integral to the functioning of the rail system, so I would suggest that the amendment that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore brought forward here is very key to make sure that the collective bargaining process that is being engaged right now between the management of CP and the 3,000 or more workers at CP that are being affected here is taken very seriously.

Different issues at the table: I'm not privy to all of what they are debating and negotiating for, but key elements of it are around safety and capacity. I know – it's probably similar to CP – that at CN they certainly have a shortage of workers in the field. They're constantly being called for more work and overtime and whatnot, and sometimes, as the workers will point out, that comes at the expense of safety and so forth. To have something like that being

negotiated is absolutely essential to make sure that the trains are running, that the trains are running on time and they're running safely.

You know, I think we all can agree here that we want those things to happen and that we all depend on those things to happen for moving goods and services that we produce here in the province of Alberta to their markets and to make sure that we're getting the goods and services delivered that we depend on from elsewhere in the country and indeed elsewhere in the world. At the heart of that right now are two parties that need to negotiate in good faith and negotiate very aggressively to come to a resolution.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't the first time that we've seen this kind of thing while in the Assembly with a rail line, a rail company. You know, indeed, we can see it happening from time to time across this country. What we do not need to play into is the notion that our rail companies in Canada are building as part of their business plan the expectation that they will be ordering their workers back to work through legislation. We don't want that to be their de facto business plan for dealing with labour issues in their company. If we allow that to happen, then, of course, those other issues that I talked about before – the safety, the integrity of the system, ensuring that you have adequate workers, that you're attracting workers and that they're being fairly compensated and being given a safe circumstance in which to work – all of those things can be compromised if there is somehow an expectation by one or the other party that there will be back-to-work legislation any time there's a labour problem in the company, right?

That is, I think, pretty useful and specific to this amendment, but I think it's useful and specific to the spirit of at least part of what I heard from the other side in regard to making sure that the trains are running as part of a way to maintain and to help to build our economy and recover. I think the amendment serves a very useful function, right? I believe that it definitely is something that we can all agree on, that we want the trains there, we want the system to be working, we want our goods and services to be brought and sold in markets and things that we purchase as well, and we want that to be safe and sustainable in the broadest possible way.

I find it interesting. As the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall had just pointed out, you know, it's interesting to see this provincial government making comment on a national issue, which is fine. You can urge the national government to do this and that. I mean, it's perfectly fine. But the absence of any action in a similar disruption of transportation and systems in our Coutts border crossing, which resulted in millions of dollars of lost goods and services trading – right? – caused lots of disruption and indeed lots of confusion around the integrity of our road transportation system: that was something that this UCP government could have acted on. You know, I just want to point that out because, of course, we're dealing with something that we're urging another level of government to do, and in fact when we did have something that was within our purview, there was a failure to act by this same government. I mean, just pointing that out.

Maybe that will help the members on the government side to endorse and support this amendment to Government Motion 16. I would strongly urge them to do so. I think we've convinced most or all of our members of the Official Opposition, and maybe we can get the government to see the light as well.

Based on those comments, Mr. Speaker, I cede the floor and look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Speaker: On amendment A1 are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to address this amendment, which I think is a great contribution to a very thoughtful and concerning situation that we have here in the House. I welcome the introduction of it by the Member for Edmonton-Decore. I appreciate some of the comments of the minister when they made the introduction of the initial motion as well in that we are in a very serious time where our economy has been significantly affected by a number of larger issues. Clearly, we've been through two years of a pandemic, which has caused disruption in supply chains and as well in business progress and planning and so on. As a result, many businesses in the province of Alberta have been under a great deal of stress over the last number of years. That would include, you know, almost every business that relies on the transportation of goods, and I would think the vast majority do.

Certainly, for those that are involved in important fields to our economy such as agriculture, where the transportation of agricultural goods is absolutely critical not only to this year's success but for future years' success for farmers who need to sell this year's crop in order to get next year's in and so on, a disruption now, we know, in this field tends to have an effect that's not just simply about the immediate but can actually have a consequence over a period of time. Of course, manufacturing has a very similar kind of experience of disruption through the COVID time. That has been very problematic.

We also know that we've had disruptions because of protests, particularly at the Coutts border crossing in the province of Alberta. It was very unfortunate that at that time there was, you know, some decision being made by this government not to take action, and indeed it did not do so for weeks while we saw the supply chains significantly affected in this province. Unfortunately, of course, we also saw some members of this House actually actively participate in supportive activities around these kinds of disruptions to business in this province. The whole thing around the Coutts border crossing was very problematic, of course, because some of the explicit intention behind the border crossing could be simply described as seditious in the sense that they were actually asking for the Prime Minister of the country to be set aside outside of the democratic processes of this country. Unfortunately, there's at least a segment of that group that was willing to do so in an armed way, apparently gathering significant amounts of arms, ammunition with what I understand was an intention to actually assault members of the RCMP and other police forces. So it was very concerning that we saw any kind of level of support for something that had those edges to it.

5:00

Mr. Hunter: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called. The hon. Member for Cardston-Warner – Taber-Warner.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Hunter: Taber-Warner, Mr. Speaker. I raise a point of order under 23(h) and (g). The hon. member basically made allegations against myself as a member. Now, that would be considered as a point of order.

- But, Mr. Speaker, I want to point out to you that 23(g) says:
- refers to any matter pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination
 - (i) of a criminal nature from the time charges have been laid until passing of sentence . . .

If the member is correct about what he just said, then this would be before a court, but it isn't correct. I've never been approached by the RCMP in this matter, and the member knows full well, as I've stated in this House and many times before, that I never took part in any illegal blockade. As the member knows, I was never there when the border was closed. I made it very clear in my press releases that I would not be there.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the two parts that I've just stated here – 23(h), makes allegations against another member. If he's doing that, it's a point of order. However, if he is stating that there should be criminal charges involved, then it's 23(g). Either way, the hon. member should withdraw and apologize for these comments.

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

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. You know, I don't think that this is relevant. Certainly, the member was pointing out, you know, comparing and contrasting the rail stoppage and the stoppage of flow of commercial traffic on the road to the Coutts border crossing. He made no other allegations besides making, I think, quite an apt comparison between the two and contrast as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am prepared to rule unless there are other submissions.

You know, members, as I provided caution earlier to the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall with respect to amendment A1, I think it's important that I provide some additional context on debate inside the Assembly. If we were debating a piece of legislation, a bill inside the Assembly, the Speaker is much more inclined to provide the widest swath possible, particularly at second reading, with respect to comments towards the bill. This is why, largely speaking, the Speaker is not interventionist in any nature with respect to relevance.

Already, earlier, I provided caution about speaking to the amendment, which seems to be a significant language change to the original government motion and nothing to do with what the hon. member was speaking about. Given that this is a government motion, in the strongest terms possible I will remind the member that his comments should be specifically relevant to the amendment.

In addition to the comments made by the Member for Taber-Warner, I would say this: with respect to the principle of sub judice – and sub judice is a very complex principle because it is when charges have been laid or the matter has been set down before a court. While I don't know specifics on this case, I think it's unlikely that the rule that the Member for Taber-Warner has risen on would apply in this case. So it is unlikely that sub judice would apply here. As such, that would not be a point of order with respect to the point of it being before the courts.

Having said that, I would provide some caution to the member and all members, in fact, when speaking about potential charges being laid or other matters of a criminal nature, that we all have a certain responsibility with respect to the judicial system and ways our comments inside the Chamber may or may not prejudice a judicial proceeding. We all have an incredible amount of privilege that comes with being a member, but that privilege doesn't mean it comes without responsibility. I would encourage the member to be cautious when referring to matters of a criminal nature that may or may not be before the court, and as such I'm sure he wouldn't want to prejudice a proceeding of the court.

Now, lastly, and perhaps my ruling is more robust than it needs to be, but with respect to making allegations of another member, your Speaker has provided a lot of comments on this issue just a

couple of weeks ago, when the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall was speaking. This is a very complex matter that is very difficult to rule as a point of order or not because the member didn't specifically refer to any particular member inside the Assembly and more broadly made statements about the government.

Now, while I appreciate that there are not that many members of the government who may have attended, so it's possible to narrow that down and make that feel as though the member is making a specific allegation, we need to provide lots of latitude with respect to the freedom of speech inside the Assembly. I know that members of the government also like to make allegations about people who have attended protests or otherwise in the past, be they oil and gas pipeline protests or otherwise, so there is a natural tit-for-tat that sometimes happens in the Assembly. I think that it's important that, very clearly, the language did cause disorder today. While I'm not going to rule it as a point of order, I want to provide some additional caution to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford with respect to potentially making allegations about members of the Assembly.

I will find a point of order on relevance because the member hasn't been speaking to the amendment. We're not at second reading of a bill. He needs to remain focused on the amendment that's before the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Debate Continued

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your advice and direction; it was very complete today. I will move back, if I have perhaps wandered off a little, to the amendment itself and to the request in the amendment to take the concerns that have been expressed in this House by myself and others about the seriousness of this situation, particularly in the context that I was providing of other situations here in this province of a threat to supply chain issues and how important it is that we actually reach out to try and ensure that the well-being of all Alberta citizens, whether they be employers or workers or people who are just in one way or another taking in the advantages of having a good supply chain in order to create good work opportunities and the chances for people to earn good income in this province.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Because of the importance of all of this, I think that we should be asking exactly what it is that it says in this amendment, that we should be immediately asking for, in this case, the workers and the employer to get together and to resolve these issues and to resolve them in a way that actually deals with the underlying concerns that have been brought forward by the workers and the need for the businesses to maintain their business. At the same time the two things are not incompatible at all. Simply, it's a matter of the businesses ensuring that the work that the workers are doing is within scope, is done in a safe way, and that they are adequately compensated. Pretty simple, straightforward requests.

5:10

I believe that this employer certainly has demonstrated they have the ability to raise the funds in their work in order to be able to meet those needs quite adequately given the profits that they have brought in over the last number of years. As a result, we would certainly like to encourage that they sit down at the table with the resources that they clearly have and resolve this issue so as to not negatively affect other Albertans who are depending on that work to be done in order for them to be able to maintain their own work or their own business and so on.

The second part of the amendment speaks particularly to the fact that there already is a work stoppage that has been instituted, and we know that that work stoppage was instituted by the employer, that it isn't a strike at this point; it is a lockout, and therefore the only action that's been taken to actually interfere with our supply chain has been taken by the employer at this particular time. So I think it would be very important for the government to work with that employer to make a new decision to stop locking out the workers so that they can get back to the table, so that they can make an early resolution. I certainly hope, whatever happens in this case, that it is done quickly and is done peaceably, and I think that the role of the government is to ensure that or to request that and to facilitate that appropriate resolution.

You know, I think that the wording changes that are suggested in this amendment are very clear, and that is to call on Canadian Pacific Railway and the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference to reach a negotiated settlement urgently to resolve the contract dispute. That seems like a very good thing for a government to do, something that would benefit all of us, that would address the needs that were outlined by the minister initially, when the initial bill was introduced and as such would lead to a satisfactory resolution.

I'm concerned, on the other hand, that if we get into an antagonistic dispute where workers' rights are subverted through some kind of process of forcing them back to work against their constitutional right to assembly and to strike, which has been upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada on numerous occasions, that would actually lead to an elongation of the problems in this contractual situation such that the workers, while being forced back to the work site, simply do not do the things that they would do to make things run quickly and, instead, would do things to make sure that the contract negotiations had to come back to the table by acting in a way that is slower, for example, than they might do otherwise or not engaging in necessary activities that are outside of their legal scope or things of that nature.

You actually might be exacerbating the problem by actually forcing the workers back in because you take away their right to govern their own work integrity. The only way that they can then respond is by changing the nature of the work that they actually engage in. There's nothing left to them. They can't negotiate in any other way. So what you find is that you have workers engaging in work slowdowns or refusing to do things they would normally naturally do even if it really wasn't part of the job because it facilitated the good functioning of the business. They would do it anyways because workers often tend to do more than they're actually paid for and more than they're asked to do just because they're part of a system and they know how to make it work and function well because they're there every day, but they can choose to stop doing all of that.

What we might have is an elongated conflict between employer and employee rather than an abbreviated one if the bill were allowed to pass without this amendment. So I think it's really important that we as a government seek to bring this to closure as quickly as we possibly can, that we should act with good integrity, respecting the laws of the land about the right to collective association and collective bargaining and the right to strike, and instead seek to become a partner with all of the people involved in this dispute, that we're absolving this in a good way with the resources that are clearly available in this situation, already inherent in the company and the union services, and bring all of those good-working, successful people together to come to a resolution that will bring us to a better place more quickly and with more long-term positive benefits. If we force people back into a work situation, the consequences could be years in the making, because they would be going back to work upset, angry, and having had none of their

concerns addressed. If we instead have them come back to the negotiating table and have those concerns addressed, then we know that the work will move forward in a positive way, and that's, of course, what I think everyone on both sides of the House would like to see in this particular situation.

In fact, in all labour situations that should be our ultimate goal, not, you know, to use the strong arm of the law to shove people back into a place they do not wish to be but to entice them back into that place by ensuring that their livelihood and the livelihood of all of their fellow citizens will be improved if they sit at the table, if they have good, open conversations with their employer and come to a satisfactory mutual resolution. Clearly, I can't see that we would seek any other kind of outcome beyond that.

I'm afraid the original motion, without this amendment, was actually moving in that direction, moving to twisting the arm, pushing people in a direction that is not going to be perceived by them as in their best interests and therefore would create the factors for underlying mistrust of both government and of the employer for a significant length of time. If we live in a culture where workers continually find they have to mistrust government, where they continually find they have to mistrust their employer, we certainly are going to find more disruptions or other mechanisms to lead to exactly the opposite outcome than the one that we desire.

I guess, in conclusion, I would like to commend the Member for Edmonton-Decore for bringing forward this resolution and suggest that the government actually be consistent and not interfere in this case beyond being a positive contribution. We certainly know that in the past they have not jumped in to protect the supply chain readily, and, as such, it would seem somewhat ironic if they chose to do it in this particular case. We really should try to be a bit more consistent as government in order to ensure that the citizens of this province, you know, understand what the rules are, feel that the rules will be applied appropriately, and are happy to be part of a process in which their concerns, their rights are recognized, are responded to, and it leads to a better outcome for all citizens in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Thank you. We are on amendment A1. Are there any members wishing to join debate? Seeing none.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: We are on the main motion. Are there any – I see the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development has risen.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to be back on the original motion. I'm standing in support of Government Motion 16, very similar to what our industry is standing in front of the House of Commons right now asking for, back-to-work legislation to save their industry at a critical time. It's imperative that this House declare rail transport an essential service and that the back-to-work legislation is implemented to maintain the integrity of our supply chain. This isn't something that we jumped to, folks. We've been doing this for weeks. The Transportation minister, the Premier, we've been asking for binding arbitration. We've been asking anyone that'll listen, right up to the Prime Minister's office. This isn't something that was jumped at.

5:20

This is specifically important to the agriculture industry. The strike action – and it is strike action – by the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference presents the most recent in a series of challenges faced

by the sector, and, simply put, it's one that we cannot afford. In the lead-up to the strike decision our ministry was in constant conversation with industry and our provincial and federal counterparts to determine the impacts of a strike action and to determine how to mitigate what we could. Our strategy has been to keep the channels of communication open, particularly across the prairie provinces, and to provide a unified response that best serves western producers, because we're feeling this here. We have the processing capacity, we have the feeding capacity on behalf of Saskatchewan, on behalf of Manitoba, but we feel it here intimately.

Mr. Speaker, let me begin by stating that the industry that will be hardest hit by the suspension of rail transport will be the fed cattle sector. This industry is currently reliant on imported feed corn from the United States to provide daily rations to over a million head of cattle in Alberta's Feedlot Alley. Alberta imports an average of 57,000 tonnes of U.S. corn and almost 11,000 tonnes of U.S. dried distiller grains each week. However, there's a projected 400 per cent increase in corn imports to Alberta and Saskatchewan in 2021-2022. This is the highest on record since '02-03 – it should be no surprise – the last substantial drought that the province saw. This massive reliance on U.S. imports is a consequence of the prolonged dry conditions and the extreme heat experienced in 2021, and that's why this isn't a business-as-usual situation; this is a critical, timely situation.

We know the drought severely depleted available feedstock in our province, crop yields fell far below historical averages, and of the limited quantities produced, the majority of product was graded moderate to good and therefore shipped out of our borders for mailing and export. This left Alberta producers with severely limited access to domestic feed-grade product, and in many cases international markets became the sole source to secure feed. To compound this issue, CP is the only rail transporter of U.S. feed corn into southern Alberta. This means that many feeders are not only reliant on feed imports but on CP Rail imports more specifically. Mr. Speaker, for many feeders the suspension of CP Rail transport means the elimination of their sole source of feed. This places many producers in dire straits, and it's why we must pass this motion, hopefully unanimously, as one body, to show our support for this industry.

For the benefit of the House, to give a little context on the immediacy of the situation, you know, an animal consumes an average of 24 pounds of grain each day along with silage and supplements. You can play with those numbers a little bit when you take into account corn instead of barley, but it's close. One railcar feeds an estimated 8,000 head for a single day. That's one day. This means that our province requires 900 to 1,000 trains per week to sustain current cattle populations. I rise today to make it abundantly clear that feed supplies will run out in an estimated one to two weeks as a result of a CP Rail suspension. Simply put, in the not-so-distant future we will not be able to feed livestock and will be faced with an animal welfare crisis as a result of the strike.

I was in Picture Butte two weeks ago speaking to feeders about this very thing, and a gentleman grabbed me by the collar and said: you gotta let 'em know this leads to bullets and backhoes; they have to understand that. So I hope that when we're talking about this in this House, no one is playing politics with this, no one wants an unfair deal for anybody. We need this to move ahead because it's critical. The emergent nature of this situation cannot be overstated, and it requires the immediate attention of all members in this Chamber. Given the immediacy of this issue our government, along with our counterparts in other prairie provinces, has been investigating potential solutions to make up for lost imports. As I mentioned previously, we need about 900 to 1,000 trains per week of feed to sustain current feeder populations.

Although freighting supplies in by road seems like an obvious alternative, we know that this is not a viable solution. It's estimated that 1,000 to 1,500 super-B trucks would be needed per week to replace the volume of feed grain currently being brought in by CP trains; however, we simply do not have anywhere near this capacity with respect to both vehicles and drivers to meet the demand for Alberta feedstock. There is a current and increasing trucker shortage, not lost on anyone in this House, not only in Alberta but across Canada. Trucking HR Canada estimates that 18,000 truck driver jobs will be vacant by this month, so we know that trucking commodities across the border does not provide an alternate solution to lost rail capacity.

Culling is the last resort in a feed crisis; however, in the event that the sector is driven to this outcome, current processing capacity presents a challenge. Meat processors are at or near capacity, and product deliveries are nearly one month behind schedule. Packer utilization rates were around 95 per cent in 2021 compared to 2015. The western Canadian slaughter reached 2 and a half million head in 2021, which represents an 8 per cent increase over 2020. The year-to-date 2022 federally inspected western Canadian cattle slaughter is running about 2 per cent higher in 2021, with 49,000 head slaughtered per week.

I'm telling you this because we have still not worked through the glut in the supply that came from the first COVID shutdowns in 2020. We're getting close, we're working through it, but we haven't. There's no more capacity to be taken up. We can't meet the capacity of a potential surge in processing demand as a result of culling procedures. Alberta does have a small advantage with over three-quarters of Canadian beef processing occurring in western Canada and the vast majority concentrated in Alberta, but because products cannot be exported through rail, we may face a major bottleneck at the processing site resulting in a backlog of fed cattle like we saw as a result of the pandemic.

While this strike threatens the cattle sector most significantly, it also impacts Alberta's crop producers. Grain shipments have been challenged this winter with British Columbia mainland disruptions, cold weather events, and illegal blockades. CP order fulfillment versus hopper car demand in Alberta remains poor, and service has not recovered following the B.C. mainland disruptions in November '21. As a result, crop producers were already facing rail issues prior to the strike. However, the demand for rail capacity in the crop sector is much smaller compared to the import needs of the cattle industry.

The 2021 drought decreased crop yields, and many producers held moderate to low carry-over crop inventory. For instance, yields of the major crops of spring wheat, canola, and barley were 37 per cent below the five-year average. Midway through the 2021-2022 crop year, producer deliveries of crop to licensed elevators and processors were down 30 per cent from a year ago and Canadian crop exports down by 40 per cent. As a result, the CP Rail strike has a smaller impact on crop exports and elevator stocks. The demand for rail capacity is lessened by reduced crop export quantities, but concerns remain around the import of necessary seeding inputs like chemical and fertilizer.

Mr. Speaker, our government has worked hard to stem the impacts of this strike. On March 4, 2022, I sent a letter to the Hon. Seamus O'Regan, federal Minister of Labour, raising concerns with the CP labour dispute. To be clear, Minister O'Regan is still held up in Calgary. He's saying all the right things and working hard, and we are honestly very hopeful that they can come to some kind of amicable solution quickly with his help. The letter highlighted the immediate adverse impacts a strike would have on Alberta, specifically on the cattle feeding sector. It also requested that Minister O'Regan take immediate steps to ensure that a solution can

be reached between CP and the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference, namely, at the time, to push both parties into binding arbitration, as was asked by industry. This would keep the trains rolling while bargaining continued.

The Minister of Transportation and I sent a joint letter to the federal Minister of Transportation regarding the CP labour dispute, and my deputy minister has raised these concerns at all the FPT deputy minister calls. We've met with our provincial counterparts in Saskatchewan and Manitoba to discuss the impacts of the strike and outline potential supports, and of course we've maintained constant communication with industry groups throughout the process to keep track of their concerns and to forecast emerging issues.

Mr. Speaker, this is a matter of feeding the world. This is a matter of protecting a very important industry. We must ensure that the agricultural supply chains remain intact in order to keep food on the shelves and on our tables. The ongoing geopolitical crisis in Ukraine points to the fragility of the global food system. Ukraine has about 18 million metric tons of wheat stocks available for export, but with Black Sea ports closed, these stocks won't reach the market.

The CP strike and rail movement stoppage will likely increase port backlogs, creating additional costs for manufacturing and food sectors, impact spring crop planning, and have immediate adverse impacts on Alberta's cattle feeding industry. More generally, it can mean empty shelves and tables in the near future. It could also mean devastation to our fed cattle sector, immediate animal welfare considerations, and it has the potential to delay much-needed relief for livestock producers by continuing to back up the system.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, I support the motion to urge the government of Canada to declare rail transport an essential service. This is not an unconstitutional ask, as the opposition are claiming. Declare them an essential service, and implement back-to-work legislation to ensure Canada's economy remains uninterrupted. Or put them in binding arbitration. Just get it done. Much like the industry, we just need to see this happen.

To the members of this House, I urge you to do the same and to support Alberta's agriculture industry. You know, I had hoped that this would be a positive thing that the whole House could get behind, especially in lieu of the fact that our industry is in front of the House of Commons right now. I do not know if it's abstract when 95 per cent of your caucus lives within the Anthony Henday and you can't understand the seriousness of this, but when I listen to what I've heard for the last hour, I cannot believe what I've heard.

We need to support the industry. Of course, the union and the company are going to get through this and represent the needs of the workers. Nobody is saying that that shouldn't happen, but this needs to stop. It's too big, and it needs to stop. This isn't about a union or a company; this is about Alberta. I hope we can all support this.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to, you know, ignore maybe some of the comments that the minister just made. I appreciate that he's frustrated. Generally speaking, though, I would like to think that both sides of this House work together quite well when it comes to the industry and that we're able to have a discussion that actually gets us to a place of mutual respect.

My concerns – and I hope I get as much latitude as the minister did when it comes to speaking to this motion, because I do have some thoughts and some concerns. Part of it is that I have serious concerns about the supply chain in this province. I have serious concerns about the supply chain across the whole nation and the impact that it's had on our economy since COVID, since the floods of B.C., since the droughts, all of those things. I've had serious concerns. I've had concerns to the point where even during estimates I asked the Minister of Transportation what the plan was going to be, because we knew this was coming. I asked the minister what the plan was going to be, because we knew this was coming. I asked the Minister of Finance the very same question, "What was the plan?" because we knew this was coming.

In January the freight car shortage that was occurring across the nation was the lowest since 2014. We were having issues in January getting product to market, and when this was brought up, when this was discussed with the government, the response I got was silence. There was no plan being created, being discussed to address these very issues that we're talking about today.

The fact is that the government is talking about this today only because of the fact that it will be something that will have a serious impact on the industry, but the reality of it is that we've had serious impacts on our supply chain for the industry for months that this government has refused to address.

The Coultts blockade would be an example of that. We had trucks that were stopped at the border with beef products, with feed that couldn't get across the border. The government didn't react to the extent that they are reacting right now to address those very stoppages. We have honey sitting in the Vancouver harbour right now that can't be exported because we can't seem to get our supply chain working internationally.

There is a serious issue with our supply chain in this province, and there is a serious issue with the supply chain across the whole country – I don't disagree – but when I asked the government to come up with a plan to look at how we're going to address these issues, why is today all of a sudden the day where it becomes the problem when we've seen the problem growing over months and months and months and yet silence?

So, again, I'll be clear what I asked the government for earlier. I sent a letter to the Minister of Transportation, to the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development, to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation, as well as to the chair of our rural stewardship committee asking for us to come together and have a conversation about what is going on with our supply chain. Let's look at our strengths, let's look at our weaknesses, and let's look at how we get our product to market. That is collaboration. That is trying to work across the aisle. That is not about trying to abandon an industry, like the minister just likes to say.

What it is is that we should have been having this conversation a long time ago, and the problem is that our economy is taking a hit because of the lack of action that has been taken in regard to this. This is not a new issue. Rail capacity is not a new issue. But what it is becoming is the government trying to turn it into a labour issue, and it's not a labour issue. It is the fact that we can't get our product to market. It's the fact that we can't import and export the way that we should because we're a landlocked province that relies on these supply chains, and when they don't work, we're in trouble. Maybe let's focus on that. Let's create a solution to our supply chain. Let's be proactive, create a plan, and look at doing it. Let's work together on that. I have no problem with that.

I have a problem with this motion because of the fact that this is about federal jurisdiction. The province has a responsibility to fix some things in the province, and they've been silent on fixing

anything in the province. That's the fundamental issue with this. If the government wanted to put something forward today that read something along the lines of, "We have a supply chain issue in Alberta; as the government we should take some action because we're concerned about what's going on in the agriculture industry; we're concerned about what's going on in our pulp industry because they can't get their product to market," absolutely, let's have that conversation. But that's not what this is about. This is about injecting into a labour dispute.

Let's do something proactive, government. Let's do something proactive, ministers, and come up with a plan on how to actually get our imports and our exports happening, something that was identified months and months and months ago. I've been talking about feed shortages for months. I've been talking about rail access issues for months. I've been talking about the Coutts blockade and the long-term impacts it was going to have on our economy for months. Why is today the day? Today is the day because the government all of a sudden wants to make it not about their responsibility but about someone else's. Well, here's the reality. It is the government's responsibility to get our product to market in Alberta. Government, do your job. That's all I have left to say.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I enjoyed the exposé that the member across the way put forward, we also have to recognize that today is the day because today is the day that there is a lockout and strike action happening on our rail which is stopping the line at this time. We have to recognize that a lot of these other elements that the member is speaking towards are being worked on on a continual basis, but today is the day that we are discussing a work stoppage on a critical piece of infrastructure, on rail line. We have a limited amount of rail capacity to begin with, and now we have a work stoppage. We've just come out of a COVID pandemic, where we talked about essential workers and essential service workers. Whether they're health workers, whether they're farmers and transport agencies, whether they're in manufacturing, these are all essential services.

But the difference with this situation is that we have limited capacity to begin with. We have limited opportunity to actually continue with the movement of goods within this country when one out of the two line companies has essentially stopped working, and when that happens, we need to take action and try and find a solution that will be able to get the products moving and find the ability to actually have those conversations on how to rectify the work-stoppage issues.

Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of this motion. Motion 16 states:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Canada to immediately invoke provisions to declare rail transport an essential service and implement back-to-work legislation to prevent any disruption or CP work stoppage to ensure Canada's economy remains uninterrupted.

5:40

Now, if we have a work stoppage, a labour dispute, a strike, a lockout in an area of our economy where people that are in need, where stakeholders that are in need will be able to find the service elsewhere, then I would suggest we're not needing to – even though it is an essential service item, if they're able to find their service elsewhere, then we need to allow that to play itself out. In this instance we have an industry that is 10 days, two weeks away from essentially not being able to feed their animals. I have constituents that have contacted me that have 10 days' worth of storage of feed in their bins. We just finished a drought season on the prairies, the

first one since 2003. In 2003 we brought in 2.9 billion tonnes of corn to try and keep our livestock fed and keep that industry alive and going well.

But here we are. We're currently bringing in 10, 11 train car units, 100 cars every week. We are in critical need here, and if we don't get this resolved, we have an animal welfare situation. It's incumbent on legislators, in this case federal legislators, who oversee the rail networks, to recognize that this is an essential service. Without this service, animals on the prairies here are going to go without. We need to get on top of that.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that we are not proposing something that would be unconstitutional to the point where we're inhibiting or putting in place unsafe work conditions. The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall says: well, it's all about safety; that's all they're asking, just safe workplaces. Well, that's not all of what they're asking, and I don't believe that this motion is putting these workers into an unsafe condition. We need to recognize that without the federal government stepping up to the plate and identifying this as a critical situation, we are going to be having a very difficult time trying to, as an agricultural industry, keep the livestock in good condition and keep that industry healthy and strong going forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I know there are other members that would like to speak. I will close my comments and essentially say that I am in full support of Motion 16. I do believe it's necessary to act on this quickly.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next member who has caught my eye is the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll try to keep this really brief. Again, the minister did a great job of it. My colleague from Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock pointed out the criticality of why this motion is important, of getting the two parties together. It's not about crushing a labour negotiation or anything else. We're really critical in the supply chain. I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Manning also for her comments and words and concerns on the supply chain. I'm just going to quickly read the motion into the record here.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Canada to immediately invoke provisions to declare rail transport an essential service and implement back-to-work legislation to prevent any disruption or CP work stoppage to ensure Canada's economy remains uninterrupted.

The Member for Edmonton-Manning is one of the folks across the aisle that I have a ton of respect for. She researches her items. She's very passionate about what she does. We may not always be in alignment, but on the criticality of the supply chain, absolutely. What I've been sitting on here, Member – through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member – is that about two years ago, two and a half, three years ago, I was talking about Motion 501, which was economic corridors tying into our supply chains. Subsequent to that, I received a mandate letter from the Premier, and it was also part of the Fair Deal Panel item. I was named in that document as well to lead a task force to look at just this. The mandate letter stated to look at all of the rail infrastructure within the province of Alberta, see what we have to build out, talk about the interconnectivity, and then look at economic corridors, supply chains specifically.

My task force has completed that action. I'm looking very forward to that becoming public. I'm looking very forward to working with the ministers and the member opposite for Edmonton-Manning. Once it's out officially, I'd love to have a coffee with you and go over the items because what you're hitting is spot on. We have congestion in supply chains coming into the port of Los

Angeles, Long Beach, which then cascades into the effect in the Vancouver port, which cascades then into the Prince Rupert port, of how we can't get materials out.

The across-the-border disputes. Yeah, the border crossings for the trucking are critical, but we've got options on the trucking. Again, when we're looking at supply with the Coutts border specifically, that is a pinprick compared to what we're talking about with CP Rail, the volumes that they can move. The minister of agriculture is stating something that's very direct from the ag industry: you've got two weeks, and then it's bullets and backhoes. You literally are going to be starving animals. With the drought conditions and everything else – I know the member agrees with the criticality of this – that's what we're talking about.

I would propose that our supply chain is so darn fragile. That was why we put in the critical infrastructure act, you know, in pre-COVID days, because we already saw that things were getting backed up. With the perfect storm of the logistics issues that I've just spoken about of the supply chain in the west coast, of not only our country but down in the States, with the drought conditions going back and forth, with our feed supplies being bought up on this side of the border, that have already moved south of the border to feed their stock, we're at a critical stage. It's no longer nice just to have an oligarchy or two groups, two rail companies, that have this. We need to really expand our rail infrastructure and our logistics and our supply chain or the wheels come off this wagon. The reason why everyone is now in violent agreement on this is because the perfect storm that we've been predicting for three years has come to roost. This is the issue.

Members opposite, we can debate this back and forth, but I think we're in the same place. The wording and the nuances on it: this isn't about crushing labour. We want to make sure they're there. The one that jumps off the page for me most is declaring that it is critical infrastructure and it is essential service. Mr. Speaker, through you to the other members, I encourage you to vote in favour of this motion. We really need to get things back on the wagon here because it's all fallen apart. Two weeks: tickety-tock, clock's ticking.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. [An electronic device sounded] I think we've got a little interruption of music there.

Hon. members, we are on the main motion, Motion 16. Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to preface my position on this motion by stating to the House that I have several Canadian Pacific employees living in my constituency of Lethbridge-East, and the CP Kipp yard is a major hub just outside of my riding. I need to assure the House that I'm not taking a negotiated side here. A work stoppage seems inevitable as multiple reports state that if the employees did not strike, they would have been locked out. I would like to think that we are all united in this Chamber, and if what I've heard over the past few minutes is true, when I say I'm hopeful to see a speedy and satisfactory resolution to this dispute, we would all be in agreement.

Mr. Speaker, I am on the side of Albertan consumers. Our supply chain, as has been fully stated here this afternoon, has been negatively impacted for the better part of two years because of the pandemic and other international issues. We are already experiencing inflation that our country has not seen in over three decades. We saw some empty shelves in grocery stores following the massive flooding in B.C. late last year. We all know that Alberta

is landlocked, so without our economic corridors, how else will people be able to get their food? R and R, roads and rail, are the main ways we get goods to and from our province.

I want to also discuss my concerns on how this affects the agricultural industry. The minister of agriculture and forestry has very clearly shared many of these points already. Seeding season is almost here. Most fertilizers ship by rail, and about 75 per cent of fertilizer and livestock feed is transported mostly by train. Given that we saw one of the worst droughts in our province last year and given that having a strong growing season is essential in our long-term economic survival, for many of our farmers this year we need to get this addressed. Grain is mostly moved by rail, which could lead to an increase in prices of items like bread and flour. As you know, CP also operates in the United States, and this work stoppage is starting to affect shipments to and from our largest trading partner. I am concerned about how this will affect Alberta as a reliable business partner at this time.

According to the Retail Council of Canada 89 per cent of small businesses are feeling the effects of supply chain challenges. The council cites retail, manufacturing, and construction as the hardest hit industries due to these disruptions. I think everyone in this House knows several people who are employed in these sectors if not more. The council says that approximately 30 per cent of businesses have already seen their costs increased by 20 per cent due to supply chain issues. I think we all need to take a moment to think about who inevitably pays for those increases, the final consumer.

5:50

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned at the beginning of my speech on Government Motion 16, I won't take a side in terms of the CP management or the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference union. However, I do agree that rail is an essential service for many of the reasons I stated earlier in my remarks and of those of other members on both sides of the aisle in this Chamber.

Many of the CP employees call my constituency or Lethbridge city or southern Alberta home, and I fully respect the right to collectively bargain and, hopefully, come up with a new agreement that satisfies both sides. I value the critical role that CP conductors, engineers, yard workers, and others play in keeping our supply chain moving and so many Albertans and Canadians safe in the process. I can't comment on the issues that have led CP and the union to this point because I'm not at the bargaining table. Again, what I do support is a quick resolution to this dispute.

In all reality, Mr. Speaker, when there's a strike or lockout, neither side wins. CP loses freight revenue and employees lose wages. However, the ones that stand to lose the most are Albertans and Canadians who are already dealing with increased fuel costs, the staggering effects of inflation, among other things, that are currently stressing household budgets, many directly related to policies of the federal Liberal government and their decisions, including the coming increase of the carbon tax this April 1. I'm glad to hear that sides are still talking, and I pray for a speedy resolution to this unfortunate situation and hope that everyone will put their best foot forward to make sure that we can come to a resolution that doesn't further negatively impact any constituencies in my riding or across Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Taber-Warner has risen.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for acknowledging me here today. I'll be quick in my comments. I do want to set the record

straight for one of the things that was said by the MLA for Edmonton-Manning. She said that because she hadn't heard about what was being done, nothing was being done. Now, that hon. member knows full well, as she has been on the government side and on the opposition side, that just because the opposition doesn't know what's going on, it doesn't mean that things aren't going on.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the Member for Drumheller-Stettler has addressed this issue. The Transportation minister has also addressed this issue, letting the Chamber know and also all Albertans know that this has been top of mind for a long time. The Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has also stated that, you know, he has been doing some really good work in terms of corridors and the importance of supply chains for three years now. That goes to show that this has not gone unheeded and that the members have been working at this diligently.

I will say that – I'm very much in favour of this motion, just to say that on the record, Mr. Speaker – I'm very much concerned that CP and CN have monopolies within their areas, which makes it extremely important to make sure that they're running. They are an essential service to so many of our products in this province. For us to say that it's not an essential service, I don't understand that kind of reasoning.

The other point that I wanted to make is that the approach that we are taking to this is going to have a devastating effect if we don't get this right, Mr. Speaker, on so many Albertans that have done so much to keep Alberta going. Our ranchers, feedlots: they need to have this work. We hope that the hon. members from the NDP caucus will support us in asking our federal colleagues to make sure that we get this right.

The federal government has a responsibility for interprovincial and international transportation. For the hon. members to say that we should have been doing something about that – I heard them argue earlier on in the day, saying that it's not our jurisdiction to go into what the federal government is doing. Mr. Speaker, you can't have it both ways. The reality is that it is their responsibility. All we can do is ask them, beg them on bended knee to please make sure that they get this right because there is no way – if we don't get this right, then our ranchers and our feedlot operators aren't going to survive this. This is a five-alarm fire. There's certainly the importance of getting it done now versus in the future. We can't overstate that.

The other point that I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker, is that there have been allegations made by the hon. members about the Coutts border. I will remind them that, once again, I do not believe in the approach of doing something illegally. I'm a lawmaker, not a lawbreaker. I think that it's extremely important to make sure that the members know that at no time did I engage in any illegal activity at the Coutts border. That is very important. This was in my riding, and it was important for me to be able to go down and to meet with the people there to make sure that they were safe, make sure that they were not breaking the law, and if they were breaking the law, to tell them not to break the law, which is what I did. I stated that in my media statement as well. I met with the council down there. I did go down three times, as the members have stated, but those three times I didn't go down there to do anything illegal. I went down there to be able to try to be able to resolve the situation as best we could.

It's important to be able to get our product back and forth through that border. That is the only 24/7 border crossing that we have. That

is the only place where we can actually send live cattle and live swine through. In order for us to be able to actually get that border going – 14 days without having it open or intermittently throughout that was very disruptive to my constituents. I dealt with that in speaking with many of the people in my riding and the Member for Cardston-Siksika's riding to the north part of Lethbridge there. It is an area that is well known for feedlots. They call it Feedlot Alley. To state that we didn't care about that: absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. We did care about it, we do care about it, and we want to make sure that that commerce is flowing adequately.

Now, I do want to state also that in terms of our approach here all we can do is make a government motion. We cannot tell the federal government what to do, nor could we tell the federal RCMP what to do at the border. They have their jurisdictions, and as frustrating as it was down there to be able to see this play out the way that it did – every day was gut wrenching for myself and many of the colleagues that I spoke with.

Mr. Speaker, this goal of ours, in order to be able to implore the federal government to do what they need to do to be able to get that CP Rail going again, is absolutely critical, and I hope that all members of this House will make sure that they support this important motion to be clear to our federal counterparts, the federal Liberals, that this has to happen, that this has to happen now. We cannot equivocate on this, and we cannot be slow on our movement on this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. government deputy whip has risen.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hearing both sides of the argument today and the wide range of discussion, I think we just need to remember that our agricultural industry is in dire need, including our ranchers. In listening to the president of the Cattlemen's Association just on CHED the other day, he was talking about the fact that they're getting corn out of Iowa and that that is the feed they're depending on. It can't come by truck. The volumes that they need have to come by rail. We're going to have a very serious problem in a very short amount of time with the ability to be able to feed cattle and to keep them safe, keep them going. They can't just go and be processed. You can only do so many head of cattle every day, so that is not an option that you can just turn to. Euthanizing them would be the humane thing to do if you can't feed them. I think we need to look at this in the broader situation that we have.

Mr. Schow: It's an animal welfare crisis.

Mr. Rutherford: It's an animal welfare crisis. Very well put, Cardston-Siksika.

I think that we need to understand that the amount of stress people have been under in the last few years, the supply chain issues, the world conflict that we have . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont. However, the time is 6 o'clock, and we are now adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, March 21, 2022

Day 12

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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| Jason Kenney | Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations |
| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gotfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, March 21, 2022

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd now like to call committee to order.

Hon. members, prior to beginning, the chair will outline the process for this evening. The Committee of Supply will first call on the chairs of the legislative policy committees to report on their meetings with the various ministries under their mandate. No vote is required when these reports are presented.

Members are reminded that there was an amendment introduced during a legislative policy committee meeting, so the committee will vote on the proposed amendment. The committee will then proceed to the vote on the estimates of the offices of the Legislative Assembly, and the vote on the main estimates will then take place.

Finally, the chair would like to remind all hon. members of Standing Order 32(3), which provides that after the first division is called during Committee of Supply, the interval between the division bells shall be reduced to one minute for any subsequent divisions.

Committee Reports

The Chair: I would now like to call on the chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future to present the committee's report. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Chair. As chair of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(10) I am pleased to report that the committee has reviewed the 2022 to 2023 proposed estimates and business plans for the following ministries: Ministry of Advanced Education; Ministry of Culture and Status of Women; Ministry of Jobs, Economy and Innovation; Ministry of Labour and Immigration; Ministry of Infrastructure; and Executive Council.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would now like to call on the chair of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities to present the committee's report. The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Madam Chair. As I'm filling in for the chair of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(10), I am pleased to report that the committee has reviewed the 2022-2023 proposed estimates and business plans for the following ministries: the Ministry of Children's Services, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, the Ministry of Seniors and Housing, and the Ministry of Service Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now the chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. As chair of the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship and pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(10) I am pleased to report the committee has reviewed the 2022-2023 proposed estimates and business plans for the following ministries: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development; Ministry of Energy; Ministry of Environment and Parks; Ministry of Indigenous Relations; Ministry of Municipal Affairs; Ministry of Transportation; and Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance.

I'd also like to table amendments to the following ministries which were introduced during our meetings for the Committee of Supply's consideration: Ministry of Energy, one amendment.

The Chair: Thank you.

Vote on Main Estimates 2022-23

The Chair: The next item of business is the vote on the amendment introduced during the legislative policy committee meetings. The amendment will have been identified as amendment A1. Members should have a copy on their desks.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:34 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|------|---------|----------|
| Ceci | Hoffman | Nielsen |
| Deol | Irwin | Shepherd |
| Gray | | |

7:50

Against the motion:

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer | Madu | Sawhney |
| Allard | McIver | Schow |
| Copping | Nally | Schulz |
| Frey | Neudorf | Shandro |
| Gotfried | Nicolaides | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Hanson | Nixon, Jeremy | Toews |
| Issik | Orr | Turton |
| Jones | Panda | van Dijken |
| LaGrange | Savage | Yao |

| | | |
|---------|---------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 7 | Against – 27 |
|---------|---------|--------------|

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We shall now proceed to the vote on the 2022-23 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, general revenue fund. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(5), which requires that these estimates be decided without debate or amendment prior to the vote on the main estimates, I must now put the following question on all matters relating to the 2022-23 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, general revenue fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023.

Agreed to:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| Offices of the Legislative Assembly | \$173,455,000 |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

We shall now proceed to the final vote on the main estimates. Those members in favour of the resolutions for the 2022-23 government estimates, general revenue fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023, please say aye.

[The voice vote did not indicate agreement]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:51 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer | Madu | Sawhney |
| Allard | McIver | Schow |
| Copping | Nally | Schulz |
| Frey | Neudorf | Shandro |
| Gotfried | Nicolaides | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Hanson | Nixon, Jeremy | Toews |
| Issik | Orr | Turton |
| Jones | Panda | van Dijken |
| LaGrange | Savage | Yao |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|---------|----------|-------------|
| Ceci | Hoffman | Pancholi |
| Deol | Irwin | Shepherd |
| Gray | Nielsen | |
| Totals: | For – 27 | Against – 8 |

[Motion carried]

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

I would now like to invite the hon. Deputy Government House Leader to move that the committee rise and report the 2022-23 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, general revenue fund, and the 2022-23 government estimates, general revenue fund.

Mr. Schow: Well, Madam Chair, you took the words right out of my mouth. I do move that the committee rise and report the 2022-23 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, general revenue fund, and the 2022-23 government estimates, general revenue fund.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2022-23 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates, general revenue fund, and the 2022-23 government estimates, general revenue fund, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

The following resolutions for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023 have been approved.

Offices of the Legislative Assembly: support of the Legislative Assembly, \$71,858,000; office of the Auditor General, \$27,455,000; office of the Ombudsman, \$4,019,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, \$45,224,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, \$976,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, \$7,441,000;

office of the Child and Youth Advocate, \$15,259,000; office of the Public Interest Commissioner, \$1,223,000.

Government main estimates.

Advanced Education: expense, \$2,545,525,000; capital investment, \$25,000; financial transactions, \$980,100,000.

Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development: expense, \$639,200,000; capital investment, \$11,096,000; financial transactions, \$1,310,000.

Children's Services: expense, \$2,066,316,000; capital investment, \$7,500,000.

Community and Social Services: expense, \$3,949,317,000; capital investment, \$547,000.

Culture and Status of Women: expense, \$260,123,000; capital investment, \$2,331,000; financial transactions, \$2,093,000.

Education: expense, \$5,007,471,000; capital investment, \$565,000; financial transactions, \$18,117,000.

Energy: expense, \$551,832,000; capital investment, \$500,000; financial transactions, \$96,970,000.

Environment and Parks: expense, \$584,695,000; capital investment, \$93,891,000; financial transactions, \$4,019,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$18,680,000; capital investment, \$25,000.

Health: expense, \$22,421,131,000; capital investment, \$25,276,000; financial transactions, \$84,976,000.

Indigenous Relations: expense, \$181,394,000; capital investment, \$25,000.

Infrastructure: expense, \$441,442,000; capital investment, \$1,879,397,000; financial transactions, \$25,473,000.

Jobs, Economy and Innovation: expense, \$468,335,000; capital investment, \$2,625,000; financial transactions, \$25,000,000.

8:00

Justice and Solicitor General: expense, \$1,409,975; capital investment, \$23,207,000.

Labour and Immigration: expense, \$325,057,000; capital investment \$1,050,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense \$980,338,000; capital investment, \$3,009,000; financial transactions, \$4,764,000.

Seniors and Housing: expense, \$665,285,000; capital investment, \$25,000; financial transactions, \$19,700,000.

Service Alberta: expense, \$675,515,000; capital investment, \$95,334,000; financial transactions, \$5,500,000.

Transportation: expense, \$1,613,985,000; capital investment, \$1,547,799,000; financial transactions, \$126,679,000.

Treasury Board and Finance: expense, \$218,271,000; capital investment, \$25,000; contingency, \$1,750,000,000.

Madam Speaker, that concludes my report.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 7

Appropriation Act, 2022

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, 2022. This being a money

bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

The bill requests a total of \$45 billion from the general revenue fund so that the government may meet its funding commitments as laid out in the 2022-23 government estimates.

Additionally, the bill requests a total of \$173 million to cover the Legislative Assembly's expense for the year as detailed in the offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates. The bill also includes \$3.7 billion for capital investment, \$1.4 billion for financial transactions, and \$1.75 billion for contingencies.

I ask all my colleagues in the Assembly to support this bill to move Alberta forward to a brighter and more prosperous future. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

Committee of Supply

(continued)

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

Before we commence consideration of supplementary supply, I would like to briefly review the standing orders governing the speaking rotation. As provided for in Standing Order 59.02, the rotation in Standing Order 59.01(6) applies, which is as follows:

- (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
- (b) for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak . . .
- (d.1) for the next 20 minutes, the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent Members and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (e) for the next 20 minutes, private members of the Government caucus and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak, and
- (f) for the time remaining, to the extent possible, the rotation outlined in clauses (b) to (e) shall apply with the speaking times set at 5 minutes as provided in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).

During the first rotation speaking times are limited to 10 minutes. Once the rotation is complete, speaking times are reduced to five minutes. Provided that the chair has been notified, a minister and a private member may combine their speaking times, with both taking and yielding the floor during the combined period.

Finally, as provided for in Government Motion 14, approved by the Assembly on March 17, 2022, the time allotted for consideration is three hours.

The Committee of Supply has under consideration the 2021-22 supplementary supply estimates. I will now recognize the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to move the estimates.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to move the 2021-22 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund. When passed, these estimates will authorize an approximate increase of \$1.2 billion in voted expense funding and \$1 million in voted capital investment.

These estimates include additional funding to the following offices and government departments: the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, Children's Services, Culture and Status of Women, Energy, Health, and Municipal Affairs. The funding in Bill 8 will help cover the health care costs of the pandemic, provide aid and equipment to Ukraine, give rebates to Albertans struggling with electricity costs, support child care workers and parents of young children, and build municipal infrastructure.

The supplementary estimates report the additional funding needed for the government's fiscal plan in 2021-22. Some of the items in this bill are funded by the federal government or are offset by savings in other areas, meaning that the overall increase to the deficit forecast for 2021-22 will be limited to just over \$200 million. While these supplementary estimates reflect a modest increase in spending, it's important to note that the government has taken significant steps to get the province's finances back in order.

Our government was elected on a platform committed to responsible fiscal management, and to that end we established three fiscal anchors to inform policy and guide decision-making. The first anchor was getting our per capita spending in line with comparator provinces, and I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight that we've made considerable progress in that regard. In 2019, when we took office, as per the MacKinnon report, we inherited a government that on a per capita basis spent \$10 billion more per year than similar provinces. Moreover, the previous government's operating spending was increasing by 4 per cent per year. Had we stayed on this trajectory, many of the programs and services essential to Albertans would simply have become unsustainable and out of reach.

Over the last three years we've brought that 4 per cent annual operating expense increase down to less than half a per cent per year, and if we exclude health spending increases of nearly 2 per cent, our operating spending has essentially remained flat over the term. As a result, beginning in the next fiscal year our costs to deliver government services will be within the range of comparator provinces. We will no longer be an expensive outlier, and that is tremendous news for our province and the sustainability of the programs and services we provide for all Albertans.

The government also established an anchor, committing to keep Alberta's net debt to GDP ratio below 30 per cent. Abiding by this principle preserves our net financial position or, in other words, ensures a strong balance sheet. Our projections for the net debt to GDP ratio have continually improved over the course of this fiscal year. In Budget 2021 the ratio was estimated to be 24.5 per cent, but with an improving fiscal picture, it's now forecast to be 18.3 per cent at the end of this fiscal year. Alberta has one of the lowest net debt to GDP ratios in the nation, and our responsible fiscal management will maintain that strong position. With increased economic and fiscal capacity and by maintaining fiscal discipline in our spending decisions, our fiscal future as a province is vastly improved, the positive effect of which is significant and tangible for Albertans today and is of exponential value for the Alberta of tomorrow.

The largest supplementary amount in the estimates belongs to Health. An additional \$726 million will help cover the health care costs of the pandemic. This funding will go towards lab testing, contact tracing, rapid test kits, continuing care, acute care, vaccine deployment, and personal protective equipment. While the costs of the pandemic have been greater than anticipated, the government has spared no expense in keeping Albertans safe. I'd like to note that Budget 2022 will provide further funding above and beyond what's in this bill to build the health care system Albertans need by expanding capacity, adding ICU beds, and addressing surgical

backlogs. These are important steps to improve Albertans' health outcomes and make our province and economy more resilient to system-wide challenges.

8:10

The next largest expense in the estimates comes from the Department of Municipal Affairs. The amount of \$231.2 million is related to federal funding under the Canada community-building fund and will be distributed to municipalities.

The supplementary amount for Children's Services is also related to funding from the federal government. The bill includes a total of \$134.7 million for child care subsidies and worker supports under the Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement. The bill also includes a capital investment of \$1 million to provide information technology for child care initiatives, and this is also federally funded.

Aside from helping the province administer federal funding for child care and municipal infrastructure, the bill will also help the provincial government provide \$150 in electricity rebates to over 1 million homes, farms, and businesses. We've heard the concerns of many Albertans facing high electricity bills due to the carbon tax and other factors, and this bill will help the government provide real, tangible relief. The bill includes a supplementary amount of \$96.3 million for the Department of Energy, which will go towards a total of \$300 million for the utility consumer support electricity rebate program.

While Alberta is not immune to the rising cost of living, the government is striving to ensure that this province is a more affordable place to live than virtually any other Canadian jurisdiction. Due in no small part to our competitive business environment, Albertans earn more than Canadians in any other province, and this is true in both the energy and nonenergy sectors. Albertans also have some of the lowest home prices and rents among Canadian urban centres. Our gasoline and diesel prices are the lowest in Canada, owing in part to low fuel tax rates and no provincial sales tax. In fact, we recently announced that starting April 1, we will not collect any fuel tax while overall energy prices remain elevated, which is another measure we're implementing to provide real, tangible relief to Albertans.

Our tax policy continues to ensure that Albertans pay less in overall taxes than any province, with low personal income tax and no provincial sales tax, payroll tax, or health care premiums. We also have the highest basic personal exemption amongst provinces, allowing individuals to earn more before they have to pay any provincial income tax. In fact, Madam Chair, 40 per cent of Albertans do not pay any provincial income tax at all. That, combined with our status as the highest earners, means that the after-tax incomes of Albertans are the highest in Canada.

The last ministry that will receive a supplementary amount is Culture and the Status of Women, and this is another important item as it will allow Alberta to support Ukrainians who are struggling with Russia's invasion of their country. Alberta's government is contributing \$11.4 million in support for Ukraine, \$10.35 million of which will come from the funding in this bill. This includes \$5 million to the Ukrainian World Congress to equip 5,000 members of the Ukrainian territorial defence force with defensive equipment, \$5 million to the Canada-Ukraine Foundation for humanitarian aid, and \$350,000 to the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council for co-ordinating the shipment of first aid and defensive equipment to Ukraine.

In addition to the supplementary amounts for the five ministries I mentioned, the last item in the bill is a supplementary amount of \$55,000 for the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. This amount will cover reasonable increases in staff compensation to

account for the lifting of the salary restraint for non-union employees.

Overall, the amounts in these supplementary estimates are needed to help the government address Albertans' current priorities. As I mentioned, the child care and municipal infrastructure funding in this bill is supported by federal government funding. Also, much of the additional funding in this bill is off-set by savings in other areas, meaning that the overall increase to the deficit forecast for 2021-22 will be limited to just over \$200 million.

Responsible fiscal management, a growing economy, and strong energy prices have helped the government successfully shrink this year's deficit by about 81 per cent since Budget 2021 was first tabled. The government has acted swiftly to adjust the fiscal plan and help address emerging issues like the rising cost of living and the war in Ukraine, and we've done so without losing sight of our commitment to long-term fiscal responsibility.

The Chair: Hon. members, we'll now move to the first 60-minute block with members of the Official Opposition. Would you like to break up your time into 20-minute blocks? Would you like a reminder at 20 minutes? A reminder at 20 minutes? Okay.

The first 20-minute block will go to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. Would you like to share your time with the minister?

Ms Pancholi: Yes, I would.

The Chair: Okay. Minister, is that amenable?

Mr. Toews: Sure.

The Chair: Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to take a look at the supplementary supply bill, specifically with respect to the provisions around Children's Services. There appears to be a discrepancy between the supplementary supply estimates and the 2022-23 estimates document. According to both the original 2021 budget estimates and the supplementary supply estimates on page 18, the original amounts for child intervention and early intervention were \$879.8 million and \$96 million respectively. However, in the current Budget 2022 budget documents that were provided at estimates, it actually showed that those line items, line items 2 and 4, were actually \$841.5 million and \$131.8 million respectively.

Can the Minister of Finance confirm that this actually represents a transfer of spending of approximately \$38 million from line 2 to line 4 of the Children's Services budget? Please provide an explanation of what this transfer is for and how it will impact support provided.

The Chair: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Sure. To answer the questions, first I'll provide some context just in terms of what our dollars are about in this supplementary supply vote. What we're looking at, obviously, is \$135.4 million in the Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement. We know, Madam Chair, that we have talked a lot about this historic child care agreement, which will provide \$3.8 billion over five years for a made-in-Alberta plan to reduce fees, create at least 42,000 spaces right across the province, and help parents get back to work.

The ministry's forecast includes as well \$15 million in reallocated funding to help child care providers with COVID-19 costs and an additional \$134 million in funding for the Canada-

Alberta early learning and child care agreement. This also, Madam Chair, as the Minister of Finance mentioned in his opening remarks, allocated a million dollars for capital IT expenses to begin enhancements and system modernizations to allow us to roll out this plan.

We needed that for a couple of reasons, Madam Chair, but really, when we look at our IT system, we had to accommodate the new affordability grants, that didn't exist before, as well as increased subsidy levels and then the sheer volume of applications we had when it came to our new subsidy model. We also had \$56 million in one-time bilateral workforce funding, again from the federal government. There was no transfer from line 2 to line 4. That's the transfer of supports and financial assistance dollars from program 2 to program 4, early intervention.

I think the member opposite has another question, so I'll allow her to jump in.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Minister. Yeah, I think the minister was just answering that question. It reflects the transfer of funding from the supports and financial assistance agreement program, so the dedicated caseworkers, I'm guessing, moving from child intervention to line 4, youth in transition. I appreciate that clarification. So it's not actually a change in the amount of resources but simply allocating which budget line it's coming from.

I want to move on to the funding that the minister highlighted around additional appropriations to account for the increased child care subsidy and supports and worker supports related to the provision of additional funds under the Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement – I'll refer to it as the ELCC going forward – and the early learning and child care bilateral agreements.

On page 16 of the supplementary supply estimates there's additional funding of \$134.4 million from the Canada-Alberta ELCC agreement and \$56.4 million from the ELCC bilateral agreement. I'd like the minister to just confirm that that means there was a total of \$198 million that is being sought under the supply estimates specifically for federal funding. Can the minister confirm that?

8:20

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. We do have \$135.4 million in the early learning and child care agreement with the federal government. We will continue to refer to that as the Canada-Alberta ELCC grant because, as the member opposite may know, there are a number of different grants that we have with the federal government. It's important to articulate which one we're discussing. So we do have that. That also, as I said, includes \$1 million for capital. It's split between a number of line items as well. We have \$131.1 million in 3.1, child care subsidy and support; \$3.3 million in 3.2, child care worker supports; and \$1 million in capital IT expenses.

We had \$56 million in one-time early learning and child care. That was ELCC workforce funding, Madam Chair; \$25.8 million of that would be found in line item 3.1, child care subsidy and supports, and \$30.3 million in 3.2, child care worker supports.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you to the minister. Just to clarify, I believe that that is a confirmation that there was \$198 million that is being sought under the supplementary supply from federal funding from the Canada-Alberta ELCC and the bilateral agreements.

At the March 8 estimates of the consideration of Budget 2022, the Minister of Children's Services and I discussed, of course, those estimates. I asked the minister: how much of the expenditures for

child care in 2021 were provincial dollars? At that time the minister indicated it was \$350 million in 2021, the same as the previous year, and that it would continue at that level for years going forward, as part of the Canada-Alberta ELCC agreement is that federal dollars cannot replace provincial dollars. In other words, provincial funding cannot reduce for child care as a result of increased federal funding under these agreements.

If we look at the original estimates on page 17 of the supplementary supply estimates, we see that the original expenditures for child care were, in fact, \$393 million for 2021. Taking into account that \$45 million, which comes in every year under the bilateral agreement, that does mean, as the minister indicated in estimates, that \$350 million of these 2021 dollars were spent from the provincial funding, not federal funding. However, with these new supplementary supply estimates, total expenditures in child care are now \$529 million. If we take away the \$190 million in federal funding under the Canada-Alberta ELCC funding as well as the \$45 million from the bilateral agreement, we're actually left with a provincial spend of \$286 million, not \$350 million. This is what it indicates in the supplementary supply. It says that in 2021 the government of Alberta spent \$286 million of provincial funds on child care, not the \$350 million which was dedicated in this budget for child care. This is about \$60 million below what the minister had indicated in estimates.

Can the Minister of Children's Services please tell this Assembly: in the supplementary supply estimates how much provincial spending has in fact been replaced by federal dollars? It looks like this government is spending approximately \$60 million less in provincial funding than the original stated \$350 million. If that's the case, where is that \$60 million being spent as it's not being spent on child care?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The member opposite is correct in her math around the \$191 million when we're looking at our agreements with the federal government. Now, as the member opposite knows, we do know that child care providers and programs have faced many challenges throughout this pandemic. They've done an amazing job keeping their programs open and making sure that they can continue to support parents. In Budget 2021 the ministry planned for enrolment rates to turn a bit closer to where they were in previous years. We did expect enrolment to go back up to the 80 per cent average, especially once we signed the agreement with the federal government. That is not necessarily what we saw. We are still at about 70 per cent enrolment, which is about 10 per cent less than we had anticipated in December.

I would also point out that we reinvested \$31 million. That was a split between federal and provincial dollars; \$15 million in provincial dollars to help assist with COVID-related costs.

I would point out that while that number is \$55 million lower, it's largely because, again, we had lower than anticipated enrolment. Again, we did anticipate that enrolment to go back up in December-January. I would point out, Madam Chair, that no dollars have been replaced by federal funding. Our ongoing budgets remain at previous years' budgets of \$350 million. This is an agreement that we have with the federal government, and that's a requirement within that agreement.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just going to ask for clarification, then. Based on the lower enrolments, as the minister indicated, the number I reached was \$60 million. The minister indicated \$55 million less was spent from provincial funding for

child care due to lower enrolments. I guess my question to the minister is: where is that \$55 million? What's being done with it? Where is it being invested? How is it being invested in child care? If it wasn't used to address subsidies because there was lower enrolment or lower child care worker wage top-ups, where is that \$55 million being spent?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Again, we have very specific line items within our budget and areas in which we redirect dollars. The majority of our dollars go to support subsidies for families under the subsidy program. We also do invest in wage top-ups. Again, as we saw lower than anticipated enrolment, specifically in December, January, February, March, that is where those dollars go, but we're very limited in terms of where we invest those dollars. However, we did redirect provincial dollars. We do have \$295 million in provincial spending. I didn't quite catch the number that the member opposite used, but I do just want to correct that number as well.

Again, we did communicate to programs to make sure that they were aware of all of the benefits and supports that existed. We continued to support the child care sector with \$165 million throughout COVID. Again, the \$31 million in December partially was to help with the transition to the new program. We knew that some programs were finding the transition a little bit challenging and thought that a certain amount per licensed space would help them not only with their administrative costs but to backfill while they were waiting for the federal dollars to roll out. Then, also, we wanted to make sure that they had flexibility in those COVID supports to invest in recruitment and retention. Madam Chair, many operators did invest that in their workforce, whether it was through additional wage top-ups, bonuses, recruitment and retention bonuses, but those are decisions that operators make as well.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm a little puzzled because all of the items that the minister just described are actually federally funded, all of those pieces. In fact, \$15 million of federal funding was directed to COVID supports, we know, as well as that workforce funding, the transitional funding for those programs that were participating in the Canada-Alberta ELCC agreement. Those were all federally funded. My question, specifically, for the minister is: where is the \$55 million less that the minister has acknowledged was spent on child care from the provincial budget? Where specifically was that \$55 million invested in child care? If she can break down that \$55 million, that would be appreciated.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm going to just mostly reiterate what I just shared with the member. Again, you know, it is difficult as we did expect child care enrolment to go up, especially once the agreement with the federal government was made. We did see a slight bump in January, but certainly those numbers are going up all the time. We've also, I think, seen a very positive increase in the number of early childhood educators who are working in this field, and these dollars that are provincially allocated are released specifically within these program areas, earmarked for supporting wage top-ups and subsidy dollars for parents who really need it.

Madam Chair, again, even now I would have anticipated that we would be back up, you know, certainly past 80 per cent, especially

given the exceptional feedback we're hearing about the early learning and child care program. Parents are very happy to see their fees low. They're happy to be taking part in the workforce. We also were very happy to redirect \$15 million, even in December, of provincial funds with that \$31 million in December to support child care. That is part of the \$165 million that were invested in this area throughout the pandemic. This was important. We listened to operators throughout the pandemic. They identified the need for additional supports, and we stepped up to the plate.

8:30

Then, Madam Chair, they identified the need for flexibility in those supports, that they could use them whether that was to support parent fees or to support benefits to educators. So we stepped up and we gave them that flexibility, and now we have an agreement with the federal government that's going to see a billion dollars invested in child care this year. That is very positive. In that budget there is, like I said, a billion dollars. It includes \$350 million of provincial investment, as is our commitment, in the out-years, and that's going to support our child care sector and parents moving forward. I think that, once again, this is very positive. We're hearing lots of great news about it. You know, we did reinvest dollars where they were needed, when they were needed.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. For the record it sounds like there is no accounting for the \$55 million less in provincial spending on child care by the minister. Two very long answers without any explanation as to where \$55 million went. I think that the Assembly and Albertans should be concerned, because the last time that enrolment – the year before, when enrolment was lower and there were lower subsidy rates being used by parents, this minister took \$108 million and handed it out in a one-time payment to parents that did nothing to actually increase child care affordability the following month or to improve quality for child care. It sounds like once again, perhaps – I don't even know if Albertans are going to get a nice paycheque like they did last year from this minister from the surplus budget, but it certainly does not sound like it's being invested in child care, and there's no accountability for it.

With respect to the \$49.3 million reduction due to lower expected enrolment, which is indicated on page 16 of supplementary supply, it seems reasonable, of course, that a 20 per cent reduction in funding could correlate to a 20 per cent reduction in enrolment, which would lead to a decreasing number of workers. If there are fewer children enrolled, of course you need fewer educators. Yet the minister has claimed that the number of workers and educators is actually increasing drastically. She's claimed it's reached up to prepandemic levels. So can the minister explain how the sector can be experiencing at the same time a decrease in the number of children in the system and an increase in the number of staff working in the system? Did the minister make any changes to ratios? Did any of that information get released publicly? And why is there a shortfall and lower than expected participation in the critical worker benefit if educator levels are back up to prepandemic levels?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I think that that's actually a good question, because as we see a new program, I think like any new program, it takes a little bit of time to roll that out. Even though we weren't one of the first to sign the agreements with the federal government, we were one of the first two provinces to

roll out affordability dollars to parents. Why? Because every one of us in this room was elected to represent people of Alberta, and certainly what I was hearing from working parents right across this province was that affordability was a concern, especially with uncertainty throughout the pandemic.

Also, however, I would point out that there is lots of hope and optimism. We're seeing more jobs created in Alberta every day. I think it is, too – we're hearing from operators that it takes time to adjust as their programs are going. We're seeing wait-lists in some areas that didn't exist before. I think that's positive. Part of it is also making sure that we have child care spaces in the actual communities where they're needed, Madam Chair, not necessarily – you know, not that I have specific insight, but I think that there were patterns around certain constituencies that the former government created a number of child care spaces in. We need to make sure that we're not overbuilding in certain areas and then leaving some child care deserts behind. You know, we really are accounting for this in the supplementary estimates; the \$49.3 million and the \$5.4 million are in there.

Also, the critical worker benefit ended in September. Early childhood educators didn't reach pre-pandemic numbers until around December, Madam Chair. We did see, and I think we discussed this in estimates as well, another I think it was growth of 500 educators in that one month. That was positive.

Just to talk a little bit more about – I want to break down that \$5.4 million because I think I maybe didn't get a chance to get that specific before. That was where we had dollars that were not used in the critical worker benefit. Again, it was really just because we used our best, educated estimate based on how many educators we thought we would have in the system. We did in fact extend the second phase of the critical worker benefit to other support workers within the child care system because we wanted to get those dollars out the door. That's an area, too: if the member opposite wants to know why the estimate wasn't as accurate, it's because while we do track early childhood educators, given our system for wage top-ups and given the supports that we do provide educators, we don't always know what operators are doing when it comes to other support staff in their operations. Again, that's something that typically we don't have a specific line of sight into, and that's where that additional \$5.4 million came from. Again, that was just due to what we saw in terms of our numbers and the number of staff that were working in the field.

We also did reach out to operators a number of times to make sure that they knew that all of their staff were eligible for this benefit in the phases where they were able to apply and receive the benefit. Again ...

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt; that concludes the first 20-minute block.

Would you like to continue on? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: I would, Madam Chair. Thank you so much. Actually ...

The Chair: Sorry. Would you like to continue to share time with the minister?

Ms Pancholi: Yes.

The Chair: Minister, is that amenable? All right. Please proceed.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. Actually, I'll follow up on the response that the minister was just giving with respect to

page 16 of the supplementary supply estimates and the lower than anticipated participation in the critical worker benefit. As we see, it indicates that there's about \$5 million less than anticipated in terms of what was paid out for that critical worker benefit. I wonder if the minister can please indicate how many child care workers or staff, actually both if possible, child care workers and then non child care educators, actually received the critical worker benefit.

As well, if the minister can comment on – as we know, unfortunately, throughout this pandemic there were a number of situations where federal dollars were available to the UCP government to access to support Albertans during the pandemic and the UCP was slow to actually participate in those programs or to take the funding available through the federal government because they were reluctant to match federal funding with their own provincial dollars, and we know that there was a delay in the rollout of the critical worker benefit, particularly as compared to other provinces, by the UCP government. Part of my question to the minister is – I understand that while the ministry cannot track non early childhood educator staff, part of the situation is that we know that last year the sector lost thousands of early childhood educators, and had this program been rolled out earlier, perhaps there would have been more early childhood educators still in the system who would have received this benefit, potentially might have even stayed in the work had they received that critical worker benefit. So how many more child care workers would have received this benefit had the UCP government rolled this critical worker benefit out at the same time as other provinces?

Ms Schulz: Madam Chair, while that is not necessarily specific to my program area when it comes to the critical worker benefit, what I can say is that the positive is that Alberta actually did do something different than other provinces, and we offered it to a wider range of workers in this province. I am very proud that we are one of the few provinces that included child care workers. Why? Because I think that they are exceptionally important. And you know what? When child care program operators reached out to us and said that, you know, they wanted support staff included, I know – I have two young children; they are almost 7 and 4 – that support staff are just as important, so we stepped up to expand that eligibility. We did communicate to programs to make sure that they were aware of the benefit, and all workers who were eligible in this phase in the programs who applied received the benefit. Children's Services sent out a number of e-mails on that front, including things like application forms, and we responded any time there was a question. I know, certainly, a number of them came to my office about eligibility, and we were able to make that work for our very important educators and support staff.

We also talked about that on a number of our town hall calls. You know, I don't have the specific numbers, Madam Chair, but given the numbers around \$1,200 per worker, it would be an equivalent of over 300 support staff, and I think that's probably a fair estimate given the budget we have and the amount that would have gone out for those eligible workers.

The Chair: The hon. member.

8:40

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. To clarify, there were a number of other provinces that also provided critical worker benefits to child care workers and, in fact, did so much earlier than the UCP government did. I just wanted to clarify that for the minister's understanding as well as for the record of the Assembly.

With respect to the supplementary supply, it indicates that there's an increase in \$1 million in capital spending for IT for

child care initiatives and that that, of course, is federally funded, as most of the child care budget is. This amounts to about a \$1 million reduction to the policy, innovation, and Indigenous connections line of the budget. Specifically, this will come out of 5.1, policy, or 5.2, Indigenous connections. If the minister could clarify which line that comes out of and what area of Children's Services' responsibility will see this reduction, intervention or child care.

The \$1 million in line 5 was originally covered by provincial dollars, is that correct? Now it appears to be federally funded. I believe it originally showed up in the estimates as provincially funded, and now it appears we're, through supplementary supply, seeking federal funding to cover that cost. I guess the question, if it is actually federal funding that's now being used to fund something that was originally supposed to be funded by the province: is this not federal funding replacing provincial funding, which, again, is contrary to what our understanding is of the Canada-Alberta ELCC agreement? If the minister can answer those questions, that would be appreciated.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. These are separate numbers, I would say. When we look at the IT, every province has the ability and the agreement with the federal government – certainly, Alberta's does identify that there will be some IT and staffing costs related to the Canada-wide early learning and child care agreement. That million dollars is not replacing provincial funding; that is federal funding to roll out this new program. We just signed that agreement back in November, but we knew there were going to be changes required to address the changes within the physical system to add the operating grant and handle the increased volume of subsidy applications that we were going to see.

When we look at program area 5.1, the million dollars that the member is asking about was a \$1 million, one-time reallocation, and that actually was to the Ministry of Indigenous Relations to support the residential schools unmarked graves research initiative led by Indigenous Relations. Those dollars were moved from my policy, innovation, and Indigenous connections area over to support the residential school grants.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll turn my time over to my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

The Chair: All right.

Hon. member, who would you like to speak with?

Member Ceci: Municipal Affairs.

The Chair: Municipal Affairs. Would you like to share your time?

Member Ceci: Sure.

The Chair: Hon. minister, is that good? All right.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Member Ceci: Thank you. The government is asking, of course, for supplementary supply for this ministry to take advantage of the federal funding through the Canada community-building fund, a fund that provides capital funding for municipalities to help them build and revitalize their local public infrastructure. The program is fully funded by the federal government and administered by the province. That permanent source of funding from the government of Canada is provided up front twice a year to provinces and territories to go

on to municipalities and Métis settlements. It's the second-largest supplementary supply number in this document. I'm just wondering if the minister can tell me how that fund will be distributed to municipalities and Métis settlements and when that will be done.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Madam Chair. The member is right; this estimate is almost completely the federal additional money to the Canada community-building fund. I'm just looking here through my notes for how it's distributed. It will go to municipalities. The fund, of course, used to be called the gas tax fund, and in fact the number that we're getting from the feds is actually, I believe, well, it's \$15,695,000 more than the \$231,208,000 – there's that number – then \$15,695,000 that municipalities were not able to get spent through ICIP grant approvals. I think the hon. member knows that when you're doing construction projects, some of them go faster; some of them go slower. What you can see as part of this, Chair, to the member, is that you can look forward to us moving that \$15,695,000 into next year's budget once the municipalities confirm that that's when they need it, and that's just a matter of: they didn't get things built as fast as they anticipated this year. In other words, to make sure that they don't lose the money and that the federal money comes with them, we'll do that.

The municipalities have quite a range of ability to choose what projects. I'm just trying to see – I've got quite a few numbers in front of me here – trying to sort out the CCBF ones. In 2022 the city of Calgary is estimated to receive \$77.05 million, or 30.3 per cent of the total CCBF, and the city of Edmonton \$58.26 million of the total CCBF for all municipalities. It is for capital expenditures. I don't have, necessarily, the detailed amount for all of it. I'm looking through my notes to see if I can get you something here. There's a \$5,000 base amount for summer villages out of the CCBF and a \$50,000 minimum amount for other small municipalities. I think it's safe to say . . . [interjection] Oh, I guess I didn't use the word "million." The Treasury Board president is helping me to use my words. I left out the word "million," but I think the hon. member knows that. Nonetheless, I'm grateful for the assist.

I think what's most important is that we administer this. It's a federal program. Municipalities have a great deal of autonomy on how they spend that money, and in my opinion and, I dare say, our government's opinion, they do a great job of making wise choices. This is, I think, as the hon. member understands, simply a flow through. As he rightly described, the federal government provides the money to the municipalities, the province administers it, and that number that is coming here is actually the full number, so I could say it out loud for the record. It's \$246,903,000 from the Canada community-building fund. The reason, again, that the supplementary estimate is \$231,208,000 is because of that unspent money through ICIP, \$15,695,000.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Member Ceci: Thanks. Thank you for that information.

Can I just clarify, then? It sounds like, other than for summer villages and smaller communities, where there's a \$5,000 and a \$50,000 amount, the balance of the money is split out on a per capita basis. I think you talked about 33 per cent going to the city of Calgary. Is that correct?

Mr. McIver: I could tell the hon. member, through you, Chair, that the gas tax fund, what was formerly called the gas tax fund, which is now the Canada community-building fund, is governed by an agreement signed between Canada and Alberta back in 2014, and

all the expenditures will be according to that agreement. Now, there you go. It is funded based on populations, but again, as I mentioned as part of my earlier answer, the formula includes a \$5,000 base amount, a minimum amount, if you will, for summer villages and a \$50,000 minimum amount for other small municipalities so that they get enough.

The federal government structured it this way, and I think it's actually a good idea; in other words, so that municipalities, hopefully, get enough money to do something with. When you're doing construction, well, in some cases \$5,000 won't get a lot done. In other cases \$50,000 won't get a lot done, but in many cases it actually will make a difference either in creating a new project or in some cases actually enhancing or improving a capital project that the municipality would have done. At any rate, this is, again, as per the agreement between Alberta and Canada. Yeah, we are grateful for the federal government's support of municipalities, and I think that answers the question: largely population based.

8:50

Member Ceci: Just one further clarification on the \$16.7 million made available from lower than budgeted expense in other programs. That program, as I understand it, was ICIP, and it was because construction didn't happen that would need to be billed in this year, so it's carried forward to a subsequent year, where it will be fully expended at that time.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Not to be critical, but I'll just correct the number. I think he used a \$16 million and some number. It's \$15,695,000. I don't say that to be anything but helpful, okay? The hon. member described it accurately. It's ICIP money through the federal ICIP program that was allocated to municipalities.

As the vagaries of construction go, sometimes you can't get all the work done in the year through some delay. It could be a contractor who was behind, it could be that some part or some supply in the supply chain was late, it could be weather based – so many reasons – but the important point is that what we taketh away here from the municipalities, we will giveth back next year. We just need to confirm with the municipalities first that they can spend that next year. Then don't be surprised to see me standing up here or else a piece of paper in your hand for that same amount being added as a supplementary estimate for next year, but probably not until we get some indication that the municipalities actually can use the money. I fully expect they will be able to use all of it as well as whatever ICIP is available to them next year, but of course we'll do that work with the municipalities first.

Member Ceci: I cede to my colleague from Edmonton–City Centre.

The Chair: Hon. member, would you like to share your time?

Mr. Shepherd: Yes, if I could.

The Chair: With the Minister of Health?

Mr. Shepherd: Yes, please.

The Chair: All right. Minister of Health, is that amenable? Absolutely.

Mr. Shepherd: And a time check, Chair?

The Chair: There are four minutes remaining in the second 20-minute block.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. In regard to, I guess, the supplementary supply for Health, the amount of \$375,500,000 for lab testing, contact tracing, and rapid test distribution, during the height of the third wave, in May 2021, our contact tracing workforce here in Alberta numbered about 2,500. Now, by August, in the midst of the best summer ever, we had the announcement from the government of the ending of testing, tracing, and isolation. That's hundreds of contact tracers that were laid off or did not have their contracts renewed as the government told them they would no longer be needed to notify close contacts and only continue to investigate high-risk settings.

But what we do know, Madam Chair, is that as of October 5 the Premier and the ministers of Education and Health announced that we were indeed going to reimplement contact tracing because, indeed, we found ourselves in the midst of a fourth wave. That contact tracing would not begin again until October 12, after the Thanksgiving long weekend. By that October 12, in the midst of that fourth wave, AHS had a total of approximately 1,124 contact tracers. They were in the midst, then, of racing to fill these positions which the government had prematurely chosen to end in its rush to declare the pandemic as an endemic.

My question to the minister is: can he clarify how much, if any, of this \$375,500,000 for lab testing, contact tracing, and rapid test distribution was to cover the cost of needing to rapidly rehire the contact tracers his government chose to fire during its best summer ever? How much, if any, of it is for payments to those contact tracers that they did not fire but who may have had and likely did have to work overtime to address the gaps that his government created?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. I can say that in regard to the \$375 million that was for lab testing, contact tracing, and rapid test distribution a total amount of \$144.7 million was for contact tracing and case notification. I'd like to point out to the hon. member that we did re-engage contact tracers during the fourth wave, and we actually were able to increase the staff to be able to respond within 24 hours in terms of being able to contact trace once we actually, you know, got into the fourth wave.

Madam Chair, I'd also like to point out that, you know, like all other jurisdictions, as we got into the fifth wave, we limited our contact tracing in the fifth wave only to high-risk settings and high-risk individuals. This was the same response that was done, quite frankly, across the entire country given the widespread nature of the omicron variant, and we were able to run that area and then actually leverage rapid tests. We knew that when we actually had to deal with the omicron variant, we needed to spend more money in terms of rapid tests to be able to get that to Albertans, because the PCR testing couldn't keep up. Given the nature of omicron, as part of this budget as well, we spent \$153.6 million for rapid tests and inventory acquisition – that was in order to buy 14.3 million tests – and that's in addition to the tests that we received from the federal government. But that was the appropriate response.

I'd like to just point out to the hon. member that, you know, as we moved through the pandemic and we had different variants hit us, we responded accordingly. We put the resources in place, and that's really, quite frankly, what the supplementary amounts are all about. The total amount is . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, this concludes the second 20-minute block. Would you like to continue?

Mr. Shepherd: Yes, please.

The Chair: Please proceed.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Indeed, I would be happy to talk about rapid tests. I would note that the minister has just spoken about how they responded to each variant appropriately, not his precise words but what he was suggesting. I'd say that a large number of Albertans, certainly a large number of health professionals, would have some thoughts on how appropriate it was. Again, I think we saw a government that repeatedly responded last and least, at the great cost, I think, probably, unfortunately, of some lives but certainly also to our health care system.

Speaking of rapid tests and this government's planning ahead, what we do know is that as of December 21, 2021, the government indeed, as the minister said, announced that it was going to purchase an additional provincial stockpile of 10 million tests. Now, they at that time said that they intended to secure that before the new year. We know, ultimately, that that was unsuccessful due to the fact that so many other jurisdictions were all trying to acquire rapid tests at the same time.

Now, we also do know that the province of Saskatchewan had shown some actual forethought here. In the fall the government of Canada had approached the provinces – and this was, of course, during the midst of the fourth wave, at which time this government was not distributing any rapid tests to the wider public despite the fact that it had a significant stockpile that it had not distributed at all. What we saw was, indeed, that the province of Saskatchewan had the foresight to take the government of Canada up on their offer, so Saskatchewan had a significant stockpile of rapid tests ready to go in December. Alberta chose not to do that. Now, by our calculations, if Alberta had taken the advantage that Saskatchewan did on a per capita basis, we would have had an additional 25.5 million rapid tests available for Albertans, but of course this government chose not to do that.

We also know that this government, again, despite the protestations of the minister at multiple times, did not act quickly to respond to the fifth wave. They waited until just before Christmas, just before the holidays, as our numbers were beginning to climb, and they were trying to go the other way but realized rapidly they had to do something, so they made this announcement about the distribution of rapid tests, on very short notice, at the end of December.

A couple of questions based on this, Madam Chair. Can the minister clarify how much, if any, of the \$153,600,000 that's listed here for rapid test kits might have been saved if his government had had the foresight and the good judgment shown by Saskatchewan and taken advantage of the opportunity they had in the fall to purchase rapid tests through the government of Canada rather than scrambling to get those 10 million during a time of incredibly heightened scarcity and demand in the midst of the fifth wave? Actually, I'd be curious, if he's able to tell us, too, how many of those 10 million he was actually able to get and when they arrived in the province.

Secondly, how much of the \$375,500,000 that was set aside for lab testing, contact tracing, or rapid test distribution was specifically for the rapid test distribution, and might those costs have been reduced if his government had taken the time to prepare a plan for distribution before being forced to do so by the rising of the omicron-driven fifth wave at the end of December?

9:00

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Chair. First off, I'd like to point out to my learned colleague that actually Alberta began distributing the rapid test program in March 2021 and distributed over 8.8 million tests to over 2,000 locations, including priority settings like continuing care, schools, postsecondaries, and workplaces. Now, we did begin broad public distribution of rapid tests through pharmacies and AHS sites on December 17, 2021, and as of February 28 we had made over 12 million tests available to Albertans. Throughout January and early February over 8.5 million rapid tests were distributed to schools, and in February over 1.1 million tests were sent to First Nations and Métis communities for distribution.

Now, as pointed out in the supplementary estimates, \$375.5 million was for lab testing. Of that – and this goes to the question asked by the hon. member – \$24.8 million was for rapid test distribution costs. Again, as previously noted, for inventory acquisition, the 14.3 million tests, it was \$153.6 million to actually acquire that. Madam Chair, the Alberta government, you know, in recognizing, responding to the upcoming omicron wave not only had been distributing rapid tests as part of a program for months prior; we recognized that a wider distribution would be helpful given the nature of omicron as we were learning the impact that it could have on Alberta and our health care system, so we responded. Again, as I was saying before the timer went off in the first 20-minute block, which I only had four minutes of, that is really what the supplemental estimates and the additional funding are all about.

Madam Chair, we responded to COVID. You know, in terms of total funding associated with COVID, we're looking for just under \$716 million, but that's in addition to the \$1.1 billion that was already allocated the previous budget year to be able to respond to COVID. We fully appreciate – and this is part of the challenge in terms of when you don't know what you don't know. COVID was brand new to us the year previous. We made an estimate in terms of the budget, what it would cost, but you don't know what you don't know for how it would evolve and change over the period of time.

Madam Chair, we made one commitment to Albertans, and that was mentioned already by my colleague the Minister of Finance, that we would spend the money necessary to be able to respond to COVID as we could see it coming at us and respond appropriately to this given the changing nature of it. We saw differences, different approaches in delta and differences in omicron. We did exactly that. We had rapid tests throughout last year. We expanded the application in December as omicron came at us. Because of challenges with the federal government, who we had requested additional tests from – quite frankly, the federal government indicated that they'd give them to us, but they couldn't deliver – we went out, and we spent additional dollars to make sure we could get those tests in the hands of Albertans. We did accomplish that.

Again, Madam Chair, I am thankful that we are now moving into the endemic phase. We have come out of the omicron wave and moved to the endemic phase, and the numbers and the hospitalizations are continuing to go down.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. Indeed, we don't know what we don't know, but we certainly do know that Alberta had some of the worst outcomes in Canada. So it's quite clear that other governments were quite able to understand, were able to make some decisions that were able to lower the number of excess deaths, that were able to prevent the same number of cases, that were able to indeed take actions that were more prescient than those we saw taken by our government, which at times was quite clearly so caught

up in its own internal politics that it was not considering what was best for Albertans but, rather, what was best for itself.

I would note that, you know, the Minister of Finance commented that Alberta will no longer be an expensive outlier when it comes to health care spending. Well, Alberta, unfortunately, was an outlier when it came to the costs of this pandemic. Indeed, Dr. Tara Moriarty, in her study that was released last year looking at excess deaths across Canada from COVID-19, reported that Alberta had nearly 150 excess deaths per 100,000 residents. That equates to about 4,800 more deaths than would be expected during the time period, the highest rate of any province in Canada, Madam Chair, and that is because of choices made by this government when there were things that it did know.

Speaking of which, when we're talking about, again, the spending of \$375,500,000 for lab testing, contact tracing, and rapid test distribution and we're talking about staffing speech-language pathologists, Madam Chair, they were part of the staff which were required to help fill gaps due to poor judgment on the part of this government. Now, we recognize, of course, that in the initial redeployment that took place, I think starting from March 2020, even through, we'll be generous and say, that second wave in December 2020 most SLPs were quite all right with that. They understood the enormity of that, as many other health care workers did, and they were willing to step up and do their work. But by that point there were many things this government did know. Yet we found ourselves in the third wave where speech-language pathologists – and I've learned this by speaking with them – were again redeployed. Again, remember that this was when this government was sitting back and refusing to take action as several of its own MLAs were crusading against this government to end all public health measures as case numbers and hospitalizations were growing during the third wave.

What speech-language pathologists have told me is that there were times they would be called in, even at the last minute, which meant an overtime shift, where they were being paid double time, as much as \$100 an hour to be a line leader; that is, simply making sure that people were in their chairs and ready to go in to get tested. Now, again, that is important and essential work, Madam Chair, but by that point the government had the opportunity to begin to staff up for those positions. During that third wave I understand that speech-language pathologists were very happy to hear that AHS had taken the opportunity to begin to hire some folks to be line leaders, admin staff at the vaccine centres, and swabbers at their testing sites that would allow speech-language pathologists to get back to their important work supporting youth and supporting other people who needed their assistance.

But they found themselves called back again in the fourth wave in September 2021 because this government, which, again, had moved to end all testing, tracing, isolation in August as part of its best summer ever, at a time when it had had three waves to learn, to know, Madam Chair, had effectively gone radio silent, utterly absent, refusing to take action even as cases and hospitalizations were rising and, as we have heard, were locked in backrooms fighting amongst themselves about whether to take any steps to actually meet this growing fourth wave. As a result, my understanding is that they waited until four days prior to when they had to renew the contracts of the newly hired swabbing staff, which meant that many of those staff had gone on to find other work, so once again speech-language pathologists were pressed into being redeployed to man testing sites and others, again, at a premium cost of up to \$100 an hour.

Can the minister clarify how much, if any, of the \$375,500,000 set aside for lab testing, contact tracing, and rapid test distribution would have been used to cover the costs of the premiums paid to

speech-language pathologists or other health care workers who had to step in to cover the gaps because his government waited too long to take the action to follow through on the contracts of the folks that had been hired to cover those positions?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, before I sort of respond to the breakdown of the \$375 million, I'd like to first comment on some of the comments that the hon. member across the aisle started out talking about, that Alberta has the worst outcomes in terms of deaths. Don't get me wrong. I feel for every individual who has been impacted and everyone who has lost a loved one during this pandemic, but the comments that Alberta has had the worst outcome in terms of deaths is quite simply incorrect. Although we've had deaths, if you compare Alberta in terms of the Canadian average, we are below the Canadian average. In fact, we are several times below the average you find in U.S. states and even so when you actually look at Europe. I appreciate the comments being made over there, but the fact is that the characterization of our government's response to COVID is simply incorrect.

9:10

Madam Chair, we committed to Albertans that we would spend the money necessary for an appropriate response to COVID, and quite frankly we have done that. If you look at the year previous in terms of the amount spent in 2021, that was \$1.5 billion. This year – right? – we're talking \$1.867 billion to respond and so that we can respond appropriately and make sure that Albertans and AHS have the resources that they need to be able to respond.

The response was varied and many. It involved lab testing, contact tracing, and rapid test distribution, supports for continuing care, vaccine deployment, purchases for PPE, rapid test kits, which we spoke to earlier, acute-care and entry screening, and then support for, you know, isolation facilities, border programs, public health guidance, department EOC operations, the COVID critical drug reserve. Madam Chair, we spent the money, and quite frankly our government, under the leadership of the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, gave the commitment to us that the health system would have the money that it needs to be able to appropriately respond. We did provide that, and that's, quite frankly, what we're here doing today.

Now, Madam Chair, the question that the hon. member asked was sort of like: what is the breakdown of that \$375 million? I can tell you and share with this House that it's \$166 million for testing and assessment centres, \$144 million for contact tracing and case notification, \$40 million for testing supplies – this is the inventory acquisition – and another \$24.8 million for the distribution costs, already mentioned, for the rapid tests.

One more comment. I do appreciate, you know, the challenges that our health care system has faced. This has been a very challenging time, and our jurisdiction, Alberta, is no different than many other jurisdictions across the country in having the need to redeploy resources to be able to respond to the pandemic.

Madam Chair, I want to first of all thank all the health care workers, who actually stepped up to the plate through multiple waves. We saw in this fiscal year part of wave 3 but also wave 4. I thank them for stepping up. You know, we needed to be able to redeploy these workers, to be able to put health care professionals who had some training into different roles, whether that be moving individuals with health care training into contact tracing roles. But then, of course, as we moved out through a wave, we could actually move them back into their role to be able to provide the health care services that they were originally trained to provide. So I want to

thank them for that. That was necessary, and it's been necessary not only in our jurisdiction but across the entire country and in jurisdictions around the world.

That's why Budget '22 is so important, Madam Chair. Budget '22 is so important because we recognize that we need to increase overall our capacity in the health care system so that there needs to be less moving of resources from one location to another to be able to respond to future waves of COVID. We have an additional \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year, \$600 million the year after that, a \$1.8 billion addition to our operating expenses over the next three years, \$3.5 billion in capital. The hon. member and I had a lengthy conversation about the investment in capacity when we spoke about estimates.

But, Madam Chair, we recognize that we need to, quite frankly, normalize the resources that we have within the system – you know, the additional \$100 million a year, for example, for ICU – so that we can respond better without having to pull resources from other areas of health care, without having to postpone surgeries. We're doing that in Budget '22 to be able to increase capacity. Again, the estimates here are all about the monies that we have spent in the past fiscal year to be able to respond to the COVID pandemic appropriately and fully and make sure that our health care workers, who have done a tremendous job, had the resources to be able to step up and respond to the crisis and provide services to Albertans.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that response from the minister. Certainly, there is something to be said for providing the financial resources that are needed to respond to COVID-19, but what I would note is that indeed Alberta faced the same pressures as other jurisdictions, Alberta faced the same challenges, and certainly there are uncertainties that are baked into responding to a pandemic with a previously unknown novel coronavirus. But there were repeated decisions by this government that made that situation, that uncertainty so much worse for our front-line health care workers.

Indeed, spending of dollars does not make up for lack of leadership, it does not make up for putting politics ahead of public health, and indeed that is what we saw repeatedly throughout this pandemic, not unlike previous Conservative governments who put health care spending on a roller coaster. It would rise and fall with the price of oil, and the chaos, the uncertainty that created within the health care system made health care less efficient, more expensive, and created far more stress for health care workers, and indeed that is what we had throughout this pandemic thanks to this government's repeated decisions to act last and act least, to let its own political infighting get in the way of making the decisions to support those health care workers that the minister now stands in this House and purports to thank.

Now, respectfully, I recognize we're here to talk about the dollars, and, hey, if you want to talk about the dollars, the fact is that the costs of this pandemic are undoubtedly higher than they needed to be because of this government's decisions to repeatedly push our health care system to the limits, to repeatedly push the limits of our ICU and hospitalization capacity, and the ongoing impacts that we're going to have, which, indeed, I had the opportunity to talk about with this minister during the estimates process. The fact is that the minister and his government can congratulate themselves and pat themselves on the back . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt; that concludes the first 60-minute block for the Official Opposition.

We will now move to the independent members of this House. There's a 20-minute block remaining.

Just to confirm, Hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, would you like the first 10-minute block and the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley the second 10-minute block?

Mr. Barnes: Yes, please.

The Chair: Yes. Perfect.

Would you like to share your time with the minister's?

Mr. Barnes: Yes. I have a couple of questions for Health and one for Energy.

Ministers, do you mind if we go back and forth? Thank you.

The Chair: Just a reminder to direct your comments through the chair. I'm happy to facilitate that for you.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you again, Madam Chair. First of all, to the Minister of Health: \$25 billion spent last year, and now we're dealing with another \$726 million in supplemental supply. I want to start with the \$174 million for increased physician compensation, please.

You know, again, thank you so loudly to our physicians, our nurses, all our front-line workers through what was absolutely an incredible two years, and I just couldn't imagine. But there were lots of things that we heard last year that were COVID and pandemic response related but not quite. Rural Alberta: I heard time and time again about communities being short of doctors for locum, about emergency wards not being open, about service not being able to be provided. Of course, two or three years ago there was quite a controversy with our rural doctors especially, and there was some talk of withdrawal of service, and I believe \$180 million was added to the budget for that. Mr. Minister, I'd like to ask you: of the \$174 million, is any of that for locums? Is any of that to increase the number of rural front-line providers and physicians, and how much of that would be related to their extra work and their extra stress during COVID?

Thank you.

Mr. Copping: Thanks to the hon. member for the question. You know, broadly speaking, I can break down the numbers for the roughly \$174 million. The vast majority of it, ballpark \$85 million, was really associated with increase in fee-for-service billings, and that sort of had two components to it. One is a catch-up. You may recall the year previously, when we got into the first year of COVID, there was a delay, so people reduced the amount of time that they were actually seeing their doctors given the restrictions in place, and some people were just not comfortable seeing their doctors. What we saw this fiscal year was a catch-up, so people actually seeing their family doctors that they actually hadn't seen before, and you had an increase in billings as a result of that.

As well, we also put in place virtual codes to be able to make it easier, and in particular for omicron we put a new array of codes because we didn't want the same thing to happen as it did, you know, the first year that we were actually dealing with COVID. As a result, we changed the codes so that patients and doctors could build, like, for example, complex modifiers that they couldn't under the previous virtual codes so that they could continue to see their patients and see their patients virtually, which actually increased the costs associated with it, but it really was to make sure that we didn't

create that backlog of individuals seeing their doctors. That was one portion of it.

9:20

Another portion that was associated, \$43 million, was an increase in clinical alternate relationship plans due to the introduction of new and expanded ARPs. As the hon. member may recall, this was part of the initiative to be able to not only manage costs but better services – right? – in terms of a capitation plan and being able to expand that. Partly, it was to be able to enable family physicians, not only in urban centres but in rural centres, to be able to provide better services to Albertans.

Then I think the last piece, which is what the hon. member is driving at, is that \$43.4 million of this was associated with the rural, remote, northern program, and that was actually the increased funding associated with that due to the changes in terms of the approach to billing.

This was part, last year, of the overall \$90 million, between the supplemental estimates and then what already was budgeted, to be able to support doctors in rural areas. That \$90 million had a number of different components. If the hon. member just gives me a moment, I can pull them up here. Yeah. That included the rural medical education program, \$6 million; the rural integrated community clerks program, \$4 million; the rural health profession action plan, \$9 million; the locum program, \$3 million, which included a rural locum of \$1.4 million, a specialist locum program at \$1.5 million, and the rural physician on-call program, \$12 million. Now, some of this was built into the original budget, and then, as indicated previously, the other amount is in that \$173 million.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you. Keeping with the same minister, \$726 million more for COVID measures on top of about \$1.1 billion for the pandemic transferred from contingency already. I believe I have a number of \$169 million that is beside a line item for acute care and front-line services. Minister, I guess what I want to ask you is that we all know that Albertans fell thousands and thousands behind for their surgeries, and we saw an announcement for this year's budget of I think it was \$300 million for 100 beds, so I'd like to ask you: of that \$169 million extra that you're asking for today, how much is going towards reducing these wait times for our much-needed surgeries, and is any of that money going to increase ICU capacity?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Chair. The hon. member is quite right. In Budget 2022 we put an additional \$100 million in terms of expanding capacity by 50 ICU beds. So that is the focus, and we've actually funded that over the next three years. That's based on the premise that we understood that even though we did flex up and flex down throughout this current budget year, to be able to respond in particular to the fourth wave, where at just under 380 beds we had to flex up into typically 173, the \$100 million in Budget 2022 is to be able to expand that 50 from 173, an additional 50 beds.

Now, in terms of the \$169 million for acute-care and entry screening, \$138.6 million is for hospital and ICU beds. That was actually to enable us to flex up beyond the 173. Also, because we had to flex up – that was wave 4, but in wave 5 we had to do some increase in ICU, not as much. We didn't have to head up to that 380 number, but we did, you know, go over 225 – right? – to be able to do that.

Plus, also, on the non-ICU beds, we had to increase our capacity there, but again it wasn't a large amount. So of that \$169 million, just \$130.6 million was for hospital and ICU beds to enable us to be able to respond to COVID during the pandemic. I guess my point is that it wasn't – it's not base funding, right? It is the flex up to be able to do this in response to COVID. Now, the \$100 million that we're putting in Budget '22 and for the next three years is base funding for the additional 50 beds, to make it easier for us to be able to respond to whatever happens next.

The Chair: One minute, 37 remaining, hon. member.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Minister. To the Minister of Energy, please: this is really an Energy budget. Two years ago we were a \$16.9 billion deficit. This year we're a \$3.2 billion deficit, plus the \$1.2 billion being asked for here tonight. Oil and gas royalties went from \$3 billion to \$13.2 billion, and that brings me to the \$300 million you're asking for residential support. Of course, your share of supplement is \$96 million, not the \$300 million, rather, that is going out to residential consumers.

So I congratulate you, first of all, on approximately \$200 million of savings in your department, but, Minister, I don't hear about – Albertans aren't complaining to me about the high cost of electricity. They're complaining to me about the transmission and distribution, the extra charges. Is any money going into researching how we can bring those costs down long term for them?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you. Exactly. We are actually doing a lot in that area, led by Associate Minister Nally. Anybody looking at their bill sees the distribution and the transmission costs to be the most significant part of the bill. One of the things we're doing: the AESO is conducting a 2022 long-term transmission plan. Alberta Energy is reviewing the transition policy. They'll be taking feedback and reviewing the feedback from 2021 stakeholder consultation.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt; the first 10 minutes have elapsed.

The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley for the second 10 minutes. Would you like to share your time?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Share my time, and just maybe have the minister continue answering that last question, and then I'll ask mine.

The Chair: If that's amenable to the minister, you may proceed.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you. As I mentioned, there are a lot of things under way to look at getting the costs of electricity down. In particular, the AESO's 2022 long-term transmission plan is under way. They're reviewing it. Alberta Energy has feedback on stakeholder input last fall. We're looking to identify solutions to address the rising trajectory of transmission costs. We're also looking at a number of things within the grid to try to get the price of electricity down, including self-supply and export. We're looking at energy storage, and the Alberta Utilities Commission has completed an inquiry into the future of the distribution system. So there are a number of things under way.

In terms of getting the energy price down, I would note that the return to the energy-only market, not proceeding to the NDP capacity market, has brought a number of announced investments into the electricity system: \$5 billion of investments announced for new generation projects, including 50 power plants. The more electricity we have in the system, the more we'll get the costs down.

We do know that while utility prices are high right now, we are very concerned with the distribution and the transmission costs. But, as I noted, there are several policies under way looking at innovative solutions to get the transmission costs down.

The Chair: The hon minister to supplement.

Mr. Toews: All right. Thank you, Madam Chair. The member is right to ask this question. Albertans are paying very high transmission fees right now right across the province, especially in rural Alberta. As we consider what options we have, what levers we might have to pull, I think it's important that we understand what gave rise to these high transmission costs. It bears repeating tonight that the previous government – and previous governments before them – spent almost \$8 billion on transmission costs, and those costs must be recovered by consumers. The system was overbuilt, and those costs are real.

9:30

Madam Chair, I can say this, that there's been a lot of work done to understand the recovery curve, the methodology to ensure that it's most advantageous and appropriate that we're assigning the transmission costs, which were an overbuild by the previous government, to consumers who might benefit. And I can say this, that there's not a silver bullet out there based on everything that we can see. The fact of the matter is that the members opposite overbuilt the system; consumers are now paying.

But there's more. Madam Chair, the members opposite – when the NDP were in power, they hastily moved from coal to gas-fired electricity. We were on that trajectory, but they hastily, prematurely made that transition, costing Alberta consumers about \$1.4 billion. That's included in the bill. Moreover, they added a carbon tax, and when you add all three pieces up, it makes for significantly higher electricity bills than consumers would otherwise be paying today.

The Chair: The hon. member. Would you two like to share time?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah.

Mr. Barnes: We could.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Barnes: Minister, I'm confused. I'm very grateful that I was elected in 2012, but in 2012 it was all about the fact that the PCs had approved these transmission lines and the overbuild of these transmission lines through the province. Maybe the NDP government built the lines that a previous Progressive Conservative government approved. I ask you: should they have not honoured a contract, or am I wrong? Bill 50: I remember lawyers, I remember town halls of 350 people in Medicine Hat concerned not only about the Alberta Land Stewardship Act but the fact that Bill 50 was going to way overbuild the transmission lines, and, Minister, it was clearly a Progressive Conservative government. Please help me.

The Chair: Hon. member, I'm going to take a moment to remind all members to speak through the chair.

The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you. Just to give some details on the transmission overbuild, from 2015 to 2019 \$7.5 billion in new transmission infrastructure was built, as noted by the Minister of Finance, that included approximately \$5.2 billion in critical transmission projects such as the eastern and western Alberta transmission lines and the Fort McMurray west 500-kV line. Since

2020, since our government came into power, we've spent \$100 million on transmission infrastructure versus \$7.5 billion.

I don't want to get into a debate of which government in the past authorized the approval. It doesn't matter. It's there in the budget, and those are coming up with higher electricity prices. The fact is that between 2015 and 2019 \$7.5 billion of overbuild in infrastructure happened, and consumers are paying for that right now, Madam Chair. That's why we are taking an innovative look at how to get down those costs through the various reviews I mentioned earlier.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Nally: Could I provide a little colour?

The Chair: Hon. member, would you like a supplement from the associate minister?

Mr. Barnes: How much time is left, please?

The Chair: You have just under four minutes.

Mr. Loewen: I'll do this question, and we'll see what's left after that.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Loewen: My question is fairly simple. It's to the Minister of Culture, and it's more of a question as far as, I guess, maybe just an explanation. I'm not questioning the amount, I'm not questioning the need for the money that's funding going to Ukraine for humanitarian and nonlethal defence military equipment, but I guess I'm curious as to why that amount of money is in Culture and not in intergovernmental affairs. I'm just wondering if there'd be a simple explanation of why that is, because when I look through the business plan of Culture, I don't see anything that relates to any kind of transferring money between governments, especially internationally, though intergovernmental affairs could qualify for that. I just wondered if I could get an explanation for that.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. Thanks for the question. The reason it was put through Culture is because Culture is set up with all of the granting staff to qualify and review and preview grant applications. These were put through under all of the rules. Even though we offered it, the organizations still had to apply and provide all of their financial data and their legal society data and all the rest of it to the department so that there was good tracking and record keeping for it. It was put through under the other initiatives program, which is a very broad, open program that allows for a real wide variety of specific programs. It was the cleanest, best reporting vehicle, I think, that we could have used, and that's the main reason that it was put through my department.

Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: Just a follow-up and, again, just an honest question here. What organization made the grant application? Was it the Ukrainian government? Just trying to get that straight.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I can give you the exact details; \$350,000 of it went to the Alberta provincial congress of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. That was for local Alberta services. Actually, there was a previous \$1 million in an initial grant and then \$5 million also added to it for a total of \$6 million to the

Canada-Ukraine Foundation, which is registered within Canada – so it's, again, within Canada – then the further \$5 million for the Ukraine World Congress for its Unite with Ukraine campaign. So that's where the money went, and those are the amounts that went to each.

Mr. Loewen: Perfect. Thanks, Minister. I appreciate that.

I'll turn the rest of the time over to the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

The Chair: The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. How much time do I have?

The Chair: Fifty-two seconds.

Mr. Nally: I just want to provide a little bit of colour, and I'm glad that the member has picked up on the fact that there is a continuity of government. In 2015, when the NDP were elected, it's not like everything that the PCs were working on stopped. In short, the NDP were not guilty of being the first government to overbuild the system; they were guilty of continuing the overbuild that began on the NDP. They were also guilty of not stopping the overbuild, and in addition they are guilty of allowing the overbuild to literally explode on their watch. Madam Chair, as the Minister of Energy pointed out, we saw \$100 million in 2020, and in 2021 there were zero dollars spent on transmission. So they are guilty of not stopping the overbuild, which is the exact restraint that we brought to the electricity grid.

The Chair: Well timed.

Hon. members, we will now move to a 20-minute block with government caucus members. I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to share time with the minister, I'm going to assume?

Mr. Neudorf: Yes, Madam Chair. I'd like to share time with the Minister of Children's Services to begin.

The Chair: And that's okay? All right.
Please proceed.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you very much, Chair. First off, I would like to thank the minister for all of the time that she's put into this file, particularly the time she's spent with many of my constituents talking and answering questions about Children's Services and the new agreement as well as her work on getting the agreement with the federal government, working very hard and diligently on behalf of Alberta and the unique composition of our constituents all across the province, making sure that this program worked as good as it could with the constraints put on her by the federal government on their half of the negotiation.

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

To begin, I'd like to start on page 16 if possible. There is a total of \$134,726,000 requested with another \$1 million that is being reprofiled from lower than budgeted expenses in other programs. Can the minister tell us how many children this funding is expected to benefit?

The Acting Chair: Go ahead, Minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Chair. The majority of this funding is in fact due to the new Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement, to which we've spoken a little bit about tonight. I do

want to point out – it's one thing that I didn't quite have enough time to mention when the members opposite were asking questions – that there is really one taxpayer. One taxpayer. And bringing these hard-earned Alberta tax dollars back to this province is something that Alberta parents wanted to see. This is a positive, so we did invest. We invested in supporting child care providers throughout COVID. We've got excellent news for parents and operators right across this province with \$1 billion in funding starting in the next budget year.

But in December 2021, to answer the member's specific question, there were approximately 70,000 children from birth to kindergarten age enrolled in licensed child care. That's about 73 per cent enrolment where we're at right now.

9:40

Affordability grant funding and subsidy supports will result in an average reduction of 50 per cent, and that is based on the average child care fees that we see. Programs do report that information to the ministry, so we use that as an average. With the operating grant we will reduce fees for all parents in every single space, Mr. Chair, and that is in licensed day homes and preschools and child care facilities because we respect parent choice. This is an average, so some families may see less of a reduction when it comes to a percentage. Some will receive a greater reduction than that, but every single parent right across this province, in every corner, in a licensed space will see a decrease. They already have seen that. Those dollars started to roll out in January. Some operators had the flexibility to roll it out in February or March and then retroactively support parents.

We're also committed to creating another 42,500 spaces as a minimum over the next five years.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, through you, to minister for their work on that. I deeply appreciate it, and I'd again just reiterate that I appreciate the time that she spent in Lethbridge and area speaking to many of those operators there, answering their questions.

Again, I know that the minister put a lot of work in negotiating an agreement with the federal government that would work for Albertan families. This government knows that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to child care, and I would like to again thank the minister for her work specifically on this file. The Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement includes child care worker supports, which I see are being allocated at \$28,167,000 on page 16 of the supplementary estimates. Can the minister tell us what supports this funding will provide for these workers? I know many of these workers have contacted my office, and they're seeking just to understand the complexities of this agreement and which part was the responsibility for the federal government and which is the responsibility for us as a provincial government. I'd appreciate a response on that.

Thank you, Chair.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead.

Ms Schulz: Thank you so much, Chair. I do want to thank the member for just being so engaged on this file. It is true that we've had a number of discussions with operators in Lethbridge and area, and specifically the last meeting we had was on areas where there's still some work to do. We committed to rolling this out over five years, and I firmly believe that to do that, we need feedback from Albertans, so I do want to thank the member for organizing that and making sure that he is well connected with operators in Lethbridge and organizing opportunities for me to speak directly to operators

and educators because we want to make sure we get this right, and that's exactly how we do that.

The \$28.2 million is made up of three things: \$3.3 million from the new Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement; \$30.3 million from the federal child care workforce agreement. There was a total in that funding of \$56 million to support the workforce in that federal agreement. This funding is to strengthen the workforce through skills training and professional development. It will also support child care staff recovery and retention, wage top-ups for child care and preschool educators, which is something we heard was very important, and it's off-set by \$5.4 million due to lower than anticipated uptake of the child care critical worker benefit, as we've discussed this evening.

The Acting Chair: Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the minister yet again. It is my understanding from page 16 of the supplementary estimates that related to this \$28.2 million is a partial offset of the \$5,414,000 due to the lower than expected enrolment in the critical worker benefit program, so I've got a number of questions on this topic and this line item in particular. I'll ask maybe a couple and allow the minister to respond. Can I assume that this lower enrolment is why we did not use the full critical worker benefit program, and would the minister be able to provide insight as to why we saw a lower than anticipated enrolment in that same program?

Ms Schulz: Thank you. Those are excellent questions, Chair. First of all, the number of eligible workers was estimated based on ratios of support to front-line staff, and we wanted to make sure that there were enough dollars set aside to support all of those front-line workers, educators, and support staff who might be eligible for this program. It was estimated based on the highest possible uptake because that is the responsible thing to do.

As mentioned, phase 2 was expanded to make sure that we could include non front-line staff, those that may not be trained early childhood educators levels 1, 2, 3, those educators that we provide a wage top-up for in our licensed spaces and facilities. We heard from child care operators that this work was very important, especially during a time like COVID. Those who may come in as supports, those who made sure that facilities were kept clean and they could adhere to all of the guidance put forward by the chief medical officer of health, those who provide healthy, nutritious meals for our youngest citizens are very important. In my case, you know, my own son maybe ate bread for probably a good six months. They prepared exceptional meals, Mr. Chair, but my son didn't always appreciate them. But I know lots of children and parents very much do. These are very important roles. We heard that feedback. We expanded that program.

Staff levels are also, though, based on child care enrolment, and those numbers fluctuated, of course, throughout the pandemic. Children's Services did in fact communicate a number of times to programs to make sure that they, first of all, were aware of the benefit, that they knew exactly who was eligible in each of the phases. We did make sure that all workers who were eligible in this phase who applied received the benefit.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead. Carry on, Member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Chair. Continuing on the same topic for the minister's sake, given that it is a cost-shared program, will the federal government approve the reallocation of the \$5.4 million that went unused? Going hand in hand with this last question, having

already established this as a cost-shared program, can the minister provide some insight into how the federal government determines Alberta's allocation under the Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement?

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much. To answer the first question, the Ministry of Labour and Immigration is providing the oversight to this program and will address the use of any unspent federal dollars, so that's not something that I should probably speak to specifically.

To answer the second question, the federal government's 2021 budget allocated \$30 billion for a five-year commitment for all provinces and territories. The Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement designated amounts to be transferred in total to all provinces and territories under this initiative. The formula includes funding on a per-child population, and that's zero to 12 for each of the provinces. Those were the numbers that they used for their basis, so we work within those parameters.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Chair. Two final questions on the same line of thinking, and then I can move on. Will the amount change year over year, and will we require additional supplementary supply each year? If the minister can explain a little bit of that process. Then perhaps the minister can explain why we need supplementary supply if there's an agreement in place that allocates the federal amount. Just last bits of clarity on that topic.

Thank you, Chair.

Ms Schulz: Those are excellent questions, Chair to the member. To answer the first question: no. The funding for the new Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement is included in Budget 2022. It's based on our estimated requirements to meet the new terms of the agreement. Each province has an action plan that specifically outlines how those dollars are going to be allocated. Like I said before, we do have some wiggle room to make sure that we're meeting the demands and what we're seeing as we roll this out. I think some of the flexibility is a positive thing, but only changes to funding allocations might require supplementary supply, which would be something like carry-over funds. In previous years we did have some flexibility to use some of those dollars, for example to address COVID-related needs, specifically in the first year of the pandemic.

To answer the second question, the ministry still needs the authority to disburse the funds. Additional details for that – that is, you know, as per, I would say, the Financial Administration Act. We still need the authority to draw from general revenue fund and then disburse those federal dollars received from the federal government.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

More questions, Member?

Mr. Neudorf: Yeah. Thank you very much, Chair. Carrying on, then, still on page 16 of the supplementary supply estimates, it is mentioned that the funding requested in supplementary supply is partially off-set by a reduction of \$49,300,000 due to lower than expected enrolment in child care facilities. On that topic and that amount I also have a number of questions. These are a little bit longer, so I'll probably just take them one at a time. Can the minister tell the Chamber if that's a result of the pandemic and the adjustments being made there with some families keeping their children at home or if there's another reason for this enrolment

reduction or something else that can be anticipated? If the minister can unpack that portion of that amount.

9:50

The Acting Chair: Go ahead, Minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you so much. You know, one of the very important places that we get this information is not only from parents but also from child care operators, and we do keep in touch with them and have throughout the pandemic.

In Budget 2021 the ministry did plan for enrolment rates to return closer to pre-pandemic levels. Obviously, none of us knew what each additional wave would look like. I think it's fair to say that there was some uncertainty due to COVID but also due to the economic situation that we saw at the time. However, levels have returned to just over 70 per cent enrolment. I think that's positive. They're still lower than the pre-pandemic levels of about 80 per cent. We do want to have a little bit of wiggle room there to make sure that there are spaces available for parents when they need them, but this, of course, did result in less spending in 2021-22.

We do continue to support Albertans applying for child care subsidy. This reduction has been restored in Budget 2022. Since the pandemic began, again, we've allocated \$165 million in supports so that child care programs could remain open and support parents who really, truly needed those dollars to take part in the workforce. Of that, provincial funding was \$26 million, and federal was \$139 million.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, Minister.
Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Chair. Continuing on that thought, how does lower enrolment in child care facilities result in an additional \$49.3 million? I think you partially answered this, but if you can expand a little bit more fully: I would assume that we would expect enrolment to continue to increase as we move away from the pandemic, and if so, how will this affect future budgets, and how will you make your decisions in light of that trend as we proceed towards recovery?

Ms Schulz: No. You know, we do not expect it to affect future budgets. As I've said, the agreement that we have with the federal government does require us to not replace provincial investments with federal, so we're going to continue to invest at budgeted levels in the past, and we'll continue to support the increasing demand of Albertans applying for child care subsidy. The one-time reduction has been restored in Budget 2022. This is something that we know Albertans are going to rely on. Again, as we roll this out, it's things like making sure we have spaces in areas that we need them, specifically rural, remote, northern communities, and making sure that we have lots of options like day homes and preschools, that we're focusing on as well, and I think that will help us better meet the needs of Alberta working parents who want choice, flexibility, and different options when it comes to care.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.
You can carry on, Member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. Can the minister also provide the Assembly with an explanation as to why we are doing supplementary supply when child care programs were undersubscribed and federal funding via the bilateral child care agreement increased significantly? Again, I think that's what some of my constituents would like to ask and just understand, how that relationship all works, in this format here tonight.

Ms Schulz: As I've said, this funding has been restored in Budget 2022 to continue to support the recovery of the child care sector. We know that parents really were counting on these dollars, whether it is to take part in postsecondary or education and skills training. I know, obviously, Chair, that there have been major investments made in that area because we know that our unequivocal focus is making sure that Albertans can get back to work and drive our economic recovery. We were one of the first provinces, as I've said, to roll out the affordability dollars to parents, again, knowing how important those supports are for working parents, especially for children zero to five. You know, that was a parameter of the federal government's program, but it also is where we see that child care fees are high or higher. We know that a strong child care sector supports all working parents. It's absolutely vital in getting parents back to work.

It is, like I said, \$3.8 billion over five years for this made-in-Alberta plan. We'll continue to fight for the flexibility that we need or push for the flexibility that we need to meet the unique needs of Alberta working parents. That's also something that I think Albertans expect, the flexibility to meet the needs here and not have a child care program that was designed in Ottawa or in other provinces where the market is different, the needs of parents are different. Rest assured, Chair, that we will continue to push for that. There's \$135.4 million allocated for this agreement in '21-22.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you again to the minister through you, Chair.

Two final questions. On page 16 a supplementary amount of \$1 million is requested to provide information technology for child care initiatives, which is federally funded. Can the minister tell us what this capital funding is going towards? It's not necessarily, at least in my thinking, my first thought for child care, that we're talking about information technology. I think many people have a question: what is this allocated toward, and how will it be used?

Thank you.

Ms Schulz: Chair, I had the exact same question when I first saw that within the agreements. You know, I would say this. We talk about red tape and reducing red tape. One of the first things we did in our ministry was work with Service Alberta and the ministry of red tape reduction to overhaul the subsidy application system where it used to take two weeks, three weeks, a fax machine, maybe a bus pass or a taxi or definitely a car to get down to the library. I mean, who has a fax machine in 2020? I think 2020 was when we made those changes. Now parents can apply from their smart phone or their computer wherever they are and know within 10 minutes what they can probably expect in terms of a subsidy.

You know, IT doesn't sound like a direct link to in-person child care services – it's not people's go-to – but we did have to make some changes to that system. Again, that was to allow us to add an affordability grant, because typically our system manages wage top-ups for early childhood educators and subsidy up to – back then, at that point it was \$90,000 of household income a year. We had to make changes to the subsidy threshold, the eligibility threshold, as well as for those affordability grants but also the volume.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

Obviously, Chair, as parents we're quite excited about this program. We saw the volume of applications coming in for subsidy go up, and we needed to make sure that the system can handle that. I mean, hopefully, as we move forward, the system will become even more responsive to changes that we're seeing. We also know that we need data to, I would say, effectively make future investments and get these dollars out to programs so that they can help support parents.

The Chair: Five seconds remaining.

Mr. Neudorf: If I could just read it into the record?

The Chair: No. Sorry. Next time.

We'll now move to members of the Official Opposition for 10-minute blocks. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, would you like to share your time?

Ms Hoffman: I would, yeah.

The Chair: With which minister?

Ms Hoffman: The first question is to Culture and then the remainder for Energy, if possible.

The Chair: Okay. Is that amenable for Culture and Energy? Okay. Perfect.

Please proceed with your 10 minutes.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks so much. I want to recognize the public servants who are here tonight to support us in this important discussion as we consider supplementary supply. Thank you very much to them and to all members of the Assembly. I also want to say how I appreciate the tone we've had here tonight, and I hope that we're able to keep it going. I think that having the back and forth and having some opportunity to probe more deeply is certainly beneficial to getting better information to answer questions.

My first question, the only one I really have to the Minister of Culture. I understand there was a \$1 million commitment and then a \$10.3 million commitment made on separate dates about a month ago and about three weeks ago. I'm just looking for clarification that that money has actually made its way out the door. We know that every day people in Ukraine are continuing to defend their territory, and their sovereignty matters, so I just want to make sure that the announcements that have been made have actually resulted in the, you know, helmets and first aid kits that have been announced.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Thanks, Madam Chair. Yes. The grants have been through the process. Well, I've signed off on them. My understanding is that they are out the door, but I don't actually sign the cheques – they're direct transfers – but I have signed off on them, so they should be, if not already. That's as close as I can give you for an exact answer on that.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. If either the Minister of Culture or the Minister of Finance would take it upon themselves to confirm that that money has actually been distributed and notify the House tomorrow in whatever fashion they see fit. I just think Albertans would like the confirmation as quickly as possible that the commitments that have been made have materialized. I know the pledges were very well received, and rightfully so, but, yeah, every day people are putting their lives on the line, and I think we'd like to make sure that we have that confirmation. I appreciate that it's been signed. I just want to make sure that the resources are actually being provided, especially in hearing about things like medication and, you know, a lot of these very things that people there need to sustain their own lives. Waiting for three or four weeks to get money to buy medication that's much needed would not be sustainable for many people.

10:00

The remainder of my questions relate to Energy, and I just want to start by acknowledging that there are a couple of areas of overspend in this budget. The primary one relates to the recent announcement of an energy rebate, \$50 a month for three months postdated. I think that's January, February, March, but I imagine the money won't get out the door till probably April. But because it's in the current fiscal year, I think that's why we're being asked to approve the expenditure today. I'd like just some confirmation from either the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Energy that with the \$50 per month, because it's for the first three months, which are in the fiscal year that we're already about to leave, that's why it's being asked for even though people probably won't actually see the cheques until the next fiscal year in their own mailboxes.

Mrs. Savage: Madam Chair, the member is correct. It's \$50 per month, for a total of \$150, to help address the electricity costs for the months of January, February, and March. This targeted relief will be provided to residential, farm, and small-business operators, consumers who consume less than 250 megawatt hours per year. We anticipate that that will cover up to 1 million homes and farms and businesses.

The exact eligibility criteria are being determined right now and will be announced very shortly. The government is working with utilities and regulators to determine the exact details. That includes working to enable the retroactive rebates to be applied to the consumers' bills as soon as possible. We'll be releasing those details as soon as possible. This rebate, combined with the natural gas rebate announced in Budget 2022, will provide some real relief to Albertans. We also think that the electricity rates, just to give an example of how the \$50 will help, have gone up, on average, by between \$50 and \$75 per month for the typical Albertan household, so a \$50 rebate per month for that period of time should significantly help those consumers.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Except, what I'm hearing and what I imagine most members of the Assembly are hearing is that most people are saying that their bills are doubling or more than doubling. I've been door-knocking a lot this late winter, early spring, and many people on fixed income are talking about \$300-plus increases to their actual bills. So it's \$900, over that same period that they'll be getting \$150 for, that they're seeing as the increase over what their bill was before. I know that members have had it raised with them. I am aware that other people have been raising it with members of the government.

So it certainly isn't as substantial as I think many would hope to see when the government is celebrating this unplanned revenue that they have come across for the people of Alberta. Again, that revenue belongs to Albertans. It doesn't belong to one party or even to this Assembly. It's the benefit from primarily natural resource revenue, that we are all owners of and therefore should all see the benefit of.

The government is asking the Legislature to appropriate funds to provide some relief to Albertans, but at the same time they're spending \$30 million on the war room. I know that we have asked questions about why the government is continuing to prioritize that, and I think that we deserve some more clarity about why that \$30 million isn't being passed on to consumers to help reduce their personal burden that they're facing and why the government is seeking to, instead, ask for more money when they could simply reprofile some of the money from the war room, which hasn't seen

the kind of returns that I think most Albertans would hope from a \$30 million investment.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you. The funding for the Canadian Energy Centre comes from the overall industry advocacy budget of \$27 million. The portion that goes to the Canadian Energy Centre is \$12 million, so it's not the \$30 million. The remaining money in the industry advocacy budget goes to cover government advocacy for things like hydrogen, for things like critical and rare-earth minerals, for geothermal, for all the energy advocacy that we could anticipate and undertake. So it's only \$12 million that goes to the Canadian Energy Centre.

When you compare that to the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been spent targeting environmental initiatives in Canada and in Alberta to land-lock our resources, it's money well worth it to protect our energy sector and to ensure that we're able to continue to get our energy product to market. We've seen the impact in the past of what happens when you don't stand up and support your energy sector. It's vetoed pipelines. It's delayed projects. It has impacts on royalties collected. It has impacts on the differentials. We ended up in curtailment because we didn't have enough pipeline capacity to move our resources to market. Again, to emphasize, the budget for the Canadian Energy Centre is \$12 million.

The remaining budget is extremely important to Albertans if we want to be able to develop a hydrogen economy, if we want to be able to diversify. We know that the funding that has been used to target our oil and gas sector in the past is money looking for the next cause, it's money looking for a home, so we have to stand up and make sure that we're supporting hydrogen and all the sorts of energy that are going to be needed to bring in a lower carbon future.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Sure. Chair, may I have a time check?

The Chair: One and 20.

Ms Hoffman: Hopefully, I'll get to hear more supplementals in a further exchange, but I will take this one minute to just say that many Albertan families are facing a really tough time right now in terms of their personal bills and particularly as it relates to their power bills and energy costs. When I think about the government celebrating the \$300 million, which works out to about 50 bucks a month just for three months – and, of course, that continuation of the program isn't in Budget 2022, so we don't see any anticipated relief for Albertans in the out-months.

When I think about the \$1.3 billion, at least, that was gambled on the re-election of Donald Trump, what a difference that money could have made if it would have been extended through this budget to actually help family budgets rather than a failed bet on who would be the President of the United States. I can't help but think of the opportunity that that could have created. It could have been 250 bucks for those three months, or it could have been \$50 a month for an extended period of time. I think most Albertans would like to see some kind of stability, certainty, a return to some type of rate cap. Has the government considered what would be possible if that money that was gambled on that re-election bid instead had been focused on supporting everyday Albertans, particularly as it relates to their power bills?

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members . . .

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would also note . . .

The Chair: Sorry.

We'll now move to members of the government caucus for the next 10-minute block. Hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, would you like to share your time with the minister?

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: I would, yes, with the Minister of Culture.

The Chair: Minister of Culture, is that amenable?

Please proceed.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Excellent. I actually appreciated the Member for Edmonton-Glenora talking about Ukraine and, of course, the challenges that we've seen there. I'm certainly thankful to see our budget addressing some compassionate work and making sure that we as Albertans are helping out as best we can. I think it's fair to say that the horrors of the ongoing war in Ukraine are top of mind for many of us, and I've certainly heard from a lot of my constituents about this as we've seen images of bombed maternity hospitals, the one in Mariupol, a site which was supposed to be a place of life and hope, that have been circulating online and on our TV screens, a sickening example of the atrocities that are being committed. These images can leave many of us here feeling helpless and unsure of what we can do to help the people in Ukraine, and that is why, again, I'm so glad to see that our government is planning to commit funding to Ukraine.

If the supplementary estimates are passed, I see that on page 20 it says that the ministry is requesting supplementary funding "to provide funding to Ukraine for humanitarian and non-lethal defensive military equipment." I just wonder if the minister can tell us about what organizations this is going to be funding and what they will be using the funding for specifically.

10:10

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Thank you. Yes. I did briefly state a few minutes ago that the initial \$1 million went to the Canada-Ukraine Foundation, then \$5 million more to the same, which makes a total of \$6 million to the Canada-Ukraine Foundation, and then \$5 million to the Ukrainian World Congress, which is actually sort of a support organization for Ukrainians around the world to support their country, to support what happens with them. I can just confirm that the two organizations have a slightly different focus in terms of what we have committed to them for. The Canada-Ukraine Foundation is almost entirely for humanitarian aid: food, hygiene products and materials, medical. Those sorts of things are the primary purpose for the Canada-Ukraine Foundation. The Ukrainian World Congress is more for nonlethal defence to go to Ukrainian defence personnel in Ukraine. It includes things like helmets, night-vision goggles, boots, protective vests, also some communications equipment and logistics resources. That's sort of the general direction for those.

I can be even a little bit more specific on the \$350,000 for the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, Alberta chapter, because I just happen to have the actual page with me. That money specifically, according to the agreed-upon grant application: part of it will go for a public information campaign to educate Albertans about the war in Ukraine and, particularly, its impact on Alberta. I should say that that will also be in anticipation of refugees that may end up here, to facilitate joint fundraising projects – they're going to use it, actually, to multiply what we've given them through fundraising efforts to, hopefully, make it substantially a lot more than that, in fact – for humanitarian purposes and refugees to Alberta and to

enable a number of organizations to use organizations of the Alberta provincial chapter to liaise and provide co-ordination of volunteers with Alberta's professional immigrant settlement agencies. There is the anticipation that there will be a need to help some folks, whether it's for a shorter term of a few years or permanently – I don't know – to help settle immigrants that end up here because they are refugees of war.

That \$350,000 expense is associated with that: \$225,000 of it will be for staffing costs to achieve these objectives, another \$100,000 of it will be for general operations, and the last \$30,000 for social media marketing. That's \$350,000 to the Alberta chapter. That's the one I can give you the most details on because I happen to have it here with me tonight.

I hope that answers the question, and I'm open to whatever else.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'd just like to rise and respond to the I think very good question from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, and that is in terms of the status of the funds. It was certainly the belief of the Minister of Culture that the funds had gone out, and it was my belief. We can confirm right now that the funds have gone out to all three organizations, and I think all members of this House would be interested in that.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: I'm glad we could get a double in there.

I'm also just excited to hear about the partnerships with civil society organizations and the ability to leverage these great organizations to just get that much more done with the government dollars here. Great to hear. Thank you, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister for that initiative.

Alberta has a large population, obviously, of Ukrainians, many of whom live in Calgary-Klein and have friends and relatives who have been severely impacted by Russia's aggression in their country. The fear and anxiety of these Albertans, what they're facing each and every day, is just unfathomable. I couldn't even imagine having to turn on the TV and log on to Twitter each morning to see how the war is moving and what area most recently has been hit with the air strikes, hoping to get confirmation that their loved ones are still okay and alive. The question here is: can the minister tell us how this funding will support those who are currently being impacted by the war here and in Ukraine?

Mr. Orr: I mean, this is truly a tragedy almost beyond belief, and the needs for just urgent humanitarian aid products are sort of the immediate urgency of the hour: food, clothing, baby care supplies. All of these different kinds of things are being delivered. I can also add that I know even from Alberta here there have been a number of individual voluntary organizations that have sent aid to Ukraine. I've received pictures of the plane landing in Ukraine, it being distributed to different cities. There's sort of the immediate physical support that will come but also, you know, the long-term trauma, the separation of families, the death of loved ones.

Like I said, these are tragedies almost beyond belief. The need to welcome and to help people settle and be accepted, those that end up here in Alberta as refugees: I think there'll be a tremendous need for us as Albertans and in particular the Ukrainian community to gather around their people to try and provide for them that sense of welcome, of belonging.

I don't know that we can even begin to imagine the struggles that they will face, but I know that there is an intent to be able to provide housing, of course, employment opportunities, resettlement issues, counselling and supports, and all those different kinds of things. It's the full spectrum, really, of the immediate physical need to much

longer term mental, economic, social supports, that will be there to help the people particularly that arrive here in Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Excellent. Thank you, Madam Chair, and again thank you to the minister for all of his efforts to help make things better for the people in Ukraine as well as those who have loved ones here that have people impacted by this war.

Talking about our civil society partners and ways people can get involved, I'm just curious, with the numerous ways that you've mentioned, if there's going to be a site available or if you can reference how people can get connected so they can volunteer and they can help contribute financially or in other ways if possible.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think the best answer to that would be to connect with the Alberta council of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. That is their role to sort of be that clearing house. That's what we've funded them for, to be that resource and that centre guide, and I think they'll do a great job of that. That would be my answer, to connect with them, and they'll be the ones that will be the most informed, the most connected and aware of what the specific needs are in that regard.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member will not have enough time.

The next 10-minute block will go to members of the Official Opposition. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: I just wanted to paraphrase the last question, and I know the minister didn't have a chance to respond. Just the question around the significant investment – we believe it was reported at least \$1.3 billion – on the re-election of Donald Trump in one specific energy project and how that money could have instead been used to support family budgets. It would either be \$250 a month, I believe, following the same formula that the minister outlined around \$300 million being \$50 a month, or it could have been extended for many more months. Does the minister have any thoughts about how that money could have been reprioritized to address family budgets?

The Chair: I'm assuming you're sharing your time.

If the minister is amenable, please proceed.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you. One of the things that could've helped us with having more funds available was if there hadn't been the NDP crude-by-rail deal. Madam Chair, it would have cost the government \$2.7 billion to run that program. We've achieved a significant cost reduction by renegotiating the contracts, and we saved at least \$400 million from that.

10:20

One of the significant things here is that some of the money – you'll notice in the supplementary estimates that their overall savings from Budget 2021 in the Department of Energy budget was \$203 million. Over \$50 million of that was some further savings in the crude-by-rail contracts, about \$51 million, which has been available. Certainly, if there hadn't been the crude-by-rail contracts negotiated in the very last days of the former government's tenure, we would have had additional funds. On top of that is the Balancing Pool allocation, \$1.3 million in ratepayer money, which is now being paid back, due to the NDP's disastrous management of our

electricity system. So those two things, \$2.7 billion in crude by rail plus \$1.3 billion in the Balancing Pool, are fairly significant.

I would just point out that with respect to the KXL claim we are pursuing a NAFTA claim in the United States, under a CUSMA claim, for arbitration to recover those costs. Madam Chair, that investment in KXL was to derisk a project due to political risk. The crude-by-rail deal was just simply a bad deal, as was the Balancing Pool. Those things would have significantly returned money. But, as I said, we are providing \$300 million electricity support to consumers through the budget.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Chair. What I was hoping we would have heard was some discussion around what could actually be done for Alberta families instead of trying to lay blame for skyrocketing costs that Alberta families are facing today under the current government's leadership.

I do want to touch base on page 26 of the supplementary supply estimates. There's a line item where it says, "cost of selling oil." The budget we're asking for here in the Assembly is almost double what the current estimate was, with the supplementary estimate an additional \$63 million. I'd like to have the minister explain a little bit why that number is so much higher than anticipated.

Mrs. Savage: Madam Chair, the cost of selling oil refers to the APMC costs to market the BRIK barrels, bitumen royalty in kind. It goes up and down depending on the volume of oil marketed. There's been a greater amount of – it also goes up and down dependent on the costs of transportation and other logistics. So over last year the cost of selling oil went up because there were more BRIK barrels being marketed, transportation costs were higher. Also, some more of the costs for selling oil were pulled back into APMC. Previously, in prior year's budget, there was a third-party agent that was engaged to do it. That's been pulled internal, in-house, to do that by APMC, which has saved significant costs overall from the third party. Those various factors of the cost of selling oil have increased it. One of the parts is that it's a good thing. It's a good thing if there's more oil being marketed by APMC because there will be a revenue associated in another part of the budget. That's basically background on that additional cost.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Hoffman: May I have a time check again, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Just over five minutes.

Ms Hoffman: Oh, wow. Excellent. I will ask one more question and then probably will, if there's still time remaining, pass to one of my colleagues, probably the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

The minister just highlighted that moving staffing from a third party to internal hire within APMC has seen cost savings, significant cost savings, I think she just highlighted. I just wanted to say that I'm glad that she has shared that information with the House, and I hope that when colleagues around the cabinet table are looking at privatizing or outsourcing to third parties, they consider some of the feedback that we just received about some of the benefits when you actually do things internally, in-house, and how you can see significant savings that can, in turn, be passed on to Albertans at large, including, of course, the taxpayer. So thank you, Minister, for that clarity.

I'm happy to pass the remainder of my time to my colleague for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

The Chair: Hon. member, would you like to share your time with the minister?

Member Irwin: Yes, please, if you don't mind.

The Chair: Which minister?

Member Irwin: Let's stay on the Energy train, why not.

The Chair: Hon. minister, are you amenable to sharing time?

Mrs. Savage: Sure.

The Chair: All right. Please proceed.

Member Irwin: Thank you.

Thanks very much. I would like to touch on a few pieces that have been said before but maybe just get a little bit of clarity. You know, well, I will preface this a little bit. I am going to get to my question here in estimates, but I did hear the minister railing a bit against – when asked about the war room by my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, her response was to talk about activists and that sort of thing.

I just really hope that this minister, you know, reflects on the fact that – she did make a comment about, I think, a low-carbon economy, which was nice to hear. But we are hearing today – and I didn't get a chance to speak in the Legislature at all, or I would have noted it – just where we're at with climate change these days: 30 degrees above normal in the Arctic today, 40 degrees above normal in the Antarctic today. So we are definitely seeing the devastating effects of climate change. I do hope that this minister is very aware of that.

I'll connect that to the war room and to the budget line estimates, to just, again, think about how that money, the \$30 million on the failed war room, could be instead used. I mean, we could point to countless examples like, you know, perhaps reindexing AISH. To ask it again and maybe in a different form: if you're not going to shut down the war room – and I feel like the prior answer was unsatisfactory – why not look at reinvesting that money in, say, diversification projects? I'd love for the minister to just talk a little bit more about why we're paying for the failed war room.

Mrs. Savage: I've got to get a question just to address some of the questions around climate change, and I can tie some of that background into some of the work that the Canadian Energy Centre is doing. Let me talk about the tremendous project that our Canadian oil sands producers are undertaking in their pathways initiative to net zero. That's to get our entire oil sands to net zero by 2050. That's a significant initiative that the Canadian Energy Centre is promoting. In fact, their recent advertising campaign in New York City, in the *Wall Street Journal*, on billboards in New York City was: cleaner, closer, committed to net zero.

Talking about the importance of Canadian energy, I can't think of a better use of Canadian Energy Centre funds than to promote how great our country is and how great our oil sands producers are in addressing climate change. So that's one of the significant things that the Canadian Energy Centre is doing, and I would think and I would hope that the members opposite would be proud of that, would be proud of our oil production here in Canada, would be proud of the fact that our pathways initiative is getting our oil sands to net zero.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and I appreciate the opportunity to rise. Just on the question of the energy centre and the

important work that it does, we certainly heard from the Minister of Energy of the great progress that our oil sands producers are making in terms of reducing emissions. I think we all agree that that's important work, but I would assert that there has been an inordinate focus . . .

The Chair: My apologies, hon. minister. Perhaps in the next round.

We will now go to members of the government. Hon. Member for Grande Prairie, would you like to share your time and with which minister?

Mrs. Allard: Yes, please, Madam Chair. I'd like to start with the Minister of Energy, please.

The Chair: The Minister of Energy says that's okay. Please proceed.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. Energy is a hot topic tonight, and it should be in Alberta these days. I just wanted to highlight – again, I'm reading from the fiscal plan update that there's a \$300 million increase in Energy for the \$50 per month fixed rebate for electricity costs, and these increases are for January, February, March of 2022, to be provided to these consumers who are using less than 250 megawatt hours per year consumption.

10:30

That said, I guess my first question for the Minister of Energy is – I note and I'm referencing page 23 of supplementary supply. The supplementary estimate is only \$96 million out of \$300 million, and I just wondered if the minister could expand. She started to answer that in one of the previous questions from the members opposite, but I was curious to understand why that is so much less than \$300 million. As the Minister of Children's Services said earlier, there's only one taxpayer, so I'd really like the taxpayer to understand what this government has been doing to be fiscally responsible with this budget and, in fact, to bring in a balanced budget. Through you, Chair, to the minister, I'd love to hear her answer on why the supplementary supply is so much lower than the required \$300 million.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. The Member for Grande Prairie is correct. Of the \$300 million allocated to the electricity rebates, \$96,246,000 is in the supplementary estimates. The other \$203.8 million is coming from surplus funds in the Department of Energy budget, funds that we did not use last year in 2021.

That's a good-news story, and I can go over some of the areas where we've achieved savings significantly. First off was the crude by rail, the divestment of the contracts, and due to the very good work of our officials in APMC with the divesting of those contracts, they found another \$51 million in savings this year which is available and is now in that surplus of \$203 million.

We have some surplus with lower spending in the resource development and management part of our budget, so that's a savings. With discipline and the government's emphasis on essential spending only, we've achieved \$13 million in savings in that area.

We've achieved some savings in the site rehabilitation program. That's the allocation of spending from year to year, so there are some cost-reduction savings in the site rehabilitation program.

In the renewable electricity program, which was a program from the previous government, there are lower anticipated payments, \$5 million in savings, as a result of favourable electricity market prices. That amount is partially off-set by the \$63 million increase

in the cost of selling oil, that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora had asked about.

So this is a good-news story. We've saved \$203.8 million from the budget last year, which has been applied and can go to lowering electricity costs for Albertans.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you again, Madam Chair, and, through you, my thanks to the minister and her team on behalf of the Alberta taxpayer for those savings.

I did want to go back to something that we were talking about with the Minister of Energy and also with the Minister of Finance from the members opposite around the Canadian Energy Centre. I know the ministers got cut off in their answers. I was just wondering if either minister would rise and respond.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Again, I have been quite interested in the conversation around the value of the Canadian Energy Centre and the important work that they do advocating for Canadian energy. We've heard the Minister of Energy stand up and talk about the great progress that our oil sands producers have been making – we can certainly add our conventional producers as well to that – in emissions reduction.

Madam Chair, right now there has been an inordinate focus on one part of the E in ESG, simply on reducing emissions at the expense of social and governance issues. CIBC Capital Markets just issued a report. I picked it up tonight on BNN, and I'm going to just read a bit of it into the record.

CIBC noted that the focus on carbon emissions has led ESG funds to make the "shocking" decision to load up on Russian energy firms.

"In the most shocking example we have come across to date, the ESG fund universe owned twice as much Russian oil and gas as Canadian oil and gas at the end of last year."

Madam Chair, the Crown rests.

Our investment in the Canadian Energy Centre to advocate for Canadian and Alberta oil and gas is essential. It's not only an opportunity but a deep responsibility to get responsibly produced, ethically produced oil and gas on to the market to displace Russian production, Russian production that's fuelling the war against Ukraine, the atrocities against Ukrainian people.

The Chair: Hon. minister, I'll have you table that document at the appropriate time.

The hon. member.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Madam Chair. Could I have a time check, please?

The Chair: You have four minutes left.

Mrs. Allard: Perfect. Thank you so much.

I want to go back to the electricity costs and the electricity rebate. Again, I'm referencing page 24, I believe, of the supplementary estimates. I see that the \$96,246,000 has been requested along with the \$203,754,000 which is being reprofiled. Again, I want to highlight for the taxpayers this evening that are watching that the ministry has managed to save over \$200 million to help them, to support them in their electricity expenses.

In order to pay for this electricity rebate program, estimated at \$300 million, I have a couple of questions, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister. First, can the minister tell the House how

many households this funding is expected to support with the \$150 rebate over three months? Then my second question. We've seen some criticism that this program should have been extended longer than three months. Can the minister tell the House what the projections are for electricity rates after the rebate period has concluded?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you. The electricity rebate program for the \$50 per month, totalling \$150, applies for three months – January, February, and March – and we estimate that it will cover over 1 million homes, farms, and businesses to help retroactively pay the costs. The homes, farms, and businesses that qualify are those who consume fewer than 250 megawatt hours per year, so that will be quite significant. It's offered for three months over the winter. That's when consumers are struggling the most.

Madam Chair, we're taking a number of efforts in the long term to bring down the costs of electricity. We spoke earlier – and the associate minister of natural gas also spoke to it – on a number of things and initiatives that are under way to reduce electricity costs long term, including addressing the long-term problems and costs associated with distribution, transmission. This amount for the \$150 per month will help over 1 million homes, businesses, and farms to weather the electricity prices over the winter months.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you again, Madam Chair and, through you, to the minister. To aid in transparency for all Albertans, I'm hoping the minister will be able to provide a bit more clarity around how this program will actually be delivered to Albertans, those that qualify. Through you, Madam Chair, to the minister: how will this electricity rebate be received by Albertans? Can they expect to be receiving a \$50 cheque three months in succession? Is it one cheque for \$150, or will this rebate just show on their electricity bills?

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Madam Chair. The exact eligibility criteria are being determined and will be announced in the very near future. The government right now is working with the utilities and the regulators to determine the exact details, including timing. It takes a little bit of time to work those details out, and this work includes working to enable retroactive rebates to be applied to consumer bills as soon as possible. This work is under way, and the exact mechanism and details will be released – and transparently released – as soon as possible.

The Chair: The hon. member, with 25 seconds.

Mrs. Allard: Perfect. I'll be really fast, Madam Chair.

My final question. The cost estimate is about \$300 million, and I'm just wondering: is there a possibility that this rebate program will cost more, and if so, how will that be funded?

The Chair: The hon. minister, with 13 seconds.

Mrs. Savage: We're anticipating – the estimate is that it will cost \$285 million to \$300 million. That's based on an estimate of how many consumers and how many businesses qualify.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I'm assuming you're sharing your time. With what minister?

Member Irwin: You know what? I'm having a lot fun with Energy, so if we could continue.

The Chair: That's great to hear. The hon. minister seems amenable to sharing time. Please proceed.

10:40

Member Irwin: So kind, so kind. I appreciate that I had the chance to just mention climate change because, you know, I fear it's a topic that doesn't get enough attention in this Chamber. There are a lot of folks out there, young and old, who write to me every day, that are incredibly concerned about the very real impacts of climate change and that we're seeing, as I noted earlier, just shocking increases in the temperatures in both the Arctic and the Antarctic. It's truly a crisis, and it should compel all of us in this Chamber to take action.

You know, I'd like to switch gears to talk a little bit about – switch gears for me, but it's actually been a topic that's come up a lot tonight, and that's on utilities. I have to say that, just so I don't get called out on it, I am, of course, referring to page 25 in the supplementary estimates. I haven't had a chance, actually, to talk a lot about my constituents lately in the Chamber. Like, I'm sure, most MLAs, we're hearing from so many of our constituents who are struggling with their bills. Even tonight I was talking with someone on Instagram who said that she's going to face, likely, having to very much choose between paying her power bills and paying for groceries. She said that she's immunocompromised. Anyways, it's one story out of many. I know I don't have time to talk about how many folks we really are hearing from. It's not an exaggeration. There are a lot of people who are struggling.

I think, too – and maybe the associate minister would even want to chime in. You know, I was actually just door-knocking in his riding on the weekend, and it was fantastic to meet some of his constituents in Morinville-St. Albert. It really was. We had some wonderful conversations. I did hear from folks. I always ask people when I'm at the doors: what issues are top of mind for you? Utility bills. It's interesting that where we were door-knocking is quite different demographically than Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood: fairly big houses and a lot of folks who are doing fine financially, they would say. But even many of them said: "You know what? It's been hard." We're seeing the concerns about rising utility bills transcend socioeconomic backgrounds, right? Like, everybody is struggling it seems.

You know, can I ask this minister or this associate minister to further clarify how it is – if we're hearing from our constituents, I'm certain they are as well if they're listening – justifiable to offer to Albertans simply a \$50 rebate. How is that sufficient? I need that again clarified on the record for my constituents and for theirs as well.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thanks. I'm just going to make a couple of comments and turn it over to the associate minister, seeing that he can talk in reference to his constituents. I would note that we do recognize the pressures that high electricity costs can place on Albertans. We hear it, too. I hear it in my constituency, Calgary-North West. We do note that the electricity rates are based on market conditions, namely supply and demand. There are several options to help alleviate some of the high costs, including fixed-price contract, equalized payment plan. But we recognize, on top of that, that people are struggling. That's why we brought in the electricity rebate program, \$300 million of support for Albertans, totalling \$150 for each consumer.

I'll turn the time over to my colleague the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity to speak to his constituents.

The Chair: The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I'm quite aware that the hon. member was in my riding. They met at Mercado's, which was my unofficial campaign residence during the nomination. In fact, my son works there. Certainly, it's a very meaningful location for me.

What I will say to the hon. member is: let's stop underpinning what we're actually – the support we're providing: it's not \$50. We're providing \$150. That is going to hit their bills in the form of a credit of \$150. Where we landed on that is that we know the average bill increased between \$15 and \$75, and that's per month, so \$50 is on the high end of that, and we are paying it retroactively for the months that had the highest increases, which would be January, February, and March.

I want to reach out to that member, you know, through you, Madam Chair, to them and to their entire caucus because they seem to be speaking to a lot of members, they're speaking to a lot of individuals that are struggling with utility costs, and I hope that they are making those individuals aware of a couple of things. One is that if they are on a variable rate, then they should encourage them to take a look at a fixed-rate contract because not everybody saw their electricity bills go up double and triple. They would have seen small increases through usage, but the individuals who saw the big increases are because they had variable rates. I would encourage the hon. member to direct those folks that are struggling with higher costs to the Utilities Consumer Advocate and have them take a serious look at fixed-rate contracts.

The other thing that I'd encourage the member to do is that if they actually have someone that is struggling with utility insecurity and is at risk – I mean, they're not even listening, Madam Chair. They're either talking amongst themselves or looking down at their shoes, but I would encourage them to refer those members to the Utilities Consumer Advocate, where they can actually get supports. There are supports for low-income seniors. There are supports for low-income Albertans that are struggling with utility and security.

Lastly, if we have an individual that is on the verge of having their utilities cut off, Madam Chair, my office has been reaching out to the utilities, and they have provided assurance to us that they have no interest in cutting anybody's electricity off. They have said to us that they will work with any Albertan that works with them and they will provide flexible payment terms that will allow them to keep their lights on. If nothing else, encourage those individuals to contact their retailer because as long as they're contacting the retailer, they will work with them, and then there's no reason to have their utilities cut off.

Again, between that and referring them to the Utilities Consumer Advocate, where there's some really good information on fixed-rate contracts, that would be my advice, Madam Chair, through you, to the hon. members, if they could share that with these Albertans that are struggling with a higher cost of electricity.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member. Two minutes.

Member Irwin: Wow. You know, this is very good timing because I wasn't able to mention her name before; I just asked her if I could, if I could share. This is Patti, the person I was referring to earlier: "We've been unable to pay rent and the extreme utilities and buy food. I prioritize rent, gas. I owe over \$1,200 on both of my bills." She says: "I'm immunosuppressed due to medications. I have not worked since January 2020. I've run through my savings RRSP. I

went and got a job in January. Three days in I caught COVID, and I'm dealing with the effects of that."

That's just one example, somebody who is a low-income Albertan who's struggling every single day, and this minister is asking those folks to just go figure it out, go navigate a fairly complicated system. I admit that I'm not, you know, a rocket scientist, but it is hard to navigate the system of trying to figure out how to move to a fixed rate. I just think it's quite rich of this minister to offer that as a solution to Albertans when he and his government could be taking that real action to make Albertans' lives easier.

I think, you know, this government even co-opted one of our sayings from a while ago: making life more affordable. You're certainly not making life more affordable. You're making life more expensive and you're making it very difficult, particularly for folks who are working three jobs, folks who are a single mom who is being told to just go and change your contract or go and figure it out. That is just not enough. Very much a pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-bootstraps mentality, and that's incredibly frustrating because that assumes that everybody has boots.

All right. I don't think I have a lot of time left, but I would again just, you know, get on the record that, as my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora did as well . . .

The Chair: My apologies.

Hon. members, we will now go to members of the government. The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. Would you like to share your time with the minister?

Mr. Hanson: I'll share my time with the Minister of Health. Shockingly, Minister.

The Chair: Happy to do so. Please proceed.

10:50

Mr. Hanson: Awesome. Thanks. Just a few questions here. In the Health supplementary supply estimates, page 28, there's additional money for physician compensation, with page 29 under line item 3.2 further clarifying that this additional funding is for physician services. Can the minister explain how this increase relates to the number of doctors in Alberta?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you very much to the hon. member for the question, Madam Chair. The supplementary estimate is due to higher than budgeted costs primarily for fee-for-service billings, alternate relationship plans, and the rural, remote, northern program rather than the actual number of active physicians in Alberta. Now, the growth in expenditure relates to an increase in fee-for-service compensation for physicians. This is due largely to an increase in demand for services, sort of a catching up of the previous year. As I indicated in a previous set of questions, during the first year of COVID there were a large number of Albertans who decided not to see their family physicians, for example. They held off on doing that, but then in the most recent fiscal year, as vaccines became more available and more people got vaccinated, they felt more comfortable to go and see their doctors, and there was a catch-up. So that's a big part of it. Another part of it is also associated with ARPs, and then, lastly, in regard to the rural, remote, northern program.

Now, all of this growth is not directly targeted at increasing the numbers, but I can share with the hon. members that, you know, the number of physicians billing in Alberta actually increased this budget year over the previous budget year, and the number of doctors coming to Alberta, when we do a year-over-year comparison, also increased. That is in part in terms of particularly

the rural, remote, northern allowances. That was additional money particularly for rural doctors where there are challenges and shortages in certain areas.

As well, as I indicated earlier to the House, Madam Chair, for the omicron wave we increased flexibility for billing of virtual codes by doctors. One reason we did that was because we actually understood that there were some challenges of doctors doing billings when people wouldn't see them, a loss in revenues and a risk that family doctors would be closing their doors. We didn't want to see that happen, so we made the change in terms of the virtual codes. Although it doesn't relate directly to the number of doctors in terms of the payments here, it helps to retain and then also attract, because we have, especially in our rural areas, some of the highest pay rates for family doctors so that we can attract them and retain them.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much. I know that the minister is probably shocked that I'm asking these questions about rural health care and rural physicians, but I just have to get it off. One of the biggest issues facing rural communities, as has been discussed, with regard to health care is a lack of physicians who are able to operate clinics and provide medical care. This is by no means a new problem; however, it is a persisting problem that needs to be treated. I see on page 28 of the supplementary estimates that \$173,857,000 would be allocated toward physician compensation if these estimates were granted. My question is: how does this increased spending on physician compensation attract physicians to rural Alberta, and will it be different for more remote areas?

Mr. Copping: Thanks again to the hon. member for the question. As the hon. member knows, our government is focused on ensuring that there is equitable access to health care across the entire province, including in rural Alberta. Quite frankly, this \$173 million: part of that is actually to do just that. You know, spending more on physician compensation means more efforts and better ability to recruit and retain doctors across our entire province. Two of the categories that I mentioned in my earlier answer of \$173 million is \$43 million in clinical alternate relationship plans, or ARPs, to provide 15 new ARPs, 12 of which are related to clinical stipends plus three additional ARPs, and an increase of \$43.4 million in the rural, remote, northern program.

Now, Madam Chair, the rural, remote, northern program compensates physicians who practise in underserved areas, particularly northern Alberta. The program pays a percentage premium on services in geographical locations depending on the latitude where the services were provided. There are higher percentage premiums for locations with fewer physicians that are more remote, considering the availability of general practitioners and specialists' proximity to regional centres and proximity to Edmonton and Calgary. Communities are given isolation scores and are assigned a premium amount as well as a flat fee, details of which – if the hon. member is interested, you can go online and check it out. These estimates also include a \$2 million increase for the rural health physician action plan.

Madam Chair, this is part of our \$90 million commitment that we made last year in terms of improving doctor recruitment and retention in Alberta, particularly in rural areas. Let me just give you a breakdown of this. This includes, as I indicated, the rural, remote, northern program, which is in total \$57 million, which includes the \$43 million increase, which is part of these estimates; the rural medical education, which is \$6 million; the rural integrated community clerkship program, which is \$4 million; the Rural Health Professions Action Plan, which is \$9 million; there's also a

locum program that's \$3 million, and that is comprised of a rural locum program of \$1.4 million and a specialist locum program of \$1.6 million; and a rural physician on-call program of about \$12 million.

Madam Chair, I'd like to point out that this \$90 million that we made in this year's budget: it's in Budget 2022 because we understand the importance to be able to attract and retain doctors, particularly in our rural communities. Also, we have a new program, the RESIDE program. As the hon. member knows, \$6 million over three years to target certain areas where there is a lack of particularly family physicians in those areas, to be able to pay for some of the education of residencies so that they could actually sign a contract and go and live there, hopefully settle, raise a family, and stay in that particular area and be able to provide services to rural Albertans.

Madam Chair, not only will the estimates in this budget help pay for that in the current budget year, but we are investing in the next budget year in Budget '22.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Minister. I'm sure that you will agree that getting people from one community to go to school and come back to their community – they're more likely to stay, so I thank you for that program.

During the COVID pandemic a major focus of this government has been protecting our most vulnerable, primary among them being seniors in continuing care homes. On page 28 of the supplementary estimates under the additional \$716,120,000 estimated for COVID-19 pandemic response, I see over \$260 million dedicated towards continuing care. To the Minister of Health: what outcomes are expected in Alberta's continuing care services as a result of this increased funding?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. In terms of the breakdown of that \$260.4 million, that includes just under \$258 million in support to continuing care operators and just approximately \$2.7 million for continuing care audits.

Madam Chair, as you know and as the hon. member knows, our COVID-19 response has focused on protecting continuing care residents and staff since the beginning of the pandemic with ongoing adjustments as new evidence has emerged. Continuing care settings are uniquely high risk for COVID-19 outbreaks and severe outcomes. We recognized this early in the pandemic and provided incremental funding for continuing care operators starting in May of 2020.

As continuing care measures remained in place until the province reached step 3, the government of Alberta has continued this funding throughout this fiscal year to support clients, residents, and staff in these settings. Specifically, this funding helps contracted designated supported living and long-term care operators to pay for increased costs during the pandemic, including enhanced staffing, extra cleaning supplies, and a wage top-up of an additional \$2 per hour for health care aides. The funding also includes a \$2 wage top-up for HAs in contracted home care agencies to help retain current and recruit additional staff and allow more Albertans to be cared for in their own homes.

Madam Chair, you know, this is critically important. Not only does this supplemental pay for and support continuing care homes in the existing budget year, but Budget '22 also continues on this because we recognize that even though we're heading into the endemic phase, COVID is not over; it's still with us. We need to support our continuing care homes.

I was also, Madam Chair, incredibly excited to be able to make the announcement of – you know, Budget '22 is not only about

supporting continuing care homes through the pandemic, but we are also making significant investments in capital. We will have this in the upcoming budget; 1,515 new spaces for continuing care. We increased the budget by over \$200 million for the upcoming . . .

11:00

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt.

The remaining six minutes will go to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to likely share time with the minister.

Ms Gray: I would love that. With the Health minister, to begin along the same line that was just being debated. Thank you very much. On page 28 of the supplementary supply estimates the increase to physician compensation, which you've had the opportunity to speak to a number of times through this debate. Minister, if I was listening carefully enough, I believe at one point you were saying that the physician compensation increase, spending more on compensation, allows you to better recruit and retain doctors. That was one of the things that you said.

Looking at the supplementary supply and thinking about the previous year, I'm curious. We do not see any additional dollars for other health care workers when it comes to their compensation. We know strongly that the heroes of this pandemic struggled with burnout, struggled with staffing issues, and I don't see anything in this supplementary supply for other health care workers, allied professionals, other than physicians, and, in fact, in the media recently bargaining positions of pay cuts.

While physician compensation is increased to better recruit and retain, I'm concerned that the supplementary supply estimates do not include compensation increases for other health care professionals, and I'm curious about your department's, Health, human resources plan because I think there are some serious concerns, particularly coming out of the pandemic, in this regard.

Mr. Copping: Well, thanks to the hon. member for the question. I appreciate that, you know, this is the way – partly it's how budgets are broken down. In regard to physician compensation there is a specific line item that was associated with that, so we can actually talk specifically to that. I can say, for example, that for continuing care we did provide a \$2 wage top-up, as I just spoke to earlier. That was in the supplemental estimates, and then we actually will continue that into the next budget and Budget '22.

In regard to other health care professionals, for example nurses, for some of these we didn't need a supplemental benefit because this is actually either – you know, in terms of the most recent nurses settlement this was either captured within the current AHS budget or, quite frankly, its budget is budgeted in Budget '22 in terms of the other changes associated with that.

But I would like to make one comment about – you know, the hon. member sort of raised the negotiations that are ongoing, and this goes more to a Budget '22 question. Similarly, in terms of Budget '22 with physician compensation we did not make a significant change because we don't know what the outcome of that bargaining will be. Similarly, in terms of the bargaining that's going on between the HSAA and AHS at this point in time, bargaining is just that: bargaining. As the hon. member knows, with experience dealing with unions as a former Minister of Labour and Immigration, the parties put a position on the table and then they move from there.

Again, as I've indicated in this House earlier, I'm very hopeful and optimistic that the HSAA and AHS will move towards an agreement just like UNA and AHS moved towards an agreement. Any costs associated with that in the current year were such that we didn't need a supplemental estimate, but the fact is that, as the hon. member knows, Budget 2022 includes the costs in that. We will do the same thing as necessary for any other agreements that we reach.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister. Then I will just very quickly, because we're running out of time – part of the supplementary supply estimates refers to the lower than budgeted expense in some programs off-setting some of the increases in others, and we learned through Budget 2022 that one of the areas of underspending is in the EMS budget. So in relation to these supplementary supplies I simply want to ask the minister why that underspending may be happening given the number of red alerts that we have across this province. EMS is so critically important to Alberta families and is an issue of concern. So I raise that as one of the items of lower than budgeted expense in your Budget 2022.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you for the question from the member. Like, in supplementary estimates, if I can point your attention to it, there's a \$164 million savings which off-sets the \$173 million, so the net is a \$10 million increase. I can tell you, though, that when we look at the major dollars associated with that, the savings is not associated with EMS, quite frankly. You know, we can see that the biggest element of that is a \$65 million decrease in the drugs and supplemental health benefits, a \$59 million – sorry; a \$45 million decrease for a capital grants requirement. This is in regard to the continuing care beds and because we – this was an RFP that was done on the expense side to increase the continuing care beds. Given COVID we weren't able to actually implement that last year, so that money we moved over to Budget 2022. When I make reference to the 1,515 new beds that we actually have coming this year, that's what it relates to, the \$44 million.

There's a \$10 million decrease in out-of-province health services due to lower demand as a result of the pandemic, an \$8 million decrease in addiction and mental health as a result of the delay in opening recovery communities, but we've actually just moved the money. Moving on, a \$4 million decrease in regard to information technology. These are the changes . . .

Vote on Supplementary Supply Estimates 2021-22 General Revenue Fund

The Chair: Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Government Motion 14, agreed to on March 17, 2022, the allotted time of three hours has elapsed. We shall now proceed to the final vote on the supplementary supply estimates.

Those members in favour of the resolutions for the 2021-22 supplementary supply estimates, general revenue fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report the 2021-2022 supplementary supply estimates, general revenue fund.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again. The following resolutions relating to the 2021-22 supplementary supply

estimates for the general revenue fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, have been approved.

Offices of the Legislative Assembly: the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, \$55,000.

Children's Services: expense, \$134,726,000; capital investment, \$1 million.

Culture and Status of Women: expense, \$10,350,000.

Energy: expense, \$96,246,000.

Health: expense, \$725,974,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense, \$231,208,000.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Hon. members, I would like to alert hon. members that pursuant to Standing Order 61(3) following the Committee of Supply's report on the supplementary estimates, the Assembly immediately reverts to Introduction of Bills for the introduction of the appropriation bill.

Introduction of Bills

(continued)

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

Bill 8

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 8, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Bill 8 will provide authority for government to pay from the general revenue fund for additional costs that are not already covered or otherwise provided for during the current fiscal year. Supplementary estimates include \$1.2 billion in expense and \$1 million in capital investment.

The funding in Bill 8 will ensure that the government can cover the health care costs of the pandemic while also sending aid and equipment to Ukraine, provide electricity rebates to Albertans struggling with rising costs, support child care workers and parents of young children, and build municipal infrastructure.

11:10

Other items in this bill are funded by the federal government or are off-set by savings in other areas, meaning the overall increase to the deficit forecast for '21-22 will be limited to approximately, in fact, just over \$200 million. Responsible fiscal management, a growing economy, and strong energy prices have helped the government successfully shrink this year's deficit by about 81 per cent since Budget 2021 was first tabled. I ask all my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to support this bill and help the government move forward with these important supports.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to seek unanimous consent for the Chamber to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of the evening sitting.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Motions

Canadian Pacific Railway Service

16. Mrs. Sawhney moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government of Canada to immediately invoke provisions to declare rail transport an essential service and implement back-to-work legislation to prevent any disruption or CP work stoppage to ensure Canada's economy remains uninterrupted.

[Debate adjourned: Mr. Rutherford speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join the debate?

I will give just one minute for our officials to exit the Chamber.

Okay. Any members to speak to Government Motion 16?

Seeing none, I will call the question on Government Motion 16.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 16 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:12 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer | Lovely | Savage |
| Allard | Madu | Sawhney |
| Copping | McIver | Schow |
| Frey | Nally | Schulz |
| Gotfried | Neudorf | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Hanson | Nicolaides | Toews |
| Issik | Nixon, Jeremy | Turton |
| Jones | Orr | van Dijken |
| LaGrange | Panda | Yao |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|------|---------|----------|
| Ceci | Gray | Irwin |
| Deol | Hoffman | Shepherd |

Totals: For – 27 Against – 6

[Government Motion 16 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think we've made some great progress this evening and Albertans were well served by the Chamber. At this time I move that we adjourn until tomorrow, Tuesday, March 22, 2022, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:16 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 22, 2022

Day 13

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
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Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
 Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
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Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
 Government Whip
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
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Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
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Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)

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Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
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Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

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Barnes
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Frey
Irwin
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Sweet
van Dijken
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Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 22, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, seated in the galleries today is Cyndi Bester, the executive director of the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce, a guest of the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Also seated in the gallery are guests of the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

I would like to ask that the Ncube family as well as the Taylor family and Ms Bester please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms Renaud: Modest sacrifices: that's how the Premier characterized the massive cuts and sneaky schemes to take more money directly out of the pockets of Albertans. This means \$500 less for every Alberta family. It means \$750 less for a senior couple, and it means \$3,000 less for people living on AISH. Mr. Speaker, last year I spent a month living on the same amount of money as an AISH recipient. It was nearly impossible, and I had so many advantages that others do not. I did this well before we saw a 30-year high in inflation. Groceries, rent, cost of clothing: all of these things are skyrocketing.

That's not enough. This government had to turn it around and make it worse. They're hiking property taxes, school fees, tuition, and so much more. Even when they're prepared to help, they fail. Their natural gas rebate program is a fake. Their electricity rebate amounts to \$50 when Albertans are staring down bills in excess of \$700. The Premier stands there claiming modest sacrifices when we have Albertans that are homeless, others that fear they soon will be, and even more facing the potential shut-off of electricity and heat in their homes. For the Premier, who enjoys being driven around by security and enjoys a six-figure salary, the horrible, cruel decisions from this government may simply be modest sacrifices, but for everyday Albertans it is much worse.

This Premier is out of touch. He has lost the trust of the people that put him in his office, and it's time for him to go. Albertans watching this, I want you to know that hope and help are on the way. We stand in this House every day ready to serve you and to make life more affordable for you and your family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has a statement to make.

Federal Liberal-NDP Agreement

Mrs. Frey: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last night under the cover of darkness the Liberals and the NDP struck a shady backroom deal that will secure power for Justin Trudeau until 2025. The reaction from Canadians was swift: anger, frustration, betrayal. I share in those feelings, but unlike some, I am neither shocked nor surprised by this unholy left-wing alliance. The NDP, the same party as the members across the aisle, at this point only exist to serve the interests of Justin Trudeau. The party of Tommy Douglas and Jack Layton is long, long gone, and the NDP has sold out every value and principle it once had for a taste of power that Canadians did not bestow upon them.

Albertans know this all too well as the NDP members across the aisle have been good friends and allies with Justin Trudeau and have been doing his bidding for him at every single turn. They backed Trudeau's vetoes over the Energy East and Northern Gateway pipelines. They refused to back a motion saying Albertans, not Justin Trudeau, should decide who represents them in the Senate. Just last week they refused to support a common-sense motion telling Justin Trudeau to drop his pointless travel restrictions. On April 1 they will support yet another massive increase to Justin Trudeau's carbon tax, a policy that they support. Funny, given they claim to care about the rising energy costs.

Anyhow, for the rest of Canada, I'm going to tell them what they can expect from an NDP-Trudeau alliance. They will jack up your taxes every chance they get, they will continue to block pipelines and energy development even as the demand for responsible Alberta energy soars, and they will abandon support for our Armed Forces at a time when the world needs countries like Canada to stand up for freedom and democracy. That's just who they are.

But all is not lost. Conservative governments across Canada will continue to push back against Justin Trudeau's policies and the Jagmeet-Justin bromance. In 2019 Albertans fired the NDP in part for supporting Justin Trudeau's antienergy policies, and in 2023 I'm confident Albertans will do the same.

Thank you.

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

Aviation Industry

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The aviation industry has a long, rich history in Alberta. It employs thousands of Albertans and has contributed significantly to our province's GDP, economic growth, diversification, and connectivity to the world. The aviation industry in Alberta is both entrepreneurial and resilient, but we cannot hide the fact that it has been one of the hardest hit by the pandemic and the enduring and heavy hand of federal health-related restrictions. Major airlines laid off people across the country, and at one point almost all routes were suspended.

But, Mr. Speaker, the good news is that bad times will pass, and our aviation industry, along with our economy, is coming back stronger than ever. Just last week WestJet announced that Alberta will lead Canada's travel and tourism rebound as the airline restores its summer 2022 schedule to near prepandemic levels. WestJet is also investing in Alberta's connection to global and business economies with more nonstop routes to London, Heathrow, Gatwick, Rome, Paris, and Dublin.

Flair Airlines, headquartered right here in our capital, has also announced that they are confident in travel demand over the coming year and has announced significant growth in both routes and capacity. Lynx Air, whose headquarters are in Calgary, will take flight soon with a growing network, having added Victoria as its

sixth destination, and a month ago Swoop, another Alberta-based airline, added five new routes to the U.S. from its operational base right here in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, I'm thrilled to see our aviation industry growing and our province rising as a hub for aviation, aerospace, and logistics and, at the same time, providing hope for a rejuvenated visitor economy. Now that the federal government, at the urging of this Assembly, is moving towards easing travel restrictions and with spring in the air, it's time for all Albertans, not just our snowbirds, and visitors from around the world to spread our wings and support an industry that is so vital to our bright and ambitious future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Racism

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, a day to recognize and show solidarity with all peoples fighting against racism, and while we've arguably made real progress since it was first observed, in 1979, the hard truth is that racism remains. In recent years we've seen repeated attacks on Black Muslim women, the ongoing genocide of Indigenous women, attacks on mosques and synagogues, anti-Asian hate, and the return of overt White supremacy promoted in media, on social media, and, sadly, even by some in political power. Less than five years ago we saw Nazis march openly in Charlottesville. It was only last year that we saw their flag flown in Alberta, only last month on Parliament Hill.

Now more than ever we each have a duty to stand against these voices of hatred and their attempts to gain power and influence, but let's be clear, Mr. Speaker, that racism runs deeper than its most visible face. As recognized by members on both sides of this House, systemic racism is real. It has deep effects on the lives of racialized people. From our justice system to health care, education, economic opportunities, social supports, racialized Canadians face more barriers and have poorer outcomes not because of any moral failing, lack of personal effort, or failure of will but because of unchecked biases and discrimination baked into our systems and institutions that govern our lives.

That's why in their recommendations last year the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council called on the government of Alberta to mandate the collection of race-based data in all departments and its use to identify existing gaps between racialized and nonracialized communities and to track progress to address it. Tomorrow I'll introduce a bill, the Anti-Racism Act, that would create a structure and process to do just that, a thoughtful path to empower all public bodies to take on that important and essential work, and it's my hope that on this crucial issue we will be able to come together on both sides of this House to make Alberta a leader in working to end all forms of racial discrimination.

Alberta Health Services

Mr. Guthrie: Mr. Speaker, prior to COVID many boasted about Canada having one of the greatest health care systems in the world, but when stress-tested, capacity declined and wait times increased. The system failed to adapt and meet expectations. Dedicated front-line staff did their utmost working in a stressful environment, dealing with countless managers and supervisors in a bureaucracy resistant to change.

1:40

Now, our government put forward a number of great initiatives in this budget: \$2.2 billion to build health facilities, \$100 million to expand hospital capacity and ICU beds, \$64 million towards EMS, and \$23 million to Alberta's 911 system, to name a few. But a problem remains. Canada ranks second as the priciest universal health care system in the world but among the bottom in performance. With Alberta being the most expensive in the country and considering the failures at AHS over the last two years, it is clear that higher levels of spending do not translate to better results.

Budget 2022 calls for the addition of 850 new full-time positions at AHS, but under the same ineffective management, is this money well spent? AHS staff dissatisfaction is another factor. Without meaningful interaction with the front line to create a positive work environment, fundamental change will be difficult.

Mr. Speaker, AHS is a bloated and underperforming entity that requires reform to ensure its future success. Professional consultation, restructuring management, and meaningful implementation of publicly funded, privately delivered services will help. One does not leave a struggling system to continue struggling. It's imperative that we have trust in our public institutions, trust in government, and trust in leadership to do the right thing. To satisfy trust and generate competence, change becomes necessity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Education Concerns

Ms Hoffman: I knew it wouldn't be good, but I didn't know it would be this bad: those are words I hear often from Albertans when they talk about the current government. The UCP keeps making life more expensive and more difficult for everyday families. School fees are going up. Ride times are going up. We need replacement schools. We need new schools. And the UCP is failing.

Families living in Calgary choosing public or Catholic schools got only one each over the last three years. Public school families in Edmonton, Lethbridge, St. Albert, and most of the province, to be honest, were completely shut out of this year's budget. At a time when the government stumbled backwards into additional revenue because of a spike in the international price of oil, oil that belongs to each and every Albertan, families across Alberta are saying that you just can't trust the UCP to build public schools.

Then there's the curriculum. The UCP has trashed our international reputation through their desire to ram through their Dumpster fire of a curriculum. Teachers don't want it. Principals don't want it. Indigenous leaders don't want it. Parents don't want it. Academics don't want it. I asked the minister to name one – just one – employer who would stand with her publicly and say that her curriculum would set kids up for success in the world of work, and she couldn't do it, because her broken curriculum is rooted in a desire to amplify the voices of people like Chris Champion instead of helping kids be successful.

And teachers: this government is so focused on going after the very professionals entrusted to educate children. They went after their pensions. They fired them from the curriculum partnership. They fired the educational assistants who support disabled students, and then they cut the funding to the point where we have 1,000 fewer teachers in Alberta classrooms today than when the NDP was in government.

To all the voters thinking, "I knew it wouldn't be good, but I didn't know it would be this bad," it is this bad, and Alberta children deserve so much better. It's clear that you can't trust the UCP with public education. To the Premier: you keep saying that you have a

mandate to do whatever you want with public education. Let's test that. Call the election, and let Albertans decide.

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

Budget 2022

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's focus on responsible fiscal management and relentless pursuit of economic growth have put the province on a more sustainable fiscal path. Budget 2022 moves Alberta forward by building health care capacity, getting more Albertans working, and sticking to the fiscal plan, resulting in a balanced budget for only the second time in more than a decade.

To expand system capacity, the budget will grow Alberta Health's total operating expenses budget by \$600 million this year, and it will grow by a total of \$1.8 billion by 2024-25 in order to scale up capacity. Budget 2022 ensures that Alberta remains one of the most affordable provinces in Canada to live and work. Alberta's lower cost of living combined with relatively high average earnings and the lowest overall taxes mean that Albertans keep more money in their pockets.

Budget 2022 provides funding for an energy rebate program, an increase of more than \$700 million over the next three years to support teachers and to address cost pressures in transportation as well as growth in enrolment, \$6.2 billion which supports Albertans by providing the education and training opportunities they need to prepare for the workforce, and \$5.8 billion for postsecondary operations. Budget 2022 includes about \$2.5 billion over three years in support of the child care agreement with the federal government. Alberta is moving forward to a prosperous financial future through a well-developed set of fiscal anchors to guide decision-making, bringing per capita spending in line with other provinces, keeping net debt to GDP low, and finding a path back to balance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has risen.

Member for Edmonton-South

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-South has a lot of explaining to do. In December the Alberta RCMP Cybercrime Investigative Team executed a search warrant on the member's home, and he's now under criminal investigation for, quote, unlawful access to private information related to the vaccination quota.

Mr. Speaker, this ongoing vax hack scandal does not look good for that member or the NDP. In the months leading up to the police raid, he was obsessed with the vaccination status of government MLAs. He was even obsessed with the timelines of MLA vaccinations, posting online about when the government MLAs got their shots and when they were eligible to receive them. We posted his history of harassing government MLAs over private information online, but there are still a lot of questions that are yet to be answered. How did he know any of this? Why was he so obsessed with private medical information of MLAs, and did he take it upon himself to find this information?

He certainly has the ability, Mr. Speaker. In fact, believe it or not, he brags about being, quote, an ethical hacker. Yes, you heard that right. The self-styled hacker is now under police investigation for – surprise, surprise – hacking. But the real question here is not for the Member for Edmonton-South, because he already confessed to Postmedia today. Therefore, the NDP leader, who may have been directly involved in this hacking scandal, has yet to come clean about what exactly she knew about the member's hacking when he

was in her caucus. Did she benefit politically from any of his online activities? Would she have? Albertans need to know: is this the first time, or is this an isolated incident?

Mr. Speaker, we are just starting to scratch the surface of the NDP vaccination hacking scandal, but let me be clear. If the NDP leader, any of the MLAs, or her staff knew or benefited from this illegally obtained information, then the NDP leader must resign. The NDP leader has been very defensive about what she knew about this scandal, and hopefully soon we will find out why.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Bullying and Racism

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to read part of a statement written to the RCMP by Thabo Ncube, a 14-year-old student who was wrongfully accused but who along with his family earnestly and patiently sought justice.

If ever I've learned anything, it is that you should not make bad decisions based on other bad decisions. There are always people who may not like you or who will try to get a rise out of you, and all that you can do at that moment is to keep your cool and not retaliate. In my situation I tried to protect myself, and it ended me in a bad place. For me, unfortunately, I had to make hard decisions and choices more frequently than other people who do not look like me. I face more; therefore, I have more decisions to make every day.

I'd gone back to school, and everyone thought I pulled a knife on that girl when I didn't. School is not the same anymore. It was tough losing friends during the time, but I had real friends who stuck by me the whole way. The culture of snitches getting stitches is very bad, and it is not okay to use that against someone who wants to stand up for the truth. People should not have to live with the fear of being punished for saying the truth. Everyone should be able to speak freely and proudly about what they think is right without negative consequences or fear of being shamed.

In life, before we go on to confront others, I think it is important to hear all sides of the story. When the school came to some decisions, I was confused about why nobody asked me about my side of the story, not even the police officer when he charged me. It was not right, and the kids and the adults would assume that I did pull a knife on someone without having both sides of the story. At that time I wasn't at school, the rumours were spreading, and more and more were made. People were saying I had killed someone, stabbed her and cut her. I knew better than to retaliate, so then again I kept my cool. Any reaction I make is almost always taken the wrong way. If I ever say something back, I know I will get the worst punishment because of the colour of my skin.

I hope I am the voice for many and that everything that I've been through was a lesson for me and can be used as a teaching for many.

Thank you to Thabo and Sinikiwe and the Ncube family for your courage; to Blake and Crystal and the Taylor family for standing by them; to the RCMP, who listened; and to the MLA for Highwood for being an advocate. All charges have been withdrawn.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has question 1.

Physician Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, rural doctors continue to flee Alberta at alarming rates thanks to the UCP's mismanagement of our health

care system. According to the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta 140 doctors left our province in 2021, a trend that's, unfortunately, increasing because of the UCP. Communities in northern, southern, and in central Alberta have fewer doctors this year than last, families are left without a doctor, emergency rooms have to close, expectant mothers are left to drive hundreds of kilometres to cities to deliver their child, all because of the UCP's attacks on health. When will this government stop their attack on health care, acknowledge the damage they've done, and reverse this all?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, only the NDP would call a \$2 billion increase in the baseline budget of health care an attack. Alberta spends more per capita than eight provinces on health care. We have more physicians working in the system, in fact, than ever before in our history, more nurses, and this government has announced major capital projects, including the largest ever hospital redevelopment program in the history of the province, the \$1.8 billion Red Deer regional hospital, in addition to the completion of the Calgary cancer centre, the expansion of the Peter Lougheed surgical facility, the new La Crête medical centre, and so much more.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, new facilities need new doctors, and this UCP government has left the south zone with 41 fewer doctors this year than they had in 2019. The primary care network said in December that up to 43,000 residents in Lethbridge cannot access a family doctor. With these trends in the south of the province, I'm afraid that even more residents will soon be left without a doctor, unable to access care they need. The UCP says that they're addressing the problem, but the data says otherwise. The UCP balanced their no-help budget by cutting the care that Albertans are able to access. What does this Premier have to say to 43,000 people in Lethbridge who do not have a family doctor?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the no-help budget: that includes \$22 billion for health care; that includes a \$600 million increase in the baseline for health care on top of last year's \$900 million increase in the baseline budget for health care. In 2021 we saw a net gain of 33 physicians across the system in Alberta. In February 2019 we had 28,735 nurses, but in February of this year we had 30,517 RNs, more than ever in Alberta history.

Mr. Shepherd: And we have 43,000 Albertans in Lethbridge who have no doctor thanks to the devastating impacts of this government's attacks on doctors. Yet we see the UCP again using the same scare tactics against Albertans who've dedicated their careers to saving the lives of our families, friends, and neighbours. The UCP are trying to cut the wages of health care professionals, heroes of the pandemic, like respiratory therapists, who helped COVID-19 patients in the ICU breathe. Aren't doctors fleeing the province enough? Why is this government now trying to drive out all these other health care professionals, too?

Mr. Kenney: One of the reasons that Albertans don't buy the NDP medi-scare campaign is because it's so obviously false. They're claiming that we've cut the Health budget when we've increased it by \$2 billion. They claim that doctors are leaving the province when the number of doctors is at a record high. They claim that we've laid off nurses when there are 1,800 more nurses working in our health system now than when the NDP was in office, Mr. Speaker. They claim that we're shutting hospitals when we're building new hospitals and investing in record and increasing health care capacity, increasing the number of ICU baseline beds by 50 above what the NDP had.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition has question 2.

Personal Income Tax Deindexation

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier refused yet again to help families fighting record inflation. Instead, he doubled down on his bracket creep plan, taking more and more of Albertans' income, and when I asked what it would take for the Premier to stop taking from those with the lowest incomes, he mused about cutting taxes for the wealthy. Those earning seven figures will be the first to catch a break. How very on brand. Is the Premier really saying that he would rather cut taxes for the top earners instead of scrapping his billion-dollar income tax grab on families?

Mr. Kenney: You know what's on brand for the NDP, Mr. Speaker? It's their coalition with Justin Trudeau, a coalition that was just cemented today by their leader, Mr. Singh, in Ottawa, who has kept their ally Justin Trudeau in office for the next three years. Now, I know the NDP's favourite research technique is to hack into people's private information, so here's a research tip for them: they could hack into our public policy and see that we are giving Albertans \$1.7 billion of consumer relief on the fuel tax and the electricity rebate.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's amusing hearing the Premier talk about a coalition when he may not even pass his own confidence motion inside his party.

Now, the Premier is taking a billion dollars from Alberta families on the back of inflation. Instead of fixing that issue, he wants to hand that billion dollars back to top earners: \$700 million to the top 1 per cent alone. Why does a single mom earning \$50,000 a year get \$500 less while a CEO with a \$2.7 million salary gets \$100,000 more in his bank account?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP opposition hacked into Alberta's tax system when they came to office, and they drove revenues down. They drove jobs and investment out of the province. They raised income taxes by 50 per cent. And guess what? They got less revenue. They raised taxes on businesses by 50 per cent, and they got less revenue. This government is cutting taxes, and jobs are taking off. We're leading the country in growth, and we have a balanced budget.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the government has a windfall. That's it.

Meanwhile they gave wealthy corporations a \$4.7 billion handout with no jobs in return. He let big insurance companies hike premiums by 30 per cent, pocketing millions. He gave 40 per cent raises to government money managers while threatening the wages of respiratory therapists and social workers, all this while his tax on inflation takes more from the poorest Albertans. Why is the Premier robbing from the poor to give to the rich? When he watches *Robin Hood*, is the sheriff the good guy?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader is partly right, because Albertans are experiencing a windfall of economic growth and diversification. Last year was the best year ever for Alberta exports, the best year ever for Alberta manufacturing, the best year ever for high tech, the best year ever for venture capital, the best year ever for ag revenues, the best year ever for forestry. I want to give them a trigger warning. They won't like it, but last month was the best month on record for Alberta oil and gas. This economy is taking off. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

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

Ms Notley: And this Premier had absolutely nothing to do with it.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Ms Notley: Now, I want to read part of a message that I received from an Albertan named Joelle Powell, and I quote: I want to be kind to others, to open my heart and my wallet, but today I have to borrow money for food and utilities, and I'm fearful of being destitute. End quote. Yesterday the Premier said that he won't stop his plan to keep more income tax because he's asked Albertans to make, quote, modest sacrifices. A simple question: is Joelle not being able to afford food his definition of a modest sacrifice?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I forgot to mention the windfall for film and television workers – we've seen a 10-fold increase in that industry as a result of our policies – and the forthcoming windfall for Alberta workers with the \$18 billion of new investment in petrochemicals, the billions of dollars of new investment in hydrogen. Yes, Albertans are experiencing the strongest economic growth in the country, a windfall that is a result of this government's open-for-business, low-tax policies and Alberta's recovery plan, that's working to get our economy back on track.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Calgary mother Tiffaney Hill works three jobs to make ends meet, and her son Riley suffers from extreme sensory sensitivity and an anxiety disorder. He's one of 10 children in his class with learning disabilities. Riley and every single one of those children has lost their educational assistant, lost support in the classroom to help them grow and learn, their entire lives forever altered by cuts to a single line item in this Premier's budget. To the Premier: is Riley's future a modest sacrifice?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, there have been no layoffs of educational assistants. What she's referring to is that in the first quarter of COVID, when the schools were closed – by the way, at the insistence of the NDP – there were some temporary furloughs for people who were not at work. But when it comes to educational assistants, this government, to defend Alberta's great tradition of school choice, has just provided additional funding to ensure equitable access for special-needs kids in our charter schools and, yes, those who benefit from home-schooling as well.

2:00

Ms Notley: The Premier's Education minister has cut teachers and PUF funding and EAs, and the Premier knows it, and he should be truthful about the facts in this office. Meanwhile Albertans have sacrificed their health after the Premier chased away their family doctor. They've sacrificed their dreams, no longer able to afford the postsecondary education they'd planned. They've sacrificed the family vehicle, unable to pay the spiralling insurance costs. I could go on and on. One thing I know is that none of those Albertans want to hear this Premier call their sacrifices modest. Why won't he stand and apologize for talking that way to Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, once again the divisive leader of the socialist party seeks to mislead Albertans. Last year the budget included an additional \$40 million in support for special-needs kids. This year's budget includes a 1.7 per cent increase for K to 12 education, that represents \$700 million over two years. But here's the thing. We're able to do that in the context of a balanced budget because, yes, we made some responsible spending choices. If the

NDP was still in office, we would have a \$6 billion structural deficit this year, and we would be mortgaging the future of those kids.

Coal Development Policies

Mr. Schmidt: Two years ago in May the UCP lifted the Lougheed coal policy after conversations with coal companies and their lobbyists to open up the eastern slopes to strip mining. This UCP decision was opposed loudly by Albertans across the province: farmers, ranchers, businesses, country music stars, Indigenous communities, and more. In response, this government implemented a ministerial order to reinstate the policy, an order that can be rescinded at any time for any reason. What assurances does the Premier have that this order won't be lifted? Is it something more concrete than asking us to trust him?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the good work of the advisory committee on coal. The recommendations have been adopted. That includes the policy in question. We have a long and proud tradition that goes back for 140 years of responsible mining across the province, including for coal – the NDP's historic roots were in the coal mine unions that operated off the eastern slopes – but we must do that in an environmentally responsible way. That's exactly the policy of this government, as clarified recently by the hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Schmidt: Last year our leader introduced a bill that would ban coal mining in the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains, providing more protection than a ministerial order that can be lifted at the whim of the minister. UCP MLAs at the time agreed that this bill should be debated in the Chamber last year, but today they completely reversed their position and blocked the bill. Given that this bill would have restored trust in the government that lost it with their sneaky plan to blow up mountains for coal, can the Premier tell us when the minister plans on lifting the ministerial order since her party and government are so clearly opposed to protecting the eastern slopes?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the bill was just a bad case of political theatre. The government policy already establishes that protection with respect to sensitive ecosystems in the eastern slopes. But I think the real question for the NDP today is: why did the Leader of the Opposition engage in such a long campaign of personal vilification against myself and other members of this government that a member of her caucus felt he was justified by illegally tapping in to personal information? Why doesn't she take responsibility for that outrageous conduct by her caucus?

Mr. Schmidt: If the Premier wants to ask questions, he can call the election.

The shameful hypocrisy of the UCP voting to block debate on a bill that only months ago they agreed should be debated fuels distrust in this government. Trust in the UCP is already at an all-time low because his minister lifted the Lougheed coal policy with no consultation. Rather than debate real protections for the eastern slopes, the government is asking Albertans to just take them at their word, which actions have shown isn't likely. Will the Premier commit to not lifting this ministerial order unless a motion of the Legislature authorizing them to do so has been passed?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, our position is absolutely clear, that we are for responsible resource development, yes, including responsible coal mining, but we are going to protect sensitive ecosystems in the Rockies, as Alberta governments always have done.

Mr. Speaker, the real question here is: what did that member know about his colleague purposefully hacking into sensitive, private information? Who else's private information did they seek to access? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.
The Premier has the call.

Mr. Kenney: Who else's private information did the NDP seek to hack into, Mr. Speaker? And what did the leader of the NDP know about this outrageous NDP violation of privacy?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Federal Liberal-NDP Agreement

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night the Liberals and the NDP made a shady backroom deal that will secure power for Justin Trudeau until 2025. This brought back terrible memories for Albertans who watched the opposition NDP leader form a similar alliance with Justin Trudeau, that still exists to this day. Alberta is finally back on track, but Albertans are rightfully worried about how this formal NDP-Trudeau alliance will affect our province and our economic recovery. To the Premier: how can we ensure Alberta remains strong and free in the face of this disastrous left-wing merger?

Mr. Kenney: I thank the member, Mr. Speaker, for the very important question about the formalization of the NDP-Liberal coalition. We always knew it, that the NDP here was in cahoots with Justin Trudeau to increase inflation and taxes, punish people for consuming energy, for heating their homes, and filling up their gas tanks. But now they've made it formal in a political marriage in Ottawa that will keep Trudeau's anti-Alberta policies in place for the next three years. I put them on notice. This government will fight to defend our economy against the Liberal-NDP coalition every day. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.
The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the Premier for that answer. Given that both the NDP and Justin Trudeau have a long record of opposing and actively blocking pipelines in Canada, from the Northern Gateway to Energy East to Keystone XL, and given that Alberta's oil and gas sector is a critical component of our province's economic recovery and stability on world markets, to the Premier: what can Alberta do to safeguard our critical oil and gas sector from this radical antipipeline, anti-Alberta alliance?

Mr. Kenney: The member is absolutely correct, Mr. Speaker. This is a coalition of parties that are clearly opposed to the vital economic interest of Alberta and to the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who work in this country's largest industry. After Putin's invasion of Ukraine the world knows now more than ever that we need to increase and produce more Alberta energy to displace dictator oil, and that is why we will use every tool that we can to fight the Trudeau-Singh alliance and their effort to kill pipelines and damage Canada's largest job-creating industry.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the Premier for that answer. Given that the NDP support Justin Trudeau's carbon tax, which is set to increase by another eye-popping 33 per cent on April

1, and given that energy prices are already too high due to short-sighted NDP policies, the Justin Trudeau carbon tax, and other global factors, to the Premier: what is our government doing to lower the cost of energy for Albertans now that we're all facing an NDP-Trudeau alliance intent on making them go even higher?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canadians are struggling to cope with 30-year high inflation, inflation that, according to the Bank of Canada, will go even higher with the Liberal-NDP hike of the carbon tax on April 1. But if you think that's bad, the Liberal-NDP coalition intends to more than quadruple the carbon tax, making groceries, home heating, and fuel for your car unaffordable. The Liberal-NDP coalition wants to drive Canadian families into energy poverty. We will fight them every step of the way.

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

Government Policies and Youth

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Despite the picture that this Premier is trying to paint, the truth is far less bright. Last year there were 9 per cent fewer 25- to 29-year-olds in Alberta than there were five years ago according to a report from the Canada West Foundation. Young people, especially young Calgarians, are interested in leaving Alberta, the report said. The government's policy of deep cuts to postsecondary, killing interest rates will only make matters worse. This puts Alberta at risk of loss of talent, skills, and brain power like we've never seen before. Is this UCP government really willing to risk a total brain drain of Alberta's youth?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, he's right. Since 2017 – since 2017 – since the NDP's disastrous economic policies that drove tens of billions of dollars of investment out of this province and created a jobs crisis, felt particularly by young people. But here's the good news. With this government's recovery plan and our pro-growth policies, Alberta is once again leading the country in population growth and in the last quarter of 2021 experienced the first significant net interprovincial migration that we've seen in years and years.

2:10

Mr. Eggen: Well, given that Alberta's youth are looking for opportunities that this UCP government is making harder and harder to come by, they're leaving the province as a result. Given as a result as well that they are making postsecondary more unaffordable for those who want to access our institutions, hiking property taxes, utility rates, even making it more expensive to access our parks and natural areas, because of this UCP government young Albertans are less able to see opportunities here in this awesome province. Does the UCP really not see the problem that they are creating?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that this government inherited the economic devastation of the NDP's policies, the record unemployment that they left us with. It's also true that we went through two tough years of COVID. It's also true that we are leading Canada in economic growth and in job growth with dynamic diversification across every sector and region, and we're bringing the Alberta advantage back in a big way with the lowest cost of living of any major province, the lowest taxes, the highest economy, and the highest incomes in the . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the Canada West report also highlights how investment in safe public transit is one strategy to attract people to Alberta's communities, one thing that all Albertans have seen loudly and clearly is that there's no worse friend to public transit than this UCP government, who stalled, delayed, even threatened the existence of the Calgary green line from the day that they took office. Even now we hear from Calgarians worried that the UCP will stop this critical project. Will the UCP take this recommendation and their fights about public transit and show young Calgarians looking at moving here that they're willing to learn from their past . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, this government just invested an additional \$80 million into mass transit. We are making multibillion-dollar investments into LRT systems in Edmonton and Calgary. Maybe young New Democrats would rather move to Toronto to pay three times the housing prices, pay higher taxes in a weaker economy in order to ride the subway, but the young Albertans I know want to work hard in the home of free enterprise: Alberta, Canada.

Physician Recruitment and Retention in Lethbridge

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, we learned today that over the last two years Lethbridge and surrounding areas have lost 41 doctors, more than doubling the number of folks without a family doctor to 46,000. In the fall it was 24 that we had lost; now it is 41. While my constituents are looking for doctors, we heard the Premier just now say that there is no problem with doctors. But the fact is, the reality is that half of folks in Lethbridge don't have a family doctor. To this Premier: where are the doctors? What is he going to do about it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. I'd like to point out, first of all, that the members opposite only provide half the story. They talk about 140 doctors leaving last year. Yes, that's true, but they don't talk about the doctors coming in. There was a net increase of doctors in this province, so if they're going to share facts, then share the whole story. We commented in this House – actually, when we talked about supplemental estimates right here in this Chamber last night, we talked about there being challenges in having doctors at the right places to be able to serve Albertans. Our government is focused on that. We focused on it last year in terms of supplemental estimates, and we're focusing on it this year in budget . . .

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

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, given that it is a fact that 41 doctors have left the south zone, Minister, and given that the UCP continues to break trust with the people of Lethbridge by driving doctors out of the city, doing nothing about it, and then trying to turn around and tell us that, wait, there is actually no problem here, will the minister report to this House and the people of Lethbridge just what he is doing to fill the gap of family physicians and why he keeps trying to tell us that there's no problem? We all know there is a problem. Half of us don't have a doctor.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member knows, because we talked about it in this House, about the plans

that AHS is doing to be able to provide doctors in Lethbridge. We know that there is an issue in Lethbridge and rural Alberta. We know that this issue is not unique to Alberta. In fact, it's across the entire country, and Alberta has more docs per capita overall than the national average, but we are working extremely hard. We invested \$90 million to be able to deal with the issue in rural Alberta last year. That's \$90 million again this year in this budget. We are hiring doctors in Lethbridge as we speak.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, given that we've been having this conversation for over a year and given that the problem is only getting worse and given that none of these so-called spin answers or plans or meetings or whatever the minister is doing are working at all, will the minister level with the people of Lethbridge and tell them how many doctors we are getting, when they are arriving, and when they can start serving the people of Lethbridge so that we can get on with this just grotesque mismanagement of the primary health care system in Lethbridge?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated to the hon. member before, AHS is active in seeking new doctors, family physicians. They're sponsoring a number of physicians, nearly 20. Offers have been made, and we expect doctors to start working there over the coming weeks. In addition, at AHS we are funding a nurse practitioner to be able to assist. I have been to Lethbridge numerous times, met with the local docs there, met with AHS. You know, this problem wasn't created in a day, and it won't be solved in a day, but we are dedicated to solving it. We will solve it. If the hon. member would like to talk more details as opposed to 45-second sound bites, I'd be pleased to have that conversation.

Agriculture in Southern Alberta

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, agriculture is a pillar of our provincial economy. In southern Alberta we are blessed with amazing conditions that allow us to grow many high-yield, high-margin specialty crops. We have 70 per cent of Canada's irrigation system right in southern Alberta. Our government recognizes the importance of southern Alberta agriculture to our overall economy and has been working to develop Canada's agrifood corridor between Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. Can the minister of agriculture please update this House on the work being done to develop Canada's agrifood corridor?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to share that over the past two years Alberta has attracted about 105 projects, resulting in \$886 million in agrifood-sector investments. Fourteen of these investments were within Canada's Premier Food Corridor and account for more than \$368 million in investment. This comes in addition to the \$27.8 million investment we're making in the agrifood hub in Lethbridge and the great work my colleague the Minister of Transportation is doing in twinning highway 3 from Taber to Burdett. Currently we're also facilitating 15 additional investment projects within the corridor valued at over \$450 million.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the response. Given that only 5 per cent of Alberta's farmland is irrigated, yet our irrigators produce more than 20 per

cent of the crops, and given that these crops are high-yield, high-margin specialty crops and given that much of our irrigation was due to the forward-thinking farmers of years past, to the minister of agriculture: what are we doing to ensure our irrigation is up to standard so that we can continue producing high-quality crops in southern Alberta?

Mr. Horner: It's a great question, and the answer is the biggest investment in irrigation in the history of the province: in partnership with the Canada Infrastructure Bank and 10 irrigation districts, a \$933 million investment to modernize our irrigation infrastructure and increase water storage in southern Alberta. This is going to create 7,300 direct and indirect permanent jobs and 1,400 construction jobs. We're going to increase the irrigated acres by 230,000, a 15 per cent increase across all affected IDs. Every year these projects will contribute \$477 million to the GDP.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for his reply. Given that agriculture is the backbone of Alberta's economy and given that farmers commit their entire lives in often uncertain conditions to produce high-quality food to feed the world and given that many consumers are unsure of where their food comes from, to the minister of agriculture and forestry: what are you doing to recognize farmers' hard work and to ensure that consumers continue to know where their food comes from?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure everyone in this House, even the hecklers and hackers, are proud of our producers and processors and manufacturers. They're all top-notch, and we're proud of the products made in this province. One example is that my department is supporting local businesses and products with a new made-in-Alberta-by-Albertans label that processors and manufacturers alike can use. We've met with the local food producers to talk about changes to improve farmers' markets. We're very excited about this proposal. Hope to have news soon.

2:20 Government Data Security

Mr. Dang: The personal data of Albertans is being digitized at an ever-increasing speed. The government regularly stores and transmits highly sensitive personal information of Albertans and is increasingly relying on the Internet for everything from transmitting health care data to the administration of justice at a time of unprecedented cybertech from both domestic and foreign actors. Since the government of Alberta published a website that left the personal and private information of Albertans vulnerable to a malicious attack, will the Minister of Health tell this House whether anyone was held accountable for failing to enact even the most basic security measures that would have protected Albertans' information?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's great to see the NDP chief hacker up in the Chamber today. The first thing I would suggest to the Minister of Health is: do everything they can to protect Alberta's computer systems from that member, who today admitted that he broke the law and tried to hack into private information of a member of this Chamber.

Mr. Dang: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: It's shameful. He should apologize for that. Further to that, today he admitted that the NDP knew about this months before they made it public. It's time for that member to

stand up and say what the Leader of the Official Opposition knew and when she knew it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. A point of order is noted at 2:22.

Mr. Dang: To the same minister. Last year I discovered and reported a vulnerability in the government's initial release of their COVID-19 vaccine passport website. Given that a vulnerability that exposed Albertans' personal health information existed on one of the most accessed government portals at the time and given that no process exists for vulnerability disclosure, will the minister admit that the government's current measures to protect Albertans' data are insufficient and that the information I provided aided in fixing the vulnerability before malicious actors exposed the data of potentially millions of Albertans?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, for that member to even ask a question in this place without first apologizing is appalling, let alone about hacking. He had a full press conference today, almost an hour long, where he brags about trying to hack using the personal information of the Premier of Alberta. Through you, shame on him. Further to that, we have an e-mail, which has been released to the press, that shows that the NDP knew about this hacking months in advance of talking, but they then sent an e-mail to the then Minister of Health and claimed it was an anonymous person. Again, what did the Leader of the Official Opposition know?

Mr. Dang: To the Minister of Service Alberta. Given that the government's 2016 five-year IT modernization plan now appears to be a six-year plan and counting and given that the government's digital innovation office does not have cybersecurity in its mandate and given that the government does not appear to provide any transparency for Albertans on our cybersecurity readiness and given that security through obscurity actually makes us more vulnerable to these types of attacks, will you commit to providing an annual state of the IT infrastructure report to provide accountability to Albertans on the state of Alberta's cyber readiness?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, that hon. member published a document today titled How I Did It, describing illegal hacking actions trying to get the private information of members of this place. Further to that, he has admitted he ended up getting a private citizen of Alberta's information. Through you to him, he has no right to even ask a question in this place until he stands up and apologizes and explains what has taken place here and makes clear what the Leader of the Official Opposition knew. If she knew about this and covered this up for six months, it's time for her to resign.

Traffic Ticket Administration

Mr. Sabir: In January the UCP announced their plan to strip Alberta drivers of their right to dispute a traffic ticket without paying a nonrefundable \$150 fee within a week of getting the ticket. It is simply disgusting that the UCP believes that only the people who have plenty of cash laying around on a week's notice should have access to justice. Now a report in the media surfaced that the UCP is going to scrap this horrible idea. My question is: can the current Attorney General confirm that he's indeed scrapping this horrible policy put forward by his predecessor?

Mr. Shandro: I can confirm, Mr. Speaker, that it is being scrapped. We have announced that it is being scrapped. Thank you. The JTI initiative is being scrapped and will not be proceeding any further.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. Given that the minister who represented the scheme was found to have called the Edmonton police chief and attempted to interfere in the administration of justice and given that despite this egregious abuse of his office that minister faced no consequences and remains in the UCP cabinet, does the current Attorney General believe that every Albertan should be able to call their local police chief to dispute their ticket, or is that a privilege only afforded to the UCP ministers?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, in an independent review the judge was absolutely clear that the former Minister of Justice, now the minister of labour, did not interfere with justice. That is a fact.

But that member is part of a caucus that we now know has covered up hacking of private medical information of members of this place. Through you to him, when did he know that his colleague was hacking members of this place's health information? Did he help cover it up? Again, Mr. Speaker, what did the Leader of the Opposition know and when? If she helped cover this up for months, she should resign immediately.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this minister has also made changes to victim of crime . . . [interjections] Shut up.

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Highwood.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta EMS Provincial Advisory Committee, known as AEPAC, brings together Indigenous, AHS, municipal, and rural leaders to discuss issues and bring forward solutions to the EMS delivery model in Alberta. As the co-chair of this committee I have heard Albertans' concerns on all aspects, including air ambulance, front-line support, and dispatch processes, just to name a few. But many Albertans are worried about the approach to deal with the current situation. To the Minister of Health: can you explain how the Alberta government will implement the work done by this committee?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to, first, start off by thanking the Member for Highwood and the Member for Grande Prairie for their work in co-chairing the EMS Provincial Advisory Committee, to which the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is also contributing. As the member knows, we created the advisory committee because we wanted thoughtful engagement with stakeholders from across the EMS sector to deliver working solutions to the rising demand for EMS services. My office will continue to work closely with this committee to review any recommendations that come forward. Where it makes sense to implement them, we will do so immediately.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that rural communities are long distances from hospitals, which creates a unique logistical challenge, and given that rural ambulances have regularly been pulled into larger centres to provide support and given that during the time rural communities can be sitting without ambulances, which is an obvious concern for rural Albertans, to the Minister of Health: can you update the House on the results from recent changes made to assist rural communities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows and the House knows, we're spending an additional \$64 million this year to address EMS pressures across Alberta. That's part of Budget 2022. AHS is also in the process of implementing the majority of their 10-point action plan to boost EMS capacity, and quite frankly we're already seeing results. As part of the metro response plan, nine communities have seen a drop in ambulances being called into neighbouring urban centres, meaning they can respond to calls closer to home. For example, trips from Beaumont to Edmonton dropped by almost 50 per cent. Trips from Airdrie to Calgary are down by 43 per cent. Response to high-priority events has improved, and nearly 70 more staff have been hired.

The Speaker: The Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Given that AEPAC was implemented to help identify and establish solutions to deal with serious matters such as paramedic mental health issues and given that it is critical for us to provide immediate health and wellness supports to our EMS workers, who work tirelessly to protect our communities, to the Minister of Health: can you provide details on how the budget will improve wellness support for our front-line EMS providers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Being a paramedic is an incredibly stressful job, and the pandemic, quite frankly, hasn't helped. Preventing burnout and improving wellness for Alberta's paramedics has never been more important. As part of the 10-point plan and as part of our Budget 2022 we announced \$14 million to support AHS's hours of work project. That project will help address crew fatigue by adjusting working hours, shifts, and scheduling among paramedics in 14 rural communities. We're also excited to see the recommendation coming from AEPAC on additional ways we can support the mental health of our emergency responders. Once again I want to thank the committee for their tremendous work.

2:30 Family Support for Children with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: Family supports for children with disabilities can improve the quality of children's home lives, family relationships, and increase educational inclusion while supporting mental health. Last year there were more than 3,400 families and children on a wait-list. The UCP calls that: in planning. Imagine my surprise during budget estimates this year when I asked the minister how many families and children were on the FSCD wait-list, and the minister said that for FSCD there is no waiting list. Poof, gone. To the minister: how many families and children have met eligibility for service and have not yet received service?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that question. We recognize how vulnerable Albertans who have children with disabilities – it's very important to receive the support from this government. With Budget 2022 we protected the funding for children with disabilities. We actually increased \$61 million there. The way this was inherited from the previous government: we're taking every way possible to address that. This increased budget is a way to respond to that.

Ms Renaud: Given that I and very likely many of us receive alarming and heartbreaking e-mails and messages about the dangers and hardships families experience when there's a significant delay

in starting or renewing services and given that delays to early intervention such as speech and language therapy, occupational and physical therapy harm children and families in ways that can cause lasting damage to family wellness and resilience, not to mention the well-being of the child, can the minister assure this House that all 3,400 families and children that were published in the open-data FSCD wait-list last year have signed agreements in place and are getting supports?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, our government is proud that we're working diligently on this. We're providing transparent services. We also committed to release the public data on a quarterly basis. With Budget 2022 we increased funding for FSCD with \$61 million. Day in, day out this government works with families who have children with disabilities, making life better for them. We're taking concrete actions.

Ms Renaud: Given that it's clear this UCP government is the most secretive in Canada and that it's obvious that the UCP budget is best described as a shell game with underestimated costs and misleading jargon and given that we know that the 2022 budget for family supports for children with disabilities is not sufficient to meet cost pressures, population growth, and inflation, will the minister please commit here today to resume publishing data on the status of supports of all Alberta families and children who are eligible for FSCD and not actively receiving supports? We're asking for a number. Where did they go?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, while this government is busy day in, day out working with families and communities to improve the lives of vulnerable Albertans, that hon. member there keeps making empty promises, doing nothing to help those communities. We committed \$61 million for Budget 2022 to continue to help families with children with disabilities.

Personal Income Tax and Benefit Deindexation

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, yesterday I brought forward a motion to protect Albertans from inflation and stop the Premier's income tax grab that's taking a billion dollars out of Albertans' pockets through inflation eating away at our income. But lo and behold, the Premier's closest friends jumped at the opportunity to defend jacking up our income tax by thousands a year through so-called bracket creep. Will the Minister of Finance explain to Albertans who can't make ends meet, who could really use all of that money why neither he nor a single MLA voted yesterday to give Albertans back the billions of dollars they've crept from them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because we've not raised taxes, contrary to the wrongful assertion of the members opposite. Our revenues are going up, but we took a different approach than the members opposite. The members opposite raised taxes, increased regulatory burden . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister shouldn't have to yell at the Speaker for him to be able to hear.
The minister.

Mr. Toews: The members opposite raised taxes, increased regulatory burden, sent billions of dollars of investment out of the province, Mr. Speaker. Wages went down, Albertans lost their jobs, and income tax revenues declined.

Ms Phillips: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that that wasn't the question at all and given that we are talking here about bracket creep and deindexing the tax system and given that the minister has not provided this House a rationale as to why he can justify taking a billion dollars out of Albertans' pockets in personal income tax, why didn't the Finance minister at least tell Albertans he cares about the rising cost of living by getting the UCP's bracket creeping hands out of Albertans' pockets?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, this government took a different approach than the members opposite. We did not raise taxes, but we actually dropped taxes. We dropped corporate taxes. As a result of that, tens of billions of dollars of investment is pouring into this province. There are additional job opportunities for small businesses and for Albertans looking for a job. Wages are going up. That's why our fiscal house in this province is improving.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that it wasn't just the Finance minister yesterday, Mr. Speaker – it was also the Minister of Community and Social Services – who couldn't resist the opportunity to justify letting inflation creep up for Albertans living with disabilities, claiming that AISH recipients should be lucky to receive 1,600 bucks a month, and given that he's taking \$3,000 a year from every single Albertan on disability supports because he's letting inflation take away those folks' benefits, will the minister of social services stand in the House, look into that camera right there, and explain to Albertans living on AISH why yesterday he voted to take \$3,000 a year from people on AISH and why he's so smug and self-satisfied about it?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, that's ridiculous. We have maintained AISH payments. We continue to be, by far and away, the province that supports our disabled in the most significant way. We're over \$400 higher per month than the next nearest province, and that's why we know Albertans care for the vulnerable. This government believes in supporting the vulnerable.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, in a time when people should come together as one, the complexities of COVID-19 have kept us apart. As one consequence, current research indicates that there has been an increased need for mental health supports during the pandemic. This includes mental health supports that ensure that everyone has access to the resources they need when and where they need them. My question for this government is: what have you done during the COVID-19 pandemic to support people in Fort McMurray and other communities across the province, to support their mental health?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. You know, the COVID-19 pandemic public health restrictions, quite frankly, over the past two years have had a real impact on mental wellness. That's why early on we committed \$53 million, more than any other province, to help make sure people have access to addiction and mental health supports that they need during this pandemic. As part of the COVID-19 plan our government has provided grants in the Fort McMurray area to Fort McMurray's Legacy Counselling Centre, the Fort McKay Métis

community association, Wood Buffalo's integrated youth support network, and many other organizations in that jurisdiction.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, it is a given that the pandemic restrictions had disproportionate impacts on people between the ages of 16 and 24. This resulted in stunting their emotional growth, increased psychological distress, and other mental health concerns. These young people are the future, and we should be doing everything we can to support them because they are still growing in maturity and they're still developing the character to cope with such distress. To the same minister: can you identify the actions being taken to increase access to supports that help the youth improve their mental health and wellness?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much again, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. The new youth suicide prevention grant program has partnered with local youth-focused organizations who know their communities well. Of course, they do important work to support mental health and for Alberta's youth. These grants are going to be built upon and are already doing the support for the youth in mental health. I was proud to announce even last year in the Fort McMurray area the 10 other communities across Alberta that are implementing the youth mental health hubs. These mental health hubs are supporting children between the ages of 11 and 24. We're very proud of the work they're doing.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, it is a given that this minister worked tirelessly to get more than \$1 billion allocated annually towards addiction and mental health services through strengthening and building capacity for our recovery-oriented systems of care. Currently, though, mental health service providers in Fort McMurray are dependent on seeking out funding from organizations like the Red Cross, United Way, even organizations like Suncor for annual support. Is there a thought that this minister could provide consistent funding for mental health agencies in Fort McMurray and across Alberta so they don't have to apply year after year?

2:40

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Ellis: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2022 continues our commitment to invest \$140 million over four years to enhance the recovery-oriented addiction and mental health system of care, with \$50 million allocated for '22 and '23. This budget also commits an additional \$60 million over three years to improve access to mental health and addiction services in Alberta. We're focused on providing consistent funding to nonprofits across Alberta so that they can provide services in their communities. Communities are an integral part of the recovery-oriented system of care that we're building, and we're proud of the work that they do.

Thank you.

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has a report to present.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I'm

pleased to present the committee's final report on Bill 202, Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley. This bill was referred to the committee on March 8, 2022. The report recommends that Bill 202 proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 202.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont has requested concurrence in the report on Bill 202, Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022. It is debatable pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members who wish to debate concurrence? Hon. members, a member has noted that they would like to debate concurrence. That debate will take place next Monday under the item of business Motions for Concurrence in Committee Reports on Public Bills Other than Government Bills.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Bill 9 Public's Right to Know Act

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act.
Thank you.

The Speaker: I'd like to point out the first reading speech just given by the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General as a perfect example of the introduction of bills.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

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

Bill Pr. 1 Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill Pr. 1, Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022.

This bill modernizes the objects and powers of the YMCA Calgary and gives the YMCA Calgary the rights, powers, and privileges of a natural person in a manner consistent with other modern incorporating statutes. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

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

Bill Pr. 2 Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill Pr. 2, Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, I understand, has a number of tablings.

Mr. Rutherford: I do, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with section 20(1) of the Auditor General Act it is my pleasure as chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices to table the following reports from the office of the Auditor General: (1) the Alberta Energy site rehabilitation program; (2) the Alberta Labour and Immigration delivery of COVID-19 emergency isolation support program; (3) Alberta Health grant management processes; (4) Alberta Environment and Parks pesticide management; (5) assessment of implementation reports Alberta Energy Regulator, Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General, and Alberta Labour and Immigration.

The Speaker: I saw the Minister of Energy. Were you rising for a tabling?

Mrs. Savage: Yes. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of written questions from the Committee of Supply main estimates on March 16, 2022, for the Ministry of Energy.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:22 the hon. Member for Edmonton-South rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Accepting a Member's Word

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At approximately 2:22 the Government House Leader stated: he admitted he broke the law. I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j). I believe the Government House Leader is making allegations against another member, imputing false or unavowed motives to another member, and also using abusive and insulting language that did create disorder in this place. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader to rise.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A matter of debate, certainly. If the hon. member has concerns about communications inside this Assembly about what is taking place with the criminal investigation into the hon. member, I would suggest that he doesn't hold one-hour-long press conferences, have long newspaper columns in which he outlines his criminal activities. That said, I think he's referring to – actually, I'm not sure what he's referring to, so I'm going to stick with that. It sounds like it's a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Well, I do have the benefit of the Blues, and the hon. the Government House Leader said the following: "Do everything they can to protect Albertans' computer system from that member, who today admitted that he broke the law and he tried to hack into private information."

Hon. members, I'm sure that all members are familiar with both *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* as well as *Beauchesne's* paragraph 494, that statements by members respecting themselves must be accepted. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 619: "Remarks which question a Member's integrity, honesty or character are not in order."

The hon. member to this point has said that he didn't break the law. We have to take his statement as fact until it is proven otherwise, should it be so. While I appreciate that this could be considered a matter of debate, I won't find a point of order at this point in time, but I will ask that the Government House Leader governs himself accordingly in the future with respect to these remarks.

Hon. members, I consider this matter dealt with and concluded. We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Second Reading Bill 7 Appropriation Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to move second reading of Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, 2022.

This act will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government of Alberta for the '22-23 fiscal year. This includes the following amounts from the general revenue fund: \$173 million for the Legislative Assembly; \$45 billion for the public service, including the government's various ministries and departments; \$3.7 billion for capital investments; \$1.4 billion for financial transactions; and \$1.75 billion in contingency funding, which will ensure the government is well equipped to respond to disasters and emergencies as well as any future pandemic-related cost pressures. This funding will ensure the government has the resources it needs to continue providing the programs and services Albertans will rely on over the coming fiscal year.

2:50

I would also like to note that within these amounts the government is living within its means. We've reined in the government spending, and this has allowed us to present only the second balanced budget in more than a decade. Budget 2022 is moving Alberta forward by strengthening our health care system, getting more Albertans working, and bringing our finances back into the black.

The pandemic has brought with it significant challenges for all Albertans, and nowhere has this been more evident than in health care. The past two years have revealed a lack of health care capacity, specifically ICU, surgical, and critical care. Budget 2022 will prioritize strengthening our health care system by investing \$600 million per year to Health's budget to provide additional capacity on a permanent basis, including adding new ICU beds. This will improve health outcomes for Albertans and ensure the province is more prepared for future pandemics or other system-wide health challenges. The budget includes a \$750 million contingency fund specifically to fight the pandemic, address the surgical backlog, and ensure the province can cover other pandemic-related costs that are evolving or remain uncertain.

Budget 2022 will help more Albertans improve their mental health, with an additional \$20 million per year on top of the \$140 million that was committed over four years for mental health and addiction supports. Helping Albertans improve their mental health is a top priority for the government, and this additional funding will support the continued building of a comprehensive recovery-oriented system of care. We will partner with local nonprofit organizations in every corner of the province to bring better mental health services to every Albertan. As we move forward beyond this pandemic, keeping Albertans healthy will be instrumental in our overall economic recovery.

Budget 2022 reflects our government's continued focus on investment attraction, economic growth, and diversification as we move forward to a time where all Albertans will have opportunities to build their skills, pursue their passions, and support themselves and their families. Alberta has gained back all of the jobs and more lost during the pandemic, but, Mr. Speaker, some people are still struggling to find good jobs, and employers are dealing with labour shortages because they can't find workers with the skills they need.

That’s why Budget 2022 includes more than \$600 million in new strategic investments for Alberta at work. This important initiative will help Albertans, no matter where they are in their career path, to participate in the local labour market with jobs that support their aspirations and improve their lives.

Over the course of the fiscal plan the government will expand the collegiate learning model, assisting high school students on their path to postsecondary education, trade designations, and in-demand jobs. We will add 7,000 additional postsecondary seats in high-demand areas such as computer and data science, information systems technology, finance, agriculture sciences, health, and aviation. New capital investments will also help address critical labour shortages; for example, the expansion of the veterinary school at the University of Calgary will result in more veterinarians for rural Alberta.

To help Albertans develop new skills in a practical and hands-on environment, the government will create additional job placement and integrated learning opportunities, and to increase accessibility and ensure more Albertans can participate, low-income students will benefit from a new nonrepayable support when enrolled in high-demand programs.

Mr. Speaker, the government is aiming to roll out these new learning and work programs and achieve our health care goals while also balancing the budget. Again, I’m pleased to say that Budget 2022 is only the second balanced budget in more than a decade.

We committed to carefully and thoughtfully bringing down the per capita cost of programs and services so that Alberta is no longer an expensive outlier in Canada. With this budget we expect to achieve our goal of bringing our spending in line with other comparable provinces. This means that the government is operating efficiently and that Albertans are getting more value for their tax dollars. I’m also pleased to say that over the last three years the government’s operational spending has remained largely flat, since 2019. Prior to 2019 it was increasing by 4 per cent per year despite the fact that Alberta was already spending much more than other provinces and debt was rapidly growing. Without the flattening of operating expenses, we would not be presenting a balanced budget. In fact, we would be presenting a budget with a \$6 billion deficit had we continued on the 4 per cent increase spending trajectory that we inherited from our predecessors.

The government also committed to keeping Alberta’s net debt below 30 per cent of its gross domestic product, or GDP. Alberta has one of the lowest net debt to GDP ratios in the nation, and the government’s responsible fiscal management will ensure the province keeps its position as a leader in Canada. Alberta’s projections for the net debt to GDP ratio have continually improved over the course of the current fiscal year, and it is expected to fall to 18.3 per cent by March 31.

Budget 2022 puts Alberta on the path for a stronger and more diversified economy, a path towards a labour force with the skills and experience required for growth in new and emerging sectors and to a future where the burden of debt is not the legacy left to the next generation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Budget 2022 is a blueprint for the bright, thriving, and prosperous future that Albertans deserve. I urge all of my fellow members in this House to support this bill today and help us deliver on Albertans’ priorities.

Madam Speaker, I now move to adjourn. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:57 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Allard | Luan | Rutherford |
| Amery | Madu | Savage |
| Copping | McIver | Sawhney |
| Ellis | Neudorf | Schow |
| Fir | Nixon, Jeremy | Schulz |
| Getson | Orr | Shandro |
| Glubish | Panda | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Gotfried | Pon | Toews |
| Guthrie | Rehn | Turton |
| Issik | Reid | van Dijken |
| Jones | Rosin | Williams |
| LaGrange | Rowswell | Yao |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|----------|----------|---------------|
| Eggen | Phillips | Sigurdson, L. |
| Goehring | Sabir | Sweet |
| Loyola | Schmidt | |

Totals: For – 36 Against – 8

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 8

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I move second reading of Bill 8, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022.

The funding in Bill 8 will ensure that the government can cover the health care costs of the pandemic while also sending aid and equipment to Ukraine and provide electricity rebates to Albertans struggling with rising costs. It will support child care workers and parents of young children, and it will build municipal infrastructure.

This funding will go to the following office and five government departments: the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, Children’s Services, Culture and Status of Women, Energy, Health, and Municipal Affairs. If passed, these estimates will authorize an approximate increase of \$1.2 billion in voted expense funding and \$1 million in voted capital investment.

The largest amount in this bill is for the Department of Health. An additional \$726 million will help cover the health care costs of the pandemic. This funding will go towards lab testing, contact tracing, rapid test kits, continuing care, acute care, vaccine deployment, and personal protective equipment. The costs of the pandemic have been large, but we’ve continued to provide the necessary resources to keep Albertans safe.

I’d like to note that Budget 2022 will provide further funding, above and beyond what’s in this bill, to build the health care system Albertans need by expanding capacity, adding ICU beds, and addressing surgical backlogs. These are important steps to improve Albertans’ health outcomes and make our province and economy more resilient to system-wide challenges.

The next-largest expense in the estimates comes from the Department of Municipal Affairs; \$231 million will be distributed to municipalities under the Canada community-building fund to support infrastructure projects across the province.

The supplementary amount for Children's Services is related to funding from the federal government. The bill includes a total of \$134.7 million for child care subsidies and worker supports under the Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement. The bill also includes a capital investment of \$1 million to provide information technology for child care initiatives, which is also off-set by federal funds.

With the help of this bill we will provide \$150 in electricity rebates to over 1 million homes, farms, and businesses. The bill includes a supplementary amount of \$96.3 million for the Department of Energy, which will go towards a total of \$300 million for the utility consumer support electricity rebate program.

While Alberta is not immune to the rising cost of living, we're striving to ensure this province is a more affordable place to live than virtually any other Canadian jurisdiction. Due in no small part to our competitive business environment, Albertans earn more than Canadians in any other province, and this is true in both the energy and nonenergy sectors. Albertans also have some of the lowest home prices and rents among Canadian urban centres. Our gasoline and diesel prices are the lowest in Canada, owing in part to low fuel tax rates and no provincial sales tax.

In fact, Madam Speaker, we recently announced that starting April 1, we will not collect any fuel tax while overall energy prices remain elevated, which is another measure we're implementing to provide real relief to Albertans.

On top of this, our tax policy continues to ensure that Albertans pay less in overall taxes than any other province, with low personal income tax, no provincial sales tax, payroll tax, or health care premiums.

The last ministry that will receive a supplementary amount is Culture and Status of Women. This is another important item as it will allow Alberta to support Ukrainians during the Russian invasion of their country. Alberta's government is contributing \$11.4 million in support for Ukraine, \$10.4 million of which will come from the funding in this bill. This includes \$5 million to the Ukrainian World Congress to equip 5,000 members of the Ukrainian territorial defence force with defensive equipment, \$5 million to the Canada-Ukraine Foundation for humanitarian aid, and \$350,000 to the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council for co-ordinating the shipment of first aid and defensive equipment to Ukraine.

In addition to the supplementary amounts for the five ministries I mentioned, the last item in the bill is a supplementary amount of \$55,000 for the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. This amount will cover reasonable expense increases in staff compensation due to the changes in the salary restraint measures on non bargaining unit staff.

Since some of the items in this bill are funded by the federal government or are off-set by savings in other areas, the overall increase to the deficit forecast for '21-22 will be limited to just over \$200 million. While the supplementary estimates reflect a modest increase in spending, it's important to note the government has taken significant steps to get the province's finances back in order.

3:20

It bears repeating, Madam Speaker, that in 2019, when we took office, as per the MacKinnon report we inherited a government that on a per capita basis spent \$10 billion more than similar-sized provinces. Moreover, the previous government's operating spending was increasing by 4 per cent per year, and again, had we stayed on this trajectory, many of the programs and services essential to Albertans would have simply become unsustainable and out of reach. Over the last three years we've brought that 4 per cent annual operating spending increase down to less than half a per cent

per year, and if we exclude health spending increases of nearly 2 per cent per year, our operating spending has essentially remained flat over the term.

With increased economic and fiscal capacity and by maintaining discipline in our spending decisions, our fiscal future as a province is vastly improved. The government acted swiftly to adjust the fiscal plan and help address emerging issues like the rising cost of living and the war in Ukraine, and we've done so without losing sight of our commitment to long-term fiscal responsibility and accountability to taxpayers.

I respectfully urge my colleagues in this House to support this bill, and with that, I move to adjourn debate. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:21 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Allard | LaGrange | Rosin |
| Amery | Lovely | Rowswell |
| Copping | Luan | Rutherford |
| Ellis | Madu | Savage |
| Fir | Neudorf | Sawhney |
| Getson | Nicolaides | Schow |
| Glubish | Nixon, Jeremy | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Gotfried | Orr | Toews |
| Guthrie | Panda | Turton |
| Hanson | Pon | Williams |
| Issik | Rehn | Yao |
| Jones | Reid | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|----------|----------|---------|
| Eggen | Phillips | Schmidt |
| Goehring | Sabir | Sweet |
| Loyola | | |

Totals: For – 35 Against – 7

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

This bill consists of several legislative amendments which support government's commitment to responsible financial management, red tape reduction, and respect for Albertans' tax dollars.

I'd like to start with changes that directly relate to implementing Budget 2022 decisions and legislation under Treasury Board and Finance. The first proposed change would require online marketplaces such as Airbnb and VRBO to collect and pay Alberta's tourism levy on behalf of their Alberta hosts. This will be accomplished through an amendment to the Tourism Levy Act. Currently if you are the host of a short-term rental through Airbnb or other platforms, you have an additional step when renting your property where you must collect and pay the levy yourself. This change would ensure that the levy is collected more efficiently and

consistently and minimize red tape for Alberta hosts. This is a change hosts have been asking for, and we're pleased to reduce the red tape and level the playing field for accommodations in the tourism sector. This also aligns with the processes in other provinces, notably British Columbia and Quebec.

3:40

Another change in this bill would establish a new tobacco tax category and accompanying tax rate for smokeless tobacco products effective March 1. This will be accomplished through an amendment to the Tobacco Tax Act. Since neighbouring jurisdictions have a lower tax rate for smokeless tobacco, Alberta's current tax rate is not deterring people from using these products. Instead, we're seeing Albertans crossing into Saskatchewan to buy products at a lower rate. With this decision we're reducing the tax differential between Saskatchewan and Alberta, and we're reducing the incentive to purchase this product outside of the province.

Further proposals in the area of provincial tax administration included in Bill 2 contain largely technical updates to Alberta's tax statutes. These are annual updates done to ensure the legislation is up to date, aligned as necessary, and continues to support the effect of efficient collection of Alberta's taxes. This will be accomplished through amendments to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, Alberta Corporate Tax Act, and Fuel Tax Act.

Finally, on legislative items related to Treasury Board and Finance, Bill 2 proposes amendments to the Financial Administration Act. If passed, these amendments would ensure designated provincial corporations, regulated funds, and other consolidated entities participate by holding their surplus cash in a new cash pooling structure. The new cash pooling structure would replace an outdated and administratively complex system currently in place. The new structure would use surplus cash held in pooled accounts to pay down debt and lower debt-servicing costs. This would reduce the amount of money the government has to borrow by at least \$1 billion and lower debt-servicing costs by a minimum of \$25 million per year. These amendments also respond to the Auditor General's recommendation to examine the government's current cash management practices.

Now on to amendments related to other departments. Bill 2 proposes a number of updates to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act. These are intended to strengthen the current legal framework for the delivery of health benefits and give the government flexibility to make decisions in an ever-changing health environment. In Budget 2022 we addressed the need for a stronger health care system now and took steps to build capacity and provide an excellent standard of care for all Albertans well into the future. We committed record investments in health care, and as a result, Albertans will see expanded access through additional ICU beds, new facilities in their communities, and more mental health and addictions care around the province. The proposed changes to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act contained in Bill 2 build on these commitments and would ensure our regulatory framework for health benefits is responsive to the needs of Albertans.

Essentially, the amendments address the current lack of authority in the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act to make necessary adjustments to how benefits are paid for basic health services; for example, affording Albertans virtual care options for allied health benefits, adjusting benefits based on medical necessity, age, health status, and other criteria. We're fixing this by adding new regulation-making authority for setting coverage eligibility for health benefits delivered by allied health providers such as optometrists and podiatrists. This will help ensure care goes to those who need it most. Additional changes would also increase financial

accountability through the health system by strengthening audit and compliance activities.

Bill 2 also proposes an update to the Emissions Management and Climate Resilience Act which would reduce red tape and remove an obsolete power for extending loan guarantees under the TIER loan guarantee program, a program that hasn't been used since 2019. This change helps reduce undesirable financial risk to government, that often comes with loan guarantees, and is aligned with our approach to prudent financial management.

Lastly, amendments to the Public Transit and Green Infrastructure Project Act and related regulation would help the province deliver on its financial commitments for the light rail transit construction projects in Calgary and Edmonton. The province's overall commitment to provide \$3 billion for the light rail transit construction projects in Calgary and Edmonton recognizes that strong and vibrant communities are vital to Albertans' personal and professional well-being. This is more important now than ever as Alberta is moving forward to a time of economic recovery and prosperity where Albertans have opportunities to build their skills, pursue their passions, and support themselves and their families. Madam Speaker, Bill 2 builds on Budget 2022 by further integrating financial responsibility across government operations. Fiscal discipline and better use of tax dollars will ultimately yield better outcomes for Albertans and a stronger financial position for the province.

Madam Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, and I look forward to healthy debate moving forward.

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am rising to provide my initial comments on Bill 2 and to note that there are a number of things in this bill that the Official Opposition does not find any particular quarrel with given that they serve pedestrian, I would say, what I call drumbeat of government, initiatives, including aligning the tax codes, which happens every year or roughly every year alongside every budget, and a number of other sort of perfunctory changes such as the changes to how Airbnb hosts collect and remit their tourism levy. That's all fine as far as it goes.

I think what we need to zero in on here are a couple of things. One, when we open up this act, we're making changes to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. That is fine as far as it goes to align the changes to the federal personal Income Tax Act, but omitted here was an opportunity to reindex Alberta's personal income tax system to address the rise in inflation.

Now, rising inflation is, of course, not at all a surprise. Debates have raged among economists, particularly south of the border, on the coming inflation. Certainly, more hawkish observers, like Larry Summers and others, in early 2021 were pulling the fire alarm over inflation. There was a lively debate. Now, I think it is true on both sides of the border that we are in fact returning to an inflationary period in our economic history. It has been a generation, but inflation is back.

Many of us have made a number of our large consumer choices – buying a house, buying a car, and so on – in a very low inflationary environment, Madam Speaker. Albertans have not seen these levels of inflation for 30 years. Certainly, you know, my parents used to tell stories of the '70s and '80s, when they first bought their house and then interest rates went up to 20 per cent. Those are really hard on people. Certainly, the national energy program didn't help, or at least it certainly didn't help my dad and so many folks like my parents who were working in oil and gas.

Inflation is back. This is not a surprise. What used to once preoccupy Main Street and Bay Street is now a real concern for Albertans. The fact of the matter is that we have a number of decisions that were taken in 2019, in a relatively low inflationary period, that we have absolutely blown by, and there is no question that we are no longer living in that world. When we are reopening the Personal Income Tax Act, there is an opportunity here to ensure that our income tax brackets align with the rise in the cost of living.

Let me just provide some context for folks for what is actually happening here and why both the now Premier of this province – back in the '90s he used to call this an insidious tax grab, which is why the Official Opposition has asked so many times why he is now strangely comfortable with this given that it was one of his first acts in terms of decisions as Premier. The basic personal exemption in 2019 under the NDP was \$19,369, Madam Speaker. That is the amount that you do not pay taxes on. You pay taxes above that \$19,000 threshold. The basic personal exemption in 2025 under the UCP, according to what they have put forward since 2019 and have indicated no change on particularly – this was the opportunity for them to do that, in this Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 – will be \$19,369.

3:50

Now, if they had continued to index the income tax system to inflation – that is to say, not taken the decision to let inflation eat away at our incomes – then the basic personal exemption in 2025 would have been \$22,219. In other words, you're paying taxes on \$3,000 more of your income than you would have otherwise been. Over the course of the fiscal forecast period this means that the statistically average family will pay more than \$500 more under this decision in personal income tax alone. And then we add, on top of that, that the child and family benefit is also no longer indexed to inflation, so it's not going up every year, and those benefits will then be lost by \$485 a year because that benefit is not increasing with inflation.

Now, there have been other measures that have resulted in deindexing of benefits from inflation. I'm thinking here of the assured income for the severely handicapped and the Alberta seniors' benefit. Leaving those aside for a moment, the fact of the matter is that this Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, before the House today could remedy that problem of indexing our income tax brackets to inflation. It does not.

You know, it's very clear to me that this budget did submit to a rewrite in January. I was noting in the budget speech that there were a couple of typos on the fake natural gas rebate. There was a misspelling of Ralph Klein's name. It's fairly clear to me that somebody just kind of tossed that in there at the last second to kind of meet the – this was their idea of meeting the moment, I guess, for a rebate that is not going to happen for people's rising cost of living as this issue was starting to boil in late January, early February. Although, I mean, certainly on the Official Opposition side we could have told the folks across the way, and did, in fact, that rising property taxes, insurance, school fees, tuition, and other costs were eating away at the family budget in a very significant way.

Be that as it may, it's very clear that this was a bit of slapdashery that is before us in terms of this budget, you know, as evidenced by the fact that there is actually no line item for the natural gas rebate. It doesn't really exist. The electricity rebate was sort of thought of after the fact, and we just rammed through the supplementary estimates in order to finance it. There's no question that there could have been a retroactive rewrite on this decision to tax people more at a time when, as discussed, their insurance is going up, their property taxes are going up, their school fees are going up, interest

on their student loans is going up, their tuition is going up. Pretty much everywhere that the province of Alberta could exercise a public policy choice in terms of saving people money, they chose to do the opposite.

This is a real missed opportunity, Madam Speaker. Even though, you know, under normal circumstances this would be a perfunctory exercise, we are not supporting this bill because we cannot in good conscience allow this bill to go through when we have a Finance minister who has told the public: oh, yes, I think we will reindex sometime at a later time. But people need that help today. They need to know that they're going to be paying – that their personal income taxes are going to be indexed to inflation and that the, generally speaking, very high inflation that people are now seeing is not going to eat away at their take-home pay when they file their 2021 taxes.

You know, the fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, that the absence of indexation in this bill just fundamentally signals to the people of Alberta just how incredibly tone deaf they are to people's challenges right now. When we are hearing from people who are looking at \$500 and \$700 electricity bills from January, February, and they've – the pool price has abated a little bit, but people are still looking at pretty high bills, and it hasn't exactly been a warm spring across the province. At that level, when people are already reeling from the pandemic – there's been lots of job disruption, lack of paid sick leave, all kinds of financial challenges for people. You know, you just have to go out and talk to any random person on the street, and they will tell you that the last two years have been difficult. Many people have different stories to tell, but the foundational theme is that, yeah, it's not exactly been easy on anybody.

From the fact that we're now bringing in this piece of legislation that doesn't take that opportunity and is just wilfully blind to what's actually on people's minds, you know, I just think it's no wonder that the government caucus is in the public opinion quandary it finds itself in. They're just simply not meeting people where they are at in terms of their legitimate concerns.

You know, I think it's fair to say that in this sort of slapdashery of getting mixed signals from the Finance minister, it's fundamentally unhelpful to people, and I think it goes to trust. People simply do not trust that this Minister of Finance, this government caucus, has people's best interests and financial security at heart when he sort of muses publicly: oh, we might reindex at a later time; maybe we will, and maybe we won't. We have an opportunity to do so in this legislation here. Just to give people that certainty would certainly, I think, go some way to restoring that breach of trust as well. It's very, very clear that Albertans, as I often hear from people out on the doorsteps, on the left or the right or the exhausted middle, Madam Speaker, all have trust issues when it comes to this government and have all had experience in some way, shape, or form with these folks not keeping their word with Albertans. When we hear open musing from the Finance minister that "Oh, we might rewrite the budget in this way or that," including reindexing, it would go some way to including that measure within this. It would be exactly within this Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, that that goal would be in fact accomplished.

Our firm commitment to Albertans is relatively simple on this matter, Madam Speaker. You know, to go back and talk a little bit about the history of indexation of income tax brackets – I know it's an extremely exciting topic to the dozens of people at home who are at the edge of their seats, to hear about that economic history – the fact of the matter is that there was a previous era of high inflation, and there was a policy consensus that emerged that governments in Canada would index the income tax system to account for inflation every year. This is a pretty boring economic

accounting concept. That meant that the amount that Albertans and Canadians pay on their income taxes would be adjusted annually to account for inflation. Each year the basic personal income tax exemption and brackets would increase in line with inflation.

Now, the fact of the matter is that this Premier has actually played an integral part in the history of this particular policy initiative. There's no end to the *Hansard*. There is a forest of *Hansard*, Madam Speaker, with the Premier on the record on this matter, calling the lack of indexation of the income tax system a pernicious and sneaky and insidious – and all these big words – tax grab. Yet at the first available opportunity that's what the Finance minister did in his first budget, in 2019.

You know, over the course of 20 years since that conversation in the 1990s, of which the now Premier was a part, both federally and provincially policy-makers did reach a consensus. This was across the aisle. It was very uncontroversial until this government reintroduced the controversy to it. Whatever the rate of inflation, citizens would be protected. It should be a very simple concept. The income tax system and benefits would be indexed, and there would be no tax on inflation.

I want to use my remaining time to just touch very briefly, Madam Speaker – and I may speak to this further as the bill progresses – on the matter of cash pooling and the GOA essentially having access to all funds and being able to cash pool for their associated agencies, boards, and commissions. While on the face of it I don't particularly have much in the way of quarrel in terms of this provision, the GOA could take the U of A or AIMCo's cash on hand and pool those resources centrally. It seems to make sense on the face of it, and there are a number of Auditor General recommendations with respect to cash management that do need to be satisfied. We all understand that.

4:00

Having said that, the government has given themselves in this act the power to charge lower than market rates, costing the associated government entities funds. The government argues that by centrally pooling cash, they improve overall liquidity, therefore need less cash overall across all public entities. That may well be true, which will save on debt-servicing costs; also may well be true. But on the other hand – and we have very recent experience of this, Madam Speaker – it limits the autonomy and independence of organizations that are generally thought to be at arm's length from government; for example, AIMCo, universities and colleges, school boards, et cetera.

Because the government has given themselves the right to charge below market rates, it may be that a commitment now to not do such a thing will be reneged upon in the future. I'm thinking here of the decision to charge municipalities more in interest for their infrastructure projects as a result of changes to the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, a commitment that they said they were not going to do, Madam Speaker, to municipalities. Lo and behold, they just turned around and did it with absolutely no remorse. You know, it's in writing, that they weren't going to do it, and they just absolutely don't care. What they said before: don't care about their word, don't care about establishing relationships of trust with anybody, and went back on their word. Now they're raising those interest rates from municipalities borrowing for infrastructure projects, which will cost those of us who are property tax payers potentially a lot of money over the course of these very large infrastructure projects, depending on which municipality we live in.

This provision of the act, I will say, is not problematic on the face of it if you can actually trust the government at their word, and that's a bit of a tall order these days. There is no question that if this is going to happen, there probably needs to be a bit of legislative

protection or a dial turned on this because nobody trusts this government to do what they said they were going to do, because two minutes later they turn around and do the opposite. I can't support this as it is written right now although I do not disagree with the principle or what it is trying to achieve.

I think this business of the reduction to the provincial tax on chewing tobacco piece – I'll just say a few things on this. You know, this does bring us roughly in line with other provinces. Despite the lower rate it is not unlikely that revenues will increase. Revenues are a function of rate multiplied by volume, after all, so if people are indeed doing sort of cross-border adventures for this particular product, then it may be that the revenues actually go up.

My questions here would be around whether the government, in fact, spoke to any of the tobacco reduction advocates, any health professionals, or others on this move, whether they consulted with them or if they just left them completely in the dark. I would argue that these are folks who have been really important partners to government and for public health for a really long time, and it would be unfortunate indeed if they were left out of that process. I hope that perhaps, as we go along through the bill debate process, the government can shed a little bit of light on what kinds of public consultations were done and if there was any sort of health or other revenue analysis done associated with this decision.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will conclude my remarks for now and just simply conclude by saying that it is unfortunate indeed that this is the time that I rise to speak to this Financial Statutes Amendment Act seeing as we just did pass through supplementary supply and the government also cut off any opportunity for the opposition to provide some comments on that. You know, it's hundreds of millions of dollars in new spending. It would seem to me that it is only right and proper for the people of Alberta to have at least some window on what the government is up to there when they come to this House to ask for hundreds of millions of dollars in supplementary supply. On the face of it some of these initiatives are supported by the NDP opposition, others less so. But either way it is up to this Chamber to be able to communicate to the people of Alberta on what's in those bills, what the government is actually asking for in terms of sups, and to be able to judge for themselves based on the debate in this House.

With that, I will conclude my remarks, Madam Speaker, and look forward to the debate on this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer a few comments on Bill 2, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I want to start off by thanking my friend from Lethbridge-West for her thoughtful comments and just say that I agree in large part with all of the things that she said about this bill, particularly her concerns with respect to the lack of changes to the tax code that we've been pushing for.

I think it's important from the outset, Madam Speaker, to just clearly state what I believe the NDP's view of fair taxation is. We all agree that government has a role to provide goods and services to the people of Alberta. We don't necessarily agree what those goods and services should be, but we know from word and deed that we all agree that government should provide goods and services to people. Those goods and services come at a cost, and the question is who should pay and who should be let off the hook when it comes to footing the bill for the goods and services that government provides. Now, as members of the New Democratic Party we've long believed that a fair taxation system asks those who benefit from the economy of the province to pay the most and those who are benefiting the least should

also pay the least. That, to me, seems to be a fair way of covering the expenses of government.

Unfortunately, that is something that we don't see from our Conservative friends across the way. They seem to have an opposite view of what constitutes fairness: if you are benefiting a great deal from the economic situation, you're actually asked to pay less, and if you're suffering, struggling to get ahead, you're actually asked to pay more. That's why we have a tax system now that has been constructed to allow the most profitable corporations in our province to pay \$5 billion less in taxes than they would have under the old tax code while simultaneously asking the average personal income tax payer to pay \$500 a year more at a time when they can least afford it, Madam Speaker.

Not only that, not only are we asking the people who can least afford to foot the bill to pay more while letting those who can well afford to pay more off the hook; we're asking those who receive government services to do without because this government doesn't have the courage to implement a fair taxation system. Who am I thinking of, Madam Speaker? Of course, I'm thinking of AISH recipients. I'm thinking of students in the postsecondary system. I'm thinking of people who access the Alberta child and family benefit, those seniors who are eligible for seniors' benefits. All of the people who receive those benefits are now receiving substantially less than they would have if the tax code from 2018 had been carried forward to this present day.

With respect to the issue of deindexing the tax code, there are a couple of comments that I'd like to make. It is astounding to me, Madam Speaker, to hear the Member for Lethbridge-West essentially channel the 1997 Reform Party on this issue. I find that my head is spinning because the world has come full circle. I clearly remember in 1997, as a 19-year-old who didn't know any better, voting for the Reform Party candidate who was running in my constituency in that election. Now . . . [interjections] Don't cheer, because that Reform Party member ended up going to jail for illegally confining people as an RCMP officer, not exactly the kind of person that you would want to have holding public office. I am not proud of the fact that I voted for that person.

4:10

It is incredibly interesting to me, Madam Speaker, to find myself in a party that I thought was the New Democratic Party but is echoing lines from the 1997 Reform Party. There's something called horseshoe theory that says that people on the extreme left and the extreme right converge on certain issues, and perhaps this issue of tax deindexation is one of those issues on which we're converging. I don't know.

The fact of the matter is, though, that deindexing the tax code has had a very real cost for the average income tax payer here in the province of Alberta. We heard as much this morning at the Public Accounts Committee, where we met with officials from the Department of Finance and Treasury Board. My colleagues questioned officials from the Department of Finance and Treasury Board to give exact figures for how much additional personal income tax has been collected in the fiscal 2019-20 year, the fiscal 2020-21 year, as well as the fiscal '21-22 year. That number adds up to somewhere north of \$300 million additional taxes that have been collected from average working Albertans. That number is projected to increase significantly over the next few years as, hopefully, wages go up. But tax brackets don't rise along with them.

You know, it's interesting to me, Madam Speaker, when the Member for Lethbridge-West pressed the Premier on this issue of deindexing the tax brackets, that he loudly and proudly proclaimed that 40 per cent of Albertans don't pay taxes under our tax system. Well, as my friend from Lethbridge-West clearly stated, the

personal exemption is not quite \$19,500, so when the Premier brags about 40 per cent of Albertans not being eligible to pay taxes, what he's saying is that 40 per cent of working Albertans earn less than \$19,500.

I hear members opposite say that they're not working hard enough, and I think that that's exactly the attitude that has made Albertans so upset with members of this government, because we know full well that Albertans are working harder than ever before. They continue to fall behind, and this government, instead of offering them any hand up, kicks them while they're down, at the same time turning around and allowing profitable corporations to get away with not paying \$5 billion in taxes that are rightfully owed to the people of Alberta, approving 40 per cent pay raises for executive managers at AIMCo, and then, if that weren't enough, the Premier is musing idly about giving people who earn \$300,000 a year a tax break.

It's quite clear to me whose side the government is on, and it's those who don't need any help from government. The people who earn \$19,500 or less are on their own. Not only is the government continuing to shovel money into the pockets of the people who already have the most in this province; they continue to claw back money from the people who have the least to give. We heard clearly this morning, also in Public Accounts, about changes that were made to the Alberta child and family benefit. Hundreds of dollars every year are taken because of the changes to the Alberta child and family benefit that this government made. Hundreds of dollars a year are taken out of the pockets of families who are living at the poverty line. The government wants to claim that they made this wonderful change because a very small section of people who were living in deep poverty got a slight increase in the child benefit. But they took that money from people who were living in poverty that wasn't as deep, and that's clearly unfair.

Not only that, but that is not the only change they made. The decision to deindex AISH was one that has cost the average AISH recipient \$3,000. Now, \$3,000 to somebody who receives – what is it? Is \$1,600 a month the average for AISH? I'm not getting any help here from my colleagues, unfortunately. They are deep in their phones. [interjection] Approximately \$1,600. That's the equivalent of two months' worth of benefits that have been clawed away from AISH recipients. And what's the justification that we heard from officials in the Ministry of Finance and Treasury Board? Well, similar recipients in other provinces make less, so the people of Alberta who are on this program should make less, too.

What's insulting, Madam Speaker, the insult that is added to the injury that has been visited upon AISH recipients, is this government's continual perpetuation of this myth that AISH recipients in Alberta receive the highest benefits of anybody in the country, which is patently untrue. My friend from St. Albert this morning challenged department officials on the fact that similar recipients in the Northwest Territories, for example, receive higher benefits, and when she asked them to confirm whether or not that was true, you know, the ministry officials shuffled papers on their desk and looked awkwardly at their shoes and avoided answering the question.

The fact remains that this government had no justification for clawing back AISH benefits to those recipients other than the fact that they believe that because people in Ontario and British Columbia are suffering, we should visit an equal amount of suffering on people in similar situations here in the province of Alberta. It's grossly unfair.

The same is true with seniors' benefits. We asked a similar line of questions about the deindexation of seniors' benefits to officials at the Department of Treasury Board and Finance. Again, when we highlighted that the changes that this government has made have cost the average seniors' benefit recipient \$750 a year, the only

answer they had to justify that decision was that seniors in other jurisdictions receive less, so seniors in Alberta should receive less, too. It doesn't make sense.

Their version of the Alberta advantage is that if you are a multibillion-dollar corporation, you should receive more here than in any other province in the country and you can send that money to foreign investors, you know, move your headquarters out of Calgary to Denver or wherever. That's fine. People in this government can't do enough to make sure that they benefit companies way more than any other province would, but when it comes to AISH recipients or people on seniors' benefits, well, they should suffer as much as any other Canadian should because that's their version of fairness, Madam Speaker. I find it incredibly frustrating and incredibly offensive.

4:20

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 2? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a great opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 2 and clarify, I think, some of the comments that we've been hearing throughout the course of debate thus far. You know, there's no question that Albertans are feeling some of the pinch when it comes to fuel prices and utility bills. That's precisely why Alberta's government has stepped up to provide assistance. When it comes to utility bills, the government of Alberta is providing a \$50 rebate for three months, \$150 in total over three months, to help off-set some of the increased costs of utilities that Albertans are feeling. [interjection] As you can hear, members opposite – I don't know – don't like that approach and want to heckle, but it is important. The members opposite want to object to us providing assistance to Albertans who are feeling the pinch, but we believe that it's important to provide relief to Alberta families through that initiative.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, I also wanted to rise to talk a little bit more about the cost of gasoline and the cost of fuel prices. As it relates to fuel prices, the government of Alberta is removing the provincial tax on gas, on fuel. What really is a challenge when it comes to this issue is the fact that the NDP stands up here all day, every day and talks about the issue of affordability, but on April 1 their ally, their governing partner – we know their federal leader, of course, Jagmeet Singh, and the federal NDP have . . . [interjections] You can hear how angry they get. They know where I'm going. I haven't even gotten there, but they know where I'm going, and they get so angry. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. It's becoming very difficult to hear the hon. member who has the floor. Only that hon. member has the floor.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: It's unfortunate. I've been sitting here for most of the afternoon listening intently, but unfortunately the members opposite can't do that.

Regardless, Madam Speaker, as I was saying, their federal counterparts – not just their counterparts; they actually belong to the same party, being the federal NDP – have just signed a deal to hang onto power with the Liberals until 2025. We know that a key part of the federal Liberal agenda is to increase the carbon tax on April 1. What's going to happen when they increase the carbon tax on April 1? It will make life more expensive for Albertans. It will make life more expensive for every Albertan, for individuals on a fixed income, for families, for individuals who want to take their kids to school, who want to take their kids to hockey practice. The NDP hasn't said a word about the federal carbon tax.

Now, I'm willing to give them some latitude. If they really do believe in making life more affordable for Albertans, Madam Speaker, I would look forward to seeing any member stand up and call openly on the federal government and their coalition NDP partners to stop the carbon tax increase on April 1. That is what I would like to see. I invite any member opposite, if they are so concerned and so interested with the issue of affordability, to stand up and speak against the carbon tax increase that is scheduled to happen on April 1. None of them will do that because their allegiance with Justin Trudeau cannot be shattered and cannot be broken. It must be maintained at all measure. We know that, and we see that.

However, again, we are taking action on our side of the House. We are removing the provincial tax on fuel. That'll equate to 13 cents per litre in savings for all Albertans. We firmly believe that Albertans shouldn't be punished for taking their kids to school and for going about their daily business.

That's why, Madam Speaker, you may remember, in 2019, when our government was elected, the first act, Bill 1, of our government and of this Legislature was An Act to Repeal the Carbon Tax to remove the carbon tax that those members put in place when they were in government. Why? Because Albertans did not want to pay more to heat their homes, did not want to pay more to get their groceries and to drive their kids to school.

We have taken direct action on bringing costs down. The members opposite just like to talk a good game, Madam Speaker, but again I would invite any member to stand up and speak against the federal carbon tax increase that is coming.

I wanted to speak a little bit about the issue of affordability – I think we've covered that – but I also wanted to speak on the issue of corporate taxes as well because I understand that several amendments within Bill 2 are making amendments to corporate tax. Madam Speaker, I think we heard it earlier from some of the speakers opposite. Our government took decisive action in bringing corporate taxes down. Do you know what the result of that was? [interjection] I'm so glad the Minister of Finance asked, but I think it's a little bit of a rhetorical question, because he knows the answer well and clear.

The result, shockingly, of course – big surprise – was more revenue, more corporate tax revenue. It's very simple, Madam Speaker. A lower tax regime and a lower tax environment encourage investment, allow investment, and facilitate investment, but unfortunately the members opposite don't understand that. When they were in government, they increased corporate taxes, taxes on corporations, and what happened? Businesses left, divestment occurred, and jobs were lost as a direct result of their action.

It's very clear in looking at the budget documents. Any member of the public can look and see the details for themselves. As a result of our corporate tax decrease, the province now is realizing more revenue from businesses, more corporate tax revenue. But you don't just have to look at the budget documents; just look every other day at the news and see what is happening, Madam Speaker. There is investment from organizations like Amazon Web Services, new investments just the other day from Walmart opening up a new distribution centre, record investment in tech, record investment in film and television. Venture capital investment is also up. All we have to do is look at the signs. Again, if Albertans don't want to look through the mundane details of the budget, just look at the news and look at what's happening on a day-to-day basis. Perhaps the Minister of Finance will disagree with my assessment that there are mundane details in the budget, but of course I think we have a little bit of a different perspective when it comes to that issue.

We see very clearly, Madam Speaker, signs of strong economic growth. We see very clearly signs of opportunity and signs of

growth. That also is on the back of having to deal with two years of challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, but through that time Alberta's government has kept its course. We have continued to be focused on the priorities that Albertans want our government to be focused on, and we are now beginning to see the results of that hard work and that diligence.

I know some critics, including the members opposite, will say that the results of some of the successes in the budget are solely the result of increased revenue and solely the result of – I believe I heard one of the members during question period talk about a revenue windfall, that we fell backwards into a revenue windfall and that that's the only reason that we are in the fiscal environment that we are in now.

Madam Speaker, let me say very clearly that Alberta is back with a balanced budget for the first time in eight years, and that is because of diligent and prudent fiscal spending and fiscal restraint. Under the NDP, if you apply the same revenue projections that the NDP had when they were in office, we would still be dealing with massive deficits as a result of their spending trajectory. The math is clear. It's been \$6 billion. It's been verified by other economists. Have a look at the information. Under the current trajectory with our forecast that we built into the budget for revenue projections, we would still have billions of dollars in deficit if we followed the NDP spending trajectory.

4:30

You know why we don't have deficits anymore? Because our government has been successful in bringing costs under control, bringing costs in line with other jurisdictions. An important part of bringing costs in line with other jurisdictions is allowing us to do more. Madam Speaker, we are investing \$171 million over three years to create 7,000 additional seats in our postsecondary institutions, more seats than those members created in our postsecondary system, more seats than have been created in a decade. We're providing new funding for student aid to ensure that every Albertan has the opportunity to access postsecondary education. We are investing more in apprenticeship education, in ensuring Indigenous learners have the opportunity to access postsecondary education, and we are able to do this because we have made the difficult decisions to get our finances under control, to rein in reckless NDP spending.

As I look to the future, I see optimism, I see signs of investment, I see signs of job growth, job creation, and I am confident that if we continue with our plans, we will see even greater results and success. With that, Madam Speaker, I'm happy to cede the rest of my time.

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 2, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. You know, listening to the hon. minister, he made a reference that I just found really interesting. He says: all day every day the NDP talks about affordability. Absolutely. We absolutely are, and when you're still not hearing it, it's a concern. I question why this side of the House is actually listening to Albertans and their concerns about affordability in this province, yet the other side of the House is also hearing the same concerns – we hear them, we're CCed in the e-mails, we talk about it every day in this Chamber – yet they're bringing forward legislation that makes it harder for families.

This piece of legislation is doing nothing that I'm hearing Albertans want. They want affordability. They want to be able to

pay their bills. They want to be able to put their kids in post-secondary. But what this government is doing is so out of touch with what actual Albertans are asking for. So I'm confused. They're hearing the NDP, who is speaking on behalf of Albertans, talk about their concerns with affordability yet are doing nothing. I'm just very confused about the cognitive dissonance that's happening on that side of the House when it comes to what Albertans are actually asking for. It is certainly not an increase in cost. It is certainly not this \$50 that they're claiming is going to save people with their utilities. When people are paying \$800 a month for a utility bill and can no longer afford insurance on their vehicle because that's skyrocketing, they can't afford the cost of living that's happening, I'm just so confused why this government is not understanding what's happening.

As part of my critic role I spend a lot of time talking with nonprofits all across the province. On March 17, 2022, just recently, Vibrant Communities Calgary released a budget review. They did an analysis, they published it, and I would encourage this government to review that report because the title of this article is Alberta Budget 2022's Business As Usual Approach Falls Short: New Spending Priorities Don't Address Issues That Matter to Struggling Albertans. This organization meets with nonprofits and organizations that serve Albertans all across the province. It involves the Calgary chamber of voluntary commerce, Alberta seniors and community, Edmonton Social Planning Council. They're those individuals that are working front line with Albertans. They're concerned with this budget. They're concerned with tax. They're concerned with the lack of investment in what they've claimed are priorities.

We see in this piece of legislation that one of the pieces of the omnibus bill is the Tourism Levy Act. That's one of the pieces that's going to be impacted. It's creating a space where Airbnb-type companies can charge the tourism levy, which is interesting because part of this government's plan is to increase travel and tourism in the province. It's something that they talk about all the time. How are we supposed to entice Albertans to actually travel when they can't afford their bills, they can't afford insurance on their vehicle, they can't afford basic groceries?

I'm hearing from parents who are struggling. Parents call me in tears wanting to know what supports and services are available. They've exhausted the food bank. They've exhausted their church. They've exhausted their neighbours. Pleading with resources, supports, and information, and this government laughs at the NDP talking about affordability.

Madam Speaker, I'm so confused about why this government is prioritizing the way that they are. They're not looking at inflation costs. They're not looking at increasing access to the supports and services that people need. They're creating a space where people that are on a very fixed, limited income, like seniors, like individuals on AISH, are set even further behind than they were before. If they listened to Albertans, if they listened to the organizations that serve Albertans, they would hear loud and clear that something needs to happen. Something needs to change.

We know that we stand up in this House and we talk about what needs to happen, what are potential solutions, and this piece of legislation doesn't answer that. We look at a government saying, "We need to increase travel; we need to increase tourism," but they've taxed parks. It just doesn't make sense. They talk out one side that they understand it, that they're working on building the economy, yet they're not actually doing things that support that growth.

When I talk with the tourism industry – they have come to committee. They've met with individual members. They have pleaded to meet with this government to talk about things that will actually work to increase travel and tourism in the province. One of

the things that I brought up in estimates was talking about: what is the province doing to encourage Albertans to enter into the travel and tourism field? There's no plan. The travel industry relies heavily on international people to come and work in the province. Well, we've seen a decline, partly to do with COVID and the inability to travel, but there's no plan to get Albertans working in those sectors. The travel and tourism industry is one of the biggest hit, has the highest unemployment rate out of the industries in the province, yet we don't see a plan to get individuals working.

We have hotels that are struggling – they don't have staff to clean the rooms – and we also have Albertans that are out of work. What is their plan to get those people working in an industry that could be thriving in the province? We have the natural landscape of Banff and Jasper, beautiful places, but simply putting an Airbnb tax does not incentivize Albertans to travel. They can't afford to travel. They can't afford to rent an Airbnb. It just doesn't make sense. It's so out of touch, Madam Speaker.

I think that when we look at what people are saying about this budget, there are some significant concerns about the impacts on the average family. We know that people can't pay bills. We know that they are struggling in job loss. They're struggling in career changes. They're struggling with some significant emotional impacts. None of that is being looked at when it comes to how this government has planned their budget. They have created a space that is so out of touch with what people are actually talking about in the province and what people actually need in the province.

4:40

We look at what average expenses are in a household. People cannot afford day-to-day life. It's not luxury things that people are going without, Madam Speaker. It's not that, you know, they can't buy that luxury SUV. They can't afford milk. There's a housing crisis that's happening in the province. People can't find affordable housing. Seniors are struggling. Parents – we're in a sandwich generation. I have my mom who lives with me, and I have my kids who are still at home. When I think about what her life is like, I'm so fortunate to have her in my home. But when I look at some of her peers who are struggling to make ends meet, it breaks my heart. It absolutely breaks my heart that people who have worked their entire working careers to build a life for themselves can't afford milk, can't afford to go and see their grandbabies.

These are the stories that we're hearing, and I know members of government are hearing those stories as well. We're CCed on the e-mails. There's no response on what this government is going to do to actually make life affordable for people. People are in pain. People are asking for some sort of budget that actually has an impact on their day-to-day life, and this isn't that, Madam Speaker.

There are some significant concerns when we look at what average families are being faced with and the pain that they're feeling. Saving to put kids in postsecondary is a big cost, and now it's, unfortunately, unattainable for some families. They cannot afford to have their children attend postsecondary. That has a ripple effect. That has people in our province that aren't being educated to a level that they want to be because they can't afford it. We see postsecondary students leaving the province. Talking to physicians, they're saying that a lot of their graduating doctors don't want to work in this province. They're leaving. They don't want to be told where they have to open up their practice. This government talks about their plan to entice doctors to the province. It's not working.

When we talk about things that make people want to live in Alberta and want to invest here, not having a physician, not having an education system, that has a curriculum that has been rejected on so many levels, not having supports through FSCD, knowing that there are significant wait-lists or what this government refuses to

call a wait-list – families that qualify without having access to supports is perhaps a better way to frame it in their language – ultimately that means that families are going without the services that they need and deserve. There's nothing in this budget that shows that that's being supported.

When we talk about the film industry, that is definitely a success in the province. We've seen how there have been some incredible productions that have come out of this province. But when I was in estimates, I asked the minister: out of those big productions, how many Albertans were employed in that production? How many carpenters were Albertans? We see a big production coming here, but how many Albertans actually benefited from working on that production? I couldn't get an answer. We talk about this wonderful film that's been here – everyone is talking about it – and it absolutely brings light to Alberta, but what was the impact on Albertans working? It's hard to hear them talk about all of these wonderful things but not be able to drill down and provide exact examples of what's actually happening.

I know that one of the main concerns from the nonprofits is that they've been hit incredibly hard when it comes to COVID and the lack of supports from government. These are organizations that are all across the province that are struggling to meet the needs, and those needs are going up.

When I talked to my former co-workers in Children's Services about the complexity of the families that they're working with, trying to support, there's such a lack of understanding of the poverty in this province and the lack of resources and supports. By not acknowledging inflation in the budget, it just simply doesn't make sense. The nonprofits know that that's how you calculate. The nonprofits are aware that when you look at the way that you do a budget, you have to account for that, yet this government just simply hasn't done it. They've just simply refused to consider inflation. They've refused to provide any real relief for families. We simply cannot support a budget that doesn't provide real relief for families.

When I look through this piece of legislation, this omnibus, that has, I believe, nine different acts that it's impacting, it's hard to be able to go back to my constituents and say: this is something that's going to have an impact on your budget.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll be brief. I will move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 5

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I rise for the second reading of Bill 5, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022.

This bill will allow the government to improve safety on our roads for roadside workers. These amendments proposed under Bill 5 are part of government's ongoing efforts to ensure that our roads are among the safest in the country. This bill will provide improved safety on our roads and highways for roadside workers and enhance existing safety rules for first responders.

Every year there are dozens of collisions and near misses with snowplows on our roads and on our highways. Highway maintenance workers also face considerable risk when they work to keep

our roads safe and clear throughout the year. Between March 2018 and March 2021 there were 128 collisions involving snowplows contracted by Alberta Transportation. The Alberta Motor Association reported that since December 2019 there have been 36 near misses and at least 13 serious roadside incidents involving Alberta tow trucks and passing vehicles, collisions resulting in injury, hospitalization, and even death.

Last year we consulted with Albertans and our stakeholders on safety for roadside workers. The result was that Albertans, traffic safety advocacy organizations, and those who work in highway maintenance wholeheartedly agreed that more needs to be done to protect roadside workers and make our highways safer. Bill 5 proposes many changes to do just that.

First, let me talk about what I mean when I talk about roadside workers. We know about construction workers who are building new roads or paving existing roads within construction zones. They already have protections in place, as do first responders, but roadside workers are a different category of workers. They can be doing their work anywhere alongside the road. They are the men and women who maintain our roads and highways and keep them free of debris, tow truck operators, those servicing public utilities, or even sometimes those who do animal control and more. If their vehicle has a flashing lamp – not just hazard lights but separate flashing lamps – they would be protected under this legislation.

Currently motorists are required to slow down to 60 kilometres per hour or the speed limit, whichever is lower, in the adjacent lane when passing a stopped emergency vehicle or tow truck with its flashing lights activated. The changes in Bill 5 will mean that all lanes of traffic travelling on the same side as a stopped emergency or roadside worker vehicle must slow down to 60 kilometres per hour or the speed limit, whichever is lower, when the vehicle's lights are flashing. This also applies to all vehicles travelling in both directions on a single-lane highway.

4:50

Similar rules are common in most other provinces across the country, and this leads to improved safety. The proposed changes under Bill 5 will require drivers to slow down to 60 kilometres per hour or the speed limit, whichever is lower, when passing any vehicle that is stopped with their lamps flashing. These changes will come into force on proclamation. To ensure that Albertans and law enforcement are informed and have time to prepare for these changes, government will undertake an education campaign for all drivers in the province prior to the anticipated in-force date in spring of 2023.

Last year my department used a public survey to gauge Albertans' interest and knowledge on the rules around roadside workers. About 15,000 Albertans responded to an online survey from March 16 to April 6, 2021. Respondents were very supportive of extending existing protections to snowplow operators and other roadside workers. A majority, 60 per cent, of respondents felt that the current safe passing laws are inadequate. A shocking 85 per cent supported reducing the current safe passing speed from 60 kilometres per hour to 50 kilometres per hour. And a staggering 92 per cent supported requiring all vehicles to provide one lane of space when passing a roadside vehicle when its lights are flashing. When was the last time that 92 per cent of Albertans agreed on anything? Finally, 75 per cent of respondents agreed they would be less likely to speed past an emergency vehicle when its lights are flashing if fines were increased. So while some of the opposition may complain about so-called cash cows, it seems that fines do work as a deterrent to dangerous driving behaviours.

Some have suggested that we should have made these changes by ministerial order; however, the existing requirement to slow

down when passing stopped emergency vehicles and tow trucks is in section 115 of the act. It could not be expanded to other vehicles in other lanes of traffic without an amendment to the act. There is no existing authority that would allow this change to be made by ministerial order.

Further, by keeping this requirement in legislation, which is published and publicly available, it ensures the rules are transparent and accessible to Albertans and enforcement. Moving rules out of legislation and into ministerial orders, which do not have the same publication requirements as acts and regulations, affects transparency. Simply put, it can make the law more difficult for Albertans to find.

It has been asked by some: how many tickets have been written for drivers who didn't move over for stopped emergency vehicles with flashing lights? Currently there's no legal requirement to move over; those may come when we amend the regulations. However, between 2014 and 2019 an average of 700 tickets were issued each year related to speeding past a stopped emergency vehicle or a tow truck. Every single one of those tickets was handed out to protect an emergency worker at the side of the road, each of whom has family, friends, and colleagues who want them to go home safely at the end of their shift.

My office got an e-mail from an Albertan last week asking: why does anyone in the far left lane on a three-lane highway have to slow down when passing emergency vehicles? There are two obvious reasons we are doing this. The first one is obvious: it's safety. Between 2014 and 2018 there were 2,034 collisions involving emergency vehicles in Alberta. Let me state that number again: 2,034. That's more than one collision with a stopped emergency vehicle with its lights flashing each and every day for five years. While most of these collisions only resulted in property damage, sadly, there were two fatal collisions and 191 injury collisions that caused two deaths and 274 injuries. That's two deaths and 274 injuries too many.

The other reason is for consistency across jurisdictions. By making these changes, our rules will mirror those already in place in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. Matching rules in neighbouring jurisdictions simplifies driving for everyone, and it increases safety.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Michelle Chimko, president and CEO of the Alberta Motor Association, had this to say last week, when we introduced Bill 5:

Near misses and collisions are a regular occurrence for Alberta's tow truck operators, emergency responders and other roadside workers. We applaud these changes as an important first step in improving the safety of these essential workers and look forward to our continued work in further improving their visibility and safety. We ask all Albertans to take care when passing a roadside scene. Those few extra seconds can make all the difference in keeping someone's loved one safe.

Ron Glen, CEO of the Alberta Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association, stated this about Bill 5:

Alberta's road construction and maintenance industry puts worker safety first. This legislation is greatly appreciated because we need drivers to slow down and do their part to make their highways – our worksites – safe and efficient for all.

It's not just construction workers who support this bill but also those who currently have no protection under the existing legislation. Our highway maintenance contractors work tirelessly to ensure our roads and highways are safe in all forms of weather, whether it's blinding snow and frigid cold in winter storms or in the blistering heat in summer. Roadside maintenance workers support this bill, too.

Kelly McManus, president of transportation and highway operations with the LaPrairie Group of Companies, said this last week:

Highway maintenance crews throughout our industry provide critical services to our province's expansive highway and road network, for the benefit of all Albertans. It is gratifying to see our government taking deliberate and proactive measures to improve safety for all highway maintenance and roadside personnel.

Even municipalities stand firmly behind this bill. Amber Link, reeve of Wheatland county, had this to say about Bill 5:

Road safety and the safety of personnel is a high priority across Alberta. Bill 5 considers the concerns that were raised by Albertans and is intended to protect road users and workers, create safety programs that encompass best practices, as well as a province with the highest quality road infrastructure for the transportation of people, goods, and services.

These changes are exactly what both Albertans and our stakeholders have asked for. These changes will make our roads safer for those who work on or near them.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 5 and urge my colleagues on both sides of the House to support this important legislation. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Minister of Transportation has moved second reading of Bill 5, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022. Are there others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to applaud the Minister of Transportation for this particular bill. I think that it's a long time coming. It's a perfect example of why we actually need government legislation and regulation when it comes to the safety of workers in our province. It goes without saying that the Alberta NDP, we've always been on the side of supporting workers and making sure that they're safe not only on the job site but when they're commuting to and from work and around the province, especially with their families. And one could honestly say that this piece of legislation is a no-brainer, right?

You know, there are people who don't believe that there should be government intervention in matters when it comes to safety. Some people don't understand that: okay; well, in order to change cultural or even sometimes human behaviour, government can implement a piece of legislation or introduce a regulation that would actually help people to understand why something as simple as moving to the left and slowing down on the highway in order to protect a tow truck driver or a construction worker that's doing their duty on the side of the road is actually essential and life-saving.

5:00

I'm glad to see that the Minister of Transportation has brought this in. When I was the critic for Transportation, I had the opportunity to meet with several truck drivers, and this was a really important issue. As the minister highlighted, unfortunately, yes, there were two fatalities, but a number of near misses and a number of accidents that occurred where people were injured, unfortunately, because of this. It was 13 serious incidents involving tow trucks and passing vehicles, according to the AMA. They reported this in December 2019. In that same report they communicated that it was actually 36 near misses.

Now, I remember that when I was meeting with the tow truck drivers, they were saying that – and it's not necessarily when visibility is not at its ultimate because of snow flurries and things like that. This is sometimes when visibility is perfectly within, one would deem, normal range. You know, a truck driver is doing their work on the side of the road. It has to do, again, Mr. Speaker, with the behaviour, the human behaviour, thinking: "Okay. Well, even

though there's this person working on the side of the road, I'm just going to fire right past them. I'm not going to slow down."

A lot of the time, as we know, Mr. Speaker – and I'm sure you see it in your commute up to Edmonton. Along highway 2 I imagine is the highway that you take in order to get here. We see that people are actually going even greater than the speed limit. You know, when workers are working on the side of the road, tow truck drivers are doing their thing, they don't see a need to actually slow down. Tow truck drivers, I remember, communicated to me heart-wrenching stories of incidents where members of theirs, friends of theirs, were actually in accidents on the side of the road. Individuals were hit and actually just thrown, like – I don't know – tens or hundreds of metres into the ditch because of these accidents. What seems like a no-brainer, that someone would simply just slow down when they see someone on the side of the road: people, unfortunately, weren't doing it, and it was the cause of these types of accidents.

Many a tow truck driver communicated to me that there needed to be greater visibility for the tow trucks as they were working on the side of the road. They came together and they did a lot of advocacy, so I'm assuming that the Minister of Transportation actually did meet with tow truck drivers when coming together with this bill. That makes me very happy, that she consulted with tow truck drivers, took the time to listen to them and hear what their issues and their concerns were regarding this really important piece of legislation. Of course, I just want to say that I support this wholeheartedly. It's something that I believe is a long time coming, in fact. These are common-sense reforms to our traffic laws that will reduce confusion for drivers, who will now hear just one consistent message, and that is: slow down when passing folks on the side of the road.

I'm really eager to hear more about the education campaign that will be complementing this particular piece of legislation because I think that's really important. Now, I know that this is something that will be developed through the ministry, of course, with people, but I can't stress enough how important it is that this be communicated to the public in the most effective way. I'm sure that the minister, having consulted with tow truck drivers, with construction workers that do this kind of work, the number of stakeholders that she mentioned during the passing of Bill 5, as she just finished stating, will be consulting with these people in order to actually determine what would be the best way to educate the public when it comes to this new piece of legislation, that is bound not only to save lives but also to contribute to the safety of workers and of tow truck drivers here in the province of Alberta as we continue moving forward.

On that note, of course, this opens the Traffic Safety Act. And because I heard directly from truck drivers, my questions is: well, why aren't there more amendments that could potentially take place with the opening of this act? Although I applaud the minister for making this change that I believe will save a number of lives, there are also other issues that need to be highlighted here. One of them, of course, is that during the Coutts blockade we called upon the minister to exercise her authority under the act to revoke the operating licences of folks engaged in illegal activity. It was a good idea, one that we thought was feasible.

At estimates we heard that the minister did a legal analysis and that she believed that she needed more authority under this act. So here's an opportunity. The act could be amended to actually provide that authority to the minister, to this government to be able to deal with situations where individuals that, you know, although they're very passionate about their politics, are engaging in illegal activity within the province of Alberta, and of course that needs to be addressed.

This would be an opportunity for the minister to actually implement a change in regulation at this time by opening up the act. I would ask her to please consider this. It's something important. As we all know, the Alberta economy suffered greatly with the Coutts blockade. Businesses were suffering. It wasn't just businesses in southern Alberta and even the community as well. You know, like, millions of dollars were lost daily because of the Coutts blockade. Here's an opportunity for you, Minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, of course, to actually make a change when it comes to that.

It appears that the government is more worried about alienating members of their caucus that support the illegal blockaders than they are about ensuring that the government has the tools that they need to keep our borders and our supply chains open. Unfortunately, I'd have to say that this is a missed opportunity.

Again I ask the minister to consider this as an important opportunity for her to introduce other amendments that would give her the authority to actually make the changes that on this side of the House we think are also a no-brainer, very similar to simply moving to the left and slowing down a little bit while you're going down the highway in order to protect the lives of people. In this instance it's simply to protect our economy, to actually make sure that there are no negative impacts.

Honestly, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I am the first one to stand up in this House and protect the right of every person to demonstrate, to participate in demonstrations, in protests. I think it's an important part of our democracy. I got up many times in this House to actually talk about those particular rights of people, their human right to freedom of speech. I know that members on that side of the House want to protect that right as well. But, at the same time, while individuals are engaging in free speech, they cannot be permitted to engage in illegal activity.

5:10

Now, as was pointed out by several when it came to the Coutts blockade – we talked about it – it's perfectly plausible, it's perfectly allowable that people would want to demonstrate. They simply could have just done it on the side of the road instead of actually blocking the highway entering into Alberta. This is not something that's over the top. It's not as if a simple change in legislation or regulation would take the rights of individuals away when it comes to being able to voice their political perspective on a particular issue or concern, and it's a shame that the minister isn't taking this opportunity, since she's opening the act, to actually make amendments to this particular aspect of this piece of legislation.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I think that it's important for individuals to be able to speak their minds both inside and outside of this House. I have to say that, you know, some days it's a little bit difficult being inside this House because, of course, not only do we not see eye to eye on particular priorities when it comes to Albertans; sometimes the communication style used when in debate actually creates more discord inside of the House. And I get it. I mean, we're all passionate, on both sides of the House, when it comes to many issues and concerns. But I think it's very important, though, that people, when they do get up to speak in the House, be permitted to do so and that they're not chastised or judged for bringing in the voice of Albertans when it comes to particular issues.

Now, members on the other side of the House say their piece, and, you know, we engage in debate. But again, when it comes to the Coutts blockade, Mr. Speaker, I believe that although people should be able to participate in demonstrations and protests, they still need to follow the law. I would hope that members on the other side of the House would agree with that. I'm sure that many do, but

history and matters have demonstrated to us that some members support questionable perspectives not only when it comes to the Coutts blockade, I would argue, but on a number of things – right? – which is important for us especially, because we are examples.

Now, by no means, Mr. Speaker, do I think I'm any more important than any other Albertan. You know, although having been elected to this House, I don't think I'm any more privileged or more important. I mean, I understand I have privilege as part of the House, but I shouldn't take advantage of those privileges, is what I'm trying to get at. People look to us as examples in our community and across the province, so when the minister has an opportunity to actually have – and I would state that this is an opportunity to amend the bill to actually help Alberta's economy.

You know, members on the other side of the House like to think of themselves as the champions of the Alberta economy and that they're the best at implementing legislation, but as has been discussed in the House a number of times, Mr. Speaker, what we see is that they're good at making decisions that profit already-wealthy individuals. The rest of Albertans? Well, you know, especially at this difficult time they're finding it hard to make ends meet.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, I had a wonderful phone call with a member from my community just last night. This member of the community was actually talking about how her parents, grandparents, and even she were long-time conservatives, and that for the very first time she was not going to be voting Conservative or United Conservative because of the arrogance displayed by members not only of this government but the entire caucus. She was telling me how this next election can't come soon enough so that as Albertans we can replace a government that truly isn't listening to the people of Alberta.

It's unfortunate. It really is unfortunate because, of course, that's who we're here to serve, Mr. Speaker. When people are going through financial hardship, you'd think that the government would take the opportunity to actually make sure that Albertans have every opportunity or access to government programming. While in debate I heard one of the members on the other side of the House say, "Well, they're not working hard enough," which, to me, is a complete display of the type of arrogance that the community member that I was talking about previously . . .

An Hon. Member: I can't understand what you're saying with your mask on.

Member Loyola: How dare – how dare – the member . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Members are welcome to join in the debate through a variety of ways. Doing it from their seats with other members also in their seats is not one of the approved ways. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, however, is using the approved form of debate.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that friendly reminder. I know that we need it from time to time in this House. Of course, as I was saying previously in debate, we're very passionate when it comes to our particular perspectives.

As I was saying, stating that Albertans aren't working hard enough when they are engaging with their political representatives and stating that the current economy is making it difficult for them to make ends meet – I can tell you how I've had a number of conversations with constituents, not only in my own riding but across the province, where it's becoming very hard to make it to the end of the month.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 5. The hon. Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 5. I appreciate the minister and her work on this and her team, so I wanted to take this opportunity to thank them. I believe that this will be a bill that is truly in service to all Albertans, and I appreciate the comments from the members opposite, that they are also, as far as I can tell, in support of this bill. One of the things that I found interesting from the last speaker, though, was that he talked a little bit about not hearing and not listening to Albertans. You know, I'm speaking to Bill 5, and with respect to Bill 5 – the minister said it herself – we heard from over 15,000 Albertans, and 92 per cent of them agreed that this was a good change, so I would argue that that is definitely listening to Albertans and what they want, and I'm happy to support this bill as a result.

It's a fairly simple bill. I don't have a lot that I need to say about it. I think it's fairly straightforward for people. I do think it will simplify the traffic rules for drivers. I'm a proud parent of three young drivers, three young adults, and I think simplifying rules for young, new drivers is never a bad idea, to be quite frank, as a parent of those drivers on the road.

5:20

I wanted to take an opportunity to say hello to the folks at Ledcor. I had the opportunity a couple of months ago to visit some snowplow operators at Ledcor in my constituency of Grande Prairie, and I just wanted to say thank you to them for the work they do, through you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to them and thank you for the sacrifices they make to go out when the road conditions are terrible and the rest of us don't want to be on them and, if at all possible, choose not to be on them, but those guys have to go out and those women have to go out and clean the roads and keep them safe for us. This is one small way that we can do our part to keep them safe for them as well. I just wanted to say hello and thank you. Thank you for the great ride on the snowplow and for the education. I did pass the simulator, to my surprise, so that was exciting.

With respect to the bill, though, Mr. Speaker, really, the goal of this bill is simple, to improve safety on our roads and highways for roadside workers and enhance existing safety rules for first responders. I can't think of an Albertan, certainly not in my constituency, that would debate that. Road safety is something that's important to all of us. I know that when I spoke with those plow drivers, they talked a lot about safety. They talked a lot about when they have to stop on the side of the road when there's poor visibility, the lighting that's important, and the fact that other vehicles, especially on major highways – I travel highway 43 a lot back and forth from my constituency into the capital here, and I so appreciate not only the good road maintenance but the safe driving practices of those that I'm driving around, and I know it's critical to slow down. This bill is pretty simple, making it a requirement for us all to slow down as we pass and if possible, if there's an extra lane, to leave that space between the stopped worker and our car as it's passing.

I don't have a lot of other things I need to say. I'm happy to rise and support this bill. I want to again thank the ministry for their work on this. I know the members opposite touched on the education, and I think they had a really good point about that. I'm happy to see in the plan for the bill that there is a plan for robust education on the bill and the requirements before they take effect in 2023. I think that's important and fair for drivers, to understand what the changes are and how they'll be affected by them, what the potential fines would be, and why this legislative change is needed.

I don't have a lot else to say, Mr. Speaker. With that, I will cede my time. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to say a couple of words in regard to Bill 5, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022. Again, I concur with other members of the Legislature that this appears at second reading, my first reading, to be a good bill. You know, we all travel around the province from time to time or quite a lot, depending on where you live and where you go, and certainly we do see, I guess, a lack of consistency – right? – with dealing with workers and snowplows and tow trucks and different vehicles on the side of the road. We know that this is a potentially unsafe place to be. If you're on, let's say, highway 2, which does have four lanes, but people are travelling at quite high speeds, to perhaps protect professionals who are working – snowplow operators and tow truck operators and emergency vehicles and so forth, construction workers on the side of the road – so that we have more consistency in regard to the laws that do protect them, this bill seems to be a good one generally.

You know, I do have a couple of questions that the minister can perhaps provide clarity for in regard to the different sorts of roads, right? This bill, as far as I can tell, compels vehicles to slow down to 60 kilometres an hour when passing any of these vehicles or people in the different categories. I'm just curious to know if that is 60 kilometres an hour for the adjacent lane or for both lanes on a four-lane highway.

I mean, I think that is something that everyone would like to know more specifically because, of course, you know, we want to make sure that we're following the law, and we want to make sure that that's part of the education program for drivers when this new law comes into force, presumably sometime next year, 2023. Talking about the speed limit and reducing your speed in both lanes or one of the lanes: I think that needs a good clarification point for drivers.

You know, this education thing: we just need to perhaps expand on it a little bit. We all know that some people are slowing down and other people are not slowing down, and that lack of consistency is also unsafe – right? – especially when the road is slippery, like on Sunday on highway 2. If someone is slowing down and somebody else is not slowing down, then it really does endanger potentially multiple vehicles, piling up and slipping and sliding, along with the workers that are on the side of the road, too. I think a pretty robust education program needs to be with this bill, and it has to be quite emphatic and enforced straight away and consistently as well. I'm sure everyone can think of a time, or just even the last time you drove, when there were some people slowing down for activity on the side of the road and other people that weren't slowing down. That just creates an unsafe circumstance, for sure.

Another element to this – again, you know, opening up the Traffic Safety Act, I would suggest perhaps having more consistency around the lights that denote an emergency vehicle or a tow truck or a snowplow, say, for example, to have perhaps more consistency around those lights so that people can have an instant reaction when they see those things and to know: action, reaction. You see that certain coloured light, a certain resonance in that light, and you slow down straight away, right? Right now you have sort of a whole bunch of different colours and a bunch of different strengths of light. If that could be standardized somehow, I think that that would really help as well because, of course, when you're dealing with moving from 110 kilometres an hour down to 60, it's almost like it has to be fast enough so you don't even have to have a conscious thought about it; you just slow down.

You know, again, that's how the human brain works. If you see a consistent stimuli, then you can get a more consistent response, right? Certain colour, certain intensity of light and, boom, you know what to do straight away. That would be something that I would suggest in this amendment, since we're opening up the Traffic Safety Act in the first place, in regard to roadside safety.

I think that that probably – you can always learn from other jurisdictions as well, right? I mean, I know that B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario have all put in legislation like this to cover emergency vehicles, so perhaps we could explore what they've done and what their experience has been in those other provinces so that, you know, we can learn from best practices and make our roads as safe as possible.

Again, in regard to the fine structure I just have a question about – certainly, the fine structure is in keeping with how fast somebody is going. I'm just curious to know for clarification. Can I get the minister to tell us more about: are there demerits involved with that as well? Of course, that's a good deterrent – right? – not just the money that comes from the fine but, you know, insurance issues down the road if you are receiving demerits for that kind of traffic infraction.

Yeah. Those are my first thoughts about this bill. I mean, I certainly think that I and our caucus can support it. We're always looking for ways to make sure we keep our roads safe. You know, we have, I think, still an unacceptable amount of crashes and injuries and fatalities in our province. Every weekend we hear about these things, especially on our roads, and it's incumbent upon this Chamber to ensure that we have maximum safety while travelling the roads and byways of our province.

Those are my comments on this bill, Bill 5. I certainly welcome the balance of the debate here over the next few days.

Thank you very much.

5:30

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise at this late afternoon hour to provide some initial thoughts at second reading of Bill 5, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022, as brought forward by the Minister of Transportation, to provide some assurances to the minister and to Executive Council and to the Chamber of the people of Alberta that indeed, as has been discussed by my hon. colleagues for Edmonton-North West and Edmonton-Ellerslie, we do not have any concerns with this particular piece of legislation, concerns for the substance that is in the act. What we primarily concern ourselves with is what is not in the act.

Certainly, the basis for our support of this particular amendment act is that we support keeping workers safe, and we support keeping our highways safe. I spend an awful lot of time on highway 2 and highway 3 and various others, and I know that, you know, driving by car is statistically one of the most dangerous things that we do in the course of our lives. We should probably take it more seriously given the risk that we undertake every time that we get on the highways. Of course, that's even doubly so given the kind of weather conditions with which Alberta drivers grapple on a far too regular basis, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West points out; for example, on Sunday night, where things were quite treacherous between Red Deer and Edmonton.

I think there's no question that this is a common-sense reform to our traffic laws, and there's no question that safety for people stopped on the side of the highway has been a concern of the members of this House because it has quite frankly affected one of our own. We have seen the tragic passing of the Member for Calgary-Greenway at the time, the hon. Manmeet Bhullar, who in

2015 was stopped at the side of the road, and a collision occurred, and he, in fact, lost his life.

You know, I will never forget that day, Mr. Speaker, because both the Minister of Energy and I were slated to drive to Calgary on that very same road going the other direction. We were just discussing in the Speaker's lounge, just behind the chair, whether we were going to go or how we were going to get there or whether we were going to cancel our next day's activities because a blizzard had come in when we received that shocking news that Member Bhullar had been involved in a traffic collision while stopped at the side of the road. There's no question that the Minister of Transportation bringing forward this Traffic Safety Amendment Act is of central concern to many of us. Everyone deserves to be safe at work or on their way to work.

I do think that some of the clarification questions, for example, around the extent of the public education campaign, that the hon. Member for Grande Prairie has raised, the extent to which the Traffic Safety Amendment Act could either via legislation, ministerial order, or a simple matter of policy begin to work on some of the pieces the Member for Edmonton-North West flags with respect to the colour of lights and the required sort of signals for people to slow down – they are, you know, quite different between different tow truck companies or tow truck styles and snowplows, et cetera. I certainly wouldn't mind knowing a little bit more, perhaps at the committee stage, from the minister around the public education campaign piece. I mean, many Albertans are already used to slowing down, obviously, for law enforcement and others given that that came in – I think it was in 2005. It was some time ago.

Many of us already do at least try to get over and moderate the speed when there are tow trucks for the reasons that I identified, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, the members of this Chamber are not alone in knowing someone who has been involved in a collision on the side of the road. It's an extremely dangerous place to be. You know, some of those public education pieces, I think, would be really great for the members to have a bit more information on simply because our constituents are going to be asking, because it is a fairly common experience for those of us over 16 to drive down the road. These are conversations that are really important to people's daily lives.

There is no question that this is a missed opportunity to not clarify in the act some of the ministerial powers around a commercial or even a private driver's, any operator's licence revocation if vehicles are used for unlawful activities. Now, I was a little confused why it wasn't undertaken in the first instance given how these laws work and how some of the law enforcement powers, as soon as the operator of a vehicle is doing something unlawful – indeed, the one place where we don't have much in civil liberties is in the operation of a motor vehicle. Even the Supreme Court has ruled on this, that we are not subject to the same sorts of rules around unreasonable search and seizure, ability to stop, provide identification, all of these sorts of things. As soon as there's a vehicle involved, the legal rubric that surrounds us as individuals changes considerably.

Having said that, you know, the Official Opposition at the time in particular – I really did support using every possible tool, including an injunction and suspension of commercial vehicle licensing and/or taking actions on commercial vehicle insurance, as was done by the Ford government in Ontario, simply because it would have given law enforcement more indication of the provincial government's seriousness and the seriousness with which the province took the economic harms that were being visited upon the people of southern Alberta, agricultural producers, manufacturers, exporters, and others. Certainly, I was probably the

first person putting up their hand, saying: yes, I will make haste to the Legislature, if need be, to amend this act immediately.

There is no question that now, even when we find ourselves here some weeks later, the Official Opposition would facilitate a hasty and uneventful addition of this ministerial power to the act, and there is no reason at all why Parliamentary Counsel could not be expeditiously put to work on an amendment. We could all work together for the betterment of this province and ensure that law enforcement has every tool that they need should this sort of practice be repeated once again. I don't think that this is the last time that we will see these sorts of tactics, these sorts of disruptive tactics using heavy equipment, in order to essentially hold an economy hostage and interfere with the movement of people and goods across an international border crossing. There's no question that we encourage the minister to do so, and we would be happy to work with whomever in this Chamber would like to work with us on this matter.

Now, in terms of the consultations I commend the minister. You know, government surveys can often shed some degree of light on where the people of Alberta are at, and 92 per cent is, of course, a clear indication of where Albertans are at on this. It's certainly better than 50 per cent plus one; I'll say that right now. But I think that the government could provide, at the committee stage potentially, some analysis or assessment on collision prevention because according to the Alberta Motor Association there have been 36 near misses and 13 serious incidents involving tow trucks in Alberta. Some overall assessment around traffic safety, I think, would be great because it might actually shed some light for the folks in this House on other amendments to the Traffic Safety Act that we could make and that we could work together on, as we are doing in the instance of this piece of legislation, incomplete as these amendments are.

5:40

I do think that some interjurisdictional analysis, if the minister would like to share it with us, again, at the committee stage, such as in Ontario and British Columbia, where these sorts of amendments have been made, would be helpful both for the public to understand where this train may be going, to mix metaphors a little bit, and where we can actually make our roads safer in a common-sense way that ensures the free flow of people and goods up and down our highways.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments on this bill except to say this. There is no question that we can provide our concurrence with this piece of legislation fairly quickly. It seems to me that it is a rare opportunity for us to do so in a time that is extremely polarized. The elements that are not contained within this legislation are further evidence of that polarization, that we couldn't even do that simple thing to ensure the free movement of people and goods, to ensure the uninterrupted flow of commerce in southern Alberta and elsewhere. That is, I think, a lamentable commentary on the state of political life and, in particular, on what holds us together in terms of the guardrails of the rule of law in a liberal democracy. The fact that a very simple amendment couldn't be made for, ostensibly, reasons of political calculation, that we couldn't get it through caucus is a darn shame, Mr. Speaker. I hope to see it remedied at the committee stage.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer some of my thoughts on Bill 5, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act,

2022. Now, it's my understanding that this bill would require drivers to slow down where possible when passing roadside workers, including snowplows. First of all, as a resident of the city of Edmonton I have to ask: what exactly is a snowplow? [interjections] I see that we have bipartisan support for that sentiment here. I sincerely hope that the people at city hall hear our complaints because I spent the entire winter trying desperately to drive up and down the roads in this city and being unable to most of the time because apparently the city of Edmonton is a snowplow-free zone. It's unfortunate that the amendments to the Traffic Safety Act don't apply within the city of Edmonton. Maybe it's an issue of safety that we don't see any snowplows on the roads of Edmonton – I don't know – but certainly it is my sincere wish, as it is the majority of the residents of Edmonton, that we see these things called snowplows moving up and down the streets of our city more than once a winter.

In all seriousness, the issue of traffic safety is an incredibly important and personal one to me, Mr. Speaker. When considering the policy options that are available to the province of Alberta to make our highways safer, I'm reminded of my beloved aunt who was killed in a car accident in 2001 after taking her daughter to Augustana College in Camrose and making her way home to Hanna, Alberta. Unfortunately, the road conditions were not good. She was travelling with my grandmother at the time, who was driving. My grandmother made an error that cost my aunt her life and significantly injured herself, and she was never the same as a result of the physical and emotional injuries that she sustained in that accident.

You know, she was cut down in the prime of her life. She was in her mid-40s, and she worked really hard to raise her family. She ran a small farm with her husband, my uncle, and enjoyed that work tremendously, and it all came to an end too soon because of a highway vehicle collision. I think about her every time I get behind the wheel and drive up and down the highways of this province. I hope that I'm not the next victim of a highway collision, or I hope that I don't cause an accident and cause somebody else to be the victim of a highway collision, because I have experienced, personally, the loss of unsafe highway conditions.

You know, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, it is not an uncommon situation. I have in front of me right now data from the government of Alberta, that was updated in February 2021, that showed that between the years 2014 and 2018 on average somewhere between 250 and 300 Albertans lost their lives driving up and down Alberta's highways. On top of that, the fatalities are, of course, the most extreme example, but tens of thousands of people every year suffer some nonfatal injury due to collisions on Alberta's highways. So it's absolutely appropriate that the government of Alberta do everything it can to make our highways safer for the people of this province, and I'm so pleased that the Minister of Transportation is making this amendment to the Traffic Safety Act to require drivers to slow down when they're passing workers on the highway, including snowplow and maintenance workers and other roadside workers. That is the proper and rational response when hundreds of people die every year from a preventable cause.

Let me just say, Mr. Speaker, that that's not the only thing that the government of Alberta has done throughout its history or that people in general have done throughout our history to make highways safer. We've implemented speed limits that are appropriate. We've changed the design of highways to make sure that they're wider, that the curves are the right design to be taken at the speed for which the road is designed. We've changed the design of vehicles to make sure that the glass doesn't shatter, that when vehicles come into contact with one another, the force of that collision isn't transmitted to the people in the vehicle. We require them to wear seat belts. We mandate the presence of airbags. We

require them to turn their lights on when they drive at night. We've improved the kinds of lights, the kinds of headlights that vehicles have so that they're more visible, not just in the evening but also in the daytime. Those are changes that we've made in my lifetime that have had tangible results in improving the safety of people driving up and down Alberta's highways.

5:50

It's hard to remember, Mr. Speaker, but not all of those changes were without controversy. I remember quite clearly the passionate debate that was held when seat belts were required to be worn at all times when people were in a vehicle. My parents and grandparents said that no government was going to take away their freedom to die on the roads, and for a while they refused to wear seat belts. But after a couple of tickets that totalled a hundred bucks, they were happy to give up their freedom. In the end, most of them lived to a ripe old age because they didn't die in fatal vehicle collisions.

Similarly, I remember the debate that was held when jurisdictions passed requirements to turn the lights on on vehicles. There wasn't Facebook at the time but the equivalent of Facebook, right-wing radio, the *Alberta Report*. These kinds of jurisdictions made all kinds of conspiracy claims about the supposed lack of science behind lights improving visibility. Like, it shocks me to think that there were people who actually thought that cars were as visible with their lights off as they were with their lights on during the daytime. That was a matter of intense debate at the time. But, again, governments mandated that people drive with their lights on, and after people were hit with a few hundred-dollar tickets, everybody started to do it. In fact, it's not even an issue anymore. I don't think you can even buy a vehicle that doesn't have automatic daytime running lights anymore. Like, if I wanted to shut the lights off on my vehicle, I would have to go in and rewire it so that it didn't work.

My point is this, Mr. Speaker. As a society we've collectively decided that the number of people who were dying and being injured on highways was unacceptable, and we've moved heaven and earth to do everything in our power to protect people from dying from these preventable causes. I would very much appreciate it if this government took the same approach to managing COVID. I sincerely hope that the government realizes that the power to prevent people from dying and getting sick from COVID is also in their hands and that they can take measures to do that and that those measures may be controversial today, but by sticking to it for just a little while, they will be widely adopted as well.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to vote in favour of this legislation, and I encourage members of the government to go even further and do everything that they can to protect the people of Alberta from every public health issue that currently faces this province, traffic safety as well as COVID.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second reading of Bill 5. Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to speak to Bill 5, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022. I have to say that, you know, you brought up a lot of memories, Member, when you talked about the previous laws that were controversial. I remember being a child with the seat belts and crossing the border into B.C. and it being a big crisis within our family vehicle of having to get us out of the back of the station

wagon and putting all of the kids in a seat belt. As a child I had no idea what was going on, but I knew it upset my parents greatly that they required us in seat belts. Just a trip down memory lane.

When I look at this piece of legislation, I think that it's clearly a no-brainer when it comes to supporting worker safety. We have the ability as government to make decisions that can improve the lives of Albertans, and I think that this legislation does that. When we talk about safety of those working on the roadsides, I think it's really important to acknowledge that anybody that's going to work deserves the right to come home safely, and when it comes to those that are responding to emergencies in traffic, I think there's a lot more that can be done to support them.

I know that when I was doing my PTSD Awareness Day consultations across the province, I met with many workers that work in roadside assistance, and PTSD was quite prevalent in that community. They weren't necessarily the first responders on the scene, but they were responders that cleaned up the mess of a car accident. They were the individuals driving the tow trucks, those kinds of things, and there was significant trauma that was experienced by those individuals. I think that when we're looking at the importance of safety of those individuals, it can't just be about their physical safety. We need to broaden the conversation to include mental health.

While I think that this is easy to support and it clearly acknowledges that their safety is important – and I wholeheartedly agree – I would like to see this government take this same theory and apply it to mental health. When we watched this government roll back PTSD requirements for supports in the workplace, it was very, very concerning. I think that we have a government that acknowledges that worker safety is important, so we have this legislation, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022, that will create legislation that requires drivers to be safe around more than just emergency vehicles. I think that expanding those workers that it requires us to be safe around is so important, but I would encourage the government to apply that same theory to their mental health.

When we look at the impacts of a collision as a result of a roadside accident, the impact on those workers is huge. It's not just the fatalities that have an impact. It's the mental health of those workers that I think is so important, and it's not discussed. I would just really, really encourage that with this theory, this piece of legislation that creates a space for physical safety on the road, we need to talk about the trauma that can happen to these same individuals.

When I look at the legislation and I see that it's been expanded to include snowplows and trucks with lights, I think a question that I have is: does this legislation also expand the lanes? Right now my understanding is that if there is an emergency vehicle pulled over, it's only the direct lane that is responsible to reduce their speed. If you're on a two-lane or three-lane roadway, are all of the lanes impacted? Does this legislation address that? I know that that's something I've heard specifically from tow truck drivers, that it's nice to be able to have all traffic flowing at a reduced speed . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but time for debate this afternoon has elapsed, and pursuant to Standing Order 4 the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, March 22, 2022

Day 13

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 22, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading Bill 3 Special Days Act

The Speaker: I see the chief government whip has risen.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Minister of Culture to move second reading of Bill 3, the Special Days Act.

We all know the importance of recognizing special anniversaries or occasions in our lives. They serve as opportunities to come together with ones that we love, celebrate the achievements we have made, or make new traditions that strengthen our families. The same is true for many special days, weeks, and months that Albertans recognize together. They unite people, and right now we need to find ways to find joy and work together, whether it's the anniversary date the first Ukrainians arrived in Alberta, which we celebrate on Ukrainian Canadian Heritage Day, or Month of the Artist, which celebrates creative work and artists in the province. Alberta's government has recognized these types of days through ongoing proclamations, one-time declarations, or through passing legislation. Proclamations, declarations, and acts have been used as ad hoc solutions depending on the significance of the date. This has caused confusion for Albertans and within the government as well.

Bill 3, the Special Days Act, proposes a simple, standardized way to establish dates in perpetuity. Ministers will be able to issue ministerial declarations through ministerial orders. All dates recognized this way will be tracked on a centralized web page. Dates that have been previously proclaimed or created through legislation will also be listed online. Not only will this help reduce confusion and duplicate requests; it will also help more Albertans learn about the cultures, causes, and histories behind each date. Dates that are only recognized once will be recognized through ministerial statements.

There are some requirements for dates to be officially designated by the government of Alberta. Dates must be submitted by groups, not individuals. They must also follow the guidelines that have always applied to these types of requests. The special days, weeks, months, or years must be directly connected to the province of Alberta. They must also be nonpartisan, not offensive, and adhere to the principles of the Alberta human rights code.

This legislation will help foster more cultural awareness, celebrate Alberta's diversity, and inspire people to take a stand on important issues. I hope that all members, on both sides of this House, will support this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members – sorry. Were you about to say . . .

Ms Issik: I was going to move to adjourn debate.

The Speaker: Perfect.

Hon. members, the hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women and chief government whip on behalf of the Minister of

Culture has moved second reading of Bill 3, the Special Days Act, and has also moved that that debate be adjourned.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 7 Appropriation Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate: Mr. Toews]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak to the Appropriation Act, 2022? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I think this is my first opportunity to speak to the Appropriation Act, 2022, which I believe was tabled last night. It definitely is one of the overarching government bills as it relates to the budget, the no-help budget that's been presented in this Assembly.

I will say that I think when we all saw the fortunate increases – and it's complicated. Obviously, I'm very grateful as an Albertan that the resources we have have hit a new, very high price that appears to be sustaining for at least a bit. And, obviously, there are complicating emotional factors when we think about the people in Ukraine and the horrific situation there as they continue to fight to defend their land and their right to self-government, self-determination, because, of course, the global price of oil has been impacted by this horrific conflict.

The price of oil, of course, the oil here in the province of Alberta – we all own the natural resources that we benefit from here in the province of Alberta. That is something that every single one of us as residents of this province has a sense of ownership over and a right to ownership, not just a sense. We are the owners. We are the stewards of the riches that we have here in the province of Alberta. And we, of course, have a responsibility to ensure that we harness those resources in a sustainable way that brings full benefit and maximum economic opportunities to the people of Alberta, including the benefits that are created through good, full-time jobs, not just in the extraction but also in opportunities where we do upgrade here locally and, of course, all of the additional products that can be created from waste products that are related to those natural resources as well.

We are here today considering a budget that is impacted by global factors significantly when it comes to the revenue side. I am grateful that we have additional revenue in this province for the first time in a number of years because of the extremely successful price in oil right now that we are experiencing. When I think back on other governments and having lived in Alberta my whole life – I did spend three summers in Toronto, but the remainder of my life has been right here in Alberta. When I think about all of the lessons that we've learned or hopefully have learned about – you probably all remember the bumper stickers, at least those of you who have lived here for more than a few years, the bumper stickers about, you know: please, God, give us another boom; we promise not to waste it this time.

An Hon. Member: That's not quite the words.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. Maybe that's the G-rated version, but that's how I paraphrase it. Happy to be corrected on the record later by my colleagues.

When I think about the opportunities that I think that bumper sticker was speaking to, one of the biggest ones was an opportunity to invest in a diversified economy. Certainly, we made a number of inroads in a number of sectors, particularly tech sectors, during the

four years that we had to govern in this province. The current government, today's government, has an opportunity to extend those. Unfortunately, they cancelled a number of the different programs that we had in place to support economic diversification, but the good news is that some of them are coming back. Some of them are even coming back through the budget that we're here considering tonight.

I really wish that we had more of a focus on taking this opportunity we have right now through this boom and investing that and making sure that we have strong jobs in the oil and gas sector; strong jobs in the offshoots from that, including hydrogen; strong jobs in the manufacturing sector; strong jobs in tech and AI; strong jobs in the public service; strong jobs in health care and education; strong jobs in renewables; and, of course, the list goes on. I want every kid who goes to school in Alberta to see themselves living their full lives here, to see themselves as creating a long-term, permanent path for them and their families to be successful here at home. No matter what their personal interests are, their political ideation, their values are, I want them to see themselves here for the long term.

Far too many young people have been leaving Alberta for a number of reasons, I am sure. One that many talk to me about, especially recently, in the last year or so, is the cost of a postsecondary education in this province. It has gone from being one of the most affordable places, because we brought in a cap on tuition and we funded postsecondary for population growth and inflation when we were in government to make sure that we could keep those tuition rates more affordable – we were one of the most affordable in the country. That is no longer the case here in Alberta as tuition has continued to be jacked up over and over and over again by the current government.

Another one is employment opportunities. There are many Albertans who don't see themselves feeling success and finding success here in the long term. We saw recently a scientifically validated report, from a survey of teachers in the province of Alberta, that shows about a third of Alberta teachers, a third – if you think about your child's school, a third of the teachers in that school – planning on either not teaching next year or moving to another province to teach next year. If we're to think back just one or two budget cycles, to earlier in the pandemic, when we talked about the need to provide more supports to students here in the province of Alberta, when we talked about the benefits of reducing class size, the government would say: well, where can we possibly find all these teachers to hire in order to reduce class sizes? But they sure don't seem to have a problem right now with chasing teachers out of the province or out of the profession. That should be a massive reality check for every Albertan who thinks, "Well, it's bad, but it's not that bad," because it is already that bad, and it is only going to keep getting worse if we continue to look to the current government to guide public education in this province.

7:40

The truth is that the UCP can't be trusted with public education. They can't be trusted to work in partnership with teachers. One of the first things they did when they came in – and this, of course, relates to Bill 7, Appropriation Act, 2022, Mr. Speaker, because it's about where the government chooses to put its money, and where you put your money reflects what your values are as well, of course. One of the first things they did was tear up the memorandum of understanding, the agreement that was reached between the Education minister of the day and the teachers of the province when it comes to creating the curriculum that guides the education system, that puts the requirements in for instruction, and the legal

obligations that teachers have to share and instill and to support students in their learning, in reaching curricular outcomes.

When they tore that up, what they said to teachers at that moment and what continues to be the case through action is that this isn't a partnership. There are employers and employees, and the government thought that the government knew better and that teachers would not be partners in creating the bones of the curriculum to ensure that all students had an opportunity to be successful.

That maybe wasn't a budget issue, but then shortly thereafter the government decided that teachers' pensions were going to be the next thing on the chopping block. I don't know what the obsession is that specifically this Premier and a number of Conservative governments have with attacking public-sector pensions, but it is so disrespectful to people who have rightfully negotiated and planned and invested and deferred their payment – those are their wages being put into a retirement savings plan to benefit those who retire from the profession.

They were taken to court, because that's what teachers had to do, and the government lost, so that's on pause for now, thank goodness, but again we see an intention to tear up an agreement, a long-standing agreement between teachers and their employer, the province, because the government feels that they know best. The courts had to say: "No, you don't. You don't get to do that."

That's where we're at in those couple of decisions. Then, of course, we see in this budget in black and white – and the minister will only talk about one year. They won't talk about actually looking back the three years this government has been already in a leadership position in this province, but in the tables as part of the fiscal plan there are tabs and numbers for certificated and noncertificated staff. If you look at the adjustments that the government made to the certificated staff number for teachers – that means teachers in the province of Alberta – they show that it isn't going down this year, but what they did is that they put an adjustment to show that it went down significantly last year, and they just didn't tell anybody about it in the budget. Then if you go to the year before, you see that it went down that year, too.

So what you actually look at when you look back three years is that the difference, between when the NDP was in government and today with the UCP in government, is about a thousand teachers fewer working in Alberta classrooms. That's in the budget. That's the Appropriation Act we're being asked to ratify in this place.

So the government continues to say, "Oh, no, no; teachers are great," but all of their actions show that they are cutting teachers, they are tearing up agreements around involving them and making decisions about the curriculum, they are going after their pensions and lost in court, so thank goodness for that, but why should teachers have to take the government to court to be able to defend their own earnings that they're deferring for their retirement? Well, it's because clearly this current government, today's government, can't be trusted with education, and they can't be trusted to work with educators.

Those are a couple of the points I want to make as the Appropriation Act relates to education on the operational side. There are other significant issues on operations. Actually, I will touch on a few others. Insurance, as I'm sure all members of this place have heard from their constituents and their stakeholders – I'm sure school boards have reached out to many of the MLAs in this place; many have reached out to me – has gone up and up and up under the UCP. For school divisions that own a number of school buildings, sometimes a few dozen, sometimes more than 200, having your insurance on all of those assets go up cuts into the amount of money that is available to support student learning

because you have to pay your insurance. You can't operate without having insurance.

By failing to actually properly regulate the insurance industry and provide stability for schools and for students, the government is taking money out of classrooms because that money needs to be spent on insurance for buildings or insurance for school buses, fuel for school buses. There's a variety of different systems here in Alberta. I know the minister of children likes to talk about how unique Alberta is in the child care sector because we have public, nonprofit, and private, and it's essentially the same – it is absolutely the same – in transportation for schools as well. We have some school authorities that run their own transportation system. When their fuel costs and their insurance costs and their staffing costs go up, they see that and eat that immediately in terms of their budget.

Then we have some that work through outside contractors. I will tell you that there are some contractors who are losing money every day right now because they signed an agreement one, two, or three years ago with the school authority to provide transportation services for that school, and then their costs have gone up significantly because the government has lifted caps on insurance, and they've also seen increased costs with their insurance and with their fuel. There are a number of contractors who are losing money right now and are at the point where they either have to decide to take their buses off the road or go back to the school authority to plead for a top-up so that they can afford to keep operating, or they're going to have to continue to eat significant losses. Then, of course, they will have to negotiate them into the next year. What kind of government thinks it's okay to have the transportation of children from their home to their school, a right to education, a right that I hope all members of this place share, at risk because the government continues to fail to properly fund for transportation?

Now, the minister will say: we launched a task force. That's true; there was a task force to review student transportation. It submitted its report well over a year ago to the minister, and the minister will probably say: see, there was an increase to the transportation budget. There was. It's, in transportation, about the equivalent of population growth and inflation if inflation were only population growth and inflation, but what it actually is, as we've rightfully pointed out in this place over and over again: increased cost of fuel far exceeds the cost of inflation; increased cost of insurance far exceeds the cost of inflation. This 4 per cent increase is far from sufficient to cover the massive cost that right now contractors and school boards are eating. When I say, "eating," that means they're taking money again out of the classroom to pay for those additional costs to get kids to and from school.

When the minister says, "Well, there can't possibly be fewer teachers because we gave zeros last year," well, zeros when you're dealing with an increased population and increased inflationary costs as well as, let's absolutely mention, the increased educational needs that students are facing everywhere in this province – the last few years have been very difficult for Alberta families, and instead of stepping up and saying, "You know what? You're a mom with a disabled child; we're going to make sure that your child gets as much support and nurturing right now as possible," one of the first things the government did during COVID was fire more than 20,000 educational assistants who were dedicated to work with those students. The member is right to be outraged and disappointed in the actions of the government. The member is right to be upset and outraged. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The Deputy Government House Leader will come to order. I've made a lot of comments about having conversations with other members who are also seated in the

Assembly. I'd encourage him to join the debate, not debate from his chair.

7:50

Ms Hoffman: One of the first things that happened, Mr. Speaker, was that the government chose to lay off more than 20,000 educational workers, and that included bus drivers. Just a few days earlier, when we were asking about school nutrition programs and hungry children who weren't going to be able to be fed at school, the minister decided to talk about bus drivers in southern Alberta who were delivering food hampers to families in need, what a great thing that those bus drivers were doing. They also got their pink slips. They got laid off. Educational assistants who are dedicated to work with disabled children got laid off.

Oh, and all of this at the same time the government has cut the supports for PUF, which is specific program unit funding dedicated to three-, four-, and five-year-olds – or at least it was three-, four-, and five-year-olds – who have measurable delays. All of the research shows that if you invest that money in the early years – and I am sure that the Minister of Children's Services is well aware that investment in the early years pays significant dividends and that particularly if you catch kids up on those areas of deficit when they're the preschool ages – three, four, and five – and get them ready for an even start in grade 1, their educational attainment tracks much more consistently with students who were assessed at three years old as having no delays.

Part of the rush now that the government gave through the budget process was: "Well, we don't have as many supports when they turn six, so that's not fair to the kid that turns six, that when they were five, they had more supports. Therefore, we'll get rid of those supports a year earlier. Therefore, we'll take the supports away when they turn five instead of taking them away when they turn six." Totally counter to what all of the research shows. Totally counter to all of the lived experience that those kids have been through.

Also, I want to remind you, Mr. Speaker, that we've been living through the pandemic chaos through this current government continuing to have children and their families and the staff who work with them have to react last minute to closures, being shifted online, being sent back in person. There are kids who are three, four, and now five who haven't had the level of PUF intervention that they should be entitled to, that the research shows will make a huge difference to their learning outcomes, their earning potential, their ability to contribute back to the broader economy. They have been deprived because of the chaos caused under the current government's leadership when it comes to schools. They were deprived of full supports for the year that they were three. They were deprived of full supports for the year that they were four because of the response to COVID, and now that they're five, they don't get the funding that they were once entitled to. That is something that is shameful.

Again, I started the conversation by talking about how fortunate we are that we have additional revenue in this budget, significantly increased revenue because of the price of natural resources, particularly oil and gas, and how those resources belong to every single Albertan. The fact that here we have three-, four-, and five-year-olds continuing to make massive sacrifices, sacrifices to their self-esteem, to their ability to be successful in school, to their ability to be successful in terms of their earning potential, their ability to go on to postsecondary and the world of work as equal partners in the world of work and the fact that the government now, with all of this additional revenue, refuses to go back on some of the most cruel cuts they've made to vulnerable

children, I think, is – I was going to say embarrassing – shameful, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, 2022, is before the Assembly at second reading. Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address this for the first time in second reading and to my colleague the Education critic, who spent a great deal of time talking about her disappointment with regard to the appropriation of monies or the lack of monies going into the Education expense and capital investment lines. This piece of legislation, of course, that appropriates funds for Budget 2022: we have it before us, and that codifies the government's agenda. I would just like to go through some of the difficulties, the disagreements that I have with various ministries and their appropriations, starting on page 4.

The first one – and it hasn't been talked about a great deal yet – is Advanced Education. Of course, postsecondary education is critical for our future leaders, and without it we as a province don't really get the best out of the young minds that are growing up in this province and aren't able to attract more people for postsecondary education if we don't have quality educational institutions. What I'm disappointed in, of course, in this \$2.5 billion for expense and the low amount of capital investment and then the financial transactions, which is the on-lending to institutions through the Finance department, is – well, on the on-lending piece now those institutions are going to be paying half a per cent to .75 per cent on top of what the government of Alberta is able to get, bonds or being able to attract money into Alberta. That's an additional cost, and it never was there before, Mr. Speaker. This government has decided to charge for the on-lending of monies to both advanced education institutions as well as municipalities as well as health authorities as well as airport authorities. That's a cost that will make life more expensive, and it already is getting quite expensive.

Back to advanced education. Of course, we know that tuitions are going up. We've seen some incredible raises to the actual cost of education. Some of those are more than 50 per cent of what they were last year. That is a problem when you look at people going through a four- or six- or eight-year program and getting out of that program with tens and tens of thousands of dollars in debt. As well, now they'll have more of that. We put a great deal of time and energy as a government into capping tuition fees, and students appreciated that. Universities appreciated the fact that they could be competitive, that they weren't at the top of the pack. Now, very much so, they're getting to be in some courses priced out of the market for attracting students.

The next one I want to talk about briefly. I'll skip over Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development for a second and go to Children's Services. Just over \$2 billion in expenses and some smaller amount in capital investments. The things that aren't in this that disappoint me are – well, it is in there, but it was far too long in taking place, and that's the child care agreement. We know that it took several months of delay before that was brought into this province for parents. It's still at a point where parents were having to pay pretty high amounts for their child care, their daycare for their young ones. This government seemed to be bickering back and forth with the federal government instead of doing what other provinces did, signed on and took part. [interjection] No, Thank you. No. Thank you. Instead of what other provinces did: quickly signed on to that program and got those monies to parents. That is unfortunate that that's taken place.

Truth and reconciliation is another area that hasn't been given enough time and attention in this file. The Indigenous youth who

are part of the care of the province of Alberta need additional supports, and unfortunately we're not seeing that in this budget to the extent that it needs to be for Children's Services.

8:00

The next one is Community and Social Services. There's an expense line of about \$4 billion. You know, my colleagues on this side were very proud of the fact that we indexed income support programs and made that something to be really, really proud of in this province. Other provinces are doing that now, but we were one of the first ones to get that done and to backdate financial supports to people on income support programs that would reflect the indexing of each year. The fact that it was taken away and that it is only kind of mused about by this government is a total disappointment to me.

There's FCSS under this file as well, I believe, Mr. Speaker. We were the government that brought that up to \$100 million back in I think 2016, perhaps, well, probably 2016. We increased it from \$77 million, that was set in place by the previous PC government for a long, long time. I was going to say dog's years, but it was a long time, and it hadn't improved. FCSS dollars are one of the best investments this government can make in communities through nonprofits and charities, because there's no profit motive, of course, taken off that \$100 million to the people who are managing that money. It's leveraged up in the community by at least 20 per cent, and many municipalities or counties put far more than that in because they believe in the power of their volunteers. They believe in the opportunity to address the preventative social services needs of their communities, and the fact that this budget line under Community and Social Services has not taken the opportunity to increase this particular budget line of FCSS is another failure of this government.

Ms Hoffman: Can I intervene?

Member Ceci: Sure.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, for the opportunity to intervene. When the member was talking about FCSS, I was reflecting on the excellent work that Meals on Wheels provides. Most recently I had the opportunity to thank the executive director here in Edmonton, Liz Tondou, who is retiring after 20 years in the role of executive director for Meals on Wheels, something that has seen a significant increase, particularly during the last two years, about a 40 per cent increase to the demand that they have to feed, primarily seniors, who are stuck at home and trying to be as safe as possible.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I wonder if he could talk about that their only funding comes from FCSS and about the importance of FCSS as it relates to feeding hungry seniors or others throughout the community. I think that the services they provide are fundamental to keeping people safe during, especially, the last few years but moving forward as well. I would welcome an opportunity to hear more about that from the member.

Member Ceci: Yeah. Thank you for the intervention.

Of course, operational funding is what they might use their FCSS dollars for, to pay for their staff. They get a lot of donations, probably of foodstuffs, and FCSS is the grease that makes many of these community organizations work on a regular basis. Brown bagging for kids was mentioned by someone in the House either today or yesterday, and of course for that, providing lunches for kids in schools, FCSS is very helpful because it provides a small

stipend for volunteers, to support volunteers, or even for staff so that they're not totally taking out of their pockets all the time.

I just want to flip over and talk about Culture and Status of Women for a second. CFEP, I believe, is under Culture and Status of Women, and I did see where it was suspended for a couple of years here, and now I think it's coming back under this budget. That's a good thing, but the fact that it's probably coming back at the same amount of money as it was two years ago, when it was cut, really leaves those organizations and the communities that depend on CFEP for ongoing support dollars out in the cold. Many have struggled, many have closed, and the fact that CFEP dollars come in at the same amount – again, it's one of the best kinds of investment you can make because it's leveraged up in the community.

My colleague the critic for Education talked a great deal about the challenges, the difficulties, the problems with the Education budget that's before us: \$5 billion in the expense line and about half a million in capital investment and then on-lending. Frankly, there are too few schools started in this province. There needs to be more investment in K to 12 schools, and we're hearing that. I know that there are many advocates in the Calgary area public system that are looking for schools on the west side of town, and the fact that this budget leaves that part of the city out in the cold again is a tragedy.

As my colleague was saying, there are too few educational supports in schools, and the fact that we're not seeing more money put in the expense line so that school boards can do that hiring is an oversight of major proportions. The educational assistants, the teachers, the supports for young people in schools are not there in this budget, haven't been there under the support of this government. It's another problem that needs to get rectified in subsequent budgets and may not get rectified until a subsequent government is in place.

The war room, under Energy, is the next one. I'm looking at that, and I know that the war room costs of \$30 million a year, or \$82,000 a day, could be redeployed and hire a great number of educational assistants. I think \$82,000 would probably cover salary and benefits for one educational assistant in one school board location somewhere in the province. The fact that we're wasting 365 educational assistants every year because the war room is still there is a tragedy, in my view.

The Environment and Parks expense line is just over half a billion dollars. The fact that some of those – sorry. I'll just back up. In the Environment and Parks area there are a couple of areas that, really, are unfortunate that they're in this budget. One of them is the Kananaskis pass fee, that is being collected from all users in Kananaskis – or from the users that pay the fee in Kananaskis; I guess that is a better way to say it. The fact that Peter Lougheed set that park up for all Albertans and now there is a fee to access that park is a disappointment not only to me but to lots of Albertans who are not happy with that. The fact that more isn't done to regulate OHVs under this Environment and Parks budget is also an oversight. That seems to be a preference for OHV users and the total opposite for people who have no impact on the environment, which is hikers and campers, well, hikers, for sure, in Kananaskis.

Going on to Health, we see that there's a major expense line there, of course. It's our biggest budget line, at over \$22 billion. The difficulties that I have with the Health budget are the fact that EMS – in listening to people at both RMA and AM in the previous two weeks, they were talking regularly and in an unsatisfied way about EMS in their communities and the fact that they see that system as broken. I'll have more to say later.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

8:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Appropriation Act, Bill 7, is for debate, and I see the hon. Minister of Children's Services has risen.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know the member opposite wasn't interested in taking an intervention, but I do have some points of clarification that I would like to make. I do want to talk a little bit about this budget and the importance I think it has for Alberta families, families like mine. It's part of the reason why I chose to run in the first place. You know you're a fiscal conservative when you tear up during a budget speech when the Finance minister says that we've balanced the budget for the first time in eight years and only the second time in 14. Obviously, the members opposite have a hard time understanding what that is all about. Our approach was not: borrow, tax, spend. It was to bring down our spending in line with other comparable provinces while still maintaining our investments to support those most vulnerable.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it's also about growing the economy. It's positive that we're seeing more investment every day, more jobs every day, again, quite the opposite of the record of the members opposite. I'm happy to remind them: 180,000 jobs lost, chased, in fact, out of this province during those four years. Yet we are seeing 130,000 jobs created last year, in a pandemic, and thousands and thousands of jobs already, a number of thousands of jobs, this year alone.

I also want to talk a little bit about Children's Services. Our budget was obviously increased greatly, partially because of the agreement that we signed with the federal government to support early learning and child care. I do want to talk about that a little bit because, Mr. Speaker, I heard the member opposite say: "You know, they should have signed faster. They took too long. They fought too hard." Why is that a confusing concept? It's because fighting for Albertans means listening to them and pushing back when Ottawa tries to impose their ideology on Albertans. I know that's a tough one for the members opposite.

I mean, today we saw again, obviously, the NDP-Liberal alliance in Ottawa and the commitment to support continued growth in nonprofit and public spaces, Mr. Speaker. What is one of the things we fought for in that early learning and child care deal? It was to support private operators, private operators that are largely female entrepreneurs in every single corner of this province, women oftentimes who stepped up and said: "With the economy growing, with the jobs boom, I'm going to help out my neighbours. I'm going to start a child care centre." We believe in that type of entrepreneurial spirit. In fact, I truly believe that that is what grew Alberta.

I am curious to know. What I was hoping to ask the member opposite is that given that private operators were completely left out of their pilot program, given that we heard from a number of operators who said, "Under the NDP's plan we would have to change ourselves into nonprofits" – we value their contributions. We value the spaces they create, the innovation they bring, the high-quality child care that they offer Alberta families, and we know that they are needed. In fact, we got the federal government to agree to that in our plan. I believe the wording was something like: we will continue to rely on the creativity and innovation of the private sector to continue to step up and meet the needs of Alberta parents.

We're going to do that, but, you know, obviously, what we hear from the members opposite: sign faster. Just like they did, right? "Sign on the dotted line. Don't listen to Albertans. Sell out to Justin Trudeau." Sure, Mr. Speaker. We know what they did. We know their record. That's certainly not something we're interested in. I was really hoping to be able to ask the member opposite if that's, in fact, what they support, selling out to Justin Trudeau.

I think that now we're at the Notley-Singh-Trudeau alliance. Is that where we are?

An Hon. Member: You can't say names.

Ms Schulz: Oh, sorry. Mr. Speaker, I apologize, and I withdraw. I apologize and withdraw.

But, you know, we do have this alliance that we see, obviously, the NDP-Trudeau alliance, alive and well.

One of the things that we are absolutely not going to take advice from the members opposite on is, you know, how best to represent those views of Albertans. We will fight for Albertans. We will never apologize for that, Mr. Speaker. We take their feedback, and we use it to develop the programs that we're going to implement. I think that that's what we see in here.

I also wanted to talk a little bit – and, obviously, this deal is good news for Alberta parents. The feedback we have been hearing, Mr. Speaker, is so positive. Why? Because instead of focusing on ideology, we thought: who are we here to represent? Ultimately, for me, that is hard-working parents right across this province of Alberta. We put them first.

We were not one of the first provinces to sign that agreement with the federal government. No; that is true. We took the time to fight, to get a fair deal, a deal that worked for Alberta parents. But in rolling out those dollars, we were, in fact, one of the first two provinces to roll affordability dollars out to parents. Why? Because we put parents first. Ahead of ideology, ahead of any agenda, we put parents first, because we want them to be able to take advantage of postsecondary opportunities, training, retraining, reskilling so that they can take part in this new economy. We know we have labour shortages that we're about to face, and we want parents to be able to access postsecondary or to just jump right in and take advantage of the thousands of jobs that we're seeing created here every day with the amazing investment we're seeing in Alberta.

Now, child care is obviously something that matters a lot to me as a working parent of two young kids, but I also want to talk a little bit about child intervention. I do think, Mr. Speaker, it is rich to hear the members opposite, or that member, specifically, address the child intervention budget. I do believe that at the time that the members opposite were removed from this side of the House to their new seats on that side of the House, that member opposite was, in fact, the Finance minister, the Finance minister who, even after an all-party panel on child intervention, left child intervention underfunded. You know what they said? "Okay. Great. We're headed into an election. Well, we don't need to really worry about that, so let's leave it to chance." That is irresponsible. It's dangerous.

When we came into these seats, it's something that we take very seriously. It's something that my colleagues on this side of the House talked a lot about, the importance of supporting the most vulnerable children and families in this province. So not only did we fund their encumbrance, all those expenses that they didn't budget for, they didn't invest in – we did that – then we budgeted for that in each and every year after that. I know that sometimes it's hard to remember what happened a few years back, but given that the member opposite was, in fact, the Finance minister, I did want to remind him of his record in that area.

Mr. Speaker, once again, this is an area that I am really passionate about. This budget is very good news, not only for working parents but for vulnerable Albertans. We also maintained our investments in prevention and early intervention services. Instead of just continuing to fund things that had been funded because they've always been funded that way, we redesigned our network of family resource networks. It was new. It started in April 2020. None of us anticipated a pandemic when we undertook transformational change, but we continued to fund \$63 million to support this really purpose-built network of community organizations that offer a wide range of support services for families and for kids right across this province.

Just as we committed to doing when we made these changes – I know, obviously, the members opposite made all sorts of accusations about what that was going to look like, but ultimately it was what people were asking for. It's what families were asking for. It was what our community partners offering these services – they were asking for this, so we said: look, we're going to do this. And once again, as opposed to government knows best, we made sure we listened to those community partners. We designed this program with them in mind, and then we saved some money, saying: "Hey, you know what? Sometimes when governments roll out a new program there are things that we miss or areas that were underrepresented or gaps that we see in the system, and it's our responsibility to step up and address those gaps." And we're happy to do that.

These are all things that are funded in this budget, Budget 2022, a budget that is balanced, Mr. Speaker, that brings our spending in line with other provinces and continues to drive economic growth and also invests in those most vulnerable in our province. I'm happy to correct the record on those issues, and I would be very happy at some point if we could get answers from the members opposite on some of those issues.

The Speaker: I'm just going to go to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View as we try to go back and forth, but that will be followed by the Member for Calgary-East.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm thrilled to rise and speak today to Bill 7, which is the budget, because, well, I actually think the budget is probably one of the single most important things we do in this place.

It's interesting. I was reminded recently by social media that it was almost exactly seven years ago that I was nominated to run as a candidate for the NDP. That, of course, takes me back to the reasons that I wanted to run in the first place. Those are primarily issues which are extremely well represented in this budget. One of them is to combat the myth of trickle-down economics, that was pervasive under previous governments, under this current government. It's extremely problematic, and I think there's a lot of evidence against it, so I think it's very much worth discussing.

8:20

Another was early intervention. Early intervention saves money, and the way that Conservative parties generally balance budgets is by cutting things like early intervention.

Another, of course, was to combat bad arguments. You know, Mr. Speaker, this is an ideal moment to rise because that argument that went before me was among the worst I have ever heard: all rhetoric, zero argument, no facts, no evidence, bluster over substance. It was an argument that is, well, the perfect example of exactly what I got into government to fight against, people who say a lot of words with no substance behind them and no facts to support them.

I am thrilled to rise at this moment and be able to defend all of those values. Right now we're dealing with the Appropriation Act, 2022. That's the budget, this government's no-help budget, which represents no help for families. This government in this budget has received a massive windfall. Massive. The price of oil is up, up, up, and that's good for Alberta, Mr. Speaker – don't get me wrong – but let's not pretend that it has anything to do with the members opposite that this budget is balanced.

In addition, we stand here in a time when Alberta families are struggling probably more than they have in 30 years, and this government has nothing to offer them, nothing at all, nothing to

combat the costs that they themselves have driven up. So let's talk about those costs.

Property taxes. Now, the members opposite love to say: we don't control property taxes. Except, here's the thing. Municipalities receive funding through the government. I'll speak to the example I know best, which is to say police funding. This government has downloaded police costs and cut police funding on every municipality, so those municipalities have a choice. They can reduce services or they can raise taxes, and that is the choice that this government has forced onto them. So it is this government raising those property taxes and particularly in the instance, Mr. Speaker, of rural municipalities, where they have downloaded literally hundreds of millions of dollars. This government loves to crow about how they funded more police. They didn't fund a thing. They handed that bill to the municipalities of this province.

This government has also raised taxes on families, to the tune of \$1 billion, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] It's true: \$1 billion. There you go. And this is through what they used to refer to as sneaky, pernicious, all sorts of nasty adjectives, which is, of course, their tendency, as we saw with the member who spoke before me. They used to refer to it that way, and now it's the thing that they're doing. They called it sneaky, they called it pernicious, they called it a backdoor tax grab, and now it's the very thing that they're doing. They are raising those taxes on families.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, one of the things they are definitely eroding through inflation is the child tax benefit. Under the NDP government child poverty was cut in half. We cut child poverty in half, and that was largely through the child tax benefit. These folks are working to take that away, and it will reverse the trend, and that is a problem. It is a problem that everyone in this province should be concerned about.

They've also raised tuition, making it harder for average people to go to school to get the education that they need. They've increased interest on tuition, and this, Mr. Speaker, is a particularly interesting one. One of the oddities of public finance is that by raising the interest on student loans, they essentially made money appear, because that's how the accounting works. When they raised the interest on student loans, because it's projected forward through time, it essentially makes sort of more money appear in the budget. Now, obviously, that's standard accounting practice, that's fine, but it's just one more way this budget misrepresents to Albertans.

Another way worth discussing is education. This government will tell you they haven't cut education, but tens of thousands of new students have entered the school system, and they will enter a school system with a thousand fewer teachers. So that's tens of thousands more students, a thousand fewer teachers. That sounds like a cut to me. I mean, if each student gets fewer . . . [interjection] No, thanks. If each student gets less, then I think we wind up with a cut, and that is, to me, extremely problematic.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, we're seeing fewer teachers and fewer actual physical classrooms. So as all these students are entering the system, in Calgary, where I live, over the entire term of this government we get one public school and one Catholic school. That is not nearly enough to accommodate the number of students who are coming into the system. It's incredibly problematic, and when we cut public education, it impacts those who may come from a background that is less wealthy but deserve just as much of a chance.

That's why cuts to public education, like the ones under this government, bother me so much, because public education is an equalizer. It means that regardless of where you came from or how much money your parents had, you are given an equal chance to succeed. When we cut public education, then those students don't

have the same chance to succeed, and, worse still, it essentially hides costs that will occur in the future.

There is an enormous amount of evidence. You can actually predict based on elementary school literacy rates your prison populations. There is an enormous amount of evidence demonstrating that investment in early child care, in early learning, in elementary school, in supporting students to have their learning needs met so that they have the opportunity to access that education will save more money in the justice system than it costs. What this government is doing is appearing to save money by taking that money from future generations, forcing those costs onto people 20 years from now. That is incredibly problematic.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

In addition, we see a budget that offers virtually nothing in the way of help for families. I would be remiss if I did not mention this Premier's promise to provide a natural gas rebate to Albertans. A promise to provide a natural gas rebate. They introduced the program; it's fake. There isn't even a line item in the budget. It doesn't apply now, it doesn't apply until next winter, and it only applies if those rates go up 30 per cent from where they are now. Now families are struggling. Families are struggling with the rates now, but this government doesn't think it's a problem unless they go up 30 per cent more. That's no help. It's unlikely that this will ever apply to anyone.

Also on the get lasts: health care. At the beginning of the pandemic we saw this government take off on a war with doctors, and then there was a war with nurses. Now they're attacking other specialties: respiratory therapists, social workers, people who have helped take care of their fellow Albertans through this pandemic. This is incredibly problematic. All of this, it appears, is under the guise of wanting privatization, again, something which – there's rhetoric to say that it saves money; it never actually does. There are enormous amounts of evidence. In fact, of all the studies that have been performed on this, you can't find a single high-quality, methodologically correct study that indicates that adding a private tier improves health care unless the total investment, so the total amount invested in health care, increases. And then it's not the fact that there's a private tier; it's the increase in investment that changes it, which is – I mean, we already know that's the case. You put more money into health care, you get better health care. So that's not really a surprise. This is another incredibly problematic part of this budget.

8:30

Essentially, my complaint about this budget is that it creates a less equal society. It gives more to those who have more. It takes more from those who have less. It cuts public education and makes it harder for those who start with less to get ahead. It cuts public health care, creating an Americanized two-tier system, that we know is, well, generally damaging to everyone but particularly to those who don't come from a wealthy background. It also continues this government's sort of general trend to privilege general tax cuts that help existing companies over targeted programs that help start-ups in newer industries. That's problematic as well.

[The Speaker in the chair]

It's also worth mentioning – I mean, there are many things, many things in this budget, but it's always worth mentioning the war room, which continues to be a nontransparent waste of money. We recently discovered it's not subject to FOIP, which, of course, will come as no surprise to the members opposite because it was always designed to hide money from the public. It was always designed to take the public's money and send it somewhere where there was no

oversight, where the government can spend it without anybody watching what they spend it on or anybody knowing what they spent it on. So that's incredibly problematic.

Yeah. I guess, to sum up, my issue with this budget is that it continues to create less equality. It continues to push forward a situation in which income inequality becomes worse, and it continues to make it more difficult for those who were born to less privilege to achieve. Why? Because they have less access to public education. They have less access to early learning supports like PUF funding. They have less access to EAs in classrooms if they need it. If they choose to go to university, they have more tuition to pay. They have more interest to pay on the debt from their tuition. Their parents may find themselves in a position where they're paying exorbitantly for costs and unable to save for that education. This compounds the inequality problem, and honestly, Mr. Speaker, it's to the point where I almost feel like that is the object of the exercise. It almost feels like, at this point, it can't all . . .

Ms Hoffman: It's a feature, not a bug.

Ms Ganley: It's a feature, not a bug.

It's a feature for this government that inequality becomes worse, that people who are born with less are less able to better their situation than they would have been previously. At a certain point, Mr. Speaker, if it's every budget they've ever introduced, it kind of seems like maybe it's intentional and not accidental. So I think that's really the problem I have with this budget, that there's no help for families in it, their services are reduced, their taxes and fees and costs – I didn't even get into the Kananaskis park fee, which we recently learned goes who knows where. Who knows where. I think that all of this is incredibly problematic, and I hope Albertans can make a different choice soon.

The Speaker: I had previously mentioned – here we go. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Why, thank you. I don't want to speak for too long on this because I think we've certainly heard a lot so far on this, but I do have a couple of things I would like to respond to the members opposite, specifically the members for Edmonton-Glenora, Calgary-Buffalo, and Calgary-Mountain View, on some of the false things that they've said, frankly. Let's start, for example, with insurance. Now, the members opposite have oversimplified this issue, which we already know is a very complex issue of insurance, suggesting . . . [interjections] And I know that they love to heckle, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I don't need the hon. Deputy Government House Leader's help in determining my job. Having said that, I have already provided caution perhaps to members of the government about having conversations across the aisle from seated positions, and I've encouraged members on one side of the House to refrain from doing that. I'm now encouraging members from the opposite side of the House to do that.

The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would never in a million years presume to tell you how to do your job. Yours is a mantle I do not wish upon myself.

With that said, I do want to talk about insurance, because I believe the members opposite from the Liberal caucus – and I use Liberal caucus because of the recent matrimony between their federal party and themselves, so they're effectively a de facto Liberal party – have oversimplified this issue. Now, when they were in government, they had put in the insurance cap, as if this was

a way to artificially manipulate the free market to make insurance more affordable.

But this is a party of unintended consequences. Now, members of this caucus know very well that this is a term that we use often when referring to the Liberal caucus opposite, because we could use that term with regard to Bill 6. Mind you, I think the actual consequences that were felt by the ag industry were exactly what they had wanted, to unionize farms. We don't need to go down that road.

But specifically what the insurance cap did to those in Alberta who wanted to get insurance – now, as many know, I come from a small town down in southern Alberta, Cardston, and Cardston is adjacent to the Blood Tribe, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to tell you what this insurance cap actually did, and this is what I talked to an insurance broker in Cardston about. He told me that because of the cap and the artificial manipulation, insurance companies were no longer in a position to insure drivers on a monthly basis unless they were able to bundle that insurance with something like home insurance or life insurance.

Now, for those of you who know much about First Nations, many of them do not own their homes, so if you go in – and I hope the members opposite are listening because this is important. You should know what your policies did, okay? Members of the Blood Tribe, for example, or others who didn't own a home were unable to get insurance because they either weren't willing or could not afford to pay for an entire year of insurance up front, or they didn't own a home with which to bundle their insurance packages.

While the members opposite, the Liberal caucus, are saying that the rate cap that they imposed and we removed has driven some consumers out of the market, their policies punted people out of the market entirely. They weren't even eligible for insurance. There were some workarounds that some insurance brokers tried to find, things like tenant insurance, but even then the insurance companies realized what was happening because they were not generating any revenue and they were under water.

Now, insurance companies are private businesses. Look, I want low insurance rates like anybody else, Mr. Speaker. I don't think anybody argues with that, but the reality is that no one is in that business to lose money, and artificially manipulating that market is inappropriate. What the members opposite did punished so many Albertans who didn't own their homes.

If you want to talk about unintended consequences, let's talk about the members opposite. Let's talk about their record. Let's talk about Budget 2018: A Recovery Built to Last, a budget that was supposed to project a \$1.4 billion deficit for the fiscal year '22-23. That's laughable. Mr. Speaker, the members opposite suggest that our budget is just a windfall budget. I actually believe the Member for Lethbridge-West in a news article called it, if I'm not mistaken: a pylon budget; that a pylon could have balanced the budget. If the members opposite – if we were on their fiscal track, we'd be staring down the barrel of a \$6 billion deficit. That's the party of debt, deficits, and dumb decisions, and everybody in this Chamber knows it. They refuse to realize it, and they refuse to admit it.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, let's go back to insurance for a moment because this is so important. It's so important to my constituents. I can tell you right now that the constituents of Cardston-Siksika don't have a bus to ride, and they certainly as hell can't walk. I retract that comment. They cannot walk to the grocery store. They can't walk to Lethbridge. [interjection] Oh, yeah. Sure.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you to the member, through you, Mr. Speaker. I love the passion that the Member for Cardston-Siksika is

expressing. In fact, I would love for him to expand a little further on the insurance. I know of many individuals in my riding – a young man, who is now my son-in-law, was offered \$7,000 for one year of car insurance because he was in that age where he didn't own a house, he didn't have a large record, and he's in the high-profile demographic, so just a high risk. That's the only insurance he could get. The value of one year of insurance was more than the value of his car.

I've also heard from insurance agencies in Lethbridge that under the previous government's policies up to 30 per cent of drivers on the road had no insurance whatsoever. They would purchase insurance, they would get the sticker, and then they'd cancel the insurance and drive for the next 11 months without insurance. Incredibly risky.

I appreciate the Member for Cardston-Siksika bringing up this incredibly important issue and expounding on it. I wonder if he would go a little further.

Mr. Schow: Yes. Well, I want to thank the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. I'd like to say that at least there's some common sense in half that city right now represented in this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I'm appalled. I'm absolutely appalled by the audacity of the members opposite to stand in this Chamber and cast aspersions about us removing the rate cap when they know full well what their rate cap did. That is one member – the Member for Lethbridge-East clearly articulated just one of what I suspect are countless examples of people who were driven out of the market.

Going back to this issue of the rates, the market is now correcting itself. It is just now correcting itself, and insurance brokers are only recently able to begin to write monthly plans again for some of their clients. But imagine, for example – we want to talk about inflation. We want to talk about all the problems that people are facing in this province right now and across the country, for that matter, as a result of the Liberal poor decisions, both in the previous government here and the current government in Ottawa. The price of insurance is so high that some people just don't get it. The member just said that. Think about the kind of stress that you would have knowing that you can't afford insurance but you need to get to work. So you're now driving a vehicle illegally, without insurance, but you have – maybe they feel they have no choice. I'm not in the head of some of these individuals. I'm grateful that I can afford insurance, and I have that.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there are people who are not doing well in this province, and it's a result of the fiscal policies of the previous government and their desire to manipulate the free market to the point that it makes it unaffordable or, in fact, unattainable for so many.

Mrs. Frey: Give way?

Mr. Schow: Sure.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you very much to the hon. member for giving way. I was curious if the Member for Cardston-Siksika – I know that not only was he a staffer when the United Conservative Party was formed, but he was very involved in many of the campaigns. So he heard across the province just how much the affordability crisis, created by the NDP with their carbon tax, affected Albertans and their pocketbooks at home. I'm curious if the Member for Cardston-Siksika could elaborate on the unintended consequences of meddling in the market when it relates to the carbon tax and the electricity market, that the NDP themselves created.

Mr. Schow: Well, I want to thank the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat for the intervention and for the very insightful and thoughtful question. Like her, I have a very rural constituency in some parts. That carbon tax, in particular, was something I heard about every time I knocked at a door, and I continue to hear about it. Cardston, like many of the towns – you know, if the members opposite have something they'd like to say, they're welcome to jump up and speak on this.

There are a lot of people on a fixed income, Mr. Speaker. Fixed incomes are very common down in Cardston because people retire in these towns. They're wonderful places to retire. But the carbon tax put such a burden on many of my constituents that while the price of everything is going up, they could barely afford it. It was just a new cost of living, something that wasn't built into their retirement plan when they were saving during the time when they were working. [interjection] You know what? I'm going to allow it.

Ms Hoffman: Yesterday I got Wordle in one; today I got an interjection from the Member for Cardston-Siksika. Like, I should probably go buy a lottery ticket after this. Thank you so much to the Member for Cardston-Siksika for the opportunity to return to debate. I'll keep it short.

Just about a minute or two ago he talked about the market correcting itself when he talked about insurance rates getting jacked up and the number of Albertans who were facing significant increases to their insurance right now. I would say that for most Albertans, who are facing extreme pressures in terms of cost of living, they wouldn't call that a correction. They'd call that extreme pressure, and they would say that the government should be doing more to support them in making life more affordable and finding ways to actually control some of their costs.

Then I just wanted to say that if we're going to refer to members of this Assembly being from parties that they're not, then people might refer to people being from ridings which they grew up in and not the ridings that they currently represent. I don't think that that would create a good tone in this House, so I respectfully request that we refer to each other as the ridings that we represent, like the Member for Cardston-Siksika, rather than saying other names of places that people might be associated with.

Mr. Schow: Sure. I'm happy to address this issue of rising insurance rates, as I have already in my remarks. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you I would rather have expensive insurance than no insurance.

Ms Hoffman: More expensive?

Mr. Schow: No. Insurance in general.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite made insurance impossible to achieve for so many members of my constituency, and I'm disgusted by it. While they stand there on their high horse and pretend as though they're doing a favour to all Albertans by capping insurance, what they're really doing is driving some people out of the market because they didn't own a home. It's plain and simple. This is Liberal logic at its finest from the members across the way. In the last 12 months insurance rates have begun to decrease because the market is correcting itself. But I can tell you that as I knocked on doors in my constituency of Cardston-Siksika, I heard them countless times saying: "How long is it going to take? How long is it going to take for this province to fix itself after only four years of an NDP government? How long?" One part of it: it's already taken three years.

An Hon. Member: How long?

Mr. Schow: Three years to begin to correct the mistakes of the members opposite.

Now, if I can switch gears just for a moment, because I'm going to get riled up a little bit about insurance because of what it did to some of my constituents, to people that I represent – I take that personally. But I'll tell you that they're talking about taking money from future generations. Taking money from future generations: that is something our government is doing, in the words from the members opposite. It's so ridiculous, so absurd. Look at their budget projections, Mr. Speaker. If it was up to them, they'd be squandering anything they had. I mean, they did. They squandered an opportunity to continue governing because of their socialist policies. They squandered the trust of Albertans by forming an unholy alliance with the federal Liberals, and they've said nothing about it.

An Hon. Member: Not a word.

Mr. Schow: Not a word.

Unlike other political parties in this country, Mr. Speaker, that one opposite is directly attached to their federal party. You buy a membership in the provincial NDP, you've got one in the federal. Jagmeet is your guy. Bromance at its finest. Yet they talk about, you know, "Now we actually have some money to spend," because there is certainly a windfall in the price of oil – and we're doing that with this budget – but it's still not enough. It's never going to be enough. We were elected with a mandate to get Alberta's finances back in order, to bring prosperity back to this province: jobs, economy, and pipelines. Jobs, economy, and pipelines: I could go through all of it at the moment, but I'll spare you the details and say that Alberta is leading Canada, and the members opposite know it. If you listen to the questions in question period, they're flailing. There's no direction because things are on the right track in this province, and they can no longer go stand in this Chamber and talk about COVID.

8:50

Mr. Speaker, the province is on the right track, and this budget is a large piece of that. I applaud the Minister of Finance, the Premier, and all members of Executive Council for the tireless work that they have put in on behalf of Albertans to get us to this point, but the work isn't done. It's not done. My constituents keep asking me: "Are we getting back on track? Are we bringing back the Alberta advantage? Have we recovered yet from the disastrous NDP?" The short answer is no.

You look at what the NDP did in their budget projections. I believe, like I said, in 2018 they had projected \$60 oil, with an \$8.8 billion deficit. Compared to last year, those were boom times, Mr. Speaker. Now we're sitting with oil well above \$100 a barrel. We're making significant strides to help Albertans who are struggling, like helping them cover their utility bills to the tune of \$150, despite the NDP suggesting it's only \$50, looking to potentially as a party mislead the public. But, of course, never let the facts get in the way of a good story or a good tweet.

I can only imagine what the NDP would do. They'd look at the budget we currently have and all the money coming in from oil and say: "Look at us. Let's go spend everything we want to." Zero fiscal restraint from members opposite.

I find that I'm going down a bit of a rabbit hole, Mr. Speaker, so I'll conclude with this. When the NDP get up in this Chamber and talk specifically about finances, you hear snickers, audible snickers, coming from members on this side of the House because we recognize that the members opposite don't have a clue when it comes to how to balance a budget. According to their new party leader, Justin Trudeau, the budget balances itself. You know, if

that's the way that members opposite are going to approach the finances of this province, I am grateful every day that the United Conservative Party sits in government, because heaven forbid if the NDP were back on this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 8

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate: Mr. Toews]

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 8, supplementary supply. The hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 8, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022. I'm going to focus most of my comments on just a little piece of the budget. Some of my colleagues have gone into great detail in the other areas, but I'd like to look at Community and Social Services specifically, which is about almost \$4 billion in spending. I would assume that the government would want to pay some attention to some of these concerns.

It is a lot of spending, and what's unique, I think, about this particular ministry and these programs and this spending is that they're really front-line supports. When there are changes to policy or changes to amounts and things like that, people feel it almost instantly, as we saw with something that I think the government thought was as random as realigning a payment date, let's say, for AISH or income support. I think they truly believed that there wouldn't be an impact, but of course we saw that there was because these programs do touch individual lives very, very quickly.

I'm going to talk a little about assured income for the severely handicapped and the income supports benefits. The previous speaker went on at length about, you know, the importance of accuracy, so I'd like to spend a little bit of time talking about accuracy and some inaccuracies that are in this budget. While we don't see it in the actual figures of the budget, we do see it in the text of the budget again and again and again. What we've seen are different members repeating these messages again and again and again, and I would hope that I'm going to, for I think the second time, try to explain that what you're saying is not accurate, and it's my sincere hope that the government pays attention and actually corrects their story.

What we have heard again and again is that the assured income for the severely handicapped benefits are the most generous in the country. That is not accurate. It is not correct. Now, I know it's hard to compare programs because they're not always the same, but still this is not accurate. I'd like to quote here. This was reported by Global on September 16, 2020. It was the Premier saying this. He said, "The truth is that we have, by far, the most generous benefits for social services" – he's referring to AISH – "of any province in Canada. I think in the case of AISH, about 40 per cent more generous than other provinces." That's incorrect. Quebec: disability supports core amount for a single is \$1,685, which is 16 per cent less than Alberta. That doesn't even account for the supplementals that are regularly assigned to people. British Columbia: disability core supports for a single are \$1,358, which is 19 per cent less than Alberta. That also doesn't account for the extras. So, obviously, 40 per cent: not accurate.

The other thing that isn't accurate, Mr. Speaker, is that the Northwest Territories and Yukon have more generous disability supports than we do here. It is my hope that the government will

correct the language that they use. Now that they know better, hopefully they will do better.

The other part that's somewhat alarming: can you imagine someone being a diabetic and, you know, relying on someone else for diabetic supplies like, let's say, test strips and that if they got one test strip for the week and knew that they needed seven test strips for the week but were told: "It's generous. Just be thankful for it"? I mean, can you imagine telling someone that it's generous, that it's good enough, to just be thankful for something as life-saving as a test strip or a diabetic supply?

The reason I'm bringing this up is that we all know that for somebody in Alberta to be able to live on \$1,685 a month is next to impossible. You know, the average one-bedroom rent in the capital region is just under \$1,000. You add on transportation, which is more than likely a bus pass, because people can't often afford vehicles or gas or insurance. You're looking at food. You're looking at insurance for your apartment. You're looking at clothing, even medical supplies, because not everything is covered. So you can see that it is almost impossible to live on \$1,685.

We know that the low-income measure in Canada is \$24,642 for a single. In Edmonton, in the capital region, it's just over \$21,000. AISH per year is just over \$20,000. We know that people that are living on AISH are living below the poverty line. So for this government to repeatedly stand up and crow that AISH is generous, the most generous in the country, (a) that is incorrect, and (b) I would suggest that that's abusive. It is my sincere hope that the government rethinks their language around this. Can you imagine being someone with a severe disability trying to get by, knowing that you're sinking further every single month, and to have their government tell them that, basically, it's good enough?

Anyway, when I saw this budget, I was – I guess I'm always hopeful that this government will do the right thing. They never seem to quite get it right as it relates to Community and Social Services, but I was really hopeful that, given this windfall with commodity prices, they would look at reindexing these benefits. Mr. Speaker, I think that all of us know that people that live on AISH and income support are some of the most vulnerable people in this province. I'm sure we've all had casework that includes people that live on AISH. I was really hopeful that benefits would be reindexed.

In 2019 we heard the Premier talk about, you know, difficult economic conditions which really necessitated the need for him to deindex AISH and income support and that that would be re-evaluated when economic conditions changed. Well, economic conditions changed, and still these benefits are not reindexed even when we have surpassed 5 per cent inflation. You know what? That is alarming. I'm not going to go on at length about the cost of poverty. I think that we are all in this Chamber smart enough to understand that there is a cost to poverty. There is an additional pressure to acute care, to other safety nets, other social safety nets. We know that there is a cost to poverty, and year after year of not keeping pace with inflation is causing people to go farther and farther below the poverty line.

9:00

You know, one of the things in – I think it was in early 2019 when we did index these benefits. Obviously, one of the things I was really grateful for, actually, is that I felt for the first time that people with disabilities – and let's be clear; there are over 70,000 people on AISH – would not have to sort of make a case for themselves every single year about why they needed a raise, that for once it was just going to be a given. Although it's not a huge increase, every single year keeping pace with inflation makes a difference. It truly made a difference for people's lives. For this government to have

cut that and then when there is a windfall that we see because of commodity prices – I didn't even hear a murmuring about what the criteria was to reinstate this indexation, which is incredibly, incredibly sad to me. It's incredibly sad, actually.

You know, the other thing that I wanted to mention – again, I mean, it's one thing to say it; it's quite another to create programs that allow for this to happen. We hear it again and again. This government will say that the best social program is a job. Sure, jobs are great. A good social program sometimes does include a job. But that is incredibly ableist – incredibly ableist – to think that you know that a job is going to make somebody's life better. You don't know what somebody's life is like. None of us knows what somebody's life is like living on AISH. If you happen to have a disability severe and permanent enough – and that's the reality about AISH recipients, that in the legislation it is required that their disability is so severe and the permanence is there that they cannot support themselves. To hear these comments coming from government doesn't even make sense. It's almost like government members don't even understand the AISH legislation or what the program is.

I would really hope that we all want to do better. I'm still learning about what ableism is. It's still fairly new to me. I'm not a disabled person, I don't live on AISH, so I don't understand all of the aspects of ableism, but I am trying. What I do know is that to assume that you know best for someone what the best social program is is incredibly ableist. I hope that all of us in this Chamber, now that we know better, can actually do better.

What else I would like to say about this budget – and, you know, this goes for other areas of spending. I call it a shell game, and that's exactly what it is. We've heard member after member stand up: we've got a balanced budget; we're keeping spending under control; we're doing this. The reality is that it is a big shell game.

I'll give you a couple of examples just in Community and Social Services. We hear again and again: we've got the most generous AISH payments; it's the highest it's ever been. It's less than a 1 per cent increase. Let's be honest. It's not going to keep pace with growth pressures. We know this. It's about 5 or 6 per cent growth every single year, and 1 per cent is not going to cut it. Of course, it's the highest; you have the highest number of people on AISH. It makes sense. Why spin it? Why not just be factual about it? You know, it's incredibly frustrating.

The other thing is that we see – with homeless supports we saw a slight decrease in homeless outreach supports and then a flat line in spending for the other line that relates to homeless supports, but we know that there's other spending in there because it's rural homelessness. Instead of adding that amount and showing an increase to that budget line, where it should have been, it's not there, so what the government is going to do is trot themselves out and say, "Oh, look at us; we're funding this many million dollars to these rural communities to address homelessness in their communities," just like we saw a few months ago, without putting it into the budget line to say, "Look, we are increasing spending because we made a mistake; we didn't budget for rural homelessness the way we should have." No; shell games. That's what that is, shell games.

Another example, women's shelters: flat spending. The government will crow: "Look at us. We kept spending flat. Aren't we excellent financial managers?" You are not.

Another example. We know that Jessie's House, the newest shelter in Alberta, just opened a little while ago, got one-time funding last year because this government failed to put their operating funding in their budget. They did it again this year. Now, Mr. Speaker, I think it's a pretty safe bet to say that they're going

to fund Jessie's House again, because we know that – the ED told us that, that they're going to fund it – but it's not in the budget. Why not? Why won't you show us that there's an increase in spending because you brought another shelter onboard? Why? Because this is a shell game. It's made to look like spending is flat when it is not.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker – well, there are so many things. I'd like to talk about FTEs. As you know, in the budget documents and in this budget it's always about FTEs. They are cutting FTEs. My example is Community and Social Services. Since the UCP formed government in 2019, they have cut 514 FTEs from Community and Social Services. Every single year I have asked successive ministers: "Where are these cuts coming from? Where are these FTEs coming from?" "Oh, trust us: attrition." Honestly, do you know what attrition means? It's not that good. Like, 514 employees: that's a 16 per cent reduction in the workforce. Now, for a ministry that delivers . . . [interjections] I don't know why you're making little gestures at me, but maybe you should sit down. Mr. Speaker, I don't know why this government thinks that they can deliver these ever-growing programs like AISH, like income support . . .

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

The Speaker: A point of order is called. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Schow: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically imputing false motives, that I was making gestures at the member opposite when, in fact, I'd just put hand sanitizer on and was drying my hands. While I apologize if my actions had offended the Member for St. Albert, to impute false motives on me would be wildly inappropriate.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not think that this is a point of order; obviously a matter of debate. Here we have the Member for St. Albert talking about Bill 8, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022, and being distracted by what I also saw – it looked a little like jazz hands – at the time. I think it is a matter of debate and not a point of order.

The Speaker: Well, I agree. It isn't a point of order. I would provide some caution to the hon. Member for St. Albert that it's not very parliamentary to tell people to sit down inside the Assembly.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Debate Continued

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Going back to my point, since 2019 514 FTEs have been cut from the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Now, I'd like to remind the House of the really important programs that are in this ministry, and, as I said earlier, these are really front-facing programs that deal with individual people on a daily basis. Their caseloads are massive. They're looking at AISH recipients: there are more than 70,000 people. Income support: there are tens of thousands of people on income support. Persons with developmental disabilities: there are probably around 15,000 people. FSCD: probably around 12,000 to 15,000 families. And it goes on and on. That includes the Appeals Secretariat, so hundreds and hundreds of appeals. There are just so many programs that have so many staff that are so essential.

Now, perhaps if the government was clear and transparent and said: "Well, you know what? We're removing these positions. We don't think they're essential because we've looked at all of the caseloads across the province, and we don't think there's a problem. We think we can safely cut here." But that's not the case, Mr. Speaker. That is not the case at all, and what we do know is that of, I think, the six delivery regions in the province for Community and Social Services, all but one are in this red zone, which means that the caseload pressures have become too much. So we're looking at between 300 and 400 people on caseloads.

Now, these are AISH generalists that have this kind of caseload. Now, I don't know if other members – I know I certainly, probably get them. If a day doesn't go by that I don't get casework related to AISH or income support or one of the programs in this ministry, it's an unusual day, and I'm quite sure that other members are getting casework similar to the casework that I get. And it's intense because people don't understand the systems, whether it's because of an intellectual disability, they don't have family support, they don't have an appropriate guardian. They just don't understand it. They're panicking because they're afraid they're going to get evicted. They don't have money to buy food. It's intense casework. It's absolutely intense casework. You can imagine an AISH generalist. Those are the ones that get the calls. Those are the ones that have to deal one on one with AISH recipients. Can you imagine a caseload of between 300 and 400 people and then thinking that it's a good idea to remove more FTEs? It doesn't even make sense.

9:10

Perhaps there is some grand plan and maybe there's some – I don't know. Maybe they've made some shifts or they have changed the role of AISH generalists or the way that cases are managed. I don't know because there is zero transparency. There is no plan other than attrition. It's just attrition. It's attrition. That's all we ever get. It's attrition. I would hope – if we've learned anything from the Auditor General, it's that you establish objectives so that you can go back and you can measure them. You can measure the success, you can see what you've done, but you do a risk assessment. I asked all of these questions during budget estimates and got zip, nothing. There is no plan. There was no risk assessment done.

This was about the bottom-line cutting. This was about removing more FTEs so that we're now over 500 jobs lost in Community and Social Services. That's a lot. That's 16 per cent of the workforce. If you think that that is not going to impact the quality of services that the government of Alberta delivers, you are sadly mistaken, and I think this government is smart enough to know that, to know that you cannot remove 500 staff and not have people negatively impacted. That's just a fact. That's a fact. And we know that the caseload growth has just – it's dangerous. When you have that many people on one staff's caseload, that is dangerous. It is no longer safe.

The other questions, Mr. Speaker, that – again, I wish there was some clarity. In the budget documents – we can see it right in their documents – income support was underspent by over \$100 million last year. Government will spin that: oh, yes, spending is flat or it's a little bit lower because of COVID federal supports. That's all fine and good. We know that caseloads changed. We know that people went on different federal benefits. We know that there are lots of clawbacks going on right now or that have gone on. What we're trying to get at is: "Okay. If that is the case, that's fair. Tell us what the amount is. How much was clawed back? How many people were able to be transferred from AISH or income support to go on to a federal COVID program?" That's easy. Just tell us how much. How many people? How many people on AISH had a spouse that went on EI and that negatively impacted the amount an AISH

recipient received? How many people lost income support because they went on a federal program? Crickets. We got nothing. Nothing.

For a government that likes to stand up and crow about their budget, “You know, we kept spending flat,” it is a shell game. If you want to prove otherwise, it would be very easy to do: just table the documents, answer the questions, show us the plan, show us the risk assessment. I’d be very happy to be wrong about this. If there actually was a plan to keep people safe and to keep caseloads manageable, I would be incredibly happy about that. [interjection] If you’d like to intervene, I’m happy to take it. Go ahead. Yeah.

Mr. Luan: I can’t stand listening to the opposition member, who, after three hours of the detailed budgeting estimate process, is still playing around with numbers which are not true. Let me correct a couple right now. First, when you talk about the AISH caseload, you talk about 10,000 people receiving AISH today. Let me tell you: 70,000. You’re materially wrong. Not even close, okay? We’re currently supporting 70,000 Albertans on the AISH caseload.

Let me tell you something else that you’re . . .

The Speaker: I’m sorry. I hesitate to interrupt because I know that the minister has a desire to intervene; however, the mover of the speech was the hon. the Minister of Finance, and the second to speak was the hon. Member for St. Albert, so there are actually no interventions during the response. My apologies, but I’m sure he’ll have an opportunity to rise a little bit later.

The member actually only has 35 seconds remaining in her remarks.

Ms Renaud: Yeah. That’s okay.

Actually, yes, we’re very well aware that there are 70,000 people on AISH. I don’t know which part of that wasn’t clear. Yes, we do understand that. It’s in the documents. It’s also available online.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, you know, it’s incredibly disappointing that given the economic circumstances that we find ourselves in, our first thought didn’t go to the people that had to give things up in 2019. They have consistently lost after that. We’ve got a lot of people living in poverty.

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate having a chance to rise in the House to contribute to the debate here. As I’m listening to the opposition member, the hon. Member for St. Albert, I can’t believe she’s throwing the numbers back and forth. Some are making no sense. Others have been answered in the three-hour detailed budget estimates. She keeps throwing her issues as if – for every social issue we have here in our province, just keeps throwing money as a solution.

Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that’s something that fundamentally we take a different approach to in trying to help vulnerable Albertans. I am so proud to stand on this side of the aisle as a government. We are not only taking care of the most vulnerable Albertans, but we also make our programs sustainable.

Let me give you an example. For Budget 2022 we added \$12 million in addition to the already highest AISH budget in our province, with \$1.4 billion as it stands today. Once again, this is the highest in Alberta’s history. I remind you also, Mr. Speaker, that three weeks ago the Premier and I announced additional prenatal benefits for pregnant women who are receiving AISH and income support. With an additional \$600 per month added, they will receive \$856 per month prenatal benefits. Once again that’s the highest in the country as we speak today.

Mr. Speaker, we are doing tangible changes to make life better for vulnerable Albertans, like the examples I’m taking about. At the same time we protected core funding, what we call the social safety net. Whether it’s income support, whether it’s supporting people with a disability, whether it’s helping families and women flee from domestic violence, we maintained that core funding.

I want to share with you one story that – it’s a real story – one of the members shared with me while visiting the province during the summer. That story stuck to my heart and made a significant impact on me in terms of my work with the ministry and the work that – how we established the direction we currently have. I was visiting the Edson bottle depot. I’ll use her real name. Anne is the executive director there as the employer. We were talking about how the conditions of the pandemic impacted people and employers’ impact to work and so on and so forth. During the conversation she shared something with me dearly. She said: “Minister, you know, my operation here is not a highly paid job. It’s repetitive in nature. I keep losing people. You get people working here. Their heart and mind isn’t here, and the next thing you know, they are gone. Plus, when they’re here, you have to keep a very close eye on the quality of the work.” She said: “It turned out to be quite an expensive undertaking until lately. I hired” – I’ll use a different name just to protect the privacy of the individual. I’ll use the name Frank.

Frank is a guy who’s been on AISH, who was on disability for many, many years. He has been through different programs that helped him along the way. He never competed for what they call a commercial rate of employment, to put it another way. Anne offered a competitive job offer to Frank. Frank competed the same way, no different than the rest of the others, and he got it. What Anne finds different is that every day before she opens the door, Frank is the first person who comes through, and every day Frank is the last one to leave. When she asked him why, Frank said: this is my very first job I competed for that I got the market-rate employment. For him, it’s a job that matches his full potential, and this is a totally different life he’s experiencing.

9:20

Anne said: “From an employer point of view, I never need to worry about losing Frank. I never need to worry about recruitment. He took this job like a new life. This is good for him but good for me as an employer. Why didn’t I know this before?” That conversation really inspired us. Not only do we want to provide a system, provide a social safety net, but we also want to empower people to reach their full potential, like Frank’s story.

Because of that reason, Mr. Speaker, in our Budget 2022 we added an additional \$34 million as a new investment to help vulnerable Albertans who have the opportunity through employment to reach their full potential. Once again, I want to share to the hon. members in this House what a drastically different approach we’re taking. Not only is our government providing core funding to maintain a social safety net, but also we emphasize helping people to reach their full potential. To me, that’s a fundamental difference. Instead of simply a handout approach, which I think the opposition is all about, we do both. We provide safety. We added the enabling part.

I’ll give you another example. The hon. member mentioned about the homeless part of the work. You would recall that in the peak of winter Edmonton’s mayor was making an urgent request for homeless shelters in Edmonton, and, you know, within three weeks we responded. But we didn’t respond in the NDP way, just to pour the money as if that will solve the problem. Yes, we did give \$21.5 million province-wide. We know that resource is important, but that’s not all, because money alone cannot solve the problem.

At the time that we announced the \$21.5 million, we also established a provincial task force. The task force was a group of people coming from multiple sectors, from police – sit down; let me finish first – to shelter operators, from social service agencies to many other stakeholders who care about this issue and who really want to make a contribution to solve their problem. One thing that we agree on is that stand-alone, fragmented issues are not going to help Albertans. We're looking for a comprehensive, co-ordinated approach in responding to homelessness.

Mr. Speaker, I am so much looking forward to the findings of this task force. They're expected to deliver their study and recommendations in June of this year. By then I'm looking forward to see this new way of doing business. Not only will we have resources provided here; we're also looking with a fundamentally different approach to how we approach the complex issue in such a way. All we're doing is a balanced, sustainable solution to make life better for Albertans on the real term rather than just throwing a whole bunch of slogans with no concrete actions coming into place. That is what I want to convey to the House. That is a sharp contrast to the different approaches to how we approach social services, how we approach helping our most vulnerable Albertans but in the meantime providing them with assistance so we can empower them to reach their full potential.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of other things that I'm so excited about, the work that my ministry is doing, and so passionate about. I will leave the rest of the time to the House to continue debate on this very important cause here. At the end of the day we want to provide not only the social safety net to provide support to people when they have unfortunately fallen into difficult times, but – make no mistake – we'll never create a codependency as if government throwing money will solve the problem, because I know and lots of people in the sector also know that if you erode an individual's self-confidence, their self-purpose, their sense of pride in themselves, it doesn't matter how much money you dump to them, you're not helping them. You've actually eroded their self-confidence and their success.

Our hope is that we'll provide timely support to them, meaningful support to them, and make their life better, at the earliest time help them return to their journey of their success. Mr. Speaker, their success is ours.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the supplementary supply. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I think, is rising.

Member Irwin: Yes. I just didn't want to interfere with you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. It is, as always, an honour to rise in this House. I did speak briefly to supplementary estimates last night, but I did not get a chance to do as I typically do the first time that I rise in the House and give a shout-out to the front-line workers out there who are absolutely still doing so much for all of us in the midst of a pandemic. We are still in the midst of a pandemic, might I add, and those in health care, those in retail, those in education, any front-line workers: we owe them a lot, so thank you.

I have many things I want to say in relation to Bill 8, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022, but I must – I must – pick up on a few points from the previous member as I was not able to successfully interject. Intervene? Intervene is the proper word. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I found it quite troubling as he basically threw out a whole lot of accusations about us and the NDP, and he mentioned something along the lines of – sorry; to quote the Speaker, I don't have the benefit of the Blues – the NDP throwing money at things. He gave an example of supporting our unhoused neighbours through the investments over the winter. Hey,

this minister has heard me speak many times in this House about how critical it is that we support houseless folks in our communities. It is a topic that I am incredibly passionate about.

Yes. Of course, we can all agree, and we agreed when that action was taken, to provide additional dollars to Hope Mission, which is based in my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. But we also somewhat couched our response in the fact that mats on the floor are one thing – absolutely, they're a short-term, Band-Aid solution – but unhoused folks need more than mats on floors. They need roofs over heads. One of the most tangible ways that this government could support unhoused folks would be investing in permanent supportive housing. Permanent supportive housing not only saves lives; it saves money, too.

Let's talk about that a little bit. There's clear research that shows that permanent supportive housing saves lives. In fact, there's an example in my riding, Ambrose Place. It's in the McCauley neighbourhood. It's an incredible facility that has taken some of the hardest to house folks, folks with, oh, my goodness, multiple disabilities, folks who have been on the streets for extended lengths of time, and provides them with a harm reduction approach, incorporates Indigenous cultural practices, and it's had a really good success rate. Of course, it's not all success, and huge props to the workers there because it's a lot. They're dealing with a lot. But the research is clear from the city of Edmonton that that's a project that has saved lives, and it's a project that has saved money.

You can look at the impacts on the health care system. If those folks aren't housed, they're often going to emergency rooms. Go not too far from my riding to the Royal Alex any time, particularly during the winter. You will see many folks who are unhoused in the Royal Alex in the emergency room. So it saves money there. It also saves money for the judicial system, right? We know that incarcerating folks costs a whole heck of a lot of money.

9:30

Both of these arguments, the moral argument in that it's the right thing to do and it saves lives and the economic argument in that it saves money, were not enough to convince this minister and this UCP government to invest the measly, I believe, \$9 million asked for by the city of Edmonton to support permanent supportive housing. A drop in the bucket when it comes to their budget, when it comes to, you know, the broader fiscal picture, yet they weren't willing to do that. So spare me, please, ministers across the aisle, your degrading comments about our record and about us when you're not willing to make the investments that in the long term are going to save humans and save money.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

Okay. Now that I've talked about that a little bit, let's talk – obviously, for those folks who are listening closely, of which, I'm sure, there are many in this Chamber, I will tie this into supplementary estimates. [interjection] The House leader is paying attention, she tells me. Thank you. I will tie this into supplementary estimates, but I just haven't had a chance in this Chamber to speak to my own critic portfolio, and that's Status of Women. I can draw this to Bill 8 and the fact that, you know, this government had an opportunity to invest some additional dollars in, well, multiple ministries.

Actually, I'll give my colleague a shout-out. Sometimes he needs more shout-outs. That's my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo. He did a really good analysis in his debate on Bill 7, where he went through each ministry. He's not actually listening to my credit for him right now. I shouldn't be giving him credit because he did not bring me cookies as promised. But he gave a really good analysis

about how in each ministry this government could be doing a lot better.

Look no further than Status of Women. I know it is a small ministry, of course, and historically when you compare it to other ministries, absolutely, I can accept that. But I can't accept that under this government's leadership one of the very first moves this government made was to, first of all, basically, you know, not have Status of Women as a stand-alone ministry, throw it in with culture, multiculturalism, absolutely decimate the budget for Status of Women in the first two years and fully cut back the number of FTEs. In our budget estimates I talked about the fact that I was having complete déjà vu from the previous years' estimates. Even though the folks at the table had changed, there was still no clear plan to support women in this budget or to support women at all from this government. They had an opportunity to address critical supports for women, and they refused to do so.

Actually, it was at that same time as we were doing Status of Women estimates that we had just learned that wage rollbacks, huge wage rollbacks, for front-line health care workers were being proposed, front-line health care workers like – I may need some help from my colleagues here – respiratory therapists . . .

Ms Renaud: Occupational therapists.

Member Irwin: Occupational therapists – thank you – speech language pathologists . . .

An Hon. Member: Social workers.

Member Irwin: Social workers. Yeah. The list goes on. I can't think of them all. It's been a long day. But, I mean, these are folks – like, respiratory therapists. We had an incredible woman named Holly Champney stand with us, actually, and share her story of how she's the person who inserts the breathing tube. She's the person who's kept people alive during this pandemic. And this is how this government is responding, with massive rollbacks. I think her rollback – and again I'm going off memory here – is about 8 per cent, right? I can't even remember exactly what sort of mental gymnastics this government used on that one to justify it, but I imagine it was quite intriguing.

You think about that. You think about the wage rollbacks that are being proposed for, you know, a large group of workers here in Alberta, which would be just awful in themselves, but this is along the backdrop of many Albertans already facing huge, huge affordability challenges.

We talked about this yesterday in the supplementary estimates debate – right? – the fact that this government had an opportunity. They could have addressed it here in Bill 8 other than just the energy piece around, you know, a \$50 rebate. The associate minister came back and said, "Well, actually, it's \$150." Well, actually, I came back to him and said, "You know, we were actually door-knocking in your neighbourhood, in your riding of Morinville-St. Albert, on the weekend." It was wonderful. Lots of support. Lots of orange signs are going to be up there heading up to the next election. It was very fantastic, and I got to meet a lot of great people at the doors.

Without prompting, the top issue that came up was affordability, and as I shared yesterday – you know, it's so intriguing. The area where we were door-knocking in St. Albert, I have to admit, is different than the area I live in in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, a higher socioeconomic background. You might think that they'll probably have different issues than my neighbours in the Alberta Avenue, Parkdale area. No. Similar issues, right? These affordability challenges transcend demographics. Albertans from all backgrounds are struggling with skyrocketing utility bills.

This government had an opportunity – I won't use it as a prop – in Bill 8, in their supplementary estimates, to make some adjustments and to really provide relief to Albertans. They chose not to, and I think Albertans are going to remember that. I really do think they are. Absolutely.

I shared this story yesterday – and she was happy for me to share it – of a younger person named Patti who told me that she is at risk of losing power and heat, and she said: listen, I'm trying here; I'm trying to make ends meet. She talked about using up all of her savings. She talked about how she was working a job, and then she actually contracted COVID during her job and had to take time off. Like, that's not just a one-off example. We've all heard, at least on our side of the House, from a lot of Albertans who are absolutely struggling with their utility bills.

I urge this government: they still have an opportunity. You know, we're only on Bill 8. I'm certain the Premier will be bragging about his robust legislative agenda this session. Well, you know what? Make it robust by making tangible, positive impacts on the lives of Albertans because so far it's a huge disappointment.

I want to pick up on some of what my colleague from St. Albert was sharing. She's always been a huge advocate for folks who are on AISH. You know, I'm thinking back to one the first things we heard from this Premier when he tried in this Chamber to justify the deindexing of AISH. I remember quite clearly his words because I was kind of – I think my jaw was dropped a little bit. Like, did he actually just say that? He said: "You know what? It's not onerous, right?" He said that it's not going to be onerous. I said at the time: well, that is awfully rich for a man who's worked . . .

An Hon. Member: For a rich guy.

Member Irwin: Yeah.

. . . six-figure jobs pretty much his entire working life, who's entitled to a six-figure, seven-figure pension fairly soon. To say that people who are living on \$1,600 a month, to lose \$30 a month: that's not onerous? I'm no mathematician, but that's a huge, huge impact for somebody who's barely making it. As my colleague from St. Albert talked about, she tried to live on that, and she acknowledged that she's got a heck of a lot of privilege and people and a network and community that she could rely on, and she hardly made it, right? So imagine – just imagine – how it is for folks right now.

Fast-forward. You think: oh, he couldn't get more crass than saying that it's not onerous. Oh, yes, he could because in the Chamber just on Monday that same Premier stood, and he proudly said that AISH recipients and seniors who are losing thousands of dollars as a result of his government's policy decisions – guess what he said. He said that they were making "modest sacrifices." Wow. Wow. When I talk to that senior in my riding who's struggling to make ends meet, I'll just let her know: "You know what? Thank you for making those modest sacrifices." No. Absolutely not.

And I joke, I smile, but I'm not smiling when I'm hearing from countless constituents who are struggling so hard right now as a result of this government's policy decisions. It's incredibly troubling that this Premier continues to minimize their experiences, their lived experiences as people who are living in poverty, living below the poverty line, even folks who have traditionally been able to make ends meet who are struggling right now because of high utility costs, high insurance costs, fees on parks – what am I missing? – higher tuition. The list goes on.

9:40

Ms Hoffman: Education property tax.

Member Irwin: Education property tax. Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. Yeah. Right? The list goes on. I only have so much time here, folks.

Mr. Schow: It's all your fault, too.

Member Irwin: I mean, the Member for Cardston-Siksika is welcome to stand up. I'm not sure if I'll acknowledge him, actually, but he is welcome. I'll think about it.

You know, I would be remiss, actually, if I didn't talk about education. So thank you to Edmonton-Glenora for reminding me of that. You know what? I talk about my neighbourhood a lot: Alberta Avenue, Parkdale area. In the same area, just north of where I live, is a lovely community called Delton. [Member Irwin's speaking time expired] Dang it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Any other hon. members wishing to join debate this evening? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you so much. I'm going to try to channel my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and talk about Delton school for a minute because Delton school is fantastic in terms of building community and having great support and a sense of inclusion. What Delton school struggles with, though, is the actual building. The building was built at a time when most of the families in the neighbourhood, even though they lived in three-bedroom bungalows, had four or five kids – we were experiencing baby booms – and that school was built to accommodate the significant number of students who were living in the neighbourhood and attending a local school.

There still are a lot of families living in the neighbourhood, but most of the families in three-bedroom bungalows now have one or two children. Many still attend the neighbourhood school, but, as you can rightfully deduce from the number of children who were in the neighbourhood to the number of children who are there now, the school isn't full as it was when it was originally built. It also isn't in the beautiful, pristine shape that it was when it was originally built either.

One of the things that school divisions across the province have been encouraged to do is to find ways to right-size the capital that they have to meet the demand. We do this on the Legislature Grounds, and we did it in this current fiscal year because, of course, the Minister of Infrastructure was there the day they started picking apart to remove the legislative Annex because the Annex was beyond its useful life expectancy in terms of the building envelope. The Annex was no longer needed, and we were trying to right-size the office space on the legislative grounds, a responsible, prudent decision even though I have a special spot in my heart for the legislative Annex as my first office that had a door that closed, that I didn't have to share with anyone else, was in that building. It was a special place.

I have to say that on the legislative grounds the Infrastructure minister made the decision to remove space that was no longer needed, upgraded other space. You probably have all seen the Terrace Building, which I think is being renamed to Poundmaker's, have renovations done to it to improve that building envelope to make sure that the needs of government and legislative employees on this site have safe work environments to work in and the right-sized envelope for the number of people who are working here.

That's what the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was almost certainly going to talk about when she spoke about Delton school because Delton school is not a building that is in a condition that is as conducive for positive student learning outcomes as we would hope for any of our own children, and it is also overbuilt.

When the government talks about, "Well, it's only at 65 per cent capacity," that's why the plan is to build a smaller school that is a quality building that's appropriately sized for the neighbourhood. Of course, it wasn't good economic sense for the Minister of Infrastructure to continue to heat and maintain a building that was not energy efficient, that was overbuilt for the parcel of land that it's on, and here we celebrate. There was a big photo op with that building coming down and new space being renovated to appropriately meet the needs of the legislative grounds, the staff, and the government public servants who work in those buildings. Kids in Delton deserve an opportunity to learn in just as positive a school environment as any other child in the province of Alberta. The government could have through Bill 8, supplementary supply appropriations, 2022, focused on the needs of kids living in Delton. The government could have focused on the other infrastructure that's desperately needed.

Let me just talk about a couple of pieces. We have in Edmonton alone a need for five schools that were identified in the year 1 capital plan needs assessment. Now, remember that Edmonton public was overlooked last year in the government's budget and again this year in the government's budget, so presumably the list will keep getting longer while they continue to be ignored.

The government has also asked for many years for people to submit both disaggregated and aggregated lists for capital. The government had three different lists. If they didn't like what was on the top of the aggregated list, they probably should fund all five projects because they've met a needs assessment, but if they wanted to fund a project that was on the disaggregated list, they could have at least done that, even though they tell everyone to focus on aggregated, focus on making sure you reduce the footprint and making sure that you have appropriately sized buildings for the communities you serve, and then, of course, the need for additional new space in the areas of growth to meet the significant demands of growing communities, including south Edmonton, in significant need of a high school, and northeast Edmonton, in need of a junior high.

These are all things that could have been included in Bill 8, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022, or in the budget, Bill 7, which we are debating as well, but the government has chosen to continue to ignore the needs of everyday families, including right here in the capital city. It almost feels like the government has written off Edmonton and Calgary as places that they choose to actually govern and lead on behalf of because Calgary for two years got no new schools for either public or Catholic students living in the city of Calgary – for two years, nothing – when we know that the numbers of kids have continued to increase, when we know that there were many important, worthy capital projects that could have been under construction so that we would have that necessary space, the space that the minister, when we asked to reduce class sizes and spread students, said wasn't possible because there was simply no way that the government could provide additional educational space.

When the government had opportunities to actually build some, which isn't the only way – you can absolutely get portables. You can rent other community spaces, especially during the period of time where groups weren't congregating significantly. Calgary waited for two years with no projects, and this year there's just one new school for public and one new school for Catholic students. For a government that continues to say that they support choice when they fail to provide the necessary capital to meet the educational needs for families who are choosing public and Catholic education as well as francophone education anywhere in the province: zero capital dollars in this year's budget or in this supplementary supply that we are considering here, again, Bill 8, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022 – zero capital dollars – to

support francophone schools and those choosing to exercise their right to a minority education in this province.

Instead, those families continue to have to go to court, and there have been court decisions that say that financial availability cannot be a factor, that children choosing a minority language education have a right to equal access to educational opportunities, which includes equal access to schools. The fact that we continue to have francophone schools throughout this province, including right in St. Albert, having to meet in a church basement to offer the educational opportunity is not equal access. The government certainly should be taking this opportunity to make good on decisions that the courts have already directed is what must be done in terms of people's Charter rights and their access to minority language educational opportunities. But there's nothing in this bill that will do anything to address those needs as clarified again by the courts.

Instead, there is a plan in this bill to make Albertans pay a billion dollars more in additional personal income taxes. A billion dollars. It is the exact same tax change that the current Premier is well documented fighting against both when he worked for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation as well as when he was in the House of Commons for about 20 years, I believe it was. Maybe it just felt like 20. I think it was 20, actually, 10 around the cabinet table, 10 in caucus. For the Premier to have such a well-documented articulate argument as to why bracket creep is so wrong headed and so hurtful for low-income families in particular, low- and middle-income families, is the height of hypocrisy but also disrespect to the voters, which we all work for.

9:50

To take this billion dollars by forcing a tax on inflation, taxing people more than what their earning power is, because, of course, inflation is a significant burden facing everyday families – the members opposite talk about it. What they fail to recognize is that they're the government, and they have a responsibility to do something about it.

Also in relation to inflation, the government has chosen to deindex, which I know is sort of not the most accessible term, to get rid of inflation-proofing people's income when they are on a very fixed income, of which they require the government to pay for their ability to be able to live with dignity in the province of Alberta.

This bill specifically is failing to index for those folks who are struggling so hard. I want to remind members that prior to being elected as the Premier, the current Premier at that time said that, of course, they weren't going to get rid of inflation-proofing income for folks on AISH, which in this bill – certainly, Bill 8, the appropriations act, could have brought back some form of indexation so that people on AISH, those who are struggling to make ends meet could have a little bit of a bump in their pay to make up for the fact that their power is going up, their personal insurance is going up, their cost of living generally is going up, and the government has done nothing to address those pressures being downloaded on them through government policy decisions that have resulted in tough times getting tougher for many people here in Alberta.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that it doesn't just end with AISH. We know that families who are seniors as well, requiring seniors' benefits and other programs, are seeing about \$750 less for a couple because of the government's failure to inflation-proof the family budget and to match those benefits to inflation.

What's in this supplementary supply bill? We know that the 2022 budget is a no-help budget, and I hate to say that there isn't much in the supplementary supply bill either for that short-term relief. The big program the government wants to pat themselves on the back for is \$50 a month just for three months – January, February, March – for families to off-set a fraction of the increased cost that

families have seen to their power bills. This is probably one of the biggest issues that is being raised with me regularly by folks who live in my riding and in others, around affordability and their absolute frustration that the government fails to return the cap to electricity rates and to actually act in some sort of regulated fashion to provide some stability and certainty for everyday families.

I hate to say that this bill is no help, but it is a fraction of the help that everyday families deserve, and Alberta families should have a government that shares the benefits of the resource wealth that they have stumbled upon because that wealth belongs to all Albertans. It doesn't belong to the UCP or the current Premier, that's for sure.

With that, at this point, I move that we adjourn.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

Bill 3 Special Days Act

[Adjourned debate: Ms Issik]

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to the Special Days Act. I think it's worth beginning by talking about what this bill does and does not do. Essentially, what it does is that it gives the minister the ability to recognize by way of a declaration certain special days, weeks, or months. Now, it's actually quite typical for a government to recognize special days, weeks, or months. This sort of puts the declarations into a process although it's interesting because it can still be done by way of proclamation. It can still be done by way of ministerial order, so this doesn't sort of prevent all those other things from happening. One might actually kind of wonder as to the purpose of this act because it puts the declarations all together, but the proclamations and the ministerial orders still sort of hang in their own where-ever-they-ares. In that sense it doesn't do a lot.

But I guess my top-level, top-line message on this act is that this seems fine. It doesn't really create anything new. It doesn't particularly change anything. I did have, just because I'm a bit of a drafting nerd, a couple of questions about this act, and this being second reading, normally one can leave one's questions, and they sort of reappear with the minister, whether in their closing comments or when this is spoken to in Committee of the Whole. The questions I have with respect to this act are – I mean, what it is is an act about a declaration of a special day, week, or month, which again, like I've said, is fine, but it's not a law that's going to sort of go around overruling other laws or change very much the operation of sort of everyday people.

I'm a little bit curious about section 5, which is: the act prevails. Basically, what it's saying is that if there's an inconsistency or conflict between this act and another act, this act will prevail, which is – I don't know. I guess it seems weird. It seems like a weird thing to be in this particular act. Like, what it would be inconsistent with, and why would it need to prevail? Yeah. I mean, there are some times where provisions like this are necessary – I don't disagree with that – particularly when an act might be interacting with a whole bunch of other acts. I can't really see the circumstances under which this one would, and I'm not really sure this would be my top choice for prevailing acts. It seems like a weird decision, so I'm a bit curious why that's in there.

The other question I have is about section 6, which is the regulation-making power. Now, this is very normal. Acts almost always have regulation-making powers because you don't want to

do everything in the legislation because then every time you need a teeny little tweak to something – like, for instance, fees for something tend to be in regulation because you don't want to have to come back to the Legislature every single time although some fees could properly be put in the legislation, I think. The Kananaskis fee would be a big one for me because then we would know where it was going. Anyway, the point is that in this particular act the Lieutenant Governor in Council can make regulations.

One of them is called a deficiency regulation-making power, remedying any confusion in the application or difficulty in applying the provisions of this act. The reason this is odd is that – this is an interesting regulation-making power in the sense that it allows the government to sort of write things that are outside the scope of what was defined in the act for regulations. It's a fix-all provision, so if someone comes along, and they're like, "Whoops. We made a huge oversight; we, like, missed something really obvious in the act, and we need a deficiency regulation," this allows them the power to do that.

I'm a bit curious why, in an act which is two and a half pages long, you would need a deficiency regulation. I feel like: well, what is there you might not have thought about? It literally grants the minister the ability to declare a special week, day, or month. Cabinet can still proclaim special weeks, days, months outside the act. Ministers can still proclaim special weeks, days, and months on their own. I don't know. I'm guess I'm just a little bit curious. Deficiency regulations are normally for acts that do incredibly important things for which a deficiency would be extremely problematic to the orderly operation of government, so it seems a little bit weird that in this instance you would need a deficiency regulation.

10:00

Yes. Those are my two questions. Why does the act need to prevail, and why would we need to be remedying confusion? Other than that, it seems on its face that this act is fine.

Honestly, I kind of like this sort of thing. It gives us a chance to sort of reflect on the significance of different cultural communities that we have in the province of Alberta. Pride Month, I think, is a very good example. It's an important time. It gives us all the chance to reflect on both how far we've come and how far we still have to go. You know, coming up shortly – I mean, yeah, there are a number of these different days. I think also of Transgender Day of Remembrance, a day that I think is incredibly important, that allows us to mourn those we have lost and consider the fact that transgender folks still experience a significantly higher level of death world-wide. That's problematic. That's something that we should think about and talk about and have a day to recognize.

I actually think that some of the things in this act can be very, very important. I think that, you know, days to remember the victims of the Holocaust: again, they remind us. They remind us of these things that have happened in the past and why they're so important going forward. I think, again, days on which we celebrate different cultures that form part of the fabric of the community – the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, I believe, was instrumental in the declaration of Philippine Heritage Month. Again, the Filipino community is huge in Alberta, and it's great to have that chance for everyone to come together and to celebrate, you know, the importance of that culture and the contributions of people to the province. And it's like that with every other community. Obviously, I'm not going to go through and list everything.

But, yes; this bill does seem to do an important thing. I have those two questions about it. Otherwise, I would say I am generally supportive.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika and the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency name is like music to my ears. I do rise, though, to ask for unanimous consent from this Chamber to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of this evening's sitting.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address Bill 3, Special Days Act. You know, as far as this bill goes, the declaration of special days, weeks, and months in perpetuity: okay. This legislation does nothing to address the huge issues that Albertans are experiencing at this time.

It's hard to believe, you know, having had the privilege of sitting around the cabinet table, Mr. Speaker, that a bill like this would survive a cabinet table of the NDP government because it would be pushed back, and we would say: there are more important things to do for this province with our time than, regrettably, this bill before us. You know, there is only so much time that a government has to do the work that they need to do, and it's hard to believe that this bill rises to the top of the important work of a government. I'm flabbergasted. It's not like there aren't important issues in this province. Like, earlier tonight we were talking about child poverty, a scourge on any population as rich as this province is.

In addition to preparing somewhat to look at this bill, I've been spending my time tonight looking through a document that is called Lessons on Child Poverty during a Pandemic, put out by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. It talks about the importance of child poverty and addressing it for all the reasons we can imagine: in terms of health, in terms of education, in terms of opportunity. My colleague from Calgary-Mountain View was talking about low-income child poverty being a predictor of young people who don't have opportunity, how more of them wind up incarcerated or not fulfilling, you know, their capacity in life, but here we are talking about a Special Days Act.

Mr. Speaker, under our government we focused on things like the family and child benefit, which this government has cut in terms of their indexing of it, which means that there are more children in poverty today than there were in 2018 when we were government. What about an act to fully house all the homeless Albertans in this province? What about taking time to do that? What about this government putting their time and effort and their brain power behind that or an act to ensure that all youth graduate high school in this province?

An Hon. Member: That would be good.

Member Ceci: That's a good one, too. Yeah.

But, no, we're dealing with an act to declare special days in perpetuity for days and weeks and months. I think that's the big difference between this side, which tries to understand what the issues are and tries to come up with solutions, and that side, which seems to be coming up with acts that, like, you have to shake your head and say: why is this more important than child poverty or homelessness or high school completion or ensuring that all elderly people feel valued and vital in this province? I can almost hear the critics now saying: "Well, that's the responsibility of families. You know, they should make sure that every elderly person feels vital and valued." Well, not every person who is elderly has that family anymore. Not every person can count on neighbours and the kindness of strangers. So why isn't the government spending time making sure there are solutions for that?

Mr. Speaker, you know, a government that preferences the time in this Legislature to talk about special days as opposed to social

issues and problems and other big concerns, whether that be health or education or social or on and on and on, is a government that, I think, is just sort of spinning its wheels and kind of feinting, you know: “We’re a government that’s doing things, but don’t look over here because we’re changing the education system to preference private education. We’re changing the health system to preference privatized health care. We’re changing the tax structure to give more money to corporations.”

10:10

Those are the things that are happening under the surface, and on the surface we see Bill 3, as if – as if – it’s an important consideration in this province. I guess it’s another tick in the box of platform commitments that the UCP has committed to their grassroots. It certainly wouldn’t make it in a group of people like this on this side or the members of the Alberta NDP.

I’m going to take my seat and listen to some other debate on this subject. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 3, Special Days Act. You know, I’d like to echo some of my colleagues’ comments. When I look at it, truly, there is a limited amount of time that we have to debate legislation, for the government to bring forward legislation for us to debate in this place and pass. And with such a finite amount of time, I guess, I thought there was some kind of matrix that this government would use to score or to determine what is most important to Albertans and what will have the largest impact on Albertans, where the greatest need is.

I mean, I look around at where we are right now. There’s so much going on. We’re still in a pandemic. There are crises all over the place, and what we’re debating is a Special Days Act. It’s a bit confusing because I was under the impression that Albertans could already request the declaration of a special day or week or month by the government through a website. If that is not the case – I know that one of my colleagues asked this very question – it would be really great if the Minister of Culture or somebody else that has some knowledge could stand up and provide some clarity.

Now, I think that there certainly is a place for declarations of special days. I think it raises awareness for lots of really great issues. However, if you just use something like this to tick a box, to say: “Look at us. Aren’t we great allies? We flew a pride flag for one day, or we flew the Franco-Albertan flag for, like, 24 hours” when it’s an entire month that it should be up. You know, it sort of begs the question: is this sort of giving more coverage just to say, “Well, it’s a special day; it’s a special week; we’re going to do this for you,” when in fact there’s not a lot of substance behind the support that government claimed to have for some specific special-interest groups or even groups of Albertans that believe certain things or even French Albertans?

One of the examples that I also would like to use – you know, it’s one thing to have a special day and for us to stand up and make a member’s statement and maybe wear a ribbon or a button and talk about how important issues are, but if there is nothing of substance that follows, if there is no true legislative work or subsequent policies that actually drive the agenda forward, then it’s just kind of an exercise in futility.

A good example is the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Every December, at the beginning of December, we proclaim this. We talk about it. We do members’ statements. We have an event, which is so important. Then there are awards that are awarded to different individuals and to groups, and that is so important. But what is more important than that is the work that

goes behind it so that every year on December 3, I think it is, when we stand up and proclaim IDPD, which is International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we can all proudly say that we understand this commitment to the United Nations. The declaration on the status of persons with disabilities involves action and it involves investment and it involves funding. It involves addressing poverty. It involves addressing inclusive education and on and on and on.

But that’s not what this government has done, not with this budget and certainly not with this piece of legislation.

Bill 7
Appropriation Act, 2022
(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but in accordance with Standing Order 64(3) the chair is required to put the questions to the House on every appropriation bill standing on the Order Paper for second reading.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:15 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------|----------|------------|
| Amery | Neudorf | Stephan |
| Fir | Pon | Toor |
| Frey | Rehn | Turton |
| Horner | Reid | van Dijken |
| Hunter | Rosin | Walker |
| Issik | Rowswell | Williams |
| Luan | Schow | Wilson |
| McIver | Schulz | Yaseen |
| Nally | Singh | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------|---------|--------|
| Ceci | Gray | Irwin |
| Ganley | Hoffman | Renaud |

Totals: For – 26 Against – 6

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

Bill 8
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022
(continued)

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:19 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------|---------|------------|
| Amery | Neudorf | Stephan |
| Fir | Pon | Toor |
| Frey | Rehn | Turton |
| Horner | Reid | van Dijken |
| Hunter | Rosin | Walker |

| | | |
|---------------------|----------|-------------|
| Issik | Rowswell | Williams |
| Luan | Schow | Wilson |
| McIver | Schulz | Yaseen |
| Nally | Singh | |
| Against the motion: | | |
| Ceci | Gray | Irwin |
| Ganley | Hoffman | Renaud |
| Totals: | For – 26 | Against – 6 |

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

Bill 3
Special Days Act
(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. member has 11 minutes remaining should she choose to use them.

Seeing none, are there others?

An Hon. Member: Question.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am prepared to call the question.

The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women has up to five minutes to close debate.

Ms Issik: I waive.

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women has moved second reading of Bill 3, Special Days Act, on behalf of the Minister of Culture.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we had a lot of productive work done this evening, and at this time I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow, March 23, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:25 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 23, 2022

Day 14

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 23, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a number of guests joining us in the galleries today: guests of the hon. the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, OP Gothaang and Dee Adekugbe; guests of the Member for Calgary-Klein, Jasneet Lakhyan, Ellen Rose Alog, and Jodi-Lyn McCaw.

Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Federal Equalization and Transfer Payments

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, Albertans well know that we make massive contributions to the rest of Canada. They know that through inequitable taxation we disproportionately fund the federal government in Ottawa. Through federal transfer payments and equalization we also disproportionately fund provincial governments. We help fund their health care, their education, their social services. We fund all these things through net federal taxation out of Alberta into Ottawa to the tune of nearly \$20 billion a year. Our economy drives much of the national economy, yet we are forced to make oversized subsidies to the budgets of other governments.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are more than generous. Albertans support everyone in Canada having similar access to public services, but we also believe in fairness. Fairness is what drives our desire for equalization reform. Unfortunately, this year yet again we see the opposite of fairness. As Albertans work hard to build our economy despite the challenges we face, Quebec has announced that they will be taking \$3.2 billion, the money we send them, and writing \$500 cheques to every Quebec adult with an income of less than \$100,000.

This is outrageous. This is clearly not a matter of providing similar public services across the country; this is a case of direct transfers from the pockets of Albertans to the pockets of Quebecers. If Quebec has enough to start doling out money to everyone, then they have enough money to write a refund cheque payable to the taxpayers of Alberta. This is perhaps the most egregious abuse of transfer dollars that we have ever seen. This is not only unfairness; it is fiscal injustice.

Now more than ever Albertans must stand behind our government. Just as we did in the fall equalization referendum, we must continue our campaign to demand reform and demand that Ottawa fix equalization now.

Utility Costs

Member Irwin: We're going to lose both gas and electricity. I owe over \$1,200 on both. We've been unable to pay rent, extreme utility

ills, and buy food. This has never happened to me before. I'm ashamed and sad.

Those are the words of Patti, just one of thousands of Albertans who've written us to share their very real struggles. Yet this Premier truly believes that Albertans like Patti are simply making "modest sacrifices." Those are his exact words. If you've never had to choose between buying food, paying rent, your utility bills, then, yeah, you probably think Albertans are just making modest sacrifices, or maybe it's that you're completely out of touch with the lived experiences of working Albertans, or maybe it's that you're a Premier with a seven-figure pension coming who can't seem to empathize with anyone ever, the same Premier who justified his cruel cuts to AISH by saying that they wouldn't be onerous.

But it's not just this Premier. This kind of thinking is insidious in the UCP. I urged this government to take real action to address skyrocketing utility costs. Instead of offering tangible help, like through reintroducing a rate cap or a rebate program that would actually provide Albertans immediate relief, I was told that my constituents should just go look at fixed-rate contracts. Those words aren't helpful. They're not helpful to Patti. They're not helpful to a single mom navigating multiple jobs who doesn't have time to try to figure out the complicated system of fixed-rate contracts. Albertans are being told to go figure it out on their own. It's every person for themselves when it comes to paying their bills, that old "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" mentality, an incredibly frustrating attitude that assumes that everybody has boots.

Listen, Albertans deserve real help. This government had an opportunity to make life more affordable, to make life easier for all of us, and they chose not to. It doesn't need to be this way. People like Patti shouldn't be forced to fight daily for their own survival. If you are someone struggling right now, I promise you that you're not alone. You are seen, and you've got a party on your side that will do all we can to help you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Coleman History and Roxy Theatre

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to share some exciting news with you today about my riding. I've frequently shared in this Chamber about the amazing people in my riding of Livingstone-Macleod and how it's full of rich culture, with a wide variety of provincial landmarks that many should visit. One of those is the town of Coleman, located in the Crowsnest Pass near the Frank Slide, which is another place I highly recommend that all Albertans visit. Coleman is a small community that was founded in 1904. It was one of the most important coal-producing centres in the Crowsnest Pass and the greatest coalfield in Alberta prior to 1913.

But it also played a part in a more interesting way in Alberta's history as it was the location of Alberta's only armed train robbery. In 1923 Russian men boarded a train in Lethbridge and waited until they were just outside of Coleman before robbing the passengers. After escaping, a few of them were involved in a deadly shootout with what were then officers from the Alberta Provincial Police force and the RCMP. Along with about \$400 in cash, the robbers also stole the conductor's pocket watch. This watch led to the arrest of the final suspect and can now be found at the Crowsnest museum, also in Coleman.

In 2001 the community was designated as a national historic site of Canada. Among the many historic buildings in Coleman there is a theatre which just recently, thanks to the Minister of Culture, was also declared a national historic resource. I had the honour of receiving that message earlier this month, and I couldn't be happier for the people of

Coleman. The theatre, now known as the Roxy, has so much rich history. It was originally built in 1908, when it was known as the Palm Cafe and Palace Theatre. Unfortunately, they burnt down in 1948 and were rebuilt and were renamed the Roxy. The theatre represents a key piece of Alberta's history when it comes to film and live performances.

I want to thank the Minister of Culture for designating it as a provincial historic resource. I once again encourage all Albertans and extend an invitation to my fellow members to visit Coleman and the pass when they have a moment as a community that is rich and a great place to learn about Alberta's history.

Thank you.

Eastern Slopes Protection Act

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, it takes a special act of cowardice to refuse to debate. In the seven years that I've been in this Chamber, I've taken part in many debates, some where I've agreed and some where I've disagreed, but I've never been afraid to stand up for my views and the people who have sent me to this Chamber to represent them. Sadly, though, this is not something we can say about members across the way.

Our leader put forward a bill that would have protected our eastern slopes from coal mining and enshrined this government's finding from their own coal report into law. This bill was also drafted after we consulted with thousands of Albertans and was supported by tens of thousands. The UCP even supported debating this bill last year, but rather than show some consistency and integrity to debate the exact same bill, only months later the UCP used their majority to kill the bill in committee.

Killing Bill 201 and preventing debate shows us two things: one, the UCP are hypocrites who Albertans can't trust to stand by their own words, and two, the UCP is still reserving the right to tear apart our beautiful Alberta mountains and risk poisoning our water supply with coal mining. The UCP claimed they acted when the minister signed a ministerial order to theoretically put protections in place, but we know those protections are not worth the paper they're written on. With one stroke of a pen the minister can undo all the protections and allow coal mining back into some of Alberta's most environmentally sensitive areas.

Albertans can't trust a government that didn't even want to at least debate the Eastern Slopes Protection Act. They all know full well that this government will undo those so-called protections when the opportunity strikes. Just like last year, I fear that when this UCP government feels that Albertans are no longer paying attention, they will sell off the rights again to strip-mine Alberta's beautiful landscape and risk critical waterways. Albertans just can't trust this Premier or the UCP to protect the eastern slopes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

1:40 Dee Adekugbe and Ruth's House in Calgary

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are people one meets in their lifetime that remind them of what is at the core of all of us, humanity. Compassion is a main component of our survival. No nation succeeds, no community succeeds, and no individual succeeds without the deep-rooted humanity that is in all of us. The trouble is that sometimes this compassion gets buried so deep behind the trials and tribulations of our lived experiences and earthly existence that we lose sight of our innermost core and compassion. This oversight not only causes pain and suffering to ourselves, the people closest to us in our communities, but it inhibits our ability to aid each other in our struggles.

Mr. Speaker, I stand today to recognize one of the beautiful human beings on this earth and in our province who has not only overcome struggle but has continued to be a pillar of support and a beacon of hope and light to others. Dee Adekugbe, referred to in her community as Mama Dee, is one of these exceptional human beings that you meet, and it reminds you of what it means to be human. A survivor of domestic violence, Dee has overcome exceptional circumstances of hardship and used her incredible strength and resilience as an opportunity to help others solve a problem in our society that has gone on for too long.

Dee has founded Ruth's House, a safe-haven organization that provides community homes, family support, and community outreach and advocacy for those who've experienced domestic violence. Mama Dee always says that those who have been affected by domestic violence is one too many. The route to being a victim or a perpetrator is a dreadful road of exposure and experience of ugly realities that leads to broken parts in people. Reconciliation and healing need to occur between everyone and in our society.

Mama Dee, I'm so grateful that I got to meet you, and I'm so looking forward to the many bright days ahead as we lean on you and your courage and those you serve to rid our world of corrosive control and support families through organizations like Ruth's House. Thank you so much for inspiring us all to be better.

COVID-19

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, COVID has taken the lives of over 4,000 Albertans. Countless more have been infected by this deadly disease. Thousands have been hospitalized. Thousands fought for their lives in intensive care. Thousands were forced to have surgeries or medical procedures postponed while our front-line heroes fought this pandemic. Students were forced to move from in-person to online learning time and again. People were forced to isolate, lose work, their jobs, their businesses. People had the rugs pulled out from under them by this government, who raced to open for summer and then vanished, nearly collapsing our health care system.

It's been a very difficult two years, and these years will live forever in the minds of the people who have witnessed it. From the first day this pandemic hit Alberta, we've seen friends and family members getting sick, and we stepped up as a community to wear masks, get vaccinated, distance, and stay home when sick. The impacts of this pandemic will live with this province for a long time, but people are still getting sick with COVID. People are still going to the hospital with COVID. People are still in the ICU with COVID, and tragically people are still dying of COVID, leaving devastated loved ones behind. My heart goes out to everyone who has lost a family member, friend, neighbour to this pandemic. It's a pain that too many Albertans have been forced to share.

Now, I completely understand the desire to put this pandemic behind us, but while this government tries to wash their hands of this pandemic, we must always remember that COVID is still here. That's why I urge all Albertans to wear a mask, limit your contacts, and demand clean air in our public buildings. We must be supportive and work to ensure that as we emerge from this pandemic, no one is left behind. So please continue to get vaccinated, continue to stay home when you're sick, continue to support your family, friends, and neighbours. We will get through this together. We just have to choose to do so.

Thank you.

Road Maintenance and Repair in Camrose Constituency

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, this past winter and the seasonal change have been rough for the Camrose constituency. It was a cold and

harsh winter, and now for the past month we have seen dramatic changes between warming and freezing. This weather has been doing an unimaginable amount of damage to the roads and highways, with many roads falling behind in maintenance and in some cases, according to some residents, just not being maintained at all.

Highways 14 and 630 have been a huge area of concern, especially with safety. We have experienced many hardships within the community due to the tragedies that continue to happen on these roads. All of us in the Camrose constituency and the surrounding communities need the issues around safety on these roads addressed and dealt with. We are all painfully tired of hearing about crashes that happen on these roads. As parents and loved ones keep getting calls about their child or loved one not coming home, the concerns for safety when one must drive on these highways grow.

Everyone has the right to safety on the roads as a driver. When we wake up in the morning to go to work, we shouldn't have to worry about being able to miss the big pothole just to avoid damaging our vehicle. In more rural areas, where individuals don't have the luxury of paved roads, they shouldn't have to worry about the roads being washed out or ending up in the ditch in the winter and perhaps not being found for hours, let alone days.

Mr. Speaker, not all roads have bad tales, but some occasionally slip through the cracks. We have a tremendous opportunity to make highways and rural roads a safer place for everyone and the best in Canada. I can't think of a better government that can do just that.

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

National Indigenous Water Operator Day

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oki. I rise today to tell the House about National Indigenous Water Operator Day. It is celebrated on March 21 annually, but as parliamentary secretary for water stewardship I believe it's an occasion that needs to be acknowledged. Many of us give very little thought about the quality of our drinking water, and when we do, it's often because something went wrong. National Indigenous Water Operator Day is in recognition of the vital work done and the dedication shown by those who work to provide safe drinking water for our Indigenous communities. These are not necessarily high-profile positions or even ones that are well known unless something goes wrong, and then we value these workers with our very lives.

So thank you to each and every one of the many Indigenous water operators for the incredibly important work that you do and because of your many successes. We may not know you personally, but we celebrate you now on the day dedicated to your service.

I had the pleasure of attending an event at Calgary city hall this past Saturday to recognize some of the front-line water operators. Many of them work and live in Alberta; however, many were able to come from across the country, including Saskatchewan, B.C., and Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, our rivers, streams, and lakes cross many jurisdictional boundaries. We all appreciate the front-line workers, engineers, and students who keep our water clean and safe. It is a team effort, and please know that you are supported by your provincial government. Your ingenuity and initiative often lead to many creative and effective solutions to everyday problems, but more support is necessary.

Mr. Speaker, to you and to all my colleagues in this Chamber: the next time you pour a glass of water and take that first sip, take a moment to reflect on the many men and women who make sure that our glasses or bottles are full of clean water. We all know how essential water is; water is life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Charter School Funding

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Providing education for children and youth in Alberta is a high priority for the United Conservative government. In 2019 our government was selected with the mandate to bring back parental choice and education, and that's exactly what we have done. Last week our government announced \$25 million in operational funding and \$47 million in capital investment over the next three years for charter schools in Alberta. This investment was made possible through Budget 2022 and will greatly improve and upgrade the facilities used for public charter schools.

Mr. Speaker, our government is working tirelessly to get Alberta's economy back on track after the damage caused by the NDP government. As proof of our success in this recovery, Alberta is in desperate need of skilled tradespeople to work as plumbers, electricians, pipefitters. The skills required to work in these industries can be developed through learning in public charter schools. Mr. Speaker, this investment is great news for Alberta. The funding will allow for schools to utilize different teaching styles and will offer students specialized learning in science, technology, mathematics, or engineering. This unique programming will continue the course of providing parental choice in education, which I am very excited and happy to see. I extend my gratitude to the hon. Premier as well as to the Minister of Education for working hard to deliver on the promises made.

My constituents in Calgary-Falconridge are grateful to see a government that is defending our students and parents from the intrusive educational changes made by the NDP. In addition, they're also happy to have a government that is giving their children an opportunity to pursue a specialized education early in life. Mr. Speaker, by investing in education for children and youth, we'll continue to build a strong workforce.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has question 1.

Budget 2022 Vote

Ms Pancholi: Tomorrow is the final vote on this Premier's bogus, no-help provincial budget. It is also a confidence vote on this Premier. I can tell you that our caucus will stand on behalf of our constituents, the people who elected us to serve them, and vote against this budget. We will do so because it fails so deeply to help Albertans as they face a cost-of-living crisis. It also does not properly fund public education. It levels massive cuts to postsecondary and actively attacks public health care. To the Premier: with everything I've just outlined, how can he expect Albertans to support . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Everyone is going to have their opportunity to ask questions today. As members know, I am not opposed to the occasional heckle. What I am opposed to is members having full on conversations with others all in sedentary positions.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: May I begin again, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: No.

Ms Pancholi: Okay.

To the Premier: with everything I've just outlined, how can we expect Albertans to support this budget and have confidence in his incompetent leadership?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP once again characterized this budget as a “no-help budget” when, in fact, it increases the base Health budget by \$2 billion, taking Alberta from being the second most expensive health care system in Canada per capita to being the second most expensive health care system per capita in Canada, with \$600 million of additional investment in this budget on top of \$900 million last year to double the number of surgeries that are performed in charter facilities, to provide surgeries more quickly, to increase by 50 the number of baseline ICU beds, to hire more doctors and nurses, taking real action for Alberta health.

Ms Pancholi: But there's no help in that budget for Alberta families. Inflation rates not seen in 30 years. The cost of everything is rising, from groceries to rent to clothing to gas. The UCP knows this, and they still pressed ahead with a \$1 billion tax grab on families. They've spurred massive increases to car insurance, to tuition, to school fees, and more. So why would UCP MLAs wait until April 9 when we have a confidence . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Pancholi: . . . or a nonconfidence vote on this Premier tomorrow? My question is: will it be a free vote? Will the Premier allow MLAs to vote on their conscience?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:52.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is a budget bill in front of the Assembly. There will be a bill to reduce the fuel tax by 13 cents, to eliminate the Alberta fuel tax as long as oil prices remain high. That is \$1.4 billion in direct cash in the pockets of Albertans on an annualized basis on top of the \$300 million in support for high electricity prices through the \$150 rebate. Meanwhile the NDP is cheering on their coalition partner Justin Trudeau, who wants to quadruple the carbon tax starting April 1.

Ms Pancholi: It sounds like the Premier is afraid of a free vote.

My message to the MLAs on that side of the House is that they can take a stand, a stand against this Premier and a stand for Albertans. Eighteen members of the government caucus is all it takes to defeat this budget. I'm encouraging each UCP MLA to think long and hard today about why they were elected and to vote on their conscience tomorrow. We know that some members across the way won't be voting for him on April 9 anyway, so will someone in the government caucus or on the front bench stand right now, support your constituents, and vote no confidence in this Premier? Let's take a stand together, and let's build a budget that gives Albertans real hope.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm confident in saying that Conservative MLAs will be thrilled to vote for the first balanced budget in 14 years. [some applause] A balanced budget that we got by responsible spending restraint, dynamic growth across the entire economy, and a balanced budget that is allowing us to eliminate the fuel tax for Albertans starting April 1.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Budget 2022 and Utility Costs

Ms Ganley: This budget does nothing to support Alberta families, and the Premier knows it. Alberta families have been hammered

with months of skyrocketing natural gas and electricity bills, and this government refuses to act. The Premier boasted about a natural gas rebate, and it was fake. He planned to do nothing for electricity rates and then offered them 50 bucks. Albertans have lost confidence. They feel abandoned by this entire UCP caucus. Will someone over there do the right thing, stand up, apologize, and actually do something to help Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the NDP and their ally Justin Trudeau want to do – you know, of course, they've actually formally created the coalition. By the way, in case anybody is misunderstanding this, the Alberta NDP is a branch plant of Jagmeet Singh's federal NDP, which is a branch plant of Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party, and they're all in cahoots to make life more expensive for Canadians. They're not satisfied with the punishing carbon tax like it is today. They want to more than quadruple it starting April 1. Will the member opposite stand in her place and vote against the Liberal-NDP hike in the carbon tax?

Ms Ganley: This is the government that dines out on the sky palace roof while Alberta families can't put food on their table. As MLAs we have to demand better. We've demanded a real rebate for natural gas and electricity. We've demanded a ban on utility shut-offs for the next six months at least. The associate minister of electricity has boasted about doing nothing. He's shrugged off concerns from Albertans about having their utilities shut off, and he offered them a fake rebate. Can the Premier tell families why he thinks it's okay to pass a budget that will drown them in debt?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, on inflation the NDP supported Justin Trudeau's ridiculous vax requirement for truckers that created further problems for our supply chains. They supported the teamsters, against Alberta farmers and commodity producers, in opposing a settlement to that work action, further driving up inflation. They brought in the carbon tax. They're cheering on Justin Trudeau's plan to more than quadruple it, and with their coalition with Justin Trudeau they want to keep printing money, driving up inflation even further. There is no party that is further away from Canadians than the NDP on the issue of inflation.

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, this Premier's ability to ignore the genuine struggles of Alberta families is absolutely astounding. The budget is due for a vote tomorrow. Albertans can't afford their utilities, their car insurance, their property taxes, all because of this government. They even want to tax the family camping trip. This budget fails to recognize the realities facing Albertans and is not worthy of this House. Will someone over there stand up, commit to do the right thing? Don't support that budget that does nothing for the people they were elected to represent.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are excited to see the first balanced budget in 14 years because of responsible spending, because of pro-growth policies, the recovery plan that created last year the best year ever in Alberta forestry, in high tech, in venture capital, in exports, in manufacturing, in film and television, even in ag revenues during a tough year. This economy is diversifying. It's growing. The big problem of cost of living is being made a whole lot worse by the Liberal-NDP plan to quadruple their carbon tax. We're going to fight that every step of the way.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert is next.

Budget 2022 and Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: I remember this Premier claiming to be offended at the suggestion that he would take money away from Albertans with disabilities. He called it fearmongering, a scare tactic, and then immediately after being elected, he took thousands away from disabled Albertans. He left them to fend for themselves in a cost-of-living crisis unlike anything we've seen. This budget was the Premier's opportunity to make amends, but he chose to continue to make life harder for them. This budget should not be passed, period. Will the Premier commit to bringing forward more supports for vulnerable Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy is growing. The problem we have right now is inflation being worsened by the NDP-Liberal carbon tax.

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting hearing the member opposite talk about ethics when she's sitting next to an NDP colleague who broke the law to violate my personal privacy and the personal privacy of another Alberta citizen. The question is: how long did the NDP know that was going on, and why did they create an environment where it was ethically acceptable in the NDP to violate personal privacy?

Ms Renaud: Our caucus presented Albertans with a plan to put more money in their pockets. The Premier's budget squeezes Albertans for every cent while wealthy CEOs get billions. This selfish, hurtful budget should not be endorsed by this House. I and my colleagues will proudly vote against this no-help budget. We're asking MLAs from all parties to have a conscience and think long and hard about this and vote against this Premier. Will someone on that side take a stand in this House against this cruel budget? Disabled Albertans are watching. They don't care about your spin.

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, only the NDP could refer to a budget that has increased support for education, for health care, for Children's Services, for community services as cruel. You know what I think is cruel? Burdening future generations with an enormous debt that, basically, is an intergenerational transfer of wealth from kids who can't even vote for consumption by today's generation. We think that endless deficit spending is immoral, and the NDP is wrong to continue campaigning for even more debt on future Alberta generations.

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, disabled Albertans are hurting. This budget is cruel, and it is harmful, and it will drive Albertans into debt. It will see some households lose power and heat. Imagine that in Alberta. That's unthinkable. It will push more vulnerable Albertans onto the street. If this Premier is so proud of this ridiculous budget, then put it to the test. Put it to a real vote in this House and drop the UCP pageantry. Will the Premier or someone in this House rise right now and commit to tomorrow's vote on the budget, commit that it'll be a free vote?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what. It's not cruel. It's compassionate to invest 600 million new dollars in job training for underemployed and unemployed Albertans. What is cruel is quadrupling the carbon tax to make it more expensive for Albertans to buy groceries, to fill up their gas tanks, to take their kids to school. Do you know we've had 18 per cent food inflation... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The Premier has the call.

Mr. Kenney: We've had 18 per cent food inflation since the NDP started with their carbon tax in 2015, but they want to impose even greater cruelty on Albertans right now who are having to go to the food bank by making food even more expensive by quadrupling the carbon tax. Shame on them.

Technology Industry Development

Ms Sweet: Upon being elected, the UCP declared diversification a luxury and cancelled several tax credits that support start-ups, attract investment, and support economic diversification. Now Alberta is losing ground to other jurisdictions because we're just not competitive enough. Last year Ontario attracted \$7.9 billion, a 295 per cent increase; British Columbia, \$2.9 billion, a 224 per cent increase; Quebec, \$2.8 billion, a 180 per cent increase. Meanwhile Alberta, a \$561 million increase. Is the tech industry really a priority for this government, and why are we falling so far behind?

Mr. Kenney: Well, I'm delighted the member asked that question, Mr. Speaker, because when she was in office in 2018, there were 24 ven cap deals in Alberta, worth \$96 million. Last year, because of our recovery plan, there were 87 ven cap deals, worth \$561 million, a fivefold increase in the volume of venture capital, a doubling of the number of tech companies operating and global companies like Amazon Web Services, Infosys, Mphasis, and others that are setting up shop here in Alberta in a tech boom that we've never seen before.

Ms Sweet: Billions for other provinces, millions for this government. It's a failure, Premier.

The UCP likes to point to their \$4.7 billion corporate tax giveaway as helping the economy, but there's actually no proof. The Alberta Chambers of Commerce says that the UCP corporate tax rate reduction only applies to large, profitable corporations and not to start-ups. They and the Calgary Chamber of commerce and tech leaders have all been calling for the reinstatement of the Alberta investor tax credit. Reinstating this tax credit would put Alberta entrepreneurs on equal footing with other jurisdictions. Why does the UCP continue to ignore our business community?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP claimed that the job-creation tax cut was going to reduce revenues by \$4.6 billion. In fact, no, it didn't. The budget projected that revenues would grow by incentivizing new investment, new job creation, new taxpayers, a broader tax base, and that's exactly what happened. We are now generating \$400 million more in revenue at an 8-point corporate tax rate than the NDP was at a 12-point rate. Today their leader told the chamber of commerce she wants to raise business taxes by 50 per cent to put more Albertans out of work.

Ms Sweet: Again, Mr. Speaker, by the end of 2018 the Alberta investor tax credit leveraged \$94 million in investment, with 71 per cent of the credit going to Calgary companies. This was vital to the growth of the tech and innovation ecosystem we are seeing in Calgary and included investment in everything from energy to ag tech. The tax credit, if it had not been cancelled, was expected to create 4,400 jobs and attract an additional \$500 million in private investment in Calgary. Just this morning our leader promised to reinstate the AITC, which will attract investment to Alberta and help diversify the economy. Why is this government refusing to do the same? It's hurting our competitiveness.

Mr. Kenney: Let's sum up the NDP in today's question period, Mr. Speaker. They stand with Justin Trudeau and his plan to quadruple the job-killing carbon tax. They want to increase taxes on job creators

in Alberta by 50 per cent. They defend their 50 per cent increase in income taxes on Albertans. They defended Justin Trudeau's higher tax on jobs through the CPP premium. They support an unfair employment insurance system that hammers Alberta workers to transfer money elsewhere in the country. Why is it that the NDP did not learn the lessons of their disastrous economic record? Why do they want to raise taxes on everything in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein is next.

Auditor General Report on ARCHES Expenditures

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We just learned more about the depths of the incompetent fiscal management under the NDP. Yesterday the office of the Auditor General released their report on the management of the ARCHES grant program in Lethbridge. It revealed how under the NDP millions went missing due to the NDP's wilful blindness. As a reminder, under the NDP's watch this organization couldn't account for 1.6 million in taxpayer dollars of the total \$18.3 million they received over three years. To the associate minister: how are you cleaning up the NDP's mess and bringing fiscal accountability to your grants . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a great question by the member. That's what we get, quite frankly, when we get an NDP-Trudeau alliance to manage our finances. We get missing money, we get inappropriate spending, and we get lining of their friends' pockets in the name of helping those who are most vulnerable. It is shameful. We're committed on this side of the House to strong fiscal management. We're committed to improved access to services, strong partners. This organization is under new management, and I am very optimistic about working with them in the future.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his efforts. Given that it just does not end, that under the NDP's watch this organization's staff attended conferences in Europe, luxury staff retreats in British Columbia, and bought thousands in gift cards from their own families' businesses, and given that the NDP turned a blind eye to this gross misuse of taxpayer dollars, dollars that should have been used to help people, to the associate minister: how can we make sure this never happens again in the future?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The best thing we can do for the people of Alberta is to make sure the NDP do not get into government again and that they do not have an NDP-Trudeau alliance in this province ever again. Our government has resolved this issue. This government is hard at work ensuring that taxpayer dollars are being spent properly in this province, and that is why we've had the first balanced budget in over a decade in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't argue with that. Thank you to the minister. Given that the question on everyone's mind coming out of the Auditor General's report is on how this was allowed to happen, to the associate minister: how did this happen?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great question by the member behind me. I'm not sure how I can actually even answer that question without the assistance of the members opposite. Maybe the former Health minister, who oversaw the grants, could really help everyone out by publishing her own white paper, quite frankly titled *How I Did It: Helping ARCHES Lose 1.6 Million Taxpayer Dollars*. You know, that's a report that I'd be willing to read and, I'm sure, all Albertans would be willing to read.

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

Health Care Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. New data from the Canadian Medical Association shows that over half the doctors in Canada have experienced burnout during the pandemic. But while every province has had to grapple with COVID, only Alberta's doctors have also had to deal with the incompetence and scare tactics of the UCP, who put politics first and pushed our health care system to its limits while driving doctors away. Doctors remain under enormous strain as hospitals remain over capacity while this government looks the other way and continues to fight with them. Why is the UCP continuing to create chaos and undermine our health care system at a time when our health care heroes need support?

2:10

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question, because it's important that we get the facts out on the table. We actually have more health care professionals in the province today than we've had at any other time. There has been an increase in the number of doctors, and we have been working very closely with the doctors and supporting them. We put in our budget this year that it continued the \$90 million to be able to support doctors, to be able to ensure that we have doctors in rural Alberta. In addition to that, we have made changes to the formulary in terms of virtual care codes to enable family physicians to be able to continue billing through COVID. We made that change in the fifth wave. We are supporting our doctors, and we're supporting health care.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that doctors and health care workers do not feel supported by this government and given that this was shown in a post by Dr. Neeja Bakshi – she said: “We are still over capacity . . . The new steady state of healthcare. Where demand is high and resources are low. Where we are forced to squeeze every ounce of moral and ethical obligation out of an exhausted workforce” – and given that she says, “I am tired of speaking up and speaking out to a void that doesn't listen,” why are the UCP continuing to devalue health care heroes fighting to hold our system and themselves together by driving to cut their wages instead of giving them help?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, the resources are at the highest level ever. In Budget 2022 that increase is \$600 million for this year, and that's in addition to the \$900 million in the base operating budget last year, another \$600 million the year after that, still an additional \$600 million the year after that. That's a \$1.8 billion increase over a three-year period. In addition, we are investing \$3.5 billion into infrastructure projects across the province. Our government is focused on providing the resources to health care, we are focused

on supporting health care professionals, and we are focused on supporting Albertans getting the health care that they need.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that anyone watching can see this minister is not listening, just like health care workers know that this minister and this government are not understanding the realities on the ground – indeed, health care professionals find the UCP want to cut their wages even though they’ve been on the front lines of this pandemic throughout this government’s mismanagement – and given that the UCP even wants to cut the wages of respiratory therapists, who helped Albertans who were sick with and dying with COVID breathe their last breaths, and that they want them to take an 8 per cent pay cut, why is this government repeating these same scare tactics and undermining our health care workers?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is focused on supporting our health care system and our health care workers. I want to thank all the health care workers, who have done a phenomenal job over the last two years. You know, we are providing increases to health care workers. I’m pleased to point out again the agreement that we reached with UNA, which provided an increase. By the way, that increase was not provided by the previous government. No, we provided that increase. We also provided additional payments and the critical worker benefit to thank health care workers. That wasn’t done across the entire country, but we did it here in Alberta because it was important we say thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

School Construction Capital Plan and Calgary

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government’s disrespect of my constituents in northeast Calgary is well documented. The Premier and the local MLA did nothing to support residents after the devastating hailstorm. The Premier accused and blamed the people of northeast Calgary for the spread of COVID-19 in Calgary, and now this government’s budget again ignores the need of my constituents by failing to invest in the schools and other infrastructure that’s badly needed. Can the Minister of Education please explain what metrics she used to deny my constituents the new school they need in northeast Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We’re supporting schools right across this province. There are 66 current projects on the go, 15 new projects announced, and of course it goes through a very rigorous Auditor General approved process, 10 gates that they have to go through. We look at all of those projects, and they will rise to the top as they’re needed.

Mr. Sabir: Given that none of the schools the minister mentioned are in northeast Calgary and given that I raised these concerns with the Premier in budget debate last week but he was unable to give me a reason why northeast Calgary was not given a much-needed school and given that the northeast is one of the fastest growing regions in Calgary and is badly in need of new schools, what message does the minister have for my constituents who will spend a longer time travelling to school to learn in overcrowded classrooms because she wasn’t willing to make these investments in northeast Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The message I have for his constituents is that, unfortunately, the member opposite is incorrect. We have two schools currently being built in Calgary-North East: Skyview middle school and the north Calgary high school. Of course, that’s in northeast Calgary. We’re happy we announced another school in northwest Calgary. We will continue to announce and take care of Calgary.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the Premier has constantly refused to apologize for his harmful remarks blaming northeast Calgary for spreading COVID-19 . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. It’s very difficult to hear the hon. member’s question, which he has a right to ask.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

. . . and now given that this minister refuses to acknowledge the difficulty she is putting my constituents in by failing to invest in a new school for the area and given that my constituents want answers, will the minister agree to attending a town hall that I will organize in northeast Calgary so she can tell my residents in northeast Calgary . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I previously indicated, there are two schools currently being built in northeast Calgary, but the two public school divisions in Calgary, Calgary public board of education and Calgary Catholic, both got schools, their number one priorities. Their number one priorities were in . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. I’m not sure who was making unparliamentary remarks on the government side about perhaps encouraging people to not speak, but it’s certainly unparliamentary, and I hope not to hear it again.

The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The two schools that were announced in addition to those ones in northeast Calgary that are currently being built: one is in Evanston to address an issue in northwest Calgary of a school that has 103 per cent utilization; the other one is in Legacy in south Calgary.

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

Rural Health Care and Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rural Albertans have been blessed not only with blue skies and picturesque landscapes worthy of the silver screen but resources and industries that feed the nation and fuel the world. I’ve been told many times that money is made in rural Alberta, but it’s counted and spent in the big cities. When it comes to health care in rural Alberta, we have the buildings, but we need the people to run the systems, to provide the health care and services that rural communities deserve. To the Minister of Health: can you advise how Budget ’22 will address the gap in rural health care services and infrastructure and specifics, if possible, regarding ambulance services?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the important question. Alberta’s EMS system is under

increased pressure. That's why Budget '22 adds \$64 million to address needs of the EMS system and make EMS more responsive to community needs. We formed the Alberta EMS Provincial Advisory Committee to provide ongoing and timely recommendations to improve EMS service as well. In the meantime the initial steps of Alberta Health Services' 10-point action plan are already yielding results. One step they're taking is piloting a rural interfacility transfer project that will increase the availability of ambulances in rural areas.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister, for the answer. Given that \$22 billion was proposed in Budget 2022 and promises to improve health and operating expenses and given these measurements will improve health standards for rural communities deserving better health care services from AHS, to the Minister of Health: can you provide more detail on the ministry's plan to implement the recommendations from the 2020 AHS performance review as it relates to rural communities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the hon. member. AHS submitted a comprehensive implementation plan in August 2020 for review. As a result, 19 of their savings initiatives are either complete or under way, and 50 were approved to move forward. Now, AHS moved forward to better virtual care options, consolidating regional EMS, dispatch operations, and contract laundry services. These savings initiatives reinvested \$83 million into our health care system, and these funds directly benefit rural, remote, and northern Albertans, who deserve access to the same quality of care as those in urban areas. We are investing in the health care system, and we will deliver for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic is now behind us and the Alberta province has removed many of the previous restrictions and there was a large uptake in vaccines that were intended for the initial COVID strains and given that I'm hearing many have experienced adverse reactions or side effects from the vaccines – there are a lot of questions and concerns of how to report these incidents – to the Minister of Health: what is the process for reporting, compensating vaccine injuries in the province, and what is being done to make sure that that process is available to the general public?

Mr. Copping: Well, thanks to the hon. member for the question. As the hon. member pointed out, we are moving into the endemic phase, but I want to be clear that COVID-19 is not yet behind us. While we are transitioning to the endemic phase, restrictions are still in place in high-risk settings. As we've indicated in the House numerous times, vaccines are safe and significantly reduce the chance of severe outcomes from COVID-19. Of the 8.5 million vaccine doses administered in Alberta, only 2,636 adverse events were reported to Alberta Health. That's a safety rating of roughly 99.97 per cent. Now, Health Canada is responsible for certifying pharmaceuticals, and Canada is not offering compensation for . . .

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

2:20 Canadian Energy Centre

Member Ceci: Thank you. The war room's blooper reel includes hiring a failed UCP candidate to run the organization, stealing logos, impersonating and attacking journalists, and attacking an

animated kids movie about Bigfoot. Naturally, Albertans would like to see some transparency around the war room and answers about how that money is being spent. In a recent ruling the Information and Privacy Commissioner found that the war room was not subject to FOIP, but the government has the power to change that. Will the government open up the war room to FOIP? If not, what's being hidden there?

Mrs. Savage: The Canadian Energy Centre is needed now more than ever as we see the fallout of global energy supplies with the need to weed out Russian barrels of oil. We see the U.S. now looking to Venezuela [interjections] Oh, listen to the NDP cheering on Russian oil production again. Mr. Speaker, this is exactly why we need the Canadian Energy Centre. We need it to stand up for our oil and gas sector as the United States starts looking to Venezuela, Iran, Saudi Arabia for replacements. We're right next door; they can look to us, and that's what the Canadian Energy Centre is . . .

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

Member Ceci: Given that the government continues to defend the war room despite repeated failures and given that just a few days ago the UCP voted against cutting funding for the war room despite the minister being unable to tell us what the war room actually does and given that the war room is nothing but an example of the UCP's failed energy policies – while we were successful in making the case for market access, the UCP have not been – zero pipelines, 130,000 fewer jobs than promised, and Calgary has the highest unemployment rate among major Canadian cities, can the minister actually provide the House with one tangible . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to report and note that the energy industry is thriving. Drilling is up, the service sector is employed again, the land sales have gone up, price has gone up, people are back to work, and that's why we are standing up to the opponents of oil and gas. One of the reasons why the Canadian Energy Centre is not subject to FOIP is to not share its strategy. Why would we share the strategy of the centre to protect our oil and gas industry with those who want to cut it down? We're protecting it.

Member Ceci: Their strategy made oil go up. That's pretty good.

Given that the war room is intentionally designed by the UCP to evade public scrutiny and the Energy minister has been unable to provide even the most basic details about how Alberta's money is being spent and given that the war room is nothing but a money pit that provides no value for the people of Alberta – worse yet, it's a slush fund for the UCP to spend tax dollars for partisan gain – and given that the war room has not provided a single tangible thing for Albertans, will the UCP do what's right and shut it down?

Mrs. Savage: As the members opposite know very well, the Canadian Energy Centre is subject to the Auditor General, and every single penny that they spend is publicly disclosed. But, Mr. Speaker, we will not share the strategy of the Canadian Energy Centre with those who want to use that strategy to stop it. I don't know. The NDP seem to be really good at hacking information. I would assume that their hacker can get into the Canadian Energy Centre website and find out what the strategy is.

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's NDP know that a well-funded and well-supported postsecondary sector is critical for helping Alberta's future leaders. We've seen two studies from the Canada West Foundation. Now they're showing more young people are leaving Alberta than moving to the province, for the first time since 1988. These are young people that would be starting a family, starting a business, buying houses, launching innovation, building strong communities in Alberta if they weren't leaving. The numbers are crystal clear. The UCP policies on postsecondary are causing significant harm. Why is the UCP gutting our colleges, universities, and polytechnics and driving young people out of Alberta?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very clear from that statement that the member just read the Coles Notes version of the report and didn't actually open it and read it in detail. If he would, he would know that there are many factors contributing to that. As well, he would know that there are a number of recommendations in the report that touch on postsecondary education. And you know what? We're already doing those things. It calls for the government to invest more in work-integrated learning. We're doing that. It calls for more focus on competency-based learning. We're already doing that.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the UCP is ramming through senseless cuts to postsecondary, pushing the best and the brightest to leave our province, and given that, on top of that, they're stacking massive increases to tuition, forcing more students to take out student loans, and then actually hiking the interest on those same student loans, can the minister explain why he is balancing the budget or trying to balance the budget on the backs of our students here in Alberta?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, the budget is balanced because we stopped the reckless spending that those members had us on the trajectory to continue. We've reined in spending. We've balanced Alberta's finances and have presented a balanced budget for the first time in eight years. When it comes to tuition, tuition today is below the national average, but, in addition, we've added more to scholarships, bursaries, and other student awards to ensure that every Albertan has the opportunity to access postsecondary education. That's being maintained through Budget 2022 and being committed to.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that this minister has and still stubbornly thinks that cuts and cost hikes are a good idea when so many postsecondary students and young people are voting with their feet and simply leaving this province, will someone on that side of the House rise and tell this minister that his cuts are putting our postsecondary institutions in jeopardy and his cost hikes are cruel and he's driving out the very future that we rely on, which is our young people? It takes generations to build the reputation of our schools, but it takes only months to let it wash away in a sea of cuts and disrespect to postsecondary education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, we've worked over the last few years to bring funding in line with other provinces. Across the U15 the universities of Alberta and Calgary, which are included in that category, remained at the top of the U15 when it comes to funding levels on a per student basis. The average funding level across the U15 was approximately \$12,000 dollars. Many of our universities in Alberta were way above that at \$15,000, \$16,000 in funding. Again, coming back to the report, one of the other things the report – and I have it right in front of me – talks about is creating apprenticeships in other careers. Again, another example of . . .

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Culturally Appropriate Foster and Kinship Care

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Mr. Speaker, as you know, prior to politics I managed youth homeless shelters. For many of the children we served, their guardian was the provincial government. During this time working with youth in care it became clear that removing a child from their family could be more traumatic than what they were dealing with at their home, more so when they were placed in an entirely different cultural setting. To the Minister of Children's Services: can you tell us what efforts are being made today to increase the availability of culturally appropriate foster care?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to thank the member for the important question. Our goal, whenever safely possible, is to support families so that children can stay safely in their homes, but if we can't do that, we do want to keep kids connected with their families, with their community, and with their culture. We work with community organizations and families to identify culturally appropriate foster and kinship care placements, and we provide training for kinship and foster caregivers to meet a child's cultural needs. We're moving in the right direction as the growth of kinship care placements continues to surpass the number of foster care homes, and we'll continue to support this important work.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her efforts. Given that culturally appropriate placement is critical for reconciliation and given that it has also been an issue that has been raised as a concern by many cultural groups in my community, including the Somalian, Ghanaian, South Sudanese, Eritrean, and Ethiopian communities and leadership at Ruth's House, to the same minister: can you tell us what efforts are being made to increase the availability of kinship care as well as supports and safety for kinship care homes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do first want to thank Dee and the volunteers and board members of Ruth's House for taking the time to meet with me this morning and for the important work that they do to support women and families in our communities. We know the importance of keeping kids connected to their families and their culture, and as kinship care placements increase, we're continuing to make sure that we have culturally responsive support services in place as well. We've improved kinship caregiver training and training for our staff to better understand and assist the unique situations kinship provides, and this also includes supporting the work of our . . .

2:30

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for her response. Given that we know that if we truly want to meet the needs of young people, we need to support the families and we need to build strong communities and given that in my experience African Canadians have a strong sense of community and are ready and willing to help their brothers and sisters in need if they could only access the resources that are needed to help, to the same minister: can you share with this House what efforts are being

made to partner with volunteer organizations, faith and otherwise, to aid in the efforts of building stronger communities?

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We do work with a number of amazing volunteer faith and community organizations right across Alberta to help support families to stay together and identify safe and culturally appropriate temporary homes when they're needed. We're also improving the supports that we have in place for kinship caregivers. As part of our review that we're doing in our ministry, we're creating more culturally relevant home assessment tools for caregivers who are caring for members of their own family or community. I know there is more work to be done on this front, but we're committed to making changes where and when they're needed.

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

Education Concerns

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Monday I met with the Red Deer Catholic school board, a board that the Minister of Education was very familiar with. They told me that they do not believe this curriculum should move forward this fall. They are grateful that the minister finally delayed some subject areas and some grades. But it's March 23, and there are no resources, no professional development. Clearly, this curriculum is destined to fail. Will the Education minister listen to her former colleagues and promise Albertans she won't force this failed curriculum on the students she once claimed to represent?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We embarked on the largest, most transparent engagement process on the curriculum, which is exactly what we said we would do. I am very proud to say that we will be introducing the three subjects of mathematics, English language arts and literature, and physical and wellness. You know what? I spoke with a Red Deer Catholic elementary school teacher that is excited about bringing in the English language arts program this September.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the Wolf Creek public board and the Red Deer Catholic board both desperately need schools in Blackfalds since the existing one is already over 100 per cent capacity, given that the UCP's no-help budget offers no hope for Blackfalds, can the minister explain to these families why she failed them in her no-help budget? Did the minister even bring a proposal to cabinet? Was she ignored, or is it that she didn't even bother to fight for the people of Blackfalds?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've indicated over and over again to the member opposite – she was a former school board trustee. She should know exactly how it works; obviously, she doesn't. There is a gated process approved by the Auditor General in which case – and I'm happy to tell her that there is a new high school going to be built in Blackfalds. She must have forgotten that element. The member opposite should do her homework.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's not in this no-help budget and given that Fort McMurray public has a new superintendent in town and given that she's not very happy with this government's Dumpster fire of a curriculum and given that Fort McMurray has asked the government to pause – the superintendent knows that the current draft curriculum is developmentally inappropriate. Given that the feedback isn't new, Minister – the minister has been getting this feedback from school boards, from educators, from academics, from community leaders, from teachers, from people on the street – will she finally listen to Albertans and stop with her bungled curriculum?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, through the chair.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I want to inform the member opposite that, yes, I'm listening to the people of Alberta. We have made refinements. We are bringing forward three subjects in September. We are going to bring other subjects forward. We've been listening to the implementation advisory council made up of teachers, curriculum experts, superintendents, all telling us that we can move forward with the curriculum.

Utility Costs

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, I received an e-mail from Robert, a constituent who wrote to me because his latest utility bill has reached \$750 – \$750 – in a single month. He's worried because his income is barely covering his basic expenses, and he's having a hard time making ends meet. While Robert struggles, all this government is prepared to do is cut him a \$50 cheque. How can this government think that reducing utility bills from \$750 to \$700 is an improvement? Are you even listening?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can appreciate that utility costs are going up. Electricity costs have gone up. I want to inform this House, though, of the reasons why they're going up. The previous government's policies are a big part of that reason. They overbuilt the system by close to \$7 billion when they were in office. They prematurely went from coal to gas, costing Albertan consumers \$1.4 billion. Then they teamed up with Justin Trudeau and brought in a carbon tax, costing every Albertan thousands of dollars.

Ms Goehring: Given that another resident of Edmonton-Castle Downs, Ceilia, wrote to me about their utility bills, which have climbed to over \$600, and given that she is worried that bills like this will push some Albertans past their fiscal breaking point and into poverty and given that she's looking for support and a fake natural gas rebate and 50 bucks won't help them at all, how many Albertans like Ceilia is the associate minister willing to push past the fiscal breaking point before he steps up to help them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I always appreciate the questions even when they aren't supported by the facts. You know, as we all are aware on this side of the House, the NDP brought in disastrous policies that drove up the cost of electricity for everyone. Now, my advice to the NDP is to simply advise these people that there are supports to help them. There is help at the Utilities Consumer Advocate. They don't have to do the work. Despite what they tell you, they don't have to do the work themselves. There are

people standing by that will help walk them through all their choices, including supports for people that are suffering from a utility . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Goehring: Given that I could stand up here every single day and read more of these stories of my constituents struggling while this government ignores them and puts more effort into yelling in this House than helping Albertans and given that two of the constituents I spoke of today are worried about making ends meet because this government refused to step up when needed but given that this government simply doesn't care about the people who can't make ends meet because of their no-help budget, will the associate minister look into the camera right now and tell Robert and Ceilia why he refuses to help them at all? Better yet, will he stand and admit that he's done wrong by them and commit to voting against this budget?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly do acknowledge that Albertans are facing some increased cost pressures, and we are responding. [interjections] We have brought in a natural gas consumer protection program of gas price . . .

The Speaker: I find the irony of the question referring to certain individuals in the House yelling only to be followed by yelling of that same member's side – it makes it very difficult for the Speaker to understand and, particularly, hear the Finance minister.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we have brought in a natural gas price protection measure that if gas prices go up, like they are in Europe or Asia, consumers will be protected. We brought in an electricity rebate program. It'll be \$150 for every Alberta electricity consumer, and we are halting our fuel tax in this province, saving Albertans \$1.3 billion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Athabasca University

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One key mandate of Advanced Education is ensuring postsecondary learning is available for all who desire it, regardless of location. Athabasca University provides distance learning education for students in Alberta and now around the world. The board of governors' move to a near-virtual strategy has many of my constituents concerned over a loss of jobs in their community. To the Minister of Advanced Education: is the government cognizant of the potential impact Athabasca University's near-virtual agenda may have on the local economy, and what is being done to mitigate it?

Ms Hoffman: Nothing.

The Speaker: Order. The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education is the one with the call.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, just let me commend and thank the member for his incredible advocacy. I know the member has spoken with me on a variety of occasions, bringing these concerns to me directly, and I want to thank him for being such a strong advocate for his constituents. I will say that we are indeed aware of these challenges, and I'm speaking with Athabasca University to outline next steps. In fact, just this very

morning I had a conversation with the board chair to help ensure that we continue to support jobs in the community.

Mr. van Dijken: Given that the decision some 40 years ago to base Athabasca University in Athabasca led to incredible growth and success of the university and given that this was propelled by great communication among university management, academics, professionals, and support staff in Athabasca community and given that the Keep Athabasca In Athabasca University support group fears that the near-virtual strategy may be putting the future success of the university at risk, to the same minister: how will Athabasca University's physical presence be managed, and what support exists for the university to ensure . . .

2:40

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

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, on this very point I have been speaking with Athabasca University, and I have mentioned to them the importance of maintaining their physical infrastructure in the town of Athabasca. I know that the institution has some administrative offices in other centres, but I believe it is critically important that we look at strengthening these physical offices in the town, in the community, to continue to support job creation and job development in the community.

The Speaker: The member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a key factor in ensuring the development and sustainability of rural Alberta is jobs and given that jobs in government-funded institutions provide steady employment and act as a shock absorber for the rural economy during downturns in our core industries and given that Athabasca University's near-virtual strategy threatens to quietly move jobs out of Athabasca and potentially out of Alberta altogether, to the same minister: what do you say to my constituents who are concerned that Athabasca University jobs may no longer be recruited from and attracted to the town of Athabasca?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the member to inform his constituents that we are taking measures to ensure that Athabasca University remains in Athabasca. In my conversation just this morning I asked the board chair and the entire board of governors to develop a strategy that will not just maintain but also grow jobs in the community. I firmly believe that Athabasca University can excel as Canada's online university while at the same time building and supporting jobs for the local community.

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

Notices of Motions

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 15 I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time I intend to raise a point of privilege regarding the comments and actions of the MLA for Edmonton-South. I have the necessary number of copies of the letter I provided to your office this morning. In part my letter reads:

In accordance with Standing Order 15 of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta I am hereby providing you with written notice of my intention to raise a point of privilege today.

Yesterday the MLA for Edmonton-South published a document entitled “How I did it” and held a press conference to explain his actions to the media. Furthermore during yesterday’s proceedings the same MLA stood in this Chamber to ask questions while denying that he was guilty of using the personal information of the Premier to hack vaccine records. I intend to argue that these statements were intended to mislead the Assembly and therefore rise to a contempt of the Assembly.

I look forward to addressing this issue at the appropriate time.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Copping, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Public Health Act the Public Health Appeal Board annual report 2021.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order, and at 1:52 the Government House Leader called a point of order which he subsequently withdrew.

That leads us to points of privilege. At the appropriate time, under Notices of Motions, the hon. the Government House Leader provided the House his intention to raise a point of privilege, which I invite him to do now.

Privilege Misleading the House

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for giving me that opportunity. First, let me start with the formalities. Standing Order 15(2) reads:

[Members] wishing to raise a question of privilege shall give written notice containing a brief statement of the question to the Speaker and, if practicable, to any person whose conduct may be called into question, at least 2 hours before the opening of the afternoon sitting and, before the Orders of the Day are called, shall call attention to the alleged breach of privilege and give a brief statement of the nature of the matter addressed in the complaint.

This part of the standing order, Mr. Speaker, I would submit to you, was met when I provided a letter to the Speaker’s office that was time-stamped at 11:15 a.m. today and an e-mail from myself was sent to the MLA for Edmonton-South at 11:23 a.m. today.

Next, the matter, Mr. Speaker, as you know, must always be raised at the earliest convenience. While the MLA for Edmonton-South posted his confession, that he titles a white paper, online yesterday morning, his press conference did not conclude until 11:30 a.m. yesterday, and we still had not had the chance to see what remarks the member would choose to make yesterday inside the proceedings of the Chamber. Therefore, I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that the earliest opportunity I had to raise this matter was by submitting a letter at 11:30 a.m. today.

Now to the issue itself and the context behind it, which is very important. I would submit, Mr. Speaker, to you that it would be important that we measure what is part of the public record against what the member alleged yesterday in this very Assembly. First, we know that the MLA for Edmonton-South has been frankly obsessed. That is the only word for it. I will table multiple documents from social media as well as transcripts from the member inside the Assembly over the period of the last several months that I believe would illustrate the obsession with the vaccination status of the government and private members of this Chamber.

We also know that the member, Mr. Speaker, raised a motion in Members’ Services on October 18, 2021, seeking to elicit confirmation of the vaccination status of MLAs. After that motion

failed at Members’ Services, the MLA for Edmonton-South attempted to introduce an identical motion in the Assembly on October 27, 2021. I do note that in these motions he suggested the Speaker designate a Legislative Assembly Office employee to receive the proof of those vaccinations though it does look like in some of his first drafts he actually suggested that he himself should be the one to receive those vaccination statuses.

Now to the issue and the history of the issue at hand. Mr. Speaker, in December 2021 the RCMP announced – and there was a statement from the RCMP to this effect from the cybercrime investigation team – that they had initiated a criminal investigation after receiving information regarding suspicious activity related to unlawful access of private information related to the vaccination record portal of the Alberta government. The Alberta RCMP cybercrime unit in the course of their investigation developed reasonable grounds, they say, to apply for a warrant to search the residence of an Edmonton resident at that time.

Now, at the time the Member for Edmonton-South announced, with the NDP caucus, that he would be leaving the NDP caucus and indicated at that time that he may or may not have been associated with that investigation. If you fast-forward to yesterday, the member publishes a document and does interviews in advance of publishing that document. I do want to stress that the document is available online, and I will table it as well. It is authored by the Member for Edmonton-South, and it is titled *How I Did It*, in which he outlines how he used the personal information of a member of this Chamber, who happens to also be the Premier of Alberta, to be able to go and get vaccination records on the computer.

He also at that time does interviews with the *Edmonton Journal* in which he admits to hacking the Alberta government’s COVID vaccination record system last year and admits that said search warrant had been served on his place of business. He goes on to say that he used a hacking script to try to guess health care numbers of Albertans and then, ultimately, would go on to use personal information that he found online of a member of this Assembly, the Premier of Alberta, the MLA for Calgary-Lougheed, which is the very definition of identity theft, to be able to go into that computer system and be able to attempt to access that member’s information.

He goes on, inside his own document – this is a document that has been published by the hon. member – to say that after modifying that script to be able to try and get access, he also then ultimately would obtain the records not of the Premier but of another private citizen of the province of Alberta while he was attempting to do so. That record is, clearly, a matter now of the public record and will be tabled in the Assembly tomorrow.

2:50

I will also draw your attention to the following. The Health Information Act says:

- (2) No person shall knowingly . . .
 - (b) gain or attempt to gain access to health information in contravention of this Act.

Also, the Criminal Code says in section 342.1:

- (1) Everyone is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than 10 years, or is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction who, fraudulently and without colour of right,
 - (a) obtains, directly or indirectly, any computer service using false information or pretending to be somebody else.

Mr. Speaker, I’m almost there, and I will move on with the point of privilege, but I will table these documents as well.

When you access the COVID-19 vaccination portal, you have to go through both a record of terms of service and agree to the terms of service to use that computer system. You also have to go through and indicate that you understand those terms of service, indicate

that you agree to those terms of service. You also have to go through a COVID record of privacy statement and agree to the statements that are associated with that.

I will draw your attention to a couple of specific things that I think are very relevant to this conversation. It says, Mr. Speaker:

By submitting information to this Service, you acknowledge and represent to Alberta Health:

1. You are either requesting Covid Records for yourself, or you are legally authorized to submit information, and request Covid Records, on behalf of the individual whose information you are requesting.
2. You [must indicate] you understand that
 - a. It is an offence under the [Health Information Act] to knowingly collect health information, or gain or attempt to gain access to health information, in contravention of the [Health Information Act].

On the COVID record terms of use you have to agree and indicate that you agree that

your use of the Site shall not violate any applicable local, national or international law . . .

In addition, you agree that you will not use the Site for any purpose other than that for which it was intended and you agree you will not:

- (i) use the Site to impersonate another person, or otherwise attempt to gain unauthorized access to another individual's health information or to infringe the intellectual property or any other rights of [a] third party.

To gain access to the site, you have to indicate that you agree with that, that you understand that, and that if you did, Mr. Speaker, in fact, as the member did and has admitted in his documents, use information of another person, you would be in fact breaking multiple laws. That member had to indicate to do that.

I will turn your attention to *Erskine May*, Mr. Speaker, which says, as you know, that a point of privilege – this is about privilege, I should say.

Generally speaking, any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of their duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results, may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice illustrates the following as a potential breach of privilege:

deliberately attempting to mislead the House or a committee (by way of statement, evidence, or petition).

There is also a three-part test, Mr. Speaker, to be found when allegations are made about a member misleading the Assembly. This test, of course, can be found on pages 653 and 654 of *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*. The three parts of this test are as follows. One, it must be proven that the statement was misleading. Two, “it must be established that the member making the statement knew at the time the statement . . . was incorrect,” and three, that “in making [the statement], the member . . . intended to mislead the House.”

I think it has been clearly established that during yesterday's proceedings the MLA for Edmonton-South said that it was a false allegation when I said yesterday, in response to a question, that he had broken the law. I guess I felt it was self-evident, Mr. Speaker, that by publishing a document publicly detailing the steps that you took to use another MLA's identity, which, as I pointed out earlier, is in contravention of the Health Information Act and in contravention of the conditions to access the COVID-19 proof of vaccination records, it was enough to form the conclusion that the MLA was admitting his guilt. I understand that he can maybe say that he hasn't broken the law because he hasn't been convicted of

anything yet. However, I think the hon. member is trying to establish that he isn't guilty because he broke the law out of the goodness of his heart and that his motives mean that he can't be guilty of a crime. I hesitate to point out that that isn't how the law works.

On the second point, we know that the MLA knew the statement was misleading because he posted a document detailing how he used the Premier's private information to access vaccination records and then held, Mr. Speaker, a press conference in case anyone had missed his incriminating document. Then not more than three hours later he's trying to stand up in this very Assembly and claim that I was making allegations against him. He was now stating that he was innocent of wrongdoing after he had held a press conference announcing his wrongdoing. Either the member doesn't know what he believes, or he's attempting to gaslight this Chamber and Albertans.

Finally, we can all know that by calling the point of order, the MLA was intending to mislead this Assembly. Therefore, I think there's no option here except to find that a prima facie breach of privilege has occurred, and the government is prepared to refer this matter to the appropriate committee for review if you do decide so.

I want to close with one other thing, Mr. Speaker, and then I will be done. I will refer you to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, 2017, Privilege Versus Contempt, in chapter 3.

The House of Commons enjoys very wide latitude in maintaining its dignity and authority through the exercise of its contempt power. In other words, the House may consider any misconduct . . .

Any misconduct, Mr. Speaker.

. . . to be contempt and may deal with it accordingly. Instances of contempt in one Parliament may even be punished by another Parliament. This area of parliamentary law is therefore extremely fluid and most valuable for the Commons to be able to meet [the] novel situations

that it finds itself in.

Mr. Speaker, I will table, am happy to provide to you, repeated social media posts, repeated questions in question period to ministers, including the Premier of Alberta, whose information was used to illegally hack into a website, by the Member for Edmonton-South for months. Not once did that member rise in his place and say to the members on this side of the House: I've been hacking your information. Instead, he continued inside this place over and over – and it does beg the question what the Official Opposition knew, when they knew it, but it's not relevant for today – repeatedly stood in this House asking questions of the member whose privacy he was violating and had violated. Certainly, if that is not contempt of the House, I don't know what is.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has also indicated that he went to the NDP caucus and his leadership on September 23, 2021, and asked them to go forward to the Department of Health to say that there was something wrong while he was doing what he calls ethical hacking. That is outrageous, to in any way try to say that it is ethical to use any member of this place's, let alone any other Albertan's, information to try to illegally access a website. But he says that at that point he wanted to draw attention to the government that there was a problem going on with the computer system, which in and of itself is ridiculous. He could have asked that at any moment in question period on September 23, 2021.

As a result of that, the NDP caucus wrote a letter to the Department of Health in which they indicate that they had heard through anonymous sources that there might have been potentially a problem with the website. At no time do they say that their member, their ethics critic, was the one who had been hacking that

website. At no time do they say that. In fact, Mr. Speaker, they remain quiet about that for months. Not just the member but his entire caucus remains quiet about that inside this Chamber for months while asking questions of the Premier of Alberta, while asking questions of ministers about this very issue that they were hiding for months. The only time they finally admit that they've been involved in hacking and using a member of this place's private information was when it came to light from the RCMP that there was an investigation, because a search warrant had been served on the hon. member's house.

Mr. Speaker, it is outrageous that a member of this place would be treated this way by another member. It's completely and utterly unacceptable, and I think the member, first of all, should be honest with this Chamber and certainly is in contempt of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as is the convention with respect to points of privilege, those who are named in the point of privilege have the opportunity to respond. They also have the opportunity to delay their response to tomorrow, and I certainly will take time to consider my decision.

3:00

The other thing that I might just add for the member: the member may make decisions to respond to the point of privilege or may in fact choose not to respond, given that the matter at hand is under some form of investigation, and may not want to prejudice that in any way, shape, or form in this forum, being that it's being investigated in another. But, of course, that is up to the member to decide. The question for now is: would the member like to respond today, or would you like to provide me notice of not responding at another time as well?

The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to reply at the next possible opportunity.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Can you repeat?

Mr. Dang: I'll delay my response till tomorrow.

The Speaker: The hon. member has elected to provide additional comments tomorrow, and we will take him at his word for that.

That brings us to Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 4

Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022

[Debate adjourned March 14]

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is second reading of Bill 4. Are there others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and offer a couple of thoughts on Bill 4, the Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, I think, first of all, it's important to just recap for everyone here in the House the purpose of this bill. The bill is extremely

confined in scope, and it's my understanding that if this bill were to be passed, it would prevent municipal governments in the province of Alberta from passing any bylaw which would require citizens living in that municipality or wandering around in that municipality to wear masks or to be asked to provide proof of vaccination when entering places of business or municipal buildings, that sort of thing.

I'd like to make a couple of points with regard to this particular piece of legislation. First of all, I want to make some points around the efficacy of the measures that the minister is intent on preventing municipalities from implementing. Then I also want to make some comments on the impropriety, I guess, of the Municipal Affairs minister overreaching in this case and imposing his will upon locally elected municipal governments.

Now, I think the first thing that I wanted to say was with regard to the efficacy of the COVID protection measures that the government is intent on preventing municipalities from making bylaws around. That's with respect to wearing masks in public places and requesting vaccination status when going into places of business, public places, those sorts of places that were subject to the vaccine passport that the provincial government implemented in September.

Now, the best that I can understand, Madam Speaker, as far as the reasoning for the government choosing to bring forward this bill is that they failed to implement protection measures sufficient to keep people safe from COVID, and instead of actually correcting that, they decided to overreact and prevent other local governments from also implementing COVID protection measures that were sufficient to protect people. It's incredibly frustrating to me.

Madam Speaker, when the government implemented the vaccine passport in late September, we saw an incredible uptake in vaccines in this province the day that the vaccine passport requirements were implemented, which was a good thing. We know from having delivered billions of doses world-wide of the COVID-19 vaccine that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe. It protects people from dying from COVID. It protects people from having severe nonfatal consequences of COVID. It was a good thing that the government did to implement the vaccine passport to create an incentive for those Albertans who were reluctant to get the vaccine to actually get the vaccine.

I think that the government deserves some credit for doing the right thing in September and encouraging uptake, but as soon as they implemented the program, they started to undermine it. They created a whole host of exemptions, most notably exempting children aged five to 11 from being subject to the vaccine passport, which, I can tell you, created some difficulties for a whole host of kids' groups. My own son was on a soccer team with kids aged 11 and 12. The kids who were 12 years old were subject to the vaccine passport when they showed up to their soccer games, but the kids who were 11 weren't. That didn't make any sense. It created a lot of confusion.

When the omicron variant of COVID reached Alberta, when it became clear that two doses of the vaccine were not sufficient to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 among the population, that we required three doses of the vaccine to have a hope of mitigating the transmission of COVID, what did the government do? They scrapped the program.

What they could have done instead, Madam Speaker, was update the program. They could have said: "Look, obviously, two doses of the vaccine are not enough. We need to encourage people to get three doses of the vaccine." Encourage uptake that way. They could have updated the vaccine passport program and said that, no, you're not considered to be fully vaccinated unless you've had three doses of the vaccine. I can't help but wonder how many people would

have been prevented from getting sick and dying if the government had actually taken that approach to the vaccine passport instead of scrapping the program entirely.

We know from the statistics that the government puts out that Alberta lags the rest of the country when it comes to third doses of the vaccine. We are last in Canada with the number of our citizens who have three doses of the vaccine. When it comes to kids aged five to 11, less than half of the kids province-wide have even had one dose, much less two, and they're not even eligible for a third one. It's incredibly frustrating to me, Madam Speaker, that instead of improving the program to respond to the changes in the COVID-19 pandemic, to make the program more effective, they scrapped it entirely. And now we're paying the consequences.

This is also true of masks. When the province implemented their mask mandate requiring people to wear masks in public, they didn't specify what kind of mask was sufficient to protect people from contracting COVID-19 when in public. Public health experts were raising the alarm all along that surgical masks, the cloth masks that people were wearing at the beginning of the pandemic, weren't as effective at preventing transmission of COVID as N95s, the kind that I have on right now. We know that wearing N95 masks or an equivalent is much more effective at preventing the transmission of COVID than the blue surgical masks or the cloth masks that people have been wearing so frequently.

3:10

We also certainly know that the government didn't make any efforts whatsoever to enforce these measures. We had an admission as much from officials from the Ministry of Justice when they appeared before Public Accounts last year, that they wanted to take a light touch when it came to enforcement, which essentially meant doing no enforcement whatsoever. So we have a couple of half measures that didn't work, and they weren't adequately enforced.

Yesterday in debate around the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022, I talked about how we've upgraded vehicles to have better safety measures. You know, the government's approach to COVID is like saying: well, strap yourself into your car with baler twine, and hope that that prevents you from dying in a car accident, and if that doesn't work, well, might as well scrap the idea of a seat belt altogether and then make it illegal for people to even try to wear seat belts. That's the kind of approach that they're taking here.

My wish for the government is not only that they would retract this awful piece of legislation but that they would go back to the drawing board and look at COVID protection measures that are adequate to the challenge that the province faces right now, implement them where they need to be implemented, and ramp up enforcement so that they're widely adopted enough to prevent the transmission of COVID. We just got through the fifth wave. Cases, hospitalizations, ICU rates, daily deaths started to decline, then the government lifted all COVID protection measures, and now we see it again. COVID cases are going up all across the province, but you have to do a little bit of digging in order to see that happening because the government won't even report their statistics on a regular basis anymore.

But we know, thanks to the University of Calgary, who is tracking waste-water data from waste-water treatment plants all across the province, that COVID levels are spiking up. They're higher right now in Edmonton and in Calgary than they've ever been except for that period of the fifth wave in January. We have levels of COVID in our waste water right now in the city of Edmonton that exceed the level that we saw during the fourth wave, when the Premier was on holidays and left the hospitals to collapse under the complete lack of oversight from Alberta Health and the government. So we urgently need COVID protections that will keep

people safe. I'm willing to entertain the fact that maybe vaccine passports and masks aren't enough. Maybe we need some other COVID protections as well.

My colleagues and I here in the Official Opposition have repeatedly pushed for measures to clean the air in public spaces, particularly in schools. But when the Education department came in front of Public Accounts a few months ago, we asked them how much they spent on improving ventilation and filtration in schools. The amount was zero. This government has completely given up on protecting people from COVID, and it's astounding to me that they are comfortable with the level of sickness and death that we continue to see all across this province. They don't want to do anything, and not only do they not want to do anything; they want to prevent local governments from doing anything to help stem the tide.

That brings me to my second point, this idea of local autonomy. Now, I'm a resident of the city of Edmonton. I've complained loudly about the management in the city of Edmonton on a couple of occasions here in the House. Just yesterday I aired some grievances about the lack of snowplows clearing the roads during the wintertime.

Mr. Eggen: Did they come after that?

Mr. Schmidt: No. The snow melted thanks to the 18-degree temperature. That was the city of Edmonton's plan all along, I guess, to let the snow be self-plowed by the sun at the end of March. I also continue to have issues with the way they manage waste in this city, but what I didn't have an issue with was the way they responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. The city of Edmonton should be given credit for doing the best that they could with the tools that they had in hand to stem the tide of transmission when they did. They acted before the provincial government did, and for that I'm grateful. I think we should all be grateful because the fewer Edmontonians that are getting sick, the fewer spaces that are taken up in our hospitals, the fewer cases.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to address this bill because it is a serious concern not only to myself, of course, but to citizens of the province of Alberta, who we are here to represent and to try to make rules that provide them with the best amount of support and protection to live good lives.

Unfortunately, this bill is clearly intended to do exactly the opposite. The intent of this bill is to prevent people from being able to make a declaration that as a community they wish to protect themselves with the use of masks, public health measures being taken by a local authority in order to be able to protect the people in their community. The fact that this government is actually actively seeking to prevent communities from acting in a co-operative way for the well-being of their own citizens is truly appalling.

We know from research over the last number of years that the use of masks is effective in reducing the number of cases of COVID that occur in a province and occur anywhere and that the use of masks helps to reduce the rate of spread and indeed has helped to prevent significant numbers of deaths in the COVID crisis that we now experience. The research is there, has been done in multiple places around the world, and is readily available to anybody who chooses to spend 10 minutes online to find that masks are indeed effective.

The question isn't one of: should we prevent the city of Edmonton or other places from imposing something on citizens? "Should we prevent them from preventing the deaths of others?" is essentially what we're saying in this bill. We know that if they implement this mask mandate, fewer people will die. The evidence is clearly there. This government has constantly taken the position of doing too little too late with regard to this pandemic, and, as a result, statistically Alberta is the worst place in the country to live in terms of the likelihood of acquiring COVID.

Just a quick look at some numbers from StatsCan from March 17, the latest day that's available. Some other provinces are available after that day, but Alberta has decided not even to report the number of COVID cases, so I had to go back a week to find the last time that Alberta did report. We can see that Alberta reported that they had 533,000 and change, the number of people with COVID, as compared to British Columbia, who had only 353,000 people with COVID.

3:20

Now, given that B.C. has a population of approximately 5.1 million and Alberta has a population of about 4.5 million, that means that Alberta's rate of COVID is almost twice what the rate in British Columbia is. You have to ask why two provinces right side by side would have such dramatically different rates of COVID. The answer is that one has a government, British Columbia, that has taken various serious measures and provided absolutely every support they could in the community to try to reduce the acquisition of COVID whereas in this province this government has done only what it has been forced into doing at the last possible second and behind the time when the strategies for reducing COVID would have been most effective.

These kinds of statistics are repeated when we look for incidence of death because, of course, the rate of death follows the rate of COVID. What we find is that Alberta has an excess number of deaths, or a disproportionate incidence of death, over other places such as British Columbia.

We're actually talking about government making a policy decision that is directly related statistically to the number of deaths that are occurring in the province. We have a provincial government now that is making the decision to prevent people from stopping that happening using the best medical research possible. To prevent that from happening.

You know, this is on the same lines as if the government said: "The city of Edmonton can no longer clean its water because that would be unfair. Not everybody has access to clean water, so now the city of Edmonton is not allowed to clean its water. Whatever comes through your tap is what you live with." Can you imagine, if we shut down the systems in the city of Edmonton for chlorinating and cleaning and fluoridating our water, what would happen to the health and well-being of the citizens of Edmonton? It is exactly the same kind of thing that we're doing here. We are actually preventing people from taking public action.

This is a complete turnaround of the last 500 years of science on public well-being. Since we discovered the whole issue of microbes and viruses and so on, our western society has moved toward taking public measures to actually prevent people from becoming sick. We know that having clean drinking water has actually been better for our population than most other medical inventions over the years. More people have been saved by clean drinking water than have been saved by the most advanced heart surgery that has ever been brought into this province or invented in the world.

Public health measures save lives. The statistics are there. They're reflected here in the same way they're reflected in issues such as clean drinking water. Why the government would actually

make a decision to interfere with duly elected representatives of the citizens of Edmonton or any other jurisdiction in this province from actually taking action to protect those citizens is really ridiculous and appalling. It's certainly a return to the Dark Ages in terms of science, and it certainly cannot be supported by anyone who has any depth of understanding of the history of well-being of citizens and wishes for the citizens of the province of Alberta to be the beneficiaries of good science in terms of the policy decisions that are being made in this province.

It's particularly egregious that we have a Premier who at one time, just a little while ago, was suggesting that the cities do their own mandates because he was refusing to act on the science at the time, and now that they are doing their own mandates, he's wanting to take that power away from them. Why is he wanting to take that power away from them? Because there is a radical fringe group, that is no longer fringe within his party, that has taken over the party just as they took over our capital city, took over our border at Coutts. Now they've taken over this party, and he is making bad public health policy, that has the consequence of people dying, in order to preserve his electoral ability within his own party.

That's it. That's the only reason why this would happen. There's no logical reason for this thing to happen other than there are people who might vote against him if they perceive him to be taking policy actions for the benefit of Albertans. That's it. There's nothing, there's no explanation in here that explains why you would take this power away, why you would interfere with the good science. We're left with this circumstance of the radical fringe finding a way to push their extreme – and, we now know, morally dangerous and physically dangerous in terms of deaths in this province – into the policy of the party which the Premier represents.

I can't think of a worse reason to actually introduce a bill into this House than to actually want to preserve power in the face of death. You know, in the comparisons around the world if I mentioned the other countries that do that kind of thing, we would have people leaping up on the other side of the House objecting, as they always do. They're always wrong, but they always like to cut me off. We know that they clearly do not take into consideration the evidence before them with an eye for the well-being of the people of this province. We know that under Conservative rule life has become more expensive, more difficult, and now we also can see that it has become more deadly.

I think that we need to take this kind of thing extremely seriously. This isn't about internal party politics. It shouldn't be, but apparently it is on the government side of the House. It should not be about internal party politics. It should be about: how do you actually prevent people from dying? If we look at the number of people who died in this province, if we had the same rate of death as they had in British Columbia, we would be much closer to saving the lives of almost 2,000 people in this province. The statistics are there. People can read them themselves. They're available on Stats Canada when the province decides to update their section, and we can see that the number of people that have died here has been in excess of the number of people that have died in other provinces.

We know from the research that part of the actions that can be taken by governments, good policy decisions that can reduce the number of deaths, are masks. Masks save lives. It's that simple. It should be written on the outside of every mask, that they save lives. And because they do, we should be doing everything possible to get them in people's hands. We should be making sure that people have every support they can to wear those, and in those places where they have no choice but to go, because they are public places, where they need to conduct the circumstances of their lives – to pay their bills, to buy their groceries, and so on – they should be able to feel safe. They should be able to feel like they can leave their home and enter

into a place where they will not acquire COVID and the potential of dying.

You know, that means that they should be able to live in a place where it's okay for the local government to say that people should be wearing masks in those kinds of public places. If you don't want to wear a mask and you want to stay at home, that's fine, but that's a personal choice. What government is doing is that they're trying to make a public-level decision, the same kind of decision that we make when we say that every child has to go to school because we want an educated citizenry, when we say things like, "We will provide a public health care system so that you don't have to pull out your wallet in order to go into a hospital," and the same thing we say when we're going to actually chlorinate the water so that we don't have viruses being spread.

That's the tradition and the lineage that this government is rejecting in their attempt to interfere with another level of government completely unnecessarily. They don't need to do this. They could have simply stood aside and let other governments make their own decisions. They would be appalled if the federal government started making decisions about the province of Alberta in this way and started saying: we're taking away your powers in order to make decisions. They'd be standing up and lighting their hair on fire, but they're not now because it's them that are doing it. The philosophical consistency is absolutely lacking in this decision-making here.

3:30

It's really appalling to see a government who is acting against the best interests of the citizens only because it aids or abets someone within their own political party for their own political advantage. That's the kind of thing that, you know, we do not want to see happening in our society, where a government seeks only to maintain its own power even at the expense of the lives of its citizens, something that we reject anywhere else around the world and that we should be rejecting here at home as well. I wish that it was a more complex or nuanced thing that we were talking about here and not just simply the lives of Albertans because then you might sort of go: well, they're just wrong, but I guess it's too bad. In this case the outcome, the severity of the consequence of this government decision is such that you cannot stand aside and watch this happen without absolutely condemning the government's decision-making here.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate on Bill 4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 4. I say this all the time, that I'm going to keep my comments brief, and then I'll probably ramble on for way longer than I anticipate. I do think it's important to speak to the bill in the bigger context of the democratic process and how this is really signalling an intrusion into the levels of government. I mean, we hear often from the government side that there are concerns about the federal government and the jurisdiction that the federal government has and how it impacts the ability of the provincial government to do the work that they want to do or, you know, the relationship between the federal government and provincial governments.

Then we also see the relationship between provincial governments and municipal governments. I would say that this piece of legislation is challenging in the context of the relationship. I do believe and I am a strong believer in democracy, and I have had numerous concerns as we move forward through the years about the shift of relationships and the erosion around political parties and the discourse that I continuously keep seeing when it comes to how

citizens view politics and then how others are treating each other within political settings and just this shift that continuously keeps coming up as we see different scenarios, different pressures happening.

It concerns me that the government felt the need to go here with Bill 4. It concerns me because I truly believe that there is a reason why we elect different levels of government. Local governments are elected by the citizens that they represent to make local decisions, whether it be, you know, like my colleague said, shoveling or clearing roads or not clearing roads, filling potholes, looking at rec centres, services, different things at that local level. Lots of those decisions happen in partnership with the province because there are funding agreements that have to happen.

There are lots of different things that occur between those relationships, but ultimately bylaws are the discretion of the municipalities. Municipalities get to set their own bylaws, and there's a reason for that, because they're responding to the community needs. When we see the province deciding that they want to start injecting themselves into the conversation around bylaws, I become concerned.

This is just one example. You know, I'm not going to get into the debate around the actual content of masks versus no masks, vaccines versus – I'm not going to entertain that conversation because it's actually not the issue of this bill. The issue of this bill is the fact that we have levels of government who have decided that they're going to override the local authority of another government because they disagree with a decision that's being made by the elected officials. That's a really slippery slope.

I think that there are members of the government side that would be very concerned if they made a policy decision and all of a sudden the federal government came in and made a different decision. In fact, we hear almost daily about decisions that the federal government has made that impact the provincial government that they don't like, that they disagree with. They constantly talk about how upset they are about the decisions the federal government is making that impact the provincial abilities to do the work and all the things. It's hypocritical, in a way, for that to occur and then to say: but it's okay that we're going to do it because if we do it, it's okay; if anybody else does it, it's really not. You know, a "Do as I say, not as I do" sort of mentality, right?

I think that, you know, that is a concern. I would like us to get to a place where we start really just respecting the levels of government and leaving the authorities that are given to those levels of government the ability to do the work that they want to do, and I would really, really enjoy it if we could do it in collaboration and if federal, provincial, and municipal governments could actually just come together at a table and discuss issues and get to a place of – they don't have to agree; I can appreciate that we have different views of how to get to places on lots of different topics – at least being able to have a respectful conversation where maybe there is an ability to discuss the issue and compromise on issues.

My concern that I continuously keep seeing – and it's at all levels – is that that willingness to have a respectful and open debate and to disagree is eroding, and it's becoming very much one side versus the other side. I think it does a disservice to Albertans. I think it does a disservice across the nation, to be honest, when it comes to other issues. I think that there is a real opportunity for us to evaluate how we work with each other and how we have these conversations and how we disagree. We can disagree. In fact, healthy debate is good debate, in my opinion. If it's done respectfully and in collaboration and we remember that we are all doing it for the purpose of the good, then it's fine to disagree, but when power is used to try to influence the outcome because there's just a fundamental disagreement, then I think we're on a slippery slope.

I think that that's what Bill 4 does. The province, obviously, we knew, disagreed with what the city of Edmonton was doing. This is very much targeting the city of Edmonton. Yet we also see that there are legitimate concerns that are being brought forward, transit being an example of a bylaw being put back on public transit, which aligns with what the province is also talking about doing because of the close connection, because of the fact that there are many people going on LRTs, going on the C-Train, you know, being on buses. There's a recognition that that needs to happen. Obviously, there's a way to have that conversation where there is a common agreement that that makes sense.

I will just say that I think that is where this bill goes sideways. I don't think it's necessary, for one. I think it was a serious overreach. I think it was used to posture to a municipality that the government didn't agree with and tends to disagree with on a frequent basis and that this was used as a signal. It's a very adversarial way to engage in conversation and to use the ability for legislation to try to influence a discussion.

3:40

I would really just appreciate if the government recognized that it wasn't necessary, that it doesn't need to happen, and withdraw it. I mean, that's a great solution to this piece of legislation. The issue is over, right? And if there's going to be a future issue, sit down at the table as adults and have a conversation about it and, like, figure it out.

There is a mechanism here within our legislative process where the government can just say: "You know what? We were a little heavy handed. We created this piece of legislation. We don't need it. Maybe we shouldn't keep fighting with our colleagues and the people we're supposed to be working with in local governance and withdraw it." Like, let's move on.

I think that that's the summary of what I have to say. I mean, again, I said that I would speak for not very long, and I went on longer than I anticipated. Let's just try to get to a place where we can all start working in more collaboration and actually have these conversations without using the power of our positions to try to influence other people.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 4 just briefly. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning: I'm glad that she did linger on this bill because towards the latter part of her comments I think she hit on exactly what needs to be done with this bill, which is simply to withdraw it.

We have lots of important things to deal with here in the province right now around affordability. This is the highest inflation rate that we've seen for more than 30 years. Affordability for so many essential services – food, energy, and everything else we might need in our lives – is becoming unaffordable for hundreds of thousands of Albertans right now, and those are the kinds of things that we need to deal with that are within our purview and indeed within our responsibility, Madam Speaker, in this Legislature.

You know, for us to be lingering on a bill that simply is out of step with events that took place in the matter of days after this bill was introduced or the threat was sent out by the Premier to force through legislation on any municipalities that chose to retain a masking bylaw on their books after the province had thought that they would end their masking law – so from the beginning, I mean, the part that we should probably linger on a little bit is a cautionary

tale for governments to not abuse their position of responsibility and power.

You know, it wasn't lost on me that right after they did this, we went to the municipalities convention and people were hopping mad. They really were. Lots of people who otherwise – I know I've seen some of these guys for a long time, right? They're otherwise conservatives, maybe mayors or councillors, and they wanted nothing to do with this bill. They found it to be insulting. They found it to be the provincial government overreaching into municipal matters. It broke that sense of trust, that caveat between municipalities and the province to do the right thing on a practical level.

Even if you thought, "Well, we should have a unified mask mandate across the province and everything should always be the same" – I mean, you know, there is something to that – the way that this government chose to do it through Bill 4 and all the threats and bilious thundering and waving of hands and whatnot was not just not appreciated; a lot of people, mayors and councillors, found it insulting, Madam Speaker. I bet you that down in Airdrie would be amongst those people, right? Say, like: back off, provincial government; you just told us a few months ago that we should maybe have regional standards for COVID, which include municipalities choosing to have masking or not according to their COVID rights, right? That same thing came out of the same mouth of the same Premier who then suddenly comes out and waves this thing and says: you're all following the rule; we're going to make a law that you can no longer exercise your right as a municipality to create bylaws to protect your citizens. That's totally the wrong message for relationships between municipalities and provinces. You know, it takes a long time to build relationships, and you can torch them just in an instant by doing things like that.

Again, I've been going to municipality conventions and so forth for a long time, and I never felt the sense of animosity like I did in this last meeting that was just here a few weeks ago in Edmonton. People were mad, and when they're angry, there's not just the emotional reaction; it's being less able to provide the goods and services that municipalities and provinces are responsible for, you know? That's just kind of what happened with this bill. As it happens, the municipalities went through their normal council process and debated this in their own time frame, which is all very fine, and chose to rescind their masking mandate. Not because of this bill. In spite of this bill they chose to do that, right? If you think it's anything else besides that, this sort of macho thing to try to bully people into doing it, it was nothing to do with that at all. In fact, you probably got their backs up, and maybe they said: well, maybe we'll wait a few more days; maybe we'll wait for the weekend, and then maybe we'll think about the masking mandate. You know, like, you get quite the opposite reaction when you choose to do the wrong thing. I learn that all the time.

This is a good learning moment for all, for this government, definitely. This bill is irrelevant, this bill should be pulled, and the longer it lingers, I would suggest, the more damage it does. It's as simple as that. Madam Speaker, that's kind of my feeling on it. You know, I think that we've had long-standing municipal powers to ensure the health and safety of inhabitants of a town or a city, and I think that those laws have served us in good stead for as long as we've had a province, probably even before, when it was a territory. So for this idea that you can play with those things to suit your own political agenda, to try to send some kind of message or whatever it is, is just the wrong way to go about the business of creating legislation and good governance. So there we go; that's my two bits, right? Free advice. Pull the bill, and everybody will be happier. Maybe say, "Sorry" as well, just as a side note. It's not a bad idea.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege to get up and speak to this particular bill. One of the things that I have to say I found very surprising is that one of the members on the other side of the House talked about having to spank municipalities, and just that language in itself is – well, I don't even know what to call that. Now, what the members on the other side of the House like to do in the privacy of their own homes: that's completely up to them, you know, if they're into that kind of thing.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, this is probably a good time to interject. I'd just caution you to stay on topic, the matter of Bill 4, and not on members of this Assembly. We've had this discussion before in this House, and while you're not quite that far down the path, I feel like you're getting there. I'm just going to interject and provide some caution early on into this speech so that I can hear some other great debate that you have planned. Please continue.

3:50

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I mean, I am staying on topic, the fact that in regard to this particular bill is where one of the members on that side of the House actually made the comment about spanking, and it just goes to show the type of attitude that members on the other side of this House have when it comes to others.

Now, I prefer to treat other people, especially adults in our society, as equals, equals in that, through dialogue, we can actually come to agreements on stuff, on issues and concerns and whatever the case may be. But this just demonstrates the kind of attitude that some of the members on that side of the House have, as if, you know, they're the authoritarian power that has to come in and lay down the law and tell others how it is and that they either listen – essentially, it's either their way or the highway. That's not the way that we reach productive, number one, relationships, especially when it comes to legislation.

In this case municipalities have the right to establish whatever bylaws they deem necessary for the areas that they represent. I don't think that that's unheard of. I think that's a part of our democracy. But you see, Madam Speaker, the reality is that members on that side of the House love to talk about freedom when it suits them. When it suits them. They're all about talking about freedom when it suits their ideological objectives. But when it doesn't serve their ideological objective, they're ready to run in, in a very authoritarian way, lay down the law, and spank whoever needs it. That's what this bill does.

Now, I've got up in this House a number of times and I've talked about how, you know, proposed bill after proposed bill after proposed bill that this government has brought into this House since they became government is actually taking power away from Albertans, specifically – I've talked about it before – agencies, boards, and commissions. Agencies, boards, and commissions are an avenue by which Albertans themselves can participate in the governing of this here province that we all love. So, to me, it's abhorrent. It's abhorrent that members on that side of the House, Madam Speaker, would actually take that privilege away from other Albertans. It's absolutely unnecessary.

In fact, we should be trying to democratize processes here in the province of Alberta even further, not take power out of the hands of people who are serving on these agencies, boards, and commissions and centralize that power in the hands of ministers of this cabinet or any future cabinet for that matter. I can only hope that when we

see a change in government, that's something that – at least I can speak for myself – I would be happy that we would actually change and put that power back in the hands of Albertans so that these agencies, boards, and commissions are actually an avenue by which Albertans can participate democratically, provide input, help make decisions, and then will be implemented by the government.

Here again, Madam Speaker, we see a particular bill that is taking power away from other Albertans and, in this particular bill specifically, from other orders of government. If we saw this happening in any other jurisdiction around the world, I'm sure that members on the other side of the House would be screaming: "Well, that's a dictatorship. It's a centralization of power. How can they do this? This is an affront on freedom." But again, Madam Speaker, as I've said before, members on the other side of the House like to talk about freedom when it serves their ideological objective and only then. When it comes to rights, when it comes to our political rights, our individual rights, when it comes to our social and our cultural rights, yes, these are all things that have to be respected, but your rights end when they butt up against someone else's human right. You should not have the right to exploit another. You should not have the right to oppress another. This government time and time again has created proposed legislation where they come in here, run roughshod, and simply pass on Albertans that actually does that. Quite frankly, I believe that they should be ashamed of it.

This isn't the first time that we're seeing it here in this House. There have been a number of times when they've come into this House and they proposed just such matters. As many of the other members on the other side of the House, you know, we've been at conferences, at meetings of the RMA, AUMA, and people out there, people who have the responsibility of representing their constituents, their regions, are completely dumbfounded that this government would actually bring this piece of proposed legislation into this House.

It's just another example of why not only this Premier but this entire cabinet and, I would say, even this entire caucus cannot be trusted. Albertans should be very, very, very concerned when it comes to the type of legislation that they're proposing inside this House. This is just but one example. Can't be trusted. Municipal leaders all around the province are talking about this. As was stated by the Member for Edmonton-Manning, this sets a very dangerous precedent. This sets a very dangerous precedent. Today it's Bill 4. What's it going to be tomorrow, Madam Speaker? If the government doesn't like what municipalities have decided in terms of what services they provide their citizens, are they again going to bring in another bill that limits how that particular order of government then provides services to its citizens?

You know, they're already tying the hands of municipalities. This is what I find incredibly unfortunate, strange even, Madam Speaker, that they were able to convince a lot of the people from these municipalities, these municipal leaders, that they somehow were going to govern better for Alberta, and in budget after budget after budget that they've presented in this House, they have been underfunding municipalities, taking programs away from municipalities, leaving municipalities with no other avenue but than to tax their citizens more to provide the same level of service. Now those citizens either get a reduced amount of service or they have to pay more in taxes. Which is it? This coming from the party that says that they're going to lower taxes. They're going to lower taxes for Albertans, yet their economic, political decisions are actually making it so that municipalities all across Alberta are having to raise taxes on their citizens so that they can get the same level of service from their order of government. I believe that, Madam Speaker, the members on the other side should be ashamed of that.

It's like they're talking out of both sides of their mouth. They want to be popular, so they say: yeah, we're reducing taxes; we're reducing taxes. Yet the political decisions that they're making inside of this House actually lead to increased taxes on the average Albertan.

4:00

Not only that; they decide that they're going to take the cap off insurance. Insurance goes up by 30 per cent on Albertans. Here we are attempting to recover from COVID, and it's getting worse and worse and worse for Albertans because of inflation, because of the economic decisions that this government has made in terms of removing the cap on insurance, removing the cap on utilities, that are making it absolutely difficult for Albertans to actually make it to the end of the month. I can't tell you, Madam Speaker, how many people that I've heard from that tell me they're one paycheque away from not being able to pay their mortgage.

The Deputy Speaker: Member, I hesitate to interrupt, but I am finding a hard time tracking your relevancy to Bill 4. Just a gentle reminder to get back on track. If you need a copy of the bill, I can certainly have one sent to you. We are discussing Bill 4, and the arguments should be as such.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate your words of caution. But as you can tell, I'm simply making the association that decisions made by this particular government are actually making it economically unfeasible for a large amount of the population to actually make it to the end of the month. I'm drawing an association between the decisions that are being made by this government in association with this particular bill because of the centralizing of authority, centralizing of power, and, in this particular case, actually taking decision-making power and freedom away from municipalities.

So I ask the members on the other side of the House: which is it? Do you stand for freedom or not? That's the simple question here, Madam Speaker. You can't speak out of both sides of your mouth. You can't govern trying to be all things for everybody. You just simply can't. But you do have to try to do your best to meet as many of the needs of Albertans as possible. What do we hold in common? These are the things that we should be striving for when we govern.

Again, Madam Speaker, through you to the members on the other side of the House, I would say that there . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate this afternoon's debate on this bill and the conversation around freedom from Edmonton-Ellerslie and the points made, I believe, about the Constitution, if that even came up, and how the constitutional powers are divided in this country between federal powers and provincial powers. They seem to have a great deal of concern for Edmonton city council and not of Edmontonians, who overwhelmingly wanted the mask bylaws removed, just as a gentle reminder. I think Edmonton city council heard that, and I'm glad that they heard that and removed the mask bylaw.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 7 Appropriation Act, 2022

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join the debate? First to catch my eye was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by Calgary-East.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. You know, it is of deep concern to the people of the province of Alberta, and whenever we are in the House looking at how the money that they contribute to the well-being of us all is spent and if it is spent wisely and with an eye to the benefit of all the citizens of the province – we know that even just yesterday this government refused to allow debate on some aspects of how we spend our money in this province, and they certainly have been hiding from the public eye some aspects of their spending such as the war room, the Energy Centre, that really are quite appalling decisions by a government in a democracy, to not make available to the citizens an opportunity to examine how money is being spent. Here they are hiding great sums of the money, so I'm glad that we have an opportunity now in terms of this Bill 7, the appropriations bill, to have some kind of a conversation.

What I'm disappointed about, though, is that this bill is clearly one that we cannot support because it continues all of the negative things that we have been quite rightly pointing out to the citizens, both in the House and outside of the House, about this government's decisions over the last number of weeks and how those decisions are making life harder, more difficult, more financially expensive, and with fewer positive outcomes for the average citizen. We know, for example, that the government has deindexed the tax rates in this province so that even though citizens may not have received a raise at all in the last year, they'll certainly be paying more in taxes, because inflation is taking some of their money away but is not being reflected in the bracket that they have to pay, so your actual purchasing power has decreased significantly. We know that over the next number of years that's over a billion dollars of money taken out of the pockets of Albertans, without any good reason for doing so, at a time when they're already highly stressed.

We know that the government is also deindexing a variety of other programs, and those programs are reflected in this bill. We see that people on AISH are losing substantial amounts of money. In fact, under this plan AISH recipients will lose about \$3,000 in real purchasing power. We're talking about some of the poorest people in our society moving in a downward direction. Now, sometimes you might stand aside and say: unfortunately, it's just the circumstances of the time; inflation is going up and so on.

But it takes no time at all to do a little bit of statistical research online to find that that is not true for everyone in society, that there are significant portions of our society that have actually done much better over the last little while. There are segments of our society whose income has gone up dramatically, and this government themselves has been contributing to that. When it came to making decisions about pay changes to members of the staff of AIMCo, this government made decisions to allow their raises to be considered up to a 39 per cent increase at a time when other people are being asked to take a 10 or 11 per cent decrease.

4:10

It's not just incidental or accidental or outside of the hands of the government. This is actually a decision on the part of the government to take money away from the most vulnerable and the poorest

in our province and to dramatically increase the profits of shareholders and corporate executives across the province at a time that has already been extremely difficult for citizens in this province, and it's really just completely unacceptable. In looking at this particular bill, we see that there is a whole variety of ways in which citizens are losing that money. We see that the average person will lose about \$500 from the deindexing of the income tax. We see that the AISH recipients will lose about \$3,000. We see that the Alberta seniors' benefit recipients will lose about \$750 at the same time that executive pay in this province has gone up.

There are incidents that are widely available in the public of seeing executive pay that has more than doubled over the last number of years, but we're not talking about doubling the pay of someone who's earning \$16,000, where we would say: well, you know, maybe that'd be okay because \$16,000 isn't very much. In fact, that's what people who live on AISH are living on, so doubling it would not be that dramatic. But doubling the pay of somebody who's already earning in the multiple millions of dollars and allowing that to happen by reducing taxes on that, by giving a break to large corporations – we know this government has already given a break of \$4.7 billion, their own number in their own documents, to large corporations, already-profitable corporations, by the way. It wasn't to help young corporations or small corporations to grow. It was simply giving money to the wealthy.

We have a very strange circumstance in this government's budget where the clear intention is to help the rich become richer and to ensure that the poor become poorer. We hear the government rail against all kinds of measures that have been taken to help average citizens. They continually complain about the carbon levy as somehow an attack on people when it was clear that over 60 per cent of the population was actually benefiting from the amount of the rebate, something the government hates to mention. They don't mention the rebate because the rebate only went to poor people, and that really doesn't matter for them. If you actually look at something like the carbon levy, you will find that it actually enables and helps people, the vast majority of people. The only people that end up paying a bit more under a carbon levy are people that can afford it.

Here we are in this bill doing the same thing over and over again, stealing from the poor, giving to the rich. Monty Python had a little song about that, which I can't repeat because it's against the rules of the House.

Mr. Eggen: Monty Python?

Mr. Feehan: Monty Python, yeah. About stealing from the poor and giving to the rich.

I think we can quite seriously refer to this as the Monty Python government. The specific reference for anybody who is looking for it is the Dennis Moore sketch, by the way: Dennis Moore, stealing from the poor, giving to the rich. You know, this kind of thing is really just appalling.

We stand here saying that the government got lucky. The government got lucky because oil and gas revenues went up, obviously through no control of their own. This government does not set the price of oil. They have themselves said that on numerous occasions. As a result, they got a windfall bonus, but what they're doing is making sure that that windfall bonus is not shared appropriately across the province of Alberta. They're not saying: look, hey, we got all this extra money, billions of dollars, in fact, over what we actually predicted in our own budget.

We know that it was a surprise to this government, and it was, you know, legitimately a surprise. Nobody can predict the price of

oil. We know that they didn't count on it, but they're sure celebrating it now and pretending that somehow they had something to do with it when it was actually the international price of oil which brought this government into the black. But they're not saying: "Okay. Look, we got this benefit. It's a benefit for all Albertans, so why don't we share that with all Albertans?" They're instead ensuring that only the wealthy are deriving that benefit, only the major corporations.

This government likes to talk about itself being a pro-business government, but it's not, really. It's only a corporate business government. It doesn't actually do anything for small businesses. I can tell you that the small businesses in Edmonton-Rutherford, the district that I represent, have had a very rough two years. Many of them have had to close shop for periods at a time, had to lay off workers for a significant period of time. They have made applications to the government to try to get something to help them to change that circumstance, to bring back their employees and so on, but they got denied the support because they happened to use an iPad, and the government failed to develop a system that would read the information off an iPad. Then when the government was told that this was a legitimate application that your system rejected because of the particular piece of technology I used to apply: "Oh, too bad, so sad. You didn't apply; you don't get the money." The government was informed of this, but they didn't do anything to change it at all.

What we're finding is a government that really is not focused on the lives of everyday, average Albertans, not focused on the lives of people who are experiencing dramatic increases in their utility bills, not focused on the lives of people who are experiencing dramatic increases in their insurance rates, people who are experiencing dramatic increases across the board. What we are seeing is a government who is happy to make sure that those who are already financially successful get more successful, that the millions of dollars that they reap every year for whatever their position is turns into millions plus but not caring about the people that are living on \$1,600 a month, the most vulnerable people who simply have no other alternative. They're on AISH because they cannot actually derive an income on their own. As a society we should be concerned about those people. We should be concerned about their well-being. We should be concerned about them actually living a decent life, not just surviving barely moment to moment, month to month but actually living a vibrant, fulsome life, thriving in a community that's thriving.

But that's not what this government is focused on. It's not focused on the community thriving. It's focused only on individuals thriving. It's really just completely unacceptable that they would introduce a bill that repeats this same error, yet again taking advantage of their ability to determine the lives of poor people in order to be able to support their close personal friends and international business, who subsequently take the monies that they're given and use it to move money offshore, away from Alberta, to other parts of the world.

You know, the government complains about the fact that Alberta has had a really great resource-based economy for many years and, as a result, many people are able to pay taxes to the federal government because they actually earn a good income. They're actually complaining about that and saying: "That's not fair. If we earn a good income here, we shouldn't have to contribute to the federal government because other people don't have a chance to earn that other income, that same kind of income in another province." That's what they're complaining about.

But the same thing can be said throughout the province of Alberta. In some places people have greater incomes and in some places have lower incomes. But do they apply that standard there?

Do they say: oh, we're going to go through the province and look at the municipalities where people on average have a lower income and stop giving them money because why are we supporting them? They don't use that because they know it's absurd and because it would actually affect their electoral chances if they did that. They would actually be hurting the communities that they're representing.

They're willing to say that on a federal level because, as usual, they're completely inconsistent in terms of their economic policy. You know, they certainly have taken on the chance to brag and boast about having brought in what they refer to as a balanced budget, but they are not showing any responsibility as to how that actually was derived and not using that wonderful opportunity of that windfall to actually make lives better for all the people in this province. They could have done many different things. They could simply start by stopping attacking people, stopping deindexing things, and start looking at our seniors and saying: how can we support them more?

4:20

We know that, for example, when we increased the child tax credit, we helped to reduce the number of children living in poverty by 50 per cent. If they had simply made the decision to take this windfall profit, put it into more of the child tax credit, they may have been able to reduce poverty up to 100 per cent. They could have added the other 50 per cent, but they took a look at it, they said: "Hmm. Child poverty; executive salaries. Now, which one should we support?" Executive salaries every time.

They could have gone to reduce child poverty. They know, they have actual evidence, that the child tax credit does that because it happened during our term as government. They heard that mentioned many times in the House, that child poverty was reduced by half, and they could have said: "Hey, we found a successful program that actually helps citizens in the province of Alberta. If we reduce child poverty, then we might be able to reduce things like school dropout rates, adult health incident rates, addictions rates, incarceration rates. We could have done all that, because we know that the social determinants of health have indicated that all of those things go up when child poverty goes up, and if we reduce child poverty, we can reduce the demand on other government services over the next number of years."

If you're long-term thinking, that's the kind of thing that you can do. You can actually just take the available research on the social indicators of health and say: let's put extra money into all those things so that we will actually have a better province down the road. They could have chosen to do that. They could have actually had five- and six-year-olds not worried about whether or not they're going to have food to eat for dinner tonight, but instead they're worried about whether or not rich Texas millionaires have a swimming pool in their backyard. That was the choice they made.

They had some extra money that flowed in, through no work of their own, to government coffers, and they had a clear choice as to who would benefit from that, and look who they picked. It wasn't Albertans, it wasn't people who are most vulnerable, and it wasn't the future, a future in which we would have better health, reduced addictions, less incarceration, and greater high school and postsecondary graduation rates. All of that was available to them, and they didn't pick any of it.

This bill is just an example of a continuing desire to adhere to a widely discredited economic idea, that was brought in in another country some years back and has been simply copied by this government from a 1970s manual hidden somewhere in the Premier's office, in which they believe that somehow if you make rich people rich, other people will benefit. It's very clear that this

government is unable to read the information on trickle-down economics and how it is being consistently decried by researchers around the world as being a transfer of wealth away from the average citizen to the top 1 per cent of society.

In fact, during these very difficult last two years, we've actually seen the wealth of a few individuals in society more than double and triple in that 1 per cent while the rest of us are either standing still or, in fact, under this bill are actually losing ground. The wealthiest people in America, for example, actually gained \$1.7 trillion worth of net wealth over the last two years – \$1.7 trillion – and that's who this government has decided to be on the side of, not on the side of the AISH person who is living on \$1,600 a month; \$1,600 a month.

They couldn't even allow them to maintain that \$1,600 a month; they're going to allow inflation to eat that away for the year. All they had to do was just do nothing. If they had done nothing, they might have an argument, that, well, we have some good rates, so why don't we just leave it alone? They actively sought to take money away from people who are living on \$1,600 a month. I suspect there's not a single person on that government side of the House that could live on \$1,600 a month if they tried, yet they're expecting other people, typically people who have severe disabilities – that's the nature of why they're on the program – who do not have the options to pursue wealth in other ways that may be available to you and I, who absolutely must depend on that money, to do so. They've taken money away from them. They actively do so in this bill. It's just really, completely unacceptable.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair, for this opportunity given to me to rise and express my support for Bill 7. First of all, I would like to applaud the Premier and all the ministers for coming up with a budget that will fulfill our promise to Albertans. It is aimed to have financial stability as the government maintained all the needed services with the assurance of creating jobs and more businesses in the province.

This government had planned to balance the budget from day one. It is a wise and thoughtful plan to eliminate the largest deficit in Alberta's history. In fact, during the start of this government's administration the deficit has decreased even faster than initially planned. However, a new challenge came when every jurisdiction's economy in the world faced the major impact brought by the pandemic, economic downturn, not to mention the decrease of oil prices, which at some point reached into the negative. Through the well-thought-out strategy of the government our economy is showing encouraging signs of recovery and growth, but there is a lot more to be done to further diversify, strengthen our workforce, grow our resources, and extend the needed help for all Albertans.

What is the importance of balancing the budget? The question, Madam Chair, never crossed the thoughts of the previous government. Balancing the budget would mean a lot to Albertans as it would give us the ability to reduce the debt-servicing charge and eventually pay the debt. It would remove the burden to future generations, a debt that they did not incur.

When the previous government assumed governance of the province, debt servicing was under \$800 million a year. When they were ousted from office, it was about \$2.3 billion a year. Balancing the budget will put an end to a spending spree path being asserted continuously by the NDP so that we can go to the path of redirecting the debt-servicing amount to more useful services that Albertans

rely on, including health care, infrastructure, social programs, child care, and education.

Madam Chair, this budget is not only focused on balancing the budget and reversing the deficit; it also includes input from Albertans and stakeholders. The government received feedback and submissions from Albertans and various stakeholders through consultation conducted by way of online surveys, written submissions, and telephone town halls. Everyone's views were all considered by the government, and they were all received as great help in understanding the priorities of families, businesses, and communities. Having said that, let me express my appreciation to all who participated with the Budget 2022 consultation.

After many challenging years of economic and pandemic hardship Alberta is finally moving forward once again. The government's focus on responsible fiscal management and relentless pursuit of economic growth has put the province on a more sustainable fiscal trajectory, creating expanded financial capacity, resulting in additional government revenues.

4:30

The job-creating corporate tax cut introduced by this government, Madam Chair, is proving to be the more sensible approach than the increasing of taxes imposed by the previous government. Through this approach we will collect roughly \$400 million more in annual corporate tax revenue at an 8 per cent rate than the previous government did at 12 per cent, demonstrating the huge investment framework established since the government took office.

As multibillion-dollar investments are expected to come into Alberta, the Conference Board of Canada, Desjardins, RBC, and TD forecast that Alberta will be leading the country in economic growth this year. Amazon Web Services announced its plan to establish a second cloud computing hub in Calgary, amounting to \$4.3 billion, while Infosys and Mphasis are to create thousands of tech jobs in the province. RBC is also creating a tech hub in Calgary with about 300 jobs while EY will create a new finance hub with about 200 jobs in Calgary, impressed with the talented workforce. Northern Petrochemical also announced a \$2.5 billion project in the municipal district of Greenvue, and Dow Chemical plans to work on a project that would be the world's first net zero carbon emissions petrochemical plant, which is predicted to cost about \$10 billion.

Another huge investment that has landed in Alberta is Lynx Air, Madam Chair, Canada's newest low-cost airline. It joins Flair and WestJet as Alberta-based airlines. These are just some of the many investments creating jobs in Alberta and boosting our economy, Madam Chair.

As we saw, the unemployment rate hit prepandemic levels in December 2021 by gaining about 130,000 for the year, including 6,100 in the oil and gas industry. Moreover, in January this year we heard that Canada lost 200,000 jobs, but Alberta's economy gained over 7,000 jobs. Our unemployment rate continues to drop, and unemployment is at its lowest since September 2019. Eight thousand two hundred jobs were created in February, which means more Albertans are returning to work and receiving a regular paycheque.

Let me also add that Alberta continues to be the world leader in sustainable and responsible resource development among oil-producing jurisdictions. This shows that while we recognize that Canada's largest export is still the oil and gas industry, we are experiencing broad-based investment and economic diversification in our province. Nonetheless, this investment climate and composition does not mean that the government's approach of carefully handling the province's finances will twist. Alberta's

government continues its disciplined spending to maintain balance. Budget 2022 is moving Alberta forward by strengthening our health care system, getting more Albertans working, and bringing our finances back into the black.

As we move forward, Albertans need a strong health care system with the capacity to manage extraordinary surges and provide an excellent standard of care to all. Madam Chair, Budget 2022 provides more than \$22 billion in Health's operating budget, a \$550 million, or 2.4 per cent, increase from the 2021-2022 forecast, excluding COVID-19 costs – it will grow by a total of \$1.8 billion by 2024-2025 in order to scale up capacity – another year of record-high investment for health care in Alberta. Record investments in health care mean that Albertans will see expanded access through additional ICU beds, new facilities in their communities, and more mental health and addictions care around the province. This record investment will also ensure that Albertans across the province have access to the highest quality and most modern services our health care system can provide.

Over the next three years Alberta will invest \$100 million per year to provide additional health care capacity on a permanent basis, including adding new intensive care unit beds. The budget also includes a \$750 million COVID-19 contingency this year, which will help address the surgical backlog and ensure the province can cover evolving pandemic-related costs.

To expand continuing care programs and services for seniors and vulnerable Albertans, Budget 2022 provides nearly \$3.8 billion in operational funding for professional health care and support services across the continuing care system, a 6.3 per cent increase over last year.

Through Budget 2022 Alberta's government continues strong support for the education system. It provides an increase of more than \$700 million over the next three years to support teachers and to address cost pressures in transportation. This increased funding also recognizes enrolment growth. It includes a 1 per cent increase to both base funding and operations and maintenance funding. In 2022-2023 this increased funding will ensure school authorities can hire the required number of teachers and support staff, address increases in property and vehicle insurance premiums, support schools in maintaining enhanced cleaning protocols, and mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on student learning. Targeted funding of \$110 million over three years, including \$30 million in 2022-2023, will enable schools to support students experiencing academic challenges and create school environments supporting student well-being and positive mental health.

Recognizing the needed support for working parents and families, Budget 2022 also includes about \$2.5 billion over three years in support of a child care agreement with the federal government. Since the program was announced, Alberta parents are already experiencing lower costs, with the price of child care targeted to average \$10 per day by 2026. To ensure families can choose the child care that works best for them, 42,500 new licensed child care spaces will be added over the next five years.

To cope with rising inflation caused by global supply issues and the federal government's unrestrained spending, Budget 2022 provides funding for an energy rebate program to help Albertans manage higher natural gas prices.

Madam Chair, Budget 2022 is also investing \$390 million over the next four years to bring high-speed Internet to rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Alberta. This proves that the government is taking action to address Albertans' concerns about connectivity. The pandemic has made clear that access to a high-speed, reliable broadband Internet connection is not just important to Albertans but essential for Alberta's recovery and economic diversification. The government's broadband strategy will power

education, workplaces, venues, and homes across the province and will deliver access to connectivity that provides livelihoods and makes life better for hard-working Albertans. From education to health care and from agriculture to small businesses, connectivity will help Albertans interact with the global marketplace, innovate for local solutions, and help diversify our economy.

4:40

Madam Chair, Budget 2022 increases the operating expense budget for Seniors and Housing by 4.2 per cent compared to last year. With this budget the government is maintaining the seniors' benefit for those most in need, ensuring that vulnerable seniors can count on a stable source of income. It also enables the 10-year stronger foundations affordable housing strategy, with \$118 million in capital funding and \$25.3 million in operating funding over three years. Capital plan 2022 allocates \$281 million over three years and is a \$42.4 million increase over capital plan 2021. It will provide 2,300 new and regenerated affordable housing units.

As the government fast-tracks Alberta's economic recovery, supports will be provided to all Albertans finding opportunities to build their skills, pursue their passions, and support themselves and their families. Budget 2022 devotes more than \$600 million over three years to a new initiative called Alberta at work. This new component of Alberta's recovery plan will provide \$47 million over three years in capital funding and \$25 million over three years in operating funding to support collegiate programs and charter school expansions, creating pathways for students into higher learning and in-demand careers.

Alberta at work also provides \$171 million over three years to expand student enrolment in areas with skill shortages. This initiative will create approximately 7,000 additional postsecondary seats in areas such as computer science, information technology, data modelling, finance and financial technology, fintech, engineering, health care, and aviation. A further \$30 million will be provided for apprenticeship expansion programs, giving Albertans the training and education and opportunities they need to secure a rewarding career. Over three years \$64 million will be allocated for skills development, training, and employment programs. Additionally, investments of about \$30 million will be provided until 2024 to address barriers to employment, including training in literacy and numeracy as well as English as a second language courses for unemployed Albertans.

In addition to these investments, Budget 2022 includes \$30 million over three years, mostly in commercial driver grants, to address a severe shortage of skilled drivers in Alberta.

There's so much more to mention about Budget 2022, Madam Chair, which brings more great news for Alberta's economic recovery, but I may not have enough time today. Budget 2022 increases supports for vulnerable Albertans, including increases to help them find jobs. Through the Alberta at work program the government has enhanced funding so there can be more practical training to more Albertans looking for work. The budget supports the goal to help individuals and families gain independence and stability by providing opportunities for them to enhance their skills and get connected to jobs.

Budget 2022 ensures community and social service programs remain fully funded, including AISH, income and unemployment support, disability services, and help for people experiencing homelessness or fleeing violence.

Having said that, let me conclude by applauding the Premier, the Minister of Finance, and all the ministers for sticking to our thoughtful fiscal plan and making Alberta move forward to a prosperous financial future. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I know tradition in the House is to go back and forth between parties; however, I already stated that the hon. Member for Calgary-South East would go, but then followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to my colleague, through you, for highlighting many of the important aspects of Budget 2022. In response to the member opposite: we will make no apologies for standing up for our world-class energy sector. Given that the members opposite did everything they could when they were in government to stifle and harm that industry, it isn't surprising to see them frustrated and confused by our continued support for the most ethically and responsibly produced oil and gas.

The member did raise one real issue that Albertans and Canadians are facing. No, it's not the NDP. It's affordability, an issue that they contributed to with the introduction of the carbon tax, their unsustainable and irresponsible spending, by chasing away virtually all investment, by attacking our own businesses and industries, and through their continued support of Justin Trudeau and the Liberals. The best affordability initiative our government has done so far, in my opinion, was the removal of the NDP from office.

Alberta's current government, on the other hand, is providing real relief to Albertans who are struggling with the increased cost of living. We're stopping the collection of the provincial fuel tax beginning on April 1 to offer Albertans relief from high fuel prices. We're also providing \$150 in electricity rebates to ratepayers across the province.

The member did highlight another reason why it's great to live in Alberta. He talked about the basic personal amount, which continues to be head and shoulders above other provinces, the highest in Canada. And he mentioned one other thing, that our supports in Alberta continue to be some of the highest and most generous to Albertans in need. AISH. AISH continues to be at the highest level in Canada. The reason we can do that, the reason we can maintain world-class benefits like that, is through continued financial discipline and responsible government.

Budget 2022 includes record funding for Health and Education, increases to Advanced Education, Children's Services, and Community and Social Services. We're doing this while running balanced budgets, projected surpluses for the next three years.

Thank you for your comments. I'm interested to hear what else you have to say about Budget 2022, which has returned this province to balance.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I expected that to go a little bit longer.

It's an honour to rise and speak to this bill. I do have some comments, though, that I think it's important that we highlight. Again, I mean, we're fundamentally going to disagree that this budget is actually doing anything for Albertans. The government will say that this is the best bill ever and the best budget ever, but the reality of it is that it's actually flat.

[Mrs. Allard in the chair]

Two point eight billion dollars less on expenses is the reality of what this budget actually says. It's flat. It's not actually investing and increasing what the government would like to say in looking at their expenses. In fact, even with this surplus the budget has completely flattened out. There are no big investments happening.

A lot of what we've been hearing from the government are re-announcements of past budgets, of things that they've committed to repeatedly, and we have yet to see any type of outcome.

The Kananaskis pass would be an example of that. The Kananaskis pass was put in the last budget, a fee on Albertans to enjoy their backyard, where there was a commitment that that fund was going to be used to actually do something for the Kananaskis area. The announcement that the government made in regard to that investment was a reannouncement from last budget. It wasn't a new announcement; it was a continuation of the same announcement. In fact, the revenue that this government has created with their fees on Albertans has just been put into, basically, a whole bunch of little savings accounts that aren't actually benefiting Albertans.

4:50

I want to highlight something that I think is really important that the government members hear. There is a report – and this comes out on a quarterly basis, so the members are more than welcome to read it every quarter if they would like – that MNP puts out. Now, MNP does, and has been doing this since 2017, a review on the confidence of different provinces on their ability for individuals to be able to leverage their own personal capital. In January, before this budget came out, we were already on shaky grounds. We'll see in April whether or not these numbers have changed, but what I can say is that the title of it was Alberta's Confidence in Personal Finances, Debt Repayment Abilities Plummet amid Pandemic Fatigue and Uncertainty.

In January, before the budget came out, before this government had an opportunity to look at the affordability that was happening in the province, how Albertans were feeling about being able to pay their day-to-day bills, before we saw this massive increase in gasoline prices, before we saw what was going on with natural gas and insurance premiums going up, and now we see farming premiums going up and all the things going up that we've seen in the last even couple of weeks, Albertans were saying:

Compared to the last quarter . . .

So before Christmas.

. . . the number of Albertans who are concerned about their current level of debt has jumped nine points to 50 percent, the highest level amongst the other provinces. Slightly fewer are confident [they're comfortable covering] their living expenses in the next year.

Fifty-seven per cent don't believe they can cover their expenses without going into debt.

Making matters worse, four in 10 . . . say they're finding it even harder to pay down [their] debt. Compared to other regions, Albertans are [more] likely . . . to say it's become much less affordable to set aside money for savings – up a significant six points since last quarter.

Now, in continuation of this report, the Consumer Debt Index . . .

If anybody would like to read the Consumer Debt Index and do some research when you speak to some of these pieces of legislation.

. . . which measures Canadians' attitudes toward their consumer debt and gauges their ability to pay their bills and endure unexpected expenses, has fallen seven points [in Alberta] since last quarter to 88 points – the lowest reading since . . . 2017.

"It's clear households in Alberta are becoming increasingly worried about the debt they are carrying . . . We often see financial optimism wane [around the] holiday bills.

Of course, people buy presents, and you've got all the expenses that come with those holidays.

But additional factors such as [COVID] pandemic fatigue, as well as rising inflation and the potential for interest rate increases are

making Albertans feel [far] more financially insecure [than in past years] . . ."

Fewer than three in 10 . . . are confident in their ability to cope with life-changing events without increasing their debt burden. In comparison to the other provinces, Albertans are the most likely (35%) to say they are not confident in their ability to cover an unexpected car repair, jumping a significant 10 points since September. They are also the most likely (41%, +10pts) to say they are not confident they can cope financially with an illness that renders them unable to work for [more than] three months. Four in 10 . . . have concerns about coping with a loss of employment or change in wage or seasonal work, [which is] a jump of 14 points since [last] September – by far the largest increase compared to [any other province]. Albertans are also less confident in their ability to handle a change in their relationship status (27% . . .) or cope with the death of an immediate family member (13%) . . .

Four in 10 . . . Albertans report they're \$200 away or less from not being able to meet all of their financial obligations at month-end . . . This proportion also includes nearly three in 10 . . . who say they already don't [have] enough to cover their bills and debt payments, remaining above the national average.

"The cost of living is on the rise, and we expect those households who were already overextended throughout the pandemic may feel they have to resort to [their] credit just to afford basic necessities and make [their] ends meet . . ."

In fact, Albertans are the most likely to admit to paying only the minimum balance on their credit card . . . compared to the other provinces – and [most] Albertans say they have borrowed money they can't afford to pay back . . . ([about] 16% . . .). More also say they were lured in by deals or special offers on . . . Black Friday . . . Additionally, six in 10 . . . Albertans point to low interest rates [as being part of the problem] . . .

With concerns over inflation and cost of living at the forefront of many Albertans' minds, two in 10 . . . believe their debt situation is worse than a year ago. [Fifty per cent] of Albertans say they regret the amount of debt they've taken on. When looking five years into the future, more Albertans appear to be apprehensive about the road ahead.

They believe the debt situation is going to get worse. Reality check for Albertans.

This government stands up and says, "Look at our balanced budget, look at how great we've done, look at all of these things," yet there is nothing in this budget that addresses all of the concerns that I just brought forward. The cost of living is going up in Alberta. Albertans feel it. Fifty per cent are concerned about the future of their finances. When a government stands up and continuously talks about, you know, "Look at all of these great things we've done; we've done all of these amazing things; Albertans want a balanced budget; they're not concerned with what the opposition is saying," that is factually incorrect.

I can't wait until the next quarterly comes out by MNP and I can see what their next report says in March now that they've seen the increase in their utility bills and the increase of trying to put fuel in their vehicles and their new insurance premiums and the bills that they've received in the mail recently, when they see their property taxes from municipalities have gone up because of the cuts that this government has done to municipal funding and the downloading that this budget is doing on the pocketbooks of Albertans. It has a serious impact. To ignore those comments and to say that that's not the case is disingenuous to every single one of our constituents. Fifty per cent, according to this report, of Albertans are worried about their financial security. Fifty per cent. It's factual. I will table this tomorrow if other people want to read it.

It's not just about individuals living on AISH. It's not just about individual seniors' benefits. Those are serious issues that should

have also been addressed in this budget, absolutely, but it is the average Albertan who is sitting at home, 50 per cent of Albertans who are sitting at home going: "I don't know how I'm going to pay my bills. I'm worried about our economy. I'm worried about whether or not I'm going to have a stable job and whether or not I'm going to come out of COVID with some kind of financial security."

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

When the government talks about, "Look at all the job creation that we've done," those are part-time jobs. I would really enjoy the government to stand up and talk about how many full-time, long-term, mortgage-paying jobs this government has created versus the part-time jobs that this government continues to use in their job numbers. That's also disingenuous. That's not true to what is actually going on for the average Albertan.

It's not a celebration. This budget hasn't addressed the needs of Albertans, and when you see that the expenses have gone down, \$2.8 billion less – \$2.8 billion less – of what this government is spending on their overall budget, that isn't addressing any of those concerns, real concerns.

We have a financial instability problem with the amount of capital that people have access to right now. That drives our economy. When people spend, our economy does well. When people can't spend, our economy slows down. People don't have the capital. They don't have the personal financial liquidity to be able to spend, and if they do, they go into debt, which is also not a good thing for our economy. We don't want people going into debt, my members of the government.

Ideally, we want people to have financial security, where they feel like they can spend on those extras, they feel like they can go camping for a weekend and now spend an extra \$5, according to the press release that just came out, to be able to reserve a camping spot. They should feel confident in being able to look at new vehicles or look at those luxury items, but clearly Albertans don't feel that way. It will slow down our economy because right now people are trying to figure out how they're going to buy their groceries and how they're going to pay their utilities and how they're going to pay their rent, which ultimately slows down the economy. If you don't have people spending, the economy can't keep going. It's a pretty basic economic idea. I see people shaking their heads, which I don't really understand. I'm a little concerned by that.

Mr. Getson: I'm nodding.

Ms Sweet: I know. I have one member who nods at a lot of things, which is also very concerning to me.

The reality of it is that this budget hasn't addressed how we're going to keep the economy driving forward. That is a concern.

5:00

Talking about the investment of big business, sure. And you know what? If we were getting capital coming in that was big capital, that was investing in big projects, that was actually creating good-paying jobs, that were full-time jobs, there would be a discussion, but the reality is – I mean, we just saw an announcement about Walmart coming into Alberta, but those aren't high-paying, long-term investment jobs. They're not paying people's basic necessities. It is a problem when we can't seem to attract companies to hire people for good, mortgage-paying jobs.

When we're talking about part-time employment and people are working two to three jobs, that's a problem. [interjections] It's a problem, Minister. It is an absolute problem. The fact that I'm

getting heckled by the government, by a minister, when I'm talking about basic economics and how to encourage people to be able to have full-time, mortgage-paying jobs is actually very concerning to me. Very, very, very concerning.

Like, read the report. This is about investment and Albertans' personal finances. This is consumer debt indexing. It's real numbers. It's how Albertans feel, and to not have any understanding or respect from this government about the reality that this budget doesn't actually do anything to support that shouldn't be something where the government thinks they should heckle. In fact, they should be listening, re-evaluating, and going: maybe this budget isn't doing what we think it should be doing. What it could do is that it could help to support some of that consumer confidence again by helping bring down some of that cost of living.

The concern that I have is that, again, the government will talk about a 13-cent reduction in gasoline, but there is no guarantee that that 13 cents is going to get down to the consumer. There's nothing that locks that in and guarantees that. So the government can give 13 cents off the taxes, but how do you guarantee that it's going to be in the pocketbook of the person that's buying the gasoline? Where is it in this budget – well, it's not even in the budget. But where is the policy that protects the consumer to know that that 13 cents is coming back into their pocketbook? There's zero. Nothing. It is a false promise.

It is super frustrating to me that when there's an announcement made, there isn't a policy that actually shows Albertans that they're going to get that money back. The \$150, which is \$50 a month, is also not going to address the cost of living today, because we know it's not actually going to come into effect until maybe October. We also know that right now the cost of natural gas isn't even at the threshold the government set, so it's another false promise on how to address the cost of living going on in this province.

There are strategies that could have been implemented in this budget that would still have maximized being able to have a surplus budget and would still have supported Albertans to feel like somehow this budget supported them, and I don't see it. I don't see it stimulating the economy to ensure that Albertans are actually going to get the jobs that they need, that are good, high-paying, full-time – let's emphasize the full-time part. This inconsistency to the government to keep talking about job numbers that are part-time is absolutely ludicrous, in my opinion. It's not genuine to the reality of what Albertans are looking for, which is good-paying, full-time positions that are long term, not even contracts. Let's get people long-term employment, where they feel confident in staying in Alberta and want to live here long term and want to invest in the economy and want to spend money and want to keep our economy driving. I don't see it, and I don't see it happening in rural Alberta. I don't see it. I don't see that job creation happening in a way where we're encouraging people to stay in rural Alberta. I want them to stay in their local communities. I want people to learn, to live, and to play where they want in rural Alberta, outside of the Edmonton and Calgary areas.

I absolutely, fundamentally agree – I come from a small town. I love my community. I enjoy being able to go there. And you know what? If there was a job for me back in the day, I probably would have been there still. But the reality is that there were no employment opportunities for me, so I moved to the city. I went to school in the city. I got a job in the city. It's what happens. And many of my cousins, of whom I'm sure the chair is aware because she knows some of my cousins, also moved into bigger communities, away from smaller communities, because there wasn't the opportunity for them to do what they wanted to do. It is a fundamental problem.

I was hopeful that when we heard and we could see the writing on the wall that the budget was going to be balanced, there was going to be some ability to address what is happening in Alberta. We benefit from our resources. The price of oil going through the roof right now – I mean, it's gone quite high, and it continues, as my computer keeps telling me, to go up as we speak; well, the market is closed, but prior to the market closing – should be beneficial to all Albertans. It's our resource, yet this budget, which is significantly benefiting from the price of oil, is not reflective of how that's transferring back to the average Albertan.

You can do both. You can absolutely do both. With the royalties that we have and the ability to look at the future and what is going on, there was an ability to do both. I'm not saying: spend it all. Absolutely not. I believe that, you know, we should be financially prudent, and we should be able to have a budget that could have a surplus. There were things that could have happened in this budget . . . [interjection] You know, some of us can talk about the economy, Member. There's an ability to use a budget with a surplus that can still stimulate the economy and can still help relieve the stress for Albertans. It just wasn't done. It didn't address the concerns that have been brought up. It hasn't supported consumer confidence, to be honest.

You know, there are lots of fiscal conservatives that I speak to who like the idea of a surplus budget, but when they looked at this, they said: yeah, the surplus was great, but I was expecting something else. Like, there should have been something else, and there should have been a forward vision. There should have been something that was clearly going to create jobs and do all of the things, yet that's not here.

I'll be honest with you, government members. There are fiscal conservatives that aren't impressed with this budget. There just aren't. Like, they don't think that just because you have a surplus, it's a win. There has to be more in a budget than just a surplus. Where's the vision? Where is this government planning on going? How are they going to create the jobs? How are they going to take care of those people that can't pay their bills? What is going on? Why wasn't . . .

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

Mr. Getson: Thanks, Madam Chair. I need to stretch my legs. I really appreciate the debate that's taking place in here. I have to admit that the last speaker I listened to intently. Some of the other members from the other side – I can't speak freaky-deaky socialist, so I don't catch most of it. I've got to step up and leave the room sometimes; I hate to say it. But with the member opposite, from Edmonton-Manning, I can listen to her. She does a ton of research. I have a ton of respect for the lady.

I made some notes here because there were a bunch of items. I wasn't originally planning on speaking to the budget even though it's a phenomenal budget, even though it's the best budget that we've had in – how many years? – eight years, a balanced budget. Now, it doesn't come with, you know, as some would think, the unholy coalition of socialism that we're seeing down in Ontario right now, with budgets balancing themselves. [interjection]

The member opposite is heckling. He prefers democracy in action by groups that he supports, like propping up an emergency act that was only used for times of war, unless you have protesters you don't agree with and are silencing speech and going after people's bank accounts, the same group that he's talking about, who are on AISH payments, who actually made contributions to some of those having their bank accounts frozen. He's okay with that type of democracy. I'll continue, Member. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Just a slight caution to direct your comments through the chair.

Mr. Getson: Oh, I'm sorry. My head was in the wrong direction. I have this one bad eye. Sorry, Madam Chair.

To the Member for Edmonton-Manning: again, I really appreciate that. The bad news out there – and I was agreeing with her. She's making comments about my head movement. I was actually nodding with a lot of the items that she had. There were impacts on people's cost of living that we have. There are driving inflationary costs. Consumer confidence is down, absolutely.

5:10

There is a ton of pressure on folks, both socially and economically, right now as we come out of COVID. Not to blame everything on COVID, because that would be a cop-out entirely, but there is that lack of confidence. She was talking about part-time jobs. She was talking about lesser paying jobs. She was painting, quite honestly, a very dark picture, but this is the same picture that we inherited in a lot of cases when we were elected. We saw a decline in jobs, of high-paying jobs. We saw a lot of people switching to part-time. We saw a lot of people not having the same consumer confidence, not spending the money.

Now, we compound that with what took place with COVID. Absolutely, people are a little concerned and cautious, and they still should be. They should still be cautious. Don't throw caution to the wind just because we've had a good year, just because we happened to balance the budget, just because we happened to push down the spending, just because we happened to save about \$6 billion versus the trajectory of where we would have been if we didn't make those changes.

Now, the other thing the member opposite had mentioned was the windfall from oil prices. Yeah, we got a win. At one point last year we actually were in negative values. The deals that were made with some of the larger companies for curtailing production: the Minister of Energy had to go to those folks and put acts in place to curtail production while they allowed the smaller companies to still produce. We were in negative values. That is bad for everybody across the board, Madam Chair, through you to the other members. We were in pretty dire straits and circumstances. Now, the budget itself – and although some of the members will speak to the great \$110 or \$120, depending on the commodity prices in the market that are taking place at the time, it's actually pinned at \$70-a-barrel oil, so we haven't accounted for all those other windfalls yet.

Ms Sweet: Oh, I know.

Mr. Getson: Well, yeah. We're in agreement, one hundred per cent agreement, on that.

So the question is: what do you do with these potential windfalls? It also has to do with that cash-flow projection and the duration that it takes. I would think – and I think most Albertans would agree – that if there is an opportunity, if there are any windfalls, we make sure we don't send them away in transfer payments, that we don't send them back to the east so they can get on it, or that we don't have that projection forward.

Part of the thing that we'd have to look at is: what can we do? What levers are at our disposal? Although some of the opposition scoffed – not the Member for Edmonton-Manning; she didn't scoff at it. She asked a good question, but some scoffed. They're saying about these 13 cents that you're taking off everyone's fuel prices at the pumps: well, that's no big deal. Well, yeah. It's kind of off-set by that flipping carbon tax coming back again and getting compounded for us April 1, April Fool's. I wish that the members opposite, the one that particularly likes that style of coalition

democracy taking place with his fans down there, through you to that member so he can hear me, would actually step up and say: "Maybe we should ratchet back the carbon tax. Maybe it was really a failed experiment, and we don't really know where the dollars are going other than to a Ponzi scheme, in principle, moving shells around and taking it out of people's pockets." That would really give us more of an impact.

The fuel tax itself, the road tax: there are only 13 cents that we have. For some of these things, as the Member for Edmonton-Manning pointed out, we don't have anything in legislation to make that stick. You're right; there isn't a price protection. But with these same companies that curtailed it, the same companies that have been working with us, there's also an agreement. There's a leap of faith. There's trust in that, and there has to be something held to account on that. We're going to be monitoring those items to make sure that that doesn't take place, but we won't be so punitive to try to put other measures in place. It's temporary, too. It's also tied to the commodity prices themselves. What we had to do was make sure that the supply that was already in the tanks ran through the system so that we weren't inadvertently taking away from those other small businesses.

Now, inflation. Well, inflation is on a bit of a runaway. Imagine that, with the financial logic – some are talking about trickle-down economics. Well, I'm not sure when you've got Captain Fancy Socks running around driving up a higher deficit than we've ever had, over all other Prime Ministers combined. You've been having warnings nonstop from the financial community on how to stop that, and it hasn't. Now the chickens have come home to roost. When you put all these pressures on normal people, yeah, they've had enough.

The coal policy. When it came down to rapidly shutting down the electricity – in my area, again, folks, just come out a little bit to the west, and I'll give you a tour of where the mines used to be in production. Thousands of people were put out of work, the compound effect not only from the folks that worked in those mines – high-paying union jobs, I might add, full-time jobs, legacy jobs, and positions where families made their incomes. Legacy: from one generation to the next for years, Madam Chair. The Devon coal institute: they did a ton of research on that front, and Keephills 3 was, I would argue, the cleanest source of electricity in our province. That technology could have been packaged up and sent around the world.

We drastically changed that. Well, not we. When I got here, I jumped out to the project manager that I happened to work in a carbon capture and storage project with, who was from TransAlta, and asked him if we could turn this thing around, fire those plants up. We could extend the life still, keep those thousands of people working. It was too late, but they did get a \$1.3 billion package payout because the other folks broke the contracts, and we did add an overbuilt transmission system. And you're absolutely right. To the members opposite, we're having to deal with that right now, and the folks at home, unfortunately, with the way the system works, the ratepayers: it gets pushed back to them. The chicken is coming home to roost again.

It may be paltry, but at least the members, the ministers on this side are putting in programs to try to take those reliefs. We've got to make sure that people know there's an advocate out there for them to call so they can try to get those rates reduced, and we need to figure out the electricity file because – you're right – we can't do it.

And I came to some of this as we're just starting to launch. We're coming off – we're in ground effect, using some aviation terminology; you have an extra buoyancy when you're coming off the ground – and if we come off too quick or we keep getting these

other things pulling back on us, offering that additional drag, like that inflation, like the carbon tax, all those things, we do risk falling and stalling. Members, all of us from both sides of the aisle have to make sure that that isn't the message we're sending. We've got to make sure we're doing things that are prudent.

We have to make sure that folks don't overspend at this point as well, and we have to make sure that even if they're taking part-time jobs now, at least there are jobs for them to take. We weren't in that circumstance before. And once we have those part-time jobs filled and the new jobs become available with all the investment we're seeing, then they're moving up the ladder. Again, there was a point in time when, if you served at Starbucks or one of the Tim Hortons, you were getting 30 bucks an hour to serve coffee, not that we want to see that again. It was pretty disproportionate, but that was happening in different markets. When the market starts to roll again and things start to go in place, those wages will come back, and you will see that.

Right now we're seeing a scarcity of labour – believe it or not – a scarcity of skilled labour. Now, arguably, we could have or should have spooled up more people to jump off the couch, get training, and do that. There are a bunch of programs in this budget to help that. When I look at aerospace and aviation – I mentioned this a number of times, and hopefully it resonates with the folks on this side and the members opposite. We did a look over the glass, if you would, into the aerospace and aviation sector. We have 80 per cent transferable skill sets from the energy sector to get in that area. You need the same engineers. You see the cost-control people. You need the technicians that do similar work. We can do that, and that side is taking off.

In fact, I was approached by a company called Nexus Space, that was looking to try to set up here and build satellites and launch vehicles, crazy things that we never would have heard of until we had the Alberta International Airshow, where we started connecting the dots. We were literally doing things and going outside of our comfort zone. Again, they're looking at a stable environment to do that in. A lot of the reasons why these corporations come are the value of living, the cost of living, the quality, and the other amenities that we have. We have that, and we're attracting and garnering that attention globally.

Now, if you take in current circumstances, a lot of us were looking at, you know, short-line rail trying to fill some of these voids. We're talking about the rural Internet package because we need that. The members opposite had mentioned as well: what is rural getting out of this? You're absolutely right. The way we have to build out rural is that we have to make sure that they have some of the services, because they're living in the shadow of these bigger cities, which is commuting time. Also, if we do things like in aerospace, for example, you need to be out in the country, so to speak, utilizing these things on the shadow of the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, et cetera. So having high-paying skilled jobs: we're just on the cusp of that again. It might pain us sometimes to agree on things, but we have to make sure we agree on that. We're trying to get to the same outcomes with the same futures.

The tourism and travel industry. Well, holy crow, you wouldn't believe the amount of attention we got from these little air tours of taking pictures and showing that and with the First Nations, the Indigenous groups around the area. Heck, even Grand Chief Arcand now was helping us with, you know, the gentleman from Michel, Gerard. I'm messing his name up, Minister, offhand. He helped introduce the air show with me. They're full partners in the Villeneuve landing network. These are the types of things we're bringing there. So when the international stage sees First Nations people and fighter jets and the rest of us all together: holy crow.

From that interaction there, we talk about the education file. Grande Yellowhead took that leap of faith. I had the superintendent there, the board chair at the time. We got the schooling program from the Calgary board of education in place where we've got students now – four schools in that area are taking flight training, the basics of flight training, aerospace and aviation, the ground schooling, and getting high school credits for it. Recently at RMA the reeve from Westlock came to me and said that because she saw what we were doing there, she actually reached out to that same school division, so now they can start doing that in Westlock county. These are the things where we've got these skilled jobs, these high-paying jobs.

5:20

We have to give people hope again. We have to talk about the brighter future. We have to talk about providing our energy, literally our energy, getting it to markets because it's our place where we should do that. A lot of these jurisdictions have no choice but to go to the communist countries like Venezuela, Russia. Start naming the other ones that go down the lines, the Kazakhstans, the Syrians. They have to get that oil from there. They have to get the energy, and it's our duty, quite frankly, because regardless of how the rhetoric goes in here, we produce the cleanest, most ethically produced oil in the world. In 2018 on the hydrogen file, which is a massive thing, by the way – the hydrogen economy is going to be huge – Japan does an independent study on their own between blue hydrogen and green hydrogen. We were number two only to Russia for producing the most efficient blue hydrogen, so we can see how Russia operates versus us. On the green file, heck, we were in the lower quartile.

Members opposite, please tell some of those stories, too. We don't have to agree on everything, but stop saying that we're going to crash this thing before we've even taken off again. This is something to be celebrated, the fact that we do have some higher commodity prices, the fact that we're weathering the COVID storm and coming out of it. Let's talk about joining people together again, have a grand vision for all of us – for all of us – to gain in. We can be that light again in the country. A lot of people have lost hope, but they're looking towards Alberta because we are leaning that way and we're leading the charge. Please help us tell that vision.

Budget 2022 does that. It might not be the be-all and end-all of where we're going in the next four or five years, but, boy, it sure is one heck of a good start, Madam Chair. We've navigated through the worst of the storms, made it past the icebergs, and we're coming out the other side with a balanced budget that's looking good for the future, and people are paying attention to it. We have to tell that story because the only way you make a story stick is by singing off the same song sheet, being on the same stage, and presenting your best foot forward. The worst thing that we can do is keep shooting each other in the feet here while we do our own little political tap dances and paint the wrong picture.

This is business 101: fake it until you make it. The proof is in the pudding. The minister is down in New York, and the proof is in the pudding. Even the folks in Toronto had to begrudgingly agree: yeah, we're getting it. We're getting it. Grand vision and future building: let's look towards the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region, let's look towards our trading partners that are in agreement with us, that hold the same social values globally as well. Let's be that bastion of hope. Let's get them the energy they need to transition to the fuels of the future, but we're it; we're here right now. Alberta is back. Help me help you to make that dream come true.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Jones: The previous NDP government measures success by the amount of money that they spent, not by outcomes or value for taxpayer dollars or with any regard for sustainability or future Albertans. It's not surprising, then, to see that during their time in government they raised spending an average of 4 per cent per year. At that rate of spending, even at the budget's projected commodity prices and assuming their policies hadn't harmed businesses or our energy sector further, Alberta would have a \$6 billion deficit this year, a 7 and a half billion dollar deficit next year, and a \$9 billion deficit in 2024. They also significantly increased taxes and regulatory burden.

This year Alberta will collect approximately \$400 million more in annual corporate tax revenues at our 8 per cent rate than the previous NDP government did at 12 per cent. Our government has cut over 21 per cent of red tape, saving Albertans and businesses an estimated \$1.2 billion while making Alberta a more desirable place to invest. Our government continues to work to ensure that Alberta remains the best place in Canada to live, work, and raise a family. Budget 2022 reflects our government's focus on investment attraction, economic growth, and diversification as we move forward to a time when all Albertans will have opportunities to build their skills, pursue their passions, and support themselves and their families.

That is why Budget 2022 includes more than \$600 million in new strategic investments for Alberta at work. Over the course of the fiscal plan the government will expand the collegiate learning model, assisting high school students on their path to postsecondary education, trade designations, and in-demand jobs. We'll also add approximately 7,000 additional postsecondary seats in high-demand areas such as computer and data science, information systems technology, finance, agriculture sciences, health, and aviation. New capital investments will also help address critical labour shortages.

Unlike the members opposite, we're creating jobs, we're attracting investment, and we're diversifying Alberta's economy, and Albertans have every reason to be optimistic. With continued responsible government and financial discipline we can avoid burdening our children so they can share in that optimism.

Madam Chair, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 3 Special Days Act

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I would like to express my appreciation to the minister for introducing this important bill, Bill 3, Special Days Act, which will establish a new process for Alberta's government to recognize special days. Since time immemorial, different societies have given high priority to the commemoration of special occasions. This theme is common in all kinds of civilizations. Cultures, nations, and traditions have their special honorific days for celebrating special occasions, and Alberta is no exception. Special days of celebration help to cultivate a sense of community by giving everyone the chance to connect with those we love and care about on a more profound level.

Every year the province of Alberta recognizes special days to celebrate and commemorate different milestones in our collective history. Indeed, the Alberta government recognizes these special days as days of particular significance for Albertans. These anniversaries, celebrations are significant for many reasons. First, they help us to acknowledge the contributions of past generations

by helping current generations remember historic events that are significant.

Also, through the commemoration of these special days such as Hindu Heritage Month, Islamic Heritage Month, Philippine Heritage Month, Black History Month, or Francophonie Month the province can appreciate the diversity and shared heritage of our nation and acknowledge the contribution of different racial groups. This bill will be in recognition of the cultural awareness that is unique to Alberta.

Thirdly, the special days inspire Albertans to take actions that help them to be more involved in important issues within our communities, like Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month; International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation; Sexual Violence Awareness Month; Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Awareness Day; or Human Trafficking Awareness Day. Special days instill a sense of significance and meaning in our lives. Special days also create a perfect opportunity for everyone to be joyful and give thanks for the year's accomplishments.

Currently the government of Alberta does not have a formal legal mechanism to recognize a special day, week, or month. In 2016 the government created a process to declare or proclaim special days, weeks, and months with specific criteria. That process involves the creation of order in council proclamations, but there is no specific statutory authority to make a proclamation.

5:30

Some special days have been recognized through the creation of arts while other special days are recognized through proclamations or declarations, which have no formal force or legal effect. The unique rituals that accompany special days appreciate the essence that connect us all to a common source. Also, through proclamations recognizing special days, the government is ensuring that there is a legal framework that supports these special days.

Madam Chair, this is exactly what Bill 3 seeks to achieve, to create a process that we legalize, recognize special dates, and promote greater cultural awareness in our communities. The Special Days Act will regularize how the Alberta government decides to recognize days, occasions, or events that are of great importance to Albertans. Part of what the Special Days Act will also achieve is to give a known legal protection to special days through an act, a one-time declaration, or ongoing proclamation of an order in council. This will equally fast-track the acknowledgement and recognition of special days each year.

If passed into law, Madam Chair, Bill 3 will empower ministers to issue ministerial declarations that recognize the special days for as long as necessary. The act will also continue to recognize days that have been previously announced and recognized through proclamations. More importantly, the bill makes it a requirement for recognized special days to be published on a web page where Albertans can keep track of it. This bill will also allow Albertans who are seeking recognition of special days to submit a request to the relevant government minister through the request declaration form. By simplifying the process of recognizing special days, Albertans will be able to participate in the democratic process, and the government will also be able to avoid duplication of efforts in determining special days.

The Special Days Act will make it easier for the Alberta government to celebrate Alberta's cultural history, diversity, and heritage and focus our attention on values that we hold in high esteem. Currently we have not done enough to recognize the special days because they are only limited to proclamations and declarations and because none of these methods are protected by any legal framework. By allowing this bill to be passed into law,

ministers in Alberta government, through ministers' declarations, will have the authority to recognize special days in perpetuity. These days can be easily traced by members of the society. The Special Days Act proposes a simple solution for the government to increase awareness of important issues to our province.

There are so many wonderful things to celebrate throughout the year. Some of these are special dates that still need to be legally recognized by the government of Alberta. Some of these dates are a reminder of how far we have come. The ad hoc process by which special dates are recognized in Alberta needs to be reviewed, and I believe through this bill this process will be corrected. There are currently 11 dates that are recognized through proclamations and nine dates that are recognized through acts. Apart from what I have already mentioned, the other special days as of this moment, Madam Chair, include the Month of the Artist, Alberta Police and Peace Officers' Memorial Day, Day of Older Persons in Alberta, Disability Employment Awareness Month in Alberta, Ukrainian-Canadian Heritage Day, Holocaust Memorial Day, Ukrainian Famine and Genocide (Holodomor) Memorial Day, Family Day, Polish-Canadian Heritage Day.

Though a special day recognition through an act is an important procedure, as members of this Chamber can debate or cast their support for such recognition, Bill 3 will make it faster and easier for days to be acknowledged. Albertans will still be able to request recognition of special dates the same way they always have. They will be able to either write to the relevant cabinet minister or submit a request through the prescribed form.

Having said that, Madam Chair, let me end by applauding the minister and all the ministry's officers for making this initiative, a new way for Alberta's government to recognize special days, making it more efficient to acknowledge and track important occasions. I encourage all the members of this Chamber to support Bill 3, Special Days Act, as we promote greater cultural awareness and inspire Albertans to take action on important causes.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there members wishing to joining the debate on Bill 3? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the colleague from Calgary-East for his comments on this bill. I am pleased to rise and offer a few comments of my own on the Special Days Act. You know, it's interesting to me that this is one of these pieces of legislation that attempts to set out the job description for the Minister of Culture and kind of continues a tradition that we saw last session, where the Minister of Infrastructure needed to have his job description set out in legislation with the adoption of the infrastructure act. Here we have the Minister of Culture setting out his own job description, at least in part, with the adoption of the Special Days Act that we're considering here today.

You know, the minister knows full well that the powers that are being given to him in this piece of legislation are already available to him, that any organization can request a special day or week or month be declared at any time and that currently those declarations have to fulfill some specific criteria. They must recognize important events, milestones, cultural groups, or organizations that directly impact or connect with the province of Alberta. They have to be requested by organizations and not individuals, and they can only make the request once per calendar year. They have to be apolitical, can't be offensive, and adhere to the principles in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Alberta human rights code.

It's a little bit concerning to me, Madam Chair, that we don't see those same criteria set out in this piece of legislation. One can only wonder what the criteria for being declared a special day will be,

and I certainly hope that the minister or any of his colleagues in Executive Council with knowledge of the matter will be able to enlighten us here in the Chamber and let us know what conditions must be met before a special day can be recognized under this act.

5:40

It should also be concerning to members of the government backbench in particular but all private members about whether or not this bill will have any impact on the ability of private members to bring forward legislation that would set out declarations of special days. I quite clearly recall the colleague from Peace River bringing forward and passing unanimously through I think all three stages of debate as well as Committee of the Whole in one afternoon a declaration celebrating a Polish heritage day here in the province of Alberta. I think this was something that was meaningful not only to the member himself but to constituents that he represented. I certainly hope that this piece of legislation doesn't take away the ability of private members to bring forward this kind of legislation and declare special days on behalf of significant cultural groups or organizations that have a special day in mind.

You know, I do have to say that I struggle with the concept of special days, and anyone who knows me knows that this is true. My children often have to remind me that their birthdays are coming up and, in fact, have to often remind me that that particular day is their birthday. More than once I've been in the position of having to buy my children happy-day-after-your-birthday cards just to make up for the fact that I've neglected their birthday.

The same is true for anniversaries, Madam Chair. I find that I'm now divorced and probably in no small part because I couldn't remember the day that I was married. Now, you know, that relationship ended so badly that I don't want to remember the day that I was married anymore, but I certainly wasn't able to do that when I was married. This is something that continues to irritate the people in my life, but it's still a struggle for me to remember and properly recognize those special days.

However, that's not to say that I don't appreciate the fact that special days do exist and that there is some benefit, I think, to recognizing some special days. You know, the minister, I'm sure, is listening intently to debate and is probably taking suggestions for some special days that I think Alberta would be wise to recognize. I have some suggestions here for him should he choose to consider them.

First of all, today is National Puppy Day. I think we all appreciate – well, my friend from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has some reservations about dogs, but the majority of the members here appreciate our canine companions. I think it would be appropriate for the minister to formally recognize puppy day here in the province of Alberta just to celebrate the benefits of canine companionship. That's one suggestion.

There could be a national cat day. I don't know, off the top of my head, when an Alberta cat day would be. I know that that would be an incredible irritant to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, to officially recognize an Alberta cat day. Perhaps even just out of spite the minister could recognize a provincial cat day here just to irritate the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I think there'd be no better way to honour cats than by acting out of spite, because that's how cats tend to act towards their owners.

You know, Madam Chair, another month that is important to me and a lot of people I know is the month of June, which is National Accordion Awareness Month. The accordion has made significant cultural contributions to the life of the people of the province of Alberta, and I think it would be only fitting for the minister to formally recognize June as accordion awareness month here in the province of Alberta.

Another potential day that the minister could recognize – in my past life, Madam Chair, before I was elected, I was a professional geologist. Now, geologists are, I would really say, the unsung heroes of the province of Alberta. We have the knowledge and skills and the work ethic that have kept this province going for a very long time, developing the natural resources, the water resources, the groundwater resources in particular, in the province of Alberta. I think it's only right and fair that Albertans recognize the contributions that geologists have made to this province by recognizing December 4, which is the feast of St. Barbara, who is the patron saint of geologists. I think it would be a worthwhile endeavour for the minister to recognize a geologist by declaring that as a special day.

Some other suggestions for special days, Madam Chair, also in the month of December. I had the privilege of living in Germany for a couple of years in my student days, and in wide sections of southern Germany as well as in Austria December 5 is what's called Krampusnacht. Krampus is the evil spirit the Germans believe comes around on December 5 and punishes all the bad boys and girls for their misdeeds in the year. Now, I understand why the minister wouldn't be too keen to recognize Krampusnacht here in the province of Alberta, because I certainly think that there are 61 boys and girls on that side of the House who would probably suffer greatly at the hands of Krampus should he visit the province of Alberta on December 5. But, regardless, I think that there is a significant swath of the population who would take great delight in watching that happen. You know, I think the minister could at least serve the people of Alberta in that way.

My final suggestion, Madam Chair, and I raised this with the Member for Peace River when he brought forward his legislation recognizing Polish heritage day. Just from the name alone, I think it's worthy that the province recognize this day, and that's Dyngus Day. Dyngus Day is widely celebrated in Poland. It happens to overlap with the day that we call Easter Monday here in Canada, but it's a day that Poles world-wide celebrate Polish heritage. I think that it would be an excellent complement to the Member for Peace River's legislation if the Minister of Culture also recognized Dyngus Day as an official day here in Alberta.

You know, Madam Chair, I think that, all things considered, even though this bill is not, in my view, the most productive use of the time of the legislative Chamber since it creates no new powers and only sets out a partial job description for the Minister of Culture, it's relatively inoffensive, and I think that it's worthy of support. So I'm pleased to offer my support to this legislation, and I sincerely hope that the minister takes into consideration the suggestions that I've made for declaring some additional special days here in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Madam Chair. I'm not sure whether I can follow the previous speaker and do better or worse, really, perhaps staying on the topic. Offering any special days, I think, probably will not be part of my remarks, but, you know, part of what my remarks do circle around, as I review this bill, is that it doesn't seem to change the way by which special days can be enacted here in Alberta right now.

5:50

You know, while I think it's important to have special days and I think it's important to be able to be flexible around proclaiming special days – I know, for example, the city of Edmonton will

declare a special day and that it's only for that day, so it doesn't go on in perpetuity, right? Maybe that's part of what this bill is. I see the Culture minister thinking about that right now, and it seems to be. Yeah. Okay. All right. So it's a way by which we can have a declaration of a special day and for it to not live on necessarily for ever and ever. Of course, at some point, exactly at the number 365, you run out of days, so it's good to perhaps have that provision in there. Otherwise, of course, all the days become special, and then you have to maybe have an extra special day. I don't know. That, I guess, has some practical application for Bill 3.

You know, I guess I don't want to belabour the point, because that would actually go against what I'm going to say now, which is that I think we have other things that we need to do here in the Legislature right now besides this bill. I mean, we are okay with it, we're down with it, for sure, but I don't think we necessarily need to linger on this very minor change in regard to the proclamation of special days here in the province of Alberta.

Yeah, I mean, it's always great to do so. People take a great deal of pleasure and pride at being recognized for certain things, and some of those proclamations need to live on, too. I mean, we don't just want to have Black History Month once – that wouldn't work – or other days or weeks or months like that, right? I just want to make sure. Again, I'll ask the minister, just rhetorically right now but in committee, to ensure that this legislation would in no way endanger some foundational special days, weeks, and months that we already have enacted here in the province of Alberta which I think, you know, have a lot of history and have a lot of organization around them. We don't want to jeopardize the integrity of those special days, weeks, or months.

So, yeah, I mean, that would be my thing. You know, really, I think that it would undermine my argument here for me to belabour the point around Bill 3, because, in fact, my main issue with this is that we have other things that we should be doing that are more important. I know that sometimes bills can be big, medium, small, and in between and so forth, so I think that with this one, we can carry on, agree to agree, and get on with it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for such an enlightening and insightful interjection in the House regarding this bill, because, of course, he brought up a really good point, and I'm hoping that the Minister of Culture can actually address this particular point: will all members of the House be able to participate in actually providing input, I'll say, into proclaiming special days?

As you may know, Madam Chair, I'm a big fan of these proclamations. I think they're important because through them we recognize the ongoing and historical contributions of communities that call Alberta home. Of course, as I've stated in the House several times, my community of Edmonton-Ellerslie, my district, is one where 50 per cent of the population is actually ethnically diverse.

I was very happy that during our mandate, when we were in government, the Alberta NDP took it very seriously to acknowledge the contribution of the Sikh-Punjabi community, for example. I was

just at an event earlier today of that community. It was the founders day celebration of the Millwoods Cultural Society Of Retired and Semi Retired, and we know that, for example, Sikhs have been contributing to Alberta for more than a hundred years.

Another example of that is the Muslim community, Madam Chair. You know, the narrative that tends to be told about Canada is one that it is not necessarily ethnically diverse, and I would hope that the members on the other side of the House would work with us to actually make sure that the narrative of Alberta is one that is multicultural, one where people from diverse ethnic backgrounds have been contributing to Alberta for a very, very long time to make Alberta what it is today, and, of course, that these communities should be recognized for their contributions.

I remember meeting one of the families of the first Lebanese people that actually came to Alberta more than a hundred years ago. Of course, up in Lac La Biche is where many of them settled, and they continue to this day to call that community their home and participate in the economy by running businesses there. They have small businesses.

Many of the Muslim community have actually been elected to municipal office in communities all across Alberta and have been contributing insightfully and making sure that we have not only an equitable economy that encourages everybody to participate but are making sure that because of their cultural values, which, at the end of the day, Madam Chair, are really not that different from values that Albertans hold when it comes to making sure that we're there to take care of one another as a community, you know, that we provide assistance to one another when in times of need specifically – that's one of the things that I really love about Alberta, about all of these communities. Whether it be the fire that actually occurred or the floods that have occurred throughout Alberta on a number of bases, communities come out to actually help.

I'm reminded of some of my good friends in the Sikh Motorcycle Club, which I was able to help very early on during our mandate, when we were in government. The Sikh Motorcycle Club is one that works very hard to raise funds and donations when there's emergency relief that is required throughout the province, you know, really a contribution that they have made, actually, throughout all of Canada because there are Sikh motorcycle clubs in Ontario, in Saskatchewan, in B.C., of course, here in Alberta. They pride themselves based on the culture and religious values that they have, and so much of that, just like many other cultural communities, is the fact that they want to help people, especially in times of need, when they're being hit hardest.

I think that that's a lesson that all of us have in common, a lesson that we all can share with one another: to be there for one another when we most need it. I think, in my own particular and humble opinion, that Albertans want to see a government that actually acts that way, especially in times of crisis, whether it be through COVID or in an economic crisis like we're experiencing right now with inflation going up and life becoming less and less affordable for Albertans. I'm hearing it from multiple communities.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the clock strikes 6. The committee will be recessed until 7:30 this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, March 23, 2022

Day 14

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 23, 2022

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Bill 3 Special Days Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members looking for questions, comments, or amendments at this time?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question.

[The clauses of Bill 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? And that was for when the committee rises.

Bill 8 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022

The Deputy Chair: Are there any hon. members looking to join debate with comments or questions? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill 8, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022. This is the exercise which is normally performed at the end of the year to deal with sort of any overages in the budget. As opposed to Bill 7, which is before us, which applies to the year's budget going forward, this applies to the year that just passed. Fortunately, as it turns out, the things that apply to the budget that just passed and apply to the budget going forward are roughly similar things. You know, this presented yet another opportunity, along with the budget that we saw introduced, for the UCP to do something to help families, and they have chosen to do nothing. It provided another opportunity to provide a real electricity rebate, to provide a natural gas rebate that wasn't fake, to provide some sort of assistance with any sort of cost, and that isn't what we see.

In addition, we see a budget which has plenty of money left over to go to those who already have more than they will ever need and nothing for those who are struggling to make ends meet. We see last year and this year roughly the same thing. In addition, last year we were going through a pandemic, yet we see no additional spending in education, and in fact we see what I would describe as significantly inadequate spending. The budget going forward sees an increase, an increase which does not align with population growth or inflation, and going backwards we see no increases at all.

For instance, my daughter will enter the public school system this upcoming September. She will arrive in school with tens of thousands of additional students and a thousand fewer teachers, not to mention the thousands of fewer EAs that will be available to help her. So children like mine who have spent the last two years in a pandemic, who haven't had the same experience that most children

have had, have probably had a lesser sort of social interaction than many children have had, will be entering the school system, and they will be entering a school system massively underfunded compared to students that went five years before them.

Now, let's begin by saying that this isn't fair. The year of your birth shouldn't be the determining factor in terms of how much funding you get for your education, in terms of whether or not there are more students in your class than were in predecessor classes. Unfortunately, that's not really the way it worked out. So we have a bunch of students who are already potentially behind, and we have fewer teachers, not to mention the students that have been in school, some of whom missed the end of the first pandemic year, and then they were in and out and in and out because, of course, this government didn't believe in investing and making schools safer.

They could have taken the time to make those investments to make life easier for students and for parents so that schools could stay in, so that there wasn't this constant back and forth and in and out, but they chose not to do that, not because they didn't have the money to do it but because they were choosing to spend it on other things.

So that is what we will see. We will see these students entering school. We will see them underfunded relative to their peers. Really, Mr. Chair, at the end of the day, I don't think that's fair to them, and I don't think that it's fair to the rest of Alberta either because this will change the trajectories of lives. This will result in students maybe not being able to learn as they would have learned, maybe not being able to contribute as they would have contributed.

Can you say exactly what the impact on each individual student will be? No, not necessarily, but you can say on a population level, because enormous numbers of studies have been done on the impact on a population level, and the impact on the population level is that it will cost us more money in the long run. This government's choice not to invest in students, not to invest in early learning, not to invest in ensuring that those students can achieve their full potential will cost us money in the long run. That is one of the things I find incredibly troubling about this.

We see also in this supplementary supply a very interesting addition. One of the additions is for physician compensation, \$173 million. What is interesting about this is that essentially this is the government finally, finally, finally, two years on in a pandemic, reaching an agreement with doctors.

Mr. Shepherd: It's not an agreement yet.

Ms Ganley: Oh, it's not even an agreement yet. I'm sorry. My colleague has corrected me. At least some sort of attempt at an agreement.

We entered a pandemic in a situation that was incredibly difficult for physicians, in a situation where this UCP government was attacking them. Not only did they tear up their contract, but they chose to misrepresent them to the public, to claim that they were grifting and taking money that they weren't owed, which I think is incredibly unfair. So we went into this pandemic with physicians who were already under attack by this government, a government who was essentially trying to attack specifically primary care. That's a big problem because primary care makes a huge difference in the lives of Albertans. It also has a big equalizing effect. You know, folks from more affluent backgrounds, from more educated backgrounds are likely to seek out treatment for their medical condition, but for some people who are not in that position, who maybe don't feel as empowered to speak up for themselves for whatever historical reasons, primary care is incredibly important to make sure we're monitoring their conditions, and it ultimately saves money.

This is the thing with this government. They like to save money now by essentially taking money from the future. They do it in education. They do it with primary care. They just have absolutely no respect for upstream intervention, for how much it saves us to treat someone's diabetes as opposed to have to perform a surgery later, for how much it saves us to help a child learn to read at the appropriate age versus paying for incarceration later. That isn't to say that all students will go down that road, but there is really, really solid evidence linking literacy rates and incarceration rates; reverse linking, obviously. That is incredibly problematic. Those are a couple of the things in here.

I'd like to sort of touch on a little hobby horse of mine as well. One of the things we see in this past-year budget is the introduction of the Kananaskis park fee. Obviously, this is an area that belongs to Albertans, that is for Albertans, that has historically been for all Albertans, and this government has sort of come in and imposed a fee on it. So now it's only for some Albertans, which is obviously problematic, especially right now, especially in this moment when more and more families are barely able to cover their basic costs with what they earn, in large part due to decisions of this government. For some people \$90 is a lot of money. For some people that's \$90 that they don't have because their electricity bill went up \$300, and they just don't have it. This government is sort of taking that opportunity from them.

7:40

Worse still, I had the opportunity to sit in estimates and watch the minister of environment try to tap dance around this issue. You know, Albertans paying that fee at least wanted to be assured that the fee was going back into the management of that park, but he couldn't tell us where the fee was going. In fact, a bunch of it – he read off a list of grants that this went to maintain. We asked – I don't know – some very basic questions that one might ask about grants, like: what are the criteria for the application? Did multiple groups apply? How did you pick between them? Nope.

We asked some very basic questions like: how do we evaluate the work that's done? Once you pick the group for whom this grant is awarded, how do you figure out what they're supposed to do, and how do you measure whether they've done the thing they're supposed to do and whether Albertans are getting value for their money? Do you know what the answer was? We pick based on "existing relationships" with the UCP. Yeah, that was the answer. Who gets the grants has nothing to do with who's best situated to do the job; it's based on existing relationships with the UCP minister. That I find incredibly problematic.

Even if these groups are doing great work – and maybe they are. I don't know. I'm not out there to assess it. In fact, no one knows. None of us will ever know because apparently we don't assess these things at all, which I think is a problematic use of money, to say the least. But even if they are doing a fantastic job, other groups may have wanted that work, other groups may have wanted the opportunity to compete, but this government decided to pick their friends. I think that that is incredibly problematic.

Another thing worth discussing, which I touched on somewhat, is the electricity program. Oh, boy. The things that have been said about this. You know, we began with the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity proudly announcing that his plan was to do nothing. Then we moved to a rushed-out \$50 rebate, which I think most Albertans have received as sort of an insult. And then we have the minister standing up and talking about skyrocketing costs and referring to them as the market working. I think that's problematic. I don't think the market is working for most Alberta families, and I think that that is very, very difficult for them. Yeah. I would consider that extremely problematic.

Another thing included in here is money that's sort of coming back from the war room, so under the supplementary estimates. Sometimes there's more money needed, and sometimes the government didn't spend all their money. It's worth talking a little bit about the war room because, I mean, it's problematic. There's really no way to say it except that it's problematic. It was designed specifically to avoid freedom of information. It is a place that the government can essentially send money and disappear it. There are no outcomes measured. No one is paying attention to what's done with the money. There's no way to FOIP it. The minister refuses to answer any questions on what's being done with the money or what's achieved. And no one measures – usually when you spend money in budgets, there are performance measures for each ministry that sort of measure the impact of the money that you are spending in order to be able to tell taxpayers that you're getting value for them. Not with the war room. No measures at all. It's just out there.

We've seen it – let's see. It's headed by a failed UCP candidate. It has impersonated journalists, attacked journalists, rendered wildly popular a strange movie about Bigfoot; maybe the only measurable impact it's had, actually, at all is the sudden skyrocketing ratings of, honestly, a not very good movie on Netflix. So there you go. That's a bit of an odd choice.

Even more interesting, last year we had a conversation at estimates, and the war room budget was to be \$10 million. We were speaking two weeks before the end of the year, so 95 per cent of the way through the fiscal year, and the minister said: "Oh, yes. Oh, yes. They're definitely going to spend their \$10 million, and we're going to spend this \$19 million on other advocacy." So \$29 million in total between the war room and the other advocacy. She wouldn't tell us what it would be spent on. She wouldn't tell us whether anything would be measured. Nothing. Then we come to this year, and it turns out that when she was telling us that she had spent the money – again, we were talking two weeks from the end of the fiscal year – telling us that she had spent, past tense, \$29 million, it turns out they didn't. So that money all went back. Who knows what happened to it?

This year again we see money going to the war room and again no idea – we're not measuring what it achieves. We have no idea what it's going to be used for. I don't know. Maybe this time they'll try to make something incredibly popular on Disney+ instead of on Netflix. Who knows? But this continues to be an incredibly problematic area. It continues to be an area without oversight. The spending of public money without the public being able to know what the money was spent on is, in my view, just exceptionally problematic. I find it baffling that the so-called fiscal conservatives on the other side of the House would just accept this, would think that it's perfectly fine for the government to spend money and not be able to indicate any value for that money.

I guess, at the end of the day, there are a lot of problematic areas in this budget. Some of the ones I would say are the biggest: definitely health care and education. Another, I think, particularly important one: supportive housing. We saw this government – and, you know, we had a long conversation in the last session with this government saying: "Oh, we're bringing in this bill. This bill is going to increase affordable housing, and by increase we mean that we're going to define affordable housing to be anything the minister points to and says that that's affordable housing. By increase affordable housing, what we actually mean we're going to do is that we're going to call a bunch of stuff affordable housing regardless of whether it's affordable or not. But don't worry. We'll put in lots of money." They did not. They did not.

I guess fast-forward to today: no money. This is super, super problematic. We have a federal government who's investing. We

have municipal governments who are asking for funding. They're asking for this funding because municipal governments pay sort of the bulk, with some assistance from the provincial government, of the cost of policing. When you don't have supportive housing, you pay a lot more for policing. Now, this provincial government is actually paying it, too, because a lack of affordable housing is also correlated with sort of cost drivers, especially in emergency rooms.

Emergency medicine is some of the most expensive medicine there is, but that is, like, wildly driven up, not to mention the impact that it has on people's lives, you know. When we're driving up, unnecessarily, people having to go to the emergency room because they have an infection that has gotten worse because they're living on the street and they're not able to clean a wound and that's tying up emergency resources that could be used elsewhere, it's expensive. It's a really expensive solution to a problem that is otherwise inexpensive.

Correctional centres: also a very expensive – very expensive – place to house people. Permanent supportive housing: definitely, a better solution. But this government chooses not to invest. I think, really, when we look at this, what we see is a failure to invest, a failure to invest in pretty much every possible way that this government could fail to invest. I think that's incredibly problematic, and I will not be supporting it.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much.

Are there any – I see the hon. Member for Calgary-South East has risen.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Chair. I'm not sure I would characterize record investments in health care and education as a failure to invest, especially when it was achieved while projecting three surplus budgets. I think that's good, responsible fiscal management.
7:50

Bill 8 provides the authority for the government to pay from the general revenue fund for additional costs that are not already covered or otherwise provided for during the current fiscal year. The funding in Bill 8 will ensure that the government can cover health care costs from the pandemic while also sending aid and equipment to Ukraine, providing electricity rebates to Albertans struggling with affordability and rising costs, supporting child care workers and the parents of young children, and building municipal infrastructure. The supplementary estimates include \$1.2 billion in expenses and \$1 million in capital investment. The overall increase to the deficit is minor. It's projected to increase it by about \$200 million.

This funding will go to the following five government departments: the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, Children's Services, Culture and Status of Women, Energy, Health, and Municipal Affairs. For Health, the largest item, an additional \$726 million will help cover the costs of the pandemic. This includes things like lab testing, contact tracing, rapid test kits, continuing care, acute care, vaccine deployment, and personal protective equipment. This is above and beyond what we committed in Budget 2022 to address backlogs due to the pandemic.

An additional \$231.2 million is allocated to Municipal Affairs and will be distributed to municipalities under the Canada community-building fund to support infrastructure projects that create jobs and are necessary for economic development across the province.

The supplementary amount for Children's Services is related to funding provided by the federal government. It includes \$134.7 million for child care subsidies and worker supports under the Canada-Alberta early learning and child care agreement. Bill 8 also

includes a capital investment of \$1 million to provide information technology for child care initiatives, which is, again, fully off-set by federal funds.

While Alberta is not immune to the rising cost of living, we are striving to ensure that this province is a more affordable place to live than virtually any other Canadian jurisdiction. This is in addition to the many other affordability advantages that Alberta has to offer. Bill 8 includes a supplementary amount of \$96.3 million for the Department of Energy, which will go towards a total of \$300 million for the utility consumer support electricity rebate program. With the help of this bill, we will provide \$150 in electricity rebates to over 1 million homes, farms, and businesses.

Culture and Status of Women will receive \$11.4 million in support of Ukraine, \$10.4 million of which will come from this bill. This includes \$5 million to the Ukrainian World Congress to equip 5,000 members of the Ukrainian territorial defence force with defensive equipment, \$5 million to the Canada-Ukraine Foundation for humanitarian aid, and \$350,000 to the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Alberta Provincial Council for co-ordinating the shipment of first aid and defensive equipment to Ukraine.

Lastly, in this bill there is a supplementary amount of \$55,000 for the office of the Information and Privacy commissioner to cover increases in staff compensation due to changes in the salary restraint measures on nonbargaining staff.

Hopefully, that clarifies what's being invested, and I look forward to continued discussions on Bill 8.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak to this supplementary supply. To the previous speaker, I guess: my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View I think was trying to make the point that the investments overall, both in this sup supply and the Bill 7 appropriations for the '22 budget, don't prioritize the spending in directions that will help the greatest number of Albertans, hard-working Albertans that are being hit hard by inflation, that are being hit hard by the current experience we all are living through.

That's part of the difference, you know, and it's a pretty major one. This side believes that there is a role for government to help and ensure there are programs that help lift the most vulnerable up and above where they are so that they can enjoy full participation in this great province, and the other side believes that helping the richest and the trickle-down on the rest of us will get us further ahead. We don't believe that. We believe in good health care, solid public education, good postsecondary education, and the other side, Mr. Speaker, believes in looking at more privatization going into the future, which is built into Bill 7. It's also considered in the sup supply here.

We know that inflation is starting to eat away at the savings, at the weekly earnings of Albertans. They're not only finding that on a day-to-day basis, but when they do their taxes again this year, there's an insidious, pernicious increase in that income tax that this government has built in. I heard some of the discussion from the other side, basically wedging open the window a little bit and saying that we're going to get back to balance and that then Albertans will all enjoy the benefits because we'll change that pernicious, insidious bracket creep tax grab. It wasn't said fully like that, but it was implied. I think that that's the difference between this side and the other side. The other side holds, you know, a carrot out or way into the future and says: don't worry; things will get better. The windfall in oil and gas has really helped out this side a lot. I mean,

without that, we wouldn't be talking about three balanced budgets and your fiscal plan into the future. We'd be talking about deficits into the next three years, I guess. The plan to make Albertans pay more is also part of this sup supply.

I certainly don't have any issue with the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. I was at the meetings – I think it was Legislative Offices – where we met with all of the offices, and we heard that settlements in other areas could be rolled in if we reconsidered their budgets, and here it is. That's not an issue.

The Municipal Affairs one. Well, just generally, there are several of these increases in sup supply that have to do with federal dollars that sometimes come late in the fiscal year, understanding what those are going to be, not unlike Municipal Affairs, which is here at \$231,208,000, I think. That's the former gas tax, the building Canada fund I think it's called now. That's a flow through. That's not a result of anything other than the federal government providing those funds. They do twice a year. It's here and being flowed through to municipalities and Métis settlements on a per capita basis. Except, if they're small hamlets or summer villages or small places, they get a set amount.

That has nothing to do with this government looking to the needs of municipalities. In fact, if we were to talk about municipalities for a second, one of the things that we learned in estimates about municipalities was that Bill 77 – the restoring tax accountability bill I think it was called – that was brought in under a previous Municipal Affairs minister, really hasn't had the effect that it was hoped to have in terms of municipalities being able to put special liens on equipment and property of oil and gas companies that aren't paying their bills, aren't paying their taxes. We heard from the minister, in response to questioning from members of the government side, that it hasn't worked. Municipalities have not been able to access funds through special liens. They're there now as opposed to not being there, but their taxes still are not being paid by those who choose not to pay them or go out of business. The RMA indicates that somewhere between I think it's \$240 million to \$280 million in taxes is owed to them.

8:00

Certainly, the Canada community-building fund helps municipalities, but it doesn't help municipalities with regard to the monies owed through taxes, as RMA has indicated, and the special liens that the Restoring Tax Accountability Act, Bill 77, provided municipalities is – I don't know if it's next to useless, but it's not working. So it's a good thing that there are federal grant monies flowing to municipalities so that they can address their capital infrastructure needs and provide the kind of capital infrastructure both to city properties – city, towns, other kinds of things – above ground and below ground that keep our quality of life throughout Alberta one of the highest in the country and one of the best in the world. So that's one area I wanted to focus on.

I would like to just compliment the government around the \$10.4 million that is going to Ukraine for various supports for Ukraine people. That is laudable. It's important, not unlike other provinces and indeed the federal government. Canada is stepping up to help our friends in Ukraine, many of whom have made homes in Alberta over the years. That seems like an important thing to have in this sup supply, and I'm glad it's here.

The other thing I just wanted to point out again is another flow through – it's in the area of Children's Services – from the federal government. Just reading the narrative here, it talks about federal funding not only for programmatic support for child care, but it talks about capital investment, federally funded dollars, to provide better information technology to child care facilities. Really

important, actually, because, as our leader was saying today at the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, the ability for families to have quality child care available to them at a rate that is affordable instead of at a rate that is like a second mortgage really allows more people to get into the workforce – I think she quoted the number of 40,000, primarily women – and help drive our economy forward.

We certainly need across Alberta more and more labour, people who are willing to work, because coming out of this pandemic many companies are looking for workers, and the support that's coming through from the federal government, primarily for child care subsidy and supports, is an important way of getting back to that future we all want, which is full employment, which is having children cared for in quality environments, regulated environments, where they have the best start possible because a good start there, as we all know, sets them up for an elementary school education where they can, of course, achieve better than sometimes some of their cohort. So that's a really great thing.

I do like this other part, too, which is supporting the child care workers. We know that many of them were out of work over the pandemic, and coming back to work, you know, is difficult. There were media reports just the other week where child care centres couldn't find enough workers, so ensuring that there is, again, some federal funding for child care workers to top up wages and other things, to provide support for education, accreditation so that we know that they're working with the best information about child and youth development is a good thing as well.

I want to just talk a little bit about the next one. Okay. Children's Services. Culture and Status of Women. We heard a lot about Energy, the \$96 million which will kind of go towards the electricity support for Albertans. That's a good thing. I mean, that's an important thing to do. It's not adequate for vulnerable people, vulnerable families, who are paying exorbitant amounts for their electricity and their home heating. I'm just trying to see if it's a targeted thing. I did hear a million households and farms identified here. I'm thinking about how many million people there are in Alberta. It does sound like there's some targeting to that money, but I wonder if it shouldn't have been more targeted to those with the least in this province and those who will have the highest bills in this province relative to their incomes. That's where I would have gone with all of that. But there is some help for some, which is a good thing.

The failure to invest in places where it would do the most good is, I think, the challenge that I see with this government and bills not only 7 but 8. The fact that Albertans are struggling and some are coming out of this pandemic with exorbitant personal debt loads is something we should all be conscious of, that the government shouldn't make life more expensive for those Albertans, that they deserve better. They deserve a government that can help look out for them instead of hitting their family budget hard, as is the case with so many increases across the board as a result of government withdrawing support or jacking up fees.

Mr. Chair, the last thing I'll say is again about Municipal Affairs. What I heard when I was at the AM and RMA spring conferences that were just held here is that the government could do more to work in partnership with local authorities. It's going to be coming up later on our agenda; I think it's Bill 4. The fact that this government is not working in partnership with municipalities is a problem, and the fact that we see federal flow throughs as opposed to restoring the funding and the amount of funding that municipalities have historically enjoyed so that they can build on that and leverage it up in their communities is a failure of this government.

8:10

The federal funding that we see flow through for four out of five of these areas – or all five, actually, is a welcome relief for Albertans, who are enjoying a share of federal monies in long-term partnerships with the federal government and province of Alberta. Municipalities are the beneficiaries of those agreements. I wish we were at a point of being able to say that municipalities feel that the government has their backs, but what this government has is its hands in many of the pockets of municipalities. My colleague talked about some of those and policing, which is not before us right now, but as an example, GIPOT, other areas where, when we were government, we paid our provincial bills, government bills, and this current government gets away without paying bills. As I started off saying, into the future they talk about, you know, things will be better and you'll be better off into the future. Well, that's unfortunate. It's indicated in the priorities of this government, in sup supply as well as Bill 7.

I'll have more to say on those things later. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-South East has risen.

Mr. Jones: I'll be brief. The member opposite took issue with the prioritization of the government's Budget 2022, which is curious because it provides record funding to health care and education. I'm not sure where else the members opposite would like to see Alberta dedicate the majority of its funding, but we are certainly going to continue with our world-class provision of health care and education.

The member opposite also took issue with Alberta maximizing federal transfers as if there is more than one taxpayer. Our government bringing taxes back to Albertans from the federal government to benefit them here now, their families, is what they expect of us. That's prudent fiscal management.

The member opposite also took issue with the private delivery of health services and school choice, which, again, is curious because under their government they funded both.

I would invite the member opposite to join Albertans in celebrating Budget 2022 on the achievement of balance, the projected three surplus budgets, and to appreciate the difference responsible government and fiscal discipline make, especially in the lives of Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any – I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate those comments from the Member for Calgary-South East. If he wants to debate the budget, I'll be happy to debate the budget when we're talking about the budget. Right now we're talking about supplementary supply. Certainly, I'd be happy to talk about their budget for 2022-23 when we get to that point.

I'd like to reply to a few things that the member noted. He has talked several times, as indeed have many members, ministers of this government, about their record investments, Mr. Chair, record investment in health care, record investment in education. Well, let's talk about what the term "record" means. Record simply means that it's the highest amount that has been spent so far. Okay. Fair enough. So they spent more on health care last year than had previously been spent by any other government. Well, we also had record costs. See, population goes up. Inflation also rises. So in order for government spending to have the same impact each year, that spending has to rise. That means that every year, if a

government is actually accounting for inflation and accounting for population growth, will be a record spend. Imagine that.

Here's the kicker, Mr. Chair. His government has fallen short of funding for inflation and population growth every single year it's been in power. Indeed, their record spend on health care in this coming year's budget – and I apologize; I guess I am going to talk about that briefly – falls \$600 million short of where they would be if they had simply accounted for inflation and population growth over the last few years. So that is the record spend about which this government wants to pat itself on the back, Mr. Chair, not to mention the fact that, of course, we had record costs in the last year for the COVID-19 pandemic. Imagine that. The government spent more than ever before on health care in a year that we had a global pandemic – break out the balloons; pat the government on the back – not to mention, of course, that for the education system it was a more expensive year than we've ever had before because, again, we surprisingly had more students. Indeed, inflation drives up the costs in education as well, not to mention that schools faced greater costs because of a global pandemic.

Again, when we are talking about the fact that there is only one taxpayer, as the member just pointed out, we have to recognize that school boards had to take up additional costs because the government refused to step up to cover the costs that were necessary to help protect students in those spaces. Again, that in turn is a government that has driven up property tax and the education property tax. There is only one taxpayer, so this government devolved its responsibility onto another level of government and onto the backs of taxpayers in Alberta, and that is what the Member for Calgary-South East believes that we should praise his government for doing.

He talked about how they spent in the last year above and beyond what they committed in Budget 2022. Well, imagine that, Mr. Chair. In the midst of a global pandemic, health care costs were higher than anticipated, though admittedly I recognize that this government had pretty poor judgment when it came to that pandemic, as we saw in the third wave, as many members on that side were calling for the government to end all health restrictions even as case counts were climbing, as deaths were rising, as hospitals were overflowing, and their lack of action, acting last, acting least, indeed drove up the costs in health care. Repeat, wash your hands, rinse, and do it all again for the fourth wave in the fall except at an even higher level. Of course, they spent above and beyond in Budget 2022 because they used the health care system as a crash mat, because they put their politics ahead of taking prudent action in public health.

Let's go on to talk about what we actually have in this supplementary supply, Mr. Chair. Now, the Minister of Health was patting himself on the back today for the fact that, you know, they've increased spending on physician compensation. He specifically mentioned having brought in virtual codes, improved the virtual codes for physicians – it took place as of January 1 – and congratulated himself for that step. Now, let's be clear. That was two years – two – after doctors had begun asking the government to take that action.

Now let's talk about how this actually occurred. Here we are in February, just as we see COVID first appearing on the horizon. The pandemic wasn't here yet, but that was when this government tore up their contract with physicians. Tore up the agreement. Basically, that left physicians at the whim of the health care minister. He and his staff and others went on a social media crusade, as my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View noted, smearing doctors on social media, attacking them, putting up a government web page talking about how greedy and entitled they were.

Then we found ourselves going into a pandemic. Doctors rightfully recognized that as we were bringing in restrictions and isolation, that was going to have a massive impact on their ability to see their patients, so they reached out to the Minister of Health and said: we need support because right now we cannot bill to see a patient virtually. It was about two weeks as we were moving into the pandemic, as people were forced to stay at home, and doctors were waiting for this minister to take action. Finally he did. What did he do, Mr. Chair? He revived a code from the SARS pandemic that paid \$20 for a 15-minute visit, actually for any visit, because you couldn't bill beyond 15. It was \$20 for any virtual visit.

Now, doctors are normally paid about \$34 for a visit. In fact – what do you know? – they had just signed a deal with Telus for their Babylon app, and what were they paying Telus per visit for virtual walk-in doctors who had no history with their patients? Thirty-four dollars a visit. Alberta's family doctors were getting \$20. Doctors, of course, were reaching out and saying: "Hey, this is a problem. Can we fix this? Can we fix this? Can we fix this?" More weeks went by. Eventually the government took action. Now, this was, of course, weeks in, so doctors, of course, had been losing large amounts of income, making it more difficult for them to operate their clinics, losing money to continue to see their patients, which they did do, Mr. Chair, because they care about the health of Albertans.

8:20

Now, the trick is, Mr. Chair, that they were only able to get \$34 no matter how long that visit was. Now, normally a doctor, when they see a patient, is able to bill \$34 for the initial visit and then what's called the complex modifiers. If it is a visit that goes on longer than 15 minutes, they are allowed to add on additional amounts for the extra time that they are spending. The government did not apply that to virtual codes. That meant that doctors were spending 40 minutes talking with patients who were struggling with their health, who were dealing with mental health issues in the midst of a pandemic, and getting paid for 15.

That concern was raised repeatedly with this government throughout the course of the pandemic for two years, Mr. Chair – for two years – because this government was so intent initially on trying to grind doctors down in the midst of a pandemic as part of their war on physicians. For two years we had physicians, family physicians that were struggling incredibly. We had clinics close. We had doctors leave. We have Albertans, tens of thousands of Albertans now, that have no family doctor in part because this government took two years to take a simple step that they now want us to congratulate them for doing. That's what we have here, and when we're looking at this fee increase in physician compensation of \$173,857,000, that is in part the government finally stepping up to the table and covering these costs.

Now, also here we do have some additional spending in health care, and I did have the chance to talk about this with the minister the other night when we had some back and forth here in the Chamber as we were debating the supplementary supply before this bill was introduced. I had a chance to chat with him a little bit about some of the other additional amounts that are here. Again, Mr. Chair, recognizing that this government has repeatedly made decisions of acting last and acting least, has been spending more time fighting amongst themselves behind closed doors, waiting to take action on rising case counts, that in turn has driven up costs, and part of that is represented here in this supplementary supply.

I had the chance to ask the minister about the \$375,500,000 that is here in supplementary supply for lab testing, contact tracing, and rapid test distribution, and what I asked him about, Mr. Chair, is the

fact that during the pandemic we had health care workers who were redeployed. Now, that, of course, is understandable. In the first wave in particular, when we did not know what we were dealing with, when we had serious issues – even in the second wave, I think, it's understandable. That was a far more serious wave. Yes, the government again acted last, acted least, but still we were learning. Indeed, I had the chance to speak with some of the folks that were redeployed, including some speech-language pathologists, and that's what they said to me. They said: "You know what? We get it. First, second wave, we were happy to do this. We were happy to be redeployed to serve. We recognize the impact that that had on the children we were helping, on others, but, hey, it was a pandemic. That needed to happen."

But as we moved into the third wave, Mr. Chair, they talked about how they were surprised that at that point the government had not begun to invest in bringing other workers in to handle these situations, particularly in the case of testing sites, where they were being called in. But they said: "You know what? After doing that third wave, we were very happy to see that the government actually worked with AHS." They were hiring staff to take over some of those key things at the testing centres, what they called being line leaders, which is standing and sort of just making sure that they've got people in chairs, the lines are flowing smoothly, people are getting to the nurses to get their testing done, important work to conduct that PCR testing and keep that available. But that was not something that you needed to pay a speech-language pathologist at their rate of pay, indeed, at overtime pay. They told me that at times that would mean working at a shift premium of up to \$100 an hour to do that work, so they were very happy to see that AHS was moving to hire folks and had folks ready.

But then came the best summer ever. This government decided that it was going to declare COVID done, and even as we saw case counts rising in August, we heard nothing. The government went radio silent. We know they were fighting amongst themselves behind closed doors because members of the government have themselves spoken up and said so, but they did not take action.

What happened, Mr. Chair? Of course, we found ourselves in the midst of that fourth wave. We had to ramp up testing and everything again, and because this government had not moved quickly enough, all those folks that they had on contract and ready to go: the majority of them were gone. Contracts expired. They'd moved on. They'd found other work. So what happened? We had to call our speech-language pathologists back in to do that work – they have premiums of up to \$100 an hour – once again creating massive backlogs for children and youth who are struggling and needed that support. What I asked the minister, Mr. Chair, is: well, how much of that \$375,500,000 represents those workers who had to be redeployed, their overtime, their shift premiums, because this government chose to act last and least and let those other contacts lapse?

This is a challenge that we saw throughout the pandemic, Mr. Chair, decisions made by this government. They want to congratulate themselves now for their spending on health care and talk about how much they thank health care workers, but the fact is that every single one of those health care workers, I'll tell you, would have far preferred to have a government that would have actually listened to them when they warned about what was coming and what they were seeing on the ground. They would have far rather had their government actually take prudent action than step up now and brag about the fact that they're investing in more ICU beds. They would far rather prefer that the government hadn't filled those beds to begin with. Now, to be honest, they probably prefer both. Certainly, I think we can appreciate that we do need to make investments in our health care system.

Certainly, over the years of Conservative government we saw the roller coaster of spending that tracked with the price of oil, not unlike the current government, because – let’s be clear – this spending would not be here if this government had not stumbled into an oil revenue surplus. We’ve seen what this government does when the chips are down, and what they do is that they make cuts, and they put that on the backs of Albertans. They put in things like a sneaky tax on inflation. They can’t even be honest, Mr. Chair, when they are taxing Albertans. They try to sneak these things through the back door.

Of course, we saw much more about some of the backdoor shenanigans that have gone on within this party and indeed the last leadership race, which the Premier won, that was published today by the CBC. I imagine we’re going to see much more. A lot of drama happening on that side of the House. There has been for a while.

But the fact is that the spending that we are seeing here is indeed, in many respects, likely necessary. You know what? If we had been in government, probably some of this spending would have taken place. Now, certainly, I think some of this money would have been used a lot more efficiently, Mr. Chair, because I think we would not have made that repeated decision, that this government did, to act last and act least, drive up those costs in the health care system to respond to the pandemic.

I just want to be very clear that the biggest tragedy of this pandemic is not the dollars lost; it’s the lives lost, over 4,000 Albertans. Certainly, many thousands and thousands more – 20 per cent is the estimate from AHS – Albertans contracted COVID and now will likely have long COVID. Of course, we’re going to have those costs appearing in the system here.

Of course, also baked into some of this supplementary spending, I imagine, though I did not get the opportunity to question the minister about it, may have been the additional premiums and overtime that had to be paid to try to cover the critical staffing shortage that we’ve had in this province starting since about last May is when I first began to raise concerns about that in this House as we began to see rolling closures of ERs across the province of Alberta due to a lack of physicians, lack of nursing staff. I remember talking in this House about the Galahad continuing care centre. Twenty seniors there, Mr. Chair, I believe, in May of last year were displaced due to a lack of nursing staff, again in part due to this government’s pressure that it created on the health care system, pushing it to its limits.

8:30

I remember at that time, I seem to recall, the minister at the time talking about how that was going to be a short-term thing. Mr. Chair, those seniors still have not returned to Galahad. They’re still separated from friends and family. The costs of all that, I imagine, are also baked into this supplementary supply.

Coming back around, Mr. Chair, while this government wants to pat itself on the back for record spending on health care and education, I have spent nearly three years now watching this government on health care, and I can tell you that no government in the history of this province has done more damage to our public health care system than the UCP, none, bar none. So I’m not inclined to praise this government for its record spending as it splashes around a little bit of cash to try to backfill the deep, deep hole they have dug Alberta into in terms of recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, from the loss of physicians, that, again, we just saw demonstrated by data from the CPSA.

However much the government wants to deny it, it’s concrete. There are 41 fewer doctors in Lethbridge and area than there were in 2019, when this government came into power, and 43,000

residents in that area who do not have a family doctor. That is on this government. It is their record, and no record health care spending now is fixing that, partly because they aren’t really putting record spending in on physicians. They’ve got \$6 million that they’ve reannounced repeatedly, but the fact is, Mr. Chair, that just like a corporate tax cut is not simply enough on its own to bring companies into a jurisdiction, neither are some dollars thrown in belatedly after the fact enough to cover up for a government that has fundamentally broken trust with health care workers, has salted the earth and given our province a reputation under this government of one that is decidedly unfriendly to health care workers.

That’s going to be a challenge, Mr. Chair, because we are in competition globally for health care workers right now. There’s a CBC article that just came out talking about how many more youth are leaving our province. Let me tell you that young health care workers are leaving. Doctors are graduating, and they are not going to work in the rural areas whatever amount this government wants to put into its RESIDE program. As long as this government maintains legislation that says that any contract they have can be torn up on the whim of a Health minister, these are challenges that are going to continue.

I look forward to having more opportunity to debate this. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. As you can imagine, I’ve got several thoughts this evening on Bill 8, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022, and it’s even hard to kind of decide where to start. You know, I think where I will start – and I’ve said this before in the House in terms of some of the legislation that we’ve seen presented by the government. Albertans find themselves in almost the same place as Oliver Twist did. They’re looking to the government, and they’re saying, “Please, sir, I want some more,” and that goes to show you the severe lack of support that we’re seeing towards Albertans.

Now, I’ve certainly heard this evening, you know, talking about all this record spending, everything that we’re doing to increase jobs and things like that. But the thing is that I’m hearing from not only my constituents but others across the province – because I know; I’m getting copied on the e-mails that are going to all of you as well, so I know it’s out there – that are very concerned about where things are going, like, for instance, the utility bills. And we can talk all we want about the rebate for gas, the fake rebate that only kicks in at a certain level, and we’re just slightly over halfway there. Let me put it to you this way: people are complaining that they can’t afford the bill now. What happens when it doubles? Because that’s what it’s going to take to hit that mark – right? – the six and a half dollars per gigajoule. They can’t afford it here. This is a problem here, right now, and you’re not going to help them until at least next winter.

You know, I have a constituent who’s on AISH, Mr. Chair. I was hoping maybe to see something out of this for them besides what very little they get. They were hoping, you know, maybe it’ll get reindexed. She’s come to me saying: well, one of my utility bills has just gone up by \$300. Yet out of Budget 2022 this individual is going to lose up to \$3,000 in purchasing power. Now, if they can’t even afford the bill, how are they going to be able to do anything else?

Again, you know, I’ve heard people jump up: oh, well, this is record spending on AISH. See, here’s the problem. Remember I’ve

always said, Mr. Chair, that I'm listening to what people say about legislation that comes forward and whatnot, and when we think about Budget '22 and Bill 8, there's an attitude that we're fighting already. It happened just last Monday, and what was said was: "Mr. Speaker, what the opposition doesn't have a clue on is that you have to create wealth first before you have money to take care of people."

My friend from Calgary-Buffalo had kind of started to touch on this a little bit, and I think I'll expand a little further. Historically I've always seen this cycle that comes forward. You know, government comes in: "Ah, well, you know, the former government just spent recklessly and put us into debt and everything, so we've got to climb our way out of that." Then you get to the point where you're starting to make some success: "We can't help you just yet. We're close. We're almost there. Just hang on a little bit longer." Then you get to the next stage of: "You know what? We're just starting to get ahead. Things are really ramping up. We're really going to get going here. Can I just get you to hold tight a little bit longer?" People keep waiting, and then you get: "You know what? There are signs the future is not looking good. We've got to prepare for the future. You're just going to have to wait." Then when things are free-falling: "Well, things are in free fall. We can't help you now."

It's this cycle that keeps going along. It's the cycle of failing to help, and we're always leaving the most vulnerable behind based on what I was just talking about, a constituent on AISH who can't afford a utility. But what's up for offer? Oh, a whole \$150 spread out over three months in \$50 chunks. And I still haven't heard the plan as to when that's going to get paid out, how that's going to get paid out. In the meantime they're falling further and further behind, which then leads me to another constituent that's already in trouble, and now their power is getting limited. Can you imagine, Mr. Chair, not being able to have a pot on the stove and some toast in the toaster? But, hey, I've got 50 bucks for you. Come on. Really?

You all were able to bet \$1.3 billion on Donald Trump's election. You've managed to find tens of millions of dollars to go chase Bigfoot and get logos wrong. Yet we can't help some of our most vulnerable in the province to make sure that they at least have a decent quality of life because, as I believe the Minister of Community and Social Services had said: we've got to create wealth first before you're able to take care of people.

Mr. Panda: Yes.

Mr. Nielsen: I even hear people agreeing with that. How very big of you. How very big of you. I'll make sure to tell that to constituents who are coming to me and e-mailing me saying: I need help from my government.

8:40

When we see that Albertans are going to start to lose about \$500 alone in personal income tax exemptions – the famous bracket creep: I remember I actually brought up a member's statement specifically on that because, Mr. Chair, the Premier, with his hair on fire when he was an MP in Ottawa, railed against how bad that was. I believe actually it was earlier today I had a member's statement talking about being consistent, acting with integrity, standing up for your views. So either the Premier never actually ever believed that when he was in Ottawa, that bracket creep was bad, or somehow, somehow, somewhere he's decided: oh, well, that's different now.

It's very, very interesting, like I said, as we see legislation presented before us. What does it say? What doesn't it say? What's being said about it? Persistently and consistently – at least there's consistency there – those things are butting up against each other.

I've seen concerns from seniors about the Alberta seniors' benefit, potentially losing up to \$750 on that. For a senior on a fixed income that's a lot of money. Hey, I guess the attitude is already prevalent over there. Got to be rich first before you get any. The people that built our province, that have allowed us right here, right now to enjoy that, built on their backs, and we're going to say: sorry; till we're profitable, we can't do anything. Wow. I have a lot of seniors in my riding. You know, I have the North Edmonton Seniors Association. I get seniors from my friend over in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. My friends over in Edmonton-Castle Downs and Edmonton-Manning all come to that centre. I get the opportunity to chat with them all the time, and I'll tell you that some of them were Conservative voters; they're not now. And I have a feeling that after they see this budget pass, there are probably going to be a few less after that.

You know, my friend from Edmonton-City Centre was talking about some of the things that have happened in health care and, again, the whole line of record spending and being fiscally prudent and everything like that: fiscally prudent to bet on an election, fiscally prudent to go after a cartoon character, fiscally prudent to take away diagnostic imaging privileges from chiropractors and physiotherapists, claiming it's going to save the system money. Yet now we found out that it's turning out that it's costing about \$4 million more. Not my numbers, by the way; this was the chiropractors that figured this stuff out.

I believe, actually, Mr. Chair, that's called red tape because now instead of somebody being able to go to their practitioner, quickly get an X-ray, and start to get treatment, they've got to go through the extra step of booking through their general practitioner, then getting that X-ray, then going back to that general practitioner to look at that X-ray, and then hopefully they'll pass that on to the chiropractor or the physiotherapist so then they can get their treatment.

Oh, I know you can say: well, people have the ability to just go and pay for it. How can they pay for it? You've taken away \$500 from their personal income tax, their insurance is going up, their property taxes are going up, their school fees are going up. Where are they supposed to come up with that money? You could have maybe helped them out a little bit here in Bill 8, alleviated some of those costs.

That's certainly a barrier for somebody who's on AISH. They need to get treatment. They have to go the long way, and I'm hearing about this. People are waiting weeks. I even heard one report of somebody waiting up to a year to be able to get treatment. That's ridiculous, all because, well, we thought it would be fiscally prudent, and it wasn't. I'm surprised that there hasn't been a move to reverse that by now. When the actual stakeholders come to you with a report – I know the government has it. They gave me a copy of it. I've seen it. Maybe you could invest that \$4 million into AISH.

As you can imagine, Mr. Chair, I've got some considerable problems here with Bill 8. I don't see myself in a position to be able to support this. I mean, if there were certainly some changes that were going to be coming out of this debate and this discussion that would help constituents with their rising insurance costs or rising property taxes, paying more for just simply working – and that reminds me. I've got a couple of friends who work in oil and gas. One was a j-man electrician, used to make some good dollars. Used to. It's funny; he goes to work now, doesn't get paid double time. You took that away. How does that help Albertans? Now he's on an agreement where he gets one day off a week. He's almost not even able to come home just because of the distance from Fort McMurray to Edmonton; you know, that whole change between averaging arrangements and averaging agreements. It's funny because he said quite directly: "I thought you supported me. I

thought you said that my industry was number one. But you've taken this away from me." So now he's making less, but now he's also paying more for all the things that I've been mentioning through this whole time I've been talking.

I don't really believe that the government actually believes that they're making life better for Albertans. I think it's just a line, just like the Premier used to say, when he was in Ottawa, about bracket creep. Clearly, he doesn't believe it now. I remember members that served in the 29th Legislature on the government bench and in the government caucus that used to get up and go on at length about omnibus legislation. I know that every single red tape bill I've seen so far is omnibus. Did you all actually believe it when you said it? What changed? There are a lot of things that seem to have changed, including the attitude towards helping Albertans trying to make ends meet. Instead, we're doing things like helping multibillionaires make more billions.

I'm not afraid to say it: the Walton family doesn't need your help. I think they're making enough. They're paying their utility bills. They're paying their gas bills. They're paying their insurance. They're paying their property taxes on probably multiple properties when people are having a hard enough time keeping one property.

We need to do better. Bill 8 isn't it. Mr. Chair, I would certainly urge every member of this House to oppose this piece of legislation. We need to do better. We need to look after everyone so that no one gets left behind. No one. And if I can make a suggestion, let's drop this attitude about: we have to be rich and wealthy before we help the ones that need it and that built this province that we're currently enjoying.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

8:50

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I believe I see the hon. Member for Calgary-South East has risen to respond.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Chair. Again, the funding in Bill 8 will ensure the government can cover the health care costs of the pandemic while also sending aid and equipment to Ukraine, providing electricity rebates to Albertans struggling with rising costs, and supporting child care workers and parents of young children. It's unfortunate that the members opposite continue to be offside with the financial expectations of Albertans, that elected us with a mandate to repair the fiscal and economic damage caused by the previous government.

We inherited a government with spending increases in many areas that exceeded population growth and inflation. Now, to be fair, some of these issues preceded the NDP government, but they saw the trajectory, and they chose to ignore it or to make it worse, to place that burden, with interest, on future Albertans. Programs were growing at 6 per cent, 8 per cent, or even more per year, putting into question if we could provide these services at the same level for our children and grandchildren without large future tax increases. Broadly, the NDP raised spending an average of 4 per cent per year. At that rate of spending, even at the budget's projected commodity prices and, again, making the assumption that they hadn't harmed businesses or our energy sector further, Alberta would have a \$6 billion deficit this year, a \$7.5 billion deficit next year, and a \$9 billion deficit in 2024.

How did they plan to pay for this? By increasing taxes, increasing regulatory burden, shutting down the energy industry. Sadly, for the Albertans that lost their jobs and saw their businesses go under, this was the NDP plan. They now claim that the balanced budget presented is solely the result of a thriving energy sector. I would

invite the members opposite to explain: if on the one hand the NDP believes our energy sector is making a significant contribution to the public services Albertans and indeed Canadians require, why did they do everything in their power to harm the industry, to chase investment away, to shut it down?

Our government took the opposite approach, an approach that has resulted in a balanced budget, an approach we can't take credit for because it was mandated to us by Albertans. We cut taxes, we eliminated red tape and unnecessary regulatory burden, and we championed our world-class energy sector, our industries, and our businesses. They criticize our approach, particularly the job-creation tax cut, but you know what happened, Mr. Chair? This year Alberta will collect approximately \$400 million more in annual corporate tax revenue at our 8 per cent rate than the previous NDP government did at 12 per cent. Our government has also cut over 21 per cent of red tape, saving Albertans and their businesses an estimated \$1.2 billion while making Alberta a desirable place to invest.

Listening to the debate tonight, it's clear to me that the members opposite aren't upset with the budget or the supplementary estimates we're debating tonight. They're upset that Alberta is doing so much better now that they aren't in government, that their job-killing policies have been removed, forgetting that Albertans put us here to do just that. Despite their narrative of fear and cuts, the province is providing world-class public services more efficiently and more sustainably, and the province is projecting surpluses instead of deficits. Albertans are getting back to work and, maybe worse for the NDP, back to normal.

I invite the members opposite to join Albertans in moving forward and to celebrate the remarkable turnaround of our province. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

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

Member Irwin: Oh, gosh, I don't know if I can follow that. I sure wish – what's his riding, the environment minister? I sure wish he were here because he repeatedly rails – sorry. I sure wish he was listening. He might be listening. I'm not going to refer to his presence or absence. He's always railing against us for using notes, and I haven't seen such an incredible use of notes as I did tonight, multiple times, in fact.

Anyways, I do feel sorry for Calgary-South East because, clearly, he's the appointed one to speak tonight. I would hope that some of the other MLAs, if they are so passionate about their budget and about Bill 7 and Bill 8, which we're talking about tonight, supplementary estimates, that they, too, would join this debate and share their passion with the House and, in fact, share their passion with their constituents, because, as my colleagues have shared tonight, we are hearing very much directly from our constituents, who are struggling.

Mr. Shepherd: Apparently his, too.

Member Irwin: Yeah. Apparently his, too, and in fact I do hear from a lot of folks from all over this province, many of whom do not find that they get a response from their UCP MLAs.

Mr. Panda: The thing is, unlike them, we did it drama free.

Member Irwin: Again, I hope that perhaps the Minister of Infrastructure will join in the debate as well, because I'm sure he's quite passionate about the supplementary estimates as well. I will await his entering the debate.

Member Ceci: With bated breath.

Member Irwin: Yes, very much with bated breath.

You know, I did have a chance to speak to this bill last evening as well, and I actually was in the midst of talking about education when my time ran out, and my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora actually continued my train of thought. She had just mentioned the fact that I'm home in my riding to a lot of incredible community schools. I represent mature neighbourhoods in the core of Edmonton with, you know, a lot of old schools. Delton school is one of those schools. It's a fantastic school. It's in the community just north of where I live, with just amazing staff and students there. It was actually the number one capital ask on Edmonton public's list, Delton school, yet it didn't make this government's cut for funding.

We asked the minister multiple times, actually, the Education minister, if she would be willing to come with myself and the Education critic and tour Delton school and just see how much need there is in that community, and unfortunately she has not accepted our request. You know – always the optimist – hopefully she still will because it's not too late to do the right thing for my constituents.

You know, I don't have a lot of time here, so I won't get into as much detail as I did yesterday, but education is a big one for us. My colleague from Edmonton-City Centre gave a great summary yesterday of health care. I wanted to get on the record, because I didn't get a chance yesterday, just a couple of comments from my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud. She didn't get a chance to hammer this one home on Children's Services in sup supply. Just two days ago the Minister of Children's Services admitted, thanks to the incessant prodding of my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud, that she has not spent \$55 million of her provincial budget on child care out of \$350 million in 2021, and she won't say what she's doing with that money. That's quite concerning to my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud, who, as we know, as our Children's Services critic, has been in touch with countless stakeholders and talks to both parents and families accessing child care and also to child care providers and is kind of wondering: what the heck is happening with that funding?

My colleague has pointed out that it's likely a breach of their agreement with the feds, which states quite explicitly that they can't replace provincial funding with federal funding. I would love to get some clarity on that. It seems like there are a lot of questions that remain when it comes to these supplementary estimates, so if anyone in the Chamber has some light to shed on that, we would love to hear it.

You know, I noticed the Associate Minister of Status of Women in – I just noticed her. I try not to refer to presence or absence, but I had the opportunity in budget estimates to ask that associate minister questions about Status of Women, and while Status of Women might not be explicitly tied to supplementary estimates, there is a little bit in there about culture and the funding given to Ukraine.

9:00

I do need to get on the record again just the fact that this government had an opportunity – I just had to talk about women, you know – to invest in women and to really bolster that associate ministry, but instead they chose to continue to minimize the importance of that ministry. And it started before this associate minister took over, so I'm not blaming her. Immediately one of the first moves we saw from this government was, obviously, throwing Status of Women in with culture and multiculturalism, making a large ministry and not having a stand-alone ministry for Status of Women.

You know, I raise for this minister, too, just some of the big concerns that we have, actually concerns that don't necessarily require large numbers on a budget line but do require support from this government, and those are things like gender-based analysis plus, GBA plus, which is a proven policy approach to ensure that programs, proposed legislation, any policies that a government is putting forward are viewed from an intersectional lens and that the impacts of said document pieces are very much thoroughly assessed. That makes for better decision-making. That makes for evidence-based decision-making, and we weren't able to get from this minister any answers on why something like that would be fully thrown out in this government's business plans.

I needed to get that on the record. Again, I've said it many times in this House already in this short time that it feels like we've been – well, maybe it doesn't feel like a short time we've been in session; sometimes it feels like a very long time. But, you know, I've said it many times that this government had a true opportunity, as was noted by one of the members over there on that side, with windfall revenues, oil prices higher than they've been in a long time. What an opportunity this government had to make a visionary budget – right? – to tangibly improve the lives of our constituents, and they chose not to. [interjection] Well, hopefully, we'll hear more from Calgary-South East, because clearly he's got a lot to say today.

They chose not to. You know, it's not shocking from this government, but it certainly is disappointing, especially at a time when they can't point to not having the funds to do so. I just don't think – and I've said it multiple times in this Chamber – that bragging about a balanced budget is something that you should be doing when people are still struggling.

That leads me to my last point tonight – I talked about it at length last night, but I'll talk about it again – and that's utility bills. It's about affordability, about the fact that our constituents are telling us every single day that they're struggling. And as I shared the other night – well, I believe it was last night, maybe the night before; all the nights blend together – it's not just my constituents in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. It's constituents in Morinville-St. Albert, where we were door-knocking. It's constituents in Strathcona-Sherwood Park, where we were door-knocking, right? It's constituents all over this province, many of whom are in UCP ridings. I just can't understand how it is, when I'm trying to help folks, when my staff are trying to help folks that we're hearing from – you know, it's hard. Especially, it's hard when you can say: "Well, the government has got a \$50 rebate they can give you. I mean, you're not going to get it right away, and I know it's only going to make a very tiny dent in your bills." It's hard when we don't have concrete help for them.

I mentioned earlier today in the Chamber that the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity's offer was, you know, that your constituents can call the Utilities Commission and that they can also just figure out a fixed-rate contract, right? And my point earlier today was: why is this government telling Albertans to just go figure it out on their own? Why not take those steps as a government? Why not? I mean, we know that affordability is an issue that's impacting folks from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Why not address that, right? Why not? Especially if you think you're heading into an election here shortly, why not make some moves that are truly going to improve the lives of the folks that you represent?

You know, with that, I could speak a whole lot longer. Oh, gosh, I could talk about AISH. I could talk about housing some more. Hey, I could even talk about Walmart, like my colleague did there. Don't get me started on praising Walmart. But I will avoid doing that, and instead I will end my remarks.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Associate Minister of Status of Women has risen.

Ms Issik: Mr. Chair, I move to adjourn debate on Bill 8.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. associate minister has risen again.

Ms Issik: Thank you. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 3 and report progress on bills 7 and 8.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 3. The committee reports progress on the following bills: Bill 7 and Bill 8.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed, please say nay. That is carried and so ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 3 Special Days Act

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Culture has risen.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and move third reading of Bill 3, Special Days Act.

Alberta is a province rich in diversity, culture, and heritage. Throughout the year Albertans across the province come together to recognize special days and months. In some events it is a day of great celebration and dance and music, and for others it is a much more somber day of reflection and remembrance.

We have seen an increasing number of requests for special day recognition, which is a good thing because it means that our province is growing, that people are coming together and in many cases looking for a chance to celebrate. Mr. Speaker, the Special Days Act is internal housekeeping, really, not quite as exciting as actually celebrating, say, Alberta Francophonie Month or Black History Month or as fun as heading to the mountains on Family Day, but it is legislation that is important as it will standardize the process for how Alberta's government recognizes special days. So it's really an act of order and good government. The current process is quite ad hoc and lacks clarity for many people, so this act will give guidance and allow ministers to make ministerial declarations and to make it faster and easier for the date to be acknowledged.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Yes, Mr. Speaker, private members will still be completely free to make private members' bills. This has nothing to do with those regulations in the standing orders. As well, should this act be

passed, the web page that will be created for it will be used to track these events for all Albertans so that they will be able to see and understand and easily find out which days and months have been officially recognized in and by the province of Alberta. Sometimes we see duplicate requests, and sometimes we get questions not quite knowing what's happening or what might be happening for a day or a month that has official recognition. Having this information online, consolidated in one place, will help Albertans save time and find the information they need, including guidelines and regulations that will be developed with it.

For those wondering, the process remains the same for those making requests for special days recognition. You can either write the relevant cabinet minister or submit a request using the request-a-declaration form that will be on alberta.ca. Mr. Speaker, it's important to acknowledge these dates, and we just want to make it easier.

9:10

Before I finish, you know that Alberta was the first province in Canada to recognize Family Day, under Premier Don Getty, which is a day recognized under the Special Days Act. Quite frankly, without federal support often, Alberta has been a leader in cultural support, one of the first provinces in the country to establish a Minister of Culture, a department of culture, and we continue that tradition now. Just a short while ago Alberta's Glenbow became the first museum in Canada to soon have perpetual free admission thanks to a gift to the museum. Alberta continues to lead in the whole cultural field. Processes may change over time, but coming together, promoting cultural awareness, and remembering our shared heritage is the one thing that remains the same.

Mr. Speaker, I'm asking again that all members of this House support Bill 3, the Special Days Act. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. the Minister of Culture has moved third reading of Bill 3, the Special Days Act. Is there anyone that would like to speak to third reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to rise this evening to add some comments, I guess, on Bill 3, Special Days Act. You know, at the end of the debate we'll be happy to support it. I guess I have I don't know if it's questions but just maybe some comments that, hopefully, going forward, will be taken in good faith, as they're given. As we know, the bill will allow the declaration of special days, weeks, and months in perpetuity. Of course, we know that right now Albertans can actually already do that. I kind of wonder a little bit about: is this really sort of like a red tape thing? I've heard maybe some comparisons there.

I guess what I'm concerned about, Mr. Speaker, is that, you know, if we are actually looking at Bill 3 as a form of red tape reduction, I fear that may start to trigger a snowball rolling down a hill, as we have heard over and over again, sometimes ad nauseam, about the government wanting to reduce its red tape by one-third and whatnot and get to that one in, one out. So if we're kind of putting in some red tape here, is there going to be a rush now to try to find something else to get rid of here? I know that we tried to make a bit of a big deal around Albertans being able to cut their Christmas trees and not having to pay the \$10, but they still had to fill out the form. Yet we called that red tape reduction. Hopefully, that's not how Bill 3 is being used.

I guess – maybe it's a little harsh to say – I have a concern around Bill 3, and I think it would be prudent of me to bring it up. In terms of priorities, Mr. Speaker, right now Albertans are trying to figure out ways to pay their rising insurance costs. They're trying to figure out ways to pay their rising property taxes, their rising tuition and student loans, you know, and to figure out how to get their money

to go further as they have to pay more income tax. We're focused on this as an actual piece of legislation. The Minister of Culture had mentioned that this is about cleaning up the process a little bit, making it easier, making it smoother. I'm totally onboard with that. Is this really a focus piece that we should be looking at versus some of the other things that, really, I think Albertans are hoping to get help with?

I know we had spoken a little bit earlier this evening, on Bill 8, about some of those things and, obviously, the concerns that we've heard from constituents about this. Again, not that I'm against a smoother process or whatnot, but honestly I really don't remember getting phone calls from constituents saying: "We need a bill to address special days. We need the government to prioritize this over making sure our health care workers have the proper staffing that they need." I mean, it's all great fun, you know, dandy that we get the opportunity to recognize these special moments or to remember things that have happened in history in order to make sure they never happen again, but if there's no relief for you to be able to leave work to be able to go to these special days or special remembrance periods because you're busy working your 16th hour of what was supposed to be a 10-hour shift – again, I don't want to sound like I'm not supportive of Bill 3 because I am, and I'm fully prepared to vote in favour of it. I appreciate the minister bringing it forward and allowing us to discuss this. I just really wish there'd be more of a focus on things that are top of mind right now for Albertans.

As I had mentioned earlier this evening in debate, I bet if I went to my one friend who doesn't get double time anymore, only gets one day home per week, working six and one, the gas price right now – it's just unaffordable for him to actually go home to be with his wife and then go back up to work. You know, would he rather see that addressed, or would he have rather seen Bill 3? I'm pretty sure I would know his answer, Mr. Speaker. I probably wouldn't repeat it, to be honest with you, just knowing my friend. Again, one tiny example around priorities.

I guess the other concern that I may have, and I've kind of voiced this: I guess the example would be the private member's bill bringing in an aviation council. Great idea. I was fully supportive of it, but I had a concern of that bill being used as a bit of a political tool for appointments to it. You know, my hope is certainly that that is not taking place. Speaking with the member, I haven't heard of anything like that yet, which is good. It's there doing its job promoting the aviation industry, but are we potentially going to see, maybe, some abuse of this with the government leading up to an election? I would hope not. To sit here and spend the time to debate this bill and have individuals be promised: well, we'll bring forward the special day if you vote for us. I hope that that would not be the case, Mr. Speaker.

I guess the one shortcoming: when we do declare these days, there is a bit of a short time limit on that. I know the minister did mention that private members are still able to bring forward legislation for that, which could result in kind of a more permanent declaration. I'm kind of hoping that maybe there could have been a clause for something a little more permanent. Obviously, there would probably need to be criteria for that, and I'm not opposed to that sort of thing either. Just, you know, maybe a small shortcoming. Maybe we can look at another time to add that in and just make the bill a little bit better and a very useful tool for Albertans.

9:20

I'm not going to belabour it. I know one of my colleagues also has some things to say on this. I do appreciate the time to be able to add some comments, and I hope that some of things I say, you

know, are taken in good spirit. Again, I'm happy to support Bill 3 when we get a chance to vote on it here in third reading.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 3, Special Days Act, on behalf of my constituents. Bill 3 proposes changes around how to, you know, declare special days. If this bill passes, it will make slight changes, and there are a lot of questions around even what we will achieve after that. The declarations of days, weeks, and months in perpetuity: Albertans do have this mechanism or provisions already, to request these declarations of special days, weeks, or months by the government. They can do it through the website.

The biggest concern to me is that in this spring session of the House we're seeing what we're debating not only with this bill, with the other pieces of legislation: it seems the government still has not learned their lesson and still seems pretty out of touch with Albertans, with what is happening. I was listening to a radio talk show yesterday. The Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction was speaking and providing quite a bit of information. When it came to the question that – the host, I think, asked questions around if the minister can deliver the information that tied the achievements and numbers so that it would help Albertans understand how they are benefiting from what is happening in the House. There was not really a meaningful answer to that.

More than that, I've been, myself, on the radio talk shows, and I did actually pose questions in this House based on the callers' requests and demands, what they were asking, a number of constituents and people from my neighbour ridings – like, they're close to my office, a few blocks away from my office – walking into my office, sending e-mails. Their concern was affordability, particularly the rising cost of gas prices at the gas stations, the rising cost of natural gas, and skyrocketing prices of electricity. That is where I heard from an angry young man: "My credit card is full. I don't know. What should I do? I'm calling the service providers, but they are telling me that if you can't pay the bill, shut off your heat and put on a hoodie."

Those are the kinds of concerns I'm hearing, and I was expecting, you know – we are all members from different ridings, even members from different parts of the province, and we get the chance to go back weekly if not daily during session. I'm very sure the messages in their communities are not going to be very different. What I'm hearing in my area is people calling me and seeking my intervention. Unfortunately, I cannot. My position is limiting that. Families living across from schools are not being able to have their kids accepted because of the capacity issue. They're on a wait-list, and they're in fear that they will end up going to a faraway school and that will change their whole lifestyle and nature of work or their ability to work. Where bus service is not an option also: a number of those issues. The class sizes.

I attended the grade class, grade 6 students, the past week. Their desks are cramped, and their classes are crowded. These students share these concerns. I'm amazed at the way these 6th grade students, I think, at the age of 10-12, talk about their experience, how it has changed within three years, marching the classes together from one room to another room, due to lack of teachers in their school, due to lack of education staff in their school.

I received a letter from a constituent that she has graduated from the University of Alberta and she's not able to find a job in the tech sector in Alberta. I can agree to that concern as I do have my own son, my own nephew, graduated in digital media and IT. They're struggling to find a job in Alberta for the past two years and going

through a lot of interviews right now. All of those proposals and all of those options are from either Ontario, Vancouver, or from different parts of the country.

That letter also said that she's so glad and thankful to the previous government that she was able to achieve and able to afford higher education, benefited from the tuition caps. Now her sister is also – her younger sister, her sibling, is struggling to manage between her fees and studies and finding jobs. Her fees have jumped almost to double. That is a long letter, two pages of letter, that I received in my office.

I was wishing after this issue – and that issue was not normal inflation. It was not something that cannot be felt when you see the utility prices, the gas prices raised to 300 per cent. The people who paid \$900, their bills jumped to \$1,900. Insurance is the area I just tried to refrain from discussing, but, you know, I think I have a duty to speak of my constituents' concerns. The rising cost of insurance as well is, like, 40 per cent. It's just a joke.

9:30

So those are kind of the concerns. I was at two events today, and I'm in my office, and that's what was being discussed. That's what we hear from our constituents, and that's what we wanted to discuss, and that's why I wanted to have this information on the record, that I do listen to my constituents and we do represent their concerns and their issues in the Assembly, that all members of the Assembly can come together and be serious about addressing their issues.

This bill is not one of those that I can go back to my constituents and claim that, you know, the government is serious about your concerns. The government is serious, and they are willing to address, and they're listening: that is not the message that this bill sends back.

We are spending – I think we are halfway through this spring session, and not even a single debate I could participate in that is focusing on what Albertans are going through. Alberta has seen unprecedented, you know, revenue in the last at least six, seven years, but Albertans are not feeling it. Albertans are not feeling that. They're happy about a balanced budget, but that balance is not really visible on their tables, in their daily lives.

The bill we discuss: as I said, there are a number of questions around it. I will be happy to hear from the minister or anybody from the government House members exactly why we are discussing this bill, what kind of changes Albertans will benefit from when we already have legislation where Albertans can request for a special day, month, and week. I definitely have a lot of questions on this bill, and I will be sharing and putting these questions in the House and will be happy to hear from the ministry.

With that, I conclude my remarks on this bill, and I'll be happy to seek the opportunity in the future to discuss and raise my questions around this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

The Minister of Culture to close debate.

Mr. Orr: I'll waive.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 2

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate March 22: Mr. Rutherford]

Ms Issik: I rise to ask for unanimous consent for one-minute bells for all of Committee of the Whole.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Bill 2, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, is before the Assembly. Are there others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 2, which is the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. This is the act which implements the budget. We are, of course, in estimates and in budget debate, so we've had many opportunities to speak about the budget, but I am excited to speak about it again. I think the thing that I want to focus my comments on in this instance, because it deals specifically with it in this particular bill, which deals with taxation, is what the Premier used to refer to as the sneaky, pernicious, backdoor tax grab, which is to say failing to index to inflation. What that means is that as Albertans are seeing costs rise with inflation and significant costs rising, some faster than the cost of inflation – I think perhaps specifically of, you know, the costs of utilities, natural gas, electricity, that sort of thing, also insurance. Massive increases.

We're seeing costs rise. We have been for a while seeing wages sort of struggle to keep up. This was actually one of the issues that drove me originally into politics, having to deal with this sort of increased income inequality and how it hollows out the middle class and ultimately the impact on civil society and, actually, on democracy in the end because I think that creation of greater inequality is actually very bad for democracy. A number of other factors there, the hollowing out of the media, but this is definitely one of them. Yes, we're seeing this government sort of slowly bracket creep to increase taxes.

This isn't a small amount. Over the course of this government's fiscal plan they have admitted that this is \$1 billion – \$1 billion – coming out of the pockets of Albertans. These are everyday, middle-class Albertans that are giving up this \$1 billion to this UCP government. Meanwhile they have billions of dollars to give away to corporations. Now, they claim this will create jobs. There are not only a lot of good studies on how this, which is really just trickle-down economics, doesn't work, but there's also proof right here in Alberta. They implemented it, and you know what happened? It didn't create jobs, which is what everybody said was going to happen, yet they proceeded anyway.

In the first year when they dropped the corporate tax rate and it didn't create jobs, they thought: "Wow. That sure didn't work. You know what we should do? We should definitely triple down and accelerate it and give it away faster and create no jobs." I don't know. I feel like, personally, if I started a program and the program didn't work at all, I wouldn't think that I should do it more. But there you have it. That's the UCP for you.

So while they're giving these billions away to corporations, who send it out in dividends to overseas shareholders, to people who are very wealthy, they are taking that money and backfilling that hole that they have created in the budget from everyday Albertans, from middle-class Albertans struggling to get by. They are struggling, Mr. Speaker. We hear from them every day. They write in to our offices from across the province to tell us that they are struggling, that families with two kids and two jobs are struggling to meet ends meet. They're struggling to pay the rent and the mortgage, to buy food, and to pay their utilities. What that means when they have less and less money in their pockets, in the pockets of those middle-class

Albertans, is that that's money they are not spending in the local economy.

9:40

We know that low- and middle-income Albertans are way more likely to spend their money in the local economy, so this government, by taking money away from those low- and middle-class Albertans and transferring that wealth to very wealthy people, many of whom don't even live in this province, is actually sort of hurting our local economies. They're hurting small businesses that could be getting that. That's a big, big problem.

These Albertans aren't just struggling under income taxes that this government is raising, because this government has also raised their property taxes. You may ask: how is that possible? Well, they cut MSI funding. They cut police funding. This is fundings that goes to municipalities. Municipalities can't carry deficits the way a province can, so they don't really have a lot of options. They can either cut services or they can raise taxes.

It gets even worse for rural municipalities because this government downloaded onto them massive costs for what they claim is their rural crime strategy. Really, it's not theirs at all. They're not paying for a dime of it. They sort of forced that upon municipalities, municipalities who, incidentally, always had the option. They always had the option to buy into a contract for additional RCMP officers. They chose not to, so this government did it for them. That will raise property tax bills for those residents, some of them up to \$400 for a family. That's very problematic.

Then there's the cost of insurance. Ah, the cost of insurance. We hear about this all the time. Folks are struggling. Now, this government loves to talk about how it was the fact that we put in a cap that caused them. First off, the cap was 5 per cent, and that wasn't this year, when inflation is large. That was in past years when inflation wasn't nearly that large. Now, these folks love to rail about the fact that we accounted for population and inflation in our budget, that some budgets' population and inflation increases added up to 4 per cent. "That's ridiculous," they say. "How could anything possibly cost 4 per cent more? That's insane." Meanwhile, with insurance, we capped it at 5 per cent, five being larger than four, and these folks say: "Oh, that's ridiculous. How could you hold insurance companies to only 5 per cent a year? How could they possibly live within 5 per cent a year?"

Mr. Speaker, that's absurd. That's absurd. Five per cent a year is totally reasonable. In fact, our Finance minister at the time – the best Finance minister in history – went out and had conversations with those insurance companies and said: "You know what? We're going to give you a chance to prove yourselves. Demonstrate to us why your costs are going up more than 5 per cent a year, and we are happy to listen." But this UCP government pulled the cap, and they didn't require that demonstration. That's why it is so absurd that they stand in this place every time and say: "Oh, it's because the NDP held it to 5 per cent. That's why they went up." That's ridiculous. If it was true that 5 per cent was insufficient, all the UCP had to do was ask them to generate the report that they were already generating for the NDP government, the report that they were already working on. They let them get away without putting in that report, and it's because they knew. It's because they knew that they didn't need more than 5 per cent, so they didn't make them prove it. They just gave them whatever they wanted at the cost of Albertans.

Tuition – tuition – is also a thing that goes up in this budget. Not just tuition but the interest on student loans. People out there wanting to go to university, wanting to better themselves are having to pay that increased tuition, and they're having to pay increased costs on that debt. That makes a big difference, Mr. Speaker, in

people's lives, and it makes a big difference, too, in terms of people's ability to better their situation.

You know, I'm very lucky. I had parents that were in a position to finance my first degree because they both had degrees. My mom, for instance: her parents worked hard, and they saved a lot of money to pay for that first degree. My mom was born in Scotland, and her parents came here when she was four years old because there was no work over there. I believe that her dad, my grandfather, had, I would say, roughly an 8th grade education. They came here and they worked hard. They put her in university, and she did the same for me, and I hope to do the same for my daughter.

The point is that that trajectory that we were able to achieve because of affordable tuition is a trajectory that this government is closing off to people in a similar situation, to people coming here from other countries to better their situation. I think that that's really sad, because I very much believe that your ability to go to university should be based on – well, I mean, ideally, everyone would go – how hard you work and your achievement and that sort of thing, not on whether or not your parents have enough money. So that's another big one.

One that I think is incredibly problematic in this is the Alberta child tax benefit. Because this hasn't been indexed, families are losing on average \$450 a year, and that money is a big deal, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta child tax benefit I feel like we don't talk about enough. That was something that was brought in under the NDP government. It cut child poverty in half. It cut child poverty in half. Again, that was our Finance minister who did that, and that's an incredible achievement. It's something we should be very, very proud of. It's certainly not something that we should be seeking, like this UCP government is, to erode. When we make progress, when we move forward, when we lift children out of poverty, we should stick with that. We should do more of it, not what this UCP government is doing, which is eroding it.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure I have told this story before in the House because it was very, very meaningful to me. Before the 2019 election I was out door-knocking. I knocked on the door of one particular woman who came to the door, and I said, you know, "What are your views on politics?" She said, "I don't follow it much." I said: "Okay. Well, has anything the government done impacted your life?" And at this time it was NDP government. She said: "Oh, well, I'm actually trying to go back to work right now after the birth of my third child, and I had tried to go back previously after previous children. It was really hard because I couldn't afford to have someone look after my kids while I was going on interviews." And she said, "Now I get the child tax benefit, and it meant that I was able to afford to pay someone to watch my kids while I went on a job interview, and it was just such a relief."

The story stays with me, Mr. Speaker, because it reminded me why I do what I do. It reminded me why I come to this place, why I run in elections. For that woman that action on behalf of the government made all the difference. Maybe it was only a small difference, you know, not having to, like, try to figure out what to do with her kids while she went on interviews for jobs, but for a lot of people that's life changing. You know, being able to go into an interview calm and composed and put together and knowing that you're able to pay someone to provide high-quality care for your kids while you're going back to work is a big deal. It made a big difference in her life, and I'm sad to see this government try and erode it. I wonder if she were in the same situation today, what the impact would be.

9:50

This also is a budget that doesn't account for inflation, which, again, is extremely high, the highest it's been in 30 years, for any

sort of benefits. That's AISH or the seniors' benefit or Alberta Works. I believe that is the program. It means that a senior couple will have \$750 less in their pocket. That may not seem like an enormous amount of money, but for people living on the edge – and there are a lot of them, Mr. Speaker; we hear from them every day in our offices – it is a lot of money, and it does make a big difference.

So I don't support this bill, and honestly I don't think the UCP members should support this bill either. I think that if they're really listening to their constituents, they know that they shouldn't support this bill. They must have . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, and follow the very able and capable debate of my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, who I think very succinctly summed up what this bill means for Albertans, for Alberta families. It means higher costs. It means less money in their pockets at a time when this government is choosing to give more dollars away to those who already have a lot. Profitable corporations: they're getting more dollars from this government. Insurance companies: absolutely, they are making more money under this government. Average Albertans: they are taking home less. At a time when Albertans are facing record costs with inflation, from their utility bills, from their insurance costs, this government is charging them more and giving them less.

Now, that flies in the face of what this government purports to be, Mr. Speaker, certainly the very populist appeal that it rode into office on. Certainly, it's absolutely contrary to the Premier's own past history and the promises that he made, but sadly it is the reality of what Albertans are facing under this government.

This budget, Mr. Speaker, as enabled by Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, the budget implementation act, marks a grand achievement on the part of the government, that achievement being that it is now collecting more tax, more revenue from individual personal income tax than it is from corporations. This government came into office with their promises of their \$4.5 billion corporate giveaway, immediately moved forward on that, gave hundreds of millions of dollars away to companies that immediately pocketed those proceeds and took them out of the province, did not create a single job, did not invest in a single thing. In fact, they turned and laid Albertans off.

And, in thanks for that, the government turns and gives them more dollars and, in turn, now puts the burden of the tax system on the individual Albertan. Those same folks that lost their jobs with those companies who pocketed the corporate giveaway from this government are now paying more tax to this government, higher utility bills, more property taxes, paying more for insurance. This government has shifted the burden from those who have to those who have less.

Under this government something they were doing through the back door, something that they swore they would never do, and that is raising income taxes on Albertans. Now, of course, the tax rate, Mr. Speaker, has not in fact changed, and the Minister of Finance will pat himself on the back for that, and he will stand and he will speak very proudly of that. But the fact is that he is taking more income tax from a vast number of Albertans because he deindexed the income tax brackets, something the Premier, as we have talked about quite a bit – and it's been quoted, and the videos are available on social media – railed against, that practice, when it was a Liberal government in Ottawa, but it is the practice of this United

Conservative government in Alberta. As I said earlier, they do not have the guts to tax Albertans honestly. They do it under cover.

The basic personal exemption for Alberta income tax in 2019, Mr. Speaker, was \$19,369. Under the UCP in 2025 the personal exemption will remain \$19,369. Now, if they had left it indexed, if they had not used this underhanded way of taking more tax dollars out of the pockets of Albertans, that personal exemption would be \$22,219. So every year this government is taking more dollars away from Albertans at a time when this government is costing them more. If the income tax system had remained indexed through 2025, all Albertans would have seen an increase in the basic personal exemption of \$2,850.

So, simply put, on that measure alone, the statistically average family in Alberta is paying more than \$500 extra because the UCP government is taxing inflation. At a time when they are giving dollars away to corporations, when they are giving record profits to insurance companies, they are costing average Alberta families \$500 more. Now, of course, they will pat themselves on the back because they're giving them back \$50 a month on their \$700, \$800, \$900 utility bill, but at the same time they are taking \$500 away, Mr. Speaker.

Now, as my colleague for Calgary-Mountain View noted, it wasn't enough for the government simply to charge every Albertan more income tax, they also decided that they would take away dollars from those who need them most through things like the Alberta child and family benefit as they degrade and erode the value of those benefits every single year. Indeed, a family with two children will lose about \$485 in income because the government is not increasing the ACFB with inflation. As my colleague noted, that is a benefit that helped cut child poverty in this province by 50 per cent, in half, one of the biggest impacts we have seen in terms of a government policy in ending child poverty in this province, and this government decided, at a time when it was handing more dollars away to profitable corporations, taking away the cap to let insurance companies, with no accountability, raise their rates to whichever level they should choose, that families being lifted out of poverty should pay \$485 more. That's quite the Alberta advantage under the United Conservative government, Mr. Speaker.

We know that overall, under this government, Albertans are paying more than \$1 billion in additional income tax – \$1 billion, Mr. Speaker – out of the pockets of everyday Albertans in a way that this government cannot even be honest about. They will not admit it, but they're happy to take it. The most vulnerable Albertans, the folks who are struggling the most, are losing every single year. Again, while this government gives away dollars to profitable corporations, while it gives away those dollars to insurance companies, while it raises property taxes, while it defunds municipalities and increases the burden on people, they are also taking dollars away from seniors and people that are living with disabilities.

10:00

The annual AISH amount in 2019 under our government, Mr. Speaker, was \$20,220. The annual AISH amount under this government in 2025 will be \$20,220, not one dollar more under record inflation, rising costs in every aspect of these individuals' lives, not one dollar more because those dollars are going to profitable corporations. They are going to insurance companies. They are going to utility companies. They are going to this government's friends.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The annual AISH amount, if this government had not made the unconscionable decision to deindex these benefits, would have been \$23,195, Mr. Speaker. That is \$3,000. That is a huge amount for an individual who is making such a small amount per year. But this government decided to balance its books, to show its fiscal prudence. It would take that \$3,000 away from individuals who are living with a disability, who are already struggling to pay rent and buy food, because that's politically convenient for them.

The Alberta seniors' benefit in 2019 under our government: \$5,145. Under this government in 2025 it will still be \$5,145. If it had stayed indexed, it would have been \$5,902. Seniors, Mr. Speaker, indeed are struggling right now with rising utility costs, with rising insurance costs because this government, again, wants to prioritize its political friends, wants to prioritize profitable corporations, wants to prioritize covering its own bottom line and looking good even at a time of record oil revenues, which they did nothing to earn.

They'd rather splash those dollars on their energy war room. They would rather burn those dollars on their 1 and a half billion dollar gamble on the re-election of Donald Trump and take those dollars away from seniors and people living with a disability. It's shameful, Mr. Speaker. But that is the decision of this government, however much they try to obfuscate, however much they try to deny, however much they try to shake their fist at Ottawa to distract from this unconscionable action on their part.

It's also interesting in this bill, Mr. Speaker, that the act is modified. They make a modification to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act to make it explicit or to clarify – that's a favourite word of this government to do things that they want to do and want to claim were already there even though they're making the change. They like to talk about how they are clarifying legislation. This was quite clear before, actually. This was something that we put in place under our government, but of course then this government clarified legislation to say that they had the right to tear up the contract with doctors whenever they wished. They are, at least, in this act, apparently, modifying to make it explicit or clarify that only the AMA, the Alberta Medical Association, can negotiate on behalf of doctors for compensation.

Again, Mr. Speaker, what we have here is the government trying to cover up for things it has previously done and its decision in 2020 to use the powers they awarded themselves in Bill 21 to tear up the contract with Alberta doctors whenever they wish, simply at the whim of the minister, a one-sided agreement. Of that legislation, of course, the minister at the time said that he was clarifying a power that he believed he already had.

Now in this act we see them backtracking once they realized the damage they have done, as indeed we see that they have continued to drive doctors out of our province, that we have fewer doctors in many areas now than we did when this government came into power, that we have far more Albertans without a family doctor than when this government came into power, that we have severe problems in many areas of the province having doctors like anaesthesiologists and others that are badly needed to dig us out the hole that this government has put us in coming out of this pandemic, with the tens of thousands of cancelled surgeries.

We have rolling closures of ERs across the province of Alberta because we do not have enough physicians to cover, hospitals that are struggling right now at 130 per cent capacity and do not have enough coverage to look after patients overnight, so I suppose I at

least support this part of the bill as the government again attempts to backfill a small amount of the damage they've done.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. It's actually a bit of a tough act to follow my colleagues the Member for Calgary-Mountain View and the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. They've raised so many of the issues and concerns that I, too, share with respect to what's in this bill but, most importantly, what's not in this bill and what it does not address. They've gone through in great detail, outlining precisely the impact, for example, of bracket creep, which is, I know, an obscure term. Frankly, until I was elected as an MLA, I wasn't familiar with what that term meant, but I became familiar with it quite quickly in 2019, when the Premier did deindex personal income tax.

At the time I was quite – you know, I spoke out, actually, and spoke to media a little bit about it because it was quite shocking to me when I heard, of course, that the Premier had spoken out against this very kind of change, which basically means that as inflation affects your personal income, actually your tax bracket, you get bumped into the next tax bracket. That's pretty much what it means. The personal exemption continues to be small, and it doesn't apply to you, and you get bumped out of that personal exemption phase in your income sooner because, basically, personal income tax is frozen. The Premier spoke out against that many times. In fact, he's got a long and lengthy history on record in the Houses of Parliament speaking out against it and calling it an insidious and pernicious tax creep and referring to other Members of Parliament at that time as “bracket creeps.”

I think at this point, though, three years into this government, it's not so much the hypocrisy that shocks me anymore about the Premier and the UCP government in terms of the actions they take but, I think, an overall concern and question that continues to come up, which is: what are the principles of this government anymore? What do they really stand for? They seem to very quickly shed the things that they claim are most important to their core beliefs at the drop of a hat, and they do it for insidious reasons. They were easily – like, look how quickly the Premier was able to give up something he had railed against for years, this idea of bracket creep, and how quietly and quickly he did it willingly when he became Premier of this province. It wasn't simply that he failed to index personal income tax; he actually ended that practice. It was something that was in place, and he actively took a measure to end that practice, to go against something that he claimed as part of his principles for so long.

That really, I think, speaks volumes about this Premier but also this government, because I have yet to hear any member of the government caucus stand up and explain that complete abandonment of their principles. What they're doing, of course, is raising revenue, raising taxes on Albertans but not having the courage of their convictions to say that's what they're doing, and that's perhaps because nobody knows anymore what their convictions are. I think my colleagues outlined exactly what that means in terms of what it's going to cost Albertans, what it continues to cost Albertans, so I want to speak a little bit about some of the things that my colleagues also spoke to, which were about the deindexing of many benefits that Albertans receive, particularly low-income Albertans.

10:10

I want to talk a little bit about the Alberta child and family benefit. Now, in 2019 this government made a decision to combine two previous benefits, of which one was the Alberta child benefit, which, you know, we brought in as the Alberta NDP, which was critical, as my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View spoke to, in actually reducing child poverty in this province. We know that benefit programs like that are critical. They are perhaps the most critical tool in alleviating child poverty. The UCP government in 2019 combined that with the Alberta family employment tax credit and put it all together into the Alberta child and family benefit. Now, in 2019, when that happened, of course, what the government didn't address was, first of all, that \$50 million less was actually being provided in benefits to vulnerable families. And let's be clear. These benefits go to lower income families primarily, and they are meant to help them with the costs of raising a child and raising a family.

So not only did they mention that they are actually investing fewer dollars, \$50 million less at that time, into this benefit, but they also failed to speak to the reality of the changes they made, which were that, yes, they did provide slightly higher benefits to the lowest income families. We're talking about \$10,000 in annual income. Those are the families who are getting a slightly higher benefit. They dramatically not only reduced the eligibility, made many low-income families ineligible for this benefit, but it actually meant that they received a lot less even if they were still receiving the benefit. For example, Mr. Speaker – and I think it's important to get a sense of what we're talking about here – we're talking about how families earning \$25,000 or more a year saw a drop in their benefit. Twenty-five thousand dollars a year: that is very low income, yet they're actually receiving less in benefits under this government.

The same is true for a family of two parents and two children living at the poverty line, which is under \$40,000 per year in this province, who now receives – well, actually, sorry. In 2019 they received \$500 less per year than they were before. So they actually cut a number of families off it. Now we find out, of course, that they're also not indexing this. And that is becoming more and more relevant at a time when we're seeing the cost of living and inflation – rents are going up because utilities are going up. Everything is going up for these low-income families, and they're actually not going as far with less money, with less purchasing power.

Just earlier this week, Mr. Speaker, we asked the officials from the Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance what analysis they did to actually assess in this past fiscal year what the impact would be on those receiving the Alberta child and family benefit, on those receiving AISH, on those receiving the seniors' benefit. What would be the impact on their purchasing power of failing to index their benefits to the rise in inflation? We asked this question multiple times because we got very interesting answers, and the response that became very clear from Treasury Board and Finance was that they did not assess that because that was not their goal. Their objective last year was to bring down those benefits to be in line with other provinces.

That was their policy objective, actually to lower those benefits and the purchasing power that goes along with them. That was actually their stated outcome: reduce those benefits to make it more in line with whoever the UCP government is comparing themselves against to serve their purposes on this day. When asked about what the impact would be on families, they could not give an answer. I think that's exactly what we're seeing with this

government. They crow about a balanced budget, with a surplus, actually, and do not seem to understand at all that that budget is doing nothing for families. They're not seeing that benefit. They're very proud of it. Conservatives will all vote for a surplus budget – right? – a balanced budget. They're super proud of it. But they don't answer for the fact that their constituents are struggling with higher costs than ever, and there is nothing in this budget to actually make their lives more affordable. They're not seeing what this government is crowing about. They're not feeling it.

I know that that's true for all of the constituents of the UCP caucus members as well. I was door-knocking, as I usually do, in my riding this past week, and it was the number one issue that came up at the doors. I am certain it is coming up at the doors. If they are door-knocking – I don't know if they're spending most of their time actually on a leadership review – they should be listening to their constituents, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. That was great timing. As you know, it is 10:15, and I do hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. However, pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) we must now proceed to Committee of the Whole to vote on the appropriation bills.

Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, I will now call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) I must now put the following question: does the committee approve the following bills, Bill 7, Appropriation Act, 2022, and Bill 8, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:16 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer | Long | Rehn |
| Allard | Luan | Rowswell |
| Amery | Madu | Sawhney |
| Copping | Neudorf | Schow |
| Ellis | Nicolaides | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Issik | Nixon, Jason | Singh |
| Jones | Nixon, Jeremy | Toews |
| Kenney | Orr | Walker |
| LaGrange | Panda | Williams |

10:20

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------|---------|----------|
| Ceci | Irwin | Pancholi |
| Deol | Nielsen | Shepherd |
| Ganley | | |

Totals: For – 27 Against – 7

[Motion carried]

The Deputy Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) the committee shall now immediately rise and report.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. I believe I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 7 and Bill 8.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur in the report?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for concurrence carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:22 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer | Long | Rowswell |
| Allard | Luan | Sawhney |
| Amery | Madu | Schow |
| Copping | Neudorf | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Ellis | Nicolaides | Singh |
| Issik | Nixon, Jason | Toews |
| Jones | Nixon, Jeremy | Walker |
| Kenney | Orr | Williams |
| LaGrange | Panda | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------|---------|----------|
| Ceci | Irwin | Pancholi |
| Deol | Nielsen | Shepherd |
| Ganley | | |

Totals: For – 26 Against – 7

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 4

Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate: Mr. Rutherford]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Are there any members wishing to join debate on Bill 4?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question, noting that the close of debate has been waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to everybody for their hard work tonight and all that progress. Therefore, I will move that the Assembly adjourn till tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:27 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, March 24, 2022

Day 15

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
 Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
 Government Whip
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
 Premier
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)

Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
 Government House Leader
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
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Orr, Hon. Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
 Deputy Government Whip
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
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| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
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| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
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| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

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| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
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Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
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Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
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Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

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Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gotfried
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Renaud
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Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Pancholi
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Schmidt
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Turton
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Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

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Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 24, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of *God Save the Queen* by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. I would invite you to join in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble Queen,
God save the Queen!
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the Queen!

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, this morning I had the privilege to meet with a very special guest who's now joining us in the Speaker's gallery. Please welcome the ambassador of the Kingdom of Denmark, Her Excellency Hanne Fugl Eskjaer. [Standing ovation] Her Excellency is joined by Minister-Counsellor Louise de Brass; honorary consul general of Denmark, Rob Seidel; and his assistant Alexandra Hryciw. Thank you so much for joining us.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Members, joining us in the galleries today we have a number of guests. A guest of the Member for Calgary-Peigan, Jackie Flegel. Also joining us in the gallery there are a number of United Conservative Party constituency association presidents. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Premier's Leadership

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, the UCP is the most unethical, undemocratic, untrustworthy government Alberta has ever seen, and the legacy starts at the top. Alberta has a Premier who claims to support the rule of law, but his actions show that he does not consider that the rule of law applies to himself. The Premier tried to brush off allegations that his campaign ran a false, sham campaign designed solely to attack his opponents in the leadership race – a sham campaign designed to attack the Premier's opponents, Albertans know exactly – funded by an illegal, secret \$60,000 corporate donation. Despite his protests and claims that these allegations were merely gossip, it's now a hundred per cent clear that they were true. His staff wrote speeches, designed graphics, planned when the campaign would end, and even wrote the

concession speech for a campaign that was a sham from top to bottom, and it reached all the way to the top. The Premier even provided the whisky for the planning meeting.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines were issued by the Election Commissioner, who then was subsequently fired by this government, with every member of the UCP applauding this action. The Premier dismissed allegations that voter fraud occurred in the leadership that elected him, but only yesterday the RCMP confirmed that an open, active investigation into voter irregularities is still ongoing.

And just like the Election Commissioner, the Premier now tries to find reasons to fire the RCMP because, apparently, in UCP land the only firing offence is for trying to hold Premier to account, this Premier who changes the rules to suit him, doesn't follow the rules he tells others to follow, shuts down debate when he doesn't like the topic, and then hides when things get tough and much, much more. There is nothing this Premier will not do to stay in power. But Albertans see him and his actions for what they are, and in 2023 he will face the legacy of his legacy of corruption.

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

Traffic Offence Administration

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that Alberta is getting back to normal after the COVID-19 pandemic – and on average we have approximately 2 million traffic safety ticket challenges each year that are filed within the court system. This amounts to approximately 400,000 people entering Alberta's courthouses each year to deal with traffic offences. Now they can begin doing that.

This large volume of ticket challenges prompted Alberta's government to develop an administrative system for handling the resolution of traffic offences. Phase 1 implemented an adjudication process for impaired driving offences and became operational in the fall of 2020. Phase 1 has proven to be highly successful and has reduced court pressures over the past year; 89 per cent of all impaired driving matters have been diverted from the courts to SafeRoads Alberta, and enforcement has increased by over 46 per cent. Mr. Speaker, over 1,700 matters of impaired driving were resolved in just 30 days. Phase 1, or administrative judgment of impaired driving charges, will remain in place.

Mr. Speaker, phase 2 of the justice transformation initiative was designed to address violations of the Traffic Safety Act other than impaired driving. In late January we paused the implementation of phase 2 so that we could take a closer look at the program and engage with Albertans all across the province. After careful consideration and consultation with Albertans this government has decided not to proceed with phase 2. Albertans will continue to enjoy their right to due process, procedural fairness, and the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, as they've always known it to be.

We will continue to consult with Albertans to find new and innovative ways to decrease backlogs within the Alberta justice system. By doing so, we can save tax dollars and time when interacting with the justice system. Mr. Speaker, when Albertans speak, this government listens.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River is next.

Member for Edmonton-South

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The poor Member for Edmonton-South has been abandoned by his party and taken a

hit for the NDP caucus. After using backdoor hacking techniques to seek out the vaccine status of a government MLA and expose the status of a private Alberta citizen, he's tried to convince the province that he did it with justification. But let me tell you that there is no justification. There is no heroism in using shady tactics for political gain. In fact, Albertans have said the opposite. Unfortunately, the remainder of his political career will be spent at home, alone as an independent, left out to dry by his own leader. The members opposite have watched one of their own members contort himself in an attempt to explain how hacking private health care information was not only legal but an obligation. He has tried to save what's left of his time in Alberta politics, and his fellow NDP members are happy to show him the door so long as none of them go with him.

The member's vaccine obsession now makes sense, and Albertans have woken up. They see right through his explanation after he spent his Tuesday morning frantically trying to defend his position in exposing the same security flaws that he used to obtain vaccine records of private individuals. Mr. Speaker, those that elected him to this position scratch their heads, wondering: is this what they asked out of their elected representative? Is this the kind of representation they want for their family? Is this how they expect to see the cost of living go down in the province of Alberta? Not at all. They understand.

And his claims that it was ethical hacking fit about as well as the glove on O.J. Simpson's hand. Impersonating individuals and hacking to obtain personal health data is illegal. Full stop. The Member for Edmonton-South released a paper entitled *How I Did It – not If I Did It, not How I Would Have Done It* – where he admits to hacking and impersonating the individuals to obtain private personal health data. Sadly, in this province, Mr. Speaker, a lot of people seem to ignore this fact because they like his politics and the colour of his jersey. That is sad.

We need to understand why the Leader of the Opposition is doing the same. We have to know what she knew and when she knew it.

1:40

Budget 2022 Vote

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to be an MLA. We have responsibilities and privileges as members that only 87 people in this province get to have. We have a duty to support our constituents and bring their concerns to this House. We have the ability to vote on issues that matter to them in this Legislature, the ability to vote in ways they understand and can support.

A perfect example: today there will be a vote on the budget, a budget that doesn't do much to help actual Albertans, a budget that does not support families, which does not secure our economic future, which makes life harder for our most vulnerable and makes life less affordable every single day. You know, a budget is a very interesting thing when it comes to the actual meaning of the vote because every single budget is actually a confidence vote in this House. It is asking each and every one of us: do we support this Premier? Do we feel he deserves to lead this province? I know there are a lot of us in here that don't, and they aren't just on this side of the House.

Don't ever forget that we are all here to represent the voices of all of our constituents. Do your constituents support this Premier? Do the people you talk to back home – your neighbours, your friends, volunteers, and community organizers – feel that this Premier should be allowed to lead this province? By standing and putting your name forward in favour of this vote, you are telling all of those people that you support the leadership as it currently stands.

I'm asking each and every single UCP MLA to think long and hard about why they were elected, about who elected them, and I'm

asking them to vote with their conscience. If you support this confidence vote today, you are supporting the continued leadership of this Premier, so in the future you might as well not even vote in any type of review. Your supporters will know where you stand and how you will vote because you will have just showed them today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Member for Edmonton South

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP vax hack scandal has gone from bad to worse. On Tuesday we learned that the disgraced Member for Edmonton-South hacked Alberta's vaccine records system using the identity of a member of this Chamber. That's bad, but what's worse is that he illegally obtained access to the personal health records of at least one private citizen in the process.

We all need to know more about what happened here, like why did he use the birthdate of a member of the government to hack the vaccine system instead of the birthdate of someone in his family or even his own caucus? Has he hacked sensitive government information before? If he thought it were necessary, would he do it again? Why did he think it was his job as a member of the Legislature to hack the private health records of Albertans?

But the biggest question here centres around the NDP leader and her role in this vaccine hacking scandal. Here's something we learned yesterday. In December, when the Edmonton-South MLA's private residence was raided by the RCMP, the NDP leader claimed to have no prior knowledge about this hacking, but this past week our government released an e-mail showing that her senior staff knew about the vax hack back in September. When asked, the NDP leader admitted that she knew the MLA had, quote, found a flaw in September.

This is shocking, Mr. Speaker. For months we listened to the NDP obsessively question government members about their vaccine status. This was all after the Member for Edmonton-South hacked the vaccine record system. Let me be clear. Any NDP member who used the private health records of Albertans to their political advantage in this Chamber must do the right thing and resign. This includes the NDP leader. This scandal has unearthed a shocking disregard for ethics in the opposition benches, and we need to get to the bottom of this scandal. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Budget 2022 and Personal Debt

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, today the Legislature will vote on the UCP government's failed budget, which lacks a clear vision for the future of Alberta. Yesterday I spoke in this Chamber about the most recent MNP report on consumer debt in Alberta. The report was published before this budget, yet the government did nothing to address the real concerns that Albertans are facing. According to the report 50 per cent of Albertans are concerned about their current level of debt, with many only \$200 away from having to use their credit to pay their bills. That was in January.

Since January we have seen this no-help budget introduced, a budget that does nothing to support Albertans struggling with their personal finances. In fact, what this budget does is that it makes it harder for Albertans to pay their bills and put money into their savings – increases in property taxes, increases in insurance, increases in school fees, increases in all fees that make life more expensive – at a time when everything is becoming more expensive. The government could have done more to support the people of this

province. They will talk about their 13-cent rebate on gas, but I clearly heard yesterday that the government . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting Members' Statements

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays knows very well and truly that interrupting a member's statement is wildly unparliamentary, and I would expect better from him.

From the top.

Budget 2022 and Personal Debt (continued)

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, today the Legislature will vote on the UCP government's failed budget, which lacks a clear vision for the future of Alberta. Yesterday I spoke in this Chamber about the most recent MNP report on consumer debt in Alberta. The report was published before this budget, yet the government did nothing to address the real concerns that Albertans are facing. According to the report 50 per cent of Albertans are concerned about their current level of debt, with many living only \$200 dollars away from having to use credit to pay their bills. That was in January.

Since January we've seen this no-help budget introduced, a budget that does nothing to support Albertans struggling with their personal finances. In fact, what this budget does is make it harder for Albertans to pay their bills and put money into their savings – increases in property taxes, increases in insurance, increases in school fees and all other fees to make life more expensive – at a time when everything is more expensive.

The government could have done more to support the people of this province. They'll talk about their 13-cent rebate on gas, but I clearly heard yesterday that this government does not have a guarantee that it's even true. It was just a handshake with gas companies; it's a just-trust-us deal. Well, Albertans don't trust this government, Mr. Speaker, and this is just another false promise to an already financially stressed Alberta. The government says that this budget will create jobs, yet all we've seen are part-time jobs, not long-term, not full-time, not paying-the-bills jobs.

Mr. Speaker, I had hopes, when I saw that oil was going to balance this budget, that the government would set a vision for the Alberta economy and our future, a vision that would help address the economic stressors that many Albertans are facing. I was disappointed. This government did not invest in the people of Alberta. They balanced the budget on high oil, cutting \$2.8 billion in expenses, and increased the cost to Albertans. Even fiscal conservatives agree that a balanced budget isn't enough if the citizens of the province don't have the buying power to get the economy going. It's time this government listens to the people of Alberta.

Federal Liberal-NDP Agreement

Mrs. Allard: Well, there's no sugar-coating it, Mr. Speaker. The NDP-Trudeau alliance that will keep Justin Trudeau in power until 2025 is bad for our economy and bad for our oil and gas sector. Justin Trudeau's hostility towards our energy industry is well known. He's worked to kill pipelines, ban tankers, and impose lofty carbon taxes. Despite these provocations, however, our industry has managed to continue working and providing ethical energy to the free world. But this new unholy alliance between Justin Trudeau and the radical NDP poses a truly existential threat to our largest

industry and the hundreds of thousands of men and women who work in it.

Canadians did not vote for the NDP to have any decision-making powers in their federal government, and had they known, they may have voted entirely differently. The NDP is, after all, the party that passed the Leap Manifesto, a radical doctrine that opposes any new pipelines and includes a demand to, and I quote, leave the oil in the ground. Our industry needs certainty, Mr. Speaker, but the NDP-Trudeau coalition agreement only contains vague promises to, and I quote again, proceed with policies and programs meant to target climate change. Unquote.

Undoubtedly, the NDP has found one of their own in Liberal environment minister Steven Guilbeault, who was an activist for Greenpeace before he was appointed by Justin Trudeau. Guilbeault was once arrested for scaling the CN Tower in Toronto and unfurling a banner calling Canadians – wait for it – climate killers. Undoubtedly, the NDP will work with Guilbeault to shut down pipelines, keep Canadian oil in the ground, and pursue other anti-Alberta policies meant to harm our industry, our working families, and our country, Mr. Speaker.

Now more than ever Alberta needs a strong Conservative government to stand up for our energy and its workers. Our government supports the oil and gas industry, and we are more committed than ever to protecting it from this unholy alliance between the radical NDP and Justin Trudeau, who are bent on killing it. Why, Mr. Speaker? Because on this side of the House we stand up for Alberta.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has question 1.

Budget 2022

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, today the House will vote on this Premier's no-help budget, but it hasn't happened yet, so there's still some time. He could stop his billion-dollar tax on inflation, taking more and more money out of Albertans' pockets. He could stop his hike on tuition and school fees. He could put a real cap in on electricity rates and offer a real rebate for natural gas. He could do more than 50 bucks on a \$700 electricity bill. He could actually make a difference. Why doesn't the Premier stop raising costs and put some real relief in this budget for Albertans today?

1:50

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is real relief in this budget. We call it a job for every Albertan who needs an opportunity. We call it fiscal responsibility so we're not downloading irresponsible decisions on the next generation. There is lots in this budget for Albertans, not only for this generation but for the next as well.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, unlike this Premier, Albertans don't cheat or change the rules to get ahead. They work hard, and when times are tough, they expect their government to be there to help them.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Hoffman: Families can't make ends meet, people are waiting for their surgeries, parents are fighting this horrible curriculum, yet the Premier is shutting down shop to go campaign for his own job.

To the Premier: you actually have a job to do right now; why won't you do it? Why won't you do anything to make life better for Albertans?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:51.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we're right back to where we were three years ago, with the NDP focused on the politics of fear and smear. Dare I say that it might be just because their polling numbers keep dropping like a rock? This side of the House is not going to focus on the politics of fear and smear and the high school politics like you see coming from the NDP. We're laser focused on the economy, getting Alberta back to work. Great news: it's working. You know what the NDP is trying to hide? Just shortly, we're about to vote on the first balanced budget in 14 years inside this Chamber.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's Divided Conservative Party is crumbling all around him. Today at least two MLAs have called for his resignation. At least two. It could be more. I can barely keep track. Let me tell members on that side of the House that they can make a change today. They can vote nonconfidence on this horrible budget and eject the Premier. To the government: will any of them over there show the courage of their Facebook convictions and actually stand up to the current Premier? Now is your chance.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I can guarantee you that any true Conservative MLA in about an hour and a bit is going to stand up and vote for a balanced budget. This side of the House is proud of returning all of the jobs that have been lost under the NDP, getting our economy back on track, getting pipelines built, and moving this province forward. The NDP, though, focuses on the politics of fear and smear. That's exactly what they do every time that they get in trouble in the polls. But don't worry. Through you to Albertans, Mr. Speaker, we're going to make sure they can never get back into power.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora and the second set of questions.

Premier's Leadership

Ms Hoffman: The government is falling apart, Mr. Speaker. No one trusts this Premier or anyone on that front bench at this point. Today the MLA for Red Deer-South wrote to the Premier saying, "Confidence is lost, and for the good of the party, for the province, the Premier should be gracious [and] resign." Can the Premier inform this House how he can still expect Albertans to trust him when it's clear that his own members, his closest allies, are telling him that they've lost confidence in him?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, there is a confidence motion that will be before this House today, and I suspect – I don't know for sure what will take place – you're going to see that motion pass and the government stand with our Premier, who's bringing forward balanced budgets, returning jobs inside this province, and taking Alberta on track to lead the country in economic recovery and, most importantly, fixing all of the damage that the NDP did to this province. Again, to Albertans: we promise we're never going to let these guys get back into power.

Ms Hoffman: The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul is disgusted with the corruption and the disrespect. The Member for Airdrie-East is shocked that the UCP would be in the middle of an RCMP investigation and change the voting system. I could go on, Mr. Speaker. There is a nonconfidence vote in this Legislature today. I

know that there are members over there who want to vote against this Premier. Will the Government House Leader pledge here and now to let all of his MLAs actually vote with their conscience, or is this another example of a rigged vote by the UCP?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, that member, who is a member of a party who has covered up sexual harassment allegations about their own caucus, who had their ethics critic hacking members of this place's personal health care information, that they then covered up for months and hid from Albertans, and who, when they were in power, did not give the documents about the murder of a toddler to homicide detectives, has no business lecturing anybody in this Chamber, and that member should resign if that's how it's going to go.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:55.

Ms Hoffman: So anyone who was hoping for a free vote, your House leader just said no.

The Member for Airdrie-Cochrane also said today that trust in the Premier has been shattered and that he wants a new leader. The UCP presidents just stood outside of this Legislature and said that they don't trust this Premier to hold a free and fair vote. That's right, Mr. Speaker. Party members, MLAs, volunteers don't trust this Premier to play by the rules. If the Premier will rig a vote among his own members to stay in power, imagine what he'll do to the rest of us.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again you're seeing it happen at the beginning of this Legislature. The NDP, every time that they get themselves into political trouble, go back to the politics of personal fear and smear, the politics of egos, those types of situations. It's because their poll numbers are an absolute disaster. Here is where we are at, though. This government and the members of this government will continue to be focused each and every day on Albertans, and we promise we won't act like the Official Opposition and some members of this Chamber who are focused on their own ego. Instead, we're going to focus on continuing to make sure Alberta is a great success.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

2017 UCP Leadership Contest and 2022 Review

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two years ago this government fired the Election Commissioner investigating the kamikaze scandal, but despite their best efforts the investigation into UCP corruption continues. That commissioner, that this government fired in a brazenly unethical act, laid over \$200,000 in fines with that scandal. Does the Premier regret his attack on the rule of law by firing the commissioner investigating the UCP? Will he reinstate this position now, ahead of the UCP leadership review vote, which seems to be filled by the same scandals?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, exactly what I said was going to take place: you're going to continue to see it from the Official Opposition as they become more and more desperate. That is completely and utterly ridiculous what that member just asked inside this Chamber, but through you to him, let's get down to the meat and potatoes of this week. When did he know that the Member for Edmonton-South was hacking members of this Legislature's private information? Did he participate in the cover-up of the NDP over the last several months to hide that from Albertans? Is he one

of the ones that was found to have done sexual harassment in his caucus, that his leader has confirmed they've been covering up?

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: And, Mr. Speaker, that member hid Serenity's documents from the RCMP. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. A point of order is noted at 1:58.

Mr. Sabir: Yesterday the RCMP confirmed that there is still an active investigation into voter fraud in the UCP leadership race, an investigation that has one-third of the UCP cabinet members and former top advisers questioned by the RCMP. This Premier's leadership race is being investigated by the RCMP for voter fraud, and he forced through a bill that makes it possible for people to buy memberships for people without their knowledge and consent. Can the Minister of Justice assure Albertans their identities will not be stolen to make votes for the Premier's leadership review?

Mr. Jason Nixon: There's the NDP putting forward false accusations that come from their rag the Broadbent Institute, Mr. Speaker. Here's the real question. What we do know – you want to talk about RCMP investigations? Get this. The NDP ethics critic has confirmed himself, in the document titled How I Did It, that he is under RCMP investigation, and in fact search warrants have been served on his home. To the hon. member, through you to that hon. member, have search warrants been served on his home, and is he part of the hacking of individual medical records?

Mr. Sabir: Transcripts from the office of the Chief Electoral Officer indicate that the Premier was present at a meeting where the kamikaze scandal, financed by a single \$60,000 donation, was planned. The commissioner uncovered a scheme to funnel corporate money into a fake campaign to attack this Premier's opponents. This type of behaviour should not be tolerated in Alberta politics, but this government defends it on a daily basis. Since they are incapable of doing the right thing, will they join me in calling on Elections Alberta to supervise this Premier's leadership review?

2:00

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, continuing to make up fake allegations inside this Chamber is ridiculous.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: I challenge that member to go make those allegations outside this Chamber so that legal action could be taken against them. But here's the real question again, Mr. Speaker. When did the NDP leader know that the Member for Edmonton-South, her ethics critic, was hacking the government, and why did she allow her staff to cover that up? And is that why the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is now running around running for leader . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: And, Mr. Speaker, are the concerns from the Official Opposition leader's cover-up of that hacking scandal why the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is now running for leader across Calgary?

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

Electric Utility Rebate and Provincial Fuel Tax Suspension

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe I'm actually going to say this. Perhaps for the first time ever in this House, yesterday I

actually agreed with the UCP Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland when he admitted that this government's \$50 electricity rebate is "paltry." It's a good word, actually. I could use other words – it's meagre, ridiculous, maybe disingenuous, a bit insulting – but let's stick with this. Why did the associate minister of electricity give Albertans such a bogus electricity rebate when even his own caucus members are calling it paltry?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After four years of NDP government and a series of poor policy choices Albertans are seeing higher electricity prices, but as we pursue longer term solutions to the high price of electricity, we're coming out with short-term relief, things like the \$150 . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. You know what the government did? They provided the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning some courtesy to allow her to ask the question. I think the opposition is capable of the same; some people may not.

The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we pursue longer term solutions to the higher prices that we see in electricity, we are offering short-term solutions such as the \$150 rebate that every ratepayer will see on their electricity bill. In addition to that, we're cancelling 13 cents a litre on the gas tax.

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's \$50 per household when my constituents' bills in Edmonton-Manning have gone up \$500 in a single month. The natural gas rebate from this government is completely disingenuous. Honestly, it's never going to happen. The budget featuring this fake rebate is being voted on today. Will the minister at least rise and concede that his natural gas rebate isn't real and that it's never going to happen? If he won't, I have to ask: has he even read the budget?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. I can tell you that the only support they provided Albertans was an electricity cap which did not apply to 60 per cent of Albertans. Not only did it not apply to 60 per cent of Albertans; it also only related to a small portion of people's electricity bill. Over two years their program was worth \$108 million. Over three months our program is worth over \$280 million, far more generous than anything they ever did.

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, the UCP Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland also admitted yesterday that the government's removal of the tax on gas at the pumps may not actually lead to lower prices. He admitted that there is nothing, not a thing, being done to prevent companies from simply raising prices and collecting the profits for themselves. Will the minister admit that his so-called gas tax relief program is also fake? It's so fake that even his own colleagues know it. Why doesn't the minister?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we're very proud to actually reduce and in this case eliminate the fuel tax in Alberta effective April 1. This is a real elimination annualized. It will provide \$1.3 billion in tax savings to Alberta households, Alberta businesses, and Alberta seniors. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Calgary-South East is the only one with the call.

Corporate Taxation and Investment Attraction

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, the United Conservative government recently tabled a balanced budget, only the second balanced budget in over a decade. Balancing the budget was partly the result of higher corporate tax revenues. Despite the extreme challenges brought on by the pandemic, Alberta continued to see investment flood into the province, and Albertans are now enjoying the jobs and revenues that came with it. To the Minister of Finance: can you tell the House how reducing the corporate income tax rate has impacted revenues for the province?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. A competitive tax rate is a very important ingredient in an attractive business environment, and we have one of the most attractive business environments in North America. That's resulting in the attraction of billions and billions of dollars of investment into this province, leading to economic growth and expanded fiscal capacity. This is reflected in our corporate income tax revenue line in this budget. We will collect \$400 million more in corporate income tax revenues at 8 per cent than the NDP did at 12.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the members opposite said that they would increase the tax on job creators by 50 per cent, back up to 12 per cent. Given that when the NDP were in government, they increased the tax on job creators to 12 per cent, leading to a decrease in revenues, and given that the current government's budget estimates show that corporate tax revenue is estimated to grow by 31 per cent in 2022 under an 8 per cent corporate tax rate, to the same minister: what would a significant tax increase do to the investment climate here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't imagine a more disastrous policy. At a time when we're attracting investment by the billions, at a time when the capital markets, the business communities see Alberta as a predictable, certain, competitive tax jurisdiction, to jack up the tax rate by 50 per cent would drive investment out. Jobs gained over the last year would be lost, and I project that our actual corporate revenue lines would decrease.

Mr. Jones: Given that the NDP decimated the investment climate in this province and given that the government has, thankfully, implemented measures such as lowering the tax on job creators down to 8 per cent and given that the NDP continue to announce programs that cost millions of dollars with no real plan to pay for those measures, to the same minister: can you explain what responsible fiscal management means for Albertans?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We inherited a government that was spending \$10 billion more per capita than similar provinces, and the trajectory was going up by 4 per cent per year. Over the last three years we've flattened that curve and we've effectively brought this government from what would have been a \$6 billion deficit to a \$500 million surplus. What that means is a certain fiscal environment that will, again, attract more investment, create jobs and opportunities for Albertans, and ultimately result in expanded fiscal capacity and expanded revenues for the government of Alberta.

Anti-Racism Act

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, if we ask Indigenous or racialized Albertans, they will tell us that systemic racism is real, embedded, felt, and experienced throughout the very systems that we all depend on, from health care to education to justice to social supports to the job market. Unchecked biases in these systems have real impacts on Indigenous and racialized Albertans, and in order to remedy this, we need to collect the data to track its impacts. I'm tabling the bill today to support that. Now, the minister of labour has spoken in this House that he believes systemic racism is real, in his own experiences. Will he support this bill to have fair and open debate on the floor of this Legislature?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for raising a real issue that we need to address here in Alberta in our health care system. Our government is committed to providing the necessary care and equitable health care access to Indigenous people living on- and off-reserve. Racism has no place in our health care system, and all patients must receive the care they need with respect and compassion. Alberta Health is working closely with First Nations and Métis partners to address racism. I'm working right now – and I actually just had a conversation earlier today – with my colleague the Minister of Indigenous Relations to be able to put forward a plan to work with Indigenous partners to be able to address racism.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that the government released a report from the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council about a year ago and given that their recommendations called for a government-wide approach to addressing racism and for that to include the collection of race-based data to identify the rate and impacts of systemic racism throughout public services and given that the legislation that I will introduce today would enact that recommendation, will the Minister of Justice or the minister of labour support Bill 204 to receive fair debate in this Assembly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of labour.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, for four years, between 2015 and 2019, the NDP lifted no finger in addressing issues of racism and discrimination in all of this province. All of a sudden this has become an issue for them. We are the party and government that banned carding for the first time in the history of our province. We are the party that amended the Police Act through Bill 38 to include the first Indigenous policing in our Police Act. We walk the talk.

2:10

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, given that this is not a partisan bill – this is something that comes from our caucus undertaking a series of conversations with Indigenous and racialized Albertans and community leaders on solutions to combat racism in Alberta – and given that during those conversations about health, education, public safety, community support, economic and democratic participation we repeatedly heard the importance of collecting race-based data and given that many of those Albertans are watching today, will the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism state his support for this bill having the opportunity for fair debate in this Assembly?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the aisle we are not interested in party and foolish politics. We are interested in actually solving the problem. Racism and discrimination are real, but the last thing we want to do is to allow the NDP to play politics with this serious matter. We have done so much to deal with racism and discrimination. We are the political party, once again – despite the protests between 2016 and 2018 on the steps of this Legislature, the NDP couldn't do anything about it. We took action, and we have so much work to do on that particular front.

Racism Prevention and Premier's Leadership

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, at one of his rallies to save his leadership, this Premier declared that as long as he is Premier, voices of racism, hatred, and intolerance will find no home in the UCP. I applaud this. Racism has no business in our government, Legislature, or society, and I welcome the Premier's words agreeing on this. So will the Premier embrace this new spirit and finally apologize for allowing Chris Champion to try and put racist views in the draft social studies curriculum?

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, the funny thing is, again, that for four years the NDP did nothing with respect to the curriculum, to deal with racism and discrimination, or to include minority people in the curriculum. We have a draft curriculum that I am proud to have nominated two eminently qualified Black professors to work on, the social studies curriculum. That work is being done. I want us to make progress. I don't want us to embark on petty politics. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I ask that particular member: where was their leader between 2015 and 2019?

Mr. Deol: Given that this Premier employed and defended a speech writer who wrote horrifically racist statements about Indigenous and racialized people, including calling the tragic history of residential schools a "bogus genocide story," a statement condemned by Indigenous community leaders and survivors of residential schools, but given that the Premier now says that racist views are not being tolerated in the UCP, will he apologize for the extremely energetic defence he gave for his racist speech writer?

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, all that the members opposite need to do is to look at the membership of the folks on this side of the aisle. On this side of the aisle we speak more than 10 languages right here, we cut across all of our provinces, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to do the heavy lifting that is required to build a province in which all of us can be respected and live our full potential. No petty politics, no going to our communities for dances and for shows.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I'm glad to hear this government is ready to tackle racism in the UCP and given that communities, individuals, and victims of racism have been waiting for this Premier to commit to taking real action, that has not happened for the three years he has been in office – while the party has been consulting and proposing deals, our party has been consulting and proposing real solutions – can the Premier commit that he will stand up against racism in his party, in his caucus, and in his office even once his job is no longer on the line and he needs votes of racialized Albertans?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, in short order, I am proud of the achievement that we have made on this particular issue. I as Minister of Justice established a hate crime co-ordination unit within the Justice

department. As Justice minister I appointed a community liaison on hate crime. As Justice minister we established the Alberta security infrastructure grant to help vulnerable communities. As Justice minister we banned carding, we reformed street checks. There is so much more to be done, and we will get the job done. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Federal-provincial Relations

Mr. Barnes: It has now been nearly two years since the Fair Deal Panel. As a proud member of this panel I provided the government with additional measures it should undertake to negotiate an equitable deal, yet there has been no meaningful action. The federal carbon tax has increased, Bill C-69 has not been fixed, Bill C-48 remains in place, the fiscal stabilization program is still capped, and the equalization program continues to transfer enormous wealth out of our province. My question to the Premier: after two years of inaction, are you ever going to get serious about fighting for a fair deal for Albertans?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member certainly identifies an issue, and that is the fact that Alberta makes a disproportionate contribution fiscally to the rest of the nation. We are taking action. We have in fact received the support of every province and territory on correcting the fiscal stabilization program. We made that a number one priority. Our position was that caps need to be taken off. Unfortunately, this federal government did not respond to every Premier and every provincial and territorial leader, but they did raise the caps from \$60 to \$170. That meant \$500 million a year for Albertans.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, this week the Prime Minister announced a deal with the NDP. Given that part of the deal ensures Quebec never loses any seats in the House of Commons regardless of population changes, given that, in short, when it comes to fighting for a fair deal within Confederation, the Prime Minister just called Alberta's bluff, given that Quebec has 78 MPs compared to Alberta and B.C.'s combined 76 and given that Alberta and B.C. have a million more citizens than Quebec, my question again to the Premier: why is your fight for basic fairness limited to empty platitudes and strongly worded letters while Albertans suffer?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we fight every day for fairness in this Confederation. We fight every day for the interests of Albertans, unlike the member opposite. We've worked every day to create an investment climate in this province that would attract billions of dollars of investment, create tens of thousands of jobs, and provide Alberta small businesses with additional opportunity. This is resulting in expanded fiscal capacity. This is resulting in a balanced budget. This is resulting in a future for future generations.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that it seems to me the rules of Confederation are rigged worse than a UCP leadership review – and the Premier is fine with both – and given that this Premier appointed himself as Minister of Intergovernmental Relations almost three years ago and given that Alberta has achieved absolutely nothing when it comes to winning a fair deal and given that this Premier has fired ministers for far smaller failures, my question again to the Premier: when are you going to fire your do-nothing intergovernmental affairs minister?

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The one thing I know about getting things done in intergovernmental affairs is that you have to get along with people. You don't get yourself kicked out of the party. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has the floor.

Mr. McIver: You don't call yourself a conservative and then vote against a balanced budget. Actually, the Premier has gotten the other Premiers in this country to vote with him, to face the federal government with him, on a whole range of issues. He's not hiding in the corner by himself having to have his own way on everything, like some people in this place. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Health Care System and Women

Member Irwin: The Associate Minister of Status of Women is introducing legislation today related to health care. I'm interested in how this will impact both women who work in health care and women's access to health care, and I hope that any changes are substantive and not merely symbolic. Many health care professions are women dominated. They've been heroes throughout this pandemic, but many are facing burnout and mental health concerns. The UCP are proposing wage cuts to many health professionals, including respiratory therapists, speech pathologists, social workers, to name just a few. Will the Associate Minister of Status of Women rise today and commit that she will not allow one of these professions to take a pay cut?

Mr. Copping: Thank you to the hon. member for the question. Mr. Speaker, our budget is expanding health care capacity. We are adding an additional \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year, and \$600 million the year after that. We are expanding jobs, and as the hon. member pointed out, many of those jobs are filled by women, so we are providing more opportunities for women in terms of our health care system. That includes doctors. That includes nurses. We have hired more nurses in the system now than we've ever had, and we actually have more doctors as well.

2:20

Member Irwin: Given that we will not forget Bill 207, a bill that posed a real threat to the health care of many Albertans, especially women, and particularly targeted reproductive health and access to health for members of the LGBTQ2S+ community – while this bill was defeated thanks to the push-back from countless Albertans, we are vigilant, and we are quite worried that reproductive rights are still not safe under this UCP government – and given the Premier's long-standing opposition to access to abortion, will the Premier confirm today that reproductive rights are fully safe under his watch and that he will block any attempts from his MLAs to limit access to abortion?

The Speaker: The hon. the chief government whip and Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Associate Minister of Status of Women I must say that my job is to make sure to support women to be successful, to protect their rights, to protect them, and keep them safe. I can tell you that I will continue to do that work. I have been doing that work. We are working on many women's health initiatives, and we are going to continue to do that work.

Member Irwin: Given that many women across this province have shared their concerns with me, including concerns about reproductive health – in fact, I should mention that it is Endometriosis Awareness Month and that many women are suffering from this condition and that they're not getting any support – and that the loss of family doctors and specialists is particularly damaging to women's health right now, since I didn't get an answer from that minister earlier, will she, again, repeat her support for reproductive rights, and will she commit to ensuring that no specialists and no more doctors leave this province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said earlier, I am committed to protecting the rights of women, to protecting women's health. We're working on health initiatives, and actually this very afternoon we will be introducing legislation that speaks right to that. I think the members opposite will be very interested, and I hope that they will support that bill.

Homeless Supports and Affordable Housing

Member Loyola: So many Edmontonians rely on public transit. Throughout the pandemic transit stations have also become a place of shelter and refuge for many who don't have a home and are struggling with mental health. It's not their fault. They have nowhere else to go, which is the fault of the UCP. The city of Edmonton has requested during every UCP budget more social support and to fund permanent supportive housing so that people who are forced to stay in transit stations could have a home as well as mental health support. The UCP already has done one rewrite of their budget, why were the most vulnerable left out of it?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I actually reject the premise of that question. We have committed \$140 million over four years; we have \$20 million in this particular budget. Vulnerable people are very important to this government. I can tell you that numerous ministries are spending time to help those who are most vulnerable, and we are proud of the work we have done here in Edmonton with the VODP, with the HELP teams, with the Edmonton Police Service, along with building relationships with the fire department to continue to help vulnerable people.

Member Loyola: Given that the Minister of Transportation used to be the Minister of Community and Social Services and that she's fully aware of these concerns from the lens of transit safety and much-needed social support and given that the current Minister of Community and Social Services can't even provide an approximate estimate in this Chamber of how many Albertans live in poverty – it is no wonder he is blatantly unaware of the desperation that so many Edmontonians are facing – will the Minister of Transportation rise and commit to working with the city of Edmonton so that all people in Edmonton have a safe, dignified place to call home?

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government stands strongly, supporting vulnerable Albertans. I have mentioned several times in this House that Budget 2022 maintained core funding for all the support services: income support, AISH, and services to people with disabilities. I'll just give you one more example: the AISH budget. We increased it \$12 million in Budget 2022. Facts speak louder than political rhetoric.

Member Loyola: Given that there are hundreds of millions of dollars available for affordable housing through the national housing strategy but the UCP are not doing the work to get it and leaving municipalities and housing providers high and dry and given that business leaders are calling for supportive housing to be a part of the economic recovery and that there have been so many tragic deaths of people experiencing homelessness in places such as Dumpsters and that there are about five preventable drug poisoning deaths happening every day, how many people have to die before the UCP start doing their job and working with municipalities to provide homes with mental health supports to those in need?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I know the NDP want to continue with their woke plans to deal with the addictions crisis, but we are committed to a recovery-oriented system of care. It's a continuum of care that starts from when a vulnerable person enters the system to a point where they exit the system, actually into housing. It's part of the recovery-oriented system of care. We're proud of the work that we've done. We're proud of the relationships we're building. We're continuing to help Albertans. My question is: why do the members opposite not want to help people into a position where they do not have to rely on drugs as the only method of support?

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

Culture-related School Bullying and Discrimination

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week I received a heart-wrenching e-mail from a constituent who shared concerns about her son, who is regularly bullied at school. It is a sad reality, but there are instances in which new Albertans are on the receiving end of hurtful comments and actions from their peers specifically related to race, culture, and religion. Could the Minister of Education tell the House what actions are being taken to educate teachers and school staff on how to deal with culture-related bullying and discrimination?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. School authorities are required to provide a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment. This includes a code of conduct that must be publicly available and prohibit discrimination as per the Alberta Human Rights Act. Additionally, Alberta is renewing the draft K to 6 curriculum, and, once finalized, Alberta will have the most equitable and diverse kindergarten to grade 6 curriculum this province has ever seen. This includes specific foundational knowledge about treaties, residential schools, and reconciliation as well as emphasis on Black history. Students will also learn about the legacy of racism and anti-Black racism.

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that the Calgary-Falconridge constituency is made up of a diverse community of different cultures and backgrounds and given that this diversity can cause division and in some cases has resulted in bullying and harassment towards students, can the same minister tell Albertans about the work that the United Conservative government has done to welcome first- and second-generation Canadians into our province and how their children are being supported in our schools?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the daughter of immigrants myself, I know how very important this is. School

authorities are required to provide a continuum of supports and services that are consistent with the principles of inclusive education and that can be accessed by every student, including newcomers to Canada. A specialized learning support grant now supports school boards in providing a variety of supports and services to meet the learning needs of students within an inclusive learning environment. These grants support our most vulnerable students and children, including those for whom English is a second language as well as refugee students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that youth whose families have immigrated to Alberta from other countries can be subject to discrimination based on their race, religion, or culture and given that this can have severe impacts on the mental well-being of an individual and given that our government is committed to providing a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students, can the same minister tell the House how the United Conservative government has supported mental health for students in our education system?

The Speaker: The minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for this important question. It's very top of mind right now. Mental health and well-being are very important to us and to our schools. There is definitely a heightened level of effort in this area due to the pandemic. In Budget 2022 targeted funding of \$110 million over three years, including \$30 million in the '22-23 school year, will enable schools to support students experiencing academic challenges and create school environments supporting student well-being and positive mental health. During the pandemic Alberta's government provided more than \$53 million to make it easier for students, families, and Albertans to access mental health.

2:30

Climate Adaptation Funding

Mr. Schmidt: If there's one thing that we learned from the tragedies of the wildfires in Wood Buffalo, Slave Lake, Paddle Prairie, the floods of Calgary, Fort Mac, and British Columbia, it's that we as a province must always invest in protecting communities and people from natural disasters. That's why it's so concerning that in the 2022 provincial budget the UCP is planning to gut the funding for climate-resilience projects. This is money that would go towards projects designed to protect communities from disasters before they happen: flood mitigation, fire stops, and more. I know that this government is reluctant to spend anything on Alberta communities, but does the minister even see the value in investing in climate adaptation?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, this government has invested significantly, in partnership with our industry, in climate-resilience projects. Again, unlike what he wanted to do and did when he was in government, we don't have a consumer carbon tax in Alberta. The federal government, unfortunately, is still imposing that on Albertans. We continue to work with our large emitters to make sure that our world-class industry can remain competitive. That's our focus on investment when it comes to climate. If I was him, I'd have a conversation with the federal government on the fact that they continue to take Albertans' money for the carbon tax and not invest it properly back into this province. Better yet, how about we just get rid of the federal carbon tax.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that a recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns of the potential for more extreme weather and natural disasters and given that investments in climate adaptations seek to mitigate and protect communities and people from these disasters but given that on page 143 of their fiscal plan the UCP makes it clear that taking action to protect communities isn't their top priority, will the minister explain who he expects to address this critical issue since he's actively taking Alberta backwards on this? Municipalities? Homeowners? Or does he think it will just go away?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this government is investing billions of dollars when it comes to flood adaptation – in particular the Springbank dry dam; my department continues to work on the new Bow River dam, as examples – billions of dollars in irrigation projects across the province that do help with flood mitigation, has released more flood maps to municipalities than any government in the last 30 years. The list goes on and on, hundreds of millions of dollars invested in being able to protect our community from climate-level events. But, again, back to this issue of the carbon tax, that member continues to support the federal carbon tax. Will he finally stand up in this place and vote with this government to call on the federal government to get rid of the carbon tax once and for all?

Mr. Schmidt: Given the shameful response of this government to the 2020 hailstorm, the fourth-largest natural disaster in Canadian history, which devastated northeast Calgary, and given this budget cut, which means that the government is seeking to get out of the business of protecting families and communities from the increasing risk posed by climate change, will the minister reconsider his senseless cut to protect Alberta communities and families? Or is it the policy of the government to ignore the climate crisis until it's too late?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, the member never lets the facts get in the way in his ridiculous questions.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Again, this government continues to invest in protecting communities when it comes to flood events, fire, and will continue to in the years to come. But the reality is that the federal government continues to have a consumer carbon tax on the citizens of this province. They should get rid of it once and for all because the hon. member is right about one thing, that the federal government is not investing the carbon tax revenue back into this province as they promised. Again, will he stand up, finally, and call on the federal government to get rid of their ridiculous carbon tax?

Victims of Crime Program

Mr. Sabir: This government is failing victims of crime. In budget estimates the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General confirmed that since the government passed legislation to take money out of the fund, 60 per cent of it has been diverted towards other initiatives. This means less support going to those who need support recovering from violent crime and more people being denied support. Will the Minister of Justice acknowledge that these changes have been hurting Albertans and really commit to reversing them before more people impacted by crime lose their supports?

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

Mr. Shandro: Justice and Solicitor General.

The Speaker: Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's all right. It's Thursday. It's the end of the day on Thursday. And thank you, through you, too, to the member for the question. As I answered his question at estimates, previously the government had taken the victims of crime fund, and it continued to support victims through the victims of crime fund – it's also now the victims of crime and public safety initiative fund – of course, continued to make sure that the money and the supports for victims continue to get to those victims through various supports in the community. That's going to continue to be included in the victims of crime and public safety initiative fund.

Mr. Sabir: Given that in December our caucus raised the concerns of Emma Wilson, who was a victim of crime, whose claim for financial assistance was denied because of this government's change to the victims of crime fund, and given that this government, rather than listening to the victims and reversing these harmful changes, created a working group to consult with key stakeholders in creating a new model, when will the government release the findings of this working group? Until they do, will the minister reverse the changes to the program that are causing harm to the victims of crime?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, through you, to the members who are involved in the review of the victims' services units that we have throughout the province and made sure that we had recommendations on how we could improve the VSUs and the way that money gets to the communities and gets to victims in the most efficient way, maximize the way that we get money and supports to those victims. We have almost completed a review of that and hope to be able to implement the changes in the near future. Thank you again to those MLAs for those valuable recommendations.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the victims of crime are waiting for far too long for this government to announce its so-called new model, will the minister tell us and the victims or survivors of crime, who will be watching this response, when this government will announce the new model and how much funding will go to support that new model? Or is he going to continue in this House proudly while cutting away supports from Albertans who desperately need these supports now?

Mr. Shandro: Well, I answered that question. That was his second question, and he's repeating it, Mr. Speaker, but I'll answer for him again. We have now almost completed our review of the report and the recommendations that were provided to us by the MLAs who had been involved in the review committee. We are now very close to the point where we'll be able to present to Albertans the new model on how we'll be able to make sure that the maximum amount of funding can get to victims in the community, because that's got to be our focus as all MLAs and as government, making sure that the most amount of supports can continue to get to those victims.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, living within our means is very important to me. Therefore, I was happy about Alberta's recovery plan, which aims to invest more money in profitable petrochemical, technology, and film sectors. Achieving a balanced budget for 2022-23, with record spending on health care, despite hardships levied by the pandemic and a history of accumulated deficit is a feat we should be proud of. To the Minister of Finance: can you elaborate on work

done to ensure Budget 2022 is balanced and plans to maintain responsible fiscal management in the future?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We would not have a balanced budget in Budget 2022 without responsible, sustainable fiscal management informed by three fiscal anchors: keeping our net debt to GDP ratio below 30 per cent, aligning our per capita spend with that of similar provinces, and getting to a balanced budget as soon as possible. We have allowed those anchors to inform our decisions. And in spite of the fact that we inherited a government spend that was \$10 billion higher than similar provinces, we turned that spending down. It will take sustained responsible management to keep . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Given that under the NDP platform Alberta's per capita spending was more than British Columbia, Quebec, and Ontario yet comparatively Alberta did not witness better outcomes and given that one of the key commitments was to bring ourselves in line to be at least as efficient as other large provinces in the delivery of government-based services, to the same minister: can you update the House on the progress made towards this goal?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to update the House on our fiscal progress because, again, we inherited a high-spending government, the highest spending government of any in the nation. We have thoughtfully and carefully turned that spending down, at the same time increased health care by \$1.8 billion in this budget alone, at the same time added \$600 million to our labour, jobs, and talent strategy. But we will not take our eye off the ball. We will continue to deliver responsible fiscal management for Albertans.

2:40

Mr. Rowswell: Given that Albertans have faced one of the worst economic crises in the past two years, compounded with high inflation, and given that in response we implemented measures such as lowering the corporate tax rate to 8 per cent – this has resulted in projected collections of \$400 million more in corporate tax revenue; Mr. Speaker, our projections for balanced budgets in the coming years have also sparked questions on what will happen with surplus funds – can the minister elaborate on whether growth will be retained in the heritage savings trust fund or continue to be put into general revenue?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, one of the real positive outcomes of a balanced budget is that it gives the government options for reinvestment. I was explicit in the fiscal plan. Any surplus up to the earnings level of the heritage savings trust fund will be reinvested in that trust fund. That's good news for Albertans. Unlike the members opposite, who robbed that trust fund year after year after year, we will reinvest.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Government Policies and Economic Recovery

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to need more than two minutes to explain all the good things that are happening in our province, but let me try anyway. For the first time in almost a decade our United Conservative government has balanced the budget. Job numbers have been rising for four straight months, and unemployment is back down below prepandemic levels. Almost all pandemic restrictions are gone, and we have the fastest growing economy in the country. In every corner of this province major private-sector companies are investing serious capital in Alberta's economic future. It hasn't been easy, but our government has managed to create this economic prosperity. We did this by maintaining the lowest taxes in Canada.

Alberta is once again a lighthouse, a beacon of economic opportunity for those seeking a better life, as evidenced by the fact that net migration to our province is now higher than at any point under the disastrous NDP government. If you listen to the NDP leader, however, none of this is true. She said that our harmful policies our keeping many people from moving to Alberta. The reality is that far more people are coming to this province than leaving it. She said that we are hiking taxes because personal income tax revenue is up when the reality is that we are taking in more income tax revenue because more people are working and have better paying jobs.

She continues to fearmonger about this fictitious \$4.7 billion business tax cut when the reality is that we collect \$400 million more with our 8 per cent than they ever did with their 12 per cent. This all speaks to the incredible investment climate and low-tax advantage that we have restored over the last three years. After years of disastrous NDP policies that saw 200,000 jobs and billions – billions – of dollars disappear in this province, Alberta is back and we are booming.

I understand why the NDP leader is mad. Her policies failed, and her government is fading into a bad memory for everyday Albertans. Albertans, meanwhile, are looking forward to the next great chapter in Alberta history.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, I will raise a point of order at the appropriate time. I will seek your, I guess, guidance on the matter.

The Speaker: A point of order is raised at 2:44. [interjections]

Order. I would like to provide a friendly reminder to the Assembly that members' statements are to go uninterrupted.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South.

Government Data Security

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are well into the 21st century. The vast majority of government services now rely on digital infrastructure. Everything from health records to banking information is regularly transmitted online with our personal identification. The pandemic has greatly accelerated our transition to digital government.

Last year I uncovered a vulnerability on a government of Alberta website that provided access to Albertans' personal health information. As a result, I am facing an RCMP investigation, and I've stepped aside from my role in the Official Opposition while I

await the outcome of that investigation. Whether or not you agree with how I approached this issue, what we cannot lose sight of is how important these issues are. It is incumbent upon this House to act in the public interest and to protect Albertans. The government is not doing enough to make sure the delivery of government services is secure and defended from cyberwarfare.

Today I'm extending an offer to work with the government to take immediate action to defend Albertans from cyberthreats. There are three actions the government can take immediately to help improve our cyberdefenses and protect Albertans. The first is to establish an independent office of information security and cyberdefense. We need a co-ordinated and specific office that is focused on ensuring the security and integrity of our digital infrastructure.

The second is establishing a vulnerability disclosure program like the ones that are offered already by major software and hardware companies around the world. The government of Alberta must immediately establish a set of guidelines for responsible testing and disclosure for developers and security professionals. This will ensure that vulnerabilities will not go unreported due to fear of repercussions. Vulnerability disclosure should be encouraged, and we should be rewarding Albertans who are protecting public information.

Third, we must provide a state of the information infrastructure report. The government of Alberta must regularly provide a report into its IT infrastructure. Security through obscurity is not security at all. Instead, we need thorough and proper assessment of our public IT infrastructure. Outside analysts and professionals can critique and offer the best chance at success in modern cyber-defense.

The government must act now. Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 17: "Be it resolved that the period referred to in Standing Order 74.11(2) be extended from eight sitting days to 11 sitting days in respect to Bill 203, Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act."

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Bill 10 Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 10, Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022.

Our well-being as a society is only as good as our humanity. It is critical that the safety and security of women and girls is a priority. The fear of physical or psychological violence because of sex and gender must be removed. The premise of coercive control and the accompanying practices must be eradicated. We are not rejecting cultural rationalities but rejecting violence perpetuated against women in the name of cultural practices. Every woman and girl deserves to live free from fear and violence.

Approval of the proposed amendments will strengthen the existing laws that ban female genital mutilation in Alberta. No other

jurisdiction has professional legislation that speaks directly to the issues of FGM.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move the first reading of Bill 10. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Standing Order 7(8) the daily Routine may continue beyond 3 p.m. if needed.

I also move that pursuant to Standing Order 75 Bill 10, the Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and request leave . . .

The Speaker: My apologies to the hon. member. I'll let you begin again from the top on that.

Hon. members, the motion that was moved by the hon. Government House Leader is a nondebatable motion, but it does require a vote of the Assembly.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 204 Anti-Racism Act

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and request leave to introduce Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act, 2022.

This bill flows from input received from the very individuals and communities who experience racism, overt and systemic, daily and addresses recommendations that were made by the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council. Those recommendations called for the collection of race-based data in all departments as well as the analysis of this data to track and evaluate the progress being made and identify existing gaps between racialized and nonracialized communities in order to promote equitable access to public services and partnerships with government.

2:50

Bill 204 would do just that through the establishment of an antiracism office that will, in addition to consulting with communities and others on the establishment of data standards and other regulations, track and monitor impacts of racism throughout public services and provide recommendations on how to address them. I hope that all members of this Assembly will support this bill and give it the opportunity for fair debate in this Legislature.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the Government House Leader.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I referenced the MNP report on consumer debt indexing, Albertans' Confidence in Personal Finances, Debt Repayment Abilities Plummets amid

Pandemic Fatigue and Uncertainty. I am now tabling the requisite copies.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I rise on behalf of the hon. the Premier to table written responses to questions during Executive Council's main estimates.

I also have all the necessary copies of documents that I referred to yesterday during the point of privilege regarding the MLA for Edmonton-South and his hacking record for the record.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 1:51 the hon. Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). At the time the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was speaking and referring to the Premier. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but she did say something to the effect of: unlike the Premier, we don't cheat. This is actually uncharacteristic of that member as she usually maintains a reasonable level of decorum in this Chamber, but this language is certainly unparliamentary, and I do believe that it should be apologized for and should be withdrawn.

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I do remember that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora referenced those words in relation to the Premier's leadership race, which is under investigation for voter fraud, and some recent changes in the upcoming leadership review. I think that that's a matter of fact and debate, not a point of order.

The Speaker: Thank you. I am prepared to rule if there's no additional submissions. I do have the benefit of the Blues. It says, "Mr. Speaker, unlike [the] Premier, Albertans don't [get to] cheat." It sounds a lot like an accusation or remarks which question the member's integrity or character, which are not in order as pursuant to page 619 of *House of Commons Procedures and Practice*. I'm sure that all members are aware of the reference. So is the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, so I'm sure she'll be happy to apologize and withdraw.

Ms Hoffman: I am happy to apologize and withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

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

At 1:55 the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall rose on a number of occasions, including 1:55 and 1:57. I believe that perhaps we can co-ordinate these into one point of order, but I'll leave that to your discretion.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Sabir: Thank you. We can certainly do that. There were a number of things. Again, I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but it was a matter in relation to sexual harassment allegations levelled by the Government House Leader, and on previous occasions other government ministers have done the same. There are, Mr. Speaker, extensive rulings on that issue, extensive caution provided by you on that issue. I think the Government House Leader and the government side continues to ignore those cautions, and I urge you to rule this out of order once and for all.

Mr. Schow: Well, I certainly, Mr. Speaker, don't have the benefit of the Blues, and I don't know what was said in specific. If something was said to the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall that was unparliamentary, I'd be happy to hear if you may have that. If it is unparliamentary, then I will withdraw and apologize. But I would like to know where you're at.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues, and in the interest of time as well as repeating perhaps unparliamentary language, I will defer from reading them all. But I do want to say this. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall is correct that there have been extensive cautions, ongoing reminders that this type of allegation is unacceptable. On April 21, 2021, I said:

But in the strongest possible ways I will provide a caution on this very, very sensitive issue. In particular, these situations often end in a tit-for-tat, where members of the opposition will raise similar allegations and vice versa, and we end at the bottom of a [very] negative spiral making . . . allegations [against one another]. While I will provide the strongest caution to the minister, I hope that both sides will avoid these sorts of allegations in the future.

They certainly do rise to the level of a point of order and certainly do not assist in the decorum inside the Assembly.

This is a point of order. I insist it not happen in the future, and I'm happy to take an apology and withdrawal.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your direction and out of respect for this Chamber and the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, I do withdraw and apologize on behalf of the Government House Leader.

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

At 2:53 the hon. the Deputy Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, I think I have another point of order at 2 p.m. Again that was the Government House Leader in response to my question where I asked about the investigation into the Premier's leadership race fraud. The Government House Leader said: he makes up false allegations. Again, that was directly pointed at me as an individual. That's clearly offside these rules, and I urge you to rule that as such.

The Speaker: My apologies to the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. That is correct. You did call a point of order at 2 p.m. when the Government House Leader was speaking. I'm happy to have you provide additional comments should you feel like it's necessary, or I'm happy to have the Government House Leader respond.

Mr. Sabir: I think that I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I'll look for your guidance.

Mr. Schow: I would suspect that if the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, the hon. Government House Leader, said something to the effect that the member is making stuff up, that would be unparliamentary. I don't have the benefit of the Blues. I'll defer to you, Mr. Speaker. If that is, in fact, the case, again, happy to withdraw and apologize.

The Speaker: I do have the benefit of the Blues for the point of order at 2 p.m. The hon. the Government House Leader said the following: "Mr. Speaker, continuing to make up [false] allegations inside this Chamber is ridiculous. I challenge that member to go

make those allegations outside this Chamber so that legal action could be taken against them.” And a point of order was called, and the member proceeded to ask his question.

Like, I think further to the previous ruling – and I think it’s prudent to provide a reminder to members of the Assembly from *Erskine May*, 497, I believe. To be clear, this is not a point of order. But what I do want to do – and I often do this on a Thursday afternoon so that members can go home and consider themselves accordingly about how we’ll function next week. It’s imperative that we recall *Erskine May Parliamentary Practice*, page 497, where it says, talking about making allegations about other members, that the chair is often required

on the Member to withdraw the words,

including words imputing false motives

or unavowed motives; the misrepresentation of the language of another and the accusation of misrepresentation; and charges of uttering a deliberate falsehood.

3:00

I just want to provide that caution. This isn’t a point of order. I don’t think that he was making a particular accusation against the member but more statements that he was referring to. Not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

I hope that the level of decorum can increase next week as we move further into the week.

That now brings us to the point of order of 2:33, where the hon. the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had asked a question and a point of order was raised by the Opposition Deputy House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the previous ruling I certainly missed the part where the member said that I should say it outside; a lawsuit will follow. I can certainly do that.

Point of Order

Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Sabir: Moving to the point of order at 2:33, 2:34, again, the Government House Leader said, specifically referring to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, that the member never lets facts come in the way, something to that effect. It’s a roundabout way of saying to somebody that he is not telling the truth, that he’s lying, those kinds of things that have been ruled unparliamentary. Again, I think it’s offside the rules of this House.

Mr. Schow: I don’t have the benefit of the Blues, but in the earlier points of order the language from the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall was far more specific. I believe we are now starting to grasp at straws. This is not a point of order but a matter of debate. Until I hear something from the Blues that suggests otherwise, I would say that this is not a point of order. Let’s move on.

The Speaker: Thank you. I do have a very rough copy of the Blues. The member says something to the effect of: the member never lets the facts get away in his ridiculous questions. I think the member meant to say that he never lets the facts get in the way of his ridiculous questions. You know, members day in and day out try to find creative ways to make such statements. It happens on both sides of the Assembly. I don’t believe that this rises to the level of a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Immediately following the member’s statement for the Member for Calgary-Klein, the Opposition Deputy House Leader rose and asked a question about raising a point of order. I’m happy to take that question now, and we’ll govern ourselves accordingly following.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do recognize that on a number of occasions you have talked about decorum in the House when member statements are made. You have talked about that members should be allowed to make them uninterrupted. But at the same time, when that much latitude is afforded to a member to make that member’s statement, I suspect that members won’t be allowed to say things that they’re otherwise not able to say. The Member for Calgary-Klein, who was referring specifically to the Leader of the Official Opposition, said that she continues to fearmonger about some \$4.7 billion. I think referring to the member and making that accusation directly at a member should be offside the rules of this House. The \$4.7 billion number is at page 144 of their first budget in 2019.

The Speaker: This sounds a lot to me like we’re continuing a matter of debate. If that same logic was applied to every member’s statement that members of the Official Opposition or the government made, we would have a lot more congratulatory member statements to our constituents, which may be a very good thing for all of the decorum in the Assembly. But that is a decision for each and every member to make when they rise to their feet. This is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

I wish that this period of time in our day had concluded. However, yesterday the hon. Government House Leader rose on a point of privilege, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-South, who was the subject of the point of privilege, deferred his opportunity to respond until today. I will hear the response now.

Privilege

Misleading the House

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will attempt to keep my comments brief in responding to the point of privilege raised yesterday.

Yesterday the Government House Leader argued a prima facie breach of privilege has occurred by means of a member misleading the House. As outlined in the fourth edition of *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*, the test for this is three parts and as follows: one, “the statement must . . . be misleading;” two, “the member must have known that the statement was inaccurate at the time the statement was made;” and, three, “the member must have intended to mislead” the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the first part of that test, that a statement must be misleading, I have not admitted to committing any crimes, have not been charged or arrested with any crimes, and continue to co-operate with the RCMP in respect to the matter which they are investigating. I believe, clearly, any statements I have made in the House are not misleading to this effect.

Second, the member must have known that the statement was inaccurate at the time the statement was made. Clearly, I did not believe then and do not believe now that any statement I made in the House is misleading.

Finally, the member must have intended to mislead the Assembly. Mr. Speaker, I did not and do not intend to mislead the Assembly with respect to my white paper and the ongoing investigation; hence, my openness and publication of the document describing the entirety of my test and situation. If the member opposite believes differently or has a different interpretation of those facts, they may be matters of debate.

I will refer to your ruling, Mr. Speaker, on March 22, 2022, where you cited *Beauchesne’s* paragraph 494: “It has been formally ruled

by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted.” As I have stated already, my arguments today are with regard to matters respecting myself, and I would ask that you and the House accept my knowledge on those matters.

Further, I will also refer to a point of privilege that was raised on October 25, 2021, on *Hansard* page 5649, by the hon. Deputy Opposition House Leader. The Deputy Opposition House Leader argued that the Premier had misled the House with respect to his knowledge of the COVID-19 modelling data. The following day, on October 26, the current Government House Leader then made arguments that the word of a member, in this case the Premier, must be accepted as per *Beauchesne’s* 494. This was then ruled by you, Mr. Speaker, on page 5750 of *Alberta Hansard*, that you accepted members at their word and no prima facie breach of privilege had occurred.

As I have shared the facts of the matter as I understand them, Mr. Speaker, accordingly I ask that you rule in the same manner and find that no prima facie breach of privilege has occurred in this case.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, points of privilege are serious matters, and any member of the Assembly does have the opportunity to provide their remarks even if they aren’t subject to the point of privilege. However, that would possibly be unique in this situation. I want to provide that opportunity to other members of the Assembly should they wish to do so.

Seeing none, I will take both the argument made by the Government House Leader as well as the Member for Edmonton-South under advisement, and I will report back to the Assembly at my earliest opportunity, which I would anticipate to be in the first days of next week.

Hon. members, Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 7 Appropriation Act, 2022

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m really pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, 2022.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Budget 2022 is about responsible fiscal management. Mr. Speaker, It’s no secret that we inherited the highest spending government of any across the nation. Over the last three years we have worked hard, worked collectively across ministries, across government, to make responsible, surgical, thoughtful decisions to deliver more value for Alberta taxpayers. I’m very pleased to say that Budget 2022 reports on our progress, and in fact we have turned that spending down. In the upcoming year we will have aligned our per capita spend with that of other provinces’ governments, and that puts this province on a sustainable fiscal trajectory.

Mr. Speaker, there’s more. Budget 2022 really reports on the progress of revenue creation, reports on the progress of wealth creation by our private citizens and businesses, all of that leading to expanded fiscal capacity and increased government revenues. There’s not a data point in this budget that represents that fact in a more clear way than the fact that we will be collecting \$400 million

more per year in corporate income tax revenues over the course of this fiscal plan at an 8 per cent rate than the previous government collected at a 12 per cent rate.

3:10

The great advantage with responsible fiscal management is that now this government and the people of Alberta have additional options. Mr. Speaker, that’s why Budget 2022 includes a \$1.8 billion investment in health care over the course of the fiscal plan. This investment will in part be allocated to increased health care capacity, health care capacity that has shown itself deficient as we’ve worked to deal with the pandemic.

There’s more. As I’ve travelled across the province over the last number of months, I’ve encountered a labour shortage across sectors and across regions, that at a time when we’ve had an unemployment rate north of 7 per cent. Mr. Speaker, as we’ve worked to understand the fundamentals driving this inconsistency, we’ve recognized that many Albertans that have perhaps lost their jobs in 2016 or 2017, during the last downturn, in part brought on by the economic and fiscal policies of the members opposite, many of those Albertans don’t have the skills, the confidence today to re-enter the workplace. That’s why we’re investing \$600 million in Budget 2022 to ensure that every Albertan has the opportunity to reskill, to enter a postsecondary program, to pursue an occupation or profession, perhaps one that didn’t even exist in this province 10 years ago.

We’re seeing an ever-increasingly diversified economy in the province of Alberta. Mr. Speaker. This \$600 million investment will go towards providing an additional 7,000 seats in our great, world-class postsecondary institutions. Again, this will create opportunities for Albertans to reskill and ultimately graduate in a profession, an occupation where they can provide well for themselves and their families, where they can make a great contribution to their communities, where they can again support the nonprofit organizations and charities that are an important part of the fabric of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I’m presenting a balanced budget today. In fact, we presented it in late February. We’re going to be passing it, I trust, with the support of members of this House later today. This budget is balanced while maintaining the highest levels of support for seniors, while maintaining the highest levels of support for the most vulnerable, because these are the values that are held by Albertans and these are the values that are held by this government.

But, most importantly, Budget 2022 is an inflection point. Budget 2022 marks a time when and where we will no longer place the burden of irresponsible fiscal decisions on the next generation, robbing our children and grandchildren of opportunity and prosperity – opportunity and prosperity – Mr. Speaker, that I was privileged to have. So I urge all members of this Assembly to support Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, 2022.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton West Yellowhead has risen to join debate.

Mr. Carson: Almost, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton-West Henday.

The Acting Speaker: Oh, Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you for the opportunity to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 7. As you might imagine, Mr. Speaker, I am not quite as excited as this Finance minister might be other than the fact that we do here in the Assembly today have the opportunity, both on this side of the House and on the other side of the House, to truly show this Premier and this Finance minister that they are indeed on the wrong path and that they have made decisions that aren’t to the

benefit of all Albertans through this budget. That is indeed what I have been hearing in my community from the correspondence that I get through my office and through the phones on a daily basis on a number of fronts, first off being, which this government continues to ignore, the fact that there are many Albertans that are accessing AISH benefits, many Albertans that are accessing Alberta Works benefits and other benefits that are provided to Albertans to ensure that they can continue to survive in our province. Unfortunately, while this government believes they are balancing the budget for future generations, they aren't even balancing the budget for the current generations in terms of the fact that they are making so many decisions and, at the end of the day, cuts to these important programs. Again, we hear it every day in my office and, I imagine, in every single office of our MLAs across the province, the damage that the decisions that this government is making are having on Alberta families and some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

Unfortunately, we can continue to look back to the initial decision of this government to deindex AISH benefits, to deindex seniors' benefits. We look at what that means in real numbers. For example, a senior couple receiving the Alberta seniors' benefit is set to lose \$750, and that is truly remarkable, Mr. Speaker, considering the state that we find ourselves in, with inflationary pressures continuing to hammer on the budgets of our families and, again, in many respects even more so on those that are relying on assistance from the government to simply survive.

For this Finance minister to say that these are the values held by Albertans, that we are making the decision to, quote, unquote, balance this budget by cutting important services like the indexing of AISH, like the indexing of seniors' benefits: I don't buy it, not for one second. Mr. Speaker, I don't think that those are the values that Albertans hold, to leave these people behind, these vulnerable people, to, again, essentially find ourselves in a position where this government can call it a balanced budget, but it truly is anything but that.

Of course, we have spent a lot of time talking about the fact that Albertans cannot trust this government. The same can be said about this line around a balanced budget, because we are truly balancing, quote, unquote, again, Mr. Speaker, on the backs of the most vulnerable. At the end of the day, it continues to be truly dependent on the price of oil for that day, and we might not see ourselves in the same situation a week from now, a month from now. Unfortunately, we can see ourselves with again a balanced budget, but at the same time these vulnerable Albertans will continue to be left behind.

I believe that this budget is anything but aligned with the values of Albertans. We can look at other increases that this government has had direct opportunities to take care of. When it comes to insurance costs, we've been dealing with this for several years now, at a time when insurance companies continue to see some of the best returns that they've seen in quite some time, Mr. Speaker. We are hearing accounts from everyday Albertans where they're seeing their insurance increase upwards of 30 per cent per year, this at the same time when they are driving less, this at the same time they have maybe never seen themselves receive a ticket or been in a collision. It is truly based on the decisions of this Finance minister and this government to remove the cap, to make backroom deals with insurance lobbyists.

At the same time that Albertans are actually seeing their benefits reduced in terms of caps on minor injuries, at the same time that this government is telling Albertans that they are going to receive less in compensation if they are in a collision that causes them long-term disabilities, potentially life-altering disabilities, they are actually going to be compensated less but, at the same time, very

possibly will be seeing year to year their insurance increasing upwards of 30 per cent.

3:20

Again, Mr. Speaker, this is on top of the many other costs that are being piled on Albertans. We've heard a lot of talk about utility bills increasing. It's hard to explain, truly, how much of an effect this is having on Albertans. Some are seeing their utility bills essentially double. We've seen that in cases that have come to my office. And what has this government offered them? A \$50 rebate a year from now, potentially. A year is a long time for those Albertans to wait, and they truly see through what this government is trying to put forward to them as a solution, because it truly is not that.

Again, we can look at the budget of Advanced Education as we continue to look at Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, Mr. Speaker. This, again, is a ministry and a part of our economy that is so important, yet we see this government jeopardizing the long-term competitiveness of the postsecondary institutions and industry across this province. We see through Budget 2022 a cut of \$600 million in real terms for the Advanced Education ministry, and on top of that, this government is actually asking Alberta students to pay more on the debt that they are being forced to accumulate because of the decisions of this government. They're actually continuing to pay higher interest rates because this government has really shown that they are leaving the students in this province to fend for themselves and, even worse, is actually taking counterproductive actions against those students, who are the future of our economy.

We should be doing everything we can to ensure that they believe Alberta is the best place for them to stay or to come to in the first place, potentially. We have heard discussions around brain drain and the concerns that we've seen around that. If we aren't ensuring that there are competitive programs and processes in place, whether we're talking about tax credits, whether we're talking about any other rebate, Mr. Speaker, we should be doing everything we can to ensure that our advanced education system, our postsecondary education system, is as competitive as possible in terms of the programs that we're offering, in terms of the cost to take a four-year degree or longer and, of course, not just a four-year but any type of postsecondary education. Unfortunately, again, what we're seeing through this budget is a downloading of costs to our postsecondary institutions, which, in turn, is to some extent forcing those institutions to download those costs onto students.

It's truly unfortunate that this is where we find ourselves, Mr. Speaker. I think that our decision, under the NDP government from 2015 to 2019, to freeze postsecondary tuitions for the most part was the right decision and, at the same time, continuing to fund them at a level where they were able to succeed. Unfortunately, we're seeing a complete reversal of not only the cost of tuition but the amount of funding that this government is providing to postsecondary institutions. It's going to have a devastating effect on our future economy and even on the economy that we have today.

Again, when we look at other decisions that this government has made in regard to relationships with our municipal partners and the continued downloading of costs, whether we're looking at the gutting of MSI, municipal sustainability initiatives, and the funding that our municipal partners are receiving to support the important infrastructure in each of those communities, we've seen a complete reversal, of course, from what this government initially campaigned on. Of course, I've raised the point before that they supported the big-city charters when we were in government and campaigned on upholding that. Yet, again, just like we saw on supports for AISH, supports for seniors' benefits, the government has done a complete reversal on supporting our municipalities.

Of course, it goes further than just supporting infrastructure. Whether we're talking about the need for mental health supports in our municipalities, whether we're talking about the need for affordable housing, we have heard from municipalities across the province that on those important issues this government is failing as well.

It becomes even more unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, when we reflect on the Appropriation Act that we have before us and the need, specifically in this instance, for affordable housing. We see federal dollars on the table. We see municipal partners ready to access that funding and ready to move forward with agreements, but instead of the provincial government coming to the table and understanding that we need to do everything we can to access those dollars, they are not providing those dollars. So we will see federal funding left on the table, and it's truly unfortunate because we should be doing everything we can to access those dollars. There's no doubt that those relationships are important. There's no doubt that there continues to be strain on our affordable housing system, even more so because of decisions that this government is making when it comes to AISH supports and Alberta Works supports.

Again, when we look at the supports that are being offered by this government, when we look at the Alberta child and family benefit not being indexed, Mr. Speaker – I mean, the list is long about the decisions that this government is making that are going to have a long-lasting effect on Albertans and a long-lasting effect on the children that are counting on this government to take meaningful action to support them. Coupled with the decision to not index the Alberta child benefit, we see a minister responsible for the rollout of the federal child care program also not willing to put the dollars forward to ensure that we see \$10-a-day child care rolling out across this province in a timely manner, bringing into question whether we will see that program successfully fulfilled.

There are so many problems that we see within this. I do not believe, to any extent, that it reflects the values of Albertans to place the burden on the most vulnerable in our society, to place the burden on children and seniors and those trying to access postsecondary education and, further, onto our municipalities, who in turn will be forced to download those costs onto taxpayers in those respective municipalities. At the end of the day, if the province is funding less to municipalities – we know that there are agreements in place across the province, in our cities, that they have to have a balanced budget at the end of the year. So if the government is telling them that there is less funding for them, there is only one way for them to get that back, and that is to increase taxes on the people in those communities, which is truly unfortunate, again, with respect to all the other things that are being put on Alberta families.

Again I would encourage members to truly consider whether this is the right direction for our province, whether they truly believe that these are the values that Albertans hold when we look at the billion-dollar tax grab that this government is moving forward with in terms of bracket creep, something that the Premier himself used to rail against for many years when he was part of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, when he was an MP in the federal Parliament. But, my, how things have changed, Mr. Speaker.

There is a lot to be desired in this bill. I think that this is truly an opportunity for both sides of the House to show clearly that we are headed in the wrong direction. I think that to some extent I understand – well, not really. I was going to say that I understand where the government is coming from, but I truly don't because there is just so much wrong in what we're seeing before us. I continue to hear from Albertans, above and beyond what I've discussed already, when I go to school council meetings and the concerns that they have for our education system, with this government's continued reluctance to fund for enrolment – that

continues to be an issue that is having terrible effects on our K to 12 system – the completely flawed rollout of the draft curriculum that this government will do everything but roll back, will continue to push off, continue to try and find somebody, anybody, any school board that would pilot this but has been rejected so many times.

There are just too many things in this budget, Mr. Speaker, that are completely wrong for me to be able to even consider supporting it. With that, I hope that we may see other members of the Assembly join in this discussion and share why they are so concerned with what we see here. I think that, again, there are likely members within the government's own caucus that have concerns one way or another, and I would appreciate hearing from them as well.

With that, I will take my seat. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and share my concerns with this bill.

Thank you.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much to the hon. member for the great constituency of Edmonton-West Henday.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has now risen.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Bill 7, the Appropriation Act, 2022. I have to say that I would like to echo a lot of what the hon. member has shared about concerns with this budget. I think that this is simply a budget that we cannot support. We look at what has been proposed by this government, and it's ridiculous that this budget comes at a time when the cost of absolutely everything is going up: utility bills, insurance rates, tuition fees, property taxes, park fees, and there's a way that this government has found an opportunity to tax inflation. And, you know, I think when we're looking at the real struggles of what families are facing, this budget does nothing to support them.

Yesterday in this House I rose and asked a question about aid that is being provided to some of my constituents, who I hear from, hundreds talking about their inability to make ends meet. With the cost of everything going up, they are hurting, and this government won't address it. They yell at us and, you know, make all of these ridiculous claims, but when you look at a \$50 rebate when my constituent wrote to me about a \$750 utility bill, a \$50 rebate does nothing. People are struggling. They can't afford their bills. They can't afford food, Mr. Speaker. I hear just devastating stories every day, and I know that members of the government are hearing the same. It baffles me that they're so tone deaf about what is happening to Albertans right now.

When I was in estimates for Culture, I had the opportunity to ask questions. Unfortunately, it wasn't shared time; it was block time. You know, part of my job as the critic is to listen to those that are impacted by this government's decisions, and it's something that I've heard for the three years when it comes especially to nonprofits and community organizations, that they're not feeling heard.

In last year's budget I had asked the previous minister on behalf of two organizations if she would meet with them. It was the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues and the Federation of Calgary Communities. They indicated for this budget that, again, they still hadn't heard from the previous minister or from the current minister, and when I asked the minister in estimates why he hadn't been meeting with these organizations, he said that there are simply too many. Well, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues represents 161 community leagues. That's one organization that represents 161 community leagues. The Federation of Calgary Communities represents 230 nonprofits and 151 community associations. This

has been a plea from these individuals that represent so many, that also represent thousands of Albertans that don't have voice. That's concerning to me, when I hear that they've made decisions on a budget without talking to some major, major community leaguers.

We all know that the communities are the heart and soul of each and every one of our constituencies. They know first what's going on. They know when needs are required, and they step up and provide support to Albertans when this government has failed them. They failed them in their first budget. They cut things like CFEP, which communities rely on for support. Not even to mention what happened with the pandemic and the mishandling of that. So many communities leagues were struggling to find ways to support their communities because this government's failed leadership in how to handle the pandemic impacted communities, impacted families, impacted Albertans. And who stood up and answered the call to support? Our community leagues, our agriculture societies, our charities, with no help from the government.

These wonderful communities have come together, and they continue to reach out to the many organizations and individuals that they serve on behalf of Albertans. Vibrant Communities Calgary created a report called Alberta Budget 2022's Business as Usual Approach Falls Short. They say simply that it falls short. They say that the "new spending priorities don't address issues that matter to struggling Albertans."

I would like to just read to you the first two paragraphs of this article, Mr. Speaker, that I think is very impactful in their summary of what Budget 2022 is saying. It says:

Holding the government to account on budget issues is a complex and difficult task. However, a small number of nonprofit organizations regularly provide this type of analysis. The Edmonton Social Planning Council, the Alberta Seniors Community Housing Association, and the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Commerce have all called attention to the government's inadequate support of important public services, the nonprofit sector, and affordable housing in Budget 2022.

In 2021, VCC's response to the budget stressed the importance of investments to tackle inequities that were exposed by the pandemic, including systemic racism, income security, and precarious work. In Budget 2022, our concerns remain unaddressed. Spending was maintained in most areas, although when inflation and growth are taken into account, most budgets were decreased. And, where we do see funding increases, as is the case with child care and affordable housing, this is primarily attributed to federal government transfers.

This was a huge missed opportunity. These are organizations that have been pleading to have a voice at the table of government. To me, Mr. Speaker, this is an absolute no-brainer. When you want to know how best to serve Albertans, you talk to Albertans. If you're not talking to Albertans, maybe even talk to those that represent Albertans in our communities. They are the pulse of what is happening in each and every one of our communities. They know what's going on. They know which families are struggling. They know where the gaps in services are. They are also incredibly skilled at being resourceful and coming up with strategies and ideas and ways of how to support. Had the government simply met with some of these individuals, perhaps we wouldn't see this budget in such disarray. Perhaps we could stand proudly in this House and vote for a budget based on what Albertans are asking for.

However, Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. We're standing in this Chamber debating a budget that doesn't actually support Albertans in ways that they actually need. I don't understand why there are all of these wonderful opportunities to connect with so many individuals that represent Albertans, and this government just turns a blind eye.

On this side of the House we stand and we ask questions on behalf of those we represent. We share stories of those that are being impacted by the reckless decisions that this government has made, and it falls on deaf ears. People are pleading to have a voice at the table.

When the pandemic first started, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that the NDP called on, alongside artists, was for artists to have a voice at the table when it comes to the economic recovery plan. They wanted to be able to have an impact on how services and resources and supports were given to Albertans. These are creative thinkers. It was ignored. We've seen so many reports coming from these industries on ways that would make a significant impact on the day-to-day lives of Albertans, and they're being ignored.

We saw the culture industry being one of the very first industries that was impacted by the pandemic and will be one of the last industries to recover. This budget doesn't do anything to support that recovery.

3:40

In the budget from 2019 this government slashed supports and services for the arts community, for culture prepandemic. During the pandemic there was no one around to listen. We held news conferences. We requested meetings. We stood in this Chamber and pleaded for supports to be provided, and nothing. What happened was that there was a considerable amount of inconsistency in the mandate regulations, so we had organizations that were just left on their own, and right now Albertans are left on their own. This is a budget that we simply cannot support.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to cede my time and listen to the debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask for unanimous consent to go to one-minute bells for the duration of the sitting day.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Bill 8

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 8, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022.

Bill 8 provides the authority for government to pay from the general revenue fund for additional costs that are not already covered or otherwise provided for during the current fiscal year. The supplementary estimates include \$1.2 billion in spending and \$1 million in capital investment. Mr. Speaker, the funding in Bill 8 will ensure the government can cover health care costs required to deal with the pandemic, it will send aid and equipment to the people of Ukraine, and it will provide electricity rebates to Albertans

struggling with rising costs. It will also support child care workers and parents of young children and build municipal infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I need to point out that while we're presenting this supplementary supply bill, we've not lost sight of the importance of fiscal management. We can never lose sight of the importance of fiscal management, and within the expenditures represented in this bill, the expenditures of \$1.2 billion, there's an offset in revenue side of close to \$1 billion. In fact, the net effect on Alberta's fiscal situation for our current fiscal year, the year that ends in only a few days, will be just over \$200 million. Yes, there was required and necessary spending beyond the fiscal plan. We were in a time of pandemic. The tragic geopolitical events in Ukraine have also required a response from this government, and we know that Albertans are supportive of that initiative.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I urge all members of this House to support passage of Bill 8.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, with 20 minutes should she choose it.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this supplementary supply bill, Bill 8. I'd like to take this opportunity to comment on what I heard when I was in debate in this House on this supply bill, which I think is very concerning. I know it's taken this government a very long time to even superficially acknowledge the importance of affordable, accessible, quality child care for both our children's education but also for our economic recovery in terms of expanding access for more families so women can participate in the workforce more often and we can increase our GDP. Very reluctantly, and only because there were federal dollars on the table, did this UCP government finally acknowledge that, after, of course, ending the former NDP government's \$25-per-day program. What we saw in supplementary supply debate is that that commitment by this government to child care is actually paper-thin. It's not only paper-thin, but it falls far too short.

What we learned in supplementary supply and in this bill is that not only is there no actual commitment to getting to \$10-per-day child care by this government, but they continue to underfund and underspend on child care. During this discussion and the debate, despite saying that in the fiscal year 2021 there would be \$315 million spent by this provincial government on child care, the Minister of Children's Services acknowledged that it was actually only \$295 million and that, in fact, \$55 million of provincial funds that were dedicated for child care have not been spent, and she could not account for where those dollars would be spent.

Why is this important, Mr. Speaker? In light of, of course, the significant investment by the federal government into child care, it seems as though this government is content to let the federal government be the primary funder of what is their provincial responsibility, which is the delivery of child care and early childhood education. But it also means that this government is actually failing to live up to its commitments in agreements with the federal government that provincial funding for child care would not be replaced by federal funding. As we've heard clearly, it is being replaced. Through this bill the UCP government is asking for, you know, hundreds of millions of dollars of federal funding to go to the child care sector while acknowledging that they underspent \$55 million on child care.

Why that's also relevant, apart from the fact that the government is not living up to its commitments, is also that there was so much that could have been done this past fiscal year with \$55 million to strengthen our child care system. Importantly, movement could have been made to actually create more child care spaces. But most

importantly, Mr. Speaker, child care spaces are only relevant if there are staff there to fill them. We have a staffing shortage, and we'll continue to have a sizable staffing shortage in the early childhood education sector for some time, which will mean that this government will not fulfill its commitment to create 42,500 nonprofit spaces in Alberta over the next few years if we don't have staff. Those dollars would have been critical to keep staff in the sector, to keep educators, to retain them, and to attract new educators. Key to that would have been investing in an increased wage top-up or implementing a wage grid to make sure that early childhood educators get paid a decent wage for the professional work that they do, yet this government didn't do that. They just didn't spend \$55 million which they allocated for child care. They chose not to spend it. That, I mean, raises the question of: where did those dollars go? We don't know. The minister could not account for those dollars.

This is the second year in a row that this government has significantly underspent in child care. The previous year, Mr. Speaker: \$108 million because, yes, there was lower enrolment during the pandemic. Again, child care programs were crying out for greater PPE support, greater paid leave support for their staff so they could stay home. Maybe child care programs could have stayed open, even with lower enrolment, had they actually invested those dollars, that \$108 million that year before. But, no, the government not only did not invest it in child care; they handed it out in a quick cheque. At the end of the fiscal year they had \$108 million, and they thought: ooh, let's try to buy some support by sending out a one-time cheque to some parents, not even all parents – some parents – for child care purposes. Guess what? That didn't do anything to lower their fees the following month, didn't do anything to create more spaces. It didn't do anything to attract and retain new child care educators.

So two years in a row, Mr. Speaker, this government has significantly underspent on child care. That's \$163 million that they have not invested in child care, dollars that were set aside in their budget for that purpose that they have not used. I mean, honestly, at this point I think it's already established that this government cannot be taken seriously when it comes to investing in child care. That's important, of course, for all the families who had to wait an additional four months, five months while this government played politics to even sign that deal for the federal government, to actually see any benefits.

3:50

Even now, while some families and, hopefully, most families are seeing a significant reduction in their fees, we know that the lowest income families are not seeing the same kind of reduction. We even know that some low-income families who are eligible for full subsidy support are actually now – some of them are actually paying more under the way this government has rolled out this program. This is at a time, Mr. Speaker, when families all across this province are struggling with their bills, so any benefits that they're seeing – perhaps reduced child care fees are being eaten up now by skyrocketing utility bills, by property tax bills, by their car insurance, by school fees.

Any benefit that this government or that Albertans might have seen in reduced fees is now being eaten up by a budget that does not address the needs of Alberta families, that boasts a surplus but doesn't actually make life more affordable for Albertans. It's not creating jobs. It's not doing any of the things that this government is saying other than they get to cheer and pat themselves on the back. That's great. That's great that we have higher oil prices. No, that's not because of anything this government did. It does help their bottom line, but it is not helping Alberta families.

When we see how fiscally irresponsible they are by not even being able to invest their own child care budget into child care – \$163 million in two years, Mr. Speaker. That's how much this government has not spent on child care even though it was allocated for child care. So for all those families who over the past two years have been struggling to pay their fees, to find a child care space, to the 96 per cent of the workforce that are women, who are earning just above minimum wage as early childhood educators, who are working two jobs, who are wondering why they would stay in the child care field when they can earn more working at Tim Hortons – when all of those Albertans could have used the support from this government to actually create child care spaces, make it more affordable, attract more workers, this government did nothing. They actually pocketed that money and handed it out, \$55 million.

We don't even know – at this point this is where we're at with this government. They don't even blink about hiding \$55 million, about not accounting for it. It's just that that's the level of fiscal responsibility that this government expects Albertans to expect from them. But we know that Albertans expect higher, especially at a time when all Albertans are pinching their pennies. When they're very concerned about every dollar, this government seems incredibly irresponsible and unconcerned about how they spend Albertans' dollars.

Mr. Speaker, I have a very difficult time supporting a bill that, clearly, just demonstrates the fiscal irresponsibility of this government and their lack of commitment to investing in child care, the lip service that they continue to pay to something that is critically important not only to Alberta families but to our economy.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll cede my time to one of my colleagues.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Children's Services has risen.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to take a quick few minutes to respond and correct the record in terms of a few of the things the member opposite just said. Now, I know this is going to be a difficult concept for the members opposite, but fighting for Albertans is what we were asked to do. It's what we were sent here by our constituents to do, fight for a fair deal for Albertans, okay?

Now, I know, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite just said that we should have signed a little faster. I heard her colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo say that the other night when we were in fact talking about this as well. I know that that is very difficult for them to understand. We know what they would have done because I think their past performance would have been a really good indicator.

Ms Pancholi: Where's the \$55 million, Minister?

The Acting Speaker: I think that the last hon. member who had an opportunity to speak was able to be heard. Now I'm having trouble hearing the hon. minister as I believe there is a bit of a response happening. The only person with the floor is the hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Please continue.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that this is very difficult sometimes for the members opposite to understand. We know that past performance is a really great indicator of future activity, and what did we see the members opposite do? Sell out Albertans to our Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau. That is always what they were happy to do. Sign on the dotted line, they say. Sign on the dotted line. If we had signed on the dotted line, here's what we would have had, something very

similar to the program under the NDP, the pilot program that left out thousands and thousands of families right across Alberta. You selected certain centres and certain operators who could choose. Signing on the dotted line would mean that we would have gotten agreements like other provinces, like B.C. or Nova Scotia, who have been in fact signing agreements that would leave out – leave out – private operators. I know that is what the members opposite would have done.

Every single province is making choices when it comes to how they invest these dollars, and what did we do, Mr. Speaker? Instead of using ideology to lead our plan, we listened to Albertans. We know that between 60 and 70 per cent of child care operators are entrepreneurs. They are private operators. They are often female entrepreneurs who stepped up and said: hey, when the economy was good, we needed child care. What did they do? They stepped up to help their neighbours and grow our economy and opened up these child care centres. They are not the enemy. They are not the enemy.

When they say, Mr. Speaker, that we should have just signed on the dotted line, sell out Albertans to Justin Trudeau, that is what we would have gotten, a system that would have really just focused on nonprofit, public spaces. That was not good enough for Albertans – we heard it loud and clear – because they saw it under them.

What we did was we took the time. We took the time to listen. We took the time to gather feedback. We presented a plan, a plan that worked, a plan that worked for Albertans, nonprofit and private operators alike, Mr. Speaker. That is what we did. [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, one more time I'm just going to remind that the only person with the floor right now – and I know that sometimes comments made by both sides may not be agreed upon from both sides, but previously the member did have the opportunity to make her points, and now I think that there's a response happening. If the other members from the opposition are having issues with this, there will be ample opportunity to stand and take opportunities to speak as well.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services has the call.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We did. We took the time. We took the time to get it right, to listen to Alberta parents, to listen to Alberta child care operators. Not only did we include private operators; we also respect parent choice. What does that mean? I know that's, again, an interesting concept for the members opposite to understand. That means taking a look at the types of choices parents are making and making sure that there is flexibility in our system to meet their needs, things like preschool.

You know, that's a type of care that is very important for part-time working parents, parents who are staying at home, parents who are working from home, parents who want their children to have access to early learning and development opportunities. We included them in our plan. They weren't included under the members opposite. Not at all. We took the time to get this right. We did. We took the time to get it right. Yes, we . . .

Mr. Williams: Will the member give way?

Ms Schulz: Oh, absolutely, I will.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you very much, Minister, for that speech. It seems members opposite are paralyzed in the sedentary position when they could rise and intervene. I'm taking the opportunity to ask the minister: approximately how many Albertans are better served now in terms of numbers where they would not have been served under the NDP pilot program? If we had continued with that, how many Albertans would not have had day

care because of their ideological drive to only have one solution rather than being flexible in an Alberta-based decision?

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to speak to that. When we look at private operators, 60 to 70 per cent of our operators would have been left out. They were left out under the NDP pilot program. They actually believed that they were fundamentally going to have to shift their entire business if the members opposite would have been able to expand their plan. Why? Because they were not open for business. They did not respect parent choice. They created spaces in areas that were politically expedient. They closed child care centres because of oversaturation and not using data to drive space creation. [interjections]

Now, the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, has said – and I hope she's listening. I know she's heckling quite a bit here, but I do want her to hear this answer. She has said that we have lost child care spaces. I can tell you that we have actually grown 10,000 spaces since March of 2020. Ten thousand spaces. Throughout a pandemic, a time that has been very difficult, we invested \$165 million in child care operators right across this province because we knew that they needed those supports. We saw 10,000 additional spaces created even during a pandemic.

Let's talk about their record for a second. I mean, look at us. We want to talk about jobs, okay? Let's compare jobs for a second. I would like to talk about the record of 180,000 jobs lost under the NDP. We created 130,000 jobs last year during a pandemic. We added 10,000 child care spaces right across this province. The members opposite also want to say that we have lost early childhood educators. Mr. Speaker, not true. It's just not true. The numbers do not show that the arguments made by the members opposite have any semblance of fact.

We, in fact, were around 18,000 educators. That number did drop during the pandemic, Mr. Speaker . . .

4:00

Mr. Schow: Will the member give way?

Ms Schulz: Absolutely.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, hon. member and Minister of Children's Services. I do have a question specifically regarding something that the hon. minister had just said about misrepresenting certain facts and not having the facts correct. I'm wondering if the minister could maybe elaborate on some more inaccurate facts that the NDP has tried to peddle in this Chamber, specifically the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, as that member chooses not to listen but . . .

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: I hear that a point of order has been made. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has risen.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Sabir: Under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). I think that insofar as the member is talking about the NDP as a whole, that's fine, but when you specifically pick on an individual member, that's offside these rules. It's a point of order, and I urge you to rule that as such.

The Acting Speaker: I see the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Well, two things, Mr. Speaker. One, there was no point of order cited, no standing order . . . [interjection] You can sit down. You've had your chance to speak.

Second, Mr. Speaker, I was specifically referring to statements made by the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, the critic for Children's Services, and that member, in my opinion, has made a number of accusations and misrepresented or used inaccurate facts in this Chamber. I am simply asking the minister if that minister could cite some of the inaccurate facts that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has used. It's not a personal attack, and I know it gets the members opposite very riled up when they hear this . . .

Mr. Eggen: Because we're trying to debate the budget.

Mr. Schow: Again, it's my opportunity to speak, Mr. Speaker. Should the member from Edmonton – I forget the constituency – choose to speak, he has an opportunity.

Not a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. [interjections] Order.

I have taken into account both sides. I do think that we are getting frightfully close to the line with regard to language that could create disorder in here. There is always an opportunity within debates to disagree among facts. At this point, though, I do not believe that this is a point of order. However, as I've kind of intimated at the start, I would caution members with regard to the language that they are using.

I think that, in noting the time, I'm going to take up less of it given that 4:15 is coming imminently, and the hon. Minister of Children's Services, I hope everybody here understands, is the only one with the call.

Debate Continued

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a feeling it's going to get a little quieter in here now for this round of my comments.

Just to clarify, we have made significant investments in this year's budget, and I do want to tie this to the budget and also respond to the question that the Member for Cardston-Siksika had raised, which is, you know: what is some of the misinformation that we've heard today so that we can get it on the record and clarify the record?

You know, the members opposite said that there's no support for educators, that there's no plan to create spaces, that there's no plan to move forward with reducing child care costs further. That couldn't be further from the truth. We signed an agreement with the federal government, unlike the members opposite, fought for a made-in-Alberta plan. We did not take the first offer that was slid across the desk, because that is not what Albertans sent us here to do.

So let's talk about this budget. This budget has over a billion dollars to invest in early learning and child care. [interjection] Absolutely.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and, through you, to the minister. Because you're speaking about how you're connecting to the budget, could you also speak about the incredible amount of consultation that you did? I know that much of that consultation came through my riding and many other ridings. It's really important to understand how those dollars were leveraged, especially because of the immense amount of consultation that you did.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, and thank you for that question. We took part in the first consultation in over a decade with child care operators. The MLA for Grande Prairie led a lot of that when it came to our legislation, but we also heard a lot about what people wanted to see in this plan, Mr. Speaker. We did in fact travel the province, again, and met with nonprofit and private operators alike so that we could make sure that we got this plan right.

This million dollars and this plan that we signed with the federal government, Mr. Speaker, despite what the member opposite said, absolutely do seek to create 42,500 spaces in the nonprofit and home-based sector alone, with additional growth being required. We need the growth in the private sector as well, because we know the innovation and high quality that many of those programs provide. We need that if we want to meet the terms of the agreement with the federal government, and that is right in the plan. We are committed to looking at the wage grid and: how can we do a better job of recruiting and retaining in a time when we're going to see huge economic growth?

We're already seeing the job growth, Mr. Speaker. We know that there's going to be a labour market shortage, so how can we do things better to bring more early child educators into the field and keep them there? We are consulting on that because the answer isn't simple. It's not a one-size-fits-all. We want to be flexible, and the feedback we heard was diverse, so instead of moving ahead based on our own thoughts or ideology, unlike what we saw from the members opposite, we're continuing to listen. We do have \$1 billion to invest, and I just do want to clarify one thing. One thing I just want to end on is that, unlike the members opposite – borrow, tax, spend; borrow, tax, spend; borrow, tax, spend – this budget is a good budget.

I was sent here on behalf of my constituents to deliver a balanced budget, investing in things that matter to Albertans like child care, health care, education, and a balanced budget. We didn't sign on the dotted line, but, Mr. Speaker, there is one taxpayer here. One taxpayer. These are good investments on behalf of the people of Alberta.

Thank you for the opportunity to correct the record.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has the call.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you can see, the United Conservatives like to pat themselves on the back and claim that this budget actually serves Albertans. But I can tell you something: there are a number of Albertans out there that aren't patting this government on the back. That's for sure. That's for sure. Now, I know that the members opposite like to claim that they're listening to all Albertans, but you know what I would say? They only like to listen to the Albertans that actually support their own ideological perspective.

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

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister has called a point of order.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. McIver: Clearly, under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j), the member opposite said that our party, our side, only likes to listen to people that agree with us, Mr. Speaker. That's entirely not true. Under (h) and (i) it's a false and unavowed motive applied to

another member. It's "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. I appreciate the comments.

I think I'm prepared. However, if somebody does want to . . .

Mr. Sabir: It's not a point of order.

The Acting Speaker: That is what I'm going to say as well.

The hon. member can please continue with the call.

Debate Continued

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. But that's what we can expect from this government, because when they don't like the truth being stated inside of this House, they simply like to heckle. They like chirping over there, just like you can hear them right now, right? The reality is that they're not listening to all Albertans, because if they were actually listening to all Albertans . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, as you know, I always try to be as unbiased as possible in here, but during the previous speaker there were some comments being made that made it difficult for me to hear the debate. The only member with the call right now is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Please continue.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You see, that's the problem. They like to overshoot, and they just think that if it doesn't fit with their ideological perspective, then it doesn't deserve any time of day. [interjections] You know, the members on the other side: there they are heckling again. Heckling again, just like they always do in this House, right?

4:10

So this is the truth: we have been elected to be inside this House and represent all Albertans. When I come into this House and I express opinions – you know what? I'll qualify this even further, Mr. Speaker. I know that the members on the other side of the House are getting the same e-mails I'm getting because they're copied on them. They're copied on them. So how can they claim to be listening to all Albertans when Albertans are saying that their insurance is going up? Insurance is going up, utilities are going up, and life is becoming more unaffordable for Albertans with this particular budget.

You know, they got this windfall – they got this windfall – and they could have applied it and actually made some decisions that were actually better for Albertans. But they chose, "No; we're going to stick to our own plan; we're going to do what we want to do, our ideological perspective," which, as I've said in this House a number of times, Mr. Speaker, is completely outdated, this trickle-down theory that giving money and perks to the most wealthy in our society is somehow going to create more and more jobs for Albertans. What we're seeing: we're seeing part-time jobs. We're seeing part-time jobs at Walmart. You know, I have nothing against Walmart. I personally don't like going there myself, but I'll tell you this. The people who are working at Walmart, in jurisdictions even outside of Alberta, don't have enough money. They actually have to go to the food bank because they don't make enough money.

Now, you apply the fact that this Conservative government is actually giving perks and money away to big corporations, and then on top of that, Mr. Speaker, as if bad didn't come to worse, they have the perspective that they're going to take benefits away from workers, good-paying union jobs where people get additional benefits, which

is a part of the way that they're remunerated. They're going to take those away. You have one policy with another policy, so when holistically you start looking at the policies of Conservative governments, you see that they're actually disadvantaging, creating disadvantage for Albertans. They like to call themselves the party that's bringing back the Alberta advantage. [some applause]

The Acting Speaker: Order. Order.

With limited time available, the hon. member.

Member Loyola: This is the kind of clowning around that these members like to do inside of this House, Mr. Speaker. This is the kind of clowning around that they like to do, because anybody who gets up and actually debates against their perspective . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I was listening, and I'm going to say right now that there is not a point of order from what I heard. I was listening very carefully.

Mr. Schow: I called a point of order on that member.

The Acting Speaker: I will listen to this one, then, because I was listening to the member. I don't have the benefit of the Blues, and I think that, actually, from what I just stated, I can't call a point of order on something that I didn't hear. I know that we are short on time with regard to this because 4:15 is coming up quick. Please do not use a point of order for the purposes of potentially joining debate. However, I recognize that that wasn't your intention. It still does not discount the ruling that I have.

The hon. member.

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, this government, this UCP government, is creating more and more disadvantage for Albertans. They're making life less and less and less affordable with the decisions that they've made. They've made insurance go up. They've made utilities go up. And what they're replacing it with is part-time jobs for Albertans. What Albertans truly need is full-time, mortgage-paying jobs, ones that they know they can rely on. They need jobs that are going to be able to provide benefits for them and their families, for their children. That is real advantage. You can bet that in 2023, when this next election happens, we're going to be on that side of the House to actually come through with a plan that will provide advantage for all Albertans in this province.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member because I was enjoying the debate today. I could have sat here for hours, actually, with the way things were going. However, unfortunately, the time is 4:15. I hesitate, of course, to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, but in accordance with Standing Order 64(5) the chair is required to put the question to the House on every appropriation bill standing on the Order Paper for third reading.

Bill 7
Appropriation Act, 2022
(continued)

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:16 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer | Lovely | Sawhney |
| Allard | Luan | Schow |
| Amery | Madu | Schulz |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | McIver | Shandro |
| Copping | Nally | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Dreeshen | Neudorf | Singh |
| Ellis | Nicolaides | Stephan |
| Fir | Nixon, Jason | Toews |
| Frey | Nixon, Jeremy | Toor |
| Getson | Orr | Turton |
| Glubish | Panda | van Dijken |
| Hunter | Pon | Walker |
| Issik | Rehn | Williams |
| Jones | Rowswell | Wilson |
| LaGrange | Rutherford | Yao |
| Long | Savage | Yaseen |

4:20

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------|----------|----------|
| Carson | Goehring | Pancholi |
| Eggen | Hoffman | Sabir |
| Feehan | Loyola | Schmidt |

Totals: For – 48 Against – 9

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a third time]

Bill 8
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022
(continued)

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:22 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer | Lovely | Sawhney |
| Allard | Luan | Schow |
| Amery | Madu | Schulz |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | | McIver Shandro |
| Copping | Nally | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Dreeshen | Neudorf | Singh |
| Ellis | Nicolaides | Stephan |
| Fir | Nixon, Jason | Toews |
| Frey | Nixon, Jeremy | Toor |
| Getson | Orr | Turton |
| Glubish | Panda | van Dijken |
| Hunter | Pon | Walker |
| Issik | Rehn | Williams |
| Jones | Rowswell | Wilson |
| LaGrange | Rutherford | Yao |
| Long | Savage | Yaseen |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------|----------|----------|
| Carson | Goehring | Pancholi |
| Eggen | Hoffman | Sabir |
| Feehan | Loyola | Schmidt |

Totals: For – 48 Against – 9

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a third time]

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask for unanimous consent to waive the necessary standing orders in order to proceed immediately to consideration of Government Motion 17.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Motions

Bill 203 Committee Referral Timeline

17. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:
Be it resolved that the period referred to in Standing Order

74.11(2) be extended from eight sitting days to 11 sitting days in respect to Bill 203, Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join debate?

[Government Motion 17 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn the House until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:28 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 3rd Session (2022)

Activity to Thursday, March 24, 2022

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act (\$) (Kenney)

First Reading — 4 (*Feb. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 94-97 (*Mar. 7, 2022 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 140-44 (*Mar. 10, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 230-34 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation]

Bill 2 — Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 312-19 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft.*), 391-95 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., adjourned*)

Bill 3 — Special Days Act (Orr)

First Reading — 124 (*Mar. 9, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 327 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 343-45 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 346 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 375-78 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 379 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 389-91 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022]

Bill 4 — Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022 (McIver)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 163-77 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft.*), 360-66 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 396 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Bill 5 — Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022 (Sawhney)

First Reading — 202 (*Mar. 16, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 319-26 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 6 — Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022 (Orr)

First Reading — 228 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 7 — Appropriation Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 272-73 (*Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-11 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., adjourned*), 327-36 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 345 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 366-75 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve.*), 395 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Third Reading — 411-14 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft.*), 419 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022]

Bill 8 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 297 (*Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed*)

Second Reading — 311-12 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., adjourned*), 336-43 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 345-46 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 379-89 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve.*), 395 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Third Reading — 414-19 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft.*), 419 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022]

Bill 9 — Public's Right to Know Act (Shandro)

First Reading — 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 10 — Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022 (Aheer)

First Reading — 408 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Eastern Slopes Protection Act (Notley)

First Reading — 156 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill 202 — Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022 (Loewen)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), (*Mar. 22, 2022 , committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly; motion on concurrence to take place Monday, March 28, 2022*)

Bill 203 — Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act (Bilous)

First Reading — 228 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill 204 — Anti-Racism Act (Shepherd)

First Reading — 408 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022 (Jones)

First Reading — 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill Pr2 — Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022 (Nixon, JP)

First Reading — 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, March 28, 2022

Day 16

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
 Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
 Government Whip
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
 Premier
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)

Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
 Government House Leader
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
 Leader of the Official Opposition
Orr, Hon. Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
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Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

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| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gotfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
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Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

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Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, March 28, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. I invite you to join in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Members, seated in the members' gallery are special guests of the Minister of Education. A very warm welcome to Gabe Williams and Amelie Williams, who are seated in the members' gallery with their mom, Nicole Williams, chief of staff to the minister.

Also seated in the galleries are Mary Velthuisen, Kayla Quiring, and Haley Quiring. I'd like you all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Human Trafficking Task Force Report

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday Alberta's government officially accepted the final report, *The Reading Stone: The Survivor's Lens to Human Trafficking*, from the Human Trafficking Task Force.

First, I would like to praise and acknowledge the Human Trafficking Task Force for the work they've done over the last several months. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Paul Brandt. His profile, his experience, and his commitment to the cause made him an ideal candidate to serve as chair. Joining Mr. Brandt on the task force was a group of individuals with decades of experience in law enforcement and social work: Heather Forsyth, the former Alberta Solicitor General and former Minister of Children's Services; Jan Fox, the executive director of REACH Edmonton; Dale McFee, the Edmonton Police Service's chief of police; Douglas Reti, the former senior executive director general of RCMP Indigenous

relations services; Patricia Vargas, the director of Catholic Social Services; and Tyler White, the CEO of Siksika Health Services.

Their final report is the result of months and months of often difficult but ultimately productive and extremely valuable work. Mr. Speaker, the task force liaised with experts and thought leaders from around the world and listened to presentations from nearly 100 individuals and organizations who shared upsetting, often first-hand details of one of the fastest growing crimes in Canada.

Alberta's Human Trafficking Task Force has compiled several calls to action that will make it more difficult for this horrific crime to continue and, just as importantly, will empower the survivors of human trafficking to recover from their own experiences and see justice done. One of their main recommendations, for instance, is to create an Alberta office to combat trafficking in persons. This office would be established as a partnership between government and community. It would provide support and access to services to victims and survivors of human trafficking.

All told, Mr. Speaker, the report contains 19 calls to action, 18 of which our government has already accepted or has accepted in principle. It will be a challenge, but it's vital that we all rise to meet it. Once again I want to reiterate my gratitude to the task force and each member for their work on this important issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2017 UCP Leadership Contest and 2022 Review

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, no one is surprised that someone currently caught up in an investigation by the RCMP for their leadership race is again raising countless corruption red flags around their leadership review. For those who don't recall, the Premier won the leadership race for the UCP over the newly elected MLA for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, but he couldn't win without becoming wrapped up in an RCMP investigation around allegations of fraud, forgery, bribery, and propping up a kamikaze candidate to help him defeat that opponent. Shortly after becoming the Premier, he fired the Election Commissioner, who was also looking into his leadership campaign. The commissioner was fired after placing over \$200,000 in fines around that highly suspect UCP leadership race.

This Premier also changed election laws by allowing wealthy friends to buy over 400 party memberships a year for their closest friends, co-workers, employees, or whoever's information they have on hand without getting that individual's consent. The Premier legalized the exact corrupt practice he was already being investigated for.

Albertans cannot trust this Premier to run a fair leadership review, and he's made a mess of Alberta's election finance laws. Now, each and every one of us has heard the anger UCP members have with this Premier's shenanigans, rule change after rule change to help the Premier prevent an almost inevitable defeat at his leadership review – well, inevitable if it was run fairly. Just yesterday we learned that the increase in memberships is from the Premier's organizers securing thousands of memberships in bulk, again likely without the knowledge and consent of individuals who are now members.

We cannot trust this Premier anymore, and that's why my colleague is calling for the RCMP to look into these allegations with the upcoming leadership review. UCP members deserve to determine their own leader. This Premier is up to old Tory tricks. A decade ago we had ghosts on government planes; now we have phantom party members, and it's not lost on me that both haunted Premiers like to hang out in the sky palace. Here's hoping the UCP caucus can finally make the change Albertans deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

School Construction in Sherwood Park

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are exciting times ahead for the children and parents within my constituency of Sherwood Park. The balanced budget presented last month has introduced funding to begin the design process for a new school in Sherwood Park. This new school would replace Sherwood Heights and l'école Campbelltown and provide children in Sherwood Park with a new school facility in which they can grow and thrive.

Mr. Speaker, there are a few groups and individuals I would like to thank for advocating strongly for this funding, that will ensure the best for the students of Sherwood Park. I would like to thank Pine Steet, Brentwood, and Westboro elementary schools as well as Sherwood Heights junior high school and l'école Campbelltown parents for their advocacy for a new school, which has made this investment a reality. The dedication of these parents to the children's success is inspiring and admirable.

Next I would like to thank the Elk Island public school board trustees and their chair, Trina Boymook. This group of parents and community leaders has been working tirelessly to ensure that the best educational experience is provided to the children of Sherwood Park.

Last but certainly not least I would like to thank the principals of Sherwood Heights and l'école Campbelltown schools. Mr. Amit Mali, principal of Sherwood Heights, and Mr. Greg Probert, principal of l'école Campbelltown, are two individuals who are invaluable members of the Sherwood Park community. Their dedication along with the dedication of the school's administration and teaching staff ensures that the children of Sherwood Park receive the quality education that will set them up for success in the years to come.

Mr. Speaker, we love and support public education. Thank you very much.

2017 UCP Leadership Contest and 2022 Review

Mr. Deol: The allegations made concerning UCP election practices are deeply concerning. The idea that anyone in the UCP would think it's okay to use someone's ID without their knowledge to acquire their vote is horrible. It's corrupt, and it cuts directly against the democratic values that come with being in Canada. The idea that anyone in the UCP would think it's okay to take advantage of those with a language barrier to win a political contest is simply disgusting, but sadly this is where we are with this Premier and those around him.

1:40

The RCMP has been investigating the leadership race that elected the Premier for over three years now: allegations of fake e-mails, stolen personal identification numbers, the use of software to hide where votes were being cast, and stolen votes. People have found out from the media and the RCMP that votes were cast in their names using e-mails that weren't theirs. The Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation, the Minister of Infrastructure, the Minister of Seniors and Housing, the Minister of Community and Social Services, the former Minister of Culture, the deputy House leader, and the Member for Sherwood Park were also questioned by the RCMP in this investigation.

But it hasn't stopped there. Only last week we heard a disturbing allegation that people supporting a candidate in the UCP leadership review were approaching certain companies to get copies of

identification to attach to membership forms, likely to get ballots. I deeply hope that this allegation is false.

This Premier likes to pride himself as an ally of ethnic communities. He calls himself the Minister of Curry in a Hurry. Not fear, not smear: serious allegations have been investigated by Canadian police since this Premier has been in office. If this Premier has any real respect for these communities and their families, who make their home there, he will stand today and condemn anyone who attempts to campaign like this. He will welcome transparency into his party to ensure that this isn't happening, and he will do it now. I hope the Premier does the right thing.

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

Budget 2022

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week your United Conservative government voted for Budget 2022, and for the first time since 2014 I can say this: the budget is balanced. Now – and this is very important – the budget is balanced on the projection of \$70 oil. For context, right now western Canadian select is about 100 bucks; WTI is about \$114. This is important because it shows that our government is not gambling with any high oil price lottery windfall to balance the budget. At \$70 oil a balanced budget is no fluke.

In fact, if we kept spending on the trajectory of the NDP budgets, today we would have a \$6.5 billion deficit, meaning even more debt that would have to be paid off unfairly by future generations like my son and daughter. Don't ever forget that the NDP added over \$70 billion in new debt, which still has to be paid off, still has to be financed. All they did was make a bunch of bankers rich and effectively bankrupted our province. The NDP drove away hundreds of billions of dollars of investment. All those jobs and people forced to leave the province: I met many of these families and their hard-knock stories while door-knocking in Calgary-Currie. Possibly worst of all, under the NDP the GDP shrank, which ironically made us more reliant on oil and gas royalties to pay for social programs, AISH, schools, and health care.

Mr. Speaker, there is good news in our balanced budget. Revenue increased across all sectors of the economy: manufacturing, fintech, venture capital, film and television, energy, hydrogen, agriculture. All this means real economic diversification. We are also spending the most ever in history on our children's education, and to support our world-class health care system, we did something the NDP never did and – let's be honest – they never would: we brought fiscal responsibility back to the province. We did what Albertans asked. We balanced the budget.

Thank you.

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

Official Opposition Policies

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the UCP is making memes celebrating interpersonal violence and ruining Alberta's international reputation in environmental, social, and corporate governance, the NDP has been working with Albertans to build excellent policies focused on Alberta's future. Over the last year albertasfuture.ca has had over 75,000 Albertans participate in consultations focused on where the Alberta economy needs to go and building a path to get us there.

Many of the policies have been announced before the government has been able to even cobble together anything, and policies such as our hydrogen policy are described by industry as

more detailed, thoughtful, and realistic than UCP policies. The tech industry has celebrated our Alberta investor tax credit policy, that was created after extensive consultation on albertasfuture.ca. Most recently our significant consultation process has led to a private member's bill calling for race-based data collection.

Occasionally we have seen the government borrow from our policy website, but we encourage Albertans to go directly to the source. At albertasfuture.ca you will find policies on economic expansion, agricultural innovation, infrastructure development, affordable child care, protection of the eastern slopes, renewable energy, postsecondary education, tourism, hydrogen, lithium, making life more affordable, and many others.

Albertans want a government that is focused on building our province, not a government that wastes its time on internal fighting day after day. While this government is wasting \$82,000 a day on a useless war room that hasn't produced anything of value in over three years, albertasfuture.ca has produced dozens of policies that will make life better for all of us. We will help you fight inflation by reindexing personal income tax and seniors' benefits, we will create new jobs in the fast-growing tech, agriculture, and renewable energy sectors, and we protect the history and the environment, on which we all depend.

Albertans, join us at albertasfuture.ca.

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

COVID-19 Vaccination

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last year there was a disproportionate amount of interest in my health by the mainstream media and the NDP. Heck, even one of the members hacked into the public health care system. Given his position with the NDP it begs the question if the leader actually put him up to it.

In contrast, I maintained that people's choices for vaccination were their own and that they would do what's right for their families, their communities, and themselves with the information that was made available. When it comes to personal health information, in my opinion, the only thing a waitress or a server should be asking you when they're taking your order for a burger is, "Do you want fries with that?" not what your health history is.

I never asked for a QR code. I paid for my own testing results, that were showing negative. My family and I, back in January 2020, had COVID, so I had much interest in the serology test results as they became available. As a private pilot I have to complete a medical performed every two years. The medical includes an ECG, all relevant blood work, vision, et cetera. It served as a baseline for my health postvaccination as I passed my flight medical with no issues at all.

The same day as my medical I had my first shot of Pfizer. Though I didn't believe I needed it because my immune system is working fine, I did it anyway for a couple of reasons. One was to be able to document my own health information, serology, and potential side effects first-hand. The second was so that I didn't lose my voice in this place. The rhetoric and the mainstream media pressure of last fall was in hyperdrive, pitting Albertans against one another, and I didn't want to lose the ability to speak for those people that made their own choices.

Postinjection I was sick in bed for two days. Over the next three months I had progressive health issues, losing function in my right shoulder, pains in my left jaw, pain in my left side, chest pains, severe aches and pains in my legs. Postinjection serology showed that I'd posted 197 out of a possible 250. I saw my doc on the 22nd, seeking help. In the examinations he saw my health declining and ordered immediate workups. He found that I had a partially

collapsed lung, which was causing the chest pains, but no heart damage because of the blood work.

To put it in short, Mr. Speaker, there are way more than 2,000 people out there suffering. If you're having issues with people listening to you, send it to me. I'll see what I can do.

Ukraine Donations

Mr. Bilous: A lot of times in this Chamber people stand up and talk about the things they don't like, the people they disagree with, and the topics we can't align on. But sometimes we get to come together to work on a common cause. Today is one of those days.

A little while ago something really meaningful started to take shape. Two former members of this House dedicated to stand up for what they believe in asked us all for some help. Former Premier Ed Stelmach and former Deputy Premier Thomas Lukaszuk put out a call to action to help Ukraine, and Albertans answered.

More than a thousand Ukrainians fleeing their ravaged homeland are set to arrive here in Edmonton today on a flight supported by donations from LOT Polish Airlines and Shell Canada, with hosts awaiting them in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Proving that politicians of all stripes can work together on important things, Lukaszuk and Stelmach worked with Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland to identify those who could come to Canada on that plane, entirely free of charge. Once they land, after the passengers depart, the plane will be stocked with donations organized with help from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and the Canadian Polish Historical Society as well as people from all over Alberta. Donations heading back to the war-torn region will include essential supplies such as emergency medical equipment, items for seniors, and items such as sleeping bags and other outdoor survival equipment.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, Ed Stelmach is of Ukrainian heritage. Thomas Lukaszuk lived under martial law in Poland. This is a personal effort for both the organizers and those who have donated. I want to thank all members of this Chamber who collected or made donations to help the people of Ukraine. Albertans' hearts are with Ukraine and with those going through unimaginable trauma fleeing a war zone while missing their families, their homes, and their country.

This is an important initiative, and I want to thank these two former members for this important work, helping a thousand Ukrainians, and the many Albertans opening up their homes and hearts. But there is more to be done, and I'm calling on the provincial and federal governments to step up and do more for people who need their help. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Ukrainian Refugees

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to the generosity and support of donors, corporate partners, organizations like the Ed Stelmach Community Foundation, and volunteers like former Premier Stelmach and former Deputy Premier Lukaszuk, tonight about 400 Ukrainians will arrive in this province after fleeing war with Russia. Albertans are united behind the people of Ukraine, and they are fighting this conflict with compassion. This may be the first plane, but we all know it likely will not be the last. My question to the Premier is: has he been advised on how many

more Ukrainian refugees are expected to arrive in Alberta? Is there a number he's preparing for?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for the very relevant and thoughtful question as well as for the statement from her colleague. No, I have not received information from the government of Canada on an estimate although I have heard that approximately 30,000 temporary resident visas have been issued under the special federal program by the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. We can certainly expect more, and we have certainly indicated that Alberta would be delighted to receive and help settle a disproportionate number of those individuals. They will overwhelmingly be women and children as men under the age of 65 are not permitted to leave the country, and we will be there to do everything we can to support them.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much for that answer, and I want to acknowledge that Alberta has been providing both humanitarian and nonlethal aid on an overseas basis. Beyond that, though, as folks arrive, we must do work to prepare with our immigrant settlement agencies. I know that when we engaged with settling 4,000 Syrian refugees, that work was complex as we had challenges related to trauma and integration. As such, at the time we increased funding for settlement by about 30 per cent. Has the Premier considered targeting more funding to settlement agencies to help meet these challenges?

Mr. Kenney: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for another good question on this, Mr. Speaker. The answer is yes. When refugees are resettled, as government-assisted refugees they are typically supported by the government of Canada, including through the refugee assistance program and their funding to immigrant settlement organizations. However, these folks coming from Ukraine are not classically *de jure* refugees. They are, rather, temporary residents, and therefore there is no automatic federal support for them either through RAP or the settlement organizations. We are prepared to provide that support should it be necessary. We're working with the settlement organizations on . . .

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you again for that answer. We know this is the largest displacement of people since World War II, almost 4 million people. Imagine the population of our entire province fleeing war and violence, folks curled up in train stations and humanitarian aid tents and evacuation convoys, hoping for the chance to come to places like Canada. This pressure means we're going to have to look at support services in other areas like mental health counselling and schooling and health care. To the Premier: what type of work is being done now to prepare our children's supports, social services, education system for the arrival that we are anticipating?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I can inform the House that the government, through the Department of Culture, has already provided \$350,000 to the Canadian Ukrainian Congress, Alberta chapter, partly to help with their efforts to begin welcoming those individuals. I think many of them could be provided special support through the community that speaks their language and is familiar with their culture and context. But we certainly are working across departments and ministries to prepare for the additional kinds of social services that will be required by this population, that has been traumatized.

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

2017 UCP Leadership Contest and 2022 Review

Ms Notley: Well, change of pace, Mr. Speaker. Last week our party put forward ideas to protect Albertans facing utility shut-off because they can't pay their bills, to prevent coal mining in the eastern slopes, and to create more jobs in the tech sector. Meanwhile this UCP government is collapsing: shocking court documents, leaked recordings, more allegations of wrong-doing and corruption, a Premier who, in his own words, calls his party an asylum and his members, quote, lunatics. My question is simple: when does this end? How much longer do Albertans have to put up with this callous, corrupt, and chaotic government?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that's all ridiculous, and that word I was applying to people we have not permitted to run for us because of extreme views outside of the mainstream of Alberta politics. This government is leading Canada in economic growth, in job creation, almost historic diversification across our economy, which is why last week we passed through this place the first balanced budget in 14 years, a government that has kept 88 per cent of our campaign commitments. I understand why the NDP is concerned, because they're now falling behind in the polls, because Albertans want a government focused, like they are, on economic growth, jobs, and pipelines.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the allegations of corruption are actually coming from inside the Premier's own party. This weekend we learned more details about the alleged fraudulent actions undertaken by the Premier's 2017 leadership campaign; you know, the one under RCMP investigation, where the Premier was apparently interviewed. These details included the wholesale acquisition of ideas to create fake members and log fake votes. Today we wrote to the RCMP and asked them to keep an eye on the April 9 leadership vote. Does the Premier support this call, and if not, can he explain why he feels he's above the law?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP tried all the same fear and smear in the last election, and you know what it got them? The first majority government to be defeated after just one term, and this government secured a million votes for the first time ever in Alberta electoral history. While the NDP talks about internal party democracy, maybe she can explain to us why it is that 25 per cent of the votes in the NDP leadership elections is reserved for Gil McGowan and his union boss friends as opposed to regular NDP members. Is that why they call it the New Democratic Party?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the Premier keeps claiming he has nothing to do with this stuff – deny, deny, deny, deflect – except we also now have sworn statements from his former associates made to a public investigator, you know, the one they fired, saying that when it comes to the kamikaze campaign, he was in the room. He gave the orders, he talked about the money, he poured the Dark Horse. These allegations of illegality keep coming one after the other after the other. My question is this: is the least trusted Premier in Canada really saying that it's everybody else being dishonest, not him?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP is becoming so politically desperate that they're now resorting to citing somebody who was prohibited from running for the UCP because his campaign team physically assaulted a journalist to the point of unconsciousness. Now, that's just about what you would expect from the NDP, who

had one of their members break the law to seek to violate my personal privacy and who did violate the privacy of another Alberta citizen. That was acceptable in the NDP because of the campaign of personal destruction led by their leader.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand here today on behalf of our democracy. Albertans should be able to vote their conscience and do so free from intimidation and coercion. This Premier has thrown all of that into question. The allegations of what happened in the 2017 UCP leadership race and what is happening now during the current UCP leadership review undermine trust and confidence in our elections. Can the Premier assure this House here and now that no vote will be cast in the UCP leadership review without an Albertan's consent?

The Speaker: You know, I take a fairly wide swath of questions about government policy. I find it very difficult to find that that particular question had anything to do with government policy, more an internal party matter that is to take place. If the Premier would like to respond, he's welcome to; if not, we'll move on.

Mr. Kenney: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, every member in the United Conservative Party will get a secure mail ballot, handled by an internationally recognized auditing firm, with scrutineers overseeing the whole process, unlike the NDP. When they have a leadership election, according to their constitution 25 per cent of the votes are reserved for big union bosses, for Gil McGowan. Maybe the leader of the NDP could tell us: what deals did she make with Gil McGowan to secure his 25 per cent of supervotes, which they have in their twisted, nondemocratic NDP system?

Mr. Sabir: The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that no one trusts this Premier. So many in his own party believe that he won the leadership of the party using corrupt practices. We know that the investigation into that corruption is still ongoing, and today we learned that the Premier was interviewed by the RCMP in regard to this matter. Can the Premier tell this House here and now when he was questioned by the RCMP and why he waited until today to make this public, and can he also update this House on which ministers and staff have also been questioned as part of this investigation?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, the Election Commissioner and the office of the electoral officer investigated these allegations, and you know who were fined? You know who were fined? The two people that they are citing as sources; one of whose campaign team physically assaulted a journalist to the point of unconsciousness. This is classic politics of personal destruction from the same NDP whose ethics critic violated the law by seeking to violate my personal privacy. Why do they do this?

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, the Premier plays games instead of giving real answers. He treats these questions as if they are not legitimate when our democracy and free and fair elections are being called into question.

Today I have written to the RCMP to urgently request that they immediately expand the scope of their investigation into the 2017 UCP leadership contest to include the current 2022 UCP leadership review. Will the Premier commit to supporting the request by also writing a letter to the RCMP and urging them to expand the scope of their investigation?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this is exactly the pattern of the politics of personal destruction that leads the NDP ethics critic to believe that it is right and justified to clearly violate the law in order to violate my personal privacy. They are reckless about this.

But here's the good news. Albertans observed their politics of fear, smear, and personal destruction in the spring of 2019, and they sent the job-killing, high-tax NDP packing. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Premier's Office Staff Political Activity

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, during my time as minister I was proud to work with dedicated public servants who devoted their time working for Albertans. This government's approach seems different. During a time when Albertans have been hammered with a cost-of-living crisis by this government, the Premier is telling his staff that it's more important to help him keep his job as party leader than it is to help struggling families and businesses. He's been dispatching more and more of his staff to campaign for him even if it means the normal work of the Premier's office is sitting undone. Can the Premier confirm how many staff have stopped working for Albertans and are instead working to save his career?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you what. If the NDP wants a new rule where no political staff ever work on political campaigns, they should tell us.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you this. On the cost of living – on the cost of living – we are going through 30-year-high inflation. Food prices are up 18 per cent since the NDP brought in its carbon tax, and right now they are cheering on their ally Justin Trudeau to raise the carbon tax by another 25 per cent on April Fool's Day and by 400 per cent over the next eight years. That would cost the average family \$2,000 a year. Will the NDP vote with us to stop the April 1 carbon tax hike?

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I asked a straightforward question.

Now, when this government promised to be laser focused on jobs in the last campaign, we didn't know the Premier meant laser focused on his own job. I'm hearing daily from Albertans scared about making ends meet, who are seeing utility bills skyrocket month after month, with no support. Weirdly, not a single constituent has stopped me worried about this leader's campaign and his political fortunes. Can the Premier explain why keeping his leadership is more important to him than supporting Alberta families? How much of the job of Premier is going undone as he spends his time campaigning?

Mr. Kenney: You know, Mr. Speaker, this government is spending its time balancing the budget, growing the economy, creating jobs, and, yes, reducing the cost of living for Albertans, which is why on April 1 we will suspend the Alberta fuel tax, saving \$1.4 billion for Albertans on an annual basis, in addition to the \$150 electricity rebate – together, \$1.7 billion of consumer relief – while the NDP is cheering on their ally Justin Trudeau to raise the carbon tax by 25 per cent later this week.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier keeps saying that it's very normal for his staff to be staffing call centres for his leadership campaign. It is not normal. The government is not the Premier's reserve campaign team. It is not a taxpayer-funded call centre to bail him out of the situation he created. Phone calls are not being answered, e-mails are not being responded to, and concerned Albertans are feeling abandoned during this cost-of-living crisis that the UCP government has created. What do Albertans desperate

for help who want to raise concerns have to do to be heard? Buy a UCP membership? Oh, wait; someone already did that for them.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I distinctly recall at my by-election, in December 2017, seeing so many cars with Legislature parking passes as NDP staffers drove down to Calgary-Lougheed. They'd never been there. They don't spend a lot of time in the Calgary suburbs, but they did that day, and they were probably still on the public payroll, unlike a handful of staff who have taken a leave of absence, an unpaid leave of absence.

The NDP is standing here telling us that they are cheering on the 25 per cent increase in the carbon tax on April 1. Will they stand and vote with us to tell Trudeau to scrap it?

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

Utility and Fuel Costs

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rising cost of everything from food to fuel and electricity has put pressure on individuals and families across the province. People in Brooks-Medicine Hat are suffering from price hikes to essential and everyday items, and households are not able to budget like they used to. The cost of living is becoming overwhelmingly unbearable. Albertans are wondering how they can continue to make ends meet, especially with rising fuel prices. To the Premier: what measures are being implemented to reduce the price Albertans are paying at the pump?

Mr. Kenney: I thank the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat for her good question, Mr. Speaker. With inflation at a 30-year high and fuel costs going up because of the carbon tax, we need to take real action, which is why this government is stepping up with by far the boldest cost relief of any government in Canada effective April 1, reducing the provincial fuel tax by 100 per cent, 13 cents a litre. That will save Albertans on an annualized basis, if prices stay high, \$1.4 billion. Unfortunately, some of that will be lost to the Trudeau carbon tax unless he . . .

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

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Premier. Given that the cost of electricity has also continued to rise in recent months, partly due to the failed policies of the previous NDP government, in which electricity hit its highest prices ever, and given that our government is taking action to provide relief for families from fuel prices, to the Premier: what measures are being implemented to help Albertans who have faced and continue to face high utility bills this year?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, Albertans are paying for the NDP's huge energy policy mistakes. That's why we've seen electricity inflation. They spent 7 and a half billion dollars on additional transmission. They wasted \$1.3 billion on their power purchasing agreement fiasco. They stopped the cheapest and most reliable baseload power in our thermal coal plants and then conspired with Justin Trudeau on their carbon tax. We're taking real action to protect Albertans from the costs of all of those bad policies with a \$150 rebate that will be on their electricity bills as soon as possible. That's worth \$300 million to \$400 million of relief . . .

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

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Premier. Given that these relief measures are helping Albertans through a

volatile period but there's still federal legislation that affects us all and given that the federal government has a plan to continue to increase the carbon tax on fuel on April 1 in perpetuity and further given that this will only create more financial pain for Albertans, to the Premier: what will the government of Alberta do to try to stop the increase to the federal carbon tax and stand up for Alberta families?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The member is right. The Bank of Canada itself has said that the April 1 25 per cent increase in the Liberal-NDP carbon tax will raise inflation by another half a percentage point when inflation is already at a 30-year high. That is why we today have tabled a motion calling on the federal Liberal-NDP coalition to stop this scheduled increase. I've also signed a letter with the Premiers of Saskatchewan and Manitoba with the same call. Please, to Justin Trudeau, just show a bit of common sense and a little regard for people who can barely pay the bills today.

Premier's Leadership

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, on Thursday UCP MLAs heard what the Premier really thinks about them. In a recording the Premier describes his leadership review as, quote, the lunatics taking over the asylum, and described his opponents as: bugs attracted to the Premier's bright light. Earlier that day five UCP MLAs stood in front of the Legislature in protest to the Premier changing the rules. For the sake of those watching at home, can the Premier clarify which of his MLAs are lunatics, in his opinion? The MLA for Red Deer-South, Airdrie-Cochrane, Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, Calgary-Fish Creek? Which is it, Premier?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Premier already said today, some of the people that he was referring to are not members of our party and have not been allowed to run for our party, including a member, who the NDP are using as their source, whose campaign beat a member of the press to unconsciousness. Shame on the NDP. Let me tell you, this side of this House is never going to be lectured by that member, who referred to Albertans as sewer rats. Shame on her. She should never stand up in this place and try to lecture people on how to speak about Albertans after her despicable actions when she sat on this side of the House.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted is at 2:10.

2:10

Ms Hoffman: Given that Albertans are beyond exhausted with the unending drama and disrespect coming from the current government and given that the current Premier of the Divided Conservative Party is forcing government staff to campaign for him and given that 58 per cent of Albertans think it's time for this Premier to resign, can the Premier clarify for all Albertans who don't trust him or his leadership why he thinks we're the lunatics or bugs?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the desperation from the NDP is quite humorous. The more their polls go down, the more you're going to see this. This is the only playbook that the NDP has, complete fear and smear, trying to hide from the great things that are taking place inside this province. But don't worry; we're not going to fall for it, and Albertans can rest assured that this side of

the House is going to stay united and make sure people like that never get power again inside this province.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

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

Ms Hoffman: Given that the current Premier fired the Culture minister after she criticized him for his sky palace patio party but given that the Premier stands behind his liquor cabinet and will defend them to the bitter end – like the Health minister, who shouted at doctors in his driveway in front of his family, like the Justice minister, who tried to interfere with the administration of justice, and then there’s the Minister of Environment and Parks – since the current Premier cares more about loyalty than the ministers being competent at their jobs, will the Premier admit that he believes his own UCP MLAs are the lunatics and bugs? Or why won’t he kick those guys out of cabinet and put in . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the deputy leader of a party who hid the Member for Edmonton-South hacking members of this party’s personal records, their health records, who has had, on top of RCMP investigations – there’s only one party in this House who has had their doors kicked in by the RCMP with search warrants. You will continue to see this behaviour from the NDP because – you know why? – they’re losing and they’re desperately panicking as their poll numbers go down. This side of the House, though, is not going to focus on junior high politics because we came here to make life better for Albertans.

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

Cancer Care and Medical Physicists in Calgary

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP’s war on health care continues to harm Albertans and their families. At the Tom Baker cancer centre in Calgary a quarter of the facility’s medical physicists have resigned, including the program director. Two more are expected to leave soon. These highly trained specialists are a critical part of the care team for cancer patients in Alberta. Why is the Minister of Health putting Albertans with cancer at risk by driving these essential health care professionals away?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to thank the hon. member for the question. These medical physicists play an important part in providing cancer care to Albertans, but I’d like to set the facts straight. There is an issue in regard to personnel. There are currently four vacancies out of 22 positions in Calgary. I’ve been speaking with AHS. They have a plan to be able to fill those vacancies and work with the University of Calgary to be able to hire more. But let me be clear. This will not impact treatment for cancer patients now, nor in the future. We will get this solved.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that if there was not a problem, 24 physicians would not have tried to speak out and given that if there was not a problem, this government would not have tried to muzzle those doctors at the cancer centre by telling them not to speak with reporters and given that a letter signed by those doctors says, “We are concerned that we will be unable to provide our current standard of care or indeed any treatment; the safety of our routine daily cancer treatments are put at risk by a medical

physics department that’s understaffed, overworked, and inexperienced,” does the minister understand that his failure to act highlights exactly why Albertans cannot trust the UCP on health care?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member may not know this, but AHS has already acted. So just to put this into context, we have 50 of these types of positions across the province. There is an issue in Calgary, which has been identified. AHS has already made an adjustment in pay to be able to better attract and retain, and they are working to be able to fill the four vacant positions. We understand how important these positions are. We’re working to fill them, and we’re also working with the University of Calgary to be able to create a pipeline for the future.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that if this government understood, we would not be repeatedly coming down to the wire with physicians in this province – the work done by these medical physicists is crucial to world-class care in Alberta, and they’re expecting that the Calgary cancer centre will deliver that – and given that the UCP hasn’t set aside a single dollar to staff that facility and given that now it seems this government can’t even hold on to the staff they have, will this minister admit responsibility for his failures, or will he simply admit that the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock was right and their plan for the Calgary cancer centre was simply to have a fancy box?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I already indicated, I’m very pleased with the work that’s going on in building the Calgary cancer centre. This will be one of the largest cancer centres in North America, and we have committed to be able to provide funding for the cancer centre. In fact, we have committed to increase the capacity of our entire health care: \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year and the year after that, an increase of \$1.8 billion. We are making significant investment in terms of capital, and we have more health care professionals than ever in this province, 28,735 nurses, up to . . .

Premier’s Leadership (continued)

Mr. Loewen: In recently leaked remarks the Premier took a page out of his buddy Trudeau’s name-calling playbook and compared his opponents to, quote, bugs and lunatics, yet there’s been no apology for these disgraceful, dehumanizing remarks. The Premier’s complete focus on mudslinging means he’s failed to deliver on many items, including the Recall Act, which is still not in force. The result is a recent poll showing that a majority of Albertans from every region of the province want this Premier to resign. To the Premier: is it current government policy or just current practice to refer to 57 per cent of Calgarians and 62 per cent of Edmontonians wanting you to resign for failing to deliver on key promises as, quote, lunatics?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, that’s not what the government said at all. But I can tell you that what I heard from a lot of constituents about that member is his close friendship with Brian Jean, who’s called for a coalition with the NDP, similar to what we’ve seen in Ottawa. In fact, that member and his friend Brian Jean have called for putting the Leader of the Official Opposition, the NDP leader, into cabinet. So I guess my question to him: does he support her as well with mandatory vaccinations? And what’s

next? He's going to stand in this place and call for door-to-door vaccinations like the Leader of the Official Opposition?

Mr. Loewen: Given that that's more fear and smear, just like the NDP, from that member and given that in the Premier's slanderous leak the Premier stated, I quote, the lunatics are trying to take over the asylum and given that the, quote, lunatics the Premier is referring to include duly elected members of the UCP caucus and cabinet and given that managing the asylum now takes up so much of the Premier's time that he has failed to deliver on a number of platform commitments, including the citizen's initiative bill which is still not in force, can the asylum operator please rise and tell us exactly how many lunatics are currently within the UCP caucus opposing this Premier and his practice of failing to deliver on key promises?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the Premier was referring very clearly to people who are doing racist things and bringing forward hate, who have no space inside our party, not to our members or any members of the Legislative Assembly. But, again, I can't help but notice that the hon. member avoided the question. Does he support the Jean-NDP alliance? Yes or no? Is it part of his policy to bring the NDP into cabinet and force their disastrous policies on this Legislature and on the people of Alberta? Is he even going to stand up today and vote with them as they – I suspect the NDP will continue to support the Justin Trudeau carbon tax.

Mr. Loewen: Given that the minister continues to give misinformation and given that with the way things are going, the Leader of the Opposition won't need a kamikaze candidate in the next provincial election because she has this Premier and given how the Premier's failed leadership was felt in the most recent federal and municipal elections and given that this Premier is so wrapped up in his own drama and scorched earth politics that he can't get any work done for the people of Alberta, including failing to deliver on this government's fair deal agenda, to the Premier: were you really Alberta's kamikaze candidate all along, or is it just your government's policy to fail to deliver on key promises?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, while this hon. member focuses on playing junior high politics, this Premier and this government have been hard at work doing things like balancing the budget, restoring 130,000 jobs or so just recently, recovering all of the jobs lost by the NDP, on and on and on. While that member plays junior high politics and works on trying to develop his coalition with the NDP, like you see in Ottawa, and playing games inside this Legislature, this government is going to continue to go work every day for the people of Alberta.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, if you looked out your windows at the Legislature today, you would have seen students coming forward on a day of action to fight for their own well-being. Investing in the postsecondary sector is a surefire way to grow our economy, to attract and retain brilliant people, and to build resilient and thoughtful communities. We need to equip future leaders with the tools necessary to thrive, not push them away. Students came here to demand an end to the cuts in postsecondary and to call on this government to reverse their disastrous decisions. What does this government have against students? Will the minister listen to them and restore funding to our postsecondaries, and if not, why not?

2:20

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have nothing against students. In fact, we're doing the opposite to implement many of the objectives and goals that students have asked us to implement. The students have asked us to provide more funding for low-income students; we've done that. The students have asked us to put more into work-integrated learning opportunities; we've done that. As well, we're providing over \$171 million in new funding to create 7,000 additional spaces in our postsecondary institutions to ensure that every student has the opportunity to pursue . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Given that last year almost half of the provincial cuts to postsecondary were absorbed by the U of A to avoid harming students but there's only so much these universities can take and given that this year millions more were cut and given that this government has allowed tuition to increase anywhere from 17 to 105 per cent and given that these massive increases will deter students from coming here, therefore shrinking our talent pipeline, to the minister: will he recognize his actions are hurting students, businesses, and our economy and reverse these cuts already?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Mr. Speaker, as I've done, you know, numerous times in the House – I guess the member opposite hasn't heard that tuition in Alberta today is below the national average. I have to repeat it many times, but I just can't get through to the members opposite. You know, I have some fancy charts in my office as well I'd be happy to share with them to help highlight that information. As well, as I mentioned, we're providing \$12 million over three years to support our existing scholarships as well as \$15 million over three years to create new bursaries to assist low-income students.

Speaker's Ruling Gestures

The Speaker: I'm not entirely sure what sort of hand gestures the government deputy whip is making or the Opposition House Leader – you know who I'm talking to – but whatever this is, it's not appropriate inside the Assembly.

Postsecondary Education Funding (continued)

Mr. Bilous: Only the UCP would celebrate being average.

Given that Alberta already falls short of other provinces in offering financial aid and given that this government isn't even getting the student aid out the door to students and given that more young people are leaving Alberta, wanting to leave Alberta, or wanting to stay away from Alberta than in a generation, to the minister: is this government really going to stand there and claim their policies are working when it's so clear that they're driving future leaders out of the province?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not true, what the member opposite is suggesting there. You know, there have been some recent reports that I think the member is referring to from Can West and other organizations. I encourage the member to take a close look. There are a number of recommendations in there as to what the government can do to support postsecondary education, and in fact the government is already moving forward on many of those. It calls for greater investment into work-integrated learning; we're doing that. It calls for actually expanding apprenticeship education; we're doing that. We're taking these steps and more to

ensure that our students here in Alberta are able to find the programming that they need right here at home.

Utility Costs

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, recently I received a message from Margaret. She has a child with a disability and cannot afford this month's gas bill. She's looking for assistance from this government, but all this government chose to do is create a fake gas rebate plan that won't impact her and doesn't come into effect until next year. I know that the associate minister is proud of his plan to do nothing for Albertans, but how can he hear this story of Margaret and refuse to do anything? Why do big-time CEOs get billions and Margaret gets nothing? She's drowning in debt, and this government won't lift a finger.

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we are empathetic with any Albertan that is struggling with the high cost of utilities. What I would encourage the member to do is to speak to that individual and let them know that there are options and there are supports. The place that they should start, because they don't have to do the work themselves: they can actually contact the Utilities Consumer Advocate. They can actually speak to people online, and they will give them advice not just on different contracts but also on the supports that are available for Albertans that are struggling. Again, that's the Utilities Consumer Advocate, and I advise the member to share that information.

Mr. Nielsen: How about a real gas rebate?

Given that another constituent of mine, Amerire, recently received a \$500 electricity bill and given that rather than stepping up and helping these Albertans, the associate minister is high-fiving himself and boasting over a \$50-a-month rebate – \$50 – as in they're covering a measly 10 per cent, can the minister explain to my constituents: what are they supposed to do to cover the other 90 per cent? Take out a loan, another credit card, or sit in the dark freezing?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fear on the other side of the House is just palpable. I guess they have access to the same polling data that we do.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I can only impress upon the member that we have brought in meaningful supports that will help Albertans, things like the \$150 electricity rebate, cancelling the 13-cents-a-litre gas tax on April 1. But the number one thing that we can do to keep utility prices low is keep the NDP away from the natural gas and electricity grid. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, given that I have more stories for the minister, like my constituent Marilyn who got a \$402 electricity bill, Charlene's bill has doubled, Danielle got a \$246 bill for natural gas alone, and Lorrie a \$300 electricity bill – these are real people with real struggles who can't make ends meet – what message does the associate minister have for all of these people? Will he finally take responsibility and commit to a real support program or pass the buck and ignore the concerns since he's done that since day one?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly acknowledge and understand that electricity prices have been going up. We are in a time of real inflation driven in part by high energy prices. We're doing all we can to position Albertans well to deal with these higher costs, but what Albertans need to understand around electricity is the fact that as consumers we're all paying exponentially more today because of the failed policies of the members across the aisle. They added 7 and a half billion dollars of unnecessary transmission costs, prematurely paid out power purchase agreements, costing Albertans \$1.3 billion, plus they brought in a carbon tax.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Postsecondary Education Funding and Programs

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta 2030: building skills for jobs strategy aims to improve student access, and the UCP government has shown a commitment to doing so by prioritizing targeted enrolment growth at postsecondary institutions with a strategic investment of \$171 million in Budget 2022 to ensure students can meet labour market needs. To the Minister of Advanced Education: can you quantify the seat expansion the \$171 million will create for Alberta students? In what programs will these seats become available and when?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, Mr. Speaker, great question, and, yes, happy to provide more details. The \$171 million, the historic investment, in fact, that we're making over three years in Budget 2022, will create over 7,000 additional spaces in our postsecondary institutions and, just to be clear, more spaces than the NDP ever created when they were in government. We will create these seats in programs where there is additional demand, high-demand programs, including aviation, tech, health care, finance, engineering, and other areas, so that we can ensure that students are able to access in-demand programs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Budget 2022 provides over \$600 million in additional funding over the next three years for Alberta at work to ensure access to postsecondary education opportunities and the fact that expanding work-integrated learning opportunities is a key component of the Alberta 2030 strategy, to the same minister: how will students have guaranteed access to work opportunities within the province both during and after their programs of study so they can remain right here in Alberta?

Mr. Nicolaidis: Another great question, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, you know, there are many recommendations from Can West and the Alberta Colleges Economic Recovery Task Force and many other organizations that have outlined the importance of strengthening work-integrated learning. We're listening to them, and we're doing precisely that. In fact, in this recent budget there's \$6 million over three years to increase work-integrated learning opportunities. As well, we provided in previous years \$15 million to create new internships with Mitacs. These internships and co-ops will help ensure students . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that a core part of Budget 2022, Alberta 2030, and Alberta's recovery plan is ensuring that individuals develop the

skills needed to thrive in the workforce of today and given that the changing nature of work demands that people remain agile in learning and skills development, to the same minister: what pathways exist for students and workers who want to reskill, upskill in how to do microcredentials? How do these feature in Alberta's postsecondary degree landscape?

2:30

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is bang on. You know, there are a number of reports, again, the Conference Board of Canada and other organizations, that point to the changing nature of work and point to the importance of fostering and developing reskilling opportunities within the province, so we're doing precisely that. Within this budget there's \$8 million over three years to create additional microcredential programs. These will help all Albertans reskill and upskill for the new economy. As well, this past summer we announced new funding for additional microcredential programs.

Utility Costs (continued)

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to represent the people of Edmonton-Ellerslie and bring concerns of my constituents into this Legislature. My constituents are struggling because of the decisions of this government which cause utilities to skyrocket. I hear from them every single day. Families cannot afford to wait. They should not have to choose between paying utilities and putting food on their table. My constituent Wanda e-mailed me and said, quote: something needs to be done to stop these fees; please explain to me how this is fair. End quote. To the minister: how is removing price caps and allowing prices to skyrocket fair to Wanda?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. The member is absolutely right. On the fee side, costs have continued to go up. You know, during their time in government they spent \$7.5 billion on transmission infrastructure, and now they want to gaslight all of us and ask: why are fees going up? Not only do Albertans have to pay off that \$7.5 billion, but they also have to pay the carbon tax as well, that their friend Justin Trudeau will be increasing on April 1.

Member Loyola: Joy, a constituent, e-mailed my office and said, quote: the increase in costs right now is ridiculous; I want to know how these increases can be justified. End quote. Given that this UCP government does not recognize that skyrocketing electricity bills hurt Albertans and their families, especially those on fixed incomes, and given that they are delaying taking action and given that any of the programs they claim to have put in place are completely fake, can the minister justify these cost increases to Albertans like Joy?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the member is correct, and their constituent is correct. Costs are rising. At the end of the day, there's one reason and one reason alone. That's because the NDP broke it. We are going to fix the issue that we have with transmission and distribution costs in this province, but it is going to be a longer term fix. While we're doing that, we have given all Albertans the \$150 rebate to give them some short-term relief. Again, the best thing

that we can do is to make sure that the NDP never gets near the natural gas or the electricity grid again.

Member Loyola: Not taking action is almost as bad as taking terrible action, and with this government it's always one or the other. Given that less money in the pockets of Albertans is less money that goes back into the local economy and given that in the fall the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity boasted in the Legislature that he would do nothing to help Albertans from massive price increases, will the associate minister acknowledge that the UCP government is responsible for this mess? Do the job of government, step up, lead now, stop living in the past, and help ...

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the historical revisionist on that side of the House wants to quote me and tell me what I said, so let me say it clearly so the hon. member can write it down this time. We were asked if we were bringing rate caps like the NDP. Of course, we know that rate caps don't work. We're bringing in real, meaningful solutions that will address the fact that the NDP raised the cost of utilities for every Albertan. They broke the system; we're going to fix it.

Homeless Supports and Affordable Housing

Ms Sigurdson: Homelessness is increasing across the province, shelters are overwhelmed, and the UCP is inconsistent with funding shelters such as the Hope Mission. The Mustard Seed expressed in an *Edmonton Journal* article today that they want to be a temporary place where they can redirect people experiencing homelessness to permanent housing. Shelter staff are burning out, and the UCP is ignoring requests from the city of Edmonton to fund permanent supportive housing. While poverty and homelessness increase, why is the Minister of Seniors and Housing ignoring calls for permanent supportive housing with mental health support?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, providing support for people who have no home through shelters and the co-ordinated support for housing is important for our government. That's why in this budget we committed \$49 million for shelter support services. In addition to that, at the time when we provided more funding to the shelter services, \$21.5 million, we also established a provincial task force. We're looking at a structure, a new way, how we can provide comprehensive, co-ordinated support services for this.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that there's a clear solution to this ongoing crisis of poverty, one that has been researched and supported around the globe – that is, housing, particularly an investment in permanent supportive housing – and given that the province ignores calls from the cities and from organizations to fund permanent supportive housing and given that these support systems rely on the government funding for their operations, why is the UCP ignoring experts, ignoring municipal partners, and ignoring people in this province with lived experience and leaving the most vulnerable Albertans on the streets?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The capital plan for 2022 increased overall funding over three years by \$42.4 million compared to capital plan 2021. This budget is, in fact, the first year of stronger foundations as we conduct the needs assessment in communities, develop innovative models, and expand our

partnerships. The budget in the coming year will ramp up as the community needs and assessments and partnerships are developed.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that it's not just front-line workers who are calling on the government to act – chambers of commerce and downtown business associations all know the solution to social disorder and concerns brought forward by their customers is to provide a home with wraparound support – and given that there is a human rights argument in favour of supportive housing as well as an economic one, what will it take for this government to realize the crisis is their responsibility and to commit long-term, stable funding to support those impacted by the rising levels of homelessness?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the hon. member raising a very complex issue. Homelessness is a complex and difficult social issue to tackle. That's why we appointed a provincial task force with experts from various sectors, from shelter to supporting housing, from social services, health, the recovery-oriented continuum of care. We're taking a drastic new approach, looking at the issue from a comprehensive, co-ordinated approach for this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Ukraine-Russia Conflict

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the end of World War II, in 1946, many in Europe were on the verge of starvation. Their cities were bombed-out ruins. People were homeless and living as displaced persons all over Europe. With the defeat of fascism in 1945, the first issue was to help feed and house the millions of displaced Europeans. To the Minister of Labour and Immigration: what can the people of Alberta and this government, who have a long and close relationship with the people of Ukraine, do to help meet the needs of those Ukrainians who find themselves displaced in Europe?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for that very important question. You know, the people of Ukraine, who helped settle our province: they helped build our province. I have been inspired by the phone calls, the e-mails, the contact, and the meetings that we have had from ordinary Albertans across all regions of our province asking how they can help. I can assure that particular member that Alberta and Albertans have a strong bond with the people of Ukraine, and we will be there for them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Ukraine is one of the key nations in the world for food exportation and given that it is likely that the war in Ukraine is going to affect world food supplies and given that Alberta is going to be looked to by the world to help replace the food losses from the war in Ukraine and given that fertilizer costs for farmers in Alberta have skyrocketed over the last several years, to the minister of agriculture: what can the Alberta government do to address the shortage of fertilizer production in this province and help farmers to grow the food that is going to be so badly needed around the world in the next few years?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A great question. I know that the whole agricultural community globally is watching what's happening as Russia has invaded the literal breadbasket of the world. Fertilizer prices: historic highs globally. We're fortunate here in Alberta. In talking to our fertilizer companies, we know that there is enough supply in Alberta for spring plant 2022, very fortunate in that regard. But the biggest thing: we need to continue our fight against things like the carbon tax. When I talk to these companies, they want to build more production in this province, and they won't. They'll do it south of the border and rail it up.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in post World War II Europe the Marshall Plan helped to rebuild European prosperity by targeting the goods and services that Europe needed to rebuild and given that one of the major issues that Europe is going to face as a result of the war in Ukraine is energy sufficiency and given that Alberta has the third-largest reserves of natural gas and that this gas is needed by Europe to replace Russian energy, to the Minister of Energy: what actions are being taken to supply Europe with the energy it needs and the resources that we have to provide?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member for the question. As he said, we do sit on the third-largest oil reserves in the world, yet we see the United States first banning imports from Russia, and now they're looking to other dictatorial regimes like Venezuela, Iran, and Saudi Arabia to fill their supply gaps. Importing from these regimes when there's an ethically sourced, environmentally friendly oil and gas supply available right here in Alberta, ready to ship to Europe and to the U.S. if we can get the necessary infrastructure built, is senseless. There is an answer to this problem, and it's called Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Budget 2022

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans can be proud to know that their elected government has balanced the books for the first time in nearly a decade. Despite the constant fear and smear from the NDP, this is good news for Alberta. Inheriting a damaged economy from the NDP wasn't easy, but Albertans knew that if anyone was going to fix it, it was our government.

The NDP showed up in pathetic numbers last week to vote down this budget. They claim that it was damaging to Albertans and decreases spending across the board, but it's just not true. Leading up to the days of the vote, they told Albertans that it would be the day that the government would fall; it was going to be the Armageddon. However, nine out of 23 caucus members showed up to vote, and I think that that sends a loud message to their Twitter followers, more than anything they could have actually tweeted. It's unfortunate to see an opposition party so deep into political theatre that they would try to lead Albertans to think that this balanced budget is bad news.

The UCP is proud to provide Albertans with quality health care, education, and other supports while still maintaining fiscal responsibility. Rather than heading in the direction of the \$6 billion

deficit of the NDP, our government has brought Alberta back on track with a \$500 million surplus for this fiscal year. Mr. Speaker, it's understandable that the members opposite are upset. They were a part of a caucus and a government that tried to fiscally and morally bankrupt Alberta. The NDP hates to see a government that spends money with sustainability and responsibility in mind. The UCP did what the NDP could not: we balanced the books and worked hard to deliver on promises despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. I know that Albertans are happy to see those promises being kept, and that is what they'll remember when they vote in 2023.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to present the committee's final report on Bill 201, the Eastern Slopes Protection Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. This bill was referred to the committee on March 14, 2022. The report recommends that Bill 201 not proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 201.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the motion for concurrence in the report on Bill 201, Eastern Slopes Protection Act, is debatable pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members wishing to speak? There are.

Hon. members, given that members wish to speak to the motion for concurrence in the report, that debate will take place on the next available Monday under the item of business motions for concurrence in reports on public bills other than government bills. This procedure is in accordance with the ruling that I made on Monday, June 7, 2021, with respect to then Bill 218, Provincial Parks (Protecting Park Boundaries) Amendment Act, 2021, which will afford some time for members to prepare for concurrence debate. The next available Monday is anticipated to be April 25.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 18, sponsored by the Minister of Environment and Parks. It reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government of Canada to stop its planned April 1, 2022, increase of the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne and its further plan to increase the carbon tax to \$170 per tonne given that Canadian families are struggling with the highest inflation in 30 years.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Bill 11 Continuing Care Act

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and request leave to introduce Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill establishes clear and consistent authority and oversight for the licensing, accommodations, and delivery of publicly funded care in the continuing care system. Alberta's current legislation falls under multiple acts and regulations, some dating back to 1985. The delivery of continuing care has evolved, and existing legislative requirements do not reflect present-day practices, services, or settings, and the COVID-19 pandemic revealed further gaps and inconsistencies. As a result, the government is introducing new, streamlined legislation under one act. It will strengthen government accountability and transparency and enable better co-ordination and alignment of care. Therefore, I move first reading of the Continuing Care Act.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Luan, Minister of Community and Social Services, responses to questions raised by Ms Renaud, hon. Member for St. Albert, and Mr. Hunter, hon. Member for Taber-Warner, on March 10, 2022, Ministry of Community and Social Services 2022-23 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, points of order. At 2:10 and again at 2:11 the Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe that these are two points of order; however, my arguments for the two are the same, so with your indulgence I will make the argument a single time. I look forward to your ruling.

My point of order, under 23(h), (i), and (j), is specifically because in this place, in this Assembly, the language that we use in relation to other members is very important, Mr. Speaker. As outlined in *Erskine May* as well as the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, one of the basic principles of this House "is that the proceedings be conducted in a respectful manner," page 610.

At 2:10 and then again at 2:11 the Government House Leader, in response to questions from the deputy Leader of the Official Opposition, was using language that I believe could cause disorder in this House and very specifically showed a lack of respect for another member in this place. I do not have the benefit of the Blues, but, Mr. Speaker, what caught my ear at 2:10 was the Government House Leader telling the member that she should never stand up in this House, which I think is particularly problematic, unparliamentary, and likely a point of order; as well, at 2:11 referring to a colleague in this Chamber as "people like that," a very disrespectful and insulting disparagement that, I believe, is unparliamentary and should be considered a point of order.

Certainly, this government has spoken about raising the bar in this Chamber a number of times, yet we continue to see patterns of behaviour like this and talking down to other members in this Chamber. I believe that these are a point of order and did not live up to the standard of this Assembly that we should all be trying to reach. I look forward to the arguments and your ruling, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think context is everything, and I think that would apply to this as well. I don't have the benefit of the

Blues, so I wouldn't be able to speak to what the hon. House leader had said. In respect to the comment that that member should not stand in this Chamber, certainly, that comment on its own would be unparliamentary, but if it was with regard to not standing in this Chamber to spout off something that was not factually accurate, that would certainly lend itself well to context and I'd say is not a point of order.

In terms of the comment of "people like that," again, I was not aware of the context. I don't recall it, so I leave that to your ruling. If it is in fact a point of order, I'm happy to withdraw and apologize. I just don't have the benefit of the Blues to suggest if it was or wasn't.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, I do have the benefit of the Blues. "She should never stand up in this place and try to lecture people [about how to talk to] Albertans after her despicable actions when she sat on this side of the House." *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 623: personal attacks and insults are not in order. I would suggest, between a combination of suggesting that a member shouldn't stand up and referring specifically not through the chair but to "her despicable actions," that this has raised to the level of a point of order.

The Deputy Government House Leader to apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Schow: Most certainly, Mr. Speaker, I apologize and withdraw.

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

Privilege Misleading the House

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am prepared to rule on the point of privilege that the Government House Leader raised on March 23, 2022. The question has to do with statements made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-South in the Assembly on Tuesday, March 22, 2022. The Government House Leader provided notice of the question of privilege to my office at 11:15 on March 23, with a copy to the Member for Edmonton-South, therefore fulfilling the notice requirement under Standing Order 15(2). This matter was raised at the earliest opportunity, as required under the standing order.

In his notice, the purported question of privilege, the Government House Leader indicated that on March 22 the Member for Edmonton-South stood in this Chamber and asked questions while denying that he was guilty of using personal information of the Premier to hack vaccine records. The Government House Leader argued in his submissions to the Assembly on March 23 that publishing a document publicly detailing the steps that the Member for Edmonton-South took to use another MLA's identity was enough to form the conclusion that the MLA was admitting his guilt.

The Government House Leader contends that the Member for Edmonton-South made statements in the Assembly denying that he was guilty of using personal information of the Premier to gain access to the Premier's COVID-19 vaccination records and, more broadly, denied that he broke the law. The Government House Leader claims that in making such statements, the Member for Edmonton-South was deliberately misleading the Assembly and, therefore, committed a contempt.

Members can find these submissions on pages 358 to 360 of the March 23, 2022, *Hansard*.

On March 24 the Member for Edmonton-South presented arguments on the purported question of privilege. In his submission

the member indicated that with respect to making misleading statements, he has "not admitted to committing any crimes" and that he believes that, "clearly, any statements [he has] made in the House are not misleading to this effect." These submissions can be found on pages 410 and 411 of the *Hansard* for March 24.

Hon. members, the Assembly has had this type of question of privilege, deliberately misleading the Assembly, before on a number of occasions during the 30th Legislature. As noted in past rulings, this type of question of privilege is treated as purported contempt of the Assembly. The reference is found in *Erskine May*, privileges and practices and usage of parliament, 25th edition, on page 307.

As noted in previous rulings, the test for deliberately misleading the Assembly is a very difficult test to meet. As set out in the fourth edition of *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand* at pages 775 to 776, the test has three elements. "The statement must . . . have been misleading; the member must have known that the statement was inaccurate at the time the statement was made; and the member must have intended to mislead the [Assembly]."

Hon. members, I have reviewed the *Hansard* of March 22 and specifically the statements made by the Member for Edmonton-South that day. I can find no reference by the member denying that he was guilty of using the Premier's personal information to access vaccine records. In addition, I find that he made no statements confirming or denying that he was culpable of an offence in connection with the matter at hand. As such, there is no evidence that these statements were made. As the Member for Edmonton-South himself has indicated, there was no possibility to mislead the Assembly. Therefore, the first part of the three-part test has not been met. Accordingly, I find no question of privilege. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Motions for Concurrence in Committee Reports on Public Bills Other than Government Bills

Bill 202

Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: Hon. members, on March 22, 2022, the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills reported the report of the committee of Bill 202, Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022, and requested concurrence of the Assembly in the report, which has recommended that the bill proceed. As a member other than the mover rose to speak on March 22, debate on the motion will proceed today.

The motion to concur in the committee's report on Bill 202 has already been moved. Therefore, I will now recognize any additional speakers that would like to speak. Are there members who wish to speak to the motion for concurrence? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley has risen.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a privilege for me to rise today and speak to concurrence of private member's Bill 202. It's my proposed legislation to amend the Public Health Act. Now, before I get into the details, I just want to offer my sincere thanks to the folks who helped me determine the substance of this bill. The select special Public Health Act committee put forward a list of recommendations, and this bill aligns with those recommendations. These recommendations have not been implemented yet. These recommendations encourage checks and balances and transparency, which is what Bill 202 does.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I listened to people from across Alberta, and I came up with Bill 202 because it was of great concern, the Public Health Act and how it was used during the pandemic. It takes a firm commitment to listen to all constituents regardless of political affiliation; however, in my experience it is well worth the effort because no single person, party, expert, or interest group has a monopoly on good ideas. The recent pandemic has impacted the lives of every single Albertan over the past two years, so I wasn't entirely surprised that pandemic management was the top concern of the majority of those people who provided input.

Bill 202 aims to address three main concerns: transparency, accountability, and democratic oversight. The importance of addressing these issues cannot be overstated. I am certain that every single member of the Assembly has heard from Albertans, directly and through correspondence, about these matters. We also know that these concerns were raised as part of the legislative review of Alberta's Public Health Act conducted more than a year ago. The report issued following the review specifically recommends that the Public Health Act be amended to enhance transparency and democratic accountability. Speaking to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee on August 27, 2020, the chief medical officer of health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, stated that

there need to be checks and balances, there need to be assurances that there's not going to be use of this act in an inappropriate way, I would advocate that tools not be taken out but, rather, if additional checks and balances are needed, that those be put in.

Recommendations included in the committee's report included three key measures. First, the committee recommends that the Public Health Act be amended to ensure that an order declaring a state of public health emergency under section 52.1 cannot lapse and subsequently be reinstated without the approval of the Legislative Assembly.

Secondly, the committee recommends that ministerial orders issued under section 52.1 cannot be renewed without the approval of the Legislative Assembly.

Thirdly, the committee recommends that sunset clauses be included under section 52.1 to ensure health orders are reviewed in a timely manner to ensure they are removed when no longer necessary.

3:00

While these recommendations have gone ignored for more than a year, it is perfectly clear that the public wants action when it comes to transparency, accountability, and democratic oversight. MLAs and all Albertans need access to timely, accurate information concerning public health orders during declared emergencies.

Furthermore, MLAs need to be seen taking an active and public role in pandemic management. It is important to me to ensure that Bill 202 ensures MLAs can carry out our duties while ensuring cabinet and medical officers of health can take swift action to protect the public when necessary. While there is room for improvement in many other areas of the Public Health Act, Bill 202 is limited in scope to sections of the Public Health Act concerning states of emergency, particularly pandemics.

I just want to take a quick dive into the details of Bill 202. Every MLA here today has a duty to represent the families and communities they're elected to serve. Bill 202 provides MLAs with additional oversight powers during a public health state of emergency. The Public Health Act currently requires that a public health state of emergency may not be extended without the approval of the Legislative Assembly. However, during the recent COVID-19 pandemic no such vote was ever held. Under Bill 202 the Assembly's essential role in debating and voting on the extension

of public health states of emergency will be strengthened. Future ministers of Health will be prevented from circumventing the Assembly by allowing a state of emergency to elapse, only to declare a new state of emergency without seeking the Assembly's approval.

Albertans have told me repeatedly that it is not acceptable for cabinet or bureaucrats to operate for months on end without a democratically expressed mandate. Democracy matters more during an emergency, not less. If Justin Trudeau and the federal government must seek House of Commons and Senate ratification for the federal Emergencies Act, there is no good reason why Alberta's government can't seek similar ratification before extending a public health state of emergency.

In addition, Bill 202 proposes a new section to be added into the Public Health Act. This new section provides a framework by which the Assembly may opt to review, revoke, or amend some public health measures during a public health state of emergency. Under Bill 202 any two members of the Assembly may file a written request with the minister to initiate the Assembly's oversight process. This process must be carried out within two sitting days, it must include a debate of at least two hours, and a vote must follow the debate.

Bill 202 also includes some simple and straightforward transparency measures. During the recent COVID-19 pandemic some elected officials and many public members grew frustrated and concerned regarding the emergency powers being exercised by the government and public health officials. Bill 202's transparency measures are designed to ensure Albertans have timely access to specific and accurate information regarding public health orders.

Bill 202's transparency requirements are limited to three specific sections of the Public Health Act. One, under Bill 202 medical officers of health will continue to be able to issue isolation and quarantine orders as well as exemptions to these orders. Bill 202 requires that such orders be tabled in the Legislature in a timely fashion to ensure legislators and the public understand the nature of the orders, including which specific section of the Public Health Act is being invoked. Bill 202 applies to general orders only and not to orders that may allow private citizens to be identified.

Two, under Bill 202 the cabinet will continue to be able to issue orders that may be necessary to protect public health, including the emergency closure of specific facilities. In addition, for example, the government may request that the Lieutenant Governor delay an election. Bill 202 requires that such orders be tabled in the Legislature on a timely basis to ensure legislators and the public understand the nature of the orders.

Three, under Bill 202 the Minister of Health may declare a public health state of emergency in consultation with the chief medical officer of health. Bill 202 requires that such declarations be tabled in the Legislature on a timely basis to ensure legislators and the public understand the nature of such declarations, including which specific section of the Public Health Act is being invoked.

These three measures are necessary to provide clarity to legislators and the public alike. In addition, I think we all recognize the impact that misinformation spread on social media has had on public morale over the past two years. There are those who believe the answer to this is to restrict speech. I am not one of those people. Restricting speech will only make things worse. The answer is to provide clear and accurate information in a timely manner. The more we can do to promptly address Albertans' concerns and reduce unnecessary public frustration, the better.

In conclusion, let me say again that I fully understand the complexity of the current legislation, and recognizing this, I have intentionally limited Bill 202 to these changes. If any of you have questions, I'm more than willing to provide answers. At the end of

the day, this bill is quite different than many of the others presently introduced during this session of the Assembly. This bill isn't about politics. Rather, it's about democracy and good government. It's about providing checks and balances. It's about ensuring the supremacy of the Assembly.

It has been more than two years since the world first learned of COVID-19. Since that time we have seen governments go from preaching, "We're all in this together" to implementing some of the most divisive policies the free world has seen in generations, without holding a single vote.

Now, with the pandemic finally shifting to endemic, health restrictions and emergency mandates are slowly being lifted. I think it is safe to say that we all hope to never face another public health emergency like the recent pandemic, but if and when we do, it is important to learn from our mistakes and address the systemic issues that left so many Albertans feeling confused, frustrated, and ignored.

The best place to start is by ensuring greater transparency, accountability, and democratic oversight. Until we address these issues, there is no reason for any Albertan to truly believe that we are all in this together.

Thank you very much, and I would hope that we can all vote in favour of concurrence.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion for concurrence? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by Edmonton-Glenora.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I first of all want to thank my colleague for bringing such an important bill forward. I, too, am absolutely in favour of this bill going forward and being passed. I, too, am in favour of democratizing the Public Health Act.

Madam Speaker, how often during the last two-plus years did our constituents reach out to us looking for answers, looking for help with their families, looking for our ability to get their needs, their ideas, their questions on the floor? This bill goes so far as to still allow the important checks and balances that the government may have to put in but allows the 87 of us in here to represent, through the democratic process, our constituents. Easily in the last two-plus years there have been an overwhelming number of calls to my office, people questioning the rationale, people wanting to understand, wanting to help, wanting to do different things but not being able to have their voice heard, and this bill goes a long way to do it.

Of course, a lot of the people across the floor are, like me, from the legacy Wildrose side of the UCP merger. In 2011-2012, when I was first elected, when I was first talking to Albertans, the concept of free votes and democratic reform was probably the biggest reason that Cypress-Medicine Hatters were looking for change. What an opportunity that my colleague from Central Peace-Notley has put forward for Albertans that want to protect each other but want to have an opportunity to be heard.

Not only, Madam Speaker, in 2011-2012 were Albertans crying for democratic reform and free votes; they still are today. The number of times that I've heard recently, you know, "How come we couldn't get votes on this in the Legislature, and how come we couldn't get this talked about on the floor of the Legislature as the Public Health Act was in place?" – I hear it every day when Albertans say to me: how come citizen-initiated referendums and recall haven't been passed and put fully into law with proclamation and put in a more realistic form?

Every day, Madam Speaker, Albertans are looking for the opportunity to be involved in their government, for the opportunity to reach out to one of the 87 of us and have a say. Again, my hon.

colleague from Central Peace-Notley has come up with a step that will allow this to be enhanced. As he pointed out, the chief medical officer of health suggested that it was necessary.

3:10

Bill 202, of course, is a direct response to a legislative review of the Public Health Act completed more than a year ago. Speaking before the Public Health Act Review Committee in 2020, the chief medical officer of health stated that checks and balances may need to be added to the Public Health Act to provide "assurances that there's not going to be use of this act in an inappropriate way."

Well, again, Madam Speaker, my colleague has presented an idea where two MLAs can get an idea on the floor, where all relevant documentation relating to changes and orders of the Public Health Act have to be brought here. What a better way. We can make it so that 4.4 million Albertans can have their voices heard. Again, clearly, it's something that the people that had to deal with this daily highlighted as important.

I'll also say that we're not through this yet. Hopefully, we are at the endemic stage, but there's a lot of healing that Alberta needs in our business community, in our families going forward. To me, the sooner the better, the sooner that we have the opportunity, so that Albertans know when they phone my office or e-mail another MLA's office, their ideas have a realistic chance of being heard, debated, and their individual rights protected.

Of course, as my hon. colleague pointed out, even the federal Emergencies Act was subject to parliamentary approval and Senate reform. We all know that the Senate never got to the point where they approved it or turned it down because it was revoked.

Madam Speaker, I want to end with an example. Do you remember when the Premier apologized at about the six-month mark for getting it wrong when it came to small businesses? Do you remember how at the start the guideline was that essential could be open, that nonessential couldn't? Do you remember how many of us said: "No, no. This is wrong. It should be safe versus nonsafe. If you're a business with safe practices, you should be allowed to be open, just the same as the big box store with its social distancing and safe practices." It was approximately six months of not having the opportunity to debate that in this House, of not having the opportunity to fully expand upon why the decision was different that that decision stayed in place.

Madam Speaker, here's what happened. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business put out that after six months the average small business was \$170,000 in debt and that if you were a hospitality business, you had probably incurred over \$200,000 of additional debt because of the COVID mandates.

When the Premier came forward and apologized for getting it wrong, for not listening to the fact that some of us were saying that it should be safe versus nonsafe instead of essential versus nonessential, although I think that the apology was welcomed, it still didn't change the fact that Albertan businesspeople had individually lost hundreds of thousands and collectively lost tens and tens of millions.

Madam Speaker, this is our opportunity to further democratize Alberta, to further democratize the Alberta Legislature, to add accountability and transparency and democracy to the Public Health Act. For that reason, I will fully support it every step of the way, and I thank my colleague from Central Peace-Notley for bringing it forward.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the mover and the last speaker for their comments as we consider Bill

202, Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022. I know it's not every day that private members have the opportunity to bring forward bills to this place, so I want to recognize the Member for Central Peace-Notley for the work that's gone into crafting a bill and the staff, of course, who supported him along that journey. While I do appreciate the work that went into this bill, at this point I am not comfortable supporting it as a member of the Assembly. I have to say that I appreciate that the last two speakers spoke about this bill in relation to the current pandemic, the global public health emergency that we've all been living through for what feels like way, way, way too long. Legislation doesn't just apply to one point in time or one public health crisis; it's in place until the law changes yet again.

With that in mind, I'm going to share a few examples of public health emergencies that have taken place in the last few years. The one I'm most closely aware of, the one when I was the Minister of Health, was, of course, the wildfires in Fort McMurray. When I think about the importance of being nimble and being able to adapt in a time of crisis, I have concerns that the procedures that are laid out through the proposed bill today would impede our ability to act in the public interest and to save lives. One of the concerns I have is noted, that it's just two MLAs to basically stop the business of the House and change direction completely to consider the ideas that those two MLAs have as it relates to an ongoing public health crisis. I can tell you that when I was getting regular updates – and we had essentially daily cabinet meetings, sometimes more than once a day, because, of course, the wind changes, the trajectory of the fire changes, and of course the response needs to change as well.

To think that at any point everyone who's working on evacuating – I'm thinking specifically about the hospital and the long-term care that was in the hospital, the upper floors of the hospital at the time, because, of course, the PCs had promised many times to build a stand-alone long-term care facility for Fort McMurray, but it hadn't happened. So we had seniors and people primarily with mobility issues living on the top two floors of the hospital in need of evacuation immediately, in need of accommodation and a safe harbour in another health care facility somewhere else in the province, and we needed to make sure that we evacuated that hospital incredibly quickly and found ways to get people to a safe place to be. At the same time, the entire municipality was fleeing.

I do pause to reflect on the fact that some MLAs chose to go towards the fire instead of welcoming people when they were fleeing. That's their choice. But it could have also been their choice to bring forward potentially a motion in this place to stop the important public health orders and to consider whether it was appropriate or not as opposed to politicians making sure that they assess the information that's being provided by front-line firefighters, by health and welfare officers, by local emergency disaster response preparedness folks and making sure that we put the right tools in place and the proper orders in place to make sure that people could evacuate in an expeditious fashion and get to a safe place to be while the worst of the fires were upon us.

But the emergency didn't end the day the fire was extinguished. The emergency lasted because, of course, the chemicals that are used to dampen a fire and to stop its spread and to prevent it from spreading have often very serious health effects themselves. They're very effective in putting out fires, but you don't want to rush back in after everything has been dampened with these chemicals because that could have health consequences as well. Again, it's important that you go through the checks and measures.

Where I do absolutely agree with the remarks of the prior two speakers is that there has been a significant lack of transparency, a deep lack of trust with the citizens of this province. The actions that

we have experienced felt like they were covert, like they were in the darkness of chambers that nobody would be able to access.

3:20

For those reasons, we've put forward a number of proposals on how to address issues as it relates to this pandemic specifically and other pressing public health issues. One is that we've called for the creation of an independent COVID-19 advisory panel. We've called for that for about a year, and it's following what's happened in some other provinces where there have been others who have actually brought forward science-based advisory panels that report back to the government in a public way so that all Albertans – it would be Albertans in this case, but I'll insert the names of other provinces here – would have an opportunity to receive that unbiased, unfettered, open, and honest information.

We've also asked questions about the appropriateness of the current reporting structure between the chief medical officer of health as a member of – oh, I'm trying to remember the term. There are four different models that you can have in which public health officers report, but what's in place here in Alberta is that the chief medical officer of health reports through the department to the Minister of Health, to the Premier. That is very removed from having what the government would like to pretend is a relationship directly with the public. Just because you tell somebody to talk to the media doesn't mean that they are indeed able to be open and transparent and speak publicly to Albertans.

We have asked many times if this is the proper reporting structure and proposed again, about a year, year and a half ago, that it might be time to consider independence, making the officer an independent officer of the Legislature, which would enable greater opportunities to receive public reporting in this place, to be able to hold the recommendations made to government to account, and to allow for greater transparency.

But, again, what's being proposed in this structure is that two MLAs can get together, and they can say: we need to put a stop to this; we need to make sure that we change course. They can't necessarily change course, but they can sure put a stop to it, because what they would require is – I believe it's within two sitting days of the Assembly for that business to take priority over everything else. Really, what it would do, when you have folks at the POC, the Provincial Operations Centre, seeing this type of – the greatest analogy I can think of is that when you are in the middle of a crisis and you're driving a speedboat and you're trying to get away from a disaster and you hear that you might be put on a different route and be sent in a different direction, that certainly isn't the most respectful way of engaging with the folks who spend their careers focused on responding to disasters.

Again I want to say that I'm trying to think about this in the context of other public health disasters and other major crises that we faced in our province. I wish that there was only the current one to think of, but there isn't. There are always the ones that have come before, and I hate to say that there will probably be more again in the future, Madam Speaker. To pass legislation just thinking about one specific point in time and the frustration that I think all members of this Assembly – or at least those of us who are able to speak freely, without being given direction from the Government House Leader, I think, have felt a very strong sense of undermining the public's right to information, the right to fair, transparent government, the right of all of us to have an opportunity to have the government present in a fair and open way so that we can have trust that the government is acting in our best interest.

Of course, when there was a report done by an auditing firm after the first wave and it took well into the third wave, after immense public pressure, for that to be made public, I think that probably

helped contribute to the lack of trust and the lack of confidence that Albertans have in this government when it comes to their management of our collective public health.

I guess one of the questions I would have to the mover is how he landed on only two members being the trigger to initiate a debate. It seems like an incredibly low threshold and, I think, would be an outlier certainly in this place and an outlier for probably any other Assembly. So if the member has done any other interjurisdictional comparisons within parliamentary democracies or specifically within Canada, are there any other times where just two members can trigger this type of debate on any issues, let alone a public health disaster that is an emergency? I would find that information helpful because it does seem like an incredibly low threshold.

Yeah. I will just say again that I know how difficult this has been for all of us.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion for concurrence? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this bill. As my colleague noted, you know, we don't often see opposition bills get any opportunity to come and be debated in this House. That's been an unfortunate circumstance of changes that this government has made to the process by which private members' business takes place. Certainly, I appreciate that we have the opportunity to consider this member's bill. Certainly, I hope that my own bill, that I've brought forward, will get the same opportunity.

Unfortunately, though, I think I have to join my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora in saying that I will not be supporting this bill. Now, certainly I can appreciate the concerns that the member has brought forward and the concerns that have motivated him in bringing forward this bill and proposing these changes. He has spoken about the need to seek further transparency, and indeed a distinct lack of transparency from this government throughout the COVID-19 pandemic – and on that point I certainly do agree with the member. They have noted that Dr. Deena Hinshaw, our chief medical officer of health, indeed commented that there need to be checks and balances built into the system, and I would also agree with that, Madam Speaker.

Indeed, as my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora outlined, we have made repeated calls throughout this pandemic, first of all, for the government to release the data on which it was making decisions. We called for the release of all modelling data, we asked for them to be transparent with all recommendations that they had received from the chief medical officer of health, and indeed we called repeatedly for a full public review or inquiry of the government's handling of the pandemic. Unfortunately, on every one of those points, at every turn this government has rejected those calls for additional transparency. They have continued to undermine the trust of Albertans in the decisions that they were making and seemed to repeatedly demonstrate that in many instances they were indeed making decisions that were far more motivated politically than they were by protecting the public health.

We just have to look back at how things went throughout this pandemic, how during the second wave the government indeed sat on its hands and refused to take action until case counts were soaring, Madam Speaker. It was well into December before we saw any significant action from the government. Indeed, before they took the actual significant action that we knew had been recommended and that we'd seen other jurisdictions taking, the government made a number of small measures that did nothing but actually create more confusion amongst the public, because they

seemed like seemingly arbitrary measures. Again, that is why we called for the government to provide all the information it was actually looking at, to help restore that faith from Albertans. We saw that again in the midst of the third wave.

Now, that speaks exactly to the substance of this bill, where this member is suggesting, which my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora noted is concerning, that two MLAs – only two out of 87 – would be able to stop the business of this House and force a debate on any public health measure. What we saw during that third wave is 16 MLAs in this House who wrote a letter demanding that all public health restrictions be removed. All, Madam Speaker. That was as the third wave was just beginning to rise, and we saw the devastation that wave brought on Albertans. Imagine how many more lives would have been lost, how much more damage might have been done to our economy, how many more Albertans would have been left suffering with long COVID if those MLAs would have had the ability to come into this House and try to force the removal of all public health measures against the advice of the actual medical experts and the science. That is one reason why I feel I could not support this bill.

Again, what we saw clearly during that wave of the pandemic, Madam Speaker, is that this government was delaying taking actions because it was concerned about its own political fortunes, more so than the public health, which is a reason why indeed we do need to have more transparency. That, of course, led into the best summer ever – and we're all well aware of how that played out – where we found ourselves again going into a much higher, rising case count with the Premier on vacation, not a word from this government, dead silence, while Albertans and public health experts and our doctors and our health care workers were crying for this government to take action and step up.

By the time we finally got there, where they began to consider taking action, these guys were arguing behind closed doors amongst themselves about taking the step that proved to be the most effective public health measure in raising vaccination rates and helping lower case counts, lower hospitalizations, and indeed prevent deaths, that being a vaccine passport system.

3:30

Because of this government being delayed, arguing amongst themselves, caught up in their own political turmoil, we saw that wave grow far worse. We saw thousands more surgeries cancelled, thousands more Albertans that were infected with COVID and indeed having health effects as a result. Indeed, when they finally even brought in that policy, the democratization of that vote within their caucus watered down that policy from what had been recommended, as was revealed by one of the members from Grande Prairie.

One of my concerns is that what we saw within this government alone, simply their democratization within their caucus, led repeatedly to steps being taken that undermined the public health, that caused more damage to our health care system, that made a public health emergency worse. Not only that, Madam Speaker, but I would say that from the first wave through the fifth what we repeatedly saw was that this government's lack of transparency led to them releasing not enough information about the actual public health measures they brought into place.

Indeed, the health measures were confusing. They constantly shifted and changed. They made no sense initially, before they finally got to the measures that were actually effective. And when they brought those measures in, even when they went to lift measures, Madam Speaker, this government's communication was so incredibly poor that my office continued to field hundreds of phone calls and e-mails from individuals, organizations, businesses

trying to make hide or hair of what this government was in fact asking them to do, indeed repeatedly bringing out public health measures, putting them into effect before they were even publicly available and published online through multiple waves of the pandemic.

I can understand why the member is bringing this forward. Certainly, I share his frustration with the incompetence with which this government handled so many aspects of the pandemic and made this so much worse and indeed undermined the public trust. But therein lies the problem, Madam Speaker. This government undermining the public trust did not mean that the scientific and the medical experts were, in fact, wrong.

It's unfortunate that perhaps our chief medical officer of health was undermined repeatedly at so many turns by this government's own political decisions, to the point where her own reputation began to be undermined. [interjections] As others have noted, Madam Speaker, we have had a serious epidemic of misinformation during this pandemic, indeed spread at times by some of these government members who sit and heckle now. Perhaps they'd like to get up and speak for themselves at some point.

The fact is, Madam Speaker, that the member said that no single expert, no politician or interest group has a monopoly on good ideas. The medical consensus was clear. The vast majority of medical experts said that drugs such as hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin were not effective in treating COVID. That is what the vast majority of peer-reviewed studies said, yet that information continued to be spread. The vast majority of public health experts said that, yes, in fact, masking is an effective way to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 as an aerosol virus, yet misinformation about that spread and indeed has been actively undermined by or spread by members of this government.

That is why I do not support this bill in terms of trying to give MLAs the power to override the actual public health experts. We have seen it repeatedly demonstrated, whether because they personally believe the misinformation or whether because they are seeking some other form of political power or opportunity or advantage, by members of multiple governments across Canada, including the MPP Randy Hillier, who is indeed up on charges today for his support of the convoy protesters and blockaders in Ottawa and indeed was himself responsible for spreading an enormous amount of misinformation throughout this pandemic. I cannot support the idea that those sorts of individuals should have the opportunity to override actual medical experts, the actual public health advice.

Now, I do appreciate some of the points that the member did bring forward. For example, one of the changes in this bill is to make it so that medical officers or the cabinet must provide a copy to the Health minister when they make an order. Now, certainly, again . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion for concurrence? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, who I saw afterwards.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this bill. While I appreciate the intent of the bill, which is, obviously, a throw to transparency, I think my concern here is that it works in the opposite direction of what, I would say, was most needed during this pandemic. The challenge during this pandemic was the fact that this government was leading based on politics instead of based on science and data and public health advice. That was probably the single biggest challenge we faced.

Now, certainly, we saw a wild overreach with this government's Bill 10, a wild overreach which was rapidly followed by a number of government members standing up and yelling, "Fear and smear; it's nothing like that," and then, of course, members of their own party stood up and rallied against it because that was incorrect, Madam Speaker. It's not a word that I can say in this place, but certainly it came rather strongly to light that the government's defence of Bill 10 was not factually accurate, so ultimately they chose to reverse their position on that.

But I would say that our largest problem as we trucked through this pandemic, so to speak, I suppose, was the spread of misinformation, the wild spread of misinformation, and the spread of misinformation which went unchecked. It went unchecked by this government because it was in their political interest to leave it unchecked. That, Madam Speaker, I think, was the biggest concern we faced.

Public health decisions ought to have been based on what was good for the people of this province, on the opinions of the people of this province, on advice from medical health experts, but that's not what we saw. Instead, we saw a flailing government, desperate to bolster its own support, being blown around by wherever the political winds happened to be blowing, a government so desperate to hang on to the support of people their own Premier has now called all sorts of names, has referred to as the inmates running the asylum – that's their own Premier that said that. They were so desperate to appease those people over the course of the pandemic that they allowed their own members to join illegal blockades, that they allowed their own members to spread misinformation about vaccines and masks and science. Madam Speaker, it's incredibly problematic.

I actually think that as we move forward as a society, with the sort of increase in access to the Internet, which is in many ways an incredibly good thing, the access to information that we have at this moment in time is unprecedented throughout history. The problem, Madam Speaker, is that it cuts both ways. It leaves us with access to unprecedented misinformation at the same time, and most people, unfortunately – or many, anyway – lack the ability to determine what's a credible source. We all sort of suffer from natural and inherent cognitive biases, but many people are not informed about these cognitive biases and therefore are not able to counter them in themselves.

You know, we see these stories online, these sorts of trumped-up stories where someone happens to have gotten sick and there is some sort of linkage in time to the point at which they were vaccinated. Now, many of these things have been undercut, very clearly, by science.

3:40

I think back to, for instance, the well and truly debunked myth about the MMR vaccine and autism, which was sort of started by a media celebrity figure whose child turned out not to have autism at all, and it certainly wasn't caused by a vaccine. That sort of problematic misinformation is often started by bad actors but often supported by those who simply lack an understanding of their own cognitive biases, lack an understanding of the difference between correlation and causation. In fact, many of the people who start those stories don't necessarily do it through ill intent. They're simply so badly misinformed that, you know, their own brains may tell them that this is the truth when it transparently is not.

That's incredibly – incredibly – problematic, and I think that in particular, Madam Speaker, it's worth noting that when members of this House engage in that sort of disinformation, it actually doesn't matter whether they are intentionally misinforming or are themselves misinformed. It ought to be beneath every member in

this place, and the public ought to hold us to a higher standard than that.

My concern with this bill is that it would take us in a direction where we're seeing more politicians who are sort of being blown around in the winds of strange misinformation on the Internet, interfering in decisions that should be based on reason and science. One of the things that drove me, Madam Speaker, to this House is evidence-based decisions, ensuring that we make our decisions based on the best facts and evidence that are presented to us.

I think this would take us backwards in terms of that. This would encourage members to sort of come forward with unfortunate and ill-informed views that are unhelpful going forward. I think that as a society we're going to have to struggle with this, and I don't know that it's necessarily – certainly, the government has a hand, but I don't think the government alone can do it. Certainly, the UCP's backwards curriculum, their attempt to remove critical thinking skills from the curriculum, is absolutely a step in the wrong direction, is absolutely a step that will make this problem worse, that will ensure that our children do not have the capacity to evaluate the source and the reasonableness of information in the right sort of way. On the Internet information and disinformation can look very, very similar. If you don't have the appropriate skills to figure out what's what, a person can get very quickly into trouble, and in a democracy when enough people get into trouble, we're all in trouble in that way.

I certainly think that this government ought to have done a better job throughout this pandemic at circulating information, at attempting to combat misinformation, at making decisions based on public health. We can look back historically, Madam Speaker. We can look at the data and we can see that this government's strategy of acting last and least, of trying to ignore the science, like, this sort of faked-out, "Oh, we wouldn't have done it except we were forced by your lack of personal responsibility" resulted in some really bad results and really bad results in a population in this province who are younger than the average population in this country, a population who ought to have fared better because of our relative youth, and a population in a province that has one of the best health care systems in the country.

I think it has been incredibly problematic. This government's handling of this pandemic has been incredibly – incredibly – problematic but not in a way that is fixed by this bill. That is why I won't be supporting this bill. I think it takes us in absolutely the wrong direction. I think it takes us in a direction of rhetoric and misinformation and the opposite of the direction we should go in, which is the direction of science and information and rational debate and rational argumentation and conclusions which flow logically from their premises. I think there are a lot of ways that that can be achieved. Unfortunately, I don't feel that this is one of them, and I hope that this government takes this as a lesson.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege, always, to be able to get up in this House and to be able to speak to a bill, especially a private member's bill. For those that maybe aren't aware of what we're doing this afternoon, we're being presented with a motion for concurrence. That's a motion that asks us whether or not we want to pursue a particular bill, a private member's bill, and whether we want to actually have debate on that bill and move forward in the House with discussion on that bill, in this case Bill 202, the Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022.

Madam Speaker, it's a privilege, any time we get into this House, to be able to speak to a bill, and for those out in the real world that

are trying to make a living, when we get into the Legislature, most of the bills that we discuss and that we deal with are government bills. They're brought forward by the executive, by the government, and they're important often. We debate them and we discuss them, and we make our arguments pro or con in this House. We try to represent our constituents. We try to make sure that, if possible, we can bring forward amendments and make any kind of bill, a government bill or a private member's bill for that matter, better and that through the process of that debate and through that process of exchanging of ideas, at the end of the day we have a bill that's either appropriate to move forward and to work in the interests of the citizens of Alberta or whether we believe, at the end of the day, that that's a bill that should be turned down and should be voted against and, in the process, not be brought forward in a way that's going to affect Albertans.

Now, we have today the opportunity to bring forward Bill 202 to this Legislature. Private members' bills are actually really important, I believe, when you take a look at the fact that, you know, not every good idea is brought forward by the government. There are many good ideas that are brought forward to us as MLAs on a daily basis. We have constituents. All the time we're all meeting, on both sides of the House, with constituents that bring forward ideas and suggestions for how we could better run this province in the interests of the people of Alberta. As MLAs it's important for us to have a private members' process that allows us to bring forward bills that will make this province better, make it work better for the constituents that we all face, whether it's an MLA's idea for moving forward or whether it's something that's come from our constituents through the MLA.

You know, I can remember bringing forward and standing up in this House to speak to what I call the silver alert, which would help seniors that get lost, and it was brought forward and passed in this Legislature. That came from stakeholders within the seniors across this province. It was an idea that was brought forward to us. I liked the idea, and we worked on that, and it was brought forward and passed in this Legislature. Now, this is a way, through these bills, for people in Alberta to be able to use their elected representatives to bring forward good ideas that can represent them. I believe that it's an important part of the process.

I think that when we talk about a motion for concurrence, we should be very careful that when we actually speak to a motion for concurrence, we're actually speaking to the bill and that it's not about, for instance, past rights or wrongs that we may have thought in this House that have come forward with government policy. It's not about, for instance, whether or not it was a wise thing for the NDP to spend \$7.5 billion on electricity infrastructure that's jacked up the electricity prices and bills for all Albertans. That's not what Bill 202 is about. It's not about – you know, it's a motion for concurrence as to whether or not we in this House believe that we should move forward and debate this bill and the merits of this bill. It's not about the NDP's support for a carbon tax, which has jacked up all the costs for all Albertans.

I'm not sure that we get very far on private members' business when we don't speak to the actual bill, so I want to just focus for a couple of minutes on this bill. It's been brought before the House already that, you know, this bill is going to allow us what's in the title. It's Bill 202, the Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022. You know, if we take a look at this bill, in a state of a public health emergency

if an order under subsection (1) is made in respect of a public health emergency that exists or may exist, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may not make a subsequent order under that subsection in respect of that public health emergency unless the

Legislative Assembly passes a resolution approving the making of that subsequent order.

Maybe the Legislature should get involved in these kinds of situations.

3:50

Under section 52.2 amending as follows:

(a) by repealing subsection (1) and substituting the following.

In part (b)(3):

If an order under subsection (1) is made in respect of a public health emergency that exists or may exist, the regional health authority may not make a subsequent order under that subsection in respect of that public health emergency unless the Legislative Assembly passes a resolution approving the making of that subsequent order.

Again, it's an opportunity for the Legislature to become involved in a public health emergency and in the order that is coming out of a public health emergency, that

a member of the Legislative Assembly may, in accordance with this section, bring before the Assembly a request to revoke, or amend any term or condition of, an order or exemption, a copy of which has been tabled under section 29(7), 38(2.1) or 52.4 [and that] on receiving a request under subsection (2), the member of the Executive Council must, within 2 sitting days of receiving it, bring the request before the Assembly for its consideration [and] consider the request for at least 2 hours [and] dispose of the request by resolution.

Madam Speaker, this Bill 202 is speaking to the fact that the author of this, the MLA for Central Peace-Notley, would like to see the Legislature become more involved in that process of public health emergencies. We can debate the issues, should this come before the House, as to whether this is the piece of legislation that should actually move forward or whether it should be amended or whether maybe we, at the end of the day, decide that it shouldn't go forward, that it should be voted down. But I believe that this is a worthy piece of legislation for the consideration of this House, so the motion for concurrence will have my support.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: That was beautiful timing, my hon. member.

Would the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont like to close the debate?

[Motion for concurrence carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the Assembly has concurred in the report, and the bill will be placed on the Order Paper for second reading.

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. It is a great honour to rise and speak to this motion before this House. First off, I wish to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for his great work on this motion. It is often paramount to invest in postsecondary . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt. The mover of the motion would be very pleased to move the motion.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Rural Health Care

504. Mr. Hanson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue working to improve access to health care

for residents of northern Alberta by increasing opportunities for postsecondary training in health care fields for rural students who agree to work in areas of rural Alberta that require medical professionals, once they have completed their training.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. My apologies to the House. I was on a Zoom meeting with the local municipality and one of the ministers. The one error, if I might say, in Motion 504 is that it says, "for residents of northern Alberta," and actually it's for residents of the entire rural area of the province. Thank you for that.

Northern Alberta has been struggling to have adequate access to health care for several years. It's not the first time I've gotten up and spoken about that in this House. I think that pretty much all of my members' statements and most of my questions for the last couple of years have been on this issue, that doesn't seem to be getting any better with what we've gone through with COVID, advocating to AHS for better recruitment of medical professionals for over six years that I've been in the House here. Recruiting medical students originally from rural communities is successful because they're more likely to commit to staying in rural communities for the long term.

This is something that I've been talking about for quite a long time. You know, rather than trying to attract foreign doctors – with all due respect to the foreign doctors, we've relied on them for many, many years, but they tend to not stay for very long periods of time once they get into rural Alberta. You can't really blame somebody that's grown up in a country with the average temperature of 28 to 30 degrees Celsius, and they come up to northern Alberta and discover what minus 30 feels like, right? It's not a surprise to me that not a lot of these folks stay.

I guess my priority is to work with the government. I know we've had some success working with the Minister of Advanced Education and the Minister of Health to create some more spots in the U of A and the U of C, which I think is where we need to concentrate to get some more seats and get our rural students accepted. I know that the program that we came out with on March 29 – the Minister of Health announced the \$6 million program to help pay for students' medical school costs. In exchange for financial support, students have to complete their residency training in rural Alberta and agree to practise in a rural Alberta community when their schooling is complete.

What I'd really like to see, since we've got that and it's going to be a very successful program, I believe, is that I'd like to see it expanded not just for doctors and surgeons but also RNs and LPNs, lab technicians, nurse practitioners as well as midwives. I'd really like to see the RESIDE program, as good as it is – I think it's a step in the right direction. I've had really good feedback from my local communities and municipalities on it. But one of the things that we did hear about is increasing that to RNs, LPNs, and lab technicians, et cetera.

I do understand that the University of Calgary has got a program, where they're working with some of the local colleges, for allowing LPNs and RNs to go to school within their own communities. I know they're talking about a program with Portage College, which I'm pretty excited to hear about as well, so that local LPNs can get their upgrading right in their own local communities and get their training there as well as at least starting RN programs in rural Alberta and possibly finishing them up in the city. You know, the same shortage that we see for doctors is present for nurses, lab technicians, and midwives. That's why I'd like to see them added on to that.

Just as an example, I think last week I talked about it in the House here when I asked a question to the Health minister. For 44 eight-hour shifts at the Cold Lake hospital ER department, the ER was closed for all of those 44 shifts in one month, the month of – that's coming up in the month of April. Sorry. It was 35 in this month of March. I've also met with St. Paul nurses on a couple of occasions, with the local mayor, as well as with the northern director for AHS to address some of their issues. It just seems to be a spiral that the more stress we put on the system, the more nurses we lose. It just keeps getting worse and worse.

A big part of the complaints that the nurses had was that because of the medical emergency that was called, it gives AHS kind of special powers to redeploy. A lot of the nurses are concerned that they may have been working in home care for 10, 15 years and haven't actually worked in the hospital in their entire career, and suddenly AHS can have the power to redeploy them to an ER situation or an obstetrics situation that they haven't been trained or orientated to. So there are a number of things that we could work at to improve, but, like I say, it isn't just the doctor situation; it's the entire medical situation out in rural Alberta.

Attracting doctors during their medical degree does work. We have some stats here that 72 per cent of rural family medicine program graduates from the U of A and 66 per cent from the University of Calgary are practising in rural and regional communities; 57 per cent of rural integrated community clerkship program graduates from the U of A and 66 per cent from the University of Calgary are practising in rural and remote regional communities. We do have some practices that are working, but we need to, I think, increase those numbers of students in those rural programs. You know, if we can maintain that percentage of those students coming back into communities, the more seats, the better. I've actually been pushing for dedicated seats at the U of A and the U of C in the doctorate program, but we should also be doing that with all of our health care professionals.

4:00

Madam Speaker, according to enrolment data at the U of A – this is from 2020 – 138 rural applicants for their medical school in 2020: of those 138, 111 were deemed to have met all of the academic requirements, but only 25 of them were offered admission. That's kind of a step back. We recognize that there's a problem in rural Alberta. Our postsecondary institutions need to recognize that. With the amount of funding that we put in as a provincial government, we should have a little bit more say in addressing the problems. As I've said in the House many, many times, I'm not looking at a permanent change to postsecondary education, but what we need to do is highlight the issues that we have in the province and direct our efforts toward those. Basically, yeah, again, you know, only 22.5 per cent of qualified rural students actually received an offer from that school. On the same day I talked about the University of Calgary. We had 127 applications to med school; 119 were deemed to be qualified, and out of those 119 qualified applicants, only 11 rural students received an offer of admission.

This is where we're having the problem. I don't expect, you know, students that have grown up in Edmonton, Calgary, or major centres to be as attracted to a small-town setting, but if we can take our students from those small areas of Falher or northern Alberta, St. Paul – my son is a good example of that. It took him three years to get accepted into med school because he couldn't answer all the questions at the interview process properly and they score heavily against you because you don't have access to the research facilities and to be able to work in a hospital setting, which is something that they like to prioritize. You know, I've often said that they need to change the questioning to a little bit more rural standards, like

maybe talking about cattle. I know it has nothing to do with med school, but it might get a lot of these kids accepted a little bit earlier.

These are the things. Like I say, it's nothing against urban students at all, but we need to address the fact that we have a problem in rural Alberta. I think it's far more likely that a student that grew up in that town gets accepted at the U of A or the U of C, gets some help from the provincial government with tuition, and maybe gets some help from their municipality as far as living expenses, with the agreement that they're going to move back to that community. We're really seeing in our small rural settings that, you know, we're trying to attract young families to come back and live in those communities. As a young couple that wants to raise a family and you're looking at moving anywhere in the province, one of the big things that you look at is access to health care. Are you going to be able to have an obstetrics facility to go and have a baby in? Right now we're in a crisis situation in Bonnyville, Cold Lake, and St. Paul when it comes to delivering babies.

I look out at the snowstorm that we had this morning. We got about three inches of snow last night again. The highways were glare ice for 30, 40 miles coming in. We're getting it again. Putting these people into a situation where they have no choice but to travel down these highways is tough. These are all things that we have to consider when we're looking at expanding and promoting our rural physicians and rural medical professionals. I mean, I can . . .

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

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Motion 504, brought forward by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. I appreciate him bringing this motion forward, and admittedly I have not been advocating on this file nearly as long as this member has. Admittedly, as a resident of downtown Edmonton I did not know a lot about rural health care in the province of Alberta at the time that I had the honour of being appointed as the opposition critic for Health.

However, in my first year in the role I very quickly got a crash course, and that was, unfortunately, because of the chaos and disruption that was caused certainly for physicians and then later on throughout the pandemic for many rural health care professionals due to decisions by this government. Indeed, when the former Minister of Health moved forward with a number of changes that he was demanding, after this government tore up the contract that existed between doctors and the province of Alberta, it was rural health professionals, rural doctors that reached out to my office the most.

We have a short time for debate, so I'm not going to go into all the details, Madam Speaker, of what happened during that period, the concerns that were raised, but I will simply note that rural doctors were among the most that expressed the biggest concerns about the impact that this government's short-sighted decisions would make on their ability to continue to practise and provide services in their areas.

[Mr. Rowswell in the chair]

Rural physicians, of course, tend to work both – a lot of them like to have their own family clinic, and then they also work in the rural hospital. They are multidisciplinary. They enjoy the challenge of taking on a number of different roles and providing full service in their communities. The decisions made by this government directly undermined their ability to do that, and it took weeks for this government to sit up and listen and begin to make some changes. In that time, unfortunately, we did see some very good rural physicians, like the folks at the Moose & Squirrel in Sundre, that withdrew from

the local hospital and have not yet returned. We saw the loss of doctors from the province of Alberta, and we've seen that continue since. Three times as many doctors left this province in 2021 as in 2019, 140. And, sadly, that impact is being felt far more deeply in rural communities.

I appreciate what the member said about this being a long-standing issue, but absolutely this problem has been badly exacerbated under this government. Now, that said, the proposals that the member is bringing forward, the things that he's talking about in terms of how to remedy this: absolutely – you know what? – I would agree with him on those.

Again, I've had the chance to speak with doctors from all corners of the province and indeed a number in rural areas and a number who worked at some of the clinics that were most respected for training rural doctors: the folks down in Pincher Creek, the folks in Sundre, and others who have been training up young doctors in the province and have been responsible for helping us get so many of the excellent rural physicians that we have been able to get. They agree with the member, as does the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta and others, that the best way to recruit more doctors – and I'd agree, probably other rural health professionals as well – is, first of all, to offer more training where they are.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

If we recruit more people from rural areas, give them the opportunity to learn in their community, to get experience in their community, they're more likely to stay and to work in that community. So, absolutely, that is a good investment, and I'm pleased to hear that this government, after some of the real damage that it did, is taking steps to try to correct that. That is one step that absolutely I would agree with.

The RESIDE program: certainly, it's a small step, again, compared to the damage that has been done, the doctors that have been lost, but indeed I have heard support for that from some of the folks that I've talked with, some of the rural physicians, who feel that could help work towards that. I would agree with the member that perhaps looking at other incentive programs to bring other health professionals into some of these rural areas – absolutely, I agree. That could help solve some of these problems.

But, frankly, Madam Speaker, I think the most important thing that we need to get if we want to attract more health professionals is to actually have a fair contract, and sadly that's been undermined by this government. It's been dragged out far longer than it had to be. The initial contract, when it was unilaterally cancelled by this government – let's be clear; let's remember: this government went on an incredibly aggressive campaign to attack and smear physicians.

The then Minister of Health went on social media. They put up an entire website accusing these doctors, including many of these rural doctors, of abusing their position, misusing the billing system. For two years as these doctors, including many rural physicians, called on this government for virtual codes to be extended, to add the complex modifiers so that they could provide care to their patients in the midst of a pandemic, this government sat on its hands and refused to act, refused to listen, in large part at the beginning because they were intentionally trying to grind doctors down to try to get a better budget line.

4:10

This government has created an atmosphere. Again, I have talked to physicians as recently as last month, talked to physicians in Red Deer who said: "You know what? They lost contracts with anaesthesiologists who definitely specifically named the lack of a

contract, the antagonism of this government as the reason why they decided not to come to Alberta."

Now, I know that the member who brought this forward was himself advocating and that he was demanding that the health care minister take action. Indeed, I believe that is in part why that Health minister finally did backtrack on a portion of the changes that he was trying to force through. I respect that the member brought forward that advocacy on behalf of his constituents, but there is still a lot of damage that needs to be undone, and all the programs in the world, all the incentives are not going to undo the fact that we still have a lot of uncertainty.

I recognize that the current Minister of Health certainly presents a much better face for this government in those negotiations. We are seemingly seeing some progress made, but this government still continues on many levels to push things to the very last minute. I know there's a situation right now with hospitalists in the province of Alberta. We have the situation with medical physicists in the province of Alberta where this government is indeed grinding right up to the very last minute within days of contracts ending. That still creates further chaos in the system. That is going to make it more difficult to recruit health care professionals indeed and specifically to rural areas, too.

The member mentioned, you know, speaking with nurses and others who were talking about the concerns they had about being redeployed during the pandemic and the stresses that were created. Again, Madam Speaker, those were decisions by this government on how it handled its COVID-19 policy, and again they repeatedly seemed to use our health care professionals – doctors, nurses, others – as a crash mat to take the impact of their political decisions. They were more concerned about their ability to stay in office than they were about doing the right thing for Albertans and indeed our health care system. As a result, we exhausted many of our health care professionals, which led us to the situation which began last May, where, as the member noted, we had these rolling closures of emergency rooms, closed beds. The Galahad seniors' care centre is still closed, 20 seniors still displaced because of a lack of nurses and other health care professionals. That has exacerbated this situation that we find ourselves in now.

Let's not forget that as we went into the fall, then, and into that fourth wave, as case counts were rising, this government was demanding 5 per cent wage cuts from those same nurses. Now, certainly, they arrived, in the end, at a better place, but let's not forget that that was the message this government sent to nurses in the midst of the fourth wave. Again, that creates an atmosphere where it's far more difficult to recruit.

It creates an atmosphere where it's far more difficult to convince people to go into postsecondary and study to be a nurse or a doctor when they see that their government is not going to value or respect them and indeed when they're going to have a Premier and others who talk about them as being a cost on the public balance sheet that has to be rectified as opposed to people who are bringing valuable services and, as the member noted, helping to support the economy in rural Alberta. As many members in this House have said in this House as they've spoken up for their constituents, our rural communities depend on having health care services available. That is at the core of these communities, and if the hospitals are undermined, as they have been in this last year because health care professionals have been undermined and attacked, then that hurts those communities.

With that said, I absolutely support this motion from the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. I appreciate him bringing it forward. I appreciate the very practical suggestions that he is putting forward on how we begin to address these issues. It's just my hope that this government will also address the other many

outstanding issues. Again, these programs are not going to be enough to undo the lack of trust that currently exists between this government and many health care workers. That is going to be the chief thing we need to overcome if we want to support our rural communities.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to speak on my good friend's motion. The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul has been an excellent advocate for rural health care. Though I know that we shouldn't say names, I do have to acknowledge his nickname when we were in the opposition during the 29th Legislature. It was Dialysis Dave for his advocacy for the community of Lac La Biche in getting a permanent dialysis centre. Again, we can acknowledge the former Health minister also for her support on that. That was definitely a demonstration of good co-operation by both sides of the House to address the real needs of communities.

The system that we currently have, with the educational systems being focused in the larger centres, which is natural and is a model that is throughout the world in every nation – let the big schools be in the large centres. But the problem with this is that when we see people getting educated in these communities, in these large centres, they certainly become attracted to and desire to live in those very same centres and they become acclimated to all the amenities and the services available in large cities. I believe my good friend from Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul's hope is that perhaps more educational opportunities in rural areas will be supported.

Certainly, one example of this, if we were to look at Ontario as an example, is the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. Madam Speaker, back in 2005 Ontario decided to invest in a college to produce physicians in the communities of Sudbury and Thunder Bay, two smaller communities but very far away from Toronto. Many years later, when they reviewed the success of this school of medicine, it has exceeded expectations. It has been just a wonderful demonstration of what happens with this. To that effect, my understanding is that approximately a large percentage of students that are educated in this program actually stay in rural and remote communities, not necessarily in Thunder Bay or Sudbury but certainly in some other small communities around there, and to great success, keeping physicians in rural areas where we really need to attract these people.

Not only that, Madam Speaker, but this school in Ontario has also succeeded in supporting Indigenous Canadians in becoming physicians and who then practise their skills in many of these rural areas where they're from. This is a fantastic thing and something certainly that I hope we consider mimicking here in Alberta, perhaps a northern Alberta school of medicine with locales in Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray, as an example. Again, when we're trying to attract physicians and other health professionals to these rural communities, we have to look at the current impacts. Certainly, if we take Fort McMurray as an example, right now there are 46,000 trips a year from Fort McMurray to Edmonton just to see health care specialists and other professionals that aren't available in Fort McMurray. Despite a very rich community with an average household income of almost \$200,000, despite the fact that the industry there creates, according to our last budget, \$10.3 billion in revenues for this government, we have a hard time attracting people to this community to work as health professionals.

The ability to have a school of medicine in Fort McMurray, as an example, would be fantastic and certainly a way of not only

attracting physicians but keeping them if not there then in other rural areas. Again, we continue to struggle in maintaining a lot of physicians in these rural areas as well as other health professionals. Lab technicians, diagnostic imaging, like people with nuclear medicine abilities so that they can run CT scans and whatnot, are so valued and so important. Paramedics are another area that we need more of. Certainly, in Fort McMurray we're blessed to have a paramedic program at our local college, but a program like that needs to be expanded in other areas. Certainly, northeastern Alberta, in particular, could definitely use some ability to attract people to this field.

Now, don't get me wrong; our government has done a lot to try to help in these areas. Our government committed \$90 million towards the recruitment and retention of physicians to rural areas, and our government is also providing \$57 million towards programs like the rural, remote, northern program and other programs similar to that like the rural education supplement and integrated doctor experience, or RESIDE. These programs play an important role in physician recruitment in local areas, but again we can do more. We can listen to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul and start institutions that educate these people and get them acclimated to working and living in rural, northern, and remote communities.

With that, Madam Speaker, I just wish to thank you for the opportunity to speak here, and I hope the members of this House support this fantastic motion from my good friend.

Thank you so much.

4:20

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I do want to take a few minutes and talk about Motion 504, brought forward by the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul. I really appreciate this motion. I know that this member has been working on this issue from the time he first was elected, and it likewise has been a great concern in my constituency, too. I just want to read it.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue working to improve access to health care for residents of northern Alberta by increasing opportunities for postsecondary training in health care fields for rural students who agree to work in areas of rural Alberta that require medical professionals, once they have completed their training.

This has been an issue for quite some time in rural Alberta, of course, not having enough physicians, and now we see a shortage in nurses, too. It's been a great concern. We need to be able to get this under control. We've seen many shutdowns in my constituency of hospitals, and I think that when we look at the difference between rural Alberta and urban Alberta, again, we don't want to see urban Alberta suffering the same way as rural Alberta is as far as having hospital closures. Likewise, I don't think urban Alberta wants to see rural Alberta have hospitals shut down and not have access to health care in a reasonable distance from where you live.

Recently the Swan Hills hospital was shut down. I've got a daughter that lives there, and she's 34 weeks pregnant. Of course, it caused me alarm, when she was having some issues with her pregnancy, that she wouldn't be able to get to a doctor without a minimum hour's drive, maybe even more. Depending on the roads it might have been inaccessible altogether because weather in that area is very temperamental. We've seen the Fairview hospital close down beds from a nurse shortage. We've seen McLennan hospital shut down many times for lack of physicians.

I think there are many issues, and I know that this will take care of some of the issues or will work towards some of the issues that we see as far as health care professional shortage in rural Alberta, but we also have some other issues, too, and I just want to point out

a couple of things. Right now we have students from Alberta, youth born and raised in Alberta, that want to become doctors, want to become nurses and can't get into the Alberta educational program, postsecondary educational program, so they travel outside Canada to be able to get their licence. The problem is that there are barriers to get back.

I know, for instance, a young lady in northern Alberta that grew up in a small rural town. Her grandmother was a doctor. She wanted to be a doctor, too. She couldn't get in in Alberta, so she travelled to England to become a doctor, and now I think she's been licensed there for over a year and a half. She's trying to come back to Alberta, but she can't because the process takes too much time. She could go almost anywhere else in the world, but for some reason we can't get her back here, and she wants to come back. She wants to practise in northern rural Alberta in a small community. The exact people that we want are not able to come back and do what we want them to do, so we need to be able to take away those barriers for bringing people in.

I know that we need doctors where we need doctors, not just doctors coming into Alberta, but we need them specifically where we're short doctors, and we see that need all across northern Alberta and all across rural Alberta. It mentions that in this motion, that we need these doctors in rural Alberta. It starts off talking about, you know, health care for residents of northern Alberta, but I know that it mentions in here, too – it talks about all of rural Alberta.

Another problem we had. We had a female doctor that wanted to come into McLennan, and the process and the testing – I think originally they were doing tests twice a year to allow the doctors to be certified to come in and practise. Well, then with COVID they shut it down to just once a year. This doctor came in, I think, a month or so after the test, which means she had to wait 10 or 11 months before the next test to be able to come in. There are processes like that that need to be changed so that we can remove these barriers to get doctors and health professionals to rural Alberta.

But I think one of the things we can be working on immediately is what this motion addresses, our postsecondary institutions right here in Alberta, where we can bring our Alberta students that want to practise in Alberta, particularly rural Alberta, and make sure we have places for them so that they don't have to travel outside the country to get their education and then go through this long, drawn-out process to get back.

I really do support this motion. I think it's fantastic. I want to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for bringing this forward. It is very important. It's very timely. There's never a bad time to be talking about the importance of rural health care and making sure that we have the services in rural Alberta that the people in urban Alberta have. Again, we don't want to see people in urban Alberta suffering, and they don't want to see us suffering in rural Alberta either. I think it's something that could be supported all around in this House, and I'm going to support this. Again, I appreciate the member bringing it forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Madam Speaker. First and foremost, I want to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for introducing this important motion in the House. As a member and resident of a rural area I have experienced the health care shortage issues present in our community first-hand. On March 15 Alberta Health Services sent out an e-mail to many of my constituents in Whitecourt informing them of a temporary interruption of C-

section services at the Whitecourt health care centre. Many people might hear this news and wonder what the big issue is and why they can't go to another clinic. Unfortunately, they can't. The next closest health care centre is in Edson, over 95 kilometres away. Under perfect conditions that trip takes over an hour.

Can you imagine going through all the stress of pregnancy and then being told you may not be able to receive a life-saving C-section that you may need? It's not a feeling any expectant parent should go through. In a country like Canada no pregnant woman should worry about whether or not she and her baby will make it through labour and delivery, especially not in Alberta, the province with the third-highest GDP in the country.

I must admit that now seems like the perfect time for this motion to be brought forward, considering it will benefit everyone: the residents of rural areas, the students, young professionals starting their careers, and current health care workers experiencing significant strain. Earlier this year our government announced a \$6 million investment to increase Albertans' access to the care they need, and those funds will be used over three years to help students pay for medical school costs.

Some exchange students will complete residency training in rural Alberta and agree to practise in a rural Alberta community when their schooling is complete. That is excellent news; however, physicians are not the only health care workers who are scarce in rural areas. All health care professionals are. This includes nurses, mental health professionals, social workers, physician assistants, respiratory therapists, dentists, pharmacists, speech-language pathologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, physical and behavioural therapists, medical laboratory scientists, dietitians, and many, many more. Therefore, it is essential to have a plan in place to attract allied health care professionals to rural communities.

It's also important to remember that working in rural areas requires knowledge about those specific communities. Madam Speaker, that is why this motion is so important. Having a chance to gain experience and training from rural areas will allow students to understand rural upbringing, available resources, common health concerns, and societal needs. Studies have been conducted in Canada and the U.S. regarding the success of retaining health care professionals in rural areas, and they have all concluded that a positive undergraduate rural exposure and targeted postgraduate exposure outside urban areas are consistently associated with a greater probability of physicians choosing to practise in rural communities in the long run.

I would also like to point out how this motion is beneficial to students in different health care fields of study. This program will grant them hands-on experience, including the scope of practice required of a primary care physician. In many cases because the community is so small, students are able to work closely with the same attending physician all year. This is particularly valuable because it allows them to build on their experiences, have a more in-depth knowledge of their area of study, and grow as part of a team that can identify their strengths and weaknesses and provide tailored mentoring.

4:30

Madam Speaker, many of the leaders in different health care fields are of the opinion that rural rotation should be a part of every health care related curriculum. They're correct, because a rural rotation would introduce students to a career path that some may never have considered. What is more, according to a 2019 study in the long run working in rural communities has resulted in practitioners being less burned out than their urban counterparts. This is mainly due to the strong presence of community and family

in rural areas. So often health care workers will take care of whole families. They will see and help them through birth, death, trauma, and, really, all parts of individual lives. In rural Alberta health care professionals forge relationships with their patients, which is vital for patient care as well.

Madam Speaker, an increased number of rural training programs alone won't solve the crisis in rural health care. Most pressingly, we need additional government funding for rural residencies. In addition, the lack of adequate infrastructure in some rural areas still needs to be addressed. Currently our government is modernizing and improving rural health facilities across the province, including in my constituency, and I look forward to watching this process continue as rural health concerns are heavily dependent on having appropriate facilities.

Now, I don't want to turn the focus to only doctors, because Alberta is currently facing a health care worker crisis in many fields, but most of the research available has been focused on doctors. Many people may not realize this, but the number of physicians that left Alberta last year nearly tripled compared to prepandemic years. Of the total of 568 physicians who left the profession in 2021, 140 left the province to simply practise elsewhere, in comparison with 87 in 2020 and 54 in 2019. While it may not be the cause in all cases, more often than not individuals in the health care field decide to leave due to burnout. This is particularly strong in rural areas, where health care workers continue to feel a growing strain and increased workload as there are staff shortages all around.

Madam Speaker, Budget 2022 has assigned specific funding for postsecondary institutions to target seat expansions to support Alberta's recovery plan. Now more than ever before we need to address the disproportionate shortage in rural communities and help stop the brain drain that the Alberta health industry is experiencing. The current partnership with the Rural Health Professions Action Plan has an initiative dedicated to offering educational resources and school outreach to encourage students to pursue careers in rural health care and providing enrichment and training programs to rural health practitioners to maintain and upgrade their skills.

Madam Speaker, advocacy is another important part of improving rural health concerns, which is why the Rural Health Professions Action Plan supports communities to attract and retain health professionals, brings a stronger voice to rural health workforce issues and accomplishments, and conducts research and analysis to develop innovative programs and policy towards improved rural health services.

I support these investments and the focus on expansion, and I do want to thank the government and the Minister of Health and the Minister of Advanced Education for their devotion to addressing Alberta's health care crisis. But I really want to once again focus on thanking my hon. colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul, who, like many rural colleagues, has truly been advocating at length for improving access to health care across every profession in rural health. Thank you, hon. member.

I would encourage all members of the House, like me, to vote in support of this motion. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that. I so appreciate what all my colleagues before me have said, especially the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for putting this motion forward. I'd just like to start by reading it.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to continue working to improve access to health care for residents

of northern Alberta by increasing opportunities for postsecondary training in health care fields for rural students who agree to work in areas of rural Alberta that require medical professionals, once they have completed their training.

Madam Speaker, I want to start by talking about rural Alberta. I've lived in Medicine Hat and in rural Alberta since 1974, and I absolutely know that there is no better place in the whole world to live. The people are so friendly. I could spend all 10 minutes here telling you about my neighbours, all they do for me. I just have to open up my garage, and they come running to help me. It's amazing. And people are like that everywhere. You know, throughout rural Alberta they are so willing to be friendly, to lend a hand.

We all know about the economic opportunities in agriculture, forestry, oil and gas, and with some expansion of irrigation, and that is wonderful. Of course, Medicine Hat and Cypress county have the added benefit of the best weather in all of Alberta, so let's not forget that. Madam Speaker, rural Alberta is so extraordinary a place to live. But this is our biggest challenge: health care, to protect, as the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley said, our young families, our opportunity to have children and watch our families grow.

I'll just tell you about three stories that are on my mind. I heard about a young hockey player who broke his leg on the ice in small-town, rural Alberta. They had problems getting him to the hospital because there was only one person in the community with the level of EMT that it took to drive the ambulance, and, like everybody else, he was on a holiday. He needed a holiday. So they had to come up with another system to get him there, and fortunately it worked out. But that is one of the stories why, when people think about taking their family and their friends to rural Alberta, they do it with caution. It makes them think twice.

I think about when previous governments have changed some of the diagnostic laboratory testing. I think about one lady who did it for years and years in small-town Alberta and went to everybody's house and knew their neighbours, knew what they needed and when they needed it, and when that was centralized, it wasn't properly taken care of. We all know about HALO and HERO. We're expecting good news this week on some fairness and equity there. But, Madam Speaker, those are the kinds of things that make people hesitate before they move out to areas that have so many other things.

But also doctors. I'm so grateful to have represented for 10 years Cypress-Medicine Hat, and it's easily three young Albertans a year that come to my office with perfect university scores – you know, 4.0s out of Calgary or 9s out of Edmonton – with lists a mile long of volunteer work and community engagement, and for some reason they can't get into medical school. Now, I missed some of the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul mentioning some of the statistics, but I think that it was, like, almost three-quarters of those that apply can't get in. At the same time, some of our emergency rooms – we just saw last week that Ponoka's emergency room was closed overnight. What, to me, was amazing about that one: it was the very day that we had just approved \$25 billion in health spending from the year before, with the 700-plus million dollars in supplemental supply, and we're announcing an emergency room being closed. I hope they got it going again. I hope the locum or whatever was necessary got figured out for that, you know, what could have been done.

Madam Speaker, again, I think of three or four of these younger people that have come to me that have ended up leaving Canada for their training: Ireland, the Caribbean, America. I don't think a single one of them has come back. My hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley talked about some of the bottlenecks to coming back, but I don't think these other young Albertans, these other young

doctors, ever decided to come back, where their first preference was to practise in rural Alberta, to practise in Medicine Hat.

I think of how word spreads. When their 10 or 20 or 40 friends in university or high school with similar aptitudes and similar interests hear that one of their shining stars, one of their champions couldn't get in, do you think that encourages these other people to try? I bet you not. That's why I'm so thankful that the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul put this forward. This is not only about the 30 people or so, the 30 young Albertans that came to see me in the last little while. It's about the hundreds of their friends behind them that would pursue a similar career, and it's about the hundreds of Alberta patients that aren't being serviced in emergency rooms.

4:40

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo mentioned – I think he said that 46,000 of his citizens and constituents come into Edmonton every year for their treatments. Okay. So it costs the citizen, it costs the Albertan money to get here and do that rather than the system, but it's a huge cost. It's a huge lack of service, again, when it was stated that we have the third-biggest GDP in the world.

An Hon. Member: In Canada.

Mr. Barnes: In Canada. The third-biggest GDP in Canada. Thank you.

Anyway, regardless, two years ago oil and gas royalties were \$3 billion, this year were \$13 billion. What an opportunity to put some of that money into solving a long-term problem. Of course, a motion is a value statement to the government. A motion doesn't have the means to measure the government actually doing this, but I hope that this government will give it direction to not only increase spots at the U of C and the U of A for doctors, but I hope it will also go a long way to make sure that all the other allied health professionals have the opportunity to receive service and give service.

Again, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo mentioned about 46,000 people a year from his area going to Edmonton. In southern Alberta they go to Montana. They end up spending big money to get a knee or a hip or a shoulder fixed in Montana instead. Wouldn't it be better to take care of those people here? Wouldn't it be better to give them that quality of life and that opportunity for professionals to grow here?

It's always hard to talk a bit late, when a lot of the things have been talked about, but again my compliments and my thanks to the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for a motion that is bang on, exactly what Alberta needs. I hope the government will put in the measurement and the desire to make this happen. I will be supporting it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wish to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Madam Speaker. First, I'd like to thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul for proposing Motion 504. It will go a long way to ensure that rural Albertans receive adequate health care services. Rural communities represent a significant part of Alberta's population, and they are key to our province's economic growth and overall success. I remember that the same member has said numerous times the amount of revenue that flows into the province's coffers from rural Alberta, and it's incumbent upon us to make sure that we create a good lifestyle

there, where people can get medical services, which is part of a lifestyle, to maintain those places so that we can continue to create the revenue that comes into the province's coffers.

There's more that contributes to ensuring that local populations are met with the best health care than just building hospitals. We need the people. We need outreach programs, satellite clinics, mobile services, in-home services, digital services, which we found out about this year relative to telehealth and virtual care. We also need to expand opportunities for other practitioners such as nurses and health care aides to shore up medical services.

To achieve these services, we must first be cognizant of the differences and the challenges separating rural health care from urban health care. It wasn't one of the things that I was up to date on when I first came to this House. I had certain things I wanted to work on, and health care wasn't one of them, because I didn't know exactly how it worked, but I've learned. I know that in an urban setting there are doctors that are clinical doctors. There are doctors that specialize in the emergency units and other ones that specifically do rounds at the hospitals. In rural centres they do all of that. They do their clinicals in the morning, and they're available on shifts for emergency care. They can put in a lot of time, and that may not suit everybody. You know, it takes a special person to accommodate that and work at it.

They're very well known in the community. I know that when I wander around my community and you get talking to people, they know their panel size, which is interesting, you know? They know who's got the biggest client list or patient list or whatever, and they do know that.

I know they've been very involved. Like, we raise a lot of money for – we find a specific need. For example, Wainwright needed a new CT scanner, so it became a project of the community. Actually, on April 23 we're doing another fundraiser in Wainwright just to continue to do this, and they put money in as well as other people in the community, but they're there. They're supporting it. Everyone knows. They know who everybody is. We did another one in Lloydminster, and it was the health foundation that was helping raise money to relocate our dialysis machine. Well, the doctors were there and very involved in raising money for that, and in the end we got the money. The CT scanner is going into Wainwright as we speak, and the money is in place for the renal dialysis machine in Lloydminster to get replaced, so that's good.

Another thing that I found that was interesting was medical students. We met with a group of medical students in the Legislature in one of the rooms up here. You know, all I'd heard was how tough it was to get rural doctors. When we sat down and met with this group of people, they said, "We loved coming to rural Alberta to do our residency." That kind of took me aback. I said: "Well, what do you mean? All I hear is that you guys don't want to come out to rural Alberta." The reason they liked it is because they got a broad range of experiences. They didn't specialize and get pigeonholed into a certain area, so they really enjoyed the fact that they were able to get a broad range of experience. But then they left. They went back to wherever they came from, so it was a problem keeping them in those, and it might have something to do with the potential hours of work.

Another problem that happens is when we're trying to get a lot of doctors. When they're trying to recruit another one, they're looking for specific talents as well to fill in the complement of skills that are available in the community. And the doctors got very involved in that, with health councils and trying to get people to come in for that, and that's the doctors' component of it.

The other one: like, we do have the RESIDE program, and that is specifically for doctors, where we're going to – just going to check my notes here and make sure I get it right. Anyway, I think it's

about \$2 million for 60 students, in that range, that we're putting that money to, and the goal is to say: "Okay. Come here. We'll pay money towards your tuition, but you've got to commit to stay in the community for a certain length of time." And the goal is that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt.

Under Standing Order 8(3), which provides for up to five minutes to the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate, I would now invite the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul to close debate on Motion 504.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all the members that spoke in support of my Motion 504. This is really nothing new, folks, a decades-old issue. It's been going around for a long time. As a matter of fact, I have a 72-page report, the rural health services review, that was initiated in 2014 by Premier Prentice and then Minister Mandel under the supervision of Dr. Richard Starke, the MLA for Vermilion-Lloydminster. The issues – I've read through the whole thing. It's 72 pages long. Nothing has changed, right? The good thing about it is that we don't have to do another review, because it's already been done. We need to take some action.

I'd just like to point out to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat that it's actually worse than you stated, sir, because only 9.2 per cent of rural applicants were accepted at the U of C in 2021. Nine per cent. We have a problem in rural Alberta. We need to recognize that as a government. We need to recognize that at the postsecondary school level as well. We need to work together with all levels of government – federal, municipal, and provincial – as well as with our post-secondaries to fix this problem.

4:50

We need to encourage rural students: work hard, and we will support you to improve your community and train in your community. We need to step up our program a little bit. As a matter of fact, exactly what the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat said, it's that students watch these, you know, superintelligent students that grew up in their school apply and apply and apply and apply and apply, get rejected and rejected, so if you're a grade 11 student, you're going to kind of change your focus from med school to something else because you see that it's just nearly impossible to get accepted to it. I think that's something that we really need to change.

I'm trying to change that at the municipal level. I'm trying to encourage my junior high and high schools to start talking to those students in the grade 6, grade 7 level, so that they can work on their marks so that they're the top of their class and get accepted, and make sure that we have the support, that finances aren't the roadblock when we have a good student that can get into med school. They're very valuable to their community. They improve the overall value of the community for attracting young families, which is what we need to continue to make our communities grow.

Remuneration may be a part of it. Like the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo said, you know, when we look at the contribution from these areas to the province and rural Alberta, maybe we need to spend a little bit more. I know that there is a program out there, but it needs to be reviewed because it's not been very effective.

We need to remove the roadblocks for assessments of our international students. I know a number of them personally from St. Paul, two young men that couldn't get into U of A and U of C, so they went and studied abroad and cannot get back in. They're willing to come back to rural Alberta, practise and stay and raise their families for 30 years but can't get in, can't get an assessment.

We need to make it a priority with the College of Physicians & Surgeons that when we have an applicant that's willing to commit to a long term in rural, they get the high priority for those assessments.

Surgical facilities. We've got some great surgeons that are living out in rural Alberta. Cold Lake and St. Paul specifically I can speak to. You know that yellow line that runs down the highway? It's because traffic goes in both directions, and I can't see why a person from Edmonton – if they could move up four months in their surgical wait time, they're going to come out to St. Paul. They'll come out to Cold Lake. They don't care. If they knock four months off a wait for a knee surgery, why wouldn't we do that?

I'm going to probably run out of time here, but we need to make better use of our rural facilities and our rural colleges to get the education upgraded so we can educate our rural students to come back to our rural communities. Please, everybody.

I thank you in advance for supporting Motion 504.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 9 Public's Right to Know Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to be here today to move second reading of Bill 9.

This is the Public's Right to Know Act, which will make it easier for Albertans to find information about crime in communities throughout the province. As the name of the bill itself indicates, we believe that folks have a basic right to know how crime is affecting their community. Madam Speaker, today we're delivering on a platform commitment to put forward legislation that's designed to uphold and to strengthen that very right. Another promise made, another promise kept. If passed, this legislation would require the provincial government to report currently available crime and justice system metrics annually. This would involve publishing information like police-based crime data on the government of Alberta website and tabling the information in a report to this House every year. This annual reporting requirement would enhance transparency by creating an expectation among the public that the government will provide Albertans with this information at regular intervals and ensure that it's easy to find and easy to understand.

Now, we know from talking to folks that there's a strong appetite for this kind of information as well as valid reasons for wanting it. During a tour of the province in 2019 the former Minister of Justice and Solicitor General heard from many rural Albertans who were concerned about crime, and they also told him that they wanted more information about what was happening in their communities.

Transparency is certainly a principle that's worth upholding, but increased openness isn't the only benefit of legislation like this. There's a saying that goes back centuries: knowledge is power. Well, there's a reason that expressions like that have become so popular. It's because they're true. Information empowers people to make better decisions. Improving access to crime data could help decision-makers at many different levels develop policies and take actions that are based on evidence. A troubling crime trend could expose gaps in services and lead to the development of new initiatives or the development of new enforcement strategies. An example: a rural crime watch group may make different decisions about the need for volunteering or volunteer patrols or public

awareness efforts after they've taken a look at and studied crime data that's in their area.

At a more basic level this is also about empowering Albertans to make better decisions about their own personal safety. Knowing property crime statistics may prompt someone to lock up their car instead of idling it with the key in the ignition, or a business owner may decide to invest in surveillance cameras or an alarm system. What these examples have in common is that in both cases having access to reliable information can bring about better outcomes. A better informed public can help build safer communities for everyone in Alberta, and it starts with ensuring that folks have easier access to information that they're entitled to know.

I hope members on both sides of the House will support this legislation, and I ask that we move second reading of Bill 9. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 9? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 9. I think that to open my comments on this bill, the first thing worth saying is: what, Madam Speaker, does this bill do? And the answer is: nothing. This bill doesn't do anything. It's called the public's right to know, and it requires that the minister publish a report.

What needs to be in that report? Well, Madam Speaker, what needs to be in that report is information and data. "What does that mean?" one might wonder. Well, unfortunately, the answer sure can't be found in this bill. It requires the publication of information and data that the minister considers necessary or advisable. That's what it requires. I mean, I would love for someone to explain to me how this requires the minister to do anything. Now, we certainly just heard the minister speak, and he said that it will require the publication of crime data. Well, he may choose to publish crime data, but it's sure not required in this bill. This bill doesn't require him, again, to do anything at all. It requires simply that he publish a report and that that report contain information and data. For all we know, he could publish a report entirely filled with the number of patrons at some coffee shop. This bill doesn't require anything.

Now, the Lieutenant Governor in Council – that's cabinet – can in fact make regulations about this, but we don't know what those regulations are going to be. They're not made at this time – they can't be; that's the normal course – but my issue with this bill is that it is entirely void of substance. Leaving literally everything to be defined in regulation, leaving literally everything up to the discretion of the minister isn't really legislation. The point of legislation is to bind government officials. The point of having to come forward to this House and put forward a bill is to have something that is before this House, that the members of the Legislature get to decide on the substance of, to require the government to do things. This bill doesn't require the government to do anything except to publish a report which may contain information; we know not what.

5:00

I think this bill is incredibly problematic, and it's incredibly problematic because it's being sold as something that's going to increase transparency, but the bill itself lacks anything resembling transparency. If the minister had come forward to this House with a bill that required him to publish reports and then listed the type of information and data that was required, I would be supportive of that, but this, I mean, essentially says that he can publish a report and it can include things. Well, I mean, I think the minister probably could have published a report and it could have included things

without this bill. This wasn't something that needed to come to the Legislature. He could have just published a report if he was feeling so inclined.

I think it's worth talking about what ought to be in this bill. I mean, one of the things that could be included in this bill, that's definitely worth reporting on, is information about cases at risk from Jordan. The Jordan case, as members of this House will be very aware – myself in particular because I was the minister when it came down – significantly altered timelines before criminal courts. It was a big change in the law when it came down, and it required governments, particularly provincial governments, to move very quickly, and in fact the federal government made multiple changes to the Criminal Code arising from Jordan to try and tighten up the timeline procedures. Now, that's not to say that cases didn't get tossed out for unreasonable delay before Jordan, but it certainly became a much bigger issue after Jordan.

Now, this minister, the minister who gets to decide what statistics are relevant to be published, went out in the media and declared that no cases were beyond the Jordan timeline, that nothing was at risk. It's difficult to describe that using language that I am allowed to use in this place, but it was factually inaccurate in the most large sense of the word. There are, in fact, many cases, and in fact the Crown prosecutors' association came out and contradicted the minister because it was just completely inaccurate. It just absolutely isn't the case. And this is the minister who gets to decide what's published in the report, the minister who doesn't think any cases are at risk for Jordan.

How about information on how many sexual assault victims have been denied funding as a result of this government's changes to the victims of crime act, changes that were rejected by the community, changes that were rejected by victims' advocates and which this government trotted out and did consultations on fixing?

[The Speaker in the chair]

What happened to those consultations? Well, Mr. Speaker, who knows what happened to those consultations? We never heard back from them. This government went out, they consulted on how to fix the mess they had made of the victims of crime act, how to fix the fact that they had cut victims of sexual and domestic violence off from what little supports they were entitled to; nothing ever came of it. It's still like that.

This same minister actually proudly walked into estimates and told us how much money is being taken from the victims of crime fund, money that was intended for victims, and being used in other priorities that this minister has. So he's the one who gets to decide whether that's relevant data or not?

How about race-based data? I mean, I'd say that there could be very little more relevant to the criminal justice system, but that's certainly not mentioned in this bill.

We have, Mr. Speaker, a problem and have done for a long, long time. Anyone who denies the existence of systemic racism, quite apart from being wrong, is saying something quite problematic about the data, because the data is quite clear in terms of incarcerations that, you know, Indigenous Albertans, Black Albertans, many Albertans of different races are far more likely to come into contact with the justice system: they are far more likely to be incarcerated. If we take seriously the idea that every person is equally likely to be capable of committing a crime, then it has to be something in the system that is responsible for those results, because the results are clear, and that is incredibly troubling. It should be incredibly troubling to us all.

What we need is information because there are, unfortunately, many people out there who still believe that systemic racism is not

a thing that exists. So let us test that hypothesis, let us publish the data, and then we will know, because as a justice system we absolutely must take accountability for the impacts of decisions and for the impacts of the system that we have created. To suggest that in a system where, you know, close to 40 per cent, at least at last look, of the people incarcerated at any given point in time are Indigenous when they represent closer to 6 per cent of the population, to suggest that there is nothing wrong in the system that's causing that problem is to suggest something incredibly troubling.

I think we need to take this seriously, and I certainly think that that is the sort of data that should be in this bill but isn't. It's certainly possible to do, because my colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre has brought forward a bill on precisely that.

Here's another thought. How about data on how many police resources are being used to deal with the lack of affordable housing? This is a huge, system-wide problem. We use the wrong systems to deal with the wrong problems. We use the most expensive and the least humane solution we can think of, in many cases, to deal with people who aren't housed. This government has embarked on a mission of cutting affordable housing. They brought forward a bill that they claimed would increase it but didn't.

I won't go down the rabbit hole of that bill, because it was incredibly troubling to say that something's doing the opposite of what it's actually doing, but definitely the amount of affordable supportive housing being built under this government has been significantly lower. Municipalities have been begging for help to build affordable housing, to build permanent supportive housing. People from throughout the sector have been begging for help to find better solutions than people staying in shelter for the length of time that they stay in shelter, and this government has turned a blind eye and a deaf ear and everything they can think of. This government has ignored them, and that's incredibly problematic because this is extremely costly.

How about data on the number of people who wind up in the justice system, in police custody, in our jails, going through the court system and the cost of that relative to the cost of housing those people? I think that is information that would be extremely informative to Albertans. I think if Albertans saw that information, if they saw the true cost of cutting affordable housing, they would be incredibly supportive of investing.

How about data on how much social disorder and how much crime is due to underfunded social programs? That would be important data. I mean, if there's one thing I heard consistently from police throughout the province it's that they don't want to be the first line of intervention for a mental health crisis. When we talk about police funding versus funding in other areas, it is often the case that people misapprehend, and they think that the police want to be the people who are responding. They don't, but you have to answer 911. There's actually case law on this.

When someone phones 911, there is a duty to respond. When every other system fails, when someone falls through every other crack, that's what's left, 911. They have to come. It's not because they want to come. It's not because the police want to be in charge of the most acute mental health crises in this province; it's because they are legally bound to do that. So if we could get the data on how much we pay to essentially underfund mental health services, I think that would be incredibly illuminating information for Albertans. I think that would completely change public opinion on how we spend and where we spend.

5:10

This is supposed to be an act about the public's right to know, the public's right to understand information about the criminal justice

system, so it should require the publication of information. I think that this information, information about the true costs of not investing in affordable housing, about the true costs of not investing in social programs and mental health programs and programs that support people to not come into contact with the justice system, would be incredibly illuminating, and I think that this bill should require that information.

How about progress on Indigenous overrepresentation in our correctional centres? That would be incredibly important information. This is an issue that has plagued the justice system for decades, probably since its inception, although we probably don't have good data that goes back that far, but I would suspect that it is. How about data on that? How about if we publish that? I think if the people of this province truly understood the scope of the problem, truly understood the level to which we, as a set of government systems and individuals who work within those government systems, have failed Indigenous people in this province, I think that would be very illuminating information for them.

This, at the end of the day, is my big issue and my big concern with this bill, that it allows the minister to cherry-pick data to support whatever narrative he happens to choose to drive at that moment. It doesn't require anything. It doesn't require the publication of data on any subject, and it leaves it entirely to the discretion of the minister. That is incredibly troubling because in the hands of the wrong minister what it means is that the data that is being published can be used to paint an inaccurate picture. You can use truth to paint a picture that is not, in fact, the truth by simply picking and choosing what data you put forward. That is my huge concern with what's going to happen with this bill, that they're going to pick and choose what data comes forward based on what data happens to support whatever the narrative of the moment is.

This is a government with a demonstrated history of willingness to be blown around by political whims. They claim to be the government of law and order, and they sit silent while members of their own caucus go to support an illegal border blockade that cost hundreds of millions of dollars to the economy.

Mr. Hunter: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is called. The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I call a point of order on 23(h), (i), and (j). The hon. member knows that this has been an issue that has been talked about in this House. Speakers have not made rulings but have cautioned the members to be careful in the way that they are expressing the events that actually happened down at the border. The hon. member knows this. She's been in this House many times when this has been an issue. I would ask that she apologize and withdraw those comments.

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is absolutely not a point of order. In fact, this would not fall under 23(h), (i), and (j). The member has been really quite measured and reasonable in her approach, and she's stating a fact in mentioning the illegal blockades. This is not a point of order, and I would love for the member to be able to continue her eloquent speech.

The Speaker: Are there any others?

I am prepared to rule. I'm not convinced that at this time this is a point of order. The member was speaking quite broadly and not specifically.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Debate Continued

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. I think the point there that I was attempting to make is that this government's support for law and order, much though they may espouse it, waxes and wanes depending on the political will of some of their members, and that's problematic.

Again, this is a bill that doesn't require them to do anything. It's a bill that allows them to pick what data they bring forward. We've literally just seen a member of this House rise and attempt to argue that something which is illegal was not illegal. I mean, I find it problematic that that's where we're leaving this.

Meanwhile, as we have this bill that doesn't require the minister to do anything, this government is in a position to move on a myriad of issues. They could move on the victims of crime fund. They've certainly done the consultation. They could put back the supports – put back the supports – for victims of sexual assaults, for victims of domestic violence, for victims of any sort of crime at all. This government has massively cut the supports they give to victims. They've shortened the timelines, and they've disallowed a series of lines of benefits in a way that suggests they just don't understand trauma at all or what the costs of trauma are. The benefits were very small, but they allowed, say, a victim of sexual assault to take some time, not a long time but at least a few days, off work to deal with their trauma or to pay for some counselling to deal with their trauma.

The government could be bringing forward a bill that fixed that problem. The government could be moving forward with ensuring that we continue forward with the RCMP contract. I mean, this is a huge concern to many Albertans. There are lots of things that could be in this bill, but instead it has nothing.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate this evening? The Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View for framing what are arguably some of the greatest flaws in this legislation. I am of course pleased to speak to Bill 9, which is titled the Public's Right to Know Act. It's a three-page bill, but certainly it doesn't really insist on the right to know because most of the sections begin with "may." We all know that "may" is just about saying that the government can choose to do something or may choose to do it, but there is nothing actually compelling them to do it. The section that says "shall," the only section really that has a "shall" in it, is section 3(1).

The Minister shall prepare a report respecting data and information relating to the criminal justice system in Alberta, including data and information in respect of the year immediately preceding the year in which the report is prepared, that the Minister considers necessary or advisable to carry out the purposes of this Act.

Now, I want to say that when I think about reporting annually, we have an excellent process in place in this Legislature. It's actually annual reports that relate to each and every ministry, and within them they should be related to the actual business plan objectives as outlined in the government's budget, a budget which we have just finished considering in this Assembly, the ministry business plan for Justice and Solicitor General for 2022-25.

5:20

The government has chosen to only have three outcomes that are going to be measuring their success of their delivery of the business of the Ministry of Justice. One of the reasons why I highlight this is because we used to have much more extensive publication of what our goals and objectives were for each of the respective ministries, but this government has significantly pared it down over the last two years to only three actual measurable performance objectives.

Then even within that, the performance metrics that they tie to them don't necessarily make sense to the actual objectives; for example, performance metric 2(a), "Performance Measure: Provincial Court of Alberta lead time to trial for serious and violent matters." There are some targets mentioned. There's no reference to prior years, so you would have to go back. Oh, and the target is 24 weeks, so half a year, half a year for lead time to trial on serious and violent matters. That's a flat target. They don't plan on reducing that at all for the next three years that their business plan is out.

If the government actually wanted to take the matter of serious and violent matters seriously, they would adjust the way that they present and the way that they plan through their actual business plan, just like any private organization has objectives that they outline for their shareholders. Albertans are the shareholders of Justice in the province of Alberta, and we deserve to have a government that takes their role seriously in actually addressing serious matters of justice being delayed and therefore denied.

If the government wanted to take this matter seriously, I would strongly encourage them to amend the way that they're conducting themselves through their business plans in the province of Alberta, specifically as it relates here today to the Ministry of Justice, because what happens with the business plan and then, in turn, an annual report is that the Auditor General can actually provide some of that auditing function on behalf of the people of Alberta as an independent officer of this Legislature to actually say: "The government set these as their key objectives. This is how they govern themselves. Did they achieve those objectives?" Then that information comes back to an all-party committee of the Legislature, of course, Public Accounts, and we have an opportunity to actually probe more deeply into: did the government indeed work to achieve the objectives that it said it set out to achieve, and what are the measures of success or failure as it relates back to that?

However, Mr. Speaker, instead what we get is a three-page bill full of may's, that "the Minister may enter into an agreement with any of the following bodies for the provision of data", that the minister may "collect and use data and information, including personal information," subject to regulations. The minister, oh, shall lay a copy of the report before the Legislature. But, again, what value is the report when it's predicated on "may"? Giving the minister already – and I will say that the minister absolutely has the ability already to do these types of things if he or she so chooses.

The city of Edmonton, for example – I just went to pull it up, but they're doing some work on their website – has an interactive heat map of the city where you can actually look at the different types of calls that happened and what's going on in a variety of neighbourhoods. You can do that throughout the entire city. There's nothing limiting that sharing of data in real time, and it's all data. It's not the data that the minister so chooses at that point in time, as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View so rightfully pointed out. There are ways for us to have consistent, transparent, and available to the Auditor General opportunities for accounting and holding the government to account on actually delivering its mandate if that was what the government actually wanted to do.

Instead, what appears to be the case is that the government wanted a communications exercise, to be able to say that they're doing something when it's really that they're doing nothing. They're giving themselves the right, if they so choose, to report on things that they may or may not want to choose to report on. Like, it is such an exercise in a government that once claimed to care about law and order, but clearly there are multiple RCMP investigations, as the Premier just reminded everyone of today, one including his own leadership campaign from the last time and, as has been highlighted, the well-documented participation in matters that significantly harmed the economic well-being particularly of southern Alberta through the most recent blockade measures that members have participated in.

Again, if the government wanted to be more open and transparent and actually wanted the public to have a right to know, I would ask . . .

Mr. Rutherford: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted. The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(h), (i), and (j). I just caught, I think, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora referring to our side participating in blockades. I think members have been clear about when they spoke to constituents, when they went down to Coutts, what they did, what had happened at the time when they went. To continue the narrative that they participated in the blockade is a false accusation.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe that this is not a point of order, that this is a matter of debate. My colleague was talking about a wide range of issues, including the reported-on fact that UCP MLAs attended the blockade and attended what was happening at Coutts, well reported in the media. I believe this is a matter of debate. I was listening to my colleague's language. She did not mention any specific members, did not accuse anyone of anything. I don't believe that this falls under 23(h), (i), or (j), but I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to rule. I know that members inside the Assembly will quite often make accusations about a wide variety of protests that members of the Assembly may or may not have attended, with a variety of facts of their attendance at any of those events, so at this point in time I don't find this a point of order but a matter of debate.

Edmonton-Glenora.

Debate Continued

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about outcome 3 in the most recent business plan for the government of Alberta. I did talk about outcome 2. Outcome 3 talks about introducing "a new model of victim service delivery to ensure victims have the help they need, when they need it." But, of course, we know that it doesn't restore the actual victims of crime fund. That could have been a much better use of the public's right to know. This bill, in my opinion, could have been about something. It could have been about helping those who are survivors and victims in having a path

back to being able to have some compensation to help address some of the harm that's been caused to them, but the government instead has chosen simply to put, you know, a new model as one of their objectives and no accountability with regard to that in terms of legislation. They could have brought forward a bill.

Then 3.2 talks about continuing "to implement digital transformation to improve Albertans' access to services, promote system sustainability." Sure. No measures at all to talk about what it is that they'll be measuring to determine whether or not they were successful in achieving that objective. And then 3.3: "Work with the courts and other stakeholders to develop options for individuals and families interacting with the justice system who could benefit from targeted services, interventions and supports, where appropriate." Again, no actual ways of measuring this identified clearly through the actual business plan and budget documents. So if the government wanted to take the opportunity to create a bill and try to package it as a communications exercise, they certainly had the opportunity to address any of the key objectives outlined in the budget that the government just passed and could have acted in that regard.

Earlier today we had an opportunity to reflect on some of the challenges that the province has been facing in terms of crime, and the minister, I think, is right to highlight that those who have been impacted directly by crime – it has a serious negative consequence for most Albertans who've experienced it, whatever that crime might look like. Again I want to say to folks who've already worked to ensure greater levels of transparency that, unfortunately, I don't think this bill is going to do that in any sort of meaningful way given the way that the legislation is written, the vagueness, and that it, you know, simply appears to be a communications exercise rather than actually talking about the types of information that will be included or disclosed and in what ways.

5:30

Again, there is an annual report for Justice each and every year, which the Auditor General reviews, and that is probably one of my other biggest concerns with this bill, that it is simply a way for the minister, whoever that happens to be, to package some information that they want to share with people and say that they're doing it in a bill. The minister can certainly write reports any time he or she sees fit and can present information to the public much more frequently than annually if they so choose and can do it in a way that is responsive to the needs of the citizens of Alberta, but this bill doesn't compel any of that, and it doesn't ensure that there's any rightful oversight when it comes to actually reviewing the information to see if it's actually responsive to the needs of Albertans.

I do want to take a moment here to say that if the government wanted to do something to take a bill and to turn it into a government bill, I suspect that my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre would welcome the opportunity for his private member's bill to be taken by the government and moved forward as a government bill. I think that he's done considerable outreach with the community, and we've heard repeatedly how having broken-down analytics, including race-based data, would make for more honest reporting and for an opportunity to have better demographic analysis and better programming in place to address some of the root concerns that people feel with the justice system here in Alberta. Of course, it isn't just an Alberta-specific problem, but there are some serious problems with the justice system that I think we as a society need to address, and we could do that through a meaningful piece of legislation that talks about gathering actual race-based data to help inform better policy-making decisions.

Maybe the minister wants to do something around that, this minister today, in relation to this bill, but there is certainly nothing

compelling that in the way this bill is written, and I don't think Albertans have confidence that this government will act on that in a meaningful and sustained way. It really does feel like this is a bill about nothing, and that is disappointing, because there are so many pressing issues as we continue to navigate through this important time in Alberta's history, and I would have loved to see a Justice bill that talked about restoring some of the harm done to the victims of crime compensation fund and about having greater accountability and transparency when it comes to the government's decisions and the government's actions and the way that those are carried out in our society and how it impacts the justice system. I think that we did have an opportunity for that, and the government has really missed seizing the day. It was sort of teed up for them, and they have really missed the mark, I think, on this.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I'll cede the remainder of my time to my colleagues. Thank you for the opportunity to engage on this discussion here today.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to briefly address Bill 9 and to just carry on where my colleagues both from Calgary-Mountain View and Edmonton-Glenora have talked about the shortcomings in this bill. I, too, see that this bill does little to address the priorities of Albertans. It does little to address the key justice issues that are before this province at this time, and my colleagues identified some of those key justice issues, like the victims of crime fund, where there is a report that has been laid before members of this government and could be followed up with in terms of a bill to positively impact the situation for victims of crime, serious crime.

There is, again, another issue of overrepresentation of Indigenous persons in the correctional system and institutions. That could be the subject of a bill, and I think all would welcome that. Of course, the underinvestment in the mental health system and the impact on those people who have mental health challenges by the system of enforcement in this province or indeed the impact on people in poverty with regard to the system of enforcement and policing services. The significant number of Albertans that are dying daily as a result of drug poisonings, five Albertans daily: are there better ways that the public could find out through the Solicitor General on how to deal with that situation?

All those important issues are overlooked by a bill that purports "to increase transparency and accountability with respect to the criminal justice system." That's purpose (a); (b) is "to help Albertans better understand the criminal justice system;" and (c) is "to ensure Albertans have information about safety of their communities." You know, when I read those purposes, the three of them, I'm struck with the fact that any Justice minister and Solicitor General could do those things today. They don't need a bill. The fact that it's codified to say, "This is your job" is a failing, I think. I don't see the purpose of this although the minister stood up and said, "Well, this was a platform commitment made, commitment kept," or something similar.

Mr. Madu: Promise made, promise kept.

Member Ceci: Yeah.

Like, you need to be told how to do your job? That's what's incredible, that you don't know coming into this place that you're here to serve the people of Alberta, that you need to be told how to serve the people of Alberta. That's astounding. And the fact that these purposes are written here when they can be done already – you don't need a bill. It's another example of a bill, Mr. Speaker,

that seems to be wasting the time of this Legislature. Is that side so bereft of ideas about how to improve the lives of Albertans that they have to go back and say, "Well, maybe we'll put down what our jobs are and bring that into the House?" That's what I'm hearing from the other side. Though you can talk about how much you're following the platform commitments, it seems to me that what you're not following is common sense in the big sense of the word.

The Speaker: I'll just remind the member to speak through the chair.

Member Ceci: I was looking right at you.

The Speaker: Well, just because you're looking at me doesn't mean you're speaking through me. If I say "you" but I'm looking somewhere else, it doesn't mean that you're not speaking through me. So if you speak through the chair, you might be saying "they" as opposed to "you." This is very helpful and lowers the temperature.

Member Ceci: All right, Mr. Speaker.

I will continue. Where's the crossjurisdictional analysis? Has any other province brought forward a bill like this? I would say I haven't seen any crossjurisdictional. Maybe our critic, who was informed about the bill, may have heard about it, but I doubt very much that any province or territory is bringing forward something like this before their Legislatures.

I doubt that time has been taken to do these things, because already information can be provided to citizens of Alberta. If they want to know about rural crime watch, they can sit down with their police detachments and find out more. That happens now. That happens every day in this province. That was an example that was used by the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, and he talked about knowledge being power. Well, if that's such an important consideration for him, he and the previous Justice minister have had three years to put that knowledge before Albertans. It says, you know, in here that the year you start working on a report, you will prepare it for the year before, so 2019 information could have been prepared in 2020; 2020 information could have been prepared in 2021; 2021 information could have been prepared this year. None of that's happened.

5:40

I'm not so sure that the government is all that concerned about information getting out to the communities, or they would have started this. Here we are three years into their mandate, and they bring this bill that they say is a result of a platform commitment. Why the wait? If it was so important, why wait three years to bring it forward? Only they can answer that, Mr. Speaker.

I think this bill doesn't do much. I think I've made that pretty clear. I think that the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General should know what their job is, and they should share information that's important to Albertans with regard to justice matters, with regard to policing matters, and if they need a bill to tell them to do it, then maybe they're not the right person for the job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to this bill, Bill 9, Public's Right to Know Act, on behalf of my constituents and fellow Albertans. I'm going to restate some of the comments my colleagues made. You know, it's very sad to see that we are quite not utilizing the time of this House to do the things that

Albertans expect from this government. The other way I could say it is that this is obviously another example of this UCP government wholly out of touch and still having not learned lessons from their previous three years' experience and discussing legislation that does not really change anything in the law that already exists.

I just wanted to go back two years. In June 2020 15,000 people showed up to the Legislature grounds. We heard them and we promised: "We will go back to the public. We will consult with them, we will hear their issues, we will consult, and we will summarize the report. We will develop recommendations based on that and will bring them to the House." We have done that. Since then we spent almost from June, July up to May of 2021, almost 10 months, consulting with Albertans, hearing their concerns when it comes to racism, and summarized a broad report of 12 pages. I just wanted to echo their concerns with regard to the justice system, what we heard. Those were individuals, racialized Albertans and community leaders, and they were experts. They were experts from universities, colleges, with their extensive experience and knowledge on the issue of hate crimes.

There were a few things they actually echoed, and they loudly said their minimum requirement if the government wanted to really progress to further tackle hate crimes or the issues that minorities are experiencing in this province.

One of the biggest concerns that we heard was about creating citizen oversight processes. There's a huge complaint that there are not enough resources, that there are not enough processes and procedures to go through or to get help with that, to help them address, file complaints, then, further, to investigate complaints when it comes to the challenges they're facing in communities with law enforcement. They ask for ongoing antiracism and cultural knowledge and sensitivity education and trauma-informed training for law enforcement. These were kind of the issues they raised. They expected that by those consultations, by raising those voices while advocating in communities, this government would listen and hear them and, further, actually take initiative to establish these processes.

The other thing they asked for was creating and funding a cultural and diversity liaison – that position could help better integrate the needs of our communities and policing and building and supporting trauma and for mental health supports for vulnerable populations – again and again. Even a few weeks back the members from the South Sudanese communities did not only demonstrate after the painful death of their community member in Calgary – not only in Calgary, but they drove all the way to Edmonton to raise their voices and concerns on the Legislature steps here in Edmonton. They handed a letter to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, and I expect that letter would have been passed and forwarded to the Ministry of Justice. I would have been so happy to hear if the minister would have something to act on or announce or acknowledge that he has received those concerns and complaints, the issues that the community members are raising, and, if he heard anything, to send a message back to those community members so that he is willing to take actions, according to that, to address their concerns.

The biggest thing: the motion I brought back when the then Justice minister of this government announced the Police Act review. The government totally failed to acknowledge and address the communities' call, the communities that were disproportionately represented in the remand centres, in the jails and cells. That was a call that the government needs to establish an antiracism panel that would have been comprised of the community members, community leaders, Indigenous community members, and racialized communities, specifically those communities that are disproportionately represented in these problems. But the government did not give

unanimous consent. We reiterated that call many times, community members reiterated that call many times, and I'm reiterating that call once again in this House, and we don't see – the government did not even acknowledge that concern that we have been raising for the past more than a year now.

Those are kind of the concerns. When we go back to our ridings, when we go back to the communities, that's the type of concern that they're raising and the types of issues that they're concerned with, not what we're discussing in this House, that does not even make a single change to the law that already exists, that the government is claiming to do that they can already do under the existing law. No one is stopping the Justice minister from issuing annual reporting or listing the data that this bill is claiming it will allow the minister to do.

5:50

The other biggest thing that I hear from my community members is the government's changes to the victims of crime fund, that I heard from the women's association within my community. Not only that; I remember that institutions, of which I can name a number of organizations – the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, the Alberta Police-Based Victim Services Association – out loud unanimously, like, all together in solidarity, spoke against the government's move to make changes to the victims of crime fund, but the government seems to be not listening. That is why Albertans still cannot trust this government. Still the government is out of touch with Albertans.

If the Justice minister wanted something to be doing in this House, that was something: to revisit their decision, listen to Albertans, listen to the people who are suffering, who are impacted by those changes, and address those issues in this House. We would have been happy to debate that bill as well. We would have been happy to support that bill as members of this House, but that is not happening.

The other biggest concern that we have been hearing about and that is not really helping and that is the biggest concern right now in this province is Jordan timelines for the cases in the courts. The government has said many times that they will hire more prosecutors. They acknowledge the lack of prosecutors and the lack of staffing in the justice system, but there's no piece of legislation they brought forward to really address any of those issues. Even though the government itself has acknowledged those problems, the piece of legislation we are discussing does not even touch those issues. They are important.

In 2016 the Supreme Court of Canada condemned the culture of complacency, complacency within the legal system, that led to lengthy and excessive pretrial delays and strained the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms' protection of the rights.

The government has acknowledged that lack of staffing, lack of prosecutors could compromise the Jordan time frames, but again in this bill we are not seeing that this piece of legislation will bring any kind of improvements, that they will hire more prosecutors or hire more, you know, staffing in the justice system or improve in any way to achieve the Jordan time frames regarding the justice system.

The other thing that Albertans are out loudly saying – and an overwhelming majority of Albertans showed again and again that they're not for Alberta policing. More than 90 per cent of Albertans showed their trust and their feelings. They don't want to get into a kind of debate that does not really help Albertans or Alberta as a province or Alberta's economy or Albertans' lives.

These are the kinds of issues the Justice minister could have been, you know, moving forward or bringing the debates to discuss in this

House what Albertans are currently concerned about. None of these issues, none of these concerns that were raised by Albertans are a piece of this legislation, what this legislation is focusing on, or what legislation will achieve if this bill, this legislation, is passed. Due to this, right now I can just say that we cannot really support this piece or proposal under Bill 9, Public's Right to Know Act, as it does not further the interest of Albertans. It does not bring the changes to the justice system that are important to Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, second reading of Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. The hon. the Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to rise to speak to Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. You know, sitting down here and listening to members opposite, all you hear are issues that have absolutely nothing to do with Bill 9. That is consistent with what we have come to see from the members opposite in the last two and a half years. Certainly, that was also the case when they were in office between 2015 and 2019. You hear them talk about a particular bill that seeks to address a real problem, and all of a sudden they take interest in that particular subject matter but devoid of any substance whatsoever. They had four years. Each and every one of the concerns that they have raised: they had four years to have tabled a bill to address each and every one of those things. But, no, they didn't do that because they were solely interested in hammering Albertans, in hammering businesses. They chased billions of dollars out of our province. Their policies drove away investors, created hundreds of thousands of people out of employment.

Here we are talking about a bill that is the product of consultations and town halls that my predecessor, Doug Schweitzer, had with rural Albertans. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm sure that the hon. minister knows not to and will refrain from using proper names.

Mr. Madu: Yes. I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

My predecessor, the former Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, took the time to tour all across our province, including rural Alberta. He heard from them that they want to understand why it has been so difficult to tackle rural crime. I as Justice minister continued on that particular work throughout last summer. I travelled all across our province, mostly in our rural communities, and I heard the same thing. This bill is the product of the consultation that we had with folks in our rural communities.

At the end of the day, the question is that we need data to better understand what is going on in our rural communities. That is exactly what Bill 9 seeks to do. Bill 9 would establish a regime by which the province, the Department of Justice, enters into an agreement with the government of Canada because there are certain data that we can't get from them. The RCMP would not release certain data to us without an agreement. There are certain data that we can't even get from the municipal governments. There are certain data we can't even get from other areas of government, so this particular bill, in section 4, would require the Department of Justice to enter into an agreement with those municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of this particular bill, and I'm proud to support it.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt. However, pursuant to Standing Order 4 the time for debate has concluded.

The House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, March 28, 2022

Day 16

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, March 28, 2022

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 9 Public's Right to Know Act

[Debate adjourned: Mr. Madu speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

I see the hon. Member for the wonderful riding of Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. As I had the opportunity to review some of the work that we see within it, I think that on paper it looks reasonable. But, like much of other pieces of legislation that we've seen come forward from this government, it's often light on details, and at the end of the day we have to wait for further consultation and regulations to come forward to truly see what this government has in mind for the legislation itself.

When we look at what's before us, specifically before the regulations have been developed and some of the final ideas have been completed, the fact is that within the legislation I think that it does very little to address the priorities of Albertans. In the same breath, it does little to address the key justice issues that Albertans have and the concerns that they brought forward to myself and my colleagues over the last few years with this government in place.

One of the main issues that we continue to hear about – and we raised our concerns at the time the legislation was brought forward regarding changes to the victims of crime fund, a fund that was put in place to support, as the name suggests, victims of crime. Unfortunately, at the time of that debate we saw this government moving to divert the majority of the funds, 60 per cent of the funds from that program, that very important program, into other programs or other parts of the ministry or in the department. That continues to be a concern, something that we aren't seeing addressed through Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act.

Further, we saw through this budget, if I am correct, a further cut to the victims of crime fund by approximately 12 per cent. We continue to ask as a caucus and myself as a representative of those in my community who may be trying to access funds like the victims of crime fund: why are we going down this path, and why, when we have the opportunity to fix problems that this government has made, aren't we instead having conversations about that, or why aren't we seeing opportunities to fix that in Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act?

While I think that the principle of this legislation is reasonable and we can get into further what this might actually mean for the responsibilities of the department and the minister, I think that at the end of the day – and we've actually heard the minister quite clearly explain – this doesn't necessarily change a lot of the opportunities that the minister has to provide this potentially critical information in the first place, that in many cases there were opportunities to do this already.

Instead of addressing the priorities of Albertans, we see a government that's more concerned with passing legislation that the

minister himself admits isn't necessarily needed. I know or I believe that this was a platform commitment from the UCP, so I can appreciate that they are working as fast as they can to move forward on those platform commitments that they had. The fact is that while we are going through that process, we should be ensuring that while we are reflecting on opportunities to strengthen the justice system and strengthen the transparency within the justice system and within the ministry even, we are actually taking those opportunities and making sure we are doing the best that we can when those opportunities are before us.

I think it's quite clear, from some of the discussions that we've seen and looking to even some of the opportunities that we have in the opposition with Bill 204 and that we have as a House, that this legislation doesn't necessarily ensure that specific data that Albertans are very clear should be recorded and reported – it is quite lacking, and we have opportunities in the House.

Again, a perfect example is Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act, to ensure that things like race-based data are being collected and reported on to ensure that we are able to, in the case of systemic problems, do our best to combat those types of things. While I can appreciate that with Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act, that may be, in principle, what the government is trying to accomplish, I still do have concerns, based on the vagueness, I suppose, of the legislation before us, that we are going to ensure that that is indeed the case, transparency in recording and reporting of these types of incidents, that it is done to the best of our ability.

Again, when we look at Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act, and the idea of collecting data within the justice system related to race-based data and also providing a framework that requires public bodies to collect that important data and evaluate it, I think that in Bill 204 it's quite clear what the objectives are and how we get there, a road map to ensure that we are bringing forward more transparency. I think that is somewhat unlike what we're seeing in Bill 9. Again, we see in Bill 204 an opportunity for an Anti-Racism Advisory Council that can make recommendations based on that data collected. We don't see any such thing in Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act.

When we take a moment to just quickly review what we saw in the UCP platform regarding this act and potentially the idea of why it may have come forward, we see that they want to enact the Public's Right to Know Act, of course, which will require annual reporting, by judicial district, on a wide number of measurements. It lists those: numbers of crimes committed by a person on bail, on probation, on parole. The list goes on. I think, first of all, that we see some of this data already being highlighted and collected by the government and Statistics Canada, specifically regarding the crime severity index, potentially, and other aspects of the system as well.

Again, when we have the minister saying, you know, that it's quite likely we would have been able to do a lot of this work that is being proposed by the legislation already, all the details aren't clearly laid out in the bill in terms of what specific outcomes they're expecting or any mention of an advisory council or, potentially, additional funding to ensure that this data collection is done correctly, again looking at specifically what data is going to be collected and how it's going to be used. While it is reasonable to support this in principle, I think that there is more work that should be done regarding this legislation and ensuring that we are taking the time to be as transparent as possible through the process or ensuring that, at the end of the process, transparency is going to be increased.

You know, we've seen other decisions by this government or conversations that they've brought forward specific to justice, the Justice department and the system, and one that continues to be a concern for my colleagues and colleagues from municipalities

across the province, whether we're talking specifically to the Alberta Municipalities organization or Rural Municipalities of Alberta, is that they've all been very clear on this continued talking point from the UCP government that they do not support the idea of an Alberta police force, that it will take important resources out of those communities, that it potentially could lead to less transparency compared to what we have now. Those have been clearly laid out by, again, municipalities across the province, but we continue to hear from the minister, from the Premier, from this government that they are still interested in pushing ahead down that path. I think it clearly shows that there is a disconnect between the UCP's priorities and the priorities of everyday Albertans, the priorities of this government and the priorities of municipal leadership across this province.

7:40

I think it's reasonable to say, again, when we look at the decisions to divert funds and further cut them from programs like the victims of crime fund, this government, while it has had ample opportunity to correct some of these mistakes that they've made already, hasn't taken those opportunities, and it's deeply frustrating to myself and to my constituents and to many Albertans across the province, especially those who are actually trying to access these programs.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 9. I think that, in principle, it's reasonable to see a reason to support this. I think that it would have done us well to see more details about exactly what data is going to be collected, how it's going to be collected, potentially what kind of extra funding we might see to ensure that it's collected on a systematic basis, to ensure that the data is, you know, equitable across the board, and to ensure that communities have ample funding to do the work that the government may be asking them to do through the regulatory process.

With that, I look forward to hearing more discussions on this. I think that, again, as we talk about our caucus's proposal around Bill 204 and the importance of collecting data such as race-based data, with what we're seeing here from the government, I think that there are some similarities. I hope that when the vote on Bill 204 comes up, the UCP government recognizes those similarities and opportunities to do what's right for all Albertans in that instance.

With that, I'll take my seat, Mr. Speaker, but I appreciate the opportunity. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate, always, the opportunity to speak in this House about matters before us. You know, I take my role here in the House as opposition critic very seriously and read each of the bills and read supportive information that's made available to me, and I'll quite frequently do a fair amount of research myself on each of the bills. But, you know, I've commented a number of times in the House here that the bills that we're seeing in the House repeatedly are bills without substance, and here we are yet again with another bill.

I know that in the fall session I made comments that we had a significant number of bills that were only four pages long, and in this case the bill is only three pages long. Again, as I have sought to make comments to this government, I sort of wonder why it is that they proceed with bills with such little substance to them when they clearly have decided to open up a file and look at a particular topic. Why don't they actually spend some time working with

members of the community to talk about how you might make the bill robust, make the bill effective, and so on?

But I've finally come to the conclusion that the UCP government has taken the position that their supporters can count but they can't read. As a result, they are able to say that they have, you know, produced X number of bills, some number that sounds good, in this House and that they have filled some X percentage of their campaign promises, hoping, of course, that nobody looks beyond those simple numbers and actually looks at: "Well, what did they do? Did they actually do something that's going to make our life better or not?"

Frequently we're finding ourselves with these bills that, you know, surely were written in just a few minutes – I previously joked about it being written on the back of a napkin – and here I am in exactly the same place again.

Just as with some of the bills in the fall, I have some serious concerns that yet again this legislation is simply putting into legislation practices which are just normal governance practices that would be expected of any minister anyways, and I don't know why they feel the need to constantly legislate their own minister's behaviour. I guess it's a lack of trust that their minister will actually engage in due diligence and follow standard governance procedures if they don't have it in legislation forcing them to do it. I'm just not quite sure, you know, what's going on here other than simply a chance to bolster their numbers so that they can have easy talking points that make it sound like they're engaged in something when they're not.

Let's just take a look at this bill for a second. Of course, you know, as I've said before, it's not the size of the bill but what you do with it. I read through this bill, as you all can if you happen to have 15 or 20 seconds, and . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called. The Deputy Government House Leader.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically comments meant to create disorder in this Chamber. This is the second time that member has used what I believe is a phallic reference in this Chamber regarding it's not the size of the bill but how you use it. He did it back in October of last year in the last session. At that point it was certainly more overt. At this point in time I think it's quite ridiculous that that member thinks that such a joke is suitable in this Chamber and worthy of the time of members of this Chamber. Frankly, the members of Edmonton-Rutherford did not elect him to come here and make jokes of such a nature. I would encourage that member to retract, apologize, and let's not try to use a bad joke again in this Chamber.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen to respond.

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, this is just another attempt by our friends over on the other side of the House to distract the member while doing his interjection here in the House. He is providing ample information and opinion regarding not only the people that he represents but, of course, all Albertans, and he's simply, you know, adding to the debate. With all due respect, I don't believe this is a point of order at all.

The Acting Speaker: I also don't find this to be a point of order. I also didn't see that the comments that were made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had really in any way decreased the decorum in the room. I think that now is the time for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to continue with the call.

Debate Continued

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to get back to what I was saying. I just every once in a while like to provoke the government to stand up so I know that that they're actually listening to what's going on in the House. It's nice to have evidence every once in a while.

Let's take an actual look at this bill and take a look at: what does this bill do? How's that? Does it do anything at all? I can tell you that this bill, by its own description, does only two things. One, it says that you can prepare a report, and two, it says that you can let people read it. That's it. That's what this bill does. It doesn't tell us anything about which particular data is in this bill, you know, what the requirements are for the construction of the bill. It doesn't say who has to be consulted, who has to be involved. It doesn't have to say what mechanisms of data collection or data analysis are to be used. It doesn't describe categories or chapters or sections that must be included in the bill in order for it to be a complete bill and to meet the requirements of this. It simply says that you can actually write a report.

Now, the minister himself has agreed that the minister can write reports now. In fact, we would hope that the minister actually engages in writing reports in order to be able to describe what it is that their ministry is doing. It doesn't actually provide them with any significant support or direction in terms of what is to be done.

7:50

The second part of this, of course, is that section 5 talks about actually letting people read the report, which actually I'm finding myself wanting to support because, of course, we're in this House with this odd situation that the murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls report that came from Ottawa three years ago was supposed to have led to the creation of a report and so on, and here we are three years later with the report not being issued to the citizens of the province of Alberta. We still haven't read the report. I don't even know if there is one. I've been told there is one, but I have no evidence that there is one because they haven't shared it with anybody.

So what we actually have is legislation that does reflect the problem with the government; that is, if you don't write it down that you have to create a report and then in the next section say, "Oh, you must let people read the report," apparently it doesn't happen. Apparently, the Minister of Indigenous Relations doesn't have this kind of requirement on him, so, you know, I guess I have to be supportive here. I have to be supportive because it's quite evident that indeed, unless they are directed by legislation, ministers of this House will not actually let people read a report that is being paid for by the citizens of Alberta. What an odd situation we're in. The whole point of this is the Public's Right to Know Act, and we actually have a government that is choosing not to let the public know unless they're forced into it by their legislation. What an odd situation that we are in here.

I certainly wish that this government had taken the time to expand this report, to give us some understanding and details as to why it is that a minister needs this level of direction in order to function competently in their job, why it is that without this kind of direction a minister can, like the Minister of Indigenous Relations, ignore the province of Alberta and not issue a report and not share the report

with people. It's really odd that we're finding ourselves in this position.

I guess I'm going to end up voting in favour of this in the hopes that maybe we could even include this piece of legislation in all government legislation, that if you actually do any work, could you please let some of us know about it so that we can actually see whether or not, you know, it's something that was worth all the time and energy that was put into it?

You know, here we are with this very thin piece of work yet again, a piece of work that suggests that something that should normally be done be done but doesn't give any direction, doesn't give any circumstance, doesn't give any context, doesn't give any timelines, doesn't give any depth, doesn't give any categorization of the information, doesn't give any suggestion about who needs to be consulted or what kind of source of information needs to be sought in order to do this. It doesn't give any sense at all about how that data will be analyzed, what mechanisms will be used to turn that data into some kind of policy. It doesn't give any kind of direction on, you know, how the mechanisms from the data collection will then lead to somehow informing the public. How will the public know? Where will it be reported? Who will get a copy? Will it be every citizen in the province who will have access to it? Will it be only specialized groups that will have access to it?

Really, this report has done very, very little. We have such a very small piece of effort here, as we have so many times. I think we're over 12 bills now that are four pages or less long, and when you consider that actually two of the pages are about, you know, table of contents and so on, that really means that there's only, like, one page of actual information, at least better than the one bill that actually, literally had only one line in it.

But here we are. We find ourselves again with a government that has done the least that it can possibly do in order to say that they did something because they want to tell people that they did something. Of course, they will report widely, I'm sure, that they put out this great bill called the Public's Right to Know Act, and unless people are taking the time to actually delve into the act, they will just assume that the government actually did achieve something, some progress in terms of the citizens' right to know.

It's a shame because, you know, I'm always trying to look for times when I could support the government and the work that they're doing. I really want to be able to do that. It's always the first thing. What can I support in this bill? What can I be happy about? Yet here again I find myself only supporting it, I guess, ironically, because I actually do want to see a report, so it's really nice to have legislation that would allow a report to occur.

What this government is not doing, of course, is that they're not actually delving into the problem at hand. They're not looking at the issue of crime. They're not looking at the causes and the mechanisms of crime. They're not looking at the mechanisms of discovering crime, responding to crime, preventing future crimes, somehow rehabilitating those people that commit those crimes, the reintroduction of those people back into society in a way that would be positive and beneficial to society. These are all things that I would have loved to have seen the government do. I probably could have jumped up and said: I found something I support you on. I'm really looking forward to the opportunity to be able to do that with vigour.

As I've said so many times in this House, the government's work is so much less than it could have been. They like to talk about the possibility of doing work rather than actually doing the work itself. They like to have the appearance of being in motion rather than actually being in motion, and that's frustrating. It's frustrating for the people in the province of Alberta, who actually expect their government to achieve things, to get to a place where they can

celebrate some of the government actions, but indeed they cannot because the government has not chosen to put some meat on the bones. In this case, I'm not even sure that I can say that the bones are there. It doesn't even ask you to do various things in order to be able to put this report together. At this point we have maybe some nascent cells, I guess, available here that hopefully one day will grow into something that will be recognizable and useful to the people of the province of Alberta.

You know, I would have really enjoyed a bill that spent some time looking at important crime issues in terms of crime and response to criminals and rehabilitation of criminals and moving us toward a safer and less violent society. I certainly would have loved all of that. I would have loved if they had, for example, gone back to the victims of crime fund, which they pilfered last year, and returned that money to the victims of crime and actually developed programs to assist people who have been victims of crime and enabled them to benefit from the dollars that come in through the criminal system and are put into the victims of crime fund but have been shuffled out by this government over the last year, which is a real shame.

I can certainly tell you that in my conversations with people in the Indigenous community about the things that could have been done regarding the murdered and missing Indigenous women report, that apparently is out there but nobody has seen, they certainly would have loved to have seen some of that money in a bill like this, for example, being put forward to actually help people who have been victims of crime. It would be really nice to know that the government, rather than reducing the number of court support workers for Indigenous women, which they have over the last year, were instead helping them.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's an honour to rise here tonight. We live in a world where information is easier than ever to access. The Internet has made it as simple as three clicks for someone to learn in depth about a recently passed government policy or a matter of seconds if they want to know who their local elected official is in order to report a problem. Albertans used to spend long hours doing their own research, looking up specific topics if they wanted to learn about Alberta's justice system, for example, but now they can do that all from a phone. That's why I feel that Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act, fits in well with today's standards of information.

8:00

Crime is a topic many discuss over the dinner table or while watching the news, and they take crime into consideration when deciding where to purchase a home or spend their time. It factors into many very important decisions Albertans need to make for their families. Bill 9 will be a great tool for Albertans to make educated decisions in their daily life. The ability to access a provincial database with crime stats is a great tool in their tool kit as they make decisions for their family.

While Stats Canada does have this information readily available to the public, having a provincial database gives this government the flexibility to highlight statistics that tend to be the most concerning for people such as data about violent and serious crimes. The public has a right to know how crime is affecting their community, and this legislation would uphold that right by requiring the provincial government to report the stat annually, at a minimum, through a report in the Legislature and by publishing the

information on the government of Alberta website. This would give Albertans the option to access the information for whatever purpose they need, whether to learn about a local area that they live in or for interested stakeholders around the province.

Some people ask: now, how does this line up with the government's red tape reduction initiatives? Well, Mr. Speaker, people have a right to know how crime is affecting their community, and this bill would reduce red tape by making it easier for them to find statistics about crime. It's all about ease of access. Having a place for the public to simply click and read would be an enormous help down the road as this government includes more crime stats into the database. Making this information available to the public will also be a great help for local leaders looking to respond to concerns from residents or to help them make educated decisions for better outcomes in their local communities.

I hope my colleagues agree that Bill 9 will aid the government's plan for increased public access to information, and I look forward to seeing what other kinds of statistics could be added to this database in the future. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. I've read through the bill, and, you know, it does some things that, in my understanding, the minister is already eligible to do. When it comes to writing reports about his ministry, I think that that's something that is well within his ability. We don't need legislation for that.

I see under section 2:

The purposes of this Act are

- (a) to increase transparency and accountability with respect to the criminal justice system in Alberta,
- (b) to help Albertans better understand the criminal justice system in Alberta, and
- (c) to ensure Albertans have information about the safety of their communities.

Well, when I look at what this government has done and their track record on crime, I would argue that what's happening, unfortunately, is that the harshest way that individuals are learning about the criminal justice system is from being victims of crime.

I can speak first-hand to what it means to be able to support someone who is the victim of crime. I was a volunteer with the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton for many years, and throughout my time there I would have to say that this was probably one of the most difficult experiences for the victim in the sense that a lot of their needs came from needing support through the criminal justice system.

When someone is sexually assaulted and they are able to find the strength to, first of all, report the assault and then go through the horrific experience of the examination of a sexual assault, where you're literally being poked and prodded and scraped and swabbed and questioned and questioned and questioned and reviolated, and then find the strength and courage to go forward and to start the process of the criminal justice system, it's very daunting to have to sit in a courtroom and sometimes speak directly to your aggressor. There are many cases where what police call the bad guy decides to self-represent, so they're the ones who are questioning the victim. I can tell you that through that process it was very humbling to see the incredible amount of strength that these individuals were able to muster to get through this process.

So when I see a piece of legislation that talks about helping Albertans better understand the criminal justice system, I could say

that anybody who's been a victim of crime and been part of that criminal justice system knows full well what that entails. The way to get through it, Mr. Speaker, is to provide supports to the victims of crime fund, and what we saw this government do was drastically reduce that program.

They reduced the time allowed for a victim to make a claim. It used to be two years that a victim had the opportunity to file a claim. I can tell you, through my work in social work over the years, that two years doesn't seem long enough for someone to get the strength to come forward and file a report. This government reduced that time period. That is a huge detriment to so many in the province that are eligible for support, that deserve support. But because of decisions that this government did when they were looking at the victims of crime fund, they reduced their eligibility simply by reducing the timeline of two years. I believe that it's now 45 days, which is absolutely unacceptable.

The other piece of this legislation: "to ensure Albertans have information about the safety of their communities." While I think it's important to be able to educate people about their communities, I also think it's important to provide supports and services to help reduce those criminal activities. It's not just about educating what's going on around you; it's about making sure that people that have been impacted are adequately supported, and we're looking at reasons why people are entering the criminal justice system in the first place.

When we look at people that are abnormally or highly impacted by involvement in the criminal justice system, when we look at Indigenous communities, when we look at racialized communities, we know that there's a higher number of those individuals that are being harassed by police, that are being charged by police, that are entering the criminal justice system and are getting extremely difficult sentences that aren't equivalent to the general population. I think this legislation is talking about all of these wonderful things, about education, but we're not looking at some of the bigger picture things that need to happen.

When this government had the ability to look at the victims of crime fund, not only did they reduce the timeline for the ability for someone to make a claim, but they also took part of the funding and allocated it to policing and, I believe, to hire lawyers that would assist, which is also important, but it shouldn't be at the cost of victims. I think that when we hear from victims and we hear from advocates, they've been pretty clear about what is needed to address crime in the province, and it's supporting victims.

So it's not just about an education campaign about how your community is safe, but we need to support the communities where we live, and that's more than just doing a report on the criminal behaviour in your community. I question what types of things are going to be subject to public release. We know that currently there are offenders in the system that do warrant a public release. When an offender is being released and they're deemed high risk, a notice goes out, and the community is informed that so-and-so, with this description, was charged with, was sentenced to, and is still a risk to the community. We have that information. We know when these individuals are being released.

What are the criteria that are going to be reported in the community? What is the consideration for individuals that perhaps couldn't afford a great defence team? We hear of cases where people are wrongly accused, they're wrongly confined, and then through appeal they're able to overturn the ruling because they were actually not guilty.

8:10

I'm curious about what criteria are being put in place when we are releasing these reports and this information to communities in

an attempt to keep them safe. Who's providing this sort of resource and information to the ministry to determine this list? I know that it was very controversial when it was determined that the high-risk offenders' information would be published. There were advocates on both sides talking about the impacts of that information being released.

I think it's very important to talk about more than just information sharing. We need to talk about support and services. I can tell you that when someone is being released, in my experience with supporting victims, typically that victim would be phoned, and they would be advised: your offender is being released into the community. And that immediately triggers stress. If a victim has any sort of PTSD, all of that could come rushing back to that individual, and what supports are in place for that? What is the consequence of providing all of this information to a community in an attempt to keep them safe if we're not supporting the victims that put this bad guy in the criminal justice system in the first place? Has that been considered?

When we are talking about informing the public, what is the consequence to those that have been impacted by that individual? I can tell you that when I've been working in the realm of social work, any time there was a bail hearing, any time there was an appeal for release or a parole board hearing, the victims were notified that their offender has asked for this to happen, and just the simple knowledge that that person is asking to be released was a trigger, and it created incredible amounts of stress for that individual and their loved ones, who saw the individual go through it, whether it was their co-workers, their children, their spouse, their parents. It has a huge impact when we talk about these things.

When we're talking about making sure that Albertans are safe under the Public's Right to Know Act, what supports are being put in place for those that have been impacted? This is a big piece that's missing, and it's a big piece that we have continued to see this government cut. Having significant cuts to the victims of crime fund is incredibly detrimental. It has ripple effects as well. It has an impact on the access to mental health supports. It has impacts on the health care system, social services. There is an impact when people aren't getting their mental health needs met, and when it's because they were a victim of crime, they deserve compensation and supports, and to reduce that doesn't mean that they're not going to still attempt to get those services and reports; it means that they're going to go to other systems to do it.

What does that look like? Well, it could be a call to Children's Services because the school has called in saying that, you know, child A hasn't come to school in two months. When we follow up with the parents, we find out that perhaps their offender has been released, and mom is traumatized and can't get out of bed and has nobody to call, no supports, no services. Is that child at risk? That's what would have to be determined. Could it have been prevented if they had a worker that they could call through the victims of crime fund, to say: this is what's happening for me? Perhaps.

When we look at ways to truly support Albertans when it comes to crime, we need to look at more than just information sharing. I think it's an important component of it, but it absolutely is not the only piece that actually helps Albertans. We don't see anything in this legislation that actually addresses the key justice issues.

We've heard about concerns from racialized communities, about police harassment. We on this side of the House have listened, have worked with those communities to come up with ideas that would help address their concerns. None of that is mentioned in this piece of legislation. These are people that are being wrongly targeted by a policing system that was sent there to protect them. Why isn't that in this legislation? Why aren't we talking about things that we could be doing to better support Albertan communities?

The legislation says: to educate communities about their safety. Well, I think that educating communities about safety goes both ways. We need to work with our individuals that are working in the police forces and work with communities and have a collaborative approach about what the needs are rather than just publishing names of offenders that are going to be living in your community. Again I go back to: what is this offender list? Who's being reported? What criteria are being put in place to have these crimes published? You know, I've worked with people that have been charged, have been in the corrections system, and they, too, have a story. They, too, have an experience that perhaps would be completely missed in just a publication of their name, their address, and the crime that they were committed for. That puts those individuals at risk, too, if we're not using some significant criteria to make sure that this person is at risk of reoffending.

I have worked with colleagues that work on that unit that monitors high-risk offenders, and they are very diligent in making sure that that individual knows that they are there. That individual that's been released: they know that they're a high-risk offender. The police know that they're a high-risk offender, and their job is to make sure that that person continues to be monitored.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Calgary-South East has risen.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. If passed, this bill would be the first legislation of its kind in Canada and would require the provincial government to report crime data annually, to make that information publicly accessible. In addition to the annual reporting requirement, which enhances transparency, additional accountability is added through the requirement to table a report in the Legislature, making these statistics part of the official public record.

Bill 9 will bring consistency in timing and a more user-friendly approach to crime statistics for Albertans. This will help my constituents and Albertans broadly to better understand what is going on in their communities. While Alberta already obtains police-based crime data from Stats Canada, this legislation enables the minister to enter into information-sharing agreements with the federal government, other provinces and territories, municipalities, and police services. This collaboration and improved access to crime data will help policy-makers at various levels to make evidence-based decisions that will hopefully lead to better outcomes and safer communities.

While there may be some costs for the technology used to report these metrics and possibly for staff to collect and publish this information, it's expected that these costs can be covered within the ministry's existing budget. In my view, these minor costs will be significantly outweighed by the benefit of providing Albertans and their families with easier access to valuable public safety related information.

I'm looking forward to supporting Bill 9, and I would encourage the hon. members here to do so as well. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's hard not to grow increasingly more and more frustrated with this government as they bring in pieces of legislation that ultimately state that the minister can do what the minister already has the privilege of doing in this House when there are so many more matters that need to be addressed when it comes, in this case specifically, to our justice system.

Mr. Speaker, I think that one of the gravest and most heinous of the realities that we live in here in the province of Alberta is the fact that, especially, Indigenous people are overrepresented in our prison systems, of course, at the provincial level and at the federal level. When you start looking at the numbers, you see that Indigenous men, for example, make up 23 per cent of the prison population, and then when you look at Indigenous women, it's actually 27 per cent whereas overall in the population Indigenous people across the entire country are closer to between 3 and 4 per cent. How does this make any sense? How does this make any sense, that we have so many Indigenous people overrepresented in the justice system?

8:20

You'd think that this is an opportunity for this government to address this particular issue. They say that they're doing as much as they possibly can in order to – and I would say that it's lip service, Mr. Speaker. When I go out into the communities and I hear what people have to say, they feel like this government is just paying lip service to the whole issue of the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It's a shame because, you know, especially the Minister of Indigenous Relations likes to get up in this House and say that he's doing everything possible to actually address the calls to action when it comes to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but what he's been able to do is next to nothing. Absolutely next to nothing.

The reality is that that's not the only concern when it comes to our judicial system, which I think is the most grave of all, though, because, I mean, it has to do with the relationship that exists between Albertans, Canadians, and Indigenous peoples. You have to ask yourself: okay; well, what's the root of the problem? Like, a lot of the time the fact that Indigenous people had to go through the whole residential school system and the trauma of having to go through that and the intergenerational trauma that is then passed on to children, grandchildren: this is something that's very real. It's studied. It's well quantified in research by academics and professionals that actually deal with this. We could be seeing a bill that could actually address these issues; instead, we see this bill, Bill 9, here in the House, which, like I was saying at the beginning, Mr. Speaker, really just amounts to providing the minister with duties that the ministry should already be dealing with.

We also have the fact that last year this very government decided that they wanted to raid the victims of crime fund and use monies from that particular program for other means, which we see absolutely nothing about. They have not demonstrated in any feasible way that they're actually addressing issues related to actually helping families. I'll remind members of the House that Alberta has 73 victims' services organizations. Seventy-three victims' services organizations. When this whole issue actually came out regarding this move, which is intended – like, this victims of crime fund is intended to aid the victims of crime and actually put people and put families first.

So here we have another irony, Mr. Speaker. This government gets up time and time again, and it's like they like to put families first, put people and families first. But here's a very concrete – a very concrete – example of how, instead of putting people and families first, they actually went in and they actually raided this particular fund and, in the end, had 73 organizations throughout the entire province calling their bluff on the fact that they like to put people and families first when it comes to this particular issue.

Those 73 victims' services organizations came out very diligently in order to tell this government – you know, just last week I was telling members on the other side that they say that they like to listen to Albertans, that they like to listen to stakeholders, and

that they're doing what stakeholders and Albertans want, but again, Mr. Speaker, I put forward the argument that they only like to listen to Albertans and stakeholders that actually agree with their political ideology. And I remind them that they're here to represent more than just those who agree with their political ideology. Here we have an example of 73 victims' services organizations that were completely against what this government presented in this House, and they have done nothing to rectify that – nothing to rectify it – not for the people who were actually victims of crime or the organizations that actually help the families and the people that actually go through that crime here in the province of Alberta.

We've discussed the fact that we have a severe and damning problem with systemic racism inside of our judicial system, our justice system as a whole, the fact that, as I was stating, Indigenous people are overrepresented in the justice system, and then on top of that we have a government who, when it comes to the issue of attacks on Black Muslim women here in the province of Alberta, has also done next to nothing. Now, don't get me wrong, Mr. Speaker. I think it's very important that places of worship should be protected, and it's great that a grant has been provided so that, you know, the boards of directors can actually put up surveillance cameras and things like that in order to deter people from marking places of worship of all kinds – it doesn't matter which religion – with profanity and racist symbols and the like. That's fine. It's good. But the specific question before the House last year was the increasing number of attacks on Black Muslim women in the province of Alberta, and we have yet to see any action from this government to address that specific issue.

The Minister of Justice could have used this opportunity to present a bill to this House that would actually address that particular issue. That's why, when people hear what this government has to say, all they can think of is: it's nothing but lip service. They say that they're doing something to address racism here in the province of Alberta, but when it comes to the actual concrete problems that Albertans are facing, they actually are doing absolutely nothing to address it. You know, it's concerning that over nine Black Muslim hijabis were actually attacked here in the province of Alberta. Perhaps people remember how I was impacted by that when the whole issue of the London family happened and that it was important for us to address this head-on. That's why I find it frustrating. I find it frustrating to be inside of this Legislature and realize that this government is doing nothing to actually address that particular issue, because these are real people in communities all around Alberta.

You know, like, the bill here – I'll read out of section 2(c). It says here: "to ensure Albertans have information about the safety of their communities."

8:30

How does this particular bill address the fact that Black Muslim hijabis walking through their communities are actually going to be able to do so safely? And not just them, Mr. Speaker; anybody that actually dresses in a diverse way. We have lots of Albertans that choose to dress in a diverse way when they're out doing their business, and because of that, they're targeted inside of their own communities.

You know, I was at an event a couple of weekends ago with the Hoyo women's collective. They were doing their celebration of International Women's Day. One of the Somali members of the community who's a Black Muslim hijabi got up and was talking about the fact that how cowardly – how cowardly – it is that an individual would run up on a grandmother from the community and attack that grandmother from behind. So then it begs the question,

because they were looking at me and they were looking at all the other politicians in the room that day, and they were saying: what are you doing to address this? This bill could have been something to address that. The Minister of Justice could have done something to present in this very House a real issue Albertans have been facing for decades, I would say, since we started having more immigration of Muslims to the province of Alberta that actually wear hijab and especially Black Muslim women, no matter what communities that they're coming from. It's a shame. Again I tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I'm frustrated.

We've taken this opportunity to actually present Bill 204, the private member's bill, which would actually collect race-based data, and we've heard nothing but lip service from members on the other side when it comes to this particular private member's bill. I'd like to add, Mr. Speaker, that every private member's bill that has been presented by this side of the House has been absolutely squashed. They don't even let us debate it.

So the level of frustration continues to grow and grow and grow, because there is no political will on the other side of this House to actually debate the matters that Albertans are really concerned about. Or is this government trying to tell me that Black Muslim women don't matter? I wouldn't put that on them, Mr. Speaker, because I don't believe in shaming people, but this is a real issue. This is a real issue that needs to be addressed, and it could have been done by the Minister of Justice with this particular bill, but again we see nothing but platitudes and lip service.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier I heard a couple of speeches from the government side as well. Colleagues on that side presented this bill as groundbreaking and something that has never happened in the history of any Legislature and how Alberta will be first and all those things.

However, I didn't see much in this legislation. When we were going through law school, there used to be an assignment – I think my colleague from Calgary-Cross may remember that – where you have to draft a piece of legislation based on given facts and some instructions. For the most part, instructions will be that you will pick up the facts that are of a substantive nature and you will leave them in the body of the act, and if there are things of an administrative nature that need to be figured out, like kind of day-to-day functioning of that program or that legislative scheme, those things may be left for regulations.

In this one, essentially, they have left everything not only to the regulation but to the discretion of the minister. The main clause of the bill reads that "the Minister shall prepare a report respecting data and information . . . that the Minister considers necessary or advisable to carry out the purposes of this Act." The whole act is based on three broad statements of purposes that can be interpreted, I guess will be interpreted, by different people differently and can be interpreted in many, many different ways. Based on those three purposes of the act, the minister has unfettered discretion to include whatever he deems fit.

I think that kind of bill even in a law school assignment for law school assignment purposes will get a failing grade. It has no substantive provision, no certainty, nothing. It's the worst example of a skeleton legislation, and here we listen to government colleagues say that it's groundbreaking legislation and that nobody has ever done it. No wonder nobody has done it, because there is nothing in this legislation at all. We don't know what information will be collected. We don't know what criteria the minister will use

to collect that information. We have no information whatsoever when we think of this legislation.

Even the UCP's platform, where that commitment was made, page 65, is more specific than this piece of legislation. That at least says that the right to know act "will require annual reporting, by judicial district" – not by the minister – "on a wide number of measurements" and lists "the number of crimes committed by persons on bail, probation, parole, subject to a deportation order for criminality, or previously removed for criminality." A lot of dog whistle in there, too, but at least there are some specific details that you can see from that platform, that: okay; that's what they are committing. There is nothing in this piece of legislation that you can say that that's what's happening there. I suspect the prime motive for bringing forward this legislation is that they can check a box, that, oh, there was a promise made in the platform, so we have fulfilled it. It does not give the public any more information that they already don't have. It does not give the minister any more authority that the minister does not have.

All of these reports – for instance, the Calgary Police Service quarterly publish on serious violent crimes, on basically everything that goes on in the city. Stats Canada publishes those. The city of Edmonton publishes those. Saying that we will put that together in one report: that doesn't help. What will really help is if government steps up and takes steps to address those issues, to address those problems.

8:40

Instead, what we have seen from this government in the last three years is that in every budget they have butchered the Justice budget. They have butchered services that the Justice department provides. None of that speaks to the priorities of Albertans that we talk to. I represent a very diverse riding. I have people from many different cultural, ethnic, religious backgrounds, people of many different talents. I think the issues facing them – if government would act to do something about that, that would actually help people.

For instance, my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie talked at length about attacks on racialized, hijab-wearing women. There are people in my riding who are fearful of going out, getting onto the C-Train just because of who they are. That should be the focus of this government. Those individuals, those Albertans, have a right to know that they can be who they are. That's the responsibility of the state, to make sure that they are safe. As was mentioned, yes, there was a grant given to religious, faith-based organizations – good on the government – but many of these attacks were at bus stops, at shopping centres, at parking lots. Many of them were even on the streets and on the roads. We have not heard a thing about what government is doing to address that one, and those people have a right to know what their government is doing about it.

There was a report, after almost three years of consultation, presented by Alberta's first Anti-Racism Advisory Council: 48 recommendations, almost 11 recommendations relating to the justice system, including collection of race-based data. To this date this government has not said a word about that report. Those on the receiving end of systemic racism, those on the receiving end of racism, those on the receiving end of hate-motivated crimes: they have the right to know why this government is so quiet, so silent on that report. Those are the kinds of issues that my constituents share with me.

As stated here, "to increase transparency and accountability with respect to the criminal justice system": if they really want to increase transparency and accountability, there are many things that they already know and will still refuse to share. Just reporting on those numbers also doesn't resolve anything.

For instance, due to the Jordan decision from the Supreme Court of Canada, some reoffences must be prosecuted within 18 months, and indictable offences must be prosecuted within 30 months. There are thousands of cases that are at risk of being thrown out because they're already at that threshold, at the 18-month threshold, at the 30-month threshold. And, yes, I understand that applications need to be made – they won't be automatically thrown out – but instead of doing this stunt, I think government should be putting forward a solid plan of how they will address those delays so that people who have been wronged can get justice from their justice system. Again, we don't see anything on that from this government.

Then the victims of crime fund: not only that those Albertans who are victims of crime are not seeing their cases moved through the justice system; government also raided the victims of crime fund. Since June 2020 they have diverted 60 per cent of the fund on other initiatives, which are not supporting victims of crimes. Just year over year, from last year to this year, there was a 12 per cent reduction in supports for victims of crimes. I think those victims also need to know why it's a priority for the government to check a box from their platform but not their issues.

Why is government failing on a basic and fundamental responsibility of making sure that all Albertans, all citizens are able to feel safe in their communities, and that whenever they are wronged, there is a system in place that will help them with that, be their justice system, be their supports from the victims of crime fund and other services? But those services, those funds: they're on the chopping block. Albertans are getting less because of this government's policies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. They're very instructive, I think, the comments that the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall had framed up in regard to this bill. The well of knowledge that I draw from in regard to justice issues is much less deep than perhaps some other people in this room, but I also, I think, can offer a perspective as to just asking for clarification on this Bill 9, to perhaps seek a more clear understanding of what the Justice minister is intending and the government is intending with this bill, and then for us to make sure that it is substantive and is meeting the public interest, and, of course, I think all bills must pass that test in order to be relevant.

8:50

I guess the first question that I have – because, of course, this bill seems to be seeking to require the Minister of Justice to publish an annual report with data and information relating to the justice system, specifically disclosing information about parole and people up on charges and so forth. So I'm just curious to know if the minister, in fact, can do that now, right? Can the Minister of Justice in fact publish a report on individuals on bail or parole, as was discussed before, or what specifically has to change that is blocking the Minister of Justice now from being able to do that? Because, of course, the first test of the salience of a bill is, you know: does it make a certain action stronger?

The second question I have for the minister and for the government in general is, you know, why the minister is choosing in this bill not to specify which data should be included or disclosed in an annual report for the public. As was mentioned here before – and definitely I have an interest in this issue as well – you know: to

what degree is data collected around race-based crime and/or arrests by the police, and how can we use that sort of data to improve the justice system for all, right? Of course, the justice system isn't just to seek to protect the public from crime, but it's also to ensure that justice is served for someone who might be charged or arrested as well.

I know in this world of algorithms and so forth that we can create tremendous sort of narrowing of probabilities down as to where and when certain crimes might be taking place and a certain geographical location and other uses for data like that. But, you know, I'm also concerned about the converse version of that, Mr. Speaker, which is to presume that you conduct justice using an algorithm as your basis for focusing, deploying forces in certain neighbourhoods, having certain programs for different racialized groups in our society, and so forth.

You know, data is an unbelievably powerful tool that we have, and it's only getting exponentially more so over these last few years and into these next few years, especially. So we really want to make sure that this Bill 9 is addressing that and respects both the integrity of data that we're collecting and what kind of data we are collecting and how we disclose that data as well. It's not just a matter of saying: let's open up the books and let's all see what's there. It's a question of: what is the minister going to choose to disclose and how and under what circumstances, and framing that data as well for the public's knowledge, to know more.

Another question I have – again, I guess it's related to that, Mr. Speaker – is with Bill 9 as it's written, and I'm sure the minister can clarify this for me, right? Like, under Bill 9 what would stop the minister from picking and choosing which data they choose to disclose, right? You know, all information has a certain meaning, and of course if you can craft certain details that you put together, then you're creating a story, right? It's very important, especially in the service of justice – right? – that we act through legislation to depoliticize the execution of justice at every turn, really. I'm just concerned, again, if the minister has carte blanche discretion as to which data he or she might be disclosing and then creating a narrative around that that maybe doesn't necessarily correspond to reality or making our communities safer or the execution of justice for people who might be charged to be the very highest quality possible.

The last question I have as well is, you know, again around the minister supporting the collection of race-based data, which we have, I think, an interest in and, I think, a common interest. I've heard the former Minister of Justice talk about this, and I've heard other members over the last few years speaking about this as well. You know, we actually, coincidentally, Mr. Speaker, have a bill before the House right now, Bill 204, which would seek to in fact create a framework for us to move forward, to compel our various police forces and the criminal justice system to give us that sort of information. So I could see a marriage between this Bill 9 and the disclosure information and then, of course, with Bill 204, the opening up of what sort of data we can in fact have and then making much more informed decisions about our justice system, to in fact make it more just. That's the best word you can use to describe the justice system if possible.

Those are some of the questions that I had. I know that, you know, there are a lot of challenges around the justice system here in the province. I mean, these are challenges that just didn't appear overnight. I certainly watched these things in opposition before and then when we were in government, and now, in 2022, we see some of those same things, but they've just been exponentially, in some cases, more of a problem. Certain issues around the timely execution of justice – right? – having people go to trial in a timely

manner: that problem has just exacerbated itself here in Alberta over the last number of years.

I know that we can use COVID as an excuse, and it certainly was a material issue around booking court dates and so forth; however, you know, here we are now, and we're not out of the pandemic by any means, but we're trying to work for a long-term solution because, I mean, justice still needs to be served, right? If you have a person that is up on trial and doesn't get a date in a timely way, then that affects the execution of justice in a profound way.

One thing that we can talk about more, Mr. Speaker, is increasing capacity in our courts, increasing capacity to have trials being called in a timely way. I mean, I think that's something that all of us could agree on that needs work. You know, there's nothing worse than perhaps making an arrest and putting up charges and then losing that charge because the courts are tied up and there's no room to have a trial. That works both ways as well, for the accused and the general public and the police system. It's just frustrating all the way around. So these are some of the issues that I think we need to talk about in regard to justice.

Again, you know, I was just being honest to suggest that I don't have the same degree of understanding or experience in the justice system as some of our learned colleagues have here, but those are some of the questions that I have.

With that, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, could I adjourn debate? Thank you.

9:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 10

Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has risen.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. This is a very emotional day for me personally. I'm honoured to have brought this piece of legislation forward, but before I get started, there are many people that need to be thanked for helping this, including the Associate Minister of Status of Women and the former and now standing ministers of Health. It took a lot of work on everybody's part to bring this together. It's been seven years of my life that I've been working on this. When you come from an amazing culture like I come from, it's incredible when you get to work with those groups of people from various cultures to help bring forward a piece of legislation that actually protects women and girls.

Around 11 years ago we started doing some work around honour beatings, honour killings, child marriage, FGM, human trafficking, and many other things. As you know, we recently just did a release on human trafficking and the task force and their information that they're bringing forward, another very proud moment, for sure. It takes an entire group of people to have a piece of legislation like this come forward. It's complicated and it's difficult.

I would just also like to tell everyone in here that some of the stuff I'm going to talk about today could be fairly triggering. I just want to let you know that there's some fairly strong language, and there may be some uncomfortable language for folks, but I think it's very important for people to understand why this is happening.

One of the things that we were asked when we were talking about legislation coming forward regarding female genital mutilation was: what's happening at the federal level, but where could we start here in this province? One of the questions that comes up over and

over again is: does it actually happen here? Yes, in fact, it does. The actual act is not carried out here, as far as we know, but we have something called the cutting season where little girls are sent to other countries to have this procedure occur for lots and lots of different reasons. The whole point of this legislation is not in any way to go after cultural rationalities, but it's to prevent violence against women that is perpetuated as a result of what people would deem as culture.

Just so you know, female genital mutilation happens on every continent in the world other than the most northern continent. You know, though, it happens everywhere else in the world. In fact, some of the biggest situations that are happening are in the United States right now because their federal legislation did not align with their state legislation. This came to my attention a few years ago in the United States, and it really started the process as to what needed to happen in our province. To everyone in here who is debating this legislation, even to be able to bring it to the floor is such a huge privilege. We will be the first Legislature in Canada to pass legislation like this, in line with many other countries, but even the United States is having issues with passing state legislation. Even 24 countries in Africa have passed this legislation. There has been no legislation in Asia we can see as of yet; however, we are seeing this happen in Africa.

There have been a lot of questions around culture as well, Mr. Speaker. We did not lead this legislation. This is not us as a Legislature or people of Alberta imposing our values on other cultures. We've been very blessed to have been led by many, many other groups and cultures that are helping us to understand what our part is in this globally, because it is a global issue. When we're talking about human trafficking, in particular about children, we have to just go that extra step to understand what we're responsible for. What's particularly special about this legislation: it's professional legislation that helps to define for our wonderful doctors in this province what they're able to do. I just wanted to start off with that, by expressing how proud I am.

There are decades – 250 million women right now are suffering. This could be happening to a little girl somewhere in the world. But, more than that, Mr. Speaker, 250 million women have either undergone or are suffering from the very, very severe effects of female genital mutilation. In a country like Canada, when we say that we protect women and girls, we protect women and girls, end of story. There cannot be pieces of definitions that either do or don't. You either do or you don't. This is one of those important things that we need to do within our province and within our country to start the conversation. And I mean that, because a lot of people don't know, and it's such a worthy discussion. What it does is that it leads to other layers of legislation to protect vulnerable peoples. Any time we can do that, I believe we are on the right side of history.

Female genital mutilation is a practice that has absolutely no health benefits, nor is it medically necessary, and instead it, in many ways, causes a great deal of harm to the health. There are four types of FGM. This is where it gets a little tricky, so I apologize for the language, but I think it's very important that we use the language and that we honour that and that we honour the people that are going to be doing this.

I think I'm supposed to move second reading. I'm sorry if I didn't do that. Thank you. I got so into my conversation. May I keep speaking after that? Okay. Excellent. Thank you. Sorry.

We have four types. The first one is called a clitoridectomy. This is a partial or total removal of the external part of the clitoris and prepuce, which is the hood of the clitoris.

Excision: partial or total removal of external parts of the clitoris, labia minora, with or without the removal of the labia majora.

Infibulation: narrowing of the vaginal opening, with the creation of a covering seal by cutting and repositioning the labia minora and/or removal of all the external clitoris pieces.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

Other procedures to the genitalia of women or girls for nonmedical purposes include pricking, piercing, incising, scraping, or cauterization. If that didn't make you a little bit nervous, congratulations to you. Every time I read it, it makes me more anxious, more upset, more concerned, and more committed than ever to making sure that all levels of domestic violence, sexual assault, and sexual violence are ended. We know that we can't always end these things, but we have an absolute responsibility as a culture, as a group of people, and as families in this province and in this country and globally to make sure we're doing the very best by our girls and our women and anybody who is vulnerable.

Some of the complications, as you can well imagine, that come from this are urinary tract problems; painful urination; vaginal problems, including massive infections; menstrual problems; and, of course, pain during intercourse. But the biggest problem is that we have the death of women and babies, thousands and thousands and thousands of them. Women have to be reopened in order to deliver babies quite often, as you can imagine – in rural areas it's very, very difficult to do – and then are quite often forced to be sewn up again after the fact.

One of the things that we learned – we did a very, very, very, very intense consultation, Madam Speaker: hundreds and hundreds of groups and organizations not just here in Alberta but across Canada and across the globe.

I also want to thank one particular woman, Giselle Portenier, who did the movie *In the Name of Your Daughter*. If you haven't had a chance to see that, it's imperative that you do. The first 10 minutes are extremely difficult to watch, but it gives an idea of what happens and the cultural practices. In Africa there are many, many groups, both women- and men-led, in the 24 states that have legislation against this, that are leading the discussions around this to help people understand that there are other ways to show coming of age but, more importantly, that girls are valued and are beautiful the way they are. This is because the way girls are put together is considered impure in some places but also because they believe that it's reducing promiscuity and makes a girl more valuable.

9:10

Kenya, in fact, right now has some of the strongest legislation in the African diaspora but are having very, very serious concerns with girls being cut and then being paraded out into the main squares and being showered with gifts and money as a result of their sacrifice to help uphold their villages. You can understand from that perspective – we can't go into this with a stigma because we don't understand where these cultures are coming from, but in Canada, in Alberta we absolutely have the ability to make these changes. In fact, I would suggest that it takes courage to do it. It's going to take the courage of this entire Legislature to be able to make sure that we're able to pass legislation that helps.

I was talking to you about the childbirth complications. Eighteen per cent of children that are born to an FGM victim or survivor are alive but need to be resuscitated. Those are significantly higher statistics than the average. Quite often they're ending up having to be born through a C-section because of the trauma to the baby. Five per cent are stillborn or die, and there's a clear link between those born alive and resuscitation and then stillborn in FGM. There's some very, very solid evidence to show that these are obviously not in the best interest of the woman or the child. But then again we also have a lot of folks who've survived and babies again we

survived, and we have a tremendous amount of posttraumatic stress and depression and anxiety. This legislation is very thorough in that it provides supports, services, and potentially reconstruction as well for any woman that has been impacted.

I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Andrea Hunter, who is a reconstruction plastic surgeon, who's actually going to be working here in Alberta, who's hopefully going to be able to help us, because one of the biggest problems we had is that when we were speaking to doctors, they didn't know how to approach this discussion, as you can well imagine. This gives them the ability to not only be able to have discussion to educate and elevate discussion around women but also to be able to have criminal influences as well should a family not follow that direction or should a doctor be participating in any way, whether that's, you know, facilitating the surgery happening, helping to organize. Like, there are a lot of things that we can prevent and at least help that discussion happen. I would challenge every other Legislature across Canada to get their own version of this legislation going.

You have to also understand from the aspect of the girls and women who've already been through this. For the girls who are going through this, there is such an immense amount of stigma and low self-esteem. Many of them actually miss their regular physical appointments because they're afraid of being seen that they've been altered and then how to answer those questions. It's very, very, very difficult. Again, if you don't think that it's happening here and our doctors aren't seeing it, let me tell you that they are.

Over the course of the last two and a half years I've met hundreds and hundreds of women, both here and across Canada, that have told me their stories of survival, of intimidation, of stigma, of the many, many things that put us into a situation where we believe that this is okay, that an abuse of a little girl like this would be okay. Again, we have the opportunity to educate and really elevate the discussion so that we can help that education piece of it and help families to make healthy decisions here in Alberta. A lot of folks think that it's really just tradition, and it's not. This is a cultural practice that is in every single faith on every continent except for Antarctica, every single one.

I think that it's important that we go over some of the misconceptions as well, Madam Speaker. We hear all the time that it only happens in Africa or other diasporas. That's false. It's practised on every continent pretty much. Even in Europe right now the numbers stand at about a million girls that have been impacted, and that's because they're doing some data collection. We're hoping also, based on this legislation, that data will be able to be collected. We understand how important this data is, but it's also about wanting to share that data. The doctors now will have – it's mandatory for them to report if they see this, so at the very least there is information about what is going on so that should a case come forward, where abuse needs to be brought forward, we're able to do that. There are misconceptions that it only happens to adult women. The majority of girls who underwent female genital mutilation are under the age of five. Cutters claim that there are health benefits.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I don't mean to point fingers because, again, I'm not trying to impose what I believe on other cultures or coming from other countries. Having said that, though, it's passed down from grandma to grandma to grandma – that happens in these countries where they're cut – so you can imagine trying to change the perception and the discussions around that and how important that discussion is. We have the idea that there's been this long-standing tradition, that there are health benefits, but it actually stems from the idea that

female genitals are dirty, and in order to be clean and not promiscuous, they must be cut.

I was going to say, too, that, like, I think one of the biggest problems that we noticed throughout this and what I learned in these discussions is that it's very, very difficult to have a lawsuit come forward. There have been very few lawsuits that have even come forward. In Michigan the court case was brought forward after state legislation was just recently passed, and they were still not able to get justice for these little girls because it was considered vindictive to go back after the same case again. In whatever way it was handled, it was not being seen as a day of justice for the girls between the ages of nine and 14 that were cut in the United States. It was seen as an act of desperation for lawmakers to come forward with this new legislation, so they couldn't even retroactively go after the doctors that were doing this practice.

I think the most difficult part of that read was that they were saying they were just doing a little cut, a little nick. Well, we're talking about a very tiny and significant part of a woman's body, and anything that happens in there is going to have long-term results. Again, the hope is – we're going to be having some meetings with some of the Senators in the United States, too, about their decisions, and the governors, around what's going on because I think globally we just really need to come together on this discussion.

In the Health Professions Act a couple of the things that we're going to be dealing with specifically, so that folks understand this legislation – please, if you have any questions about this at all or anything outside of, like, what we discuss in here, I would be, like, more than honoured to help out and discuss this. It's really important. If there's anything that I can do to help or people that you know that may need to have a conversation about this, like, please feel free to reach out to me any time. I'm certainly not the expert by any stretch, but we'll get people connected to the right people.

This is what has been said in the laws, in the existing laws, and how we'll be strengthening those laws with the permission of the House. The procurement or performance of FGM by a regulated health professional in Alberta is prohibited, and "a person who has been convicted of a criminal offence related to the procurement or performance of [FGM] is not eligible for registration as a regulated member under [the Health Professions Act]." The proposed amendments make reporting conduct related to female genital mutilation to law enforcement mandatory.

The proposed amendments will also require health profession regulatory colleges to adopt standards of practice relating to FGM and cutting. The standards of practice will address things like education related to the prevention and prohibition of FGM, Mr. Speaker, obviously, supporting victims, securing and providing further supports that may be necessary to protect a child at risk, and how to manage the resulting physical and psychological trauma to support a victim. This would mean potentially even supporting surgical procedures to help the FGM survivor to either have a natural birth or subsequent repair post that. So it's fairly substantive and, I think, a very, very good jumping-off point.

I think that as we go through the process, we'll probably hear back from a lot of docs and, through the physicians' and doctors' help, understand how that's going. I think it'll be very profound in understanding what kind of data we're dealing with in our province, especially, I mean, as Alberta is opening up and we see the opportunities, the amazing opportunities in our province right now. We want to attract as many people as we can from all over the world to come to this beautiful province and live here and contribute to the immense and beautiful fabric that is Alberta. We will be able to stand just a little bit taller knowing that we have legislation that

protects women and girls in this way and that is a layered type of protection that goes on top of the other protections that have come not just from this government but governments before us as well.

9:20

I often say this, that our society is only as good as our humanity, and that's why these discussions are so important, because it's not about a bad group or a good group or bad practice or good practice or bad people or good people. It's not about that. It's about evolving and taking seriously the things that we say in our country and in our province and truly, truly believing in the power of good legislation to be able to come forward to protect our women and girls.

Thank you so much.

The Speaker: I appreciate the remarks of the hon. member. I'm not sure – the chair may have missed it at the beginning – whether or not you actually said “I move second reading” or “I'm pleased to move second reading” or something to the effect.

Mrs. Aheer: I was a little late, but, yes, I did. Thank goodness our whip was on it.

The Speaker: Excellent. Excellent.

Are there others? The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start off this evening by thanking the Member for Strathmore-Chestermere, or Chestermere-Strathmore . . .

Mrs. Aheer: It works both ways.

Ms Issik: . . . for all of the amazing work and dedication that she has done on this cause. She has put countless hours into this. She's put her heart and soul into this for the sole reason of protecting women and girls, and I know that I am not alone amongst Albertans for being grateful for her efforts. It's been truly remarkable to watch her dedication to this issue.

You know, the one thing about this legislation that's amazing is that it actually takes a proactive approach to addressing female genital mutilation. Although we're not aware of health professionals in this province who offer this procedure, if even one woman or one girl experienced it in this province, it would be one too many. Under this legislation any health professionals convicted of performing or facilitating female genital mutilation or cutting would have their permit to practise and their registration cancelled in this province. Additionally, health professionals convicted of this crime in other jurisdictions would not be allowed to practise or register in this province. That's what makes this different. That's what makes this legislation different.

Also, it would be prohibited that a complaint alleging procurement or provision of FGM go to the alternative complaints process. Again, very important. It makes it mandatory to report any conduct related to FGM to law enforcement. Again, unique in this country and, I think, actually unique probably in almost all of North America, except for maybe Michigan. That's why this legislation is so important.

It's one of the greatest tools we've got to combat any form of gender-based violence because it promotes awareness and it promotes education. Bringing this practice to light is incredibly important. It needs to come out of the shadows. One of the important ways that that will happen is by the health profession, by the regulatory body, the college adopting standards of practice related to FGM. That's something that doesn't exist currently, and it is needed. The college would have, if this legislation is passed, a

year from the date that the legislation comes into force to develop and implement the new standards of practice. Naturally, the content and nature of these standards of practice would differ depending on the types of services offered by each profession; however, they may focus on elements such as training related to prevention of FGM or securing supports to protect a child at risk.

The Member for Chestermere-Strathmore did outline some of the other pieces around reconstruction and other sorts of practices that would support women and girls that have been through this. The standards would encompass managing treatment, recovery, and, as I mentioned before, supports for women. Alberta's government would work closely with all of the regulatory colleges to ensure the standards of practice adequately address prevention of the act and provide the support for survivors that I mentioned.

I want to note that although this practice is sometimes called female circumcision, it is in no way comparable to male circumcision, nor is it a religious practice. Female genital mutilation can cause serious, long-term health problems in the women who have experienced it, and those have been enumerated here tonight. It can cause complications with childbirth and menstruation. It can lead to harmful infections and even death. For many women around the world female genital mutilation means a lifetime of pain and fear, and I am proud that Alberta is being a leader in standing up against this practice.

This initiative is in complete alignment with this government's broader effort to protect vulnerable women and girls from sexual violence. If this legislation passes, we will be the first provincial jurisdiction in Canada to introduce legislation addressing this. I encourage all members of this Assembly to support this bill so we can help ensure that no woman in Alberta has to experience this horrific crime.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise this evening to speak to Bill 10, the Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. I'd like to start by thanking both members that have spoken to this in second reading. I think the passion that the member brings for this is incredible, and it's really heartfelt. I think, you know, that by identifying this topic and by starting with it being a trigger for many is a huge starting point, where I would like to start the discussion when we're talking about this.

I think that when we talk about legislation that has such a profound impact on women and girls, there are so many elements that we need to consider when we're making these decisions and we're going through something that is such a profound topic, that has such an impact on those that are impacted by genital cutting and those that are working with the women that have been impacted. It's both ways when we're talking about this practice. When I have done some research about this practice – you know, I come from a children's services background, and this is a conversation that we have as professionals, about the impacts on our young women and girls.

It has to start with education, and it has to start with a general understanding of what this means and what's happening in the province. Even if the procedure didn't happen in the province, when our physicians and health care providers are working with these young women, they need to understand what the next steps are and what happens after that.

I appreciate this legislation. It talks about, in depth, the criminal component of it when the practice happens in the province, but oftentimes we know that this happens out of province and these

women are here, and we need to know that when we're going forward with this legislation – and, you know, I've heard the associate minister talk about next steps and practice – we need to really ensure that we get it right, that we're looking at ways that not just support the young women and the girls but that support the health care providers that are providing service to these young women, because it is traumatic, and it does have an impact, and there needs to be an understanding, I would even argue, at an entry-of-education level, so in postsecondary, when we're talking to nurses, when we're talking to social workers, when we're talking to physicians, obstetricians. It should be part of the curriculum of what we're talking about.

It should be a conversation that everybody in the health care profession is comfortable having, because it can be a conversation that people automatically have an assumption of what that means. We've heard in this House that it is not a spiritual practice, so having that understanding that sometimes it's bigger than the why. It's: "How do we support this individual? What do they need? What are that individual's beliefs about it? What does it say about them?" and really, really working hard to try not to stigmatize the young women, because there are values that we hold and judgments that we hold. As a social worker coming to people with the most neutral understanding – and no judgment comes from a place of education, right? So if we're talking about the standards that are going to follow this piece of legislation, I think going even further than just educating our current health care professionals, looking at those that are entering the field and the practice and having those conversations about how we can support women.

9:30

Having a really open conversation about the supports that women can access: it's something that I learned through working at Terra, which is a school for pregnant and parenting teens. Some young women would find themselves pregnant and not know what services and supports and resources were available. They didn't have people in their family that they could trust. So how do we educate the broader public about services and resources and information if their home isn't a safe place to access that information, if their community of origin isn't a safe place to access that information? How do we get the message out there that women can access safe information, health care? It's so important to be able to do that.

I appreciate the criminalization piece of it. My understanding is that it's already in the Criminal Code. That education component is just so essential. We need to look at ways that we can, you know, understand genital cutting in a bigger scope. We need to include many professions, midwives. We heard the member talk about the importance of childbirth in that and that women experience alternative ways of childbirth. They might have a midwife. They might have a doula. It's not just perhaps a physician that is working with these women, so having that understanding on that level as well. I would also suggest that social workers be included in that because we typically have social workers in place in hospitals, whether they come in through the emergency room, whether they're dealing with children through the CAP Centre at the U of A, so having just a multidiverse understanding of the impacts of this and being able to genuinely really support those that are working with the women.

One of the things that I wish I saw in this bill was more talk about the women and girls. I know that it talks about the prosecution and the criminal piece, but for a piece of legislation that says Protecting Women and Girls, some sort of reference to being able to support the women and the girls and that that next step is coming, to talk about the importance of understanding that there is trauma affiliated

with this and that the government is looking to genuinely support those women and girls. I truly hope that that's the intention. I've heard you both say that. I would like to see that that's something that's happening.

It's something also to understand that it might not necessarily be done through health care providers. Solely focusing on health care providers, I think, would be part of that education piece for the general community, but they might not have gone to their doctor for this procedure. It might have gone through someone in the community. There are other ways. Just because it wasn't a health care provider doesn't mean it's not a criminal act, and there's still trauma affiliated with that. I see the associate minister nodding. I appreciate that.

I think that, with that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and continue to listen to the debate. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has risen.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support Bill 10, Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022, and it's dealing with female genital mutilation. This is a rather uncomfortable and difficult topic to actually contemplate and speak about, particularly as a male, so I'd like to thank the very strong women that spoke previous to me on this, on both sides of the aisle, that they took the very courageous stand to bring this incredibly sensitive and generally unknown topic to our attention to address it for so many women and girls.

As I was contemplating speaking about this, I asked myself the question: how does one begin to describe female genital mutilation? Words like "unconscionable," "heinous," "dangerous," "painful," "brutal" all come to mind. Particularly in the western world, this type of practice is virtually unthinkable. What about from my perspective as the father of four daughters? How horrific to consider it even remotely happening to one of my children. Therefore, should not every woman and girl in Alberta have that same care and protection that Bill 10 would offer them and do just that?

Female genital mutilation is a dangerous practice, Mr. Speaker. According to the Criminal Code of Canada this practice carries a charge of aggravated assault. This is something that we can never have practised in Alberta. One thing I'm glad that this act takes into consideration is that anyone convicted of female genital mutilation in another jurisdiction would not be allowed to practise medicine here in Alberta. I don't think it should be allowed to be practised anywhere, but I'm very glad that within our jurisdiction we are taking steps to prevent it.

My colleague from Chestermere-Strathmore pointed out last week that, if passed, this bill would make Alberta the first jurisdiction to directly address this horrible practice. As I said before, as a father of four daughters I'm proud that Alberta is the first province to act, and I'm very hopeful that other provinces will follow suit. Mr. Speaker, this is not a partisan issue. Even if you're not the parent of daughters, I would imagine everyone in this Chamber has a niece, a cousin, a close friend, a relative of some sort that they would not be able to imagine being subjected to this crime.

I know I've mentioned my daughters throughout the speech, and I will continue to because of this piece of legislation, that is intended to make our province a safer place for them and others just like them to live and prosper. Mr. Speaker, I was shocked to learn that according to statistics that the government brought to our attention when the bill was tabled, there are estimated to be 200 million women and girls world-wide who have undergone female genital mutilation or cutting and that are still alive today. Two

hundred million. I cannot get over that number. That is – what? – 20 times the population of Canada or more. It crosses at least 30 countries. What is even more disturbing is that something like 3 million girls are estimated to be at risk of undergoing this illegal practice every year. Three million girls. This cannot happen. It's unacceptable. I wish we could protect women and girls around the world, but we can't. That's not our jurisdiction. But we do have the authority and the obligation to do that right here in Alberta, in each and every one of our hometowns, to make them a safe place, a safe haven for women from around the world to come and live and prosper.

As the Minister of Health stated last week, these changes make it even more clear that any health professional performing FTM or cutting will never practise in Alberta again. I don't like that we have to make this clear, but based on the evidence that has been shared in this House, there is, clearly and unfortunately, a need to do so.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I am compelled to rise and support this bill. As members of this Chamber have pointed out, girls and women undergoing any type of FGM procedure can face lifetime health problems, not only the obvious physical effects and trauma but devastating psychological problems as well that can arise from being subjected to this barbaric practice. I believe everyone in this Chamber would agree that wanting to protect the women and girls in their lives – their daughters, their nieces, their cousins, their friends, all the women and girls in their communities – is paramount. We here in Alberta have the opportunity to set the path for other provinces and territories to follow to protect women and girls. I appreciate that this bill states that if a medical practitioner is convicted of this crime, their practice permit and registration are cancelled immediately. At this point a crime has been committed, and there is no need for a regulatory hearing. What there is a need for is the guilty party's swift removal from the profession so that they can never be in a position to harm a girl or a woman again.

9:40

In closing, Mr. Speaker, while I'm happy to speak in support of this bill as a member of this Assembly, I know that as a loving father there is nothing I wouldn't do to ensure their safety. I believe that this amendment to the Health Professions Act is important for women and girls in Alberta and will be a great tool to make sure that anyone practising FGM will never ever be in the position to do so again.

Thank you again to the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore and the Associate Minister of Status of Women for their incredible work to bring this forward. From me, from my community, from my community with many members from around the world, and from the father of four daughters, thank you, through you, Mr. Speaker, to them and to the members opposite for speaking in support of this bill. I would ask that everyone else would also rise and support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this although I must admit I'm a little loath, as an older male, to say too much, because I certainly think other people know much more about the topic and have put much more energy into making sure that they've got this right.

I guess I want to start my speech by thanking the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for the work that she has done on this bill and, you know, I think, for the many years even prior to introducing

this bill into the House, on this topic. Of course, it is one which is very serious and one that I think needs to be addressed.

Many of you will know that I have many years of experience working in the area of sexual assault, and of course this type of topic certainly came up a number of times in my time as an instructor of social work. I also did receive a number of papers from students about this topic and learned much about it. Listening to the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, I thought, was refreshing in terms of how direct the conversation was, how specific the use of clear language about what was being said. I think that is something that really needs to be done more often in this House, so I certainly commend not only their work but their words tonight on this important subject.

I do think that this bill is in line with, you know, a real trend. As I say, students have been writing papers about this in my classes for a number of years. I know that in Alberta the college of physicians back in 1994 began the process of ensuring that none of their members participated in this type of activity, and of course the federal government also made female genital mutilation illegal in May 1997. So, I mean, this has been a topic that has been in the public consciousness for a period of time, and certainly I want to support the people who are doing the work to make sure this is moving forward and doing it right.

I know that it's a difficult topic to talk about. First of all, the natural anguish you feel when you hear about the actual activities that take place make it difficult to speak to. But you also realize that it does take place in the world, and, like when I was dealing with child sexual abuse, you know, sometimes it was hard to bring up the subject to talk about with people. You're trying not to turn people away from an important topic, yet you need to address the topic with sincerity and depth and not make sort of side references to what it is but actually speak directly to the actual things, and I think the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore did that very well.

I know it's very difficult. People around the world practise this because for some reason they believe there is a reason to do this, certainly not any reason that we in this House would share. But we also, then, understand that the work is complicated. It's complicated because you want to find a way to invite people to understand why we are moving forward with these kinds of bills to stop this from happening, to help them to understand this new perspective, knowing that it will be difficult for many people to understand that perspective, particularly, as the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore said, as this is something that has happened generation after generation after generation in families. We're inviting them into a place that they have no experience, and as such it can be very, very difficult.

Finding that way to move forward takes nuance and a delicacy on some levels, and I appreciate that the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore and, of course, the associate minister for women have tried to walk what can be a difficult line and, I think, have done so somewhat successfully. I certainly don't have any complaints. I would love to find ways to be supportive about the work as it moves forward and really look forward to the work that needs to go around this kind of legislation to ensure that people who have been involved are somehow given the supports to make the transition, to make the move. I look forward to hearing about, you know, the budget items that will be supporting this, the types of services that will be available – I know some of that has been spoken to already this evening – but not just the services that are available but the process by which we will ensure that this kind of activity really ceases to exist in this country.

I guess I'll end my comments here just saying thank you to everyone who is helping to move this along. If there's some way

that we in the opposition can help to ensure the success of stopping genital mutilation in this country and indeed around the world, then certainly we, too, wish to stand and be counted.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to applaud the incredible work done by the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore on this bill. I know that she's been working on it for a number of years. It's something that she's very passionate about and something that there's a lot of misunderstanding and misinformation about as well. One of the points that I really wanted to get on the record – and the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore spoke to it as well as the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs – was that this is not a religious practice, and I cannot stress that enough. On this particular issue I myself and others in the community have heard misinformation and it being repeated and repeated that this is actually a religious practice. Of course, it's not. I really want to thank the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for making that very important point.

It's unfortunate, because it so happens that sometimes people do mistake a cultural practice for a religious one, and then people tend to just keep propagating that misinformation in the community. On this particular issue I think it's something that is really important, that if you ever hear that piece of misinformation, you correct it immediately, please, as I have tried to do many times, no matter what community I'm visiting with, if I happen to hear that piece of misinformation.

If the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore wouldn't mind, I would welcome an interjection from her simply because I'm really eager to know a little bit more about the groups that she actually consulted with on this particular issue, so at this time I cede to her if she wouldn't mind speaking a little bit to that.

Mrs. Aheer: May I?

The Speaker: A reverse interjection.

Mrs. Aheer: I know. I would be happy to. Thank you so much. It was such a robust consultation. Thank you to the member, through you, Mr. Speaker. It was a real labour of love, actually, over the years because, like I was mentioning earlier, we shouldn't be leading this discussion. The diasporas where it's very, very obvious are where those interactions need to happen. One thing that I'd love to share with you is that I met with Rhobi. She is a leader in ending FGM in Kenya, and she, a bunch of the girls from the movie *In the Name of Your Daughter*, and I, had a Zoom call together. Rhobi herself, the one young girl, is one of the young girls who was able to escape female genital mutilation and ended up going back to her family, but her family had said that, no, this is going to happen. So she ended up staying on at the shelter . . . [Mrs. Aheer's speaking time expired] Sorry. I can talk about it later.

9:50

Member Loyola: No, and I thank you for that, hon. member. It's important for me, and especially when it comes to this matter – and, of course, unlike some of the debates that happen inside this House, this is not a political, partisan one. I think that for the most part we agree on most aspects of the bill. There is one particular issue that I'm a little bit concerned about, of course, that I'm interested in knowing from the minister. How do you think that this particular bill will actually help the women and girls that you're seeking to protect? You mentioned that health professionals may get access to,

for example, supports and things like that, but through careful reading of the bill itself I didn't actually see how women and girls will be supported.

Mrs. Aheer: May I?

Member Loyola: Please go ahead.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much. The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs brought this up as well. A big chunk of any changes in intervention and how we proceed has to happen with education and empowerment. I don't think that the women who have survived this procedure or are going through it or anything are well served by an automatic jump into justice in terms of criminality until we've had an opportunity to actually talk with the families. Of course, if a family is trying to send their child away and is facilitating that or a doctor is facilitating that, that automatically leads to criminality. However, there are many, many opportunities, Mr. Speaker, for us to intervene previous to that with the doctors and physicians having knowledge to be able to intercept. The biggest problem that we've had in the past, at least from my consultations, was the difficulty in understanding how to bring up the conversation and have it, because they didn't understand if it was religious or if it was cultural practices or how to bring up that conversation.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much for that, hon. member. As we move forward, I think that it's really important that we identify those particular aspects of the bill because, at the end of the day, it is the women and girls that have experienced this incredibly horrendous – and I am at a loss for words to actually describe this practice, as some of us have already stated in this House. And, of course, it's really important that we don't continue the stigmatization on this particular issue. I think that although it's something that we find horrendous and unacceptable, at the same time we need to proceed with caution, especially with those communities that, again, are confusing a cultural practice for a religious one, as you pointed out, Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

I think it's really important as well that as we continue debate, we speak specifically to the supports that health professionals are going to get. I know that I'm going to do my due diligence and actually reach out to health professionals that I know of myself and ask them what they think about the bill, not because I'm, you know, trying to create any kind of angst or discord but just to do my due diligence with reaching out to them as well.

Once again I want to thank the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for all the incredibly hard work that she's done with this, the Associate Minister of Status of Women, as well, for bringing this piece of legislation into the House. I look forward to learning more as we continue the debate. With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 5

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022

[Debate adjourned March 22: Ms Goehring speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has some time remaining should she choose to use it. The hon. member.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 5, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022. When I was speaking to this the last time, I was talking about the importance of PTSD being included in this. One of the things that I

mentioned as a concern was the government's position on removing access to workers to claim PTSD as part of their work impact.

Part of this legislation that I think is so important is that it expands those that we need to protect on our Alberta roadways. I know that when I was doing my consultation for PTSD Awareness Day, you know, I spoke to those that provide a response to motor vehicle collisions or any sort of involvement, whether it's a tow truck or an emergency response vehicle, and the trauma that those individuals face is quite significant.

So when we're talking about traffic safety and we're expanding those that we need to slow down for when we're passing on our roadways, I would encourage this government to look at the other component of this and the trauma that we're saying in Bill 5 is a reason for their safety, that we need to make sure that we are slowing down not just for emergency vehicles but for roadside assistant responders and such. We need to take that same argument and apply it to the mental health services that we provide those individuals. It's confusing to me why under Bill 5 we talk about the importance of their safety, their physical safety, yet we don't talk about it in other realms of legislation. We don't look at why their emotional safety is just as important. I think that it's incredible that we're continuing to acknowledge worker safety, and this piece of legislation does that.

It opens up the Traffic Safety Act. One of the questions that I did have when we were discussing this, that I haven't received a response to, was: how many lanes are being impacted when we are required to slow down? Currently the legislation indicates that it's the immediate lane where you have to slow down. So I'm curious if there been some consideration in expanding how many lanes would be impacted so that all lanes of traffic are required to slow down. Often what happens is that you see emergency vehicles or a tow truck on the side of the road. In that first lane people slow down, but then the other lanes of traffic are going 110 down the highway.

Mr. Eggen: A hundred and 10?

Ms Goehring: A hundred and 10 is the law.

But it doesn't impact the entire roadway. So there are subsequent actions that could impact or enhance this piece of legislation. I think that exploring how many lanes are impacted by this piece of legislation would be great.

I think the other piece is ensuring that there's a strong educational component to this, to understand and to educate those that are driving about what the rules are. I know one of the things that I went through when my kids were doing their driver's test is that that was really the only time that as a driver I sat and reread all of the rules. I would argue that that's probably most drivers; they do the test, they have their licence, and then they're probably not being updated on current laws. I think it's important that when we look at safety, education be a huge component of that, so making sure that there's a big push to educate Alberta drivers about what it means to keep our workers safe on our roadways.

10:00

I know AMA is a wonderful organization that does some great education campaigns. I can think of one of their commercials that they had done encouraging roadside safety, and it started with what looked like some sort of carnival happening on the side of the road with lights and all these sounds. It then changed the scene to show that it was emergency responders. It wasn't something that was fun and exciting happening; it was a safety concern, and they were doing their job. So the message from that commercial was to make sure that people slow down and that important work is happening

on the side of the highway. It's not something that workers or drivers should dismiss.

I think that we become complacent when we see emergency vehicles and we just kind of do the status quo. So now that that is changing, we need to make sure that Albertans are aware so that we can keep workers safe. We need to make sure that we're all slowing down when we're seeing vehicles pulled over on the side doing work. That ensures the safety of all the motorists that are responding as well as those that are doing the work.

If education is rolling out, I think a clear message needs to happen. I worked with a gentleman who was working with the city of Edmonton and addressing the response times of Edmonton fire. They were trying to determine what was causing the delay in responses, and loud and clear it was people not merging properly to let the emergency vehicles through. They had determined that, especially in the downtown core, simply hearing sirens didn't alert a driver to pull over to allow the emergency vehicle to proceed. I mean, that's something that you learn as a driver immediately, what the response is when you see lights coming at you, what you're supposed to do, and people just simply weren't doing it. So one of the things that the city of Edmonton tried to do was change the siren sound of the fire trucks. That was something that they were hoping would have an impact to alert drivers that something is happening, because they were used to hearing sirens, but they weren't responding in the way that they were supposed to.

I know that as drivers sometimes we go on automatic – you go on your route home; you kind of tune everything out – but that's when accidents happen, and that's when, unfortunately, emergency responders aren't able to do the job that they need to do to keep us safe. When we're talking about Bill 5, it's something that I can obviously support because it makes sure that anybody that's going to work: we're going to try and ensure they get home safely.

I'm looking forward to continued discussion and continued debate about this, and I hope that some more information can be provided about some clarity about the lanes specifically, if it's expanding to more than the immediate lane and, if not, if that's possibly something that could be considered. It's something that I know I've heard when I'm speaking with members, that specifically emergency roadside assistance would like to see, because it's difficult when traffic is still continuing to go the 110 kilometres while they're trying to get someone home safely.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for giving me time to finish my remarks on Bill 5, and I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Speaker: On second reading of Bill 5, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall-Bhullar.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. I rise to speak in favour of Bill 5, and I think it's an important piece of legislation. Speaking of Bhullar-McCall, it reminds me of our friend and colleague Manmeet Singh Bhullar, whose life was cut short in a tragic accident on the roadside while he was stopped to help a fellow motorist. This piece of legislation will make sure that those who are passing by highway maintenance workers, emergency workers, first responders, tow truck operators, or even any Albertan who is stopped on the side to help somebody – they need to slow down, and that will save lives.

I'm glad to see that there is a mention of an educational component to this legislation as well. That education campaign, I hope, will get the message out far and wide to make sure that not only these people are aware of this legislation, that people are aware of these changes but that people are aware of what they need to do when they see flashing lamps, when they see highway workers, when they see emergency vehicles. As my colleague from

Edmonton-Castle Downs mentioned – I think it’s true for most of us – we only read about these rules when we first go for the written test, and after that I don’t think there is a way of kind of continued development, for lack of a better word. When I read about this educational component, I hope that it’s more substantive and it reaches far and wide to all Albertans.

The second thing I will briefly comment about. When the minister was speaking at second reading, she said that some in opposition may suggest higher fines, new fines and referred to them as cash cows. I think that it was not the opposition who coined this term; it was the then UCP sitting in opposition, who used to rage against those cash cows and higher fines, but I think that changed when they got into power and power got into their heads.

The third thing. I think it’s important that when we are talking about making roads safe, we also talk about and make sure that roads are open. That’s the only, I guess, functional utility of roads, that they’re open for traffic, that they’re open for transportation. If they’re not open and there are no vehicles on it, I don’t think that then we need these laws.

What we saw during the illegal Coutts blockade: many of our roads were closed for many days, weeks, almost 21 days. When we asked the minister at the estimates about not taking steps to cancel their licences or taking some other steps, the minister shared – and I’m paraphrasing – that she didn’t have those legal authorities. While this traffic act is now open, that is an opportunity to make these roads really safe and make these roads safe from those illegal blockades and send a strong message to those who were blocking our roads, to those who were damaging our economy, to those who were sitting illegally on our economic corridors and making roads almost unavailable for fellow Albertans. I think that was the opportunity to send a strong message, even to those who were cheering them on and even participated in those blockades. I think that’s the opportunity that this government missed while they had this piece of legislation opened already.

10:10

I hope that at the committee stage the minister will be open to suggestions, amendments that will ensure that roads are safe, that will ensure that roads are not only safe but that they are open as well and that those who would try to blockade them illegally, those who would cheer on those kinds of illegal blockades – that the government and the minister will have the legal authority and the power that the government and the minister need to dispel those illegal blockades. With that, I thank the minister again for bringing forward this legislation, and I hope that at the committee stage the minister will be open to making roads even more safe for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to rise here tonight and speak to Bill 5. Road and highway safety is a top priority for this government, as it should be. Every day thousands of Albertans get in their cars and head to work, school, or to their kids’ hockey games at the local leisure centre. Their safety remains paramount thanks to road enhancements, for example, highways 11, 19, and 15 twinning projects.

Now, those safety concerns have been addressed for our first responders as well. Every day they put themselves at risk while saving the lives of car crash victims and other calls for service along

our province’s very busy highways. Thanks to the current protection under the Traffic Safety Act they don’t have the added anxiety of drivers speeding past them as they perform life-saving duties. Thankfully, tow truck drivers are protected under the current provisions. Most of the time they are the ones on the side of the road after emergency crews pack up and are most at risk of being hit by a passing motorist.

Mr. Speaker, these current protections shouldn’t just include tow truck drivers and emergency crews. Roadside workers face the same if not more dangers since they work on the side of the road each and every day. The overwhelming majority of Albertans feel the exact same way. Last year this government heard from over 15,000 survey respondents, with 92 per cent of them supporting all drivers giving one lane of space when passing a roadside worker vehicle when its lights are flashing, and 60 per cent felt that the current passing laws were inadequate. These proposed changes as part of Bill 5 will offer similar protection to those workers along with snowplow operators. As much as I hate to admit it, most of our year involves the threat of icy and snowy roads like it is outside right now, and those operators are up very early in the morning, working until late in the afternoon to make sure that roads are clear for the safety of everyone else. We should make sure that they are safe while doing so.

The same can be said for roadside workers, who for some time spend all their day controlling traffic and standing on their feet for long periods of time. These are the people most at risk when doing their job, and we as a government need to do our job to make sure that they can get home safely once they are done. Alberta drivers must be aware of just how dangerous it can be on the sides of highways and that they pose a tremendous danger to these workers. Roadside workers in a high-risk environment deserve the best protection to ensure that they can go home safely to their families at the end of their shift.

Now, I’m thankful that in my riding I can speak with the Minister of Transportation on issues like this as many of my constituents travel and work along provincial highways like 628, highway 16, Yellowhead, and 779 daily. Their safety is critical, and these changes help provide them with extra security, knowing drivers will have to slow down on both sides of the highway. With these updated changes coming out next year, education will play a big part, and I look forward to this government’s plan to update the public ahead of the enforcement date next March. Safety of this province’s roadside workers and snowplow operators has always been and continues to be extremely important, and Bill 5 does a great job of reflecting that perfectly.

Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate. The hon. the Minister of Transportation to close debate.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move to close debate on Bill 5.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that we adjourn the sitting for tonight until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:16 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, March 29, 2022

Day 17

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)

Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
 Government House Leader
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
 Leader of the Official Opposition
Orr, Hon. Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
 Deputy Government Whip
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
 Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
 Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
 Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
 Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
 Alberta Hansard

Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Jason Kenney | Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations |
| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gotfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 29, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm very pleased to introduce a very special guest joining us today in the gallery – I know that some of you may have met with her, and I look forward to meeting her on behalf of Members of the Legislative Assembly tomorrow morning – Ms Idit Shamir, consul general for the state of Israel, accompanied by Mr. Jordan Falkenstein, director of government relations for the consulate general of Israel in Toronto. I invite you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, also joining us in the Speaker's gallery today are Jordan, Beck, Laine, and Neva Camponi. They are the family members – I know that you're never supposed to pick a favourite child or a favourite staffer – of one of my favourite staffers from the Speaker's office, Ms Erin Camponi. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Utility Costs

Ms Ganley: Let them eat cake. When first asked about skyrocketing energy prices, the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity proudly rose and declared he planned to do nothing. Nothing. When presented with stories from hundreds of real families trying to choose between buying groceries and keeping the lights on, this government tells them not to worry; it's just the market working. The UCP takes a billion dollars in increases in income taxes out of the pockets of working families and calls it modest sacrifices – food, heat, power: modest sacrifices? – but they have more than four times that to give away to highly profitable corporations with not so much as a single job in return.

They talk about fiscal discipline, but insurance companies aren't required to explain why they need more than 5 per cent a year every year in increases. Not to worry, though. The Premier's insurance went down, so I guess there's no problem.

The associate minister seems so out of touch with the impact that energy prices were having on families. I asked him if he even knew what they were compared to a few months ago or a year before. He didn't. Not even a rough figure, an attempt, some sort of indication that he knew what Albertans were up against. Nothing. Nothing, which coincidentally was his plan to address the cost-of-living crisis. This UCP government is far too busy with their own internal power struggles to worry about what Albertans are up against. Their

so-called help, \$50, sure won't feed a family facing hundreds in new costs. Maybe they do think they can eat cake or at least heat their houses with it.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we know what became of the French aristocracy. Fortunately, Albertans don't have to go to such lengths to rid themselves of their out-of-touch rulers. They'll have that chance in 2023.

Federal Energy Policies

Mr. Schow: The NDP-Liberal coalition is attacking responsible Canadian energy yet again. The environmental extremist and chief Liberal minister Steven Guilbeault has announced a wide range of policies that will harm Alberta industries and invade our provincial jurisdiction. Don't get me wrong. I support measures to reduce emissions, I support technology and innovation to make our industrial economy cleaner and greener, but what I cannot support are punishing taxes and regulations that will kill Alberta jobs, will penalize Alberta families, and will harm our economic recovery. Mr. Speaker, we are already seeing the destructive effects of ill-advised climate change policies that will be punishing us for decades.

The actions of Minister Guilbeault and people like him have restricted the development of energy and resources in western countries like Canada. They have blocked oil and gas development. They have obstructed the construction of pipelines and LNG export facilities. They have shut down safe and emissions-free nuclear power stations. In doing this, they've handed control of global energy markets to some of the world's worst regimes, like Vladimir Putin, Iran, and the socialist dictatorship of Venezuela, just to name a few. They have also killed Canadian jobs, restricted Canadian supply, and driven up prices for Canadian families, worsening the Trudeau inflation crisis.

Despite this, the Liberal-NDP government wants to double down on their failed ideological policies. They want to further limit the development of our oil and gas sector, further jeopardizing our energy security and raising prices at the pump. They want to attack our reliable baseload electricity regeneration, further driving up utility bills. They want to ban the import of new efficient gas and diesel vehicles that the vast majority of Albertans need to get to work and take their kids to hockey practice.

Mr. Speaker, as always, it will fall on the government of Alberta to defend common sense in Canada and defend our energy sector, and I'm confident that we're up to the task.

Canadian Freedoms and Russian Disinformation

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Mr. Speaker, as Canadians we are proud of the freedom we have and the sacrifices that were made. We don't recognize often how lucky we really are to live in a free nation. In Canada the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees our right to the "freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other [means] of communication" and to the "freedom of peaceful assembly." Here in Canada these rights allow for people to be able to protest government decisions that run counter to their beliefs and allow for varying opinions to be expressed through various forms of media.

Unfortunately, there are parts of the world that do not share these values, as we are seeing with the invasion of Ukraine. That's right, Mr. Speaker. The communist, socialist propaganda machine is alive and well with Mr. Putin. The Putin media has been tasked with spreading the propaganda message on Ukraine, and what is the message? Mr. Putin would like the Russian people and the rest of the world to believe that Ukraine is run by a bunch of neo-Nazi fascists

that pose a threat to the Russian state. He would like the Russian people to believe that he is fighting the good fight against tyranny in Ukraine. While he is committed to the massive disinformation campaign, he has also shut down social media channels with Russia to prevent the truth from seeping in.

But the Russian people know better, Mr. Speaker. They recognize that Russia is the aggressor in Ukraine. They recognize that their lives are being negatively affected by sanctions due to Mr. Putin's war, and they are out protesting this horribly senseless war. Unfortunately, they do not have the right to do so, and thousands have been arrested for having views counter to those of Mr. Putin.

The war is a reminder of how lucky we are to live in a free and democratic country like Canada, and I hope that those in Russia one day will know the freedoms that Canadians often take for granted.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Postsecondary Education Budget Protests

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, our actions demonstrate our priorities, our values, who we are. Actions are how we demonstrate to the world what we most care about. Clearly, the UCP's actions towards postsecondary prove that they do not care one bit about students in this province.

Yesterday was the Alberta student day of action. Across the province, in Lethbridge, Calgary, Edmonton, and elsewhere, students gathered to stand against the damaging cuts to our postsecondary institutions. Despite the blowing snow, students marched from the U of A and Grant MacEwan to the Legislature protesting budget cuts and the resulting tuition increases. In Calgary students demanded that the province reverse their budget cuts and freeze tuition. Across the province these students had their tuition increased despite taking fewer classes, some faculties and departments losing staff and capacity, and some students unable to complete the degree that they began.

1:40

It's becoming harder and harder to get ahead, and as people are struggling with skyrocketing increases in the cost of living, students are shouldering a large part of the burden, with some having to decide between pursuing an education and putting food on the table, at this time when we should be looking ahead, cultivating talent, and planning for a sustainable future that doesn't just look at the world in terms of election cycles but in terms of future generations.

What have the UCP done? What are their actions by which we can judge them? Massive increases to tuition, increased debt load to students to balance their books, failure to distribute student aid, limited accessibility to programs like engineering and counselling psychology. They created massive barriers to enter postsecondary altogether. Mr. Speaker, the list goes on and on.

Students took action yesterday. Their actions show their priorities. I can say with pride that our NDP caucus stands with the students, faculty, and support staff of our colleges, universities, and polytechnics.

Energy Security in North America

Mrs. Allard: Two weeks ago I had the privilege of representing our province at the Energy Council's conference of federal meetings in Washington, DC. The Energy Council is a nonpartisan legislative organization comprised of 14 energy-producing states and two Canadian provinces, Alberta and Saskatchewan. Formed in 1975, the council serves as a forum for energy and related environmental policy dialogue. As an appointed member for Alberta, I met with U.S. Senators and members of Congress in Washington as well as

a variety of policy influencers and stakeholders to discuss many issues around energy, chief among them, Mr. Speaker, energy security.

I was able to highlight again and again that Alberta is the answer. What's the question, you may ask? Well, let me tell you. In short, the real question is: how can the U.S. address the demand for oil whilst continuing to source it from credible jurisdictions? The answer is Alberta. How can we establish a North American energy security strategy to ensure we are using ethically sourced, responsibly produced oil and gas and make daily life affordable to our constituents? The answer is Alberta. The U.S. needs to partner with Alberta, Mr. Speaker. We need to work together to ensure there is security in our energy supply across North America, not dependent upon totalitarian regimes with questionable production practices.

Mr. Speaker, this is not only an issue of energy security but of environmental stewardship and wealth distribution. The leftist agenda demands that we keep Alberta oil in the ground, but the global demand for oil continues to rise, so what does this achieve? Two things: first, that we displace ethical, world-class environmental standards in production, and second, that we shut in production in North America, costing jobs and livelihoods here; we transfer that production and wealth generation to jurisdictions that oppose the west, like Russia. That's disgusting. North America must come together to ensure sustained production to meet our own demand, and we must develop a North American energy security strategy for the long term.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Continuing Care

Ms Sigurdson: The COVID-19 pandemic hit residents of continuing care the hardest. According to the National Institute on Ageing over 1,605 Alberta residents in continuing care died from COVID-19. Many of these deaths were preventable. Every life lost is a tragedy and should be a call for action to transform the continuing care system. Throughout the worst of this pandemic Albertans reached out to me worried that their loved ones were not getting the care they needed. Their loved ones were being left for extended periods in their own waste and not being fed in a timely manner.

The UCP conducted a continuing care review about a year ago, calling for increases in the amount of home care provided, improving working conditions, and increasing the proportion of full-time staff. I was hoping that the continuing care legislation announced yesterday would have shown some movement on these important actions. Instead, what the Health minister introduced was mostly administrative. There are some reasonable changes in the act, but Albertans need more than administrative change. We need action.

Albertans deserve a government that is willing to take the action needed to care for the elderly in continuing care. Instead, sadly, Albertans are left with a self-obsessed government that is only worried about its own survival. Ministers are more concerned with making stump speeches for the Premier than working for Albertans. Staff are even being pulled away from work to campaign for the Premier. We are left to wonder: who is doing the work of governing at all?

Albertans were told nearly a year ago to expect transformational change in continuing care. What are the UCP waiting for? Over 1,605 people in continuing care lost their lives during this pandemic. If these losses, the grief that families are experiencing, and the scars of this tragic pandemic are not reasons for the UCP to act, I do not know what is.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Federal Liberal-NDP Agreement

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week Albertans heard the devastating news that the federal Liberals and the federal NDP had reached a governance agreement that would see the Liberals remain in power until 2025. For Albertans, there couldn't have been worse news. The Trudeau-Singh alliance marks another three long years of anti-Alberta rule. Whatever happened to the vitriol between these two leaders? We heard lots of sniping at each other in the last election. Now, all of a sudden, this dysfunctional relationship has blossomed into a match made in heaven. Rex Murphy described it best in an article entitled Liberal-NDP 'Coalition' Will Make Canada Worse off, but that's just fine for Singh and Trudeau. In this article he describes them, and I quote, with no core ideas, no core principles other than: how can we best hang onto power and how can we get a slice of it for ourselves? Make no mistake, socialists love to hold onto power. They love to virtue signal. They love to raise taxes and increase government overreach through red tape.

Just how is this going to play out for our largest industry here in Alberta? One only has to go back to when B.C. Premier John Horgan formed a coalition with the Green Party in B.C. The concession Horgan more than willingly made to get the Green support was to oppose and take court action against the Trans Mountain pipeline, which is our only access to tidewater and foreign markets. Who was right there cheering on? His close friend and ally – that's right – Jagmeet Singh, of course, who, for all intents and purposes, is now the Deputy Prime Minister of Canada. Singh has stated openly that he wants the federal Liberals to scrap the program where the feds are partnering with us on the cleanup of oil well sites, a \$1 billion program that is restoring and protecting our environment. So much for the NDP being the stewards of the economy.

There's no doubt that trouble is brewing, but the question in most Albertans' minds is: where are the Albertans? Where are they going to land?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Agricultural Land Prices

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a crisis in the country. Toronto and Vancouver, Canada's two largest cities, have become the most expensive places to live and compete internationally. You might believe that this real estate crisis is confined to our country's largest cities, but that is not the case. The secret to Alberta's past and future success has been the family unit dotted across the prairie, working and owning the land. The question is now: will this have any part in Alberta's future? Increasingly, it seems that the only way to establish a family farm is to inherit it or millions of dollars. The price of land in Alberta has taken off like a jet plane, with Ontario pension funds, large financial institutions, and international investors and speculators riding first class. Alberta's young families have been left on the tarmac like unvaccinated deplorables, watching as the dream of landownership and Alberta's future are bought up by the elites, toasting their champagne flutes to another good deal done.

Mr. Speaker, our rural communities are already being depopulated by the economy of scale needed for modern agriculture. With the cost of living and interest rates ballooning ever higher as a result of Justin Trudeau's refusal to turn off the money-printing machine, Alberta families are being pushed out of the basket and their own homes with no parachute in sight. These billions of dollars from

Bay Street, Wall Street, and Shanghai have left Alberta's next generation with no hope of owning a family farm. None of the world's elite give a flying rat's behind if the communities of Manning, Wildwood, Coronation, or Stavelly become ghost towns.

On our current path, Mr. Speaker, the result will be the emptying of rural Alberta, with the corporate machine, rather than Alberta families who live there, running and owning the food supply for our country. Shareholders will be richer, yes, but our citizens will be poorer. Rural communities will be made up of renters no longer attached to the land that they live in with their homes. Now the folks who run and own this province will be out of province, out of touch, and landowners again, flying first class in a plane and a province that used to be owned by Albertan families.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

2017 UCP Leadership Contest Investigation

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier admitted that he's been questioned by the RCMP as part of an investigation into the 2017 UCP leadership race and alleged fraud therein. Now, for those at home, there is a long-standing parliamentary tradition that when a Premier or a minister is under investigation by the police, they step aside to ensure there is no real or perceived opportunity for influence over the judicial system. But the UCP? The rules around upholding the public trust do not apply to them. Why does this Premier and his cabinet continue to feel that they are above the law?

1:50

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we heard the same fear and smear from the NDP all through the last election, and Albertans rejected their politics of personal destruction. Here's the problem. That kind of defamatory attack made in the privilege of this place is what encouraged her ethics critic to violate the law by seeking to violate my personal privacy. Why doesn't she understand that every time she goes into the gutter, all she does is lower the tone of Alberta politics? That will be, I fear, her legacy in this place.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the appointment of a special prosecutor is the only thing standing between this Premier and a conflict of interest in a police investigation that goes to the heart of his current role in this Assembly. Now, three or four Justice ministers ago the UCP appointed that special prosecutor but then refused to release their name. They said that they're from Ontario, and that's it. Three years later the investigation is still ongoing. Will the Premier today stand and tell us the name of the prosecutor secured by Alberta Justice to protect the integrity of this investigation? Who is protecting . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know, nor should I. It would be inappropriate of me to ask that question. The Crown prosecution service and police services can always request, when they deem it appropriate, advice from outside counsel, and I understand that's what happened in this instance in 2019.

Ms Notley: The Premier wasn't the only one interviewed by RCMP. The Minister of Infrastructure was interviewed, as was the former Minister of Justice. Both went to great pains to say that they themselves were not the ones under investigation, again, over two years ago. Mr. Speaker, these are allegations of fraud, of vote

tampering, of serious abuse of democracy around this Premier's leadership campaign. Will the Premier today please rise in the House and say, with one hundred per cent absolute certainty, that he is not the subject of this investigation into alleged voter fraud around his leadership campaign?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I was informed that I am not.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, for three years the RCMP has been investigating the UCP and the leadership race that elected the Premier for identity fraud, allegations of votes being cast using fraudulent e-mails, and people becoming members of the UCP without their knowledge, people having their personal identification numbers taken so their votes could be cast by someone other than them. The Premier admitted yesterday that he was interviewed by the RCMP but refused to tell us anything else. Why was the Premier interviewed by the RCMP, what did they ask him, and what did he tell the RCMP? Simple questions.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, that question is inappropriate. Of course, if I have an interview, it is a confidential matter for those interviewing me. What I can say is this. The NDP dragged all of these allegations through the mud in the 2019 election, and they were sent packing, the first majority government in Alberta history to not make it past one term, because Albertans oppose the politics of personal destruction, of defamation, and division, which is the stock-in-trade of today's NDP.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, this is about trust, and the Premier is not alone when it comes to the RCMP interviewing members of this government in regard to their multiyear identity fraud investigation into the UCP. The ministers of jobs, seniors, social services, Infrastructure: all have been interviewed by the RCMP when it comes to this scandal, and now the Premier has also been interviewed. Premier, this is about justice and our democracy. Why should the details of that interview really be hidden from Albertans? It's a simple question, especially when many suspect the UCP's current leadership review process is rigged in the . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, if the member has questions for the RCMP, I suggest he puts it to them. Of course, police operations happen independent of government. Perhaps he does not know that, but what I know is that his colleague and ethics critic violated the law to violate my personal privacy and that of another Alberta citizen. What did he know about that, what did his leader know about that, and why did they create an environment in the NDP where that kind of illegal and unethical conduct was deemed acceptable by their ethics critic? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member has the call.

Mr. Sabir: The question is: why was the Premier interviewed by the RCMP? These are serious concerns if the RCMP is interviewing the Premier and looking into the UCP leadership contest that the Premier won, and the Premier is referring to that as sour grapes. I hate to break it to the Premier, but the RCMP doesn't investigate sour grapes for three years now. The Premier keeps deflecting. He points to others who have been fined for their roles. I'm asking about his role in this corrupt leadership contest that elected him. Can he finally come clean on this and stop hiding from the people of Alberta?

Mr. Kenney: Again, Mr. Speaker, if he has questions for an independent police agency, he should put those questions to the independent police agency, but that's not what the NDP is about. They are about the politics of personal destruction, of defamation, division, and deceit. They're addicted to it. But Albertans want a government instead focused on their concerns like the cost of living, which is why we're scrapping the fuel tax this week, like a balanced budget, like a growing economy, like delivering on nearly 90 per cent of our election commitments. That's why the NDP is losing right now in the polls, and you can see how desperate they're getting.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Corporate Taxation and Investment Attraction

Mr. Bilous: In the last election the UCP promised that if they cut corporate taxes, investment would come flooding into the province, but even before the pandemic investment dropped, our economy shrank, and 50,000 full-time jobs were lost. As a result, companies laid off hundreds of staff or invested elsewhere. In the middle of the pandemic the UCP doubled down on their corporate tax giveaway and even accelerated it, but that hasn't led to increased capital investment either. Now Alberta's unemployment rate is higher than the national average, and Calgary's is the highest among major cities in the country. To the Premier: why does Alberta continue to fall further behind other provinces under this UCP government?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, talk about leading with your chin. You know, the NDP said that we were going to lose \$4.6 billion in revenue through the job-creation tax cut. In fact, we are generating \$400 million more in revenue on that 8-point rate than the NDP was under their 12-point rate. Why? Because this has stimulated \$60 billion of new private-sector investment in Alberta's economy. We led Canada in economic growth last year. We were projected to do so again last year. Last year was the best year ever for film and television, for the energy sector, for our exports, for high tech and so much more.

Mr. Bilous: Corporate tax revenue in 2018 was \$4.8 billion; your numbers are less than \$4 billion this year. According to RBC economists capital investment is expected to increase across the country by 8.5 per cent, with Saskatchewan leading the way at 18.5 per cent. Meanwhile Alberta will have the second-lowest capital investment growth rate at 4.8 per cent. But here's the thing. It's still well below investment levels seen in our last year as government. In 2018 capital investment was \$62 billion. Well, the numbers don't lie. We know this government has played fast and loose with the truth. Will the Premier admit he's failed to deliver his . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons Albertans fired the NDP government was because of their jobs crisis, that they created by driving tens of billions of dollars of investment out of this province, and that's exactly why we were elected on a pledge to implement the job-creation tax cut to make Alberta the most attractive place if not in North America, certainly in Canada for new job-creating investment, and now we are seeing the results, with a projection that we will see corporate tax revenues increase from \$4 billion to \$4.5 billion and then to nearly \$5 billion on a rate one-third lower than theirs.

Mr. Bilous: All forecasts. Meanwhile under this UCP government Calgary head offices have shrunk. With higher oil prices we've seen

corporate profits increase dramatically. According to the UCP's last budget corporate profits increased 147 per cent in 2021 and are forecasted to increase another 31 per cent this year, but oil companies aren't spending money on capital investment. Instead, they're choosing to spend profits on dividends and share buybacks. The Premier went to these companies with cowboy hat in hand at last year's Stampede and begged them to spend. As we know, the Premier is all hat and no cattle. Given that he's failed to get them . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, you can't blame the NDP for not knowing what's going on in the oil and gas sector, because they hate the oil and gas sector. The NDP's entire reason for existing is to attack Alberta oil and gas. Look at what their ally Justin Trudeau is doing in Ottawa today with his new outrageous environment plan, his 25 per cent proposed increase in the carbon tax. Now, I want to give the NDP a trigger warning. They won't want to hear this, but here it is: drilling activity in Alberta in oil and gas this year so far is up by 80 per cent. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

AISH and Income Support Payments

Ms Renaud: Since 2019 the UCP has cut 514 jobs from Community and Social Services. As a direct result of the UCP's changes and massive staff cuts, vulnerable Albertans are at increased risk of harm. My constituent Darlene reached out to me because her income support benefit was cut by \$200, which is significant given that her core benefit is less than \$900. As a result, she's behind on rent and utilities, and she was in the hospital, so unable to make this government's appeal window. She can't get assistance from the ministry, and she's been calling them for a week with no response. Does the Premier consider this a modest sacrifice or just onerous?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again a misleading question from the NDP. In fact, the provincial budget for Community and Social Services is being increased in this budget that we just passed. But here's the good news. It was also a balanced budget, which means that those programs are sustainable. As long as the NDP, with their reckless increases in spending, was driving us into an endless sea of debt, that would compromise the fiscal sustainability of social programs because more money would go to bankers and bondholders in interest payments and less would go to support the vulnerable.

Ms Renaud: I received many e-mails and calls from people in other constituencies about dangerous wait times being experienced by AISH and income support recipients. Barrington Sr. from Red Deer wrote to me because he was unable to get prescriptions refilled. The stress of this is taking a toll on him, yet another preventable harm that will end up stressing an already overburdened health care system. The Premier talks a big game about supporting these extremely vulnerable Albertans, falsely claiming that they're the most generous benefits in Canada when we know they're below the poverty line. Will the Premier tell this House how he plans to address these dangerous wait times that are causing harm?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, in point of fact, the overall budget for Community and Social Services received a \$36 million increase this year. That's part of the plan. During the pandemic we invested a total of \$132 million for civil society . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to ask another question, I invite her to rise to her feet to do that.

Until then, the Premier has the call.

Mr. Kenney: . . . an additional \$130 million to civil society partners to help care for the vulnerable during the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to AISH benefits they are 40 per cent more generous than the analogous benefits across the country, on top of which we have the most generous suite of social benefits and taxes; 40 per cent of Albertans pay no provincial income tax at all.

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, these are real people that need answers, not rhetoric. The UCP has cut 514 workers in social services. We know that caseloads have exploded to dangerous levels. People aren't getting the help they need. Is this Premier finally willing to admit what is crystal clear to Albertans, that cuts to income support, the slashing of 514 jobs, the systematic removal of supplemental benefits for housing and food have created a crisis, a real crisis? Will the Premier admit what Albertans already know? He can't be trusted with the truth and for vulnerable Albertans.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the budget for AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, goes this year from \$1.3 billion to \$1.37 billion to \$1.45 billion to \$1.5 billion. Why does the NDP insist on referring to large increases in public spending as cuts? Is it because they studied too much discovery math, or is it just because they're dishonest?

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

Human Trafficking

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Human trafficking is a very serious crime, from which we are certainly not immune in Canada. It happens throughout our communities, our cities, our small towns, and places where people would not normally suspect such wicked operations of ever occurring. Generally trafficking incidents tend to happen in more urban centres, but the lasting effects ripple throughout our entire country. Human trafficking involves a process of recruiting, transporting, or holding victims to exploit them for forced labour, their organs and tissues, or sexual purposes, stripping them of their rights, freedoms, and humanity. To the Premier: can you please tell us why this government struck a Human Trafficking Task Force and who was on it?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government ran on a commitment to fight human trafficking. This is a horrific crime that happens right here in the province of Alberta. That is why it was such an honour to be with members of the Human Trafficking Task Force this weekend as they provided our government with recommendations on how best to combat human trafficking in our province. Task force members, along with the chair, Paul Brandt, include former Minister of Children's Services and Solicitor General Heather Forsyth, Reach director Jan Fox, Edmonton police chief Dale McFee, RCMP member Douglas Reti, Catholic Social Services director and First Nations advocate and . . .

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

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Well, given that our government introduced Alberta's first-ever standardized definition of human trafficking and legislation to combat traffickers two years ago but that vulnerable Albertans continue to need additional policies to protect them as human

trafficking cases in Alberta continue to increase every year and in Canada are growing at one of the fastest rates of any criminal activity, to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General: what is this government's plan to address the task force's recommendations?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has accepted in principle nearly all of these recommendations, and we are already taking action. We're establishing an office for combatting human trafficking to co-ordinate our province's work on this important issue. We've also increased support for ALERT, the Alberta law enforcement response teams, created specialized human trafficking and exploitation units to support victims directly, investigate human trafficking activity, and we are working with local groups to build networks that support victims and survivors like those that we fund in Children's Services under PSECA.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Well, given that human traffickers impose life-altering and oftentimes life-threatening restrictions on their victims, in which freedom does not ever seem possible, and that victims can feel forgotten by the system and feel alone in the process of recovering from their pain and trauma and further given that seeking proper aid to rediscover their humanity can oftentimes be intimidating for victims, to the minister: what supports are available to survivors to address financial, physical, and emotional needs once they leave their horrific living arrangements and their traffickers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to thank the member for her question and thank the task force for their amazing work, including Paul Brandt and Heather Forsyth. Very strong work. In addition to Budget '22 funding women's shelters at the rate of \$51.3 million, we also provided funding for the family violence line at 310.1818. This support line provides services in 170 languages, including Indigenous languages, where women can seek supports. We also provide funding for those escaping abuse through the Alberta supports benefit . . .

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

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was with students in Calgary for Alberta's student day of action. They shared their experiences of having to drop classes, change programs, drop out of school entirely, or choose between getting an education and putting food on the table. The UCP decimated the postsecondary budget. Then the same minister signed off on staggering tuition increases. The students asked me to ask this minister about budget cuts and jacked-up tuition rates. Will the UCP listen to the students and commit to reversing their reckless cuts and reverse their record-breaking tuition hikes?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm always happy to listen to students. I meet, of course, with them very regularly and, more importantly, apart from just listening, actually take their advice and guidance and turn that into reality. As an example, one of the things that student leaders told me about on a very frequent basis was the need to create more bursaries for low-income students. You know, we did. We did exactly that. There's \$50 million over three years to

create new bursaries for low-income students. They also asked us to make adjustments to loan limits, and we did that as well, taking their advice into consideration.

2:10

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that this UCP minister actually underspent the student aid budget by \$4 million last year and given that life has become deeply unaffordable – tuition increases, student loan rate spikes make it hard just to pay off debt – given that these students need support now more than ever and that these students are meant to be the major drivers for our economy for decades to come if they actually stay here and don't flee the UCP, can the minister explain to all of us why this government cares more about filling their coffers than they do about future prospects for young people and long-term economic viability?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, the question demonstrates that the member doesn't understand how the postsecondary budget works. Any dollar that's raised from tuition revenue goes to the institutions. The government doesn't get a dime of that, so I'm not sure what the allegation is. But when it comes to investing in students, our government is committed to doing precisely that. That's why we're providing \$171 million over three years to create 7,000 additional spaces in our postsecondary institutions. As well, we're providing \$15 million over three years to expand apprenticeship educational opportunities, \$6 million over three years to expand work-integrated learning opportunities, \$8 million over three years to create additional microcredential programs. There's more.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this minister needs a little tutorial in his own budget estimates – in his own estimates he said that he paused student aid because he had so many applications and also shared that they didn't give out the student aid because they didn't want to spend and to ask for more money – and given that already Alberta has fallen short of other provinces in offering student aid and given that higher upfront costs create even more barriers for hopeful students, can the minister let all of us here know today who actually supports his reckless cuts to our colleges, universities, and polytechnics? Certainly, students don't, faculty doesn't, researchers and support staff . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, over the last few years we've worked to bring funding and spending in our postsecondary system in line with other provinces. Having done that work, we're now providing more to create additional spaces and additional seats. As I mentioned a moment ago, we're investing \$171 million to create – the member is right – 7,000 additional spaces. Those are more spaces than have been created in over a decade in our postsecondary system. We're providing key investments to help ensure that when our students complete their programs, they graduate with the skills, knowledge, and competencies they need to succeed.

Insurance Premium Costs

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, I have a really simple question for the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Service Alberta, one I sincerely hope either of them can answer. To either minister: how much has the average Albertan's auto insurance increased since the UCP government was elected?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can say today is that this government dealt with the systemic issues that were driving up costs in the automobile insurance industry. What I can say again today is that seven major insurance companies have either dropped rates or requested a decline in automobile insurance premiums for their customers. Why? Because we dealt with the issues that were creating price inflation in insurance.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that I didn't get any kind of answer there and given that the minister either doesn't know or doesn't want to tell the House just how much the harmful policies of this government have driven up costs for Albertans relying on their vehicle to get to and from work or to pick up their kids but given that I want to give the minister another opportunity, will the minister commit to tabling all information he has regarding skyrocketing insurance rates in the House tomorrow? If he won't, what is he hiding?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the members opposite, who simply put a Band-Aid on automobile insurance rates by putting on a 5 per cent cap, this government dealt with the systemic issues driving up costs. Rates went up 5 per cent or more under the previous government. This year we've seen Intact drop rates by 2 per cent, Belair by 2 per cent, Zurich by 2.7 per cent, AMA by 7 per cent. We're seeing automobile insurance rates go down.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that most Albertans surely aren't seeing those savings that the minister claims and given that the cost of everything is going up with the UCP in charge and given that they're making matters so much worse by pulling the cap on electricity, pulling the cap on auto insurance increases, increasing property taxes, school fees, tuition, and so, so much more, can the minister explain why he both wants to drown my constituents in debt and also withhold vital information about the cost-of-living crisis they're facing?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, our government is dealing with the systemic issues that are creating affordability for Albertans, unlike the members opposite. The members opposite didn't have the courage to deal with insurance pressures. They simply put a cap on. The members opposite, on electricity costs, added over \$7 billion of costs . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: The members opposite added over \$7 billion of costs to our infrastructure system, Mr. Speaker, ultimately broke agreements with power purchase companies, creating a \$1.4 billion liability for Albertans, and imposed a carbon tax.

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

Federal and Provincial Energy Policies

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP and the Trudeau Liberals recently signed a deal that would grant Justin Trudeau a majority until 2025. This deal is bad news for Alberta as both parties are against supporting Alberta's oil and gas industry. It is disappointing, to say the least. Thousands of Albertans rely on the oil and gas sector for employment, but even Alberta's provincial NDP has refused to support jobs in that industry. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: how is the UCP fighting for Alberta's oil and gas industry against the Liberal-NDP coalition?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear now more than ever that the NDP-Liberal alliance will not help facilitate pipelines. They will not help the oil and gas sector, and they will not help Alberta jobs. That's because they want to phase out oil and gas. Yet the world demand for oil and gas is going up – it's going up – as supply is going down, as we need to weed out Russian barrels of oil. The question is: where is that oil and gas going to come from? We believe it should be from Alberta. That's why we're advocating across the border to say: look north; Alberta is the solution.

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that we are now only days away from yet another increase in Justin Trudeau's carbon tax, which will cost a Canadian family \$50 for every tonne of CO₂, and given that the carbon tax has been the root cause of thousands of lost jobs and investment dollars being retracted in Canada as well as in Alberta under the previous NDP government, can the same minister tell Albertans what our government is doing to support Albertans against a thoughtless and unsympathetic Prime Minister?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government is simply out of touch with Canadians. They're out of touch with global supply-demand fundamentals with energy. They're out of touch with the whole issue of energy security. While the federal Liberals are jacking up the carbon tax, we are providing relief for Albertans by suspending the fuel tax, that will ultimately drop fuel prices by 13 cents a litre, effective April 1.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that there has already been a substantial increase in the cost of electricity and natural gas for Alberta families and given that the former NDP government worked hard with their own carbon tax to make heating a home and driving a car unaffordable luxuries for Albertans and given that the carbon tax is set to increase at the end of this week, to the minister: what is your response to Justin Trudeau on behalf of Albertans?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct. Unfortunately, Justin Trudeau and his NDP alliance are moving forward with a 3-cent increase on gas tax on April 1 and, shockingly, continue to move forward today with a 40-cent – 40-cent – increase per litre long term on the climate plan. Tonight inside this House we will be debating on a motion calling on the federal government to remove their carbon tax once and for all. The real question is: will the NDP stand with everyday Albertans, or are they going to continue to stand with their close ally Justin Trudeau?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South has a question.

Child Care Affordability

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta families and businesses are working hard to get back to work after the COVID-19 pandemic, yet the UCP government was one of the last to finalize a federal-provincial child care agreement despite the fact that access to

affordable child care is a key driver of economic recovery. Better late than never. To the Minister of Children's Services: how many additional subsidized spaces have been created as of today?

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

2:20

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do want to point out to members of this House that while we were not one of the first provinces to sign an agreement with the federal government, because we did take the time to fight for a fair deal for Albertans, we were, in fact, one of the first two provinces to roll out affordability dollars for parents. Now, part of our plan is making sure that parents in every single licensed space right across this province, whether that be facility-based child care, preschools, or day homes, qualify for these additional supports. We are working to create an additional 12,000 spaces this year, and thousands more have been created in the last few months.

Mr. Dang: Given that it seems the minister doesn't know how many spaces have been created to this day and given that many Alberta families are still recovering from the devastating financial effects of the pandemic and given that these same families are dealing with the soaring cost of living and given that child care centres in my constituency have raised concerns that even though they have the spaces, they've been told that they won't actually receive the grants for all of those spaces, why is the government making it so difficult for child care centres and families to secure affordable spaces?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, as I've said a number of times in this House, any time you roll out a new program, there are going to be questions. We have offered and certainly I've offered to members of the opposite side of this House that any time a child care operator is having difficulty entering their information on the system, we are more than willing to help. That is what our ministry is dedicated to doing. Parents started seeing these dollars roll out in January. I do believe the vast majority of child care operators have been able to roll out these affordability dollars for parents and families. We are hearing very positive feedback, and we're seeing enrolments start to go up, which is excellent news.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it seems like this minister is full of nothing but empty words and given that the UCP government's federal-provincial child care agreement web page actually states that this agreement aims "to ensure families can choose the child care that works for them" and "support licensed child care," what is the government actually doing to ensure that these promises are rolled out besides the talk that we're hearing today?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite doesn't love my words, so let me use the words of child care operators here in Alberta. A quote from Tricia Cunningham with Sigis Child Care Society in St. Albert: because of this agreement our fees for children aged two to four dropped from \$44 a day to \$23 a day, and parents eligible for subsidy have seen their fees reduced to \$13 a day. What does that mean? It means we did exactly what we said we would do. Parents are able to access these supports right across the province, and this is great news because

these parents can now get back to work and drive Alberta's economic recovery.

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

Indigenous Relations

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week the Pope and Indigenous representatives are meeting to discuss reconciliation. As this historic meeting unfolds, it's important to take a deep look at how this government is addressing reconciliation with Alberta's Indigenous communities. This UCP budget cuts funding to Indigenous Relations by 18 per cent and continues the slow defunding of the crucial water for reserves program. On the eve of this historic meeting on reconciliation between the Vatican and Indigenous communities is the minister really going to stand by his plan to reduce support services for Indigenous communities?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is a little bit confused. I think he learned in estimates that we're actually increasing our budget in Indigenous Relations, an additional \$2 million for reconciliation. What we call it in Indigenous Relations is reconcili-action. You can see it out there working right now. I actually just signed off on – I had to crack my hands, so many reconciliation grants were going out the door, over \$8 million and along with Health another \$8 million there. There are a lot of projects going forward this year, and I'm just happy to see them happening.

Mr. Feehan: Given that this government, after taking office, ended the training of civil servants in Indigenous history and culture that our government announced and given that this government also provided no money for the urban Indigenous initiatives, which they previously cancelled, and given that as the eyes of the world are seeing the importance of addressing reconciliation, Alberta should be a leader in achieving this, will the minister end his neglect and undo these senseless decisions? Why is this government committed to taking us backwards on reconciliation?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to say that we actually increased our budget again on urban initiatives. Many things going forward this year. Again, several grants were signed off this morning to help out various projects that are going forward throughout the province. We're working on our garden. It's a reconciliation garden, and we're going to be putting a panel together that'll be helping to name it and work on developing a proper memorial for it. We're so happy to be doing that. I remember when we first started the garden, Chief Billy said that that was the most appropriate thing we could do. It brought hope and healing to the community.

Mr. Feehan: Given that it's been three years since the federal government released their findings from the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls report and given that in the past two years this government has done next to nothing and has not even released findings of the Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls despite their final report being submitted to the minister over two months ago, when will the minister finally release this report? Will he commit to immediate action or a solution to the question of reconciliation to ask those who've been waiting for years to keep on waiting?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is probably one of the most important things we've been working on because it is so important to the families. We started out this journey with a ceremony. The panel came to me and they wanted to do full circle, so we received the report in ceremony just last week. The panel members have told me that this is some of the most important work they've done in their career, and I support them on that a hundred per cent.

Even before the report was out, Mr. Speaker, because it is so important, this government started working on several initiatives, everything from our declaration of Sisters in Spirit Day and many other projects.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Emergency Medical Services

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's EMS system is strained under the competing demands of small rural communities and big urban centres. I have the honour to serve alongside my colleagues in this House on the Alberta EMS Provincial Advisory Committee to provide the Minister of Health with solutions to some of these challenges. Budget 2022 recently announced that an increase of \$64 million will go towards addressing EMS system pressure and continuing to make EMS more responsive to community needs. To the minister: can you tell the House specifically how this funding will be used to support front-line EMS workers and rural service providers as well?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education is rising.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The \$64 million in Budget 2022 goes directly towards adding more ground ambulances and crews while providing more sustainable funding for helicopter air ambulance services in Alberta. These additional supports increase the overall capacity throughout the province and improve efficiency in the system. The measures in the budget provide direct support to our front-line EMS workers, who have admirably risen to the existing challenges in the system, which the events of the past two years only magnified.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, and through you thanks to the minister. Part of the province's response to EMS pressures is a 10-point plan from Alberta Health Services. Given that point 2 in this plan is to hire more paramedics and further given that there's a plan on launching an hours-of-work project to help relieve staff fatigue, again to the same minister: what are the plans to attract more potential paramedics to the province or encourage citizens to enrol in paramedic programs to achieve the goal and implement this project?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you for that great question, Mr. Speaker. Once again I want to thank our EMS workers for their vital work, especially in the last two years. To help them manage fatigue levels, AHS has already taken steps to combat this problem and create a better working environment for new and existing staff. Since January AHS has hired 66 new staff, nine temporary full-time and 57 casual staff. These new staff members provide immediate relief for those who desperately need a break. EMS is also working

with learning institutions to expand class sizes to allow more paramedics training and graduation.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister, through you. Given that Budget 2022 only details the addition of five 24/7 ambulances to each of Alberta's largest cities, Calgary and Edmonton, plus one to Airdrie and given the recommendation to improve integration between EMS and hospital staff to improve the overall flow of operations, again to the Minister of Health: how will this help rural areas, who already have fewer ambulances than the larger centres, and what does this do in areas that don't house their own hospital?

Member LaGrange: Thank you again for another important question. Adding 20 new ambulances in these urban centres over the next two years will alleviate the existing pressure in suburban and rural areas. This reduces the need for rural ambulances to answer calls in the urban centres, meaning there are more available to respond to the calls in their immediate communities. Additionally, EMS began a pilot project in the rural areas of the northern zone on January 9 to better manage the transfer of patients who do not have acute-care needs. Mr. Speaker, we're doing more to increase EMS capacity.

2:30 School-based Mental Health Supports

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the last years have been extremely challenging for students, staff, and families. Alberta kids have been through so much over the course of the pandemic, and the impact to their mental health cannot be underestimated. Experts say mental health supports will have to evolve quickly as students face new anxieties and stresses. Considering that this government has failed to meet the mental health needs of students to date, will the Education minister now finally commit to placing a mental health therapist in each and every school?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mental health, obviously, is of concern to all of us and particularly within our schools. That's why we've added an additional \$110 million over the next three years, \$30 million in this upcoming year, to address mental health concerns. It was on the recommendation of the child and youth well-being panel, that made further recommendations. Of course, we're concerned about mental health, and we're going to continue to prioritize that in our budget.

Ms Hoffman: Given that that answer was a no and given that experts have said that in order to protect children's resilience, we must give them proper support to process their experiences, the tools for emotional regulation, and access to safe professional guidance in the form of properly trained mental health therapists in schools and given that the recent data from the University of Calgary shows student stress also comes from economic strains suffered from families and with so many Alberta families having their hours cut or, in Calgary, experiencing the largest unemployment of any major city in the country, will the Education minister commit to putting a counsellor ...

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I want to draw your attention to the fact that we've added over \$700 million to the budget over the next three years, a 1 per cent increase to base, a 1 per cent increase to operations and maintenance, a 4.6 per cent

increase to transportation, as well as an additional \$110 million over the next three years, \$30 million in this upcoming year, to address child and youth well-being, especially around the mental health area. It is of grave concern to us, and we're going to do everything we can to address it.

Ms Hoffman: Given that educators stress that mental health supports go hand in hand with academic success, especially for students who have suffered significant learning loss during the pandemic, and given that Leanne Timko, the director of learning services with Calgary Catholic school district, said that, quote, learning is about taking risks, about knowing you might make a mistake and get something wrong, end quote, but those who learn recognize when their mistakes are made and they pledge to do better, will the Education minister admit that she's failed Alberta students and learn from her mistakes? Will she fund a counsellor in every school, or will she continue to show Alberta families she can't be trusted?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite never fails to continue to make mistakes. Again she's made another mistake. We are adding another \$110 million, on top of our \$700 million, over three years in our budget. We're increasing the supports to our students. That's on top of the fact that last year we added an additional \$40 million to address specialized learning support funding. We're continuing to make sure that it is of top priority to address the mental health of our students. We know of the concerns, and not only is it the Ministry of Education, but all my fellow ministers are working collaboratively to address these issues.

Deaths of Children in Care and Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, 47 children and youth in the child intervention system have now died between last April and today, most of them Indigenous. This heartbreaking trend has continued to develop over the past year. It is our responsibility as legislators to do everything in our power to learn from and better prevent the deaths of children in government care. This is a continuing crisis, and it is time to act. I'm asking again: will the Minister of Children's Services convene an all-party committee to address the safety of children in care and outstanding recommendations of the Child and Youth Advocate?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It has been a difficult two years, and my heart does go out to the families of those children and young adults who have died and those who have had interaction with the child intervention system. We know that there are going to be changes that need to be made. Unlike the members opposite, we're not going to wait for an all-party panel. I've asked the ministry to do a review into what we're seeing in these cases as this year has been very different and we're seeing different trends in terms of the data and information we're seeing. We are absolutely committed to being transparent, accountable, and taking action where . . .

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

Ms Pancholi: Given, Mr. Speaker, that a discussion about the deaths of children deserves more time than a 35-second exchange – and that's what this is about – given that we could work together on

this, I urge the minister to reconsider. Now, given that last year the Minister of Children's Services committed to a review of policies and practices when it comes to the deaths of children in care, can the minister update this House on the state of this review? When will it be completed? Who is conducting it? Who is being consulted? Will the report be made public, and will the members of this House be able to consider it? Most importantly, when can we expect action?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have spoken about this. I have said that I would make this report public. Obviously, we had expected this in January, but we did have a number of staff away with COVID, so that has slightly been delayed, but there are three different groups that we see. We see supports for those who are transitioning into adulthood. We're seeing also a group of infants, and we want to look at the circumstances surrounding each and every one of those cases. And then for children in care, as I've already said, I will absolutely make it public. If the member opposite has recommendations, we'd be happy to hear them.

Ms Pancholi: Given that of the 47 deaths this year 21 were young people over the age of 18 who are receiving financial assistance, a grim record, given that B.C. just extended supports to youth transitioning out of care to age 27 and given that once again the UCP is out of step with best practices and chose instead to defend, through the courts, cutting young people off supports for the sole purpose of saving money, if the minister's report finds that decisions of this government in any way contributed to or failed to prevent the situation that we face today, will the minister commit publicly that that information will be included in the report and guarantee full transparency and accountability?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, we are not actually seeing what the member opposite is saying is the case, and I have shared that information with her before. What we are doing is that we've just transitioned to a transitions to adulthood program. We've always said – I started saying it in 2019 – that we needed to do better than have a financially focused support system for young adults who are transitioning into care and putting in place, really, a series of supports and check-ins to make sure that young people have the supports and services and connections that they need to succeed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Rail Transportation

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Far too often we have been faced with and are threatened by blockades of our borders and halts to our railway. These careless actions cause worry and harm in our economy and for our farmers. Farmers on our side of the border and on the other side both rely on each other to have seed for crops and feed for their cattle. To the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development: what is our government putting in place for farmers that are experiencing these price fluctuations and supply challenges?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great question. Our essential services need to remain essential. We were very happy to see CP and the teamsters agree to binding arbitration, and we look forward to a ratified agreement.

What are we doing? We're very proud of the business risk management suite of programs that we have in partnership with the federal government – AgriInvest, AgriStability, AgriInsurance, Agri-Recovery – in disaster situations like we saw during the drought last summer. Very important programs. There's enough risk in agriculture, from weather to rain to price increases and bad federal government policy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that we are faced with daily challenges of getting our landlocked oil to global markets by any way we can as we still must heavily rely on the railway system and given that Gibson terminal in Hardisty relies heavily on the rail system, which sees about 1 in 4 of all barrels exported from western Canada and moves about 210,000 barrels a day, to the Minister of Energy: what can we do to protect terminals like the Gibson terminal in Hardisty from suffering negative impacts from halts to the railway system?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start by saying that I very much enjoyed touring the rail terminal last summer with the member. It was an excellent opportunity. There's no question that we have to keep the tracks open. We need this private-sector rail capacity to be able to supply greater volumes of oil into the United States to displace Russian crude, that needs to be weeded out. We have room to move more crude by rail with existing private-sector rail that's out there and not being utilized, but we have to keep the tracks open. That's why we brought in the infrastructure defence act.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that it's not just natural resource products and farmers that rely on the goods and services transported from the rail system – we also see everyday Albertans, family-owned businesses, and other sectors across Alberta rely on these rail systems – to the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: what plans are in place to protect all sectors of hard-working business owners and families in the event we face another halt to the railway system?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, ensuring that we have alternate routes of transportation, ensuring that we have sound transportation infrastructure is critical in this province. It's all about business resiliency. And trigger warning for the members opposite: business resiliency needs to ensure that corporations and businesses are profitable – profitable, Mr. Speaker – that they have strong balance sheets. That's why we went forward with the job-creation tax cut. That's why we're improving the regulatory environment. We are creating resiliency in Alberta businesses.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will continue to the remainder of the daily Routine. [interjections] Order. If you'd like to have private conversations, there are places to do that.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Rural High-speed Internet and Broadband Strategy

Mr. Rowsell: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government has made an historic \$390 million funding commitment to improve broadband access in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, helping to eliminate the digital divide. The pandemic made it clear that access to reliable high-speed Internet is not just a luxury. In today's modern and increasingly digital world it's a necessity, a necessity which will cost approximately \$1 billion.

Alberta's government worked hard to secure an expanded dollar-for-dollar matching agreement with the federal government, bringing total public-sector funding to \$780 million. We anticipate that this financial commitment will drive significant private-sector investment, pushing overall investment north of \$1 billion, helping us to eliminate the digital divide. With funding secured, our government announced Alberta's broadband strategy, which outlines how we will deliver universal connectivity to Albertans by spring of 2027.

Alberta's broadband strategy strengthens our economic recovery and diversification. It emboldens our education and health sectors, enabling socioeconomic development. We are currently hard at work reviewing Alberta's focused applications to the universal broadband fund. With negotiations under way, we expect the first round of approved projects to begin construction later this year.

Improved broadband access has long been a concern for constituents in my riding of Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright. The Alberta broadband strategy and secured funding is yet another example of how this government doesn't just listen to the concerns of Albertans; we take action to make lives better for Albertans. My constituents and Albertans alike eagerly anticipate the first round of approved projects.

I want to thank the Minister of Service Alberta for taking the time to develop a coherent strategy and securing the funding to make it happen.

Notices of Motions

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give oral notice of a bill to be introduced, which I will sponsor, that being Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General.

Bill 12 Trustee Act

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 12, the Trustee Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings?

Seeing none, I do have a tabling today. I'm tabling six copies of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate's Mandatory Reviews into Child Deaths report.

Hon. members, Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 2
Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Debate adjourned March 23: Ms Pancholi speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has six minutes remaining, but I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung is on his feet.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to rise and speak to Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, which, of course, is a piece of budget legislation. It attempts to speak to making life more affordable, following the government's stated ambition to convince Albertans that that's exactly what they're trying to do, but in fact it fails to do that on a number of counts. The largest and most difficult to explain is the failure to index tax brackets to inflation wherein the government in this piece of legislation, the budget implementation act, locks in the horrific decision to tax inflation. It's something that the Premier, in his former role with the federal government, really waxed eloquent against on numerous occasions. He used to call this tax on inflation an insidious and pernicious tax grab, and now his government here in Alberta is working overtime, taking an additional \$1 billion out of the pockets of hard-working Albertans.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, that's a significant chunk of change, Madam Speaker – it's a billion dollars – at a time when the provincial government is trying to claim that they're not raising taxes. They'll point to other elements and say: "No, no, no. No raise in taxes is going on right now." What's actually happened, of course, is that this billion dollars is coming out of the pockets of Albertans as a direct result of the bracket creep that the government is engaging in. Albertans are not fooled by this. They know and feel every ounce of the increase that this government is putting forward that's coming out of their pockets.

The economic insecurity that the province is going through right now is being felt on so many levels by Albertans. It doesn't matter whether it's the cost of insurance for automobiles. That's one thing that's really, really a huge burden on the backs of Albertans. You know, the billion-dollar tax grab involved in the budget implementation act is one thing, but it's added onto the other burdens that Albertans are already feeling. It hurts, and it demonstrably will affect the quality of life of Albertan families. The \$1 billion is something that will especially hurt lower income families, as usually happens when extra tax burdens are placed on the population.

The cost of everything is going up, Madam Speaker, as we all know and as we hear from our constituents every day no matter where they are from: Airdrie or Cochrane or southern Alberta, anywhere, northern Alberta, Edmonton, Calgary. We know we hear from our constituents on a daily basis about how difficult life has gotten because of the increases in everything that they're seeing. This bracket creep tax increase that the government is engaging in through the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, is something that was an unnecessary burden on Albertans. It was a tax grab that the government was hoping perhaps they could claim didn't exist.

But Albertans are not stupid, Madam Speaker. They are very well adept at understanding, especially at this time of year when we're all about to do our taxes, that if indeed the tax brackets are not

indexed to inflation, it's going to cost you more. It's a tax increase by any other name. Albertans are not fooled, and they're not impressed by it either. To be taken for fools is not something that Albertans have suffered gladly over the years. This government, by failing to index the tax brackets to inflation, by implementing this bracket creep, and by taking a billion dollars out of the pockets of Albertans, is adding to the burdens that we're already feeling.

2:50

Inflation is skyrocketing for a number of reasons. Of course, the government totally fudged the numbers in their Budget 2022. They estimated inflation at 3.2 per cent, but recently, Madam Speaker, Statistics Canada measured inflation at a 30-year high of 5.7 per cent. Of course, now we see the government taking an extra billion dollars out of the pockets of Albertans who are already suffering.

The worst act, I think, that this government is taking, Madam Speaker, when it comes to placing burdens on individuals in this province, who will suffer once again because of this billion-dollar tax grab, is to those who are already on some form of government support. Particularly, I talk about those who are on AISH. The Premier in his remarks today during question period spoke about those individuals in a very offhanded way, in my opinion, and in a very callous manner talked about how they were receiving the most generous government support payments across the country compared to others who are receiving AISH-type payments.

The amount of money an actual AISH recipient receives in this province is not something that is easy to live on, Madam Speaker. It is almost impossible, I would say, to live on. You're certainly not living with dignity, and it begs the question always of why indeed we can afford to give out \$4.7 billion in tax decreases to profitable corporations, yet somehow it's beneath us to make sure that those who are least able to afford to earn a living themselves, those who rely on government assistance, somehow don't deserve the dignity of a living allowance that allows them to live above the poverty line.

To have the Premier today in question period, Madam Speaker, claim proudly that the AISH money that is received by Albertans is above average and that that somehow makes it an acceptable amount is beneath the dignity of this House. I think that if indeed we were to have anything to celebrate about the money that AISH recipients receive, it would be to actually claim that it is well above the level which is required to live comfortably above the poverty line so that you don't have to as an MLA find people somehow groveling to seek slightly more dollars, a few dollars extra a month so that they can actually, you know, have their children eat a little bit better in the subsidized housing that they barely are able to afford. I'm embarrassed to know that the Premier thinks that the current level of funding for AISH recipients is something to be proud of.

Yet on top of that, Madam Speaker, the Premier sees fit to fail to index the tax brackets to inflation and thus takes a further billion dollars out of the economy of this province, directly out of the pockets of those least able to afford it at a time when costs are going up in so many other ways.

Utility bills are another example, Madam Speaker. The government is proud once again to give 50 bucks a month for three months, a total of \$150, to balance off the cost of escalating utility bills. Of course, Albertans once again are not fooled by that. Like, 50 bucks a month is 50 bucks a month, but it's not going anywhere near the way that Albertans hope to have been relieved from utility bills that have gone up \$500 to \$700 more a month. There has been a pittance thrown the way of Albertans who are suffering the most.

While the provincial government is minimizing the benefits to those who are least able to afford a reduction and maximizing costs

out of the pockets of Albertans for things such as tuition fees, they're yet claiming or trying to claim that there's no tax increase to Albertans. Of course, as we do our taxes this tax season, for those that are wondering exactly how much it will cost them, this billion-dollar bracket increase is something that will become painfully clear to them as they realize this government is once again hitting them with a tax increase while at the same time trying to claim that they're not. That adds salt into the wounds, Madam Speaker.

For a government that wishes to extract an extra billion dollars in tax revenue from the taxpayer, Albertans at least expect an upfront and honest approach to it, and that's not what they're getting here. What they're getting is the government saying to them: no, we're not increasing your taxes. Well, perhaps the level, the rate may not be going up, but they're changing the rules, fudging the lines, making sure that they get their billion dollars in revenue. They're doing it in a way that is kind of insidious and pernicious, to use the Premier's former verbiage when he was railing against this bracket creep as a federal minister. Yet somehow when he does it here to the Alberta citizens, the Alberta taxpayer, it's not a tax increase. Well, they're not fooled, and they're not impressed, Madam Speaker, by this Premier's performance on so many accounts.

The average family, Madam Speaker, will lose \$500 alone just because the basic personal exemption in the income tax act isn't being adjusted for inflation. So 500 bucks is what you're going to see as an additional tax increase on your tax bill as an Albertan. Thanks to this provincial government and the bracket creep, you know, this phantom tax increase, that the government says doesn't exist or didn't happen, is going to be a real \$500 out of the pockets of Albertans, and it's going to become apparent very, very quickly as we do our income tax in the upcoming few weeks. Some of us have already done them and realized, of course, that we're getting nailed 500 bucks by this UCP government that would like us to believe that, in fact, our tax bill isn't going up, but it's exactly the opposite. That's the type of argument that this government tries to use in so many cases, and Albertans aren't being fooled. They'll say: "No, no. It's not happening. That's not what's going on." In fact, that exactly is what's going on, and Albertans realize it.

Tuition fees: another example. We just had students across the province rallying to oppose the hikes to tuition fees. Then the minister of postsecondary education, of course, gleefully gets up in this House repeatedly to rail off figures, saying, "Oh, we've increased spending on postsecondary education," when, in fact, what's happening is that the tuition fees are really going up. They may have spent X dollars in one year, but it doesn't really make up for the billion dollarwise that they decreased in previous budgets.

The attempted deception to have Albertans try to believe that they're actually minimizing the taxes and the fees and making life more affordable is not something that Albertans are swallowing. They try to talk about a spoonful of sugar in the form of a 13-cent reduction in the provincial gas tax. But tell you what, Madam Speaker, it doesn't help the real hard medicine go down when you're looking at the billion-dollar tax grab that this piece of legislation is actually implementing and that Albertans will feel as soon as their taxes are done.

Tuition fees are something that are a barrier to entry into university. To have the audacity, on top of that, to say that, well, we're going to cushion Alberta students and their families from the increases in tuition fees – and some of them are huge increases – by increasing the limits to the loans that they are able to get as students is crass, is really crass.

3:00

I mean, out of university, if you're looking at a debt of tens of thousands and in some cases over \$100,000, students may

justifiably say in their own minds: well, I'm not going to do that; what's the sense of going into debt that far when indeed I can do something else and not face that debt burden? That choice causes brain drain, Madam Speaker. That choice forces students to go elsewhere, where tuition is lower or where government supports recognize the fact that the youth and the education of the province are important.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members wishing to join in on the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill 2, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. This budget implementation act and the terrible decision made by this government to tax inflation, that I wanted to speak to: I will come back to this later on. I just wanted to speak to the concerns that I'm hearing from my constituents and the people I'm meeting on a daily basis.

I got a call from my constituency when driving on the way to the Legislature this afternoon, and they wanted to know what kind of supports they have in this budget for their communities. We have been listening to our constituents. We have been listening to Albertans for three years, specifically racialized communities, what they are demanding, that they don't feel secure in their communities, in their places of worship, nor at their homes, in public places, in shopping malls. That's what they were worried about, and that's what they were asking the government for, to step up and to improve their safety and security and introduce the programs to combat racism in this province.

We had the Premier's Anti-Racism Advisory Council. They worked hard. They created the report and the recommendations, submitted them to this government, and it was expected that the government would take some initiatives in this budget to address the concerns raised in the ARAC report. We didn't see it in this budget. Those are the real concerns my constituents are concerned about, and I haven't seen anything.

On the contrary, I remember that when this government came into office in 2019, we had a ministry that had a budget for multiculturalism and diversity and inclusion. That was reduced in the year 2020-21, and that has been totally eliminated in this budget. I'm getting calls from people from racialized communities from across this province. They're asking me if I'm raising their concerns. They're asking me if I'm representing their voices in this House, and if I'm doing it, what is the government's response to it? What kind of action are they taking? What kind of lessons are they learning from it?

It was very sad to see that after the rising cases of hate in this province, the government, instead of supporting this, removed the community group antiracism grant program. They removed the antiracism human rights education funds. So every step of the way they have been attacking those programs that were helping the vulnerable and marginalized communities in this province. Those are the questions I am receiving. Those are the concerns people are worried about in our communities.

I asked this minister. First of all, the ministry was actually moving, the Associate Ministry of Multiculturalism and Immigration, from Culture to the labour ministry. That was very sad to see, that the government sees multiculturalism through the lens of labour, not through community and citizenship but through the lens of labour, and not even that. Under that ministry the government has totally eliminated the budget that has been subscribed to the program in the past two years. Those are the kinds of concerns and questions that I'm hearing from my community members every time I meet them, every time the people come into

my office. They want me to bring these messages to this House. Any time we are discussing or debating something around financial statutes or the budgets, they want to see why these communities are being ignored.

The government and the Premier only remember these communities when it comes to getting help and support for their personal benefit. We have seen the rallies. We have seen the tweets, we have seen the messages, increasing messages around those communities and appeals from the government in relation to the coming leadership vote and debate. But when it comes to serving those communities, the government is totally failing.

The other concern I have been hearing for the past two months is the rising cost of utilities, the affordability issue. I remember even a few months back, in the early days of the session, when my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie actually arose in this House to ask the question: our constituents are concerned about the skyrocketing cost of utilities; does the associate minister have any plan to deal with this? The minister took pride in jumping off the seat and saying just one single sentence or word to answer the question: no. That is very discouraging. It is very sad to see that this is what is happening in this House, and that is not being discussed in this budget.

On the contrary, the government has taxed inflation. It's not about what the Premier has called it while he was a federal politician, how many names he called it: insidious, pernicious, or vicious. What is more important is that he knows what it is. He understands what it is. Still, it's sad to see the hypocritical position the Premier is taking, not only the Premier but his Executive Council and the people sitting around him, not even speaking a single word, but the Premier was saying it on the record not only once, not only twice, not only in one year, not only in the second year. He has a history of those understandings, but he implemented the same thing in this province when he got the option, when he got the choice, when he got the option to serve these very people, and he's mum.

3:10

Every single day my colleagues are rising in this House and asking this question, "Why is this government raising the taxes on the very people?" and we are not getting any answer. The minister is simply deflecting from the topic when it comes to answering these questions.

Affordability. Costs keep growing in the province, and the unemployment rate keeps growing. People keep losing jobs. Over 14,000 people lost jobs last month. In the last quarter people lost jobs. Affordability is a concern. People are struggling to pay their bills. It is not even a small increase in their utility bills. The rates have been increased three times.

I would be happy to see if any of the government caucus members want to debate on this, that this fact is not true. Three times. The utility bills rose three times. I'm surprised to see that none of the government caucus members rose in this House and represented their constituents' issues. They're struggling, and they're calling for the government to act and take real action to address this issue, but so far what we're seeing are fake programs that the government is trying to use as a distraction. A \$50 rebate per month for those who have seen an increase of \$600 in their bill: this is how much the government cares about Albertans.

The rising cost of tuition fees. After coming into office, one thing the government did with speed was – they didn't like a cap on anything. I think they don't like the word "cap," even when it comes to protecting the very Albertans, the people to whom we promised during the election that we would keep their interests before us, or first, before anyone else.

They removed the cap from the insurance prices. They removed the cap from the utility prices. They removed the cap from tuition fees. And now what is happening? People are struggling with unprecedented skyrocketing costs, whether it comes to utility bills, insurance premiums, or this hike in tuition fees. Not only that; the government doubled down on Alberta's youth by rolling back their minimum wage, saying that that will actually help to reduce unemployment or create more jobs in Alberta. On the contrary, what happened is that they saw a higher unemployment rate than in the history of this province. But the government still did not take a lesson from it.

What we are talking about, what we are saying is that these are not just NDP views. This is not just rhetoric. These are facts. The government has these facts, we have these facts, and these facts are being discussed and published on a daily basis in the media. The government needs to answer these questions, and government needs to address these problems. This budget does not talk about anything but more of this.

By passing this budget, Albertans will see their taxes going up because of this inflation being taxed in this budget, that our Premier has called vicious and pernicious tax creeps. Albertans are about to pay, like, \$1 million more in taxes under this UCP government because the Premier did not hear Albertans on something . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join in on the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to my colleagues for this opportunity to engage in the consideration of Bill 2, which is titled the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, which is the act to implement our budget, so it probably won't come as a huge shock to members opposite that I'm not keen on the no-help budget. In case you didn't hear it in question period any of the days since the budget has been presented, I'm putting it on the record at this moment.

Let me talk about what I would have liked to have seen in this budget and what would actually be a helpful budget for the people of Alberta and the folks that I've been spending a lot of time talking to throughout this province and especially, of course, the folks in Edmonton-Glenora. I have to say that the number one issue that gets brought up with me right now when I am meeting with folks, typically on their doorsteps, is affordability. The number of people who are experiencing significant hardships, particularly with their electricity bill, with their power bill, is shocking to me. I will say that it doesn't matter if they're a young person who's renting or a young family who's renting or if they're a senior who's been living in their house for 50 years. They're all expressing significant concerns about the big increases to their power bills.

This has been one of the most difficult winters, I would say, for families, and it's not because their usage is going up. That certainly isn't the case. The current government decided to forge ahead with ideology and get rid of a cap that was in place to ensure that rates couldn't go up significantly, and of course as soon as they lifted the cap, they knew what was going to happen. If they thought that rates would stay low, they would have left in the cap, but they lifted the cap, and of course rates went up. It has impacted families in a significant way.

Sometimes we'll hear members opposite say: well, good news; we're going to create more opportunities for people to find jobs. Well, the proof is in the pudding on that one, Madam Speaker, and that's that there are still significantly larger numbers of unemployed Albertans than there are in many other parts of the country, I think, only second to Atlantic Canada. Specifically, Calgary, the largest city in the province of Alberta, has the highest unemployment right

now of any major city across Canada. For folks that are being told, “Well, just get a job; that will help you pay your bills,” that’s not really a realistic option for a lot of folks right now given the situation here in the province of Alberta.

The government seems to have its blinders on and its earplugs in when it comes to acknowledging the real hardships. When I think about the seniors who are telling me about their pressures, are you telling that 85-year-old who’s been living in her house for over 50 years that she needs to go get another job to pay her increased power bills because the government got rid of the cap? I sure hope not. I think that that is pretty disrespectful to the many, many people who’ve helped create opportunities for all of us to prosper here in this province over their lifetimes and, hopefully, not just for ours but also for future generations. Affordability, I would say, is probably one of the number one issues that continues to get raised with me over and over and over again, and specifically power bills have been really difficult on ordinary families in Edmonton-Glenora and throughout Alberta.

Another one I want to highlight – and we won’t see it quite yet, because the bill will come very soon but not yet – is educational property tax. Here we have an opportunity where the government stumbled backwards into a very profitable international price of oil. That means that Albertans, who are the owners of these resources, have a government right now who has the opportunity to invest that back in making life more affordable for the families who are the owners of that resource but instead has decided that they are going to actually increase educational property tax, increase school fees, increase licences and fees, accounting for over \$117 million in increased educational costs being downloaded onto ordinary families.

3:20

The current government also continues to fail to build for what we need today, let alone what we need into the future. We see Albertans across this province in need of better, energy-efficient, high-quality learning environments for their children. In areas where there are schools, many of those schools were built in the Peter Lougheed days and certainly have cycled their life cycle for that school building and aren’t rightsized to the number of children that live in that community or that neighbourhood. We see on these Legislature Grounds that the government will take the time to remove buildings that they believe are inefficient or ineffective or are a drain on the resources of the provincial treasury, but when it comes to actually replacing schools with appropriately sized schools that are safe and quality, for everyone to learn in, the government has ignored the needs of municipalities and school boards right across the province.

At a time when they have stumbled into this additional revenue and it could be going towards helping every Alberta family, instead they’re continuing to double down on their practices of making only certain profitable corporations, large profitable corporations, more profitable and leaving everybody else to pay more. So \$117 million in educational property taxes, fees, licences – that essentially is education property taxes and school fees – in my opinion, does not help ordinary Alberta families.

When we need schools – in Edmonton public alone there were five schools on their year 1 needs assessment, and the current government granted zero schools for the second-largest division in the province of Alberta. Overwhelmingly, the vast majority of Alberta families continue to choose public education, and the government, for the second year in a row, completely shut out Edmonton public families from any capital investment in this budget. In Calgary over three years there were two years where there were no new schools for public or Catholic families in the city

of Calgary and finally, here in the third year, one – one – new public school and one new Catholic school for our largest city, the largest and third-largest districts in the province and continuing to grow.

It really doesn’t say to kids, “When you come to school, we expect you to do your best and give your best, and we believe in you,” when we fail to actually give kids the kinds of educational opportunities that they all deserve. Let’s start with the buildings, right? There’s tons of research that shows that kids who go to well-maintained, clean, safe schools learn better. I’ve asked many custodians over my time, specifically when I served on the Edmonton public school board: tell me more about why that is. It’s because we’re showing kids what excellence is. When kids show up to school and they’re in a safe, well-maintained, happy, high-functioning building, we know that we’re giving them our best. Of course, they know that we expect their best from them as well.

But this government certainly isn’t giving their best to children when it comes to school facilities across the province, leaving many to travel, even within the capital region here, over two and half hours round trip, for example, to the closest francophone school for many families who live in the Edmonton area. Again, francophone schools: completely shut out of this year’s budget province-wide, not one school, at the same time as, of course, there have been court decisions making it explicitly clear that francophone families have a Charter right to equal access to educational opportunity. The government continues to ignore that and to ignore the needs of families who want to exercise their right to access a public francophone school or a Catholic francophone school in an equal opportunity within the province of Alberta. So the government has really given no help to families when it comes to education capital.

Of course, when you actually look at the tables at the back of the budget documents and you compare the tables – I imagine that many members have gone through the tables – you can look at the full-time equivalent staff loads for certificated and noncertificated staff in education, for example. You can look at it for the Ministry of Energy, for example. You can compare one year to the next. What we see in education is that between the time when the NDP was in government and today, there are 1,000 fewer teachers in Alberta schools. That’s the government’s own budget documents. They’ll say, “Well, the NDP said it’s one year.” No. We said, “Between when we were in government and today, it’s 1,000 fewer.” Yes, they’ve moved their accounting practices around a bit, but the tables don’t lie. You can find out exactly how many teachers there were three years ago versus how many teachers there are today in this budget.

Wow. Time flies when you’re talking about all the things that could have been in this budget. I want to take a few minutes to talk about the importance of – it probably won’t surprise people that I care deeply about public health care and public health services and resources that we all rely on. I’m very proud of the fact that in the first few months, actually – there was a spring election, and by the summer, when I had the opportunity to serve as the Minister of Health, we made a firm commitment to the people of Alberta, the people of Calgary that we were going to build the Calgary cancer centre. We were going to stop the political yo-yo that Conservative governments had done to the people of Calgary over more than a decade, and we were going to move to make that happen. I am glad to see that it is continuing to make progress on the building.

What I will also say, though, through the extensive consultations we had with staff and with patients and with family members of patients – there was a dad who I think about often when I think about the Calgary cancer because his wife had passed away, but he and his child wanted to stay connected and do something better to leave families in Calgary in a better position than where they were when his wife was a patient at the Calgary cancer. He talked about

the people who worked there and how there was a need to expand on the services.

Instead, what we're seeing through the current government and the budget that's been presented is a continued contraction in the number of people who are working to deliver services in the Calgary cancer centre, as is well documented now through media reports. I can tell you, having loved many people who've lived with cancer and died of cancer, that that time between diagnosis and treatment is agonizing. So for anyone who is continuing to wait for their treatment options to hear that we're losing expert technicians from the Tom Baker cancer centre and that the primary reason they've cited is because of a lack of trust and a lack of respect and a lack of fair negotiations around their compensation – they're not part of the union – and that they have felt that they need to leave when they are given far better opportunities in other provinces is devastating for those families and for every single Calgarian and anyone in southern Alberta who's relying on the Tom Baker for their cancer treatments.

These are the kinds of things we could be addressing in this budget. We could actually focus on the main issues that our constituents are raising with us. We could talk about health care and education and affordability and economic diversification. We could actually fund additional staff for Calgary cancer today to make sure that we provide those additional services in the Tom Baker as they transition over to the new Calgary cancer centre.

We could make sure that we're increasing funding to support long-term care. For anyone who lived through the stress of having a loved one in long-term care or continuing care over the last two years, one of the scariest things, I think, was realizing that people needed to put somebody they loved in a congregated care setting when we saw the devastating impacts that COVID-19 in particular had on congregated care sites and also when we saw the issues with having staff work multiple part-time jobs in multiple settings and how quickly something can spread like COVID, which had deadly consequences for many, many Albertans, especially those who lived in these types of congregated care settings. We could be looking at putting things in this budget to actually help address the root issues that led to so much harm and suffering over the last two years, like additional staff for long-term care.

We could be moving forward on the absolutely necessary south Edmonton hospital. The last time Edmonton got a new community hospital was the 1980s, when the Grey Nuns opened. That is not acceptable. We should not be looking at our second-largest city, one that has grown significantly and continues to grow, and continue to deprive it of basic community hospital opportunities for all Albertans who access the capital region and especially those who are living in south Edmonton, who need a hospital. This government has continued to delay and dither when we know how important it is. We know that there's a very clear business case, and we know that it's important to the success and well-being of ordinary families and also can support the economic diversification of that part of the city as well, creating good opportunities for people to live and work close to home, if we were to move forward in a timely fashion on the south Edmonton hospital. Clearly, this government has no intention of doing that given that there isn't any kind of concrete action related to its construction in this budget.

3:30

Also, I want to highlight – it was cut in a previous budget, but it should have been restored in this budget – the child and adolescent mental health facility, that is so desperately needed here in Edmonton, in, I believe, my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood's riding or very near to her riding, anyway. We need to have a facility that says, again, to those children that I

talked about, the importance of quality schools. We need to have a health care facility for kids who are suffering, for their families who are suffering that says: we care about you; we're putting you in a quality space that has wraparound services, in-patient and outpatient support, and we're going to make sure that you get the help that you need because we believe in you and we care about your future.

Really, it's hard to say that today, when you look at some of the places and the incredibly long wait-lists that families are facing when it comes to accessing support for children who are suffering emotionally and mentally.

I would be an enthusiastic supporter if this budget would have hit some of those key marks, if it would focus on real affordability.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: All right. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll put my glasses on so I can see everybody's lovely faces. Yes, it is absolutely an honour to rise in this Chamber. You know, it is my first time being able to speak in the week, and I always like to just talk about the fact that we are still in a pandemic and that we still have so many incredible front-line workers, who are doing so much for us every single day, and I don't want us to forget. I don't want us to forget about the fact that we deemed them as heroes for many months, and then we seem to forget their contributions. So for those on the front lines in health care, in education, in retail, wherever it might be, just know that you are seen and that you are so much appreciated for the work that you do.

All right. Hard to follow my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora on the budget. She is always full of wisdom, and I really appreciate it. I'm going to piggyback on a few of the areas on which she focused because they are critical ones to me. And, like she said, you know, she frames her comments largely based on the conversations that she has with her constituents. I know that she's been out knocking on doors a lot in Edmonton-Glenora. Like me, when she's out knocking on doors, she asks her constituents: "What's top of mind for you? What are your big issues? What are your big concerns?"

You know, I shared this, actually – gosh, I can't remember; time is confusing, and my memory for time these days is quite weak – probably last week. I just shared that I've been door-knocking in various parts of the province, and no matter where I seem to be, the issues are the same. They seem to transcend socioeconomic backgrounds, that sort of thing.

Most recently I was out in Edmonton-Manning with my colleague the MLA there, you know, in a little bit of a different neighbourhood than most of the neighbourhoods that I represent. But, again, what were the top issues that we heard on the doors in Edmonton-Manning this past weekend? Affordability, for sure. Affordability was top of mind. We may have folks say to us: "Well, yeah, but you probably prompt people, and you probably mention: how about those high power bills, and how about those high electricity bills?" No, absolutely not. Those are issues that are organically raised. And you can watch me. If anyone would like to come door-knock with me, I'd be happy to have you hear some of those concerns. Truly, that's what I say. I say, "I'm your MLA" or "I'm with your MLA and just really want to hear what's top of mind for you."

Affordability. A few people did bring up just how much higher their bills have been over the last few months. Again, that's something I've heard in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood as well. I've heard it in some of the other ridings that I've door-knocked in,

like Strathcona-Sherwood Park, Morinville-St. Albert, and I'm looking forward to knocking on doors in a number of Calgary ridings in the upcoming weeks. I don't want to anticipate what they'll say, but I have a feeling that many of those issues will be the same.

Affordability is certainly a top issue. You know, to tie it back to this bill that we have in front of us – I should name it – Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, yeah, this government and this minister really had an opportunity to address affordability. I haven't had a chance to be up in the Finance minister's riding lately although I do have family from up in the Grande Prairie-Wapiti region, and my mom is actually a northern Albertan. Well, she's from the Valleyview area, but I spent lots of time in the Grande Prairie area, too. I can imagine that affordability would be top of mind to many of the Finance minister's constituents.

I am curious. It's unfortunate that it's the opposition MLAs who seem to be the only ones speaking up and speaking out about affordability. I would have hoped that one of them might have joined the debate today, but alas not. I would be curious: just how does the minister respond to those concerns that his constituents raise around affordability? [interjection] Actually, yeah, I'd love to have him intervene. Why not?

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker and to the member for giving way. I'd be pleased to answer that question. Absolutely, Albertans in the Grande Prairie-Wapiti constituency are concerned about affordability, as they are, I believe, right across the province. We're in a time of significant inflation. In February the Canadian inflation rate was 5.7 per cent, and we are very aware of that phenomenon. As we take a look at the various levers that governments have in times of inflation, we've reflected on those levers, and we've worked to understand: what is the best possible policy during times of inflation? Is it simply to borrow from future generations and add more fiscal stimulus into the economy, exacerbating inflation? If we take a look at the root cause of inflation today, it's certainly caused by constrained supply chains. It is caused by very liberal central bank policy, monetary policy.

Member Irwin: Thank you. Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. I actually was just chatting with the minister backstage – that's probably not the right word – back there, and I do find him to be quite reasonable. But I will have to disagree with him because, you know, he's talking about the action, or rather the inaction, they've taken when it comes to inflation. This budget implementation act very much locks in the terrible decision made by this government to tax inflation.

It was that same Premier – and we've heard many people in this Chamber throw back at this Premier the very words he used in I think it was the '90s, the '80s, maybe before my time – who talked about how a tax on inflation was, quote, an insidious and pernicious tax grab. Yet this very government and this very Premier are doing exactly that, and they are taking an additional \$1 billion in income tax out of the pockets of our constituents, my constituents in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, that minister's constituents in Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

You know what? This would be a hard pill to swallow in itself, but add on to that that this is all happening with the backdrop of higher utility bills, higher insurance costs. This minister was asked, just earlier in the day, by my fantastic colleague from Edmonton-West Henday about auto insurance and, if I remember correctly, was asked quite explicitly. I believe the question was something to the effect of: do you know how much auto insurance has gone up? Very short, very succinct. Well, that minister did an incredible dance in not answering that question. But the reality, as my

colleague talked about, is that our constituents are seeing rising automobile insurance costs as well.

3:40

Tuition fees. Let me tell you about the fact that I spent yesterday – I didn't get a chance to march over from the U of A with the students, but I met them in the parking lot just out here. I'm bad at directions; I should never point. There were a number of students who marched in a beautiful spring snowstorm to rally against high tuition costs and about budget cuts.

I have to tell you – and this is not just me being, well, cheesy. I'm often cheesy, but honestly I was so inspired by those students. They basically had an open mic yesterday on the stairs outside of the Legislature, and they talked about the impacts of rising tuition costs on each of them. What was, I think, most inspiring to me was the fact that they weren't doing that just for themselves. They were doing it for future generations because they know that the choices that this government is making through Bill 2, through their bad-news budget, will have an impact on future generations as well at a time when we should be encouraging young people to attain a postsecondary education, whether that's a university education, whether that's a trades-based education, whatever it might be. There should be opportunities for young people across this province, but this government is making it more challenging.

One of the students talked about – it was an engineering student whose name was Adrian. Apologies that I don't know his last name off the top of my head. He was an engineering student. He talked about the fact that, you know, we should be seeing diversity in the engineering faculty. We should be seeing people from various socioeconomic backgrounds, international students. Like, he's a young white guy. He said: I don't want my faculty to just be more people like me. His point was that postsecondary education is becoming something for the privileged, for the wealthy. This government is making explicit choices to make it more challenging for young people to have an opportunity here in postsecondary education.

A couple of other students stood up and spoke as well. A lovely student named Joannie is at Campus Saint-Jean. She's a student there. I've met her before. She's an incredible advocate. She talked about how – and I'm looking at my colleague from St. Albert, qui parle français aussi. On va parler français.

Ms Renaud: Oui. On peut pratiquer.

Member Irwin: Oui. On peut pratiquer un peu.

She talked about the fact that she is not able to access her education entirely in French – whereas, you know, those who came before her have been able to – because of budget cuts to Campus Saint-Jean, right? I look at my colleague from Edmonton-McClung as well, who I know is a francophile comme moi. It's absolutely absurd that someone like Joannie doesn't have an opportunity to see through her entire education in the language of her choice, which is French.

You know, these are the kinds of real-world stories that I wish – I wish – this government were listening to. I had an opportunity to speak at the mic yesterday. They said, "We don't usually have politicians." I said, "Well, you know, if any of the UCP MLAs want to come join the rally and speak, they certainly can." I did shout at the Minister of Advanced Education, but I don't think he heard me. But I wish he would truly – and I mean it quite seriously – listen to those stories.

What we see as a result of this government's choices is that we are seeing young people leaving. We're seeing young people choosing to study in other jurisdictions, where it's more affordable,

where they see more job opportunities. My colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview just earlier in question period talked about the loss of jobs, right? What kind of young person – he can talk about tech as well, right? There could be so many opportunities for young people in this province, but this government is making explicit choices that are making it more difficult.

Oh, goodness, I've only talked about a few things here, and I've got so much more to talk about in this bad-news budget. Tuition and affordability are certainly a big one.

Now, my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora spoke quite wisely about education, and I had the chance last week in budget estimate discussions or supplementary supply, I should say, to just talk a little bit about the fact that in my own riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood there's one school. It's called Delton school. It's in a lovely neighbourhood just north of where I live, in fact. It was number one on Edmonton public schools' capital list, a great school community. This government will come back, and their response will be: yeah, but it's not fully at capacity.

Well, let's think about this. It's terrible logic. It's not at capacity because young families in my neighbourhood of Delton are seeing that, well, maybe there's not a future here. My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora said it quite well, right? We want young people to be in safe, healthy schools. They don't all have to be new. They don't all have to be new. I get that. I taught in Bawlf school when it was an old school. They've got a new building now, but I've taught in schools that – Bawlf school just had one little window. I still remember that. That was not good for my vitamin D levels, but, you know, it was a safe, welcoming, caring school environment for the students there. Of course, it was in need of upgrades, and I'm happy that it got them.

The same thing for the school in Delton: we would see more parents choosing that school if they knew it was, you know, a building where they felt confident sending their kids to. Don't get me wrong. There are amazing families and students and staff at that school right now, and I'm so proud to represent it. But the fact is that this government chose to not heed the number one request of the Edmonton public school board, and that was a new Delton school. Yeah. That's incredibly frustrating to me. It's hard as their MLA to have to try to find some sort of logic in this government's decision-making, and I'm not seeing any, right?

You know, I think that if there is one theme to my speech today – and I know it's probably hard to draw too many themes from a scattered speech – that might be to just listen, right?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've had some very good debate this afternoon on Bill 2, wide ranging as it always is in this Chamber. I'm excited personally for a balanced budget, one focused on growth, and growth in all sectors as well. I think that that absolutely needs to be highlighted, as Albertans have had a tremendous opportunity in whatever profession or vocation that they are in to make sure that they've got a chance and an opportunity at a job, job security, and growth in income, and that is what is exciting about this budget as well. It is balanced, and there is . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, my apologies. You do not have the ability to speak at this time as you've already spoken on Bill 2.

Perhaps there is another member that I could recognize, which looks like it will be the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to recognize everything that we just heard. I think it was bang on. I don't need to go into any more detail. I'd like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Federal Carbon Tax Increase

18. Mr. Kenney moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government of Canada to stop its planned April 1, 2022, increase of the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne and its further plan to increase the carbon tax to \$170 per tonne given that Canadian families are struggling with the highest inflation in 30 years.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Government House Leader to move Government Motion 18.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the number one issue facing Albertans right now is the cost of living, inflation, particularly energy inflation, because that makes everything more expensive. According to Statistics Canada we are experiencing 5.7 per cent inflation in Canada right now. That is a 30-year high, and that is a tax on people's savings. It is a tax on everything.

3:50

It is driven by a number of factors, Madam Speaker, including the significant recent increase in energy prices, but, in addition, the federal government is ultimately responsible for monetary and at a macro level Canadian fiscal policy, both of which have been aligned by this Liberal-NDP coalition government in Ottawa to increase inflation.

We're now in, I think, the eighth consecutive year of quantitative easing, which effectively, to put it in plain English, Madam Speaker, is when central banks massively expand the money supply. That is sometimes called for at a time of a severe recession, like we experienced, for example, in the spring and summer of 2020. When there is a huge destruction of demand in private-sector economic activity, it is sometimes necessary for central banks to step in to stimulate growth and to stimulate demand by increasing the money supply, but to carry on a policy like that indefinitely, even in the face of inflation, makes a bad situation much worse. Printing more money means that money becomes less valuable, and that's effectively what inflation is.

But on top of that, Madam Speaker, the federal government has a deliberate policy to make the cost of living more expensive for everyone and everything we do. That is the explicit stated goal of their carbon tax. It is not a coincidence that food inflation in Alberta has been 18 per cent since 2015. What happened in 2015? Well, the Alberta NDP brought in their job-killing carbon tax in 2015, immediately following the election. It was very interesting. They never mentioned it once in the preceding election campaign, but they imposed the largest tax hike on the province as soon as they could.

By the way, Madam Speaker – guess what? – a fellow named Steven Guilbeault was at the news conference in the basement of this building, in the press gallery, standing alongside the now Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the NDP, to cheer on and endorse her Alberta NDP carbon tax. It is no coincidence that the same Steven Guilbeault, a former Greenpeace radical arrested for criminal acts to advance his environmental extremism, today

introduced a new federal environmental policy that could be devastating for Albertans, our economy, the cost of living.

Madam Speaker, the carbon taxes are designed – when I hear the NDP stand up with crocodile tears about energy inflation, the cost of electricity, the cost of gas, the cost of home heating, the cost of food, when I hear them pretend to care about this, it's like an arsonist pretending to care about a fire that he just set. You know, it is the desired outcome of their policies. Like, this is not even up for debate. Many of these issues are complex and you can debate them and come at them from different perspectives, but the obvious, stated, explicit purpose of NDP-Liberal carbon taxes is energy inflation. That is the whole point, to take the basic cost of energy and then add onto it and add onto it and add onto it with taxes. Why? Because they literally want to punish people for consuming energy. In this energy-rich province the NDP is so ideologically, zealously opposed to energy production and consumption that they actually want to punish people for consuming it.

Madam Speaker, we could not disagree more strongly. We believe that people should not be punished for consuming energy. Now, the whole concept of a carbon tax in theoretical economics is that of a so-called Pigouvian tax. A Pigouvian tax means a tax designed to disincentivize certain kinds of behaviour. The whole history of taxation is filled with remarkable examples of human behaviour being distorted by incentives and disincentives through the tax system.

One of my favourite examples, Madam Speaker, is that in 16th-century England, in the Tudor era, some tax collector had a brilliant idea of imposing a window tax because – whoever did this was an ideological fellow traveller of the NDP; you know why? – in the 16th century having a window was a sign of being wealthy. It was a luxury that most people could not afford. Glass was a very rare and expensive commodity. You know, the NDP of the 16th century, in their class warfare mentality, their resentment of people who could afford glass, said: let's tax those windows; the more windows you have in a house, then the higher the tax you have to pay.

Well, to this day if you go back to some of the villages and towns in England and see 16th-century buildings and homes from that era, guess what you see? Plastered up window frames all over England from that era. Because how did people respond to the tax on windows? They plastered up their windows so they didn't have to pay the tax. That is just, I think, one of the earliest and most colourful examples of how statist throughout history have ended up distorting human behaviour through the power of taxation, and that's exactly the idea that inspires their Pigouvian carbon tax.

Now, I cannot understand why they're so zealous about this, Madam Speaker. I accept that we do need to intelligently reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including CO₂ emissions. There is compelling evidence and a scientific consensus about the reality of anthropogenic causes of climate change. Of course, the climate has always changed. The climate always will change. There are both natural and human-made causes behind climate change. These are, I think, largely evident scientific facts, but the notion that we can somehow radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and have an effect on global climate by making it more expensive for people to heat their homes, drive to work, pick up their kids from soccer, or turn on the power at home is perverse because, at the end of the day, people only have so much money and consuming energy is not an option.

Now, I know the NDP's response to Albertans who say: "I can't afford potentially \$2 a litre gas. I can't afford continued food inflation. I can't afford these high electricity prices." The NDP response is: walk or take the bus. Remember that? The Leader of the Opposition, when she was asked about this, said: well, I don't

just mean go and buy electric vehicles, but you can also take the bus.

Well, Madam Speaker, I look at my colleague from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. I don't think there are many buses or subways out in his riding. I don't know what buses they're talking about. When I look at my colleague from Fort McMurray, most of his constituency is the size of a European country. In northwestern Alberta people don't have the option of taking a bus. They have to get in their pickup to get to work, to take their kids to school, to go to town, to get to the market, to get to the store. It's not optional. Maybe for some people living in central Fort McMurray there's some transit, but that's a minority of his constituents. They don't have those options, especially in this big province, especially in our rural communities.

The carbon tax is a prejudicial attack on rural people in particular. It is a transfer of wealth from intense energy consumers in rural communities to the minority of people who live in urban cores, who don't need to necessarily own a car, and they live in a thousand square-foot apartment as opposed to having to heat a farmhouse and a barn and run a small business on the side. I submit that the green, left obsession with making life more expensive for people is a disaster. It's an economic disaster, and it is a disaster for folks who are just trying to pay the basic costs of living.

4:00

Now, right now, Madam Speaker, the average middle-class family with – well, I should say that right now the carbon tax is \$40 a tonne, going to \$50 a tonne on April 1, and once it reaches that level, it will cost the average family – that is to say, with about a \$70,000 household income – \$600 in costs, but they're not done there. They want explicitly – again, this is not some Conservative conspiracy theory. This is not some political rhetoric. This is the stated goal of the Alberta NDP in cahoots with their ally the Trudeau Liberals. Their stated goal is to increase the carbon tax by another 400 per cent, from the current \$40 to \$170 a tonne; \$170 a tonne from the current \$40. That would take the cost, out of an average family's household budget, of \$2,000 a year. Albertans, working people, families simply cannot afford this.

Now, when they're put on the spot, the Liberals and NDP say: "Oh, don't worry about it. We're going to send you all a rebate." A rebate. Well, Madam Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, an independent officer of Parliament, just confirmed that the majority of households will be net losers on this fiscal shell game of carbon taxation and then rebates. The majority of households will pay significantly more in carbon tax than they get back in these putative rebates. But, of course, our economy is much bigger than just households. Our economy includes businesses, in Alberta hundreds of thousands of small businesses, and nonprofits and community organizations, and they all have to pay. None of them get a rebate.

Madam Speaker, just the other day I was in the constituency of the Member for Calgary-Klein, and we were at a wonderful local community hall that, you know, provides a place for seniors to be active and families to gather. While I was there, I visited the Calgary Filipino golden age club. It was the seniors in the Filipino community. They got all dressed up to the nines, and they held a big celebration. They had a dance night. I thought it was just so wonderful to see those seniors in their 70s, 80s, some of them in their 90s – I'll tell you, they were very energetic. They tried to drag me out on the dance floor. I don't want you to see the video of that. But, you know, wonderful, kind, hospitable folks, and it was just great to see them getting together after COVID and reconnecting and having a good time.

But the director of that community centre came up to me and said, "Premier, last month we had to spend \$2,000 on the carbon tax just to pay for the power and the heating in this community centre." And she said: "We're in kind of a low-income area here. We can't really raise our membership fees. We try to offer free space to these little nonprofit community groups. We don't want to charge people if we can avoid it. We don't have any big-business sponsors. How are we supposed to pay this carbon tax?" And I said, "That's a very good question." And I said, "You know that they're planning on raising it by another 400 per cent?" You know what she said to me, Madam Speaker? She said, "Well, we just won't be able to operate; we'll have to hand the keys back to the city or something; like, we won't be able to pay \$8,000 a month in the winter to operate our little community centre" there in north Calgary.

Do they care? They call themselves the party of compassion. They couldn't care less. What about those Filipino seniors? What's your answer? Nothing. What's their answer? To sign a coalition deal with Justin Trudeau to raise the taxes on that little community centre by 400 per cent while calling themselves compassionate. I'm sick of this hypocrisy, these guys standing up in this place pretending they care about inflation and the cost of living. Madam Speaker, Albertans are struggling and shocked to see their electricity bills, and rightfully so. Then they get these socialists standing up and caterwauling about this when they created the whole problem. They created the problem.

In their hard-heartedness and incompetence they spent 7 and a half billion dollars – they approved that – in additional electricity transmission infrastructure that we didn't need because we were already overbuilt. But because the NDP don't understand economics, they don't understand business, they don't understand electricity markets – all they understand is that they've got an ideological impulse to punish people for turning on the power – they put in 7 and a half billion dollars of higher transmission costs, and guess what. Here's what the NDP doesn't understand. They think there's a free lunch, but there is no such thing, as Milton Friedman famously said. "There's no such thing as a free lunch," so who pays for the 7 and a half billion dollars? We do. We all do. Four and a half billion Albertans do on our power bills. That little community centre, those Filipino seniors on their fixed modest incomes: they have to pay for it.

I know that the NDP, in their foggy, socialist, utopian minds, they imagine: well, you just make the rich corporations pay for it. What does that even mean, Madam Speaker? What does that even mean? Like, let's just walk that through. If we were to – and they didn't. They didn't. In their own power policy they passed all those costs on to consumers. Lest anybody be gullible enough to believe the beggar-thy-neighbour, class warfare, failed economics of these socialists, hear me. If you take just the industrial consumers – let's say our forestry plants, our forestry lumber mills. They are major, intense consumers of electricity. Imagine we make them pay a hugely disproportionate share of the NDP's transmission costs. Well, guess what's going to happen to those lumber mills. They won't be able to compete with lumber mills in B.C. and Quebec, that operate on hydro power. So what will they do? They'll shut down, and they'll lay their people off. That is NDP economics.

Now, not only did they put in 7 and a half billion dollars into transmission that we're all paying for, but they also made a complete hash of the power purchasing agreements, and that's a complex, basically, contract between power producers and the government. The NDP made such a hash of it that they had to pay out \$1.3 billion in compensation to the power companies because of their carbon tax, because of their zeal to shut down the single most reliable and affordable form of baseload electricity in this province, which is thermal coal. They wanted to be able to go

cocktail parties in Ottawa and hang out with their heroes, like David Suzuki and Steven Guilbeault, and say that they were green. They don't care what the cost is for those low-income seniors. So that \$1.3 billion got added onto our electricity tab as well.

What's more, they then, in their zeal, brought in these regulations and carbon taxes that shut down all those thermal coal plants and forced those generators to spend hundreds of millions, billions of dollars in converting to natural gas. By the way, I agree in the long run that that was going to happen, and in the long run natural gas is a good, reliable form of baseload power, but they were in a zealous, ideological rush to do it overnight. Billions of dollars in costs got passed on to consumers. I don't know whether it was just cold-heartedness or incompetence or both that the NDP did these things.

Then the carbon tax itself. They started it at \$10 a tonne. Is that right? Then it went to \$20 a tonne. Then it went \$30. Now it's at \$40. April 1 it goes to \$50, and they're going to get out their pompoms and cheer on their ally Justin Trudeau on April Fool's Day for his 25 per cent increase in the carbon tax. Then the NDP and the Liberals want to take it to \$60 a tonne and \$70 a tonne and \$80, all the way up to \$170. But it won't stop there. A study from Environment Canada said that for Canada to achieve the Paris climate targets in terms of emissions reductions, it could require a carbon tax as high as – fasten your seat belt, Madam Speaker – \$400 a tonne. Four hundred dollars a tonne. That would be like a 1,000 per cent increase from where we are right now.

4:10

Now, I've used this analogy before. It's worth repeating. Why do they come in and start at \$10? They just hope that nobody's really going to notice it. It's just a few pennies. It might be a couple of pennies on a litre of gas or whatever. People won't really notice it. It's called the frog in the pot, the old analogy, the old metaphor, Madam Speaker, where you put a frog in pot of hot, boiling water and the frog's fight-or-flight instinct kicks in. The frog jumps right out of that pot. The frog saves himself. But if you put the same frog in a pot of cold water and you turn it up to just lukewarm, the frog is getting kind of cozy and having a bit of a bath. You turn it up from there to warmer, and the frog is getting more relaxed, like he's in a sauna, he's in a whirlpool. And then you just turn it up to a boil, and by now it's too late. You've got to boil the frog.

It is the incremental increases in taxation. It is so fundamentally dishonest. Here's the deal. These socialists and their Liberal allies in Ottawa know full well that if they imposed a \$170 or a \$400 carbon tax cold turkey, if they imposed a \$2,000 incremental cost for a middle-income family to survive or a \$4,000 incremental cost at a \$400 carbon tax, you know, they wouldn't win a seat. Madam Speaker, they would be done for good in electoral politics not just in Alberta but right across the country. So their little, tiny incremental increases are designed – they are fundamentally misleading. They are fundamentally misleading, and that is why we are having this debate.

We are having this debate to plead with the government of Canada to stop the dishonesty, to stop seeking to punish people simply for leading normal lives. Yes, we would love it for people to invest, when they can afford it, in more energy-efficient appliances and vehicles and maybe upgrades to their home in time. You know, maybe some tax credits and incentives for things like that make sense. People over time can make adjustments, as they are, to reduce their energy consumption. The big gains on reducing emissions, Madam Speaker, are not going to be found by telling those low-income seniors that they have to spend \$2,000 a month in some punitive tax; the real gains are going to be made through the miracle of modern technology on an industrial scale.

Now, for example, the oil sands pathways group has estimated that with a capital investment of approximately \$30 billion in carbon capture, utilization, and storage technology in this province – by the way, a technology that the NDP has always been opposed to – we could reduce the absolute emissions from the oil sands by nearly 50 per cent, getting them halfway to their net zero target by 2050. Now, that's something we can get behind. In fact, it was something Alberta has been behind. It's something we've invested nearly \$2 billion in. Not just that, but the Alberta carbon trunk line and the infrastructure to support it. It's why we are trying to find common ground where we can with the federal government over an investment tax credit to support that. Now, that's the kind of practical thing that makes a big difference, not nickel and diming seniors on fixed incomes, not punishing community nonprofits for simply heating their operation. Madam Speaker, that is why this motion calls on the federal government to pause its scheduled carbon tax increase.

Obviously, this side of the House would like to scrap that tax altogether. The Bill 1 that we passed was the carbon tax repeal act. For the record the NDP voted against it because they were angry with us for making life cheaper for Albertans. Go figure. That was in May, June of 2019, okay? Then fast-forward to January 1, New Year's Day. Justin Trudeau's holiday gift for people was to impose his federal carbon tax on Alberta. Right away we kept our election commitment. We sued him in the Alberta appeal court. We joined our friends in Saskatchewan and Ontario as intervenors in their courts. We won that case as that being an unconstitutional intrusion in our ability to regulate our resources at the Alberta appeal court by a 4 to 1 decision. It went to the Supreme Court of Canada; regrettably, we lost that case by 5 to 3, so now we have this federal carbon tax.

You know, I think what's happening is that people are getting mugged by reality, and central Canadians are realizing exactly what the green left has been up to all along, which is to drive them into energy poverty. Madam Speaker, if I could add another dimension to this, a moral dimension, driving people into energy poverty hurts the poorest the most. It doesn't matter what kind of nonsense rebate schemes you come up with.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

Hear me now, Madam Speaker. The increase in natural gas prices – and this is a point that my friend the Minister of Finance frequently makes. Because we have not had enough investment in upstream oil and gas exploration and production, we have a global scarcity of supply. That means the price has gone up dramatically for natural gas, and natural gas is a necessary feedstock for fertilizer production. Now, Europe has already shut in, shut down half of their typical fertilizer production because of the unaffordability of this natural gas, and sadly much of the natural gas they are using for fertilizer feedstock comes from Vladimir Putin's Russia, fuels his war machine. You see how all of this is connected.

But here's the problem. That global reduction in fertilizer production, driven by green left energy policies, driven by them opposing pipelines, LNG facilities, carbon taxes, discouraging energy production through misapplication of ESG principles . . .

An Hon. Member: Tanker bans.

Mr. Kenney: . . . tanker bans, and all of it – all of that means less fertilizer production.

Now, I know that for the socialists, like, when a conservative starts talking about something as mundane as fertilizer, their eyes kind of fog over. They don't really get what – “who cares?” is probably their attitude, Madam Speaker. I'll tell you who cares. The billions of people in the developing world who can barely afford to

feed themselves care because as that fertilizer comes off global markets, global agriculture yields will plummet. They will plummet. The real green revolution in much of the developing world was all about increasing agricultural yields so that countries like India went from chronic starvation and malnutrition to being net exporters of grain. Why? Because of crop science, because of smarter seed technology, and, yes, because of ever more effective fertilizers.

Now, I know they don't understand farming or agriculture, and they don't care. They don't care. But here's the reality. In Africa, in Asia, in Latin America hundreds of millions of people in the next year are going to experience food scarcity not just because of the conflict in Russia but because of a lack of fertilizer, which is driven by energy inflation, which is the desired outcome of green left policies like this carbon tax. How many people need to starve for them to care? How many people in the developing world need to go into malnutrition?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The same people, by the way, in the developing world, many of them, have no access to reliable, affordable energy. Madam Speaker, I've been to many developing countries. Often when you land, the first thing you can smell is the smell of carbon, of people gathering twigs and cow dung and garbage to heat their homes and cook their dinners. Why? Because they do not have what we take for granted, which is affordable, reliable energy and the infrastructure to support it. What is the answer of the utopian green left in the rich northern countries? So sad, too bad.

The oil exports. You know, I remember visiting Narendra Modi when he was then chief minister of Gujarat in 2008 in Ahmadabad, and the first words out of his mouth were: Minister Kenney – I just violated the rules by using my own name. Excuse me. He said to me: “Minister, how can we get Canadian LNG? We're building an import terminal on the west coast over here in Gujarat. We want your LNG.” And he said to me: “Right now we have contracts with Qatar, but Qatar finances the ISI in Pakistan, which destabilizes us and funds terrorism in my country. We want democratic, reliable Canadian energy.” Are we any closer to getting it to him? No.

These folks, the green left, campaigned – you know, the Member for Lethbridge . . .

4:20

Some Hon. Members: West.

Mr. Kenney: West. Got to get that right. The Member for Lethbridge-West actually wrote a foreword to a book by another Greenpeace radical that was promoting illegal civil disobedience to stop pipelines. She actually stood up at a rally in Prince George, B.C., opposing the Northern Gateway pipeline. Maybe if we'd gotten that pipeline – and my colleague the hon. the Minister of Energy worked for eight years . . .

Mrs. Savage: Nine.

Mr. Kenney: . . . nine years of her life, that she lost, on trying to get that pipeline built while the Member for Lethbridge-West was out there trying to stop it.

Madam Speaker, here's the point. There are people in India who have to burn waste sometimes, if they're very low income, to heat their homes, and that is because we didn't get the Canadian energy to them. They don't care. They're out there – they get on their moral high horse. They go out there in front of this building with Greta Thunberg two years ago, and they're all star-struck. They're all star-struck. They're out there with Extinction Rebellion and Greenpeace and all these folks, and they're calling for no more pipelines. That's

what you've got the NDP caucus out there chanting: no more pipelines. They were pushing and shoving to get in the camera's shot with Greta Thunberg because in the weird left-wing salons that they inhabit, that's a badge of honour or something. That's what they care about, woke, politically correct points, not the people in the developing world who desperately need affordable and reliable energy.

I'm here to say that they're wrong economically, they're on the wrong side of the cost of living, and they are on the wrong side of global peace and security. They're on the wrong side morally by promoting energy poverty. You know what they say? "Oh, don't worry; those poor folks in the developing world, well, can just buy windmills and Teslas and solar panels," when they're heating their homes, in some countries, with dung. Madam Speaker, it is time for some realism and sanity in the energy and environment debate in this country. This government gets it.

I'll close where I started, by saying that the number one concern for Albertans right now is the cost of living, which is – it's all connected. When it's more expensive to buy diesel – well, right now a litre of diesel in Alberta is over two bucks, and we're the cheapest in Canada. But just imagine this. Imagine your good Alberta trucker – I know my colleague from Calgary-Falconridge has a lot of good, hard-working truckers, by the way, a lot of them from the Punjabi community, wonderful, hard-working long-haul truckers. God bless them. They kept our grocery stores filled through COVID. Right now some of his constituents who are truckers are down there in San Diego taking on loads of groceries, and they're going to then drive from California all the way up to Calgary, and they're going to unload those groceries. Then those groceries go onto the shelf at Safeway and IGA, whatever, Superstore.

Guess what. The gas that those guys have to pay for gets embedded in the cost of the groceries. Again, this is basic economics, so I don't expect the NDP to understand it. The higher the fuel price is, the more the carbon tax is, the more expensive the lettuce is. What does that mean for poor people? It means they're less able to afford produce, and they have to instead buy food that's less good for them. We want people to eat well, eat healthy, but the healthy stuff often costs more because it needs to be transported from places south of here.

This is why, Madam Speaker, we're doing everything we can. It's why at midnight on April 1, like, Thursday night at 12:01 a.m., the Alberta provincial fuel tax will be suspended: 13 cents a litre, gone. That's a big-ticket item. Now, that's predicated on there being high oil prices, \$80 and \$90 WTI. Right now we're trading at about \$105, so that will certainly be there for the next quarter and quite likely for the balance of this year. If it's there for the balance of this fiscal year, it would represent a total reduction in fuel taxes for Albertans in the range of \$1.4 billion. That's real money. To put it in comparison, when the NDP first – I think in 2018 they were bringing in \$1.3 billion on their job-killing carbon tax.

I'm so excited about this. I want to thank the Minister of Finance for coming up with it. I was bugging him pretty hard, Madam Speaker, about finding a solution to the inflationary issues and the cost of living. He is such a great conservative. There were other people saying, "Let's do rebates and everything else." He said: "You know what? We conservatives believe in lower taxes. Let's lower this tax. Let's eliminate this tax." I want to thank the Minister of Finance for his wisdom in putting that forward: \$1.4 billion. This is what I love about it. Unfortunately, we didn't win at the Supreme Court on the carbon tax reference. We're stuck with the Liberal-NDP carbon tax, but this is our backdoor way of providing people with the relief that we sought when we passed Bill 1 in May 2019.

On top of that, I want to thank the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity, who came forward with a proposal for an electricity rebate, recognizing the disaster that we've inherited in NDP electricity costs. As soon as the power companies can put it on the bill, we'll be providing people with a \$150 rebate if they consumed less than a certain amount of electricity. Basically, I think 99 per cent of households and small businesses will get the rebate, and that's worth about \$300 million. So combined, on an annualized basis we're talking \$1.7 billion of consumer relief from Alberta's government, far, far more than any provincial government in Canada is providing.

But here's the tragedy. On Thursday night of this week there will be folks working at gas stations across the province who go in to enter the new pricing, the new taxes, and they'll take 13 cents off the cost of a litre to reflect our suspension of the Alberta fuel excise tax, but then they'll add 3 cents to the price of a litre to finance the Liberal-NDP carbon tax hike in Ottawa, so people will only be 10 cents better off. I'm sorry to Albertans, but we're doing everything we can to fight their carbon tax. I don't know what more we can do. I really don't.

Here's the weird thing. People say to me: well, why don't you have a made-in-Alberta thing rather than the Trudeau one? Well, Madam Speaker, that's what we're looking for. Like, down in New Brunswick, you know what they did? They just took their provincial fuel tax, and they renamed it the carbon tax, and the feds said: "Oh, that's fine. That's good. We're good with that." We went to Ottawa, us and Saskatchewan, and we said: "Can we get the same deal? Can we just rename?"

An Hon. Member: No.

Mr. Kenney: Exactly. The answer was no, because who are we? We're just Alberta. We're just the key engine of Canada's economy. We have the largest industry in the country. We contribute \$20 billion net to the rest of the country, so do we even get fair consideration? No. We'll keep fighting for the best deal we can get, but at the end of the day we're doing everything we can.

Now it's the time to be tested for the NDP. You know, Madam Speaker, Alberta's NDP is in their constitution legally just like a local branch plant of Jagmeet Singh's federal Canadian NDP.

Mr. Getson: Just a franchise.

Mr. Kenney: They're the same party, the same membership. Yeah, they're a franchise. They just signed, through Mr. Singh, a coalition agreement with Justin Trudeau, so I know that they probably have to check in with headquarters, with Mr. Singh and Mr. Trudeau on this motion. They've got to get their marching orders from Ottawa, from Mr. Singh and Trudeau on this motion. If so, I can predict that they're going to vote against this. They're going to vote against it because they actually support these carbon taxes. They actually support.

Here's my message to Albertans in closing, Madam Speaker. If you're upset with inflation, you have every right to be. If you're upset with the price of electricity, you have every right to be. If you're upset with the price of fuel, you're right to be, and if you're looking to find a solution to all of this, let's vote the Liberal-NDP coalition in Ottawa out of office at the earliest opportunity. At the earliest opportunity.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I once again encourage members to vote for this motion, to vote for reducing the cost of living on Canadians, to oppose this federal carbon tax increase because it will make life even more challenging for people at the worst possible time.

Why in the world does the NDP want to make energy more expensive while we're living through 30-year-high inflation? I'm looking forward to them trying to answer that question.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate on Government Motion 18? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you so much, Madam Speaker. It was a pleasure to listen to the Premier's amazing speech on this. He hit all the key points, as he always does, and I'm really excited to follow and contribute to this Motion 18. I really hope that we can find unanimity, that we will have unanimity in this House, that we will collectively pass this motion, both the government and the opposition, because, as the Premier pointed out in his remarks, if you're on the side of working Albertan families, Henry and Martha in Sherwood Park, in Rimbey, in Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, in Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright, you should be supportive of this motion and opposed to this egregious, precipitous rise in the carbon tax, 25 per cent on April 1, April Fool's Day. But the fools are really in Ottawa, with this unholy coalition of Jagmeet Singh and Justin Trudeau.

Madam Speaker, in my time speaking to this motion, which I will be speaking in support of, I am horrified that we're at the point where we have to even speak to this. There's a lack of common sense in Ottawa – we know that – and the best that we can do, as the Premier said, is vote out the unholy alliance of the Liberal-NDP cabal in Ottawa. It is all from them. It is all economic pain, no environmental gain, including on this phony carbon tax, which we fought. We did our best. We lost in court, but here we are. We're still doing what we can to make life affordable for Albertans.

In my time I want to speak to the themes of affordability as well as international relations, the ESG-geopolitical component to all of this, as the Premier had touched on – again, the NDP are on the wrong side of that aspect as well – and, furthermore, on the unholy alliance and how, again, this is all economic pain, no environmental gain for Albertans and Canada. I'll also share some constituent stories, you know, through you, Madam Speaker.

I'd say that the Premier was very interesting, talking about the rising costs of products that everyday people need, including lettuce. I kid you not, Madam Speaker. I was speaking to a constituent, as all MLAs do – we're all very hard working – last week on this. The concern of my constituent – we'll call her Jane – was the rising cost of food products, based in part on this 30-year-high inflation, caused as well in part by the disastrous policies of the Liberal and NDP parties' governments, including the opposition here when they were in government with their disastrous policies, leading to huge cost rises that we're still paying for today, as the Premier and the Minister of Finance have articulately pointed out over the last few weeks.

Anyway, her main concern, Madam Speaker, was the huge rise in the cost of lettuce, actually, and the great concern she had there. She was also calling about utility bills. She understood, and it resonated with her. You know, ultimately, she understood systemically that the previous NDP government, when they brought in their disastrous carbon tax, when they overbuilt the transmission line system and cancelled the most affordable form of energy in thermal coal – overall, the genesis of all this pain goes back to the disastrous policies of the former provincial NDP government. It's thankfully former, and it will be former again in 2023, a hundred per cent, the first one-term government in Alberta's history, a total disaster. But, also, their big bosses, ultimately, in Ottawa, Justin Trudeau and Jagmeet Singh, are highly responsible for this

burdensome higher cost of living, with this egregious, very injurious rise in the carbon tax on April 1.

I mean, let's put it into context, my fellow members, including the opposition. We are living in unprecedented times, folks, absolutely unprecedented. We have lived through the first pandemic, Madam Speaker, in a century. We at one point were blessed with high commodity prices, but if you go back to I think it was February 2020, around there, oil was trading at a negative price. We're thankful for where we are today, but, you know, the energy roller coaster is something that we always have to be cognizant of, and of course Alberta had been, at that point, in recession for six long years.

Of course, our swagger is back on the economy because of a lot of the free-enterprise policies we have put forward, but take into account all those triple crises that Albertans, Henry and Martha, were facing over six years, in part also due to the disastrous fiscal and economic policies of the previous government, chasing away tens of billions of dollars in capital, Madam Speaker. And they want to talk about affordability? The members of the opposition think they can preach and promulgate on what economic policies are needed when they, as the Premier rightly pointed out, are ultimately the main creators of all this economic pain and unaffordability that Albertans are facing. That is so rich. I know the great people in Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland feel that way. The great people in Taber-Warner get that; all Albertans do. On this side of the House we defend affordability for Albertans, their quality of life. We are on the side of working men and women, their families. That is what we're here to support.

Again, on the affordability, Madam Speaker, as the Premier had mentioned, we are rolling out \$1.7 billion in immediate relief to Henry and Martha, to Albertans, understanding that they are facing unbelievable pressures with 30-year-high inflation. We are there to support them, unlike the NDP. I haven't heard a word from them. I haven't heard them complaining or, you know, going to Ottawa to talk to their big bosses and say: "You know what? Could you just hold off on that carbon tax? Like, I don't think it's going to really work. Albertans are hurting right now. Could you just temporarily take a pause?" I'm not hearing that from them, but they want to stand here and say, "I'm door-knocking here, I'm door-knocking there, and I'm hearing about affordability." Well, look in the mirror. You guys are the cause of the unaffordability that Albertans are facing. My goodness, that is rich. That is rich. [some applause] I'll take that. Thank you.

You know, there are so many ways we could look at this. I'm just going to go on to the international relations component, that the Premier was also wonderfully talking about. Here's another aspect of this motion, Motion 18, where the opposition is on the wrong side of history. Their green, left, radical politics are nothing but a pain, economic pain and social pain, for Albertans because they stopped caring probably – what? – 30 years ago, I would say. The left stopped caring about working-class people. They got into woke politics, the radical, green, left movement. It's all about globalism and being a global citizen rather than caring about your country, your province, right? Country first, province first, Alberta first – how about that? – not David Suzuki or whatever Thomas Piketty or whoever is writing. I mean, come on. This is not what they should be caring about.

Anyway, here's a great example. They have been campaigning consistently for decades now against pipelines, against responsible energy development. No one does it better, Madam Speaker, than here in Alberta. We have the highest ethical infrastructure, pipeline standards in the world, but they have been campaigning again and again against energy infrastructure. So what happens when we have a constraint and not enough Alberta oil, for example, on the market?

You have dictators like Putin and the House of Saud in Saudi Arabia. All these dictatorships now control the energy markets. From 2000, when Vladimir Putin assumed power, until now, \$4 trillion in Russian oil and gas exports have gone into his coffers to fund war against neighbouring Georgia, against Ukraine in 2014, against Ukraine again in 2021.

Now, I'm not saying that they support that. They absolutely don't. They're good people. We had a great, unanimous motion in the House a couple of weeks ago, standing against Vladimir Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine, and I thank the members opposite for that. But I wish they would understand – and I hope I can cause them to see this and that they will end up supporting this motion in part because of it – that by standing against Canadian, democratic, ethically produced oil and responsible energy projects, they are indirectly propping up and supporting dictatorship oil regimes that seek to overturn the post-1945 world order, that we have all benefited from over the last seven decades of incredible peace.

4:40

We don't want to empower Putin. We don't want to empower Maduro or the ayatollahs in Iran. This is not what we need in the global 21st century, where we need to ensure that in the ESG framework – I like how Alberta is leading the way on this discussion. Thank you to the Premier and the Minister of Energy.

Security is also an important component. You're looking at two great powers, Madam Speaker, Russia and China, that are revisionist. They don't like the post-1945 system. More immediate, Vladimir Putin doesn't like the post-1991, post-Cold War system either, and we're seeing that today, unfortunately.

Alberta's destiny is to be the energy arsenal of democracy in the 21st century. It can be the capital "S" in ESG in terms of security. We have the third-greatest reserves of energy in the world. You know, right now, for example, take the world's third-largest economy, Japan. It gets 80 per cent of its energy resources from the geopolitically combustible Middle East. Then, furthermore, those exports go through the South China Sea, which a revisionist power, China, is contesting. That is a critical choke point for them.

The Canadian west coast is closer to Japan than Qatar is, and Canada is a much more stable, democratically reliable country. We have an energy security premium. I know the Premier and the Minister of Energy have gone down to Houston and other places to tell the story of how we need more Alberta oil. Again, the energy arsenal for democracy: that is what Alberta's cornerstone destiny is in the 21st century, to supply Europe, to supply east Asia, all these democracies around the world, so that we can displace and get off nasty dictator oil. We cannot support it.

Anyway, that is Alberta's destiny, and I would ask the members of the opposition to please think about that when they're out protesting about pipelines or virtue signalling for the Scotland crowd or at COP 21 or what have you or to David Suzuki or whoever. Just think about that: you're empowering Putin, the ayatollahs in Iran, et cetera. Friendly democratic countries, as we mentioned, on the European continent, in east Asia, Japan, South Korea, other places: they want Alberta oil.

I had a conversation with a consul general – and I won't say which one – and they were telling me: we want Canadian energy more than any other place, because Canada has the highest standards. Canada is a democracy and such a great friend and also a supporter of the post-1945 world order. But they said: we fear that you guys can't get energy projects done here in Canada. And that is – and I am saying this now, Madam Speaker – because of the radical green left. They believe that by putting people into crushing energy poverty while they enjoy their wine and cheese on the virtue-

signalling circuit, somehow they're doing the world a favour, okay? Well, they're not, including on the security component. They're empowering revisionist, post-1945 powers that don't like the world order we're in, and we have to be cognizant of that. We have to be responsible.

I could go on, but I just want to talk a little bit more on the unholy, pernicious, injurious alliance between Jagmeet Singh, Justin Trudeau, the Liberals, and the NDP. I know we have a lot of speakers who want to speak, Madam Speaker. I'm cognizant of that. Just quickly, I've been talking to constituents on this, and they are telling me: "I didn't vote for this coalition. You know, we go in and we vote for one party, but then these two parties get together in cahoots. You have the leftists in with the radical leftists, and it's just not good. It is extremely prejudicial, especially for Alberta. This is not good."

But that's why on this side of the House, the government, we are proud that, as has been the tradition of Conservative governments, we are the guardians of Alberta's interests. Albertans put their confidence in us in April 2019, and I know that we'll gain their trust next year, in 2023, to be the guardians of Albertans' interests within Canadian Confederation. This behind-closed-doors secret deal between the NDP and the Liberals will be nothing but extremely painful and prejudicial against Alberta, and we stand against that. And with all being Alberta first here in this House, all 87 members, you know, that is in principle what most people would think. We should all vote in favour of this motion, Motion 18, to say: pump the brakes, Trudeau and Singh, on increasing the carbon tax.

So I'm hoping that the members opposite will be supportive of this motion and please send a message to their big bosses in Ottawa, their ultimate bosses. Like, even Gil isn't that big of a boss. We're talking the real big bosses, Jagmeet Singh – right? – and Justin Trudeau.

An Hon. Member: Even Big Daddy Gil?

Mr. Walker: Even more so than Big Daddy Gil. He'll like that on Twitter, I'm sure.

Please tell them to back off. This would be the worst April Fool's joke ever. This is painful for Henry and Martha, for my constituent Jane, as she had told me. Please support this motion. Put a call in to your big bosses, Jagmeet Singh and Justin Trudeau, and say: please back off.

With that said, Madam Speaker, I am supportive of Motion 18. Let's be on the side of Alberta working families and against the radical, green, left agenda.

Thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join in on the debate? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you. Well, after those two speeches I've got to tell you that there's not much left to be said. It was pretty impressive, I tell you, so take your expectations down just a touch.

Mr. Williams: My hero.

Mr. Rowswell: Yeah. Right. You know, I'm in that line as well. Like, I've been approaching this issue all the time from affordability. No one cares about that. No one talks about that. They talk about, you know, the virtue signalling of carbon dioxide. I might be alone in this. I don't even know if I agree with my party or if the party agrees with me, but we're talking here about carbon dioxide killing the planet in eight years. That's where we're at, and the entire premise of the carbon tax and all this stuff is related to

that. If we're wrong, what are we costing the world? We're taking the most reliable source of energy that there is available to us, the cheapest if we left it alone, and we're just wiping people out. There's the energy that the world needs to operate just to live, the food that comes from it.

I'll mention one thing. The carbon tax is making us have less ability to compete in the world. I can talk about the Canadian Fertilizer Institute specifically. I met with them, and they said: "Look, if we get to a \$170 carbon tax – we're an international company. We have to make fertilizer where it's the most affordable to make. Here we are sitting on an ocean of natural gas, and we will not be able to make fertilizer." We'll be subject to the transportation costs and whatever people are charging because we can't make it. It's just unimaginable to me that people would support something like that.

I've made statements relative to where I sit on carbon dioxide and whether it's an impact on severe weather events. You know, I've quoted science, and I've been berated by the NDP. I know that when I first started talking about it, they tried to intimidate me into silence by calling me names. That didn't work, so then they tried to send their trolls after me, sending me nasty e-mails. I fought back on that, and that didn't stop me. Now, you know, like, they're asking my colleagues to tell me to shut up. I refuse to be intimidated because this conversation has to happen. We have to have an honest conversation about whether carbon dioxide is going to kill the planet, and if it's not going to kill the planet or if it's not considered a pollutant, we have to have that conversation.

4:50

That's pretty much what I'll say today. The points that were made by the two previous speakers were tremendous. I just wanted to add my little nuance and make sure that that gets stated and that that, hopefully, becomes part of the conversation at some point in this debate.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder to all that interjections are allowed.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am encouraging my colleagues to vote for this motion, especially those on the other side of the House, my colleagues in the ranks of the New Democrats, because I believe that ultimately this is the ultimate blue-collar, union job, working, you know, average Albertan motion. Really, all it says is that the cost of living is going to be the next question in the general election in Alberta, in Canada, in the United States, in every single western country. It will be a question of: is life more expensive or less expensive under the government we're going to elect? It will be the ultimate question.

This policy is basically admitting – if you don't vote for this motion, if you're supportive of the deal that the NDP and the federal Liberals have struck together in Ottawa, then you're basically saying that you do not care about inflation either. The end result is the same. Whether it's because you've imposed it in this fabricated way through a carbon tax, that's meant to go over \$150 a tonne, or if you just let it happen through endless money printing that never ends from Ottawa, they do the same thing. They hurt your constituents as well as my own. I'm asking you: be the NDP we used to know. Be the NDP that doesn't just pander to woke leftists and a few small people on Twitter but instead really looks after the interests, the true interests, of average Albertans. I promise you – and this isn't a threat; this is a reality – that they will vote for us if you don't do that.

Whatever gains you think you get by squabbling over petty, inside politics inside the United Conservative leadership race, you will not see that on election day because average Albertans will say: these guys, the NDP, were trying to cause some sort of drama instead of trying to look after my interests. In Refinery Row out towards Sherwood Park – average, blue-collar, working folks in union jobs in my own constituency, whether they be teachers or nurses or private-sector unions working for trades, will not support the ideology of woke leftism over the bottom dollar of what gets their family ahead.

This is my plea to the members opposite. This is a nonpartisan issue if you fundamentally care about the cost of living for your constituents. This is fundamentally an Alberta – this is an average citizen issue that each and every one of you ought to be paying attention to. If you let this go underneath and you say, "Oh, I can pander a bit more woke, leftist politics to Twitter and just let this one slide," it'll slide way too far and way too fast for yourselves.

But maybe I shouldn't be warning you, because I'm happy to take those votes in my constituency. I'm happy to have my colleague in Sherwood Park get those votes. I'm happy to see my colleagues across the province and my future colleagues yet to be elected in 2023 say: "Thank you, NDP. Thank you for voting against this. Thank you for following that crazy path down the crazy, left, woke, Liberal ideology instead of looking after the interests of average, blue-collar Albertans."

It's going to mean the next election. You cannot with a straight face say that you support carbon pricing in this way and also oppose inflation, also oppose skyrocketing electricity transmission and distribution costs, oppose all these things that end up driving day-to-day costs in the average life of, you know, Henry and Martha or name your constituent, wherever they are. It's inconsistent with reality, but I repeat myself: that's the NDP policy and world view, it seems, inconsistency with reality.

The last thing I want to speak on, Madam Deputy Speaker, is this so-called unholy alliance between the NDP and the Trudeau Liberals. Now, what I oppose about this so, so very much is that we've had how many elections over the last four years federally. I mean, Canadians had a choice to vote for the NDP if they wanted to. The federal Liberals had, I think, three opportunities now to say: we're going to enter into some sort of supply relationship or an informal coalition with the NDP. They didn't do it. Why didn't they do it? Because the voters would have rejected that. They would have rejected it soundly, and they make their coalitions after the election and pull the wool over the eyes of average, swing-vote Canadians across this country.

Conservatives rightfully say, "We will build a coalition in advance; we will rebuff those who are out on one side of the spectrum too far, and we will rebuff those who have unsavoury views that are absolutely inconsistent with human dignity," and say, "This is who we are; these are our views; this is our platform," or as they say across the pond, their manifesto. It was how many pages, Premier? Was it 200-odd pages? Two hundred-odd pages of precise policy that we are executing on. Our members were known beforehand. You vote for Premier Jason Kenney. You vote for MLA – pardon me. I withdraw, Madam Deputy Speaker, unreservedly. You vote for the Premier. You vote for the MLA for Peace River or the future MLA for Peace River. You know that he or she will be a part of the team, and that's who is there.

People who voted in the bellwether constituency of Peterborough federally did not know they were entering into a relationship with the federal NDP if they voted for the Liberals. They didn't know that. They should have, Madam Deputy Speaker, and this is fundamentally the problem with these ad hoc, afterward coalitions. Albertans, Canadians, and the electorate do not know what they're

getting until afterwards. That is not how a democracy should work, and that is what allows them to drive up electricity prices and everything that has to do with carbon – everything that has to do with carbon – because now they're even more emboldened.

The voters who thought, "I want a middle-of-the-road plan" aren't getting that. They're getting an even more radicalized, if it's possible, version of the Trudeau Liberals, and they're getting that because of a shady political deal that is in its heart an offence to the very notion of the election that was held. It's an offence because it says: "You're voting for X, but let me pull the wool over your eyes. You're getting ABC instead."

That, I think, is the problem, and that is why I think voters will reject the provincial NDP's plan to play woke politics on Twitter. It is why the federal Conservatives, I believe, are going to win the next election, whoever their leader is. It is because Canadians know that they want certainty, they want the cost of living driven down, and they want to know what they're getting and what they're bargaining for when they go to that voting booth. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is our job to deliver it.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour in this House to speak on behalf of my constituents of Calgary-Falconridge. As the Premier mentioned, I represent the constituency where we have a lot of new Canadians who are involved in the service industry. They drive cabs. They drive trucks. They work in the service industry. They also own small businesses. For the last few days and few weeks I am listening to my constituents over the phones and also at the doors, and they are concerned about the rise in the prices. They are worried about inflation.

I still remember those days when I moved here more than 25 years ago. If you go and rent a basement, they used to rent a basement for \$400, utilities included. When I became a small-business owner, we used to sign a lease, and it was a lease net rent plus common area cost. You know what, Madam Speaker? In these days, even if your lease net rent is zero, still you can't afford operating costs because it's more than that lease. This is the reason that a lot of small-business owners are suffering.

Before I get into this rise in prices of utilities, I want to speak about the new coalition we have. The way I see it, what Justin Trudeau did: he has replaced democracy in Canada with a dictatorship style of governance. His latest stunt of collaborating with the NDP is a stab in the heart of this democracy. Shame on Trudeau and Singh. He states that that's what Canadians want. No, Madam Speaker. That's what he wants. This is not what Canadians voted for.

When it comes to the provincial NDP, it's just like politicians coming from different parts of Canada. They tell us when they come to Alberta that they believe in our oil sands or our main industry, but when they go back, they speak differently. At the end of the day, their concern is: the more you hurt Alberta, the more votes you will get in other parts of Canada.

5:00

It is unfortunate that the previous NDP government spent reckless amounts of money on energy infrastructure. The money? They never had it, running deficits and spending so much money on this infrastructure. When we look at the bills, the transmission costs, in the year 2008 – I still remember that bill – we were paying \$10 just for transmission cost. The same bill: you are paying \$50 now. Just five times, or you can call it 500 times.

When people ask us why this cost is going up, it's because of a few factors. The money: they never had it. They ran so many

deficits. They kept on spending money, and now we are paying for it. After they left office in 2019, they added approximately, I think, \$70 billion in debt to our province, and now we're paying for it, Madam Speaker. They worked hard to make energy consumption unaffordable for Albertans. They worked together with Justin Trudeau to create the carbon tax. It was their hidden agenda. Trudeau brought the carbon tax; they brought their own carbon tax. Started at \$20. The Premier rightly mentioned that we might end up paying \$400 per tonne. Where will it take us? Just looking at the bill, I think almost one-third is a carbon tax. If we are paying it, we don't have the control. We can talk about the energy cost, but these are the hidden taxes.

Right from day one, since we formed the government, we were up front that we don't want this carbon tax. We brought Bill 1. This Trudeau: he fought with the government of Alberta, with the government of Saskatchewan, too, to impose this carbon tax on us. As a provincial government we are fighting and will keep on fighting. One day, if not in 2023, maybe in 2025, at the federal level we will promise not only Albertans but Canadians that we will wipe out this carbon tax. This is not fair. This is not fair for Albertans. We can't tell them: do not heat your homes; do not drive your kids to the hockey arenas and schools.

As the Premier mentioned on Friday morning, we will be paying 11 cents per litre as a carbon tax. The Alberta fuel tax: the Premier made the right choice to waive this, but it won't balance it. In the year 2030, when they're saying that we will be paying \$170 per tonne as a carbon tax, it'll be 40 cents per litre. Forty cents. It doesn't matter what the energy prices are; everyone will be paying 40 cents. If it gets to \$400, this is basically more than \$1.25 per litre. Who can afford it? The NDP told us they believe in the environment. So do we, but the problem is that they want to punish you. They want to make it so expensive that at one stage you'll say: no, I can't afford to heat my house; I can't drive. This is not what we dreamed about for our future generations.

With the provincial opposition, our Prime Minister has placed his ideological drive ahead of the needs of Canadians and has kept on saying that he will keep on increasing the federal carbon tax \$10 every period of time. When my constituents are already struggling to afford other costs such as groceries, this Liberal government is refusing to put aside their politics and work together in making life affordable once again.

Our UCP government committed to removing the carbon tax that was created by the NDP. As I previously said, we passed Bill 1. This was a promise made to Albertans when we were elected, and I was happy to see that we delivered on that promise. Not only removing this; we have offered our support in the last few weeks. Nearly 2 million homes throughout the province will be getting a \$150 rebate to help off-set the high and unusual cost of utilities. Madam Speaker, effective April 1 our government has committed to removing the 13-cents-per-litre tax that Albertans have paid at the fuel pumps. This is the response that Albertans need from their government, leaders at the time of financial distress. Instead, they have received no support, absolutely no support, from Justin Trudeau and his Liberals. It is unfortunate to see the federal government so out of touch with reality that they are committed to moving forward with an increase in the carbon tax at the time of this economic crisis.

Madam Speaker, by removing the carbon tax in Alberta, our government has made Alberta an attractive place for the oil and gas industry to establish business. Billions of dollars have been brought back into Alberta after the NDP drove them out during the time they were in office. The NDP proved that this same kind of left-wing ideology being used by Justin Trudeau is bad for business. It makes

life more expensive and does not bring any investment or create more jobs.

I'm honoured to represent my constituency, the constituency of Calgary-Falconridge, and I'm grateful that our government has made and also delivered on a promise made during the election. This is the type of leadership that Canadians need, that Albertans need, and they will not find it within Justin Trudeau and his new ally Jagmeet Singh.

Madam Speaker, the members opposite will likely try to turn their back on the UCP and try to convince Albertans that it was our government's removal of the rate cap that caused skyrocketing utility costs. It's simply not true. Albertans will not forget the policies implemented by the NDP that led so many individuals and families to unemployment. Our government is committed to cleaning up the mess made by that government. It is sad to see that they still have not come to terms with the damage they caused as they continue to support Justin Trudeau and his carbon tax. Today is the opportunity for them to send a strong message to both Justin Trudeau and Albertans. This is the opportunity for the NDP to admit that they made a serious mistake by once working with Justin Trudeau to create this tax. Instead of standing with Ottawa, I hope that this time they will stand with Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak in favour of Motion 18. It's interesting to think about this motion. I thought about, you know: what does it take for a government to raise taxes, and how do you go about doing it? Actually, I listened to an interesting talk on this. The speaker said: you need to have lots of Hollywood star power to be able to try to sell it and make it seem like it's valuable and important, you need to be light on details, and you need to employ a strategy called wag the dog. It's a wag-the-dog strategy. When they're taking this out of your pocket, you don't want to be thinking about that, so they'll be doing all sorts of stuff on this side here so that you don't realize what's going on.

5:10

This is why this motion is so important and so critical right now, because we have the opportunity to be able to shine a light on what's been going on and what is continually going on throughout this world, which is an increase in cost to everyday Albertans, everyday people of the world. It's sad that earlier the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was complaining, when she was talking about Bill 2, how there were no members of the government side standing up and speaking about affordability. Yet we have had, I think, five speakers now talking about the importance of affordability and what happened and why that affordability was lost.

Madam Speaker, as you know, I've been in this House in opposition. I watched as the NDP went forward with their strategy of increasing the costs to Albertans, especially when it comes to utilities. Just so that the members opposite don't forget and that Albertans can remember what really, truly did happen, when the NDP were in office, they decided that they were going to implement the carbon tax. They actually did that prior to the federal government. They can blame all they want on Justin Trudeau: he's the one who brought it in. That's actually not true. What happened was that they brought it in, and the federal government was emboldened by that, and they thought: what a great idea; let's do that. Then they actually implemented their carbon tax on a federal level.

Now, what's interesting is that once they made a policy decision, all of a sudden the consequences of that policy decision started to unravel. One of the consequences of that policy decision was that with utility providers there's a clause called power purchase agreements that actually said that if you change the contract and change the ability of us to be able to make money or not off of these contracts in any way, we can cash in these power purchase agreements and we will sue for damages. This is what happened, and the cost to Albertans, Madam Speaker, was \$1.4 billion. That is the cost that was borne in terms of the liability costs. The damages cost was the \$1.4 billion.

But what has not been talked about is the fact that when you quickly move from coal to natural gas – there was already a plan for it – what happens is that you move the incremental costs up 100 per cent. You go from 1.5 cents per kilowatt hour to 3 cents per kilowatt hour for natural gas. Now, I remember when they first were talking about doing this. I brought this up in the house, and of course they did the wag-the-dog strategy, where you just talk about other things rather than the actual issue at hand, which was affordability. When you have a 100 per cent increase in input costs, that has got to be something you need to take into serious consideration.

Madam Speaker, the members blindly went forward and added that cost onto Albertans. Yet we have heard for weeks now the members going after the associate minister of utilities, saying that it's the government's fault or it's his fault that these costs have increased. In reality, this was the NDP's approach to utilities, and it was all because they wanted to bring in a carbon tax, the largest tax hike in Alberta history. This is the reason why the snowball effect happened, where they started to bring in these different policies, and as those policies came in, we saw the cost of everything go up.

Now, the other thing to remember, Madam Speaker, is that there's nothing that you can get in this province that isn't trucked, so as soon as you add on a carbon tax, that is going to be a cost to Albertans in everything they do. The NDP knew that the past Conservative governments had already implemented a bill that said that they cannot bring in a PST unless that PST is brought before Albertans in an election, and they refused to do that. What they did is that they brought in something that's almost as egregious as a PST, which is a carbon tax, because it taxes everything, just like a PST taxes everything. The carbon tax was their strategy to be able to bring a PST in, and the cost of everything went up. So when the hon. members to my left talk about affordability, it's hypocrisy, Madam Speaker. It's hypocrisy.

I want to talk about a very close issue in my riding. Everybody in here knows about Rogers Sugar, I'm sure. I grew up on Rogers Sugar pancake syrup on pancakes in the morning. Every morning my dad would make pancakes, and we would have Rogers Sugar syrup on it. It was a household brand. Rogers sugar is produced – actually, the name of it is Lantic Sugar – in my hometown of Taber.

Now, what's interesting about this is that Rogers sugar is made out of beet sugar, and beet sugar competes against cane sugar. Now, what's interesting about that, Madam Speaker, is that out of all the cane sugar that's produced in the world – there's a total of 1.1 billion tonnes of cane sugar that's produced – 906 million tonnes comes from countries that do not have a carbon tax. So Lantic Sugar, or Rogers Sugar, is at a competitive disadvantage to cane sugar already. It also comes from countries that don't have the same environmental standards. They don't have the same ethical standards, they don't have the same labour standards, and they don't have the same cost of living as we do. So how is it that Lantic Sugar, Rogers Sugar, can compete against countries like Brazil, India, China, Mexico? Well, actually, Mexico does have a carbon

tax. It's interesting because Mexico has started to lose their cane sugar, and it's just gone to other countries. That's a natural progression.

What's interesting about this is that Lantic Sugar recognizes very quickly that just across the border – my riding is right on the U.S. border – you have a country, the United States, that does not have a carbon tax as well. That carbon tax advantage of the United States – the lack of carbon tax advantage the United States has – is now starting to take away from our ability to keep Rogers Sugar, a household name in our province that I grew up on, from being able to stay not just in Alberta but in my riding, which is a major employer of men and women in Taber-Warner, a major employer that provides good-paying jobs, that provides jobs for people who actually came up from Mexico. The Low German Mennonite population works – a disproportionate number of people from the Low German Mennonite population work in Lantic Sugar. They love it. They love being there. They're paid well there compared to what they would be paid in Mexico.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Through our ability to provide Rogers sugar to Albertans, we not only provide a great product that everybody loves, but we also are able to provide people from other countries, like the Low German Mennonite population from Mexico, with good-paying jobs. We've allowed them to be able to come to our country, to our province and to be able to have a lifestyle that they would never have been able to have in Mexico: buy homes and have a vehicle to be able to take their kids to soccer practice, to be able to go to a soccer game, to be able to go to swimming, have their kids in ballet or in swimming lessons. This is the lifestyle that is actually provided for the Low German population that is disproportionately employed by Rogers Sugar.

5:20

Now, 100 per cent of the sugar beets produced in the United States, which is our direct competition, in direct competition with us, have no carbon tax whatsoever. On a regular basis I have to meet with Rogers Sugar executives and management and help them understand why we have the Alberta advantage and to just stick with us a little longer because – you know what? – we're going to be competitive in other ways even though we have a federal government that's bent on doing everything they can to make us less competitive with other jurisdictions.

I hope that the hon. members to my left will recognize the trickle-down effect of bad policy, the trickle-down effect of the policies that they had made in the past that took away our ability to be competitive on a national scale. When we have a situation where you're not price makers, where you're price takers with international products like sugar, there's no way that you can compete if you've got that kind of an input cost going up to \$170 a tonne. Mr. Speaker, they are complaining about being competitive at \$40 a tonne. At what point do we drive out the Rogers Sugars from this province, from this country to other jurisdictions that don't have a carbon tax? What number does it have to be? I guarantee you that it's not going to be \$170. It's going to be well below that. Within years we're going to see a complete change in employment opportunities, good-paying opportunities for our children, for our grandchildren.

There just doesn't seem to be a recognition from these members in the NDP-Liberal coalition that this damaging carbon tax, this increase in those carbon taxes, that April Fool's joke that isn't a joke, is going to cause massive problems and concerns for the very people that they say that they are actually representing, because Edmonton, which is where most of the members to my left are from

– they are also employed. They are also needing jobs. They also need to be able to have those opportunities for gainful employment. For them not to think about that – they think that they can get green energy jobs and that that will be the silver bullet for all of this – is astounding when you think about it, Mr. Speaker.

I will say that I would hope that we would see a change in the hon. members to my left, that we would see a change in the way that they understand and see how economics works and how good policy will create jobs, which is what we're seeing right now. We've created many jobs, thousands of jobs, because we have established back that Alberta advantage again. The NDP don't believe in the Alberta advantage. They actually want to break it down and destroy it, and I believe that Albertans rejected that. We're seeing that right now in the polls as the poll numbers are starting to drop for the NDP as they're starting to see that those damaging policies have a real effect on Alberta families, on each of our families, and also on the NDP's families, yet they are going quickly to do what they're doing.

Mr. Speaker, I am fully in favour of this, and I hope that all members will follow as well.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Government Motion 18, are there others? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has risen.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the conversation we're having back and forth here. This motion, just for the folks at home that are following along, is Government Motion 18 by the hon. Mr. Nixon.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government of Canada to stop its planned April 1 . . .

The Speaker: I just might remind the hon. member that no matter what the context is, the use of proper names is inappropriate.

Mr. Getson: I apologize, sir. I got caught out by reading it off the Order Paper, Mr. Speaker.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government of Canada to stop its planned April 1 . . .

April Fool's, by the way.

. . . increase of the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne . . .

It's actually going up from \$40.

. . . and its further plan to increase the carbon tax to \$170 per tonne given that Canadian families are struggling with the highest inflation in 30 years.

Mr. Speaker and to the folks here, this is like déjà vu all over again. You know, we went and campaigned on killing the carbon tax. The opposition put in this gouge that had set the world on fire, quite frankly, when it comes to Albertans. They had never had a PST before, and all of a sudden they're getting this tax grab that was hitting them. Some of my constituents – there was one gentleman that I'd spoken to. He and his father ran trucks, and he was just looking for a fair deal. He was looking for a fair shake in his own province. He said: I wish they would stop stepping on my throat while they're picking my pocket. That's where we're at. We've already had it once. We challenged it in court. We won, by the way. We won. I think the magistrate had said that it was the Trojan Horse, a Trojan Horse of legislation. We lost in the Supreme Court.

I'm still a little frustrated, honestly, Mr. Speaker, and getting a little emotional here because, again, I hear it from my constituents. We're driving costs. The inflation is up. We keep just hammering them, stepping on them a little bit harder, robbing what little bit they've saved up, especially coming out of COVID. Just as we're starting to take off, we want to throw a drowning man an anchor. Thank you very much, Jagmeet and Justin. That's what's happening. People

can't take it anymore. It doesn't make sense. It just does not make sense. Why would we continue to do this? You know what I'm thinking, jokingly? Maybe they don't get it.

But here's the other scary thought: maybe they do. Maybe they really want to drive a wedge between the west and the east. Maybe they really want to bankrupt how many more families out there. Maybe they want to have us rolling tumbleweeds down here. You know what happens then, Mr. Speaker? You break people. When they have dependency on the government, well, that is the neo-Marxist marching orders right to the end: help you; put you in the shackles; keep you dependent; keep you fed; break your will.

We want to talk about people leaving? There's a ton of people leaving. There are more coming into our province because we're still the bastion of hope, but the people that have left – I hear the other side talking about: what could possibly be driving all those engineers, cost control, and professional people out of the Calgary office towers? Well, you hammered the energy sector so hard that they picked up and left. I had a gentleman by the name of Bryce Barkus reach out to me before I got elected. He says: "It looks like a long-haired Liberal hippy just became your Prime Minister. When are you packing up and moving south?" The writing was on the wall. This is from a gentleman at NKE Associates. I worked with him when we were doing Eddystone, Pennsylvania, putting in a trans-shipment facility. He was the guy that took care of the engineering for me on the trans-shipment on the rail tracks. They could see the writing on the wall. Now we've lived through this.

It just keeps getting worse. Now, the same boy band that brought you the emergency measures act, that got put in place: they tried that on. The bromance went so well: "Well, hey, let's start a coalition. Here's a great plan. Tell you what? Why don't we do a little handshake, and you just keep me propped up in power, so then we can do all this really crazy stuff?" You know, there was a line out of *Tropic Thunder*. I'm going to kind of twist it a little bit, but quite frankly the words of advice were: never go full socialist. This is where we're at. I've got one leader of one party dressing up like Thelma and the other one's like Louise, and they're running the T-bird off the edge of the cliff. The rest of us, unfortunately, are supposed to go along with this in the back? Enough.

The opposition will stand up here and they'll talk about how bad the energy sector is. They'll talk: "Oh, my gosh, the power prices are going up. I can't imagine why. What's happening on my doors, all these people." I wonder if they're honest with the people on the doors. When they look them in the face, instead of saying, "Oh, it's because of the new budget," look them in the face and say: "You know what we did? We messed up. What we did was because of our ideology. We rapidly accelerated this phase-out of coal, which was the cleanest coal tech that we've got in the world because of the Devon institute, that put it in place." They rapidly accelerated that. Then they allowed them to go hog-wild building out the infrastructure for the transmission lines. Because, you know, they're so full, well equipped, they didn't understand this little thing called contracts. When they broke the contracts, they had to pay for them.

5:30

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm a little passionate about the coal because, again, that's my area. I understand the tech because I came from that energy sector. For a point of interest, I was the project manager for Enbridge while we were looking at a JV partnership with, turns out – at the time it was called the pioneer project. We were going to do carbon capture and storage, take it off the top of those nice little stacks there, push that down towards Drayton Valley-Devon, re-energize the fields down in that area so that we could have more flow and throughput.

Now, we had a little bit of a technological problem back in 2012, and it was with the technology that was coming out in the carbon capture from Korea. We couldn't make the financial model work. So now when I get elected and I hear we're phasing out coal, I end up running into the same project manager from the other side. I took him for a ride in the truck and said: "Jamie, can we throw this thing back? Can we turn it back?" He goes: "It's too far gone. It's too far gone." I'm going, "It doesn't make sense." [interjections] Yes, sir. Intervention? Sure.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I was interested to hear the hon. member talking about the innovation. The question I have for the member is: does he know of any situation where governments or organizations have been able to tax their way into a solution versus innovate their way into a solution?

Mr. Getson: Thanks for the question, hon. member. Again, the question was: have you ever been able to tax your way to a solution? No. I've never seen that work. You can put in different programs, like the TIER program that we put in place. That was good. Industry worked with us and said: "Okay. Take over from here. We'll pay a little bit extra. Put it into a fund where innovation is held in trust, and we'll grow it." Absolutely, that works. But just to tax your way on the inputs?

When I was talking to this project manager, again going back to Jamie and having that conversation, I'm going, "Well, it takes three parts to four parts the amount of gas to produce the same amount of energy as you do coal." And he goes, "Yeah." But they've taxed the coal – I think it was at 45, 50 bucks at the time – so high that it wasn't making sense. Well, now roll the shot clock forward. I'm in an open house at TransAlta just a couple of weeks ago, and they're looking at me at going: the people are ringing our phones off the wall complaining about the cost of power, and it's all that we can do to tell them it's because we're burning three times the amount of gas, and now we're going to be paying 50 bucks a tonne.

You've made it artificially even higher than the coal cost was when you phased it out. So when you're at your doors, give them my number and tell them to ask me what happened to the power prices so that when they're sitting in Edmonton, they'll understand what the heck is happening on the grid. And the folks in rural pay way more for their transmission costs. This is just a cascading effect, again, of the carbon tax.

Is the intent of the opposition – Mr. Speaker, through you to them: are they Thelma and Louise? Are they the cast of *Tropic Thunder*? Or are they something else, something way more nefarious trying to drive us and separate us and drive a wedge into this country until we all walk within a soup line with our little dishes?

The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood is laughing it up. Thinks this is funny. Why don't I go door-knocking with that member and talk to the people about what's happening in their representation? I have folks from eastern Europe calling me and saying: "Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland" – I didn't use my name – "this is scaring the heck out of us. We lived when Romania came down, when the walls came down. We were in Hungary. We were in Ukraine. We were in Russia. We moved here because the land of opportunity, Canada, was a safe place. We're scared. This is how it starts. Where do we go, and what can you do?"

Again, we can have a motion in here. We can plead. The other side isn't playing by the rules, Mr. Speaker. We need to start exercising more of our constitutional rights. If you want to wake up the bromance, let's drag and let's start talking something realistic; let's bring that CPP back. Let's talk regionally. We want to promote pipelines and energy? You see the mess that's taking place over

there? Motion 501: I had that two years ago. Not a single member from the opposite agreed with me on that. They wouldn't vote in favour of it, and it was simply talking about economic corridors and pathways to strengthen our country, to step up to do what we needed to do.

Roll the clock forward to where we are today. Holy cow; the world is dependent on communist and socialist oil. Now, is that by accident? Is that why the members opposite and a lot of the groups that they promote, that they show up at protests with – Extinction Rebellion. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood really loves that group, thinks they're so good that they should bring them to the classrooms and teach our kids. Well, actually, it's not teaching; it's called indoctrination. To indoctrinate our kids about that type of thing, waving communist flags more often than not: is that part of the plan?

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt; however, I provided some reflection on the use of government motions in comparison to the second reading of a piece of legislation. Second reading: significant amount of swath. Government motions: perhaps slightly less swath with respect to relevance. I think it would be prudent for the member to return to the origins, if you will, of the motion. I'm sure there's lots there that he could talk about.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you for the correction, Mr. Speaker. Again, I apologize to the group. Obviously, we're pretty passionate about this. Again, it's simply because I'm a patriot, love my country, love the flags that are represented behind us in our institutions. I feel compelled to express that, to maybe shake up the opposition to maybe vote with us on this for a change, to vote in favour of Canada, to vote in favour of the people out there right now.

When you're at your doors and people are struggling, Mr. Speaker – and I know you know it on your side. I've got people that are wondering if they should chase their businesses across the border. The Member for Taber-Warner was talking about Rogers Sugar. We have a lot of businesses that are doing that right now. We know that they're coming back, that the energy sector is coming back, but can we get our stuff to market? When I started talking about energy corridors, one of the VPs from Enbridge that's on the liquid side had said that the energy corridors, the economic corridors change everything, because they're not talking about expanding and building anymore in Canada. The risk is too high, and the risks of costs of goods and services just get compounded. If we're going to reach that socialist euphoria where we get to 170 bucks a tonne, well, you better get comfortable with nukes really quick, unless we're just trying to drive this thing right to the bottom.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take my leave, pass it on to the next member, hopefully, that'll stand up. What we have to do – hopefully, everyone in here will vote with us in favour of this motion. I thank the minister for bringing it forward. I really appreciate everyone's passionate speeches that were made to hear. There was the sound of deafening silence coming from the opposition. I really hope that they can break up the bromance, stand on this side of the House with us, and do the right things for Alberta.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has risen.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Culture I would like to move second reading of the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022.

Of course, this is an act to bring ammolite into Alberta as its official gemstone to join the other 11 emblems, including what I just learned about. Bighorn sheep is the mammal of Alberta, and the other one – rough fescue is the grass of Alberta, in case you were just wondering. There are others. The great horned owl as well. Of course, it's a unique item to Alberta, to southern Alberta. It has a history here unique to us, and to be able to bring it in as the gemstone, I think, recognizes that history as well and is something that Albertans can be proud of.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll just conclude my remarks. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont has moved second reading of Bill 6, Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022. Are there others wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 6, emblems of Alberta. It's a brief bill. I will say that about it. I mean, I could literally stand here and count the words on it. That doesn't mean it's not important, but, you know, any time I see a bill that is this light, I always think that there are so many other things that could have gone into this. Again, much like the discussion that we had about the budget earlier, there are a lot of things that could have been placed in here. One of the things: there are so many emblems in Alberta that are important. We could sort of underline their importance and talk about why we need them, but we didn't. Anyway, we'll focus on what's in this bill.

5:40

This bill designates ammolite as the official gemstone of Alberta. Now, ammolite is not to be confused with ammonite, which refers to fossil shells of ammonites. Ammolite refers to the gem-quality material made from fossils of particular species of ammonites. Ammonites, for those of you that didn't know at home and are curious, were marine mollusks that became extinct over 65 million years ago.

Now, ammolite, which is an opal-like organic gemstone, is found primarily along the eastern slopes in the Rockies. Why I bring this up about the Rockies is because we've had some really intense debates about protecting the eastern slopes. It's unfortunate that just earlier this week a private member's bill actually to protect the eastern slopes was not supported by the members opposite. I think we all saw a lot of actually nonpartisan public pressure in opposition to coal strip-mining on Alberta's eastern slopes when the UCP did some really sneaky things and changed some policies and changed some rules when they thought people weren't looking. I think the intense pressure caused them to backtrack a little, then do what they normally do, assign a panel and then go through all of those steps, which, you know: better than nothing. What they could have done is actually support this piece of legislation.

I'm going to reiterate what the leader of the NDP said earlier this week. She explained the four things that the Eastern Slopes Protection Act does. It would have immediately cancelled all exploration activities across the eastern slopes, which means a stop to road building and test pits. I think we all learned a great deal, when we did see all of the public pressure and push-back, about coal mining and pit mining.

The second thing it does is permanently prohibit new coal mining and related activities in category 1 and category 2 lands and cancels all existing coal leases on these lands.

The third thing that private member's Bill 201 would have done is prohibit coal mining and related activities in category 3 and category 4 lands pending the development of a thorough regional plan following extensive consultation with residents of the eastern slopes: Indigenous governments, elders, and communities as well as municipalities, ranchers, farmers, agricultural groups, tourism and recreational businesses in addition to representatives of other affected industries and economic sectors, the very people that this government neglected to consult before they forged ahead with their plan.

The fourth thing that this bill would have done is prohibit Alberta Energy Regulator from issuing approvals, including for water permits, in categories 3 and 4 and cancelled leases issued in conjunction with the UCP's cancellation of the 1976 coal development policy in May of 2020. So that is actually unfortunate.

The reason I bring this up, as I said a little bit earlier, is that, actually, the eastern slopes is the place that we find this gem, so you would think that this government would be invested in protecting this area.

Because this is a piece of legislation without a lot of substance – and that doesn't mean that it isn't important. There are pieces of legislation that are not very long that are incredibly important. I'm not saying that. But when you get a piece of legislation like this, it's a little bit difficult to find things to talk about, so I'm going to talk about something that I often talk about that's pretty important and that's somewhat related to this, and that is the science of paleontology, weirdly enough. So these are fossils . . .

Ms Hoffman: Tell us about your son.

Ms Renaud: I will.

Paleontology, for those of you that don't know, is the science of studying fossils of animals and plants. Now, I think most people, when they think paleontology, they think dinosaurs – they only think dinosaurs – but it is not limited just to dinosaurs; it's actually limited to plants. There are two major streams: there is vertebrate paleontology and invertebrate. Vertebrate is, obviously, extinct animals. We know that there's a spine. Invertebrate: there's no spine. No spinal cords. So it's pretty easy to tell.

You know what? Alberta is actually world-class for paleontologists, for researchers in this field. It is absolutely world-class, and the reason I know this – I know I've said this many, many times in this House – is that my son is actually a paleontologist. Right now he's in the U.K., in London. He's working as a researcher. But as he went through university here – he did a degree here, and he did his master's, and then he went to Toronto to do his PhD – I learned a lot from him and his friends, who were really into fossils and dinosaurs. I learned a lot about how important this field of research is. It isn't just about supercool dinosaurs, that you see at the Tyrrell museum, which is a world-class museum and amazing – if you haven't been there, you should go – or the Currie museum, which is in the Grande Prairie area, which is another fantastic and amazing museum. If you haven't gone, you should go. We have world-class scientists right here in Alberta that are doing really amazing research in this field, weirdly enough.

Sadly, though, one of the things that has happened over the last couple of years – and I know that the Minister of Advanced Education will frequently flick this off and just say: ah, that's not true. I do know that it is true. There is a brain drain going on, and people are leaving Alberta. People are leaving Alberta in this sector. They're leaving Alberta specifically because there is no place for them here or there are no funds for research here. They just don't see a future for themselves as a young family or a young person looking at their career, and that's unfortunate. I think if you

understood the passion of the scientists that are born and raised here, that study here, that learn here, that go on – they do their summer, their fieldwork here, they assist other researchers here, they invest so much time and energy here. They're such amazing people to represent this province, and those are some of the people leaving.

It's not just my son, it's not just a personal thing, but a lot of his friends are now scattered, actually, all over the world, from Australia to Germany to Japan. I'm trying to think. There's some in France. Like, they're just all over the place. These postsecondary institutions and, in some cases, museums are actually snapping up people from Alberta because we're so well known around the world for the kind of work and the researchers that we produce here. That's really a sad thing. Alberta is about – yeah. There's a reason that we have a little dinosaur on our drivers' licences. Alberta is really well known for the researchers here. I think if we have one leave, it's sad. If we have as many as we have had leave, it's kind of a tragedy. You won't get that back.

People aren't staying, and they aren't staying for a number of reasons, not just that tuition has been increased or that the interest on their debt has gone up. It's not just that. There are so many other things. When people look around them, they want to see their province, their government, their leaders reflect back the values that are important to them. Unfortunately, young people are leaving because they don't see those things in Alberta, which is actually a tragedy for us because our young people, the youth of Alberta, really are our greatest treasure, and they are vital for our future.

You know, I think it's great that we have an official gemstone and it is what it is. I know that ammolite, the history of ammolite, the importance of ammolite to Indigenous communities has been discussed in this House, and that's a great thing. I think that if those communities endorse this, they want this, that's great. It would have been great to see other emblems of Alberta given this attention and this respect. I can think of one, for example, and that would be the Franco-Alberta flag. It's unfortunate that this government chose to enact a policy so that when we have an entire month to recognize francophone communities in Alberta, the flag is flown for one day throughout a month, which is unfortunate. It's unfortunate that this government – they talk about not picking and choosing things, but they certainly do that.

Mr. Speaker, the long and winding road. I do actually support Bill 6. I think it's terrific that ammolite will be adopted as the official gemstone of Alberta. I recognize its ties to – you know, it is a fossil. The importance of paleontology and the fact that I got to say that word and talk about paleontology for a few minutes is a good thing in this place.

I think that, you know, we all recognize that we're famous for dinosaurs, the albertosaurus, the T. Rex, all of the big-teeth ones that are really cool, but we're actually more than that. There's so much more than that in Alberta. They unearth – all the time there are new dinosaurs that are found, new ones that are named for famous researchers that were born and raised here in Alberta and that are known sort of the world over, and that's pretty special. It's unfortunate, though, that a lot of that talent is leaving Alberta.

With that, I will end my comments. Thank you.

5:50

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to speak in support of Bill 6. When it comes to the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, there is a special connection to Lethbridge and ammolite. That's a major reason I am compelled to support this bill. Did you know our province currently has no official gemstone

under the current emblems act? The city of Lethbridge does, and it's ammolite. All of the ammolite that is mined is found in southern Alberta. Lethbridge makes up a huge part of what was called and what is called the Bearpaw Formation. It's a geological formation covering most of southern Alberta and extends into western Saskatchewan and northern Montana. However, ammolite is mined exclusively in southern Alberta. Because of that, it is not only Lethbridge's gemstone but also, hopefully, will be Alberta's gemstone. Thanks to this amendment ammolite will be as much of an emblem to our province as the coat of arms, our flag, and the wild rose. I applaud this bill for recognizing that.

For those who may not know or missed it when the member opposite just shared this, ammolite is an iridescent gemstone formed from the fossilized shells of mollusks known as ammonites, which lived in an inland sea east of the Rocky Mountains. After sinking to the seabed, the mud that covered ammonites hardened over millions of years to become shale. The shell properties, combined with southern Alberta's unique geology, transformed many ammonite shells into the ammolite that is mined and used for jewellery today.

Also, ammonite shells have been collected by the plains First Nations for a thousand years and are still collected by Blackfoot communities for sacred purposes, and I want to thank them for sharing their land and their heritage with us in this special way. While ammolite received official status from the World Jewellery Confederation in 1981, the Blackfoot people have found pieces of the stone from as early as the late 1400s. In fact, some ammonite shell segments have been collected by plains First Nations for millennia and are still collected by the Blackfoot people today. They are regarded as sacred material. The stone is in demand world-wide for jewellers, collectors, and many others, all this interest from a mine or a few mines and a history unique to Lethbridge and southern Alberta. With so much interest and history attached to this Alberta gemstone, it is easy for me to support the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take time to talk about the Fair Deal Panel, a central campaign promise of this government. When many Albertans think of the fair deal in Confederation, they think of recommendations such as the provincial police force, scrapping the Liberal carbon tax, and rightfully so. However, this amendment helps affirm Alberta's cultural uniqueness, helping to fulfill recommendation 25 of the Fair Deal Panel. Promise made, promise kept, should this bill pass. As I stated earlier, ammolite is uniquely Albertan. A big component of the fair deal recommendations is recognizing our Albertan identity, and we would now have 11 emblems.

The ammolite mine that operates near Lethbridge is also a tourist attraction and a place of employment for several people in my constituency, including some First Nations individuals. There is also the value of the gem itself to consider. There isn't an infinite supply of ammolite in the ground. It is already sold across the country and even in various parts of the world to people who appreciate unique jewellery as well as museums and avid collectors.

There is a tourism market for collectors of gems who go all over the world seeking sparkling or unique additions to their collections. Passionate collectors already know where to find ammolite, and I could get very excited about the possibilities should Bill 6 pass. It would give ammolite the recognition of a true Alberta emblem. It would raise awareness of the Lethbridge area for something that we have had in the ground going back 70 million years.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, this bill is a chance to share some of what makes Lethbridge so special. It furthers our Alberta identity. It increases tourism and awareness in my constituency. It follows through on a fair deal commitment. It promotes the Lethbridge economy and employs hard-working people.

When the Minister of Culture announced that this bill would be tabled, I couldn't help but notice his lovely ammolite lapel pin.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: it looks good on him, and it looks great when he shares it with me as well.

When it comes to our heritage and recognizing things that are unique to this province, it is a nonpartisan issue. I urge all members of this Chamber to join me in supporting the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, and I look forward to seeing more people coming to Lethbridge to find some ammolite for themselves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre with the time that remains.

Mr. Shepherd: Yes. Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 6, the emblems of Alberta act, and indeed I suspect my remarks on this will be relatively brief, perhaps five minutes or so.

The Speaker: Four.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, four and counting, I suppose, Mr. Speaker, certainly.

As I think a number of members have noted in this House, this is a bill, I think, that we can all support. We recognize the unique properties of ammolite, the innate connection it has for Indigenous peoples here in the province of Alberta, indeed the Blackfoot, who refer to ammolite as iniskim, the buffalo calling stone, connected for them to a cultural myth about the stone having been used, having been found by a community that was struggling, starving in the winter, and finding that the stone was of use in calling buffalo and helping them to provide for themselves. It's said to symbolize wealth, abundance, good health, and stamina. Indeed, for our province, I think, as we come out of this COVID-19 pandemic – we continue to grapple with the virus, but certainly as we are moving in many respects towards a recovery from the challenges that have come with that, I think certainly a symbol of wealth, abundance, good health, and stamina is a very worthy one for us to adopt as a province.

Of course, this brings Alberta in line with a number of other jurisdictions in Canada that have their own official gemstones. We know that British Columbia, of course, has named jade; Newfoundland, labradorite; the Northwest Territories, diamond; Nova Scotia, agate; Ontario, amethyst; and in the Yukon Territory, lazulite. But here in Alberta we have the relatively unique gemstone of ammolite.

I certainly appreciate the idea that is put forward here and certainly that was spoken of by the Member for Lethbridge-East, of wanting to express more about Alberta's unique identity. Certainly, ammolite, in being a multicoloured gemstone, I think, recognizes what is true about Alberta identity, that there is no one singular Alberta identity, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, all of us as Albertans share many qualities in common, certainly we share some unique history, certainly we share some common experience, but I think we recognize that there is a vast diversity of background in Alberta, a vast diversity of heritage, indeed a vast diversity of opinion and political perspective as well.

At times, Mr. Speaker, I think we can get a bit fixated on particular ideas of what it means to be Albertan or what an Albertan looks like, and I appreciate that in this bill we do not have that, that what we have being brought forward here is indeed an emblem, I think, that can be enjoyed by all Albertans. It can be considered representative of all of us as Albertans and indeed, as I said, in its multicoloured facets reflects that reality that there are many, many perspectives on what it means to be Albertan and to represent our provincial values.

I appreciate the minister bringing this forward and giving us the opportunity to support this. I look forward to many more opportunities to discuss those values, that wide range of diverse

values that indeed Albertans hold, and how we each as representatives in this House can represent those values, the voices of our constituents, and indeed the diversity of our province.

I thank the Minister of Culture for bringing this forward.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt; however, pursuant to Standing Order 4 the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Tuesday evening, March 29, 2022

Day 17

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60 New Democrat: 23 Independent: 3 Vacant: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

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| Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk | Nancy Robert, Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Committees | Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms |
| Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk | Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary Programs | Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms |
| Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary Counsel | Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i> | Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms |
| Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and Director of House Services | | Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms |

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| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
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Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
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Sigurdson, L.
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

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Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
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Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
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Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 29, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Motions

Federal Carbon Tax Increase

18. Mr. Kenney moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government of Canada to stop its planned April 1, 2022, increase of the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne and its further plan to increase the carbon tax to \$170 per tonne given that Canadian families are struggling with the highest inflation in 30 years.

[Adjourned debate: Mr. Getson]

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly this evening, Government Motion 18. Are there others wishing to speak? I'm not sure. Is the Member for Grande Prairie rising to speak or standing for other reasons?

Mrs. Allard: Wishing to speak.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure for what other reason I would rise, but I appreciate the opportunity to speak this evening. I'll keep my comments brief. I'm sure there are many that want to speak to this motion this evening.

I think it's pretty obvious, given the context that we're living in, the circumstance that we're living in, that this doesn't make any sense, this additional carbon tax at this time in history. I would say that if I spoke on the statistics and the data coming out of my constituency – and I'm pretty sure it would be similar if we polled all 87 representatives here in the Chamber – the emerging issue right now is cost of living. We hear it every day in our constituencies. We hear it every day in question period. It's not new information to anyone in politics, and it's certainly not new information to any of the constituents who are living with and facing those increased costs. So I find it mystifying why the federal government would choose this time in history to pile on more additional cost to Canadians and to Albertans.

I'm in my 50s, Mr. Speaker. This is the worst inflation that I recall seeing. Certainly, Statistics Canada tells us it's the worst inflation in over three decades. At the same time we hear the NDP, particularly in question period, talk to us about: "What are we doing to help Albertans? You know, what are we doing to assist them with the challenges of the inflationary pressures that we are experiencing in our province?" Yet it's my understanding that they're supporting the federal carbon tax initiative and their allies in Justin Trudeau and his government. It's mystifying. I don't understand it. My constituents don't understand it. It doesn't make any sense, and I don't think it serves to make life better or, actually, to achieve the climate goals.

You know, we talk about climate change – and I believe it's an important issue that we do need to talk about – but from my perspective I see that it's clearly a global problem, and it can't be fixed by a local solution. Even if all of Canada changed dramatically, we would make a dent, barely, in the overall impact of climate change. We're responsible in so many other ways.

Alberta, for example, has the most ethically sourced and responsibly produced oil in the world – in the world, Mr. Speaker – so what would serve better than to have more production here in Alberta? If we're not producing it here, they're going to be producing it somewhere.

As the world demand for fossil fuels increases – we know that that's happening right now, particularly coming out of the pandemic – we know that there are pressures from developing countries, that there are pressures from fiscal stimulus dollars looking to build more infrastructure than would typically be occurring, and as that happens, there's a rise in demand for fossil fuels. They go hand in hand. At this time in history we choose, then, to tax that further? It makes no sense. I believe that we have a responsibility in this House to stand up for the people of our province, to stand up for those men and women working in this industry, and, by extension, to stand up for our country, Mr. Speaker.

I pulled some statistics today. Canada only creates 1.6 per cent of the world's CO₂ emissions presently. I really believe it's a mistake to impose significant economic costs for a trivial impact. Even if we got rid of all the CO₂ emissions, the effect it would have on climate change is less than two-tenths of a degree in terms of the warming effect. I don't want to trivialize it, but, Mr. Speaker, there have got to be more effective mechanisms and levers to pull than this, particularly at this time.

I found it interesting as I was reading about the Paris accord today. Under the Paris accord Canada's current emissions target is to reduce our emissions to 30 per cent lower than 2005 emissions levels – 2005, Mr. Speaker; that's 17 years ago – and we're supposed to do this by 2030. According to climate action tracker progress reports it is projected that in 2030 we will be emitting approximately 250 megatonnes of CO₂ when in 2005 there were approximately 240 megatonnes. Mr. Speaker, although I'm sure everyone can do the math, this would mean that we have less than eight years to reduce our emissions to lower than they were 17 years ago. It just does not make sense. It's not realistic, and I think we need common-sense vetting in our policies. I'm calling on the Prime Minister and his cabinet, and I'm calling on his partner, Mr. Singh, you know, the de facto Deputy Prime Minister. I'm calling on them to think this through and to do what's right by Canadians and certainly by Albertans.

I also just wanted to talk for a minute about this. You know, I live in the north of the province – I'm from Grande Prairie – and I think about the impact that has on families. We're taxing families to heat their homes. We hear every day the complaints about the cost of utilities – and that is an issue; there's no question – but now we're going to support increasing the cost to heat your home? It makes no sense. It will have a disproportionate impact on those at the margin. I realize that there may be a rebate for the lowest income, but somebody is at the margin of the policy. Somebody will be caught where they make just enough money that they bear the full impact of the carbon tax, thereby reducing their income, their living income. I just don't understand the thought process.

I think that it's crazy at this time in history to consider adding a carbon tax. You know, we're heading into a period of growth, but we have to be careful. We could head into a period of stagflation and create ourselves a whole other level of chaos than we've seen so far. And Albertans are tired, Mr. Speaker. They're tired of all the years of loss. They're tired of all the years of setbacks. Finally, we're in a period of growth thanks to policies of this government, thanks to a Finance minister who brought in a balanced budget against all odds, thanks to investment attraction practices, thanks to Alberta's robust recovery plan. We're seeing hope for the first time in over seven years. Hope. And then the federal government is

going to dash that hope with a carbon tax? I am happy to rise this evening to speak against this. I'm happy to support Motion 18, and I'm happy to call on Justin Trudeau and his NDP partners to think twice and to cancel their plans to jack up the carbon tax.

With that, I will cede my time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also my pleasure to be able to rise tonight in favour of Government Motion 18. I know full well, from filling my own gas tank and buying groceries this weekend, that prices are exceptionally high, and it's that way for all Albertans right now. Families are unfortunately having to make the decision whether to pay their utility bills or go to the store and get groceries, and in just a few days the federal Liberal-NDP coalition government will make it even harder for these very same Canadians and for all Albertans by increasing the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne. As a Legislature we cannot let this happen.

Albertans are already facing the highest inflation we've seen in over 30 years, and just two weeks ago the consumer price index reported the rise in costs between 2021 and 2022. Here in Alberta every single category has seen an increase. Energy: 31.3 per cent compared to last year. Food went up 6.2 per cent over the same time last year. Mr. Speaker, on a year-over-year basis Albertans were paying 5.5 per cent more in February '22 than they did in the same month in 2021 according to the consumer price index. The national average was up 5.7 per cent. If this federal government and their NDP allies want to make life easier for everyone, stopping this carbon tax increase is the most logical and common-sense solution this week.

Right now this federal government is out of touch and disconnected with everyday Canadians, and they need to hear their cries for help. Unfortunately, the reality is that this trust-fund Prime Minister just doesn't get what everyday Albertans are going through right now: choosing to pay one bill or the other, deciding where to fill up their tanks to get to work, or to buy food for their family. Gas prices are already extremely high with the cost of energy across the country, and now a rise in the carbon tax would simply mean less money in the pockets of Albertans.

The Premier told Albertans yesterday that this increase would mean that someone driving a small, little Honda Civic will end up paying around \$70 just to fill their tank, and that's only if our gas prices stay relatively level. This carbon tax increase is something many Albertans can't and should not have to bear. And it's not like it's only going to happen one time, Mr. Speaker. No. This is only the beginning of carbon tax increases. We know that every single year until 2030 Albertans will see increases in the cost of everything: on their food, their gas, utilities, clothing, furniture. You name it, and it will cost more.

7:40

With this first increase coming in just a few days, Albertans can expect to pay about \$600 more a year, either directly or indirectly, as a result. By 2030 that number jumps to \$2,000. Two thousand dollars. As we work to recover on every level from the COVID-19 pandemic, now is simply not the time to be putting even more stress on the hard-working people of this province. We need to be doing all we can to support them, like this government's commitment to cut the cost of utilities through a \$150 gas rebate or removing Alberta's tax on gasoline. They are small support measures, but they're needed to combat the rising costs that we are going to see through this unnecessary carbon tax increase.

Mr. Speaker, you do not raise taxes during inflationary times. To quote my good friend and ally the Minister of Finance: in times of

high inflation you spend less, borrow less, and tax less. That's good advice for Mr. Trudeau. Albertans need the support from this government and all members of the Legislature to make their lives more affordable as we see the highest inflation rates in recent years.

Mr. Speaker, it's not just families who will feel the impact of the carbon tax. Businesses will also be adversely affected as they see the cost of operations rise. In my riding of Livingstone-Macleod, where agriculture is one of the main businesses, our farmers and the ag sector as a whole will also bear exceptional burdens when dealing with the rising costs. With carbon tax increases, those industries will be forced to pay more to grow the crops that feed us. The expenses for fertilizer, for equipment, for seed, for maintenance will all increase. The cost of harvesting in the fall will also increase.

Unfortunately, the reality is that the imposition of this carbon tax is driving things like the production of fertilizer south of the border at a time when we should be looking to increase production right here at home in Alberta. The carbon tax increase introduced by the federal government is not one that should be supported as it makes life more expensive for all Albertans.

I encourage members of the opposition NDP to stand up to their friend and ally Justin Trudeau and, instead, to stand with Albertans, Albertans who are calling on the federal Liberals and the NDP to stop picking their pockets and leave more money for them to spend on the essentials of life. The message to Ottawa is simple, Mr. Speaker: stop the federal carbon tax.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others on Government Motion 18? The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, followed by the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Motion 18, which reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly [of Alberta] call on the government of Canada to stop its planned April 1, 2022, increase of the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne and its further plan to increase the carbon tax to \$170 per tonne given that Canadian families are struggling with the highest inflation in 30 years.

Mr. Speaker, families here in Alberta are already struggling to make ends meet due to the rising cost of inflation, yet the Liberal-NDP alliance is set to increase the carbon tax yet again on April 1, 2022. Unfortunately, this is not a bad April Fool's Day prank. This is very real and will make life even more expensive for every single Albertan.

Over the past few years we have seen the economic impact that the policies of the Liberal-NDP alliance have had on Albertans. They have already made life exponentially more expensive on Alberta families. Gas costs more, groceries cost more, and homes cost more. Nearly everything we buy costs more than it did a short time ago. This has left many Alberta families grappling with how to pay the bills. I think we can all agree, Mr. Speaker, that this is not the time for the Liberal-NDP idealism. This is a time to look at ways to make life more affordable for Albertans, not more expensive.

We know that the recently announced Liberal-NDP alliance is bad news for Alberta. It will cost the country billions in new programs, will contribute to further inflation, and will make it even more difficult on our energy sector to get our products to market, all this at a time when the world needs more Canadian energy to displace dictator oil from countries like Russia. What's more, Mr. Speaker, is that the inflationary policies of the Liberal-NDP coalition will continue to drive up the cost of living. Policies of reckless spending, money printing, and driving up energy costs by tripling the carbon tax will hit Albertans hard.

Our government has continually fought against the federal government's intrusion into areas of provincial jurisdiction, and we will continue to do so. We have long maintained that the provinces have a better understanding of local circumstances and should maintain jurisdiction over climate change policy development. We challenged the federal government's carbon tax all the way to the Supreme Court to assert that the provinces should retain their jurisdictional authority to do what they are placed best to do, work with the taxpayers and industries to create a better future.

When our government was first elected in 2019, we brought forth legislation that eliminated the provincial carbon tax imposed by the previous NDP government. In response to this, Justin Trudeau imposed his federal carbon tax on our province, a carbon tax that is set to make life more expensive for Albertans every year on April 1. This annual \$15-a-tonne increase will bring the carbon tax to \$50 a tonne in 2022 and \$170 a tonne in 2030. To combat the impact of rising energy costs on Albertans, our government has announced that it will remove the provincial excise tax of 13 cents per litre on transportation fuel starting April 1 as well.

Furthermore, in Budget 2022 we announced consumer protection support through an energy rebate program that will begin in October 2022 to help Albertans manage natural gas prices. Our government will provide a \$150 retroactive rebate to help Albertans cover the high cost that many families and businesses paid over the last three months. Alberta's government is working with utilities and regulators to determine the exact details, including rebate timing and distribution approach. Consumers who use less than 2,500 gigajoules annually will be eligible, which includes most households, small apartment buildings, farms, and small industrial commercial operations. The energy affordability program will run until March 31, 2023, and the rebate will be triggered if the company's regulated rate is above \$6.50 a gigajoule.

Mr. Speaker, we hope that the opposition support our motion and stand with Albertans, but as often is the case, they will likely support their friend and ally Justin Trudeau. We know that the NDP isn't interested in making life more affordable for working families. They are only interested in pursuing their far-left ideology, which neglects the needs of everyday people. Make no mistake; the opposition supports carbon taxes, and they support the NDP-Trudeau alliance. I am proud that our UCP government is working hard to support working families here in Alberta and that we will continue to do so.

I will be voting in favour of Government Motion 18 and would encourage all members of this House to join me in standing up for Albertans against yet another tax increase. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon is next.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege always to stand up and speak in the House and tonight to address Government Motion 18.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government of Canada to stop its planned April 1, 2022, increase of the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne and its further plan to increase the carbon tax to \$170 per tonne given that Canadian families are struggling with the highest inflation in 30 years.

Mr. Speaker, we've heard a lot about how this carbon tax is going to kill jobs and how the Trudeau government is doing something that is really counterproductive when it comes to addressing the whole issue of carbon. I guess I want to focus my remarks tonight on an issue that really just is rock – it's foundational. Either we can tax to try and get rid of carbon production and kill jobs and lower people's standards of living and increase inflation and make it harder on Albertans and Canadians in general, or we can create

wealth and still attain our carbon goals. If I have a choice between which path I would rather walk down, it would be to create jobs, to create wealth, to address the carbon issues, and, in the process, make Canadians and Albertans have the capacity to be able to take care of their families and to move forward and to create a prosperous nation and province.

You might ask: well, what can we do to do that? How do we create jobs? How do we deal with carbon while creating jobs? It's been my privilege as a Member of the Legislative Assembly to meet with a wide range of people and a wide range of businesses, and I'm going to present just four – four – of the suggestions that I would bring to the Liberal government for how we can create wealth while at the same time reducing carbon rather than having a carbon tax.

7:50

For instance, I believe that one of the areas that we should be looking at in this province and in this country is geothermal energy, and I believe that there's a company in Calgary by the name of Eavor that has cracked the nut. They have the capacity to drill down. You can take two abandoned wells. You can drill down 3.5 kilometres into the surface of the Earth in Alberta. You will hit temperatures of somewhere around 100 to 110 degrees Celsius. You then drill laterally two wells five kilometres apart. You're drilling laterally until those drills come together in the middle, and you create a latticework under the ground like a big radiator, and the water goes down, heats up. Warm water wants to rise, comes to the surface. You harvest the heat. You put the water back down. Because it's cold, it goes down, goes through a second set of laterals, goes back up, harvest the heat, goes back down, goes through the first set of laterals, back up, and you've created what we call a geothermal loop. This technology, created in Alberta, has the capacity to generate electricity, and there is literally no carbon being produced.

They are presently drilling the world's deepest well. It's going to go down 7.5 kilometres into the bedrock, and it is going to allow us to get the heat that we need to be able to produce electricity at a price point that's going to be competitive with natural gas. Ladies and gentlemen, we have the capacity to generate electricity with geothermal energy that is going to eliminate the carbon and, at the same time, produce jobs. In one of the proposals that they have brought to the federal and provincial governments, they would have created 22,000 jobs in the drilling industry over a period of five years – 22,000 jobs – drilling wells, dealing with abandoned and orphaned wells: creating jobs, creating wealth, creating electricity, and reducing carbon at the same time.

I would suggest that we could look at Tidewater Midstream in my constituency, that has received money from the Alberta government – I believe it was something like \$20 million or \$25 million – in order to create a hydrogen project at the Brazeau River plant, and as a part of that they will be using carbon capture to be able to deal with the carbon that they produce as they are making their hydrogen.

At the same time I've introduced them to another company in my constituency, and this company and Tidewater Midstream are starting to have conversations about matching a vertical greenhouse to Tidewater Midstream where they will take carbon. Rather than pumping it down into the ground through carbon capture, they will be able to use the carbon dioxide to help the growing of strawberries through a vertical farm operation, a neat little idea that is also used to create jobs. I believe that in this project there would be something like about 25 jobs that are created while at the same time taking carbon out of circulation or at least putting it into strawberries, not talking about the amount of carbon that's going to be pulled away

because we're no longer having to transport all the way from the southern United States to get those strawberries up into Alberta.

Industrial hemp. We've been working for a while trying to create an industrial hemp industry, and I will give the opposition its due. I can remember having a conversation with a former minister of the environment who gave me a suggestion that if we were going to create an industrial hemp industry, perhaps we needed to speak a little greater than just out of Drayton Valley. So we created the Alberta Hemp Alliance from her suggestions, and I can say that the Alberta Hemp Alliance has grown to be the provincial advocacy for the industrial hemp industry in Alberta and that they've been working hard at growing and enticing businesses to come into Alberta in order to be able to create an industrial hemp industry.

One of the things that I learned very early on was that when you grow a field of hemp, industrial hemp takes five times the amount of carbon out of the air in one year than a traditional North American forest does in 20 years. It's a huge carbon sink.

Presently we grow about 40,000 acres of industrial hemp in the province of Alberta, and I know that I have been working with a couple of companies over the last little while, trying to encourage them to come into Alberta. It looks like they're going to. It looks like they're going to be spending about \$150 million in the next two years building a seed-processing plant and providing more decortication facilities for the province of Alberta. Their plans: they want to see at least a half a million acres of industrial hemp in Alberta.

They are going to be taking the hurd from that industrial hemp, and they're going to be creating little pellets, and those pellets are going to be sent down to Indiana, where they're going to be used by one of the major international car companies to produce plastic. They want to have completely renewable industrial plastic for every one of their vehicles by 2030. They're going to be creating 50 jobs potentially in one of the constituencies in this province, that shall remain nameless for now, and will be taking huge amounts of carbon out of the air for every acre that we increase. They are now presently having conversations with some of the major farms, the larger farms, in the province.

By the way, this has the potential to be the highest paying crop in Alberta because they will be paid for the seed, they'll be paid for the long fibre, and they'll be paid for the hurd, the inner-side, woody part of the fibre of this plant. It's going to be creating jobs for Albertans, it's going to be diversifying the economy, it's going to be taking carbon out of the cycle, and it's going to be good. We have the capacity to deal with the carbon issue, not by taxing Albertans and by making people poor but by growing and creating wealth and addressing the carbon issue through the technology that we have.

Finally, another example would be Cream Energy in my constituency, that has produced a solar-powered process for addressing methane leakage in wells. They believe that they could reduce the methane leakage in Alberta by a third – a third – through this process. That will actually save the company's money and make them more productive.

So when I speak to Motion 18 tonight, I speak from a position that rather than creating misery and heartache for families in Alberta and across this country by taxing and taking away their wealth and trying to force them into a pathway that may reduce carbon but is not going to be productive to their financial wealth and their health and their family life, let us look for those kinds of situations where we can create wealth, where we can use technology, where we can reduce the carbon. We can produce a strong, powerful, healthy, diversified Alberta economy, create the

wealth, and deal with the carbon. That would be my plea to the federal government rather than looking at a tired, old carbon tax.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Government Motion 18.

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to speak in support of Government Motion 18. It's no secret that Albertans have had several hard years. Just as things are starting to look better, we get hit with massive inflation. Despite what the federal government would have you believe, inflation is present in just about every aspect of Albertans' everyday lives, and it's the highest it has been in 30 years.

One part of the pocketbook hit hardest by inflation is the price of groceries. Let's use meat as an example based on Stats Canada information. Currently grocery prices are one of the highest drivers of inflation and the cost of living in Alberta. To put that into perspective, back in 2007 10 pounds of potatoes was about \$4. Now we pay \$10. If we adjust for inflation, the current cost should actually be about \$5.50.

8:00

Of course, we all know that gas prices right now have skyrocketed. Today the cost of regular gas in Alberta is about \$1.66. In 2007 gas was 97 cents a litre, which means that when we adjust for inflation, the current gas price should be \$1.33.

Why am I bringing this up now, Mr. Speaker? Well, because the federal Liberal government is introducing a carbon tax increase that is set to take effect on April 1, this Friday, coincidentally also known as April Fool's Day. They're planning to increase the tax to \$50 per tonne. They have plans for it to reach \$170 per tonne in the near future. Only a week into the Liberal-NDP alliance and already Albertans – no, all Canadians – are suffering. The government's role is to look out for the people's best interest, not insert itself and its misinformed and misplaced ideology where it doesn't belong. When people are struggling to make ends meet and pay their bills, the Liberals and the NDP have no business pushing Canadians further down to make their political agenda come true.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in some areas of the world I've heard that the most destructive animal is the hippo. In Canada it turns out that the most destructive thing to our economy and everyday life is a hypocrite. What really gets me is the hypocrisy of the current Prime Minister. Do you think that while the rest of us Canadians are working hard and paying the cost of this carbon tax, the Prime Minister is doing the same? I mean, I'm sure that he will personally be paying the carbon tax out of his pocket on his next trip to the west coast to surf.

The hypocrisy of the federal Liberals doesn't end there. Just yesterday the federal government announced that they'll be purchasing 88 F-35s from Lockheed Martin. This comes only seven years after the Liberals vowed never to replace Canada's fighter jet fleet with the F-35, essentially throwing out all the hard work the former Prime Minister had done. [interjection] That's right. Back in 2015 Mr. Trudeau got up in front of Canadians and criticized the Conservative federal government for not justifying or explaining why Canada needed new fighter jets, and now they're making the very same purchase they were losing their heads over seven years ago. Given their crusade on anything with any emissions, I can only imagine that these new fighter jets are the electric version, Mr. Speaker.

I'm only bringing this up to point out the deep-seated two-facedness that seems to be at the core of the NDP and the Liberals. Albertans have every right to be upset since this federal government has decided to betray them once again. Mr. Speaker, the good news

is that on this side of the aisle we care about Albertans, which is why we continue to stand against the federal carbon tax being imposed on everyday working Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, rising household expenses are a pressing concern for everyone. In fact, a recent survey shows that more than half of Canadians cannot keep up with their bills. This goes for all bills. Albertans are feeling the pinch, with higher grocery bills and gas prices. I fail to see in what world an increased carbon tax is beneficial to Canadians.

We need to get something straight: there's no proof the carbon tax works for what they say they're trying to accomplish. The reality is that this is a fee imposed on everyday people and companies that is supposed to work as a pollution tax. The tax increases gasoline and electricity costs, therefore giving consumers a reason to switch to clean energy, apparently. The reason the goal is to set the tax at \$170 is because they believe that this will change consumer behaviour.

Unfortunately, the rising fuel costs also drive up the cost of everything else. For example, the cost of freight has skyrocketed from higher fuel costs. According to the International Monetary Fund researchers shipping costs are an important driver of inflation around the world, with the average cost of shipping a container on the world's transoceanic routes increasing sevenfold since March 2020.

When we took office in 2019, one of our first actions was to repeal the provincial carbon tax. At that time we gave gas stations and other fuel resellers 30 days to apply for a refund of the carbon tax paid when they purchased that fuel. Albertan fuel users had until the end of 2019 to apply for rebates regarding fuel use for an exempt purchase in 2017. We also removed the spending restrictions on existing carbon tax revenue, made sure the carbon tax was not charged on sales after it was repealed. We didn't do any of this because our government is working against the environment, like the NDP claims. We did so because there was no hard evidence that showed the carbon tax helped the environment in any way, shape, or form. You know what does help the environment? Clean energy. We've been working tirelessly to introduce clean and renewable energy in Alberta and make our energy processes greener.

Mr. Speaker, we are dedicated to protecting the environment, and we want to give Canadian companies a chance to spend the dollars that would go towards the carbon tax on technology that actually helps reduce their emissions. That's why many of those companies have set upstream emission targets and are working towards a net zero future.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the carbon taxing process, which, frankly, is backwards. The current plan places tax on domestic production. It makes no sense to tax Alberta oil exports while importing foreign oil without the same tax implications, Mr. Speaker. All we are doing is impeding the competitiveness and the progression of Canadian businesses.

Mr. Speaker, we need to continue to move forward in a way that Alberta is accustomed to, which is leading the globe in emissions reduction and environmental standards. That's what would serve Canada's interests, protect the environment, and pressure imports from dictatorial regimes with zero regard for climate change or the environment. There are ways to support people, strengthen the economy, and help the environment. If there's one thing we know for sure, it is that the carbon tax is not the way.

The federal carbon tax is not about helping the environment. It is about taking away jobs in our country and creating more avenues for foreign dictators who are friends with the Prime Minister and his allies. During times of high inflation I struggle to see why the federal government is adding insult to injury. Although we all know that historically the NDP has never been interested in making life

more affordable for working families, I hope they come to their senses and support our motion and stand with all Albertans against this federal imposition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: On Government Motion 18 the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in support of Government Motion 18 and to talk about the harm the Liberal government continues to deal onto everyday families and individuals. We need to work together to get through to this newly formed federal NDP-Liberal alliance and to their supporters, who sit just across the aisle from us. From urban areas to rural areas everyone has felt the effect of the Trudeau carbon tax. This tax influences gas prices, grocery prices, increased utility prices, and the list goes on and on.

In the rural areas they have been forced to essentially stay home and not go out or drive over to a neighbour's. Every choice they make has a cost, especially now as these gas prices continue to rise. Just once I would like to see support from the members opposite to help fight the true cause of the rising cost of living, but they continue to support the Liberal agenda. Farmers have had to already deal with their profit margins shrinking from the first implementations of the carbon tax. Now, due to global events, they have been faced with skyrocketing fertilizer in recent weeks, just destroying their profit margins. Now the Liberal government continues to ignore them and has chosen to make their lives even more costly.

Even the parliamentary budget office seems to contradict the Prime Minister. In the report made by the PBO, it concluded that most households in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario will see a net loss from the carbon tax by 2030. By then they plan to have it increased to a staggering \$170 a tonne. Carbon taxes don't punish or deter the bigger companies from reducing their carbon footprints; they instead continue to show that they pass the costs on to consumers, which is not right.

The Liberal government has done nothing to stop these costs from being put onto everyday people. There is no reason why any family should have to choose to heat their home through minus 40 degree weather over the payment of other bills just because of the additional costs put on them. Farmers shouldn't have to deal with the uncontrollable cost to feed their livestock, fuel their equipment, and dry their grain. The carbon tax has done enough damage already. We need to find a more effective way to deal with emissions that doesn't pass the costs on to everyday consumers and producers. Even now we are seeing companies taking their own initiative to come up with cleaner ways to harvest resources and create renewable energy.

8:10

There are power plants reducing their carbon footprint by switching to natural gas. We see new, innovative systems that capture carbon more effectively. We are seeing all these exciting new things happen throughout our province, all in an effort to reduce carbon emissions. These efforts don't put those costs onto Albertans. No, these companies have made the changes and inventions with no government intervention.

The Liberal-NDP alliance must end for the sake of all Albertans. We hear the same thing every day from members opposite, day after day, that they are concerned about the rising costs to everyday Albertans. But instead of challenging the Liberal government when they are responsible for the aggressive rise in costs from their anti-Alberta policies, they instead misrepresent the facts in senseless

attacks on our government. If they truly care, they would fight right alongside with us.

I encourage all members here today to vote with me in sending a strong message to the Liberal government. No longer can they cater to their trust-fund and island-owning friends. The needs of Albertan and Canadian families must come first and the needs of the rich be put on the back burner. This reckless and damaging behaviour to every Canadian needs to stop, and it needs to stop today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise this evening and speak on Motion 18. I will tell you that I have heard the cries of many of my constituents regarding the increase in the carbon tax and just general intrusion into provincial jurisdiction, and those cries are not falling on deaf ears. I am very frustrated that I have heard very little, if anything, from members opposite. It sounds to me like they're deeply entrenched in the new alliance with the Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau. Mind you, I'd be upset, too, if my dad got remarried and didn't tell me either. What can I say? The reality is that the NDs across the way – I can certainly assume that they are not going to be voting in favour of this motion, predominantly because, well, they're going to do what their new daddy says.

Canadians are dreading, though, what is coming on April 1, Mr. Speaker, which is the day that Justin Trudeau, the new leader of the members opposite, and his coalition with the NDP will take it upon themselves to raise the carbon tax, punishing families for heating their homes and driving themselves to work. It's shocking – shocking – that they would think that this is the right time to do that. It's just utterly tone deaf. The Prime Minister has abandoned his integrity by ignoring the desperate calls of Canadians, and this is the reality we face.

The former NDP government in Alberta worked together with Justin Trudeau and his Liberals to instigate a tax on Albertans, attempting to convince them that it would be a good thing for the province. As usual, they couldn't have been more wrong. Mr. Speaker, the NDP's job-killing carbon tax in Alberta was responsible for record-high unemployment as well as billions of investment dollars leaving our province faster than the Member for Edmonton-South could delete his hard drive.

I hate to say it, but things could actually be worse. Everyday Albertans count their lucky stars that the NDP is not in government as we face the highest rate of inflation in 30 years. During the NDP's one-and-done government Albertans realized that taxing families on the use of natural gas and electricity will not decrease emissions. Let me restate that: taxing families for heating their homes will not make the weather outside warmer, okay? So why would they place a financial burden on the shoulders of Canadians and Albertans when they're already struggling with the cost of living?

We continue to see Justin Trudeau's leadership fail as he divides the country. The way that he spoke to Canadians regarding the COVID-19 pandemic was proof that he has no interest in healing our country following such tough years. With a clear political agenda Justin Trudeau is acting mercilessly and has committed to raising the carbon tax by the end of the week. Our government was elected by over a million Albertans with a mandate to fight against Ottawa for a fair deal. Albertans are not interested in funding Justin Trudeau's theatrical politics with a made-up carbon tax to fight climate change. This isn't a realistic approach, nor is it a fair approach for families who are struggling to pay their bills every month.

As of right now Canadians can expect to pay even more for heating their homes starting April 1. They can expect to pay more for filling their cars with fuel to take their kids to school and to drive themselves to work. Families can expect to pay more for groceries, even higher than what they already pay today. Mr. Speaker, this is no small issue.

The NDP seems happy to ignore it, and I can't blame them, considering they are just as responsible for welcoming this carbon tax into Alberta as the Prime Minister himself. I would like to think that members opposite have enough common sense within their caucus to put aside the theatrics and work with our government in standing up to Ottawa, but of course I won't hold my breath given their thriving relationship with Justin Trudeau. Now, I guess they realize that, just like with daddy, if you make daddy upset, he won't let you borrow the car, so why would they make daddy upset today by going after him and his new carbon tax? Our government will continue to stand against this tax burden on behalf of Alberta families with or without the help of the members opposite. I'm certainly not going to hold my breath to hear one of them stand up today and speak against this.

Justin Trudeau has committed to raising the cost of the carbon tax every year until it reaches an astounding \$170 per tonne of CO₂, which is more than four times what Canadians are paying right now. Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the members in this Chamber: I want you to know that I will continue to stand in this Chamber until I am blue in the face and speak on this because that's what Albertans elected me to do. That's what Albertans elected every single member in this Chamber to do. I would hope that members would share the outrage that I have for the federal government. And to members in this Chamber, through you to them, that share that outrage: let me get a hear, hear. No hear, hear?

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Mr. Schow: There we go. The outrage, Mr. Speaker, is there.

The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that for the past couple of months we have watched the cost of utilities and fuel skyrocket to record-high prices, costing the average Albertan significantly more each month, and I think Albertans would be interested to know that it was not any policy change of the UCP that caused this inflation. To put it simply, the rise in costs has been caused by the reckless spending of the previous NDP government – shocker – combined with the ridiculous carbon tax made by Justin Trudeau.

On that, for example, Mr. Speaker, I have many constituents who are concerned about utility costs, and they ask me what is going on. The answer is simple. The members opposite overbuilt the grid by \$7 billion, saddling them with debt for years to come. I find it interesting that in question period they lob insults across the aisle, suggesting that we're doing nothing to fix the problem that they created. Shame on the members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, it's astounding to have the nerve to come into this Chamber and suggest that we're not doing anything to try to fix a problem that they created, when in reality we have taken a reasonable approach, offering a \$150 rebate for the vast majority of Albertans to help balance out the cost of utilities. Now, the members opposite love to suggest that it's only \$50. It's \$50 a month for three months, which, for those whom math is hard, is \$150 over three months. That's the total. Get out your calculators. In addition to that, though, the Premier has committed to removing 13 cents per litre from the provincial fuel tax at the pumps. That is a real, measurable difference for Albertans who need to fill up their vehicles, who can't walk or take the bus.

And I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that constituents in Cardston-Siksika don't have that luxury. Oftentimes many of them have to

go into town – and by town I mean Lethbridge – to get groceries, to go to work, to take kids to hockey practice or swimming or whatever they need to do. There's no bus for that. The members opposite should be ashamed that they didn't speak up when their leader said that, insinuated that Albertans could walk or take the bus. How ridiculous is that?

8:20

Nearly 2 million homes will benefit from the electricity rebate. Here's the best news of all: Albertans don't even need to apply. Albertans don't need to apply, Mr. Speaker. The rebate credit will be automatically added to nearly 2 million utility bills across Alberta. I'm proud of the approach our government has taken in responding to this crisis. I can't say I'm surprised, but I am quite disappointed in the Prime Minister and his refusal to offer Canadians the relief they need, putting a halt to his ridiculous plan to increase the carbon tax at the end of the week.

With that said, I would encourage members of this Assembly, all members, to think about the message they are sending should they vote against this motion. I don't anticipate or try to predict the outcome of a vote, but I don't expect any members on the government side to be voting against this. My optimism is not quite so high for members opposite. They stand up in question period with no limits on their frustration for the high costs we are facing now, and I hope that they will think with some reasonableness about how this carbon tax hike is going to further hurt the same Albertans they claim to represent.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing, I will simply say and encourage all members of this Chamber to vote in favour of Motion 18, to stand up to Justin Trudeau and his Liberal government as Albertans are facing an increase in the carbon tax on April 1, something that could not be – well, I guess it could be worse. But something I wish the Prime Minister would take into consideration, the realities that everyday Albertans and Canadians, for that matter, are facing, and that is increased costs of living, cost of food, cost to drive your vehicle. How does this make life better? How does this make life better for Canadians and for Albertans? The reality is that it doesn't, so we call upon the Prime Minister to forgo his increase in the carbon tax, and I call on the members opposite to support Motion 18.

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022

[Debate adjourned: Mr. Shepherd speaking]

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West on second reading of Bill 6.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words in regard to Bill 6, Alberta's emblems. I was very pleased to see that there was going to be a change in regard to the official mineral of Alberta, and I think that the choice of ammolite is very appropriate considering its value, its great beauty, and its important cultural significance for First Nations people in southern Alberta in particular. It's interesting to see that this mineral is in fact quite widely dispersed around the world, but the particular iridescent form of it that we can find in southern Alberta is quite rare, and certainly either polished or made into different

sorts of jewellery, it has a very fine sort of opal-like iridescence, which I think is very, very popular.

I know that even quite a few years ago, when I was in Thailand, I saw ammolite in the shops and in jewellery stores in the capital, and there was, with an acquaintance of mine, a discussion about exporting this gemstone to Southeast Asia because people just found it so distinctive and unique.

Based on its value, both financial and cultural value, I believe this is an appropriate choice for the official gemstone for Alberta, and certainly I think that it is a tribute to the Blackfoot people of southern Alberta as well.

With that, I again reaffirm our support of this bill and of this choice, and I welcome further discussion. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister. The hon. Minister of Culture to close debate.

Mr. Orr: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to conclude debate on second reading of Bill 6, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022. As you know, ammolite is an important part of our heritage, our economy, our geology, in fact, our culture as well. Recognizing ammolite as Alberta's official gemstone reflects the unique nature of the stone and, quite frankly, of our province as well.

It helps fulfill recommendation 25 of the Fair Deal Panel, because, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's identity is unique and precious, as is the stone. It's made special by our land, our mountains, our plains, our badlands, our natural resources, and also our human history, our culture, our economy, our spirit of resilience, and our people and their diversity. It's all these things and more combined that create an amazing whole that is a particular Alberta identity, unique in Canada.

One of these unique parts is the organic gemstone ammolite. I'm actually wearing a pin made of it right now, Mr. Speaker. This gem is very special and unique, just like our province. Each cut of the gemstone is different. On the pin I'm wearing, it has a beautiful hue of yellow at the bottom, that, to me, represents the southern Alberta drylands. Then farther up it has a sparkling green, that symbolizes our province's parklands. Then a bit further up, the green becomes more deeply luminescent and reminds me of our boreal forests. Then it turns to an incredible blue colour, that represents Alberta's many lakes and rivers. Each stone has a story to tell, just like each Albertan has a story to tell, a unique story.

Mr. Speaker, gem-quality ammolite can be found almost exclusively in southern Alberta. It comes from the fossilized shells of molluscs known as ammonites, that lived in the inland Bearpaw Sea in what is now southern Alberta, which is why it's found almost exclusively there. The tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy have collected ammonite shells for millennia and continue to collect them today. They consider some ammonite shell segments sacred, and they symbolize the good fortune needed to provide for the tribe's prosperity and survival.

Ammolite is also part of Alberta's economy, mined and used in jewellery for more than a century.

Mr. Speaker, currently there is no official gemstone of Alberta recognized in the Emblems of Alberta Act. If Bill 6 is passed, that will change. It will officially make ammolite an emblem of Alberta. Ammolite will join the ranks of our province's other 11 emblems, including the coat of arms, the flag, the tartan, and others. This is one more way that our government is affirming Alberta's cultural uniqueness, the specialness of our province. Even though this is a symbolic gesture, it has great importance.

Before I wrap up, I just want to recognize Blaine Hyggen, the mayor of Lethbridge, and the city of Lethbridge. The city has proudly called ammolite its official gemstone since 2007. We are excited to also embrace the history, the beauty of this rare and unique gemstone. It is a gem as stunning as our province, and I encourage all members of the House to support Bill 6, Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

8:30

Government Motions

(continued)

Federal Carbon Tax Increase

18. Mr. Kenney moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government of Canada to stop its planned April 1, 2022, increase of the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne and its further plan to increase the carbon tax to \$170 per tonne given that Canadian families are struggling with the highest inflation in 30 years.

[Adjourned debate: Mr. Schow]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika has six minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to Motion 18 tonight. Maybe it's no surprise that this would come on April Fool's Day because, obviously, I think this is something that is very foolish, especially at this time but I think, really, at any time.

When I look back to the Alberta carbon tax and when it was brought in – I was elected in the 2015 election – I know the NDP didn't campaign on the carbon tax that they brought forward shortly after being elected. I believe I was the only opposition MLA that was at the announcement. It happened at the space sciences centre building in November, I believe. I was there for that, and it was interesting to see the people that were there. Of course, there were some oil executives that were there, there were some other people there, but what I didn't see were regular Albertans, people from rural Alberta. This would really affect their livelihoods and their lives.

When I look at my life and my representation of rural Alberta, I think about the cost of travel for rural Albertans. You know, it seems like everything in rural Alberta we have to drive to. A lot of us live out on farms. We have to travel to town for groceries, we have to travel to our jobs, and everything seems to involve putting miles on our vehicles. Even with the COVID situation and not travelling as much as normal, my truck has over 250,000 kilometres on it in a matter of about three years. So there are lots of miles driven, and there's just no way to avoid this in rural Alberta because of the distances we have to travel.

I often think about farmers drying their grain. Drying your grain is not an option; you have to dry your grain, or the grain spoils and you lose your entire crop. Of course, the carbon tax is on the natural gas that's used to dry grain. Agriculture products and grain itself have to be transported. Of course, then the cost of the trucking is increased because of the cost of fuel increase. So we look at all of these different things.

You know, we've been talking lately a lot about the rural hospital situation and the doctor situation. People in rural Alberta are always

travelling for doctor appointments. Say, in my community of Valleyview sometimes we're travelling to Grande Prairie for specialists; sometimes we travel to Edmonton for specialists. Of course, this adds to the cost of just necessities like medical appointments.

When we look at heating our homes, that's not an option either. We live in a climate that's very cold. I know that everybody I know is trying their best to make sure that their homes are as efficient as possible, but that still doesn't keep minus 40 out. When it hits minus 20, minus 30, minus 40, our furnaces are on. They have to be on because there's no other way to counteract that other than by burning natural gas to heat our homes.

Now, another thing is travel. I guess you could look at the cost of air travel but even just vehicular travel to travel to other parts of Alberta, maybe visiting friends and relatives or even a holiday. That negatively affects tourism and, actually, tourism across Canada, because this carbon tax is, of course, Canada-wide. I think that hurts the opportunity to build unity within our province and within our country as we learn and meet other people from across Canada and across Alberta.

We look at the cost of inflation right now, and we see the price of everything going up. A lot of it has to do with other factors, but this adds to the increase in inflation because everything that we have uses carbon to be moved, heated, or cooled. We look at our groceries. Our groceries are transported. Many of them, the vegetables and fruits and stuff like that, are brought in from eastern Canada, southern B.C., or from the United States and even farther. That transportation cost is increased with the increased carbon tax. Then you look at a grocery store, for instance: that building has to be heated. Those coolers have to be operated to keep things cool. So these things just add up over and over again. You put a tax on one small part, and that tax affects prices all the way across the whole economy.

Of course, we don't have options on things like this. There are no options when it comes to heating your home, there are no options when it comes to buying groceries, and there are no options when it comes to going to work. I know there's been talk about, you know, that there were some comments made by the NDP leader about taking the bus. Well, in rural Alberta we don't have those bus systems. Some of these towns are too small to have buses travelling around the town and everything. Of course, that still doesn't help people from rural Alberta being able to get from their farm or their acreage to the local town where they buy groceries and have their kids in school and those things.

Now, I remember that back when the NDP brought in the carbon tax, they thought that maybe if they just promoted it more, it would help. So we saw the advertisements going on in movie theatres, but I think what we saw happen, too, is that people were so upset seeing it in their face when they went to the theatre, they were actually booing, at the theatres, these advertisements. In fact, one of the MLAs that just was elected in the last election – I was talking to him and talking about that very same thing – said that, yeah, before he was elected, he remembered going to a movie theatre and seeing the carbon tax advertisement come on and actually booing it. You know, these things were happening.

These things are real. I think this negatively affects everybody across Canada but in particular rural Alberta and rural Albertans that have to travel such great distances to gain the services that they need. This is a way of tax. When it was brought in, it was supposed to bring in \$3 billion a year in taxes for the government, and that was the largest tax increase in Alberta history at that time. We can't stand by and watch this Prime Minister do this to our economy and to our people. Again, inflation is incredibly high right now. People are hurting. People are having a hard time paying their electricity

bills, their gas bills, their fuel bills. Talking to farmers, when we're talking about how much this will increase the cost on their farms, for some of these larger farmers, it's going to cost tens of thousands and even hundreds of thousands of dollars more just by adding on these extra carbon taxes.

We have to be able to be competitive in a world market. We know that our energy is produced at the highest standards, so we should be encouraging our energy use across the world, and we shouldn't be discouraging our energy use within our own country. That makes us less competitive in the world market. We need to be conscious of this because we do live in a world where our economies are all intertwined.

I just want to again say that I want to support Motion 18. I think we need to put the pressure on the federal government as strong as we can here in Alberta and let them know how we feel about this, that we want this carbon tax scrapped. We need to get our economy going. We need to take care of the people of Alberta and make sure that they can live their lives the best they can, and this does nothing but hurt them.

Thank you.

The Speaker: On Government Motion 18, are there others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer some thoughts on Government Motion 18.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government of Canada to stop its planned April 1, 2022, increase of the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne and its further plan to increase the carbon tax to \$170 per tonne given that Canadian families are struggling with the highest inflation in 30 years.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the government simply refuse to acknowledge or take responsibility for decisions that they've made to make life more expensive and more difficult for Albertans. Of course, they'll say that they didn't cause the supply chain issues or inflation, but in challenging times they've proven themselves capable of, well, nothing; for example, not keeping Albertans safe during the worst of the pandemic and not making a plan to catch up on surgical backlogs. Instead, the UCP government makes bad decisions or are conveniently absent from work when Albertans need a government to be steady, capable, and reliable, when they need a government that listens and has their best interests at heart.

8:40

This is what we're seeing again tonight, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are asking the provincial government to provide capable leadership and put the interests of Albertans ahead of their own narrow, partisan interests. They need help. They're asking for it. But instead of listening to Albertans, this government is trying to get us to look the other way, to be distracted. This is an old, sad trick, one that bullies sometimes play in the schoolyard, you know, point up at the sky and then punch the unsuspecting kid in the face.

We're tired of the UCP government's incompetence and its inability to hear Albertans and support them. Instead, the Premier is pointing up or sideways and then punching us with sneaky tax increases, tuition increases, school fee hikes, fees to hike in the parks, and, perhaps worse, a brutal policy to freeze fixed incomes of people with disabilities and also seniors when that freeze is costing groceries, heat, and basic living security. The cost of everything, Mr. Speaker, is going up. And let me be quite clear. This UCP government has all the tools it needs to help Albertans and their families to make ends meet. Instead – instead – they're making everything more expensive and then pointing around the room to find someone else to blame.

I want to be more specific. Under the UCP government they've increased income taxes, property taxes, tuition, student debt, camping and park fees, car insurance, and utilities. In their first budget the UCP deindexed tax brackets from inflation. This is something that the Premier complained about endlessly when he was an MP and when he was head of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. He called this a pernicious and insidious tax grab that disproportionately hurt low- and middle-income earners. Over the course of this government's fiscal plan this will be a \$1 billion pernicious and insidious tax grab. That's \$1 billion directly out of the pockets of Albertans.

To make matters worse, the UCP also deindexed AISH and seniors' benefits. So now, as inflation rises, those Albertans on those benefits actually lose money. It's estimated to be a \$3,000 hit for AISH recipients and a \$750 hit for senior couples over the course of the UCP's fiscal plan. We urge the government to fix this immediately. We will work quickly to amend the budget bill and reindex these benefits so that Albertans on fixed incomes are not bleeding the income that they don't have.

As I mentioned, the UCP also increased property taxes on Albertans. Their first two budgets almost doubled the 2020 tax hike for Calgary homeowners, and they went back to that, well, again this year. This year they're taking an extra \$13 million from Calgary homeowners while cutting funding from municipalities. Mr. Speaker, the government needs to reverse these tax hikes.

The UCP has also made drastic increases to tuition and student debt. Just this year they approved tuition increases ranging from 20 to 100 per cent. That means that students will be paying thousands of dollars more each year. Meanwhile the UCP has cut student aid and increased interest rates on student loans. The UCP often talks about burdening future generations with debt. Well, they're doing exactly that with these increases to tuition and student loan interest rates. Not only is this short sighted, given that we need to strengthen postsecondary achievement and that we need to support the sector as an engine of future economic growth, but it's also hurting people right now.

Next up, Mr. Speaker, are camping and park fees. This is another example of the UCP government nickel and diming Albertans. The UCP has repeatedly increased camping fees over the course of their term, and they've also charged people \$90 to take a walk in Kananaskis Country. They took an area that belongs to all Albertans and started charging them \$90 a year just to set foot in it. They said that the fees would be used to improve access and services. Instead, what Albertans see in this budget is an almost \$4 million cut from the operating budget of Alberta parks. For the reference of all members, that can be found on page 91 of the government estimates. Albertans don't trust the UCP, so when they try to distract us and tell us to look away, Albertans aren't falling for it.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, Albertans might not even be able to afford the insurance on their vehicle to get to Kananaskis. Auto insurance is skyrocketing, and that's because the UCP removed the cap on insurance premium increases. Not only that; all we see is a Finance minister patting himself on the back for making insurance companies more profitable every day, and that is a result of that government being lobbied by the insurance industry. I just want everybody to understand that we on this side of the House watch out for Albertans while the people on that side of the House watch out for the interests of lobbyists. Car insurance companies, after they successfully lobbied the government to make the changes that they needed, immediately increased premiums. A lot of them were double-digit increases, and some went as high as 30 per cent. Worst of all, these increases came during the pandemic, when Albertans were already struggling to make ends meet. We called on the UCP to provide relief for drivers, but they refused.

Finally, Albertans have been faced with rising utility bills, as everyone well knows. Again, our government introduced a cap on electricity prices, but the UCP removed it. Since then, power prices have doubled, and Albertans are feeling the pinch. At the same time, the natural gas prices have increased in the middle of the winter. The UCP promised relief in their last budget, but that turned out to be a fake program. It doesn't even take effect until next winter and only if prices increase dramatically. While the UCP has promised \$50 for electricity bills, that pales in comparison to the hundreds of dollars extra per month that Albertans are paying on their utility bills. By the government members' own admission the program is paltry.

Due to these high prices Albertans are falling behind on their bills. Our caucus is hearing from Albertans who are worried about being disconnected on April 15, when the ban is lifted. I want to remind members that we even brought draft legislation to the government to extend the disconnection ban, but once again they refused to help Albertans. They wouldn't even debate that in this House.

To sum up my initial points, there are several ways that this UCP government has increased costs for Albertans. Income taxes, property taxes, tuition, student debt, camping and park fees, car insurance, and utilities have all increased under this government's watch. They are a direct result of the policy choices made by the UCP, which means that they have the power to provide real relief for Albertans to address the rising cost of living, but they refuse, and instead they continue to point the finger and do nothing while Albertans struggle to make ends meet.

Mr. Speaker, in the time that I have left, I just want to address some of the comments from some of the government members that we've heard weigh in on the debate. First of all, let me thank my colleagues from West Yellowhead and from Cardston-Siksika for some reasonably solid jokes, at least on the UCP spectrum, talking about damaging hippos and hypocrites and worrying about our dad remarrying to somebody else and not telling us. In the UCP humour spectrum those were solid jokes, so a metaphorical tip of the hat to those members for bringing some levity to the debate.

I do want to address some of the issues, though, that members raised. First of all, I want to correct the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, who made an egregious error. I almost called a point of order because it was so disruptive, this error that he made, claiming that this borehole that's going to be drilled in his constituency is the deepest in the world. It's not. It's not. Just for the information of all of the members of the Legislature, the deepest borehole in the world is the Kola superborehole, which is in far northern Russia, close to the border of Norway.

Mr. Yao: Your closest allies.

Mr. Schmidt: You know, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo knows full well that every member of this House supports wholeheartedly the people of Ukraine, and we have long spoken against Russia's invasion of that country. So for him to make these kinds of statements: it's not surprising from the member, but unfortunately it continues his pattern of disappointing remarks.

8:50

Anyway, I wanted to correct the record so that when the member talks about the deepest borehole in the world, he knows that it's the Kola superborehole in Russia.

I also wanted to express some concerns, something that the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon can take back to his friends at the Hemp Alliance. I can't remember the name of the exact organization that he talked about, but he expressed his desire to

expand the industrial hemp crop acreage here in the province of Alberta. Let me say that I support that only insofar as it doesn't displace the crop acreage of recreational hemp, which is also a tremendous product, one that does a great service to humanity. I wouldn't want to see that crop pushed out to the benefit of industrial hemp. I hope that the member remembers that there is room for all types of hemp in our great province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks. I look forward to the rest of the debate on this motion. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Why, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oh, was that a load of something we just heard. My goodness. I wish to thank the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for his fantastic comments and, well, a little bit of hypocrisy here, especially considering that he was part of the government that did impose a carbon tax on all Albertans, also chased away so many international companies from the north from our hydrocarbon industries, resulting in the layoffs of a lot of geologists, his fellow co-workers, in APEGA. You know, I hope they didn't get you all the feedback that you wanted on that decision. Nevertheless, I digress.

Mr. Speaker, we are here to speak about Motion 18, which is about the carbon tax and our disgruntlement with that, such a tax that is going up by 25 per cent here on April 1. No, it is not a joke.

You know what? I think we need to take a look at this from another side here. Perhaps we can try to understand where the Prime Minister is coming from in all this. To that, myself I have to look back to my roots. I go way back. And, yes, Mr. Speaker, you can look at me and go: yes, he's from the east; he's from the far east. Yes, sir. I am from New Brunswick, sir, and it's very interesting to see that.

I can only assume that when, say, the Prime Minister goes to where my cousin lives in Acadie-Bathurst – you know, a great Liberal stronghold, unfortunately. But you know what? He probably goes into my cousin's basement and sees that big vat of oil that they use to burn in the oil-generating furnace that burns oil. He probably looks at that, that oil that is imported from Irving Oil from places like Venezuela or Saudi Arabia, and he knows that those are unethical places that produce this product. He's probably thinking: "You know what? We have to put a tax on this. We've got to stop these imports, this oil from these regimes that really trample human rights, that show no respect for the environment. It's absolute atrocities that happen over in these nations." He sees that big vat of oil being burned in my cousin's house, and he recognizes that so many houses, in the thousands, in the Maritimes burn oil, and he probably wishes they could burn natural gas like they do here in Alberta, which is much cleaner and much more friendly. I think maybe that's what the Prime Minister is thinking when he puts in these rules.

Or perhaps – perhaps, Mr. Speaker – he looks at all the people commuting from right across Canada all the way up to Fort McMurray, 10,000 strong, people flying in jets every day, every week, every year, flying in jets. He sees that community and goes: my goodness; we have to do something to discourage that. Maybe they will live in Fort McMurray if he could make it more difficult for them to commute. I cross my fingers because maybe we're in alignment there. Maybe this Prime Minister isn't so bad. It's just interesting to try to understand why the Prime Minister would impose a 25 per cent tax.

I've heard that the Prime Minister is very spiritual and that he believes in the power of the mind, as does the rest of the Liberal caucus, from my understanding. Perhaps they think that if they

concentrate enough, they will cause the Earth to tilt so that come the winter months, when we usually have great cold, minus 30 to 40, you know, very cold, maybe we will not get that cold with his efforts to tilt this planet as well as, hopefully, prevent the Earth from going so far away from the sun during those winter months that perhaps – perhaps – we won't need these fossil fuels. That is what the Prime Minister is thinking.

Mr. Smith: Are you suggesting they tilt to the left?

Mr. Yao: Tilt to the left, absolutely. You know what? I'll take it if we can get some more warm months in Canada, which is one of the coldest nations in the world.

But those are the things I think our Prime Minister is thinking, perhaps, when he's imposing such a tax. It's very interesting.

You know, in a nutshell, it's frustrating to see such a tax get imposed on not just Albertans but all Canadians. My goodness. Again, back to New Brunswick, as an example, with an average wage of \$13 an hour. How does that impact those people? How are they going to be able to afford groceries? How are they going to afford that lobster that comes off that boat for \$7? It's going to make it more expensive for them to ship that all the way to Alberta and everything else, where they make a lot of the revenues from their main industry, which is fishing and seafood. I can't understand why he would put these rules in.

It is difficult. It does hurt lower income. It hurts middle-class families. It is chasing away jobs. A lot of my friends have gone to the United States. A friend of mine just left to Saudi Arabia, of all places, to go work. I have other friends who are in Iraq right now working. All of these international companies: boy, they took the best and the brightest, and that is unfortunate. All good Canadians. Transporting all these jobs away.

Perhaps he looks at – yeah, you know, I honestly can't understand it, why he's putting these taxes. Again, I really think that the Prime Minister has the best of intentions. He really just wants to discourage us from using oil from Saudi and Nigeria and all these other OPEC nations. Maybe he foresaw what was happening in Russia. Who can say for certain? But it has been destructive for our communities.

I can certainly tell you how his taxes have hurt Fort McMurray and have affected my friends and my community. I can only hope that – I can only pray that he doesn't clue in that we are all carbon-based life forms. When he clues into that, I can't imagine the taxes he's going to impose on all of us. Let's make sure he never watches an episode of *Star Trek* or something. You know, it's just very frustrating.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that it is very disappointing that we see such a tax going on when people are trying to just live and prosper. We see these things that are being imposed on us by someone who has known nothing but a golden lifestyle, a lifestyle with the Aga Khan, a lifestyle where he gets to travel all over the world and dress in all sorts of great things and paint his face in whatever way he wants, with no fear of discrimination. We can only hope that he's got a plan that we're just not aware of and that he will perhaps re-evaluate these things.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I just have to say that Motion 18 is an excellent motion. I'd like to thank the Member for Rimby-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre for putting this motion forward as we attempt to convince our federal government to stop this 25 per cent carbon tax, which Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition so wholeheartedly supports, and that is very, very disappointing.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the honour and pleasure to speak before this Assembly as we move forward through the evening. Thank you so much.

The Speaker: What a shame.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a hard act to follow, but I will certainly attempt to do so. Thank you to my colleague.

I actually just wanted to speak for a few minutes about this. We talked about this a bit earlier today, but one of the things that stood out to me very strongly, I suppose, when our Prime Minister was first elected was how he spoke about feminism and the feminists. It was on his tongue quite significantly. He spoke about it all the time.

9:00

I wanted to talk about energy poverty for just a moment, not just here in Alberta but globally, and what our responsibility is to make sure that our resource stewardship of the incredible things that we have in our province not only makes it to Canadians for our prosperity but to other countries. There are many, many countries where energy poverty is the difference between education for a young girl, the ability to be able to have a small business, microloans, burgeoning middle classes in other countries, that we have a responsibility to get energy to.

We take for granted that we can flick on a light, turn on the heat. My colleague from Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo was just speaking about that, about this incredibly cold winter that we had. I have – I've mentioned this so many times in this House, but I'll say it again – 40 solar panels on my house, and believe me when I tell you that it didn't work this winter. If you saw my electricity bills as well, you would be shocked, because there were so many times when we could not tap into the grid that way. Believe me, I love solar. I love all of the options that we have for energy. But I just wanted to say quickly that this isn't just about us. This is about our global responsibility of being able to get that energy to other countries that don't have it, to help see the growth of those countries.

We're wanting to attract people to our province, and in order to make sure that we are able to bring people to this province, we have to be able to support them here with roads, schools, medical equipment. Every single time we talk about COVID, I want you to consider a syringe or a tube or anything that kept a person alive at that time that is made from petrochemicals. Everything we wear half the time, what we're sitting on, your cellphones, everything: petrochemicals. Imagine just for a moment living one day without one of those devices, how you would function. I don't know what I would do if I couldn't just contact my kids with a text and find out where they are at any moment. That's just a privilege of living here and having all of these devices. But just for a moment consider not only what our lives would be like but also the incredible work that has been done in the sector. What the motion is speaking to very distinctly is also not just the oil and gas sector but the various diversifications that come from that sector but also about Canadians themselves.

This is an attack on the people of Canada. It's an attack on our livelihoods, who we are, the identity, especially, of our province, which is why you hear so much pride coming from here. My dad is a petrochemical engineer, and in the 1970s in this province the particulates here were considerably worse than they are now. The amount that the sector has been able to clean their products, to be able to change the way that they deliver resources to us has changed – well, it is measurable. But it is unbelievable to know the difference, especially if you were – my dad would have been in his 30s at that time working in the petrochemical sector. He tells me all the time about what the sky looked like at that time here when you flew into Alberta, when you flew into Calgary, and about the distinct difference that there is now. That is because of, not in any

small part, the sector, that worked so hard to produce the best products that it possibly could. So I just hope that, like, beyond all of the rhetoric, we can all agree on that.

I would also, finally, like to say that we keep talking about our resources and who we are, but understand, Mr. Speaker – and the Minister of Energy had mentioned this earlier – that the demand for oil and gas right now is as high as it's ever been. That's not going to change for a little bit, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't be looking at other ways to produce energy. In fact, these are things that have to happen in concert with each other.

But having said that, for every single barrel of oil that is not created here in Canada, it is created somewhere else that does not have the laws and the restrictions or the production standards that we have in this country. Every single barrel. Every single barrel that comes up the St. Lawrence from another country that does not have the rules and regulations or the human rights that we have in this country, every single barrel that we don't send out that is going from somewhere else: it's called carbon leakage, and that leakage has to be discussed at every single level of this discussion.

When you put a carbon tax on the people of Alberta and across Canada – I'd like to understand if anybody in here has slowed down their driving. Even with what we're paying at the pump right now, how many people have changed their habits? How many people? I know I have to drive to get here. I'm pretty sure that my colleague who just spoke has a two-hour, maybe three-hour longer drive than I do to get here. Our jobs are here. We're supposed to come to work.

So suggesting somehow that a carbon tax is going to alter the behaviour of people who are doing these jobs – what about our agriculture sector? What about that? What about fertilizer? These are all things that are produced, and every time you put a tax on those things, it doesn't help any of that. Quite frankly, people are going to find a way. We're a resilient bunch of people. Would you rather have us burning wood and other things to keep ourselves warm?

Here's the question that we have to ask. We have carbon leakage, but we also have an opportunity to do better in this province. If the federal government was willing to work with us and understand what Alberta is trying to accomplish, imagine where Canada could be. Imagine, for just a minute, being the world leader. We actually already are, but don't you think it's time that our federal government worked with us, Mr. Speaker, together to understand not only how amazing Canada is, how fantastic we are in our resource stewardship but to be so proud – so proud – to walk into a room when you're overseas knowing you come from a country that does it the best and that you're willing to work with people to do even better and that your product lives side by side with all of the environmental pieces that are necessary in order for us to do our part.

But the Prime Minister has to understand that by penalizing the everyday person, especially when you come from a province – we're 4.3 million people in this massive province. It's a huge, huge province. It's the size of some small countries. It is not an easy drive just even going across Calgary or going across Edmonton or anything. We all take for granted, you know, that if you're going for coffee with somebody, you can drive 45 minutes to go have coffee with them, because that is a privilege that we hold.

The question we have to ask ourselves is: when we're imposing these things on people, is it actually changing behaviour? It's not. In fact, if anything, it's just making money for the government, and it's not being translated into federal dollars back into the provinces to help them do better and do better policies and contribute to the ESG. All it is is a talking point to be able to say that you've imposed this on the people, with absolutely no outcomes to show anything different. The companies themselves, Mr. Speaker, by being more

efficient, make more profits, do better, do better by the environment, are able to hire more people, and are able to help us supply our roads, our hospitals, our schools. The largest contributors to arts in this province have come from the oil and gas sector.

For anybody who's listening and especially as a heartfelt plea to our federal counterparts, I just wanted them to understand the incredible things that we're seeing now and the ability for us to bounce back and to be able to bring our economies back, to bring our people back, to unify our country, not only through the language with which we speak to each other and the kindness that is required in order to heal post COVID but also to consider those transportation corridors that also unite us across our country through trains, through electricity, through pipelines, water, all of these important things. Let's not take for granted, Mr. Speaker, for one moment how blessed and privileged we are in this country, but having that means we need to share it, get it to other countries. Also, we're not only exporting our incredible products; we're exporting our technology as well, because in typical Canadian and Alberta style, it's not something that we consider proprietary or that we want to hold on to. It's something we want to share with the rest of the world.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others on Government Motion 18? The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Member for Calgary-Bow.

9:10

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise and speak to Motion 18. I've really enjoyed the debate and discussion in the Assembly thus far, and I'm going to try to be brief here. But if I can, you know, the way I look at this and the way I summarize what this motion is calling for, of course, is: an end to the Trudeau carbon tax. There are many reasons behind that, as you've heard here today, but if I can summarize all of those reasons, it's because they don't work, and they make life more expensive for everyday Albertans and everyday Canadians. That's the only real, tangible thing that we know of when it comes to the carbon tax. That's the only tangible and real effect we know is created by carbon taxes: they make life more expensive.

Now, as some of my colleagues have said here, of course, I agree that we need to take action to reduce emissions, but a carbon tax is the wrong way of doing it. We need to do it through investments in technology and innovation and by supporting our industries to come up with more innovative and technologically oriented solutions to deliver their goods and services and do what they do in a more carbon-neutral manner. That, Mr. Speaker, I believe, is the key to reducing emissions in Alberta and in Canada.

But, of course, the carbon tax increase that's coming on Friday, that's coming on April 1, as we all know, is coming at the worst possible time for all Canadians. Costs are on the rise everywhere, Mr. Speaker. The cost of groceries is increasing; the cost of gasoline is increasing; our utility bills are increasing. I really wonder why, then, is now the right time? Why are we increasing the carbon tax when we are facing these challenges?

Just to put that into perspective, what are we actually facing when it comes to the rising cost of living? We're facing inflationary levels that are at 30-year highs, Mr. Speaker. That's where we're at today, a 30-year-high inflationary level. Now, the reason for that is very clear. The reason for the 30-year high in inflation is due to Liberal fiscal mismanagement and other inflationary policies. No matter how you want to spin it, that is the core of the matter.

I should note as well the hypocrisy that's associated with the increase on April 1. I haven't heard any members in the Assembly

discussing it, but from what I understand as well, on April 1 Mr. Trudeau is giving himself a raise – how lovely – a \$20,000 raise, not just for himself but for all Members of Parliament. Of course, he's not trying to stop that. He's happy to collect more income when Canadians are challenged, when Canadians are struggling to pay their bills. He's happy to give himself a raise and make life more expensive. I think there's a term for that, and I think the Member for West Yellowhead talked about that. I think the word is "hypocrisy," Mr. Speaker. But we're all used to Liberal hypocrisy and NDP hypocrisy.

But let me give you a quick overview of what some of these increases mean for the average family, for the average person watching at home. Just one thing I did want to note on the topic of inflation, Mr. Speaker. The Bank of Canada – let's take partisan politics out of it – has said that the April 1 increase will increase inflation by half a per cent. So it's not bad enough that we're already at a 30-year high when it comes to inflation, but we're going to pursue policies that are going to add to that. That's what's happening here.

Let me again give you an overview. As it stands today, the average price of gas in Alberta is \$1.66. Now, up till 2030 – the Liberals are set to continue to increase their carbon tax all the way up to 2030 – by the time they get there, just factoring in the carbon tax increase, which is factored to result in a 38-cent increase by 2030, it will push that price to \$2.04 for Albertans. That's not factoring in inflation, the high inflation that we're seeing. That's not factoring in inflation over the course of eight years.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the average family, the average household in Alberta, according to a 2009 vehicle survey by the government of Canada, has stipulated that households in Alberta have 1.87 vehicles on average. So let's look at the average family: 1.87 vehicles. Let's use that as a basis. Presently, with the price of gasoline today, an average family with 1.87 vehicles will spend approximately \$340 a month, assuming they fill up their vehicle every two weeks – \$340, which for some is even a stretch – \$340 a month, or \$4,000 a year. Add in the 38 cents that we will get to, facilitated through carbon tax increases, by 2030, and that same family will be paying 25 per cent more. They'll be paying \$420 per month, or \$5,000 per year. That's a difference of \$1,000 per year for the average family – for the average family – for, Mr. Speaker, living their lives, for taking their kids to hockey, for going to the grocery store, for visiting a friend and having coffee.

The Liberals and their NDP allies, which, in consequence, includes the members opposite, who are legally part of the federal NDP, have decided it's time to make life more expensive for Albertans and all Canadians, and I hope the members opposite – because I think we can all agree that we must bring these costs down. I encourage the members opposite to stand up and support this motion, but I'm not sure that we're going to see that, Mr. Speaker.

Furthermore, of course, that increase will occur not just in gasoline, as I mentioned, but the increase will also be felt on groceries, on utility bills, on all facets of Albertans' lives. Now, we know, of course, that the NDP loves carbon taxes. That's why they won't be voting for this motion. They love carbon taxes. Even though they never told Albertans about it and they never campaigned on it, the first thing, or one of the first things, I should say, that they did when they got elected in 2015 was introduce a carbon tax. You know what they did with those proceeds, Mr. Speaker? They hired people from Ontario to install light bulbs in your homes and install low-flow shower heads. That's where that money went. A real effective use of charging Albertans more money.

Now, the other point, Mr. Speaker – and I don't want to go on for too long here – is that we know very clearly that carbon taxes don't

work. Now, I'm going to back that up. I believe it's important to provide details. I want us to take a look at B.C. I want us to take a look at British Columbia. In 2007 they introduced a carbon tax, and of course they told the people of British Columbia that that will reduce emissions and help get them to their respective climate goals. Well, let's see where we're at today. Let's evaluate those many years of carbon tax, and I should say, of course, that the carbon tax in B.C. has not been stable at a single price. It's been increasing since 2007 and getting progressively more expensive. So where are we today? According to the government of B.C.'s own data, in 2019 GHG emissions were up from their 2007 baseline. In fact, emissions increased by 17 per cent over the 10-year period following the implementation of the carbon tax. Where's the rationale? It's not working. It's clearly not working in British Columbia.

Now, furthermore, just to just wrap up, Mr. Speaker, what our side of the House here is saying this evening is that Trudeau must stop this tax hike. It's that simple. Of course, Alberta's government is taking measures to bring the cost of living down. We've introduced an electricity rebate, \$150 to all eligible households, and as one of my colleagues mentioned, you won't need to apply for this. It'll appear directly on your bill. We're also removing the gas tax on April 1, and Albertans will see 13 cents knocked off the price. Now, of course, with the federal Liberals if they move forward with their increase, unfortunately they won't realize all of those savings. As well, we've also taken action by repealing the NDP's carbon tax, and when I was running in 2019 and knocking on doors in my neighbourhood, one of the top issues if not the top issue that I heard from people in my community, and I think members here found similar sentiment, was that they wanted the carbon tax gone. We delivered on those promises and are continuing to take steps to make life more affordable for Albertans, and I invite the members opposite to support it.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

9:20 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. members. I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 4

Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022

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

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's always a pleasure to get up and speak in this House. Of course, when we're faced with the current proposed piece of legislation by this government, we see yet again the disdain and disrespect that Conservatives, and in this case the United Conservatives, have for different orders of government. Here they are completely disregarding a different order of government and the authority and the power that that order of government has to actually make decisions for its own citizens. Now, of course, I understand that we have those citizens in common, most definitely, but it's important that we respect other orders of government, that we work together when it comes to governing on behalf of all those citizens together

as different orders of government, in this case municipalities and us as a province.

I know that it's been said by members opposite that, well, they're just listening to Albertans. Well, then, why not bring a co-operative approach to working with a different order of government instead of simply just dictating to them what must be done? That's what we have here within this bill. Now, it's a slippery slope that we're on, Mr. Chair, because in this case it might be related to masks and masking that this here government is just simply taking a dictatorial approach to other orders of government, and it's going to open the door. If we allow this kind of legislation to pass, then what's to say that next year this United Conservative government isn't going to just simply go and make another move to actually dictate to municipalities yet something else? We don't know that, but that's what this piece of legislation is doing.

You know, Mr. Chair, we put in an incredible amount of work and effort when we were in government to establish big-city charters. There were a lot of people sitting at the table. It was a co-operative approach to thinking up a new way of working in a co-operative manner, again, I stress, when it came to municipalities. This is what we would like – I know for a fact that the municipal orders of government would like to see more of this. Rather than it simply being dictated what they have to do, they would like to see people coming together, sitting down at a table, working together co-operatively to determine how we all move forward, different orders of government, so that we can actually serve the people of Alberta the best way.

It's puzzling, Mr. Chair, because this government was elected as offering and being, like, the champions of rural Alberta and other municipalities outside of the big cities, you know, Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Lethbridge, and then here they are just saying: "Okay. Well, we're just going to dictate everything that has to be done. We're actually going to take this power away from you." That's essentially what's happening here. Again we have an example of this government taking power away from others within the province of Alberta, taking power out of the hands of people, taking it out of the hands of other orders of government.

Now, it's important that we consider that – well, let me take a step back, Mr. Chair. You know, a lot of us remember when this Premier decided that he was going to sign his grassroots guarantee. It's important to know that here we have a reversal of this Premier and this government when it comes to this approach and that here we have the UCP interfering with local decision-making and imposing top-down governance. Now, on this side of the House we respect local democracy. We respect municipalities. As I stated, we put a lot of work into working with municipalities and coming up with alternative ways of funding, which was all just completely reversed and taken back and destroyed by this UCP government.

I think it's important that we respect local leaders, and this bill is going completely against that. It's a shame, because I believe this to be an important part of our democracy. You know, members on the other side of the House like to get up and talk about freedom, and it's hypocritical that here we see, in this bill, them actually taking freedom away from other local leaders and municipalities. You can't have it both ways, Mr. Chair. You either believe in democracy, you believe in freedom, you believe in co-operation, in sharing power, or you don't. That's why, for me, it's important to get up in this House and speak against this bill, because here it may just be – you know, the members opposite will say, "Well, it's only pertaining to masks and masking," but if we allow this to move forward, then what's to say in the future that it won't be regarding any other issues?

What's most disheartening about this bill, also, is the way that some of the members on the other side have actually spoken about

this bill. I believe during second reading, you know, I highlighted the whole issue of spanking. I can't believe that a member on the other side of this House, in reference to this bill, brought up the whole idea of just that they need to spank another order of government. Like, how paternalistic can you get?

9:30

I think that's what we see with this government, with members on the other side of the House. You know, it's expected from Conservatives, I would say, Mr. Chair, because that's the way they see the world, in a very paternalistic fashion, that others need to be spanked, which I find completely ridiculous. You're essentially saying that this grown-up person, this leader of their community, needs to be treated like a child. I'd like members of this House to think about that. Think about what you're saying when you – you may be anecdotally bringing it up, but you reference spanking. You're essentially saying that others need to be treated as children.

We're talking about leaders. We're talking about leaders of their communities, so I'd like them to check their language on that. If they're going to be dictatorial, then let them say that they're going to be dictatorial when it comes to certain issues and don't hide from the fact that you're actually being hypocritical when it comes to these specific freedoms and the responsibility that these local leaders have over the communities that they represent.

I think that a much better approach, Mr. Chair, would actually be to work in co-operation with these other orders of government. That would be more successful, working in partnership with other orders of government, with local leaders coming to the table, yes, adults coming to the table and actually talking with one another rationally, working out issues, concerns. This is what Albertans expect of the different orders of government, the leaders, the political leaders, that they expect.

It doesn't matter which side of the House. They expect rational. They expect dialogue, right? This is what Albertans expect of us, and I know that members on the other side of the House can agree with that. Then why this bill? Why this approach? Why are you supporting essentially taking powers away from others and moving towards this dictatorial approach? It's not befitting of this Legislature.

Again, Mr. Chair, I would ask the members on the other side of the House to check their language, because it's not becoming of this House either to talk about spanking and treating other orders of government as children. I think that kind of language and, well, this legislation at its fundamental base is essentially just picking a fight. It's picking a fight with other orders of government. I would even go so far as saying that it's crushing local democracy.

So with that, Mr. Chair, I am going to take my seat, but I'd, please, ask the members on the other side of the House to really consider what it is that they're presenting in the form of this bill before us.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: I see the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak on Bill 4, one that I brought to the House. I would just say that we heard some words here a few minutes ago, and very few of them actually are applicable to the bill before us, so I will correct the record here.

Mr. Chair, Bill 4, I guess if you were to shorten the name of it, because it's got a long name – it says Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022. Wow. That's a long name for a bill. But if I had to

shorten the name of the bill, I would call it the Stay in Your Lane bill simply because that's all this is doing.

The advice to stay in your own lane is actually good advice for us on this side of the floor to take, it's good advice for the federal government to take, and it's a good idea for municipalities to take because all orders of government, I'm sure, generally speaking – I certainly believe in most cases it's with the best of intentions – tend to drift into each other's lanes of responsibility. It's a natural thing because we all care about the whole world. Even if it's not the part of the world that we were elected to look after, we just care. I think that's why people get elected, because they just care, and sometimes when people just care, they do or say that they're going to do or try to do things that really kind of go out of the scope of what they were elected to do.

All this bill does is – really, we were kind of forced to do this, Chair, and I'll explain that as I talk here. To be clear, municipalities under provincial legislation have a wide, wide, wide scope of authority to protect the health and safety of their citizens. That was true before Bill 4, and that is true after Bill 4. Municipalities still have a wide, wide, wide scope of authority to look after the health and safety of their citizens – that's how it ought to be because it matters – and because they have those responsibilities, we need to let them do that.

But in this particular case – it's a little bit unfortunate – some members, really, of the council of the city that we're in kind of made a public statement that they were going to override the provincial health rules, which, frankly, the province is responsible for. And that's not to say that the municipality doesn't have a lot of authority in that area, and they should. Here's what doesn't change. Before Bill 4 the municipalities had the authority to determine things like masking and vaccination requirements on things that the municipality owns like the transit system, like the municipal buildings, like a rec centre that the municipality owns and operates, like an arena that the municipality owns and operates, and they still have that authority today. Bill 4 does not change that.

Now, I think the obvious response to what I've said so far is: what does Bill 4 actually change? Well, let's ask the bill. That shouldn't be hard to do because it's a really short bill. It's two pages. I could actually read the whole thing out, I think, in about five minutes. But I think, to stay on topic, section 2 . . .

Mr. Schmidt: Do you have to ask for help to do it, or are you able to do it on your own?

Mr. McIver: You see, Mr. Chair, the folks on the other side: they just can't stand hearing what's going on. The member there in the back row who's been chastised – I think he's set a record for having to withdraw remarks in this House, and I guess he's going to beat his own record. So that's okay. I'll just carry on here because some of the folks on the other side asked for an explanation, and I'm trying to provide it. Hopefully, I don't have to shout over the member opposite to do that.

What the bill says in section 2 is:

Section 7 is amended by striking out “A council” and substituting “Subject to section 7.1, a council”.

So the question is: what is it in section 7 that has changed because of Bill 4? And then section 3 of Bill 4 answers that question. It says:

Face mask and proof of COVID-19 vaccination bylaws

7.1(1) Subject to subsections (5) and (6), on the coming into force of this section, a council may not, unless approved by the Minister, bring into force a bylaw or an amendment to a bylaw that requires one or both of the following:

Okay. Here it comes. Now we're going to learn what municipalities can't do. That's the next section. The next section, that actually says what they can't do, says that they cannot cause

an individual to wear a face mask or other face covering for the primary purpose of preventing or limiting the spread of COVID-19 or any other communicable disease, as defined in the Public Health Act.

Or they cannot cause

an individual to provide proof of vaccination against COVID-19 or proof of a negative COVID-19 test on entering a premises.

That's it. That's all, folks. That's all they can't do. Frankly, all it says is that they can't override the health order that the Health department made for Alberta, which is a provincial area of jurisdiction. All it says is: stay in your lane.

9:40

Now, I will say – because somebody will raise it, and rightly so – that for a period of time during the state of emergency the municipalities had a broader range of authority, because of the COVID pandemic, where they could make these rules, and rightly so, but the states of emergency have elapsed because of the reduced case counts, mostly the reduced people in hospital and the people in ICU, so now the provincial health authority decided that those rules don't need to be in place anymore.

I suppose that if you wanted to read this technically – and I'd be happy if a lawyer disagreed with what I'm going to say next because I'm not a lawyer and I don't give legal advice, but it's my legislation; I think I can talk about it – I think what it doesn't stop municipalities from doing is providing people wear a mask if they go into some building or something that the municipality owns and operates, again, like transit or a municipally owned recreation centre. They have that authority. They can make that bylaw. What they can't do is require people to wear masks in private businesses, which is beyond their scope of authority.

But here's the thing. Even as simple as that is, there's still a check for safety that we put in here, because the next section says, “The Minister shall consider the public interest and consult with the Chief Medical Officer of Health . . . under the Public Health Act in determining whether to approve a bylaw” for something that is not allowed in (a) and (b). In other words, a municipality could still come forward, even with this legislation, with a bylaw to require masks in private businesses and such for COVID-19, but they would have to get permission from the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

In many cases the Minister of Municipal Affairs – and I certainly fall under this category – may not be a medical professional. I am not. So the bill wisely says that the Minister of Municipal Affairs, before he makes a decision on a municipality that wanted to bring forward a mask bylaw that's in the provincial area of responsibility, is required in this legislation – not in regulation; right in the legislation – to consult with the chief medical officer of health to get advice before deciding whether to let the municipality pass a bylaw where the citizens would have to wear masks, for example, in private businesses.

There it is. That's it. And why? The only thing that, really, a municipality can't do is have a mask or vaccine bylaw for COVID-19. Why would they want to if COVID-19 is not there? Now, COVID-19 is still here. I get that, but the provincial health authority, who has the jurisdiction in this area, has said that that's not required anymore. That's it. That's all. No other municipal authorities are hampered. I think that while we disagree on a lot of things with folks on the other side of the House, I hope – I don't know this, but I hope – we can all agree that we're looking forward to the day that COVID-19 goes away. Maybe it never will, but I surely believe that we all hope it does, so that's an authority that in other circumstances municipalities wouldn't need anyways. So there it is.

Unlike the characterization that we heard earlier that municipalities were losing a bunch of authority that they needed, no, they are losing the ability to override the provincial health authority in an area of provincial health responsibility, full stop. Nothing more. That's it. So I kind of feel good about this. The legislation may not ever actually affect a municipality. Edmonton, even after they knew we had this bill coming forward, actually brought forward a bylaw or brought discussion about a bylaw to actually do this and ask. It was defeated, if I understood it right, eight to five, so there were five members that voted to overcome the provincial health rules in the provincial area of responsibility.

Let me say this. I am making the assumption that those members of council did so because they thought, in their minds, that it was in the best interests of the citizens of their city, and good for them. I don't mean that in any way but sincerely. Good for them for doing what they thought was best. That's what we all should do when we're elected. We don't all agree. We're not always right. That's all of us. I mean, I'd like to think I'm always right, but the world has taught me that I am not always right.

The fact is that that's it. It's a stay-in-your-lane bill, very, very, very narrowly focused. I think that there's at least a reasonable chance – I can't guarantee it because municipalities have their own free will to do what they think is best for their citizens, and we'd never want to change that – a municipality still could come forward and say: I want to override the provincial health rules and expand the masking and required vaccination bylaws beyond what's in the, you know, municipal area of jurisdiction. If anything, it could be argued that this legislation actually gives more authority to try that now, to try the Minister of Municipal Affairs on for size to see if he or she might approve that. Of course, whatever he – it happens to be now, but it could be some other he or she, and that he or she would have to, under this legislation, check with the chief medical officer of health.

So there you go. It's kind of a stay-in-your-lane reminder. It may not ever have any effect on any municipality. I hope not, mostly because my deepest hope is that COVID-19 will go away and not be missed. So there it is, Mr. Chair. I felt like we were kind of forced to do this by some municipal members that made public statements about trying to override provincial health rules. This is a requirement to stay in your lane. Let me just say that it's a good reminder for all of us, including our government. People that are elected care about things beyond the legally prescribed scope of authority because they care. If there's anything you want, it's elected people that care. This is just a reminder that while we're caring – and I'll take that as a reminder for me, too – we should try to stay in our lane.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to provide a few brief comments to this Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022, Bill 4, at the committee stage. This amendment act has a bit of a bracketed text, and I would say that perhaps an alternative title might be Well, We Were Going to Fund Raise off This, But It Didn't Work Out Because Edmonton Decided Not to, So We Didn't Have That Opportunity to Fund Raise from the Convoy Wing of the Party Amendment Act, 2022. It's a bit longer, but I think it kind of captures why we're all standing here tonight.

Why are we standing here tonight? Through the fourth wave of the pandemic, the one last fall, the province essentially blew through any credibility or political capital it had left in pandemic

management. I hear this on the doorstep all the time. I ask people, you know: "Is it one thing? If you're unhappy with this government, is there one thing?" Unless it's the lack of family doctors, which comes like a blast off the doorstep from pretty well everybody, they just kind of say: "No. It's the chaos. It's the fact that we can't really trust what people are saying." This was in September and October, too, when I was spending a lot of time on the doorstep as well. In kind of late September and through to the end of October, when it was nice out, I also spent quite a bit of time out there.

People have a great deal of patience. Albertans are very generous of spirit, and people usually start, whether on what I call the left or the right or the exhausted middle, with something like: well, it wouldn't have been easy for anyone to manage through a pandemic. I agree. I've even expressed that sentiment in this House. But then they go on to say that that patience and goodwill have worn out over so many months of absolute chaos, and they use terms like clown car, you know, and the fact that they have completely lost trust in the Premier. Any words that he says just mean nothing to them anymore, whether it's on jobs or the economy or health care or affordability, anything, really. They simply do not trust him.

9:50

You know, what happened with this particular little fracas was that some folks in the city of Edmonton, and I'm not sure if rightly or wrongly – I'm not a medical officer, so I don't quite frankly know – expressed doubt at the government's trajectory in lifting restrictions very, very soon, according to a timeline that was prior to other jurisdictions in the main, and because they simply had lost trust with this government's decision-making and did not trust that they necessarily had either the public health best interests or even business continuity best interests in mind, simply because people had been just whipped around so many times by really lamentable decision-making. Some folks mused publicly about what they might do, either in Calgary or then later in Edmonton. Then, of course, this amendment act came in, which is a bit of bringing the hammer down in response.

Now we're here a couple of weeks later. Events have overtaken us. It seems to me that there is likely no real reason for this bill other than it essentially amounts to a lot of sound and fury signifying nothing. I'll be interested to see what the Q1 fundraising results look like and if they were able to fund raise off this particular piece of legislation and tap into all that fervour and fever dreams that were coming off the convoy wing of the conservative movement in and around late February, early March, when all of this was going down.

In the meantime what has it done? It has essentially poisoned the well with municipalities. When you have, like, the Alberta Municipalities president saying that we're concerned that the government is setting a troubling precedent without any prior consultation, then when we heard a great deal of disappointment at Alberta Municipalities not just over this but over a number of other decisions, you know, really what it does is – it's unnecessary, and it essentially puts us in a cul-de-sac in which we cannot move forward together. You have one order of government that is just simply going to go at it on their own and municipalities sort of left guessing about what is going to happen in terms of developing their communities.

I think the other thing, you know, this attempt to drive this wedge in this way, Mr. Chair, is also just emblematic of how the pandemic response just went so horribly off the rails in the end and really attempted – and this bill is emblematic of that – just trying to rip at the seams of social cohesion when it was completely unnecessary to do so and drive this politicization of either masks or vaccination or proof of vaccination like either on a card or a QR code. Just completely unnecessary to engage in this sort of divisive polarization

of basic public health measures. At this point we just have to hope. We just have to hope that we don't have to go backwards at all. I certainly hope that for my kids and for the immunocompromised people in my life and even just the relatively otherwise healthy people. This is a group of people, across the way, the UCP, that has even politicized the concept of pre-existing conditions. I mean, we all have them. That is to say that we have lungs and respiratory systems and circulatory systems.

You know, I gave it a long bracketed text for this amendment act, but really, Mr. Chair, at the end of the day this is the Vaporization of Good Faith bill. That is what this is. This is the UCP government just throwing a grenade behind them as they walk out the door of their just absolutely shockingly poor pandemic management and response and all of the economic and social and community costs that came with that, a lowlight reel of two years of poor decision-making. When you vaporize good faith like that, you also vaporize trust. That has been broken with municipalities – there's no question – and it's been broken with the electorate, too. I heard earlier the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow talking about door-knocking during the last election. Well, I door-knock between elections. I did it when we were in government, and I do it now. Just go out there and talk to people now: that is what I would say. That word "trust" comes up every single time.

With that, I will conclude my remarks on this bill, on this unnecessary piece of legislation. You know, hopefully, going into the future, we can begin to repair some of those broken relationships of trust both with the electorate and with the municipalities more broadly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen again.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. I might have been wrong in something I said. I gave credit to the other side that they wanted COVID to go away. I think I just heard from the remarks we just heard that they want COVID to stay, on the other side. They see that as their last desperate grasp at maybe getting a slight chance to get back into government.

You know what? COVID has been hard on everybody. No one has raised more money than the folks on the other side based on COVID. No other opposition in Canada has fought their government every step of the way. No matter what the government did over the last couple of years, they have folks on the other side who always say: don't do it. Then they'd stand up here the next day and say: why aren't people getting vaccinated? Well, maybe it's because a third of the elected people in the province are saying: don't do what the government recommends. Then they won't take any responsibility for that.

All they saw COVID as was a way for political gain, to raise money. And you know what? For a little while it worked. Their poll numbers were better. I'm sure they were pretty happy with themselves. You know who's really sad that COVID is going away now and we don't know what the virus will do next because nobody does? It's the folks on the other side. Now they're where they've always been.

You know what? Even when people were mad at us, you know what I heard when I talked to people? "I don't want the folks that were here last. We need you to get us past COVID so that we can vote for you again, because those folks that were here the four years before: we never ever want to get them near the reins of power again, near the ability to have influence and trash our lives like they did for four straight years." Maybe I was wrong in giving them credit for not wanting COVID to be here. It's hard to say after the

last speech I just heard. But on this side we really want it to go away. The other good news is that people are a lot happier now, and even the ones that aren't happy tell me that they don't want the folks on the other side. They had a lifetime of that during the last four years.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 4?

[The clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? That is carried and so ordered.

Bill 5

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments to be made at this time? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate a chance to just say a few more words in regard to Bill 5. As I had said before, I think that certainly I support the idea behind trying to make our roads more safe.

10:00

I put on a lot of kilometres in the last few days, and it popped into my head, this bill, as I passed various kinds of things on the side of the road. What occurred to me once again, Mr. Chair, is the importance of standardizing the behaviours around when there is a snowplow or an ambulance or police or whatever on the side of road so that people don't have to think about, "Well, what am I meant to do in this circumstance?" and somehow change or alter that according to the size of the car or the colour of the light or whatever, right? The degree to which we can standardize that so it's almost like internalized in your head – you see the thing, you know what to do. You don't have to have an internal conversation about that. You just do it.

In that sense, this bill, I think, helps with that idea, and for that I do support it. Of course, you have people driving very fast – right? – on the roads that I was on these last few days, and you need to make sure everybody is on the same page in regard to slowing down for emergencies on the side of the road. We need to have a good element of education around this bill as well. I think I heard the minister talking about that before, and certainly that's the key to the highway, literally. It's to have people fully informed on a constant basis of what they're meant to do when they encounter something on the side of the road.

Just a quick comment as well around opening this act. You know, I did notice, when we were talking about other traffic issues that have been occurring here in the province of Alberta and then having an opportunity by opening up this act with Bill 5, we could have – would have, could have, should have – looked at other elements of traffic safety that could have served us very well in the last few months and prepare us for any contingency in the future. I think that during the blockade of the border, for example, at Coutts a lot of people were calling on the minister to exercise her authority to revoke operating licences for folks that were acting illegally, trafficwise and otherwise, at the border crossing. We did hear the minister say that they did do a legal analysis, and they needed to

open up the Traffic Safety Act in order to strengthen that so that they could have that tool at their disposal in the future.

Well, by golly, you know, Mr. Chair, here we are with the Traffic Safety Act open right now, and that would have been a good thing to do, quite frankly, because having those sorts of blockades is not safe. It causes a lot of social disorder, and it costs millions and millions of dollars. If we have that kind of tool available to us, using the Traffic Safety Act, that's the way that you can really get a message through to people who choose to block or disrupt traffic: their licences, right? Of course, they probably have a big truck because they also have a commercial operation that involves that licence. I mean, that's the only point that I failed to make previously in regard to opening this act.

I'm fully in favour of opening the act in order to increase safety on the side of a road, and I would encourage people to vote in favour of this. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen again.

Ms Phillips: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I also want to add a few comments at this committee stage to the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022. I spoke to this at second reading, and I raised a few questions that I don't know if the minister would like to update the House on. I mean, I'll be voting in favour of this legislation regardless, but we did raise just a few questions around some of the public education campaign and some of those details. If the minister would like to share any of that. Of course, enforcement: the idea is that it would start in the spring of '23, and there's a public education campaign before that, which is very standard for these kinds of things as they're kind of phased in.

Another thing that we had asked about or, I believe, I raised at second reading was if there was any analysis or assessment around serious collisions prevention and any interjurisdictional comparison. For example, Ontario and British Columbia have brought in similar legislation, so if there were other pieces or other information that she wanted to provide there. Of course, we did ask and many of us wondered out loud why additional changes were not included in this act, in particular around commercial licensing or other penalties for engaging in the blocking of highways and the use of heavy equipment to do so, which is already an offence under the Traffic Safety Act, but this was certainly an ability to ensure appropriate penalties for these kinds of activities. It would have been an opportunity in this legislation.

You know, on the way up here there were emergency vehicles stopped at the side of the road again, and some people just blow by still. That's why this legislation is needed, because even with the emergency vehicles – that is to say, police or whatever – in response to the legislation that came in in 2005, still some people, I guess, are blissfully unaware. Certainly, broadening this, I think, would be really helpful because then maybe at some point some of those drivers will finally get the message, and that will make us all safer. Certainly, a lot of the people in this Chamber and probably the hon. minister as well spend a lot of time on the highway. I know that I do, and I would really appreciate more safety measures.

That public education piece is really important. You can't necessarily, you know, respond in a law enforcement way, but you certainly have to within an education way but then having that stick at the end of the day, which this legislation provides for. Some of these fines are quite considerable, Mr. Chair. For the dozens and dozens of people that are listening tonight, fines ranging from \$136

to \$826 are pretty considerable. That's going to sting, and that's a good thing, too, and I commend the minister for making sure that those fines were, like, appropriate and appropriately calibrated to the offence.

I will conclude my comments there, Mr. Chair, except to just add one thing, which is that there was an ambulance going the other way when I was driving home to my condo at about 5 o'clock. I signalled and pulled over to the side of the road. I was just on a city street. The guy behind me darn near rear-ended me. That has been the rule for a long time, yet some people still don't have the memo, so I wish the minister well in her public education campaign. I am pleased to report that nobody rear-ended me although it was close. You know, sometimes this traffic safety stuff really is a long arc of getting compliance in order, but at the same time it is worth doing because public safety is worth it when it is reasonable, when it is common sense, and when it protects people at work. This legislation does all three.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate as well at this stage?

Okay. Are you ready for the question on Bill 5, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022?

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has risen.

10:10

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report bills 4 and 5.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Camrose is rising.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 4 and Bill 5.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

I see the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Indeed, you do, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate you acknowledging me. Lots of great work done this evening. Albertans are well served by the members of the Chamber, but I move that we adjourn the Chamber until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:11 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, March 30, 2022

Day 18

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
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Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
 Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
 Government Whip
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
 Premier
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)

Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
 Government House Leader
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
 Leader of the Official Opposition
Orr, Hon. Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
 Deputy Government Whip
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
 Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
 Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
 Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
 Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
 Alberta Hansard

Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Jason Kenney | Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations |
| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gottfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gottfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 30, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us in the Speaker's gallery today are very special guests of the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. I would like to introduce her son Joseph Homeniuk, accompanied by Caitlin Meneses, his girlfriend. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also joining us today is Rinay Chand, nephew of the Member for Calgary-East, and he is accompanied by Nancy Narayan and Vishal Bijay.

We don't quite have a school group here yet, but they will be joining us as guests of the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley, the Worsley central school from Worsley, Alberta.

Also in the galleries today is Madison Forster, a social work student currently doing her practicum in the constituency office of Edmonton-Strathcona, and Kelly Harris, a constituent and guest of the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Last but not least, I met some very lovely folks today touring the Legislature. I might just add that public tours are available again to members, their constituents, or members of the public. We have a guest visiting all the way from Toronto and another one from here in Edmonton. Would you all please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Peace River.

Federal Climate Plan

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the eco criminal Liberal minister announced his new climate plan. Alberta's government made its position absolutely clear. This plan is insane and unworkable. I must say that the response from our opposition across the way was interesting. They came out and claimed for the first time in their political careers, in their lives perhaps, that they were opposed to Justin Trudeau. They claimed, in contrast to the entire time they were in government, that they were going to stand up for Alberta.

Well, this was curious because the truth is that this is the party that brought in the job-killing carbon tax before Justin Trudeau. This is the party that tried to meddle in our electricity markets and spiked the costs for Albertans to enable the ill-advised green energy scheme, bringing bureaucrats to change your light bulbs and shower heads. Well, I have an answer for Albertans. Just like celebrities at the Oscars on the weekend, the NDP are actors. They're acting, Mr. Speaker. They're acting and pretending that they agree with the

priorities of Albertans for purely selfish, cynical reasons. An old dog can't learn new tricks, and that's true for the NDP.

On top of the anti-oil rhetoric of the Alberta NDP, we can see their true position plainly and clearly now through the statements of their federal leader, Jagmeet Singh, who recently struck a new deal, a coalition deal, with Justin Trudeau. They had something to say on this last night. He said that this radical climate plan from the Trudeau Liberals was not radical enough, Mr. Speaker. He said that the NDP were going to use their influence in Ottawa in the coalition that they just formed to make the plan even worse and to make it more radical, to step up the attack on Alberta's ethical energy.

The Leader of the Opposition here in Alberta could come out and denounce her federal leader, she could disassociate from the federal NDP, but we all know that that won't happen. As the old Alberta adage goes, you can't suck and blow at the same time. You can't both be on the side of Jagmeet Singh and be against Justin Trudeau. You must pick a lane, Mr. Speaker. Albertans know which lane we're in over here in the Conservatives.

Cost of Living

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to represent the constituents of northwest Edmonton, and it is my duty to stand up and bring their concerns to this Chamber so that the government can take action. Right now my constituents are being hammered by the cost-of-living crisis created by this UCP government. Utility bills are at a record high, insurance rates have been climbing, school fees, property taxes, tuition, interest payments; the list goes on. And despite their claims, this government is using a sneaky income tax hike to take a billion dollars away from Alberta families. Making life more expensive for Albertans has been a constant focus of this government from day one.

I received a message from a constituent whose bill for electricity doubled to \$600. He's never seen, in his life, a bill this high. The UCP only offers \$50 cheques and a fake natural gas rebate in return. I've gotten letters from families who are now choosing between buying groceries and paying their power bills, families who are coping with more debt because they can't afford to make the full payment each month, families with two incomes that are worried about having their power cut off, and this government is offering them nothing even resembling support. That's not just from my constituents, Mr. Speaker. Albertans from one corner of this province to the other are struggling with these crises.

While each day the associate minister claims to be empathetic with the high cost of living, he also refuses each and every day to actually take action and provide anything that resembles relief, proving that Albertans just can't trust this UCP to step up for them. Albertans are struggling. They watch this government fail to respond, fail to show real compassion for the difficulties that they are in, abandoning Albertans when they need the help the most. My message to this government today is simple. Albertans deserve better. They deserve a government that cares about them, and they sure don't see it from this UCP.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Military Children

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we approach the start of April, I'd like to remind this House that April is the Month of the Military Child, a time to recognize the strength and resilience of children growing up in military families.

As the government of Alberta's liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces I am honoured to regularly speak with the forces' members

and their families. Parents among them are quick to speak of their children and hopes for the future, yet many of these parents also acknowledge the challenges caused by frequent moves and faraway deployments that are a fact of life for the forces' members and their families. Members can face new assignments to different parts of the country and even sudden deployment that can take them halfway around the globe.

Mr. Speaker, service members can spend upwards of 25 per cent or more of their professional services away from their families. The impact of separation and relocation on children can be significant and lead to emotional and even physical issues. Civilian children, teammates, teachers, and other adults often do not fully understand their experience, which can leave these children feeling isolated, a reality that was confirmed in the 2013 Ombudsman report from National Defence. This is why it is so important that educators be trained and given tools that better assist military children and that we identify the services not only in education but also in health care that can help assist children and their families through frequent relocations.

I want to thank the government of Alberta for always having an open door to learning how we can take more action on these important initiatives. It is so important to be mindful of children who may be living with long separation from a parent and check in on them. Educators, coaches, other adults in the lives of military children can help by being a listening ear and ensuring that each child has access to supports and services they need to flourish as young adults.

Mr. Speaker, there is no shortage of turmoil in this world. I ask that we consider and be mindful of the burden that military children take on. Some will have a parent deployed in Europe at this very moment, and others will know what a broader conflict could bring. Let's recognize and celebrate military children in Alberta communities and all that they and their parents contribute to our province and country.

Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Targets

Ms Ganley: We need to reduce our emissions. The science is clear. In order to do that, we need real targets, not aspirational goals. A real plan must protect Alberta workers and their families. A real plan must engage, genuinely engage, with Alberta's energy industry, and that's not what we saw from the federal government yesterday.

For all of that, we need a provincial government that can stand up and speak credibly on behalf of Albertans, that acknowledges the progress we need to make and advocates for real targets and real details. Alberta must play a leading role in the international effort against climate change, and we are proud to contribute, but Alberta deserves real support to build our economy of the future, and Alberta's share of \$9 billion is not going to do it, particularly when the energy industry is being asked to do a huge part of the heavy lifting when compared to others like transportation.

1:40

Alberta's energy industry has committed to net zero by 2050, a goal shared by Alberta's NDP, but to do that, we need real targets, a real plan with real details and real funding not just for technology but for people who will be displaced, real people with real families who deserve real support. These are reasonable requests, so why didn't they reach Ottawa? Maybe because the Premier of Alberta is not spending his time making that argument. Maybe it's because he's spending his time defending himself from various investigations. Maybe he's out selling memberships for his leadership review, or perhaps he's just too busy making Will Smith memes.

The UCP is incapable of having grown-up conversations about what is reasonable, what is achievable, and how to contribute to making real progress on the real issue of climate change, and the results are clear. The UCP is utterly preoccupied with their own internal political drama, and they are failing Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Lesser Slave Lake Constituency Update

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last couple of weeks I've had the pleasure of meeting with municipalities from across my constituency of Lesser Slave Lake at the Rural Municipalities association spring convention. We were able to meet with the ministers and discuss the rising needs in our area and look forward to following up and getting help to where it is needed.

There have also been exciting new developments happening in the riding with regard to health care. With the old High Prairie hospital demolition well under way, I am excited to see what AHS will plan for the future of this property. There are also plans to expand on the number of available doctors in the Wabasca area, helping reduce the workloads for doctors and improving the care we need.

I was happy to see that the East Prairie Métis settlement was awarded \$300,000 through the government STIP grant. This is much-needed funding and will go towards projects in the community. We're also seeing additional funding at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic academy in Slave Lake. This will help with the cost of much-needed repairs in the school, guaranteeing a higher quality of education for all in our community.

I'm happy to be seeing an increase of in-person meetings, community activities, and events popping up all over as the warm weather comes and daylight gets longer.

Three years ago, when I took office, one of the biggest concerns I heard from businesses was about the lack of work that was out there. I am now hearing from these same businesses that they are having troubles finding workers for all the work that they are getting.

With so many great things happening throughout Lesser Slave Lake and with its people, I am excited to see what will come next. With the pandemic behind us, the restrictions lifted, record investments, a balanced budget, and so much more, I can just feel that this year will be a great one.

Thank you.

Economic Indicators

Member Loyola: The UCP likes to make bold claims about the state of our economy, but they are strangers to the truth, and Albertans can't trust what they say. Here are the facts.

The UCP promised that if they cut corporate taxes, investments would come flooding into the province, but even before the pandemic investment dropped, our economy shrank, and 50,000 full-time jobs were lost. As a result, companies laid off hundreds of staff or invested elsewhere. The UCP doubled down on their corporate tax giveaway, even accelerating it. At the time the Premier said that companies would be irresponsible for not moving to Alberta.

Since then the number of head offices in Calgary has gone from 117 to 102. Now roughly one-third of office spaces in downtown Calgary sit empty, levels not seen since the Great Depression, and Calgary has had the highest unemployment rate among major cities in Canada. According to RBC Economics capital investment is expected to increase across the country by 8.5 per cent, with Saskatchewan leading the way at 18.5 per cent. Meanwhile Alberta

will have the second-lowest capital investment growth rate, at 4.8 per cent, but even with the increase in capital investment this year, it is expected to be below levels seen under our government.

When it comes to investment in start-ups, the news isn't much better. Other jurisdictions saw massive increases in venture capital investment. Ontario attracted \$7.9 billion last year, a 295 per cent increase over the year before. Meanwhile Alberta attracted \$561 million in investment, a 23 per cent increase. Despite having 11 per cent of Canada's population, we only attracted 4 per cent of the venture capital investment in the country last year.

At the same time, wages aren't keeping up with inflation, and the UCP government is responding by piling on more costs to Albertans. In the end, Albertans are working harder and harder just to survive, and the UCP is telling them that everything is fine. Conservatives like to say that they are better for the economy, but life was much better for Albertans under the Alberta NDP. When we form government in 2023, we'll bring back real advantage.

Electric Vehicles

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, lately there's been a big shift towards green technologies and energy sources while reducing our consumption of fossil fuels. Yet again I seek to remind this House that there is an underlying cost and consequence to these types of technologies. One of these technologies is the electric vehicle. However, as so often with green technologies, the cost of these highly promoted initiatives is not always communicated.

The push for electric vehicles goes beyond purchasing the said vehicle and accessing its corresponding charging platform. A large influx of electric vehicles would create capacity problems in our electrical system. Notably, EPCOR found that a 15 per cent penetration of electric vehicles into the market would require a \$2 billion grid upgrade in Edmonton alone. Transmission and distribution costs already make up more than half of some Albertans' utility bills, yet it remains unclear how much an upgrade of this magnitude in Edmonton will cost them.

Further, Mr. Speaker, while a portion of the money we spend goes to taxes that upkeep our roads and infrastructure when we fill our gas vehicles, the same does not apply to electric vehicles. As gas-fuelled vehicles use roads extensively, it makes sense that they should help pay for their upkeep. However, drivers of electric vehicles also use our roads and don't pay upkeep taxes when they charge their vehicles.

As of April 1 we will temporarily remove this gas tax. However, in the future, if and when the tax is reinstated, it would be critical to find out how electric vehicles could contribute towards road maintenance. Going forward, I believe we need to be open and transparent with the consequences of such green technological advances.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Physician Recruitment and Retention in Lethbridge

Ms Phillips: Well, in the past few days we've learned that it's actually 41 doctors that have left southern Alberta over the past two years. Half the folks in the region don't have a family doctor. Over the last 48 hours I've heard from patients who just got letters from two more doctors leaving Lethbridge. Now, two years ago, right before the pandemic hit, the Leader of the Opposition and I met with a large group of physicians in Lethbridge. They described how tearing up the doctors' agreement would hasten the collapse of primary care in the south zone. This group of physicians warned the Leader of the Opposition and I of a severe crisis coming to Lethbridge. I know these doctors said the same words to the UCP

Health minister, the Premier, and the UCP MLA for Lethbridge-East. They were ignored.

Everything that group of physicians said was terrifyingly correct. The UCP war on doctors has in fact destroyed primary health care as we know it in Lethbridge. We do not have walk-in clinics. You can't get your blood work sent anywhere. It's a disaster when it comes to referrals. I heard from Bryce a couple of days ago, whose dad just lost his doctor. Bryce says: "My dad has Parkinson's, is a cancer survivor, had a wonky hip replacement. Who's writing his prescriptions? Who's doing follow-ups?" And it's not getting better no matter how many times the Health minister stands in this place and fills this room full of velvet fog, telling the people of Lethbridge that he's strategizing to synergize the meetings for an approach to a strategy that may one day result in some more meetings.

The UCP has shredded trust in Lethbridge. I think folks all understand that governing during a pandemic is hard, but what people cannot forgive is systematic dismantling of primary health care and then turning around and telling us that there's no problem, that it's all in our heads, which the Premier did last week in response to a question from me. He said that there are more doctors, that there's nothing to worry about.

No wonder no one trusts the UCP. They are incapable of good faith. The UCP may have been the ones to dismantle primary health care in Lethbridge, but come 2023, they will not be sent back to this Legislature to be the ones to fix it.

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

Budget 2022 and Alberta's Future

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I had the pleasure of meeting with grades 5 and 6 students at Belfast school in my constituency. I was asked many great questions, one of which came from a young lady from grade 6 who asked me how this budget prepared her and her classmates for success in the future. That's a great question, and here are a few key items I want to share with her and with all young leaders of tomorrow.

For starters, our government achieved a balanced budget for the first time in nearly a decade. A balanced budget means that there will be less debt for her to pay, which means that more tax dollars can go towards important things like health care, education, mental health. She will not have to pay for today tomorrow.

1:50

Our government is committing \$3.5 billion for health care facilities, equipment, and IT systems to expand health care capacity for Albertans province-wide, and this creates thousands of good-paying jobs, jobs she will have the skills and the knowledge to thrive in.

As we focus on moving forward, our government is committed to preparing young people for the jobs of tomorrow by providing \$600 million for skills and training development. The new initiatives will address barriers for K through 12, postsecondary students, employment for women, Indigenous peoples, and other underrepresented groups and make Alberta an internationally recognized technology and innovation hub so that she will have the opportunity to be trained and ready for the economy of the future right here in Alberta.

She and her classmates are very caring and concerned about the well-being of others. That was obvious to me. Budget 2022 includes \$1 billion annually for addiction and mental health care and additional funding of \$60 million for the next three years to build a recovery-oriented system of care. We continue to fund programs that are helping our most vulnerable. To the students at Belfast

school, these are just some of the important items Budget 2022 covers. I encourage her and everyone to see how this budget is helping you and our future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Fuel Prices and Cost of Living

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling with the high cost of living. Inflation is at a 30-year high, and for many Albertans the bills just keep piling up. Now, the Premier claims that his deferral of the gas tax will ensure at least a 10-cent drop at the pumps. The problem is that there's no guarantee this relief won't be swallowed up by retailers before it ever reaches motorists. Today our Energy critic proposed that an audit be done by a third party to report back in a month on whether or not this plan actually helped Alberta consumers. Will the Premier commit to doing that audit today?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, we'll be closely monitoring retail response. We believe that retailers, many of which are mom-and-pop small businesses, will pass on the full savings to Alberta consumers. But you know where we really need an audit? We need an audit on the NDP-Liberal coalition plan to raise the carbon tax by 400 per cent. When the NDP sheds crocodile tears about higher fuel prices, it's like an arsonist crying about the fire that he set. They want gas prices higher and higher and higher. They want it to go up 400 cent in the next eight years. They could change their opinion, though, and vote for our motion against the carbon tax hike tonight.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, the Premier knows the biggest driver of the price of gas is the price of oil. Gas prices have already gone up 20 cents in the three weeks since his plan was announced. Drivers struggling with these spiralling costs deserve support in their pocket. Now, the Premier is expecting a windfall budget as oil prices stay high. Albertans, who are the owner of that resource, deserve to get some of the benefits, too. If he can't work with retailers or anyone to make sure that the price drops, why doesn't he skip them and put the cash directly into the hands of drivers?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the NDP-Liberal coalition in Ottawa released their disastrous attack on Canadian families that will kill jobs, hammer Alberta's economy, that would imply not a carbon tax increase of 400 per cent but of a thousand per cent. Now, just based on the NDP's plan of going to a \$170 carbon tax, that would add 40 cents to the price of each litre of gas purchased by Albertans. Why, with 30-year inflation, does the NDP want to drive inflation even higher?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, for the moment the Premier is still in government, and he's the one that should be coming up with solutions. Instead, yesterday what he said was: "I don't know what more we can do. I really don't." Let me help. The Premier could bring in a real gas rebate, give more than 50 bucks on electricity bills, which are in the thousands, restore the cap on car insurance, restore the cap on tuition, scrap his plan to tax inflation, which on its own takes \$400 from families. If the Premier is serious, will he do any of these things in his control today or just shake his fist at everybody else?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, at 12:01 a.m. this Friday Alberta's government suspends the 13-cent-a-litre Alberta fuel tax. That, on an annual basis, is worth \$1.4 billion of consumer relief. But, more than that, it also means that the GST won't be charged on the Alberta fuel tax. That's another \$65 million of savings. Meanwhile the leader of the NDP has taken out her pompoms to cheer on the same Trudeau coalition in their plan to raise the carbon tax by 400 per cent. Why does she want to punish families that way?

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

Child and Youth Advocate Recommendations

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Starlight was 12 years old. She was Indigenous. She loved to paint. She was exposed to parental substance abuse and later died of a seizure. Barry loved music. He experienced homelessness and violence. He died of drug poisoning at age 15. Celeste was 19. She loved to dance. She experienced abuse and neglect. She was murdered. Now, these are just three stories of children who died in care, detailed in the final report of our current Child and Youth Advocate. These children matter. What is the Premier doing today to prevent the death of children in care?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, every death of a child is a tragedy, and it's particularly serious when we see a child in care for whom the government has some custodial responsibility. We thank the office of the Child and Youth Advocate for their partnership in supporting vulnerable children in Alberta. The Ministry of Children's Services will respond publicly to recommendations issued by the advocate within 75 days. We're committed to being transparent. We'll respond within that time frame. In addition, we're co-ordinating with external bodies like the advocate, the office of the chief medical officer, and the Fatality Review Board.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, more children have died this year than ever before. This is not a one-off. The Premier has seen these numbers coming for months. The advocate's exasperation with the UCP's inaction was heard in the report. "These issues are not new. Rather, they persist despite numerous recommendations to address them, which amplifies the need for stronger accountability." The advocate wants ministries to appear before an all-party committee and answer questions about actions taken and actions not taken. Will the Premier set this up? Will he put children first? Will he find a way to maintain accountability?

Mr. Kenney: Yes, of course, Mr. Speaker, we need accountability, particularly when it comes to the tragic loss of life of children in care. We also need to ensure the proper resourcing of those services, which is exactly why the budget just passed increases the budget for child intervention in the Ministry of Children's Services from \$796 million annually to \$842 million annually. We've allocated \$29 million specifically for the child and youth health services initiative and taken additional action to do everything possible to protect children in care.

Ms Notley: More children than ever have died this year, Mr. Speaker, and the advocate is calling for accountability from each ministry for his recommendations. More safe housing options separate from shelters, greater training for care workers, stronger action on the opioids crisis, earlier intervention with mental health supports: these recommendations and more should be a wake-up call for every member of this Assembly and every member of that front bench. One more time: why is this Premier refusing to set up

the committee that the advocate is asking for so that all members of this House . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I understand that eight of the 15 deaths referred to were amongst children who, sadly, experienced drug overdoses or were victims of suicide. That is reflective of what we know is a broader mental health crisis amongst children and youth all across Canada. That is why we are investing in youth mental health hubs, the mental health capacity building in schools, the Kids Help Phone, the honouring life: Indigenous youth suicide prevention program, and much more to ensure that the supports are there for kids who are facing either addictions or mental health challenges.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and the Opposition House Leader.

Political Party Membership Sale and Purchase

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, last fall this government filibustered their own Bill 81, and they did it to prevent one of their own caucus members from introducing an amendment. That amendment would have prevented changing the elections laws to allow the UCP to buy party memberships for people without their consent and without their knowledge of knowing that this was done in their name. Will the Premier tell this House whether he believes the UCP should have an Albertan's permission before enrolling them as a party member, and does this nakedly corrupt practice align with the Premier's personal values?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Well, that was a party, not a government, question, Mr. Speaker, but the answer is yes. That is why the bylaws of the United Conservative Party require that people purchasing memberships either do so directly or for a member of their immediate family, unlike the bylaws of the NDP, which include no such requirement. There has never been a statutory regulation of party membership sales. There has never been in our history, nor is there in any other province or at the federal level. The question is: why does the NDP not have a bylaw preventing that kind of activity?

Ms Gray: You couldn't buy memberships for people without their knowledge before their bill, and now you can, and this government's flimsy excuse for why Bill 81 needed to change that does not make sense. It was rejected by Albertans. It was rejected by multiple UCP MLAs who voted against that bill. Now there are allegations coming up that stealth members are becoming part of the UCP's leadership review. It's a concern Albertans and some UCP MLAs share. Will the Premier agree that changing the law to allow someone to buy a political membership in another person's name without their knowledge or consent is undemocratic and un-Albertan? Will he commit to repealing it?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, in their panic to prevent the creation of the United Conservative Party, the NDP went through, I think, four different iterations of elections law. In none of those bills – in none of them – did they seek to regulate the sale or purchase of party memberships, and I know why. It's because they give the unions in their party structure supervotes. Gil McGowan gets to choose 25 per cent of the delegates to an NDP leadership election. I want to know: what deal did the Leader of the Opposition make with him for his votes?

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I will put the Premier's fantasy about how our party runs against the reality that they changed the law to allow the buying of memberships without knowledge or consent. They did that after a thorough debate in this Chamber, and they did that after three UCP MLAs spoke against it, voted against it, and tried to amend it, but they wouldn't allow that to happen. Will the Premier bring forward a fix immediately to remain committed to the practice of upholding democracy, or will this Premier continue to increasingly embarrass and be desperate in this effort to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, neither Alberta nor the other nine provincial Legislatures nor the federal Parliament have ever had a statutory provision with respect to the internal governance of party membership sales, but the UCP does. Section 4.1.5 of our bylaws says that members must "have paid the prescribed membership fee, personally or through an immediate family member (spouse, child, or parent)." Interestingly, I have the NDP constitution here, and there is no such provision. You know why? Because they're run by the unions.

Child and Youth Advocate Recommendations

(continued)

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the office of the Child and Youth Advocate released another mandatory child death review report. From the beginning of April to the end of September last year 18 young Albertans died under this government's watch. In the report the advocate wrote: "We have recently seen an unprecedented number of deaths. This is the largest report we have released during a six-month period." The advocate has repeatedly called on this government to provide greater transparency on what their ministries are doing or not doing to improve outcomes for young people in care. Will the Premier step up and have his ministers finally answer the advocate's calls for transparency?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Any time a child dies, especially when they are or have been in care of the government or have come into contact with the child intervention system, it is a tragedy. We work closely with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to make changes where they're needed. Just a couple of years ago we did have an all-party panel on child intervention, which was very much needed because there wasn't any transparency within the system. Obviously, we saw that under the members opposite. Out of that came this new process, which will ensure accountability and transparency and make sure that changes are made where they're needed.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering if the Premier of this province has spent the time, as I did last night, reading the 113-page report from the Child and Youth Advocate and if he read the stories of each of the young people who died last year. I'm going to say their names because they deserve to be on the record: Claire, Starlight, Suzie, Abby, Barry, Jay, Justine, Nicki, Odin, Joseph, Mariame, Celeste, Mark, Meghan, and Ray. These are real young people who lost their lives last year. The advocate's call is very clear: to provide transparency. Will the Premier allow his ministers to report to this House on their work?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that not only did I read the report that the member is speaking about; I read that report alongside every briefing note with details from the ministry so that I could understand where changes need to be made. As I have said a number of times in this House, I am not going to wait to take action where needed. There is transparency. We follow the process put forward by the members opposite. I know the Leader of the Opposition was very invested in that process, that was implemented after the all-party panel. We'll continue to follow that, be transparent, and make changes where they're needed.

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, the trend that we are seeing right now of the rising number of young people who have died in this province has been reported since last year. This minister has said that she will not wait, but she has been waiting. Albertans have been waiting. And while she's been waiting, young people are dying. The advocate has been very clear in his recommendations. Allow those ministries to come before a committee of this House to report on the work they're doing. It's a simple request for transparency and accountability as Alberta faces a crisis. It is boggling to me why this government would not want to account for that work unless there is something to hide.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, the reason why I asked my department for a detailed review of each and every one of these cases and to look for patterns that we're seeing is because we will make changes. Unlike the members opposite, who tried to make a media story go away – that is what the members opposite tried to do – we are investing in the recovery-oriented system of care, making sure that there are not 4,000 but 8,000 treatment beds, and I am working with the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to make sure that there are supports in place to help young people, because they need it, and they need it now.

Rural Emergency Medical Services

Mrs. Frey: Mr. Speaker, I'm not alone in this House when I say that members of my constituency tell me regularly that they're worried about an ambulance being available when they dial 911. That's especially true for rural areas, where the vast distances between cities, towns, farms, and the nearest hospital mean that every single moment counts. Last week this House approved the very first balanced budget in eight years for the province of Alberta, but to the Minister of Health: how does Budget 2022 address rural EMS concerns?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you so much to the hon. member for the question. Access to emergency medical services, especially in rural Alberta, is a key focus of our plan to make sure all Albertans have access to the care they need when they need it. Budget 2022 provides \$64 million specifically to ease the pressure on the overall EMS system. We also created the Alberta EMS Provincial Advisory Committee, whose work will guide how we can address these rural issues and issues across our entire province. We know there are issues with rural EMS in Alberta, and we are taking steps to address them.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that one of the issues we hear about often from paramedic crews is burnout and given that the number and length of shifts that they have to do coupled with the extremely difficult situations they're responding to is unimaginable for many, again to the Minister of

Health: how does Budget 2022 address burnout and improve capacity, particularly within the community of Bassano, located in the riding of Brooks-Medicine Hat?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's EMS workers face a high-stress environment as they save the lives of Albertans. Like others, they deserve a workplace that puts their well-being at the forefront. AHS began implementing its 10-point action plan this year to increase overall capacity and improve the system's efficiency. Point 4 of that plan specifically addresses the issue of worker fatigue. I'm happy to let the member know that Budget 2022 includes \$14 million for AHS's hours-of-work initiative to reduce worker fatigue in 14 rural communities, including the town of Bassano in the member's constituency, and I'm also looking forward for any recommendations coming from the advisory committee.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Minister. Given that another concern for rural constituents is the availability of air ambulances when we need them and given that I've been advocating for HALO to receive stable and predictable funding since day one of being elected and further given that I have raised this with you repeatedly, Minister, the fact that HALO is nearly totally reliant on the local community for support and is currently without a long-term contract to provide air ambulance services to Alberta, to the minister: can you please tell the House when HALO can expect sustainable, long-term, predictable funding so that southern Albertans can get the service that they deserve?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. member for her tireless advocacy for HALO air ambulance, based in Medicine Hat. As the member knows, Budget '22 continues \$28 million in supports for ground and helicopter air ambulance services. Last week I had the honour of joining the Premier and the Member for Highwood to announce \$15 million in sustainable funding for STARS air ambulance in Calgary, and I hope the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat and I will have the opportunity in the very near future to speak publicly about our government's support for HALO.

Fuel Prices

Ms Ganley: It has now been three weeks since the Premier announced that the government will no longer collect the fuel tax in an attempt to help Albertans, but simply not collecting the fuel tax doesn't mean the savings will be passed on to consumers. This Premier hopes that retailers will pass it along and that Albertans will see a 13-cent discount, but no one over there could provide any assurance. To the Premier: what specific guarantees do you have in place to ensure retailers pass the savings along to Albertans, or is this just another billion-dollar add-on to your corporate handout?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You can hear the insecurity in the voice of the opposition when they talk about this incredible fuel tax suspension measure. I'm confident that we have enough competition in our gasoline and diesel retail sector. We've reached out to retailers. We're confident that they will be providing relief, the 13, actually 13.6, cents of relief, to consumers. Again, we're taking real action to deal with the affordability challenge.

Ms Ganley: Given that earlier today I called on this government to provide a third-party audit to assure Albertans that vendors actually reduce their prices by 13 cents and don't just pocket the difference and given that Albertans deserve to know that \$1.3 billion is going to support them, not pad bottom lines, to the Premier: will he work with us to put an independent auditor in place to make sure \$1.3 billion of relief make it to the pockets of Albertans?

Mr. Toews: Again, Mr. Speaker, we will be monitoring how retailers respond to this reduction in fuel tax. I'm confident that they will be reducing the price of gasoline and diesel fuel by the 13 cents a litre. What we hear from the opposition is basically a plan of government intrusion, overreach, overreach that they would ultimately do to every business and every sector in this province. They had four years to do that. They chased out tens of billions of dollars of investment. Tens of thousands of Albertans lost their jobs. We will not do that.

Ms Ganley: Given that a recent study from the U.S. showed that fuel tax breaks often don't get passed on to consumers – most are just pocketed by corporations or retailers – and given that the American Road & Transportation Builders Association chief economist states that this type of tax holiday is often well intentioned but ineffectual, can the Premier stand up in this House and provide actual assurances to Albertans that they will see this relief? If not, why won't he commit to an audit?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we've reached out to retailers. We're confident that they will be dropping the prices by 13 cents a litre, and for any outliers that don't, they simply won't sell fuel. We have so many retailers across the province, and we will be monitoring it. But what's very evident is that the members opposite know that this is a real relief measure for Albertans. They're trying to create some criticism that simply won't stick. We're providing relief to Albertans today.

School Construction Capital Plan and Calgary

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the UCP has ignored the growing need for new schools in our province, especially in Calgary. Just one new public school over three years is not nearly enough when kids are being bused out of their communities to overcrowded classrooms. It's the same story for students choosing Catholic education: just one new school over three years. It's not nearly enough for young and growing families in Calgary. What does the minister have to say to parents in Nolan Hill, Walden, Redstone, who all need new schools? What about the kids in west Calgary, who are waiting for a brand new Calgary Catholic high school?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, we get approximately 400 requests every single year. They go through an auditor-approved process. It's a gated process, and all the requirements have to be met, and they rise to the list. We continue to build schools. We're spending over \$2 billion over three years to build schools right across the province.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the no-help budget failed Calgary families and given that students, teachers, and all staff deserve safe and welcoming schools to go to every day and given that more than half of Calgary public schools are over 50 years old – many have

asbestos in them, are poorly insulated, and need to be overhauled or replaced – and given that research shows that kids have better student achievement when they're in clean, safe buildings, will the minister tell Calgary public students, staff, and families why the UCP has failed to deliver for them?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Our schools are safe. They are well maintained. We entrust that to school boards; 98 per cent of all the funding goes directly to school boards so that they can make sure that those spaces are great learning spaces. As I said earlier, the \$2 billion investment includes \$251 million over three years for 15 much-needed school projects right across this province. We're going to continue to build schools where they are needed, and we will continue to make sure that it's a priority.

Ms Hoffman: Given that Albertans can't trust this UCP government to put students first – the current government won't build the schools that families need, and they're keeping kids and teachers on the road instead of close to home in safe schools – and given that that's why our NDP government worked hard to catch up over the four years we had to address the neglect under Conservatives for many, many decades and given that the UCP government's no-help budget is funding less than a quarter of what we funded when we were in government, why does the UCP continue to destroy the trust of Calgary families?

An Hon. Member: Fearmongering.

Member LaGrange: True. Mr. Speaker, fear and smear: that's all they do. They're so focused on the politics. They don't focus on the kids. We continue to focus on the kids, on school boards, making sure that we address the needs. We have an Auditor-approved process that they go through. We're spending over \$2 billion, 66 projects over three years where they only completed 60 over three years. You know, it's actually 60 over four years. Correction. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The Member for Calgary-Klein has the call.

Pipeline Development and Energy Industry Advocacy

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of weeks ago a poll in the United States showed that the majority of Americans, 71 per cent to be precise, would favour President Biden giving an executive order to restart construction on the Keystone XL pipeline. To the Minister of Energy: can you tell the House about the steps being taken by our government to try and convince the U.S. lawmakers to change their minds and reissue the border crossing for Keystone XL?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that in the United States as well as the rest of the world it's a growing acknowledgement that the world is going to continue to use oil and gas. In fact, demand for oil and gas is going up at the same time supply is going down with the need to weed out Russian barrels. The question is: where is it going to come from? Is it going to come from us, from North America, or is it going to come from regimes like Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Russia? We believe it should come from us. That's why we're engaging with the United States. That's why we've launched an advocacy campaign. That's why we've . . .

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her efforts. Given that European countries also are shying away from Russian corrupt oil, it also makes a case for an Energy East pipeline. To the same minister: can you update the House on any efforts to challenge federal Legislatures that land-lock our ethical oil here?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The tragic thing is that the Energy East pipeline, if it had been built, would have been delivering 1 million barrels a day of Alberta oil to the east coast to serve markets in Europe and refineries in India, but it was killed by regulatory dysfunction in 2017. Alberta can be part of the solution to supply additional barrels across the world if we could get infrastructure built. That's why we are challenging bills C-69, C-48, and that's why we are going to continue to challenge the NDP-Liberal alliance's unconstitutional effort to . . .

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that we want to see pipelines going east, west, north, and south and given that we know that when it comes to human rights and environmental standards for our energy, we are unmatched – federal government aside, our resources get attacked internationally. To the same minister: can you tell us about our government's recent efforts to remind the world why Alberta is a better source for our world's energy needs compared to, say, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, or Russia, just to name a few?

2:20

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no question that the world needs more energy, and that energy should come from places like Alberta. That's why we've launched an advocacy campaign across North American and U.S. markets to say, "Look north; look north for energy security," and to emphasize that not all oil is equal, that ours is produced at the highest environmental standard. That's why the MLAs on this side of the Legislature will continue to point out the insanity of the NDP-Liberal coalition production cap, which is actually a production cap even though it's charading as an emission cap.

Site Rehabilitation Program

Ms Sweet: In the latest report from the Auditor General on the site rehabilitation program a number of concerns were highlighted about the government's performance. The federal funding was meant to save jobs during the challenging times of COVID. While B.C. had allocated 97 per cent of their available funding as of October 2021, Alberta has less than 60 per cent spent by the end of 2021. To the Minister of Energy: how many Albertans in the oil service sector were unemployed and how many companies went bankrupt during COVID because the government failed to spend their federal support?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're actually really pleased that the Auditor General reported that the government has successfully and is successfully implementing the SRP program and specifically highlighted that there was an effective process for awarding funding, accurate and timely reporting, monitoring to

evaluate performance, and that it was meeting all responsibilities under the federal-provincial agreement, including creating jobs.

Ms Sweet: Given that the oil and gas industry is facing challenges with the labour force and given that many workers left the industry because they could not find work during the pandemic – jobs in this program could have been created – and given that the minister's delays have prevented well cleanups, job creation, and job security for the oil and gas industry, can the minister explain how many projects were delayed or are not going forward because of the government's failure to move forward on this program?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can actually report some really good statistics on the SRP program. In fact, over \$750 million has gone out the door to date, and in fact 3,500 jobs have been created. Over 9,000 reclamation sites have been under work, 18,340 abandonment sites. This program is putting Albertans back to work. It's providing much-needed jobs in the service sector during a downturn. It's very successful.

Ms Sweet: Well, given that the report also highlighted that Alberta is at risk of losing this federal money and given that the grant has been allocated to be used by the end of the month for Alberta to be guaranteed to leverage all of the money provided by the federal government and given that it'll be a huge disappointment for industry, for landowners, for Indigenous people, and for all Albertans if the government loses this federal money when it's supposed to be creating jobs in Alberta, can the minister guarantee that all the money that's been issued to the government through these grants will be spent by the end of the month and we won't lose it back to the federal government?

Mrs. Savage: Mr. Speaker, the NDP is now so concerned about creating jobs and so concerned about cleaning up inactive wells. Why didn't they do anything during the four years that they were in power? The inventory of inactive wells skyrocketed during those four years, and they did nothing. Zero. Nada. They did nothing. They didn't bring in a liability management regime. Instead, they saw the inventory of inactive wells growing. That's why we're putting that money to work to clean it up, and we're very proud of the work that's being done by our Indigenous advisory council and the industry advisory council to get people back to work.

Addiction, Mental Health, and Social Supports

Ms Sigurdson: A recent study by the Canadian Mental Health Association has shown that Albertans are feeling more stress and financial uncertainty than people in any other province. More than a third of Albertans have stated that they are feeling stressed, angry, lonely, isolated, and sad. This pandemic has shone a light on the major limitations and failures of the mental health system here in Alberta, and the UCP has made things worse by limiting access to services and supports. To the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions: how will he correct this failure and improve Albertans' mental health?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much, and thank you to the member for the question. You know, Budget 2022 actually continues a commitment to invest over \$140 million over four years to enhance the recovery-oriented system of care that we are

creating. I think it's important for everyone to understand that recovery can be substituted for "human," or it could be substituted for the words "wellness" or "holistic." This is a complicated problem with no single solution, but we're committed to funding the system and ensuring that everyone has access to health care.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that root causes of these struggles can include a lack of access to affordable housing, addiction services, and community supports and given that Albertans were more likely to use substances as a way of coping with pandemic stresses, with 20 per cent saying that they increased substance use during the pandemic compared to 13 per cent nationally, and given that the UCP ignored medically proven best practices, made it harder to access addiction services, affordable housing, and community supports, will the minister accept responsibility for all of the additional hardships and pressures the UCP has imposed on . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, what we will accept is being the first jurisdiction in North America to create a recovery-oriented system of care. This is taking actual action. If the members opposite had their way, they would be giving drugs to pretty much anybody who wants them, taxpayer-funded drugs. The policies that the NDP want have failed all throughout the west coast, and when that member had the opportunity, guess what she did?

Mr. Feehan: You are so antiscience it's embarrassing.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Ellis: She quit.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at both 2:26 and 2:27 or thereabouts.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the survey found that 42 per cent of Albertans have mental health struggles related to financial concerns and given that 54 per cent of survey respondents said that they could not afford to pay for mental health treatment and given that we have presented the government with a plan to provide every Albertan with access to five sessions with a mental health professional, to be covered under the provincial insurance plan, will the minister take this survey as a wake-up call and immediately implement the NDP's plan to ensure that every Albertan has access to a mental health professional when they need one?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to our recovery-oriented system of care, which is focused on people with mental health and addiction problems. We have made unprecedented investments over the last several years: \$53 million in the COVID response, \$20 million additionally in this most current budget. We've created accessibility through 211, amongst many other services. There are well over 200 not-for-profits within Alberta that we're supporting. We're continuing to help people.

Driving Back to Work Program

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, truckers play a critical role in keeping our economy rolling. In 2019 the government brought in mandatory entry-level training for all class 1 drivers. This has made the cost of truck-driving training increase substantially, causing shortages of class 1 truck drivers. Our government recently announced funding

for the driving back to work program. Can the Minister of Transportation please advise this House how this new funding will address the need for class 1 truck drivers in Alberta?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, transportation is a critical sector, and there is an impending shortage of 4,000 drivers by 2023. That's why our Minister of Transportation is directing \$30 million over the next three years to get women and men affordable training required to allow them to earn a living while keeping our supply chains moving. This support will cover the cost of 90 per cent of the training under the driving back to work program.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his response. Given that class 1 truck drivers provide an essential service, ensuring that goods are able to move from place to place, and given that a shortage of class 1 truck drivers can have a negative impact on product availability in stores and given that the recently announced driving back to work funding will assist eligible class 1 truck drivers with the cost of their training, can the Minister of Transportation advise this House on what the eligibility criteria are for this funding?

2:30

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we are laser focused on economic recovery. We know that supporting truck driver training is critical, so to qualify for our driving back to work, Albertans must be at least 18 years old and underemployed or unemployed and ready, willing, and able to partake in training. We want Albertans employed in the commercial trucking industry, and already 8,000 Albertans have received funding to complete their training and testing to become class 1 drivers.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that many farmers either need to obtain a class 1 driver's licence themselves or need employees to get this licence to drive their products to market and given that some farmers have paid the exorbitant costs for their employees to get their class 1 only to see these employees leave shortly after as long-haul trucking companies offer them \$15,000 signing bonuses, to the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development: how will the recently announced funding for a class 1 driver's licence help farmers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is great news for farmers, for the agriculture sector. This is going to mean more drivers in Alberta broadly, which will help the sector, more young people getting qualified to be behind the wheel of trucks. It's an essential service in Alberta. It'll help, with less poaching from the commercial truck-driving sector taking these young people that we need to take grain to markets. This has been an extreme challenge for the agriculture sector and one we'll continue to work towards.

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

COVID-19 Testing

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The COVID-19 pandemic has been the hardest on at-risk Albertans. While our pandemic response is shifting as Albertans adapt to a new reality, there are certain measures that should remain so we can fully understand the current context of COVID-19 and ensure that Albertans are protected. One of those measures is PCR testing.

With the closure of the Edmonton Expo Centre and, I suspect, some other sites to come, we will have less understanding of the current context and transmission of COVID-19. Why is the Minister of Health moving to make PCR testing less accessible to Albertans?

Mr. Copping: I want to thank the hon. member for the important question in regard to PCR testing. Mr. Speaker, I was asked by the media last week on this exact issue. We closed the Expo Centre because, quite frankly, it wasn't needed, but we actually have additional sites here in Alberta to continue with PCR testing. We will continue PCR testing for high-risk individuals and people working in high-risk settings. It's important that we actually continue this to understand what potentially may happen with the next wave of COVID. As the hon. member knows, we haven't moved to stage 3 yet, and we're continuing measures for high-risk settings as well.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that omicron BA.2 is now spreading in Alberta – the chief medical officer of health has admitted that it's expected to trend upwards in coming weeks, so reliable PCR tests will be crucial to maintain accurate infection monitoring – and given that at-home tests are not as accurate as PCR tests, especially with new variants, it's important to have capacity to do reliable testing. Given that this UCP government has often acted too fast to declare victory over the pandemic, giving reason to question why some of these practical processes like reliable testing are being eliminated, especially with hospitals over capacity, can the minister clarify how many sites will remain open?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, just to be clear, we are not eliminating PCR testing. That will be maintained for high-risk settings and for high-risk individuals. When we moved our focus of PCR testing during the fifth wave with omicron BA.1, this was a move not only that was undertaken by Alberta but was taken by every single jurisdiction across the country, because that was necessary. What we know about BA.2 now is that it is potentially more virulent. It can be passed on easier than BA.1, but we understand that it may very well be less severe, and we are watching the numbers closely.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that multiple jurisdictions offer more accessible testing, including walk-in and drive-through sites, and given that some are raising concerns about increasing levels of COVID in waste water in communities in Alberta and given that many Albertans are still looking for more support, reliable tests to ensure they're protecting their friends, their families, their communities from a disease that's still, tragically, infecting people and taking lives and given that many are worried that rapid tests don't necessarily provide the certainty and accuracy needed, will the Minister of Health guarantee that PCR testing will remain available for all Albertans that need it to protect themselves?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I already indicated to the hon. member, we will retain PCR testing for high-risk settings and for high-risk individuals. I'm very pleased that, you know, rapid tests remain available to all Albertans to be able to pick them up. I urge Albertans to continue to pick up the rapid tests and use them because they are very effective for those with symptoms in terms of determining whether or not they have COVID. We are using the same approach that we used successfully through the omicron wave 5, and we'll continue to monitor things closely.

Provincial Campground Cancellation Fees

Mr. Schmidt: Tomorrow this government will double the reservation fees for Alberta campsites. It's part of this government's ongoing mission to make it more expensive for Albertans to access natural places, with their tax on access in Kananaskis, their failed plan to sell Alberta parks, and their plan to tear down the Rocky Mountains and strip-mine them for coal. Can the Minister of Environment and Parks explain his objection to Albertans camping or enjoying the beautiful areas of this province? Will he use this opportunity today to pause his doubling of campsite fees?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP sure do love to make things up, but in regard to the doubling of the reservation fee, that is correct. That has been done at the request of campers who utilize the system. We were seeing campgrounds being reserved and then people not using them and, unfortunately, families going into our campgrounds and seeing the best spots stay empty all weekend. Then we had lots of campgrounds being scalped on Kijiji. We heard loud and clear from people that use our parks system that they wanted to see the reservation fee modestly increased to make sure we could stop that behaviour.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that this government has already created an affordability crisis in this province and refused any real relief for Albertans and given that just as Albertans are looking to plan their summer vacations, this minister is stepping in with a hike to fees that means that families who are struggling to make ends meet might not be able to afford to access the natural spaces that belong to them, how can this minister justify this latest cost hike to families already struggling under the weight of this government's out-of-touch decisions? Is he trying to make this the worst summer ever for Albertans?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I should provide some clarification. The hon. member is confused. I did say that it was the reservation fee, but it's actually the cancellation fee. What the parks system has done, at the request of the people that use the parks system, is increase the cancellation fee to make sure, again, that families who come and enjoy our beautiful parks all across this province don't end up spending the weekend watching the sites that they wanted to reserve stay empty the entire weekend because people never followed through on their commitments to reserve those campsites.

We continue to invest heavily inside our provincial parks system, Mr. Speaker; in fact, increased provincial park funding by 15 per cent this year.

Mr. Schmidt: The minister better check those numbers because he's not anywhere close to a 15 per cent increase to park funding.

Given that the UCP is deeply focused on ensuring that natural spaces remain inaccessible to the Albertans who own them and given that the Minister of Environment and Parks is deeply untrusting by Albertans following the debacle of the UCP's plan to sell Alberta's parks, mine our mountains, and tax the great outdoors, will the minister pause his fee hike, or will he just admit that Albertans simply can't trust him?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had bothered to stick around estimates instead of leaving only 45 minutes into it, he would have been able to find out that, in fact, we have increased park investments by 15 per cent.

No, I'm not going to reverse the cancellation fee because, Mr. Speaker, the vast majority of users of the system have asked us to do this simple measure to make sure that Albertans can enjoy their

campgrounds each and every weekend and throughout the summer and the important, busy times of the year. They can rest assured that, no, we won't listen to the confused NDP; instead, we'll listen to user groups inside our provincial parks.

Education Concerns

Mr. Turton: Mr. Speaker, education is the number one thing we can do as a government to help future generations be successful. To accomplish this, we need to invest significant capital on upgrades for schools that need renovations. One of the projects that needs attention is the Spruce Grove composite high school. It's the largest school in Parkland region, and in order to support the demand in my riding, it needs significant upgrades, which are long overdue. To the Minister of Education: where does this project fall on the government's priority list?

Member LaGrange: Thank you to the member for the question. Each year school divisions submit their three-year capital plans, and each year we receive approximately 400 capital requests. As was done under Budget 2022, school capital submissions will be carefully reviewed through the Auditor General approved gated process, and priority projects will be selected based on health and safety concerns, enrolment pressures, building conditions, functionality in programming, and legal requirements. I look forward to seeing the school's capital plan being submitted in the near future.

2:40

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her answer. Given that many families in Alberta have children with special needs who require support and given that this government announced more than \$700 million for children over the next three years and given that special-needs programs like PUF require school authorities to step in on families' behalf to assist with special needs in schools, to the same minister: what supports are currently available for families with special-needs children, and what new supports are coming in as a part of this budget? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government believes that all children in our province deserve an education that prepares them for success. That's why Budget 2022 includes \$1.4 billion for learning support funding to support our most vulnerable students and includes grants like the specialized learning support grant. This funding will allow school authorities to provide a range of supports and services for students in an inclusive learning environment. I was a rehab practitioner, and it's very important for me that our most vulnerable are our most looked after.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that teachers play a critical role in developing and growing our children and given that many have felt the burden and challenges of teaching both in person and online during the last two years and given some reports stating that there are fewer teachers today than before the pandemic began and given that school boards feel like they need more help to be

able to teach our kids to the best of their ability, can the Minister of Education please share with Albertans what this government is doing to increase the number of teachers to support the need expressed by schools and parents?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are providing \$342 million over the next three years to help school authorities address cost pressures such as staffing, inflation, increasing insurance, and enrolment growth. Additionally, school board reserves are continuing to increase to \$464 million in operating reserves as of last August. We are providing a 1 per cent increase to base and operations and 1 per cent to maintenance as well, and we are also providing a 4.6 per cent increase to transportation, these increasing costs to retain teachers and support staff and for maintaining clean, healthy schools. We're making sure they are well supported.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

Prior to rising, if I could beg the indulgence of the Assembly just for one brief moment.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: I mentioned earlier, during introductions, that the school from the community of Worsley would be joining us. They now have. I hope that you'll join me in welcoming them to the Assembly.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will continue to the remainder of the Routine.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the hon. the Minister of Education.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 13

Financial Innovation Act

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act.

This bill creates a regulatory sandbox for financial services and fintech companies. If passed, the measures enabled in Bill 13 will ensure that Alberta remains a growing destination of choice for financial services and financial technology companies and that Albertans benefit from innovative products and services for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I move first reading of Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

**Bill 14
Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training)
Amendment Act, 2022**

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 14, the Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022.

It's so important that we provide a safe environment for victims and their families within our courtrooms. Bill 14 will require the Provincial Court judge applicants to complete sexual assault law and social contact issues education before they are eligible to be appointed. It aims to reduce the risk of victims of sexual violence from being revictimized during a trial and helps ensure that all people who come into the courtroom are treated respectfully and fairly. I look forward to discussing the proposed amendment to the Provincial Court Act. With that, I move first reading of Bill 14, Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Highwood, do you have a bill introduction, or are we moving it to tomorrow?

Mr. Sigurdson: No.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has a tabling.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise with the requisite number of copies of a piece that was highlighted today in the *Calgary Herald* around: Limited Funds for New Schools Force CBE to Refocus on Modernizations. That's an interesting characterization. Nonetheless, the story goes on to highlight the desperate need for schools in Calgary.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Toews, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Pension Plan Act the Members of the Legislative Assembly pension plan annual report for the year ended March 31, 2021; pursuant to the provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plans regulation the provincial judges and masters in chambers registered and unregistered pension plans annual report 2019-20.

The Speaker: Hon. members, at approximately 2:26 the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order, and that was followed by the Opposition House Leader.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

**Point of Order
Language Creating Disorder**

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today on this point of order. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). At the time that the point of order was called, the hon. Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions was speaking and answering a question, and while he was answering that question, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford very clearly said, "You are so antiscience it's embarrassing." Now, this is language certain to cause disorder in

this Chamber, and referring specifically to an individual member in this Chamber is unparliamentary given the context. What I also find ironic about this is that it is coming from a member of a caucus that, when asked to provide evidence on such a matter to support their policy decisions, just quit committee. I would say that this is, in fact, a point of order, and I ask the member to apologize.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe that this would be a matter of debate if the member had said that the UCP are antiscience and that it's embarrassing given that we've seen a rejection of harm reduction and safe consumption sites that goes against current science, expert advice, and medically proven best practices. That being said, the difference between "you" and the "UCP" is a very small one, and I did not hear the comment myself, so I could not say for sure what the member said. It may be a matter of debate, and I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule. I am often reluctant to rule on comments made off the record as sometimes it is difficult to hear those. However, I do believe that I heard the hon. member say, "You are so antiscience it's embarrassing," and that is also what the Blues did pick up. I would find this a point of order and not a matter of debate. As such, the hon. member can apologize and withdraw.

2:50

Ms Gray: On behalf of that member I'm happy to apologize and withdraw.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

At 2:27 the Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

**Point of Order
Language Creating Disorder**

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During the same interchange between the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and the minister, on the record I do believe – and I don't have the benefit of the Blues – the minister said, "If the members opposite had their way, they would be giving drugs to pretty much anybody who wants them, taxpayer-funded drugs." Under 23(h), (i), and (j) and specifically *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 623, I rise on a point of order not because the minister specified a specific member but because I believe that that comment crossed the boundary of what is parliamentary, particularly because he was accusing the Official Opposition of wanting to traffic in controlled substances, accusing us of wanting to commit a criminal offence. While it was not directed at a specific member, I believe that that was an unparliamentary thing to hurl at the Official Opposition while we are talking about such serious matters as the mental health supports for Albertans during a pandemic.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I do not find that this would be a point of order but, rather, a matter of debate, primarily because that is a general policy of the members opposite, to give drugs. This has been a subject of conversation many times in this Chamber, specifically about safe supply. I don't believe it is a point of order, and in fact when the hon. Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions was making this comment, there were some head nods that appeared to be coming from members opposite. I don't know

necessarily where individual members stand on this issue, but as a caucus I do believe that there is a case to be made that they would support legalizing and giving government-funded narcotics to members of the public.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to rule. I think that this point of order is proof positive that this is an ongoing matter of debate that has a wide variety of opinions at this time. I would suggest that the hon. associate minister's comments were a point of order and not a matter of debate although many people may adamantly disagree with the position that he holds.

If I could offer a small tip to my good friend, colleague, and hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika: when arguing points of order, very regularly you will find more success if you throw less heat during that, in the extension of that debate. But in this case you are correct. This is a matter of debate and not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 5

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: I see the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am thrilled today to rise on behalf of Alberta's amazing Minister of Transportation to move third reading of Bill 5, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

This bill will allow the government to improve safety on our roads for roadside workers. I'm very pleased and reassured to hear many members in here express strong support for this very important legislation. This bill is intended to provide improved safety on our roads and highways for roadside workers and enhance existing safety rules for our valuable first responders. We live in a province that can see extremes in weather and highway conditions at any time throughout the year. Everyone has stories about driving through storms and blizzards and the dangerous situations that can arise.

Just think about how hazardous it is to work in these conditions as a snowplow operator or a highway maintenance worker keeping our roads safe and clear. Every year there are dozens of collisions and near misses with snowplows on our roads and highways. Between March 2018 and March 2021 there were 128 collisions involving snowplows contracted by just Alberta Transportation. The Alberta Motor Association reported that since December 2019 there have been 36 near misses and at least 13 serious roadside incidents involving Alberta tow trucks and passing vehicles, collisions resulting in injury, hospitalization, and, yes, death.

Bill 5 seeks to reduce the collisions and risk of injury and death these workers are up against each day on the job. Last year we consulted with Albertans and our stakeholders on safety for roadside workers. Alberta's traffic safety advocacy organizations and those who work in highway maintenance wholeheartedly agree that more needs to be done to protect roadside workers and make our highways safer. About 15,000 Albertans responded to an online

survey from March 16 to April 6, 2021. Respondents were very supportive of extending existing protections to snowplow operators and other roadside workers.

Michelle Chimko, president and CEO of the Alberta Motor Association, strongly endorses the changes Bill 5 will provide. A quote from Michelle:

We applaud these changes as an important first step in improving the safety of these essential workers and look forward to our continued work in further improving their visibility and safety.

Ron Glen from the Alberta Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association also advocates for stronger safety measures in Bill 5. He says:

Alberta's road construction and maintenance industry puts worker safety first. This legislation is greatly appreciated because we need drivers to slow down and do their part to make their highways – our worksites – safe and efficient for all.

I've also heard consistent support from municipalities for this bill, Mr. Speaker. The highway maintenance industry also stands behind this bill because it will protect their workers and it aligns with their corporate commitment to safety and excellent client service.

From Ledcor Group, one of Alberta Transportation's seven highway maintenance contractors, they are happy about the changes in Bill 5. Ledcor employees are working on our highways and roads every day, and they need the protection that Bill 5 will provide to do their jobs safely and effectively and, of course, get home to their families safely every single day.

Albertans will learn more about the speed limit requirements in the months ahead if Bill 5 passes. We are planning an extensive education campaign that will run during the summer, fall, and winter months until the proposed changes come into force next year. We'll take the time that's required to educate and prepare the public for changes under Bill 5 and help them to adapt their driving habits.

We will work closely with industry partners like Ledcor as well as safety advocacy organizations and law enforcement agencies to inform Albertans about Bill 5 changes. Albertans will also see highway signs throughout the province that reflect the speed limit changes under Bill 5. These new signs will clearly communicate what the changes are so that drivers can obey the new rules.

Bill 5 will improve safety for first responders and many other roadside workers who currently have no legislated protection. I thank all colleagues in this House for engaging in debate on this bill, and I ask all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of this important piece of legislation, which will keep Alberta workers safe when they are on the side of our roads and highways.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Mr. Dach: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see no reason to engage in any opposition to this piece of legislation because, of course, it's something that is a very common-sense addition to the Traffic Safety Act, to give protection to roadside workers, snowplow operators, who know because of the near misses that have occurred over the past number of years how dangerous it can be to be parked along the roadway in your vehicle or perhaps even outside of your vehicle while performing work on the roadway. So I certainly welcome this piece of legislation. We support keeping workers safe.

There are an ongoing number of reforms that could have been done on top of what this Bill 5 actually does that we wonder about, Mr. Speaker. For a number of reasons unknown to me, the minister has kind of stopped short and made this amendment a very singular

one, perhaps in reaction to lobbying and certainly forthright and worthwhile efforts at lobbying from members of the public who are involved in keeping our roadways maintained. But there was an opportunity when opening up the act, Mr. Speaker, that I think was forgone, to take a wider view and to bring in some other measures that perhaps are equally as pressing as the matter of keeping our roadside workers safe during their work on the highways.

3:00

I think we know, Mr. Speaker, that there were a number of concerns raised during the Coutts blockade. The minister was called upon by myself to exercise authority under the act to revoke the operating licences of people engaged in that illegal activity. It was a good idea and one that we believed was feasible. However, at estimates the minister said that they did a legal analysis, and she believed she needed more authority under the act to actually be able to revoke the operating licences of illegally parked vehicles on the roadway involved in a blockade such as the one we experienced at Coutts and that the act needed to be amended in order to grant such powers to her.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the act is open, and no changes were made in this regard. We're wondering about that. It was a perfect opportunity, given recent circumstances, to allow the minister to in fact do something that the public wondered why she didn't do during the Coutts blockade, and that was to create some difficulty for those involved in the blockade to actually continue to operate a commercial motor vehicle as a result of their actions in blocking the roadway. While I think members of the public think this is a pretty good idea and thought that the minister was acting in a rather toothless fashion, if indeed the minister felt it was necessary to bring forward legislative change to empower the minister to actually revoke the operating licences of folks engaged in the illegal Coutts blockade and similar blockades that might occur in the future, then the perfect opportunity was now for the amendments to be made to the act to give the minister those powers, but nothing like that is happening.

It appears that the government is more worried about alienating members of their caucus that supported the illegal blockaders than actually ensuring the safety of the roadways and keeping the borders and supply chains open. It was a missed opportunity, Mr. Speaker, and we do encourage the minister to consider bringing forward additional amendments to this act to address the situation the minister herself thought needed legislative amendments.

There are also other elements to this act that could have been expanded to involve more than it actually does. It involves, of course, vehicles parked on a roadway: highway maintenance vehicles, snowplows. Certainly, there have been an abominable number of crashes into snowplows and highway maintenance vehicles. Anybody that has had to stop on the side of the highway to repair their own tire if they've had a flat tire realizes just how dangerous it is to be on the highway. Mr. Speaker, I've certainly been involved on the side of the highway for thousands of miles, hitchhiking across this country. I've ridden a bicycle on highways, and I know that it's a dangerous place to be.

I certainly welcome the elements of this legislation that will make it safer on roadways for our public roadway workers. But while the act was open, I thought – and I mentioned this to the minister also in estimates – why indeed we couldn't see some changes to the legislation that would involve other facets of situations where traffic is being impeded or there's a slow-moving or stopped vehicle on the side of the road or on the shoulder.

I speak right now, Mr. Speaker, of vehicles which are required by law in Alberta to display a slow-moving vehicle decal, a triangle, that we see on the backs of many vehicles, whether they be commercial or farm vehicles, and I'm wondering if indeed, while

the act was open, we could not have addressed that situation, to keep those farmworkers safe, those commercial vehicle drivers safe, who are driving either roadway construction equipment or farm vehicles or other vehicles that are required to display the triangular slow-moving vehicle placard in Alberta, if indeed similar types of slow-down-and-move-over requirements could have been imposed upon drivers who were passing such slow-moving vehicles.

On top of that, I think another measure that might have been wise to bring forward in this legislation, that perhaps the minister might consider doing as an amendment, would be to take a look at the oversized vehicles that are on our roadways. Numerous corridors exist, Mr. Speaker, for the safe movement of large, slow-moving, oversized vehicles, sometimes with pilot vehicles, certainly, to increase the safety of those movements, but not always. You can have a large, slow-moving vehicle that may not be piloted. But even if it is, I think there should be very clear rules that should be enshrined in the legislation in the same way that the slow-down-and-move-over legislation is enshrining that drivers must slow down and move over to pass stopped roadway maintenance vehicles on the shoulder.

If you're passing a large vessel that's being pulled by semitrailers on a roadway, as you quite often will when you're travelling up to some places in the oil patch or up to Fort McMurray, it's a dangerous situation. It's, I think, incumbent upon drivers to slow down and move over, but the law doesn't prescribe that. There are no prescribed penalties when passing the slow-moving vehicles or the large vessels, oversized vehicles on Alberta's highways or the slow-moving vehicles that display the placard.

There are a number of instances, Mr. Speaker, where I believe the act, now that it is open, could have had its scope widened. There were a number of other situations where indeed highways are impeded by either slow-moving or stopped vehicles. This act could have described further situations that mandated drivers to slow down and move over and also included penalty provisions for those that failed to do so.

The substance of the act, of course, we don't have any difficulties with. I think it's pretty clear to Albertans who have loved ones who are employed on roadside maintenance crews or who themselves have actually had to fix their own vehicle while on the side of the highway – it's very noticeable how dangerous it really is. I know for certain. A friend of mine, that I worked with, had to pull over on highway 2 to the shoulder because of car failure, and the car was rear-ended by another vehicle that came forward from behind. It was written off. They, luckily, weren't killed. It's a dangerous place to be, the side of our roadways.

The Alberta Motor Association, of course, notes that there have been 36 near misses and 13 serious accidents involving tow trucks in Alberta. I'm just wondering if indeed the government has any analysis or assessment on how many serious accidents are likely to be prevented by the implementation of the changes that are contemplated by Bill 5.

I know that it may seem like it's common sense, Mr. Speaker, to slow down and move over if there's a vehicle parked on the side of the road. I know also that before indeed legislation was changed, it was a common sight to see people not doing so and putting at risk the lives of first responders, who were first covered under a former change to the act. Now roadside maintenance workers are also being given the protection of this legislation.

I think there should have been a wider scope and more thought given to who could have been included, what range of vehicles or slow-moving vehicles could have been included in this act. There's still time potentially to do so, Mr. Speaker, if the minister is willing to consider amendments that might be undertaken while the act is

open right now and give further protection and perhaps save even further lives of Albertans who are using our roadways who must find it necessary to either stop along the roadway or to move slowly along the roadway and not necessarily a major highway.

3:10

We know that a fairly significant amount of agricultural equipment is moved on our secondary and even our gravel roads or county roadways. There are some pretty dangerous manoeuvres taken to pass tractors pulling pieces of equipment on smaller roadways as well, which, I think, bears some scrutiny and perhaps even legislation. For example, Mr. Speaker, it may be wise to make it incumbent upon those who are moving a load that is three-quarters blocking the roadway that they must actually stop and pull over themselves to allow traffic to move around them. There are elements that this legislation could've focused attention on to this slow-down-and-move-over concept that weren't added into the legislation, and I think that they should have been. I say that it's a missed opportunity if indeed the minister doesn't consider adding some amendments. Perhaps it's something that she'll see as an opportunity before the bill actually reaches the final reading in the House.

Other jurisdictions have all passed legislation requiring drivers to slow down and move over for emergency vehicles. Now, maintenance vehicles, of course, are not emergency vehicles – they're more the amber-light-displaying vehicles – but equally they are required to be on the side of the road for their working purposes, and they are significantly at risk because of the location next to high-speed traffic. It will be noted, of course, that the snowplows – they're, obviously, in motion for a lot of their time frame, and the slow-down-and-move-over requirement means that they have to slow down and move over while the snowplow is moving and performing its operations. That's why I thought it might even be wise, given that it already applies to moving snowplows, to include other slow-moving vehicles such as those that are required to display the triangular orange and red slow-moving vehicle placard that we see on vehicles in Alberta. It's something that construction vehicles and farm vehicles and commercial vehicles of various types are required to display.

It's not seen as a necessity, let's say, by many drivers to actually slow down and then pull over when they see a vehicle that is slow moving. We've all witnessed, I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, that many drivers will see it as an opportunity to gauge the distance of oncoming traffic and perhaps to speed up and pull over and pass the slow-moving vehicle unsafely in that manner rather than to slow down and move over. It should be something that is mandated in the same way that the Bill 5 before us mandates drivers to slow down and move over for highway maintenance vehicles, including snowplows and dump trucks or what have you, that might be on the roadway.

Now, I'm sure this legislation will benefit the operators of snowplows and construction equipment or maintenance equipment, and it's something that family members will welcome as well. The fines are significant, and they should be significant, Mr. Speaker, because it's an irresponsible act to go blasting by a snowplow or a piece of roadway maintenance equipment or a first responder, for that matter, who is doing their job at the side of the road. Of course, the rate of speed – the faster you go, the more that your ticket is going to be, and that's as it should be.

I hope the public education campaign that the government puts together does include multimedia platforms as well as, of course, radio and television spots, radio being one that sometimes is forgotten. Some of our rural media as well is sometimes forgotten when the government is trying to advertise new changes. But I think

in this case, given that one of the places that we listen to radio most often nowadays is in our vehicles, if indeed the rollout of the public education advertising on the matter before us in Bill 5 doesn't include radio advertising, it would be a missed opportunity.

Now, I don't think we need to be reminded, but it is a sad fact that between March 2018 and March 2021 there were 128 collisions involving snowplows. Now, that's a three-year period – that's only 36 months – and we had 128 collisions involving snowplows. That's a horrendous statistic. Many Albertans will be surprised to learn how frequently snowplows are hit by vehicles on our roadways, and that's a high degree of irresponsibility. Even in the worst of conditions, if you're moving slowly enough, snowplows are visible to drivers who are going slowly enough to move around and avoid colliding with them. It speaks to the wisdom of bringing forward this legislation to protect those operators and to raise awareness in the community amongst drivers that it is totally irresponsible and totally unacceptable to be rolling by at full highway speed when you're passing a roadway maintenance vehicle or you're passing a snowplow.

I think there are other classes of vehicle operators that deserve the same respect and should have had it accorded through their inclusion in this piece of legislation. Unfortunately, they haven't been. I know that for each element that you want to include in a piece of legislation, if you want to include another class of vehicles, it certainly takes a whole lot more investigation and work and deliberation. I understand the minister may have been responding to advocacy from those who were working on the side of the roads, operating snowplows and highway maintenance vehicles. Be that as it may, it might have been appropriate, I think, to try to expedite consultation with other classes of vehicle operators to see if indeed, at the same time, this legislation could have included them as well. I think it would have been a good use of time and probably would have been able to be done within the same opening of the act as right now.

With respect to the revoking of commercial licences of those who would use a commercial vehicle or a farm vehicle to block a roadway with the intent of getting greater awareness for their protest, this is something that I think the minister clearly should have done. We've got a huge, glaring example of the necessity for that type of a tool in the hands of our Transportation minister, and it could have solved what might have ended up in a violent confrontation using weapons by people involved in that blockade who were intent on using them to kill RCMP officers. Indeed, many Albertans were screaming, like, "Do something, for crying out loud, to get the vehicles off the roadway; stop this blockade," yet the minister was claiming: "No. I can't do that. The legislation doesn't allow it." Well, let's make it allow it. Let's amend it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen to join debate.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to follow my colleague from Edmonton-McClung, who I think raised many good questions with regard to: while Bill 5 is before us, why are we just dealing with one aspect, an important aspect but just one aspect, when there are other issues that have come to the fore of late, notably commercial and farm vehicles being used to blockade; for instance, at the Coutts border crossing, which had a significant effect on the movement of goods down into the United States and the disruption of supply lines?

The opportunity, obviously, is here to consider that and to put some teeth in the Traffic Safety Act that would dissuade people from using their vehicles in that fashion, which was problematic for

Albertans and also, obviously, people in other parts of the country. The Windsor bridge – I can't remember the name of that bridge, the bridge going between Windsor and Detroit.

3:20

Mr. McIver: The Ambassador Bridge.

Member Ceci: Ambassador Bridge. Thank you for the generous offering of help from a former city councillor, who didn't offer that much when we were city councillors together. But he may have a change of views, Mr. Speaker. He may have a change of heart with regard to my presentation here today.

Anyway, I want to recognize, of course, that my colleague from Edmonton-McClung was correct in pointing out that many see the opportunity of an open bill as a way to improve the situation for Albertans, and I would just underline that it's unfortunate that the minister hasn't considered this as a necessary action. In my estimation – I certainly hope I'm wrong – we may see more instances, going forward into the future, of people using critical infrastructure in that fashion and trying to make a point of protest. Certainly, they have the right to protest but not in a way that negatively impacts the lives and livelihoods of Albertans and addresses critical infrastructure in that way.

We do have a bill, I just want to point out – I believe it's called the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act, something like that – that was just passed here maybe last spring, Mr. Speaker, and which could have been used in this regard in Coutts, in Alberta's case. Perhaps other provinces, like Ontario, have similar things, and the Ambassador Bridge could have been opened sooner than it was. But subsequent to the federal government, as we all know, passing the Emergencies Act, I think it was called, that bridge was opened up expeditiously, quickly, because of the federal government stepping in.

Not so here in Coutts. That was delayed, in terms of any action, more than 18 days. A Traffic Safety Act that had protections in it, as we're suggesting, for Albertans and for trade could have dealt with that though we did have an act called the emergencies act, and the government failed to use that act – for whatever reason I don't know, Mr. Speaker, but they did – and it was problematic for all Albertans.

What we see before us is an amendment to the Traffic Safety Act which would require, obviously, drivers to slow down, where possible, when passing roadside workers, including snowplows and maintenance workers, when a vehicle is passing on the same side of the highway. If there is a two-lane highway and those vehicles are in the other lane and you're passing them, you have to slow down and move over when their lights are flashing and they are stopped on the highway. You know, it's a small thing for the driving public to do. I don't consider it onerous at all. We are seeing it happen with regard to emergency vehicles at this point in time, and this act would spread that out, so we're talking about snowplows and roadside workers as well.

Mr. Speaker, we've all seen those signs on the sides of highways, particularly around areas where the roads are under construction or being worked on. I think the contractors put them up. They say things like, you know: slow down because we want these workers to get back to their families at the end of their workday. No one can disagree with the importance of that happening. That's a form of education, obviously. Now, this amendment will put some greater teeth into the request of that sign because it'll be against the law, and fines can be levied against people who dangerously – I don't know if that would be the word – pass people working on the roadside or, in fact, cleaning snowplows and other kinds of things.

You know, when I was reading the bill – it's not very long – and thinking about it, I was thinking about other kinds of municipal and county workers that are out there who are just wanting to get home at the end of their shift. While I was a city councillor, there was yearly a memorial that would take place to memorialize workers who had died at the city of Calgary during that year. There are similar kinds of memorial events across this province, Mr. Speaker – I know that it's in the hundreds each year, not a couple of hundred but between 100 and 200 – for workers who, unfortunately, in this province die in their workplace as the result of an injury or an accident.

That's the kind of tragedy that can be ameliorated by doing more. It's not a lot to expect the travelling public to pass safely. If they can't pass safely, then they should learn through a stiff fine. That's obviously something, I think, that's built into this as well. I see that my colleague from Edmonton-McClung talked about that those fines for failing to slow down when passing snowplows or maintenance workers will now apply. That fine would be in a range from \$136 to \$826, and that variance is based on the speed of the offending vehicle.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to the municipal workers that, certainly, I'm aware of, they see many things on the roadways. It's not just plows, and it's not just tow truck operators or emergency vehicles on the sides of roads. It also includes, like, people who are maintaining roads, people who are painting lines, line crews on roads, crack-sealing crews. But in those cases, you know, there's a greater attention to slowing traffic down. There are often sign and signal people. There are often moving-over kinds of things so that they'll make only one lane available.

You can't pass those kinds of workers on roadways and not take a look at the equipment that they're using. Sometimes there are these huge vehicles that are set up to absorb crashes. You kind of wonder how often they're pressed into service as a result of people, in a distracted way, not knowing, you know, that there's a lot of danger with a pickup or a vehicle hurtling down the roadway at potentially 120 kilometres an hour and the impact. You get a sense of how they're trying to protect their lives by these crash-absorber kinds of vehicles they tow behind their other vehicles to kind of keep everybody safe.

3:30

While I have no concerns with this legislation – I think everybody here wants to keep workers as safe as possible wherever they are, whether they're working on the roadside or they're working anywhere – and I see no issues with the substance and the write-up of the aspects that are amending the existing Traffic Safety Act, I do think there was an opportunity to include other initiatives in this bill, and we've made that clear. I do think there is a great deal of support for what's in this bill. The Minister of Municipal Affairs talked about the survey and the consultation that was done and the agreement that Albertans had with that.

I do think that a public education campaign is a good way to start Albertans to recognize that there needs to be a change in their behaviour. The behaviour that they have towards tow trucks and emergency vehicles needs now to be extended when they see flashing lights, whether they're amber or blue or blue and red. That public education campaign will ultimately lead to a safer roadway for Albertans.

That's really how municipalities change things anyway. If they have a new bylaw that they want to bring in – we used to have our Mr. Bruce. We used to call him Bylaw Bill. He would urge us to ensure that we had a good lead of education. He would sit down and explain that to council. He would explain to the public, through any opportunity he had to be in the media: things are going to be

different in the future; we're not going to change it right away, but please recognize that there will be a difference in the future. We always did things to improve the safety, protect the public.

That's what this is all about, you know, that families can know that their loved one will be home at the end of their shift instead of potentially injured or worse. I, too, was really astounded that so many snowplows have been hit – it must be quite a shock for the operators in those situations to be involved in collisions, and 128 of those collisions occurred – through Alberta Transportation advising the government and us being aware of that through the information that was published or made available in support of this amendment act.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance this afternoon to provide some comments for the first time, of course, around Bill 5, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act. You know, as somebody who spent a considerable amount of time before being able to serve the constituents of Edmonton-Decore in this House – safety was certainly one of the topics top of mind for me, spending much of 20 years co-chairing my workplace health and safety committee, spending several years on my union's provincial health and safety committee, trying to find ways to help workers work safely, improve those conditions for members, not only in my own work site but across others that belong to UFCW 401 members. Certainly, when I see legislation that comes forward that increases safety for Albertans, Alberta workers, I'm always absolutely in favour of that.

I'm certainly not in favour when we start to reduce those things, like, of course, we saw earlier in this Legislature around, I think, reducing the effectiveness of workplace health and safety committees. You know, those kinds of things I'm not very excited about. I don't have any issues with promoting and voting in favour of Bill 5, but I think there were certainly some opportunities that we could have taken to, I guess, make things better.

Certainly, some of the members in this House: I have not spent probably as much time as they spend on the highways, you know, getting back to their constituencies. But I've certainly spent my share of time either travelling on the highways, pulling a 24-foot travel trailer behind my truck, and, shall we say, with some of the interesting situations that have cropped up on the highways, either observing or even being a part of those situations.

I guess maybe we could have taken the opportunity with this act being opened to address things. You know, I'll bring this up because it literally happened yesterday coming back from Calgary. On kind of a dark part of the road right around Bowden, what looked like a garbage bin or container of some kind off to the side of the road right near a small bridge and kind of really close to that – and, yes, there were some safety cones out there, but those cones were very dirty. They didn't have the reflective tapes around them, so until you're almost on top of it, you can't really see this sort of thing. Perhaps we could have looked at ways to promote a better, safe situation for drivers around that sort of thing. That's something that just occurred yesterday, so it's top of mind, obviously, for me.

I know one of the things that I heard quite a bit – and this, of course, goes all the way back to the 29th Legislature, when I served in there with a lot of folks – was the concerns from tow truck drivers and the challenges, very unsafe challenges, that they face when they're on the roads. You know, again, as early as yesterday seeing a situation on the road, not only do you have somebody trying to help a stranded driver with their vehicle, but it also requires another

vehicle further down from that just to, I guess, try to provide some kind of visibility in terms of either slowing down, moving over. The funny thing, Mr. Speaker, is that even despite that, individuals who were in the lane right beside that still didn't move over, which kind of leads me into this point where they're going to commit to an educational program.

When I started my remarks here on some of the situations that I've come across on the roads, observed, been a part of – I think we're really going to have to take a very hard look at how we're educating because the reality is that we're still seeing situations where drivers are either not paying attention or they're just careless or whatnot. I mean, a simple act of a stalled vehicle on the side of the road stopped, whatever the reason is: if you're on the highway, it's really not a big deal to move over to the passing lane, giving that person a lot of space. We just don't know if they're going to open up their door and walk out. You know, some of our shoulders are not that large, and it doesn't accommodate for the entire vehicle to get as far away from the roadway as possible.

The education for these changes: I really think we need to up the game on that, especially with new drivers, you know, so that they understand the risks on the road. Is it something that we need to, for instance, start applying at the high school level, in grades 11 and 12, where we have new drivers that are going to be coming onto the road, to get them young and open-minded so that they learn these types of habits when they do get on the roads and they do get onto the highways?

3:40

It's unfortunate to say that I've been witness to and, you know, stopped for accidents involving new drivers, and unfortunately a lot of times it was due to carelessness. I think we could have had an opportunity with which to look at those things, address those types of training aspects for drivers just so that we can make our roads safer.

That kind of leads me to sort of the safety that some of my colleagues were talking about earlier around our unfortunate recent experience at the border crossing at Coutts. You know, I've seen a bit of an inconsistent approach to these sorts of things. I mean, I've seen responses to individuals who happen to block a roadway – they didn't even have vehicles; they had a couple of bicycles, and there was a very, very stern reaction to that – yet it was a little bit of a lackadaisical response with what, unfortunately, took place down in Coutts. With such a fresh experience in all of our minds, have we not lost an opportunity to learn and make something better for that? My colleague from Calgary-Buffalo had kind of started to touch on this.

I think back, again, on my days in the labour movement, and I've certainly visited, you know, many strike lines. I've been a part of strike lines with my duties through UFCW and even been on my own strike line for a week. The reality is that there is blocking of traffic that happens, whether it be into a business or possibly even a roadway. When I think about that, usually the result is – it's either through a labour board decision and/or even the courts, but it usually happens within about 24 hours. Thinking about my experience on my very own, of course, obviously, we're blocking traffic from getting into the Macdonalds Consolidated, Lucerne ice cream parking area and whatnot. The labour board quickly issued, saying that we could only hold up traffic for five minutes at a time, so for each successive car or truck we could only hold them for five minutes.

When I look at those situations, I can't help but wonder: did Alberta not have the ability to duplicate that kind of a process where they could have gone to the court system, simply got a decision saying that you can't shut down the entire border, that you can only

slow things down? I'm speculating here at this point, you know, Mr. Speaker, but clearly the response that we had here was completely ineffective. Is there an opportunity through Bill 5 to be able to look at a situation like that and to be able to handle it differently going forward from here? Just a thought around that and how maybe we could have done something a little bit different.

I guess, as some of my colleagues had mentioned some shocking numbers that we've seen come out around incidents and near misses that have happened, I'd like to be able to maybe say that I was shocked, too, but frankly, actually, I'm not. Again, just my work in promoting health and safety and safe workplaces – these kinds of things are preventable. You know, going back to some of my earlier comments around tow truck drivers, did we have an opportunity? I know the industry has lobbied very significantly over the years about changing from the amber warning light to blue. We have seen some of these changes in other jurisdictions. Was that not, again, an opportunity that we could have taken advantage of to try to protect our tow truck operators along with the education piece about moving over, things like that, slowing down? Perhaps, even though we're in third, we might get an opportunity to hear from the minister around why some of those things maybe weren't addressed in this bill.

Perhaps maybe there are plans for another bill coming up that could address those types of things, which kind of led me a little bit to – I guess I don't really want to call it a concern – a question, maybe. Again, just diving into some of the language of Bill 5 on page 2, subsection (ii), “in subclause (v) by striking out ‘emergency vehicle or tow truck’ and substituting ‘vehicle,’” I guess I'm wondering: did that maybe get a little bit too broad? I know we're trying to encompass things like snowplows and whatnot, but do we now start to cloud – you know, are people going to say, “Well, what's a vehicle?” and things like that. I guess that was more just a thought that I had when I was looking at the legislation and wondering why we didn't choose instead maybe to be a little bit more prescriptive in terms of what we want to refer to or if by doing that, it kind of boxed us in a little bit in terms of trying to increase that safety level, be it for workers on the road or tow truck drivers, things like that.

Did we miss maybe an opportunity, like I said, when we have a vehicle that's broken down on the road? How do we potentially create a safer situation where perhaps we have an immobile vehicle? I made a reference to this kind of bin that I saw late last night coming back from Calgary. You know, I think about when somebody is hauling something of great length out the end of their vehicle. They're required to have a flag on that. It has to be very, very visible so that people can see it. Could we kind of take that sort of thinking where: if something has to be left on the road, does it need to be somehow very quickly identifiable so that you can see it and you can react to it on the road?

I've certainly seen many, many times where vehicles have struck others on the side of the road. I mean, probably everybody has seen those YouTube videos where an officer has pulled somebody over. They've still got all their safety lights on, you know, the orange lights trying to point everybody in the other direction, and you still have an accident. So what kinds of things have we learned from those, and did we have a chance in Bill 5 to maybe address some of those things? Again, as my friend from Calgary-Buffalo said, it's all about safety.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 5, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act. I've been thinking, as I've sort of been reading through the bill, considering it, listening to members speak, about some of my own experience related to this field. I've held a lot of different jobs in my lifetime, and during the period when I was pursuing my degree in music performance at Grant MacEwan here in Edmonton and indeed during my dozen or so years working as a musician and studio engineer, I worked a lot of other jobs on the side to help pay the bills and help pay for that schooling. A number of those jobs were, in fact, in road maintenance and construction.

Just out of high school one of my first big summer jobs was working for the county of Strathcona. I got hired out there to work on one of their road crews, actually, a number of their road crews. That was in the summer of 1992, so way back when.

3:50

Member Irwin: Were you 10?

Mr. Shepherd: Nineteen ninety-two, indeed.

In that work I did a number of different things. I worked on a cold-mix truck. That's working with sort of cold asphalt mix, and that's just literally going out with the truck and a few shovels on the many rural roads around in Strathcona county and just patching holes in the road out there, just driving over them with the truck wheel to pack that down.

I also had the opportunity to work on some of the maintenance and construction crews. I got a chance to drive some big pieces of equipment. I got to drive a couple of the wheeled bulldozers. That was mainly in the yard, sort of filling trucks and that sort of thing, but occasionally moving them from site to site with some of the road jobs. Also, driving the large road packers: those are basically just great big giant water tanks with rubber wheels that you use to pack down the roads. I had one incident with one of those packers that scared me a bit, trying to get down and pack the edge of the road on a bit of a steep grade and actually having the side of the road collapse a bit. I ended up, luckily, being able to steer into it and ride that packer down into a farmer's fence without incident, but certainly my heart was in my throat. Admittedly, most of that work was out and off the main roads with that, so I didn't really run into too many incidents like we're talking about with this bill.

I did also follow that up then with a few summers where I worked for the city of Edmonton. That experience allowed me to get on with some of the crews here. Again, working for the city of Edmonton, I had the opportunity to work on a number of pothole crews. When you start out as the new guy on the pothole crew, you get to be the tar man, which means you carry around, literally, a bucket of steaming tar and a broom. You put on the face shield, and you go out and you put tar around the edge of the pothole before you put the asphalt in and pack it down to make sure it's going to stick.

I did also have the opportunity to work with some larger crews in some other situations. I did work with some crews that were doing paving and others, so sort of grinding out the road and then laying down new asphalt. That was in circumstances anywhere from working in back alleys to working on some side streets, all the way up to working on the Yellowhead Trail. I did have some incidents where I was working out beside traffic, at times moving at some higher velocities. Indeed, I had the opportunity on many occasions to do the much less exciting work of being a flagperson. That involved, many times, standing out on rural roads or sitting on rural roads waiting for traffic to come by to sort of let them know if they could go through or not or just simply that that rural road was closed. I certainly got some good reading done in those times.

Certainly, at times, you know, in the safety training we heard some of the horror stories as well about tragic circumstances where individuals who were doing that work, unfortunately, were seriously injured or lost their lives by drivers who were driving too fast. They failed to slow down, were not paying attention, and indeed, unfortunately, on occasion then would find themselves plowing through construction sites. So I can well appreciate the intent behind this bill and the reason for bringing it forward.

I also just reflect, Mr. Speaker, that I'm also well familiar with the dangers of high-speed traffic from my many years as a cycle commuter. For a long time that was my main way that I got around, and that was here in downtown Edmonton but certainly other parts of the city. That was at a time when we did not have any significant cycling infrastructure in the city, no protected or even painted bike lanes of any kind. I got quite adept at, as we called it, playing in traffic, riding as a cyclist in the midst of vehicles. Certainly, when you are out in that position and you are exposed, when you're having people pass within a few feet of you at high velocity, you come to appreciate just how dangerous a vehicle can be.

So, certainly, I understand and support the intent behind this act and indeed the act itself because I recognize the danger that folks that are out doing this important work, that are supporting the ability for all of us to be able to get around the province, to get around our cities, municipalities, different areas – I recognize the need to ensure those individuals are protected.

I know for myself, Mr. Speaker, even as someone who has, you know, been a cycle commuter, who has been on the side and felt the danger that there can be from a vehicle passing by, it can still be easy to lose that sense when you are behind the wheel of a vehicle yourself. It's part of the challenge of it, the psychology of driving and how that sort of removes us sometimes from the impact that we could potentially have.

You know, I think back to the times when I've been driving down highway 2 and I come in past Leduc and I come down the road and I hit Edmonton and it changes from 110 to 90 and then all the way down to 60, and all of a sudden 60 kilometres feels like I'm barely moving at all. But it could still do an incredible amount of damage to an individual. Certainly, when we have situations, then, where we are indeed asking people to reduce their speed, potentially in a highway district or area, you know, from 110 or – admit it. Let's be honest here; 120 is what most folks are doing on highway 2. I'm sure no one here would do that, Mr. Speaker. When we're asking them to slow from that to less than half of that or potentially even a third, that doesn't quite feel right as a driver. It feels very slow. But it is essential to ensure that we are providing protection for folks that are doing this crucial work.

This bill would require that drivers slow down wherever possible when they are passing roadside workers, whether that be snowplows – I think we've all encountered that, all of us as MLAs and some here more than myself, who have to make that regular trip up highway 2 in the midst of winter and the snowstorms. Certainly, we have run into the snowplows. We've been caught behind them, perhaps quietly cursed them at times as we've been in a hurry but recognize the incredibly important work they're doing, that they should have that respect when we are approaching and passing them on the road. Indeed, that would also apply, then, for roadside workers, maintenance workers when those vehicle lights are flashing and they are stopped on the side of the highway.

This basically just affords them the same protections that are given to first responders and tow truck operators. That just makes sense, Mr. Speaker, because they face exactly the same danger. When they are stopped and they are doing their important work by the side of a highway, they are every bit as much exposed as a tow truck operator or a first responder.

So I certainly support the plans, then, to raise the fines, to change the fines for failing to slow down when passing snowplows or maintenance workers, to range from \$136 to \$826, based on the individual's speed. I think that's appropriate as well, to vary. Certainly, the faster we go, the more danger we present.

I just got my own ticket the other day for driving a little bit over the speed limit on St. Albert Trail and duly went to the Alberta website yesterday and paid my fine of \$116. I believe it is appropriate that we have a scaled penalty, particularly for individuals that choose to pass at a real excess of speed. Certainly, I think we've all encountered a few of those individuals as we've made our way along highway 2 as well.

Now, I understand that the government is saying that as part of this they will undertake a public education campaign to let folks know before enforcement would start in the spring of next year. I'd say that's also fair. It's good to give folks a good heads-up of what's coming down the pipe, the changes that are going to be made, so they have the opportunity to respond and change their behaviour. Of course, Mr. Speaker, we would hope that folks are already taking that precaution, already showing that respect to vehicles, but certainly if we are going to be increasing fines and potential penalties, we should be giving folks due notice.

Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, I will be voting in support of this legislation though I would echo some of the comments that have been made by some of my colleagues just noting that the Minister of Transportation did suggest that she was encumbered from taking steps during the recent illegal blockade at Coutts, that she was unable to take some actions. She did a legal analysis and said that she needed more authority under this very act.

Nothing could be fresher in mind. I think the billions that we lost to our provincial economy should certainly be at the forefront of all of us here as legislators and taking steps, I think, to prevent that kind of action in the future through an illegal blockade. Indeed, many members of this House have spoken at length about how they oppose such things, at least in some circumstances other than the Coutts situation. That does seem to be the general consensus.

Certainly, there would have been an opportunity here to make appropriate changes to this legislation to ensure that all such blockades would be able to be dealt with in, I think, a much more expeditious manner than we saw that this government was willing to take in this particular situation.

But that aside, Mr. Speaker, as I said, I certainly support the substance and the intent of what the minister is trying to do here, so I will be voting in favour of Bill 5. Thank you.

4:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate on Bill 5?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 10 Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate March 28: Member Loyola]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join debate on this? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has risen.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is, as always, an honour to rise in this House. Just let me get my glasses on so I can read. I haven't yet had the opportunity to speak to Bill 10, the Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. I believe it's actually the first bill that's been fully sponsored by the status of women, so as the critic for status of women I'm quite happy to rise and to share my thoughts on this one.

I am going to preface my comments a little bit here, but I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that I will get back to the content of the bill. I just want to frame my points a little bit. You know, I want to start by actually talking about how the comments that will likely happen today around this bill could be presented with a content warning or with a trigger warning. This is really timely, that I mention this, because – and maybe the teacher in me will just talk a little bit about what a content warning or trigger warning means. A trigger warning is a statement that's made prior to sharing potentially disturbing content. That content might include graphic references to topics like sexual assault, self-harm, violence, eating disorders, and so on.

I think everybody in this Chamber would agree that the topic of FGM, female genital mutilation, is something that could be absolutely traumatizing and triggering to somebody listening, somebody tuning in. You know, believe it or not – I know I like to joke about people listening to the Chamber – there are people who tune in and watch. I think it's really a good learning experience, a good teaching opportunity – again, it's the teacher in me – that we should take content warnings and trigger warnings seriously whenever we talk about potentially quite traumatizing, triggering topics such as this one, that we join together and acknowledge the impact that it could have on people, on survivors of female genital mutilation.

This is why I do want to just point out that we've seen from this Premier multiple times – I didn't get a chance to fully search *Hansard*, but he did it this week on Tuesday, I believe, made light of trigger warnings and mocked them. Of course, you can do a little bit of research and reading on trigger warnings and content warnings, and you may find that some people – there's actually a lot of research that says: I'm not so certain if trigger warnings and content warnings are the best approach. Regardless, making light and mocking sensitivities like that I don't think is the right approach. I would think that most folks in this Chamber would agree with that, just as, you know, if we were talking about residential schools, as an example, when you talk with elders and you talk with survivors, you often preface those conversations with the possible retraumatizing effects.

I did actually have the opportunity – I don't think he'll mind me saying it – to talk with the Finance minister yesterday. He mirrored the Premier in making light of a trigger warning. I was actually really pleased that the Finance minister talked to me and said, "I didn't know," and he said that he won't do it again. That was pretty great to hear, and I really appreciated that. I also chatted with the Member for – oh, my goodness, I may get a riding wrong – Chestermere-Strathmore, and she also said that it's not something that we should be doing.

I'm doubtful that the Premier is watching me speak right now, but on Sunday – yep. I'm getting back to . . .

The Acting Speaker: I'm just going to remind all members that it would be inappropriate to comment as to whether or not other members . . .

Member Irwin: Oh, good point. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Yeah. It wasn't quite exactly, but I thought – I think we're all on the same page.

Member Irwin: Yeah. Thank you. I really appreciate that.

I just did want to highlight that, you know, I may not have much of a life because I did watch the press conference on Sunday and actually watched it with much interest. That was on human trafficking. One of the reasons why I watched it with much interest: the Premier was there and the Minister of Children's Services and, I believe, the Minister of Justice and perhaps someone else. Apologies. Why I paid such attention to that is that one of my constituents, Kate Quinn – she's the head of CEASE, the Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation – was there. She made the trip down from Edmonton, from Treaty 6, as she said in her remarks. She went down with April, who is a survivor of human trafficking and someone who's been an incredible advocate for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit folks, and she cofounded the Stolen Sisters movement.

So I watched with a lot of interest, and I saw the Premier standing there and supporting and saying that this government was going to do all they could to end human trafficking and to take those issues seriously. You know, I felt hopeful. Then on the next day he posted a meme trivializing assault, and then on the very next day he made light of trigger warnings. I'm urging this government, this Premier to do better and to be better. I think he has an opportunity to do so and to allow all of us to really believe his words. I hope to see that with action here soon.

Let me get back to Bill 10, the Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. You know, I said that I had the opportunity to speak with the bill's sponsor, and I know it's something that she's quite passionate about. She shared with me just the number of stakeholders that she's reached out to on this bill. I think we can all agree in this Chamber – and I shared this in my response to this bill as well – that, absolutely, FGM is a horrific human rights abuse, and we need to all call it out.

You know, I actually recall as a high school social studies teacher in rural Alberta – and the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon would recall as well – social studies 10, that human rights is an important component there, and I remember actually this topic coming up in class. I think it had been mentioned in an article, and one of the students asked: what is FGM? I still remember it so vividly. As social studies teachers, as topics come up organically, we address them, and I remember saying: okay, folks, I'm going to tell you what this practice is, but I'm just warning you. It was actually before I knew the language of content warning or trigger warning because this was, gosh, probably about 10 years ago now. I remember saying: I am going to tell you what this is about. I actually had a student faint in class. I still remember that. I remember it so vividly.

Again, as a teacher you embrace these learning opportunities, and actually then that same student did a project on this issue, so it sort of came full circle, because it was something my students, at that time in Bawlf, Alberta, hadn't heard about. I can imagine that many folks in this very Chamber haven't heard about it as well. We know that it is absolutely horrific, and we know that it is already illegal under the Criminal Code, as it should be.

I'm probably already running close to out of time here. I'm not going to speak a great deal about the specifics around it. I know that in debate yesterday there was some specific detail given from the sponsor of the bill as well. My colleagues will have a lot of specific questions; I'll say my two lawyer colleagues, who will provide some legal analysis of this as well, I know, who will be speaking here shortly, too.

4:10

But I do have to get on the record here as the critic for status of women that when I saw that a piece of legislation was coming forward, like I said, the first clear bill directly coming from the

ministry for which I am the critic, I was really hopeful, especially when I heard that it was going to be about protecting women and girls. I thought: ah, interesting; I wonder what this is going to be about. I heard that it was going to be about women's health. I must say that while – again I'm going to be very careful on how I phrase this – we know that FGM is absolutely horrific, I want us to all condemn it, it's not an issue that I hear about from my constituents.

There are so many issues related to women's health, health of the 2SLGBTQ-plus community, specifically trans health. It's certainly on my mind, as we head into the Transgender Day of Visibility tomorrow, March 31, just how much work we have to do to advance and support trans health in this province and globally as well.

You know, I think about some folks who've reached out to me, sharing reproductive health concerns, endometriosis, as an example. It's actually Endometriosis Awareness Month. I didn't get a chance to talk about it in the Chamber yet, and we're almost at the end of the month, so a good opportunity to do so. This is a condition that affects thousands of women across this province. I shared an article from someone named Meghan, who shared her story about endometriosis. In her story she talked about the debilitating impact that endometriosis has had on her life, and when I shared it on social media, I had countless people, women, weigh in, sharing their own issues, many of them experiencing wait-lists in getting treatment. It is something for which treatment is not simple, and there is no specific cure, so to speak.

A number of women shared their lack of access to health care. Endometriosis is just one example of many. During the Bill 207 debate the number of women and gender-diverse folks I heard from around this province who encounter barriers when accessing health care – this is not ancient history. This is November 2019, I believe, when we were first talking about it. I could have my dates wrong. Memories are confusing during a pandemic. I've heard from countless people, women in particular, even in urban areas. I remember one woman in an urban area who said that she was being denied birth control from her family physician, right? This is still happening. I give those as a couple of examples of some of the significant health concerns that women and gender-diverse folks have raised with me.

Again, it's not to diminish the critical importance of speaking up and speaking out against FGM, but I do wonder, of all the pressing concerns facing women and girls in the province, that this was this government's priority. I'd love to hear – and I do hope we'll have folks rising on the other side of the Chamber to just perhaps talk a little bit about, you know, why it was that this topic area was so critical. Like I said, my staff probably think I'm a little bit too nosy, but I pay a lot of attention to my inbox because I really do want to know what issues are top of mind for my constituents. I mean, like, I'm sure that all of us in this Chamber don't just hear from our constituents. We hear from folks in other constituencies, folks who might not be getting the support they need. As a critic for status of women and 2SLGBTQ-plus issues, of course, I hear from women and members of the community from all over the province, and I've not had an e-mail about this topic. I'd love to hear a little bit more as to the why – right? – as to why this government felt that this was such a significant priority for this government.

All right. I'll get a couple of questions here on the record, but again I really wanted to present that, because, hey, as I said in my response to this bill when it first was released, if this government, if this minister, the Associate Minister of Status of Women, are looking for any ideas of key priority areas where we could really be supporting women and girls and, hey, specifically women and girls' health, I've got a lot of ideas. I know I've worked closely with our Health critic, the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, too, on both the issues of

women's health and LGBTQ2S-plus health, and there are a lot of tangible things that this government could be doing to support those areas. Again – I've got to mention it because I may not get a chance tomorrow – trans health is a big one. I had the pleasure of raising some concerns around trans health in government estimates, and I shared in that room that when we're talking about delays in accessing trans health care, delayed health care is deadly health care for the trans community.

The stories I could share with you. Talking about e-mails, I could share with folks in this Chamber countless e-mails from members of the trans communities sharing just how incredibly challenging it is to access health care. The barriers are many: wait-lists, of course; lack of psychologists. We hear that there are six psychologists across this province who are able to provide referrals, and we've asked Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services to expand the list of professionals, the list of people who are able to provide referrals. We know that access to surgery itself is a huge, huge barrier as well.

With that, thank you for the time. I appreciate the rapt audience.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

We're on second reading of Bill 10. Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 10. I'll start, as my colleague did, by providing a content warning for anyone who might be watching because we will be discussing some troubling things in this particular bill.

The bill is intended to ensure that health professionals are not involved in the performance of female genital mutilation, or FGM, and that's obviously a good thing. It's rendered illegal by the Criminal Code, so, I mean, I suppose it already was illegal, but it's not necessarily a bad thing to have multiple avenues by which to approach behaviour that we want to curtail. I think that that can be important, providing – for instance, in a criminal court the standard of proof tends to be a lot higher than in other proceedings, so providing other avenues is a good thing. I am glad to see that this government is speaking out against this practice and is taking the steps that are within their control. I think that's a good thing.

I do have some questions about the legislation, particularly the wording of the legislation. The definition is provided for in here. The question I have about the way the definition is framed is: what steps have been taken to ensure that this definition doesn't impact trans folks trying to access health care? Because the definition is – I mean, to prevent the harm, I understand why the definition is broad. I'm a little curious why an explicit exemption for a trans person was not provided in the definition, because I think that that would have been possible, especially in light of the sort of exemptions that are already in there. I think that that is something that could have been added to this bill, and I'm a little curious why it wasn't because we certainly know – I mean, obviously, again, this is another thing where we talk about how, you know, you can take steps forward without solving the problem. Let's put it that way.

I was very proud in our time in government to introduce a bill that prohibited discrimination on the basis of gender expression and gender identity. That was certainly a big step forward, but we know that it wasn't enough. That's why we continued to work with the community to bring in other things. One of the things that I hear frequently about is about access to health care.

4:20

In part it's about physicians maybe not feeling competent or able to manage in the area. I've heard from some trans folks that, you know, you go in for a broken arm – and a broken arm is a

broken arm. People will not decline to provide care but be reluctant to provide care or ongoing care because the individual is trans. The doctor or the other health professional doesn't necessarily feel that they're sort of prepared to deal with that. That could certainly be dealt with by way of sort of requirements in the curriculum.

But there are also direct problems on sort of the provision of surgeries, for instance. There's a very long waiting list. There are a lot of hurdles to be overcome, but even when you overcome those hurdles, it's very, very difficult to access, and it has been made more difficult to access. Part of this is because it's bureaucratic, and people want to see protections in place, but sometimes these things have unintended consequences, I guess, is my concern.

I am concerned that this bill might have those unintended consequences, so I would very genuinely and very seriously like to hear from the minister, you know, about the legal opinions they got to ensure that this definition, as provided in the legislation, isn't going to have that impact. In particular, I'd like to hear why there's no specific exemption put in for surgeries performed for trans people. I'm really concerned.

These are people who have an incredibly difficult time accessing health care, Mr. Speaker, and it can have incredibly tragic results. I mean, imagine living in a body that doesn't feel like your own, that doesn't feel reflective of who you are and going through the process of coming to terms with that and sharing it with the people around you, the sort of emotional difficulty and resilience of that, and then add on to this potentially, you know, years of additional appointments and being questioned and being asked if you really know who you are and having to jump through administrative and bureaucratic hoops. I've had people in my office to notarize paperwork, just to sort of change names or change gender identifiers on legal documents, and it was piles of paperwork. We were sometimes notarizing for half an hour. The barriers to this and the sort of length of wait for surgery can be incredibly emotionally traumatic to people. And given those barriers already being in place and given the difficulties that people face already, I think this House deserves to understand why the definition was written this way and what protections are in place.

I am hopeful, Mr. Speaker, that the government has an explanation, that somewhere there is a legal opinion that states that this will not create a problem and that it can be shared with this House. This isn't a situation where "trust us" is going to cut it because this really is something that has a huge impact for a lot of people. I hope that the minister can come forward and answer those questions. I hope that there is a detailed explanation for why that sort of explicit exemption wasn't required in regulation, why this definition won't catch trans people seeking health care. That is the thing I would like to ask on that.

The other question I have – and, again, I'm not saying that this is a bad bill. I am supportive of this bill, but I do have questions about other areas of women's health care, especially in light of the fact that this government has sort of taken steps around talking about, like, the necessity of certain procedures and whether certain procedures are necessary and whether they're kind of – I mean, honestly, in their communications material the government almost suggested that these things were a burden on the health care system and that certain things should be deprioritized, and those things affected primarily women.

You know, even something like saying that carpal tunnel syndrome isn't sort of a priority surgery: well, that affects primarily women, right? That's the sort of information you find out if you don't scrap the GBA plus analysis that departments used to have to do when we were in government. You find out that those things are disproportionately affecting women. As well, there are a number of surgeries. There's some level of controversy over whether hysterectomies are

medically necessary in certain circumstances, and that can have a real impact on women seeking health care.

We know as well the sort of impacts of intersectionality on people seeking health care, whether they are believed, whether their symptoms are believed, how seriously the medical system as a whole takes their concerns. We can see in the data the impacts of that on longevity, not just on women but particularly on women who are marginalized in other ways.

This is a good step forward, but I feel like there are so many ways this government could have acted to protect women's health. There are so many ways that it could have been sort of possible to move this forward, and I kind of wonder why some of those are missing here.

I think that in the pandemic we have truly seen what it is to say that an otherwise neutral circumstance has a disproportionate impact on certain populations. The pandemic is ostensibly neutral, but it had a disproportionate impact on women and their lives. It was women who more than anyone else had to stay home, who more than anyone else had to reduce their hours of work or leave the workforce. I suspect, though I do not yet know, that when all of the sort of data analyzing is done at the end – I'm curious to see the impact not just of the pandemic itself but on the sort of, like, cancellation and delay of health care that people have experienced, whether that impact fell equally on every population. I suspect that it didn't.

We know, again, that women and especially women of colour are less likely to get timely access to medical care for a whole series of reasons. We do need to recognize that. We do need to recognize that that is a reality, that intersectionality exists, that these are real things that have real impacts, impacts not just on someone's health but on their life or death.

I do think it's good that we are moving forward with this bill, but I feel like it really could touch on so many other areas, Mr. Speaker, and I feel like there are a lot of missed opportunities here in terms of supporting women's health care, in terms of ensuring that we are supporting equitable access to birth control, that we are supporting equitable access to abortion, that we are ensuring that we are providing equitable access to women so that women's health concerns – endometriosis was one of them that was mentioned.

I believe it's Endometriosis Awareness Month. I mean, this is a real concern. It's a concern that affects women. It's incredibly painful and difficult. It interferes with the quality of life in just about every aspect, from work to enjoyment of their home time, and it tends to be undertreated in our medical system. It tends to particularly, again, be undertreated in women who are more marginalized, for instance women of colour, Indigenous women, women of sort of lower incomes or lower education levels because it often requires that the person go back to their medical professional over and over again with the same complaints before they receive treatment, and they're sometimes not taken as seriously as the health concerns that come forward from men.

4:30

When our systems have these disproportionate impacts, we need to recognize the existence of those disproportionate impacts, and we need to do what we can to equalize things. That's why gender-based analysis plus is so important. Having that come forward when we were in government was, I think, always incredibly useful information, because it's not always immediately obvious on its face, especially if you're not super familiar with an area, what impacts a certain apparently neutral rule will have on different populations.

Yeah. I think my two main concerns with this bill are why there's no explicit exemption for trans health care and whether we're very, very certain that this definition isn't going to catch that – those are folks who really do not need any additional barriers, in fact, quite the opposite – and, you know, why these other women's health concerns are not addressed.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak today to second reading of Bill 10, the Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this bill. I want to begin by saying, as I think my colleagues have already mentioned as well, that we do support this bill. Certainly, moving forward with any actions we can take to prevent, to address issues of female genital cutting is deeply important. We support this bill and are happy to do so.

As I understand it, the bill does a few things. Of course, we do know that female genital mutilation is already contrary to the Criminal Code of Canada. I believe it's under section 268 of the Criminal Code, which specifically makes female genital cutting a criminal offence. This bill purports to – well, it does a few things. Of course, it adds a specific definition, as my colleagues have mentioned, for female genital mutilation.

Actually, before I go further, Mr. Speaker, I should say that I know there is a difference in terminology that's sometimes used. The bill uses the terminology “female genital mutilation.” I have certainly heard and I understand, at least, it to be the case that a number of survivors would prefer to use the term “female genital cutting.” Actually, I note that one of the recommendations that I believe obstetricians and gynecologists give when supporting women who have experienced this is to respect the terminology of the survivor as to what they'd like to use. I'm a bit more comfortable myself using “female genital cutting.” That's the terminology on which I had done some research and experience in my past on this issue. I appreciate, though, that the bill actually provides a definition around female genital mutilation. It describes it as the “excision, infibulation or mutilation, in whole or in part, of the labia majora, labia minora, clitoral hood or clitoris of a person, except where valid consent is given.”

The bill also requires health workers to report cases of female genital cutting to both law enforcement and their professional regulatory body. Of course, these are changes that are being made specifically to the Health Professions Act, so it's really covering a number of health professions, not just physicians and surgeons but, of course, all of the health professions. I believe there are – I can't remember exactly – 62. Maybe that's a little high in terms of the number of health professions that are covered under this act. But it applies to all of those professions, and it does require that any health workers who have been convicted of FGM in any Canadian or international jurisdiction are prevented from, basically, practising in their profession and from holding permits or professional licences in Alberta.

Again, I don't take issue with this bill. I understand Alberta will be the first province bringing forward legislation like this, but I suppose that speaks to part of the questions I have around the necessity for the bill. I'd love to have the mover of the bill bring forward sort of some information around, you know: how many occurrences do we know of female genital cutting happening in Alberta? Are there limitations with respect to the effectiveness of the Criminal Code provisions? I'm not entirely sure – I've done a little bit of a review of the Health Professions Act – but generally when a health professional has been convicted of certain provisions

of the Criminal Code, they automatically can no longer practise. I'm not sure if this is in addition to that. I know that sometimes within the Health Professions Act specific provisions of the Criminal Code are highlighted, and section 268 does seem to be mentioned, I believe, once in the Health Professions Act.

I have a few questions about how much of an issue this is in Alberta. Now, I respectfully acknowledge that this may be an issue that we don't have a lot of data about. Specifically, part of the concern around female genital cutting is that it does happen in the shadows, and we may not have a lot of data about it, so we may not be able to conclusively say whether or not it is a pressing issue in Alberta. But, certainly, to stand in solidarity, I suppose, with the idea that we completely condemn female genital cutting is appropriate, and I support that.

However, I also do share the concerns raised by my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View around how female genital mutilation is defined in here and whether or not it will inadvertently capture some medical procedures that may be part of a gender reassignment surgery. I'm not professing, by any means, to be an expert in the medical and surgical aspects of such a surgery, but that is a question I have. I would certainly anticipate that it is possible to consider that it could be captured by how this bill defines female genital mutilation.

As my colleague mentioned, any potential increased barrier for trans individuals to access health care should be considered and wholly rejected. We want to be very clear. We know that trans people already suffer significant barriers and challenges in accessing appropriate health care, and we would not want to be unintentionally – and I certainly hope there's no intention to do so; I don't perceive that there is – creating an additional barrier for trans people to seek health care services.

I do hope that we will hear some conversation around that from the mover of the bill to understand a little bit further the protections that are in place. Now, I appreciate that the definition does include that there's an exception where valid consent is given. It's certainly, though, my concern that there is a perception that gender reaffirming surgery would somehow be considered captured by this definition. We want to be very clear – and I believe we should be that clear in legislation – to make sure that that is not captured by that. I hope that we will have some conversation around that.

I've had the opportunity, like, I know, many members of this House, to travel the world and to experience and live in other countries even, and I did have the opportunity to spend a significant amount of time in South Africa. That's where I got a little bit of an understanding of and exposure to some of the discussions around female genital mutilation. But, of course, we know that those issues are not just issues that happen in other countries around the world, that they are concerns that we have here in Canada.

But, again, I am slightly concerned that we are focusing on this issue where there are already significant Criminal Code protections. We do know that there are also already requirements under the Health Professions Act that if a practitioner has committed and has been convicted of a Criminal Code offence, they automatically lose their ability to continue to practise and in many cases cannot be reinstated.

This feels like an opportunity to really discuss other pressing issues around women's health. I know my colleagues have spoken about it, but I think we need to speak about it because of the issues that are pressing in women's health. I know of many women and I've received many contacts and e-mails and messages from constituents and Albertans who have concerns about a lot of things when it comes to women's reproductive health, not only accessing current services.

Actually, I'm struck by – my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood might remember this. There was recently an excellent thread by a doctor, and I'm apologizing that I can't pull her name right now to my mind, because I do want to give her credit. She did a great Twitter thread not too long ago talking about the limited access that women may have to – and I always pronounce it wrong – Mifegymiso. You know, this is an important drug that for many women is an important part of their reproductive health. This is a drug where I'm proud that, when we were in government, we supported it being covered, because we knew it was important for women's reproductive health. It's an important drug, but in this thread by this doctor – and I promise to find out her name and get back to the House on that – she talked about how few pharmacists, for example, made that drug available.

4:40

Member Irwin: Dr. Emma Herrington.

Ms Pancholi: Dr. Emma Herrington. Thank you very much to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

It's Dr. Emma Herrington, and I want to give her credit because she canvassed a number of pharmacies around Alberta to see whether or not those pharmacies made this drug available. She was shocked to find out how few of those pharmacies knew that it was available and made it available.

So when we talk about access to reproductive health services and treatment, we should be talking about this issue. This is a pressing issue that many women access and should be able to access, yet in Alberta apparently it's not widely available. That's something that we could certainly talk about.

I'd also like to talk about – you know, I know that for women that I know in my life, access to important surgeries such as a hysterectomy is often very important and even things such as breast reductions. I appreciate the Member for Calgary-Mountain View pointing out that I believe it was this government that had a report brought out – I believe it was an Ernst & Young report; there have been so many reports; it was before the pandemic – which talked about a number of surgeries and procedures that were deemed to be not medically necessary, and breast reductions, for example, were considered one that was not.

If any of you have experienced this or know women in your life who have experienced it, breast reduction surgery is critically important to a woman's health in many circumstances. It can alleviate significant pain and discomfort. There are many associated problems that go along with that challenge, so that is certainly very important to women's health, having access to breast reduction surgeries.

When we're talking about access to women's health, we have to talk about the surgery backlog, really, that so many Albertans are facing and that, certainly, Alberta women are facing. We know that the mismanagement by this government of the pandemic has resulted in tens of thousands of Albertans, including women, not having access to necessary treatments and procedures and surgeries. That should be a top priority, I believe, for this government.

I also want to talk a little bit about postpartum depression and anxiety. You know, when I looked at the throne speech for this government, there seemed to be a lot of focus on women reproducing up until the point of having a baby but not as much conversation about medical health supports and mental health supports that are necessary after a child is born, not only for the mother and even the father but also for children. I think we should be talking about greater access to mental health supports for women, for example, who are experiencing postpartum depression or anxiety, a very common issue that can negatively impact not only

the woman's health but also the baby's health and a family's health and well-being. These are the kinds of issues that I believe should be raised and should be highlighted.

I also want to talk about – you know, we do understand that female genital cutting may exist in the shadows. We may not have a lot of data about it, and that speaks to how important it is to collect good data. I'm very proud that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre has brought forward a private member's bill, that I'm very much looking forward to debating in this Legislature – and it will hopefully have the support of all members of this House – to collect race-based data in all areas of services that the government delivers, and that includes health care. That can help us inform, I believe, some of the practices and supports and highlight those communities, those individuals, those racialized individuals who may need additional supports.

When we see this bill come forward, I hope that means that there will be some support for this private member's bill, which will really speak to helping to get into that data that may be living in the shadows. Let's try to focus on trying to pull out those pieces of information, because that's important to developing strong policies and practices going forward and legislation and making funding decisions. Again, it also speaks to why gender-based analysis is critically important. We know that when policies and legislation and funding decisions are made that appear to be neutral, they may not be neutral in their impact. That consideration should be made before those policy decisions are made.

I think that this bill appears to be a fine bill. There are a number of questions that, I think, I and my colleagues have raised that I really do hope we will have an opportunity to discuss further in this House, but I also hope that we will see this bill as an opportunity to consider other serious health concerns that women face in this province and how we can address those not only – it's not just about funding; it is about data, and I very much welcome that.

You know, the members of the Official Opposition believe strongly in evidence- and data-based decisions and making decisions based on what we know will best serve the people it's intended to serve. I see this as an opportunity to really get into those issues of race-based data. Maybe it will reopen a critically important conversation in this House around gender-based analysis. I think we're doing a disservice to the women of this province when we fail to consider their lived experiences and the impacts of policies and funding decisions that are being made on them simply because it's an oversight by this government.

It is important for intersectional work as well. I feel it's important that we talk about that. Especially in the context of female genital cutting, we are often talking about intersectionality. We're talking about how race and gender and sexual orientation and sexual identity and income and ability all come together. My understanding is that the intent of this bill is to really protect, and if we are hoping to protect, we need to consider all the various identities and vulnerabilities that people experience and women experience.

I hope to have a fulsome conversation and to hear from the movers of the bill on some questions around the necessity of this particular bill, how many women and girls it's hoped to protect. I hope to have a really good discussion about that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join in the debate on Bill 10, Health Professions (Protecting Women and

Girls) Amendment Act, 2022, in second reading, and I want to thank all of my colleagues this afternoon who have spoken before me on this important piece of legislation. Certainly, I'd like to begin by just stating my support for Bill 10 as a piece of legislation that I will be pleased to vote for in this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 10, just to quickly summarize what we are doing in this piece of legislation, is going to enhance the protections for women and girls against the practice of female genital mutilation, which is defined in this legislation. As my colleagues have, I will begin my remarks by simply saying that the topics we are covering in this bill debate are very sensitive and potentially triggering for those who may be listening. We know that there are women and girls here in Alberta who have been subjected to this practice and family and friends who love them who may also be impacted by this, but even just hearing these topics discussed can certainly be really upsetting, because we're talking about something very, very damaging, very sensitive at this point.

The Bill 10 as announced by this government would do a few different things. It will ensure health professionals who are convicted of performing, offering, or facilitating female genital mutilation in Alberta will be removed from the practice, Bill 10 will prohibit individuals convicted of this crime elsewhere from practising in Alberta, and Bill 10 will require health profession regulatory colleges to adopt standards of practice, including education, awareness, prevention, and sensitivity training, to better support the physical and mental health of women and girls who may have undergone female genital mutilation.

Now, it does that, in part, by starting off with a definition of what female genital mutilation means, and as my colleagues have noted, I will also note that sometimes the language can change when we're talking about this issue. The act talks about female genital mutilation; it's often referred to as female genital cutting as well. It is internationally recognized as a human rights violation, Mr. Speaker. FGM denies women and girls their right to health, security, physical and emotional integrity, and it violates their right to be free from torture and cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment. Certainly, we know that this practice is incredibly physically damaging up to and including that it can kill the women and girls who are forced to undergo FGM.

4:50

Now, since May 1997 female genital mutilation has been against the law in Canada and is in the Criminal Code of Canada. I would point out to this Assembly – and I believe that it has been stated by the mover of the bill. Let me pause to simply say thank you to the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for bringing forward this bill, for the work that she has been doing on this issue. I know that she has spoken with hundreds of women and has been consulting and raising awareness on this issue for quite some time. Certainly, for the seven years that we've been colleagues in the Legislative Assembly, I know that this has been a topic that she has been incredibly passionate about and has been speaking about. That member has done an incredible amount of work on this as well as not just Bill 10 but also in creating and recognizing the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation on February 6, a day to recognize the practice, to raise awareness, to commit to efforts to prevent further victims of FGM. And now today we have the legislation in front of us for debate.

I mentioned the Criminal Code of Canada, before I was struck that I needed to thank the mover of the bill, because my understanding is that we have not seen cases of physicians practising in Alberta. But one of the things that we know happens is young girls being sent out of Canada for FGM to be performed and then being brought back here, where certainly health

professionals need to know how to support them. I also want to mention that I understand the Criminal Code of Canada can be used to control the transportation of female children who are being moved out of the country for the purposes of obtaining FGM. Knowing that the Criminal Code of Canada has provisions that have been protecting women and girls from this I think is very, very important. Anyone in Canada who is convicted of mutilating female genitalia faces a prison sentence of up to 14 years.

As my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View mentioned, particularly when we're trying to curb behaviour, we're trying to eliminate a dangerous practice that threatens the health of women and girls: having multiple legislative avenues to do that. So while the Criminal Code of Canada exists and does make illegal these practices, including transporting women and girls out of the country to have this done, we know that the practice still does exist and does happen. We need to acknowledge that. I think Bill 10 moves us forward in the steps to preventing and supporting the women and girls who've had their human rights violated. Now, certainly, female genital mutilation is primarily a method of sexual control. We see it quite often as a manifestation of deeply entrenched gender inequality.

With the changes that are in Bill 10, the requirement to have health profession regulatory colleges adopt standards of practice that include education, awareness, prevention, and sensitivity training to better support the physical and mental health of women and girls: I see this as a very positive thing. Now, I know that the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta have had standards of practice forbidding the practice of FGM since, I believe, the '90s. Certainly, this is an issue that some of our health profession associations and regulatory colleges have been aware of. One of the questions that I have perhaps for the mover of the bill or one of the government ministers is that I'm curious if we've asked all of the health profession regulatory colleges that will be impacted by this bill what the current state of their awareness, prevention, and sensitivity training is.

I'm very curious on the size of the impact that Bill 10 will have. Will this assist to reinforce the importance of things that are already in place? Will regulatory colleges and others impacted be needing to create new procedures, practice, and materials from scratch? That's something that I hope to learn as we join in the debate through this process and particularly as we get into Committee of the Whole and we're able to do a bit more going back and forth. It's clear to me, in doing some initial research on Bill 10 and trying to understand the impact of this piece of legislation, that this is an issue that Canada and our Canadian health system has been aware of and taking steps to try to address for some time, and I'm very, very curious to know more about how that has impacted each of the different health profession regulatory colleges throughout Alberta.

Now, there are some additional questions that we have as we go into this debate, including: what tools and resources will be provided to women and their health providers when they identify a need for supports when they have experienced female genital cutting or genital mutilation? I note from research done by the opposition caucus that there have been guidelines provided for female genital cutting here in Canada through the *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Canada*, recommendations that include things like making sure that health care providers are careful not to stigmatize women who've undergone female genital cutting, even just things like making sure you understand the language that the person who's had this happen to is using and adapt to their language in talking about it.

As I read more about FGM and think about Bill 10, I think it's very clear that the stigma can be crippling and is a major factor

when it comes to these women and girls seeking out health care, so it's really important that our health care professions and professionals are well trained and resourced and know how to support women and girls that this has happened to. Certainly, making sure that we are all advocating for the availability of and access to appropriate supports and counselling services, I think, should be a part of the conversation that we have around Bill 10. Some of my colleagues have talked about the challenges our health care system has been going through particularly with the pandemic. I'm curious under that context if women and girls impacted by FGM, I imagine as all of our health care system has been disrupted, if their access to health care may have been disrupted as well.

I am not aware of any cases where FGM has taken place in Alberta or any charges related to, but that is certainly something I'd be curious to hear more about as we go through the debate and find out more. Currently my understanding is that health care workers need to report cases of FGM to their professional regulatory body, and my understanding is that with Bill 10 we will now ensure that all the health professionals will be required to report to law enforcement as well, and certainly anyone found to have performed this will not be allowed to practise in Alberta going forward.

There's certainly a great deal of discussion about the issues around FGM and female genital cutting through the debate on Bill 10. I appreciate that everyone appears to be approaching this debate in a very sensitive way and to be trying to reflect the respect that we have for this conversation and the importance of the topic that is under debate. Again, I will reiterate my support for this piece of legislation.

That being said, I do want to echo some of the comments my colleagues have made around the important, critically important, need to support all aspects of women's health and the challenges that women have been experiencing through the COVID-19 pandemic when it comes to accessing important services, everything from basic health care to birth control to oncology supports. Certainly, we've seen a disruption to our health care system that's impacted women to a strong degree.

5:00

I appreciate, Mr. Speaker, the opportunity to speak to Bill 10, to offer my support, to put on the record some of the questions that I have for the mover of this bill and/or the government ministers who are working to support this move forward. I thank those within the government of Alberta who've worked on this issue, and I look forward to hearing more debate as this bill continues to proceed. I hope that it is going to have the positive impact with which it was drafted and introduced.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join debate?

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, as we continue on with this debate, I actually was wondering: am I able now to move to adjourn debate? Can we do that again successively? I move to adjourn debate.

The Acting Speaker: Actually, as is sometimes the case in Committee of the Whole, often there is an intervening proceeding with regard to this; therefore, no, you cannot, but you may speak to it. Then perhaps somebody after would look to adjourn debate. I see the deputy government whip has risen.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate all the debate this afternoon as we work through a topic around female genital mutilation or, what Edmonton-Whitemud brought up, female genital cutting, and make sure that we are not only identifying . . .

Mr. Turton: Intervention.

Mr. Rutherford: Yes.

Mr. Turton: Thank you very much to my good friend speaking. I was just hoping that perhaps he can elaborate on some of his experience and contacts in his professional environment before and tell a little bit about his experience working, obviously, with some of these more critical female issues in his previous line of work.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and for the intervention and the question around my 10 years in law enforcement. Yes, I did respond to a number of calls regarding human trafficking, domestic violence, people who were sexually assaulted, abused, child abuse, you name it, everything that could exist, unfortunately. I am not going to get into those personal stories or details as they are, you know, for those individuals a sensitive matter. They can be talked about broadly, but I would resist wanting to bring up their personal stories that they shared with me and expected me to treat respectfully as well. I thank you for the intervention and for asking about that.

Mr. Speaker, I will relinquish the rest of my time.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has risen.

Mr. Getson: Yeah. Thank you for recognizing me, Mr. Speaker. To the prior speaker here as well: I appreciate that. As a father of three young girls I think that this legislation – I think every group can agree to this, that it's very important. It's terrible that these things have to take place, but it's good that we can come together on items like this in the House and close it.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to close debate.

An Hon. Member: Move to adjourn debate.

Mr. Getson: Move to adjourn debate.

The Acting Speaker: I think I knew what you were getting at.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 11 Continuing Care Act

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Health has risen.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and move second reading of Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act.

Mr. Speaker, for years now Albertans have asked the Ministry of Health to re-examine our continuing care legislation and address challenges in the system. We made a commitment in early 2020 that we would review the legislation and address those concerns. This review led to the development of the new Continuing Care Act, which I am proud to move forward today. The proposed legislation establishes a framework, a much-needed first step, to transform our province's entire continuing care system. It will enable a modern, flexible approach to home and community care, supportive living accommodations, and continuing care homes that will serve Albertans now and into the future. It will provide a foundation for enhancing the quality of life Albertans have in continuing care. The act will create system-wide efficiency and improve service delivery for Albertans. It will also support the health system's accountability and sustainability.

Without this new act we risk gaps and inconsistencies that remain in current legislation, and we would be unable to make transformational shifts required for system improvement. Our current continuing care legislation dates back, in some cases, to 1985 and includes content in six acts, six regulations, and three sets of standards. As of today, what we know about continuing care service delivery is that it has evolved over time. Our legislation needs to catch up to a modern world. Existing legislative requirements do not effectively reflect present-day practices, services, or settings, nor does it adequately reflect the changing needs and expectations of Albertans. Albertans have told us that they want new, client-focused models of care. The act would enable this to happen going forward.

Provisions in our existing legislation are outdated and fragmented. They add layers of complexity and inconsistency to how the continuing care system is governed. The COVID-19 pandemic also revealed these system gaps. The proposed legislation will address these limitations in our existing laws and bring them up to date in one streamlined act. This new legislation will help transform the continuing care system to reflect the importance of resident and client quality of life and a person-centred approach to care and services. It will enable shifts to expand home and community care, improve care within continuing care homes and in other settings as well. The intent is to create enduring legislation that will enable and support responsiveness to changing system demands and contexts now and into the future.

While much of the detail will be in the regulation and standards with respect to service provision as it is done today, staffing, and other operational content, the act itself contains significant content on compliance, monitoring, and enforcement. The intent is that while there will be flexibility in the continuing care system through regulations and standards, there is strong oversight and authority for the ministry to ensure compliance to legislative requirements, including standards, and that will be in the act.

Having one overarching piece of legislation will provide consistency and alignment across our entire continuing care system. It will establish clear and consistent authority and oversight for licensing, accommodations, and delivery of publicly funded health care in the continuing care system, and it will allow us to support the implementation of recommended actions identified in our reviews of continuing care homes and palliative and end-of-life care. The proposed legislation will strengthen system sustainability for years to come. I'm also proud to say that if this act is passed, Alberta will be the only province in the country with integrated legislation for its entire continuing care system.

But, more importantly, we are doing this for Albertans. The new legislation supports our larger commitment to Albertans to increase access to continuing care and meet demands on the system over the next decade and beyond. As indicated in Budget '22, Mr. Speaker, we're creating 1,500 new spaces in the coming year alone with that funding increase, but we need to do much more. Our review of continuing care showed that the demand on our system will increase by 60 per cent by 2030.

At the same time, we should be helping more clients live independently for longer to avoid or delay admission to a facility. That's better care for the client. It's a better use of resources so we can serve more clients. The review recommended increasing long-term home care from the current 30 per cent of total clients to 40 per cent by 2030. We're starting that strategic shift now with more funding for home care this year, and it is just the beginning.

We're strengthening our continuing care system to meet the challenges of the next decade and beyond through this legislation, the review, and the funding in Budget '22. Therefore, I move second reading of the Continuing Care Act.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to second reading of Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, and I appreciate the brief synopsis from the minister laying out what he is looking to achieve with this legislation. Certainly, I think all of us as members in this House have heard from constituents about concerns with the continuing care system and indeed care for seniors in the province of Alberta. As the minister noted, this is a growing concern. We have an aging population. We are expecting to see an increasing demand on capacity in that system. Certainly, we have all seen that there are real concerns with some respects in how that care is provided and what is available and what is accessible, and certainly we have seen some of those cracks in that system in much more vivid detail under the pressure that's been put on it through the COVID-19 pandemic.

5:10

Certainly, this government has been ambitious in its promises and the commitments that it has put forward and said it was going to make and the action that it said it was going to take. This is the first opportunity that we have to review actual action from this government in terms of following through on those commitments. Now, the minister talked about the facility-based continuing care review, a review that was completed in April 2021 and then made public in May 2021. That report laid out 11 policy directions, 42 recommendations.

As the minister noted, one of the key commitments, recommendations in that review was to shift the current share of 61 per cent long-term care residents and 39 per cent in facility-based care to be a ratio instead of 70 per cent home care and 30 per cent facility care. Certainly, that is an incredibly ambitious goal, Mr. Speaker, but certainly one I understand and support. As the minister just said, certainly, supporting more seniors to live independently in the community as opposed to in a facility provides a better quality of life for those seniors. Absolutely. That in turn will have a significant impact on their continuing health. It certainly should be achievable at a lower cost to the system overall. Certainly, I am in agreement there. Indeed, that report projected that the shift could save about \$452 million annually, which it then recommended should be redirected to increasing direct hours of care in long-term care to four and a half hours a day and also increasing the hours of direct care for designated supportive living as well.

Now, the former Minister of Health said that of those 42 recommendations there were some he could act on immediately, others that would need to develop an action plan, others that would require some further study, but the commitment we heard from the government at that time was that the recommendations on staffing and hours of direct care would be reviewed over the summer and acted on in the fall. Things were delayed. Admittedly, I recognize, of course, that the COVID-19 pandemic likely had some impacts on that. Certainly, we have had robust debate, and I have made much comment about what role the government played in the severity of that and the, I guess, length of that delay and how that might have played out in this, but I'm not going to go into that again here.

What I can say is that we find ourselves here now with this government's piece of legislation specifically to follow through on these commitments, but we see nothing here about those particular issues. We see nothing about the recommendations on staffing. We see nothing here about the recommendations on hours of direct care. Now, I recognize, in listening to the minister as he just opened second

reading here, that he stated that staffing and other operational content will be in the regulations.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I can appreciate that indeed there are many things that need to be done through regulations. Indeed, for example, I know that with my own private member's bill, which I am bringing forward, certainly there is a lot that I've got in there to say that would be taken care of in the regulations, say, around setting data standards for the collection of race-based data, the reason for that being that that would require considerable consultation, certainly with racialized communities in particular, who do not have a long history of trust in government in handling information about them.

In this case we have had the entire review which was conducted and the recommendations that have come forward, and indeed the government has had time since then to do some robust consultation, yet we see nothing here about the specifics on that. We see that the government does not seem to be in a position to actually make any statements or take any action or indeed make any commitments on a significant piece of what's required, I think, to make reforms in our continuing care system and indeed on an area that has been the subject of, I think, the majority of the concerns that I've certainly heard brought forward. [interjection] I see the minister would like to intervene. I'm happy to give way.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much to the hon. member. The hon. member raises some very good questions. I just want to take a moment to respond to some of those, and I'm sure we'll have the opportunity for more debate as we actually talk about Bill 11. The hon. member is quite correct that the FBCC review was done. My predecessor was examining through that. Changes happened. The hon. member also . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister. However, it's come to my attention that this is actually only just the second speaker. The second speaker is given the opportunity for the full 20 minutes themselves, so I will pass it back to the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Thank you.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that clarification. I look forward to the opportunity for some more collegial interaction, I guess, at further stages of debate on the bill.

As I was saying, certainly, I have some concerns that we are not seeing clear information here about what the government's intentions are in terms of fulfilling some of these extremely important aspects, I think, of the review. As I was saying, the concerns that have been brought forward to me as an MLA have certainly often been around the direct number of hours of care that residents of continuing care and designated supportive living are receiving. Indeed, the concern has been that, particularly in privately owned and operated facilities, the drive to ensure the profit that's needed to be for the stakeholders can often come at the expense of care for the residents.

Certainly, I think a number of Albertans would really like to see some more robust information from this government about their intent. Again, putting things in the regulation: I can appreciate when that is necessary and functional at times but also recognize that that means those pieces are much more easy for government to make changes to without having to come before the Legislature, without having to even necessarily be overly transparent about doing so. When it comes to things like staffing ratios or hours of care and other things that are of very real concern to many Albertans about their loved ones in care, those are things I think that Albertans would like to see very clearly codified and requiring perhaps more

scrutiny for government to make future changes to once those commitments have been enshrined.

But I won't belabour that point, certainly, particularly given that the minister is not able to rise and respond at this time, and I will look forward perhaps to an opportunity to hear from him further on his reasoning for doing this within the regulation process. I'd be interested to hear what is going to be involved in that, indeed if there is further consultation that will be required, then, before they can move forward with those regulations and the timelines that might be involved in that. I think those would be some of the pieces that Albertans would be interested in hearing about as they consider what this government's actions and steps in regard to this legislation are going to be.

I appreciate that the minister spoke of additional funding that they are providing for home care. Certainly, again, that is incredibly important. I would note that also within the legislation it spoke of the need to increase staffing. The review mentions that close to 6,000 more staff would need to be hired in order to meet what they are recommending for proper staffing to provide the level of care that should be provided for Albertans within the continuing care system. That is a significant number of staff, Mr. Speaker.

We know already that we are still facing constraints within our system, I think for a number of reasons, certainly, a large part of that being the exhaustion of our health care staff throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We saw the effects of that beginning last spring as we were still just coming out of the third wave, before we went into the best summer ever and the deep, deep impacts of this government's neglect in the fourth wave. Certainly, we know that we have had care facilities such as the Galahad seniors' care centre, which still remains closed – 20 seniors have been displaced for coming up now on one year – because of a lack of nursing staff to be able to provide care. As we are looking forward, I think we need to hear more from the government about what their intents are to meet this need.

5:20

Certainly, I appreciated the opportunity I had to discuss this with the minister to some extent during the estimates process and also with the Minister of Advanced Education, and I am pleased to hear that they are indeed taking some action to try to open up more nursing seats and opportunities for that training around the province. I certainly appreciate their efforts to consider how that could be done in rural communities, as was brought forward by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul in his motion on Monday, recognizing that that is an essential part of ensuring that as we train these folks, we have the folks to help provide that care in rural areas. Indeed, recognizing that we have seniors across the province, we certainly, again, want to ensure that those seniors can remain in their communities as long as possible, whether that's independently or whether that's in the continuing care system.

[The Speaker in the chair]

But, certainly, I think a number of the other actions that have been taken by this government are not going to help with hiring those nearly 6,000 full-time equivalents that are going to be required to be able to provide the level of care that's going to be needed. While I certainly appreciate that they eventually arrived at a mediated settlement, which provided some increases for nurses in the province of Alberta, that was hard fought and hard won and came as this government spent a significant period attempting to grind nurses down, requesting wage rollbacks of up to 5 per cent in the midst of the ramp up of the fourth wave.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that while, again, I appreciate how legislation functions, I appreciate the need of regulation, I appreciate

the complexity of the pieces that are moving here, there is a significant deficit of trust between Albertans and this government when it comes to the operation of our health care system. Certainly, on something so important and so essential as the care of seniors, our elders, our family, our loved ones, Albertans are going to have a lot of questions for what this government intends to do.

Certainly, this is a government that we know has had a serious deficit of transparency. We have seen them attempt to move things through quietly in regulation in the dead of night, as we saw with coal mining in the eastern slopes, which the government then spent well over a year and a half or so attempting to tap dance around before half-heartedly finally accepting the results of the committee that they put together to try to take the heat off the issue, and they still, Mr. Speaker, have refused to actually put that in legislation because they are rather fond of always leaving themselves a back door to try to get around what Albertans actually want them to do and exit from their commitments. Again, a reason why, while I can appreciate some of the steps that they are looking to take within this legislation, Albertans have good reason to question and want to see a lot more specifics up front.

I have nothing against the overall housekeeping intent of the bill, and I recognize that Alberta is taking leadership, as the minister noted, in integrating the legislation, certainly, having everything together in one place. I have no issue with that. That is reasonable and practical, but that does not in and of itself address some very real and concrete issues that we know exist within our long-term care system. Certainly, I can appreciate why, I think, indeed many health care providers would be questioning this government on their intent and what their plans are when we consider even just through the pandemic the impacts that had on our long-term care system.

Remember, Mr. Speaker, that one of the biggest challenges we have in access to continuing care is indeed that access to beds, which leaves individuals stuck in beds in acute care in hospital because the beds in continuing care are not available, and I know from speaking with front-line health care professionals that during several stages of the pandemic that problem was deeply exacerbated by the fact that we had outbreaks and other situations, which made it impossible to transfer people out of acute care into continuing care or other seniors' facilities. Again, as I have gone on at length – and I'm sure members would appreciate if I did not go into detail on it again – this government repeatedly chose to act last and act least on this pandemic, which made those waves worse, which exacerbated the pressure on all aspects of our health care system, including long-term care.

I think there will be a number of questions that we'll be continuing to ask, and certainly I do look forward to the opportunity, when the minister is able to intervene, to hear his thoughts on the record. Certainly, we will be, I think, asking about the other recommendations from the facility-based continuing care review, why this government is choosing to delay on taking actions on those or choosing to do these pieces in regulation, particularly given, Mr. Speaker, that we know we are approaching the next election. We have to recognize the reality that as we get closer to an election, governments in general are able to do less in terms of concrete details, significant action. We have seen how caught up this government and its members are in their own internal political drama already, so one has to question how much capacity this government is actually going to have to follow through on the commitments that it says are going to be in the regulation but, again, which we do not have in any significant detail for the actual scrutiny of this House.

We will have questions indeed about the amounts, what actions are going to be taken to increase the amount of home care provided to work towards that ratio that has been laid out in the facility care review. We will certainly have some questions about what steps this

government intends to bring into place to improve the working conditions for continuing care staff. Mr. Speaker, one of the big issues we have had – and, again, this is largely in the privately owned and operated seniors' care facilities – is that we have a large number of staff who are unable to get full-time hours at a single position, so they are left having to cobble together an assortment of part-time hours with no benefits, at low wages, which, as we saw in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, significantly compromised the safety and health of seniors in the province of Alberta.

We have seen this government take no action to address this. We have seen the government make no comment on the record so far if they intend to take any steps to address that. Indeed, what we have seen from this government instead is that they have a seeming drive to increase the amount of private profit in our public health care system, which would, I believe, only exacerbate this problem further. Certainly, we would be interested to hear more from the government about their intent there and how they intend to go about increasing the number of full-time staff because, Mr. Speaker, I think we all in this House should be in agreement that the folks who provide care to the elders in the province of Alberta, those who built this province, our own family and loved ones, deserve to be able to make a full-time wage with benefits.

We're certainly going to have some questions. You know, I think some of these questions – it would be helpful if the government simply shared the consultation report on this bill itself given that there are these moving pieces, that there are all of these commitments this government has made. Indeed, at some point, I imagine, when the minister is able to intervene or speak again, he will likely lay out why he feels this needs to go to regulation or at least that so many pieces of it do or other actions, but certainly having access to the actual feedback he received, the consultations he undertook that brought him here would help, I think, in debate and consideration of this bill, in building trust in this government and their intent as it moves forward.

That said, we are in early stages of debate on this bill, and as I said, there is a lot of information that isn't quite here. There's certainly a lot of broader commitments that have been made by the minister, and he has so far only had a brief introduction in second reading to lay out his intent. So I look forward to hearing from him further and having the opportunity to dig further into this bill myself. We'll be doing some of our own consultation with our stakeholders. I look forward to further debate on Bill 11.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on second reading of Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise to speak to the Continuing Care Act. I'll note off the top that all of us have had or do have parents and grandparents, and all of us in the House are at least of a certain age where they may be getting on in age. It's a piece of legislation that is germane to everybody's life in this province, and it's something we hold very dear to all our hearts, and that is the long-term care of our senior population.

5:30

But not only that, Mr. Speaker, in our long-term care facilities often not spoken about very much is the number of individuals who are there at a younger age receiving care for any number of long-term or chronic issues that they might face and that require them to be in a long-term care facility or require long-term care on an ongoing basis from a younger age. Let us not forget that it is not only seniors who form the bulk of the individuals who receive long-

term care; it is also a significant number of younger people who are also involved in receiving the benefits under the Continuing Care Act, that is contemplated by Bill 11.

I'm wondering, Mr. Speaker, as we continue debate on Bill 11, if we might always keep in mind what the minister stated as the central and core objective of the legislation. An underlying approach would be, as he termed it, a person-centred approach, which was their objective or goal in framing this legislation. We'll put this legislation to that test, Mr. Speaker, as we continue on debate in second reading and in future readings as well. It comes to my mind that there are, I think, a number of things that anyone in this province who has an elderly parent or someone who is in care – that is the person-centred care approach that one would always like to see put in place.

I had spoken in this House about some of my earlier involvement in the long-term care world as a nursing orderly trainee at the young age of 17, working in the geriatric ward of the old Colonel Mewburn nursing home, as we would call it then. Also, of course, now later on in life I'm looking after now passed on grandparents and great-grandparents. Every family will face this prospect as we see our loved ones grow in age or if we have somebody who requires permanent long-term care assistance.

The amalgamation of various different components of long-term care into this Continuing Care Act and under the one rubric is not something necessarily that one would oppose in and of itself, but it certainly bears scrutiny. Whether or not the amalgamation process that this act undertakes is in and of itself something that was necessary is, I think, a question that is fair to ask.

You know, the UCP during the pandemic has failed our long-term care residents, and 1,600 continuing care residents passed away from COVID-19. That's a tragedy that is not lost on anybody in this province, Mr. Speaker. Just doing a short calculation, it's a horrendous amount of people who passed away unnecessarily and probably as a direct result of COVID-19, many of whom would still be alive even if they had other chronic conditions.

That is one of the reasons, I believe, that the government is undertaking a close look at continuing care in this province, and rightly so. Whether or not this bill will address the failings of the long-term care situation in this province during the pandemic is something that we'll try to ascertain in our discussions throughout the debate of this bill.

Now, one of the major elements, Mr. Speaker, that I have seen and that jumped out at me is something that maybe contravenes the minister's claim that this is a person-centred approach to long-term care. It's found in the transition, let's say, or the stated objective or the goal the government has to increase the number of individuals who are receiving care in long-term situations versus through home care. The minister's stated goal is that they would be looking to have a shift, a significant shift, of about 9 per cent, an overarching goal to have a shift from continuing care to home care. Specifically, the goal is to shift the current share of 61 per cent long-term home care residents and 39 per cent family-based care residents to become 70 per cent home care and 30 per cent facility care, a 9 per cent shift.

Now, on the face of it, Mr. Speaker, that may be something that's a laudable goal. Of course, most people want to live at home as long as they possibly can, provided their physical functions and mental capacities and so forth and family abilities allow them to do that or even, you know, with assistance and help that may be provided through government home care. That's a significant number of people, though: a 9 per cent shift from the current 70 per cent home care to 30 per cent facility care.

In looking at that, the government has said that there would be a saving of \$452 million a year, close to half a billion dollars a year, that they say would redirect to long-term care, increasing direct hours of long-term care, a laudable goal in and of itself. However, indeed, the devil is often in the details. If you're looking at extracting \$452 million and having that money available, it's coming from somewhere. So is it actually something that's going to be a saving to the government, or is it just a download onto the families of individuals who will now be expected to pay the difference in the long-term care of their loved one at home?

It will most likely end up being a significant privatization effort on the part of the government, and this is where they expect, I believe, their savings to come through. It will come through the lower wages that individuals might receive working in home care versus what you'll see in a long-term care facility, where you may have public servants working and serving the individual family members who happen to be in the long-term care.

I really have a significant amount of concern, Mr. Speaker, about this so-called shift of residents from long-term care facilities, or government facilities, into a home-care situation. I don't imagine that the government is going to be looking to move people who are in long-term care right now into a family situation unless, you know, that is something that's possible to do. But over time and gradually this is their effort, to shift away from a long-term care situation. My concern is that this is being done with the priority in mind of saving money and not necessarily realizing or giving full value to the burden that it may be placing on families.

Indeed, I'd be concerned if the government was looking to counsel families to opt for a situation of home care, which may save the government money but may not necessarily be a workable solution for a family who would dearly love to have their loved one live with them but doesn't necessarily trust that they're going to end up being supported as well as they need to be if the family member does actually stay at home receiving home care. Once again, the devil is in the details. There is an assessment that will be done, of course, to determine how much money an individual in home care receives in supports so that they are assisted and they're able to function in the home. It's a debatable point, Mr. Speaker, as to whether or not the rules will be tilted in such a way that it makes it difficult for the hours of care that an individual needs at home to be actually adequate and that the shortfall, the extra burden of care, will be shifted onto the family members in a way that they are really not capable of adopting, but the government is encouraging that to save money.

5:40

I think a valid question, Mr. Speaker, to ask is: will family members be faced with a difficult situation where the government is hoping to encourage them to avoid a long-term care institutional situation and opt for a home-care situation? Yet until that family actually experiences the amount of money they'll get in support or how many hours of care they can expect in support or how much indeed it's useful – I think it's something useful to ask. [interjection] I see the minister wishing to intervene. I happily give way.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for raising some of those issues. Some of them I'm happy to speak to as we go through the debate. I recognize this is a new act that's just being seen and assessed by members of this House. I greatly appreciate the members on all sides understanding the importance as we move forward for this.

On a couple of issues, you know, I fully appreciate that the act is just that; it's a framework. It's just that: a framework. A lot of the

items that the hon. member is speaking to in regard to the specific levels of care, the hours of care, how that care specifically is going to be provided: that will be in the regulations, Mr. Speaker. We've already started working through the regulations with continuing care providers and community care and home-care providers, all of the above, recognizing that we need to make the transformation, and this is the first step.

One of the advantages – oh, I'd like to point out to the hon. member that in the preamble there's a lot of detail which actually focuses on what's important.

The Speaker: Maybe perhaps the hon. member would offer you the opportunity to intervene again, in which you would have another additional minute.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd invite the input of the minister at a future point in debate as well should he have other interventions to make and bring some greater detail to the subject at hand.

I once again will express my concerns, though. I realize that there will be regulations governing much of the questions that I'm asking about, but these are concerns, Mr. Speaker, that are something that any Minister of Health, when bringing in such a piece of legislation regarding the care of our seniors in particular, had better pay attention to. It's a very, very sensitive matter and something that every voter in this province and their grandchildren will want to know is very, very carefully being treated as a person-centred matter, as the minister claims.

If indeed there is a hint that services are being downloaded to families who are possibly ill equipped to handle them or will be unfairly burdened or won't be properly compensated to allow them to provide the services in a home-care situation that their family member needs, there will be a huge outcry, Mr. Speaker. We all know that there's a plethora of studies that are done to show how burned out, particularly now, home-care providers and family members who are providers of services to individuals who need care at home are feeling. It's not a situation that is – it needs the compassion of everybody here in this Legislature to understand that certainly everybody wants to be living at home, where we're with family members as long as possible, but that costs money there, too, and it shouldn't be something just downloaded. [interjection] The minister indicates he wishes to intervene. I happily give way.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to keep my comments within a 60-second time frame. I greatly appreciate the comments of the hon. member, who is raising concerns about, you know, the support of family members and friends, who are critical to supporting our seniors and those with needs who are going to be looked after in this space. I'd like to point out the preamble where, you know, one of the key elements is: "whereas family and friends who act as caregivers play a significant role in the lives of continuing care residents." Mr. Speaker, we are recognizing that in the preamble.

One thing about this act: what it does is that it actually pulls in not only continuing care but home care and designated service living, all these acts in different places into one place. Now, much of the detail that the hon. member is looking for is in regulations. I would like to point out that they're already in regulations today, but as part of our commitment to additional home care we see in Budget '22 and our response to the FBCC, we'll be able to provide more details at that point in time.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister for that information. Now, given the \$452 million in savings that the minister is claiming that the shift would save annually, I'm certainly

looking forward to a breakdown of that number, to see exactly where those savings occur and what the shortfall, if any, in care is the result of those savings, of that \$452 million, nearly half a billion dollars, taken out of the system. Who's making that up? Is the burden being placed on families, or are there going to be fewer services offered? Will there be criteria that make it difficult for a family member to qualify for the same level of services that they've received while in long-term care? It begs the question: if there are savings of that amount, what is the breakdown? How are those savings happening? Is it because you're not using a professional labour force in the long-term care facility that costs more than somebody you might hire in your home? Is that indeed where that saving happens? That's something I think the public would like to know. [interjection] The minister may intervene.

Mr. Copping: If I could provide a direct answer to that question. You know, I assume you're referring to the FBCC report. Really, what it is, you know, so the hon. member knows, is that there is currently about 20 per cent, ballpark, of individuals who go into a continuing care setting, into a congregate care setting who don't actually need to be there if they had more support at home. It is actually more expensive for them to be in a continuing care setting because, quite frankly, the reason that they're there is because they either don't have supports for providing food, shovelling snow, that type of thing. They don't actually quite need the level of health care supports, so if we can keep them at home longer, then there will actually be savings.

But so that the hon. member knows, the overall cost to the system will actually be going up, right? It's savings of – if we don't change the model, those costs are actually going to be higher, but the reality is that we'll need to put more money into this model for continuing care and to provide care for individuals at home, but the savings are by shifting the model, and we're going to reinvest that into health for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member has a minute and 40 seconds remaining.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the minister's remarks, and I do believe he does have the best interests of humanity at heart, of our seniors and those in long-term care under his jurisdiction. However, sometimes, when creating new mechanisms, it's not the minister's heart that's involved in it; it's the Treasury Board and Finance minister's knife that gets involved. Those two can act at crosspurposes. I want to make sure that the minister knows that for those family members who are receiving care right now or other family members of those who are receiving the care, there's no wrath that is greater than a family member who sees that their senior citizen has been wronged. I think that we can count on the minister keeping that uppermost in mind, and we certainly will do so as we look forward to more details and debate on this incredibly important piece of legislation that touches every family in this province.

You know, as far as the nuts and bolts of the operational side of things, I'll certainly get into more detail as we progress in various stages of debate. We can look at how the government handled the outbreaks in some of the continuing care facilities, which resulted in significant deaths, what the fines for operators were, what reporting responsibilities there were, but there's lots more to dig into.

Thank you.

Statement by the Speaker

Interventions

The Speaker: Hon. members, if I could indulge the House just for one brief moment, I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Health

and the Member for Edmonton-McClung. It is so nice when interventions can actually help raise the level of decorum. [some applause] I'm not sure it was that good, but I do appreciate it when interventions are used in the most appropriate way and the level of decorum is raised.

I saw the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore rising.

5:50

Debate Continued

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps if that keeps going, I will attempt to keep that momentum moving around interventions.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I must admit, as our time winds down here this afternoon, that I do rise in a little bit of frustration with Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I'm always interested in reading the legislation. What does it say? What doesn't it say? And, more importantly, what are we saying about it? So I was listening very intently when the Minister of Health gave his opening remarks on the bill. One of the first things I heard was that these are some of the first steps towards changing things.

Well, I know that my colleague and critic for seniors kind of brought this up a little bit earlier: there was some touting before this bill was brought to us around some transformational changes. I'll be honest. Bill 11 is not transformational – okay? – especially since the minister started with the opening comments of, you know, first steps.

The other comment that I caught that, you know, I'll be honest, always tends to give me some concerns is around the word "efficiencies." That tends to sometimes be an excuse to do as little as possible, and when we're talking about our seniors, the folks that built this province – and we get to enjoy everything that they have built – I think we should be striving at every opportunity to be able to provide them a level of care that they deserve, that they've earned. So when I hear that word, "efficiency," I must admit that I get a little nervous.

You know, as my colleague from Edmonton-McClung was talking a little bit earlier about, some of the money that might become available as a result of some of these changes, it's just part of my nature to ask: well, how did we get there? What did we do to be able to free up this money, and what were maybe some of the consequences of that? I certainly hear – you know, Edmonton-Decore is blessed with six different facilities of different levels. I have a very significant seniors population. I get a chance to try to interact with them as much as I humanly can, and I always hear a little bit about some of the shortcomings, you know: well, it would be great if we got that.

I know the pandemic has certainly shown a level of shortcomings, I guess, in terms of how we need to be looking at things. You can certainly look, from an economic perspective, around just simply the health care workers that are at these facilities and some of the only part-time positions that are available. You know, as the pandemic progressed, we saw where we literally had to shut the door on employees being able to work at multiple facilities. I've always said that when a person has a full-time job, they're paid reasonably well and they have benefits, things like that, the economic argument for that, but there's also that safety argument. You have workers simply at one facility. Does that mean, then, that we have to be able to provide those facilities the type of funding that they need to be able to maintain that type of workforce?

As my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre talked about earlier, you know, our seniors population is going to be growing. There's going to be a larger need for that in the future, and we have to be able to provide that level of service. We certainly heard in

news reports over the course of the pandemic where, you know, maybe seniors were only getting one bath a week. I really think that we can do better than one bath a week.

I've certainly heard concerns that have come into my office over the years where, you know, a resident has needed something, and because of a lack of staffing it was several hours before they were actually able to get to that individual. I'm certainly not blaming the employees. They're doing whatever they possibly can, but as they say, there's only one of them with two hands and there's only so much that they can handle. I think we really need to look at that.

One of the other comments through the intervention that I listened to was about rolling out through the regulations in terms of how things will go. Now, I'm not necessarily going to beat up on the minister on this one, but I certainly heard in the past from members of the government and the government caucus who served in the 29th Legislature, when roles were reversed, who were very, very, very critical of the government at the time when they would say: well, you'll see these changes come out through regulations. And here we now have the shoe on the other foot, and we certainly see a lot of things that are coming out in regulations. I suppose that's just me getting a little bit hung up again on the language. Again, it just always gives me pause, because once the legislation is passed, there's not much that I can do in terms of, you know, a regulation coming out, and maybe that's not exactly going to fit, and I'm not able to really address that matter going forward.

One of the things that I did key in on with my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre, of course, was the review that was completed in 2021. He brought up a number of points about what was in that review. I hate to say this, Mr. Speaker, but I have seen a little bit of a pattern here, you know: how many more panels do we need to strike? How many more reports do we need to commission, to then have them get placed on a shelf to collect dust, and we don't do anything with them? When we're looking at that review, I'm not seeing that reflected in the bill in terms of, you know, the things that we need to do.

Frankly, I can't remember if this was in that review or not, but one of the things that I've heard loud and clear, through people and organizations, is around a seniors advocate. I know we rolled that into the Health Advocate, but that position has fallen significantly short of what seniors need. Because that position now is basically – there's too much to try to pay attention to around that whereas an individual specifically dedicated to advocating for seniors is able to focus in on that. Unfortunately, I think the position as a whole has kind of drowned that voice out. You know, I really would have liked to have seen – and I certainly know that the government has heard about this – a move towards reintroducing a seniors advocate as an independent office. They have the ability to be able to advocate for the rights of seniors and not be held back in their comments.

At the end of the day, this is about creating a living standard that we can offer to our seniors, again, who built our province. So I'm hoping that that call has been heard and that perhaps we might get an opportunity to be able to have a discussion maybe during Bill 11. Maybe there's something that we can look at putting in there. I know that I would certainly work with the minister on that to recreate that seniors advocate . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt; however, pursuant to Standing Order 4(1)(c) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, March 30, 2022

Day 18

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gottfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 30, 2022

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Government Motions

Federal Carbon Tax Increase

18. Mr. Kenney moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government of Canada to stop its planned April 1, 2022, increase of the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne and its further plan to increase the carbon tax to \$170 per tonne given that Canadian families are struggling with the highest inflation in 30 years.

[Adjourned debate March 29: Mr. Nicolaides]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to Government Motion 18? The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to speak on Motion 18 and to add to the comments of my colleagues on just how damaging a carbon tax is to the lives of everyday Albertans. I'm proud of the many things that our government has done, but our first act as government is on top of that list. Our first act, as promised to Albertans, was to repeal the NDP's job-killing, investment-crushing carbon tax. Promise made, promise kept.

Now here we are three years later with a carbon tax forced on Albertans once again by a government even more out of touch with everyday families than the NDP were. The audacity of the federal Liberals to raise this tax now when the cost of everything in Canada is going up. Record inflation, just inflation, and their response? "Let's make it more expensive," Madam Speaker.

Now, I just want to make it clear: climate change is real. Human activity has contributed to the changing of the climates. There is no dispute on that; what there is dispute on is how we approach it. You can be pragmatic or you can be ideological, but make no mistake; there is a huge difference between pragmatic and ideological. They're not the same. If you're pragmatic, you're a practical individual. That means you're solution focused. Examples of this are what we've done in the oil sands. We have seen innovation and technology come together to reduce emissions in meaningful ways. Those are pragmatic solutions, Madam Speaker. Some examples are carbon capture, utilization, and storage. We are global leaders in CCUS technology. That is a solution to climate change. That is a real, meaningful, actionable solution, carbon capture, utilization, and storage.

Some other exciting things that we've done to demonstrate this pragmatic approach to climate change are the partial upgrading to avoid diluting the bitumen, resulting in reduced greenhouse gas emissions; advanced oil sands recovery to utilize less natural gas. This is what responsible energy producers do. This is what Alberta energy producers do, Madam Speaker. You know what else we do? You know what else is a practical solution? Taxing real emitters. You see, Alberta was actually the first jurisdiction to tax carbon. The difference was that we did not tax Martha and Henry for heating their home in February. That is so dysfunctionally wrong. But what they did do is tax the real emitters, and that's how

Albertans and Conservatives put a price on carbon. That's a practical solution.

But you know what's not practical? That which is ideological. Ideologues embrace the cult of personality, and in the course of doing so they end up worshipping on the altar of a teenage girl from Europe, idealizing and living vicariously through every tweet. That's what ideologues do, Madam Speaker. [interjection] I'd like to defer to the hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Madam Speaker and to the hon. member. I was enjoying your remarks, and the difference between being practical and ideological: that makes sense to me. I know that you know that the folks across the way haven't seemed to have learned a thing. One of the big reasons they got fired after one term in office was because of the carbon tax, and they seem to be a big fan of it still, so they haven't learned a lot. I mean, you can talk about whatever you want, but I would like to hear about something that you have spent a good part of the last couple of years on: your area of expertise, your ministry, how this affects natural gas and electricity prices and just how the carbon tax works into that. I think it's a matter of great interest for whatever Albertans are watching, and maybe the rest of us will learn something.

The Deputy Speaker: A quick interjection from the Speaker. Just a reminder to all members that even on interjections you are to speak through the Speaker, not directly to another member.

The hon. member.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the intervention. Yeah. This is a great question because, in fact, it is this childlike enthusiasm for a carbon tax that has been extremely detrimental to the natural gas and electricity industry. I'll tell you why, and I can sum it up in one statement, one question. Do you know who loves a carbon tax? Vladimir Putin. He loves a carbon tax. Do you know who else loves a carbon tax? The dictators in Saudi Arabia, the dictators in Venezuela, the dictators in Syria. They love a carbon tax because that makes companies in western democracies reluctant to invest in thermal energy, because of, like I said, this childlike enthusiasm for job-crushing carbon taxes. That then makes us tied into autocrats like Putin. In fact, this is – you know, it is Ukrainian blood that flows through those pipelines, because Europe is addicted to Russian oil. We can't get off Russian oil because we don't have global energy security, and we don't have global energy security because of the radical left. That's why we're here today, and that's why I ask everybody to embrace supporting Motion 18.

You know, I want to go back to where I was on the ideologues. There are some other things we have to talk about. When you're an ideologue, you do things like invite Extinction Rebellion into the classroom. That's what an ideologue does. By the way, the Member for ...

An Hon. Member: Shame.

Mr. Nally: Exactly. Shame.

... Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said that ideologically radical activist groups like Extinction Rebellion have a place in the classroom. Ideologues want Extinction Rebellion teaching our children. Well, here's what they teach our children, Madam Speaker. They would teach them how to block rail lines. They would teach them how to shut down air travel with drones. They would teach them how to shut down subways, how to vandalize public buildings with red paint. Bringing Extinction Rebellion does not move the needle on climate change.

It also brings us to the question of – ideologues think that we should charge Martha and Henry to heat their home in the winter, and we think this is so fundamentally wrong.

That brings us to the whole question of utilities. We've seen some exciting conversations in here. You know, everybody in Alberta knows that the NDP raised the price of everything when they were in government, and nowhere was that more true than electricity. Everything that they did had the unintended consequence of raising prices. They got rid of coal.

Mr. Reid: Intended.

Mr. Nally: Intended. Thank you.

They got rid of coal. And what was the consequence there? Well, the price of electricity went up. I won't dispute the fact that there are benefits to getting out of coal. What I would dispute is the pace at which they made us get out of coal. It was a pace which Albertans could not handle.

Then they come in here, Madam Speaker, and gaslight us. They stand up in this House, after bringing in the carbon tax and making utilities more expensive, and they gaslight us by saying: how can you drive up electricity prices? They try to blame the members on this side of the House. Well, I've done a lot of door-knocking. Apparently, so have the NDP. If the NDP did half as much door-knocking as they do talking about it, they would actually know that Albertans have good memories. Albertans know who brought in the carbon tax. Albertans know who made everything more expensive, the Alberta NDP.

Now, when I was younger – I don't talk about this piece very much. I was 21 years old. I was a single dad. I was raising a little girl on my own. I went to school full-time. I worked part-time. I didn't live paycheque to paycheque, Madam Speaker; I lived hand to mouth. I remember the humiliation of having \$16 in the bank. You can't take that out at an ATM, so I had to go in to the teller, and I had to say: how much can I take out without closing the account? And she said: \$15. So I took out 15 bucks, and I went to IGA. Remember, IGA wasn't the cheapest grocery store. But I could walk there. I didn't have to start a vehicle and spend gas driving to the cheaper location.

I remember what it's like to live hand to mouth. I remember the difference that \$50 on your utility bill because of a carbon tax makes. You know, Madam Speaker, I don't think that they remember on that side of the House, and part of the reason is because there are too many champagne socialists.

Now, if you're sitting here wondering what a champagne socialist is, I actually looked it up in Wikipedia.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Wikipedia?

Mr. Nally: I know. I know. Unassailable are the definitions in Wikipedia.

Now, "it is a popular epithet that implies a degree of hypocrisy, and it is closely related to the concept of the liberal elite." Does that sound familiar?

7:40

Mr. Jason Nixon: Google the socialism.

Mr. Nally: Well, one and the same: that's them.

Now, we're talking about individuals that like to wear \$15,000 watches. I know you're thinking of Jagmeet Singh, and you're also thinking about his expensive rocking chair. In what world is it acceptable for a politician to accept a gift of an extremely overpriced and expensive rocking chair? But that is the fallacy of the champagne socialists.

Mr. Jason Nixon: That's the leader of their party.

Mr. Nally: Exactly. That's who they take their marching orders from. And let me tell you: that leader, while he sits in his overpriced rocking chair, supports the carbon tax, because he wants to make it more expensive for everyone.

Now, on April 1 it's April Fool's Day, and we will see another increase to the carbon tax courtesy of the Alberta NDP and their friends and allies Justin Trudeau and Jagmeet Singh. Let me tell you: it's not going to be a joke, Madam Speaker. It is going to make everything more expensive for Albertans.

Now, this is awkward for the NDP. This is awkward because they try to champion themselves as the champion of the everyday Albertan, and they're trying to bring up the cause of inflation and cost of living. Well, this is their opportunity to demonstrate that they represent Albertans, but if they support our motion, then they will effectively be admitting that their carbon tax was wrong and ineffective. But the other side of the coin is that if they vote against our motion, then they'll be talking through both sides of their mouth because they'll be standing up in the Chamber saying, "Why are you making everything more expensive?" but they'll be voting to support a carbon tax. Madam Speaker, where is the manufactured outrage that we know they're good at? Where is it? The silence is deafening.

Let's be very clear. The very intent of a carbon tax is to monetarily incentivize different behaviour. Now, I don't know about you, but when it's cold in February, you can't monetarily incentivize me to turn the heat down, and you can't monetarily incentivize Martha and Henry to turn the heat down. It simply is a broken policy, and it doesn't work.

I'm all for seeing emissions reduced, which is why our government does have additional charges on large emitters. That's the pragmatic solution that I mentioned, Madam Speaker. But what I do not and never will stand for is taxing a single parent for heating their home in winter or taxing seniors to heat their home in winter. The irony: claiming to care about the affordability for families while backing a policy that at its very core is meant to make life more expensive.

Now, I'm going to take you back to the last campaign, Madam Speaker. If you recall, it was buried somewhere in our campaign commitments that we were willing to support tolls in appropriate situations, where it made sense. The NDP took that message of being pragmatic and using tolls where it made sense, and they went on – I think they were on Minister Schweitzer's tour bus. They rode across the province . . .

Speaker's Ruling Referring to a Member by Name

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I'll just remind you that names are certainly not appropriate in this Chamber. I'm sure you'll just apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Nally: I apologize and withdraw.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nally: They were on that tour bus, and they were driving around the province, Madam Speaker, and they were talking – and they were actually doing more of the gaslighting, because instead of telling Albertans that, you know, we supported it where it made sense, they were telling Albertans that they were going to have to pay tolls to take their kids to play soccer. Do you remember that? Soccer moms were going to be tolled to go to soccer practice.

Hockey dads were going to be tolled every time they went to hockey practice.

Mr. Jason Nixon: It's the carbon tax.

Mr. Nally: Absolutely. You nailed it. That's exactly what they did. What the Leader of the Opposition forecasted at the time was the carbon tax, because Albertans are currently tolled. We're tolled when we start the car. We're tolled when we turn the heat up. Madam Speaker, everything is more expensive because the NDP implemented a toll on everything that we do.

Madam Speaker, we'll go back to the discussion of energy security. The truth is that this raise could not come at a worse time. In fact, along with this raise comes more of the ideology from this angry left, and they have actually – the federal NDP have adopted the same policy that the provincial NDP are supporting, which is a net-zero electricity grid by 2035. It's really quite disturbing.

I'm going to share a story with you. Minister Guilbeault was actually in Calgary consulting with the generators on a clean energy future, and Minister Guilbeault said: what can the federal government do to incent more renewable energy to come to Alberta? Do you know what the generators said? "You can do nothing – do nothing – but get out of the way because there is literally a tsunami of renewable energy coming at this province. They're coming here because of our market-based approach, and the worst thing that you could do is take away that incentive for them to come here."

Well, guess what, Madam Speaker. That's exactly what they did, their ideologically driven agenda. They will take away the incentive. They will get rid of the market-based approach that we have. The one thing that Minister Guilbeault should not have done to incentivize renewable energy he did by bringing forward the net-zero 2035 electricity grid, which, by the way, is the exact same policy that the NDP brought forward. There is no path forward for a net-zero electricity grid except through higher prices and decreased reliability.

Madam Speaker, I cannot support this left-wing, ideologically driven agenda to support a carbon tax that makes everything in this province more expensive for Albertans. I encourage everyone on this side of the House to support Motion 18, and I would like to encourage the NDP to support Motion 18. I would encourage you. Stop looking at your feet. Stop looking at your screens. Look up and engage and embrace Motion 18, because you will send the message . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. Your time is done. However, just a reminder that you are to direct your comments through the chair and not to other members of the Assembly.

Are there any other members wishing to join the debate on Government Motion 18? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in support of Motion 18, which reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly call on the government of Canada to stop its planned April 1, 2022, increase of the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne and its further plan to increase the carbon tax to \$170 per tonne given that Canadian families are struggling with the highest inflation in 30 years.

Thanks to the minister for sponsoring this motion.

Madam Speaker, Albertans have been faced with numerous challenges, especially over the past two years from the world-wide pandemic. The increase of the federally imposed carbon tax by the Prime Minister of Canada will only hurt families and businesses even further. Calgary-East constituents will be ever so devastated

by this action and the imposition of new and additional taxes. Many members that are supported by provincial programs and benefits will be mainly affected by this decision.

Madam Speaker, the increasing carbon tax is going to result in inflation, which will have a significantly negative impact on households and businesses who are already stressed to make ends meet. In this time of increasing inflation caused by the federal government's inflationary policies, the economic and fiscal costs of this planned carbon tax increase will be significant for all Albertans. It's unacceptable that our federal government is thinking of increasing the carbon taxes, especially when families are recovering from the effects of the pandemic. The anticipated 25 per cent carbon tax hike will no doubt harm Albertans and the economy at a time when the province is still recovering.

Madam Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer recently revealed the terrible impact of the Liberal-NDP government's growing carbon tax on Alberta's households, demonstrating that once the impact of the carbon price hits the economy, the majority of Albertans will be faced with financial challenges. The rise in the carbon price is mainly a penalty for Albertans who heat their homes in our cold winters, drive their kids to school, run a business, and contribute greatly to the economy.

7:50

This goes to show that the majority of Albertans will end up paying much more for their bills and daily expenses, which is unacceptable. A greater carbon price will cause the Canadian economy to decline by 2 per cent, resulting in the loss of approximately 184,000 jobs in Canadian employment as well as a \$1,540 income loss for the majority of Canadians. A higher carbon price in Alberta will mean a 2.4 per cent drop in Alberta's GDP, which is an \$8.3 billion loss and anticipated 30,139 job losses by 2030.

The carbon tax hike of \$50 per tonne of carbon dioxide from April 1 will add around 2 cents per litre to pump prices and will rise yearly to \$170 per tonne in 2030. According to the Bank of Canada the projected rise in the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne would boost inflation by an estimate of .5 per cent despite the fact that inflation is already at a 30-year high. The federal government and their cohorts from the NDP must abolish their carbon tax hike and stop adding more challenges for Albertans.

Madam Speaker, just recently it has been announced that beginning April 1, 2022, Albertans will see the price of gas and diesel drop by 13.6 cents per litre with the removal of the provincial tax. Furthermore, the Climate Leadership Act has been repealed by the provincial government as an act to remove spending restrictions on the existing carbon tax revenue.

Through the introduction of this motion we want the federal government to know that we are fully opposed to the proposed carbon tax hike. The Alberta government is not ready to slow down the economic progress that we are seeing. Our balanced budget and striving to support all Albertans will not be defeated by this insane tax hike.

Budget 2022 provides funding for an energy rebate program to help Albertans manage higher natural gas prices. An increase in the budget for the next three years will support teachers and address cost pressures in transportation as well as growth in enrolment. Most importantly, Albertans will be provided education and training opportunities they need to prepare for the workforce and for postsecondary operations.

Madam Speaker, we can clearly see that Budget 2022 ensures that Alberta remains one of the most affordable provinces in Canada to live and work in. Alberta's lower cost of living, combined with relatively high average earnings and the lowest overall taxes, means

Albertans keep more money in their pockets. We want the federal government to hear our message loud and clear, that what Alberta needs right now is not additional carbon taxes but to focus on Alberta's economic recovery and find ways to make it possible for Albertans to have more money in their pockets.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Government Motion 18?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Environment and Parks to close debate.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to rise to talk about my motion today. Thank you to the hon. members who've taken some time to speak about this important motion. I do appreciate the opportunity to quickly close debate on it, and I do hope that it will enjoy the support of the Legislature shortly to send a clear message to the federal Liberal government, particularly Justin Trudeau and some of the extreme environmentalists that are around him, that it is not acceptable to the people of Alberta for them to increase the carbon tax on Friday and to recognize the consequences of that on the people of this province.

Most importantly, though, Madam Speaker, I do think it is an opportunity for the NDP to be able to rise also inside this Chamber and show that they stand with Albertans and not their close ally Justin Trudeau. I understand that for them the carbon tax issue has been a significant ideological issue for their party. It's something, unfortunately, that they hid from Albertans when they ran in the 2015 election campaign but then became a major part of their government and the policy that came from their government in 2015.

It would be hard, of course, as the hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity said, for the NDP to completely walk away from it. But, at the end of the day, the NDP have to take a moment to recognize – and based on some of the questions that they've asked in question period and the letters that they present on behalf of their constituents, we do know that they know that the cost of living, particularly the costs of fuel, electricity, and heating, are having an impact on Albertans, including the NDP's constituents, and that they want to see action from the Alberta Legislature.

Certainly, sending a clear message to the federal government at the very least that they should stop with their consumer carbon tax increase this Friday and try to provide some relief – similar to what the Alberta government has done on the same day, when the Alberta government will remove the Alberta fuel tax to try to help as much as we can. But, unfortunately, I suspect, Madam Speaker – we'll see what happens – that the NDP will continue with their ideological approach when it comes to carbon taxes, which were, frankly, a disaster.

When the NDP was in power, as I said, they hid from Albertans that they intended to do this tax, then came in and rammed it through despite the fact that the vast majority of Albertans were against it. Certainly, the Official Opposition of the day was against it and was sounding the alarm. Some of the consequences that we see right now as far as the cost increase and the impact of the costs of everything going up: as the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity just said, it has a significant impact on heat, on fuel for transportation costs, and on electricity. But it also increases the cost of everything in daily life, from when you go grocery shopping to any product that you may buy to your Christmas presents that you may buy. Everything in our society comes by train or car or airplane, all of which require fuel and all of which are impacted by

the decisions of the NDP and their Liberal alliance inside Ottawa to bring in a carbon tax.

But if, Madam Speaker, there had been any environmental gain as a result of that decision by the NDP in Alberta or the leader of their party in Ottawa, Mr. Singh, or, again, their close ally Justin Trudeau and the Liberal government, from those policies, that would at least be something that could be pointed to. I don't know if some of the members who were not here in the last Legislature will recall this, but the NDP leader, who was then the Premier, the now Leader of the Opposition, had an interview at the end of the year, after bringing forward the carbon tax, the signature policy of her government, and was asked by reporters at year-end interviews how much in GHG emissions, how much in emissions, how much impact there had been on the environment as a result of the decision to bring in the carbon tax, and she could not state a number. She could not state a number on her signature policy. You know why? Because their policy had no impact.

B.C., that brought in a carbon tax in the early 2000s, has not seen any decrease in GHG emissions as a result of that carbon tax. Transportation emissions continue to go up inside the province because people have to drive despite the fact that the NDP leader, the then Premier, told them to take the bus. My constituents don't have buses in rural Alberta. But there was no environmental impact as a result of that, none at all. Their leader couldn't even say it. I mean, can you imagine? Your signature policy, that you put onto the people of Alberta, that has raised their expenses on everything, and in a year-end interview – I mean, a year-end interview. It's not like it's a press conference. You're sitting down there and you're prepared to talk about all your accomplishments of the year, and the Premier, the now NDP leader, could not even point to GHG reductions that had happened as a result of that. It's shockingly disappointing, and it has not worked. It has not worked.

Now, what we see is that this government ran on a platform to get rid of the NDP carbon tax, and unfortunately the federal government is continuing to force a carbon tax on our citizens. Their carbon tax, frankly, is a little better than what the NDP carbon tax was, at least as far as rebates to Albertans. The NDP certainly took more money from Alberta pockets than the federal government is doing. Nevertheless, the federal government is still taking money out of Albertans' pockets at the very moment when Albertans and all Canadians are crying out for relief on areas like fuel and heating costs and electricity. The federal government could at the very least not raise it this year and sit back and see if they could help.

8:00

Now, do you know what the NDP spent it on? Some of you may not know this. The NDP spent a tremendous – in fact, when I became environment minister, I had to clean up a lot of this mess. They focused their time on buying people light bulbs and buying them shower heads. As rural Albertans we were very frustrated. I see the hon. member from Athabasca. He'll know. He lives in a pretty remote community, like myself.

Mr. van Dijken: They even came to install it.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Correct. Yeah, they would come and install them. They paid an Ontario company to come and install the light bulbs and shower heads.

But the problem in rural Alberta – by the way, we were comfortable buying our own light bulbs and shower heads – was that the shower heads did not work under well water pressure. The NDP were so disconnected with large portions of this province that they didn't know that we have wells and there would be different

pressure issues on that. So they would install these shower heads, and they wouldn't work at all.

That's what they were doing with Alberta's climate change money. That's what they were doing when they stuck on fixed-income seniors increased heating costs, stuck on single moms increased electricity prices on top of the boondoggle that they already created with the electricity system. It made it so that hockey moms and hockey dads had to pay more money to drive their kids to hockey. All that with no benefit at all to the environment. You can't make this stuff up. It's absolutely shocking.

Nevertheless, I will give the NDP this. It was different circumstances at the time as far as inflation and some of the cost impacts that we're seeing right now as a result of the changing economy, what we're seeing take place in Europe. So at the very least the NDP should have the courage today to stand up and send a message to Ottawa today to say that this is not acceptable to Albertans, and they should join with us in making costs easier for Albertans as we navigate through this tough time that the world is facing, our country is facing, and our province is facing. But they won't do that. I think – we're going to know in a few moments – the reason they won't do that, Madam Speaker, is that, at the end of the day, the NDP Party provincially and the NDP Party federally are the same party. They are the same party. The members across from me: the leader of their party is Mr. Singh.

Mr. McIver: Well, Justin Trudeau, really, now.

Mr. Jason Nixon: And now, ultimately, Justin Trudeau, who has signed a coalition pact to be able to keep a minority Liberal government, held up by the socialists in Ottawa, in power to continue to ram through these job-killing policies and make things more expensive for Albertans.

Now, the NDP don't like it when we raise that. You see it during question period, how animated often you will see the Official Opposition get when this is pointed out. I don't blame them. I don't think I would be part of Mr. Singh's party, but they are. They need to explain to Albertans why they would choose to support their federal leader, the Prime Minister, and not Albertans when it comes to a simple motion like this inside the Chamber.

Sadly, we're going to continue, Madam Speaker, to see some of the unfortunate policies that we get from an NDP-Liberal alliance, that are going to continue to make life expensive for the people that we represent. For the NDP, as the hon. associate minister of natural gas said earlier, to be able to stand inside this Chamber and in any way pretend like they're a champion of the people of Alberta and not stand up to what we see coming from the federal government when it comes to climate policy is hypocritical and unacceptable. I do know that Albertans will eventually call on that.

Their friend, close ally Justin Trudeau, who has been shored up now by the leader of their party – leader of their party – unleashed a new climate plan, emissions projection plan yesterday. It's a shocking plan. In fact, I described it to the media as insane. It is completely unachievable. It would reduce economic activity in our province by up to 40 per cent. It would see things like the electricity grid have to remove 80 per cent of GHG emissions by 2030. Eighty per cent. There's no way technologically to do that. The only way that could end up working would increase the cost drastically for Albertans as they are trying to pay their electricity bills, and all Canadians, frankly, with that.

Mr. van Dijken: They're trying to increase electricity . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Exactly. I appreciate the thoughts from the hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

The NDP, in question period, was talking about wanting to lower the prices and demanding the government do something to lower the prices beyond some of the stuff we're trying at the moment, which is to bring in rebates and try to help Albertans. The single biggest thing the NDP could do to make sure that we can help Albertans on their electricity bills and other bills is to stand with us and tell Ottawa to drop the ridiculous climate policies and their carbon taxes.

You know, one of the things inside the document that was presented by the minister of environment federally, a well-known former member of Greenpeace, who has illegally blockaded buildings before, climbed buildings illegally, and, frankly, has acted completely against the interests of this country when it comes to environmental policy, one of the things that he presented in this, that's supported by the NDP, was the full phase-out of the combustion engine by 2036. What are we going to be? Like Cuba, where we're trading gas lawn mower parts trying to make sure that our cars can work? Madam Speaker, I want you to think about that. The NDP's partner in Ottawa is bringing forward policies to phase out the combustion engine by 2036. It's not that far away.

In fact, they've said that they are going to go so far as to legislate and dictate to Canadians what cars they can buy and what dealerships could sell, starting in just a couple of years, starting with 20 per cent – all the sales from dealerships will have to be 20 per cent electric cars. First of all, it takes six months to even get an electric car right now; second of all, they're not cheap; and third of all, that's insane.

And it's just one of the policies that we see coming forward. No money for oil and gas. No path forward for the energy industry. Most of the investment announced by the federal government in the last 36 hours on this issue is about, quote, investing in transitioning energy workers out of the energy industry, at the same time that we see some of the largest prices for oil and gas anywhere in the world, that the world cries out for our energy resources. The NDP and the Prime Minister should be standing up and saying: Alberta has the solution not only to the energy problems but to the environmental problems right here. But they won't do that.

Instead, they focus on their ideological beliefs, not on Albertans – not on Albertans – and have supported a federal government who is now trying to dictate a target, which this province will not stand for, Madam Speaker, of reducing our economy by up to 40 per cent. Unacceptable. And the NDP has to decide: are they with Albertans, or are they with their leader Mr. Singh in Ottawa and ultimately their now leader Justin Trudeau of their party? Or can they be pragmatic enough to say, "You know what? We may have gotten this one wrong," and at the very least listen to Albertans. I can tell you that the vast majority of Albertans certainly want to see the carbon tax increase stopped this Friday or not happen at all and, frankly, want to see the carbon tax gone once and for all inside this country because it does not work.

Now, the NDP, often when we talk about this, will – actually, I just want to back up real quick, Madam Speaker. We talk about 3 cents on Friday; that's what it would be, the increase per litre, roughly. The plan that the NDP has supported with their friend Mr. Trudeau will result in a 40 – 40; four zero – cent increase a litre for gas inside this country and in our province. Forty cents, Madam Speaker. I don't know what it was when you started driving. It was a little more than that for me but not much more. Forty cents a litre from that. That's where we're headed. So at the very least the NDP should be able to support a pause for some rational thought about what the impact would be of this on Albertans, but sadly I think we'll continue to see the NDP abandon the people of this province and not stand with them today.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 18 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:09 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------------|----------|------------|
| Amery | Pon | Stephan |
| Fir | Rehn | Toor |
| Issik | Reid | Turton |
| Lovely | Rosin | van Dijken |
| McIver | Rowswell | Walker |
| Nally | Schulz | Williams |
| Neudorf | Singh | Yao |
| Nixon, Jason | Smith | Yaseen |
| Panda | | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------|--------|-------|
| Carson | Feehan | Sabir |
| EGgen | | |

| | | |
|---------|----------|-------------|
| Totals: | For – 25 | Against – 4 |
|---------|----------|-------------|

[Government Motion 18 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 6

Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this particular piece of legislation. I know it's not the biggest piece that we have before us, but it's still an interesting piece. I'd like to just share with the House a little bit about some of the Blackfoot history around the gem which we are making the official gemstone of the province of Alberta. In the Blackfoot community it is frequently referred to as the buffalo stone, but of course in Blackfoot it's called iniskim. It is a stone which is really the fossilized remains of an ammonite, which is a creature that lived 71 million years ago, or baculite, as it may be called.

There are very interesting stories about the history of the stone that I think are worth talking about. As I mentioned, the stones themselves are somewhere in the neighbourhood of about 71 million years old, and they typically are really only sourced here in the southwestern corner of Alberta and some area around, but it is actually quite unique to this area of the world and has had a very important role in Blackfoot history and is still used in ceremony on a regular basis. I know I received some ammolite from the Blackfoot community when I was Minister of Indigenous Relations and was given a little, little bit of instruction on it, but I have taken some time to make sure I learned a little bit more so I could talk about that today.

In this particular case people, I'm sure, are quite used to seeing the coiled-type ammolite that comes out of the Rocky Mountains on a regular basis. They're quite beautiful. I mean, I certainly know

many people that have bought pieces of it and had them polished or bought polished pieces and displayed them in their homes or in their offices, because they're actually quite engaging. In this case, while it's the same sort of creature, what typically makes the buffalo stone are the linear ones rather than the coiled ones but the same nature. If you look carefully, you can see that there is a creature with cell divisions in it that result in some things.

But if you were to actually try to go look for ammolite in the mountains, you would not recognize it unless you actually had some skill. That's one of the things that the Blackfoot community quite pride themselves on. When you look at the stones, you know, as they exist in nature today, they typically just look like many other stones, because over 71 million years, of course, the outside of the stone has been kind of bled of colour, so you need to have some skill to be able to recognize it. There's a certain pride in the Blackfoot community to be one of the people who can identify and recognize this stone in its natural state.

8:30

Of course, when you scrape off the outside and cut it deep and then polish it, you get the quite engaging, multicoloured, rainbowlike, iridescent stone that we recognize and that you can buy in many places in the world, you know, as ammolite. The stone itself, because it is linear, can sometimes actually have the look as if there is a buffalo in it because the little cell divisions kind of can look like legs in a large-headed animal, so it is often referred to as the buffalo stone.

More than, of course, the appearance, there is a lot to be said about the actual relevance of the stone in the Blackfoot community. One of the elders in the Piikani First Nation, a man by the name of Troy Nolton, has publicly shared this story, so I'm going to share some of it with you. It's not my story, and I don't claim ownership of it. I really do want to recognize Troy Nolton for this story. I was referred to Troy when I was, you know, asking a little bit about the understanding.

Troy's story is that over 1,000 years ago there was a particular Blackfoot clan in the area that we now refer to as southwestern Alberta that was going through an extremely difficult wintertime. The buffalo just weren't accessible, and of course other animals like deer and rabbits and so on were scarce and hard to find. The snow was very deep, and it was very difficult. Then one night one of the members of what we refer to now as the Piikani First Nations – of course, they were all Blackfoot at the time – a young woman, had a dream, and in the dream a spirit visits her and tells her that the Creator has heard her prayers about the starvation of her people, sees the struggle, and has sent to the community a gift and that this gift would come in the form of a stone called iniskim, or buffalo stone, as I've said.

Then the spirit gave her instructions about where to go, where she could obtain the stone and, of course, also instructions about how to obtain the stone and what to do with the stone when it was obtained so that it would be obtained in ceremony and used in ceremony. The spirit indicated that the young woman would be able to hear the stone singing to her. Often in the Indigenous community, knowledge is shared in song, and this is one of those occasions. She woke up in the morning and told her partner, her husband, that she had this dream, and he told her that she must go and find the stone and bring it back to the people because it was a gift of the Creator and would help them in their plight of starvation at the time.

So she headed out, and indeed she did hear the stone as she headed down the valley and followed it and followed it until it got louder and louder and louder and finally brought her to a small stone just sitting there waiting for her. She picked up the stone, brought it back to the camp, presented it to her husband, and told her

husband: this is the gift. And then they had to make some decisions about what to do now. Of course, immediately they then prepared ceremony to accept the gift of the stone into their community through prayer, as she had been instructed by the spirit who visited her.

She said that there were two particular signs that the gift of the stone was in fact going to resolve their problem. The first was that there was going to be a storm that came in from the north. As a result, the community was told to tether down their teepees and to take all their personal belongings in because there was going to be this horrendous storm coming in from the north. The second sign was that the buffalo was going to come in and wander into the camp at night, but they were not to harm the buffalo that night: wait until the storm had come in.

Obedying all of the strictures given to them by the spirit, they did as they were instructed, brought the stone in through ceremony, waited, and indeed the buffalo did come through camp, and the snowstorm did come. In fact, the next morning a large number of buffalo were trapped in a large drift section of snow, and then it was possible, because the buffalo had been trapped by the snow, for the community to go out and hunt the buffalo and to feed their families and to sustain themselves through that terrible, difficult winter.

So you can see that there is a lot of history to this stone for the Blackfoot community, the Blackfoot First Nations in this province, and even to this day it is very important to the community because it is still used in ceremony and often given as a gift to show some respect to the people it is given to and to share Blackfoot history, tradition, and culture with the guests who receive the stone.

I keep my copy of the stone on my desk at the Federal Building alongside other natural stones from the Rocky Mountains and the North Saskatchewan River because all of these represent to me the fantastic land of the province of Alberta and the great benevolence that we have been given to share with each other. As a result, I am quite happy to be able to stand up tonight and to speak to this bill, in which we will be making the decision, although there's been some history of this already in the province, to officially make ammolite the official gemstone of the province of Alberta.

I encourage everybody in the room to go out, learn a little bit more about ammolite, spend some time at the Blackfoot community and share with them the incredible culture and traditions and ceremony which they have sustained through very difficult times, imposed on them through the colonization of North America, yet they have found themselves in this very positive place of respect and self-respect and pride of their future. I certainly would, you know, hope that all the people in this Legislature would share with the Blackfoot community their culture and their expectations of a good future ahead.

Just as happened with the spirit sending the stone to the Blackfoot community in order to sustain the community through rough times, I think that we as members of this province need to reflect on how we help to sustain the Blackfoot community and indeed, of course, all First Nations communities through the difficult times, particularly the difficult times that we have imposed on them as a colonialist society, and seek to pursue some reconciliation with the Blackfoot community so that we can come to a better place, a place of mutual respect, a place based on ceremony, and a place based on achieving a fair, equal, and respectful relationship into the future.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Are there any other members that wish to join the debate on Bill 6? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford for sharing that story. It's

interesting to see how the Blackfoot culture has integrated the ammolite into stories. You know, stories often, of course, are instructive, right? Part of what I gathered from that story you just shared with us is that by listening to the world as it unfolds around you and being present and able to take the time to know those things, then you should be rewarded and could be rewarded with, in that case, sustenance and so forth. It's interesting to not see the story as looking at the stone itself as something to covet – right? – but, rather, to listen to what the story that goes through the stone entails instead.

8:40

I mean, we have a slightly different version of ammolite here in 2022, which is still quite, I think, fair and reasonable. It's been recognized as quite a beautiful gemstone, right? If it's properly cut and polished, it looks very much like an opal, or maybe opals look like ammolite, I guess we could say. The value of it intrinsically and as a commodity, as a jewel, is growing quite a lot. I found it interesting just talking to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview yesterday, and he told me that when he was the economic development minister, they'd had a trade mission to China, and one of the members that came on the trade mission was an ammolite broker from Calgary. I found that quite interesting.

I remember as well, just reflecting right now, while door-knocking that one of my former constituents in the Wellington neighbourhood – so I guess that would be yours . . .

Mr. Carson: West Henday.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. West Henday now.

. . . was also an ammolite broker – I'll tell you where he lives later, okay? – and was very interested in sharing that as a way to develop some commercial operation around Stand Off, Alberta, I believe, if I'm remembering correctly.

In fact, that's where a lot of the ammolite comes from, around the St. Mary River. It takes care of the excavation into the layers between, like, 30 to 60 or even 80 metres down in the strata to them. That's where these ammolite fossils are, right? In fact, that's what they are, from an ancient seabed or a series of seabeds that would have existed tens of millions of years ago, I guess. I don't really know.

Anyway, you know, it's nice for us to look for ways to expand people's knowledge about the natural world when we do choose these emblems. I think that it's instructive in the widest possible way. I think that the importance of including a very strong First Nations element in our curriculum in the province of Alberta must include not just facts and memorizing lists of all the emblems of Alberta but some of the cultural stories and significance, as the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford pointed out, looking for that wider meaning for young people to look at our world and see and help us to animate that world around us. I think that is part of what emblems should do. Yeah.

I mean, we certainly are supportive of this initiative, and I hope that we will be able to create an education component to this, a cultural element to it, and indeed an economic element, too. There is, I think, potential for careful, sustainable harvesting and development of ammolite here in the province, and I know there's certainly a good market for it not just in North America but around the world as well, as I had mentioned last night. You know, I saw it being bought and traded in Thailand – right? – and people were very interested in it because of its inherent beauty and rarity and novelty as well. Lots of ways by which we can approach this emblem. I'm certainly happy to support the bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to this important piece of legislation, and let me thank both my learned colleagues, the MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford and the MLA for Edmonton-North West, for their remarks. I haven't heard the government side participating in this debate, or I would have recognized those colleagues as well. It's my first opportunity to speak to this piece of legislation.

When we designate something as official, we can talk about that in many different ways. I think, one, it highlights that particular thing, that it is important to the cultural, economic, social life of the province. It can highlight the significance of that particular thing to the life of the province, to the heritage of the province, to the culture of the province. In this case this bill designates ammolite as the official gemstone of Alberta. When we look into the history and background and its cultural significance, I think it's quite appropriate that we are doing this, and my colleagues highlighted the sacred nature of ammolite in the lands of Blackfoot territory, especially along the St. Mary River of southern Alberta.

I've seen the stone in many places. I may have seen it in my colleague's office. I think that before hearing this debate, before thinking about this bill, I didn't know and think about the 700-million-year-old history of the stone, its official status as a gemstone, that history, where it's found in Alberta, why it's referred to as the buffalo stone, and how Indigenous communities were able to even recognize these stones without this modern technology so many years back. So this provides us with an opportunity to highlight the rich Indigenous heritage. This is one way of doing it.

There are so many other ways that we can do that, and in the spirit of this bill we can inform the work that we need to do in order to implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We know that Indigenous people were here from time immemorial. They have a rich history, they have rich traditions, they have wisdom, they have knowledge, and they have skills that we can all learn and benefit from. At the same time, we do know that we have a long history of colonization, that we have a long history of injustices that were imposed upon the Indigenous people. As we move towards a common and prosperous future, we need to think about how we can reconcile with the past, what we can do to make good on the wrongs that were committed during that colonization, what we can do to highlight and revitalize those rich Indigenous cultures and traditions, how we can help them gather that historical evidence, gather that history that we can all learn and benefit from.

8:50

For instance, as my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford mentioned, Indigenous communities were able to recognize this stone's formation without modern technology. Now, I understand that in mining, I guess in the gemstone area, there is commercial development. There is so much development in terms of how we mine them, how we recognize them, how we grade them. There are so many technological developments which were not present, for instance, 100, 200, or 300 years ago. Certainly, there was some wisdom, there were some skill sets within Indigenous communities, within Indigenous people that they used, that they relied on to recognize these things, to collect these things.

Not only that, but I think there is a spiritual significance attached to it. The name "buffalo stone," I guess, represents that in Indigenous communities they have long been hunting, they have long been using buffalo as a source of food, as a source of prosperity, as a source of survival. So these symbolic gestures, these

symbolic designations, in fact, do mean a lot, do create and open opportunities for all of us to learn about Indigenous cultures and traditions. There are so many things that we can do as a government, that we can do as a Legislature to highlight those traditions, to highlight that forgotten history, that often ignored history. We can start essentially from implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

But I guess the attitude that this government had from the very beginning, when they became government, towards Indigenous cultures and communities was – the first thing that they stated their position on was that it's not really important to recognize treaty land. That was recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Those recommendations, I think, were made in the same spirit that this bill is put forward, that we recognize Indigenous communities, we recognize their presence, we recognize our relationship with those communities, their treaties, their rights.

In the four years when we were in government, I think the then Premier, now the Leader of the Official Opposition, made sure that at all public events where government representatives, where ministers of the Crown were speaking, they started their speech, started their remarks by recognizing the treaty lands. Again, it was symbolic, but it has deep meaning for why we do that and why we need to do that, and this government completely abandoned that.

Today, while we are talking about an important gemstone that has significance to Indigenous communities, I hope all members of this House will take this opportunity to recommit themselves to work for, to use their position to further reconciliation, to use their voice at every opportunity to highlight Indigenous culture, Indigenous traditions, and those injustices that were imposed on them, and stand up to voice their support for the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations.

I think this bill is a good piece of legislation. It's a good gesture that we are recognizing ammolite as Alberta's official gemstone, because Alberta's history is Indigenous history. Alberta's culture is Indigenous culture. These communities, these tribes, these First Nations were here long before any of us immigrants were here.

Then a couple of other things that it would have been helpful had the minister made some comments around that. I understand that designating this as the official gemstone highlights the significance of this gemstone. It will also impact how it's viewed by Albertans. It will create relevance in their minds, and it may increase demand for this gemstone in Alberta. Has the government considered how demand will be impacted, and have they consulted with Indigenous communities, Albertans at large about that, how that will be managed?

I think another thing that I want to mention as well is that its designation will certainly highlight its significance, so whatever the decisions we make respecting this, we include Indigenous communities and their voices and we try to educate all Albertans about this and Indigenous history, Indigenous culture, Indigenous traditions, in particular those First Nations who are part of our province.

Again, thank you for listening to me, and thank you to the minister for bringing forward this piece of legislation. On this side of the House we will be supporting this legislation.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others wishing to join the debate?

Seeing none, I shall call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 6 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

9:00

Ms Issik: Madam Chair, I rise to move that the committee report Bill 6.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Lovely: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 6.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate March 29: Mr. Nally]

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to join the debate on Bill 2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 2. I think that we need to take this as an opportunity to talk a little bit about the government's record in terms of finances in this province. I am very concerned that they seem to take delight in having lucked into an international event of rising oil prices. At the same time, they chastise others for the rising costs of inflation, which doesn't make much sense, that you would celebrate one and chastise the other, because, of course, they're quite closely tied together.

I know that, for example, this government has, you know, complained that some of the decisions being made by governments in Canada and indeed around the world around trying to reduce carbon in our atmosphere are such that they feel that we should not be trying to reduce carbon at this time because of inflation. Yet analysis done by people like Trevor Tombe, a professor at the University of Calgary, demonstrated that while, for example, the price of food has gone up 19 per cent over the last seven years, only .4 per cent of that is actually attributable to carbon levies and that, really, what's happening in our world is that we have a situation where certain individuals are gaining more and more wealth, but that wealth is not being shared widely in the public, and the average person doesn't have that kind of wealth.

[The Speaker in the chair]

You know, I think that we need to carefully look at what this government should be doing and take some time to challenge what it is that they are not doing. They are not actually addressing the issues of inflation. I know they sort of make claims that somehow they're going to try to make life cheaper for Albertans, but the vast majority of their actions have actually been to increase prices on Albertans in this province. For example, we have seen a dramatic

increase in utility bills in this province, and this is directly related to the removal of the electricity cap that was put in place by the previous government. We see people's bills go up in many cases by multiples of what they used to pay, people suddenly having to pay \$300, \$400, \$500 more than they used to.

We know, of course, that the government has suggested that they will, for three months only, give \$50 compensation to people in the province. But, of course, if you are paying \$500 a month, \$1,500, and you get \$150 back, that's a pittance. Or, as one member of the government side actually described it, it is paltry and, of course, does not address the inherent issue at all.

You know, we have a government that has just sort of allowed people in the province of Alberta to be victims to the treacherous winds of change that have been occurring over the last little while. We've seen them take the cap off not only utilities but also, for example, insurance, where we see the vast majority of people experiencing dramatic changes in their car and home insurance.

I know that the Minister of Finance has suggested that this year a few of the many companies have started to reduce their rates, but that is only after last year, when they put the rates up dramatically. If you put something up by 10-fold and then you reduce it down by onefold, you still have a ninefold increase. You can celebrate that temporary or late-to-the-game decrease of a little bit by only a few, only a minority of the insurance companies, by the way, a significant minority. It's not like it's even close to being half. It's not even close to being a tenth of the companies in this province.

And they all benefited from this dramatic increase over the last year, which seems a little bit ironic given the fact that things like motor vehicle accidents actually decreased over the last year because people were staying home a lot more than they were in the past. So while actual costs were going down, the price of insurance was going up. You know, it certainly is the kind of thing this government should be complaining about. They like to complain about a .4 per cent increase on our food, but they are not prepared to complain about a 400 per cent increase on our car insurance. You know, it's very problematic that this government has made the decision just to allow people to be subject to these kinds of dramatic changes when we know that the only people that are benefiting are a very small segment of society, and many of those people provide little or no return.

Many of the companies that have made great fortunes over the last couple of years have been companies that pay little and often zero tax here in the province of Alberta, and this government has done nothing to try to resolve that problem. Companies that are not contributing to the well-being of citizens, that do not help us to build our health care, do not help us to build our education yet take huge amounts of money away from our local businesses: I think that that's a big problem. I've spoken about this in the House before. This government really seems to celebrate large, successful international corporations, constantly gives them money, \$4.7 billion in their first year and subsequent monies ever since, and allows them to increase their prices and, quite simply, gouge the citizens of the province of Alberta on a regular basis.

And, at the same time, often those very same companies are actually taking business away from small businesses here in Alberta. One of the things we want people to remember is that small businesses in Alberta actually employ more people than large corporations do, if you add them all up throughout the province. But they're suffering greatly under this government and this government's total lack of action. I've had many small-business people call me and complain about the difficulties they have with this government. I've had people complain about the fact that when they try to get contracts with this government, the government tells them, "No; we're going to go with a large multinational or large

corporation because we can get some kind of a better deal,” which, of course, means that small businesses never will have a chance to actually move forward.

In one case a small local company – it actually wasn’t even all that small – a local Alberta company, found out that they couldn’t even apply for a contract unless they had been receiving other contracts from the government sometime in the last five years. So they actually made a condition. [interjection] Oh, I’m sorry.

Member Loyola: Do you mind?

Mr. Feehan: No. Please go ahead.

9:10

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. As you know, I’ve done a lot of advocacy for small businesses in the community of Edmonton-Ellerslie as well as throughout Alberta, and, yes, the members on the other side like to pretend as if they’re the ones who are doing all they possibly can to help small business here in the province of Alberta, yet throughout the entire pandemic they did absolutely nothing – absolutely nothing – to curb the costs and the economic crisis that small businesses were going through.

Not only that, Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, but I do believe that when we were in government, we actually lowered the tax rate for small businesses here in the province of Alberta. Now, I wouldn’t mind knowing how your constituents and the people that you interact with actually feel about this.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much for the intervention. Sorry; I didn’t see you behind me there.

No. I think what you’ve said is absolutely true, and it continues. Clearly, the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has a similar experience that I do, and that is that small businesses are telling us repeatedly that this government is not helping them at a very difficult time and has done nothing in terms of legislation in order to make their lives better.

As I was just speaking to a little while ago, they’re actually putting in rules that make it impossible for them to actually get contracts so that they can actually be successful. If the rule is that you had to have received a contract from the government within the last five years, inevitably all of the small businesses will lose out because they all will be with big companies that have received contracts in five years, and eventually we’ll get to a place where no small business can ever enter in because that five-year period has passed. You know, that’s the kind of thing that I think is just absolutely terrible for this government to allow to happen, in fact for this government to impose.

I want to give some credit here, by the way. I did make numerous phone calls and had numerous conversations with a member of the civil service around the particular incident I’m talking about. They themselves were extremely helpful and responsive, and I really want to congratulate them for being good public servants and helping me to understand, you know, what the problem was and why this company was not getting the contracts that they should get.

Ultimately, we just came to the point where the poor civil servant just had to say: I am sorry; there is nothing we can do; I must tell you I fundamentally agree with your concern about the problem that you’ve identified, but the rules are the rules, and I can’t change anything. So I would like to thank the civil service for trying and making sure that I fully understood what was going on. But they were not able to actually change the rule, and I think that that’s very problematic.

I have had other businesses come to me, for example, and say that they were supposed to be receiving some monies during the

COVID crisis. They made the appropriate applications and did receive money on the first round, but on the second round, without knowing it, they filled in the form and sent it in using an iPad, and it turns out that the government system would not recognize an iPad. I don’t understand the technical reasons why, but it didn’t recognize it, so officially they had not applied when indeed they had applied. So when it was discovered that this was actually a problem with the government’s program – there were multiple small businesses that did not receive the grants that they were supposed to get – even though it was identified as a government issue in terms of their program, the small businesses were still told: well, sorry; you didn’t apply at the time that you were supposed to, so you miss out on the second stage of the grant application.

Even though they clearly were eligible because they had received the first round of the grant application and they had indeed filled in the form but happened to fill it in on an iPad, which many people would, of course, because that’s a functional tool for many small businesses to be carried around while you’re doing your work at the small business and so on, they were still told they were not eligible because they didn’t apply, when, in fact, they had; it’s just that the government did not acknowledge the application. This is the kind of experience I have small businesses coming to me with constantly in this House. It’s become very evident that small businesses do not see this government as pro business. They see this government as pro corporation, which is very different than pro business. These same companies are now coming to me saying that their utility bills are getting to the point where they may drive many of them right out of business.

Here we have, again, a situation where time after time I have members of the business community, the small-business community coming to me in my constituency office and talking about the fact that this government is making life more difficult for them and, in fact, is surrendering local small businesses to the greater power of the large international corporations. You know, it is very much an anti-Alberta kind of stance that this government has taken.

Of course, average families have seen similar kinds of issues in terms of their own personal budget. Of course, they’re all paying more for school fees now because of the changes this government has made to funding schools. They are paying more on their insurance and on their utilities, as I’ve mentioned before. They’re paying more for even their recreation, like going to parks and using Alberta’s great wilderness. All of these kinds of things are happening, and now that we’re getting very close to tax time in this province, they’re finding out that they are paying more than they would have if the government had not deindexed the tax rolls.

Every time they turn around, they’re being slapped down by this provincial government. The only people that are doing well under this provincial government are the people who were doing well before, the international corporations. It certainly is a government that is in favour of wealth accumulation but is not in favour of, you know, average people trying to make a decent living for themselves. We certainly need to see this change, and we need to see this government change in 2023.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on second reading of Bill 2, are there others wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s an honour to rise this evening and, particularly following the previous member, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, is always a privilege to be able to do so and hear those comments. I share many of the concerns brought forward by that member and other members of my caucus on this side of the House, particularly around the idea that we see

in this bill, Bill 2, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, the continuation of this government's decisions to go forward with the \$1 billion tax grab.

Of course, this is a move to tax inflation at a time when we are seeing rates of inflation that recently Statistics Canada measured at around a 30-year high of 5.7 per cent. Of course, that's quite a bit higher than what this UCP government's Budget 2022 actually estimated inflation at; they had said about 3.2 per cent. Again, when we look at this idea of bracket creep, we've heard time and time again that the Premier, when with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, when that Premier was a member of the federal Parliament, railed against this idea of bracket creep and called it a pernicious and insidious tax grab, and unfortunately we find ourselves in a situation here where now what he once railed against so often is potentially one of the largest tax grabs that we've seen in some time.

It's interesting to see how we've gotten here, especially and particularly when we find ourselves in a situation with inflation at a 30-year high, a government continuing down this path of putting more and more costs on working Albertans at a time when the cost of everything is going up for them. Again, as the previous member stated, we see utility bills day in and day out, stories coming in from our constituents to our offices – we've had the opportunity to share just some of them that we've heard – you know, utility bills going up by hundreds and hundreds of dollars. Unfortunately, this government's idea to fix that is not really a solution at all, by any means, and barely a Band-Aid, Mr. Speaker.

9:20

Again, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford brought forward the idea of insurance costs increasing so much. We saw last year many Albertans seeing increases of upwards of 30 per cent at a time when they are driving far less, often having their vehicle parked for the majority of the time, but still having to pay increasing costs because this government has been so unwilling to take any action.

Again, on one hand, we see this UCP government lowering the corporate tax rate for the largest, most profitable corporations to the tune of \$4.7 billion coming out of the pockets of Albertans, and at that same time they're turning around and telling those Albertans that at a time with such cost increases they're also going to take another billion dollars out of their pockets to use as the government sees fit. That's truly unfortunate, Mr. Speaker. I think that if at all we were to consider this, I couldn't imagine a worse time.

You may recollect, Mr. Speaker, that it wasn't too long ago, I believe in 2020, that we saw this government move forward with new rules that allowed employers to average hours worked by employees over 52 weeks rather than 12 weeks. We saw this change because it took massive amounts of money from employees that quite often were working overtime, very likely working shifts of over 44 hours per week. This was particularly felt by those in the oil and gas industry who may be working these extended weeks and potentially on for a few weeks, off for a few weeks. These kinds of changes that this government has made have been devastating for workers in our province. At the same time as we see overtime dollars being reduced for employees across the province, for those who may be lucky enough to have seen an increase, even a modest one, this UCP government is now going to be taxing them more through the idea of bracket creep.

By no means do I see myself being able to support Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, because this is, in reality, the decision to move forward with the idea of bracket creep, and it's truly disappointing. Again, I truly hope that the government might reconsider. Very doubtful, Mr. Speaker. I think that now is not the time to move forward with this. I question why, again, the

Premier, a member who has been quite outspoken about the idea of bracket creep being an insidious and pernicious tax grab, in his own words, is now going back on that idea and moving forward to tax Albertans so much more.

Again, when we look at some of the other changes that this government has made at a time when inflation is at a 30-year high, particularly around the Alberta child and family benefit, we're seeing families losing upwards of \$450. We brought up the idea of those trying to take care of their families as well as those receiving funds through AISH and Alberta Works, other programs, that this government has moved forward with essentially drawing back the buying power and the purchasing power of Albertans who find themselves on these programs. I just have to question why, Mr. Speaker.

You know, this government has found itself in a situation based on oil prices being over \$100 at this time. That's great. Unfortunately, the Albertans who are depending on this government to support them are not seeing the benefits of that balanced budget. It goes past those that are receiving AISH, that are receiving the seniors' benefit, that are receiving the Alberta child benefit. It goes to every single Albertan across this province when we look at the decisions of this government regarding education property taxes. We've seen those forced to increase, and those have real impacts on not just those, again, that are accessing government programs but every Albertan who is paying property taxes in the province.

Again, it goes past that, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the decisions that this government has made and their inability to form strong relationships with municipalities. We see this government and this minister making decisions that are going to increase the borrowing cost to our municipalities. We recognize that through these hardships municipalities have to find themselves in a balanced budget situation, which is understandable. But, again, the government is making decisions that are going to increase the interest on their borrowing rate, that is only going to be downloaded onto every Albertan, Albertans of all stripes. So when we look through this legislation, while there are sections that are less consequential than others – you know, to some extent, we see this as an omnibus bill that is affecting many acts, but unfortunately, specific to the \$1 billion bracket creep tax increase that we're seeing put forward by this government, it makes it impossible to support this legislation.

Now, just a couple of other things that I specifically had questions around. We do see some changes to the Tourism Levy Act, some changes to the language, which is understandable, but we are also seeing that it will become mandatory for organizations like Airbnb to charge the tourism levy and remit that to the government of Alberta. So I'd be interested to find out if the minister or any members can potentially let us know what kinds of costs are going to be associated with that to those organizations or what kind of revenue the government expects to see from that, or maybe it's not much of a change across the board. I would be interested in hearing more about that.

We do also see some changes to the tobacco act which are going to reduce the tax rate for chewing tobacco. I found that interesting when I first saw it. I have seen that we were taxing this product quite a bit higher than other provinces, so this is going to bring it more in line. I think that there was the idea that Albertans are leaving to other jurisdictions to actually buy this product, so I'd be interested to find out if the government has any numbers on how that might be reflected with the changes, if there is going to be an increase in tax revenue from that, what that increase might be. If it's negligible, if it's substantial, I would be interested to hear more about that.

Again, while we are seeing acts amended in here, sometimes just basic language changes that are needed to modernize that, there is, at the end of the day, this massive increase to the tax burden on everyday Albertans put forward by this government, and it's truly disastrous at any time but specifically as we find ourselves continuing through the COVID pandemic. When Albertans are simply trying to make it day to day, this government is telling them that it is going to cost more to live in this province, essentially, no matter who you are. Unfortunately, for those Albertans who find themselves on programs like I mentioned earlier – the AISH program, Alberta Works – this government is truly leaving those Albertans behind.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think that I will conclude my comments. Again, I do not see myself supporting this legislation. I think that the Premier has done a complete one-eighty on where he once stood on issues of bracket creep, and I think it's deeply unfortunate. I think the idea of it, especially right now, is deeply flawed, and I don't know how we found ourselves in this position. I hope that he will at some point soon, before this legislation passes, reconsider.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Bill 2 at second reading, the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak on Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I've been listening to the comments from the other side of the House, and I guess, first of all, I'd like to say that we should probably give some lessons on how to do a Google search, because if one did one, one could find Bill 2. While the folks spent a bunch of time just now talking about stuff, I struggled to find anything that I heard that was true, and I struggled even harder to find anything that was in Bill 2.

9:30

What I heard was a list of NDP talking points, things that they know aren't true. You know, the Finance minister has pointed out that there are several car insurance companies that actually have lowered their rates this year. He gave those details in the House the other day. Yet the folks on the other side just can't bring themselves to acknowledge what is true. Mr. Speaker, again, I suppose there could have been several points of order just for not talking about the bill at all. I could be wrong, but I would be challenged to find anything I heard in the last set of speakers that actually touched on Bill 2. It just wasn't there. The folks on the other side are just not doing their homework, just not paying attention, just not serving their constituents by talking about the legislation that the House is actually considering right now. It's really sad.

A lot of things that they talked about they know aren't true. I mean, nobody took away more jobs than the NDP did when they were in government in this province.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Sabir: Under 23(h), (i), and (j). The minister is making comments such as there was no truth and whatnot that will cause disorder in the House. Members from this side were speaking to Bill 2, which is the budget implementation act, not amendment act, as the minister said. Anything that this bill will implement is in the budget, and whatever colleagues were saying was well within the

purview of this legislation. I think it will be better if the minister keeps his comments to the bill.

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's clearly a matter of debate, what we have here. I stand by it. I appreciate that the hon. member doesn't like to hear his members corrected, but I stuck with the rules of the House. I didn't point to any particular member. I certainly disagreed with what the folks there said. That's what we do here. We debate. These are all matters of debate, every single matter raised by the other side first. I was just correcting the record, which I think is the definition of debate. It's not a point of order. It's just a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Well, are there others?

I do agree and I am prepared to rule that this is a matter of debate. I'll just provide a little bit of caution that the minister is getting very close to being creative about language around what may or may not be factual inside the Chamber. He's getting very close to implying that members were lying, which, of course, would be a point of order if that was the case, so just a slight caution there for him. This is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

The hon. minister.

Debate Continued

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is Bill 2 that we're talking about here. The hon. members on the other side – frankly, I will stand by what I just said. You made it clear that I was on the right side, and I will take your caution to make sure I remain on the right side of what the rules are. But the fact is that the folks haven't talked about the bill, and so far I haven't either because I've been busy correcting the misinformation that came from the other side in between just pointing out the fact that virtually nothing that was talked about from the other side is about this bill.

Now that I've spent no time talking about the bill and all my time correcting the misinformation from the other side, I'll just take a minute for those people watching that might actually be interested in what's in this bill. I'm going to spend a few minutes, if you don't mind, Mr. Speaker, talking about what's in the bill that's actually before the Legislative Assembly of Alberta right now, which will be the first time in this evening's debate that that has been touched upon, because it hasn't been touched upon from the other side of the House. [interjections] They can't stand talking about the bill. They're just chirping and yelling. I listened quietly to all the stuff that didn't have anything to do with the bill, but they just can't stand now trying to move to talking about what's in the bill. Nonetheless, we shall persevere. We shall move forward.

Budget 2022's implementation measures support responsible fiscal management. It integrates financial responsibility across the government, which will lead to better outcomes for Albertans and a strong financial position for Alberta. The bill introduces policies which support the better use of public funds, improving cost certainty and eliminating financial risks. It enacts several specific tax changes and supports red tape reduction by harmonizing federal and provincial tax legislation. These measures will help ensure efficient use of Alberta tax dollars and protect valuable public services today and well into the future, and that is important, Mr. Speaker. Consistent with our government's goal of having an efficient government, that will allow us to balance the budget, which makes the services that we provide to Albertans sustainable, something that never happened during the four dark years previous to our government being here.

The changes to the government's cash management system in this bill will reduce taxpayer-supported debt for future generations. The amendments to the Financial Administration Act will allow the government to use surplus cash held by provincial entities to help reduce provincial debt. The government replaces an outdated and administratively complex cash-pooling structure with a more efficient and flexible structure that uses surplus cash held in pooled bank accounts to help pay down provincial debt and lower debt-servicing costs. The new cash-pooling structure will reduce the amount of money the government has to borrow by at least a billion dollars – a billion dollars, Mr. Speaker; not chump change, a billion dollars – and lower debt-servicing costs by a minimum of \$25 million a year.

These changes also respond, Mr. Speaker – now, this is important, and the other side, rather than interrupting me, should probably listen to this next little bit – to the Auditor General's recommendation. We all ought to listen to the Auditor General, and whoever is in government should because while the Auditor General's job is on one hand, in my opinion, to embarrass whoever is in government by pointing out publicly when they can do things better, a smart and mature government would say, "Wow, we maybe should listen carefully to what the Auditor General said and learn how we can do things better," because that's what a good government does. No government is perfect, and the Auditor General is there to make us less imperfect, and if we are wise, we should all listen to what the Auditor General says. The recommendations were that the government should examine its current cash-pooling structure and make better use of the surplus cash to reduce debt, and this bill responds to that Auditor General recommendation.

Mr. Speaker, what you'll notice is that there's a disconnect here – a big disconnect – between what I have talked about in this bill and what we heard previously from the other side, and what you'll find is almost no similarity between what was heard from the other side and what I've said. Why? Because I've been talking about the bill. I don't know what the word salad was that came from the other side, but it wasn't about the bill that is before this House. My advice, as I prepare to sit down, is that if the other side wants to debate this, they ought to probably do their homework, find out what's before the House, and let's talk about it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie if he still chooses to do so.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity given to me to rise and express my support for Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. First of all, I would like to applaud the Premier and all the ministers for coming up with a budget that will fulfill our promises to Albertans. It is aimed to have financial stability as the government maintained all the needed services with an assurance of creating jobs and more businesses in the province.

If passed, Bill 2 will implement many measures introduced by Budget 2022 that will make better use of public funds, improve cost certainty, and eliminate financial risk. Bill 2 will amend the Emissions Management and Climate Resilience Act, Mr. Speaker, by removing the authority for the minister to issue loan guarantees under the TIER loan guarantee program as the program no longer exists, so the function is obsolete. The changes will also uphold overall government direction prohibiting the issuance of loan guarantees as they created undesirable financial risk to government.

9:40

Bill 2 also introduces changes to the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act that will strengthen the local legal framework and

give government flexibility to make decisions in an ever-changing health environment by establishing a new regulation-making authority for health benefits for services provided by allied health professionals. The changes will also increase financial accountability in physician claims, audits, and other compliance activities, and it will clarify wording for the creation of benefit review committees.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 2 also introduces amendments that will change the end date for the government of Alberta's financial commitment to align with a revised business case for the green line LRT project in Calgary. It will extend the period of time for provincial funding by two years, to 2029-2030.

Also, the amendments carried by Bill 2 in the Financial Administration Act will authorize the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance to mandate provincial corporations, regulated funds, and other consolidated entities to participate and hold their surplus cash in the new cash-pooling structure. This will enable government to implement a new, flexible cash-pooling structure that will use this surplus cash held in pooled accounts to pay down provincial debt and lower debt-servicing costs. This will reduce the amount of money the government has to borrow by at least \$1 billion and lower debt-servicing costs by a minimum of \$25 million per year. It will replace an outdated, administratively complex cash-pooling structure. This change also responds to the Auditor General's recommendation to examine the government's current cash-pooling structure and make better use of surplus cash to reduce debt.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 2 includes provisions that will implement the Budget 2022 decision to establish a new tax category for smokeless tobacco – for example, chewing tobacco – with the rate set at 27.5 per cent per gram. Most amendments to tax statutes in this bill are annual technical updates intended to ensure that Alberta's tax statutes are clear, consistent with the federal tax system, and, overall, effective in supporting administration of the provincial tax system.

Mr. Speaker, this government had planned to balance the budget from day one. It is a wise and thoughtful plan to eliminate the largest deficit in Alberta's history. In fact, during the start of this government into administration, the deficit has decreased even faster than initially planned. Through the well-thought-out strategy of the government our economy is showing encouraging signs of recovery and growth, but there is a lot more to be done to further diversify, strengthen our workforce, grow our resources, and extend the needed help for all Albertans.

What is the importance of balancing the budget? The question, Mr. Speaker, never crossed the thoughts of the previous government. Balancing the budget would mean a lot to Albertans as it would give us the ability to reduce the debt-servicing charge and eventually pay the debt. It would remove the burden to future generations, a debt that they did not incur. When the previous government assumed governance of this province, debt servicing was under \$800 million a year. When they were ousted from office, it was about \$2.3 billion a year. Balancing the budget will put an end to a spending spree path being asserted continuously by the NDP so that we can go to a path of redirecting this debt-servicing amount to more useful services that Albertans rely on, including health care, infrastructure, social programs, child care, and education.

After many challenging years of economic and pandemic hardship Alberta is finally moving forward once again. The government's focus, responsible fiscal management, and relentless pursuit of economic growth have put the province on a more sustainable fiscal trajectory, creating expanded financial capacity, resulting in additional government revenues. The job-creating corporate tax cut introduced by this government, Mr. Speaker, is

proving to be a more sensible approach than the increasing of taxes imposed by the previous government. Through this approach we will collect roughly \$400 million more in annual corporate tax revenue at an 8 per cent rate than the previous government did at 12 per cent, demonstrating the huge investment framework established since this government took office as multibillion-dollar investments are expected to come to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the Conference Board of Canada, Desjardins, RBC, and TD forecast that Alberta will be leading the country in economic growth in this year. Amazon Web Services announced the plan to establish a second cloud computing hub in Calgary, amounting to \$4.3 billion, while Infosys and Mphasis are to create thousands of tech jobs in the province. RBC is also creating a tech hub in Calgary, with about 300 jobs, while EY will create a new finance hub, with about 200 jobs in Calgary, impressed with the talented workforce.

Northern Petrochemical also announced a \$2.5 billion project in the municipal district of Greenview, and Dow Chemical plans to work on a project that would be the world's first net-zero carbon emissions petrochemical plant, which is predicted to cost about \$10 billion.

Another huge investment that has landed in Alberta is Lynx Air, Mr. Speaker, Canada's newest low-cost airline. It joins Flair and WestJet as Alberta-based airlines. These are just some of the many investments creating jobs in Alberta and boosting our economy, Mr. Speaker.

We saw the unemployment rate hit prepandemic levels in December 2021 by gaining about 130,000 jobs for the year, including 6,100 to the oil and gas industry. Moreover, in January this year we heard that Canada lost 200,000 jobs, but Alberta's economy gained over 7,000 jobs. Our unemployment rate continues to drop, and unemployment is at its lowest since September 2019. In February 8,200 jobs were created, which means more Albertans are continuing to work and receiving a regular paycheque.

Let me also add that Alberta continues to be a world leader in sustainable and responsible resource development among oil-producing jurisdictions. This shows that while we recognize that Canada's largest export is still the oil and gas industry, we're experiencing broad-based investment and economic diversification in our province.

Nonetheless, this investment climate and composition does not mean that the government's approach of carefully handling the province's finances will twist. Alberta's government continues to discipline spending to maintain balance. Budget 2022, as implemented partly by Bill 2, is moving Alberta forward by strengthening our health care system, getting more Albertans working, and bringing our finances back into the black.

9:50

As we move forward, Albertans need a strong health care system with the capacity to manage extraordinary surges and provide an excellent standard of care to all. Mr. Speaker, Budget 2022 provides more than \$22 billion in Health's operating budget, a \$515 million, or 2.4 per cent, increase from the 2021-2022 forecast. Excluding COVID-19 cost, it will grow by a total of \$1.8 billion by 2024-2025 in order to scale up capacity, another year of record-high investment for health care in Alberta. Record investments in health care mean that Albertans will see expanded access through additional ICU beds, new facilities in their communities, and more mental health and addictions care around the province. These record investments also ensure that Albertans across the province have access to the highest quality in most . . . [interjection]

Mr. Sabir: Thank you to the member for giving way. While the member was talking about the impact of this budget on his

constituents, the question I have for the member is that this budget in Bill 2 also continues to implement that bracket creep, which will take \$1 billion out of Albertans' pockets, which the Premier used to refer to as insidious and whatnot. I'm just wondering if the member would like to comment on how bracket creep impacts residents and Albertans in his riding.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for the excellent question. The 2022 balanced budget propels Alberta ahead. With a balanced budget: more attention and spending on amenities that will benefit all Albertans, and opportunities in health care, employment, and better quality of life will allow every Albertan to grow and expand. By balancing the budget, we will not incur additional debt or borrowing, and we should not incur surpluses. We are able to more progressively pay off the provincial debt and maximize the debt-servicing fee.

New infrastructure projects like affordable housing, community service programs, and employment opportunities will grow this charge. Alberta cities and towns are where many families look for opportunity. In addition, the province's natural beauty, including vast forest and the Rocky Mountains, contributes to our desirable environment. Albertans that live in Calgary's constituency will have more opportunity to find employment, improve their quality of life, and enjoy the benefits that come along with having a balanced budget.

Over the next three years Alberta will invest \$100 million per year to provide additional health care capacity on a permanent basis, including any new intensive care unit beds. The budget also includes a \$750 million COVID-19 contingency this year, which will help address the surgical backlog and ensure the province can cover evolving pandemic-related costs. To expand continuing care programs and services for seniors and vulnerable Albertans, Budget 2022 provides nearly \$3.7 billion . . . [Mr. Singh's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for staying so on message. That was very impressive.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I completely understand that the minister of – of course, through you to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I completely understand that he likes to dictate to other orders of government and, on that same note, in character, likes to dictate what can be debated in the House perhaps. But on this side of the House we believe in having an opinion and listening to our constituents and what are the issues and concerns that are impacting them, their lives, and their ability to actually put food on the table.

Now, Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, clearly identifies the priorities of the government when it comes to the fiscal plan of the province. They as the government are then identifying which priorities they have when it comes to, you know, presenting their budget and perspective to the people of Alberta. Now, it's commonly known that the members on the other side like to boast that their ideological perspective is what's really necessary to bring more investment to the province. By way of the Financial Statutes Amendment Act that's exactly what they're doing. They're demonstrating what their priorities are, so this is an opportunity for us on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, to actually get up and debate what amendments we believe should actually be inside of this proposed piece of legislation. Through you to the Minister of

Municipal Affairs: thank you very much for your opinion, but no thank you, right? We're going to debate the things that we want to debate in this House as pertain to our constituents, actually.

Now, when it comes to conservative ideology, it's well known that the members on the other side, the conservatives in general, like to believe that less government is actually better for the economy. It is better for the wealthy, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to making sure that corporations get more benefits. When the members on the other side get up and talk about the Alberta advantage, what they're really talking about in terms of the financial statutes amendment is actually giving more privileges to corporations within the province of Alberta. That is coupled – I mean, just to be clear, in case the members on the other side don't know, what I'm referring to is actually reducing the corporate tax rate on corporations.

You know, if it would stop there, at least I could understand that they were trying to do what's best, because they believe that corporations are going to come here, they're going to make more jobs, but as the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford clearly stated in debate this evening, it's actually small and medium-sized businesses that employ more Albertans than corporations do. I'm not saying, "Let's not have corporations," Mr. Speaker. I'm just saying that there has to be a good balance and that we have to find ways of creating a more sustainable economy moving forward by having that balance between corporations and small and medium-sized enterprises in the province of Alberta.

Now, I would be remiss to not actually cover the numbers, right? As I did during my opportunity to give a member's statement today, I actually went over some of those numbers, Mr. Speaker, and I wouldn't mind covering those numbers again. When it actually came to capital investment in Alberta year over year, in 2018 there was \$62.3 billion invested in Alberta. That was 2018. In 2019 it was \$59.4 billion. Okay; so now we have a change of government. What do we see? In 2020 it goes down to \$48.6 billion. It does a little bit better in 2021. It goes up to \$54 billion but not \$62.3 billion, like in 2018. So when members on the other side of the House get up and say that they're the ones that, because of their ideological perspective and their ideological approach, are bringing more capital investment to the province of Alberta, it doesn't add up. Numbers don't lie, and Albertans know very well that numbers don't lie. Here we have 2022, and it's projected that we'll have \$56.7 billion, which is still shy of the 2018 amount of \$62.3 billion.

Now, what the members on the other side of the House fail to realize is that in order to have a sustainable economy moving forward, Albertans need to have advantage of that economy. People aren't there to serve your political ideology and the way that you think the economy should function. The economy is there to serve the people of Alberta.

10:00

Now, because of the laissez-faire approach of the members on the other side of the House – and they know very well how supply and demand works – what they fail to realize is that in the equation, in the approach of supply and demand there are going to be people who are priced out of the economy, and those are the Albertans that we care about, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker. What they fail to realize is that the economic externalities of the people who are priced out of the market end up having a real economic cost, and it ends up costing our economy more in the long run. That's what the members on the other side fail to realize. And then, on top of lowering the corporate tax rate, they even take it a step further to create their so-called Alberta advantage, and they actually take benefits away from workers.

Now, I understand that the members on the other side don't like unions, but unions fought hard and long for workers' rights: the eight-hour workday, making sure that they had weekends off. You know, back in the day children actually used to work in factories. They fought to make sure that children wouldn't have to work in factories. Workers organized and worked so that they could have their rights defended, and it was to create a balance. The members on the other side like to create this fantasy world where workers are somehow lazy and they've got to be pushed to do their work. It's almost like – maybe I won't go there. But nothing could be further from the truth. All of the workers want to make sure that our economy functions, but they just want to make sure that they're getting benefits out of it, just like everybody else is.

Now, when you couple all these Conservative ideological economic policies together, what you actually see are Albertans getting a disadvantage by this ideological approach. Corporations actually look at that, too, and then capital investment actually looks at that. Let's look at the numbers of venture capital. In 2021 in Canada overall: \$14.2 billion in venture capital invested; that's a 222 per cent increase year over year. Ontario got \$7.4 billion of that; that's a hike of 270 per cent. British Columbia got \$2.9 billion; that's 224 per cent. Quebec even got \$2.8 billion; that's 180 per cent year over year. What did Alberta have? Mr. Speaker, \$561 million; that's only 23 per cent year over year. At the end of the day, when you look at the numbers, when you look at the amount of venture capital being invested or capital investment overall, you don't see the numbers. The ideological approach that you're presenting isn't working, and we've said it before. I've said it so many times in this House. These are outdated, antiquated beliefs, and people need an economy that's going to be there for them.

I'm telling you, Mr. Speaker, that I can only hope that in 2023 Albertans put us back on that side of the House so that we can get back to the numbers like in 2018, when there was \$26.3 billion of capital investment invested under our government, when we were governing this province for the benefit of all Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 4

Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise and introduce third reading of Bill 4, the Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022.

There has been a significant debate on these proposed changes, but I believe this bill is important to achieve consistent COVID-19 public health policy in the province, something that is most certainly within the province's jurisdiction, which is the point. If passed, the bill will ensure municipal bylaws align with the province's approach to public health issues. They would require any municipal bylaws related to COVID-19 vaccines or masking requirements only to prevent the spread of communicable diseases to be approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and would require the Minister of Municipal Affairs to consult with the Alberta chief medical officer of health before making a decision on any of those bylaws that should come forward.

This bill does not affect the day-to-day operations of municipal governments, who can continue to implement masking bylaws in municipal facilities such as recreation centres, public transit, municipal buildings. In other words, Mr. Speaker, the subject matter of this bill is extremely narrow. It will ensure there is one clear policy for COVID-19 measures across the province. This is important to provide consistency and clarity for all Albertans and Alberta municipalities as we move forward together toward a path to normal.

Mr. Speaker, I'm hopeful that all members of the House see the wisdom in supporting this bill. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Bill 4, third reading. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will rise and speak to Bill 4. I've been on the record already previously on other areas of debate when it comes to this bill, but I do feel like I need to reinforce the comments that I have made previously in regard to the way that we as legislators, as individuals that are making policies, are working with our counterparts, that this government seriously give their head a shake.

I find this bill extremely disingenuous as to how municipalities should be dealt with and worked with. I think that maybe when this was introduced, there was a reason that the government felt that it was appropriate. However, we have seen, across the whole province at this point, that the very things that the minister is talking about – face masks and proof of vaccinations – are not an issue across the province. There is no municipality that is currently trying to enforce a bylaw such as those two.

This was a direct posturing, I would say, to the municipality of Edmonton even though – and some of your rural MLAs may agree on the government side of the House – there were other things going on in other municipalities that maybe should have been under consideration when it was related to COVID-19 that may not have directly related to masks or proof of vaccinations. Other things were happening in municipalities that were related to how municipalities were choosing to deal with COVID, yet we don't see that reflected in this piece of legislation. So it was very narrow and very select about how it was drafted and how this piece of legislation has been chosen to be used.

The issue that I have with it is that it could have been rescinded once the direction was clear that there were no municipalities across the province that were engaging in creating bylaws around face masks and COVID-19 vaccination, proof of vaccines. It could have been rescinded, and in fact it might have been an opportunity for the minister and the government to start creating and rebuilding bridges with the municipalities that this was directly focused on. We have heard from Alberta municipalities, AM's president about how concerned they are about this precedent of this government choosing to overreach into municipal jurisdiction and to impede, with their authority, when it comes to the creation of bylaws. That is a very, very scary precedent.

It should be something that the government takes quite seriously, but again what we see is that ego overrides common sense in this Chamber when it comes to how the government chooses to interact with different levels of government. We see it federally. We see it when this government chooses to deal with municipalities, where the ego becomes the driving force of the conversation and the common sense and reality of how we interact and how the engagement happens in negotiation, in policy creation, in regulation, and just the ability to sit down and negotiate at a table completely goes out the window.

10:10

It is a very shameful way to govern, I would say, because it is not about collaboration. It is not about setting good policy and regulation and legislation on behalf of the people. It is truly about the power of a government to make choices, and what is clearly becoming clearer and clearer, as we move through the years of this government, is that power is the ultimate priority for everything that they do. It is all about power. It's not about making good decisions. It's not about making sure that the people of this province are protected and are treated fairly and that their health is the utmost priority. It is about, "We have the power, and we are going to wield it and use it when we choose to," and this piece of legislation clearly dictates to that.

I'm going to be very careful with my words. It is a very inappropriate piece of legislation. That will be the word that I will use, Mr. Speaker: it is inappropriate. It is inappropriate because it's not needed, and it needs to be rescinded because there is no need for it. My hope is that there will be no future need for it as we move forward through dealing with whatever the next future COVID concerns may be, but at the same time the municipalities actually get to decide what makes sense for their citizens. What is the next thing going to be? The government is going to decide that they don't like some other bylaw, and the next thing you know, the government is going to come in and decide they're going to make another piece of legislation that says: "Well, I don't know. The city of Calgary lets too many people swim in the river, so that bylaw has got to go. We're going to rewrite that bylaw."

Like, this just doesn't even make any sense. If we all want to recall, 18 months ago or two years ago, when COVID happened, we had the Premier saying that it is up to the municipalities to enforce these very health measures and make the decisions, that they need to decide if they're going to be having masking bylaws, that they need to decide whether or not they're going to have vaccine passports and what all those regulations look like, that it is up to the municipalities because we don't want to be held responsible for those decisions. But now that the government doesn't like the decision, it's no longer the purview and the responsibility of the municipality, because the province doesn't like it, and therefore they're going to wield their power and take away what they clearly told the municipalities to do two years ago.

It's so inconsistent, which is pretty consistent, actually, with the government's inconsistencies, with everything that they do at this point. I guess we should just know that it is constantly going to be inconsistent. I have not seen a clear sign of leadership through this whole process when it comes to COVID, to begin with, or also a clear sign of leadership when it comes to any decision-making processes over the last three years when it comes to any pieces of legislation and how this government chooses to interact with different levels of government.

It is frustrating for me, not only as an opposition member but as an Albertan, to see the direction that this government has chosen to take this province, because they've forgotten the people of the province. They've forgotten – the government has forgotten – why they were elected and why they are supposed to be here, and that is to make sure that Albertans are taken care of and that we have a responsibility to make sure that legislation and policy actually do something for the betterment of our society. Yet when we see inflation and the cost of living and all of these things going through the roof, we have spent most of the session talking about bills that have nothing to do with the economy whatsoever. They actually don't have, really, any forward-looking vision for the economic future of Alberta, for how it's going to help the people of Alberta,

just a lot of pomp and circumstance – that is what I would say – and it’s disappointing.

One good step would be, first, to rescind this piece of legislation, and then my hope would be that maybe we will see this government finally decide to stop worrying about their own personal power and whatever is going on within the government’s issues of the day, refocus, and start serving the people of this province. I’m getting really frustrated as an Albertan with the direction that this government has decided to take, and I am frustrated as an opposition member on behalf of the people of Alberta that once again this government is so busy with their power politics that they can’t focus on the fact that they actually need to govern for the people of this province.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and have this opportunity to express the importance of Bill 4, the Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022. I want to express my appreciation to the minister for introducing this bill, which will ensure that the municipal bylaws align with the provincial public health policy.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly thank the Premier, health care professionals, government leaders, and all Albertans for supporting each other during times of uncertainty and challenges. Furthermore, I would like to extend my appreciation to the stakeholders and hundreds of essential workers that have voiced their opinion on the challenging gaps faced in our system as well as to every single Albertan that was affected in the pandemic. Your resiliency and support to the community are commendable.

In the past two years not just Albertans but the entire nation had been faced with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Citizens of Alberta had experienced a total upheaval in lifestyle and routine, from closed schools, balancing work, challenges for businesses, job uncertainty, and rising rates of death and sickness. In addition to all of these, COVID-19 has created gaps in Alberta’s health care system, which continues to deliver health services to millions of Albertans.

Since the beginning of the pandemic the health sector has navigated a difficult situation to deliver health services while protecting Albertans. Even with one of the best universal health care systems, Alberta had been faced with its own unique challenges. Mr. Speaker, now that the conditions of the pandemic have settled after two long, frustrating years, it is time for Alberta to move forward together towards a path to recovery.

All Albertans deserve clear and consistent public health policies throughout the province. Therefore, Bill 4 is appropriate since at a time when Alberta is still improving from the pandemic’s consequences, what the province needs today is a consolidation of health procedures that remove the uncertainty and aggravation regarding the masking requirements.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 4 will introduce changes to the Municipal Government Act that are very narrow and strictly focused on the public health requirements related to COVID-19. Currently section 7(a) of the existing MGA provides municipal councils with the authority to pass bylaws for municipal purposes as well as gives them the authority to pass bylaws regarding the safety, health, and welfare of people and the protection of people and property. This present provision is conflicting with the current public health policies implemented by the provincial government, which is creating confusion in the province of Alberta.

10:20

Bill 4 will propose changes that will require the Minister of Municipal Affairs to consult with Alberta’s chief medical officer of health to approve the bylaw. This approach will restrict the ability of local governments to pass bylaws that contradict public health policies and rules enacted by the province. Mr. Speaker, the proposed changes would prevent local governments from imposing masking bylaws on private-sector operators such as grocery stores, retail businesses, and other operations.

The Alberta government appreciates the significance of local autonomy, which is why the proposed modifications to the MGA will have no effect on the Alberta communities’ day-to-day operations. Because most towns currently meet COVID-19 public health regulations, the proposed modifications will have little effect on them. These changes will not apply to municipal facilities such as leisure centres, public transportation, municipal buildings, and municipalities will retain the power to enact masking rules for the operation of municipal facilities as they deem fit. In Alberta, Mr. Speaker, Albertans and Alberta companies should have the option of wearing masks or requiring their customers to wear masks, and the proposed MGA modifications will provide them that option.

The municipalities in Alberta are doing a wonderful job of working with the province to stop the spread of COVID-19, and we commend them for this. However, the task in front of us is for every level of government to continue to work together with a common focus and objective; that is, to ensure that Albertans are protected and supported. Mr. Speaker, once the municipal bylaws align with the provincial public health policy, Albertans will have more freedom and autonomy to make decisions based on the situation of the pandemic.

There is nothing wrong with municipalities imposing their own public health limitations, and the government has completely backed them. This stands. However, it creates challenges once policies start to conflict. Municipalities have every right to make decisions in their jurisdictions, but we must appreciate the genuine concern that has led to the introduction of this bill. The scope of the bill is too narrow to suggest that municipalities are being denied their law-making rights. Mr. Speaker, we must not assume that the bill is trying to eliminate the power of municipalities to pass bylaws related to public health, as guaranteed under section 7(a), but it is to work together with the municipalities when decisions are contradicting.

Mr. Speaker, amendments in Bill 4 will ensure Albertans have clear public health guidelines. As the minister said, the impact of this bill will be very minimal on the operations of Alberta municipalities. When enacted into law, Bill 4 will remove the confusion that often takes place with provincial laws and municipal bylaws and public health requirements related to COVID-19.

In a nutshell, the immediate effect of Bill 4 will impact minimally on municipalities in Alberta because most municipalities are already complying with COVID-19 public health requirements. Local governments are also able to continue to implement mask bylaws within their jurisdictions with due consultation with the ministry. More importantly, let me reiterate, Albertans and Alberta businesses will have the choice of deciding whether or not to wear masks. The bill will also give Albertans a clear public health policy on the COVID-19 public health requirements of Alberta and ensure that masking and vaccine mandates in the province follow the up-to-date data. It is on this basis that I support this bill, because I believe it will take away the frustrations of Albertans and all the constituents in the Calgary-East riding.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [some applause]

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to see that the members on the other side of the House have a . . .

Mr. Williams: A sense of humour.

Member Loyola: No, not necessarily a sense of humour. It's, like, a creative sense of drama. Yeah. But, of course, you know, no, I wouldn't want to offend the member who just spoke. His comments were absolutely riveting. Riveting. Riveting.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to Bill 4 – you know, we were just debating this in the House last night – and to complement the remarks that I was making yesterday and also the remarks made by the Member for Edmonton-Manning, I think what's truly concerning about this piece of legislation is the fact that this minister and cabinet have decided to just take more power onto themselves. That's essentially what's happening, right? I mean, don't just take it from me, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Municipalities' President Cathy Heron said to the media, "We are concerned that the government of Alberta is setting a troubling precedent by amending the MGA – Alberta's principal piece of legislation governing municipalities – without prior consultation."

Now, I know that the members on the other side, you know, like to claim that they're listening to all Albertans, but I've got to wonder: where was the Minister of Municipal Affairs that he didn't hear the president of Alberta Municipalities and actually take this into consideration when he was bringing this proposed piece of legislation into the House? And many like the president of the Alberta Municipalities share the same perspective. They want to know why they weren't consulted.

As I was saying last night, Mr. Speaker, the concern here really is that this is setting a dangerous precedent, that this is a slippery slope, that if the minister does that in this circumstance, in what other circumstances is the minister going to decide that he can simply open . . . [interjection] By all means. Go ahead.

Mr. Williams: Thank you for taking my intervention, to the hon. member. So if this is a question of a slippery slope, I assume, in my understanding of the slippery slope argument, that you have no problem with the content itself; it's what might happen down the line with the precedent set. So I ask the member: will you please vote for this piece of legislation now and stop any future slipping down the line?

Member Loyola: Well, that would completely contradict and bring this debate to a close. Why would I do that? Like, it just doesn't make sense. I'm here actually saying that this is setting a dangerous precedent. Do you not realize that the logic behind my argument is that if we do it for this piece of legislation, of course, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member, then what other pieces of legislation are going to be expected where we do the exact same thing? I don't understand why that is so difficult to understand for the member. [interjection] But, of course, I'll let him explain. Go ahead.

Mr. Williams: I appreciate this because I think this back and forth is helpful. The purpose of this body is to examine individual pieces of legislation as they come up, with the ability to amend in Committee of the Whole. If there's a problem with a future piece of legislation, raise that then. My understanding of your argument is that you don't have a problem with this legislation. You think it's fine, but "What if down the line?" can be dealt with down the line. I ask you again: please vote for this legislation.

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member, he is completely mistaken. I'll state it again. I do have a problem with this piece of legislation. The problem with this piece of legislation, again, through you to the member and to all members on the other side of the House, Mr. Speaker, is that it is setting dangerous precedent. There was no consultation taken up with stakeholders and, specifically, Alberta Municipalities. So how can I agree to the piece of legislation? Don't get me wrong. I think that, yeah, absolutely, every piece of legislation that comes through this House: we're supposed to debate it. I get it. But I specifically have a problem with this one, Mr. Speaker, because it didn't go through a thorough process of actually consulting with stakeholders.

10:30

What we really have here, Mr. Speaker – and I would venture out on a limb here, but I don't think I'm going too far – is that this cabinet decided that they were going to listen to their convoy buddies and take their truth as the only perspective in the province of Alberta and that they were listening specifically to the people that were committing the illegal act of blocking a highway in the province of Alberta. That is what's happening here. But, thank goodness for Albertans and thank goodness for the rest of Canada, we here in Alberta are not a homogeneous population that all believe in the same thing. We all have different perspectives.

That is the real problem behind this piece of legislation. When the Minister of Municipal Affairs brings a piece of legislation where he's only listening to one group of Albertans, didn't even take the time to consult with stakeholders as it relates to their specific mandates, their responsibilities, and then goes further than that and even tramples on the liberty of a different order of government, we need to ask questions. Mr. Speaker, through you to the member: I don't agree with this piece of legislation because I firmly believe that, again, this government has decided that they're going to listen to just one group of Albertans.

Understandably, I will protect every Albertan's right to the opinion that they want to have – every Albertan's right – unlike the members opposite, who like to shut us down inside of this House in debate. We just saw it from the Minister of Municipal Affairs saying: oh, well, we're debating this; you can't say that; you can't say the other. Pardon me, but we live in a democracy, and all the opinions matter. All the opinions matter and all are valid because they're perspectives of different people – and I see, Mr. Speaker, you're kind of giving a little bit of a head nod; maybe I'm mistaken – of course, not those that are preaching hate, because that I'm completely against. Those we have to be very careful of.

I would even go a step further because some of the opinions that were being shared at that illegal blockade of a highway by some – not all; some – Albertans were right on the cusp of hatred, discrimination, injustice. There were some pretty extreme opinions being shared on that blockade line by some people. Those ones I am completely against, and they shouldn't be permitted in our democracy.

Here we have an example of the Minister of Municipal Affairs caving to just one group of people, and I don't think that's fair to the rest of Albertans, Mr. Speaker, especially since he didn't go out and actually consult with one of the most important stakeholder groups, Alberta Municipalities. We have it right here, and I'll read it again. Cathy Heron, president, said to the media, "We are concerned that the government of Alberta is setting a troubling precedent by amending the MGA – Alberta's principal piece of legislation governing municipalities – without prior consultation." My big question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, of course, through you, Mr. Speaker, is why he didn't consult on a piece of legislation that he's bringing before this House. By what authority?

Mr. Williams: The Queen's, I guess.

Member Loyola: Okay. So by the very remarks coming from the other side being heckled, then we shouldn't care about stakeholders, we shouldn't care about other Albertans; we should only listen to a select few Albertans and base all of our legislation on just those people that happen to agree with the ideological perspective of those in government. Is that what I'm hearing?

Mr. Williams: Well, that's how you govern.

Member Loyola: Go ahead.

Mr. Williams: The authority on which we will pass this law will be the authority granted to us by Her Majesty the Queen with the majority of votes in the Legislature, and if Albertans disagree with that, they're welcome to go to the polls and say: "We disagree with Bill 4. These members tried to pass it, and we disagree." We can be voted out. This is a democracy.

Member Loyola: Well, I'm glad you mentioned that, Mr. Speaker, of course, through you to the member, because I can't wait till 2023. I really can't. You know, I am out there door-knocking. I'm out there talking to so many Albertans. They are so incredibly fed up with this government. Things are getting more and more expensive.

You know, like, the Minister of Municipal Affairs got up and was talking about the fact that, "Oh, yeah, insurance prices have come back down," but that's a half-truth, Mr. Speaker, because when they go up by 30 per cent and then come back down just a little bit, that's still an increase, Minister. Through you to the minister, of course, Mr. Speaker, that's still an increase, and that increase is what Albertans are feeling. It's not just on insurance; it's on utility fees, it's on postsecondary education, additional fees, on you name it. This government has made life more expensive for Albertans, and that's what I'm hearing on the doorsteps when I'm out in the community. That's what I'm hearing time and time and time again.

The members on the other side like to, you know, talk about how they're the best ones for the economy, Mr. Speaker, and this is the biggest fairy tale. When you look at jurisdictions all across this land, you see that the advantage that they give corporations is a real disadvantage for average working people in the province of Alberta and all other provinces across Canada. Through you to the members on the other side, again, I can't wait for 2023 because I'm out there day in, day out talking to Albertans and talking about how a real economy that serves people is one that takes care of those that are marginalized. What we're seeing under this government is that even middle-class – even middle-class – Albertans are getting priced out of the supply-demand equation, and life is getting more expensive for them.

I've talked to so many people, Mr. Speaker, who tell me that they're just one paycheque away from not being able to make the mortgage payment, and then they have to put it on credit. They have a line of credit with their bank, and then they're going to have to use money from their line of credit to actually pay for their mortgage. [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford was debating earlier tonight, the members on the other side like to make it seem like the carbon tax is the sole reason of this incredible amount of inflation that we've seen, and it's just not true, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You know what? I am having a hard time making the connection to is how the remarks are specifically related to a masking bylaw for municipalities. I'm sure you were just about to make the connection so that I could understand how the remarks were relevant, but at present they certainly weren't.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, what we have before us is the fact that Albertans can just not trust this government. Members of Alberta Municipalities can't trust this Minister of Municipal Affairs because he didn't even take the time to consult them on this piece of legislation that we have here before us. Nothing can be more evident than the fact that this cabinet caved to their COVID buddies that were making this illegal blockade on the Alberta highway at the entrance to Coumts. This is what the real problem is that we have before us, and I can tell you that I, for one, am voting against this piece of legislation.

Thank you very much.

10:40

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill in the last possible time that we have available to us. Of course, I oppose this bill, and I certainly wish the government would reconsider this. You know, we have talked about the particulars of this bill on a number of occasions, so the government has heard the reasons why the bill is inappropriate. But since we're on third, certainly, I think that we need to take the time to talk about the overarching concern that is inherent here.

It was only a year or so ago or perhaps a bit more that the Premier himself was suggesting that municipalities actually impose their own masking bylaw. We know that that is a part of the history of this conversation that we're having today. We have to ask ourselves what happened in the last little while that would have the government go from suggesting that, in fact, municipalities impose a masking bylaw, if they chose to do so, of course, to taking away that choice that he was suggesting they had at one time and imposing a requirement that is against their choice today. The only thing that is different, of course, is the leadership race that's happening in the party that is running this government for the next little while, not too much longer. You know, I think it's quite disappointing that a piece of legislation would actually be constructed in order to appease people who the Premier himself has recently referred to as lunatics. I think it's a cynical piece of legislation.

Unfortunately, it's in kind of a long series of pieces of disrespect for municipalities. That's really what we're talking about here. I quote Cathy Heron, who is the mayor of St. Albert and who, of course, is now the president of Alberta Municipalities – it used to be referred to as AUMA for anybody who is following – when she said about this particular legislation, quote, I believe in a collaborative approach to government, and I believe that this was the exact opposite. She also says: it sets a precedent for future legislative changes when all of a sudden a municipality and the government of Alberta disagree, and that's a precedent we don't appreciate.

This is why we're trying to use this last moment that we have to suggest that this really is wrong-headed legislation because it does almost nothing, well, really does nothing to provide any services to the citizens of Alberta. It doesn't improve their lives in any way whatsoever, but what it does do is it undermines dramatically the relationship between the provincial government and the

municipalities, which is what we've seen as a consistent legacy of this government, an attack on municipalities.

We have many other examples: the increased costs that they have caused municipalities across this province by suggesting that they would increase the number of RCMP officers and then not providing any dollars to go with it so that the costs went up in the municipalities; the decision to actually charge municipalities extra money whenever they take out a loan instead of using the provincial government's loan rate, which is going to increase costs across every municipality; the decision to give a tax holiday to companies involved in paying taxation to municipalities, again increasing the expenses for municipalities; the decrease in grants such as MSI that this government has proposed over the next number of years, rightly described by the minister as front loaded to look good and then, of course, being terrible for the municipalities ever after that; attacking them so that all these municipalities now have reached the point where they must increase taxation in order to just pay the bills because of the decisions of the provincial government here.

You know, it was just last year that we had mayors and reeves from across the province out in front of this Legislature protesting the financial decisions that have been imposed on them by this provincial government, attacking them consistently over time. There's just been series after series of insults to the government, as expressed by the mayor of St. Albert here, Cathy Heron, that this is a noncollaborative government, that this is bad for the relationship between the province and the municipalities.

There have been many other times and ways in which the municipalities have felt insulted and hurt and wounded by this government, and, you know, this is just another one that actually doesn't do anything to protect or help people. All it does is help a government in crisis, and we know this government is in crisis. We know they spend all of their time on their internal conflicts, that they really are not paying attention to the province of Alberta, that they constantly are infighting. They can't agree with themselves. They call each other names like "lunatic," apparently, and now here we are in this situation, where they're really disrespecting other elected officials throughout the province.

We know that in the past, for example, this government made a decision to take some of their issues and put them on the ballot during the municipal election, were asked repeatedly, over and over again, by municipalities to please not interfere with the municipal elections, not to distract from the important issues that need to be discussed during the municipal elections, and this government just ignored them and went ahead with it, again for their own purposes, not because it provided any greater service to the province of Alberta but because they wanted to be able to raise some false flags and influence people running, people going to the polls, for their own purposes. Again, it's all about the government wanting to maintain power when they know that they're in crisis and that there is a serious possibility that they will lose that power.

We also know that this government recently has had a very lucky windfall in terms of international oil prices, that they brought in some extra dollars, the same as every other jurisdiction that has oil has also brought in those dollars, not based on anything this government did. It was just lucky that they happen to exist at the time when the international situation has resulted in a dramatic increase in oil prices. So they had this extra money, and they had an opportunity to be able to perhaps do something good for municipalities. Did they do anything for municipalities during that time? No, they did not. They didn't do anything for them.

In fact, the city of Calgary, for example, had made a very specific request because they have had a dramatically difficult time during the last number of years. They are a city that's experiencing some of the highest unemployment rates in the country under this UCP

government. They're a city that has also had a dramatic loss of head offices in their community, has many office towers that are empty, and has really experienced some pretty rough years the last couple of years. The last two, maybe almost three years now have been very rough for the city of Calgary, so they made a very specific request to this government to help them. What happened in return? They got less than 10 per cent of what their request was from this provincial government, who was lucky enough to have a windfall from the international price of oil and wouldn't share that with our largest municipality.

10:50

This is the legacy of this government. This government has at every opportunity undermined and disrespected the municipal governments, made their lives more difficult, caused them to have difficulties with their budgets, difficulties with their revenues, and of course they now will have to impose significant increases on their citizens for municipal taxes as a result directly of the choices made by this UCP government. All across this province people are going to experience a worse life as a result of decisions made by this cabinet, as they have in so many other areas.

Thank you very much for my time. Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 4, and let me say at the beginning that it doesn't matter how many times anyone will ask, I will not be accepting any interventions. I will make my comments to the point and very brief.

While listening to the Minister of Municipal Affairs introduce this third reading, I guess it was rich coming from that side, that they are bringing forward this piece of legislation to have a consistent COVID-19 policy – a consistent COVID-19 policy – coming from a government who was on vacation during Christmas, when they asked Albertans to stay put, coming from a government that was caught dining at the sky palace. Now they come here and bring this piece of legislation, and they want us to believe that somehow it's about a consistent COVID-19 policy.

Earlier in the pandemic, when this government was asked to respond to the threats of COVID-19 by bringing forward a mask mandate province-wide, they said, the Premier said, and I quote, that these decisions are best taken locally. End quote. Now the Minister of Municipal Affairs comes up with this legislation purely for some political reasons and wants us to believe that it has something to do with a consistent COVID-19 policy. I think the Minister of Municipal Affairs . . . [interjection]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member already said that he wouldn't be taking interventions.

Mr. Williams: Oh. I apologize. I didn't hear that.

The Speaker: If you're not paying attention, you ought to be.

The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I was saying is that now somehow the government is bringing this piece of legislation and wants us to believe it's about a consistent COVID-19 policy. It is clearly not, as evidenced by this government's position at the beginning of this pandemic, where they thought that these decisions are best taken locally, and now they think that, no, they need consistency in these decisions. I think the government should be ashamed of peddling these double standards in this Legislature and wasting members' time. The minister should be ashamed of that.

They get up and they talk about their platform. They talk about consultation. We didn't see, no municipality was able to see if there was something in their platform that they will be reducing municipal government power. I do understand that municipalities are creatures of statute and that their powers can be increased and reduced, but there was no such commitment made by this government during their election campaign.

They have shown through their actions that they are incapable of working collaboratively with other orders of government. That's what municipal leaders are saying. I'm sure that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and other MLAs and ministers heard that directly from municipal leaders a couple of weeks ago. They told this government that there was no municipality who was bringing forward such laws. At least this is not an issue for now.

They warned this government: don't encroach on municipal jurisdiction unnecessarily and for political needs and reasons. Maybe it may help the Premier survive his leadership review. They told this government that municipalities across this province are against the Alberta provincial police force idea, but still this government is pushing full speed ahead on those things. They do not listen, they do not consult, and they are completely incapable of working collaboratively with other orders of government, and that is deeply concerning.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs mentioned that it's a very narrow bill. It matters less whether a bill is narrow in scope or broad. What's at stake here is that this government is willing to override municipal powers, that this government is willing to walk roughshod over municipal jurisdictions if it suits their political needs. That's the precedent this legislation is setting, that's the trend that we will be voting against, that's the precedent municipalities are against, and we stand with municipalities on this piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know we're here late, so I promise not to take my full time. Happy to accept interventions. I really wanted to set the record straight and make it abundantly clear why this legislation, I believe, is appropriate, is consistent.

I think I want to start with some fundamentals here. Municipalities are creatures of this Assembly. They're creatures of the province. They are created by legislation that we pass. That's not trying to be arrogant or dismissive of them; that's just the state of play. That's how things are. Contrarily, the province is not a creature of the federal government. Both the province and the federal government are established in the Constitution, have supremacy over their areas of jurisdiction to pass any law that they see fit, and no past parliament can bind a future parliament when it comes to what we do in this Chamber. That is not true of municipalities.

If the NDP feels otherwise, they're welcome to follow the amending formula of the Constitution, petition the other provinces, get two-thirds of the provinces onside and more than half the population, and change the Constitution to say that municipalities are constitutionally entitled to change the laws that they see fit. I, on the other hand, believe that municipalities are a function and a creature of this Legislature and the province.

Importantly, with that context, it needs to be understood as well that, for example, in my constituency we had a number of disasters and emergencies happen before COVID. Fort Vermilion, for example: we had a state of emergency when the ice jams happened on the Peace River and were wiping out the town. Quite literally, icebergs were wiping out the town. During that time, understandably, they enacted a local state of emergency, and that town was evacuated. We had another crisis before, in High Level,

La Crête, Paddle Prairie, with the Chuckegg Creek fire. During that local state of emergency they also evacuated many of these municipalities. Municipalities made these local decisions. That was right.

11:00

If my municipalities were evacuating town months after the fire and in the middle of summer, when there was no ice on the Peace River, I'd be concerned. I'd be concerned that they were abusing the ability to set up local states of emergency. This Chamber would have an obligation to say: no, no, no, no; you can't go treating our citizens in that way, because ultimately you answer to your electorate, but your municipality as an entity, as an institution, answers to this body. Now, we have an example here of municipalities that are making decisions that are contrary to the public scientific information provided. We have an example of them abusing, in my mind, the good-natured compliance of the people in these communities, and we as one province get to say: no, no, no, no; you're not allowed to do that; you're not allowed to continue to use that authority in a way that is not in concordance with the facts.

So I think it's absolutely consistent. It's our obligation in this Chamber, and if we were to not pass this law, I think we'd effectively be doing the same thing, setting a very dangerous precedent to say that municipalities can abuse these privileges that they have, granted by this body. It's our obligation as this body to make sure they are not abused and not used in inappropriate ways, because if the folks of Peace River were getting evacuated for an ice jam on a plus-30 day in the middle of August, I'd be concerned. That, ladies and gentlemen, is the equivalent of what I see happen here if we do not as a province move forward and ask municipalities to pay attention to exactly what our chief medical officer is saying and the best public data we have.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday is next.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise this evening to speak to Bill 4, Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022. I've appreciated the conversation that I've heard so far on this debate, and I will let you know that at this time I won't be accepting any interjections. Thank you.

Just a few points I want to make here. I think the one that has resonated most with me, not only from what we've heard in the debate this evening and before that but also from municipalities and Albertans alike: the fact that as we've gone through this process of trying to deal with COVID, the provincial response has been nothing less than a mess, is probably the best way I could put that, Mr. Speaker.

The fact is that, again, we heard last year the Premier abdicating responsibility for making these decisions, leaving them with municipalities, saying, quote: these decisions are best taken locally. Again, as we've heard, the Premier has done a complete one-eighty on this issue, just like many other issues that he and his caucus have had to deal with, and I would say that that is, again, one of the reasons why he is the least trusted politician in the country. Heck, Mr. Speaker, he might even be one of the least trusted politicians in his own caucus.

The fact is that when we look at what we see in this legislation and look at the initial responses, as we've heard, municipalities in the beginning of this process were asking for the province to take action. The Premier said, "Absolutely will not; it's up to you." At

that time the municipalities said, “If you are expecting us to make these important health decisions, then you need to give us the data.” Unfortunately, to this day, Mr. Speaker, those calls for experts to come forward from the province to present to municipalities have by and large gone unheard. They continue to ask for those experts to come forward to them as they try to make these decisions even in the face of this government trying to take those powers away from them through Bill 4.

I would argue that this legislation before us is a mechanism for this government in the future to not have to take any action, just like we saw in the beginning of the pandemic, because today, with the presentation of this legislation, they will say that municipalities don’t have the right to make these decisions as narrow as or as broad as the minister might like to argue. But the fact is that tomorrow, if we find ourselves in another wave and municipalities have to make these considerations, the provincial government is going to say, “Oh, we aren’t taking any action; you have this power now,” but they are now going to have to go through more regulatory red tape to actually make those decisions. Again, it’s an abdication of responsibility from this province, because they will say: “Oh, well, your municipality has to make these decisions. We’re not making them for you.” Yet here we are with Bill 4, and they’re exactly saying that.

Mr. Speaker, really, on both hands it’s quite hypocritical. The fact is that Bill 4 is putting barriers in place for municipalities regarding the decision to make health measures, and it truly is about the Premier trying to hold any semblance of power. It is the only way that this Premier sees a path to holding on to power within his caucus, a group of people who are increasingly believing that he is doing not such a good job, and I would agree with them for different reasons, potentially regarding COVID-19. But the fact remains that we, all Albertans expected much better from this Premier and from this UCP government through the COVID-19 pandemic, and unfortunately we, again through Bill 4, have not had that.

With that being said, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat, but I appreciate the opportunity to hear this. I also appreciate the many municipal partners who have come forward to raise their concerns regarding Bill 4, to raise their concerns regarding the absolute failure of this UCP government to take action from the beginning to put supports in place when they made decisions around vaccine passports and the enforcement of those, because by and large Alberta municipalities were left without supports in the first place to make those important decisions, and unfortunately that meant consequences for the health and well-being of many Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I will try to correct some of the mass of misinformation that came from the other side. A lot of things have happened. What people need to remember is that COVID started two years and about three weeks ago, so 18 months ago we had about six months of experience. Everybody in the world didn’t know what was going on because the virus was so new. It was changing. No one in the world really knew, and we were all doing our best.

The difference between 18 months ago and now is that we actually have four times as much experience with COVID, and during that 18 months, apparently, the other side hasn’t learned a blessed thing, but on this side of the House we were paying attention, which is why we made a different decision now with four times the experience than the decision that we made 18 months ago. That would make sense to most Albertans, I think. I think Albertans

expect their people that are in this place to learn. On this side of the House we did learn, Mr. Speaker. We gained more evidence, more experience, more knowledge about what would happen, yet at the end of the day we still don’t know a hundred per cent for sure what the virus will do next, but with four times the experience one should not be surprised that a responsible government would have learned something and changed perhaps some of their decisions with new information.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that some of the debate from the other side was hilarious. The first member that spoke talked about how it was about power and it was about: this shouldn’t be changing things for municipalities. But then in the same debate the same member said: why didn’t you make other municipalities do different things differently? So I guess it really wasn’t about whether there were rules about municipalities. It was about whether the other side – the other side apparently wanted to tell municipalities what to do, unlike us.

In fact, what’s clear here is that Edmonton kind of forced us to defend our own legislative territory, our turf, if you will. Again, this is a stay-in-your-lane bill. The fact is that members of Edmonton’s council went public saying that they were going to go against the provincial health rules in an area of provincial, clear jurisdiction. In fact . . . [interjection] I know they don’t want to hear the facts over there, but I’m going to carry on. Mr. Speaker, in fact, even after we introduced this legislation, the city of Edmonton actually brought a motion to their council meeting to override our legislation. Now, it was defeated; nonetheless, five members of that council voted for it.

So the argument that there was no reason to bring this forward just doesn’t hold water, because history does not support that argument. [interjections] The city council in this town brought forward a piece of business to override the proper health jurisdiction of the province, and, Mr. Speaker, we defended our jurisdiction. [interjections]

11:10

The Speaker: Order. It’s after 11 o’clock. I think we can allow the minister to conclude his remarks in closing debate in some sense of order.

The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe some of the folks will notice that I was quiet when they were speaking despite how much I disagreed with what they said.

Mr. Speaker, here it is. The province is doing the right thing defending our proper area of jurisdiction. Really, the city of Edmonton forced us into it. I’m going to give them the benefit of the doubt and say that those members of Edmonton city council that wanted to override the provincial jurisdiction, in their minds, were doing what they thought was best for their citizens, but really a responsible provincial government can’t let the municipalities try to take over municipal responsibility. That’s just not how it’s done.

We’ve discharged our responsibilities. We did it in the most narrow way possible. The municipalities still have all the authority they had before this bill to protect the health and safety of their citizens, as they ought to have, as our legislation gives them. Really, at the end of the day, nothing has changed unless some municipality wants to override provincial health regulations. [interjections] It’s unfortunate that the member from the other side tries to shout down the truth, but shouting down the truth doesn’t change the truth.

The fact is that all the arguments essentially made on the other side: they know they’re wrong; they made them anyways. What’s really funny is that they all voted for this bill at Committee of the Whole. I don’t know what revelation they had in the last day, but somehow they’ve changed. They can vote whatever way they want.

They ought to vote for this, but on this side of the House we will be, because defending provincial legislation in the area of health is this government's responsibility. This government will discharge its duties and its responsibilities, and part of that will be passing Bill 4.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:13 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|-------|-------|--------|
| Amery | Rehn | Smith |
| Fir | Reid | Toor |
| Issik | Rosin | Turton |

| | | |
|---------|----------|------------|
| Lovely | Rowswell | van Dijken |
| McIver | Savage | Walker |
| Nally | Schulz | Williams |
| Neudorf | Singh | Yaseen |
| Pon | | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------|--------|-------|
| Carson | Loyola | Sweet |
| Eggen | Sabir | |

| | | |
|---------|----------|-------------|
| Totals: | For – 22 | Against – 5 |
|---------|----------|-------------|

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Assembly adjourn until Thursday, March 31, 2022, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, March 31, 2022

Day 19

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
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Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
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Vacant, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

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Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

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Lovely
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Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 31, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, please remain standing as we will be led in the singing of *God Save the Queen* by Ms Brooklyn Elhard.

Hon. Members:

God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble Queen,
God save the Queen!
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the Queen!

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a number of very special guests with us today. First of all, it's my pleasure to introduce a visiting Member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, seated in the Speaker's gallery, Ms Bernadette Smith, the Member for Point Douglas.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Members, today is a happy day for some and a sad day for others as I have the pleasure of introducing four of eight retiring Legislative Assembly security service members and their families. Hon. members, each of these LASS members have faithfully served this Assembly for many, many years, most of them over a decade, and we're sad to see them go. We're so grateful for the work that they've done to maintain the safety and security of all members, and we certainly will miss their smiling faces as we enter the Chamber, but of course we wish you the best in your retirement. I would ask each of you to rise as I call your names: Lance Dealy, accompanied by daughters Erin Dealy and Kristin Dealy and granddaughter Olivia Dealy; Ken MacInnis; Terry Briscoe; Larry Ahl, accompanied by his wife, Kathy Ahl, son David Ahl, and Becca Kelly.

Also seated in the Speaker's gallery are family of the minister of seniors that I had the pleasure of meeting this morning. Her sister Joanna Leung and a friend, Marek Kotkowski, are joining us in the Speaker's gallery.

So many special guests today. Perhaps my favourite of the Pancholi family and guests of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, please welcome her husband, Owen Young, son Bodhi Pancholi-Young, and daughter Leela Pancholi-Young. Please rise and receive a welcome.

I'm pleased to welcome a guest of the Minister of Education, Todd Snow.

And, finally, hon. members, it's my great pleasure to introduce to you a group of 14 teachers from Edmonton area who are guests of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

I invite you all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Teachers

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, take a minute and try to remember grade 1. The first image that comes to my mind is Miss Sproll. She helped us make sense of the symbols we saw on paper and transformed them into words, into stories, and into a love of learning. Thank you to the teachers in the gallery who are here today because they believe in public education. They are here during their spring break to help us remember that no profession impacts all of society's children in the way that teaching does. They make me think of Miss Sproll and the passion for learning that she inspired in me.

Teachers use their expertise and professionalism to support students to become their best selves. Unfortunately, for the last three years this government has chosen to undermine teachers. They attacked their profession when they tore up the agreement to create curriculum together, they cut funding meant to help disabled preschool children prepare for success in grade 1, they attacked their pensions, and now they want to disband their professional association.

I am proud to be the daughter of teachers. I'm proud that I was trained as a math teacher and did a master's in educational policy studies. I'm proud that I served for Edmonton public, and I am proud that that inspiring grade 1 year lives on in the work that I do in this place fighting for every child in Alberta to achieve their full potential.

Mr. Speaker, rather than treating teachers as the enemy, this government should support them in their mission to help kids succeed. The government should show teachers the respect that they so rightfully deserve, and if they won't, the UCP will be held accountable in the next election by teachers and by all Albertans who care about education. Don't believe me? I have a feeling that the Miss Sprolls across Alberta will come together to help create a government that we can all trust and that we can be proud of, one that works with teachers instead of against them and one that gives kids the opportunity to achieve their dreams and that puts Albertans first.

Fuel Prices and Federal Carbon Pricing

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, tomorrow is April 1, and while for many Canadians it will be a day for pulling pranks and jokes on your friends, in Alberta it will be a day of tax relief. As people across the country are suffering from the Liberal-NDP affordability crisis, a crisis caused by runaway deficits and money printing, a crisis worsened by more taxes by Ottawa, Alberta's government will be providing a massive tax cut to Alberta families. Starting tomorrow, the 13-cent provincial fuel tax will be eliminated from gas and diesel bills. On an annual basis this means that more than a billion dollars will stay in the pockets of Albertans. This means that life will get a little easier for Alberta parents taking their kids to hockey practice, a little easier for hard-working Albertans commuting to the office or a job site, and life will be a little less expensive for Alberta farmers, who continue to feed our families.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is the only province that is providing this relief on fuel prices. Unlike the NDP and their coalition partners in

the Trudeau government, we do not believe that people should be punished for living normal lives. We believe that activities like work and recreation, which involve using fuel, are critical and necessary to all Canadians. Unfortunately, the members opposite do not share this view. It's why they are on record in this House supporting the NDP-Trudeau carbon tax, on record in this House also supporting a 25 per cent carbon tax hike next month, and also on record supporting more than a 400 per cent increase in the years to come.

Mr. Speaker, Conservatives on this side are working to make life more affordable for Alberta families while the NDP-Trudeau alliance on the other side is trying to stick their hands even deeper into people's pockets at the worst time possible.

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

Ramadan

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April marks the beginning of a very special month for Muslims in my constituency and 1.8 billion more across the globe. The first few days of April mark the beginning of Ramadan, a deeply spiritual and holy time for Muslims everywhere. Ramadan begins when the new moon is sighted in the night sky, after which the holy observance begins. Ramadan also marks the anniversary of when the first verses of the Quran were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon Him, over 1,400 years ago.

1:40

During Ramadan individuals will fast from sunrise to sunset, abstaining from food and drink and strengthening their devotion to faith and family. Fasting is meant to enable someone to achieve *taqwa*, or consciousness of God. Every Muslim will break their fast with the *iftar*, where community members gather with food and drink and reflect upon their faith and their beliefs. Fasting is one of the five pillars of the Muslim religion. The four other pillars are Muslim declaration of faith, daily prayers, charity, and performing the pilgrimage to Mecca. At the end of this month-long observance Muslim communities will gather and celebrate Eid al-Fitr. In Arabic this means: festival of breaking of the fast.

While Muslim communities across the world begin to observe Ramadan, I invite other members of this Assembly to learn about this significant event within the Muslim community. Alberta is a province that is rich in culture and religion and continues to be a shining beacon of hope for anyone who wishes to practise their religion freely without persecution or violence. To all Muslim individuals across Alberta, Canada, and the rest of the globe I say: Ramadan Mubarak, and I hope your Ramadan journey brings you joy and closeness to God.

Thank you.

Transgender Day of Visibility

Member Irwin: Today, March 31, is the International Transgender Day of Visibility, and this year it feels more important than ever that we talk about trans issues, that we celebrate trans folks, and that we elevate trans rights at a time when trans people across the world are facing significant barriers and discrimination. In the U.S. there is rising violence against trans women of colour. There are incredibly dangerous bills being forced through state Legislatures by right-wing politicians that would deny trans folks health care and that would prevent schools from being safe spaces for trans kids and more. Today I'm thinking of all the queer and trans people who are experiencing so much right now. We know that queer and trans Ukrainians are being held at borders, and we send our love to them.

We send our love to those in countries around the world who are still not safe to be who they are and love who they love, in countries where being gay is a crime and where being trans is most certainly a death sentence.

Yet here at home we still have work to do, much work to do. I think about trans health care barriers that I hear about often: long wait-lists; lack of physicians, psychiatrists; discrimination in the health care system; transphobia. I think about proposed legislation like Bill 207 from this government, that would have very much threatened trans health care access, a bill from the not-so-distant past that would've allowed for health professionals to deny essential health care. I think about conversion therapy, a horrific practice that many in the trans community have had to endure. While banned federally and in countless Alberta communities, it's still happening.

I also think about hope and about the incredible trans people I know. I can't imagine just how hard their journeys have been for some to have gotten to a place where they're finally free to live their own true lives yet to still face hate. To every trans person: know that you are loved, you are seen. To trans kids: I know it's hard. It might feel harder than it's ever been. You're not alone. You're loved. Don't let your light be dimmed by those who can't see how bright you shine. To all of you: trans rights . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Teacher Discipline Process

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to share the story of Todd Snow, a parent from the constituency of Taber-Warner who is with us today. Since the Minister of Education announced in December that she intends to bring legislation to this House to alter the discipline process for the teaching profession, many Albertans like Todd have expressed concerns about the way teacher discipline is handled in Alberta.

I'm sad to say that Todd has shared the struggle of his family's experience in getting a professional conduct hearing for a case involving his daughter. Mr. Speaker, it took the ATA five years to hold this hearing. Unfortunately, this is not the only instance of its kind. As more cases started coming to the surface, it became clear that more needed to be done. Todd has questioned how a union-slash-professional association could fairly adjudicate professional conduct hearings for their own teachers and remain unbiased, the same teachers that pay union dues to protect their interests.

Mr. Speaker, as a former teacher I understood that Albertans outside of the teaching profession could struggle with this disciplinary structure. There are times when a problem has no clear answer and when the question at hand is riddled with grey areas. A perceived conflict of interest within the disciplinary process should not contribute to a lack of clarity or create questions regarding the legitimacy of any ruling. Alberta needs a process in place that sets aside what could be a conflict of interest and puts student safety first and addresses the needs of those who have been the potential victim of teacher misconduct.

The students first act has been brought forward to address the inconsistencies and gaps in the teacher discipline process, and I'm proud of this government for taking a stand to do what is in the best interest of students. I applaud the Minister of Education for her promise to continue the difficult but necessary work to protect our students, and I look forward to seeing what comes next.

Ramadan

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, Albertans of Islamic faith will start observing Ramadan this weekend. It's my honour to rise today to

recognize Ramadan and wish everyone observing it a peaceful and blessed Ramadan.

Ramadan is observed by the Muslim umma world-wide, and the act of fasting during this month is one of the five fundamental pillars of Islamic faith. It's a special time for deep prayers and for strengthening bonds with the Creator and His creation. The act of fasting is also an exercise in self-restraint and self-reflection. It involves abstaining from eating or drinking anything from dawn to dusk. It puts a special significance to reflect and act on the plight of those who are less fortunate among us, who are sick and elderly, and those who are struggling to make ends meet. The last two years have been very difficult for everyone and have disrupted many of these activities. I'm pleased that this year the community will be able to come together for prayers, visit friends and neighbours, and be able to observe Ramadan in its true spirit.

Mr. Speaker, Ramadan is also an opportunity for all Albertans to learn about Muslim faith and, broadly, about the diversity of faith, cultures, and traditions in our province. As of late we have witnessed a rise in Islamophobia and attacks on hijab-wearing Muslim women. We have witnessed an increase in incidents of racism and prejudice, and we have witnessed a rise in intolerance and hatred against Albertans with visible articles of faith. It is more important than ever before that we come together as a province to push back against intolerance, hatred, and discrimination in all its forms. It's more important than ever before that we come together as a province to build a society that understands, respects, and embraces its diversity.

To all those observing Ramadan: Ramadan Mubarak.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie is next.

Scarboro Community in Calgary-Currie

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to talk about the wonderful constituency of Calgary-Currie and, specifically, the community of Scarboro. To those familiar with Calgary, you may think you already know Scarboro; however, there is much more to it than most people realize. Scarboro is one of only three suburbs in all of Canada that exemplify an Olmsted design. What does that mean, you ask? Good question. It means it is associated with one of the most celebrated landscape architects in North American history, Mr. Frederick Olmsted. Olmsted used his distinct design to challenge the ideas of the mid-1800s, which he considered "a display of novelty, of fashion, of scientific or virtuosic inclinations and of decoration." This quote comments on the trends of the time of developing landscapes without consideration for local environment.

His response was to develop his own style, called pastoral, which emphasizes protecting and enhancing natural scenery while promoting social engagement and community. Key to this is the effective organization of space. Olmsted worked to create the perspective effect, which increases "the sense of space [by] contrasting dark [forms in the foreground] with lighter, less distinct ones further away." The culmination of these concepts first came to fruition in 1857 with Olmsted's first project, which was the design of Central Park in New York City.

Frederick Olmsted's nephew and adopted son John Olmsted would continue to spread the pastoral style. The community of Scarboro was designed by John in 1909, incorporating these bold, new ideas. Anyone who visits Scarboro can see for themselves the unity of these Olmsted principles. In fact, this year marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Frederick Olmsted, and Scarboro is a unique part of that wonderful legacy and history.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has question 1.

Insurance Company Profits and Premium Costs

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling as their car insurance bills keep going up and up and up. This Premier took the cap off their premiums, and now insurance companies are cashing in. The last report from the Alberta superintendent of insurance found that companies brought in \$1 billion more in premiums than they paid out in claims. Now, that was 2019, the last report, because the UCP chose not to release the data for 2020 or 2021. Why won't the UCP at least tell us how much big insurance companies are profiting off regular Alberta families? What are they hiding?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find this pretty rich coming from a member and from a party across the aisle who ultimately refused to oppose the carbon tax increase that will be implemented on all Albertans effective tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, what I can say is that the changes we made in Bill 41 are in fact reducing the systemic costs driving up automobile insurance premiums, and those premiums are beginning to come down.

Ms Hoffman: If the government is really proud of what they've done, why won't they actually release the report and let the data speak for itself? Mr. Speaker, this report has been published every year to ensure full disclosure of transparency for the people of Alberta for 107 years. One year under the UCP and it's in the ditch. They want to hide the fact that auto insurance companies are making out like bandits; massive premium increases after the UCP caved to their lobbyist friends. Why is the UCP hiding the truth about how much car insurance companies are profiting off the people of Alberta? [some applause]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board is the only one with the call.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're not hiding a thing. Our department is publishing all of the details of that report online. Here's the fact. There has not been a request for that report for over two years. This is simply a matter of streamlining and ensuring that Albertans continue to have access to all the information.

The member talks about insurance premiums. Mr. Speaker, again, we took real action, action that members opposite were not courageous enough to take. Insurance premiums are not going up; they're coming down.

Ms Hoffman: Nobody believes that, Mr. Speaker. If the minister is so proud of that, why doesn't he actually present the data in this House? What is he hiding? The uncomfortable truth is that the Premier is a shill for his big buddies in the insurance industry. His former staffer Nick Koolsbergen lobbied this government to take the cap off, and now they want to keep Albertans in the dark about how much they're profiteering. Saskatchewan, Manitoba, B.C., and Quebec: they all offered rebates and cut premiums during COVID. Why is the UCP letting large profitable corporations pile more costs onto Alberta families?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, all of the data in the report is available online, and we encourage every Albertan to pursue that and find it. It is all available.

Mr. Speaker, again, the members opposite simply put a rate cap in as insurance prices started to go up. Insurance premiums were going up by 5 per cent plus per year under the members opposite. We dealt with the systemic issues driving up those costs. Not only have rates flattened; they're starting to come down. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Fuel Prices

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, tomorrow Albertans expect the price at the pump to drop 13 cents and stay down. Not the fuel tax; the price. The problem is that this UCP government failed to put in place any guarantee that the tax reduction would reach drivers. Yesterday the Premier said that he would be, quote, watching like a hawk but refused to commit to an audit. Watching isn't an action. What exactly, if anything, is the Premier actually doing to make sure these savings reach Albertans?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've certainly been in touch with retailers, and they have every intention to drop the price. We have a very competitive environment, a competitive environment that will ultimately result in all of the tax savings being passed to consumers, and we will be watching on the ground to ensure that that happens. When the members implemented a carbon tax in this province, that raised the cost on every Albertan, I know one thing: the retail price went up for every Albertan at every pump.

Ms Ganley: Oh, good, Mr. Speaker. "Trust us."

As usual, that answer was heavy on rhetoric but light on solutions. Albertans can't trust this UCP government. They promised a natural gas rebate, and it turned out to be fake. They promised an electricity rebate, and it turned out to be \$50, an amount even their UCP members call paltry. Now they're promising money back at the pumps, but they can't provide any sort of guarantee. One more time: can the Premier tell us how he will make sure that that money gets to Alberta families?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're providing real relief to Alberta families and businesses with the natural gas rebate should prices go high, with an electricity rebate for every Alberta electricity consumer, and by suspending the fuel tax for every consumer in Alberta, unlike the members opposite, who implemented a carbon tax, jacked up the cost of fuel utilities and the cost of just about everything in this province.

Ms Ganley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's no wonder no one trusts the UCP to make life more affordable. Yesterday I called on the government to commit to an independent, third-party audit to find out if these savings are actually passed along to Albertans. This is a thoroughly reasonable idea. Did the government's plan work in the way they said it would? Did the money they promised Albertans actually reach Albertans? Albertans deserve an answer. Will the Premier commit to a third-party audit of his gas tax program? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're going to be watching to ensure that retailers pass on this tax saving to consumers. We're very confident that they will.

But I want to ask the members opposite: why did they vote against the government motion asking the federal government to suspend raising the carbon tax, a tax that pushes up the costs for every Albertan? Why did they not support the motion?

An Hon. Member: Hypocrites.

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. No one in this Assembly is a hypocrite.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Health Sciences Association Contract Negotiations

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, global energy prices are soaring, and this means a windfall revenue for the provincial government. We've all heard about the massive pay increases executives at AIMCo are getting, and the Minister of Finance has approved pay increases for public servants across the government of Alberta. But at the same time this minister is proposing deep pay cuts to front-line health care workers, as deep as 11 per cent in some cases. If there's money available for raises, why is the minister seeking to cut the pay of critical health care workers?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, there's a bargaining process going on between the Health Sciences Association of Alberta and Alberta Health Services. I'm confident that the two will bargain in good faith and will ultimately realize an agreement that's mutually beneficial, an agreement similar to the agreement with the United Nurses of Alberta, similar to the agreement with the Alberta public service.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, there's a crisis in Alberta health care. On top of the UCP's ongoing war with doctors, this minister is attacking an entire care team that Albertans rely on when they're sick or injured or struggling with a chronic condition. There are 19 Alberta communities with partial hospital closures today because they don't have enough staff to operate safely, and many of the job categories that they are seeking to cut pay in have increasing vacancy rates. Why is the minister chasing health care professionals out of Alberta with these brutal cuts to their pay?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are no cuts to pay. Again, we settled on a very good agreement with the United Nurses of Alberta. We've settled on a very good agreement with the Alberta public service. I have every confidence that both AHS and HSAA will settle on a good agreement for both parties. In terms of picking a fight, we're not picking a fight with anybody. I have great respect and appreciation for health care workers, that have delivered so admirably and professionally and sacrificially to Albertans in the last six months.

Ms Gray: The minister is showing his respect and admiration by seeking rollbacks as high as 11 per cent for respiratory therapists, lab technicians, occupational therapists, pharmacy technicians, speech-language pathologists, social workers, Mr. Speaker. All of these Albertans have spent their career helping their neighbours in our province. Many have worked at the bedside throughout the

pandemic or were deployed to testing facilities. They've put themselves in harm's way. Will the minister commit to abandoning his plan to cut these Albertans' wages, or will they prove yet again that Albertans cannot trust this UCP government?

2:00

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it never ceases to amaze me how the members opposite simply generate unfounded fear amongst Albertans and amongst Alberta health care workers. Again, there's a bargaining process in place. AHS, HSAA are working collectively. I have great faith that they will bargain in good faith and ultimately resolve the issue and agree on a collective bargaining agreement that's mutually beneficial.

Workplace Conduct of Ministers and Staff

Member Irwin: On November 3 this Premier announced that Edmonton's Integrity Commissioner, Jamie Pytel, had been retained to conduct a review of HR policies for government staff following serious allegations of misconduct. These allegations led to the resignation of a cabinet minister. It's now been over 140 days since this announcement was made, so a simple question to the Minister of Finance, the person responsible for the public service: has Ms Pytel delivered her report to the government?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women and chief government whip.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The report by Ms Pytel will be brought to the government when she's completed it. It will be soon, I understand, and when it is brought forward, the recommendations will be made public. We've said this many times.

Member Irwin: Almost five months have passed since these allegations came to light after a former staff member raised serious allegations of harassment. Is the Minister of Finance aware of any preliminary findings or recommendations from Ms Pytel, or has he provided any interim direction to cabinet ministers or to staff about appropriate workplace conduct? Has anything changed in the last five months?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've previously said, the report will be, I'm sure, brought to the government soon, to the Premier's office, and the recommendations will be made public at that time. The report is in the hands of Ms Pytel, and it will be brought forward when she's completed it.

Member Irwin: Every Albertan has a right to a safe workplace, including here in this Legislature, and anyone reporting harassment should be confident that their employer takes these matters seriously, holds people accountable for their actions, and holds the organization as a whole accountable for its workplace culture. Will the Minister of Finance commit to releasing the Pytel report in its entirety, redacted only where necessary to protect the privacy of those reporting harassment?

Ms Issik: As I previously mentioned, the report, when completed, will be presented to the Premier's office. As we've said from the beginning, the recommendations will be made public. I can tell you that sexual harassment is not acceptable in any workplace anywhere in Alberta, period, full stop, end of sentence. I can tell you that as the chief government whip I have put a program in place for our

caucus staff called moments matter, that was brought forward by the Alberta sexual assault centres. We're working that program, and I'm pleased with the progress on it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has a question to ask.

Federal Climate Plan

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government announced an insane and unrealistic climate plan bent on destroying Alberta's economy. It's ironic, considering that the day before the federal government announced at the International Energy Agency that Canada would be increasing oil production. Albertans are sick of these hypocritical government announcements, especially considering that the Constitution says that natural resources belong to Albertans and in this House, not the Liberal-NDP coalition. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: what is your response to the federal government's insane climate plan and attack on Alberta?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I did meet with the federal minister of environment earlier today, and I made clear to him that the federal plan is insane and impossible and that this province will not be co-operating in any way with the federal government in any attempt to stop us from being able to produce our own resources, and I made very clear that this government will use every tool available to us to fight the federal government's attack on our largest industry and on this province. But, sadly, we still continue to see the Official Opposition, even as early as last night, voting with the federal Liberals to destroy our largest industry. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that some Canadians are already paying over \$2 per litre to fill up and that seniors are struggling to heat their homes and pay their bills and given that the reduction cap that Trudeau's insane climate plan wants to force down Albertans' throats will do nothing but destroy Albertan livelihoods and make life more unaffordable across this country, to the Minister of Environment and Parks: can you tell this House and all Albertans about your meeting with Steven Guilbeault and the message you delivered to him on behalf of Alberta?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I delivered a clear message to the minister today that his plan was impossible, insane, and absolutely unacceptable for this province. Let me be very clear. Alberta will not be working with the federal government on this emissions plan. We will continue with our plan, which is working, which is creating jobs and saving Albertans money while meeting our environmental obligations. It's important not just for Albertans to know but for all Canadians to know that the federal Liberal-NDP climate plan is going to raise the cost of everything inside our society, and this province is never ever going to accept that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the federal government's plan is out of touch and nonsensical and given that

the Liberal-NDP coalition is grasping at straws to show the world that they are woke and supportive of cancelling out our oil and gas sector, which is outright comical and highly irresponsible, and further given that this Trudeau-Notley plan will make life harder and more unaffordable for Albertans, to the Minister of Energy: can you tell this House and all Albertans what a production cap would actually mean for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has been in this Assembly quite a while, and he knows that the use of any proper name in the Assembly is unparliamentary.

The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. They try to call it an emissions cap out of Ottawa, but we know that they intend it to be a production cap to phase out our oil and gas industry. A production cap will mean the loss of billions of dollars of revenue in this province. It'll mean the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. It'll make suffering for every single family, every single Albertan, and every single Canadian. It is insane that the federal government is trying to block the development of our resources when the rest of the world is trying to get more of our resources. We'll fight every step of the way to make sure they . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

COVID-19 Information Updates

Mr. Sabir: Yesterday the Health minister announced that signs of increasing transmission had been seen in Calgary and Edmonton. He also stated that the average positivity rate had increased from last week to 24.5 per cent. He also announced the tragic news of 30 Albertans who lost their lives to COVID-19 last week. I know that many Albertans are concerned at the prospect of rising transmission. Does the Minister of Health think that it is time to consider increasing the number of COVID-19 updates to ensure that Albertans have all the information they need?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education is rising.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Minister of Health and the chief medical officer of health and all of her officials are closely monitoring the increases. That being said, we also are seeing that the BA.2 variant, while it is more transmissible, is not actually causing an increase in the hospitalization rates or ICU rates. In fact, those continue to decline.

Mr. Sabir: Given that last summer Albertans were blindsided when this government announced they were shutting down testing and tracing weeks before the fourth wave hammered Alberta, costing hundreds of lives and nearly collapsing our health care system, and given that since then Albertans simply can't trust the UCP, will the minister commit to, at the very least, going back to the twice-a-week update to assure Albertans that the government is not asleep at the wheel, like they were last summer?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will commit to continuing to follow it closely, follow the numbers closely, follow the infection rates closely. The chief medical officer of health and her officials will continue to do the work that they need to do. I am happy that our government is continuing to make a priority the rapid tests available. To date there are 13.8 million tests that have been distributed to pharmacies. That number continues to rise, and please make available use of all of that for anyone who wants to.

Mr. Sabir: Given that providing information to Albertans on a disease that is, tragically, taking four lives a day should not be onerous or partisan and given that, again, with the false promise of the best summer ever, this government should go above and beyond when it comes to transparency and accountability to Albertans, will the minister commit to bringing an official from the office of the chief medical officer of health to each briefing to provide a nonpartisan description of the situation?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the members opposite want to continue to live in a COVID world, we're continuing to move forward based on the evidence, with the support of the vast majority of Albertans and other Canadians and in line with the view of the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health of Canada. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member LaGrange: As I was saying, the chief medical officer of Canada as well as the chief medical officer of Alberta and her officials continue to provide us valuable input that we will continue to follow.

United Conservative Party Membership Recruitment

Mr. Dach: Recently Albertans heard disturbing allegations that reflect on the conduct of the UCP leadership review and how that ultimately might affect government policy, allegations that campaign teams have been accessing or trying to access the personal identification of Albertans working in trucking companies to attach to membership forms, potentially to be used to create fake memberships or even potentially to cast fake votes in the contest that will determine who is the Premier of Alberta. Will the Minister of Transportation or anybody else on that side who actually ascribes to democracy join with me in clearly condemning this practice and commit to taking action if these allegations are proven?

The Speaker: I provide a very wide swath with respect to questions about government policy or not. It's my hope that in the supplements the member will make an attempt to make the question about government policy. If the Government House Leader chooses to respond, he's welcome to do so. If not, we'll move to question 2.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, I will do so, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, the member has jumped the shark, if you will, wanting to talk about the violation of privacy when his own ethics critic, the Member for Edmonton-South, has violated the Premier's privacy and tried to violate many members of this House's privacy. What did that member know about what that ethics critic was up to?

Mr. Dang: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Has there been a search warrant served on his house as well? What other things did the NDP know about the violation of the privacy of members of this Assembly? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. A point of order is called at 2:12.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, this is about government policy and the use of government identity.

Given that the RCMP is already investigating the last UCP leadership race for identity fraud and even questioned the Premier

last month in regard to this investigation and given that media reports show that there were votes cast in that contest by people who do not even remember voting and given this recent allegation that trucking companies might have been approached by campaigns to get access to personal information using government ID that was scanned, can the Minister of Transportation tell me exactly what protections are in place to protect truck drivers and other Albertans from this type of unethical campaigning and unprofessional use of government documents?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, what is unethical is continuing the tactics, that you see from the NDP, of fear and smear, their party continuing to make things up about people. It is absolutely outrageous. It's all the NDP have, and I expect you'll continue to see it as their poll numbers continue to drop. But the reality is that that member has no business standing in this place asking about privacy violations or RCMP investigations when a member of their own caucus has had a search warrant served on their place, on their house. What did that member know about those privacy breaches, and did he support hacking the Premier? Yes or no?

Mr. Dach: Given, Mr. Speaker, that I've got every right to ask about fraudulent use of government documentation, given that over \$200,000 in fines were issued by the Election Commissioner around this UCP leadership race, given that with the passage of Bill 81 anyone in this room could be a member of the UCP without even knowing it, and given the concern around the possibility that personal ID may have been accessed by trucking companies, will the Minister of Transportation commit to introducing legislation to ensure that there are severe consequences to this type of unethical and immoral campaigning? And I have every right to ask that question.

The Speaker: I think that the Speaker gets to determine what's in order and out of order, not the hon. member.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, again, these issues have been addressed already by Elections Alberta, who found that what the NDP is saying is completely and utterly false. What is more outrageous, though, is for that member, again, to rise in this Assembly and talk about privacy breaches when he is a member of a caucus who has been confirmed by the caucus to be under investigation for violating the privacy of members of this very Chamber, who has admitted in their own documents that they're under investigation for that. Yet, again: did that member know about the hacking? Yes or no?

Federal Equalization Program

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, it has now been 164 days since Albertans voted 61.7 per cent in favour of removing equalization from the Constitution. Nothing has changed. The government has taken no action to press Ottawa. Given that this Premier appointed himself as intergovernmental affairs minister and given that he failed to take any action to respect the democratically expressed wishes of Albertans, my question for Alberta's do-nothing minister of intergovernmental affairs is this: after nearly six months of inaction, why should Albertans believe that you will ever stand up for us?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this government is standing up for Albertans, unlike that member, who's put himself in a corner, unable to even stand up for his constituents, which is disappointing for the people of Medicine Hat. This government continues to lead the way in economic recovery inside this country, bringing forward

some of the best years that we've seen in all of our industries, restoring the jobs that were lost underneath the NDP, and yet again today standing up to the federal government for their ridiculous climate policies. That's a sharp contrast to that member, who is getting nothing done for the people of Medicine Hat inside this Chamber. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that following the equalization referendum the members of this Assembly approved Motion 101, officially recognizing the results of the referendum and directing the government of Alberta to take action, and given that the government has now failed to comply with this call for action for 149 days and given that the people of Alberta have done their part and given that the members of this Assembly have done their part, my question for Alberta's do-nothing minister of intergovernmental affairs is this: when will you take real action for Alberta families?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're certainly moving forward on the issue of equalization because there's unfairness that needs to be dealt with there, but we're taking action on a number of other items as well, items around positioning this economy for disproportionate investment attraction and growth, balancing the budget. I would ask, through you to the member opposite for Cypress-Medicine Hat: where was he when we approved the first balanced budget in eight years?

Mr. Barnes: Given that when the Premier announced the equalization referendum, in July 2021, he stated that it would, and I quote, elevate Alberta's fight for fairness to the top of the national agenda, that in a sense it takes a page out of Quebec's playbook and given that, whether it is protecting its seats in the House of Commons or bypassing religious freedoms in the Constitution, Quebec never seems to have any problem getting its issues addressed, again to the Premier: are you now willing to admit that your promise – your promise – to push equalization to the top of the national agenda has been another complete failure?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, you want to talk about complete failures? I was just down in Medicine Hat the other day, and every constituent I spoke to expressed their complete disappointment in the inability of their member of the Legislature to represent them. Today, as we speak, down in Medicine Hat significant announcements are taking place around HALO and emergency services, just one example of the success of this government, while that member has a temper tantrum and plays junior high politics and hides himself in the corner. He can't even be bothered to support a balanced budget. Shame on him. [interjections]

An Hon. Member: You are going to lose. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I want to caution all members when using personal attacks or insults inside the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Marked Fuel Prices

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. For generations Albertans have had marked fuel for agriculture vehicles, which is priced 9 cents lower than regular. This is intended to be a comparative advantage

for the industry. The UCP's plan takes 13 cents off unmarked fuel but only 4 cents off marked fuel . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader will come to order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: . . . making the prices equal. There is no longer a comparative advantage. Four cents is a drop in the bucket when compared to the rising costs facing farmers and ranchers. Why is this government not implementing another strategy to help them out with the high cost of fuel during this time of financial stress?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're suspending the fuel tax right now to zero – to zero – and that will provide relief for every Albertan, provide relief for every Alberta rancher and farmer. Again I would ask the members opposite: they're so concerned about affordability all of a sudden, yet they failed to support the motion, that we had in front of the House yesterday, calling on the federal government to pause the increase in the carbon tax, a cost that will affect every Albertan, every Alberta farmer.

2:20

Ms Sweet: Well, given the fact that there's no longer a competitive advantage for farmers and given that there are costs to having marked fuels such as transportation to the farm and the maintenance of dye and given that all these pressures and rising costs farmers are facing are an increase, including the price of feed and fertilizer, and given that a mere 4-cent fuel reduction, especially when everyone else is getting 13 cents, lacked insight and didn't solve the problem, to the minister: with all the pressures farmers are facing, why isn't the government doing more to protect the industry's comparative advantage on fuel?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the member opposite's concern for agriculture because members on this side of the House believe in a great future for the agriculture industry in this province, a great future for the great farmers and ranchers out there, that provide every day for this province. That's one reason why we are eliminating the fuel tax for farmers and ranchers and every Albertan. Again I ask the members opposite: why do they not support us in calling on the federal government to halt the increase in the carbon tax?

Ms Sweet: Well, given that regular price and dyed fuel is now the same price and given that the UCP is driving up Albertans' electricity, gas bills, school fees, auto insurance, property taxes, tuition, and interest on student loans and given that Albertans in agriculture may already be paying these fees as well as the extra costs specific to the sector and given that the UCP also decided to tack on an extra 10 per cent increase to premiums for livestock and crop insurance, how can the minister seriously justify forcing this increase in premiums while so many other costs are also spiking?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we hear so often from the members opposite is the gospel of envy, the gospel of socialism. What I can say is that farmers and ranchers will not begrudge other Albertans who receive 13 cents of relief on every litre of fuel they purchase.

Child and Youth Advocate Recommendation

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, in this week's mandatory child death review report, which outlines the circumstances that led to the death of 18 children in this government's care in the last six months, the Child and Youth Advocate repeatedly pointed to the lack of collaboration between government ministries. The report is full of stories of overwhelmed family members and caregivers who weren't able to access supports. The advocate recommends that the ministries of Health, Education, and Community and Social Services develop a process to ensure co-ordinated service delivery. Will the UCP listen to the advocate and accept this recommendation?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday, the death of any child in care who has received services through the child intervention system is a tragedy. We do work very closely not only to review each and every case but also to work with the office of the Child and Youth Advocate and to discuss things that we're seeing and the recommendations that are being made. I can assure you that we're also not waiting to take action. Much of this is because of the collaboration between ministries like mine, mental health and addictions, Health, Education, and Community and Social Services, and there's more to come.

Ms Pancholi: Given that staffing shortages and turnover were noted specifically in cases of some of the young people in this report, like Joseph, who had a specialized liaison caseworker redeployed, and given that this minister has shown that she doesn't understand the critical importance of consistent support workers in these young people's lives – it can mean life or death for them – as she removed these supports for youth transitioning out of care when she cut SFAA supports two years ago and given that staffing problems start and end with the Minister of Children's Services and there are no new front-line staff for child intervention, how does the minister plan to improve support to children in care with no new staff?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is something that we watch very closely. Staffing concerns are not unique to this ministry. We have been working over the past number of years not only for recruitment and retention strategies specifically in rural, remote, and northern communities, where we do see some greater staff turnover; however, we have also worked to redirect ministry FTEs towards the front lines so that we have those support services in place. Many of our services are also offered by community organizations, who work very hard to keep kids safe and supported.

Ms Pancholi: Given that the Albertans addressed in this report were 12 to 19 years old – five died from drug poisoning, three died by suicide, three were victims of homicide, three young people died from medical causes, and one died in a motor vehicle accident – and given that the advocate said that his call to require ministries to provide regular public updates on how they've addressed past recommendations is more important now than ever, rather than making Albertans wait another 75 days for a response, I'm asking the minister for a straightforward response right now, yes or no: will the minister accept the advocate's recommendation to have ministries report on their work to a committee of the Legislature?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, the process that we go through to report on our progress was actually set up fairly recently, after the all-party panel on child intervention, which was overseen by the members opposite. It is transparent, there is accountability, and in fact we will not wait 75 days to act. We, in the coming days and weeks, do expect reports from the ministry not based on speculation from the members opposite but based on what we actually saw in each and any one of these cases, and changes will absolutely be made. [interjections]

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

Inflation

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The statistics on inflation in Canada and in Alberta show that the cost has gone up for food, shelter, and gas. Although our inflation rate of 5.1 per cent is less than the national average, the last time similar figures were recorded was in October 2007. Albertans continue to grapple with the challenges of inflation caused largely by poor fiscal policy from Ottawa's Liberal government. To the minister: how is the ministry reducing the impacts of inflation on Alberta households and businesses?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We certainly are in a time of inflation, brought on by a number of issues, including, I would suggest, irresponsible fiscal management by the federal government. We are bringing real relief to Albertans. We are offering every electricity consumer a \$150 rebate on this spring's electricity bill. We're also suspending the fuel tax, which will save all Albertans 13 cents a litre at the pumps.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that the cost of energy is often controlled by international demands – increased energy costs are also exacerbated by the federal government's carbon tax – and given that the inflation and supply chain issues are likely to affect gas and commodities in Alberta, the UCP government's balanced budget has put in place measures to address some of these problems. What is the minister doing to ensure that the supply chain, the very system that affects the pricing of goods and services in Alberta, is addressed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, irresponsible federal fiscal policy is ultimately assisting in driving this high inflation. I believe the best response from government during times of inflation is to spend less, borrow less, and tax less, and that's why we are providing relief at the pumps in suspending the fuel tax for every Albertan. That will save our heavy transport truck drivers \$190 on a tank of fuel. That will provide relief on the supply chain for every Alberta grocery store and for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that the federal government plans to increase the carbon tax and the fact that this will have severe economic consequences for Albertans and given that Alberta's economy is already dealing with high inflation rates, which might be worsened by the hike in federal tax, to the minister: what relief measures are being taken to ensure that the

burden of Ottawa's carbon tax doesn't affect the competitiveness of Alberta's economy?

Mr. Toews: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I've identified the various consumer relief measures that we're implementing, but on top of that we're calling on the federal government to not increase the carbon tax effective tomorrow, a tax that will increase the costs on all Albertans, all Alberta families, every Alberta business. And we're calling on the opposition to support us in our motion asking the federal government to suspend the increase in the carbon tax because the whole concept of the carbon tax is to increase costs for Albertans and for consumers. I call on the opposition to support us.

Technology Industry Development and Tax Credits

Ms Goehring: The Alberta tech sector has been reaching out to this government in any way possible to highlight the need to bring back Alberta's interactive digital media tax credit, and it was clear that this government turned a blind eye. Budget 2022 was a chance to listen to industry leaders and restore the faith of investors that took advantage of the digital media tax credit before it was cancelled but are now looking at other jurisdictions. Can the minister explain why he's passing up on this surefire job-creation tactic? Is it ideology, or is it that this sector cannot trust this government?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The tech sector is going to be an important sector in Alberta; in fact, is an important sector today. We're doing all we can to position it for investment attraction and growth. That's why we introduced the innovation employment grant, a grant that ultimately rewards incremental research and development activity by every Canadian small business. That's why we have, again, recapitalized Alberta Enterprise Corporation. That's why this budget devotes \$600 million for skills, talent, and jobs, ensuring that every Albertan has the opportunity to get the skills and talent needed to participate in the tech sector.

Ms Goehring: Given that the Premier calls the digital media tax credit a boutique program but given that the previous iteration of the digital media tax credit was directly designed with industry feedback to give Alberta a competitive advantage, an advantage that was working, and given that Alberta became more attractive for investment than other provinces like Quebec, Ontario, and B.C., to the Premier: does he not understand that the digital media tax credit was not a boutique tax credit but a successful, targeted program that kept and created jobs in Alberta?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the tech sector has a great future in this province, and we're seeing so many companies choose Alberta as their home, as their home for their head office, as their home for expanded capacity. In fact, we can take a look at Amazon Web Services, a \$4.2 billion investment in a web data services business just outside of Calgary. It's going to create over a thousand jobs. We can look at Infosys and Mphasis, both expanding in Alberta, creating thousands of jobs. We're working with the tech sector, we take advice from the tech sector, and the tech sector is booming.

Ms Goehring: Given that Accenture released a study last year that found the gaming industry alone generates \$300 billion in revenue and given that companies like Beamdog have been hiring workers and creating jobs outside of Alberta but won't hire here because of

the elimination of the digital media tax credit, to the minister: will he finally listen to industry experts and investors who are choosing to put their money in other jurisdictions and finally bring back the digital media tax credit?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we're seeing in the province: as we position this province to be most competitive in every sector, including the tech and innovation sector, we're seeing venture capital, which is the jet fuel of tech and innovation, increase in this province year over year, doubling many years year over year. In fact, Unity 3-D, one of the largest gaming companies of the world, just recently announced that they're opening an office – where? – in Calgary.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Feehan: The UCP has done everything in their power to make life more expensive for my constituents in Edmonton-Rutherford. The UCP, without warning, lifted the cap on insurance prices, causing prices to massively jump by, in some cases, up to 30 per cent. Earlier this week the Finance minister did not know how much insurance rates had gone up, showing that despite his bluster he is completely out of touch with the problems that he created. Can the minister tell me today exactly how much his insurance policies have cost my constituents, and why do you refuse to release the report on insurance profits?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, this government took real action to deal with the systemic, the root causes that were creating cost escalation in the automobile insurance industry. The members opposite simply put a rate cap on the issue, didn't deal with one systemic issue. After Bill 41 we're seeing automobile insurance actually flatten and even go down. Intact: their rates are dropping by 2 per cent. Belair: their rates are dropping by 7 per cent. Alberta motor vehicle association are dropping their rates by over 7 per cent.

Mr. Feehan: Given that the families of Edmonton-Rutherford have been hit hard with school fee hikes caused by this government, tuition hikes caused by this government, and even hikes to the interest on student loans caused by this government and given that the families that I represent are telling me that it feels like the UCP government is making it more and more expensive to access education, can either the Education minister or the Advanced Education minister explain to the families that I represent why their mission is to take more from Albertans while doing less for them?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another opportunity for me to remind the Assembly that tuition in Alberta remains below the national average. You know, apart from that, I've heard loud and clear from student leaders the need to do more to support . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. I heard the question, and I will hear the answer.

The Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, I've heard loud and clear from students the need to do more when it comes to student assistance, which is why Budget 2022 includes

\$12 million over three years in new spending to support our existing scholarships. As well, it includes \$15 million over three years to create new bursaries specifically for low-income students to ensure everyone can access . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Feehan: Given that UCP policies have resulted in the hiking of utility bills and their follow-up policy of doing nothing about them is making it harder for the constituents that I represent to make ends meet and given that I've been hearing stories of \$700 utility bills and the UCP is only responding with \$50, which even a UCP MLA described as paltry, and given that our caucus has proposed a sensible solution to protect Albertans from the UCP cost-of-living crisis, all of which have been rejected by the members opposite, Albertans can't trust the UCP. Will the associate minister attempt to change that by offering Albertans anything at all?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, it's ironic when the caucus that doesn't even know the price of electricity is complaining about the price of electricity. Now, it's true; Albertans have a hangover from the NDP because everything they did on the electricity grid rose prices. I've said it before, and I'll say it again. They broke the electricity grid; we're going to fix it. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Oil and Gas Export

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The world watches with horror the tragic events happening in Ukraine and continues to apply punishing sanctions against the Russian aggressor. Many countries are now banning Russian oil and gas. Others continue to rely heavily on Russia to fulfill their oil and gas needs. As a result, many of the same countries that are standing up against Russian aggression in Ukraine are also funding it by buying Russian oil. Can the Minister of Energy advise the House what role Alberta can play to help foreign countries weed out Russian oil?

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you for that question. Alberta can be the solution. We sit on top of the third-largest reserves of oil on the planet, and we produce it responsibly, reliably. We produce it with the highest environmental standards, and we're addressing climate change. In fact, our oil sands is moving to net zero. But most importantly, we do not use our resources to fund wars against innocent civilians. We intend to do everything we can to increase production of oil and gas here in Alberta to supply markets globally and in the U.S. that want more of our oil and gas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the United States was importing an average of 209 barrels a day of crude oil and 500,000 barrels a day of other petroleum products from Russia and given that the U.S. has banned import of oil, gas, oil and petroleum products, and coal from Russia and given that support amongst Americans for the Keystone XL pipeline is now rising, can the Minister of Energy tell this House what efforts are being made to export more Alberta oil and gas to the U.S.?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We can squeeze out every single drop of Russian oil in North America. We're able to

displace Russian oil, Russian heavy oil, going into the U.S. Gulf coast, with our oil. We're able to replace Russian light oil, going into the west coast of the U.S., with our oil. We can do that now using existing pipeline capacity that is not being fully utilized and using spare private-sector rail capacity. That's why we're advocating in the United States for a continental energy security program and our look north advocacy campaign.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again, Minister. Given that Justin Trudeau has continuously been hostile to Alberta's oil and gas industry and given that he has created rules and regulations which prevent the building of pipelines to increase our oil and gas supply to the world and given that these obstacles have prevented the Energy East and Keystone XL pipelines from moving forward, can the Minister of Energy advise this House what work would need to be done to bring these pipelines to fruition?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need to start by resetting energy policy in this country and in North America. For the last several years energy policy has focused exclusively on climate change. While it's important and while we need to address emissions and lower them, we also need to address energy affordability, energy security, reliability. Those things are just as important, and we need to start treating our energy as an asset to be a proud of, not a liability to be phased out.

2:40 Rural Physicians and Surgery Wait Times

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, access to health care in rural Alberta has been an issue for as long as anyone can remember. My constituency is dealing with insufficiencies so extreme that the Whitecourt health care centre currently has a shortage of physicians with surgical skills. This shortage has led to the AHS north zone letting my constituents know that the hospital will temporarily be unable to offer Caesarean sections from March 15 to April 13, almost a month without access to life-saving surgery. To the Minister of Health: with only limited obstetrical services available at Whitecourt health care centre during this time, how can my constituents feel safe during their childbirth journey?

Member LaGrange: Thank you to the member for the question. As a mother myself I know that pregnancy and childbirth are indeed stressful times for expectant mothers. To ensure the safety of all mothers, obstetrical services in Whitecourt will be limited to low-risk maternity services until April 13. AHS is working with all expecting mothers to ensure that they have the support plan in place to safely deliver their babies. I want to assure the member, our colleague here, that we're doing everything we can to ensure patients receive the care they need when they need it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that there is also currently a shortage of general physicians in Grande Cache and given that these shortages have been going on for quite a while now, given that doctors are able to practise in Alberta wherever they choose to live, to the same minister: please tell the members of my community what is being done to augment the efforts of AHS to recruit doctors in Grande Cache.

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to my colleague. Given that there is also currently a shortage of general physicians in Grande Cache and given that these shortages – oh, sorry. My apologies. The good news is that Grande Cache will receive new doctors this year under the rural education supplement and integrated doctor experience, or RESIDE, program. Under RESIDE 20 new family physicians will be attracted to the communities in need for each of the next three years. Budget '22 spends a total of \$90 million to help recruit and retain rural doctors.

Mr. Long: Thank you again, Minister. Given that doctor shortages aren't the only health concerns for the residents of West Yellowhead, given that some of my constituents have been waiting for months even for out-patient surgeries like knee surgeries and given that because of extreme pains and medical concerns my constituents have had to seek medical attention in other jurisdictions, where they've had to pay out of pocket, and given that many of those wait times were pushed even further because of the COVID-19 pandemic, once again to the Minister of Health: is there anything being done to address wait times for those in need of surgeries?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government was elected on a platform to lower surgical wait times. COVID-19 has impacted our ability on those timelines; however, we continue to provide more surgeries than ever before via the Alberta surgical initiative. More procedures like hip, knee, and cataract surgeries are being done within the publicly funded system for Albertans. To support the ASI, Budget 2022 provides \$133 million in capital spending to expand or build new operating rooms in many hospitals right across the province over the next three years. We remain committed to ensuring all Albertans receive quality health care no matter where they . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. As we are heading into a constituency break, I encourage you to take some time with your family, drive safely, and be kind to one another. In 30 seconds or less we will continue to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Premier's Leadership

Mr. Barnes: The late novelist Ken Kesey once wrote, "The secret of being a top-notch con man is being able to know what the mark wants, and how to make him think he's getting it." Albertans have seen their share of flim-flams over the years, but never like the current Premier. When running for leader, the current Premier rejected the idea of subsidies for solar power on a radio show, rebuffing the request by stating: no; we're broke. The statement became a slogan printed on T-shirts proudly worn by Albertans tired of green corporate welfare.

Of course, once in power the new Premier increased public debt, well over \$100 billion, while handing out billions in corporate welfare. Of course, he wasn't done pushing bad merchandise. He went on to promise no vaccine passports or mandates in Alberta and printed up Best Summer Ever hats for all his prospective marks. I think we all know how that ended up.

Well, folks, he's at it again. Last week the flim-flam man posted an antigreen energy meme on social media even as his government complies with Ottawa's just transition policies, scrambling to meet

Paris accord targets, and brags about speeding up the NDP's accelerated coal phase-out. Now, this week, the flim-flam man is attacking the federal government's carbon tax increase even while increasing his own carbon tax on industrial emitters.

He actually thinks he has Albertans fooled once again, but the problem with trying to play both sides of every issue is that eventually people realize that you are never on their side. Just like Justin Trudeau, who calls conservatives extremists, Alberta's Premier has ramped up the disgusting, dehumanizing rhetoric by calling conservatives lunatics and comparing them to insects. It reminds me of the time back in 2017 when the former Deputy Premier called Albertans sewer rats. At least she apologized. Albertans have had enough of this flim-flam man. It's time for him to resign, move back to Ontario, and find some new marks to work on.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

My apologies to the hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis for getting the order incorrect, but now the hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis.

Tourism

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tourism is the business of memory making, and millions of people from all over the world hold their fondest memories right where I come from. I've said it a million times in this House, but there are few places to whom a thriving tourism economy comes so naturally. Countless places pride themselves on man-made attractions, but in Banff-Kananaskis our industry is rooted in the God-given beauty all around us.

Prepandemic, tourism represented \$8.4 billion of GDP and 80,000 jobs, but when borders closed and visitations ceased, restaurants shut early and venues closed down, revenues plummeted nearly half and unemployment rates peaked above 85 per cent. Even in the most difficult of times our small businesses did what they could to minimize the layoffs, house their staff, and keep things running, but it came at a cost.

They say that it takes just three weeks to form a habit. After two years of fear and pandemic restrictions the security that many once felt about travel is long gone. Now more than ever Alberta's tourism industry needs a co-ordinated bipartisan effort to spread the word that our province is open and that we are excited to welcome the world back. That is why this government passed a motion last week calling on Ottawa to drop their senseless and unscientific vaccination travel requirement. The first step to welcoming people back to our province, after all, is letting them in. But the NDP voted against it. If you listen to House debates, you'd think the NDP were obsessed with Banff-Kananaskis, but, Mr. Speaker, if you look at their voting record, you consistently find the exact opposite.

In 2019 the NDP left tourism out of their election platform entirely, and, well, I'm a testament to how well that worked out for them. Three years later you'd think they would have perhaps learned their lesson about supporting tourism rather than ignoring it in the best of times, then working actively against it in the worst, but it appears that they have not.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of this government for recognizing and working with Alberta's tourism operators, and I'll always be proud to represent the most beautiful place on Earth.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Bill 15 Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise today to introduce Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022.

This important legislation will reform the discipline process for all teachers and teacher leaders to make the education system safer for students, their families, and teachers. Bill 15 would create the Alberta teaching commission and appoint a commissioner to oversee teacher and teacher leader conduct and competency complaints for the profession. Mr. Speaker, one teaching profession, one discipline process.

Mr. Speaker, I committed in December to bringing legislation to this House. Promise made, promise kept. I hereby move first reading of Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

The Speaker: The Member for Highwood.

2:50

Bill 205 Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022.

Organ and tissue donations are medical processes that save and transform lives. One organ donation can save up to eight lives, and a tissue donation can make life better for up to 75 other people. Approval of the proposed amendments will establish a mandatory referral process and increase donor opportunities throughout the province. This bill will also help strengthen education and build a culture around organ and tissue donation within the province of Alberta.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 205. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley has a tabling.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings today to support the questions I've been asking and also to rebut some of the outright misinformation I received in my answers.

My first tabling is a news article that quotes the Premier calling people that are against his leadership kooks, bugs, lunatics and having extreme, hateful, intolerant, bigoted, and crazy views.

For those like the minister of parks that don't believe that he could say such things, I'm tabling another news article where the Premier doubles down on his comments.

In sharp contrast, I have a quote from a video from back when the Premier condemned name-calling, where he says to the left: stop blaming the voters for your inability to get support; stop the vicious name-calling, end quote.

I also have another quote from another video of the Premier condemning name-calling, where he says, quote, that kind of bigotry and this kind of intimidation has no place in Alberta; stop the bully tactics.

One more contrasting video quote to table, where the Premier says, quote: so let's have a debate on the issues; let's not have a race to the bottom by name-calling. End quote.

I also brought up recall legislation in my question, so I'm tabling documents to show that recall passed in this House on June 15, 2021, and received royal assent on June 17, 2021.

I'm tabling the Premier's remarks from the November 20, 2021, UCP AGM, where he says, quote: we passed the recall law, which will be brought into force in the next few weeks. End quote.

I'm also tabling the Premier's plan for enacting recall on April 7, 2022. Not a few weeks but actually several months later and 10 months after it was passed, just in time for it to be unusable.

I'm also tabling Monday, March 28 *Alberta Hansard*, page 428. The minister of parks misinformed the House, accusing me of wanting door-to-door vaccinations. Totally untrue.

Next I have a list of people on the so-called COVID cabinet committee, of which I believe the minister of parks is the deputy chair, and that committee, which I am not a part of, did mandate vaccines.

In fact, I spoke out against vaccine mandates right from the start, as witnessed in my September 1, 2021, Facebook post, that I'm tabling here.

On Monday, March 28 *Alberta Hansard*, page 427, the minister of parks again tried to dupe the House by accusing me of wanting the Leader of the Opposition in cabinet, which is absolutely false.

So I'm tabling the 2019 election results showing that I ran as a Conservative against an NDP cabinet minister. In fact . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the guy just called me a fucking liar in the middle of the damn Legislature.

The Speaker: Order. If the Minister of Environment and Parks wants to call a point of order, he's welcome to rise to his feet. Using language that's unparliamentary, including an F-bomb directed at the Speaker, is wildly inappropriate. If you don't like his remarks, call a point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is called.

Point of Order Tabling Documents Parliamentary Language

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this is, first of all, tablings. I rise on 23(h), (i), and (j). As well as the long-standing practice of not calling people liars inside this Chamber, that member just rose in this Chamber and said that the Minister of Environment and Parks was duping this House. Just before that, while trying to speed through the Orders of the Day – I ignored it – he accused me of misleading this House as well. You have many rulings on the table in regard to that. That is completely inappropriate and certainly should not be how tablings are used. Frankly, if that's how the member is going to continue to use it, I'll bring a standing order package back here right after the break to make sure you can't use tablings like that no more.

Mr. Loewen: Well, Mr. Speaker, the term I used was "misinformed." I didn't say, "mislead the House," so the hon. minister is actually totally incorrect. I didn't call anybody a liar. I didn't use the word "liar" at all. I am making my tablings here. I find it absolutely incredulous that the minister would threaten to take away this House's opportunity to table documents in an attempt to save his own credibility, I guess, because obviously what I'm bringing forward in these documents is the truth,

and I believe that the hon. minister does not want to hear the truth, is the problem.

Mr. Jason Nixon: What a joke. That's why your career is over, Todd.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, first of all, you used an F-bomb in the Assembly. Then you used a proper name. I appreciate that you're upset at the process, but he has the right to defend a point of order just like you called one.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Agreed.

The Speaker: Then don't use a proper name. Don't use an F-bomb. It's easy.

Hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley, the minister is correct. I have made several comments with respect to using the word "misled." While I can accept the use of the terminology around misinformation, specifically referring to a member of the Assembly as misleading the Assembly is a point of order. I have provided significant swath for members to say that the government or the opposition has misled, but you cannot say that the member misled the Assembly. For that you will apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much. I will apologize and withdraw those comments.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader will apologize for using unparliamentary language inside the Assembly as well as the use of proper names.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The member has one tabling remaining.

Tabling Returns and Reports (continued)

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, the last tabling here is the 2019 election results, showing that I ran as a Conservative against an NDP cabinet minister. In fact, I ran as a Conservative against the NDP and the rest of the left-wing parties in the last four general elections.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Now, to be clear, there were many periods of time during your significant length of tablings where you kept the tablings to a sentence or two, which is the practice of the Assembly. The last tabling was too long.

Hon. members, we are at points of order, and at 2:12 the Member for Edmonton-South rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Accepting a Member's Word

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will attempt to keep this brief. At approximately 2:12 – I do not have the benefit of the Blues – the hon. Government House Leader stated something to the effect of: tried to violate the privacy of multiple members of this House. He made a similar claim in his response to the second supplemental question. I think it is very clear in both the documents that have been tabled in this place by the Government House Leader as well as my statements in the media that that is untrue and that I've not attempted to violate the privacy of multiple members of this House.

I believe that's an allegation under 23(h) and also (i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member." Pursuant to your guidance on March 22 in which you said that "remarks which question a Member's integrity, honesty, or character are not in order" and also that, according to *Beauchesne's* 494, "statements by members respecting themselves must be accepted," you said that you would give additional guidance if this was to continue to be a problem. I ask for your additional guidance today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader? The deputy whip? The associate minister of mental health.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that, if anything, this is just a matter of debate. I mean, the member opposite has written an entire paper outlining his offence. Let me just say this, just for the knowledge of the House and anybody who might be watching. The RCMP do not (a) randomly or (b) without cause enter somebody's home, especially an elected member's home, if they do not have, I would say, more than reasonable belief that they will be laying charges.

Mr. Speaker, if anything, this is just a matter of debate.

3:00

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

I am prepared to rule. I believe that there are a number of issues here before the Assembly which are a matter of debate, particularly around the difference between a member or members. No one knows the facts on that although we do accept members' words respecting themselves as fact. I would say that I did provide caution previously around this issue. I continue to provide caution with respect to making accusations against another member. I don't find this is a point of order, however. Matters that are potentially before the courts: of course, those are sensitive issues in which members have their responsibility as members of the Assembly not to take that responsibility lightly. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Morning Sittings

19. Mr. Jason Nixon moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) and for the duration of the 2022 spring sitting of the Third Session of the 30th Legislature the Assembly must sit on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday mornings for consideration of government business unless under Notices of Motions or at any time before the Assembly adjourns on a sitting day the Government House Leader advises the Assembly of the morning sittings that are no longer required.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) this motion is not debatable.

[Government Motion 19 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 6

Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to move third reading of Bill 6, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a distinct and unique culture and heritage, one that we should all treasure. It is built into who we are as a people and as a province. It's as deep as our geology and in the very expressions of who we are as people. I'm often in awe of the beauty of the landscapes, the kindness of the people, the history that surrounds us, the vast geological ages, even, included there. It truly is unlike anywhere on Earth.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that we do our best to celebrate some of the uniquely Albertan items that are important to our culture and our history and the understanding of who we are as people, and we have an opportunity to do that today.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I am again asking all members of this House for their support of Bill 6, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act. This piece of legislation would enshrine ammolite as the official gemstone of our province. Gem-quality ammolite is totally unique to Alberta. Its beauty and iridescence are the result of southern Alberta's unique geography and geology, which cannot be duplicated elsewhere in Canada or in the world. Furthermore, ammolite has been an important part of this landscape for millennia. Long before Alberta was a province, plains First Nations have been collecting this gemstone, and the practice continues today in Blackfoot communities.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all members of this Assembly for the debate on Bill 6 up to this point. I encourage all members to once again support this legislation so that we are able to officially recognize ammolite as an emblem of this great province of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to stand this afternoon in recognition of Bill 6 and the important designation of ammolite as the official gemstone of Alberta, that's embodied in the bill. I appreciate the minister's desire to create recognition of ammolite as our official gemstone in an effort to perhaps create another tool that we can use to demonstrate to the world the benefits of coming to Alberta and visiting our wonderful province. I think local Albertans, residents will find their way to various different shops that might now decide to carry ammolite jewellery and gemstones and purchase it as a collection item, either as a tourist or just simply because it's their pride in the province, now that the designation under Bill 6, if the bill is passed, has been made.

It brings to mind, Mr. Speaker, one store in particular that might have been very, very proud to carry the ammolite gemstone, a store that we're all familiar with as members of the Legislature but which no longer exists. Of course, I'm speaking about the Alberta Branded store, that was in the Federal Building and carried items of Alberta-branded artistry, let's say, creations made by Alberta artists that were sold very proudly in that store. It gave a place for Alberta artists to have their wares displayed and sold, and it was a great showcase for those artists. It gave them a great source of income and also managed to create a platform for them to spread their name and gain greater recognition on a wider stage.

Unfortunately, that Alberta Branded store, which would have been a great place to market ammolite, is no longer there. There are a few paltry showcases so that you can buy tie clips and small brooches and trinkets that are in the Legislature Building, which is a far lesser display than what was available for residents and tourists

alike to go to and buy Alberta Branded merchandise. Artists made pieces in the store that was in the Federal Building, and I, for one, really bemoan the loss of that store. It was a great opportunity for Alberta artists, and it would have been a wonderful opportunity for ammolite to have been marketed and sold in our provincial capital here.

I know that as a tourist, while onboard a ship cruising around the world, I used to really start to bemoan the fact that I had to follow my mother, who was a fellow traveller, into far-flung, different types of stores and souvenir shops to buy things such as tea towels and fridge magnets. It also included trips to find certain small gemstones which were local gemstones famous in a particular area. You know what, Mr. Speaker? Those trips actually got me into some of the places that I never would have dreamed of going to before. Now, when I pass her fridge or see the things that she's bought, it brings to mind the places that we visited in a way that I otherwise wouldn't have had memories of.

Gemstones are something that are purchased as a souvenir item by many, many tourists, and they are a higher value item than the tea towels and fridge magnets, which might be produced outside of the country and then brought in to be sold as souvenirs.

So I endorse the adoption of the gemstone ammolite to become our official gemstone in Alberta. It would have been wonderful to know that it was available in gemstone quality in more places throughout Alberta. Unfortunately, it's mostly in southern Alberta where gemstone-quality ammolite is found. However, I certainly am proud to recognize the sacred nature of ammolite in the lands of the Blackfoot people. It's especially found along the St. Mary River in southern Alberta, and we'll herald it for the historical importance that it has for the Blackfoot people and be proud to adopt it as our official gemstone in the province of Alberta and look forward to having every tourist who comes to Alberta know that our gemstone is ammolite.

It should be something that manufacturers in this province – and there are a few of them who make gemstone jewellery already out of ammolite – should be willing to adopt, and I would expect to see many more pieces available throughout their local retail operations if not through the local Assembly office, through the good offices of the Speaker perhaps, to include items made by Alberta artists made out of ammolite. Hopefully, they'll be found in whatever display case is left after the loss of the Alberta Branded store, let's say.

3:10

I'm wondering, though, if indeed the mining of ammolite will be increased as a result of this and if indeed that will put pressure on the local deposits and if indeed there are going to be perhaps more leases that will be applied for and if there are more locations available where this gemstone is possibly able to be found and if there have been inquiries about perhaps further mining of this gemstone and if indeed it's going to be something that the government will allow to be opened up to more than one mining distributor.

I don't want to see the mining of ammolite become sort of the new diamond of the world in that only one or two companies control it. Hopefully, this new opportunity is something that's spread far and wide to more than one major player in the mining industry who might be interested in mining ammolite for use in the gemstone industry.

Obviously, it's found in southern Alberta, primarily, as a gemstone. I know that there are others who may wish to talk about the mining of this gemstone and about the souvenir opportunities in ammolite in Alberta. Once again, we look forward to seeing the provincial government adopt ways of encouraging the marketing of

ammolite and maybe doing something to negate the loss of stores such as Alberta Branded, that we proudly had for many years in this Federal Building and that we used a lot as MLAs to promote Alberta products and artistry made by Albertans. Hopefully, ammolite becomes something that is well known as a gemstone and a souvenir item that every Albertan and every tourist to this province wants to buy some of.

With that, I look forward to supporting this piece of legislation, and I'll allow some of my colleagues and other members across the way to make their own comments.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next joining debate I see the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, for those following along at home, Bill 6, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022, doesn't get much shorter. I think this is, honestly, the shortest law or act that's ever been passed, and I thank the minister for that. It simply reads: "The gemstone known as ammolite is hereby adopted as the official gemstone of Alberta." I'm proudly wearing this on my chest, the ammolite itself, and I have a bit of a story to share with the group.

I'd heard about it before, but I never really saw it in any opportunities. It was my very first debate, Mr. Speaker, so I was pretty nervous. I was going to be going up against a sitting Member of the Legislative Assembly, an Ag and Forestry minister, and a local councillor from Sturgeon whose name was Wayne Bokenfohr. He came up and he kind of saw that I was nervous about this. He said, "Here," and he pinned this on my chest. I'm not using a prop, so you're not getting me that way. He pinned this on my chest and said: "You're going to represent us. This is the gemstone of Alberta. You're going to do Alberta proud and go up and do your best for us." That totally calmed down my nerves, and I haven't taken it off since. I have worn it proudly in this Assembly for the last three years. Some of my colleagues have noticed what I had as well, and we ended up sharing them around. The fact that we brought this around full circle is kind of a neat thing.

Councillor Bokenfohr travelled over to Shanghai, and he had done a bunch of different presentations, and that was always his gift to dignitaries, the Alberta gemstone, especially in the shape of Alberta. So hats off to a local guy that's doing that, and his mine, obviously, is in southern Alberta. It's something that we can share with pride, and many of my colleagues have it on their lapels. I strongly encourage members from the opposition as well now that it's the official gemstone. It's not just pretty in blue; there are some orange shades for one of my colleagues, Edmonton-Rutherford, that he might want to take. He and I have an ongoing joke about what the better colour shades are.

People of the province of Alberta can show something truly patriotic, something that is really from our province that's unique and, again, has been around for a long time and has a lot of value and also can bridge some of those gaps that we might have on the political spectrum.

With that, I'll close my remarks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I strongly encourage everyone to vote in favour.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any members? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to speak to Bill 6, emblems of Alberta, and I'm very happy to support this bill, that designates ammolite as the official gemstone of Alberta. We are proud to recognize the sacred nature

of ammolites in the lands of the Blackfoot people and especially along the St. Mary River of southern Alberta. It has a cultural relevance to the people of the Blackfoot. The Blackfoot refer to ammolite as iniskim, the buffalo-calling stone. It connects to a cultural myth about the stone being used to call buffalo and feed a starving community for a winter. It symbolizes wealth, abundance, good health, and stamina and is still collected for ceremonial purposes.

While saying this, I would also like to take the opportunity to remind this House and the Minister of Culture that I appreciate his effort, his initiative on this, but we have a long way to go. The simplest, simplest thing when it comes to dealing in helping Indigenous communities – and we failed those people. It's not long ago. I remember that the government declined to take the call of the TRC to call a national day for truth and reconciliation. That was a simple call to action from the TRC. It has over 90 recommendations, and that was the simplest thing to do. We have a lot more to do when it comes to addressing the issues related to drinking water on-reserve in those areas and protecting our eastern slopes and environment and more of this in this bill.

In the past years the government has removed the human rights education fund. The government has removed the antiracism community group programs and reduced the funding. I appreciate this initiative. I support this, the spirit of this bill and this action, but we have a long way to go when it comes to doing a real service to our Indigenous communities. We see the government has been failing over the last three years on many, many different aspects. I will seek the opportunity going forward, as a representative of my constituents from Edmonton-Meadows, to advocate on behalf of not only my constituents; also of those communities, to advocate on these issues specifically related to multiculturalism and antiracism, to keep raising the voices on behalf of this community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity this afternoon just to add a few quick comments here to – actually, I think I'm going to just call it the discussion, because there's really no debate about this whatsoever. Thanks to the Minister of Culture for bringing Bill 6 forward to declare ammolite the official gemstone of Alberta. You know, I think I'll echo some of the comments that my friend from Edmonton-Meadows said. I think the road to reconciliation is still quite long. There's a lot of work to be able to do to rebuild the relationship and the partnership with Indigenous peoples. This is certainly a really, really good opportunity to show something, but like he said, I think there's more we could do.

As we know, many of the provinces, the federal government also declared a statutory holiday around truth and reconciliation. If I could take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to maybe even place more than a bug in the ear of the Minister of Culture, there's another opportunity for him to be able to advocate within the government to really seriously consider revisiting that decision around creating a statutory holiday for truth and reconciliation. I think that is going to be a very, very meaningful offering, that we could do. Again, we've seen all the other provinces, we've seen the federal government do this. Alberta needs to now step up and do the same thing.

3:20

I did notice one comment from my friend from Edmonton-McClung around the mining, possibly, of ammolite. Maybe the

suggestion that I would put out there for the government: should something like this start to increase around that, we should definitely take the step of consulting with Indigenous peoples around any type of expansion of this gem. You know, certainly, maybe there could be some business opportunities there, but I would definitely want to see Indigenous peoples get those first opportunities to be able to do that.

I am definitely thrilled to be able to support this bill. Of course, my friend from Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, we can certainly have that discussion about, you know, which colour perhaps would be more preferable. I might suggest that it could be more towards a brighter colour, but we can always have that debate for another day. Again, thank you to the minister for bringing this forward. Happy to support the bill, and I look forward to hopefully getting to support other opportunities to really start heading down the road to truth and reconciliation and rebuilding that partnership that needs to be rebuilt with Indigenous peoples.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much.

Hon. members, next I believe I see – the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise at third reading of Bill 6, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022, and to have the opportunity to speak to the beauty, actually, of ammolite. I'll be quite honest. I was not very familiar with it until recently, and having the opportunity to explore a little bit, learn a little bit about it – it is, honestly, a beautiful gemstone. It's absolutely gorgeous. I can tell you that my daughter, who – I just will comment – I had the pleasure of having here in this Assembly today along with my son and husband, which is a rare joy in this House, to have that kind of close family connection in this House, you know, saw the picture of ammolite as I was doing a little bit of research. She said, "Mama, that is so pretty," and it absolutely is. It is a truly rainbow gemstone. The rainbow is also a lovely symbol of love. It's a truly beautiful gemstone, and I think it is something that we should be proud to have represented as our official gemstone here in Alberta.

Of course, I haven't had the opportunity to hear a lot of the debate on this bill so far, but I'm sure that many of the speakers have spoken to the origins of ammolite and what its meaning is, of course, for the Blackfoot in Alberta and that it holds such great, special meaning for them. Of course, as I understand it, the Blackfoot refer to ammolite as iniskim – I hope I'm pronouncing that correctly – and it's known as the buffalo-calling stone.

There's the legend, of course. The legend of ammolite is essentially that, you know, people were starving, a very, very cold winter, and one woman had a dream about being called to a cave and seeing this beautiful gem, woke up, and was out searching and found this gemstone, and then the buffalo came. That's why it's considered a calling stone for the buffalo, which therefore has a deep connection to Indigenous peoples in our province. It's a wonderful thing to be able to commemorate that by giving ammolite this official gemstone status.

I will acknowledge as well that in preparation for this bill I also took a look at other emblems of Alberta, because I didn't know there were so many. Of course, we're all very familiar with the crest that we see on the flag of Alberta, and we know that it symbolizes the beauty of our province. I am pointing to the flag. The Speaker looks a little confused. I was pointing to the Alberta flag next to the Speaker. It is a beautiful flag that well represents the beauty of this province.

But I wasn't aware of some of the other emblems of Alberta. Honestly, it was a little bit of an education for myself. I have grown

up in Alberta, of course, knowing about the wild rose as the official flower, floral emblem of Alberta. But I'll be honest. I did not know that we had an official grass and that our grass emblem was the rough fescue. I didn't know that, but of course when I saw pictures of it, yes, this is a grass that I've seen frequently in my travels in Alberta.

I did know that our official bird was the great horned owl. Of course, who doesn't know that?

Member Irwin: I didn't know that.

Ms Pancholi: Oh. You didn't know that? The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood did not know that. I feel like I learned that learning about *Owls in the Family*, Farley Mowat. You learn about the great horned owls, and then you talk about it. Okay. The member didn't know about that.

But in school when I was learning, which was a time earlier than the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I do recall having a great discussion about the great horned owl and its significance to Alberta.

I did not know – I thought this was very interesting – that the official stone of Alberta is petrified wood. That was new information to me. I would not actually, to be quite honest, have known that petrified wood is considered a stone. My mother used to collect petrified wood when we would go out travelling in the mountains of Alberta. That was something that used to drive my father crazy, that my mother would want to stop and pull over and collect petrified wood, but now I know she was actually collecting stones. Very interesting.

You know, again, this has been an education for me to learn about some of the great emblems of Alberta and to learn about ammolite. Actually, I think I had seen it before but had not recognized exactly what it was. To now have this recognized as our official gemstone is a wonderful thing to do. I stand in support of that.

I appreciate the comments from my colleague the Member for Edmonton-McClung, who spoke about, you know, opportunities to promote ammolite as a symbol of Alberta and the things that we value here. I miss the Capital Gifts, that we used to have right here in the Federal Building, actually, close by, which really highlighted not only Alberta artists but those things that are unique to Alberta and are special to Alberta, and ammolite – I'm certain perhaps they did sell ammolite already. [interjection] Oh. I guess I'll give way.

Member Irwin: Yeah. You know, I just wanted to intervene on the fine member and mention, too – I won't refer to his presence or absence, but perhaps I would be curious to actually hear from the minister as well on that, because what an opportunity we had with Capital Gifts to really highlight Alberta artists. I know I actually stood with our critic for Culture after it was closed. We went and we visited some of the artists there. For many of them that was a really critical source of income. I really appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud as well as the Member for Edmonton-McClung for raising that because it was really a place that would highlight artists, and people would come to the Federal Building to check out that store. Like I said, I would hope the minister might even comment on that as well.

Thank you for letting me intervene.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you to my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for that intervention. You know, at the time that that Capital Gifts store closed, I mean, that was pre-pandemic. Of course, I recall that we did stand and speak out for Alberta artists and the lost opportunity and income – let's be quite honest – for many of these artists. We had no idea what was even to come – right? – in terms of the pandemic. I mean, there are many,

many Albertans who have been hit hard by the pandemic, but artists in particular have lost a lot of opportunities to showcase their work, to perform work, and to sell their work. I was very proud, and I actually recall going down to that Capital Gifts store and really learning about some Alberta artists that I was not aware of before and purchasing some items, actually, as well.

I think it's a loss. I know it's probably not a big thing in the grand scheme of things, certainly, for this government. It was just, I guess, business as usual, but it certainly did – when I think of ammolite, when I look at the jewellery that has been created by ammolite, I can't think of a better place to showcase that than Capital Gifts. I hope those artists are finding other opportunities to showcase their work in a province that has become increasingly hostile towards supporting artists. You know, I know that many of my colleagues have spoken about the history of ammolite, the importance of emblems to unite people and also to showcase who we are as Albertans.

As I mentioned, I think this is a particularly lovely gemstone. I say this as somebody who once had a very unnatural – I don't know – obsession almost with gemstones when I was younger. I always felt a little bit shortchanged by the fact that I was born in August and my official gemstone was the peridot, which was one that always seemed to be far, far lacklustre compared to, like, a diamond or an emerald or a ruby, that so many other months seemed to get as their official gemstone. I got stuck with peridot. No offence to people who love peridot. It's a really pale green stone that is quite disappointing.

3:30

So I have to say that I wish ammolite was an option. It's probably because it's unique to Alberta. It's not, you know, on that official gemstone list for the months of the year, but maybe – I don't know who I could actually advocate to to change the official gemstone for August to be ammolite instead of peridot. Sorry. Sorry to peridot lovers.

Okay. With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll close my comments on Bill 6.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Renaud: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 6 in third reading, Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022. You know, my colleagues have covered a lot of ground, and I likely will repeat some of their very interesting facts as this is a really skimpy piece of legislation. That doesn't mean it's not important – it certainly is – that ammolite will become the official gemstone of Alberta. We do know that it's actually a gemstone formed from an ancient marine fossil called ammonite. I think when I spoke to this in second reading, I talked a little bit about the field of paleontology and why it's so important here in Alberta.

Anyway, this fossil, ammonite, is actually found predominantly in southern Alberta. I talked a little bit in second reading about how it's actually found on the eastern slopes and talked about how important it was that we protect the eastern slopes as much as possible. I know that the government hasn't done a great job doing that. It was really unfortunate that they chose not to support, or, you know, not to further the debate around the private member's bill to protect the eastern slopes, Bill 214, which is unfortunate. They claim to do a lot of things, and to protect the eastern slopes was one of those things, but their actions actually don't back that up very often.

Anyway, recognizing ammolite, I think, is a great thing. I do appreciate the fact that there was consultation with Indigenous

communities. I think that's, you know – if I'm going to give the government props, I'll give them props for doing that in this case. I don't give them a lot of props very often. But I think that for far too long – and I don't just mean right now; I mean for far too long – we have imposed legislation and made changes without consulting really important communities, and in this case those would be Indigenous communities. That extends to so much of what we do. I think that very often we pass legislation or we debate legislation and we just, unfortunately, haven't taken the time to consult properly, and then, not surprisingly, we don't get it right, and then we have to go back and correct it. Happily, in this case that doesn't seem to be the case.

So as my colleagues have said, ammolite: it's wonderful. It's very colourful. It's quite lovely. I actually was given a pin made of ammolite. It's in the shape of Alberta, the province, and it's actually quite pretty. It's got lots of different colours. I'm sure we all own a piece of this lovely gemstone. It actually only officially became a gemstone, I think, in the '80s if I'm not – 1981, actually. [interjection] I will let my colleague intervene.

Member Irwin: One of the things I really appreciated from my colleague from St. Albert: when she spoke to this at second, I believe, she actually talked a lot about just her own family, her son, who's in paleontology. You know, again, we've obviously spoken in support of this bill, so I'll be cautious in how I frame this, but I just think it should really compel us as legislators to think about the message we're sending about our larger cultural industries.

She talked about brain drain. She talked about young people in the arts and culture, in sciences – the list goes on – potentially leaving our province. So while this is, you know, an important bill that we are going to support, I hope that the minister responsible for Culture really thinks about what other pieces of legislation he could be bringing forward or what kind of advocating he could be doing as a minister of the Crown to very much support and strengthen arts and culture in this province moving forward so that Albertans, young people are choosing this place to live.

Ms Renaud: Thank you very much. I actually wasn't going to bring up paleontology and my kid again, because I do that all the time and I'm sure I bore the heck out of everyone, but of course I will talk about that. You know, I think that when I hear the Minister of Advanced Education talk about, say, “Well, there's no such thing

as brain drain; it's not happening; we're doing this; we're great,” it actually is happening, and I know it's happening because it happened to my family. I know that it happened in one case, and I know it happens in many others.

I can tell you that ever since my son was about five years old, that's when he decided he wanted to – he called it dinosaur hunter at the time, but he decided that that was going to be what he did. Now, of course, like a lot of mothers, you know, I patted him on the head and said, “Sure, honey; that's great,” but he ended up doing it and pursuing his passion and is now, I think, a leading researcher and expert in an area that I never thought he would be. It's dinosaur teeth, actually. That's what he does. But he was born and raised in Alberta. He did the majority of his research and studies here in Alberta. He's a proud Albertan, and he's no longer here, and sadly the chances of him ever coming back here and working in his field here are slim, because he's now in Europe.

Paleontology is a big thing in Alberta, and I've said this again and again. We are known the world over for our incredible fossils, not just ammolite but our incredible fossils. I mean, we've got little dinosaurs on our licence plates now. I think that says a lot. We have world-class museums, world-class digs, world-class researchers, but they're not all staying here, because they don't see themselves here in this place.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I am going to take my seat and just say that I support this piece of legislation and will proudly wear ammolite in the future.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate? The hon. Minister of Culture to close debate should he so choose.

Mr. Orr: I'll waive. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: I see the deputy government whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everybody is looking forward to a couple weeks back in their constituency, so I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 10 a.m. Tuesday, April 19, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:38 p.m. to Tuesday, April 19, 2022]

Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 3rd Session (2022)

Activity to Thursday, March 31, 2022

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act (\$) (Kenney)

First Reading — 4 (*Feb. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 94-97 (*Mar. 7, 2022 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 140-44 (*Mar. 10, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 230-34 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cQ-0.7]

Bill 2 — Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 312-19 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft.*), 391-95 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve.*), 484-90 (*Mar. 29, 2022 aft.*), 565-71 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve., adjourned*)

Bill 3 — Special Days Act (Orr)

First Reading — 124 (*Mar. 9, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 327 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 343-45 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 346 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 375-78 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 379 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 389-91 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; SA 2022 cS-16.3]

Bill 4 — Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022 (McIver)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 163-77 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft.*), 360-66 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 396 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 519-23 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 571-79 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Bill 5 — Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022 (Sawhney)

First Reading — 202 (*Mar. 16, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 319-26 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft.*), 469-71 (*Mar. 28, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 523-24 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 537-43 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 6 — Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022 (Orr)

First Reading — 228 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 502-505 (*Mar. 29, 2022 aft.*), 513-14 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 562-65 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 594-98 (*Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 7 — Appropriation Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 272-73 (*Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed*)

Second Reading — 310-11 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., adjourned*), 327-36 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 345 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 366-75 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve.*), 395 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Third Reading — 411-14 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft.*), 419 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; c1]

Bill 8 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 297 (*Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed*)

Second Reading — 311-12 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., adjourned*), 336-43 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 345-46 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 379-89 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve.*), 395 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Third Reading — 414-19 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft.*), 419 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; c2]

Bill 9 — Public's Right to Know Act (Shandro)

First Reading — 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 447-54 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft.*), 455-63 (*Mar. 28, 2022 eve., adjourned*)

Bill 10 — Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022 (Aheer)

First Reading — 408 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 463-69 (*Mar. 28, 2022 eve.*), 543-50 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 11 — Continuing Care Act (Copping)

First Reading — 432 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 550-56 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 12 — Trustee Act (Shandro)

First Reading — 483 (*Mar. 29, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 13 — Financial Innovation Act (Toews)

First Reading — 535 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 14 — Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022 (Issik)

First Reading — 535-36 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 15 — Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022 (LaGrange)

First Reading — (*Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Eastern Slopes Protection Act (Notley)

First Reading — 156 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 432 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly; motion on concurrence to take place Monday, April 18, 2022*)

Bill 202 — Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022 (Loewen)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly*), 433-40 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; proceeded with*)

Bill 203 — Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act (Bilous)

First Reading — 228 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill 204 — Anti-Racism Act (Shepherd)

First Reading — 408 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 205 — Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022 (Sigurdson, RJ)

First Reading — (*Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022 (Jones)

First Reading — 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill Pr2 — Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022 (Nixon, JP)

First Reading — 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, April 19, 2022

Day 20

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

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Frey
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Sigurdson, L.
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Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, April 19, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, please be seated.

Presentation to the Assembly of Mr. Brian Jean Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche

The Speaker: Hon. members, I now invite the hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women to proceed to the main doors of the Chamber.

Members, I have received word from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta of the report of the returning officer for the constituency Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche containing the results of the by-election conducted on March 15, 2022, which states that the by-election was conducted in the constituency of Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche and that Mr. Brian Jean was duly elected as the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Ms Issik escorted Mr. Jean to the Mace]

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, I introduce to you and to this Chamber Mr. Brian Jean, the new Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, who has taken his oath as a member of the Assembly, has inscribed the roll, and now claims his right to take his seat.

The Speaker: Hon. members, let the hon. member take his seat.
Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate March 30: Member Loyola]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has five minutes remaining should he choose to use it.

Are there others wishing to join in the debate for second reading, Bill 2, Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has risen.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and welcome everybody back, after our Easter weekend, to speak to the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, in second reading. As we know, this is a financial bill, and it is speaking specifically to the budget that the government has put forward for the people of Alberta. Now, when the budget was drafted, as we all know, it was drafted previously to what we were seeing with the increase in inflation, the spending within COVID, and the increase in the oil

revenue that the province is now benefiting from. What we have not seen, however, is this government responding to those factors.

Obviously, within this statutes amendment act there are pieces that I think many Albertans are concerned with, and those concerns, I think, are valid. As we look at what is happening across the province and, of course, happening across the country, inflation has significantly increased over the last two years. What we've seen is that on average it's raised about 5.7 per cent, a significant increase, I would say, in regard to the cost of living, not only in Alberta but across Canada. Now, what we haven't seen, obviously, are wages keeping up with that inflation. The wage right now officially would be at about 3.1 per cent over the last year and, of course, again, like I said, inflation being 5.7 per cent.

Now, because of that, what we know is that the people of Alberta's wages are not able to keep up with the cost of living that is happening across the province. We have seen utility rates substantially increase. Yesterday natural gas was on a tear. I think it's up to 8 cents a kilojoule right now. We've seen the price of fuel increase substantially. We've seen the price of looking at our basic needs such as our food costs increasing substantially, yet we've seen nothing within this bill or this budget that is addressing any of those cost pressures.

Now, the major concern around that, as we all know, is that when inflation continues to increase and our wages aren't able to keep up with that, our purchasing power also substantially decreases, so Albertans are at a place right now where they're not able to take their earnings and reinvest that into our economy.

Now, to have a budget introduced into this Legislature that is purely based on the price of oil, for the government to be applauding the fact that they have a balanced budget, again, on the price of oil, which is a resource that all Albertans own and should have some form of benefit from – we have not seen that same respect for that resource and the value of that resource reinvested into the needs of Albertans.

Now, the government could have done a couple of things, and I've spoken about those repeatedly since this budget has been introduced. One of the major ones would be the fact that they should have looked at the inflation. They should have looked at the fact that Albertans' incomes are not keeping up with the cost of inflation, and they should have reversed their decision when it comes to taxing personal income tax because, of course, what we know is that the average family is now going to lose about \$500 alone on their basic personal exemptions when it comes to their income tax. That's pretty substantial at a time where the discrepancy between inflation and wages is significant, and we know inflation is going to continue to go up. We saw the Bank of Canada already, just recently in the last couple of days, increasing the interest rates in relation to mortgage payments, in relation to car payments. That will put more stress on the average Albertan.

Now, that \$500 could have been part of the basic personal exemption, could have been put back into the pockets of Albertans to help them address the increased costs that we're now seeing, but the government chose not to do that, which I believe they should still reconsider, given the fact that we're still in second reading to be able to look at this bill, reconsider the decisions that have been made and support Albertans by giving that \$500 back. That's one simple solution.

Now, of course, the other piece of that is that we saw this government promise a \$150 rebate, which Albertans have not seen yet, at a time where, as I said, not only yesterday we saw the price of natural gas significantly increase pretty much overnight, knowing that those bills now at the end of this month are going to be substantially higher. Again, the promise that this government made

to help bring down those costs has not been presented to the people of Alberta, nor have they received any type of relief in regard to that.

Now, there were other things that this government chose to do, which was basically looking at, again, another tax on inflation for AISH recipients, because they're going to lose about \$3,000 in real purchasing power with the changes that have been made to AISH. Senior couples that are on the Alberta seniors' benefit plan are also going to lose about \$750 given the fact that this government has not kept up with inflation. Of course, there are other hidden fees that were introduced within this budget: tuition increases, park fees, insurance costs, utility bills. All of those things that the government has the ability to create policy that would help bring down those costs this government has chosen to ignore and not introduce anything in regard to this particular bill.

I think it's disingenuous to Albertans to say that we should be celebrating this budget, because, as I've said, a balanced budget is only good if it helps the people of Alberta, and there's a way to do it. I mean, we look at the budget and we look at the projected value of oil, which I think was at a very low number of \$70 a barrel, I believe – it might have been a little bit less – and we're already over \$100 a barrel. There is going to be a significant amount of revenue coming into the province that was never budgeted within this piece of legislation.

10:10

Because it wasn't budgeted, the government will come out next quarter and try to celebrate how they've done even better than what they told Albertans they initially thought they were going to do, yet there will be no policy changes, no legislation that we have seen that will actually speak to the pressures that Albertans are facing.

You can balance a budget and still make sure that you're providing services. The significant cuts to health care, the conflict within the bargaining process between our health care workers and the government right now, the request to take substantial wage decreases at a time where this government is talking about the amount of revenue . . . [interjection] I will accept an interjection.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, through you, to the Member for Edmonton-Manning. I think it's particularly worth noting, not just in this House but, you know, for Albertans in general, that this budget, this UCP budget, in fact, was underestimating the revenue from oil and gas quite dramatically, and while we don't have to calculate the exact amount now, because this is an unfolding story as we speak – right? – I think the government tabled in this budget a \$500 million surplus, something like that. It's considerably more than that. It's exponentially more than that. You know, what I fear is that, cynically, this UCP government will try to buy Albertans off in the next election by suddenly appearing with billions of dollars of surplus in a matter of months. In fact, we probably have that right now.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the interjection. He is correct. As of right now with the tax on inflation, in fact, what the government of Alberta will be doing is getting a \$1 billion surplus in just income taxes alone, a billion dollars off of Albertans just by the fact that they did not remove their decision to tax personal income tax.

It's a billion dollars. Now, of course, that is a billion-dollar tax grab. By taxing inflation and failing to index the income tax system, all of our constituents should be very concerned. I know that I have constituents in my own riding whose bills alone on utilities have doubled. That \$500 that they would have received back on their income taxes would have paid at least one month of their utility

bills, yet we haven't seen a shift or a change by this government to move that back and look at making sure that Albertans have their income tax returned to their pockets at a time when they don't need to be doing it.

Now, of course, the other piece of that, as the hon. member did say, is that this is one of those things where this government continues to try to position themselves to go into another election where they can start celebrating surpluses, talk about how great they did fiscally. We see that even with the 13-cent rebate on the provincial tax this government has put on fuel. Now, it's not a balanced 13 cents. I've talked about this already in the House a few times. We know for our agricultural industry specifically that they used to have a tax exemption on their dyed fuel. Part of the reason for that was to make sure that our agricultural industry still had a competitive advantage and a comparative advantage across jurisdictions so that those costs that they were incurring were able to be off-set, and it was one way to look at decreasing some of the input costs that were going to be required to get, you know, crops ready, to do aerial spraying, all of those things. Yet we didn't see the government make an adjustment there. Dyed fuel, regular fuel: they're now the same.

Why the government chose not to do that I don't understand, especially at a time where we continuously hear from our agricultural sector the stressors that they have when it comes to the increase in input costs. Fertilizer is going up. Feed costs are going up. Fuel is going up. Their transportation costs are going to go up. The demand on the supply chain is going to be extreme come harvest. Yet we saw nothing within this piece of legislation that would address that.

Now, again, at a time where we see many of our corporations doing quite well, our oil and gas industry doing very well, we again saw this government hold fast on keeping the corporate taxes low yet increasing every Albertans' taxes. It doesn't make sense. Why does this government feel that Albertans should continuously have to keep paying more out of their pockets at a time when they're cutting the corporate income tax? It's one more tax on Albertans and a complete disregard for the corporations that are benefiting from the natural resources of our province that are owned by the people of this province.

There should be a balance between what this government expects from corporate income tax and what they expect from personal income tax, yet they didn't index corporate taxes; they left it flat. That, I think, is a real concern because, again, we're talking about a resource that is owned by the people of Alberta, a resource that corporations are benefiting from, yet they're not paying the taxes back to the very people that own that resource at a time when this government feels like Albertans should have to pay more, at a time where inflation goes up, at a time where their wages are not matching the cost of inflation.

We know, and this government will continuously talk about the fact that: well, this is about job creation and reinvesting into the job market, but we haven't seen the evidence that these corporations, that haven't had to pay the income tax at the same rate as personal income tax, haven't had to keep up with inflation, are actually creating or reinvesting into the market. If they were, we would have way more jobs. What we are seeing is that the revenue that many of these corporations are benefiting from, the profits that they're making, are actually just being put back into their dividends, they're paying their shareholders, and they're not actually reinvesting it into the employment market.

That is another big concern, because when this government continuously talks about employment and the jobs that are being created in Alberta, one, we're behind the rest of the country still,

but on top of that, the jobs that this government continuously talks about are part-time positions; they're not full-time. They're not positions that are paying mortgages and that are high paying; they're lower earning part-time positions.

The government should have an expectation that when you give a corporate income tax cut, because that's what it is, and when you're trying to give corporations a benefit to be job creators, that they would create full-time, long-term, mortgage-paying positions, yet we haven't seen that. So, then, why are they continuously getting a tax cut? Why are Albertans having to pay more in their personal income taxes when corporations don't have to?

Mr. Speaker, I do believe that this piece of legislation has fallen short. I believe that the government could have been far more in tune to the realities of the markets and what was going on with inflation and the cost of living and the fact that we know that our wages aren't keeping up in this province to those demands. They could have created policy, and they could have done that within their legislation to ensure that all Albertans are able to pay their bills, are able to pay their mortgages, and that we are successful as we move forward, and that that purchasing power that we need Albertans to have to keep our economy moving forward is there.

Right now we don't have that, and people are worried about whether or not they're going to be able to pay their next utility bill. They're worried about whether or not they're going to pay their next mortgage payment. So I would encourage this government to go back and reconsider the decisions they've made and help to support Albertans with this increased cost of living.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on second reading of Bill 2 are there others? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be back here in the House and have an opportunity to speak to Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, and much like . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt; however, I believe that the hon. member has spoken to second reading of Bill 2 previously.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

10:20

Mr. Eggen: Am I good on that one?

The Speaker: Yup, you're okay.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Good.

I have a mask on. See; it really is me.

Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words in regard to the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Again, I will refer back to some very excellent analysis by the member previous from Edmonton-Manning, you know, just talking about priorities and perception and expectations and responsibilities of a government to the population that does elect it. I think we see a pretty good case of the application of that responsibility and the dashing of expectations and, really, a lack of direction that this budget kind of points to.

We know that it's important to be fiscally prudent, but this has to be balanced with a sense of what you are responsible for, right? When it comes down to the provincial budget here and anywhere, really, the lion's share of that expenditure is to the responsibility to health care and education and the safety of the population in general. What I see, and I think what Albertans see across the province – and I've been travelling around the last couple of weeks quite a lot, Mr. Speaker, to different parts of the province: to Red

Deer; to Camrose; to Canmore; Calgary, several times; Edmonton, of course, I just wake up and I'm in Edmonton, and what I'm seeing as I've been door-knocking, obviously, is that there's a real gap between what people are seeing on the ground and what this government is saying in regard to not just their budget but their style and choices around governance in general.

One of the most striking things that I see, and I hear it on the ground in all of those places and more, is that health care and access to health care is severely curtailed, especially in smaller centres, where you literally have places like Boyle and Edson and southern Alberta – different towns – having to close down their emergencies or the equivalent of their emergencies in a town because they have inadequate staff for those services, you know?

The reason I mentioned health care and then safety and security is that the two, Mr. Speaker, go hand in hand, right? If you live in an area where you have an expectation that, you know, within 30, 40, 50 kilometres even you can access emergency care and suddenly that's not there, it literally undermines the safety and the security of your family even if you don't happen to have an emergency at that moment. You know that it could be there and it might not be there. That devalues the ability for people to live in a place. It devalues the property value as well. People say, you know: "We're going to move here; it looks like a nice place, a nice town. How's the local hospital?" and you say, "Well, actually, it's shut down half the time because we don't have enough doctors or nurses." That literally puts pressure on the economic development and the habitability of a place, right?

Mr. Speaker, when I look at this budget and the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, I'm looking at those things. Another element that I talked about: about the lion's share of any given provincial budget being, of course, in regard to education. What my particular responsibility is as the official opposition critic for postsecondary education, for colleges, universities, polytechnics around the province – again, we've seen generational cuts, probably some of the biggest cuts in the history of this province, to this sector, and here we are in 2022 with a surplus and we don't see that turning around, right? At least approaching \$700 million taken out of the system in the previous three budgets, and those colleges, universities, and polytechnics are suffering. They're reeling with layoffs, with program closures, and just a real lack of direction for the future.

When you take a certain percentage of money from a facility like the University of Alberta in Edmonton or the University of Calgary and so forth, you know, it takes longer for those cuts to be felt, but in some places . . . [interjection] I'd be happy to take the intervention. Thank you.

Ms Goehring: Thank you. I just want to acknowledge some of the incredible work that you've been doing travelling the province, talking to our postsecondary, whether it's instructors or students or families that are deciding to go into postsecondary. You talk about the incredible impacts, and I've heard you share some powerful stories here in this House about what's happening with those that are wanting to get into postsecondary but aren't able to because of the cuts that have happened. I mean, you see it every day when you're talking to Albertans and advocating on behalf of them. You hear their personal struggles and the impacts of the finances and the devastating cuts that this government has made. I would love it if you could share some of that again in this House because I don't feel that this government is taking into consideration the personal impact that's being had across the province with so many families, students, that are really struggling with the horrible decisions that financially this government is making.

Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. I appreciate that. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, you know, we've been sharing that information and talking about it, but sometimes stories are the most powerful way by which to really understand what's going on. The story that I hear, compelling, over and over again from Fort McMurray down to Lethbridge – right? – and the colleges there is that any time you're increasing the tuition rate by 20 to 23 per cent, for example, across the province and then, on top of that, extraordinary tuition increases between 20 to 40 per cent, even up to 103 per cent for a certain counselling program at the University of Alberta, then you are literally shutting the door for a certain sector of the population that just can't afford it. If you move from here to here, you're literally disenfranchising thousands of people from being able to even consider going to university or college or a polytechnic or upgrading themselves as well.

I mean, I know a certain person in my own family that was accepted to the nurse practitioner program, which is a fantastic program. It really helps with our health care system, Mr. Speaker. It really helps to diversify critical care, and I think that this government at least on paper and in words does support using more nurse practitioners in our health system, right? But the words on paper are quite different from what actions do project, and the action is that they've increased the tuition for nurse practitioners such that many people just are not going to go. They literally will not go because they can't afford it, right?

These are usually registered nurses that are already working. They probably, maybe have a family and so forth, so they're already having to budget their time and their money and consider advancing themselves in postsecondary. That's the target for a nurse practitioner, but that program is going to be in trouble because for a whole lot of the many people that were considering it, including my own daughter, it just isn't possible anymore, right? There's a story right there.

I think that we could lose a lot of people. And the extension of that story, Mr. Speaker, is that for the first time since the early 1980s we have a net migration of people between 18 and 25 years old out of this province, right? Again, that is a loss that is irreparable and has long-standing effects to our population. If you're losing that critical group of people – right? – those young people that we educated through K to 12 and set them up and had an expectation for that generation to be here to work and to prosper, if we're losing that, again, we're in big trouble, don't you think, Mr. MLA?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: I was going to call you minister.

10:30

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much. That's twice today.

You know, I appreciate your comments, and I just wanted to talk a little bit about – you're talking about the cuts to our postsecondaries, the impact it's having on driving students out of the province, which is very, very bad for our province, for our economy, for the future. I was hoping you could also touch on the fact that we know technology companies that are looking to relocate across this country or internationally rely on a strong talent pipeline. That's something that we support very much. This budget has fallen short on funding our postsecondaries, so I was hoping the member can comment on the impact not just it'll have on the outflow or outmigration of young people, but what will that do for Alberta companies or for Alberta trying to attract these major players?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. I appreciate that. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, you know, strikes on an

important synergy that was just starting to take root between postsecondary and technology here in the province. Yeah, we've seen growth in technology investment across the country. Again, if you are looking at these things as a competition between the 10 provinces and three territories, then everybody is kind of moving up on this pretty much, and Alberta is still lagging behind. At that very particular moment, Mr. Speaker, when we need to diversify our economy and work together to try to keep those young people in the province, then, again, this choice around our budget and supplementary supply and the money we have and resources that we own together – it's not being invested in the right place. Simple as that, right?

If you lose those people, young people, they probably don't come back, right? If a company sees that the universities or colleges or polytechnics are in any way compromised on long-term, stable, predictable funding, then, again, people – they vote with their feet, quite frankly, or they just never even come. You know, it takes a generation or many generations, in some cases, to build the reputation and the integrity of a postsecondary institution, but it only takes a few months to lose it. Lose your reputation: it's gone, very hard to get back. That's what's happening now. Between the lack of investment in postsecondary and a lack of, I guess, let's say, certainty or security and affordability for young people, I think that's a pretty toxic combination, and we certainly could do better.

I know that an investment in postsecondary pays exponential returns. There are no two ways about it. We saw the University of Calgary calculating the literally billions of dollars that the University of Calgary contributes to the city of Calgary's GDP, if we could call it that, right? I mean, it's a bit fluid. I met with the president again during these last couple of weeks down in Calgary, and he calculated, you know, a \$5 billion or \$6 billion contribution to the overall economy of the city of Calgary, and we could expect that there's some equivalency to that in Edmonton with the University of Alberta and Lethbridge with the University of Lethbridge and Olds with Olds College and Vermilion with Lakeland. I could go on, Mr. Speaker. There are 26 colleges, universities, and polytechnics scattered across this province. It's a unique situation that no other province has, really, that geographic mix of small, medium, and large polytechnics and trades and universities.

You know, Mr. Speaker, you don't know what you've got until it's gone sometimes, and when a place like Lakeland College or Concordia takes a cut – I was there as well last week or 10 days ago – they're having to lay off staff, close programs. Concordia is losing its nursing program, for example, which was an important part of servicing not just Camrose but the whole region all the way up the highway, to social workers as well. I mean, if people train in a certain place, they're more likely to stay there, too.

Mr. Speaker, you know that because, of course, you have Olds College, which really helps to backstop the town of Olds' economy. Simple as that, right? Things might see an economic downturn through energy or whatever, but, hey, we've always got the college. You can see people playing off the synergy there, with the hotel and the brewing program – I definitely took a tour and tasted some of the beer; it was really good – and the abattoir that they have there, the synergy of having the high school in the same campus as the college. I mean, these are all things that happened with a long-term, sustainable investment in funding from the province of Alberta to colleges and universities and polytechnics here in Alberta.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you. I have appreciated the member's comments so far in terms of budgeting priorities and how it impacts Albertans when we look at the bill before us. I think it's important

to again note that when we compare the work of the NDP government from 2015 to 2019 and the investments that we did make in postsecondary education to properly freeze postsecondary tuition for Albertans to what we've seen under the UCP, where institutions have now actually had to come to the minister and ask for increases of upwards of a 100 per cent on some programs, I think it clearly shows the difference in values between the NDP and the UCP and clearly shows the difference in an understanding of how we support our economy and diversification of our provincial economy, especially when we made those decisions when the price of oil was so much lower, recognizing that no matter what the price of oil is, Mr. Speaker, we have to ensure that we're supporting Albertans. It's rich, for lack of a better term, that while we have the price of oil now where it is, we've seen the UCP making these decisions.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you for that. Thank you for bringing me back to, of course, the political realm – right? – which is an important part. People like to denigrate, you know, political elements to policy and so forth, but it's all about that, really. I mean, at least we have, Mr. Speaker, a democratic way by which we can choose and to constructively engage a population and have alternatives, quite frankly. Again, that's a good reminder. I don't know what the price of oil is today, but it's got to be close to a hundred bucks. We were dealing with a \$25 barrel back when we were continuing to invest in postsecondary, as just one example. You've got to do that.

I mean, you see it in other jurisdictions, for sure, right? Ireland: it's always tenuous, their economy. They ebb and flow and manage. But they realized a long time ago that their biggest asset is their young people and trying to keep them there, so they have a very affordable college and university program where many of the basic operations and basic tuition are free. The Germans do the same thing, knowing full well that, you know, it's not the coal mines of Germany that keep the country going, but it's the auto industry and their technology industry and so forth and their medical, biomedical industry. Those are the things that move an economy and are some things you can be sustainably pointing to for now and the future.

I mean, those are the kinds of things we need to do here in the province of Alberta, right? I always get a head nod when I talk about these things. The Calgary Chamber of commerce had put it as their top priority to invest in the city of Calgary, and it's a critical element of a redevelopment policy and program to the downtown especially, to have the universities and colleges being invested much more integrally in downtown Calgary.

It goes on from there, right? You can't find a place that – you know, Keyano College: when I was in Fort McMurray a couple of times in the last few months, again, people just really want that as an anchor to the community so that it's not just a place to work and go but a place where people can buy houses and start families and have their kids go to college and get a trade education and things like that.

The whole point here, Mr. Speaker, is that, you know, budgets are the enabling tool for all of these other things, for education and health care, for safety and security, for building the infrastructure that we need to grow, all of those things. Albertans are looking for that, right? Of course, we want to be prudent with our money, and we want to make sure that we're investing and saving for the future as well. People like to equate the provincial budget with a household budget, and right now household budgets in Alberta are suffering. Albertans demand and expect more, and we will be here to help deliver that for them.

Thank you.

10:40

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, an important piece of legislation that helps this government implement some of the terrible decisions they have made through Budget 2022. In the last two weeks I had the pleasure of attending many different events in my constituency and had the opportunity to talk to many people about the issues facing them. While the government is busy patting themselves on the back for the increase in the WTI price, people are hurting. Their budgets are not balanced, and they're struggling to make ends meet.

In my riding in particular northeast Calgary represents some of the neighbourhoods that are among the neighbourhoods with the lowest per capita income in comparison to many other neighbourhoods in the city of Calgary: Taradale, Martindale, Saddle Ridge. All of them have average household incomes around \$29,000, \$30,000 as compared to the average in Calgary of \$42,000 to \$45,000, which means that increases in their insurance costs, increases to their utility bills impact them way harder than some people in other neighbourhoods. I mean, these impacts are difficult to digest for many Albertans across this province, but because I represent some of those neighbourhoods with people who have been impacted already a fair bit by this government's policies, they have been particularly hit hard.

While they have income tax open, what this government could have done to help Albertans was that they could have reversed the changes they have made to income tax exemption brackets, that bracket creep that the Premier used to call while in Ottawa an insidious and pernicious tax grab. That decision alone is taking almost \$500 from those Albertans' pockets at a time when they need that money the most. It's costing Albertans across this province almost a billion dollars, and government is working overtime to do everything that doesn't help people in my riding and people across this province at a time when cost of living is going up, like, from utility bills, insurance costs, tuition fees, and even park fees. This government is bending backwards to find more ways to tax Albertans and especially to tax those Albertans who are in the lowest tax brackets, all the while giving billions of dollars – billions of dollars – to the most profitable corporations.

For instance, when we talk about insurance, the first step that this government took was to remove the 5 per cent increase cap on the premiums. I remember the government trying to convince us that unless they do so, insurance companies will leave the province, the insurance business won't be viable, and whatnot. They were standing with the insurance companies and not with Albertans. They then even tried to hide the annual report detailing the premiums, claims, payouts, all those things so that Albertans won't find out that their decision was not based on facts. Their decision was to please their friends, lobbyists, and insiders.

Last week we found out that insurance companies made over a billion dollars in the last two years even during the pandemic, where every business was hurting, every small business was hurting. Albertans were hurting. They were struggling to make ends meet . . . [interjection] I'll take the intervention.

Ms Goehring: Thank you. I think it's important to highlight how some of these decisions are being made. You talked about a government that makes decisions based on what their friends need, not what the average Albertan needs. You talk about businesses struggling. You talk about families struggling. There are so many examples of decisions that this government has made that are based

on supporting their friends, the insurance companies, for example, that you highlighted.

When we talk about how the financial decisions made by this government impact families, what are those implications? What happens to a family in Alberta when they're looking at their budget and they see that this government is making decisions to support their friends and not the average Albertan? What does that family budget look like because of the financial decisions that this government has made, because of the decision that they've made to support their friends, not Albertans? I'd like to hear a little bit more about what that means for a family who's struggling to cover the cost of insurance.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you for this important question. Last weekend I was in Banff, and I went out door-knocking with my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, and we stopped at a house where a single mom spoke to us. She was a barber, and she shared her story with us. Her business is not doing well. She was barely making ends meet throughout the pandemic, and now her utilities have gone up almost double, from \$300 to \$650. Her insurance has gone up, and basically she wasn't able to pay the rent because she was worried that her utilities would be cut off. These are real people. These are real Albertans who are impacted by this government's decision not to take action, not to do anything to make life affordable for Albertans. They promised relief of \$50 on utilities, and on the gas that relief hasn't kicked in yet. If Albertans' bills are going up, like, from \$300 to \$600 or \$700, \$50 a month does not make much of a difference.

10:50

These increases are a direct result of this government removing the 6.8 cent per kilowatt hour cap that we had in place. That's the direct result of government removing that cap in favour of the corporations, in favour of their friends, and leaving Albertans on their own to fend for themselves. That's how out of touch this government is from Albertans and issues facing them. [interjection] I'll take another intervention.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you. I appreciate the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. We all have critic areas, and what I'm curious to know is: how is this budget affecting your critic area specifically? I know that we've seen a lot of delays in the execution of justice here in the province of Alberta, and I know just anecdotally from my neighbour I was talking to yesterday – right? – who said that, you know, “I have cases that get deferred so many times that they're lost. They literally are gone.” Whatever transaction or whatever issue it is, after a certain period of time without the timely intervention and a court date or appearance and so forth you lose that case.

Mr. Sabir: Well, thank you. That's a really important question. Over the last three budgets this UCP government has cut over \$200 million from the justice system – over \$200 million from the justice system – and they have not done anything to address backlogs, to address Jordan delays, and to address the delays that have and will result from the pandemic. People who want to have a day in court are seeing their perpetrators walk scot-free, their cases being dropped in front of them. It's the government that claims they're tough on crimes and whatnot. They have not done anything to address those delays.

They had their opportunity in this budget to make up for those cuts, talk to the stakeholders and the justice system, listen to their needs, and provide for what they need so that Albertans can get justice, so Albertans can access the court system in a timely manner. Instead, what's happening: prosecutors are not happy with them.

They are even thinking of strike action. Some of those stakeholders can't even get a meeting with government ministers so that they can discuss and share their concerns. That's how bad the situation is.

Back to what I was talking about. I was talking about how government had this opportunity to fix many things and fix at least the rising costs that are resulting directly from this government's policies, but they chose not to do that. Instead, this government is piling on the costs for average Albertans. Just one simple policy, bracket creep, is costing Albertans \$500 a month. And when you're working on minimum wage, when you're a single income earner, that \$500 makes a huge difference. Albertans are also losing around \$450 because the Alberta child tax benefit isn't being indexed by this government. Albertans on senior benefits – again, these are Albertans who are on fixed incomes – are losing \$750. Under this government plan and with this Budget 2022 an AISH recipient will lose \$3,000 in real purchasing power.

Mr. Speaker, these are the decisions that this government could have reversed in this budget, in this piece of legislation, but they are choosing not to because they do not care; they do not listen. The only people who have access to government and their ears are big, profitable corporations. Even when they were giving them billions of dollars, they promised that that will create jobs, that that will bring prosperity back to Alberta, that that will help us fill downtown Calgary. None of that happened.

Those corporations got hundreds of millions of dollars. And what they did? They laid off people right here in Alberta, in downtown Calgary. Downtown Calgary is still sitting at a 30 per cent vacancy rate, and the government solution is that they're giving \$500 million to the city of Calgary to fill it up. That's how bad, that's how out of touch they are from the reality.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 2.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 10 Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate March 30: Mr. Getson]

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure we'll have time for everyone to have a few words in regard to Bill 10, Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. I see this bill as following quite closely federal legislation from some time ago that criminalized this activity and, in fact, criminalized the aiding and abetting of this practice as well. So, you know, that is the main domain of the abolition and the criminalization of this practice. We should keep that in mind, of course, when we are debating this bill.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

I mean, that being said, I'm always an advocate of, Madam Speaker, ensuring that we are providing some supports for federal legislation that we do agree with and providing an educative component to federal legislation that is the main driver of this particular practice. I guess that's what, you know, we're doing with Bill 10, and I do support that as such.

11:00

I think it's important for us to realize, really, what – my understanding is that we're aiming to send a message to people who otherwise would consider sending a woman or a girl to another place to have these operations, or these cuts, to take place and just

to reinforce the message to anybody considering that that, one, it's against the Canadian law and, two, any aiding and abetting of an individual to engage in this practice is against the law, too, right?

If we can get that message to people from various cultures that might consider this, I think that's a worthwhile thing to do, right? You know, although I don't have a great deal of knowledge about female genital mutilation here in this country, I know that in many countries in Africa this is something that governments, federal governments and state governments of various republics and countries around Africa, are taking a sharp focus on, this problem, again, trying to, yeah, certainly criminalize and recognize the . . .

An Hon. Member: Your colleague . . .

Mr. Eggen: Sorry?

An Hon. Member: . . . wants to intervene.

Mr. Eggen: Oh. Sure. Oh, I'm sorry.

Ms Goehring: That's okay.

Mr. Eggen: Here I am standing right beside you.

Ms Goehring: Thank you for the intervention. I think that you raise a really good point, hon. member, that there is a lack of understanding about this practice, and I think a key part of that could be an education component, especially when it comes to the health care professionals in how they support women in this process and support those to help destigmatize what's happening.

I mean, you come from a postsecondary lens, and I think that by talking about, you know, some of the supports that could be provided at the postsecondary level, when those that are entering the health care practice should be educated on this very, very harmful practice – so when we're looking at the postsecondary lens, what health care professionals do you think should be educated about female genital cutting, and how can that impact the education of those that are serving women going forward?

I think that when we're talking about something that is not well known, it's important to consider education. Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I appreciate that, hon. member. You know, I think that that is our purview here, considering it is a federal law that we're dealing with. Part of moving cultural practices away from dangerous situations and so forth is to not just bring down the full hammer of the law and try to put somebody in jail and throw away the key kind of thing – right? – but, rather, for people to understand that not just in Canada but perhaps in their place of origin this process of education, moving away from female genital mutilation, is happening as well. So in a place like Kenya, for example, there are active programs for health.

It's a question of power, too, I think, that if you are imposing this on women and girls, it's an imposition of dominance and of gendered dominance as well, right? So when you're trying to build a modern society in a place like Kenya or in Mozambique or in Tanzania or in Zimbabwe, you must address these things full on. I think that for us as part of different cultural communities in Alberta, let's say, this might have some residual activity still, that you can work with people and educators and with doctors and public health people as well.

Part of the message is that we're trying to move away from this not just, of course, in Canada, by criminalization, but this is also happening perhaps in your country of origin, right? So, you know, it's better to not do this, and it's better for the health of women and girls and the overall equality and sense of justice in this society,

which you can follow from that angle as well. These are things that I think we can do.

You know, I must say, though, Madam Speaker, that we need to address a larger issue here, which is that we have adequate access to health care, especially community health care, that can best provide this combination of medical advice and culturally sensitive intervention. Like, you can't do that at the emergency room at the Alex, right? I mean, there are other things going on. Where you can perhaps effect positive change the best through preventative medicine, of which I think this should fall under – preventative medicine, for sure, to dissuade people from this practice – is where community health comes in and having that reach and that trust, that sensitivity, and perhaps even language capacity to talk to people and to work with them to move away from these kinds of activities, right? I mean, that's where you can actually be effective.

What I see in my own community and right across the province is that those community health programs are being cut, right? They're being cut by this UCP government, and they are losing their effectiveness by lack of staffing and by, you know, a sort of bad relationship with the health care professionals that staff and actually make community health centres work and function. Madam Speaker, again, we can't talk about specific procedures and so forth without discussing the support system that actually makes those things work, right? We can say, again, on paper, like with my last discussion around postsecondary, that we support education and postsecondary. You write it down on a piece of paper and you say it out loud here in this Chamber or outside, but if you were literally cutting with the other hand at the same time that same program, the actual critical infrastructure that supports it, then it doesn't make any sense, right?

You know, Madam Speaker, again, we can certainly help through the criminalization of this cultural practice and to support it through education. I mean, you can have a one-two combination on that, but our job here in Alberta is to educate – education takes resources – to use community health outreach to know that people and women and girls and families that are choosing not to do this are supported and encouraged, in fact. Again, you can't just do that with words and on paper; you have to do it with actual supports. Lo and behold, if you do invest in community health, there are all kinds of ancillary benefits that come from that. People are more conscious about preventative parts of their health care and know that they have the security of a community health unit that is there when they need it for themselves and for their families. All of those things are good.

Yeah. Again, I certainly support Bill 10, and I just wanted to point out that it doesn't exist in isolation; it has to be in concert with community health initiatives that all Albertans want and need for themselves and for their families. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will be supporting this bill, as my colleague has articulated previously. I do have some thoughts in regard to the legislation and just what it will look like once passed in relation to implementation.

11:10

I do want to echo the importance of education in ensuring that women and girls have the understanding and the knowledge when it comes to female genital mutilation and their rights as women. I think that, again, this speaks to a variety of concerns when it comes to women being put into positions where they may be vulnerable or there may be power differentials between the relationships that they're part of.

Again, you know, working as a social worker previously to this and working with youth, I continuously had concerns about the young women and the girls that I was working with and those relationships that they were having within their communities. I think that there is a need to ensure that as women are growing up, they understand their rights, they understand their sexual reproductive health and their options, and they understand what a healthy relationship looks like and that the people that are around them also are respectful of those positions and the autonomy of a woman's body.

When I worked in this profession, one of my major concerns was always around ensuring that the women and girls that I worked with weren't being victimized, weren't being trafficked, weren't being brought into situations and coerced into environments where they were being put into environments like sex trafficking or human trafficking.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I think, again, we have a responsibility, when we talk about pieces of legislation like this, that we are ensuring that as much education and support is being provided to women and girls so that they have that understanding and they have those supports in place.

I believe that, you know, because it isn't something that is discussed very often, our health care professionals also need to be aware of those conversations, the requests being made, and then: how do they work with families and how do they work within communities to ensure that the rights of women are being protected and that there isn't pressure being put on young girls to have this procedure done and that their personal health is being protected as much as possible?

I guess some of the questions that I would have when this bill is passed in this Chamber, if that is to happen, are: what is the government doing to ensure that our health professionals have the resources available to them to be able to manage situations such as this? [interjection] Oh, I see an intervention.

Ms Goehring: Thank you to the hon. member. I know in the work that we've done as social workers, it's often a multidisciplinary approach that we take to working with families. I know that when we look at the cuts, specifically to social work of 11 per cent, from this government, that also has an impact when we're talking about how we best support the women and girls specific to Bill 10. I think that there is an importance to understand that when we're working in community and we're working with the well-being of individuals, we need to look at it from a community best practice. Part of that best practice is using a multidisciplinary approach. I know this member has the same background as I with social work, and we often worked very closely with health care providers. We were often the first point of contact when it came to some of these young, vulnerable women when they were being victimized, so having that importance of that education piece when it comes to not just health care workers but the multidisciplinary team is important.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, hon. member. I appreciate the comments. I think, you know, again, looking at that multidisciplinary approach, one of the things that we do know in other jurisdictions in relation to female genital mutilation is that the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada states that it is mandatory for its members to report if they suspect that a female child has been subjected to FGM or is going to be subjected. It is considered a child welfare protection issue. Now, of course, because of that, that speaks to the importance of having a multidisciplinary approach. You want your pediatricians to be able to be educated and understand the signs and the concerns, the

behaviours that you may see within a family in relation to this. You want to make sure that you have social workers available that are able to respond to the child protection matters if there is a flag or an identification of this.

But not only just within the medical profession; I think we also see this in the education system as well as our child care system. Many people who are engaging with children at all different stages of life need to have the education and understanding of what signs and indications there may be in relation to a child that may be at risk of having this procedure happen or has had it happen.

Again, I think because it isn't something that is necessarily discussed often – I mean, I'll be honest; as a child intervention worker this wouldn't have been something that I would have had on my radar as a concern that would have been brought forward to me. In fact, I have never had this issue flagged to me as a risk factor for a young girl or a female child. So even my knowledge and understanding would have been very limited had I had a referral made to me as a child intervention worker. I would have required some understanding and some education to be able to work through the different factors that would relate to the family that we would be working with.

So I do think that, you know, it is definitely something that the government, as they move forward with this piece of legislation, must make sure communities are aware of and that they understand. It's one thing to have a piece of legislation introduced into the Chamber, but the policies and the regulations that will be created because of it need to be ensured to be passed along to the people that will be managing and working within this legislation. I don't particularly see, to be honest, within the legislation how this would transfer to some of those multidisciplinary professions and ensure that people, for one, are even aware that this legislation is happening.

And what does that look like in best practice? Where do health providers go to develop the skills that they'll need to be able to manage this? What kind of cultural awareness practices will be required? What kind of ability to be able to have conversation and dialogue around this issue to ensure the best outcome for the child? I don't see how that is happening. I mean, I trust that our medical professionals are very capable of having conversations when it comes to medical procedures, but we're dealing with other complexities when we speak to this very issue.

So, for me, it's not the legislation that I have questions about; it's just the way that we speak about it. It's the terminology that is used, it's the engagement with communities, it's ensuring that all health care professionals and multidisciplinary professionals have an understanding and an ability to work through this so that, one, they know how to report if there is a concern; two, how, if there is a report of a protection issue, social workers like myself would have an understanding to even be able to engage in the conversation; and then, of course, all the other factors that would surround this practice in the sense of risk factors in relation to vulnerable populations. How do we ensure that there aren't types of human trafficking occurring, all the other matters that relate to the overall health of young women that may be involved in child intervention services?

11:20

I would like to hear from the government at some point around what the next step would be if this bill were to pass. Will there be experts? Will there be funding available for medical professionals to have an understanding or an expertise in this area? What will that look like? It's one thing to have a piece of legislation, but if it's not actually going to have the outcome, then I guess the question would be: what is the intent? I mean, we know that we can create

legislation in this place, but if it doesn't actually transfer to a workable policy or a regulation that Albertans are able to use, it's kind of a moot point.

My hope is that this bill is not going to be something that is potentially approved or passed within this Chamber and then forgotten about. Hopefully, someone on the government side at some point can give a little bit more information, I guess would be the best word, about how this will then be used as best practice. With that, I will take my seat.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank all of my friends here from the Official Opposition for offering some comments on Bill 10. I hope that I can build on some of the issues that my friend from Edmonton-Manning raised in her comments on this bill. This is around her requests for providing education to new Canadian communities and better supports for those communities. I really want to underline this point, Mr. Speaker, because I do support the bill, and I want to thank the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for her work in bringing forward this piece of legislation, but although I do support the bill, I am not entirely convinced that the requirements for health care professionals to report instances of female genital mutilation to law enforcement bodies will be sufficient to curtail the practice here in the province of Alberta.

In her comments when she introduced the bill, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore admitted that the practice doesn't happen here in Alberta – and I sincerely hope that that's true – but that there are communities of people who send their girls to their home countries or to the countries of origin, rather, to have this practice performed on them. I guess I don't see the link between requiring health care professionals to report these cases to law enforcement and actually preventing this from happening because health care professionals presumably won't know that some little girl has had this done to her until it's too late. Then law enforcement will be informed, and then they can step in and carry out whatever punishments are available to them under the Criminal Code, but it doesn't fully explain to me how that will prevent this from happening in the future other than, you know, perhaps other members of that family will be spared from being sent abroad to have this done.

One of the things that I've seen over and over again as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for the last seven years is the lack of appropriate cultural supports to help new Canadians raise their families here in an entirely new cultural context that they find themselves in. I represent a riding that is the home to a number of organizations dedicated to advancing the interests and well-being of francophone-African communities primarily, and one of the things that I've heard over and over again from organizations that work with these francophone-African communities is the lack of appropriate cultural supports to families in learning how to raise their children in a Canadian context.

My friend from Edmonton-Manning talked about that in her comments. She mentioned that, in her time as a child intervention worker, she was not aware that this was even a practice, didn't have the education, I guess, or the knowledge to potentially even have the conversation with families that she might be working with. I think that if we want to be successful in preventing this practice from being carried out on children who are currently living in Alberta, then we need to provide the appropriate cultural supports, and they're not there.

The communities that are present and that live and work in Gold Bar tell me over and over again how frustrated they are to deal with the Children's Services department when there are very few people of African origin working in the department. There is nobody who speaks French who can talk to them. I think this is a critical piece that needs to be in place if we want to prevent this practice from happening. [interjection] I see that I've generated an intervention from my friend from Edmonton-Castle Downs, so I'd entertain that now.

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much, hon. member. I think it's really important, the discussion that we're having here in the Chamber, especially when it comes to the lack of understanding with the professionals that are working within these communities of newcomers. I know that you were the previous minister of postsecondary, and you had that hands-on approach with talking with students around what their needs are. Do you see a place within the postsecondary system to start that education process? You know, we have a piece of legislation here that really does nothing to actually provide support to those that need it, to provide support to those in their first language, to provide support to those with a cultural context. Is there an opportunity within the postsecondary system to perhaps provide that education piece, to talk to the families of newcomers, to say: "What do you need? What is missing in the services that you're trying to access? Where are the gaps, and how can the postsecondary institutions perhaps provide a liaison to those gaps?"

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you to my friend from Edmonton-Castle Downs for asking the question. I think that there are a couple of things that I would like postsecondary education or the Ministry of Advanced Education, broadly speaking, to address. Now, I understand that the Ministry of Advanced Education doesn't dictate curriculum to postsecondary education institutions the same way that the Minister of Education is intent on dictating a 50-year-old curriculum to the primary and secondary education systems here in the province, but I would encourage all of the postsecondary education institutions to have a look at their curricula for social work students, for example, or other people who will be entering this field to see if the education contains the appropriate cultural components that those students will be dealing with when they go to work. I certainly think that the ministry has an important role to play in terms of providing adequate financial support for institutions to undertake those reviews and make those changes to the curricula.

I think where the Ministry of Advanced Education could play a much more proactive role is in at least providing adequate English language learning services to new Canadians. This is something that was identified as an issue, that we began working on when I was minister, but there are thousands of new Canadians who just don't have access to appropriate English language learning lessons because their benefits are cut off before they can reach an appropriate level of English language proficiency, and I think that that's something that the government would be well able to address. We have to admit that language barrier is a significant issue when we're dealing with these incredible cultural gaps that we have to cross in order to address this issue, so we literally need to be speaking the same language, I think, in order to be able to address the issue. I think English language learning would help us go a long way.

I want to wrap up my point by just urging the government to take meaningful and immediate action on providing French language services to francophone-African communities in the province of Alberta to prevent these kinds of things from happening.

11:30

Now, I honestly don't know. This isn't something that the francophone-African communities have raised with me. Part of the issue is that I am a man and the people that I'm speaking to in the communities are often men, and this kind of issue, as the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore indicated when she introduced the legislation, is something that is talked about between women and that is passed on from grandmother to grandmother, as she said in her speech.

The point is that we need child intervention workers who come from an African background and can speak French so that they can deal with the families in an appropriate cultural context and work with them to explain to them the Canadian context for raising children, and I think that if we provided that, we would go a long way to preventing this practice from being carried out in the future.

The other piece that touches on the intervention from my friend from Edmonton-Castle Downs is that we need to improve the representation in the faculties of the health care professionals who will be working with these communities. You know, I will say that med schools, by and large, have very diverse populations, and they should be a model for other health care professional faculties, but I don't think that we have the same kind of diversity in associated health care professions, and I think that that's something that also needs to be addressed. We need to have more health care workers coming from different cultural backgrounds so that they understand what families are dealing with when they're making these decisions to send their children to their countries of origin to undergo these practices and to help prevent them from engaging in those practices.

There is a lot that needs to be done, in addition to the measures that are in this bill, to take meaningful action to prevent this kind of practice from being carried out in the future, and I really urge all government members to look at what additional supports and practices can be put in place both in the child intervention system and in the health care education system to address this issue meaningfully.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others on second reading to Bill 10? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise and speak to Bill 10, the Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022, you know, and to speak to this very serious matter. I'll start off by thanking the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for introducing this piece of legislation on this very, very important topic.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I know that female genital mutilation is illegal under the Criminal Code, as it should be. Performance of FGM is also already an offence under the Health Professions Act and, as such, as well with the College of Physicians & Surgeons.

Now, I appreciate the opportunity that this bill is giving all members of the Chamber to talk about women's health, the importance of women's health, and I also want to touch on a number of points that my colleagues have made. I really appreciated hearing from my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on his references to a number of points but specifically talking about his experience over the past six-plus years representing the people of Edmonton-Gold Bar and some of the challenges that his diverse group of constituents have raised over the past several years and, you know, a number of ways that the government could enhance this piece of legislation that we are discussing before us today.

First of all, I think it's becoming clear from a number of points that colleagues have made that, yes, this bill does address the legal consequences and ramifications for our health care professionals

when it comes to FGM, but what is missing in the legislation is that really important piece around education. You know, I appreciate the fact – my understanding is that the government has indicated that that will come through regulations, but I think, Mr. Speaker, the educational component is absolutely paramount to changing and preventing future cases or instances of FGM.

You know, for that reason, it should be debated in this Chamber. It should be open to the public. We should be engaging with our health care professionals to ensure that they have a voice in what that education looks like. I appreciate that colleagues of mine have spoken about the role of our postsecondary institutions and how they play a critical role in that education. It should start as young professionals are working their way through earning their credentials, not waiting for them as graduates.

Now, granted, for those that obviously have already graduated, it's important that they also have an opportunity for education in a number of different areas from, again, being trained to recognize the different signs to providing supports for women and girls who have gone through this. Now, you know, I won't pretend to be an expert or even to have a thorough knowledge of this area, but I do think it's important that we provide our health care professionals with all of the tools that they need to be successful and to support the very women and girls that we are trying to protect and support through this piece of legislation.

You know, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar brought up some very good points around language services and ensuring that our new Canadians and folks who have come from other countries have all of the supports that they need to be successful, whether that's through English language learning services – I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that years ago I had an opportunity to attend an ELL class that was being taught in, or the classes occurred in, the Clareview rec centre. It was incredible to participate in just one short class, the impact that that has. I know that those kinds of services require government support, maybe not government to deliver but at least through not-for-profits or community organizations that are on the ground in local communities who know exactly who their clientele are and can tailor those classes to the very folks that are participating in them, but that requires support. [interjection] I see I have a friendly intervention. I will kindly accept it.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, hon. member. I think you made a really good point in your comments in that there is nothing in this legislation that actually addresses the support of women and girls. The title of this bill talks about women and girls, and that is glaringly obvious, that that is missing. To me, not having the voice of those that are impacted is huge. I know that your background is education and that you worked with vulnerable youth. I just think of the importance of your experience working with youth and being able to hear their voice – right? – like, being able to hear what they need and having that perspective of actually those that we're trying to help and support, having them share their voice. As an educator, having hands-on experience with vulnerable youth – you worked with high-risk youth – you were able to see what they needed because they told you. Having that is essential, I think.

Mr. Bilous: Yeah. Thank you very much to the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs for that really important point. It is absolutely critical to ensure that the very people that we are trying to help have a voice and participate in the solution that we're trying to get to.

11:40

You know, I was very privileged to work at Edmonton's Inner City High School for six years, working with very high-risk youth.

I mean, I like to describe them as young people who have been unsuccessful in the traditional system for a number of reasons. They face barriers. In my experience, they face more barriers than the average student does and for a myriad of reasons. This is no fault to our public system, but the services that are provided currently through many of our public schools are insufficient. We often talk about wraparound services, but I can tell you that these young people face incredible odds – I can only imagine – yet show up to school every day because they want to change their circumstances, and they do so voluntarily, which is absolutely incredible. Quite frankly, part of the reason I decided to run more than 15 years ago was because I saw that the system needed to be improved and that we needed to get more supports to young people, ironically, not less, which is where we are today with the current UCP government.

When it comes to this bill, I think the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs raised a really good point, that at the moment, the way the bill is currently written, I don't see how the very women and girls that this bill is meant to help, how their voices are reflected in this piece of legislation. Again, I think, quite frankly, if members of the government were in the opposition benches, they would be asking our government the exact same question of: where is that reflected, and can we get that in the legislation? Let's not wait for the regulations, which, of course, are done by cabinet behind closed doors. You know, let's engage with folks to ensure that all voices are represented. I don't know, honestly, who the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore engaged with and consulted with in drafting this legislation. I would hope that she has engaged with those who have experienced this first-hand.

Again, you know, the two pieces that I think could strengthen this legislation are ensuring that women and girls have a voice through this legislation and, as well, a critical piece, that educational piece, to ensure that we are doing everything we can to provide our health care professionals and educators with the tools and education that they need to be able to identify when these practices have occurred, to support the very victims of these practices.

My hope is that the government is open not just to robust debate but to ideas and, potentially, amendments from the opposition but equally from government members as well in order to ensure that we have the strongest piece of legislation that we can moving forward to do what I believe the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has stated in this Chamber: to prevent these practices from happening. With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and listen to the rest of the debate on this bill as we move forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise to speak to Bill 10, the Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. I've appreciated the conversations that we've heard so far, the thoughts and comments, especially from the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, who obviously finds this issue very important, and it shows through the discussions that they've brought forward in the Legislature regarding this important and very sensitive issue. I thank that member in their responsibility as the previous minister handling this issue as well as as a private member, more recently, for bringing this issue and giving us all the opportunity to speak to it.

I think that we've heard from many members at this point that, you know, in some cases or as far as female genital mutilation goes, it is currently illegal under the Criminal Code, and that makes sense. It should be the case. Again, when we look at the Health Professions Act, performing this type of FGM procedure is a criminal act

through that association as well. There are codes in place that are dealing with this already on a federal level and from a health professions standpoint. But I think, with that being said – excuse me; from a College of Physicians & Surgeons standpoint. The fact that the member wants to bring this into the Health Professions Act, I think, is a reasonable step forward.

You know, I think that we have heard a lot of important conversations around: while this being a valuable step forward, it's important to recognize that this should just be one step in that direction and not necessarily the last step. I think that the member who brought this legislation forward has made it clear that there are more regulations to come from this. I'm very interested to see how the consultation process moving forward will take shape and what we might expect to see after those regulations and further consultations are happening. Again, this is important, that we get this right not only through this step but also through what's to come in regard to: will we see proposals for ensuring that this is taught on an educational level to health care professionals as they are going through postsecondary or even before, Mr. Speaker, ensuring that education is in place to recognize when this might be taking place and for ensuring that those physicians and surgeons understand the steps following that from the law perspective and from ensuring sensitivity on the issue and so on and so forth?

I think, again, as we've heard from many members on this side of the House, the fact is that we can put this type of legislation forward, but if we aren't ensuring that there are health care providers in communities who are prepared to address this and, Mr. Speaker, are there in the first place, this legislation won't do as much as the member might expect it to. We've heard again and again that many communities across the province are currently without primary care networks, potentially without physicians and family GPs, so we need to ensure that we are doing everything we can to provide those wraparound services to ensure that there are supports in place to tackle this issue and many other issues regarding such services.

We continue to be very concerned that, you know, Mr. Speaker, hundreds of millions of dollars have gone unspent when it comes to the health care system, especially as we move through the pandemic, and even more so it is an even bigger concern when we look at rural communities and communities outside of the major centres while it's, of course, an issue inside our urban communities as well.

Mr. Speaker, again, I have appreciated the conversations that we've heard about this. I think that there is more that we can do on this issue, but I appreciate the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for bringing this forward, for beginning those conversations, ones on an issue that is quite clearly very important to that member. I thank all members for taking part in this debate and discussion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 10, Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. I'd like to begin by thanking the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for bringing forward this piece of legislation. We don't hear about this very often, and I think this piece of legislation will certainly help us raise awareness about an issue that's not very often talked about.

11:50

I went to social work school with a diverse group of students back in 2007-2008, and that's the first time that I heard about it. I think

that, as was said in this House, it's outside the Criminal Code and it's currently not being practised in Canada, so we don't hear a whole lot about it. I was looking up on the World Health Organization website, and I was shocked that there are 200 million women and girls that are subjected to this practice. That's 200 million girls and women. That's a brutal violation of rights of girls and women.

As this bill was moved from a private member's bill to a government bill, I hope that at the later stages the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore or other members of this House will be able to bring forward amendments and government will be willing to attach some money to this bill so that this bill can carry out its intended purpose, it can raise awareness about this important issue, and it can take steps to make sure that, directly or indirectly, this practice is not happening in any way, shape, or manner in our society.

When this bill was last before the House – that was before the constituency break – I did take some notes, and the Member for Lethbridge-East mentioned that it was not within our jurisdiction. Well, the Criminal Code is also not within our jurisdiction, but the Alberta Health Professions Act does prohibit it, and the provisions contained in this legislation will further strengthen those prohibitions and make sure that if health professionals come to know about this, there are proper procedures in place and there is a reporting mechanism.

What I really want to talk about is when the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore was speaking to this bill, she mentioned that it's not happening in Canada but that there are girls, there are women that were sent to their countries to perform this procedure, and then they are brought back to Canada. I think it's deeply concerning if this is happening in Alberta, in Canada in this day and age. We do not have – I tried to research as much as I could, but we do not have any information, any data, to show how often that's happening, where that is happening, which communities it's happening in, and this bill does not address whether we will be doing anything to make sure that it's not happening and that girls are not sent to the countries to be subjected to this inhumane practice.

My hope is that at a later state the government will look into it – now that it's a government bill, the government certainly has resources at their disposal – that they will put in some effort and share with the House any information that they can gather about the extent of this practice happening here in Canada indirectly.

I think we also need to find ways that we can work with the communities where this practice is happening and provide them with the supports that they need, provide them with the information they need so that we can put an end to this practice. As my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar mentioned, people who come here as newcomers often face many barriers, from cultural understanding to language barriers. I think one way of supporting those communities will be that we are able to provide language supports so that they can learn about the systems here, learn about the culture here, learn about the laws here, and be able to adjust themselves accordingly. In the absence of those supports that becomes very difficult.

I represent a constituency that has quite a high number of people with English as a second language, and what this government has done in the last couple of months, in this budget in particular – they've even completely cut a program called learners support, that was providing language support to newcomers. They replaced that with a new program that is completely at the discretion of the Minister of Advanced Education, and people will only get supports if there is money and the Minister of Advanced Education decides to provide support for that program. With one hand the government wants to raise awareness about this practice, the government wants to put an end to this practice, but at the same time the government is also cutting those vital supports that will help us raise awareness of this practice and put an end to this.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the House stands adjourned until this afternoon at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 19, 2022

Day 20

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 19, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. I'd invite you to join in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, seated in the Speaker's gallery today is Ms Tina Beaudry-Mellor, a former member and cabinet minister from the province of Saskatchewan. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a number of guests joining us today in the galleries. I would invite those guests, when I call your name, to please rise and remain standing until the conclusion of the introductions. Hon. members, this afternoon we have one School at the Leg. I had the pleasure of meeting them in the hallway today. They are joining us from the constituency of Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock. Please welcome Eleanor Hall school.

Joining us in the gallery are two guests of the Minister of Health, who are here in recognition of the 101st anniversary of optometry as a regulated practice: Dr. Gordon Hensel, registrar of the Alberta College of Optometrists; Mr. Brian Wik, CEO of the Association of Optometrists.

Also joining us are Frances Wright along with four guests from the Famous 5 Foundation, who are here to commemorate the 106th anniversary of equal suffrage in Alberta. They are guests of the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Also joining us in the gallery today – I'm not sure if they've joined us yet – seven guests of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood who are here. They are well known to the Assembly. They are the Imperial Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose.

Finally, members, it is my pleasure to introduce to you Scott Smulski and Alan Smulski, who are guests of the Member for Grande Prairie. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, last year I was incredibly lucky to become a father to a wonderful baby boy, Clark Aaron Carson. As a new father I am excited to watch him grow, learn, and develop. I want my son to be able to get the same great Alberta education taught by world-class teachers that I was lucky to have, but if this

government has its way, I am worried about the education system he might enter.

Instead of a balanced curriculum that will teach and guide the future leaders, innovators, educators of Alberta, this government is maintaining their decision to double down on their Dumpster fire of a curriculum. From one corner of this province to another, teachers, principals, school divisions, Indigenous communities, racialized communities, francophone communities, academics, previous Conservative Education ministers, and other provinces and territories have rejected this curriculum and told this government to start again. This curriculum, written in part by the Premier's racist friend, condemned even by members of the UCP caucus, has failed and cannot be recovered.

A government that was motivated by the best interests of the students of Alberta would act with humility and understanding, pull this draft, and start over. Instead, we have the Premier and the Education minister, who choose to wear earplugs and make false claims about the previous curriculum, playing politics rather than working with Albertans to get the best for our children.

As a representative for Edmonton-West Henday I will stand in opposition to this curriculum, as my constituents have asked me to, but as a new father and someone who wants to ensure that my son has the best opportunities to succeed, I also oppose this curriculum and urge this government to finally, at long last, listen. Like all parents, I want my child to have the best, to be afforded every opportunity, and to have a government and education system on his side, something that won't happen if the Premier is allowed to force his failed, disgraceful curriculum into our schools. Our children deserve better than the UCP and this failed curriculum.

Thank you.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Mr. Neudorf: Alberta students have waited a long time for an updated and revamped curriculum. After years of declining scores in math and reading, Albertans asked us to bring kids back to the basics. They asked us to ensure that their kids are given a strong foundation so that they can succeed.

Mr. Speaker, there are some who are calling to scrap the draft and bring back the draft curriculum that the previous NDP government failed to finish. They had four years in government, four years to get the job done, and they failed, and who paid the price? Students.

This government promised a transparent, open engagement that allowed all Albertans to have their say, and that's exactly what we did. Mr. Speaker, we engaged with teachers, parents, and education experts. We hosted online engagement sessions, telephone town halls, regular meetings with piloting teachers, and created a public survey for Albertans to give their feedback.

All of the feedback received was used to make changes and even delay implementation of some subjects. We want to get this right for our children. This government is listening to Albertans, and what we heard is that students have been falling further behind in reading and math, especially due to the pandemic, and that they are struggling with mental health. Parents have also been loud and clear that they want their children to learn about financial literacy and consent.

The three new subjects being implemented in the fall – math, phys ed and wellness, and English language arts – will help get our students back on the right track with reading, writing, math, wellness, financial literacy, and consent.

Mr. Speaker, the Education critic on the other side of the aisle admitted that she didn't even read the finalized curriculum before criticizing it. She would ignore the remarkable results seen in school divisions like Fort Vermilion, where students improved three full

years in literacy and two years in numeracy using this curriculum and assessment interventions provided by this government last fall.

I ask that, for once, the opposition focus on what matters. This is real life, Mr. Speaker, and we can't ignore the progress for political theatre. Our children deserve better. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie is next. However, before calling upon her to make her member's statement, I might just remind all members of the Assembly – and I know you're all very excited to see each other after an extended break – that if you can keep any side conversations to a minimum, that way the member with the floor can be heard the best.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Support for Small Business

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise, and, as you already mentioned, I have guests joining us in the gallery today. It's my pleasure to personally welcome my friend Scott Smulski and his father, Alan Smulski.

I first met Scott a few months ago when I needed a plumber at my condo here in Edmonton. I had the fortune of meeting Scott Smulski during that service call, and I received great service and had such an interesting conversation with him about being a family man with young children, running his own small business, and the pressures of life, balancing those responsibilities.

Mr. Smulski was sincerely interested in my work as an MLA and was curious about why I ran for public office, my background, and what led me to leave my private life. All of this got me thinking back to my why, Mr. Speaker. Why did I choose this very public role that was so outside my comfort zone? In short, to make life better for all Albertans, to restore the Alberta advantage, and to serve families like the Smulskis.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, I come from humble beginnings, and I'm proud of that. I'm grateful for my hard-working and entrepreneurial family, and I'm grateful for my parents, who gave me the example of commitment and dedication running their own small business for almost 50 years. My parents taught me not to complain; rather, to stand up for what I believe in and to be dedicated, to use my abilities to make a difference.

Don't complain about it; do something, Mr. Speaker, and so I did. I ran for office because the trajectory of this province under the NDP was untenable. It was costing small-business people and young families; small-business people like Scott and families like the Smulskis.

With all of the challenges of the last few years, the economic downturn, the world oil crash, COVID, I'm proud to be part of a government that is standing up for hard-working Albertans. I'm proud to be part of a government that remained focused and, despite all odds, brought in a balanced budget. I want to thank Scott and Alan Smulski today for being here and for reminding me why this fiscal discipline matters. I want to leave this province in better shape after my time in office, and I want families like the Smulskis to know that we aren't funding today's projects by leaving a debt burden for their children to carry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Official Opposition and Government Policies

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's NDP will deliver for Alberta communities. It's simple: because we listen. We listen to municipal leaders when they call for sustainable funding. We listened when they told this Premier that establishing an Alberta police force was a waste of money and would do nothing to improve the justice system.

We listened to school boards when they said that they needed more help to combat rising COVID-19 cases in schools, and we listened to them when they told us the Premier's Dumpster-fire curriculum was backwards-looking, racist, regressive, and had no place in Alberta classrooms.

We listened to local health care workers when they said that their hospitals were overwhelmed and that there weren't enough beds to put patients in and that there weren't enough staff to provide proper care, and we're listening to our constituents when they tell us that this government should be working to make life more affordable, to put more money in their pockets. We're listening when they tell the Premier to keep his hands off their pensions, and we're listening when they tell us that we need a real plan to diversify the economy and create new, sustainable jobs.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to spend so much of my time listening to Albertans and engaging with them. I heard the concerns from Athabasca about the need to upgrade highway 55, and I was honoured to table a petition on behalf of residents demanding better for the community. Guess what? Now that road is being upgraded. Even in opposition, Alberta's NDP delivers for rural communities.

That's not me speaking, Mr. Speaker, but the people of Athabasca. Imagine what we will do for all Albertans and the communities they love and live in once we form the government once again.

Thank you.

Teacher Disciplinary Process

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, when parents send their children to school, they should be able to do so with peace of mind knowing that their children are growing and learning in a supportive environment. They shouldn't have to worry about teachers exhibiting inappropriate behaviour with children.

Unfortunately, this was not the case for constituents of mine, Todd and Loni Snow, whose daughter was a victim of professional misconduct by her teacher. In their case the current Alberta Teachers' Association teacher discipline process took five years and left the Snow family feeling completely let down by the system.

Mr. Speaker, the current ATA process is a huge conflict of interest as the ATA acts as both the union and the body responsible for adjudicating professional conduct hearings for their union due paying members. In the Snow's situation it was disturbing to learn that the ATA felt they had no duty to report criminal acts involving children to the police because it might jeopardize their own hearing process.

It is clear that this process has to change. That is why this government is reforming the teacher disciplinary process for all teachers and teacher leaders. All regulated health professionals in Alberta except the ATA have a regulatory body, like the College of Physicians & Surgeons, whose function is to serve and protect the public's health and well-being. Alberta is currently the only province where the teachers' union has sole responsibility to pay and deal with discipline for their active members.

Our constituents are telling us that this process needs to be reformed. That is why our government is replacing this outdated model. We will do this by creating the Alberta teaching profession commission. The commission will be responsible for overseeing conduct and competency complaints for all teachers and teacher leaders. This legislation will also reaffirm and strengthen the duty to report to police the criminal acts involving children. This is a best practice that will further protect our children from a few bad actors.

Automobile and Trucking Industry Insurance Costs

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, like many Albertans, so many of my constituents in Calgary-Bhullar-McCall rely on their vehicles to get to and from work. In fact, for many their vehicle is their livelihood. They deliver goods, they shuttle passengers in cabs, they drive long-haul trucks. I could go on and on. They need to insure those vehicles. Their businesses run tight margins as it is. They were so grateful to the NDP government when it put in place a 5 per cent cap on auto insurance premiums. This allowed them to plan their finances. It made things more affordable.

But this government doesn't care about any of that. Instead, they listened to their friends and former campaign managers who are now lobbyists for the insurance industry. They paid out political favours by stripping away the rate cap. What happened? Insurance costs shot up by 30 per cent in some cases. The industry as a whole raked in \$385 million more in 2020 than they did the year prior. The profits industry wide were more than \$1.3 billion. A profitable industry, indeed.

But who suffers? It's my constituents. In fact, it's every Albertan suffering that relies on their vehicle to get to and from work, that relies on their vehicle to pick up their kids from school and soccer practice. My constituents and Albertans are fed up. They're tired of this government ignoring them. They did nothing when a record hailstorm hit northeast Calgary in 2020, and they're actually going out of their way to make things harder for them now by driving up costs and taking money out of their pockets.

The Alberta NDP will be there for my constituents and for all Albertans relying on their vehicles. We will stand up for families, and if we form government, we will put more money back in their pockets, no matter what it takes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Cancer Awareness

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Spring is finally here. Spring is a time of renewed life, activity, and hope. We all need hope, but for those battling cancer and their loved ones, it is what sustains them on their arduous journey. Every April the Canadian Cancer Society launches its Daffodil Campaign. The daffodil, the first flower to bloom in spring, symbolizes hope for those battling this dreadful disease. The campaign raises awareness for support programs and services for patients, families, and caregivers and advances cancer research to prevent, detect, and treat cancer, giving hope for brighter and longer days, an optimism that soon we can find cures for every form of this devastating disease.

Cancer touches everyone. Sadly, the odds are that 1 in 2 will develop a form of cancer over their lifetime. That means that 54 Albertans receive the gut-wrenching news every day, beginning some of the most difficult, challenging, and painful times of their lives. Fortunately, there continue to be breakthroughs in the prevention, detection, and treatment of many forms of cancer, progress that is as welcome as the blooming of daffodils in spring.

Since about 4 in 10 cases of cancer are preventable, Albertans should talk with their doctors about steps they can take to lower their risks.

Combined with awareness and early detection, these actions dramatically increase the chances of survival. When caught early, there are more cancer treatment options available and more opportunities and hope for a positive outcome. Early treatment is vital to beating cancer, and I am so glad this government prioritized cancer surgeries throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to provide Albertans with the care they needed.

Please join me, Mr. Speaker, in extending your best wishes to every Albertan living with cancer and their loved ones and helping provide hope for those who need it. Thank you.

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

Unity

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is too much division. Albertans need more unity. Some say: of course we can have unity, if only you will agree with me. That's not unity. Unity does not require us to always agree. Unity means disagreeing without being disagreeable. Conflict is inevitable; contention is a choice. What about labelling and calling people names? Is that going to produce unity? No.

Some say that unity requires you to follow the leader, but, Mr. Speaker, what if you're being led over a cliff? Should you fall like a lemming? No. If you're a member of a team and there is cheating, are you supposed to look the other way for the sake of unity? No. Winning does not justify cheating. Unity without integrity makes unity unvirtuous. Unity cannot be forced or coerced. Albertans see it, feel it, and will not unite with it.

1:50

But what if the truth angers some? Should we forsake truth for the sake of unity? No. But we should speak the truth in love. Honesty is the best policy. Without trust there is no unity. It is better to unite with honesty even if the truth disrupts the status quo. Mr. Speaker, can we sow disunity and expect to reap unity? No. Unity requires listening, valuing, and respecting others. There is great unity when men and women share a commitment to do what is right, letting the consequences follow. Albertans see it, feel it, and will embrace it and will unite with it.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Insurance Company Profits and Premium Costs

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's start today with some good news and some bad news. The good news: the UCP government finally stopped hiding the report that describes car insurance company profits. The bad news: it shows that the Premier took the cap off premiums, and once he did, Albertans got absolutely side-swiped. In 2020 the car insurance industry forced Albertans to pay an extra \$385 million in premiums. Why is this UCP government so focused on shoring up insurance profits at the expense of Albertans?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we're focused on is ensuring that Albertans have a long-term, sustainable automobile insurance industry and market available to them. We are dealing with the systemic issues that are increasing costs, resulting in higher premiums. That's why we introduced and passed Bill 41. The result of that piece of legislation is reducing costs, which is resulting in lower premiums for Alberta motorists.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about what the minister's sustainability looks like for families when that insurance bill goes up. It means pulling kids from after school activities, it means putting off critical home repairs, it means less groceries in the cart at the checkout. Why doesn't this Premier listen to those families who are struggling instead of his close friend and campaign manager Nick Koolsbergen, the lobbyist for big insurance? Quite good at his job, I must say.

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite, the NDP, when they were governing, didn't have the courage to deal with the systemic issues that were creating cost pressures in the insurance industry. They just put a Band-Aid on the problem, a rate cap on the problem, that ultimately was resulting in Alberta consumers having fewer options. Insurance companies, predictably, were pulling options back because of their exposure. This government is dealing with the systemic issues. We passed Bill 41. Insurance premiums are levelling off and, in fact, coming down.

Ms Notley: Levelling off, Mr. Speaker: Intact, up 10 per cent; Wawanesa, up 20 per cent; Co-operators, up 22 per cent; Aviva, up 23 per cent. Is that levelling off?

Mr. Speaker, these companies collected a billion dollars more in premiums than they paid out in claims in a pandemic year when lots of Albertans had parked their cars. I think the Premier ought to be sympathetic. His truck sat for so long that he forgot how to put gas in it, for heaven's sake. Does the Premier really think it's fair that insurance companies profited so heavily off Albertans during a pandemic?

Mr. Toews: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, the members opposite, when they were governing, didn't have the courage, didn't really deal with the issue at hand. They simply put a Band-Aid on the problem, which was a rate cap. That was resulting in an unsustainable industry. Products were being pulled from Alberta consumers. We have dealt with the systemic issues that are driving up costs. That's resulting in seven insurers applying for – what? – rate reductions since late 2021. In fact, the AMA is leading the charge and has applied for a 7 per cent reduction in premiums. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

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

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, after 30 per cent I'm pretty sure they can afford a year of no increases.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Notley: Right now Albertans are paying more for car insurance, for utilities, school fees, groceries, and more. Everyone can see costs going up. In fact, the Bank of Canada revised their inflation forecast upward again to 5.3 per cent. Let's be clear. The UCP budget doesn't help Albertans fight inflation; it actually makes it

worse. By the end of their fiscal plan Alberta families will lose \$700 every year because of the Premier's pernicious bracket creep policy. Why is the Premier's plan to deal with the rising cost of living to make Albertans pay for it?

Mr. Toews: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's simply not true. I can tell you that the folks in this House who have raised costs on Albertans are the members opposite. When they were in government, they brought in the largest tax increase in the province's history in the carbon tax. They raised the tax on every business in the province. They added regulatory burden to every Albertan, every nonprofit, and every household, chasing out tens of billions of dollars of investment. The members opposite have no right to ask these kinds of questions with respect . . .

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

Ms Notley: After inflation the second-largest contributor to the rising cost of living in this province is this government. It's simple. The greater the inflation shoots up, the less Albertans get back in benefits. The average family of four will get \$125 less every year from the child and family benefit, low-income seniors lose \$900 a year on the seniors' benefit, and Albertans on AISH get \$3,500 less. Why doesn't the Premier help Albertans fight the rising cost of living by giving them the benefits that they are entitled to?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we are working at dealing with the issues around the cost of living. We inherited a fiscal train wreck from the members opposite, and we embarked on a four-year plan to bring fiscal responsibility to this government and to this province. In spite of that and in spite of having support payments for our severely handicapped much higher than other provinces, we did not reduce those payments. [interjections] We've maintained those payments well above . . .

The Speaker: Oh, it's so unfortunate. You didn't have the opportunity to provide a heckle that may have been unparliamentary.

The Minister of Finance is the one with the call.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have maintained those payment amounts well above any other province's levels of supports, and on top of that, we've brought in a balanced budget.

Ms Notley: Well, that might sound just great if they hadn't ran in the last election, Mr. Speaker, on the promise of indexing AISH and then suddenly turned around and broke their promise. Now, yesterday MNP released a consumer price index, and it warns that Albertans are in the worst shape to cope with the spike in the cost of living in the country. Bankruptcy filings have jumped 18 per cent, and half of Alberta households reported they are \$200 away from not meeting their monthly bills. The Premier could help today. Will he commit to stopping his pernicious bracket creep tax on inflation right here, right now? Just keep that one promise.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite talk about affordability concerns. Had they not brought in their carbon tax, the price Albertans pay for everything would be lower, and that's a fact. We're doing more than that. We brought in an electricity rebate program that will provide utilities relief for every household. We have eliminated the fuel tax at a time when energy prices are high. That will reduce the costs for every Alberta motorist, every Alberta business that uses fuel, every nonprofit that drives.

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

Alberta Health Services CEO Departure

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve high-quality health care that's there for them when they need it so that if their children are diagnosed with a severe disease, they can see a specialist; if they are in an accident, they can get surgery; if their parents need mental health support or some kind of support after a fall, they don't have to wait for hours or days in ER. Yet, instead of support and stability, the UCP plan has been nothing but chaos and upheaval, and the firing of Dr. Verna Yiu is just the latest example. Why is this Premier kick-starting his health care agenda by canning a well-respected doctor who defends public health care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. First of all, I want to thank Dr. Yiu for her years of service. She committed, provided stability for our system for a period of time. As I indicated two weeks ago, when an agreement was reached between Dr. Yiu and AHS that she would be leaving, this wasn't about the past six years; this is about the next five years. We are embarking on a transformation agenda. We've already started that, but it was delayed through COVID. We are focused on providing this service for Albertans, and we need a leader in there that can get in there as quickly as possible and lead the change over the next five years.

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, here's the real reason. In the middle of a global pandemic Dr. Yiu led with honesty, with respect, and with the principle that universal public health care is a basic human right. Meanwhile this UCP government chased away doctors, pushed front-line workers to exhaustion, and drove hospitals to near collapse in their best summer ever. Unlike the UCP, Dr. Yiu is well respected by the front-line health care workers who keep this system going. At a time when the health care system needs more stability, not less, to the Premier: why in heaven's name did your government fire her?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, that is simply not the case. As I indicated earlier and as we indicated two weeks ago and again last week, the reason for the change was, quite frankly, to ensure that we have a leader in place to be able to make the transformation over the next five years and to do this as quickly as possible. I thank Dr. Yiu for all the work.

Our government is investing in health care. Mr. Speaker, in the last budget we invested \$600 million, additional dollars, this year, \$600 million next year, \$600 million the year after that. That's \$1.8 billion in additional funding, the highest levels ever, plus we're investing in capital. We are going to provide for the health of Albertans.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the truth is that this Premier is trying to kill two birds with one stone. He's now trying to shift the blame for his government's botched pandemic response onto Dr. Yiu and AHS in order to please his antiscience, antivaccine wing of his caucus and party, one that doesn't support him right now. It's brutally obvious that Dr. Yiu is the sacrificial lamb, the scapegoat in yet another episode of the UCP soap opera. Who loses? The Albertans who need a well-functioning, stable health care system. Why does the health of Albertans always come second to UCP politics?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, that is simply not the case. We are investing in health care. The last budget: \$600 million. What does that include? It also includes billions of dollars in regard to additional infrastructure. That includes an additional \$100 million each and every year to expand ICU. That includes investing it in continuing care, in home care. That includes over 1,500 new spaces this year for continuing care and another \$200 million for more continuing care spaces next year. We are investing in health care, we are providing stability, and we're going to deliver for Albertans. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Seniors' Drug Coverage

Ms Sigurdson: Seniors cannot trust this government. Three years ago one of this government's first actions was to, without warning, remove tens of thousands of Albertans from health benefits, forcing them to scramble to find new benefits. Today I stood with Gord Colwell, a 30-year veteran of the Calgary fire department, whose wife was forced to find new health benefits after the government removed her from his plan. Can the Premier explain to Gord and his wife, Mary Anne, why he decided to kick them from the benefits they had been relying on for years?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. As the hon. member knows, this stems from a change that we made two years ago. The reason for the change was to be able to manage costs so that we can not only manage the cost but reinvest into our drug care plan. I can tell you that we are spending more on our drug care plan than ever, over \$2 billion this year, more than last year and more than the previous government as well. We made decisions to manage growth and to target those so that we can actually continue to provide for seniors. This change was to ensure that seniors who are eligible for the program would actually get . . .

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

Ms Sigurdson: As a direct result of this government, 40,126 Albertans lost their insurance. This meant that families like Gord and Mary Anne were forced to spend an extra \$200 a month to ensure that they could have their essential medications covered. They are far from the only people who this government forced to scramble to find health insurance. Does the Premier have any idea what the out-of-pocket costs incurred by Alberta seniors are because of this horrendous policy? Does he know? Does he even care?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to be clear for Albertans that the seniors drug plan is that: it's a plan for seniors. The change we made was that dependents who are not seniors would no longer be on the plan. However, they could actually apply for Blue Cross. This change brought us in alignment with every single province across the country, and we have one of the most generous benefits for our seniors. We continue to invest in our health care program, and we're going to deliver not only for seniors but for all Albertans.

Ms Sigurdson: Forty thousand one hundred and twenty-six Albertans were removed from their health plans with little warning. Those are the facts, whether the government likes them or not. This government spends thousands on private plane flights for their friends, millions on an embarrassment of a war room, billions on a

nonexistent pipeline but refuses to take action and acknowledge the hardship this policy has caused. Does the Premier agree that the seniors who built this province deserve better? Will he apologize today for the hardship he's putting them through, and will he reverse this terrible policy that has taken money directly out of seniors' pockets?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I just want to be crystal clear about this. You know, the hon. member on the other side suggests that we're taking money out of seniors' pockets. That is simply not the case. The change we made to this plan was that individuals who were dependents who were not seniors would no longer be eligible for the plan, but instead, you know, a government-sponsored Alberta Blue Cross plan. They could actually invest in that and continue to get coverage. Why did we do this? We did this to be able to manage costs so that we can reinvest all the savings associated with this into our health system. We are spending \$2 billion on our drug plan, more than any time in the history of Alberta. We will continue to support Alberta's seniors.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod is next.

Federal Emissions Reduction Plan

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In releasing its third insane climate plan in as many years, the Trudeau government has fully embraced Soviet market mechanisms beyond the ever-increasing carbon tax. Not only does the plan include a cap on internal combustion engines as soon as 2026 but now also a tax on pickup trucks. It turns out that the ever-increasing carbon tax, the second carbon tax on clean fuel standards, cash rebates for electric vehicles, and even a cap on internal combustion engines are not enough to convince Canadians to stop buying pickup trucks. Would the Minister of Environment and Parks please tell the Assembly how the Alberta government has communicated its opposition to this plan?

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you to the member for the question. Mr. Speaker, the federal government's carbon plan and emissions reduction plan is insane. It's unachievable, it's unaffordable, and it's unconstitutional. Our government wanted answers immediately after it was introduced on March 29, and Alberta government officials were offered a two-hour briefing. Over two hours after the media got a briefing, our minister of environment was offered a 15-minute briefing at the airport. In the meantime the federal government – the minister of environment does not even seem to be aware of what's in his own plan.

Mr. Reid: Given that transportation is the largest source of emissions in most provinces outside of Alberta and given that we were told a carbon tax would change consumer behaviour and was a market mechanism and given that car sales have been cut in half across this country since Trudeau brought in the federal carbon tax while the sale of light trucks, including vans and SUVs, has exponentially increased, again, can the Minister of Environment and Parks please tell this Assembly if he told the federal minister of the environment to stop this ineffective carbon tax?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the meeting with the federal environment minister, our Minister of Environment and Parks did raise concerns about the rising costs of everything, including \$2 per litre for gas and diesel, to all Canadians, including seniors, who are finding it hard to even heat their homes or fill their cars, and how this insane climate plan made things even worse. The

world needs more oil and gas, and it should come from a place from Alberta. The federal government does not seem to understand that the question is one of the above, either do they want to export more oil and gas, or do they want to export the jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the carbon taxes have not been the market mechanism fantasy that the Liberal-NDP coalition has sold it as and given that the other market mechanisms that the Soviet commissars in Ottawa continue to dream up will likely fail as well and given that Alberta common sense can lead the way to tangible outcomes, can the Minister of Environment and Parks tell this Assembly how transportation emissions can be reduced?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you what won't work, and that's taxing pickup trucks. Alberta's been the wealth creation engine of the nation, and there's a lot of wealth created out of the back of a pickup truck. Whether that's in energy, forestry, or agriculture, pickup trucks are essential, and we will defend pickup truck owners in the province from undue taxes. But if we really want to punch above our weight as a nation, as the country of Canada we should be building five more LNG plants, exporting our clean LNG to Asia to off-set coal-fired electricity.

2:10 Insurance Company Profits and Premium Costs (continued)

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, no one elected the UCP to be a handmaiden of the insurance industry, but a report, that the UCP tried to hide, showed that insurance companies charged us \$385 million more in premiums in 2020 than they did in 2019 and had bigger profits than ever. Albertans deserve answers. Today we'll ask that a committee of the Legislature investigate these obscene profits and take real action to reduce car insurance costs. Will the Finance minister support this motion, or does he need to go and get his marching orders from the insurance lobbyists first?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, that's ridiculous. We did not hide a report. My department, because there had not been a request for that report for two years, chose to just ensure the information was available online. When I found that out, I asked for them to publish the report, they moved forward ASAP, and the report was made public.

Mr. Speaker, this government is dealing with the systemic issues driving up insurance costs. We're seeing those costs start to level out. In fact, we're seeing those costs start to come down. We'll continue to monitor it.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that without warning the government removed the 5 per cent rate cap that the NDP used to keep costs under control and given the UCP claim that there wasn't a problem because the Premier personally got a rebate – oh, what a relief – and given that despite the claims by the Finance minister and government costs have been going up for Alberta drivers, sometimes to the tune of 30 per cent, why doesn't the Finance minister think that Albertans deserve an in-depth investigation by the Legislature into why people's car insurance costs are skyrocketing during a pandemic?

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the members opposite keep talking about their rate cap. Effectively, they brought

in a rate cap, which limited premiums for our insurance providers, but they didn't deal with the systemic issues. Ultimately, what that would result in is insurance product offerings being pulled back. Ultimately, if taken to its end, it would result in the nationalization of the automobile insurance industry. That's what the members want. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that life is getting less affordable under the UCP as income taxes go up, utility bills are going up, property taxes are going up, and in 2020 Albertans' premiums went through the roof and insurance companies collected \$1.3 billion in profit and given that the UCP tried to hide the proof of this by withholding the report, will the Finance minister commit that he won't try and play games with the 2021 report, and will he make sure that Albertans can see exactly how much his policies enriched his friends in the insurance industry at our expense?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, unlike the members opposite, again, we're dealing with the systemic issues driving up costs and the issues that are increasing premiums for Alberta motorists. That's why we introduced Bill 41. Bill 41 has resulted in a cost reduction across the board. It's resulting in lower premiums. Seven insurers have applied for premium reductions in the last number of months. Our plan is working.

Utility Disconnection Restrictions

Ms Ganley: As of last Friday Albertans unable to afford their skyrocketing utility prices now risk having their heat and electricity shut off entirely. It's snowing, Mr. Speaker. It's inhumane for struggling families to have no ability to heat their homes, leaving them sitting and freezing in the dark. We drafted legislation to extend the shut-off period for six months. Will the associate minister show some compassion and agree to work with us to extend the utility shut-off? It's the humane thing to do.

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are empathetic to all Albertans that are struggling with the high cost of electricity. I want to assure you that we are working and staying very close with the utilities. They assure me that the number of Albertans that are struggling with utility insecurity is comparable to other years. They also tell me that they will work with all Albertans that are struggling. I would encourage any Albertans struggling with utility insecurity to stay in contact with the utility provider. They will keep the lights on for everyone that is willing to work with them. [interjection]

Thank you.

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Ganley: Given that it has been estimated that up to a thousand Enmax customers could be affected by the government's decision to allow the moratorium on shut-offs to expire and given that one family losing their heat and electricity is too many – this is Alberta; we look out for each other – what is the associate minister's message to the thousand families in Calgary who may end up with no heat and electricity? This is his responsibility.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, it must be frustrating to be part of a one-term NDP caucus that made everything more expensive for all

Albertans, including utility customers. It was their very short-sighted energy policies that caused the price of electricity to skyrocket in the first place. We are bringing short-term relief to Albertans, but the best thing that we can do is to NDP-proof the electricity grid and make sure that they never get near the electricity grid ever again.

Ms Ganley: Given that the minister claims that he is, quote, extremely empathetic with the challenges being faced by Albertans but given that he's done absolutely nothing to protect them except a fake natural gas rebate and an electricity rebate that's woefully inadequate and has yet to even materialize, is that what the minister thinks empathy looks like, leaving Albertans freezing in the dark and telling them to call the companies that cut them off?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, it's ironic when the member who doesn't know the actual price of electricity complains about the price of electricity. You know what's even more ironic? It was that caucus over there whose short-term energy policies caused the price of electricity to spike in the first place. It was the carbon tax that they brought in, the biggest tax in our province's history. They also got rid of the cheapest form of electricity generation, and in addition they spent \$7.5 billion on the electricity grid, continuing the overbuild in the system. The best thing we can do to keep prices low is to keep them away from electricity. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

United Conservative Party Meeting Processes

Mr. Loewen: In the lead-up to the UCP AGM last November the Election Commissioner clarified that only individuals who are ordinarily resident in Alberta can make contributions to registered parties, clarifying that registration fees for the UCP's AGM qualify as a contribution if the event turns a profit. Given that the Premier has defended the use of third-party money to pay for AGM tickets and given that the annual returns confirm that the UCP's AGM did in fact turn a profit, to the Premier: are you confident that the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act hasn't been violated?

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

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a little disturbing that members in this House are against democracy. With the system that we have with the SGM, about 58,000 members are going to be able to vote, not just the ones that can afford to pay the fees to go there. I think we'll stand by the fact that we are more democratic. Every member gets to vote on the future of the leadership. This is good news. The hon. member across should get onboard.

Mr. Loewen: Given that that was a serious question to which I received no answer and given that section 34(1)(b) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act was designed to prevent groups, including corporations and trade unions, from funnelling contributions to any party and given that Albertans expect any such third parties who seek to circumvent the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act will be held to account, will the Premier commit right now, today, to a full and independent audit of the UCP's 2021 AGM to ensure all aspects of its funding follow Alberta's election finance legislation?

The Speaker: I think the member made an attempt at the very end of the question to tie it to government policy, but it was a loose string at best.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as you rightly point out, that question had nothing to do with government policy, but I'll tell you what it does speak to. It does speak to the fact that we are a democratic party. All of our members are going to get to vote, and the hon. member knows that we file financial reports every single year. Now, if he just paid a little bit of attention, was a little less angry, and tried to play well with other children, he would probably know all of these things. He'd probably be over here if he could play well with other children. The fact is that we are running a democratic process, and this is good news.

Mr. Loewen: Given that I guess it's telling that the minister doesn't think that following legislation of this Legislature is relevant and given that in addition to directly funding tickets for the AGM, it has been alleged that third parties also sought to reimburse individuals for expenses incurred at this event and given that there were also allegations in the days leading up to the UCP AGM of the Premier's office staff actively contacting businesses to coerce attendance and that similar allegations continue to swirl around the upcoming leadership review, to the Premier: is it government policy or just current practice to be seen as having little regard for the legislation governing conflicts of interests, election finance, and just plain old respect for the taxpayer?

2:20

The Speaker: That's better.

The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? We follow the rules. We work with the Election Commissioner. We follow the rules. Shock of shocks, we invited people to participate in our electoral process. Shock of shocks, politics broke out at a political process. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. minister was asked a question. He has a right to answer it.

Mr. McIver: Shock of shocks, we invited people to participate in our political process. We're a big-tent party. We'd like all Albertans to participate in our party. That's their choice, but they're all welcome to, Mr. Speaker.

Deaths of Children in Care and Youth Transitioning out of Care

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, just before the long weekend the UCP released a report promised months ago reviewing the alarming rise of deaths of children and youth receiving child intervention services. Alberta has never seen a crisis like this. The rate of children dying in care is the highest it's ever been, and 80 per cent of the children and youth that died are Indigenous, yet this report includes no evidence that the minister consulted with families, elders, or Indigenous leaders about the crisis. Why did the Minister of Children's Services propose actions that directly impact Indigenous families without consulting with them?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The death of any child but especially one who has been involved with the child intervention system is an absolute tragedy, and unlike the members opposite, this is not an issue to be managed. This is a call to action. I committed to transparency, and that is why I asked for this report. It's also why I committed to making it public. There are recommendations in this report that go through our policy and practice areas where we can do better to support kids and families, and I am accepting them all.

Ms Pancholi: Given that many of these youth died as a result of drug poisoning and that the Child and Youth Advocate recommended that the government establish a specific youth opioid strategy and given that this government has had three years to develop that strategy while drug poisoning deaths have been on the rise under their watch but that the advocate has said that he saw no progress made on this recommendation and given that the UCP has shut down all attempts at accountability on this issue, why has the UCP still failed to develop a crossministry strategy to specifically address the deaths of young people in their care from drug poisoning?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is an issue that we take very seriously. It's why I've been working very closely with other government ministries, specifically the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, because we know this is something that we need to deliver on. I'm glad the member opposite raised the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. In fact, the Child and Youth Advocate was my first call last week when I received this final report, and with the previous OCYA we had those discussions as well about how we can do better, what we're hearing from young people, how we can better address the opioid crisis that we're seeing here in Alberta. Let me tell you that we are investing \$3 million in the youth suicide prevention program. We are creating addiction treatment beds.

Ms Pancholi: Given that the report ignores the systemic issues that have caused or contributed to these children's deaths and shifts blame onto external service agencies and given that it also fails to address what is in the direct responsibility of this government, overworked and understaffed front-line caseworkers, and given that the report states that the minister failed to direct her ministry to return to in-person visits between caseworkers and families long after the initial shutdown of the pandemic, leaving many children and youth removed from their main support systems, will the minister explain why she failed to staff up her own department and allowed vulnerable families to rely on Zoom visits during this crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I saw the member opposite's response last week, and I was confused by a couple of the things that she had put forward. I think she had maybe misread some of the pieces about policy during COVID. In-person visits were in fact prioritized throughout the pandemic. I'd encourage the member opposite to reach out if she has some questions. COVID was definitely difficult for caseworkers. It did present them with some challenges in reaching out to families, but, again, caseworkers did exceptional work throughout the pandemic. In these recommendations there are recommendations for us as government, for our community partners who do half our work, and we are going to deliver.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert has a question.

Appeals Secretariat

Ms Renaud: Last week Alberta's Ombudsman issued a scathing report stating that the Appeals Secretariat, meant to hear concerns of some of the most vulnerable, is unfair and troubling. The Ombudsman found that there was no policy to accommodate those with disabilities and that there was no clear system to address code of conduct complaints. This follows a two-year investigation by the

Ombudsman into a case where a man's disability was not accommodated. He couldn't hear the director and was accused of being disruptive. Can the Minister of Community and Social Services tell us right now exactly what he's doing to address these deeply troubling findings?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is correct, and I do want to thank her for this important question. Under the NDP, under the former government, the appeals process was chaotic, and policy was rarely followed. There were recommendations put forward from the Alberta Ombudsman. Our government has accepted all of those recommendations, and the department also, after extensive reviews of the AISH program, had amended the appeals process in December 2021, with those changes starting to take place in April of this year.

Ms Renaud: Given that out-of-control inflation combined with the Premier's decision to end the indexation of AISH is hurting Albertans with disabilities by taking \$3,000 a year out of their pockets, money they need to live, and given that Albertans with disabilities already struggling are unable to get a fair hearing when forced to appeal decisions and given that as Albertans with disabilities have had to cope with these horrific policies, this government can't expect them to work through this ableist system, to the minister: what emergency steps will he commit to right now to ensure vulnerable Albertans get a fair hearing right now?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to again thank the member for that question. Specifically when she asks about the Citizens' Appeal Panel, we know that this panel is committed to providing fair, impartial, and timely hearings. To help ensure this, appeal panel staff undergo extensive training such as effective decision writing, administrative justice, and interpreting legislation. Public agencies and their respective departments are also required to incorporate orientation into the onboarding process for new members. Again, I do want to point out for the member opposite that all of the Ombudsman's recommendations are being accepted by government.

Ms Renaud: Given that this government's actions since taking office have made life harder for those living with disabilities, from breaking their promise to maintain the NDP's indexation of AISH to changing payment dates to cook their books to the Premier's threat to kick people off AISH, and given that now we see that further unfair treatment of vulnerable Albertans extends to appeal panels and processes, will the minister commit to doing the right thing, start by apologizing for this government's poor treatment of Albertans with disabilities, and commit to real transformation of the system to ensure it is fair, accessible, and compassionate? It is not that right now.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:27.

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, this government in this budget has \$1.4 billion dedicated. This is the highest AISH budget in the history of the province. I'm going to just reiterate this a third time for the member opposite, who asked for actions on these recommendations, to say yes. Please, Mr. Speaker, encourage her to take yes for an

answer. This government is accepting every single one of the recommendations put forward by the Ombudsman. We are taking action. A number of the changes just took place or were implemented to start taking place in April of this year. That means establishing procedures for reviewing complaints under the code of conduct and addressing all of the issues that the member opposite has just raised.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose is next.

Health Care Professionals in Rural Alberta

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Camrose constituents have graciously shared their feedback with me as their Member of the Legislative Assembly regarding their concerns over the growing demand for health care professionals. Health facilities in my community were closed due to a lack of registered nurses. To the minister: how does Budget 2022 help expand health care capacity and attract new professionals to rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We're moving forward with our commitment to ensure Albertans have access to health professionals no matter where they live. Budget '22 invests \$90 million to recruit and retain doctors in rural areas. We continued this from last year and into this year. We're also working with Alberta's learning institutions to train those who will return home after finishing their studies. I am very happy the member was able to work with AHS on reopening the Galahad care centre in Camrose last week. I'd like to thank the AHS team for their recruitment efforts to make sure Camrose residents can continue to live, work, and age in place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that we've been advised that the provincial government has signed an agreement with both registered nurses and licensed practical nurses recently and given that some areas of the province have experienced a higher strain and a loss of these crucial health care professionals, to the minister: what is the government doing to expand the province's supply of nurses and the care that they provide? [interjections]

2:30

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the hon. member. I was glad to see that AHS and the United Nurses of Alberta came to an agreement this year. This contract provides stability for Alberta's nurses and AHS over four years. AHS is currently working to increase the number of RNs in the province and has hired about 600 nursing students to complete their final practicum in areas of particular need. My department is also working to develop independent nurse practitioner funding in primary care, including improving recruitment to areas where health care is limited.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that I have also heard from members of the Alberta College of Optometrists informing me that they are seeking to perform more work with an expanded scope of practice in order to provide laser

and superficial skin procedures that are safely offered in other jurisdictions under similar purview and given that expanding scopes of practice can increase the care provided to Albertans, particularly in rural and remote areas, can the minister tell the House if it will better meet our rural Albertans' health care needs by expanding optometrists' scope of practice?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and once again thanks to the hon. member for the question. For 101 years optometrists have delivered exceptional services to Albertans. In fact, the regulation of optometrists in Alberta dates back to April 19, 1921, when the optometry profession act in Alberta was proclaimed. Alberta optometrists also provide the broadest range of optometry services in the country and want to do more, as indicated by the member. Alberta Health has conducted a 10-week consultation regarding potential scope of practice expansion for the Alberta College of Optometrists. We'll be developing an advisory committee later this year to further examine this change.

Educational Curriculum Redesign

Member Irwin: "The UCP curriculum is a 'UCP dumpster fire'." Those aren't the words of an NDP partisan hack. They're not even my words. No, they are the words of former Alberta Progressive Conservative Minister of Education David King. He notes that when he was minister and for decades after, including under the NDP government, curriculum was solidly developed. All that changed when this UCP government came to power. My question, a simple one, to the current minister: why won't you finally admit that your curriculum is just that, a raging Dumpster fire?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We have brought in a draft curriculum. We then listened to every Albertan. It has been the most open, transparent engagement process possible. In fact, I'm not sure what the members opposite have against us aligning with the top jurisdictions not only in Canada but around the whole globe. We want our students to learn more and be able to be more successful when they leave school.

Member Irwin: Given that it's not just a former Minister of Education rejecting the UCP's Dumpster fire of a curriculum, that you can actually add him to an ever-growing list of Albertans, including school districts representing more than 95 per cent of Alberta's students, Indigenous communities, francophones, 91 per cent of teachers, academics, racialized Albertans, tens of thousands of parents, a whole lot of students – I'm running out of fingers; the list goes on – my question is simple: who does support this government's Dumpster-fire curriculum? Don't name the Premier. He doesn't count.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that last week I was at Fort Vermilion school division and, in fact, at Florence MacDougall community school, where they have been implementing the draft curriculum since last September . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: . . . in all three subjects that we will be bringing forward in September. In fact, they saw incredible results. Students in mathematics grew by two full years; in English language arts and literature, three full years. Why don't the members opposite want this for every child?

Member Irwin: Given that students deserve a modern, inclusive, evidence-based curriculum, one that tackles the challenges of today, including reconciliation, climate change, racism, and more, one that equips students for the Alberta of tomorrow – not only does this horrible curriculum take our province backwards; the impacts will be long lasting. It will fail to prepare Alberta students for success at postsecondary and the world of work. It will drive families away. Will the minister finally – finally – commit to doing what's best for our students? Go back to the drawing board and stop forcing this useless, regressive, racist Dumpster fire of a curriculum on our students.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, did the member opposite even bother to read the curriculum? I know the critic from the members opposite didn't bother last week to read it before they commented on it. In fact, we have a world-class, research-based literacy program that is embedded into our curriculum. Dr. George Georgiou, who helped develop the English language arts curriculum, led the research and did a pilot project on literacy intervention. In fact, he's been asked to participate in a Canadian Commission for UNESCO working group to examine pandemic impacts on elementary schools in Canada. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Avian Influenza

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has detected avian influenza in poultry flocks in Mountain View county, Warner county, Cardston county, and in neighbouring municipalities in Saskatchewan. It expects that this flu will spread. In the United States 27 million chickens and turkeys have been euthanized in an attempt to limit the spread across 26 states. There is no insurance in place to cover the potential massive losses due to slaughter in prevention of the avian flu. Farmers are worried. What will the government do today, immediately, to help these farmers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Yeah. For the last two weeks, since our first confirmed case, we've been dealing with avian influenza in the province. We currently have 12 confirmed cases on different sites across the province, and to give the House an idea of the speed at which this is moving, on those 12 confirmed sites 10 have already been depopulated; eight have already begun to trigger federal compensation. So the system is working. It's working swiftly.

Ms Sweet: Well, given that preventing the spread of avian influenza will require barns and equipment where positive cases have been detected to be thoroughly cleaned and sterilized and given that this will drive up costs for farmers, who have already struggled a great deal and have already repeatedly been failed by this government, who never seems to provide compensation, quick and necessary supports, what is the government doing to provide funding, expertise, and real relief to help cover a massive increase in cleaning costs for Alberta farmers attempting to handle the avian influenza?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, CFIA is the lead on this file. We do have a role working with industry, with CFIA, with the Chief Veterinary Officer, with the individual stakeholders, and the costs that the member is speaking about are covered by CFIA. They're not just compensated for the birds that are ordered destroyed; they are also

compensated for the cleaning costs, the disposal costs. I've been through this with bovine tuberculosis, and this seems to be going a lot faster. I know it's stressful for the producers, but the system is working.

The Speaker: The hon. the member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that all producers I've spoken to say that the federal inspection agency has been helpful and that the federal insurance programs will also be helpful in addressing the financial pressures due to the loss of inventory and given that this government has dragged its heels in helping to address the financial costs for the agriculture sector in the past and given that the time for action is now and that the government needs to sign on to the remaining federal dollars for insurance, will the minister finally step up and sign on to the remaining federal insurance programs and commit to not leaving federal dollars on the table?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, the BRM programs that we're part of with the federal government on a 60-40 cost share are so important to mitigate the risks across all sectors in the agriculture industry. We have upcoming FPT meetings in June. I'll be in Ottawa in two weeks. It's on the agenda with our neighbouring provinces and the federal agriculture minister. Those conversations are ongoing.

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

Recreational Use of Crown Grazing Lands

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, last week I travelled across Alberta as part of the Real Property Rights on the road show. A common theme that I heard was that provincial grazing lease holders are often blocking access to regular Alberta hunters while allowing access to outfitters and guides that are sometimes even related to the leaseholder. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: are you hearing the same thing in your office, and does your department support the leaseholders or the regular Albertans and their access to our public lands?

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

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans do enjoy using our Crown land, and we're fortunate to live in such a beautiful province with access to these beautiful, scenic landscapes. If the member has heard from someone who has been unrightfully blocked from access to a grazing lease, the department and the minister would be more than happy to work with them to resolve their dispute about conflicting land use. Environment and Parks always encourages reasonable access to recreation for grazing lease, and for grazing lease holders who unreasonably deny recreational access, they can see those leases shortened, renewed, or even cancelled.

2:40

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the parks department has recently shut down areas like the Marie Lake campground due to the Public Lands Act mandating that no permanent structures can be built on Crown lease land and given that the Athabasca Fish & Game Association also can't have overnight camping at their league place along Long Lake, to the Minister of Environment and Parks: are guides and

outfitters allowed to overnight camp on public grazing leases or build structures on public leases, and will they be held to the same standards under the Public Lands Act?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Public lands staff in the Department of Environment and Parks have to ensure the good stewardship of our resources. That means properly evaluating proposed uses and ensuring that they do not conflict with existing uses. Again, almost all recreational access disputes are resolved through existing, established processes, and we encourage all land-use users to continue to report any sort of conflict through the existing dispute process.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that section 49 of the Wildlife Act states that "no person shall directly or indirectly buy or sell, trade or barter or offer to buy or sell access to any land for the purpose of hunting any big game or any fur-bearing animals [or game birds] on any land," to the Minister of Environment and Parks: if these leaseholders are denying access to regular Albertans but allowing profitable outfitters and guides that same access, are they not in contravention of the Wildlife Act?

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you for that question. If the member has any information about a violation of the Wildlife Act or any other act, I would encourage him to contact the appropriate enforcement officials. I know that many Albertans will be enjoying Crown lands as the weather continues to warm up, and that means there will be more conflicts in use that arise between users and even with the wildlife. I want to encourage everyone to report any violations on public land and public safety incidents to the new consolidated reporting line at 310.LAND. They can easily report it. We expect all Crown users will follow the law.

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

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Medical School Graduates and Rural Health Care

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's no secret that the recruitment of family doctors in rural Alberta is a challenge, and it's no different in Lethbridge and the surrounding communities.

Let me tell you a little bit about Madeline Szabo. Madeline's lifelong dream is to be a physician and use her passion for science, leadership, and community to serve the people of southern Alberta. She wrote the MCAT and the DAT last year and applied to numerous universities across Canada for medical school. Although Madeline has a near-perfect GPA, research experience, countless hours and awards for volunteering and leadership and participates in the university's sports program, Madeline was unable to obtain even an interview with any Alberta university for medical school. Madeline wants to complete her education and practise medicine in Alberta, but she cannot even get her foot in the door at the U of C or the U of A through her medical application process.

Since access to health care is so important, I had a look at some of the interesting statistics from the Cumming School of Medicine at the U of C. In Calgary 491 resident students graduated from the family medicine program between 2012 and 2019. Over 81 per cent of those graduates were still in Alberta two years after completing their studies. What worries me is that only 24 of them, under 5 per cent of those graduates, are practising in rural communities, and only two of them are in Lethbridge.

[The Speaker in the chair]

What is encouraging is that over 70 per cent of graduates in our rural towns and counties stay there long after they've earned their degrees. Who can blame them? Rural communities in Alberta are beautiful and welcoming places. Once doctors have put down roots and their families have had a taste of these communities, the beauty of the outdoors, and the character and pioneering spirit of the people, it can become home. We just need to get them there.

A little-known fact is that many postsecondary institutions lose money training medical students, but instead of allowing supply and demand to work by raising tuition to cover this cost and allowing more access to Alberta students, many students like Madeline will have to pick the alternative, studying abroad at huge expense, and possibly never return to Alberta. Madeline, keep following your dreams. We need you and your generation to succeed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 18, Utility Commodity Rebate Act, sponsored by the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For the benefit of the House this is the notice I sent the Speaker prior to 11:15 today. I also notified the person in question and the Opposition House Leader. Please take this as my written notice that I intend to raise a question of privilege pursuant to Standing Order 15 during this afternoon's sitting.

The question of privilege relates to statements made by the Government House Leader that constituted a prima facie breach of privilege to the Assembly during Tabling Returns and Reports on Thursday, March 31, 2022. These statements violated the rights of the Assembly collectively by attempting to intimidate the House or the Assembly with a threat to change the standing orders. The Government House Leader also obstructed the Speaker by refusing to stop interrupting when the Speaker called for order. This notice is being provided to you in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 15 in advance of the daily Routine for April 19, 2022, our earliest opportunity to address this matter.

Thank you.

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time under Standing Order 42 I intend to move the following motion.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly acknowledge that following the government's removal of the cap on insurance rate increases, as shown in the superintendent of insurance 2020 annual report, Albertans have paid approximately \$385 million

more in premiums to profitable insurance companies in 2020 than in the previous year and that during the same period the difference between the premiums that insurance companies collected and the claims that insurance companies paid out increased from \$1.151 billion to \$1.324 billion. Be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately establish a committee of the Assembly to examine the reasons causing these increases to insurance premiums and claims and to provide recommendations to the Assembly in respect of the government's options that it could undertake to reduce these costs for Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 16 Insurance Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 16 proposes measures that would help ensure an efficient regulatory framework, support growth of Alberta's insurance industry, and advance our government's efforts to modernize Alberta's financial services sector.

Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of hon. Mr. Wilson, Minister of Indigenous Relations, pursuant to the Metis Settlements Act the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal annual report 2021.

On behalf of hon. Mr. Glubish, Minister of Service Alberta, pursuant to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act the freedom of information and protection of privacy annual report 2020-2021.

On behalf of hon. Ms Schulz, Minister of Children's Services, responses to questions raised by Ms Pancholi, hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, and Mr. Loewen, hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley, March 8, 2022, Ministry of Children's Services 2022-23 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, at 2:27 the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order, 23(h), (i), and (j). At the time in question, around 2:27, the Member for St. Albert was asking a question, and if I'm not mistaken, that question was going – I forget who it went to, but in that question the member specifically said: the government is cooking the books. Now, while I know that this was not directed at an individual in particular, you cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly, and for that reason, to suggest that the government is cooking the books, certainly in a legal accounting practice, I think, would be unparliamentary and certainly, I believe, meets the threshold of

creating disorder in this Chamber. I ask that that member apologize and withdraw as I hope you would find it a point of order.

2:50

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise on this point of order. I do not believe this is a point of order; I believe this is a matter of debate. The question in context was about a number of decisions this government has taken, actions they have made that have made life harder for those living with disabilities, including something that has been debated at length in this House, which was changing payment dates and the impact that it had on a particular budget year. Making sure that we are aware of what this government has done and how it has impacted those with disabilities in our province, I think, is a priority. I would argue that this is a point of debate, not a point of order.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Hon. members, I am prepared to rule on whether or not the use of the language around cooking the books is in order or not in order. I am reminded of November 28, 1990, on page 2496 of *Hansard*. Well, this particular issue had been raised by hon. members during that time, and the Speaker of the day said the following:

While the Chair will allow the phrase to stand in this instance, the Chair also cautions the House to be much more careful in terms of phrases that are used.

He went on to say:

The word “lie” was not there; the phrase was “cooking the books.” But having now declared that kind of statement, I still admonish the House to please be much more careful in [their] terminology. Thank you.

I think that day was a very good day in the Assembly. The Speaker was wise then, as I hope your Speaker is wise today. While I won't find it as a point of order, I will admonish the House to be much more careful in the use of the terminologies which they use. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Hon. members, at the appropriate time the Member for Central Peace-Notley rose in the Assembly to give notice of a Standing Order 15. However, pursuant to Standing Order 15(4), that all members will know,

if the Member whose conduct is called into question is not present, the matter shall be deferred to the next day that the Member is present unless the Speaker rules that, in the circumstances, the matter may be dealt with in the Member's absence,

I think it's reasonable that we allow some time for the member whose conduct has been called into question to be present. However, if they are not present for an extended period of time, I will hear the point of privilege by Thursday if the member isn't present prior to then. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded for now, but we will hear this very important point of privilege at some point in time later in the week.

I might provide some caution to the Member for Central Peace-Notley with respect to the point of privilege. There is never a need to defend if the Speaker has been intimidated because the Speaker is well and truly capable on his own of defending himself or herself.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: At the appropriate time the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West provided notice of her desire to raise a Standing Order 42.

Insurance Company Profits and Premium Costs

Ms Phillips:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly acknowledge that following the government's removal of the cap on insurance rate increases, as shown in the superintendent of insurance 2020 annual report, Albertans have paid approximately \$385 million more in premiums to profitable insurance companies in 2020 than in the previous year and that during the same period the difference between the premiums that insurance companies collected and the claims that insurance companies paid out increased from \$1.151 billion to \$1.324 billion. Be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to immediately establish a committee of the Assembly to examine the reasons causing these increases to insurance premiums and claims and to provide recommendations to the Assembly in respect of the government's options that it could undertake to reduce these costs for Albertans.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 42 to request that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to debate a motion that is urgent and pressing and which I read out under Notices of Motions. I would like to acknowledge that pursuant to SO 42 I have provided the members of the Assembly with the appropriate number of copies, and I have provided your office notice of my intention to move this motion as well as notified the government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is our duty as representatives in this Assembly to debate matters of the highest importance to the lives and well-being of Albertans. The Legislature must address issues that affect all Albertans and certainly issues that hurt them directly by taking money out of their pockets. Now, last week we saw the Bank of Canada announce decades-high levels of inflation, and that same week we saw the government bury a report on rising insurance costs to Albertans. This is a report that had been released for 107 years prior. Taking this kind of money out of Albertans' pockets at this time is certainly pressing business given the urgency of the cost-of-living increases that Albertans are now facing. Members of this Assembly must urgently acknowledge the effects that rising automobile insurance costs are having on Albertans and their families in light of this new information, and we must seek solutions together to reduce those costs.

Now, as a matter of background, in 2019 the UCP removed the cap limiting auto insurance premium increases to 5 per cent. We heard loud and clear from Albertans at that time that car insurance premiums were having a negative effect on people's pocketbooks. Starting in the winter of 2019, Albertans began receiving notifications from their insurance providers that their 2020 rates would increase drastically, some as high as 30 per cent. We were told that this was necessary as insurance companies were losing money. The Minister of Finance regaled the House with tales of tough times for those companies, but there was no information or evidence to support those claims.

Then, for the first time in 107 years, there was no superintendent of insurance annual report to the public, because the same minister said that the report was not needed, until Thursday after close of business on the Easter long weekend, when that report was released right as Albertans were getting ready to head out and spend time with their families for the long weekend. As many turn their attention to very meaningful religious holidays, the confluence of both Ramadan, Passover, and Easter this year, while people's attention was diverted, the 2020 superintendent of insurance report was dropped at the end of the day at the end of the work week, a report that normally comes out in January. Oh, what a report it was. It showed that in 2020 the car insurance industry charged Alberta

drivers \$385 million more in premiums than they did in 2019, boosting their profits and expanding their gross margins. It showed that the difference between premiums collected rose from \$1.151 billion in 2019 to \$1.324 billion in 2020.

That is why I am bringing forward this motion today. Now that we have this information – it was released on Thursday after the close of business – this has been our earliest available opportunity to discuss this matter. That is why the motion calls for an acknowledgement of the increased amounts that Albertans are paying to insurance companies, boosting the bottom lines of these companies. It calls for the creation of a standing committee of the Assembly to investigate these increases in insurance premiums and to provide recommendations on how to reduce these costs to Albertans. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, it allows the Legislature to consider this report. As I indicated, generally speaking, it comes out in January, but in this case it was suppressed until after the normal budget estimates debate and other considerations of this Legislature.

Here we have an opportunity, though, with the creation of a committee to study the matter, to do something positive and propositional for Albertans. Albertans want action. They don't want reference to some obscure bill. They don't want, Mr. Speaker, to hear more excuses. They want to know that we are listening. They want to know that MLAs care about their bottom line and about the reality that they deal with, and that is why I encourage members of this Assembly to provide unanimous consent to put aside the ordinary business of the day in order to debate this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a member of Executive Council has up to five minutes to respond. I see the hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to speak against this motion. I certainly acknowledge that Alberta has what insurance experts refer to as a hard insurance market. It's a market where, effectively, insurance companies have – and this is broadly beyond automobile and broadly beyond even the province of Alberta. But within the context of North America and even globally insurance companies are recapitalizing, and that results in higher premiums, less flexibility perhaps, you know, fewer rebates than might have historically occurred. We're aware of that, and we recognize that higher insurance premiums have created some hardship for Albertans, but we're taking action. That's why we brought forward Bill 41, to deal with, again, the deep root causes of increasing costs in the automobile insurance industry. Mr. Speaker, included in that bill ultimately were additional benefits for injured motorists. We wanted to ensure that there would be more care for Albertans who were involved in an accident. At the same time, we brought in a number of initiatives within that bill and associated regulations that ultimately would deal with some of the systemic issues that were pushing up costs.

3:00

All that to say, Mr. Speaker, that we introduced the bill, we passed the bill, and I'm very pleased today to report that we're starting to see some early indications that premiums are beginning to come down. In fact, over the last number of months seven insurers have recently filed for rate reductions. That matters. These rate reduction requests have varied from between around 2 per cent to over 7 per cent, so this is meaningful relief around automobile insurance premiums.

We believe it's government's role to create the market conditions, the business environment that encourages competition. In this province we have over 45 automobile insurers. We believe that constitutes enough players to create competition. As we, again,

deal with the regulatory issues that were creating cost pressures, Mr. Speaker, we're starting to see those premiums come down.

I would like to take this time to note that if there are Albertans that are facing significantly higher automobile insurance premiums than they have in the past, they should shop around, because I'm hearing out there right now in the marketplace that many insurers are trying to get a competitive advantage and take up market share, and they're doing that with reduced premiums.

Mr. Speaker, we often hear about the importance of the rate cap that the members opposite implemented in this province. Again, I've said it before, but it bears repeating: the rate cap did not deal with the systemic issues driving up costs. The rate cap simply limited returns for insurers, and the results were predictable. In a competitive business environment those insurance providers began to pull back products from motorists. If left long enough, it would have completely undermined the sustainability of Alberta's automobile insurance industry. I had my own ideas on what the members opposite's long-term plan would be: to ultimately undermine Alberta's automobile insurance system and propose a nationalized system, which we know would not result in lower premiums. It would result in bigger government, and that's what those folks are about.

Mr. Speaker, we're aware of this hard insurance market. We're taking concrete action to deal with the systemic issues driving up costs. We did that in Bill 41. We also introduced the captive insurance corporations act, which provides additional flexibility for insurance providers, and there's more to come.

Again, I urge all members of this House to vote against this motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this motion is a request for unanimous consent. It will require unanimous consent for the Assembly to set aside the regular business of the day and proceed immediately to the Standing Order 42.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 13 Financial Innovation Act

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act.

If passed, the proposed legislation would create a regulatory sandbox that makes it easier for finance and fintech companies to develop new products and services in Alberta and will work to diversify Alberta's economy. The regulatory sandbox would offer companies time-limited relief from certain legislative and regulatory requirements, making it simpler for them to research and adapt their new technologies to Alberta's market.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It would also help companies collect information on new products and services to determine if those specific products have value for consumers. Madam Speaker, a regulatory sandbox would drive increased innovation and competition in Alberta, potentially giving Albertans greater access to more products and services at a lower cost.

In Canada there is currently a regulatory sandbox in place for the securities industry. Other countries are also using regulatory sandboxes as tools to drive innovation and economic growth, but Alberta would be the first province in Canada to establish a regulatory sandbox for the finance and fintech sector, giving companies additional ways to grow their business and create jobs. It will help financial-related companies expand their offerings, to create new jobs in Alberta while preparing for Canada's launch of open banking.

A regulatory sandbox would provide time-limited exemptions from the following legislation and the related regulations: the Loan and Trust Corporations Act, the Credit Union Act, the ATB Financial Act, the Financial Consumers Act, the Consumer Protection Act, and the Personal Information Protection Act. Specific exemptions would depend on what kind of relief each applicant is seeking and whether or not the government can safely provide that relief. This would be determined on a case-by-case basis as the government needs the flexibility to weigh the merits and risks of each application. All legislative exemptions would be disclosed publicly.

To help review applications, the government has formed a working group, including officials from Treasury Board and Finance; Jobs, Economy and Innovation; and Service Alberta as the ministry responsible for some of the related acts. The office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner would also be consulted on exemptions to the Personal Information Protection Act, and their approval would be required for exemptions to proceed. The office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner was consulted during the development of the legislation, and, Madam Speaker, I can say that the commissioner is supportive.

Successful applicants would have to meet all of the following main criteria. First, they would be required to maintain a physical presence in Alberta. In other words, they would need to have an office in Alberta or staff living in the province. Second, the regulatory sandbox would only be for companies that offer financial products or services. Third, applicants must adequately explain why the product or service should be considered new, novel, or a material improvement to the existing product or service offered. Applicants would not receive exemptions for products or services that are already offered in Alberta by other companies. Lastly, applicants would have to provide a sound and viable business plan for the testing of a financial product or service. The plan must also demonstrate how they plan to exit the sandbox given that participation would be time limited.

I want to assure all members that consumer protection is strongly represented in this legislation, which is specifically designed to ensure that companies participating in the regulatory sandbox are held to high professional standards and meet specified eligibility criteria. For example, participating companies may be subject to additional terms, conditions, and restrictions such as consulting a qualified expert or auditor, limiting the number of customers who could purchase the product or service being tested, having adequate capital on hand to support the venture, providing proof of appropriate insurance coverage, implementing specific financial security or surety requirements to mitigate risk and losses, developing new risk management policies and procedures, and/or having a way for customers to voice concerns and have those concerns resolved.

Madam Speaker, the Financial Innovation Act signals that Alberta is willing to work with innovators and businesses seeking to offer innovative products and technologies. Alberta's regulatory sandbox would provide a strong incentive for financial services and fintech companies to move to Alberta. This would add to Alberta's many other advantages in attracting new investment and attracting

new businesses and diversifying the economy, and it would do so without compromising consumer protection or government oversight. In fact, the sandbox would foster open and constructive dialogue between the government and companies seeking to enter the market. This would help those companies get a better sense of the rules and regulations and open a new pathway for them to become fully regulated market participants. It would also benefit Albertans by opening the door to a wider variety of financial products and services, which could lead to more competition and ultimately lower costs for Alberta consumers.

3:10

Madam Speaker, the world of finance is rapidly evolving, and our government understands that we need to partner with businesses, entrepreneurs if Alberta is going to stay ahead of the curve. Regulatory modernization, cutting red tape, and making it easier to do business in Alberta is a crucial part of our strategy to grow the economy, support job creation, and make Alberta the best place to live, work, and raise a family.

I encourage all members of this Assembly to support Bill 13. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 13? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to provide a few initial comments at this stage of debate on Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. I thank the minister and the Treasury Board and Finance officials for bringing forward the legislation. Certainly, the financial services sector employs more than 60,000 Albertans, and of course we on this side of the House support innovation in this space to grow and diversify the economy in addition to the very important services that are perhaps a lot more established and older but just as important to our financial lives; that is to say, the important role that ATB plays in our rural communities with those bricks-and-mortar banking options, in particular for farms and small businesses.

Now, there are many positive aspects to this bill, and it builds off a previous regulatory sandbox initiative that the minister referenced that started under our government through the Alberta Securities Commission. We have some broad agreement on the overall policy approach here with some of these new products and services that we should make sure that we are open to. We do have, you know, a relatively small population of 4.5 million people but a great deal of sophistication in a number of these areas, and certainly Alberta is a good place for various fintech companies and various financial services to find a way that they can ensure that people are in fact protected and their money is protected and that some of these innovations are taken advantage of while not putting people at risk.

Certainly, the overall resources and sophistication of the Alberta Securities Commission indicate that we do have some of those tools in place to protect people, but as we know, the legislation gives enormous powers to the minister. Those powers may assist a regulatory sandbox to work, but those powers also require the Assembly and the public to trust the government and to trust that this government can competently protect consumers when they are being sold new financial products or services or technology while being exempted from some very, very important pieces of legislation such as the Consumer Protection Act and, in fact, the Personal Information Protection Act and other acts such as the Credit Union Act and the legislation governing loans in the province.

The key issue here is trust, and Albertans have very little of it in this government. Now, to be clear, one of the biggest concerns with this legislation is, in fact, that the Minister of Finance is asking us

to trust him, someone who burned \$1.3 billion on a pipeline that doesn't exist and someone who has consistently had billions of dollars in accounting errors in the budget.

Now, on the substance of the legislation – I want to focus on that – there are a few points to make at this stage of debate. First, the power to exempt new financial products from consumer protection laws can be easily abused. I have to say that this, along with the PIPA exemptions, is the one that causes me the most cause for concern given that we still have the federal Bank Act in place. That is, in fact, federal jurisdiction, but the consumer protection laws in particular I really worry about. Consumer protection is critical, particularly when the traditional safeguards are not in place. That's the whole point of a sandbox.

You know, I don't think we've seen commensurate with this bill an appropriately detailed plan for the government to show us how they're going to protect people when they exempt fintech companies or financial services companies from consumer protection measures. For this plan to work, we need the appropriate resources in place, with the technical capacity and sophistication to understand how these applications, how these money flows actually affect people and what types of regulations are necessary and absolutely cannot be subjected to any exemption and others where, if companies are in that sandbox, consumers will not be taken for a ride anyway.

Now, we heard during our technical briefing from officials that it might very well be the case that the Treasury Board and Finance department does not currently have the expertise they need, but if required, they have indicated they could put someone on contract. Okay. This is beyond the scope of the legislation, but we urge the minister to do this now. Maybe we'll put someone on contract: that is not a great answer to questions around consumer protection when it comes to our savings, when it comes to our investments, and when it comes to messing around with both our consumer protections but also our personal information and privacy.

That was the piece. I heard the minister just talk about how the OIPC indicated that they support this regulatory sandbox approach. I will, however, flag for the government that the OIPC is consistently stretched with resources. I know, for myself, I have an appeal in to the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for records withheld from me by the Lethbridge police service, and they are reviewing it sometime before 2025. That doesn't sound to me like there's a whole lot of necessary horsepower and resources in there.

So unless the government plans to also provide those resources to the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, which I think would be entirely appropriate in this case – the point of a sandbox, as I said, is to exempt people from regulations, but the point of fintech and for new financial services is that sometimes they're really, really complex. Ask anyone in this Legislature to explain cryptocurrency to you. You might find two or three. It's pretty complex stuff. You do have to have the requisite level of legal expertise but also expertise in how these products are developed now and how they are changing over time and how people are actually making money with them, how the companies themselves are making money, and how people's investments are trucking along in them. People deserve that information. So when the minister reports to the House that the OIPC is supportive of this, I'm going to trust, but I would like some verification that that's actually the case and that they have the requisite resources.

Now, I'm also quite concerned that this legislation, if not properly conceived and executed, could chip away at the trust that Albertans and indeed Canadians have in their financial institutions. Not only our big banks but also our ATB and our credit union system are part of our competitive advantage, Madam Speaker. People make investments from all over the world in this jurisdiction and in others because they know that we have an appropriately

regulated Alberta Securities Commission. They know that it has the investigative resources that it needs. They know that we have good FOIA and PIPA legislation. They know that we have good consumer protection legislation. They understand, when investors make investments in Canada, that we have the overall Canadian securities commission umbrella and that then we have appropriately resourced provincial regulators located in each province and that there's a tremendous level of co-ordination between jurisdictions.

It's really, really important that we not take steps to jeopardize that trust that Albertans and Canadians have in our financial institutions. We, in fact, did not suffer in the same ways that the Americans did during the financial crises of 2008 and '09, and one of the reasons was the strength of our financial institutions and the overall oversight of them and indeed those lending requirements, for example, which we did see changed considerably in the United States. There was a massive draining of hundreds of billions of dollars out of the global economy overnight with the collapse of Lehman Brothers and others.

3:20

But more down on the ground of what matters to ordinary people, if you go to bed with \$5,000 in your savings account, Madam Speaker, virtually everyone is confident that when they wake up in the morning, the bank won't have gone bankrupt, and that \$5,000 will still be there. Simply put, many Albertans consider dealing with financial services companies to be safe, which is exactly how they should feel. The risks are low, and in large part those risks are low because the companies are tightly regulated, which is how it should be. We want to know that our money is going to be there when we wake up in the morning.

A legitimate concern with this legislation, I think, is that people will assume that any new financial product comes with that same level of risk-free proposition, but with companies operating in the sandbox, that will not in fact be the case. That's the point of having this legislation. I understand that there is a need to have this, but what those on-ramps are into the sandbox and the off-ramps out should be more clearly articulated to the public in a way that the public can exercise the necessary caution and buyer beware.

So we do need additional measures and transparency to ensure that risks are never passed on to Albertans and consumers, in particular in the context of inflation increases and a great deal of instability that has, you know, been inserted into markets as a result of some of the sort of COVID resettling, if you will, Madam Speaker, where we're dealing still with supply chain issues, global inflation pressures.

Certainly, people were quite used, in the last few years in a low-inflation and low-interest-rate environment, to kind of putting things in ETFs and having a passive investment strategy because people were getting really good returns out of that. In fact, they were using financial technology to do that. Many people are using Wealthsimple and Qtrade and all of these direct-investor applications now in order to make those trades and do them themselves. There's no question that many of those trades now come without fees associated with them, and it has been a good way for people to exercise a bit more control over their own RRSP and TFSA savings to ensure that they are lowering their management expense ratio. Certainly, in years past Canadians have paid some of the highest management expense ratios in mutual funds and other actively managed funds, and there's been a real revolution in that, where people are simply taking care of business on their own end.

I will say that we have done that without some of these fintech companies south of the border that are quite a bit less regulated. I'm thinking here of outfits like Robinhood, which is, you know, a broker-dealer. Certainly, there have been many questions raised with regulators on how they sort of gamify investments. Robinhood

has in fact responded to many of those by changing some of the ways that they have sort of incented more of a gambling mentality into investments, with a great deal of human suffering that has come along with that. There are now competing fintech products. I think there's one called Public, where there's a lot more consumer protection and buyer beware associated with that form of direct investing.

This is where, Madam Speaker, I'm not at all convinced that that level of sophistication resides within the bureaucracy currently given that this is new. We see just flatlined investments in the civil service. We have seen, really, no indication that there are specific resources put towards this either in Service Alberta around the Consumer Protection Act or in the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. We've seen no movement in terms of how there might be this so-called contract that TBF officials discussed within the bill briefing, how that might materialize.

This is the sort of horsepower that we would need assurances on, and maybe the minister can come and provide those assurances at the committee stage. That would be the appropriate place to address some of those questions around consumer protection. I think those are fair good-faith questions. Like I said, Madam Speaker, the overall public policy approach is one that we took while we were in government with respect to the Alberta Securities Commission, so there's nothing inherently wrong with how this legislation has been structured.

The question here is whether we can trust this government as stewards of our own money or stewards of our own interests when it comes to protecting the little guy, and we have seen nothing but example after example of a government that is blissfully unaware and fundamentally uninterested in protecting the interests of the little guy, whether it's your car insurance, that's gone up by 30 per cent; whether it's your property insurance, that has gone up because of the cuts to municipalities and the fact that the government hasn't cracked down on companies not paying their taxes; whether it's the rise in one's personal income taxes; whether it's the rise in school fees or camping fees or any of these other ways that Albertans have been far more than nickel and dined. Some of these costs are up in the hundreds and thousands of dollars, Madam Speaker, particularly the personal income tax as inflation eats away at more and more of our income.

You know, the notion that we are to then turn around and say, "Oh, okay; yeah, absolutely, Albertans trust this government with protecting their investments" is a bit of a bridge too far, I think, for a lot of Albertans, so that remains the fundamental concern with this legislation, not the structure of it itself. I think there's no question that we would want to see at least examples from the minister at the committee stage, for the benefit of the public to actually understand what's at stake here in this legislation, of what types of consumer protection exemptions the government will consider, for example.

This is not the first time that fintech and the financial services industry have come to governments asking for these kinds of exemptions, so that's fine. What kinds of examples have they given to the minister and to officials? What is actually being considered here? What are some possible fences that the government can put around some of these requests so that the public can be assured that they are not in fact going to be gambling with their own savings and investment and future?

I think it would be very, very important for the government, when it comes to protection of the privacy of Albertans, to, in fact, ask the OIPC to release whatever analysis they've done of this or whatever analysis TBF provided to the OIPC so that we can see the parameters of what's actually being discussed here and, again, with

that trust but verify to the minister's claim that the OIPC was, in fact, supportive of such a thing.

I think what would also be really helpful for folks to understand here is: how will consumers know when they're using a new product, service, or technology that is operating in the sandbox and therefore is regulated at a much lower level? When people go on and use, you know, Wealthsimple or Qtrade or whatever, they know that this is regulated under the current legislation. When they go to use one of these new products, how will they know, and how will they know which of the pieces of legislation this particular company was exempted from? Is it going to be, like, one of those big, long terms and conditions that nobody ever reads and just scrolls to the bottom of and presses to accept and moves on? Is it going to be one of those? In that case, I don't know if that's good enough, and I don't think that Albertans should settle for that.

Again, I'm going to trust that this is the right approach. In fact, I'm quite convinced that under normal circumstances it might be, but I'm going to want to see more detail there, and I think that the Minister of Finance and his officials owe that to Albertans, particularly after all of the public trust and public confidence that they have shredded over the last three years in terms of the stewardship of the finances of the province and, in fact, looking out for just ordinary people's best interests in terms of their pocketbooks.

I'd also, at the committee stage, be interested to hear what kind of analysis TBF provided to credit unions, the ATB, and other players in that space to just get an understanding of how this was presented to them and if the minister could report back on what the tone and tenor of those consultations was and if there were any concerns that were raised by them and how this legislation meets those concerns. I think that would be also a very helpful addition to the public debate on this legislation.

With that, at this second reading stage, Madam Speaker, I will conclude my comments. I look forward to the rest of the debate on this legislation. I look forward to the minister's responses and to a little bit more detail and commitment to consumer protection beyond "Just trust us," because no one does.

Thank you.

3:30

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members to join the debate on Bill 13? Seeing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer a few comments on Bill 13. Let me first start off by saying thank you to the minister for his explanatory remarks when he introduced this bill, and a special thank you to my colleague from Lethbridge-West for her comments, that I hope to build upon in my speech today.

I will have to say that the one theme that I picked up on in the Member for Lethbridge-West's comments was the issue of trust. I have to say that I have deep concerns around both the activity that's being regulated and the government's ability to regulate it, as we're discussing here in this bill. I come from the old school of the New Democratic Party, where we have a deep skepticism of the financial industry, and I think that Albertans in general have a history of deep skepticism of the financial industry. In fact, that's how we ended up with the Alberta Treasury Branch as one of only two public banking institutions in the entire continent of North America, because landowners, average citizens here in the province of Alberta during the economic depression realized that they were being taken advantage of by the traditional financial institutions, and the government of the day acted to defend their interests and created a public bank that was designed to serve them and not their financial masters on Bay Street. I think it's a testament to the service that

Alberta Treasury Branch provides that it remains one of only two public banks in the country.

So not only does our party have a traditional skepticism of financial institutions; Albertans broadly speaking have a traditional skepticism of financial institutions. Even religious traditions have a skepticism of financial institutions and moneylenders. My favourite story from the Bible, Madam Speaker – I'm sure one that you're familiar with – comes from the time when Jesus entered the temple and drove the moneylenders out because they were turning the temple into a den of robbers. So whenever people ask me the question, "What would Jesus do?" I always say that he would grab a bullwhip and drive the bankers out of the building. That's what Jesus would do.

But I know that Christianity is not the only religious tradition that holds the financial industry in deep skepticism. I had the privilege of attending a forum at King's University in my riding a number of years ago that looked at reforms to the banking industry that were based on tenets of religious faith. They had presenters from the Islamic faith talking about the Islamic tradition of not allowing people to charge interest. I hope that maybe some of my colleagues who are much more versed in that religious tradition can help me understand better that tradition's position on the financial service industry.

All of these things, our history here in Alberta, our religious traditions, tell us that we need to regard the financial industry with a healthy dose of skepticism, that extending them trust is a pathway to danger, and that's why I'm very troubled with this bill, because essentially the minister is writing a blank cheque to the financial industry to do whatever it wants within the exemptions that the minister is granting them. I think that Albertans are right to regard that position skeptically because we've seen that the history of financial industry innovation is littered with cautionary tales.

My friend from Lethbridge-West talked about the mortgage debt crisis that the United States found itself in in 2008, 2009. That was the result of so-called financial innovation, and the regulatory agencies in the United States were either asleep at the switch or intent on encouraging innovation in that space, winding up with millions of Americans losing their houses, losing billions of dollars of equity in their houses. To add insult to injury, Madam Speaker, to get out of that mess, who did the government bail out? They bailed out the banks. There was no bailout for the average Americans who lost their homes or lost significant value in their homes. That's one example, I think, of so-called financial innovation that has led to significant problems for people without proper oversight and trust in the regulatory agencies tasked with providing that oversight.

You know, a little bit closer to home, Madam Speaker, members in this House who were here for the 29th Legislature will remember well the work that we did to regulate the payday loan industry. For years the payday loan industry had been trapping people who had very limited financial means into an endless cycle of debt with no way to get out. It was up to our government. We were the ones who finally took the action required to bring the payday loan industry to heel and act in the public interest rather than in their own financial interest, a move, Madam Speaker, that – I think it's important to remind everybody – all parties in this House voted in favour of if I remember correctly. Certainly, I remember members of the Wildrose opposition at the time speaking up in favour of effectively regulating the payday loan industry.

I say all of this, Madam Speaker, because we need to be extremely skeptical when some silk-suited banker comes to the minister's office talking about a fancy financial innovation that will apparently be in the consumers' interest and the public interest when, in fact, the only interest it's likely to serve is his or her own.

We need to regard the motivations and the actions of the financial industry with a deep sense of skepticism.

We also need to regard the minister's actions with that similar sense of skepticism because, as my friend from Lethbridge-West has said in her comments, we cannot trust the minister to do the things that he will say he will do. We heard it a number of times today in question period and in response to the members opposite's request for an emergency debate on the issue of skyrocketing car insurance premiums. He claimed that he absolutely had no choice but to lift the cap on car insurance premiums because insurance companies were withdrawing services and pulling out of the province. He's never ever once actually brought proof to the Legislature that that has happened. I suspect that he may be coming up with justifications for his actions that aren't in line with the truth on the ground.

He says that apparently seven insurance companies have applied to his office to reduce premiums. Well, show us the applications. I don't trust the minister when he says that any insurance company has applied for permission to reduce their premiums. Certainly, I haven't heard any stories from the citizens of Edmonton-Gold Bar that their insurance premiums are going down or that their insurance companies are even considering reducing insurance premiums.

You know, it's not just on the issue of car insurance that we can't trust the minister. We can't trust him with our pensions, Madam Speaker. This Finance minister has done more to meddle with Albertans' pensions than any other Finance minister in the history of this province. He's taken away governance of the Alberta teachers' pension fund from the teachers. He's moved it into AIMCo. AIMCo, of course, has shown colossal incompetence managing the pensions of hundreds of thousands of Albertans, showing losses or a performance that is subpar when compared to other industry comparators, particularly the Canada pension plan. The Canada pension plan has performed remarkably well for the people of this country, and AIMCo can't even duplicate their management success.

3:40

So how on earth can the people of Alberta trust this minister to allow some upstart financial innovator, somebody who has come up with some allegedly new product – how can we trust the minister to act in the public interest when he's demonstrated not once in his term in office that he's acted in the public interest? I don't think that many Albertans are willing to extend him the benefit of the doubt that he maybe would have gotten had he introduced similar legislation at the very beginning of his term.

Moreover, Madam Speaker, on this issue of the inability to trust the minister to effectively oversee the actions of the financial industry in this province, in his own briefing with the opposition he admitted that his own department doesn't have the expertise necessary to provide solid advice on whether or not the exemptions that they're seeking are appropriate and will not lead to poor outcomes for consumers. So not only do we have a track record of a minister who is not acting in the public interest; by his own department's admission they don't have the skill set needed to earn that trust and properly provide oversight in this financial space.

Madam Speaker, it's quite clear to me and to many Albertans that allowing this bill to pass and allowing this minister to create this so-called regulatory sandbox is rife with potential for disaster for average consumers. I think it's fair for any Albertan to be extremely skeptical of the government's motivations for bringing forward this legislation, and I don't think any Albertan is looking forward to – they won't see a material benefit to their own standard of living, their own quality of life, their own income because of the actions of this government. In fact, I bet they think they're probably more likely to fall prey to some bad actors in this space who cannot be

trusted to act in the public interest and who won't be reined in by a minister who can't be trusted to act in the public interest.

Those are the comments that I have on this piece of legislation. I'm looking forward to what other members have to say. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 13? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 13, a bill that I'm quite curious to learn more about from the minister. Financial innovation is an interesting direction that this government has made a priority, and the reason that I say that is that there are lots of questions when it comes to what is now being called a regulatory sandbox – who is going to be able to create products within that sandbox? – and then, of course, the specifics around the consumer protections that will exist within this regulatory sandbox. Now, I'm more than interested to hear from the minister, as we move forward and as we are able to ask questions and, hopefully, get some answers, about how the government sees this moving forward.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

But before I get too far into some of the thoughts and questions that I have about the actual bill in the context of where we're headed, I guess one of the things that I'm still struggling to understand by this government is why the priorities that are being set – when it comes to being able to create innovation, to create investment, and to try to stimulate the economy, why would this be the priority that the government would choose to go down? This is, I would say, one of the first economic bills we've seen in this session since we've returned, one of the first fiscal policies outside of the budget that this government has decided to introduce into this Chamber since we've returned, yet there are a lot of unknowns. There isn't a lot of understanding, from what the government has said so far, about what kind of investment this would look like, what kind of companies would want to be engaging in this sandbox, and what the return for the economic benefit of Albertans would be. Now, I'm sure there's potential here, and I am more than happy to learn about it.

I guess that when we're looking at the direction that the Minister of Finance has decided to take when it comes to looking at and opening up the Alberta Securities Commission and looking at creating exemptions within the Securities Commission, I don't know if I would have made this the number one priority when looking at trying to update and encourage investments. There are many opportunities that even my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has put forward in this Chamber most recently, in the last couple of weeks, in regard to ways to encourage innovation, ways to encourage investments, ways that Albertans are able to use their hard-earned dollars to help stimulate the economy, that this government has chosen to ignore and, in fact, has hindered the process in being able to create some of those changes within regulatory processes, that do have an immediate, clear, and secure way of creating innovation in tech, jobs in tech, a return on investment for Albertans but also exist within a system that is already protected, that ensures that the consumer who is deciding to invest knows and understands the risks of those investments.

This does not do that. This has quite a few unknowns around how setting up a regulatory sandbox actually supports consumer protections and works within the consumer protection laws and ensures that when these regulatory sandboxes are being built and are being marketed, they're not being abused.

I guess my question to the government in regard to this would be: why choose to do this? It's innovative; it doesn't exist anywhere else in the country. I mean, if you want to be first and if this is the government's direction, to be first, sure. But at a time where we are looking at trying to stimulate the economy, trying to ensure that Albertans have access to good-paying jobs, trying to encourage reinvestment into the province, I don't know if this would have been the strategy that I would have made my number one strategy. There were other strategies.

Again, the bill that my hon. colleague introduced: one strategy. Opening up the Alberta Securities Commission to allow investment into other projects across the province – agriculture, for example – another strategy.

3:50

There are mechanisms that could have been used, adjusted, that would have been able to stimulate investment, leverage capital, create projects, create employment, that already have a structure in place that protects the investment opportunities not only for the companies that are trying to build but also for the consumer that's going to be investing.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I guess, for me, Bill 13 – I mean, I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with Bill 13 in the context of going ahead and doing it. I think, though, that it's disappointing for a government that likes to talk about the recovery strategy that they've created and wants to talk about opportunities in Alberta, wants to talk about bringing in investment and all of these things in a session where we're on Bill 13 now, and I believe we're almost up to 16, maybe even more, 18 – there have been a couple of bills introduced in this Legislature. So we have 18 bills currently sitting in front of the House to be debated, to be turned into legislation, and this would be the one economic bill that this government has created.

Out of 18 bills, we have one that actually speaks directly to promotion of investment, leveraging capital, creating jobs, and creating opportunities for Albertans. That's pretty sad, I would say, that that would be the direction that this government would take at a time where we're coming out of COVID and we're looking for an economic recovery, to have a piece of legislation that could potentially, if not implemented appropriately, actually impact and have some pretty detrimental effects on consumer protections.

How do we trust this government, then, to ensure that this structure, that this regulatory sandbox is going to have the regulation and policy in place that is going to protect those who invest? In fact, the argument that we heard from the government not only a week or two ago, when my colleague introduced his bill, was the very concern and questions from the government members around: how do you insure the risk? How do you protect people from the risk of the investment?

Clearly, because it already exists under the Securities Act, my colleague was able to answer the question and say: "Well, you know, it would be no different than doing an investment within the stock market with your RRSP or whatever you're using. You are very aware of your risk index, and you get to make that decision, that choice. You do a high-risk investment or a low-risk investment." Sure. Fair enough.

This bill doesn't clarify whether or not those protections are going to be in place, and in fact right now, based on the structure that this is going to have, the companies, and the intent of this bill, we know that currently the Alberta Treasury Board and Finance staff don't have the expertise to even be able to make sure that those mechanisms are in place. They've never worked in this space before. This space doesn't currently exist in Canada.

Because of that, there would have to be some kind of mechanism or hiring process or contracting out to ensure that we have that expertise and those people that understand this structure to be able to support the province in building it. Those people don't currently exist, though. There's no structure within the ministry to ensure that these investments will be protected.

My hope would be that the minister is working on that and that this isn't going to be something that will be rolled out and that the government just says: "Ah. Just trust us. It'll be fine. There won't be any negative rollouts or negative impacts based on what we're going to do. We'll make sure it works. We'll make sure that it is going to meet the threshold that is required for investments." That's great. The unfortunate part about that right now, though, is that it's really hard to trust this government to make good decisions. We've seen this historically. So I would be concerned.

You know, we find, when we talk about things in this House, that it takes a lot to get that openness and transparency from this government when it comes to any sort of financial accountability. It's the: "Just read the budget. Just trust us. Insurance premiums aren't going up. Just trust us. Oh, wait. The report says that they are. That report: don't read that. We're not going to release that. There's no reason to make any of that public. Just trust us." And the reality of it is that Albertans can't because every time they turn around, there's a new fee in place or their taxes are going up. But then they'll say: "Your taxes aren't going up. That's not our fault. Municipal taxes are going up. That's not our fault even though we've cut municipal funding. Just trust us."

So when it comes to being able to trust this government when it comes to financial reporting and the interpretation of the financial data that this government has access to, I would say that there is a wide spectrum of what would be considered accurate fact because, depending on who's reading that particular page in that document at that given time, it gets interpreted quite differently depending on who you're asking the question to.

I do think that there needs to be some clear explanation, education, I would say, when it comes to this piece of legislation ensuring that those who are investing or who are looking at becoming investors into these types of products are aware of the potential risk, that Albertans are protected under this piece of legislation in the context of: there will be no financial fallout that could somehow impact Albertans, that the province is not somehow tied to the liability when it comes to some of these products. I think, too, from a competitiveness piece, we have to ensure that whatever this government does decide to create within regulation or policy under the Alberta Securities Commission, it aligns with other jurisdictions. Of course, as we know, this has been something that has been discussed with me in the past. If it doesn't align with other jurisdictions, it becomes a trade barrier, so we have to be careful that we're not creating something that would negatively impact business within the province.

Now, there are some questions, obviously, that I think my colleagues have probably already brought up, when it comes to protecting the privacy of Albertans and ensuring that we're not doing anything within this legislation or these regulations that would breach the privacy laws. Obviously, within an institutional bank those structures are very rigid. They are regulated. Your personal banking information cannot be provided to your neighbours or to anybody else. Those structures need to be in place and ensured within these structures and also need to be monitored.

I think the other question would also be, when we're looking at this piece of legislation: what are the consequences if something were to happen? What is the regulation going to look like? How is the government going to ensure that there is appropriate insurance

coverage, that there are appropriate risk management procedures and policies, that people don't just get wiped out if they invest in these or if their money goes missing and nobody knows where it went, and that there's an ability to track any type of transaction in the context of not the individual but just making sure the money goes where it should go, basically being able to do that forensic audit?

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's always an honour and a privilege to rise in this House and speak to the bills put forward by this government. With this particular bill, I would honestly say that it's something that I'm excited about. Having worked in the financial industry with RBC Dominion Securities for a while, I know that this is something that will be highly welcomed by many of the people that work in the industry. Of course, part of any economy that is trying to modernize and move forward and build opportunities: it's important that we move at the pace that innovators would like us to move, especially when it comes to financial markets. Of course, as a reminder, you know, financial markets are really based upon an old-school market.

4:00

Like, one of my favourite pastimes, whenever I'm travelling abroad or even here at home, is visiting a farmers' market or, when I visit South America, going to the market on a Sunday, which are very typical, where people are selling all kinds of goods. Of course, financial markets are based upon this, and that's why we have things like futures and derivatives. Before these were actually introduced, people were pretty skeptical about how they would actually work. You're actually saying, "Okay; well, in the future, in two months' time, I'm willing to pay this certain amount or price for a kilo of corn," for example, or coffee, or whatever the case may be. These were quite innovative steps taken by financial markets at that time.

That being said, you know, I agree with the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar that people are very skeptical about financial vehicles, and the reason for that is because they don't know how they work. I would strongly suggest to this government that moving in this direction is really important. I'm going to take a step back here, Madam Speaker. Taking this step is really important for a number of reasons, but, for me, one of the most important reasons is that we're actually experiencing the introduction of newer technologies to financial markets. We're actually experiencing a democratization of the marketplace where more people are getting access to making financial investments. Of course, this is a very good thing, but the downside of it is the fact that people need more information, and they definitely need more education when it comes to new financial vehicles and how they're being introduced into the market.

It's happened so many times in the past where, you know, you do have good financial players that do their best to educate people as much as they possibly can on financial vehicles and access to them, whether it could be anything from life insurance to, as I was talking about before, futures, right? But the problem is that not all financial players disclose all the information.

As the Member for Lethbridge-West was saying, you know, you could be investing in something, and the fine print at the bottom of the contract is so fine and so tiny and so long that you really don't have the time to actually go into it. People feel – how can I put it? – pressured, is the best word that I could use. People feel pressured just to sign on the bottom line and then read the fine print afterwards. Once they do have the opportunity to actually read that fine print, they realize that there are a number of risks that go with

this financial investment that they've just made, that, in the long term, may not be the best use of their money.

Now, of course, I know that people are encouraged to invest beyond what they get through the Canada pension plan or old age security or all these kinds of benefits that people get in their retirement years by investing in a registered retirement savings plan or, for example, investing in a registered educational savings plan for their children. All these kinds of investments are really great and really needed by people, especially in terms of how the economy is moving. I think it's so important that at the same time that we encourage people to invest privately in these registered retirement savings plans, though, Canadians also have an opportunity to make sure that they know that they're going to have a bare minimum of a retirement plan to build upon by having that Canada pension plan at their disposal once they retire.

Now, a lot of people don't know how to make these investments, and that's why the Canada pension plan is so important, so that people – you know, you have a lot of Albertans out there that just don't have the information at their disposal, and it's good that the government actually provides the Canada pension plan. They put money away, their employer puts money away so that once they do retire, they can rely on a bare minimum, right? I know that the members across the way – well, not all of them, because I've heard some of them make the argument that we should just scrap the Canada pension plan altogether and that people should just be able to invest their own money in RRSPs. I don't personally believe in that, Madam Speaker. I think that government has a role and a responsibility to its citizens to actually help them out in making sure that they have a retirement nest egg at their disposal. They can also be encouraged to actually invest on their own, if they want to, over and above and beyond that if they want to make sure that they have a higher standard of living in their retirement, but that's up to them.

What I'm getting at here is that, alongside this piece of legislation, I would urge the government to actually provide more education on financial investment, especially when it comes to people investing in these new types of financial vehicles that will be provided by financial institutions, private companies through this piece of legislation, because we don't want to see people who have spent 20, 30 years putting money into an RRSP, and then they decide, "Okay, well, I'm going to play with a little bit of my RRSP," and they actually take some of this money, and then they start putting it into these new types of investments where they could risk everything and lose everything.

There has to be a certain level of protection, Madam Speaker, and on this side of the House this is what we're most concerned about when it comes to this particular bill. We want to make sure that the government, through this new regulatory sandbox – and we don't have any of the details. I actually read through the entire bill. I read through the entire bill, and . . . [some applause] You're very welcome. Nowhere in the bill is there actually – you know, it's a funny thing. It's like: I take the time to, like, read through these bills, and I have to ask, you know, I wonder if some of the members on the other side actually read through their own bills because when they get up in the House and speak on some of the bills that the government has presented, it doesn't sound like they actually read the bill, right?

Anyways, on that note, I read the bill from cover to cover, and nowhere does it actually talk about consumer protections. It says that these will be developed in the regulations, of course, right? So the problem then becomes: okay; well, if they're going to be developed in regulations later on, then how are we going to know? The truth is that we're not going to know. So when it comes to members on this side of the House who have spoken significantly on the issue of trust and not being able to trust the Minister of

Finance when it comes to – well, the Minister of Finance has introduced a number of bills in this House, but by and large the one that has impacted not only my own constituents but all Albertans across this province is the fact that they decided to take the cap off insurance.

4:10

A funny thing: I was listening really carefully to the Minister of Finance as he was opening debate on Bill 13, and the Conservatives tend to have this innate hope that the invisible hand will truly, truly bring down prices. This is what they think. You know, they believe in this invisible hand approach, that if the market is left up to its own devices to just work out through supply and demand, somehow costs of goods and services will actually come down.

What the minister said – and I don't have the Blues in front of me, Madam Speaker, but he said it very well. He said that this could bring down prices. Now, I would make the argument that many of the Crown corporations not just here in Alberta but across Canada, as they were dismantled, at any order of government, provincial and even municipal – and, you know, I applaud the municipalities around Alberta who have actually maintained collective ownership of distribution of services like electricity here in the province, because they are actually getting lower prices for the people in those jurisdictions.

Medicine Hat is a fantastic example of actually that, and Conservatives all across this land have moved people away from that collective ownership towards these private companies and privatizing services, so much so, and what ends up happening is that people end up paying higher prices for that particular service. Now, of course, Conservatives are saying: well, it could bring down the price; it could bring down the price. But as we saw in just the months of December and January, as prices of natural gas and electricity started to go up, people started realizing that it's not just the electricity that they're paying. These private companies have actually tacked on a number of fees, and I can't tell you how many times I've heard it from constituents coming to me or even sending me e-mails or calling me on the phone saying, like: why do I have to pay a fee for this and a fee for that and a fee for this in here and a fee for over here? That's what ended up happening with privatization.

I think that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is right. People are very skeptical when it comes to the actions of this government when it comes to them saying: well, it could bring down the price. People, Madam Speaker, Albertans want a guarantee. Albertans want to know that they can trust their government and that their government is working for the common good, in the public interest, and unfortunately in jurisdiction after jurisdiction after jurisdiction not only in Canada but across North America and even throughout the world privatization ends up happening, and rarely – rarely – does it lead to lower prices for goods that were previously being offered through a collective system. I invite the members on the other side to look at the numbers. Look at the numbers.

Now, my big issue with this, Madam Speaker, is the fact that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 13? Seeing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford – Edmonton-Riverview; my apologies.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes. Riverview. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Yeah. It's my pleasure to join the debate on this bill to look at creating a regulatory sandbox where financial services companies and financial technology companies could test new products, services, technology. This is kind of an innovative, new idea. This legislation currently is not anywhere else in Canada. Certainly, this legislation builds on work that our government did to – you know, an initiative that started with our

government in the security space, which is regulated by the Alberta Securities Commission in Alberta. I mean, this is important legislation, and it will support innovation in this regulatory sandbox.

However, there are some concerns, as, certainly, my hon. colleagues have shared with the members, because there are some broad legislative powers. There's broad control, and of course there always need to be checks and balances in government. We need to make sure that things are being done in the public interest, that people are supported, and that people aren't excluded from these kinds of things, and that decisions aren't made that are really going to hurt Albertans. Of course, that is a concern. We certainly have a current government that has a track record of seeming to not really take the public interest into mind. A lot of this legislation is based on trusting the minister, trusting this government to do what they need to, but there are some concerns with that, as I've said. I mean, we could have – I could go through many, many examples of that, but I'll certainly just sort of stick to the critic areas that I am representing.

One of the very first things that this government did and that I find extremely disturbing, and it makes me and many people that I've spoken to know that this government isn't trustworthy, is that they immediately, in 2019, closed the office of the Seniors Advocate. They said at the time that that was going to be actually rolled into the Health Advocate office and that seniors would be supported through that office, which sadly, Madam Speaker, was completely untrue. That did not happen. You know, I ask at each estimates, I've asked the minister many times in this House: can we see the annual report of the Health Advocate? No report has been created or published, so none of us can see it. We don't know what she's doing. Certainly, seniors tell me that they have no access to her, that there aren't any supports for them. Yet that's clearly what the minister said, that this advocate would be rolled into the Health Advocate and that certainly they would be supported. I guess this question of trust is so key, because with this kind of legislation we are needing the government to be trustworthy.

You know, just even continuing on with this issue of the Seniors Advocate, sadly, the Health Advocate did leave her post shortly after the UCP became government, and instead of having a public competition for that position, the new Health Advocate was simply appointed by the Minister of Health. It's Janice Harrington. She is the former executive director of the Conservative Party and really has no expertise at all in this area. Again, this is another significant trust issue for this government. That's why this legislation could be problematic, Madam Speaker. We do need to rely on the assessment of the government and make sure that they are making decisions in the best interests of Albertans. I think that the examples that I've shown, where there have been questions and concerns, do demonstrate that that is really a concern and a valid concern. Certainly, I've heard from many Albertans about that.

I mean, I do support this type of regulatory sandbox, but there are about four key risks that are important for us to look at in this legislation. Government competency is one. There's a risk that Treasury Board and Finance might not have the expertise to properly regulate a new product idea because it lacks the expertise. So how will that be mitigated? This is just something that the government should look at to make sure that the legislation does support the government to be competent in these areas.

4:20

As I've already talked about, another risk is just the trust in the minister and the government. As I said, my example of the Seniors Advocate and the closure of that office and the appointment of a partisan, someone with little expertise in this area, just shows how we can't trust the government to make decisions in the public interest. This legislation gives a lot of power to the minister, and a key risk is that the power will be abused. Again, I just offer those

comments to the government so that we make sure that this legislation is for the betterment of Albertans.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Also, a third key risk is that we have too much trust right now in the financial institutions. You know, this is a riskier venture that is being presented. Will Albertans fully understand that? Making sure that they do: again, this is incumbent on the government, to make sure that Albertans are protected and that they're not naive to these risks. So again I just counsel the government to make sure that Albertans know the risks involved in going into this sandbox.

The fourth one is sufficient public disclosure. It would be incumbent on the government to ensure that any company in the sandbox and offering new services or products alerts the public that they're dealing with something novel and potentially risky. Again, this is another sort of red flag that the government needs to really make sure that Albertans know about and can be supported to make the right level of risk for themselves. We don't want them to get themselves into some hot water that they can't get out of. We want this, obviously, to be value-added.

The legislation itself is, you know, creative. It's something that our government began, and we do not stand in opposition to that. But there are so many red flags, so many risks that Albertans could be exposed to that they may not understand about it, so it's really incumbent on the government to make sure that Albertans understand that.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. I've got, as probably no surprise to anyone in the Chamber, quite a few comments to make about this proposed bill.

I'll start off at the onset. I believe I actually told this to the Minister of Finance directly. Again, as I have stated over my time in this place, I have no problems giving credit where credit is due, and I've said to the Finance minister that I'm behind the spirit of this bill in what we're trying to do here in Alberta. I know the government has often talked about Alberta as an incredibly innovative province, which we are, full of incredible entrepreneurs. However, their actions haven't always followed on those words, where we've seen a number of initiatives that were supporting Alberta's entrepreneurs and innovators, and under this UCP government they literally yanked the carpet from underneath them.

Now, in this bill, Mr. Speaker, I believe Alberta will be the first jurisdiction to set up this type of regulatory framework or, really, to establish an Alberta sandbox, which, of course, everyone is using, which is, you know, an adequate description of what we're doing, essentially putting the many different regulations that govern our securities and financial sector on pause or on hold so that companies can experiment with different products.

Now, as my colleagues have so aptly put it, that's exciting, on the one hand, to give our financial innovators – of course, Mr. Speaker, you know that the financial sector in Alberta employs more than 60,000 Albertans. It is a very large sector when we look at our economy as a whole. We also have some institutions to be incredibly proud of, from the fact that Alberta is the sole province that has a Crown corporation as a lender and bank, ATB. We have a number of incredible credit unions and other financial institutions. I don't mean to leave anybody out, so, you know, I'll put them all into that category. Many of them have offices here in Alberta. Some of them have head offices here in Alberta.

You know, I think this is and falls under a bold new initiative, but the concerns my colleagues have raised I think are really valid, and the Chamber ought to take some time to hear the words of the opposition as far as concerns that my colleagues have raised and a number that I will raise. Again, Mr. Speaker, every member was elected to this Chamber by Albertans to do a job, and our job is to hold the government to account and to offer solutions and amendments to legislation to try to strengthen it.

You know, upon reading this bill, I don't know if the Finance minister wrote this hastily or if it was intentional in that there is quite a broad swath of exemptions that are written into this bill and that are framed as: the minister will decide. Now, I appreciate that the government probably didn't want to make this bill overly prescriptive.

Mr. Speaker, for the handful of Albertans that are very interested in legislation that's being debated in this Chamber, there are going to be a number of references I'm going to make to a bill that I introduced a couple of weeks ago called the Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act, which has some similarities to this bill. In fact, members of this Chamber in committee raised a number of concerns with my bill, that are written in this bill that the government has now tabled. So, you know, if people are thinking, "Well, this is a little ironic," yeah, they should be.

I know that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Riverview spoke about some of the risks. Again, I appreciate that in order to create a sandbox and to provide companies with the ability to innovate, the current Securities Commission or Securities Act and a number of other acts, including the financial services act, would need to be amended. If we're talking about creating an innovative space, the easiest mechanism is to put those on pause. I don't disagree with that, Mr. Speaker, because you don't know what you don't know, so companies or the government won't know which acts to amend and how to amend them to allow for new innovative products because those products haven't been developed yet. You know, I appreciate that.

A concern that was raised by my colleagues, that I share, is: how do we ensure that consumers will be protected? This was a very concern that government members raised when asking me about my bill. How do we mitigate risk? How do we ensure that Albertans aren't going to be put into a position that could place either their savings or investment dollars at risk? I would love to hear from the Minister of Finance on: what are those protections in this bill? You know, as the members of that committee know, those decisions to participate in a venture fund are, first of all, the decision of individual Albertans. There are no government dollars being invested or at risk. But there was and is in Bill 203 an educational component. There is part of the bill that mandates that the government educates Albertans on the inherent risks involved with investing in that type of venture fund. I don't see that oversight or protection in this bill.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, I don't think Albertans, rightly, trust this current government when they say: trust us. I mean, first of all, I don't think Albertans trust any government that says, "Trust us," but the list of examples or the list of times this government has said, "Trust us" and then done the opposite is growing. It's quite incredible.

This government said: trust us on income taxes. We now know that Albertans are losing a billion dollars on bracket creep. The irony is that the Premier not 20 years ago railed against the federal government for bracket creep, yet somehow now it's okay. There is a word for that. I won't use that in this Chamber, but when a person does the opposite of what they're calling on past governments to do, you know, it's a clear indication that their words and actions are incongruent. That's probably the kindest way that I can frame that. There's the first example.

The second example, which my colleagues have been talking about today – and every Albertan has felt this, myself included – is the spike in premiums on car insurance while the industry has made out with a billion dollars more. The part that really caught my attention, Mr. Speaker, when my colleagues were raising this point today: this wasn't that they're making out with a billion-dollar profit – companies need to be profitable to survive; we want companies to be profitable – but a billion dollars more profit than what they were already making at a time when the majority of Albertans were working from home. For a government that says, "We're looking out for Albertans and consumers," no, you're not. The proof is in, well, these many examples. I'm going to give more. That example on the auto insurance industry is baffling to many Albertans because our rates spiked.

We have another example where this government was about to allow companies to strip-mine the Rockies. Again, Albertans stood up and pushed back on this government to say: oh, no; don't you dare. Albertans value and love our terrain, our backyard, our wilderness, you know, the majesty of the Rocky Mountains. We have millions of tourists who come every year just to enjoy them. This government was about to sell them off to the highest bidder.

The irony in that is that this government thinks: yeah, we're pro business. Well, you know what? Every tech company that has come to Alberta in the last five years: none of them that I've spoken with have ever mentioned corporate taxes. None. None have mentioned the tax rate. You know why? Because Alberta already had the most competitive corporate tax rate in Canada before the UCP came in. With the carbon tax – I don't know if members know this, but Albertans paid \$7 billion less in taxes with the carbon tax than the next lowest tax jurisdiction, which is Saskatchewan. You know why? Because we don't have a PST, we don't have health care premiums, and we don't have a payroll tax.

So why did these companies come to Alberta? The top two reasons: first one, talent – again, the irony is that you have a government that is blowing up our postsecondary institutions, gutting them by hundreds of millions of dollars – and number two, they came for quality of life. What does that mean? Why do companies often choose southern Alberta and the region of Calgary? Because of its close proximity to the Rocky Mountains and the quality of life that many people are attracted to the city of Calgary for. Strip-mining the Rockies would probably be a deterrent to other companies coming and, in fact, even those staying here, yet this current government said: no, no; trust us. Actions speak louder than words, Mr. Speaker.

I'll jump back to this bill. I will wrap up my comments to say that the bill does enable companies to be innovative and creative, which is what we want and what I support, but there are questions around ensuring that Albertans are protected, that we're protecting privacy. I know in this bill there's an exemption from PIPA, from the privacy of Albertans, which causes me some concern. I'd love to hear from the minister as to why, you know, the applications of PIPA had to be suspended in the legislation. I appreciate it probably couldn't be in regulation.

I'd like to know who and which companies the minister consulted with from industry. Again, I think it's great that there are a number of companies. I mean, I'm guessing that ATB was one of them, to be honest, just from knowing some of their former executives and the many innovative products that they have put forward, but I'm curious to know who else the government has consulted with.

I look forward, Mr. Speaker, to a robust debate in Committee of the Whole, and I look forward to seeing the outcome of this bill.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 11 Continuing Care Act

[Debate adjourned March 30: Mr. Nielsen speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has approximately five minutes remaining should he choose to use them.

Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join debate on Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. You know, we've been through a very, very difficult time these last few years. We know that over 1,600 residents of continuing care have died in our province. That is a significant tragedy, and my heart goes out to the loved ones, friends, and family of those who lost their lives during the pandemic. It is also something that's very disturbing.

I believe some of the reason that this bill was created is that we had the largest outbreak in facilities across Canada. We had the most outbreaks in Alberta. So there's something wrong – there's something wrong, Mr. Speaker – in the system that we have here in Alberta in that so many vulnerable residents of continuing care lost their lives during the pandemic. Sadly, so many of these were preventable deaths. These were preventable deaths if there had been measures put into place earlier, if our system had been different, if we were able to have more value and support for residents of continuing care. I'm not sure how many, but I would say that that number of over 1,600 seniors would be considerably lower. Certainly, one of the major reasons, I think, that many people have identified – and this isn't, like, new information; this is information that we've had even before the pandemic – is that there are issues with staffing in continuing care, that there's insufficient staff.

4:40

Often the staff are – we call them precarious because oftentimes they're women. There are low wages. They're oftentimes newcomers to our country, and oftentimes they don't have a full-time job. They have to cobble together a job. They might not work at only one continuing care facility, but they work at maybe two or three, or maybe they also work in the fast food industry plus their part-time job with no benefits. No benefits. These are the people who are supposed to during COVID, you know, do the gargantuan task of so much extra care and responsibilities in terms of supporting residents of continuing care. Guess what happened. They didn't have the support they needed because of the precarious nature of their employment working at either many different facilities or in other low-wage jobs. We know that the virus, COVID-19, spread like wildfire amongst very vulnerable residents.

This, you know, staffing issue predates COVID, but COVID, of course, shone the light so, so brightly on the issues in continuing care. Very sadly, we have these deadly consequences of over 1,600 people dying in continuing care. It didn't have to be this way, Mr. Speaker, but because of, I'd say, the private, for-profit model of a lot of continuing care facilities this is what happened. They hire precarious workers who get paid low wages, they give them no benefits, and it's all to increase the profit for their shareholders.

You know, there's a significant example of that. AgeCare has several facilities in Alberta. Four of them in Calgary were sold back in 2020 to a big financial company called Axium. Its purpose is wealth generation for its shareholders. It doesn't care about seniors' care. It doesn't care about that at all. It cares about making money for its shareholders. Four of these properties of AgeCare were sold to Axium. Guess what now is happening. Those workers, those precarious workers already, are even being tasked with more responsibilities, with more pressure on them,

less support because, of course, we have to make sure that – the bottom line is that they are spending as little as possible so those profits for their shareholders can be as high as they can. So it's not about seniors' care. It's about wealth generation, and that's why this whole financialization of the continuing care sector doesn't work.

We know from, you know, research report after research report that the best outcomes are in public facilities, the next best are in nonprofits, and the worst outcomes are in private facilities. This legislation that's before us today, Bill 11, was coming out of the facility-based continuing care review looking at: what can we do to improve the care of seniors, and what can we do to make the facilities run better? Hopefully, it's all in the public good and that this is why Bill 11 came forward. This is pretty serious stuff that I've just shared with you and very tragic stuff, too. As I said, so many of these deaths were preventable.

Sadly, Bill 11 kind of is missing an action. It's not making any kind of big changes regarding staffing, which is the key issue. I have heard from so many Albertans who have reached out to me just, you know, broken hearted and upset about the lack of care their loved one is receiving or indeed that their loved one has passed on because they had gotten COVID. This bill before us today really is just an administrative bill. It's kind of a housekeeping bill. It's bringing all sorts of legislation together that were in disparate parts of legislation. I mean, that's not a bad thing, but that's not dealing with the key issue, which, of course, as I've identified, is staffing. The thing is that when I was part of the technical briefing for this, we asked lots of questions about staffing. We talked about hours of care, where all the – what's the information for this? "Well, it's in regulations. It's in regulations. Oh, those aren't created yet. This will all come in time." They're talking about spring of 2023.

I mean, you know, I think, if anything, the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us about the urgency of these issues, not to push it away again to 2023. These need to be dealt with now, and this bill, sadly, is not doing that. They are again delaying. So it's really a bill that is kind of empty. It is not doing the fundamental things that it needs to, and it is a significant tragedy that the government doesn't see this as important enough, that they haven't seen enough of what is going on to realize the urgency of this, the importance of this, that there are still vulnerable Albertans that need significant support and that we do need, for example, the staffing issues to be dealt with.

You know, if we go back to the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government was reticent to get too involved. They kind of dragged their heels about doing anything that would really make a difference. Eventually, after we in the Official Opposition pushed and yelled and screamed at them and wanted them to make sure that workers were just in one site because we knew that that was making COVID-19 spread like wildfire – the residents are vulnerable people, and we know that they're the most likely to die from that. Sadly, the government moved very slowly on this one-work-site order from the chief medical officer of health, and then when it was put in, there were so many exemptions to it that it was almost like it was useless, because this employer needed this exemption, and that employer needed that one. It wasn't about the best interests of the residents. This government sort of did too little too late, and sadly they are continuing with that behaviour in Bill 11, without really making substantive changes and showing us what's important.

I just will say once again that staffing is a key issue, and certainly they heard that loud and clear in the facility-based continuing care review. In fact, they said that that review said that we should be hiring 6,000 – 6,000 – additional workers, because there are, you know, obviously, not enough people working in that sector to support them. How do you attract people to that? Well, of course, you give them jobs that are full-time, that have benefits, that aren't

the lowest wages, and you have reasonable expectations of them so that they're not having responsibilities that are beyond their ability to fulfill on.

I've certainly heard that when I've spoken with health care aides, where they're given such a small amount of time to do something that really takes quite a bit of time, you know, whether it be feeding somebody, bathing somebody. Of course, relationships are so crucial to the care of residents of continuing care. The health care aides, the staff need to have time to connect with people, but if they're always being told, "Okay; you've got five more people you have to feed; you have to get going over there" and sort of really unrealistic expectations in terms of what they need to do – again, I just want to remind people that these workers are precarious workers. They're maybe newcomers to Canada. They aren't feeling – they may not understand some aspects of it. They're not getting the support they need. They're stressed in their own lives, perhaps, because they have to work these multiple part-time jobs with no benefits. They're concerned themselves because the pandemic is on, and will they be bringing it home to their family? So sometimes they're scared to go into work. What supports can the government give these workers?

4:50

Certainly, we were hoping Bill 11 was going to actually give us some answers to those questions, but it doesn't. As I said, it's empty legislation. It's not, you know, talking about full-time workers. It's not talking about making sure that they have good working conditions. It's not talking about any of that. Certainly, they're suggesting it's going to come in the regulations, but, I mean, it really needs to be in the legislation.

We know that certainly the facility-based continuing care report, like, besides saying, you know, that we need 6,000 more staff, which is a significant increase, and the government really needs to work with postsecondary institutions to make sure that people are being supported to go into that work and then, again, that those workers are supported when they're in that sector, so improving working conditions, increasing – also, another thing is the amount of home care that's being provided, and another key issue is just the minimum hours of service. Certainly, it's well understood that 4.1 hours of service to each resident is needed.

Again, there's nothing in this bill about any of that. It's kind of an empty bill, housekeeping, so it's very tragic the government has decided not to deal with this very important issue. I shake my head at knowing what would make them step up. You know, over 1,600 Albertans have died in continuing care, and there needs to be fundamental change. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, that is not in this bill, and certainly that is why I will not be supporting the bill. I would encourage all members of the Legislature to not support it, because we know that so much more needs to be done, and I think it starts with staffing regarding the people in continuing care.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others who wish to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has caught my eye.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, analysis, we see before us, as was very well explained by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, a piece of legislation that really just addresses administrative issues as they relate to continuing care, which is for us a very – well, how can I put it? It's just heartbreaking given the reality that we faced over the last two years here in the province of Alberta with the fact that more than 1,600

people who are continuing care residents actually passed away because of COVID.

We were really hoping that the government was going to be able to address some of the shortfalls that are currently being experienced in continuing care. Of course, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview described those in great detail, and I have to say that I confirm, because I've heard it myself from especially people that are new Canadians, that work in this field, and of which are from many different, you know, ethnic backgrounds. They have complained about the fact that in this particular industry there just doesn't seem to be the attention required to make sure that people's health is first and foremost when it comes to the care of the residents of these continuing care facilities.

It's shocking, to be quite honest. It's shocking the stories that you hear from families, for example, of how they've gone to check in on a family member that's in continuing care and they see that they're not getting the appropriate care at all. We've heard stories of, because of the fact that those who are actually working in the field are so hard pressed, like, there is not enough staff to cover all of the residents in a particular continuing care facility. So, yes, you know, it's been unfortunate. We hear stories of people not getting the appropriate amount of care and dedication, and sometimes they're left for an entire day to sit in their own stool. This is not by any means dignified at all. For me, I find it unfathomable that here we have an opportunity to actually address these particular issues when it comes to the industry, specifically about issues about staffing, yet none of that is presented here before us in this particular bill.

We feel like the UCP is absolutely not taking any action. In fact, instead of making things better, they're creating more chaos in the system. That goes to the health care system as a whole, Mr. Speaker. Rather than improving health care here in the province of Alberta, what we've actually seen this UCP government do is dismantle it, reduce the quality of care, and throw the whole health care system into chaos. We heard it right from the minister's mouth today during question period. That is, of course, the fact that they have a different approach to health care, so much so that they had to fire Verna Yiu because she was not going to put herself at the access of this government to actually move in the direction that they want to move. Therefore, they had to go and find somebody else that was going to do their bidding.

Of course, Albertans know that what's really on the mind of this government is to privatize, privatize the entire health care system, and what we see in the continuing care industry – we can only ask ourselves: okay; is this more of the same that they're going to move, that they're going to create in the health care system here in the province of Alberta, where they're going to drastically decrease the quality of care for people here in the province? The UCP has proven that they're incapable of managing this complex health care system and putting the needs of Albertans first. This is what we are actively seeing from this government.

This bill does not even fulfill the UCP's own promise from a year ago to increase home care for the amount of hours of care that residents would receive and, of course, increase the proportion of full-time staff. This was a promise made by this government just one year ago, that they were actually going to move forward on all these three aspects when it comes to continuing care, but of course we see nothing from this government on that in this particular bill.

The bill consolidates many pieces of legislation and associated regulations but fails to make substantive and meaningful changes. All the substantive changes that will come through regulation, which the UCP are saying that they expect in the spring of – they say that they are going to come in 2023. Perhaps the minister could shed some light on that.

5:00

Waiting for this government, for us just to trust them that they're going to deal with these issues, of course, is way too big a risk for the residents of these continuing care facilities, for the people that work in them. Of course, already we've demonstrated a number of times, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans feel that they just cannot trust this government, and here we see more of the same. They know what the problem is. They've even said that they're going to address it, yet here before us we have a piece of legislation where they're not doing anything to commit to the promise, that they made a year ago, that they were actually going to address when it comes to continuing care.

Of course, this is all part and parcel of the fact that, as I said before, they fired the CEO of Alberta Health Services to move on their agenda to privatize health care here in the province of Alberta. I think that's one of the biggest reasons why Albertans are starting to get very worried about this government. We'll see, with the application of this proposed piece of legislation and others related to it from this particular minister, that Albertans are going to completely lose trust. Albertans happen to feel very attached and associated to the fact that here in the province of Alberta and across the Canadian jurisdiction they actually identify with universal health care.

I see that the minister would like to say some words, so I'll give way.

Mr. Copping: I thank the hon. member for accepting my comments. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk briefly – how much time do I have? One minute. Good Lord. In one moment I just want to make one comment. I appreciate that the member opposite, raising issues in regard to this proposed legislation, does not have details in regard to hours, does not have details in regard to staffing. I just wanted to point out to the hon. member that the current legislation doesn't have details in regard to hours, doesn't have details in regard to staffing. That's in the regulation. Those are in the policies. Our intent is actually to develop those over the coming months and work with the industry. More importantly, I'd ask the hon. member to look to the industry, which is, you know, private, not-for-profit, and public, who is supportive of our framework. This is the first step, and we are committed to be actually fixing this but recognize that the other items that he's looking for are in policies and regulation now.

Member Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Of course, the issue that we have before us, Minister, is the fact that you yourself, this cabinet have identified that there are certain problems with the continuing care industry. I highlighted those, and I'll go through them again just to refresh your memory. Of course, I don't want to make a comment about where the minister was when I said it before, so I'll just review them.

Those were – and the promise made a year ago by your government and yourself, Minister, through the chair, of course, is the fact that there needs to be an increase in home care, the amount of hours of care that residents would receive, and then increase the proportion of full-time staff. This was a promise that was made by your government, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister, and it's something that drastically needs to be addressed. That's why we're, on this side of the House, asking ourselves: you made the promise a year ago that you were going to address it, yet here we have ample opportunity for you to actually do that through this particular bill, and we're not seeing it happen, right? Really, we would like to see and hear from the minister about how this is going to be addressed. This is the primary concern. As was well stated by

the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the conditions of these continuing care facilities are the primary concern of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I see that the minister would like to interject, so I will give way.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you again to the hon. member. I just want to be able to respond to his question in terms of increase in home care and addressing the staffing issue. We recognize that. This was identified through the FBCC, and we will respond to that.

What this act does: it provides the framework to be able to address it, putting all the pieces together. We'll need to address it in regulation. We'll need to address it in policy. And the reason why that's important, Mr. Speaker, is that locking in a certain item in legislation doesn't allow for us to be more flexible down the road, because things will change down the road. We know that. Today it already is in policy. It already is in regulation. That's where we propose to put that and then look at different ways that we can supply that, providing flexibility not only for not-for-profits, for private care operators, for public operators. We have all of them, and they're all very supportive of this. So I'd ask the hon. member: you know, when doing the assessment of the act, look at what it is, which is a framework. This is a framework to allow us to actually make the changes. The changes will go in regulation and in policies, and that's the appropriate place for them.

Member Loyola: I appreciate that it's a framework. Of course, we've heard from a number of advocates, for example, Mr. Speaker, on why a ratio couldn't be established in legislation, because a ratio would be flexible. It would make sure that a certain amount of people are getting care, and then the home-care facilities would have to hire staff in order to meet that particular ratio, right? Now, advocates have asked for this. I'm sure that you've heard it. Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister, I'm sure that you've heard advocates ask for this particular approach when it comes to the care of their loved ones. Of course, people who represent workers in that particular industry as well have advocated for such ratios.

Now, of course, what this government decides to do with that information – and, you know, I've debated at length in this House. With all due respect, in my humblest opinion – and I say it to the members across the way – often what we see in legislation is them responding to the people that actually agree with their own ideology. And what this is, what this debate is really about, is moving Alberta down the road on a more privatized approach to health care here in the province of Alberta. That's what we see, and that's what our concern is.

Before the hon. minister actually got up to interject the first time, I was actually speaking about that and how Albertans identify specifically with universal health care and the fact that health care is a human right – right? – established in the Charter, is internationally recognized. For us to move in the opposite direction – now, I'm talking about quality of health care. This is the primary concern of Albertans. Albertans want to maintain a universal health care approach, but they do want it to improve. Of course, we all want it to improve. We all want to see the quality of health care being provided in our hospitals across the province improve and for people to get the care that they need when they need it and not have to pay for it, right? This is what this debate is really about.

When previous Conservative governments decided to move continuing care further down the path of privatization by allowing, you know, private companies to actually come in – again, as I was debating earlier this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, we constantly get from Conservatives, and this government is no exception, that they said: well, if you introduce privatization, it could bring the price down.

5:10

Now, I'm telling you that I've heard from so many people who have loved ones in continuing care, and they just say that the prices for care are just astronomical – astronomical – like, people having to pay \$6,000, \$7,000, \$8,000 a month for care of their loved one. Now, wrap your head around that. Wrap your head around a \$7,000 to \$8,000 bill. You know, there are some people who just can't afford that. Again, Mr. Speaker, I go back to the whole supply and demand, the curve of supply of demand. It's going to price certain people out of the market. What's going to happen to those people? Will those people end up having to take care of their loved one at home? They have a full-time job. Some of them go to a part-time job just so that they can take care of somebody at home, but these are real pressures on families all across Alberta.

This is what Albertans want this government to address. Rather than actually provide fixes or opportunities for actually lowering the price of continuing care or coming up with options for Albertans, this government is actually making the situation all that much worse. Again, we don't see that by introducing privatization – especially when it comes to continuing care, the privatization isn't driving the cost down.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join in the debate on Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, analysis. You know, I've been listening intently and appreciate comments from my colleagues on this bill, and I also appreciate the minister engaged in this dialogue, recognizing that often, due to scheduling, ministers aren't able to be present for all parts of a bill in bill debate, so that's wonderful.

You know, my comments on this bill are that – and I appreciate that it's a framework, as the minister recently articulated – for me, I think this bill misses an incredible opportunity to address a system that is woefully inadequate. Now, that's not a comment against the minister. I think the province has had a shortage of beds for many years. In fact, when I was first elected to this Chamber, I remember speaking back then, in 2012, to the lack of number of beds.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

You know, that's been exacerbated, Madam Speaker, by, of course, the number of baby boomers who are retiring and the first batch of baby boomers moving through this system, needing continuing care or needing care. I know that under our government we created 2,000 new beds, and that's a great start, but once again we're far from being completed. I know that in my riding in northeast Edmonton of Beverly-Clareview there is a shortage of beds. We often hear really sad stories of couples who've been married for many, many years. Each of them needs a different level of care or has different needs, and our system often cannot accommodate two people with two very differing needs. Now, I know that there are some operators and builders that have built some incredible spaces.

I can tell you a story. I mean, I sat down with Greg Christenson many years ago to talk about a proposed facility in Beverly that, sadly, never ended up moving forward because they couldn't get enough seniors to make a down payment to commit to the project for it then to be viable for them to build. But the aspect that I really liked about it was giving seniors – it was a four-part facility. The first part was going to be independent living. Then there was supportive living. Then there was – I can't think of the term – basically full care, and then there was also an Alzheimer's unit. The four buildings were going to be connected so that a person in the

middle of winter or on an afternoon like today in Edmonton – and I've heard Calgary has similar weather – wouldn't have to go outside to move from one building to the next. Unfortunately, that facility never ended up getting built, which is really too bad. I know many of the seniors that I represent in Beverly were excited about the prospect of having more choices, that, again, a new facility would have helped build.

I think some of the challenges with, and where this bill could have addressed a number of issues – and I'll appreciate that, likely, the minister at some point will jump up and talk about how some of the concerns that I'm going to raise will be dealt with in regulation. Now, Madam Speaker, the issue I have with regulations is the same issue that the members opposite, when they were opposition, had when we were government, which is, of course, that regulations are done by cabinet behind closed doors. There is no public debate. There is no public oversight or accountability, and those decisions can be changed. Regulations can be expedient. I agree on that point, but, you know, my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Riverview brought up a number of issues that our current system faces. Enshrining it in legislation would ensure that it cannot just be quickly dealt with or quickly changed, but I would say to members of this Assembly that forcing a future government to bring through legislation to make certain changes is also not a bad thing because it does provide that extra oversight.

I know one issue is the number of hours that are required for proper care. Madam Speaker, you know, we've heard, sadly, the challenges and some horrendous circumstances that many seniors have had to live through largely due to a lack of adequate care. Now, I want to couch that comment by saying that there are some incredible service providers that do take care of their seniors and don't refer to them as clients, you know, that ensure that they are well looked after. Again, I'm not trying to paint the whole industry, but we've also heard of some really awful examples of seniors being left in their own feces for hours if not days of neglect, of poor treatment. We want to ensure that our seniors are well looked after. I mean, these are the very Albertans who helped build this great province, and they not only deserve to be treated with respect, but they absolutely should live in dignity and not be put through either mistreatment or neglect.

You know, expanding the ability to provide greater care is something that I would have liked to have seen in this current legislation. I don't think it's satisfactory to have that put into regulations. [interjection] I'll give way to the minister in a second; I just want to finish this thought. So here's an opportunity to ensure that minimum standards, minimum hours of care are enshrined in legislation so that they can't just be changed in the dead of night and that there is stronger oversight and protection for our seniors.

At this point I'll give way to the minister.

5:20

Mr. Copping: I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for his comments. I just want to touch on a couple of items. You know, I fully appreciate the lack of the number of beds. Part of that's not addressed through the legislation; it's actually addressed through the funding. We put funding in, and then we have 1,500 additional beds that are coming online this year. We have also another \$200 million for beds over the next three years.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I can comment – and this is one example. You made a comment, you know, that the system is not able to accommodate two different needs and, actually, the model of being able to have people go from SL 3 to SL 4, SL 4 with dementia, full continuing care, and then assisted living. The one thing that this does solve is that by putting all the legislation into one book – like, right now, because it's in

different legislation, if you want to go from an SL 4 to continuing care, you actually have to move rooms in the same facility according to the rules. That's crazy, and we need to change that. So this does that. I agree full heartedly that this doesn't address all the issues, but quite frankly I would argue later about regulations.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Minister, for your comments. No. You know what? To respond to your comment: having, you know, multiple pieces of legislation in one act I do agree with. I think that does make sense, to be able to do that. I'll take your word, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister, that if a person did transition from – and I'm using a layperson's terms as opposed to the SL 2, 3, and 4 – an independent to a more dependent or supportive housing or even to where they need even further supports if they have dementia or memory issues for memory care, they don't physically need to either change rooms or whichever. So on that point I am supportive.

Again, I think I had a note written down here that addressed another concern that I have, which, of course, I'm not going to be able to find as quickly as I would like, Mr. Speaker. Oh. Yes. It was comments about – so there was a continuing care review that was done. It was made public last year that there are a number of recommendations that were made. Again, I mean, maybe this legislation isn't necessarily the place for allocating dollars, but I know that the report had projected that a shift to more continuing care done through home care could result in hundreds of millions in savings.

Now, I'm a big fan, Mr. Speaker, of giving seniors the option where, if they want to stay in their home, they can as long as possible. My parents just sold their home a couple of weeks ago that they had lived in for 43 years and have moved to a seniors' living complex. I know that they stayed in their home as long as they could, and I know that many seniors would live all of their days in their home if they could, so, you know, for lack of a better term, beefing up or providing more support so that more seniors can have that choice I think is a positive thing.

But one of the things that the report, I believe, touched on was not only the savings, but if those savings of about \$450 million could get moved over to increase the number of hours that seniors get per day in care up to, I think – increasing direct hours of care in long-term care facilities to four and a half hours. Now, I don't have the number with me of what it is currently, but I know that reports that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Riverview has cited indicate that, you know, a minimum of hours of care is about 4.1 per senior to ensure that they have adequate care.

You know, I think it's safe to say that every member in this Chamber wants to ensure that our seniors – our parents, our grandparents – are well looked after, and when we hear of these stories where they're not, it strikes a chord with all of us because that is someone's parent or grandparent.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

You know, I would argue that more can be done, and I appreciate that the minister in his previous response had indicated that the government is going to go out and consult now on this, but I would question the minister on: do we not already have this data? Do we not already have the information on what is required? Really, where we're at today, is government committing not only the dollars – I appreciate that the minister, I believe, had said \$200 million over the next few years to build more beds and that the current government has built 1,500 beds. I applaud the government for doing that. Again, we know that we have a shortage, and we're trying to play catch-up from, quite frankly, decades of inadequate investment in building new facilities.

Again, in Beverly, in my riding, there are a couple of facilities that are public – so they're for low-income seniors – that are in dire need of new dollars to at least either refurbish or refresh. I mean, they haven't had substantial investment since they were built, and I believe that they were built many, many years ago. So there is a dire need, Madam Speaker, but part of the challenge that I have with this bill is that I think we're missing out on some opportunities where, again, I believe that there are a number of industry reports on best practices and what we could and should be doing.

Now, you know, I was speaking with my colleague about what is the number one . . . [interjection] I was going to talk about the number one recommendation that facilities are making, and I will do that after I give way to the minister.

Mr. Copping: Thanks again for giving way and allowing me to provide comment. Two comments. One is on earlier talk about regulation first. I fully appreciate that if it's in the legislation, it's harder to change, but that's also part of the challenge, because as things evolve over time and the needs – and in this House we agree that we actually need to serve the needs of our seniors and that they're going to change over time. Having that in regulation allows us to be able to do that and be more effective, and then by doing consultation with, quite frankly, the industry – those are the people who actually have to deliver the services – we can actually provide more flexibility so we can get better service and, quite frankly, manage the cost so that we can reinvest this back into continuing care, and we're already putting more money into it.

I fully appreciate that the home-care shift is something necessary, and I'd like to point back to the Continuing Care Act, which includes home care as part of this so we can be seamless from home care to assisted living to continuing care as required. This is just a first step. I appreciate, you know, that more work needs to be done. This is the first step that gets it all in one place so that we can actually go to the regulation and then move forward.

Thank you.

Mr. Bilous: Yeah. Thank you, through you, Madam Speaker, to the minister for your comments. I appreciate that there will be changing needs over time, and I acknowledge that. I guess where I disagree is that legislation can also be updated and refreshed from time to time. In fact, I believe it was this UCP government that introduced a bill in the spring, ended up getting it wrong – you know, we might have said that – and then introduced amendments, like, brought back that legislation in the fall sitting. So in the same calendar year this current government brought the same legislation to the Legislature twice.

What I'm trying to showcase here, Madam Speaker, is that there's nothing stopping this government or any future government from bringing legislation through the Chamber as often as they wish. The difference between regulations and legislation is that legislation is more time consuming, but it also enables and allows all members and the public to weigh in, to peer into the conversation and to involve themselves through their MLAs and their representatives on that legislation. So, you know, I appreciate that some things are better left to regulation, but when it comes to the care of our parents and grandparents, I'd rather see it in legislation.

5:30

I'm not even sure how much time I have left, Madam Speaker, but another point that my colleague had made was about the fact that studies have been done – and I will have to dig up said studies because I haven't looked at them myself; I'm listening to colleagues of mine who are much better versed on this topic than I am – that

have shown that nonprofits are able to deliver a higher quality of care.

Now, for me, the difference between – and, obviously, businesses go into business to make a profit. A hundred per cent I'm behind that. But when it comes to taking care of our most vulnerable, those that are not-for-profit will take what would have been a profit, distribute it to their shareholders, and reinvest every single penny back into their facility whereas the for-profit providers have to show their shareholders that there is a profit. Otherwise, nobody would invest in them, and their business would go under.

Now, I appreciate that for-profit facilities would say: well, we're still investing what we need to into the facility, into the care, and it's kind of the cream at the top that is then being taken out.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members to speak to Bill 11? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. You know, this is one of those bills – I've actually had a number of them in this last year or so – where I sort of receive the bill and get kind of excited about the possibility of supporting it. As I've mentioned a number of times in this House, the things I will comment on are not what's in the bill as much as what's not in the bill, because, unfortunately, this government has a bit of a habit of bringing bills in that do pieces of work, often pieces of work that I'd like to support, but have failed to address some of the more substantive issues. I think that's maybe a bit different than some of the others, but with this one I certainly appreciate some aspects, and I really wish there was more in here and look forward to it.

You know, I reflect on the fact that when the current Health minister was previously minister of labour, we had a very reasonable exchange about foreign credentials, and I was promised at the time that more would be coming forward, and it hasn't. Now I'm back in this place where I'm hearing from the minister that more will come forward in time. I'm worried that unless I demand it today, I will never see it. I guess that's why I'm wanting to address sort of what's missing, what I'm concerned about today. It's just my own experience that I can't leave it in the hands of the government, because I'm afraid that it will not come to fruition.

Let me just start by saying that there are certainly things about this bill that the minister has spoken to that I appreciate. I mean, I appreciate the desire to have a single, overarching piece of legislation that helps in a transition from home care right through to the highest level of care. Certainly, if I can support that, I will do that, because that is fundamental in terms of a need for change in the industry, and I've seen that myself. But I'll speak to my own experiences about this in a bit.

I certainly also like the fact that there are increasing fines for when employers are clearly liable for issues, so, you know, another piece – I think that's section 48 – that I appreciate and would love to support. Section 49 creates a provision on vicarious liability for the employer, again another piece that I think is completely appropriate although these last two sections, the fines and section 49 on vicarious liability, are somewhat undermined by the government's previous decision to actually take away the rights of families to sue employers in circumstances that they would normally have had in any other consumer situation in this province. We kind of see a little bit of the giving on the one hand and the taking away on the other, but I support the fact that these pieces are in this legislation. I just wish they'd go back and change the one where they took away residents' rights to sue.

I also appreciate the fact that inspectors, for example, in section 20 can inspect unlicensed facilities and not just licensed facilities. I

really think that we have to make sure that we are trying to capture the full lived experience of people who are elders and who are receiving care and not just some subset of them.

Having said, you know, what it is I appreciate about this bill, I want to take some time to talk a little bit about where my concerns lie. My concerns lie with, I guess, the statement that I seem to have made in this House repeatedly over the last two years, that it's not what you did, that it's what you failed to do, how you haven't gone far enough. Why do we bring in the thin gruel? Now, in this case, it's not a thin piece of legislation – I respect that – but it is probably one of the most substantive areas of concern for any government, health care. Of course, all legislation is going to be quite significant, and I appreciate that there's really some important administrative work happening here in bringing some of these things together, so I just want to be really clear that there are pieces of this I really want to support.

My concern is based on a number of kind of everyday life experiences here, and I'll kind of go through a few of them, depending on how much time I happen to have. One of them is that there seems to be an intent by the government – and it seemed to be supported by the facility-based continuing care review that came out last year and was filed in this House – that we should be moving more toward home care and less and less institutionalized care. Now, as a statement by itself, I certainly support that. In fact, when I was vice-president of Catholic Social Services here in Edmonton, I was on the committee that was looking at that exact same thing around the year 2000. Here we are 22 years later, again, not really having made much progress – not, of course, on this minister or this government for the whole 22 years – but having seen this bill, I was hoping we'd see some of that.

The thing that I'm concerned about in terms of home care is that there needs to be some fairly substantive work done to bring home care up to a level of professional care that doesn't currently exist or hasn't over time. Too often, particularly with Conservative governments, when they talk about home care, what they're actually suggesting is just that, well, people stay home and the family will take care of them, you know, the sort of belief that the family is the centre of these things. I'm not going to argue that. But what happens too often, the same as with other situations like daycare and stuff: if you just simply take the governmental position that we will take this responsibility and send it back to families and then not do anything to enhance the likelihood that the families are going to be successful, it's problematic.

I can see that there is a goal. There is a goal here to actually increase the number of people that are in their homes. Of course, the minister has addressed the fact that the money saved from people being in their homes rather than in long-term care will be reinvested. I've heard numbers of well over \$400 million a year, for example, that could be saved. What I don't see, then, is all of the infrastructure to ensure that sending the situations back to a home-care situation will not result in a decrease in actual care. The people stay at home, but they don't receive the types of care that they need.

I know this government has an Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction, and I certainly think this is a place that the minister could have been involved. In my work at Catholic Social Services we actually ran a program that had people provide in-home services in people's homes in order to keep them in their homes so that they didn't end up in care. I was responsible for that program when I was there. We had numerous problems with what I would consider to be essentially red tape. From my conversations with some of my peers who I worked with at that time, who are now working in other long-term care settings in the province, some even in my own riding, who I go to see regularly, nothing has changed in those areas. We don't actually have the ability for someone to go into another person's

house and provide the full, rounded sets of services that are necessary to keep them at home.

Now, part of the problem is that there has been a tendency to believe that the home-care providers, when they come into the home, can only provide certain types of medical assistance like giving you your pill, putting on your stockings, those kinds of things. But those are often not the types of things that keep somebody in their home. Certainly, you know, making sure that they take the appropriate medication at the appropriate time every day is appropriate, but sometimes what you need is somebody to turn on the dishwasher.

5:40

If we truly are going to have an expanded home-care service, we need to actually have people who can come in and do substantive work, the type of work that would happen if you were living in a home with family members: the provision of meals, the cleaning up of the residence, the ensuring of the bathing, and so on.

Many of those types of tasks are not covered under current home-care provisions. What happens, then, is that if we move people out of longer term care situations, move them into home care, while we may ensure some basic health coverage such as taking your pills at the appropriate time, we often are not providing the kinds of services that are provided by other people in long-term care settings such as the housekeepers, who make sure that the residence itself is appropriate for the person who is receiving services. That doesn't happen in home-care services. That's just one example. I could certainly spend a long period of time . . . [interjection] I see the minister wanting to interject, and I will certainly give way.

Mr. Copping: Thanks, hon. member, for raising some issues and questions. Once again, I fully appreciate that this is a framework act. I'd like to point you to the definitions on page 5, 1(i):

"home and community care" means the prescribed health goods and services and prescribed other goods and services that are provided by a home and community care provider to an eligible individual.

The reason that I point that out is because I fully appreciate that as we do a transformation, we need to support people in their homes. This is a place where they want to be. It's not just about providing health services; it's about a bucket of services that we can provide so that they can stay home.

Quite frankly, as seen in the FBCC, roughly 20 per cent of people who are going into congregate care services don't actually need to be there if we actually supported them at home. This gives us the ability to be able to, again, as we go into our programs and services, do this through regulation and do this through policy as we work through this. But there is certainly more work that needs to be done, so I fully appreciate it. It was identified at FBCC. We also have provided more funding to increase home care in our current budget.

Mr. Feehan: I'd like to thank the minister for these comments because it tells me that we agree on the intent to some degree, and I think that that's appropriate. This is one of these bills that I would really like to be able to support because I certainly agree with the statements that the minister has given. What I am left with, however, is this sort of: well, just sit back and trust me that we'll do the things that you're hoping will happen. It's always problematic for the opposition when that happens, because we certainly have seen that that has not been what's happened in the past.

I mean, we've just gone through COVID. We certainly should learn some lessons from that. We know that what happened, after making literally dozens of recommendations, both here in the House and on albertasfuture.ca, regarding COVID, is that this government really did the very least at the very last minute. It seems to be their way of going

about doing things. The result here, of course, in the province of Alberta is that we had a significant number of people who died during COVID and more proportionately to our population than in other provinces. So the consequences are real, and the fact that the government wants to do the least at the last possible time is something that gives us pause and makes us really worried.

I certainly would love to see the government take on home care and build, in legislation, a much more robust determination to move in the direction that the minister is suggesting that maybe they perhaps might move in. I certainly can see the one line there that says: and other services might be provided. But, of course, none of that is laid out in the legislation as to what those services are and so on. That's the problem, for me, in this case. It's not that I distrust the intent of where we're going with this. Rather, I don't see the action being taken to substantially build a robust infrastructure that will actually provide the services that we wish to see to ensure that people can live in their homes and so that they don't have to stay in long-term care. I would certainly like to see that.

Of course, we know that the biggest issue is actually the employees themselves. This is an area in which we cannot trust the government because they have continuously established a horrible, negative relationship with all health care providers. They've been fighting with doctors for three years, after cancelling their contract. They have been fighting with nurses. They've been asking for 10 per cent rollbacks from other, you know, health care providers such as respiratory therapists. What we see is the government wishing to constantly privatize, and of course they constantly say really negative things about unions, all of whom provide the services in hospitals and in long-term care settings around this province. So we know that they're antagonistic.

As the facility-based continuing care review points out and as many members of this side of the House have pointed out, one of the primary issues in this case is the fact that we do not have full-time workers working where they receive all the benefits of being a full-time worker, which usually comes with unionization, which is why most of us support unions. That is, they do not get contracts that say: we will give you 40 hours of work a week. Instead – and I know this as I was that employer at one time at Catholic Social Services – contracts came in bit by piece. You go to this house, and you provide this one service. You give them their pill, and you leave. The task should take 15 minutes. You get paid for one hour of time because of travel, and you're travelling around. And then you kind of – the workers try to cobble together enough to turn that into a full-day job. That's true in long-term care all over the place. We know that part of the reason why COVID did spread is because so many people were attending multiple facilities on the same day or at the very least the same week, and that is a problem.

I do not see a direction here in this bill that will ensure that we hire on that 6,000 plus full-time care staff that the facility-based continuing care review suggested we needed. I mean, I don't see them making sure that they get competitive wages, competitive wages with what they would earn were they to be working in a facility like a major hospital, like the University of Alberta hospital or any of the other ones in the province. We don't see them getting the pensions and the benefits that would allow them to live full, complete lives and do so by providing good, substantive care to the people in our facilities.

These are the kinds of things that we really need to see some movement on. This is clearly an area we cannot just leave for the government as they have absolutely taken the position that they are antagonistic to the provision of those kinds of services.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I'm going to rise to provide a few comments at this second reading stage of Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. I may get cut off, and that is unfortunate, but I did want to make sure that I provided some comments on this legislation given that 20 per cent of the population in Lethbridge are seniors, in both seats. We have, obviously, a crisis in primary care and family medicine. I have had a number of interactions with people over the last seven years around improvements to Alzheimer's and dementia care, expansion of housing affordability, and accessibility for our seniors population.

There's no question that just the affordable housing stock and how accessible it is in general to older people is something to – in order to, you know, meet those goals of expansion of home care, that we have heard discussed this evening, sometimes there need to be homes that are appropriately affordable and accessible. Of course, there's the home adaptation grants and loans and those sorts of programs. But, in the first instance, sometimes especially lower income folks do need access to that affordability and accessibility. It's been an ongoing priority of the housing authority, for example.

I have also had a number of interactions with constituents around COVID protocols and COVID policies within long-term care and the continuing care sector, particularly in the early days, when Alberta was quite late to the game to have one facility where workers were working in, and some of the very serious concerns that family members brought to me around making sure that we had the appropriate policies in place to limit the spread of the virus and how long it took for Alberta to act on that. I certainly have had constituents talk to me about that and a number of families at that time reach out.

5:50

I have certainly – around the issues related to home care, there is no question that when nurses came up to me in great numbers over the summer, when the government was contemplating the wage rollbacks, a number of them were home-care nurses, and the extent to which they were communicating to me that the system is extremely stressed and teetering on the brink of crisis was something that really struck home to me. This was not just, you know, people communicating small, little tweaks or fixes to the system. The extent to which those nurses do not feel, both RNs and LPNs, that they are able to give the kind of care that is expected and the complexity within long-term care was alarming to me when they described the kinds of challenges that they were facing in order to take care of people.

I'm always very pleased when I hear about people wanting to, you know, fund and resource home care. I worry that the appropriate resources – health care is expensive. It's kind of like democracy, you know? It's the worst system except for all of the others. That is the way that I view, in many cases, public health care. There is no question that it is our largest budgetary disbursement. This is not a matter of opinion; it's a fact. There's no question that some of these additions, fixes, innovations even within public health care are extremely expensive. There is no question about that. The question is: how expensive is it to not do it? The question is, "How expensive is it to contract out to the private sector to skim a profit?" as my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview described earlier. The question is: how are we appropriately regulating this? How are we making those investments? How are we undertaking our discussions with various regulated professions and labour groups in a way that properly stewards the public purse but makes sure that resources are there for people?

The other piece that I will note – it isn't specifically in here – is around that family-managed care has also seen a number of

reductions within AHS, and that is also a system that keeps people out of long-term care facilities, and they're not necessarily seniors, those folks, so folks who are living with chronic illness, perhaps not quite palliative but getting to the point of palliative. Families often manage that care through the AHS family-managed care system, and there were a number of cuts in the first sort of round of them in '19 and '20 that I've had a number of constituents talk to me about. That's the first thing I wanted to do, put all of those concerns from the people of Lethbridge that have come to me over the years.

The second thing I want to do here is to, as I've discussed – you know, health care is our largest budget disbursement. It is expensive to do it right. There is no question about this, but having that right care in the right place by the right person and the right kind of professional care is, in fact, not only the lowest cost to do it in the public sector, generally speaking, in some form of public delivery even though it's – for example, in the continuing care sector we see a number of nonprofits delivering these services. There's no question about that, but there is also no question that it takes people. There's really no, quote, innovating. There's no synergizing your synergies around the fact that you need human beings to care for other human beings. You can't. There's not an app for that. It is simply paying people a decent hourly wage with some decent benefits and a reasonable pension to want to go into this field and to care for other people.

When I look at the facility-based review, I see 5,500 FTEs required in order to meet some of the recommendations of that facility-based review. We do not see in this legislation – I can appreciate that this legislation is quite lengthy, and it is well considered, but we do not see here the mention of those kinds of resourcing questions. You know, a person can, or one can, a government can put some of that in legislation such as things like staffing ratios, things like ensuring capacity and resources such as supports for being able to navigate the system. In that bucket I would put the independent Seniors Advocate, but there are other ways that that can be resourced as well: you know, legislated metrics, goals, amounts, fee schedules, all of those sorts of things that in some cases are, but we could see that piece, I think, in here as well.

Really, the question when people are trying to navigate long-term care and continuing care isn't, "What is the legislative framework?" necessarily although I can appreciate that the minister pointed out some instances where the legislative framework maybe didn't make a lot of sense. It's generally: how do I navigate the system for the best outcome for my elderly relative or, generally speaking, an elderly parent or the people that I know that have begun to navigate this system? And it's not the legislative framework; it's the resourcing, it's the ratios, it's the standards, it's the expectations. Those are the things that – you know, I have seen people now in the last year, people with a master's degree in public policy, navigating this system on behalf of an elderly, very frail parent and having significant challenges with making sure that that person got the right care in the right place at the right time, particularly when they're really, really frail, particularly layering on the challenges of COVID-19.

Now, on that, I do notice that in the facility-based review it does recommend learning from COVID-19, and in fact the Auditor General has done a report on this matter, Madam Speaker, and he asked to present that report in June to the Public Accounts Committee and was blocked by the government side members from doing so. So one would think – well, one would hope, in fact, that there are amendments coming to this legislation at the government's first available opportunity to make good on the recommendations that the Auditor General is preparing, and they

have in fact blocked him from speaking about it to the public in June, when he asked to do so, and told him that he could maybe show up sometime in November, which is entirely inappropriate. It was actually quite an astonishing misuse of procedure at the Public Accounts level. I'll just flag that for the minister because there are probably some really good recommendations in there. In fact, the facility-based review said: hey, learn from COVID. The AG went and did an audit and learned from COVID in long-term care, and now we're not going to hear about it until November.

I want to talk a little bit about moving folks out of hospital and keeping them in home care and the amount of family support that is often required when you have very, very frail people who are moved out of the hospital system. Sometimes they're very ungraciously and unkindly referred to as, you know, bed blockers or this kind of thing. We heard the former Minister of Health discuss this early last fall in response to the COVID delta wave, wave 4, saying: oh, we're going to create these other continuing care spaces; we're going to move these people out of hospital. What one ends up doing there is that extremely frail people are not getting that kind of continuous care that they would get in a hospital acute-care setting, and then they're going out to a long-term care setting, and there are no guarantees that, without constant family intervention and advocacy, those folks who are so frail are getting what they need.

I watched it up close over the last year when my partner's mother had a stroke, and it was really quite difficult to watch that constant moving back and forth from hospital over to long-term care and bouncing back and forth. It was very, very difficult to essentially trust the assessment that when she was leaving that acute-care setting, that was, in fact, in her best interests, but, you know, that's what families are left to do, and, quite frankly, families had less ability and a very, very frail spouse had less ability to interact with that person when they were in the acute-care setting because of the COVID restrictions, and on and on and on.

Again, this comes down to resources. You can put some of them in legislation, but really what you have to do is put those resources in a budget, and then you have to hold yourself to the metrics and to the expectations within that budget. You can't expect to keep those budgets constant with an aging population not adjusted for population and inflation over a period of two or three years. It's not going to work. You're not going to be able to do what you want to do in continuing care and home care. It is just a mathematical impossibility.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the clock strikes 6. The House now stands adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Day 20

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
 Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
 Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
 Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
 Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
 Alberta Hansard

Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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| Jason Kenney | Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations |
| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gottfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
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Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Ganley
Gottfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
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Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
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Toor
Turton
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Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

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Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 19, 2022

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 9 Public's Right to Know Act

[Adjourned debate March 28: Mr. Eggen]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on second reading of Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. I've not yet had the opportunity to speak to this bill, so I look forward to the opportunity to do that tonight. I also welcome back my fellow colleagues in the House today after a short break. I hope everybody had a restful time and spent some good time in their constituencies hearing from Albertans. Interesting to see new faces, or some old faces in new spaces. Let's put it that way. It's amazing how a new member in this House really mixes up the dynamic, right? Welcome to our new Member of the Legislative Assembly. It's a pleasure to rise and speak tonight.

I've had an opportunity to take a look at Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act, as tabled by the Minister of Justice. I think it's important for Albertans, as we are considering this bill, to reflect upon the reason why it is before us. As many may know, this was part of the United Conservative Party's campaign platform commitment, a very lengthy document, for those who may have had the opportunity to read it. It included a commitment around the public's right to know. Of course, we also heard this promise repeated in the Speech from the Throne earlier this year.

Now, I think it's important, when we look at what the commitment was in the campaign platform, to compare it against what we see before us in Bill 9. In the platform commitment from the United Conservative Party page 65 referenced enacting

the Public's Right to Know Act which will require annual reporting, by judicial district on a wide number of measurements such as the number of crimes committed by persons on bail, probation, parole, subject to a deportation order for criminality, or previously removed for criminality.

As I mentioned, in the Speech from the Throne we also saw reference to this piece of legislation that is before us now. The Speech from the Throne indicated that "right-to-know legislation will allow more information to be shared with the public about individuals on bail, probation and parole, and criminals pending deportation."

I think that upon hearing and receiving Bill 9 under first reading, many Albertans would expect to see that the legislation would mirror this commitment – right? – that there would be a clear requirement for reporting by judicial district on specific individuals, addressing the number of crimes they've committed by persons on bail, deportation, all the things I just listed. That's the kind of detail that was in the platform promise as well as in the Speech from the Throne, so I think perhaps, like myself, many Albertans may be surprised to actually review the contents of Bill

9 and see that it does not make such a detailed commitment. It doesn't actually commit to providing to Albertans the information that was promised in both the platform and in the Speech from the Throne.

In fact, the key provision, for those who are following in great interest, of the right to know act – it's not a very large piece of legislation. It is pretty easy to read, but unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there's not a whole lot of content here. The key provision within this bill is section 2, and it describes the purposes of the act, which is to, again, "increase transparency and accountability" and "help Albertans better understand the criminal justice system" and "ensure Albertans have information about the safety of their communities." That's the purpose of the bill.

However, when we get to the only mandatory provision, or compulsory provision, of the bill, which is section 3(1), it says that the Minister shall prepare a report respecting data and information relating to the criminal justice system in Alberta, including data and information in respect of the year immediately preceding the year in which the report is prepared, that the Minister considers necessary or advisable to carry out the purposes of this Act.

If you're following along carefully, Mr. Speaker, the report simply requires the minister on an annual basis to prepare a report respecting, quote, data and information related to the criminal justice system. That's it. That's what it says: data and information about the criminal justice system.

Now, arguably, of course, the Minister of Justice and all ministers with the responsibilities of their ministries have the ability to publish data and information regarding the ministry that they're responsible for. It's a little bit unusual why this section is even required. Certainly, the Minister of Justice has the ability to publish all kinds of reports related to data and information from that ministry. In fact, I believe the Ministry of Justice regularly issues reports, annual reporting, reports on various issues. There are various task forces and committees that come together, and the Ministry of Justice produces reports, so this actually doesn't contain any new requirement for the Minister of Justice.

In fact, I think my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View really said: what is the point of this? This doesn't seem to actually – and I'm paraphrasing for her, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure if she was here, she would say, "That's not actually what I'm saying," and she said it much more eloquently. However, the point was that she was saying: "Well, what's new here? What new data and information is actually being produced by the Minister of Justice as a result of Bill 9?" I think we would find that there is no real commitment here to any specific data. If this is about ensuring that Albertans have the right to know information about specific individuals and any bail conditions or their issues related to their deportation, that's not actually set out in this bill.

Now, it's possible, of course, that that kind of detail could be provided in regulations. The regulation-making authority in this bill is also quite broad. It doesn't actually say much about what will be specified as data and information, only that, you know, they can collect data from municipalities, from police services, and of course the minister can decide what to disclose and what not to disclose. It is clear in the bill in section 5 that the minister would not disclose public information that could readily identify the individual, which I think is important and, quite frankly, required by law, not to identify individuals in that way. However, there's not a whole lot new here.

So I think for those United Conservative Party members – and there are quite a few more this year, Mr. Speaker, I understand, than there were previously. Lots of great interest in becoming a member of the party right now.

Mr. McIver: That's because you lost the election. That's why there's more.

Ms Pancholi: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, that the minister of municipal services likes to heckle.

Certainly, a lot of those members will be looking at this platform and saying: well, where is this commitment to actually providing the information promised in that campaign platform? It's really just a very generalized ability.

Now, with that said, Mr. Speaker, you know, it is quite general. I support the idea that the Minister of Justice should be able to submit reports annually that contain data and information. I would really like it if this ministry and perhaps this entire government would focus a little bit more on data and information rather than conjecture and name-calling and ideology and all the other things they're very skilled at. It would be great if this government focused a little bit more on data, so by all means I encourage and I generally support the notion of this bill and the idea that the Minister of Justice – please, please do issue reports based on data and information.

Then, when we're looking at those reports, I think that there are a number of things that we would like to see, and I sincerely hope that when the current Minister of Justice – it's also a rotating position in this government, so we'll see who's actually going to be the one developing these regulations, but let's say the current Minister of Justice for the sake of argument, something he also likes to do at the end of driveways. He actually will maybe produce reports containing data and information that actually speak to some really key issues related to our criminal justice system.

For example, Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre has brought forward a private member's bill, Bill 204, that will be before, I believe, the private members' bills committee shortly, to address the issue of the collection of race-based data. That's critically important, particularly as it relates to the criminal justice system. In fact, the Alberta NDP Official Opposition caucus conducted a months-long consultation last year with Albertans, hundreds of Albertans, on antiracism policies and ideas on a number of issues, not just about the criminal justice system although that was a key element of our consultation, but we also talked about antiracism work in education, in health care, in democratic participation, in economic participation, in access to community supports.

As a result of those hours and hours and hours of consultation and feedback and engagement with Albertans, we were very proud to develop an antiracism policy, which includes – part of the provisions included what the Member for Edmonton-City Centre has brought forward, which is a private member's bill to collect race-based data. Now, that would apply to all ministries and all programs that deliver services and require them, put a positive obligation on those ministries, no matter what service they provide, no matter what programs they deliver, to actually collect race-based information.

7:40

That's important, Mr. Speaker, for a couple of reasons. One, of course, is that it's important to really get at the root of systemic inequality and systemic racism because it very much underlies many of our systems and programs in our province. Alberta is not unique. It implies that there's systemic racism that exists in many institutions, but our criminal justice system is a key one. It's important to collect that information to be able to identify, for example, overrepresentation of certain racialized groups, perhaps of Black Albertans, of Indigenous Albertans, persons of colour, to identify where they may be accessing services more, whether they may be subject to things such as the criminal justice system more.

Collecting that data is important to identify systemic racism, but it's also critically important to address it. Once we have that data, we can start to develop policies and practices and legislation and financial supports that really get to the root of that systemic racism.

When I see that Bill 9 allows for the Minister of Justice to collect data and information, I hope that actually reflects a commitment to the principles set out in Bill 204 by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre. I hope that means that the Minister of Justice and, in fact, any of the government caucus members that intend to support Bill 9 will also support Bill 204, because it is incredibly important information, and I think, most obvious when we think of systemic racism, Mr. Speaker, many Albertans are right to think of the criminal justice system. We know that, for example, Indigenous Albertans represent only 6 per cent of our population yet, I believe, based on the most recent information that I saw, represent about 40 per cent of incarcerated individuals in this province. We know that that means that there is inequity taking place.

Of course, if we're going to look at the overrepresentation of individuals in the criminal justice system, it does mean that we have to look at the failures or the lack of supports or the institutional and structural inequalities that exist in the delivery of so many other services such as education and an issue that I've been speaking about in this House quite a bit, Mr. Speaker, which is the overrepresentation of Indigenous young people in the child intervention system. When we talk about data that's going to be collected by the Ministry of Justice and reported publicly to Albertans, I would love to see a fulsome analysis and collection of data of why young people who were in the child intervention system may have received child intervention services, may be overrepresented in the criminal justice system, and how actually the failure to properly support Indigenous young people in particular in the child intervention system, which, by the way, is also related to failure to support Indigenous families and parents and communities and elders – how that ends up being reflected in our criminal justice system. That, to me, is incredibly important information.

We also know that investments, for example, Mr. Speaker, in early intervention, both for families but also early childhood education for all children, actually correlate with a lower interaction with the criminal justice system. I would love to see data and information reported publicly by this ministry that looks at that, that looks at the relationship between early childhood education and access to quality early childhood education and the impacts on the criminal justice system down the road, because we know those correlations do exist. The data produced annually by this ministry would be incredibly important. You know, there are a number of other issues, when I think about the child intervention system, where I think that the Ministry of Justice and the data and information that they collect and produce would be very important.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in this House the members of the opposition have been repeatedly calling on the government ministries to provide accountability in response to recommendations that have been made repeatedly by the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. In fact, when I say that the members of the opposition have made that call, we're really supporting the call that's been made repeatedly by the advocate himself, the former advocate now, as we do now have a new advocate that's been appointed. The former advocate, Mr. Del Graff, was very clear and very vocal, particularly in the last year, about requiring more accountability from government ministries in how they are improving outcomes for children and young people in care and particularly how they're responding to recommendations that the advocate has made around improving outcomes for children and youth in care.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the advocate regularly does what we call mandatory death reviews, where they evaluate the circumstances leading to the tragic deaths of children and young people in the child intervention system and then go on to make recommendations.

The advocate has actually made specific recommendations for the Ministry of Justice. For example, just last year, in the most recent annual report, the advocate asked for the Ministry of Justice to report on more information to families when no-contact orders are issued or removed or revised and how they affect families. I'd like to see that information publicly reported because that's critically important for Albertans to see.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. Just quickly, in summary, this is not a very detailed piece of legislation. In any event, this bill will require the minister to publish an annual report with data and information relating to the criminal justice system. Clearly. It gives the minister the power to make regulation with regard to the disclosure of information such as personal information. The bill states that the information should not identify the individual. Great. The bill does not specify which data will be collected or disclosed, nor does it set any criteria the reports have to meet. Now, what's interesting about this is that the minister likely already had the ability to publish these reports. Interesting.

Now, I know that some of my colleagues have already raised these questions that I'm going to repeat, but I think they bear repeating on the record. I'm really hopeful that perhaps the Justice minister or someone that previously was the Justice minister has some answers for this. I think it's really important. The first question is: could the minister today, without this bill, publish a report on individuals on bail or parole as promised in the UCP platform? I understand that this piece of legislation is specifically geared at ticking off a box of some of the to-do list that was on the UCP platform, and that's fine, but it'd be great to know a little bit more about that.

Two, why did the minister choose to not specify which data will be included or disclosed? I think that's important. I know we tend to hear in this place, you know, not to worry, that it'll all come out in the regulation. Well, I think that if Albertans had any level of trust with this government, it wouldn't be such a problem, but it has not been the experience of Albertans to be able to trust the word of this government. They will say one thing and do another. The example that I always go to, because it was just so glaring and happened so quickly after the election, is that I can remember the now Premier actually making fun of somebody on this side for suggesting that the UCP would immediately deindex benefits like AISH, making fun of us, actually. Then that was one of the first things that happened, with an omnibus bill, not to mention some of the really nasty things that were said: "It's not a big deal. Don't worry about it."

Now, I will give them some credit. I'm sure that they didn't know a couple of years ago that inflation would be as bad as it is right now. I understand. I'm pretty sure they didn't know a pandemic would be coming. But they still haven't corrected that. All of this adds to the fact that Albertans just don't trust this government. They don't trust what they say, and they certainly don't trust what they do. Anyway, you get where I'm going with this.

The next question is: what would stop the minister from annually picking and choosing which data suits them best? It would be nice to know right up front: what can we expect?

Will the minister support the collection of race-based data? My colleague mentioned private member's Bill 204, which is currently, you know, under discussion before the House. I would like to add – and my colleague did mention and talk about some of the work that was done in the creation of Bill 204. I wasn't able to attend all of the consultations, but I did attend one that was specifically geared – and I thought it was really quite interesting – at people with disabilities as it relates to this topic. I can remember thinking to myself – you know, I didn't really understand, I couldn't really envision sort of how many people this would attract or why this would be top of mind for them. But it was, and they had so many things to say. What it taught me is that that is the real value of consultation. When you do things, even if you're not sure what people are going to have to add, you do all of the work. My colleague from Edmonton-City Centre has certainly done that and has certainly continued to be an advocate for some of the things he's asking for in this bill.

In any event, one of the things, you know: just the name of this particular piece of legislation. I always find the choice of titles quite interesting: the public's right to know. I think that there are a lot of things that the public have a right to know, and I don't think they're all covered in this particular piece of legislation. This legislation does very little to address the priorities of Albertans.

7:50

When I think about some of the issues around justice, I think about some of the things that have very clearly come out, one of those being the changes that are being proposed around policing and law enforcement. I think municipalities have been very, very clear that this is not something they want to change right now. They're happy with the way things are with the RCMP. In fact, I think they've been quite specific about saying: if you're going to invest some time and money, that's not where to invest the time and money. But, of course, Mr. Speaker, as we've seen time and time again, this government always acts as if they know better, that they know better than the municipalities, who are actually far closer to their constituents than this government is.

It also does very little to address key issues. It certainly doesn't restore the victims of crime fund. You know, I can remember – I think it was in 2020 when the changes were made – all of the things that we talked about that could potentially happen, and sadly I think we've seen a lot of those changes happen.

Earlier this morning we had a meeting of Public Accounts. Not that it relates to this piece of legislation, but there is a phrase in one of the reports, the annual report for Municipal Affairs, strangely enough, and it talked about their approach to managing COVID-19. The phrase that they used was: it was a "whole-of-society" approach to address COVID-19. Of course, just that phrase makes you think about what that looks like, a whole-of-society approach. It wasn't sort of targeted here and targeted there, you know, trying to patch little holes; it was an approach that looked at: what is the problem, and what is an approach that will encompass all of the anticipated or expected or real problems that we see? That phrase really stuck with me when I read it. As I look at this piece of legislation, this piece of legislation is not that. It's not that at all. Not at all. If you're going to look at crime and if you're going to look at the reduction of crime and if you're going to look at ultimately making Alberta a safer place for Albertans, this piece of legislation falls far, far short.

We know some of the problems that were created with the changes for victims of crime, whether it was, you know, changes to caps on counselling. I don't know about you, but for any of the people that I've met that have survived some of the crimes – I don't even want to talk about them – some of the very serious crimes, I'm sorry, but five counselling sessions aren't going to cut it, and not everybody has access to resources to augment that. That's just one example.

I think the other thing that this piece of legislation doesn't do – I mean, it's all fine and good if you're only comparing it to your platform document and checking off boxes. What it doesn't address are some of the very root causes of crime and of situations that create really unsafe environments.

I'm going to go back to, you know, one of the things that I mentioned a little bit earlier, one of the broken promises – actually, I don't think it was a promise – that this government made not to deindex benefits. Well, you get it. One of the things that that inadvertently did was create a lot of hardships for a lot of people. By deindexing benefits, it may not have caused a lot of pain the first year. It started to cause a lot more pain the second year. As inflation started to escalate, it caused a lot more pain, not to mention – throw in there a global pandemic, and it's a recipe for disaster.

By deindexing benefits like AISH and income support – and I'm going to explain this again. AISH, which is \$1,685 a month – that's the maximum that people can get – is not the highest in this country, just so we're clear. The government continues to say that it is the most generous in Canada; it is not. You know better. I would expect the government to do better. It is not. The Northwest Territories and the Yukon have higher benefits. It is not the most generous in Canada. But even at that, it is below the poverty line, so why on earth would you go there and say that it's generous? People are still living in poverty. Anyway, that's AISH.

Income support is about half of what AISH is, and I can tell that there are thousands of people that are on income support that have really serious disabilities. Because of the way the AISH legislation is written, they don't qualify for AISH, not to mention some of the processes and appeals. But there are huge problems. I am not saying that poverty is a direct link to increasing crime, but it certainly has an impact. I can only tell you what I know anecdotally. It's that, sadly, I've known far too many people that are living in poverty, where crime becomes – sometimes it's a crime of opportunity, and sometimes it's about desperation or about not having the supports to show you a different way; you know, some of the very basic things like not having stable and secure housing, not having access to regular food and then knowing that you've already used up your trips to the food bank for the month in the first couple of weeks. So what do you do for the rest of the month? This creates opportunity. Sometimes crime is driven by desperation, and things escalate.

We know that there is a massive cost to not addressing poverty. There is a massive cost in health care. We know this. There is a massive cost to the justice system. You know, I can remember reading a report a while ago – and I wish I had some statistics for you tonight, but I don't – about the number of people in the criminal justice system who are undiagnosed, perhaps with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder or other disabilities. Perhaps it's brain injuries. There are so many people walking around, and sadly we've given them sort of this nickname that's awful, and it's called the walking wounded. They don't look disabled, they may not use a wheelchair, but they have incredible disabilities and incredible hurdles.

When you make life more difficult for this group of people – and this is not a small group. Just think about people on AISH – it's, like, over 70,000 people – and the tens of thousands of people on income support and then the many thousands of people that don't even get benefits that are living not even paycheque to paycheque.

They're working multiple jobs many times, and they're not stretching it month to month. They just can't make it. So with opportunity, sometimes crime is a reality.

I think that if, truly, a government wants to create an environment where you're reducing crime, where you're increasing the safety of Albertans, then you have to have a whole-of-society approach. This legislation could have been an opportunity to start to open that door, but instead what it is, I think, is an exercise in just ticking off a box on a platform document. I'm not saying that perhaps that information, the changes that would be made in this legislation, won't make a difference in people's lives. That's great if it does. I certainly hope it does. But it doesn't take a whole-of-society approach, and we have a huge problem in Alberta. It's escalating. We have a huge problem with rural crime. We have a huge problem with crime in cities.

It's unfortunate that we don't get a lot of opportunity to debate legislation. The government doesn't get unlimited opportunity to bring forward legislation. I would hope that every opportunity would be used as best as it can for a whole-of-society approach to address a very real problem. I know this government knows crime is a problem. When they were in opposition, I heard them talking about it endlessly. They don't talk about it with as much vigour; it's a little bit more targeted these days.

Anyway, I'm going to go back and talk a little bit about the Alberta provincial police force. You know, I feel like sometimes some of the legislation that this government brings forward is an attempt to distract from really large, significant issues. I don't think it can be understated just how much Alberta municipalities do not want the changes that this government is trying to push through. They absolutely do not want these changes. It's not for us to tell them that they're incorrect and that this government knows better. I think our job as legislators and as MLAs is to listen to our constituents. I think that just this very simple example demonstrates so clearly that this government is out of touch with the people they are supposed to be governing for and the people they are supposed to be . . .

Mr. McIver: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called. I see the hon. minister.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I hate to do this, but I've got to call a point of order under 23(b), "speaks to matters other than the question under discussion." Now, listen, I'm not suggesting in any way that the hon. member's debate wasn't scintillating and important, because it was both scintillating and important. It just wasn't on the topic of the bill that we're discussing right now. I would just respectfully ask you to coach the hon. member to talk about the bill before us.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. member, should you want to, the opportunity is yours, absolutely. Yes. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would suggest to you that under 23(b) this is not a point of order given that we are at second reading of Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act, and that it is this member's first opportunity to speak generally to this piece of legislation, relating it to government business and other matters. I do not think there is a point of order here. I agree that the remarks

were scintillating and relevant and interesting. They were excellent, and I hope that the member will be allowed to continue.

8:00

The Acting Speaker: I'm not sure the hon. minister necessarily called them relevant given his point of order. However, what I will say is that this is the hon. Member for St. Albert's first opportunity to speak on this at second reading, and I believe that historically there has been a little bit of a bigger berth with regard to what is spoken in here on second reading. I would invite the hon. Member for St. Albert to please continue with her comments.

Thank you.

Debate Continued

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, perhaps if it was a better piece of legislation, there would be more, you know, relevant things to talk about.

Anyway, you know, perhaps I'm going to go back to – my colleague the Justice critic actually released a statement about this piece of legislation that I thought was really terrific. Perhaps the minister of – I don't even recall anymore. There's been a lot of movement. What's his . . .

Member Irwin: Which one?

Ms Renaud: Transportation.

Some Hon. Members: Municipal Affairs.

Ms Renaud: Municipal Affairs. Okay. Sorry.

Mr. McIver: See, I was nice to her, but she's not nice to me.

Ms Renaud: I'm sorry. It's not nice that I can't remember his title. I apologize.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the only person with the call right now is the hon. Member for St. Albert. If there are conversations to be had, there are lounges where you can have them.

Please continue.

Ms Renaud: Excellent. Thank you for pointing that out.

I'd just like to review some of the press release that actually went out. I thought it was really terrific, and I think my colleague across the way will enjoy it. "This legislation is incredibly vague and doesn't even specify which data will be collected or disclosed. Most importantly, it does nothing to help address crime." I could not agree more with my colleague's statement. It doesn't restore funding to the victims of crime fund that was raided by the UCP or prioritize the new victim of crime model they've been promising for the last two years.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Taber-Warner, I believe, has caught my eye.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in support of Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. First, I want to thank the minister for all those involved in bringing this important bill forward. I know that many people are concerned about crime in their communities. In Alberta we are lucky to have many dedicated, local neighbourhood watch and patrol groups who do their best to protect our communities from crime, but the challenges with crime in rural Alberta are different than those in urban centres. Protecting our rural communities from crime is more of a difficult task. Local police are often set up in urban areas but are tasked to cover large

swaths of surrounding rural communities, and it can take them a while to get there once dispatched.

Mr. Speaker, in 2019 the former Minister of Justice toured rural Alberta and talked to a number of citizens in our rural communities. During this tour the common feedback from the individuals in rural communities was their concerns with increasing rural crime. These individuals expressed a need for more information on crimes in their communities. This bill is a result of this engagement and fulfills yet another platform commitment from our government.

This legislation would make currently available metrics such as police-based crime data reportable annually. It will require the government to table a report on these metrics in the Legislature and publish them on the government of Alberta website. This legislation will be the first of its kind in Canada and will bring consistency in timing and a more user-friendly approach to crime statistics for all Albertans.

This government believes that people have a right to know what's going on in their communities. Readily available justice statistics can help improve public safety by giving Albertans the ability to make informed decisions about protecting themselves and their communities. This will help Albertans to better understand what is going on in their communities and support effective crime-fighting initiatives with evidence-based decisions for better outcomes and safer communities. Improving access to crime data will help communities and groups like Alberta Citizens on Patrol to understand what is going on in their communities in order for them to make decisions on patrols and volunteer efforts that would best serve them.

Mr. Speaker, there are also provisions in this legislation that enable the government to obtain and publish additional data through information-sharing agreements with the federal government, other provinces and territories, municipalities, and police services, among others. Additional metrics can be reported as they become available in the future.

In terms of costs, while there may be costs for the technology used to report the metrics and/or staff to collect and publish the information, these can be covered by the minister's existing budget. Giving the public access to information on crime statistics that they need without any additional cost makes this bill a no-brainer.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this is a bill that provides Albertans transparency when it comes to crime data. It provides local groups, communities, and police the opportunity to adjust operations to make their communities safer, and it comes with no additional cost to government. For all these reasons, I will be supporting this bill and encourage all members in this House to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening to speak about Bill 9, Public's Right to Know Act. I know that some of my colleagues who've risen before me this evening have covered a lot of ground in a short amount of time and have eloquently spoken to the bill, so I hope to shed some light using some of my own perspectives and experience where I've come upon some past work and volunteer work in the criminal justice system, that I reflect upon now when I look at Bill 9 and what it attempts to accomplish.

What it shows me, Mr. Speaker, is that the government is simply trying to beat their chest and say: look, we're tough on crime. It

speaks to, as others across the floor have talked to us this evening about, rural crime and how fearful people are in rural Alberta about criminal activity where they feel more at risk and vulnerable because of the distances involved and time in response involved, but really this seems to be simply a shout-out, an electoral platform opportunity to say, "Look, we're tough on crime because we are naming those categories of people who are going through the perennial revolving door of the justice system," as they like to say.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that revolving door is something that, unfortunately, has been ongoing for a long, long time, and the reason for that, in my view, in many ways is that the criminal justice system – justice departments, the Solicitor General's department but particularly Justice itself – has been underfunded not only in this province but right across the country, in every provincial and federal jurisdiction. It seems to me that when it comes to budget time, the Justice ministry is a convenient whipping boy and doesn't get the funding that it needs because prisoners don't have a lot of voice.

Indeed, individuals who revolve through the justice system do it for a reason. There's a reason for everything, Mr. Speaker, and this legislation does nothing to address the reasons behind that so-called revolving door that make it impossible for the government to bring forward a piece of legislation like this so they can claim that they're, you know, being tough on crime. But being tough on crime doesn't mean belittling or ostracizing or blaming the individuals who are at the mercy of the courts once they have been charged. It behooves us to go further and look behind the situation and ask: why are these individuals before the courts in the first place? That's the tough-on-crime approach that I'd like to see. Simply naming the groups of individuals, identifying through data and publishing reports on individuals who have committed other crimes while on bail or parole, as the UCP promised in their platform, doesn't accomplish anything towards actually getting us closer to reducing the recidivism rate or answering the question as to why people are involved in criminal activity in the first place.

8:10

We've looked at ways where we could identify further support mechanisms that we could use to assist groups of our population who are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Our Bill 204, which the Member for Edmonton-City Centre has brought forward, which is currently before the House, purports to collect race-based data, which would be used to justify further supports for identifiable groups who are going through that revolving door on a regular basis, to identify the root causes to the criminal activity, looking at, if I might say so, the social determinants of crime, the social determinants of being on the margins of your society, not simply to boast that we're getting tough on crime but actually do something about it that is meaningful and that heals the issues that are at the surface in the courtroom. Really, there's a much larger iceberg below the surface that began much earlier in the lives of folks who are before the courts and the criminal justice system.

I mentioned, when I first began speaking this evening, Mr. Speaker, that I volunteered in the criminal justice system. You may have heard me say before that as a court intake worker with the Solicitor General's department I went for over two years in courtrooms 65 and 68, the court of first appearance, to sit as a court intake worker, and those individuals who were actually sentenced to a period of probation in that court become my responsibility before they left. It was my responsibility to have them sign their probation orders and assign them to a probation office. Sometimes the individual was incarcerated, and there I found them in city cells and was able to do that work before they took off. But it was a game of cat and mouse sometimes to get the notice from the judge, with

the wink and a nod that he was about to pronounce a sentence of probation, so that I would be able to intercede and make sure that the individual didn't leave before he or she indeed got past me and into the public domain again. Otherwise, they would have to be rearrested and come before the courts for breaching probation.

In any case, my observation . . . [interjection] Yes, I see the hon. member. I'd be willing to hear your brief interjection.

Mr. Smith: Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-McClung for recognizing me tonight. Just a question. You were saying that you were involved in the bail hearings. I know that in my constituency we've been doing a lot of conversation with various county councillors and constituents about bail. I was wondering if he could have any comments on the bail ladder and the problems that the bail ladder system is creating with the revolving door of justice and whether he had any comments, from his experience, about how we could address that particular problem, because it is a particular problem and is creating a problem for the people of Alberta.

Thank you.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sorry to disappoint the member. I won't comment on what he terms as "the bail ladder" because he has misheard me. I did not participate in bail hearings as a court intake worker. I simply processed and spoke with and interviewed individuals who had been sentenced to a period of probation. Certainly, at another occasion I might be willing to go into further detail on the particular details of bail, which, once again, I think, emphasizes the approach of this government to this whole piece of legislation, the Public's Right to Know Act, once again trying to highlight the harm that may or may not be done by an individual who breaches bail and perhaps recommits an offence while out on bail rather than looking at the whole and deeper problems and focusing on that as the approach to solving the issues of recidivism and generally crime and the fears that people have about crime in our society.

We can all agree that we all want to live peaceably. No one act of crime is acceptable. People want to feel safe and secure and do not wish to be in any way having their lives affected by somebody who's not willing to obey the law. That goes for demonstrations on our streets and on our highways as well as any other form of criminal activity that we might encounter.

But to get back to what I was saying, Mr. Speaker, about my observations as they evolved here with the court intake unit, it was a pattern of similar backgrounded individuals coming through those doors. They had in many cases been involved in a small crime and then escalated to larger and more serious crime, and then there was an incident perhaps involving a group or a gang as the person aged. Quite often early on it was simply a situation of a homeless youth stealing food.

Rather than being fully represented with their own lawyer, because they didn't have one, duty counsel would have met with them briefly to go over the summary of facts and quite often had to battle with the individual over their plea. Many of them, in the first time they've been in the court system, were simply listening to others they'd been incarcerated with in remand and would say: look, I just want to plead guilty and get it over with. That, of course, starts a criminal record and elevates that individual from a system of juvenile punishment to the criminal justice system and stigmatizes that person for the rest of their life.

This bill does nothing, in my view, to get to those on-the-street, root concerns that judges and duty counsel and lawyers and prosecutors and defence counsel face every day, and I don't know if indeed any of this legislation has been passed by the actual defence counsel and prosecutors who work every day in courtrooms

like courtrooms 65 and 68 in downtown Edmonton, where they see on a daily basis the tragedy and the tragic situations of individuals going through that process. What instead we get here is a government wanting to point to a document they're calling Bill 9 and saying to the public: you've got a right to know about these bad people that are going through our system and how many of them are committing crimes again. It's a totally inappropriate approach, as far as I'm concerned, to solving the actual foundational and underlying problems that cause the criminal activity to be acted out in the first place.

Nuts-and-bolts standpoint: the bill itself gives the minister the power to make regulations with respect to disclosure of information such as personal information. But it also doesn't specify which data will be disclosed or not, and it gives wide discretion to the minister on an annual basis to have that list of data, that may or may not be disclosed, fluctuate annually. We're not going to even have consistency, Mr. Speaker, in the data that this bill hopes to collect. It will be an incomplete and perhaps even unusable database because of that fact, that on an annual basis the minister will be able to pick and choose which categories of data will be important on any given minister's agenda.

It begs the question of what usefulness this database might actually have other than as a political tool where the government can point to Bill 9 and suggest to a certain segment of the voting population that they actually, you know, got tough on crime with Bill 9 and they satisfied a promise in their platform in their Speech from the Throne. I don't think many Albertans are impressed by that. They are looking for much deeper solutions, much deeper thinking on issues such as solving crime in Alberta.

For example, when we're looking at the identification of individuals involved in crime, I think Albertans are looking to know who exactly is involved in some of the major demonstrations that are taking place or have taken place in the province. They're not looking for reactive data collection; they're looking for proactive police work so that individuals who are co-opting a protest group for their own more nefarious purpose are actually identified, so that White supremacists or racist organizations or groups or individuals who try to use the cover of a protest group to foment discontent and perhaps create disorder, those types of data, are collected. That may be an interesting piece of data to know. Perhaps the minister of the day might choose to collect that data. I'd be interested in knowing that.

8:20

That said, it still makes it questionable as to what value the data would have because there's no standard format that the minister needs to follow on an annual basis to collect the data. Ministers, hopefully, will see some value in going a little beyond just the data and just pointing to the identifiable individuals or groups who are going through that revolving door and are part of the recidivism rate. Hopefully, ministers will use that data to actually try to get at the root causes of crime, but I don't have a lot of confidence, Mr. Speaker, in the bill's ability to do that. Unlike Bill 9, Bill 204 would do more.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a privilege to stand and to speak in this House and to bring forward some of the thoughts of my constituents when it comes to the proposed legislation that we have before us. Well, it is an interesting topic that we address tonight, Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. I

kind of like the title because it reminds me of the fact that, you know, as a former teacher, understanding always starts with knowledge. If you want to understand the situation – and I don't care what the situation is – you first have to have the data. You first have to have the knowledge to be able to make a sound decision. It's once you have understanding based on knowledge that you then can make decisions that will allow for a productive action of some sort.

To agree in a small way, I think all of us understand that we've got issues within our justice system that need to be addressed, and it's a very complex puzzle. People are complex. Why we act the way we act and the things that we do in life, the decisions that we make: they're complex things. They're a product of our past, of our family life, of the situations that we find ourselves in, whether we have a job, whether we don't have a job. It's a very complex issue, so our justice system and how we deal with it and the answers are going to be complex as well. Today we're looking at Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act, and I think this is a small piece of the puzzle that puts us in a movement in the right direction.

You know, in section 3 it says, "The Minister shall prepare a report respecting data and information relating to the criminal justice system in Alberta." I think that's a wise thing to do. Let's have a report. Let's bring it forward and into the Legislature. As it says in the publication of reports in section 6 of the act, "The Minister shall lay a copy of a report before the Legislative Assembly." We're asking the minister to bring forward a report, and that report is going to be collected from a wide range of sources. It could come from the federal government. It could come from other departments or branches within the government. It could come from the Provincial Court or the Court of Queen's Bench or the Court of Appeal. This data and this information could come from another province or another territory. It could come from a band council. It could come from a police service as defined under the Police Act. We're going to be looking at a wide range of sources, which I think is wise, to build a database that's going to help us to be able to address how we move forward in our justice system in Alberta.

Its purpose:

For the purposes of preparing and publishing a report, the Minister may

- (a) collect and use data and information, including personal information, and
- (b) subject to the regulations, disclose data and information, including personal information.

Once we've collected that data, it now needs to be able to be published, to be able to be used by the justice system, by the Ministry of Justice, by the police departments across this province. So I'm looking at this, and I'm going: this may not be the be-all and end-all for solving the problems of our justice system, but it's at least a step in the right direction.

Yeah. I would agree with the members that have stood up on the opposite side of the House that, you know, there are a lot of things that we could be looking at when it comes to our justice system, but I'm not sure that because we're not looking at the whole wide range of the issues in the justice system but narrowing it down to one specific thing, it means that this bill isn't worthy of support. It's narrow. It brings it down to one particular piece of the puzzle when it comes down to our justice system.

You know, I would agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. Maybe I did misunderstand you earlier, when you were talking about being involved in bail. But I know that we've spent a significant amount of time in my constituency talking with staff sergeants from Drayton Valley, from Devon. We've met with rural crime people. We've been talking about: well, what is it that we can do?

You know, the people in my constituency, when they look at the problems that they're facing in a rural context, where they're trying to protect the property, where they're trying to make sure that their children and their families are safe from people coming in in the middle of the night, at 2 o'clock in the morning, breaking down garage doors, stealing gas, stealing vehicles, are looking at trying to find a way to protect their families and their livelihoods and their property. And what they really want is that they want to be able to hold the people that are doing this accountable for the actions by which they are breaking the law. If they're breaking the law, then they want them to be held accountable. That's not wrong. That seems pretty reasonable to me.

We've had the discussions about the Crown bail. For instance, you brought up the issue, on the other side of the House, that perhaps we could be looking at other areas that we need to fund more or less as we go forward. A fine conversation to have. One of the things I would suggest, in my conversations with the staff sergeants in my constituency, is that perhaps we need to look at funding more for the Crown bail office. It's not always open. It's not open 24 hours. Maybe we need to fund that better. But that's not what this bill is talking about. It doesn't denigrate from the bill. It's still a good bill. But the topic is much larger than just this particular issue in this bill.

The bail ladder: cash, no cash. No-cash bails: when the person does not live up to their bail expectations on a no-cash bail, nobody is now necessarily pushing him into the cash bail system or collecting on the cash system. The bail has begun to become almost a – it's not solving the problem, not helping to solve the problem. It's actually adding to the problem by that revolving door. We need to look at the cash/no-cash bail system. Don't you think it would be wise for all of our judges and our Crown prosecutors and the defence attorneys to actually look at the bail package that's come before them and maybe see whether this person is a first-time offender or whether this is the sixth or 26th or 46th time that they've come before the courts? That seems to me to be another piece of the little puzzle.

I don't have a – as a matter of fact, I think this is a good step forward. This bill helps us to start to gather data so that we can help to understand the problem so that we can move forward and have a better system of justice, so Bill 9 will have my support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Prior to seeing the next member, I would just remind all members in the Legislature to please turn your electronic devices to silent.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity here this evening to add some of my first thoughts here on Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. You know, I will actually thank the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon and the Member for Taber-Warner for jumping up and participating in discussion on this bill. Actually, some of your comments segue perfectly into what I want to talk about around Bill 9.

8:30

We talked about the title, Public's Right to Know Act, and I would agree; the public has a right to know information that concerns them just about on any subject, whether it be property rights or the justice system or labour laws, things like that. But it's funny because – you know, as I've mentioned, Mr. Speaker, there are times when you see language printed and what's being said, what's being done: sometimes they don't mesh up. They tend to butt heads, again. So we talk about the public's right to know, yet

we've seen moves by this government to stifle the public's right to know.

The most recent example of that is the report on insurance, you know, delaying getting that out, the public's right to know. But that's not really what I want to focus on in my comments here today; it's just, again, when we start digging into the language, things aren't quite adding up.

I want to focus my comments here this evening on some of the language that the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon was talking about around – you know, we'll start on page 2, under report, in section 3(1), "The Minister shall prepare a report." I like that word "shall." It's funny because, of course, as everybody knows, I had that bit of an exchange, shall we say, with the former Justice minister about those three words: "may," "will," and "shall." Not all three of them are the same. I'm very, very firm on that position.

Reading through the legislation, as you'd mentioned, it was a little bit short. But that's okay; it's a quicker read that way. I loved seeing that word "shall" right out of the gate because that means it's going to happen. That is the type of language as legislators we should be putting forward so there's never any guesswork. So, you know, we're preparing that report respecting the data and information relating to the criminal justice system. Great. I'm completely onboard with that.

Then we get down to agreements. Of course, the member was mentioning about all the different areas that we can get information on. Here's the hitch. Right in section 4: "For the purposes of preparing a report, the Minister may enter into an agreement." Not shall, not will, which means that the minister could actually make the decision to not enter into any agreements with all those things that were mentioned by the member to get that information. That becomes a problem for me. Why did we insert that word "may"? May means we may do it. You know, if the moon is lined up and I got out on the right side of the bed here this morning, then maybe I'll look at getting that done.

When we transition on to page 3 of the bill, under collection, use, and disclosure of data and information, in section 5: "For the purposes of preparing and publishing a report, the Minister may". There's that word again, "may." It's what I like to call loosey-goosey language. It just allows all kinds of different outs for the minister instead of "will" or "shall." So according to this language – and, again, in all my experience in the labour sector and having to deal with contracts, everything always comes down to language there – the minister only may "collect and use data and information, including personal information." It's not actually saying that the minister has to do that.

When I start thinking back about this report that shall be prepared, I can't help but start to wonder: are we going to start making up information because we didn't actually have to go and get it from all of these different areas? You know, I certainly would never suggest that we would just, willy-nilly, see reports made up to suit a certain narrative. Although we've maybe seen some interesting things being said to suit narratives, I would never ever suggest that that's something that would happen.

Then we get further down, right into the next part, the publication of the report. "The Minister shall lay a copy". There's that "shall"; love it. That means it's going to happen. So we shall lay a report that was supposed to be prepared based on data we may possibly decide to get. You see how the information starts to conflict, Mr. Speaker? You know, this is the type of language where Albertans start to read this, they start to see their actions, and they start to distrust our government. Trust me, guys. You don't need any more help getting Albertans to distrust you.

I start to get a little bit further down here, down into the regulations and section 7 on page 3. “The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations”. There’s that word again, “may.” This is the one that actually concerns me just a little bit, though, Mr. Speaker. You know, I guess I should be straightforward. I’m not really opposed to this bill. I’m just saying that there are things that – maybe we’ll see some corrections here throughout the debate. In Committee of the Whole we might get a chance to see some amendments or something like that taking out those words “may,” put in “will” or “shall,” things like that so that that actually absolutely happens. May make regulations “(a) respecting the preparation and publication of reports, including the frequency and timing of reports.” There’s my problem. Because you use the word “may” make regulations, you could start pushing that report off way, way into the future.

Again, you know, as I started with my opening comments around suppressing some of the information, like we’ve seen with the insurance report, like we’ve seen – my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud has talked about that report, that it seemed to take a while to get out. There was mention of my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre bringing forward Bill 204 around collecting race-based data. Okay. We’ve been waiting a very long time to see the report and the conclusions around problems such as collecting race-based data. Why did it take so long just to say that that was in the report?

When I look at that, that really does cause me a moment of pause, not enough to not support the bill. As I said, in general I don’t necessarily have a problem with it, but we could be doing better. You know, this leaves a lot up to the regulation end of things.

I remember that members of the government caucus and members of the government bench, when they sat in the 29th Legislature, complained greatly about the number of times they thought things should be put in legislation, not left to regulation. It’s funny how things have turned around. Again, conflicting information. We’ve consistently and persistently seen that throughout the course of the 30th Legislature. There are opportunities here with which to potentially strengthen Bill 9 if the government chose to do that. I mean, you know, I keep hearing this narrative about: well, we’re going to work hard to rebuild the trust of Albertans. Not with, as I said, the loosey-goosey language which is contained in Bill 9, because it allows too much leeway for things to either not happen or perhaps maybe even be manipulated a little bit. If you really do truly believe that Albertans deserve that right to know, just like in the title of Bill 9, it’s not enough to be able to just talk the walk; you need to walk it as well.

Again, going right back to my initial opening comments around suppressing information, suppressing reports, I mean, it was interesting. I think back to the Allan report that was delayed three different times at a cost to Albertans. We just kept allowing this to go on and on. You get the report, you do your review right now, quickly, ASAP, and get it out the door so that people get to see it if you do truly believe in the public’s right to know. My hope is that, you know, throughout the discussion we might get the opportunity to see some of those things.

8:40

I did catch some of my colleagues talking about the government’s, I guess, direction to explore its own provincial police force. There is a lot of data and information out there with which I think the government could make an informed decision, just like what we heard from a couple of members of the government caucus talking about just a short time ago. You’ve got, you know, the Alberta Municipalities, Rural Municipalities of Alberta, Albertans at large, of course, and even the RCMP themselves spent a considerable amount

of time collecting data about the subject. You’re excited about collecting this data and getting this information. Well, when it’s available, you actually need put in that effort to read it, to accept it.

It’s very, very clear, Mr. Speaker. Albertans do not want to see a provincial police service. It’s way too expensive to change over. It was funny. I was actually at one of their public meetings, and I got a chance to talk to – probably wrong on this location, but it was one of the municipalities in B.C. that’s in this process. They thought it was going to take about four years to transfer over, and it was probably going to cost them – I’m trying to remember – I think they said somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$10 million or \$20 million over the course of four years to switch over. They’re only halfway through that mandate, and they’re already at something weird like \$60 million in this changeover. If you can just imagine: if they’d had the data from what we saw there, we might have had the opportunity with which to make different decisions. But that information, that data is out there right now around that.

I think we have an opportunity to collect data and use it, so in the spirit of Bill 9, when we’re talking about the public’s right to know, to collect that information, to share that information, the government should be collecting this information and sharing it with Albertans. I mean, they’re already not onboard with this. Likely, if they get to read all of these figures, they’ll be even less onboard and maybe some of the folks that were before might be switching their minds.

You pair that with the loose language that’s contained in Bill 9, with the use of “may” – let’s get rid of those. Let’s start using “will” and “shall” and actually commit, if you do actually believe that the public has a right to know this information, actually commit to not only collecting it – and I’d like to see that data collected from all of these sources that are mentioned in here, you know, “another department, branch or agency of the Government of Alberta.” Great. “Provincial Court of Queen’s Bench or Court of Appeal.” Absolutely. “The Government of Canada; the government of another province or territory; a municipality . . . a council of a band . . . a police service.” Absolutely. Let’s get all of it, not maybe just necessarily the ones that we like to see or hear because it fits into our narrative. Sometimes the best decisions you can make are when you have information that maybe doesn’t necessarily make you feel comfortable.

We have a real opportunity here. But, again, it doesn’t absolutely allow us to go and get the data from that area. Could it potentially be a bunch of work? Absolutely it is, but that is the best information that you should be getting. Again, I’m not opposed to it. I’m happy to be supporting it, but we can do better.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

Bill 12 Trustee Act

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross has risen.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise this evening on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General to move second reading of Bill 12, the Trustee Act.

This bill is about making it more efficient to manage trusts and lessen the need for Albertans to go to court. It also reflects the

government's work to continue to reform legislation to better meet the needs of Albertans.

The new Trustee Act follows the Uniform Trustee Act proposed by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. This internationally respected organization, Mr. Speaker, provides an independent analysis and recommendations for harmonization of laws in Canada. The Alberta Law Reform Institute has also recommended that Alberta update its trustee legislation by adopting the Uniform Trustee Act with some variations. The government reviewed the recommendations and adopted them with some variations.

Mr. Speaker, we used the recommendations to inform our work about the changes before the House tonight. We also extensively consulted with stakeholders on the proposed legislation, and there is widespread support for these changes. This is especially true of the Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners, charities, members of the legal profession, and experts in trusts who are supportive of the new act.

The current Trustee Act is significantly outdated and is based on mid-Victorian era legislation. The need for reform is clear. In addition, Mr. Speaker, the current Trustee Act is mainly concerned with trusts under wills. However, as the years have evolved, so have trusts. They have been adapted in modern business and applied to an increasingly broad range of property. Trusts are used in real estate investment funds, land development, and royalty trusts to finance the oil and gas sector.

To be clear, Bill 12 would replace the current but outdated Trustee Act. This new Trustee Act would clarify the trustees' roles and their administrative powers, outline specific processes so that in many instances trustees and beneficiaries do not need to go to court. It would set out provisions to support an improved day-to-day functioning of trusts and provide a basis for trusts that do not have extensive terms or do not cover all of the situations the provisions apply to while making sure that people can still set their own terms if they need to.

Mr. Speaker, as part of settling and clarifying trustee responsibilities, we are proposing to put into legislation that trustees are expected to be careful, to be diligent, and skilful in their decision-making aspects of a trust. Namely, a trustee must exercise the care, diligence, and skill that a person with good judgment would use in dealing with the property of another.

This new legislation would also increase transparency. A new duty for trustees would be to report and respond to beneficiary requests in the administration of a trust. This does seem somewhat self-evident, that trustees need to respond to beneficiaries, but this does not always happen, and it is a protection that needs to be clearly included in this new act.

Administering trusts would also improve as we are proposing to broaden trustees' administrative powers within the act. This would include buying and selling trust property and purchasing, renting, or building a residence for a beneficiary.

Mr. Speaker, at this juncture I would also like to clarify another point in how this new act would provide mechanisms for trusts that do not have extensive terms or that do not cover all of the situations that the provisions would apply to while making sure people can, again, set their own terms if they need to. For example, unlike the current act, the new act would provide a mechanism for choosing a temporary trustee, which would allow someone other than the original trustee to manage a trust for a short period of time. This means that the original trustee doesn't have to resign when they are ill or if they are away from the province for a bit or if they're unable to act for whatever reason temporarily. If the trust itself has no provisions to appoint a temporary trustee, this new act would apply.

8:50

Mr. Speaker, default rules essentially in place to fill the gaps where needed: some in this room will know exactly what I'm talking about. This is not a new concept. The Administration of Estates Act, for example, provides for automatic rules that deal with who has priority over the administration of an estate among applicants. Similarly, the Wills and Succession Act guides how estates are administered when someone dies without a will. These changes are needed now for trusts.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, Albertans setting up a trust can rely on the legislation rather than having to include all of the terms in the document itself. Rather than think of every type of contingency, this new act would provide for default rules that would allow for these things to be addressed if they weren't included in the trust itself. But I want to be clear. Despite all of that, Albertans can still add specific terms to the trust.

Mr. Speaker, the new Trustee Act would also provide processes to allow for the removal of an unfit trustee and allow a trustee to resign. All of these changes would result in more efficient management of trusts and less court involvement as typically one would otherwise have to go to court to make these changes. Ultimately, this would let trustees better serve beneficiaries and better manage trusts. For the legal community this new act would make dealing with trusts simpler and would result in less need to go to court to address minor administrative issues.

For trust and estate organizations such as the Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners the new act would clarify and set out the responsibilities and the duties of trustees, and it would also help families better plan their trusts.

For Albertans setting up a trust, the new act would make that process more efficient and simpler, and it would also be generally less expensive for Albertans to create a trust. This is because the new Trustee Act would reduce the legal and other costs and the complexities by lessening the number of matters that may be included in a document. For beneficiaries, Mr. Speaker, the new legislation would strengthen their protections. It would reduce their costs, and it would minimize the need to go to court for every single minor matter.

Charities would also benefit from the new proposed changes. This means that the new act contains provisions to allow for varying charitable trusts. This saves these charitable trusts from failing by making it easier for the court to apply the trust to a similar purpose when the original purpose fails. The court could also modify the purpose of a charitable trust even if the original purpose has not failed. For example, an Albertan may create a trust to provide for scholarships, which are usually based on academic standing. Under this proposed legislation the courts could vary the trust to provide for bursaries, which are usually based, instead, on financial need.

I want to highlight a point that I mentioned, and I want to hammer it home here today before you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said many times already, less need for involving the courts: that's ultimately what this act achieves. This would be a significant result of this new legislation. Less court time for trust matters means there is more court time and resources for other, more serious and more complex matters. Less court time means that trustees, beneficiaries, lawyers, and Albertans get time back in their day. Less court time means money is staying in the pockets of Albertans rather than having to pay to litigate trivial matters.

Now, while we are proposing an overall new piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, some provisions of the existing act would remain. For example, this includes the prudent investor rules that require a trustee to make investment decisions based on obtaining reasonable

returns and avoiding undue risk. These rules should remain to guide any investment decision that a trustee should make.

We are also proposing to continue provisions that allow for the variation of trusts. This means that this new act would empower the court to vary the terms of a trust subject to specific terms in the trust document itself. This provides flexibility to address changing or unanticipated circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 12, the Trustee Act, brings trust legislation into the 21st century. From creating to managing trusts, strengthening protections for beneficiaries, increasing the accountability of trustees, and providing clear processes for trustees to use in managing trusts to reduce court involvement, this bill modernizes and improves all aspects of trust legislation, and by improving trust legislation, we are making life better for Albertans.

I hope Albertans on both sides of this House will support this legislation. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you to the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross for moving second reading of Bill 12, Trustee Act, on behalf of the Minister of Justice.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen to respond, with 20 minutes, should she choose to take it.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure that I'll need the full 20 minutes to provide my comments at second reading on Bill 12, the Trustee Act, but I am pleased to rise and speak to this bill. I thank the Member for Calgary-Cross for introducing this bill at second reading on behalf of the Minister of Justice.

I want to begin by saying that I think, you know, I'm pleased to see this new framework for trusts in Alberta and to see that the recommendations coming from the Alberta Law Reform Institute seem to be substantively accepted and incorporated into this bill. As the Member for Calgary-Cross indicated, this does intend to modernize the system of trusts, and I believe the member gave a number of examples of real estate situations where there are trusts and for corporate examples. We also know that trusts are often commonly used for persons with disabilities. Their families might be planning for their future and how their assets and investments can be used to protect that individual's future. We know that there are other situations – as mentioned, charitable trusts – where they also, you know, use this trust model.

And for, you know, Albertans who are a little curious about sort of what a trust is or to get a better understanding of what it is, a trust is essentially a fiduciary duty and responsibility whereby an individual, generally referred to as the settlor, basically appoints an individual, who is the trustee, to manage assets and property, subject to certain conditions and requirements, in the interests of a beneficiary, so basically saying that somebody appoints somebody else to manage their business and assets for somebody else. But, of course, they may set out conditions on that and how those assets will be managed.

I'm sure many of us are familiar with, you know, what you hear the most in media and movies, the trust fund, right? You've got the wealthy parents who are planning for their children's future and saying, you know, this is how their assets can be used, and somebody else is going to manage it until that young person reaches a certain age, and then they get access to those things. That's the most commonly understood sort of idea of what a trust is, but of course, as I indicated, there are many other circumstances in which somebody else may be appointed to manage assets on behalf of somebody else.

It is true, as the Member for Calgary-Cross indicated, that this is – our current structure, our current Trustee Act is based on very old sort of English precedent of what a trust is, and the legislation was

simply updated from, I believe, English legislation from the 1800s, really, and just simply setting out that concept of it, which primarily looked at trusts within the wills and estates context. But as we've described, there are many other circumstances, and I know that this has been a subject of some discussion and research and proposals for some time within the legal community and within many various other charitable institutions of individuals who are trying to modernize, essentially, the trust legislation, and that is what I believe we are seeing before us in Bill 12 with the Trustee Act.

Specifically, as we know, we believe that a number of the provisions of Bill 12 are based on recommendations that came from the Alberta Law Reform Institute report that was issued in January 2017. I want to go back a little bit to those recommendations and just some highlights because, actually, Mr. Speaker, as you may be aware, there are actually 90 detailed recommendations that came out of that Law Reform Institute report. I'm not going to go into detail about all 90 recommendations.

Member Irwin: You could.

Ms Pancholi: Certainly. I guess I have 20 minutes, and I am a fast talker, but I don't want to do that.

I will go over some of the key recommendations that were made. I believe the Member for Calgary-Cross outlined already a number of the changes, and, as he indicated, not all of the recommendations were either accepted, or maybe they were accepted but varied, and I would appreciate some discussion perhaps from the Minister of Justice to provide clarity as to where recommendations were varied from what was put forward by the Alberta Law Reform Institute and the reason why.

9:00

Certainly, we know that the recommendations that originally came in that 2017 report from the Law Reform Institute were based on essentially a uniform Trustee Act that was developed under the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. Basically, that set out what trustee legislation could look like in any jurisdiction, and it was sort of one uniform Trustee Act. The idea was that this is the act that could apply in any jurisdiction, and provinces, for example, could simply adopt that. I appreciate that there will be variations, though, between provinces, and perhaps that's what we're seeing in the proposed Bill 12, why there are variations, maybe Alberta-specific. But I think certainly what would be appreciated is to perhaps go through which recommendations were varied and why.

The member indicated that there was a consultation done with a number of stakeholders, and I think it would be interesting to know what the feedback was from the stakeholders and why specific recommendations were not accepted. I believe, if I recall correctly, that 80 out of the 90 recommendations were implemented. So I would appreciate to know why 10 were not and what the variations were.

I want to go over for this House just a bit of an overview of some of the key recommendations that came out of the Alberta Law Reform Institute. I think we've heard already from the Member for Calgary-Cross that some of those recommendations have been implemented, but I just want to lay out for Albertans sort of what those recommendations are and why it was important to modernize our Trustee Act to adapt and to apply to so many different circumstances. Some of the key recommendations that came out of the 2017 Law Reform Institute report 109 include that the "trustee legislation should establish that the trust instrument prevails, with specific exceptions set out in the legislation," simply saying that the instrument by which the trust has developed should prevail. That should apply to the relationship of the trust. However, there may be

exceptions, and we want to see what those exceptions are within the legislation.

The report also recommended that it should be very clear in the legislation what the settlor's intent was and how to determine what that intent is because, as we indicated, a trust is really about the settlor appointing somebody to act as a trustee for the benefit of their beneficiaries. So what that settlor intended and how to determine that in a set of criteria within the legislation that's clearly applied and transparent but, you know, looks at the trust instrument itself, sets out the process for determining that intention is very important and can use and apply extrinsic evidence as well.

The Law Reform Institute report also recommended that trustee legislation should require court approval for a proposed variation to a trust that is not provided for in the trust instrument. It does still say, as much as we are looking at this Trustee Act as a way to sort of perhaps minimize interactions with the court, that variations to the trust instrument itself must be done with court approval. So there are circumstances in which going to court is still going to be necessary for a trust.

We know that one of the recommendations was that any trustee legislation should provide for temporary trustees to be appointed for a specified period of time to administer the trust, and I believe that that is something that the member indicated and Bill 12 does address. It actually does set out criteria as to how a temporary trustee could be appointed. Now, interestingly, I didn't quite hear this from the Member for Calgary-Cross, and in looking at the bill, it wasn't evident to me – and I say “interestingly” because I really do hope it is interesting to some people, but I will continue talking nevertheless.

One of the recommendations from the Law Reform Institute is that there should actually be a two-tier standard of care that applies. That means that somebody appointed as a trustee who maybe doesn't have specific experience, is not a professional investor, for example, would be held to one standard of care, which is to still exercise ordinary care and due diligence in dealing with the trust properly. There are still, absolutely, obligations on that individual to meet a certain standard of care.

But if there is a trustee who is of a professional designation and has special qualifications, they actually have a standard of care that's higher. They must exercise a greater degree of skill. So this basically says that professionals who perhaps, you know, manage trusts with their expertise and their background may be held to a different standard and a higher standard than just an average person who may be appointed as a trustee. I'm not sure if that is reflected in the bill. I couldn't see that, but I would be happy to take a better look or to hear from the Minister of Justice.

I was happy to hear, of course, that the prudent investor rule, which applied even under the existing trustee legislation – the Law Reform Institute has indicated they believe that should continue to apply. I think that makes logical sense. We all still expect, when somebody is appointed to manage a trust, that they do act in the way of a prudent investor. I understand that Bill 12 preserves that rule, and that's important.

The Law Reform Institute also talked about, you know, where there is more than one trustee – there are certainly circumstances where that would be the case – that those trustees must act as a majority rather than unanimously. It's not that all trustees must agree to the same action, but the majority of trustees must do so.

As well, the Law Reform Institute recommended that trustee legislation should define conflict of interest and provide a process by which to allow a trustee to act in certain ways despite a conflict. I think that's really important because they're being

trusted to do something, but there is certainly the case where a trustee may have a conflict, may have an existing relationship with the beneficiary, perhaps as a family member, and there should be some acknowledgement that conflict of interest may apply but does not always have to rule out that that person is still a qualified trustee.

Another recommendation is that the provisions regarding trust compensation prevail over contrary terms in the trust instrument, so there should be fair compensation set out in the legislation that would prevail in circumstances where the trust instrument perhaps sets out a really low level of compensation in certain circumstances. Managing a trust can be onerous work, and a trustee should not be, I guess, discouraged or disincentivized from acting in a prudent way because of low compensation.

As well, trustee legislation to provide a mechanism to validate and regulate noncharitable purpose trusts: I understand that that is incorporated into Bill 12 and key, I believe, to what the member had spoken to and is perhaps the intent of this, that trustee situations in the case of a will or an estate should not apply to those circumstances. There's already legislation that applies. It's not necessary for trustee legislation to apply to that, and in that respect I believe the objective there is to minimize the amount of court action that occurs around a trust and thereby free up court time. Now, I just wanted to take a moment to comment, Mr. Speaker, that, you know, I would love some analysis or assessment from the Minister of Justice as to how much court time will be freed up by putting in this legislation. We certainly do support it.

I support the idea of modernizing our trust framework, but really that issue of freeing up court time is more important than ever. It was incredibly disheartening to hear that the current Minister of Justice was apparently unaware that more than 3,000 cases in the Provincial Court system are currently at risk of being thrown out for being over the Jordan time limit in terms of being assessed in court. You know, the current Minister of Justice went on record publicly and said that there were no cases at risk of being thrown out as a result of the Jordan decision, and in fact that was quickly just proven to be incorrect. There are actually more than 3,000 cases in the Alberta Provincial Court system right now that are at risk of being thrown out because of the length of time that the matter has taken in the court system.

Of course, actually, of those 3,000 cases, Mr. Speaker, over 1,200 of them are violent offences. You know, for a government that has predicated so much of its platform and its messaging in the area of justice around law and order, it is quite shocking to me that not only is the current Minister of Justice unaware of what's going on in the court system but that there are a significant number of cases that are at risk of being thrown out.

I seem to recall, Mr. Speaker, being in this Legislature, you know, in early 2019 and hearing this strong commitment to hiring all these new prosecutors, which hasn't happened. Very few new prosecutors have been hired. For some reason it appears that the current government of Alberta has difficulties attracting individuals to work for it right now. I wonder why that may be, but certainly we do have a shortage of prosecutors. We continue to have a shortage of prosecutors, and that is leading to a significant risk that many cases, including violent offences, may be thrown out of our court system as a result of this current government's failure to act and their never-ending – I don't know – Whac-A-Mole of Justice ministers.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Certainly, let's hope somebody can get the job done. I don't know that it's going to be anybody in this government, but I'm certainly

confident that come the next provincial election Albertans will have a government that is committed and able to address these issues to make sure that we are dealing effectively with the criminal justice system, and that will be the members on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker.

9:10

When it comes to Bill 12, this is a moment where I think there can be agreement in this House that modernizing the trust system is certainly important. This seems to be, you know, well welcomed in terms of doing this and updating our Trustee Act. I do hope it does free up some court time because certainly we have a lot of cases to get through our courts, Mr. Speaker, but also I would be interested in hearing some feedback from the Minister of Justice or members from the government side as to which recommendations from the Alberta Law Reform Institute were not accepted, the reason that they were not accepted, and perhaps the feedback that came from stakeholders that led to those variations with respect to Bill 12.

I look forward to a spirited debate and discussion of Bill 12, the Trustee Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is second reading of Bill 12. Is there anyone else wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that introduction. To continue on, my colleague left off with regard to Bill 12, Trustee Act. I just want to say that, you know, when we were government, we did work in this area, of course. We tried to look at modernizing aspects of this act. We met through Justice and Solicitor General at the time, met with the Alberta Law Reform Institute, and talked about consultations that would improve and modernize this act and talked about 23 new or modified recommendations. I don't know them all at this point in time, but I do know that the work that was done previously by our government had some benefit.

One of those clear benefits, Mr. Speaker, was – I think it's called the Henson trust. It was brought forward, I remember, by a member of our government to address the clear need for people with disabilities who were granted or who were gifted large financial gifts or inheritances. Previously, as I understand it, disabled people in those situations would have been cut off AISH until the proceeds from those gifts or inheritances were drawn down. What our government did in passing legislation in 2018 was to make possible that there could be a trust set up for that individual and they wouldn't have to draw down those funds. They wouldn't have to be cut off AISH until those funds were extinguished.

I was very pleased. I remember sitting in the House at that time, and the people who brought it forward were in the gallery, and they were very thankful that our government listened and made changes to this act at that time. The Member for – I'm just trying to remember where he was from – I think it was Calgary-Currie at the time was the sponsor of that bill, bringing that forward. That was a positive thing.

I, too, like my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud, wonder what has resulted in 10 of those recommendations that the Alberta Law Reform Institute proposed not coming forward at this time and wonder what difference they could have made in this act had they been subsequently approved and written into this act. I understand that this new framework will be of benefit, and I listened to, of course, the Member for Calgary-Cross talk about this bill in the introduction to second reading. We do need a more efficient court and judiciary, not the judiciary itself, Mr. Speaker, but efficiency around the kinds of things that are brought forward. We do need to lessen the need for conflicts that people feel only can be solved in

court. I think that's a good thing to look at, improvements to this act, modernizing it in that respect, because that will better meet the needs of Albertans with respect to other significant issues that are before the courts.

My colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud talked about some of those; namely, the large number of cases that are potentially going to be thrown out of court. Three thousand cases are beyond the 18-month timeline established by the Jordan principle, the Jordan decision, and the fact that our current Justice minister was unaware of that is very concerning. We need to obviously focus court time and attention where appropriate on those kinds of cases so that we deal with the egregious crimes which people are alleged to have committed and not see those people walk from that situation as a result of the Jordan decision being levied.

I also know that when I was reading through the bill and listening to the Member for Calgary-Cross talk about it, he mentioned that it's adapted to modern business. Of course, my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud talked about 1893, I think, when the initial principles were laid out, the statute was laid out, that our previous act is based in part on. Just with respect to modernizing this act so that it relates to current business practices, I wonder how the whole area of real estate trusts is covered in this bill, Mr. Speaker. I have been reading through this bill, and on page 27 under items 34(1) and (2) it talks about investment powers of corporate trustee or agents. I think there's an aspect there of real estate investment trusts, and there are other parts of this bill that probably are reflective of real estate investment trusts. It would be helpful to hear from the sponsor, the Member for Calgary-Cross, where other parts in this bill talk about trusts.

I know that, you know, the area that I represent, Calgary-Buffalo – I don't think I'm incorrect in saying that I think the highest density of population in this province is in that community of Calgary-Buffalo, that riding of Calgary-Buffalo, basically the Beltline, the Mission district, the west end of downtown, the east end of downtown in the East Village, and Connaught. In those areas are predominantly apartment buildings, predominantly older apartment buildings, that were built in the '70s, '80s, and '90s in Calgary. There are a number of condominiums now that are coming up throughout the riding of Calgary-Buffalo. It's not the newer ones that are being built and condominiumized; it's the older ones that are four storeys to eight storeys that have caught the attention of real estate investment trusts.

9:20

We know, of course, that investors receive returns on their investments without needing the expertise to buy or manage any properties themselves. They pool capital. I just wonder in this Trustee Act, which, I understand, modernizes the situation for real estate investment trusts, how, in fact, it does that, and potentially the sponsor or the minister can make that more clear as we go forward in debate of this bill.

Real estate investment trusts are relatively new. In the 1990s they started to take off in this country as a result of the federal government and provincial government stepping back from investing in the creation of affordable housing, social housing in this country. So that phenomenon is a new one, and it has resulted in the consolidation of affordable housing in the control of real estate investment trusts. There is not necessarily the greatest track record. Many people, including those who are in long-term rental situations in older apartments, are concerned about their tenure in those apartments because of the desire of the REIT to get the most profit from those investments. The amount of actual affordable housing on the market and in Canada has decreased as a result of REITs being involved and making a greater profit as a result of

increasing rents or shutting down their buildings so that they can be remodelled and rented at a higher level.

This Trustee Act, as the sponsor said, is being adapted so that modern business can work better, I guess, as a result of them being subsumed in this act. I think aspects of this bill certainly make sense to replace the existing Trustee Act with this act, but there are aspects of the impact of this bill on REITs and on those who need affordable housing throughout this province and this country that are unknown as a result of the effect of this bill. I want to raise that as an issue that I'd like to look more into, but anything that can help make trust legislation more effective for a broad number of people, setting aside REITs, of course, is a good thing.

Like this government has done with the insurance industry and essentially allowing lobbyists to dictate what the insurance industry profits should be in this province, I'm concerned that potentially the same was done to allow REITs to dictate how they should be treated under this act. We've seen that in the past with not only health care and insurance and now in the justice area, potentially through this trust act revision, that this government can't be trusted to work in the best interests of the broad number of Albertans. What it does work in the best interests of, unfortunately, are those insiders and people with specific interests who don't have the interests of the majority of Albertans at heart.

I'll sit down now at this point and listen to additional discussion with regard to the changes that are coming forward under this Trustee Act, though I would like to know other parts of this act that – for instance, real estate investment trusts – are potentially impacted, because it's not all that clear. Of course, reading through it, there are a number of content areas where potentially you could read into it that a REIT would be positively impacted. But not being a lawyer, some of this is very much in legalese and not in common language, so I will certainly sit down and benefit from listening to other people talk about this.

Just one more thing. Yeah. I think that I've covered everything I wanted to say with regard to REITs, the area that I represent, and recognizing that anything that increases the power of those companies over people who live in low-income housing is not a positive thing, in my view.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on second reading of Bill 12, the Trustee Act, are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 12, the Trustee Act, in second reading. You know, let me just begin with – both of my colleagues have mentioned this, and I'm actually very curious. I understand that the vast majority of recommendations that were made by the Alberta Law Reform Institute – I think there were 90 of them. I'm just looking at them now. I believe this legislation addresses 80 of them, and I'm really curious which 10 were left out. I just had a quick look at all of them. Again, I'll preface this. I am not a lawyer. They all look quite reasonable, so I'm actually quite curious. I hope that somebody from the other side will just explain which 10 were not addressed and perhaps why maybe they weren't necessary. I think that would be quite helpful.

You learn something every day. I didn't realize until I started looking at this legislation that there have been amendments to the Trustee Act, but it's actually never comprehensively been reviewed. It's based on an 1893 English statute that certainly has fallen out of step with modern practices and issues, so it is great that this legislation will address some of those shortfalls.

The bill does develop a framework for all trusts, which is certainly an improvement, and establishes more provisions for the day-to-day management of the trust. It further clarifies the duties of trustees, and there are – well, it certainly does that. The old Trustee Act dealt mainly with trusts established under wills, and certainly as my colleague mentioned, there are far more trusts than those just established under wills. Other examples of trusts are charitable trusts, trusts benefiting people with disabilities or businesses. I think my colleague mentioned the Henson trust. Again, you know, I would also add to what my colleague said. [interjections] If the . . .

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. I just might remind members that if they have private conversations that they'd like to have for whatever reason, if I'm able to hear them, perhaps the member speaking is as well, and it would be reasonable for us to take those into the lobbies.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you. The government has argued – and I hope this is the case, Mr. Speaker – that this new framework will free up court time as it will add more clarity, hence reducing instances where beneficiaries and trustees have to go to court. That would be great. I think my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud sort of underlined the current problem that we're having right now. You know, this is all happening at the same time that there are over 3,000 cases that are beyond the 18-month timeline as established by the Jordan decision, the 18 months referring to the time since charges were laid.

9:30

When I did first get this piece of legislation, yeah, it was a lot to go through and to digest. Again, I am glad that it is being updated, but there were a few things that drew my attention. Because we're in second reading, I'm actually going to talk about something that I didn't really see covered in this but sort of referred to the Public Trustee. For example, on page 36:

- 50(1) If a minor is entitled to trust money or trust securities, a trustee must pay the money to or transfer securities to
- (a) the trustee appointed by court under the Minors' Property Act, or
 - (b) the Public Trustee.
- (2) If an incapacitated person is entitled to trust money or trust securities, a trustee must pay the money to or transfer the securities to
- (a) the attorney acting under the Powers of Attorney Act, or
 - (b) the trustee appointed by court order under the Adult Guardianship and Trustee Act.
- (3) If an attorney or trustee is not appointed for an incapacitated person, then an attorney or trustee must be appointed for payment of the money or transfer of the securities.

That seemed fine. I understood that part.

But then I looked through the legislation for other references to public trustees. It did talk about incapacitated persons, and we all know that there is a need. There are actually thousands of people that are in need of both a public guardian and a public trustee, so as we know, there is the office of the public guardian and trustee in Alberta. They are essential to people, for example, that – a good example is people that are dependent adults or require assistance with decision-making. For example, a public guardian which is not a trustee, but very often they are both, will be involved in decisions, like, around health care, where the person lives, who to associate with, if they can work, where they can work, legal proceedings, of

course, employment, all of those things. Very often they have a trustee that can be a private trustee or a public trustee.

I think I read in the most recent annual report for the office of the public guardian and trustee that there was a trend going away from public trustees to private trustees. Now, let me say, Mr. Speaker, that that's a great trend if that's happening. This may be due to the pandemic. I'm not sure. We'll have to wait and see. But that is great because that means that there's somebody in that person's circle, whether it's a friend or a family member, that is able to assist them, and that's always better, to have someone that is knowledgeable about the person and can assist in that way, managing the trust.

But, unfortunately, there are too many cases where a public trustee is required, so I was really hoping to see something a little bit more in this act. Now, perhaps the minister at some point could explain to me. Maybe it was covered, and I didn't understand it. Maybe it was in some of the recommendations that weren't addressed. I'm not sure, but it would be helpful to know. Maybe there's something planned. I'm not sure, but there are some issues around public trustees.

Now, maybe members of this House don't know. I think there is a threshold that a person, like a dependent adult, who would require a public trustee – I think they have to have a minimum of assets of \$5,000. Now, as you can imagine, somebody who's on CPPD, which is like a CPP pension with disability or AISH: the chances of them having \$5,000 in assets are not great, you know, unless perhaps they've inherited or they've managed to save from a job if they're able to work. That's not the norm, that people have a lot of assets. But if they do, there is a process for them to have a public guardian if they're unable to find a private guardian.

I was hoping that maybe there would be a review of the fees that are charged. Now, you can imagine someone living on AISH, particularly AISH benefits that have been deindexed. For someone living on AISH benefits, you know, even fees, annual fees, of \$100 make a difference. Fees, monthly fees, of even \$10 are actually going to make a difference, so I was hoping that there would be something there, but there wasn't.

You know, the other thing that I wanted to talk about: there was another piece, and this is also under the office of the public guardian and trustee. I could see that maybe it wouldn't fit into legislation like this, but it would have been nice to see even mention of it, or perhaps there are plans in the future. There is another program. It used to be called – it was, I think, called the AISH or CPPD administration. What that was: it was a trustee that would actually help people – and it was voluntary – manage their money. People that were AISH recipients or CPPD recipients who didn't meet that threshold of \$5,000 in assets could actually use this program. Now, it wouldn't manage, let's say, gifts they received or any kind of employment income. It would simply help manage AISH or CPPD monies.

What that would do: it would ensure that primary bills would be paid – for example, rent, utilities, things like that – and would actually help people. As you can imagine, people that are dependent adults, that require assistance with, you know, significant decisions, life decisions, are very often vulnerable to perhaps lending out money they don't have or making bad decisions about credit cards or getting credit cards they shouldn't have or getting phone plans they maybe didn't look through, things like that. So having assistance through a public trustee's office, in this case an informal trustee – and the program is now called the informal benefits administration program. It was actually a terrific program, and it gave some protection, some of the protection that we see outlined in this piece of legislation for people that don't have large trusts, that don't have a lot of assets. It would have been nice to see that, but I did not see that.

The other thing: you know, this legislation talks about conflict of interest and all of those things, and sadly there are many cases where private trustees – there are issues. For example, let's say that it's an extended family member – I'm going to give you a specific example, Mr. Speaker, and this is sort of where I'm coming from with this anecdotal information that I have. Many years ago we were helping to support a fellow – he's no longer with us – but his only source of income would have been AISH and perhaps if he received any kind of gifts or, like, a GST rebate, something like that. So this was not a wealthy man.

He had a pretty significant complex disability, and he had a nephew that had stepped up to be his private trustee. It wasn't required to get a public trustee to manage his nonexistent trust. We saw a pattern. Again, he would show us his bank statement, and we saw this drawing of, let's say, \$150 every single month. After all the bills were paid, you know, there would be a little bit of money left over for an AISH recipient. It's not much, but it would be maybe \$20 at Subway, \$50 here. Every month it was happening, and it was this nephew at the time that was drawing down this money. He didn't have a lot of recourse because there wasn't a formal trust agreement; it was just a private trustee.

Now, there have been some legislative changes made since then, but it was really, really difficult to get anybody to investigate this because it was such a tiny amount of money. Really, this was a trust account, but it was a tiny, little amount of money.

I'm bringing this up because when I looked at the annual report of the office of the public guardian and trustee, they talked about complaints. This was in their annual report. Again, it's 2020-21. Now, I'm not saying that the pandemic hasn't impacted this – I'm quite sure it has – but they only screened a total of 109 complaints and launched 19 investigations. Now, I know investigations are timely and costly, so you want to be careful that you are investigating, you know, complaints that should be investigated. But at that same time period the report states that the office of the public guardian and trustee revisited the criteria, that prompted an investigation and resulted in a significant reduction in investigations in the year of the report, which was 2020-21. For comparison – and I'm not talking about hundreds here, Mr. Speaker. In 2019-20 there were 38 investigations, and then 2020-21, the most recent report, there were 19, so almost half. That's pretty significant. It would be great to hear perhaps: what is the criteria for investigating?

This piece of legislation is quite clear about what the rules are around conflict, around even the expertise of the trustee, yet there are people with trusts that are very small, and that's all they have. They're not large, they're not big inheritances, but I think I would suggest that they're equally important. So maybe this is an area that we could look at.

I'm glad to see that there is a new framework for trusts. It is good to see that the robust process by the Alberta Law Reform Institute is being implemented. I have no doubt that this will help make trust legislation more effective. You know, this is a good thing and perhaps a stable thing going forward and progress given the fact that we've got a lot of instability right now within the justice system. My colleagues have mentioned, you know, a few of those things, actually. In the previous debate on the previous piece of legislation – I think it was Bill 9 – we even mentioned some of the changes that have been made that have caused some instability, I would suggest.

9:40

Anyway, a couple of other questions that I think a couple of my colleagues or one of my colleagues may have mentioned, but I'm going to – in case she did not, I'm going to restate it. How much

court time is the government estimating this act will save or add? I think that if this legislation, if the government is saying that one of the reasons that this work is being done – and I'm sure there are many reasons, but if one of the reasons is about the time savings, where will that be coming from, and what's the estimate? There must be an estimate. It would be great to know. I think Albertans would like to know, actually.

Who else did the government consult with since the final report of the Alberta Law Reform Institute? That would be helpful. It would also be good to hear the minister talk a little bit more about the recommendations, as I said earlier, that were not implemented. I think that we've all learned in this place that sometimes we focus a little bit on what isn't said because sometimes there's a lot of information there. Maybe this is not the case with this. There are a lot of recommendations that were made. I think there are 90, and if there are 80 that were covered in this legislation, it would be terrific to know what that is.

Let me just think. Hang on, Mr. Speaker. Oh, actually, I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others on second reading of Bill 12? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has the call.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak at second reading of Bill 12, the Trustee Act. Certainly, this is a fairly technical and involved piece of legislation, somewhat specialized. Certainly, I recognize it presents a bit of a challenge. There's quite a bit of material here and on a very specialized subject, but I would reflect that it is something that does impact a lot of everyday Albertans. Indeed, this is something that impacts my own family. I have a niece who is on the FAS spectrum, a beautiful young woman, very intelligent, very talented, very artistic, plays the drums, always had a natural knack for rhythm from the time that she was very young, loves to paint.

She's been through the child care program over at MacEwan University, audited the program, has worked for the YWCA here in Edmonton as a volunteer taking care of children, loves that work. But, indeed, she is in a position where some of the challenges that she has means that she is not able to manage her own money and her own finances. Indeed, there's a guardianship arrangement amongst members of my family to help look after her, look after her finances, take care of those aspects of her life and to provide her, then, with the support to be able to do all of the things that she enjoys and indeed make some real contributions to her community, to her church, indeed, to our family.

I think it is incredibly important that we have quality legislation overseeing that, and my understanding is that this is coming forward to modernize the legislation that we have that governs these sorts of trustee relationships, guardian relationships here in the province of Alberta, and certainly I welcome that.

We recognize that there are a lot of different kinds of trusts, so a lot of different ways that this can be set up. We've heard talk about real estate trusts. Indeed, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo spoke a bit about a new kind of trust that was set up during the time we were in government by one of my former colleagues and a friend of mine, Mr. Brian Malkinson, who was the MLA for Calgary-Currie. I know he was very passionate on this issue, Mr. Speaker, having spoken with a large number of folks across the province of Alberta who had family members who were on AISH and indeed were looking for the opportunity to be able to provide for those family members.

He worked to bring forward legislation to establish what is known as a Henson trust in the province of Alberta. It's used to hold an inheritance for the benefit of a handicapped individual which

wouldn't affect their eligibility for income support programs like AISH. Alberta, at that time, was the only jurisdiction in Canada that did not allow for that kind of discretionary trust. I know that he worked very hard. He had many consultations with folks across the province of Alberta and then indeed brought forward and was a sponsor on Bill 5, allowing trusts for AISH recipients, a bill that passed, I think, with the support of all members of the Legislature at the time. It enabled that possibility for individuals then who are on AISH, an opportunity for their family, indeed, at times their trustee or guardian, to oversee a fund that would be available to them without affecting their ability to access AISH. That's extremely important, Mr. Speaker.

As we are considering Bill 12, the Trustee Act, it has caused me to reflect that, indeed, there are some real challenges for folks who are on AISH. Certainly, we know that under this government we have seen them make the decision to deindex AISH. That was despite a promise during their election campaign that they would maintain the indexing of AISH for individuals who rely on that. I guess you could say "promise made, promise broken," Mr. Speaker. That was indeed unfortunate. It is important, again, that we are observing how we can best set up these situations to be able to look after folks, particularly when, unfortunately, we have a government that in many respects is certainly not.

You know, in speaking about this bill, the Minister of Justice remarked that outdated trust laws are burdensome for Albertans, trustees, and the legal community. By modernizing these laws, trustees have greater accountability, and it will be simpler to create trusts for Albertans. Certainly, you know, Mr. Speaker, accountability is important. It has certainly been at many times, I think, a weak point for this government, but it is important when we are bringing forward this kind of legislation. Indeed, we want to strengthen accountability for those who are responsible in many respects for the well-being, for the assets of others.

The minister went on to say that these changes will also ensure that trust laws are current and reflect the needs of Albertans. Certainly, that's important to recognize, again, when we are talking about individuals who are reliant on AISH, and indeed, Mr. Speaker, may require having a trustee. Indeed, we know that there have been challenges with that system, certainly, with barriers and a system, I think, under the AISH appeal, in particular, as we saw in a news article today, that is somewhat out of date and in many respects is not working well for individuals in those situations.

Indeed, we know that there have been some changes made, and there were recommendations from the Ombudsman that came forward, some of which the government has committed to following through on. But, certainly, at other points we have seen, for example, the Minister of Community and Social Services has made changes in the appeals regulation that have made it more difficult for individuals. In fact, it is taking away their voice in being able to speak up and make themselves heard when they are appealing their AISH application, saying now that they may not consider any information other than that considered by the director in making the decision that is being appealed. He said that's to make it easier for people to get a result earlier, but frankly it makes it much more difficult.

When we are talking about Bill 12, the Trustee Act, and we're talking about making improvements to the system, I certainly appreciate that that is the direction of this bill, and certainly it seems that, in fact, the government is following through on the majority of the recommendations. But, certainly, it would be my hope that perhaps, more broadly, this government could take that to heart in many other aspects such as in the AISH appeals process.

You know, the Minister of Community and Social Services referred to the appeal procedure as being chaotic, a never-ending

loop for finding fairness in judgment. Well, Mr. Speaker, much of that is within his power to correct and fix, and he is choosing not to. Indeed, the government in acting, I guess, in its role somewhat as a trustee over that system – as we are talking about Bill 12, the Trustee Act – is failing in many regards and indeed has made many of these processes far more difficult for people to access, has created far more hardship for the very people that they are responsible for trying to help. I've certainly heard about that clearly at my constituency office, with changes to income supports and accessibility to housing benefits and other portions under that.

9:50

Speaking of Bill 12 and the Trustee Act, it's suggested that one of the intents of the bill is to increase transparency, in fact, to reflect that the needs of Albertans are changing. So the proposed model here, that we have, introduced some new provisions to provide additional transparency, improve the administration of trusts by requiring trustees to exercise the care, diligence, and skill of a prudent person. It includes a duty to report to beneficiaries, to be responsive to beneficiary requests. It carries over some pieces of the previous legislation, is my understanding, such as the prudent investor rules, that require a trustee to make investment decisions based on reasonable returns while avoiding undue risk. Certainly, that seems appropriate, Mr. Speaker. That is in line with the recommendations that were brought forward for changes that should be made.

Now, it does cause me to think a bit about this government's own decisions in some respects, again, where it is responsible, particularly in terms of, you know, having taken the Alberta teachers' retirement fund, the special forces pension plan, the local authorities pension plan, the public-sector pension plan and legally requiring them to be managed by AIMCo, taking away choice and jurisdiction from the individuals who have their pensions within those plans, arguing that consolidation would allow for better economy of scale, lower costs overall.

But, frankly, the folks that were invested in those plans did not buy it. Indeed, you know, when we had a bill that came forward to try to increase transparency and to try to increase protection, a bill that was brought forward by the Member for Lethbridge-West, Bill 208, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation Amendment Act, 2020, this government's members voted it down, did not even allow it to come for debate on the floor of the Legislature. So, again, I appreciate that Bill 12 is indeed making some important changes to increase transparency, to ensure, when we are dealing with funds that belong to other people that are being managed on behalf of other people, that there is transparency and a requirement that there be demonstrated good and due diligence, something which we, unfortunately, often do not see from this government in its care of the public tax dollars of the people of Alberta.

Now, the minister, in speaking about this bill, also emphasized that this act would make the process of setting up a trust more efficient and less costly for Albertans. He noted that, in his view, judges will benefit from a reduced caseload because fewer trust-related applications will be brought to court, and dealing with trust cases will be simpler for lawyers. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I can appreciate that being a valuable thing to do. We recognize that our court system is indeed under a significant amount of pressure. Certainly, COVID-19 and the pandemic amplified that and made it more challenging for us to be able to have cases and made it more challenging for court proceedings to be able to go forward and certainly created more impacts in the system, so finding a way that we can ease the pressure on our court system and at the same time provide other opportunities for people to resolve potential legal issues or, indeed, not even legal issues but simply to set up a trust,

to go through the legal mechanisms of getting this established and providing this oversight and this support for Albertans who require a trustee, certainly seems like a reasonable step and an important thing.

One certainly hopes it will be more successful than some of the government's other attempts because, again, as we have seen recently, we know that our court system is under incredible strain. Indeed, just on April 6 we saw the Alberta Crown Attorneys' Association raise very serious concerns about the pressures in the justice system, in their view, accusing this government of what they said was chronic underfunding. Indeed, they said that chronic underfunding, in their words, was creating a crisis in the justice system. They highlighted the significant vacancies for Crown prosecutors, which indeed is, I suppose, a reason to enact pieces like we have here in Bill 12, to help ease the pressure on that system. But, probably, it would be better, Mr. Speaker, if we were actually filling those vacancies.

The association reached a point where they've actually even threatened to strike, Mr. Speaker, as we face over 3,000 cases beyond the 18-month time limit established by the Jordan decision. So there are real concerns. I'm sure the Crown prosecutors would welcome this step to ease pressure on the court system, but certainly they would like to see much more significant action from this government as well.

This will hopefully be more successful than one of this government's other attempts to ease pressure on the court system; that being, charging Albertans a nonrefundable fee of up to about \$150 simply to appeal their traffic ticket. We heard a large outcry from many Albertans about this government attempting to make it more difficult for Albertans to simply access justice, have that opportunity to argue their case. It's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that in so many situations where this government chooses to – is ostensibly trying to streamline the system, they are creating further burden and obstacles for Albertans, much as I spoke about with the changes that they have made to AISH to improve the administrative process, apparently, or income supports or many of these other things, but indeed they are doing that on the backs of Albertans who are struggling and are in need. When they are streamlining the systems, there is a good reason to ask whether they are doing that for the sake of Albertans or whether they are doing that for the sake of the systems, the processes, and the bureaucracy.

I know that we will have much opportunity for continued debate on Bill 12. I know that all members are of course following it with great interest, as I can see. But I'm sure we'll have many members who have the opportunity to address this and probably in more detail and perhaps with a bit more expertise than, admittedly, I'll personally be able to bring to bear. That said, I appreciate the opportunity to add a few thoughts on the record in this debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 12 for second reading. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to rise here this evening, add some other thoughts to Bill 12, Trustee Act. Like my friend from St. Albert, I too am not a lawyer, so I think I might be approaching some of my comments here this evening as the critic for Red Tape Reduction. Clearly, I definitely welcome some of the changes that I'm seeing here in Bill 12. I mean, when we're talking about language dating back, you know, a century, it's certainly time to update these things. When I think about, I guess, how long it's taken us to get to this point, I wonder perhaps, maybe why the former Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction didn't take a look at updating some of this. We certainly saw some moves around, for instance, the coal act, which only went back to the '70s, and the

government trying to move on that, with a little bit of a narrative around red tape reduction for that. Of course, we know that that didn't exactly work out very well. So I guess I'm kind of surprised that perhaps we didn't tackle this a little bit sooner, looking at red tape.

In essence, when I'm looking here at Bill 12 – I mean, we're taking one act and swapping it out for the other – there is one question that kind of arises in my mind when we're doing that. You know, by this modernization: is it creating any kind of, I guess, red tape pressures? We've certainly seen this government on this quest to reduce red tape; sometimes not to the advantage of Albertans. And the reason I say that is because I think about one of the things that the government changed under the auspices of red tape reduction, and that was around changes to diagnostic imaging. They felt that chiropractors, physiotherapists, audiologists were ordering too many diagnostic imaging orders. Of course, there's been a report, that the college of chiropractors and the college of physiotherapists brought out, showing the negative impacts of that decision.

It's kind of interesting that earlier in the evening, Mr. Speaker, we were talking about the public's right to know and collecting information and being able to disclose that to Albertans so they know what's going on, yet here we are, sitting on a report that very clearly shows the negative impacts of the red tape reduction around diagnostic imaging, causing longer waits for patients to get care from their chiropractors or physiotherapists, and it's even costing the system more. I believe it's somewhere around \$4 million more.

10:00

So when I'm looking at Bill 12, one of the questions that pops up because of that would be: how much court time is the government estimating that this act change will save or, what's even more important, will add? Hence why I made that reference to the diagnostic imaging, because it's added more time to Albertans being able to get timely care in terms of having to take extra steps to be able to get diagnostic imaging to diagnose their problems, being able to get that information in a timely manner, and then being able to actually get care, which has resulted in more expenses to the health care system, which could have been redirected elsewhere because of that. So, you know, are we actually going to save court time out of this, or is it going to be added? I'm hoping that throughout the discussion on Bill 12 and perhaps maybe even in Committee of the Whole, when we get a chance to kind of go back and forth a little bit, we'll be able to suss through some of that information and perhaps, maybe, not repeat the mistakes that were made around the changes to diagnostic imaging.

Of course, one of the big things that was even brought up earlier – I know my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud had made mention to this – was around funding of the system. We've seen significant cuts to Justice. You know, I'm certainly not saying that government is purposely trying to add more court time with the changes here in Bill 12, but if that is indeed a possibility, even though the changes are needed – as I mentioned in my comments right from the beginning, I mean, we're dealing with language from – what was the date? – something like 1893. We have to get it updated. But if that does indeed create more court time, is the government prepared to fund that in terms of more court space or more prosecutors, whatever the case may be?

We all know that when it comes to trusteeships, sometimes there are some fantastic stories out there with regard to how somebody's estate or affairs are managed, and we've also heard some very serious horror stories as well. I don't think there's one person in the House that hasn't heard both of those situations happening. So if we are going to add additional pressures to the court because of this, are you prepared to fund them? That's the critical piece here. Again

referencing back to diagnostic imaging, the whole claim was: let's streamline the system. You know: let's cut waste; let's save money. And it did neither of those. None of that actually happened. Wait times increased, more steps to take, more taxpayer dollars being spent.

You know, perhaps if we had a little bit more public knowledge, information, data available to Albertans, we could find out, maybe, sort of what's going on, for instance, with that change. I mean, we know that anywhere between \$10 million and \$15 million is being spent on the red tape reduction ministry, and all we really have to show for it is a letter grade. That's how we're measuring that money well spent. It's great that we're getting this letter grade, but, as I said, there are Albertans that are waiting to get care, and they're paying more for it simply because we made a change under the guise of red tape reduction. So when I'm looking at Bill 12, I do have that concern.

With the changes and potentially any regulations that need to be changed, is that going to be measured on that red tape scale? Are there now going to be pressures to try to reduce something else because, you know, the whole need to reduce it by one-third by the end of the term, one in, one out? Even though we need to update the legislation – that is not in dispute here. But if we need to update that legislation, which creates new regulations because of it, are there now going to be pressures to quickly try to cut something else, possibly with negative consequences, just like the negative consequences I mentioned earlier around diagnostic imaging and the negative impacts that have come with it for Albertans?

I know that there were many recommendations that were made, I believe about 90 of them. This bill does encompass about 80 of those recommendations, so I'm really glad to see the great number that were considered within this bill, but I am curious about the other 10. Is that something that can't be done at this time? Is it on the list to get done going forward; you just need more time? It'd be nice to hear back a little bit around some of those things that weren't made.

I know, for instance, I guess to get specific, Mr. Speaker, around recommendation 11, how the institute recommends defining a represented adult and an incapacitated person in the different acts. You know, I understand that sometimes changes in one act can start to influence others, so hopefully we're taking a close look at those, keeping track of that and not missing anything, creating, you know, sort of little complications later on that we're going to have to try to adjust on the fly.

For the most part, like I said, I'm not necessarily opposed to this piece of legislation. It definitely needs to be done. It's just language that's way too outdated. We need to move forward on – hopefully, we'll get a chance to hear from some of the ministers around some of the questions that I have. I certainly would like to hear back on, you know, for instance, what the Alberta Law Reform Institute said about the final report. It's always great to go out, do those consultations, bring those changes forward, but at the end of the day does the act actually reflect what they were expecting to see being brought forward?

We've seen many examples where there have been claims of consultation with Albertans. Kind of that difference I make sometimes, Mr. Speaker, when I say: the difference between consult and consul-tell. Those are definitely not the same thing, and I think it does a very big disservice to Albertans when you're simply just telling them what the legislation should be. I would be interested to hear back on that, too. Again, I understand that here in second reading is not exactly the opportune time to be able to do that, so I'm more expecting to see some of those answers come across through Committee of the Whole.

Again, more or less, I'm willing to support Bill 12, Trustee Act, needing to update legislation that's definitely too old. We need something more modernized going forward. Hopefully, we'll get a chance to discuss any potential shortcomings or any concerns about some of the language moving forward. I look forward to that part of the debate.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I would move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2
Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate April 19: Mr. Sabir]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

10:10

Bill 10
Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls)
Amendment Act, 2022

[Debate adjourned April 19: Mr. Sabir speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any others wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call on the associate minister to close debate.

Ms Issik: Waive.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. chief government whip.

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Assembly be adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m., Wednesday, April 20, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:12 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, April 20, 2022

Day 21

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
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Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
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Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)
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Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
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Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
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Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
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Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
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Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
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| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, April 20, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 11

Continuing Care Act

[Debate adjourned April 19: Ms Phillips speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen on this fine morning.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this morning to speak to Bill 11, Continuing Care Act. Before I start, I just wanted to express my sincere appreciation for all those working in seniors' care and the incredible hard work that they've been doing during this time. I know it's difficult, and we see you, and we hear you.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about this piece of legislation that we have before us this morning. I think that there was some hope when we saw the title of this bill, the Continuing Care Act. We felt that there was a real opportunity for this government to really make some impactful changes to a system that they have failed during the pandemic. We saw too many perhaps preventable deaths during COVID; 1,600 continuing care residents tragically passed away from COVID-19. Truly, this tragedy should have been a call to action. This piece of legislation could have been an incredible opportunity for this government to look at the failings and to make some meaningful change to a system that they failed; however, there is absolutely no action in this bill.

We saw all across Canada individuals suffering from this pandemic, specifically when it came to continuing care and the treatment of seniors. We saw information come from the military about some of the horrific experiences that they had while working in continuing care, residents being left in soiled bedding for days. This is not how we should be treating human beings, especially seniors. I heard from so many family members that were pleading for something to happen to make change for their loved ones.

I'm fortunate in the sense that I have my mother, who is retired, living in my home. There's been talk about her wanting some independence and being out of my home and in her own space, but I can honestly tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there is absolutely no way that that would be an option under this government. Seeing how they've treated seniors, seeing how they've completely ignored the

calls to action, in good conscience it was not a decision that I could make for my mom to leave my home. Now, I'm fortunate that I have the space and capacity for her to live with me, but not everybody has that.

We see so many devastating stories coming out, and I know that this government hears them because we share them in this House. We're CCed in the e-mails that are going to the Minister of Seniors and Housing, to the Premier, to the Minister of Health pleading for significant change, pleading for action. Now, when it comes to this piece of legislation, many of the things that we hear and that we continue to hear from this government are: don't worry; it'll be dealt with in the regulations; just trust us. Well, I think that it's fair to say that this government has proven time and again that they can't be trusted.

So to simply say, "The work that we're going to do is coming; it'll be in the regulations" is not acceptable. This time in this Chamber is for us to debate the actions that are needed and to be transparent with what the plan is. If you genuinely wanted to make a change and you wanted to analyze and contribute to action regarding the Continuing Care Act, this is the opportunity to do that. This UCP government has failed.

I know one of the things that was heavily discussed through my office was when this government created legislation that took grieving families' rights to seek justice away. There were deaths that happened while their loved ones were in continuing care that they no longer have the right to seek justice for. When that's happening, how can those family members trust this government that they're going to actually do something that is going to have a genuine impact going forward?

Throughout the pandemic there were continuous failures. One of them started with the vaccine rollouts. I had residents calling me. Because of their age they were eligible to receive the vaccination, but their spouse was under that age, so they weren't eligible. That meant that in their home their spouse wasn't allowed to engage in the group activities and the socializing that their loved one was able to do. There was absolutely no consideration for the reality that so many Albertans were facing. It seemed that this government just didn't care. It seemed like there was just no plan. There were arbitrary decisions made all throughout the pandemic that had tragic impacts on residents living in continuing care.

The other piece that I think is important to talk about is the staff that provides care to those individuals. Part of my experience as a social worker, Mr. Speaker, was that I was a staff member that worked in group care. While I worked with youth, I would say that it's similar to working in a continuing care facility because you're working in their home. This is where they reside, so there's a certain level of respect that needs to happen. There's an appreciation that this is their home and that you are essentially a guest, a paid guest, but you are a guest in their home. Your job is to make sure that all of their needs are being fulfilled, that they have the greatest possibility to achieve the life that they want to achieve.

When this government failed staff and was putting them at risk, which, in turn, put the residents at risk, that is a complete and utter failure. We heard from staff that were calling on this government for supports and resources and policy that could help them do their job safely to provide service and care to the residents that they served, and that didn't happen.

This legislation could have been a wonderful opportunity to make some substantial and meaningful changes; however, we don't see that. We don't see staff-to-patient ratios identified. We don't see hours of care identified. We've heard heartbreaking stories of family members calling, wanting to be able to go in and provide the service and care to their loved ones because there just simply weren't staff available to do that.

I have a former staff of mine that is doing her nursing program, and she's doing part of her practicum in a continuing care facility. She would call me at the end of the shift, devastated, crying, because her entire day was spent trying to prioritize the minimal amount of care that she could provide because of staff shortages. Now, the facility where she was at had an advantage because they had students there, and with the extra students that were in this facility, they still weren't able to meet the basic needs. Most of their day was spent showering and bathing residents, not being able to interact and do some of the positive things that the residents wanted to do.

9:10

When that's the kind of treatment that we have in this province, there is a huge failure, and I know this government is aware of it. This piece of legislation, while saying that it's doing something, actually isn't doing the call to action that's required to actually do the bare minimum to support seniors in this province.

When it comes to the health care of seniors and the health care in this province, there are some significant concerns when it comes to their ability to access health care. When we see decisions being made by this government to move towards privatization of health care, there are some devastating impacts on seniors. When we look at their ability to access dialysis, if you live in rural Alberta, there are some significant impacts that are going to delay your quality of life. There are life-changing treatments that should be available to every Albertan regardless of where you live. Our seniors are being impacted, and it's absolutely not okay.

We as government had an independent office of the Seniors Advocate that provided independent accountability. It was an opportunity for caregivers or the seniors themselves to call and raise concerns. Well, this government took that away, so what happens is that we have seniors and their loved ones calling their MLA to plead for supports and resources. This could have been a wonderful opportunity in Bill 11 to talk about some of that stuff, to actually make changes, to put back in place what Albertans are asking for, accountability for seniors' care, and that's not happening. We have zero accountability for the care of our seniors in this province.

I know that when I talk to seniors, they're feeling that they're being ignored. When we have a Premier that talks about age and implying that the age range in which seniors are dying because of COVID, that they had lived a long, good life – that is absolutely unacceptable. We see a government saying: "Here's a piece of legislation that we're going to bring forward, and it's going to do the things that we know we should do. It's not actually in this legislation. It's going to come in regulation." Nobody believes that, Mr. Speaker. Nobody believes that their call to action is actually going to be doing something that is creating more accountability in continuing care.

We have seen previous legislation do things like removing the ability for grieving families who feel that their loved ones were wronged to seek justice. So when that kind of legislation comes before this, what is there to trust? We've seen the intentions of this government, and they're not to do the right thing. The right thing would be to provide some concrete action that has been called upon by so many in this province to make sure that those that are living in continuing care are receiving a high quality of life, safe living accommodations, that the staff that provide service and work in those care facilities are safe when they do it, that they have the right ratios for staff to seniors. I think that this could have been a wonderful opportunity to provide some of that clarity and some of that concrete action. I hope, Mr. Speaker, that through this debate we might see some opportunity for some amendments to be accepted.

With that, I will take my seat, and I encourage all members to engage robustly in this debate. Thank you.

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

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for her comments around Bill 11 and, obviously, comments on reflection, I think, in terms of what we have just been through, one of the toughest, most challenging periods, I think, in the world's history and certainly in Alberta's history and most certainly for our seniors and our most vulnerable, this pandemic through this period.

Mr. Speaker, I first wanted to start out by just saying that I was very honoured and very proud to be able to chair the facility-based continuing care review, which was a really deep look into the seniors care system in Alberta and with reflection of what's happening not only across Canada but around the world. We had an incredible group of skilled experts on that panel that looked at that. We spoke to over a hundred individual groups, organizations that were represented and had very deep consultation with them. We had hundreds, even thousands, of consultations from individuals, from caregivers, from employees, from family members, from residents themselves, that helped to inform that review, which has been very instrumental in the development of Bill 11 and the changes, the update, the renewal, and the evolution of legislation, some of which has not been touched for close to 30 years.

Mr. Speaker, I just attended last week the ASCHA conference and had a chance there to connect with many of those responsible for delivering care to our seniors. There was a sense of hope and elation, I guess, that we are at least through some stages of this pandemic and that we are moving more to some normalcy, but of course I also sensed some concern from them. They've learned so much in the past two years. They've brought that information back to government. They've pushed that information through their own sector and shared information more broadly than I've ever, ever seen within any sector within Alberta.

Attending that was a great opportunity to sit down with those people and to see, again, what they've been through, what they've learned, what they're applying today and the concerns that they have as we face perhaps some additional challenges with COVID as we move forward. But they feel a bit empowered now that they've learned so much, made mistakes, and certainly had an opportunity to learn from those mistakes and to bring that information back to us so that we can work with them.

Mr. Speaker, I was blessed, I think honoured, in the early stages, probably for almost the first year, to do weekly calls with all the major associations across this province and to hear their concerns and their challenges that they were facing and the unknown as they moved towards the unknown. Something that we thought would maybe only be a challenge for us for a few weeks or a few months became a year and then two years.

I had an opportunity to hear from them and to hear the stress and the fear that they had, the fear that they had for the health and the well-being of their residents, Mr. Speaker. I felt that that compassion and that care was there. This is from the operators, from the staff, from the representatives. They were fighting hard to make sure that they had what they needed.

I was quite encouraged, Mr. Speaker, to hear from all those organizations that the health and well-being of their residents and people under their care was of the utmost importance, that they were doing what they needed to do. They were looking for support from government, and gratefully we were able to provide that not just to those contracted services but through a lot of looking back and forth

and ensuring that we were caring for all seniors in Alberta irrespective of who owned the facility or who managed the facility or who paid for the accommodations that they were in, that they received the supports that they needed.

That was successful, Mr. Speaker. We were there to help them. We were there to help ensure that they had the PPEs that they needed, that they had the care that they needed, that they had the staffing levels that they needed, that they had the HZAs, and we worked with Labour and Immigration and various other regulatory bodies to ensure that we could move people through the responsibilities that they have and to ensure that we could empower people and provide the staffing required to care for those individuals in a time of very, very dire need.

9:20

I have to say that I saw some of the most incredible collaboration through that period. I went for weekly calls, and then it was twice a month, and then it was monthly, and then things flared up again and we went back to having them every two weeks. I continue to have some of those informal calls with those individuals. But what I was really impressed with, that continues to this day, are weekly calls with all of the major associations and representatives from various groups, resident groups and others, with members of our Ministry of Health and with Alberta Health Services, gathering feedback, sharing information, collaborating, talking about challenges that they were facing or challenges that they were anticipating.

Mr. Speaker, it was incredible. That continues to this day, and there are some people within Alberta Health and, again, Alberta Health Services who have gone the extra mile and listened intently and come back sometimes saying: you know, we don't have the answer to that, but we're going to get that answer for you. I'm not going to mention any names here, but there are some incredible people we have within the staff of Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services that have been there every step of the way in caring for Alberta's seniors. That, to me, was one of the most heartening things that I've seen and certainly one of the best examples of collaboration between government and any sector that I've ever seen within this province.

Was it perfect? No, it wasn't. We were all learning every step of the way, following the leadership of our medical experts. Were we listening? Yes. There was a constant feedback loop and a constant opportunity and a constant commitment to getting back to people so that they could make those decisions that they needed to do to care for their residents in the best way they knew how. Was it responsive? Yes, it was. Sometimes to the point where the people that were caring for those individuals were put in very difficult positions.

There were, obviously, differences of opinion with family members, even sometimes with the residents, but for the most part the residents said: "No; we want to be cared for. We want to be protected." But that wasn't always easy because we interface – those seniors' facilities, as I was reminded throughout the pandemic: not only are they an interface, not only are they a place where we care and where our seniors reside, the most vulnerable of our society through this pandemic reside, but it's also a place where you don't escape the community. You're part of the community, and what goes on outside in the broader community also comes into those buildings unless we put in special and extra protections, in which case we were able to deliver that.

And, yes, there were people who got COVID and there were people who died in our most vulnerable population through no fault of anyone other than the fact that we were facing a global pandemic. Was there constant feedback? Absolutely, there was. I was privy to that, and actually – right? – even to this day they do their weekly

calls. Tuesday mornings at 8 o'clock. I listen in, and occasionally I'll pipe in and just say a sincere thank you to those people for their compassion and their care, their dedication, and, yes, the stress that they face through this. Trust me; in hearing their voices, it was evident that they were going through very difficult times. And, yes, there were staffing challenges. Everybody is facing staffing challenges. In today's world it looks like workforce challenges are going to be a challenge in almost every industry, so the seniors care sector is no different.

But what are we trying to do with this new legislation, Mr. Speaker, Bill 11? Well, those things that we highlighted in the facility-based continuing care review are embodied in this and really refocusing our seniors care sector. We talk more about quality of life as well as quality of care. It's not just about quality of care. It's not just a measurement. It's not just the metrics and the objective view of it, but there's a subjective side of this, which is the quality of life that we're delivering to our seniors. We've committed to ending the ward rooms, to getting rid of what's sort of euphemistically called divorce by nursing home, that couples can stay together as they age even though they may have different levels of care that they have to address.

It's a commitment to innovation and using technology. New technology will be a huge boon to how we care for our seniors in place, in community. Aging in place, aging in community: I always like aging in community better because it might be some new forms of housing. I've talked to the seniors sector. There's lots of innovation already going on in terms of building form, updating our facilities.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that my own father-in-law, when he was first moved from assisted living into hospital and then into long-term care, the first building he moved into: the bathroom doors wouldn't accommodate the width of a wheelchair. We need to refresh that. We need to empower our sector to move forward with innovation, new building forms, and refreshing the stock of housing and care facilities that we have. This legislation, Bill 11, will help to empower that.

A commitment to keeping our seniors in their homes, increasing home care funding to allow that, to allow us to transition so that we don't have to build bricks and mortar for everyone. They can keep in their homes, in their communities that they've lived in for years and years. They can still visit their local baker and hairdresser and things like that, that keep them connected to the community and to keep them focused on living a good and healthy life. Many people, Mr. Speaker, don't have the supports of family around them, so we need to make sure that the community and our services that we provide from a government perspective will support them in living those long and healthy lives.

Mr. Speaker, we've had a commitment to modernization, system modernization, and a focus on outcomes within the seniors care sector that is going to support, again, this evolution of a sector to empower it. The member opposite referenced that it's not all in the legislation. Guess what. It's because we need to make sure that this legislation will endure and be flexible for the coming 10 or 20 years. In fact, the current legislation that was in place before this: some of the terminology didn't even match the sector that it was set out to be responsible for.

As much as anything I am very, very convinced and very, very confident that the minister responsible, the Minister of Health, is not only deeply committed to this evolution, but he's compassionately committed to this evolution of this legislation to ensure that he empowers his people in the ministry and those organizations that they work with, Alberta Health Services and the entire continuing care sector, that they're empowered to focus on outcomes, Mr. Speaker, to focus not just on the metrics of, "You

have to have this many hours of this and this many hours of care from this kind of health care professional” but to focus on the outcomes so that we can allow that flexibility within this sector to utilize doctors and nurse practitioners and registered nurses and LPNs and HCAs so that they can have a full scope of practice to take care of our seniors in the best way that we can, following the outcomes to ensure that we can deliver quality of life, not just quality of care, and that we can work together with our various sectors in supportive living and in long-term care to ensure that there is a continuum of care without displacement, sometimes maybe without even having to move, that we just up the level of care within a facility.

Those moves are very, very challenging, Mr. Speaker, on those seniors. If you talk to anybody who’s gone through that with family members, it’s that displacement, it’s that moving, it’s that change of routine that often is a catalyst, unfortunately, for something that is not a positive outcome for those individuals in terms of them adjusting to a new facility or a new routine. If we can deliver that, if we can empower the system to do that, that, to me, is where we should be focused.

When I hear criticism from the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, it gives me concern that we’re not all working together to focus on the opportunities here to take care of those people who are our most valued individuals in this province, our seniors, who have built the foundations of the province we live in.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to say that I will be supporting Bill 11. I encourage everyone in this House to support Bill 11 through to final reading. With that, I certainly would encourage anyone to speak in favour and to share their own experiences with respect to the seniors care sector and to long-term care and to this legislation, which I believe is a great step forward for the future of Alberta.

Thank you.

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

9:30

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s an honour to rise and speak to this bill this morning. I appreciate the comments from the member opposite in regard to his involvement in this piece of legislation and the work that he has done in regard to trying to speak to stakeholders and speaking to different members that have been engaged within the continuing care space. Now, I was listening to some of the comments that he made in regard to the direction that the government wants to take. I appreciate that within legislation, of course, we don’t want to legislate everything. There is room for, obviously, the creation of regulation. But I think something that we need to acknowledge and look at is that we have learned and we have observed over the last few years that there is a need to re-evaluate, to support, and to ensure that there’s appropriate funding for our continuing care services.

I appreciate that the member opposite was speaking about the need for an expansion of home care, and I agree. I believe that if we can ensure that seniors have the ability to stay at home, to be with their spouses, family members, with the care supports that they need, that would be the best scenario that we could possibly offer. I think the major concern for me, the main concern, is the fact that we have a discrepancy within the quality of care within the continuing care space. People who have the financial means to have good quality of care, who can pay for higher accommodation, who can pay for those services, have an ability to have the supports at a higher level of care than those that do not have those financial means, and I think that that is a real concern when we look at how we evaluate quality of care.

As the member opposite said, that should be what it is about. It is about the quality of care that we are supporting our seniors to have. Yet you go into some long-term care facilities – and I’ve been in many – and you see some seniors sitting in wheelchairs in spaces where there’s no stimulation, there’s no staff; they’re just housed in a space in a room. I go to other continuing care facilities where there are dining halls and there are pool tables and there are cafés and there are all of these amazing environments, like, stimulating communal spaces where seniors are able to have that interaction with each other, to have that social connection, really the fundamental pieces that keep us healthy and connected to our neighbours and our society and that we know are best for mental health and keeping people healthy.

I appreciate that the government will say: well, we’re going to put some of this in regulation. My caution and my concern is that I don’t see a commitment from the government, nor have I really heard a commitment from the government around ensuring that the quality of care is consistent for all seniors accessing whatever level of service there is through the spectrum of supports. Home care is extremely difficult to access for many seniors. Being able to get those supports, that multidisciplinary team in place takes a long time. And if you don’t have a family advocate who understands the system, who makes the calls, who sometimes calls the MLA – I do get these calls – there is a concern that seniors won’t get the support that they need. The fact that seniors have to fight within the system to be able to access the medical needs and the supports that they need to either stay in their residence or to even have continued care within the supportive living facilities is a problem. It’s a problem that I don’t necessarily see being addressed within this legislation.

I see a lot of legislation being brought together to talk about what would be a collaborative approach, yet what we know is that – and as the member opposite spoke to, there was a review that was done. That review was completed in April of 2021, so actually exactly a year ago, and it was made public in May 2021, so we’ll give two more weeks and then a year ago. Now, there were 11 policy directions that were included, with 42 recommendations. The previous Health minister made a commitment that there was going to be an action plan created and that that action plan would help to guide the services that were going to be provided within these different programs. It’s been a year. A year. We haven’t seen an action plan, Mr. Speaker. We haven’t seen this government, who stands in this House, introduces a piece of legislation to speak to what the review is supposed to talk about, that was supposed to address the review that was done a year ago – we don’t see the action plan, yet we see a piece of legislation.

Again, as we see this government do repeatedly, they put the cart before the horse. We don’t have the clear direction. We don’t have the clear plan, but we have a piece of legislation the government would like us to trust them on and just vote on and be like: this is how it should be done. It’s very consistent. The government wants everybody to just trust them, say yes to everything, and then if you question everything, you’re not actually being a collaborator. You’re not actually working with the government. Oh, shame on anybody who actually challenges anything that we ask, because we should just all work together. Well, we can work together if we’re given all the information and if there’s a clear plan to move forward to work together on.

Asking questions and trying to clarify information from the government is not actually working against them. It’s not trying to not be a collaborator. It’s just clarifying information and bringing up concerns, and the concerns here are that this is a piece of legislation that collaborates a whole bunch of other pieces of legislation, where there’s no clear transparency from this

government about what the future will look like. “Just trust us. We’re going to put it in regulation. Don’t worry about it. Just pass this bill, and away we go.” Where’s the action plan? Where is the information that a year ago the minister committed to providing to this Chamber, providing to Albertans to let them know that this is what we are actually going to do? It’s not here. A piece of information that directly relates to this legislation is missing.

Unfortunately, I can’t trust the government when it comes to this space because I know of the inconsistency. I know that this government is very keen on privatization of our health care. I know this government would like to move to trying to have more fees for services within the health care system. Seniors care is a prime example of if you can pay, your quality of care is substantially greater than if you cannot. There is a difference, a substantial difference in the equality and the equity in care.

Now, I also have concerns with the fact that I haven’t actually seen anything addressed in this piece of legislation that has acknowledged what seniors have gone through during the last two and a half years and the learnings that have come out of that. I don’t see this government taking it seriously when it comes to supporting seniors, because I don’t see the Seniors Advocate being put back in place.

Again, as I’ve said, I get phone calls often from family members who are trying to support their parents either to access home care, sometimes access different facilities, whether it be hospitals or, you know, rehab services, adaptations to their homes, those sorts of supports, where they are continuously facing barriers. I had a constituent in my riding who was in an apartment by herself, who had severe dementia, three children that would visit her every day to try to make sure she was okay, didn’t have the capacity to move her into their homes. I had to advocate for months to even get home care to start going in there to visit her. Within a very short period of time it was deemed that she couldn’t live on her own anymore because her mental health and her dementia had become so severe that she was actually a risk to herself.

It took an additional six months past that to get her into a facility, into a supportive facility. She actually ended up in hospital for a while because that was the only place that she could go because there was no space for her available within the city. Again, I’m north side. The options that were provided to this family were south side, a 45-minute commute to go visit their mother in a facility because that was the only space available, and it was still a hospital setting for a very long period of time.

9:40

Again, the only reason that their mother was able to actually even get into a hospital facility to start was given the fact that they called my office and we started advocating. If they didn’t know to call their MLA, if this woman didn’t have adult children who cared or were available or understood that there were mechanisms to advocate within, she would’ve still been in that apartment setting. There is a gap there. It shouldn’t take, to be clear, three adult siblings to have to advocate to be able to do that. It took all three of them. One was doing an advocacy over here, one was advocating in a different system, one was advocating in a different system until we finally got all three of them to advocate all together, to all systems at the same time.

I appreciate that the government thinks that by consolidating pieces of legislation, it’s going to fix the problem, but it’s not. When I don’t see clearly from the government where their plan is and what the plan is going to look like and how it’s going to be equitable access for all seniors and it’s not going to be based on if you can pay or if you can’t pay and that the quality of care is going to

substantially increase across all service levels, I have a hard time understanding why we have this piece of legislation in front of us today. If the action plan had been presented and had been made available and we could see that these are the actionable items that the government is committing to, “This is how it relates to this piece of legislation that we’ve introduced into the Chamber, that gives Albertans the confidence to understand that by passing this piece of legislation things are going to get better,” I think there would be a different conversation happening in the Chamber. But there is information that is fundamentally missing.

Again, I’m not trying to dispute that they did a review, that the government did a review. What I’m asking for is: how come a year later we’re still waiting for the government to show what they’re going to do with the review? It’s really slow. The recommendations are there. So if the recommendations were provided a year ago to the government, how come it’s taken so long to create a report, and why do we have this legislation in front of us today without it?

I don’t think Albertans have faith in this government when it comes to long-term care and to health care. They fundamentally don’t. We see a shift, and we see a defunding of staffing, and we see conflicts within the bargaining process, and we see our health care professionals leaving the profession because of those conflicts. So until the government can come back to Albertans and say, “We want to have a better relationship with you as health care workers; we want to support you; we want to ensure that you are paid fairly and that the supports that you need to do your job are available to you to do that,” this legislation is not going to fix long-term care. We need the people, we need the resources, and we need to be able to ensure they can deliver that service and feel good about the service that they’re delivering. Without it, this legislation doesn’t mean anything.

I really would encourage the government to release the action plan, to show Albertans what they plan on doing, and ensure that they’re supporting our health care professionals by paying them fairly, by not fighting with them. That will be the beginning of fixing the long-term care issue in this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate an opportunity to speak on Bill 11 here this morning. It’s something that all of us, I think, have a responsibility to not just reflect on but act on in regard to continuing care here in the province of Alberta. We know that right across this country and indeed in so many jurisdictions around the world continuing care centres, or some version of that, were the single most lethal place to be during COVID over the last couple of years. Indeed, some of the scenes that we saw in Quebec, for example, and in southern Ontario and to some degree here as well are not just unfortunate tragedies but, I believe, a call to action for all of us to ensure that seniors are in a safe and secure and healthy place in various forms of continuing care.

Indeed, we know that more than 1,600 and counting residents in continuing care died of COVID over the last couple of years. You know, if we tried to contextualize that number with any other tragedy or mass loss of life, I mean, indeed this is a historic tragedy for Albertans. What we don’t see, though, is both a commensurate call to action and definable improvements that we could make so this kind of thing doesn’t happen again, right? We know that you can learn from very difficult circumstances like this and know that the loss of more than 1,600 seniors is unconscionable if we know that we could improve the circumstances in which they live and make that a safer place to be.

For example, I know that – well, we all know – COVID was travelling through populations between facilities here in Alberta and elsewhere, largely because while we did have shutdowns in all seniors' facilities, really, the workers were travelling between facilities, because, of course, many continuing care workers trying to make ends meet were compelled to work multiple jobs in multiple facilities. I think that that was curtailed for a time, but then we're back to doing that again here in the province, right? It's like we tried to mitigate that for an emergency, and now somehow, you know, we've gone back to our old ways where people are working in multiple facilities.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? Some people through sort of denial would think, "Oh, well, we're past that emergency stage," but we don't know that, right? We know that we don't have as much COVID data by which to analyze the situation right now. We can only look, really, to hospitalizations and, you know, severe outcomes and fatalities, but this is an evolving thing. We must presume that we might deal with this kind of emergency again in continuing care, in our facilities, and quite frankly it's our job right here in this House to do something about it.

So I appreciated the tone of the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek in regard to, I think, quite sincerely emphasizing that we do need to do something, right? My question – and I need to know this – is: is Bill 11 what we need to do? You know, I have more questions than affirmations for this bill at this point. Like, maybe that's why we have three readings, I guess, of any given bill, but this one has a particular gravity attached to it because, of course, as I said before, in the last couple of years we had more than 1,600 people die in our continuing care facilities just from the pandemic alone.

The first question, amongst several that I have, Mr. Speaker, around Bill 11 is, you know: why is this UCP government not acting in its entirety from the recommendations of the facility-based continuing care review, right? There were several things that stood out in regard to this review that it seemed self-evident that we needed to do something about and do something about straight away.

9:50

Maybe I'm reading this bill – maybe I'm not catching the detail, but I mean are we in Bill 11 increasing the amount of home care being provided to people in Alberta, and how are we doing that? We know that having capacity in home care requires staffing and requires expertise, and it requires a long-term, stable commitment from the provincial government. So I'm just wondering if and how and are we, in fact, doing that, and is it somehow attached to this Bill 11?

The second question that I will ask in regard to the recommendations of the facility-based continuing care review is that it became obvious that the working conditions for continuing care staff need to be addressed immediately, right? Like I said before, lots of continuing care staff are compelled to hold down multiple jobs in multiple facilities in order to make ends meet, and that's just one indicator, I think, of a problem around working conditions or hours being available and the adequacy of pay or lack thereof for continuing care staff. Of course, this came back to be a painfully obvious fault line in our continuing care system here in Alberta because we could see that the transmission of COVID was aided and abetted by the staff working in multiple facilities. While we had any given place locked down, staff were entering through that lockdown, and you know then COVID continued to spread.

The other recommendation from the facility-based continuing care review that just I was wondering, you know, about – and again

it's to do with staff – is to make and compel more of these jobs to be full-time so that, again, that same scenario that I just described, that we all saw unfold, would be mitigated somehow, right? If people could in fact have full-time options in a given facility, then they could dedicate themselves more to that place, and you have a better relationship with the residents of a continuing care facility if you have full-time staff that are there to get to know people and so forth.

Yeah. Those are some of the questions that I have, you know, and quite frankly I think that what we could do to help to hash these things out is to perhaps follow the amendment that I have here to offer this morning. If I could to drop that to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. If you want to just pass that to the pages. Once I have a copy here, I'll ask you to proceed.

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

The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West to proceed. You have six minutes remaining.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As everyone can see, this is a referral motion to refer Bill 11 to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2. I believe that this is a substantive and reasonable request, and the reason, the main one, I have is that, you know, I see quite a lot of consolidation of existing legislation in Bill 11. It's almost like you're setting the stage for doing something more substantive, but I think that we need to flesh out what, in fact, those further actions should be, right?

While it looks like, you know, Bill 11 consolidates, like, the Nursing Homes Act, the Hospitals Act, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, co-ordinated home and community care legislation, so pulling some of this together, Mr. Speaker, it seems that the most substantial aspects of care, especially standards, like I said from the onset of my comments – right? – the standards that can literally save lives and create a quality of life for people and to protect from emergencies such as a pandemic, all come through regulation.

I mean, I know that we don't necessarily, you know, unroll, roll out regulations here, but we set the standard by which the staff in the Department of Health and Alberta Health and so forth – we set an expectation here in this Chamber of what those regulations should do, right? So in the absence of clear direction with Bill 11 as it stands – again, you can show me where it does do these things, but I don't think it does – setting standards around fees, staffing, and so forth, then I think it's incumbent upon us to take some time to, in fact, debate those things.

You know, continuing care, Mr. Speaker, sort of straddles the public and private system. You see nonprofits running continuing care facilities, which is fine – right? – and it's good. You have fully private facilities as well and then public and community-owned ones from the city or from the province or the town or municipality. That's all fine. I mean, this is the evolution of continuing care. But what we do need to do is make sure that there are standards that are right across the whole spectrum of the delivery of continuing care here in the province. I don't see that right now.

My concern, of course, partially is that as you see different elements break off – for people to, if they have more money, be able to pay for, you know, a better level of care and accommodation, well, that's one thing. I mean, certainly, you wouldn't begrudge someone to look for the best level of care for themselves and for their families and loved ones, especially when you're a senior. You want that to happen. But, again, this is a health issue, and we need to make sure that we're not leaving behind a whole other sector of the population with a lower standard or the absence of a standard.

I think that we saw those gaps just demonstrated as a natural chasm – right? – with COVID because, you know, again, it just really showed how if there's an absence of a standard or if there are different standards based on the ability for someone to pay, then it literally puts lives at risk and not just the people who can't afford it and have to stay in a place that's cheaper but for everybody. Of course, COVID showed that it doesn't recognize different amounts of money you have in your pocket and so forth. If you have a pandemic, then things spread from one thing to another, and we're all affected as a result.

So, again, I think my amendment here this morning is reasonable. I hope that, you know, we can hear about how people feel about that, and I expect that we will have a robust debate in that regard.

Thanks a lot, Mr. Speaker. I will cede the floor the next speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment REF1 the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is on his feet.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak in favour of this referral motion put forward before the House here by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-North West. I, too, have a number of questions on this bill.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

I will say, Mr. Speaker, that there was quite a robust debate on this very bill yesterday afternoon, in which, you know, it was great to see the Minister of Health engaging with the members of the opposition, engaging early on in second reading, answering some questions that we have.

10:00

Now, you know, I'll state at the onset, Mr. Speaker, that I am in favour of some elements of this bill. First and foremost, the consolidation of what seems to be more than a handful of different pieces of legislation that all govern our different types of seniors' housing, our different structures that have been scattered throughout a myriad of legislation, is a positive step that will make it much more efficient. To put this into context, you know, the Minister of Health explained that previously, or before this bill passes through third reading, if a couple are in a facility that has different types of units, if they need to progress from, say, independent to supportive living – no. I'm going to mess up this example because I was going to say they have to move units, but it was an example where it seemed silly to force a couple to change units in the same building if they're receiving the same type of care. By consolidating, this will address that issue, and that is positive.

I appreciate as well that the current government is building more beds. We know that we have a chronic shortage of beds, Mr. Speaker. This is largely due to the fact that for many, many years previous governments did not act swiftly and build an adequate number of new beds for the aging population. Under our government we built 2,000 new beds. I know yesterday the Minister of Health indicated that the current government is on track to build 1,500 new beds, which is all positive.

Some of the issues that we have, you know – I think part of the reason you're going to hear from my colleagues as to why we support this referral is because this bill was a real opportunity to enhance the quality of care that our seniors are getting, and currently, the way the bill is written, it's not addressing some of those fundamental issues that we would have an opportunity to address.

Now, I know that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-North West did go through some of the recommendations from the facility-based continuing care review that took place last year. So

very timely, Mr. Speaker. This is part of the reason why the Official Opposition were hopeful that this type of bill would have additional tools or additional supports for our seniors and then, quite frankly, as well, you know, supports for the very people who take care of our loved ones, that play such a critical role in the quality of life that our seniors either experience or the challenges that they face.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the other part that's disappointing in this bill is that we've had a great deal of learnings over the past couple of years. Now, it's come at a cost. It's extremely sad to know that we lost over 1,600 Albertans in our continuing care facilities during the COVID pandemic. That tragedy should be a call to action. You know, again, the Minister of Health had said: well, we're going to go out and consult and we'll come up with a plan. The reality is that we have already an adequate number of studies and reports. It's time for action. We've looked at the causes of some of those losses of 1,600 Albertans, and this bill, in its current iteration, doesn't increase the amount of home care. It doesn't increase the number of hours that residents could receive or should receive or increase the proportion of full-time staff.

You know, Mr. Speaker, my colleagues have very articulately expressed and laid out the challenge that many workers in our continuing care facilities face, and that is a patchwork of part-time hours, where they're scattered between a number of facilities, that they aren't being adequately taken care of, which will directly impact the quality of care that they're able to give to our loved ones. There was an opportunity in this bill to address some of those things.

Now, we know that, again, the government has claimed: well, the details of this bill and potential additional supports will come through regulations. You know, the opportunity to fix the issue regarding staffing hours can come through regulations, but the challenge with that, Mr. Speaker, is that regulations are drafted and decided upon behind closed doors, by cabinet, and they can be changed. They can be changed on a whim. They can be changed on a moment's notice whereas, you know, including it in legislation ensures that, one, there is robust debate not only in this Chamber but that Albertans have the ability and the opportunity to look at the proposed changes and to weigh in on them as opposed to reading about them on a Friday when they have already been done and decided. And it would enhance this legislation, which is another reason that I am speaking in favour of this referral motion.

You know, there are a number of changes that this current government has made previously, you know, which really call the government's judgment into question. I mean, we've recently seen the firing of AHS's CEO, you know, Dr. Yiu, who's done an incredible job trying to navigate Alberta and Albertans through an unrelenting pandemic, unrelenting in part because of failed actions of this current government to act decisively and swiftly at a number of different moments over the past two years.

You know, I believe it was last year, Mr. Speaker, that, again, the government brought through a bill in this Chamber removing the ability for grieving families to seek justice. You know, when a loved one is lost and it is due – and there is a process, but if it is determined that it was due to neglect on behalf of the facility or the care providers, there should be recourse for grieving families, and the government brought forward a bill to remove that.

You know, the government has also refused to create an independent office of a Seniors Advocate even though that is a recommendation that has come up time and time again, but this government has chosen to ignore it.

10:10

One of the questions that I have, Mr. Speaker – and I'm hopeful that there will be a robust debate in this Chamber. I think, quite

frankly, if members chose to support this referral so that we can have these conversations, we can bring stakeholders in front of the committee and really work together to try to strengthen this bill so that we are not just consolidating legislation into one place but also looking at how we can provide additional supports for our seniors, our most vulnerable, and how we can also support the very front-line workers who provide that care and then, of course, the facilities that take care of them.

I'm curious to know why the government has not acted on the recommendations from that facility-based continuing care review. Again, the minister has stated that they will look, the government will look at those recommendations in the coming year, but the question that I have is the fact that this report came to government about a year ago. I think it was released about 10 or 11 months ago, and there has been no action taken. The government claims that, you know, these losses of life are a call to action, but the only action that we have is a consolidation of a number of different pieces of legislation into one. Now, as I stated at the onset, I support that, but our seniors deserve much better than merely an administrative bill that brings different sections of different acts together.

I'm curious if the government is interested in creating an independent Seniors Advocate. I know, Mr. Speaker, and I'm not sure how familiar you are with this review, but the review does mention or state that close to 6,000 more staff need to be hired in order to bring the level of care up to a standard that Albertans deserve, quite frankly. I'm curious to know where the government is on that, on making progress regarding hiring up.

I have questions around, you know, the different aspects of care on staffing and fees and standards. Again, the bill really points to regulations that will look at setting those fees or standards. Again, the challenge that I have is that the answer that we continue to get from this government is: "Trust us. It'll be in regulations." The reality is that few Albertans trust this current government on a number of issues, and – you know what, Mr. Speaker? – it's with good reason that this government has lost the trust of Albertans.

You just look at, you know, the actions of this Premier. You look at the actions of this government. I've lost trust in this government and won't take them at their word. Again, that's why there's an opportunity to put this in black and white, to put it into this piece of legislation, as opposed to waiting on regulations that will come. I mean, the other challenge, Mr. Speaker, is that we don't know when said regulations will even come into existence. You know, I mean, this bill has to go through its three stages and then it has to be proclaimed and then cabinet has to get around to regulations.

The other challenge, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, is that this government is doing everything but governing. They are so distracted with their own internal politics, their party business, their leadership review that nobody is behind the wheel.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? I see the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to this referral amendment, which, I would like to say right off the bat, I think is very much misplaced given the amount of time and energy that's been put into Bill 11 by the minister, by so many people in his department. This has not been an overnight thing. This has been ongoing for years and years, since the mid-2000s; 2008, I think, was some early attempts to do this evolution of the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, I'm reflecting back, and I hear the talk of us not doing anything with respect for many, many years until the

government of the member opposite was in place. I reflect back on the 2,000 units that keep being referenced, and then I have to have a little bit of a chuckle to myself because I recall that that ASLI program was actually put in place, which provided most of those spaces and funded most of those spaces, before their government was in place. In fact, it wasn't 2,000; 2,671, I think, was the number – I was trying to find the reference to that – so there was actually a reduction from the original ASLI. There were many people – in fact, I refer back to a question I asked to the then minister back in October about what was happening with the 2,600 Alberta seniors' units and why are 2,600 Alberta seniors continuing to be at risk due to continued NDP funding delays and that they had put it on hold and that there were people that were on that ASLI list who hadn't heard the status of their funding. Didn't know, in fact, were told that – let's see. I'm taking a look through the media. They were told that pending a review by that government of the day, which allowed us to miss an entire construction season.

I reflect back on that, and I look back on some further documentation which referenced a lot of initiatives going on before that. In fact, I've got a full list of all of the seniors' facilities, the long-term care facilities, the designated supportive living spots, and the other supportive living facilities in this province that have been built in what I think is a really healthy mix in our province, which is a mix of publicly owned and operated, not-for-profit, and faith-based operations and some private operations, Mr. Speaker, which has given us a great mix and an attraction of capital of various sorts as well as public funding to ensure that we have that in place for our seniors.

So when I hear that they want to send this back to committee, Mr. Speaker, it gives me a huge pause for not only concern but for some serious angst on where we're going with this. We do have a bit of a hurry up. We do have baby boomers, of which some of us in this room are, and the pressures of the baby boom. We know that the number of seniors in this province is going to increase significantly. In fact, it's going to represent about a quarter of Alberta's population over the coming decade or so, and that is a huge challenge for us. That is why the importance of this legislation being passed now and being passed in a way that empowers and leaves some flexibility for the future is in place.

When I reflect back, there's so much in the current legislation which is not even reflected in the realities of the sector today. Some of the references, DSL and other types of supportive living and some of the contracted care that we have, are not even reflected in the current legislation. We know that that's going to change going forward as well, Mr. Speaker. We know that there's going to be evolution. We know that we want this to be flexible legislation that we can really work with and change over time as – guess what – society and the sector will evolve and improve, quite frankly, because of what's in this legislation. The overarching work of this legislation is very, very much something that we need to focus upon.

When we look at the high level, the highlights of these key principles that we're moving towards with this new legislation, again, Mr. Speaker, I look at the keys here: quality of life, person-centred care, dignity and respect, importance and contributions of caregivers of all sorts, importance of staff to resident and quality care of life. How are we going to attract the people, the talent we need in this continuing care sector? That in itself is a challenge, and I know that the minister will be working with those in education, in advanced education so that they can ensure that we have that career path for professionals in that sector so that we can support, again, that bubble, the baby boomer bubble, that is coming very quickly here upon us, as we see in society.

10:20

The highlights, the key principles, again: enabling Albertans to age in place, Mr. Speaker. Age in place. Hence, some of our focus is on increasing the home care options and opportunities. Again, I talk to innovators across this province all the time giving us new options for smaller congregate living, ways that we can deliver more comfort, care, and quality of life to individuals.

Providing services in alignment with the Alberta Health Act: that's something we need to do. We need to be able to deliver those services where people live, Mr. Speaker, whether that's in larger congregate living facilities, whether that's in medium and new-sized ones in evolution of the care, in the form of housing that they choose to live in or in the homes that they've lived in, in some cases, for many years.

And, Mr. Speaker, respecting diversity: that's a new one that's come out, and I applaud so much that's going on in our province. I reflect on a facility that I've had the opportunity – Wing Kei nursing home in Calgary, which has expanded significantly through the support of the ASLI program and others. It's great. I go in there, and – guess what – I ran into a fellow who I knew from when I was a kid, Ken Jang, who's a resident there and actually a spokesperson in the facility. I knew him when I was five years old. He and his family ran a grocery store near where I grew up, and to see him in there is just like running into old friends. He's vibrant and he's healthy, but he's also getting appropriate care and culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate care and meals, too. As I've often said, you can't take somebody who's enjoyed rice and noodles their entire life and give them a ham sandwich and expect them to thrive. We've got to be culturally appropriate.

We're doing that, and this legislation will allow us to empower the sector to do so as we move forward in the future. So when I hear of referrals and “Let's study this more” and “Let's throw this back to committee,” Mr. Speaker, this legislation, through the hard work of the minister, through the facility-based continuing care review, through the input of so many people – residents, family members, caregivers, operators, the associations that represent the sector on both sides, from the individuals, from the seniors themselves but also those that are operating – has been incredibly robust, and I was very honoured to be part of that, thanks to the former minister, and be given the opportunity to continue to work with that sector and to find out what the priorities are and what the focus is.

When I hear that there was only one government that ever did anything – Mr. Speaker, I'm looking back, actually. I pulled up a report here and some information back from 2011, a gentleman that I know that is still working in the seniors' care sector, and that direction was well in place at that time as we were moving forward. The ASLI program was part of that at the time, and as we involved that, the noncapital ASLI programs that have been brought forward now and other innovative ways for us to bring more capacity into the system, into the facility-based side of it as well, knowing that we want to evolve it so that we can deliver those services, those health care services in different settings, that we can deliver that quality of life along with the quality of care: I see that these are all embedded in here but at a high level, giving us the latitude through regulation to ensure that this legislation meets the needs of a growing and diverse and pretty demanding group of seniors, as we see.

You know what? We've now gone past the era of Depression-era seniors. In fact, now we're into their kids. Depression-era seniors, I think, were taught: if you have a roof over your head and three squares a day, you're supposed to be happy. Then we got into the current generation, who's going, “No, actually, I want better; I saw my parents; I'm cut from that cloth of frugality,” but they wanted

something more. Guess what. The new generation, the baby boomers, are going to go: hold on here a minute; we've worked hard. Some people will have means, some not. We need to make sure that those people are all receiving a high level of care, quality of care and quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, when I see this, when I hear this “Let's throw this back to committee,” it really irks me. It's time for us to move forward, for us to look at the people, the professionals in the ministry. I will not be supporting this amendment. I think it's, quite frankly, irresponsible for us to consider doing it. Now is the time for us to move forward bravely, boldly and to address the challenges and opportunities. There are going to be challenges, but there are opportunities for us to work together with a diverse sector, which we're blessed to have in this province, to work with them to build the housing, to create the facilities, to create the options to deliver the services where people choose to live, and to make sure that they can have that enduring quality of life as they move forward into their golden years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment REF1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to address this. I think the referral motion is one that was brought forward with good intention and not as an attack on the government. In fact, this is one of those bills that I think the underlying intent for both the government side and the opposition side is very much in line. The reason why we feel like this could be deferred at this particular time is the fact that the promise of this bill was so much greater than the bill itself.

I know that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has talked a number of times, quite well, about the incredible amount of work that has been put into the review, the facility-based continuing care review, and, of course, the subsequent legislation. That's the very reason why we have concerns, because we actually believe everything he says about that, that there were people who are quite dedicated to bringing things forward, issues forward, and brought forward quite a comprehensive report, that we were quite excited about. There were 42 recommendations in that report that we were looking to see, yet when we look at the legislation, we don't even see most of the aspects of that report even mentioned, let alone actual, you know, construction of overarching legislative pieces to enable the recommendations to be moved forward. I think that's the concern here. We do not seek this referral in this amendment because we wish to quash the bill; rather, we wish to enhance it and to bring it to life.

You know, when I look at the facility-based continuing care review, I see a number of things just in their overall policy list that I really feel like I can get behind. Policy direction 2, for example, is “Enhance overall Quality of Care with emphasis on residents living with dementia.” Certainly, I think that there's a need for that. It's an area that is going to require a fair amount of structural establishment here of systems to allow people to deal with dementia.

Right now what's happening in people's homes is that they're finding themselves unable to care in their homes for people with dementia because they don't have the level of support services that they need, and as a result, people with dementia are going into care for the safety of the family members, very often, because living with someone with dementia becomes a 24-hour-a-day responsibility. Unfortunately, because the resources aren't there, people are having family members go into care when they would prefer to take care of them at home but they know they simply cannot do that 24 hours

a day, and they become fearful themselves that they'll fall asleep at the wrong time, that they'll just be exhausted and not be able to tend to the issues.

You know, what we needed to see in this bill, in that particular case, for example, is some legislation that would establish a new process for ensuring that dementia care would be created and deliverable in in-family-home situations in a way that it is not today. I think that would have required some legislative work, and I just don't see all of that work being done.

I look at the next policy direction, policy direction 3, and it talks about "culturally appropriate continuing care services." I don't even see the word "cultural" in the bill at all. Now, I may have missed it once, but in my review I don't see an emphasis on: what does it mean to bring in cultural services? What are the systems that are going to ensure that that is going to happen? I can go through all of those pieces of the continuing care review act and tell you that what we saw in that review, as the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek has indicated, was some really good work being done by people who clearly knew what was happening on the ground.

10:30

What we do not see are these policy directions and these recommendations actually coming forward. Now, what the government is saying is, "Well, we have an overarching bill here," and I understand that. But even if you have an overarching bill, you should have some sections that deal specifically with the recommendations to establish the processes by which those recommendations will be fulfilled, and we don't see that. We just don't see that the work is going forward.

Now, we're always left with this statement: well, that'll come out in regulations. It's always bothersome to me when I see that happening because if it is an issue of regulation, then you're saying that it does not require legislation; it just requires a decision by government, and that decision by government will happen in the regulations. Well, that could happen without the bill, so why aren't we seeing any progress then without the bill? We should have been seeing the implementation of many of these things anyways in spite of the bill because the government is saying that they don't need to be in the bill, that they can be done outside of the bill. Why haven't we seen any progress on that? That's the frustration that we have. They either have to decide that the bill is necessary or it's not. If it's necessary, can we please have the bill substantially do what it is the government promised to do in their own facility-based continuing care review?

You know, yesterday I talked about some of the other pieces, like the staffing hours, which certainly, I think, could have been included in legislation. Absolutely, there could be rules about the percentage of staff that must be there on full-time, ongoing contracts. That could be in legislation without any problem at all, and I don't see any emphasis on that here.

I've certainly talked about the things that I appreciate and I like about this bill. I mentioned at least four things yesterday just off the top to make sure that people know that, you know, we've kind of gone through it, we see some really positive things here, and we want to be encouraging as much as we possibly can. It's these other pieces that I get very concerned about.

I noticed that policy direction 8 talks about: to "consolidate monitoring processes and improve the coordination of inspections, while enhancing accountability and public reporting." I think that that's a really important area that certainly should have been enhanced in this bill in terms of the legislation. You know, we would certainly like to see that there is greater accountability and that there is some increase in fines, which I mentioned yesterday I appreciate, and the ability of inspectors to inspect unlicensed facilities, again which I appreciate, but what we don't have is a

recognition that the families themselves need to have rights. We know that the rights of families to sue many institutions were taken away by this government, so I was very disappointed not to see that.

I could go through a number of specific things. You know, when I talk to the facilities in my area, one of the things that comes up fairly regularly is the fact that they are constantly having to pull staffing away from front-line care into meeting their accreditation requirement processes. Of course, those processes are extremely important. Many of these facilities, because of the nature of the facilities, have to do these accreditation pieces time and time again, sometimes four or five different accreditations at a single institution.

It often means that in September you've satisfied a requirement that is asked by the second accreditation group in November, but you can't give your September results to the second group even though it's only two months old because it has to be done newly for each of the new accreditations. I would have loved to have seen something that talked about: how do we make sure that the accreditation process itself is not pulling people away from the front-line work, those kinds of things, and how do we make it, you know, really sensible? I could go through in fine detail because I actually know many of these people and I worked with them.

I just wanted to summarize my comments by saying that the point here is that much more could have been done. I can give specific suggestions in basically every one of these areas of what should have been in this bill. As a result, we'd like to see this bill being deferred as per this amendment, but at this time I would like to ask that we adjourn debate on this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 14 Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to move second reading of Bill 14, the Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022.

As the Associate Minister of Status of Women I'm so pleased to see this moving forward. You know, as society becomes more aware of sexual assault and other violence that has taken place against women, this is an important step in making sure that victims are comfortable coming forward. I think the more we talk about the realities of sexual violence, the more we realize how widespread the problem really is. I think society is moving in a healthy direction by learning to accept that there is a problem and that we need to take action.

Of course, it's one thing for us to raise awareness about sexual assault and other context issues, but we need to make sure that victims can come forward. I think that we've done well in encouraging victims to speak out, and I'm proud of the work that has been done by many of our stakeholders and society as a whole in helping to encourage this. But, Mr. Speaker, we can't end there. We cannot just encourage victims to come forward; we need to realize and address the challenges that exist when they do come forward.

Up until recently many of these victims would feel shame about what happened to them due to misinformed public judgment and stigmatization. Instead of this, victims need to know that they will be supported, heard, and understood. More than that, they need to

be assured that there is a justice system waiting to help them. One of the biggest challenges for survivors of sexual assault is not just dealing with public opinions but dealing with the reliving of their trauma as they seek justice. In order for the process of our justice system to take its course, victims will need to provide statement and testimony of their assault. We're not talking about just any type of assault; we are talking about sexual assault, an assault on a person's most intimate, personal parts of themselves. These victims face reliving their experiences and often have to face their assailant in person in order to seek justice.

It's not something that's just forgotten; it has a lasting impact on victims' mental well-being. So what survivors of sexual assault need is confidence in their justice system. Confidence. Sadly, there are reasons for confidence to be shaken. In 2014 a court judge here in Alberta, who I'm sure most are well aware of, made headlines when he humiliated a victim of sexual assault by asking why she couldn't keep her knees together. This young Indigenous woman was brave enough to come forward. She was looking for justice. What instead she got was ridicule. With that comment and more, this woman was made to feel like the assault was her fault and that she should have done more to prevent it. During the same time a Nova Scotia judge told a courtroom regarding another case that clearly a drunk can consent.

These remarks came from past misconceptions about sexual assault that have been shown to lack any basis in reality. Instead of having judges that were there to impartially examine the facts, these judges showed highly damaging opinions. The Alberta judge's conduct, the Canadian Judicial Council said, was so "profoundly destructive of the concept of the impartiality, integrity and independence of the judicial role."

Now, we recognize that the actions of these judges were unreservedly wrong. We must also recognize that these opinions come from the past, where misconceptions about sexual assault were widely held and then passed down. One of the best tools to combat misinformation and stereotypes of the past is education and training. We all know this. In recognition of this, we have brought forward Bill 14 to make sure that our judges understand the nature of sexual assault and the humiliation experienced by victims. This is aimed to ensure that survivors of sexual assault are not revictimized by the very institution that is supposed to help them find justice.

We also need to remember that some victims of sexual assault never make it to court because they lose their lives during the assault. This leaves grieving families attending court and being traumatized all over again. This cannot be ignored by those running the courtroom. Many will know of the Cindy Gladue case. We must make sure that families never ever, ever again have to go through what the Gladue family went through. Bill 14 will help make sure of that.

10:40

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, we can encourage victims to come forward all we want, but there needs to be a willingness to come forward and seek justice. We are seeing a lot of women victims coming forward with their stories. This is a good start and a good sign that culture is starting to change, but it's not good enough. By assuring victims that they will not be berated or accused for bringing forward allegations, we hope to see more engagement in the justice system by all survivors, including Indigenous people, minorities, and other vulnerable populations. All Albertans deserve a justice system that is unbiased, effective, fair, and respectful. As with many things that we implement into law, this won't happen overnight.

I know there are concerns about having individuals currently on the appointment eligibility list for becoming judges undertake to

complete this training. This will take some time, but I am confident it will be done. The independence of the judiciary must be respected. Currently judges are provided with ongoing education and professional development, and that's derived from a number of sources, including third parties and, of course, the National Judicial Institute. The training for new judges is actually quite robust. What we are doing here is making sure that before a judge is even appointed or considered for appointment, they receive this very important education. This shows how seriously we take the issue of sexual assault.

Victim blaming and victim shaming must stop, period. We will only be able to prevent sexual assault when it is exposed to the light of day. This starts with victims feeling safe to report and feeling safe to proceed through the courts. I ask all members to show their commitment to ending sexual violence by supporting Bill 14.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 14? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this morning to speak to Bill 14, Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022. I want to thank the associate minister for her opening remarks. I think that there was a lot to be said on the importance of discussing sexual assaults and the importance of educating the justice system when it comes to that.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I think that there are some questions that I have regarding this piece of legislation. It's quite limited in what it's asking. There's a reference to – it's simply an appointment eligibility list, and there are two requirements, that the person being appointed as a judge "is a Canadian citizen" and "has completed education in sexual assault law and social context issues."

Now, I have a background in social work. I was a volunteer with the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton for quite a few years. I also, at the end of my career, prior to being elected, worked in the justice system with Children's Services as a specialist. I was a court coordinator, so I had the incredible privilege to work with Provincial Court judges under family law, and I had an incredible opportunity to sit on a committee with Provincial Court judges. In this committee it was the justice, the Chief Judge, for family court as well as defence counsel, members from family law, the native counselling centre – who else was there? It was a very diverse group of individuals that came forward to talk about the issues that were being faced in family law, and I can tell you that a lot of the solutions, because of the lack of ability to impede the independence of the judges, came from community.

We've seen, in Children's Services specifically, the creation of the Zebra centre. That was a space created that would allow an expert opportunity for the lawyers that were representing the victims to be specifically trained in issues related to child abuse, whether it's sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and it was an opportunity, what was intended, to create a space to educate through testimony to judges. It was real time, so it was happening during the trial. The experts that were there were the supporters of the victims. They were the lawyers themselves. They were defence that were, you know, quite versed in the issues regarding this, so the education component came from the lawyers and the witnesses, right? Whether it was the psychologist or therapists that responded to the victims, the approach was taken in an attempt to educate the justice in a way that was provided by testimony.

I can say that that has been somewhat successful when it comes to Children's Services. There has always been this discussion about

what sort of education can be provided to judges because of their independence, so it's a grey area when it comes to what that would look like. I think that simply being a grey area doesn't mean it shouldn't happen. We have an opportunity here where we're providing an expectation that any judge that's going to be appointed have this education in sexual assault, sexual awareness training, and I think that that's a wonderful first step.

I think that when we look at the federal law, there's a component of ongoing education when it comes to their judges. There's an expectation that you're a sitting judge and you continue to educate yourself on issues that are coming up. I know that in social work something that is a standard for our practice is that we have continuing education. We have categories that are required in order for us to maintain our status as a registered social worker. Part of the profession expects that we are educated based on upcoming events, current issues. Some of those things for job requirements are, you know, taking suicide awareness training ongoing, because the context is continuously changing, as we know, as society changes, as new procedures and techniques come out.

There should be an expectation that all of the service providers that interact with an individual who is a victim have that same level of training, and it shouldn't stop at the justice level. It shouldn't stop at judges. Having an opportunity to create space for newly appointed judges is wonderful, but I think the majority of those that are seeing cases before them are current sitting judges. It's a slow process to get new judges appointed, and to be quite honest, judges can sit well past retirement. They're brought in, you know, some of them in their 70s, 80s, and that's not a unique experience in Children's Services. It happens in drug court. It happens in criminal court.

So I think that we're missing a huge opportunity when we talk about the importance of educating judges and how it can be done. We can look to the federal legislation, that talks about that education component, and how it is simply just a requirement of being a judge. I think so many professions that we have that work with people have that requirement. It's part of the job. It's an expectation that your education is maintained. You can't go to university, graduate, and then just continue to practise in the education that you learned, perhaps some of them in the '60s, in the '70s. Things have changed, and it is unrealistic to look to the social workers and to our lawyers and to our organizations to have the expectation put on them that they're the ones educating the court process, they're the ones educating the judges.

What happens is that you have individuals who are brave enough to, number one, report, because that simply is a very low statistic when it comes to those that have experienced sexual violence. They were brave enough to tell someone, and then they were brave enough to bring it before a police officer, and we hope that that police officer has been trained in how to receive that report and then take it to a place where they feel that there's enough evidence to actually prosecute. Then the police officer then has to convince a lawyer, the Crown, that this is something that's worth prosecuting, because there are so many barriers put in place even before it gets to the court system. This victim is so brave and vulnerable to be put in that position.

10:50

I'm happy to see the minister nodding and understanding this process. It's quite a complex system that, unfortunately, could fail on so many stages of it. I know it's a big task, but when I look at how much strength and support is required to get this to trial, the chances of it getting to trial with a new judge who's been trained is a very low per cent. I would question: have those conversations happened with current judges? Like, what could it look like in the

province in ways of receiving education? I think it's absolutely unrealistic for the current sitting judges to say: no, we're not open to that. Well, you know, maybe you need to be.

We look at the federal government and that expectation of ongoing education. Why are Provincial Court judges left out of that?

Ms Issik: They're not.

Ms Goehring: I know the associate minister is saying that they're not, but there isn't a set expectation that they have to follow. There isn't a guideline that says: you must comply with sexual assault training, a certain amount of education. It's all at their discretion. It's a slippery slope when we look at ways to educate a profession that needs it so desperately. Our victims need it desperately when they've taken that stance that they're prepared to tell someone what happened to them and then hope that that first person believes them and then supports them through this really daunting process.

I know part of the training that we give to social workers is to take what they see on TV and disregard all of that. When you're testifying, it's not like it is on TV. It's not an experience where a judge will simply say, you know, "You can come and sit down and give your evidence," and they're seated nicely. For most of Provincial Court testimony you're standing. That act itself is something that can throw a victim off or a witness off without knowing that the true life experience is so different from the court experience. Even the placement of a courtroom: the judge is quite high up. They're looking down on the victim. There are so many things that are so intimidating to someone who's never experienced that. To have to testify in this space about something that is so violating and then to not have empathy when you're looking over to the person who's making the decision is heart wrenching to watch.

I think that this legislation is so essential when it comes to making sure that newly appointed justices are given that awareness. But I think that this legislation doesn't show how that's going to look. What are the timelines? What's the potential for actually educating those current sitting judges? I know many of the judges want to learn. They would sit on that committee, where we would discuss current issues, ongoing concerns, and they would ask those questions. It was in a safe place because it wasn't on the record. There were no clerks. There was no public. It was just an opportunity to have an open discussion. But not all judges are in that space where they want to genuinely learn what's happening.

There were several judges, that I had experience with over the years, that, you know, when you walked into the courtroom and that was the judge that was sitting up there, you knew what the results were going to be. You knew that there was a bias. Despite them intending to be nonbiased and neutral, you knew that judge X was going to rule in a certain way because they weren't perhaps aware of whatever the dynamic was, whatever the situation was. I think it has to be something that is a requirement. It can't be: I hope you get educated on this; I hope that you will take that additional training. Some do but not all. It's those judges that you referenced in your opening statement that, I would argue, probably wouldn't be open to voluntarily taking training and taking education because they have a bias and they have an opinion on what that means.

I can think of an experience where I went before a judge to present an apprehension order of an infant. The information that I had gathered through interviewing the family was that the father of this infant was a sexual offender of children, with quite an extensive history. You know, to me and my team, when we discussed how we were going to present that, it seemed pretty straightforward: new baby, vulnerable, mom was low functioning, bio dad, who was in

the picture, in the home, was a court-convicted sex offender of children. We put the information before the judge, and his statement was: "He served his time. He was released into the community. I have no concerns. This child is not at risk. People can change."

When you put information before a judge, they ultimately have the final decision, and you can only do so much. Perhaps if this judge had information on what sexual offenders' behaviour could be or sexual violence training, there might be some more probing questions that could have been asked. I could have come away with a better dialogue with this judge, but I wasn't given an opportunity to explain any more concerns. I wasn't provided any sort of opportunity to educate in that moment. It was just: no; this is my belief, and absolutely not.

So I've experienced attempting to provide information to a judge to perhaps educate in the moment, and not all are open to that. I would think that when you know better, you do better. Until you have that information – perhaps it's not that they're intending to be malicious or ignorant; it's just a lack of education and understanding. I think providing an opportunity to sitting judges is so wonderful if we could do that, come up with a way that the federal government does it. Provincial Court sexual awareness training is something that I'm so happy to see come forward. I know that there has been a lot of conversation over the years about the requirement of what does education – what are the standards for a person seeking to become a judge? What does that look like?

I think that when we look at some of the horrific stories that have come across our kitchen tables, when we're looking at some of the decisions and some of the disgusting comments made by those that make decisions, we have to do something. We have to start somewhere. I think that being able to look at the legislation and change it is a great first step. I would hope that when it comes to the type of training, that's something – that the victim's perspective is all throughout this training. I know that when you are hearing first-hand from a victim and what their experience was like in a courtroom, they're able to identify those little things that I talked about, just the simple staging of where the judge sits and that eye contact and not being able to sit. A judge doesn't consider those things when they walk into a courtroom.

Hearing first-hand from the person that had a horrible experience and also the positive experience – because there are some wonderful experiences where I've seen victims provide testimony, and the judge was so compassionate and so caring and so kind. Take those experiences as part of that education as well, not just what not to do, but: here's what it could look like to really support a victim who's coming forward and being so brave.

I know that one of the examples that we could look at is how we work with Children's Services and the way that we support children in testifying. There are support dogs that are provided through the Zebra centre. You know, they have a support animal with them. It's things that we've learned over the years that people need in order to get over that anxiety, that stress, and that simple acknowledgement that what they're about to do is hard. It's so hard. To be able to talk about the violence that you experienced in an open setting is terrifying, and unfortunately when it comes to a trial, you're not only sharing your story, but you're often made to feel like you're defending it. You're questioned on so many of the facts.

11:00

Defence lawyers use tactics that are horrible. You know, the minister mentioned the question of being sober. It's a strategy that we see over and over and over, so when we start getting to a place where judges are saying, "That is absolutely not acceptable; that's not an appropriate line of questioning," that culture, hopefully, will

shift and will change. But until then we have a system that has existing judges that don't have that training. I'm so appreciative to see this start of what's happening, but I'm just hopeful that there's opportunity to make it so much better.

With that, I will take my seat. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and speak to Bill 14, the Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022. There are some thoughts that I have in regard to – and to build a little bit on what my colleague from Edmonton-Castle Downs was also speaking about, obviously, we have similar backgrounds. The member worked in court services, and I worked with high-risk youth. Sexual assaults, grooming into gangs, things like that were the areas that I worked in and, of course, was engaging with youth that, unfortunately, were often being either sexually assaulted, abused, things like that.

Now, I agree that this piece of legislation is important. I think that when we are looking at our court systems – and how we're supporting victims is extremely important, and as my colleague mentioned, the training and understanding of that is very, very important. And the reason that I speak to that is the fact that I've had scenarios where I've had to work with youth that I've gone through this process with, and I think one of the biggest frustrations that I had through the whole process of trying to get to a court date and support a youth taking the stand and actually being a witness was the time that it took to get there. From the time that the first report was made, through the interview process, to the gathering of evidence, and then getting an actual court date, we were at about two years.

This youth that I was working with was assaulted at 14. We didn't have a court date till 16, and by that time her life had changed significantly. She was, at 14, living on the streets. She'd been groomed into a gang. Many horrible things happened in that process. By the time she was 16, she was living in an independent living environment, had gone back to school – her life was significantly different – and had gone to counselling, so she had processed what had happened to her to the point where going to court was not on her priority list. She didn't want to relive what had happened to her when she was 14, and she didn't want to have to tell her story again because she told her story already so many times, whether it be in her interviews, whether it be the officer that she had to talk to, whether it be the social worker that she had to explain. Like, the reliving and retelling of that story over and over and over again is a deficit, to be honest, in all of our systems.

The court date was set. We sat down. We talked about: what did she want to do? Again, because she had been supported through Zebra, she knew what was going to happen because we did the practice. She knew she was going to have a screen and that she'd have the support dogs and all the things. The day came, and her youth worker went to pick her up, and she didn't go. That court case failed. That individual was never convicted. We had enough evidence where I could confidently say that we would have definitely won that case, but because she wasn't able to attend as a witness, the case died.

Is training important for judges? Absolutely. Do we have a fundamental problem within the justice system of how we get to these court cases? To me, it's just as big of an issue. We are underfunded in the justice system. The access to judges that understand these cases is limited. The retelling of stories and having to expect individuals that have been sexually assaulted to have to tell that story over and over and over again is a problem.

And how we interact in these conversations is a problem. I will admit that when my first disclosure happened to me from a youth, I was unprepared to engage in that conversation. I acknowledge that in my practice as a social worker I could have handled that way better. I had training, and I had all of the things, but when you're taught something and then you have to actually practise it, it is very, very different. Luckily, again, as my colleague mentioned, we had the Zebra centre, so I was able to get support. There are experts there that were able to do the interview appropriately, and we were able to support that youth. Then I obviously spent more time at Zebra and, unfortunately, got better at being able to do that interview. But it was through that training and that expertise and engagement and being surrounded by people that understood what needed to be done and how to do it properly that I was able to be better.

Sexual assaults are extremely difficult to talk about, and they are also very easy to, unfortunately, mess up in an interview, with leading questions, with how you engage, so I think one of the strengths that we have in the province is that partnership that we have with Children's Services and our police partners and the fact that we have joint training. Social workers and officers go to the Zebra centre together; we do our training together. We get the justice perspective from an officer's perspective. You get the social worker's perspective of what we engage with: who gets first disclosure? What does that look like? How do we work in a collaborative partnership to ensure that we are doing the best practice we can do?

I would encourage the minister, when looking at this piece of legislation, "What does training look like?" that judges participate in that same process, that they come with us to the Zebra centre and they sit with the social workers and they sit with the officers and they learn about, one, how the Zebra centre works – in Calgary they call it something else; it's slipping my mind, but it's set up the same way – and that judges actually learn, from the moment of disclosure, what that whole process looks like, and they see it.

I appreciate that this is very much from a children's perspective. However, I think that if you can be a good judge and go through a trial with a child that has been sexually assaulted, your likelihood of being successful with adults is probably higher, because it's far more complex with kids. But I also just think that it's a good practice to see the whole spectrum of how the systems need to work together to make sure we have the best outcome.

11:10

My other recommendation, obviously, as we're talking about this is that the ministers – ministers, to be clear – work together in the sense of how this legislation from the Associate Minister of Status of Women to the Minister of Justice gets those cases seen sooner and that we accelerate those processes, because two years after an assault is too long. It is an unrealistic expectation to ask a person to go to court two years after a traumatic event such as a sexual assault and ask them to relive and retell that story and expect that they're going to show up, for one, and then, when they show up, to not necessarily have those supports. We need to make sure those supports are there, so I agree that this needs to happen.

I do think, though, that I also would like to see a harmonization between the provincial requirements and the federal jurisdiction. There are more strengths in the requirements for federal judges, obviously. We wouldn't have this piece of legislation if there wasn't, but because there is a requirement for federal judges, it would make sense to me that the legislation aligns, and I do believe that the federal legislation is a little bit stronger. There is more of a continuation of a requirement for training. Everybody is required to have it.

I agree that I don't believe that it should just be new judges. I think that all judges should be required, and I think it should be a continuation, and there should be a requirement for updating of that training, no different than in Children's Services, where Indigenous training is required. You have to update it every two years. You know, there are courses that can be taken within sexual assault training that you can update. Suicide prevention: you can update. Well, you have to. Because it is such an unfortunately common interaction, to refresh your understanding and your ability to engage, I think, is important.

Unfortunately for me, because I worked with high-risk youth, I was dealing with sexual assault often, so my skills were constantly being tested. Other colleagues of mine may never ever have to deal with a sexual assault as a Children's Services worker. They may deal with neglect and abuse and all of the other things but may never ever in their caseload experience have to do an interview when it comes specifically to sexual assault, just based on what kind of family you're working with and demographicwise. So for those workers who never had to engage or are less likely to, having that refreshing training is very important because when the day comes, if it does come, you need to understand and be prepared.

I do think that there needs to be more clarity that it is an ongoing expectation. I mean, I would assume that it's not depending on what a judge's docket looks like. They may not necessarily have these cases coming across their desks very often, so they also need to make sure that they're up to date and aware.

I think, I mean, as my colleague from Edmonton-Castle Downs also mentioned, things like even courtroom structure changes, right? Like, we never used to put screens in front of victims so that they didn't actually have to see the perpetrator. We never thought of that. Then one day someone decided that that would be a good idea and maybe we should provide a screen so there was limited eye contact, lack of intimidation, limiting that feeling of threat. Put a chair down; have a support person that can sit beside the person while they're testifying: those things shifted significantly as we became better at talking about sexual assault. Then it was about training court workers and, like, "How do we set up those spaces, and what does that look like?" So there is an evolution as we move through our systems, and as we learn more and as we develop more and get better at our professions, things shift.

Those were just the considerations that I would ask the minister to think about. Again, I think we can just always do better in this space. Our intentions are always good, and the more we learn and the more we're able to look at how we support victims so that we can have successful outcomes at trial, I think that is what we all genuinely want to see happen.

With that, I will close my remarks.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to add additional comments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has the call.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to speak to this legislation. We seem to have our third social worker in a row speaking to it and maybe more yet to come. I guess I want to start by thanking the Associate Minister of Status of Women for bringing forward the legislation. It is very nice to be able to support a piece of legislation for what it does. I think my comments will be more around thoughts I have around this whole, you know, issue or area of sexual awareness training and some of the concerns I do have, but I can certainly tell you that I support the direction of this bill and support the work that's been put into bringing this forward.

I think that, you know, the evidence has been that our sort of nonexpert attitudes and experiences towards things like sexual

assault have a huge effect on the decisions we make around sexual assault, and it turns out that judges are not immune to that in any way more than any other group in society. They are not experts in the area of sexual assault, and as such they make decisions based on the information that they have available to them, and that's typically their life experience. Unfortunately, that doesn't always lend judges to move in a direction which, I think, we need to see them moving in.

I know that in my many years of working in the area of child sexual abuse, I had, of course, many opportunities to deal with children that had been sexually assaulted, but also I did indeed provide counselling for or advice for and often training for people in the area of general sexual assault, including adult sexual assault. So this area is very meaningful to me, an area that I certainly dedicated a significant part of my life to and, of course, trained a lot of people on how to deal with this, both as a professor and in my work in private practice as an independent contractor providing services on training in the area of sexual assault for many years both to government and to nonprofits and other groups and agencies.

I certainly believe in the value of education, and I've certainly seen the negative effects of a lack of education in a particular area. It's really not to cast aspersions on the judiciary; it's just to point out the fact that one can only make decisions based on the information one has available to them. If you don't have it available to you, you tend to go fall back on things that are not, you know, really helpful, but it's what you know. I certainly experienced that a lot as I testified in cases of child sexual abuse.

I testified dozens and dozens of times. I was deemed an expert in both the Provincial Court and Queen's Bench in the area of child sexual assault and associated areas. I know I certainly tried to bring information with me when I presented all the time, but of course the courts want you to provide facts and not education in the courtroom as an expert witness, so it was a bit limited. Having a place where this could be done would be very appropriate.

11:20

I sort of reflect on some of the cases where I was, you know, particularly aggrieved at the decision-making that was done; a case, for example, of a child of three who was sexually assaulted by their father. When the decision was made, there was a reference by the judge that if we put this father in jail, this family is going to be without income and they'll be worse off. I can understand, from the judge's perspective, that that would be an important thing. A family needs to have funding and so on, but of course it totally neglected to bring into consideration the fact that, having been a sexual offender once, the likelihood of reoffending is significantly high. Of course, that young child was sexually abused continuously until they left home at the age of 18, and then it became a big issue again at that time. I was brought back to testify about it, this some 15 years later, and really was concerned that the decision why this man was left in this home was based not on the sexual assault aspects of the case but, rather, on some other aspects of the case.

Another one that, you know, really stuck with me – and some of these stay with you your whole life; you just never give them up – was a young woman that was abused by her father and, in fact, had become pregnant by her father and had an abortion by her father. But when it came time for the trial, unfortunately, nobody had thought to take evidence, DNA evidence, about the abortion from the time of the abortion to prove that it was the father. It was only at this point about a 16-, 17-year-old young woman testifying against her father.

One of the things that I was really aggrieved about was that the defence attorney brought in writings by this young girl, that she had written down, about how much she hated her father and so on and

had the young girl admit on the stand that she did in fact hate her father, and then they used that as evidence: obviously, this is all fault; she just hates her father, and she's doing this to attack her father. You know, it was just a terrible, terrible outcome, and I've never been able to get over that. Again, it was because they were using the outcome to justify their decision that somehow the assault hadn't actually occurred. I think that judges, with appropriate training, would certainly have been able to understand that, of course, a child who'd been sexually abused to the point of having gotten pregnant and having an abortion by her father by the time she was, I think, 14 would be angry. The point of the anger was an outcome of the abuse, not a reason to believe that somehow it was a false accusation.

You know, those kinds of stories just hang with you for a very long time, and you certainly are happy to see a piece of legislation that's going to move us ahead, that's going to make the likelihood of decisions based on information that is irrelevant or secondary to the sexual assault piece of the criminal activity – I think it's really important that we see legislation that supports that kind of work.

I want to also add in some thoughts about things that I might like to see happen that could perhaps be part of this legislation, because I, of course, believe that it's not just simply sexual awareness training that is important for the judges; there are other aspects that could be included. Maybe this isn't the appropriate place to put them, but I know that there has been a recent review by Professor Jennifer Koshan at the University of Calgary's law school asking essentially: can we have this kind of legislation for intimate-partner violence as well that looks not only at understanding intimate-partner violence but also context and so on?

Of course, as in the case with the young woman I just spoke about, in many cases of intimate-partner violence we also see decisions being made based on – well, in the outcome what we see is somebody who's very angry and that therefore this is probably a false allegation by somebody who's just trying to attack. I know that Professor Koshan, you know, wants us to caution against that and to actually have judges go back and learn more about intimate-partner violence and not look at where we're at now in terms of a fight between people but, rather, at what the circumstance was at the time, to help us understand and understand that what's happening now is an outcome, a legitimate outcome, of that.

I guess I wonder if a bill like this might include something like intimate-partner violence – or perhaps another bill could be brought forward that would do the same thing – to ensure that anybody who wishes to sit on the Provincial Court also has training in that area. You know, again, I'm just saying: "I like what you're doing. Is there more that we could be doing to move things forward a bit?"

I guess I also just wonder – and it's because of my own lack of knowledge, so I'm going to acknowledge that right up front – about the decision to have this only for people who are applying to become judges. I wonder whether or not it should be more broadly done, as some of my colleagues have said, for people who are already sitting judges, because, of course, if they missed that opportunity to get the training and they're on the bench for 30 years, they're still going to be making the same decisions now that they were making 30 years ago. So it might be good to include them, and perhaps there's a way to do it. Perhaps there are legislative reasons why we don't do that. I don't know. It would certainly be something that would be considered.

I happen to come from a bit of a legal family, and I know that when both my father and my brother were appointed to the bench, both of them were required to go for various sets of training after they were appointed. I can see the minister sort of saying across the floor that not all these things are possible, and I kind of understood that that might be true. I'm just wanting to put that out there, that I

certainly would like to see judges get information, whether they've been sitting for a long time or not, on these kinds of issues like sexual awareness or intimate-partner violence.

I wonder whether or not there might be some kind of work that could be done with the members of the Law Society, more commonly referred to as the benchers, who make these kinds of decisions about all lawyers. Should we be asking them to consider the possibility that all lawyers, particularly any lawyers who are going to be acting in the area of family violence and so on, should actually have some training, just as part of the course of their being able to practise law and stand before the bar at all? I realize, again, that that's not in the associate minister's hands. It would have to be a discussion with the Law Society and the benchers to do that.

You know, at this particular time I'm wanting the House to support this kind of legislation. There may be some things we can add to it as we go through the stages of the bill. I certainly would love to see some work done on the maintaining of statistics in this bill. As we have suggested in other situations, sometimes gathering statistics is important in understanding how differentially laws are applied. I know that our Member for Edmonton-City Centre has suggested in other situations in legislation that we keep race-based data on the outcomes of various things with regard to health and other areas like that.

It would also be interesting to know if there is a difference in this particular case in terms of sexual awareness training, whether or not that would have an influence on changing the nature or the application of law. But we'd only know if it needs to be changed if there were stats available. Are there cultural differences between who gets convicted and who doesn't, both in terms of the cultural status of the victim and the cultural status of the offender? It would be interesting to know if there is some difference there – I realize that it's just casting aspersions, so I want to be careful, but I suspect that we might find that there are some significant differences; we certainly do when we look at it from a social science perspective in many cases – so having some stats on that and having stats on the number of cases that are coming forward and the number of them that are actually resulting in convictions and the number that are not.

One of the things that you certainly have an experience of if you're a social worker, as I and many of my colleagues are, in terms of going to the courts is that the chance or likelihood of a conviction is very low.

11:30

We know that, in the statistics that have been done around, you know, adult sexual assault, for example, the conviction is the last of about four different stages, and in each stage the likelihood of progressing to the next stage goes down. Starting with the first stage of just even reporting that, in fact, something has happened, there is only a per cent of anybody who wants to report because they know the likelihood of a conviction is so little and the likelihood of sort of something negative happening to you as the victim through this process is likely to go on, and then, of course, having to report it. How often do charges get implemented, and how often are there convictions, all the stages along the way? I'd really like to see some stats on that end and see those used to bring us to a better place in terms of our legislation here in this House.

Thank you to the minister and the associate minister for this legislation.

The Speaker: Second reading of Bill 14. Is there a social worker in the House? Just teasing. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much. Yes, it's my pleasure to join the three social workers who previously spoke, to also add

my voice to this. Although, I think it's pretty tough to be a social worker without having this part of your practice. Because I did a lot of macropractice – I didn't do so much micro, working with individual clients – I probably have perhaps the least experience directly working with this area of social work. Certainly, I also will say that I'm happy to see Bill 14 come forward.

You know, I just was looking at the legislation. It's a couple of pages. It's not an extensive bill, for sure. I think the section that's the substantive piece of it is section 3. It says:

- (2) No person may be appointed as a judge unless the person
 - (a) is a Canadian citizen, and
 - (b) has completed education in sexual assault law and social context issues.

That's basically what this bill is about, very specific to that and, of course, needed.

You know, we want this legislation in, and as my colleagues have all spoken about extensively, there's tremendous need. There are a lot of stereotypes. It's often referred to as rape mythology. Rape is sort of an old term. We don't even use it very much anymore, but it's still seen as this – a stereotype of often the victims of sexual assault as – I don't know – provoking it, wanting it. They gave false impressions of, you know, interest, so they were implying consent. A myriad of things. We can go on.

I mean, it's important that we do bring this legislation forward. Of course, you know, we're always wanting to give the government some advice, some suggestions on how to make it better. My colleagues have spoken about how it should be expanded to current judges sitting, and I would say that that's even probably more important almost than the judges that are newly appointed because it has a lot to do with age. I think that age and perhaps some of those stereotypes are correlated, and I would think, too, that there are just more people with lived experience of understanding what this is about.

You know, we have probably an appointment of more women judges now, so gender plays a role. I don't know the stats on how many judges are women or how many judges are men or things like that. But I would say that judges appointed in years past were more likely to be male and have less understanding of this issue. Certainly, they probably don't have lived experience at all.

But, as we know, 1 in 3 women have experienced sexual assault. That's a tremendous amount. You know, a third of women have had that happen, and only 1 in 10 actually report it, because of some of the things that we're trying to address today. It's not going to make a difference. They feel they'll be humiliated in a public setting. Nobody is really understanding. They don't understand the very significant trauma that, I'm sure, they experienced.

So it's very important that people be properly trained when they become judges and if they are already sitting judges. Certainly, I, as my other colleagues have shared, would like very much for sitting judges to also need to be trained in this way so that they, when they are presiding over these cases, have the knowledge, have looked at those myths and looked at themselves and done some reflection on what maybe are some of their biases that are unconscious, that they don't even know. That's why it's so important to have sitting judges be asked, required, mandated to do this training. I think this is very important.

Certainly, another thing that would help this legislation be stronger – and I am going to refer to some public comments by the MLA for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. Of course, he said that mandating sexual awareness training for judges is very important and just encouraged also to follow the federal process, where the training is overseen and implemented by independent professional bodies, developed in consultation with sexual assault survivors. Again, I just offer this advice to the government, to make sure that

it's done similarly to the federal process and, you know, making sure that the voices of people who have experienced this – these are the survivors. They understand it intimately. Of course, their voices are so important, and they must be honoured. That is another thing that the legislation doesn't speak to – it's silent on that – but is very important.

I mean, it always certainly makes me very happy to see legislation – and largely we would say that women and girls are usually the victims of sexual assault. Not that men and boys don't experience this, but I'd say that the majority are female. Of course, anything that we can do here in this Legislature to create policies that support females to live better, healthier lives here in our province: I am completely in support of that. I would say that this legislation is going towards that.

I think that in Alberta we have some very challenging issues here. I want to point to a study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. It looks at five indicators regarding: what are the worst and best cities in Canada for women to live in? It's looking at a whole bunch of different indicators, you know, for their quality of life and what are the best places to live. You know what? Out of 25 of the major centres, Edmonton is 24, so that's bottom basement, right? That's very, very low. We're not 1; we're 24. And Calgary is 23. So there's a lot of work to do. There's a lot of work to do to make sure that women in our province are supported based on some very key indicators.

Certainly, this legislation touches on what the study talks about in terms of security. Security they define as intimate-partner violence, police-reported sexual assault, and police-reported criminal harassment. Alberta and, specifically, our two major cities have extremely high rates of these acts of, you know, violence that hurt women's security. Because of that one indicator but also the others in combination, we actually have a lot of work to do in this province. We have a lot of work to do to make sure that women are honoured and supported and treated fairly and justly.

This legislation does, you know, focus pretty specifically on an area that's important to do, but there's still so much significant work to do to really support women in our province. I mean, I think it's important just to identify the other indicators that this study looks at because I think we really need to think about this in Alberta, what we're doing here and that there is some pretty significant inequality, unfairness, lack of justice for women in our province.

11:40

Another indicator is economic security; for example, the measure of the income gap between men and women. Alberta has some of the widest gaps in all of Canada. Economic security, we know, is so important, and we know – there's the joke where a woman might say, like: I'm a divorce away from poverty. A lot of times women don't have their economic independence, and here in our province, sadly, that is another indicator that really creates inequality, unfairness, injustice for women.

Also, another measure is looking at women in leadership. They're not looking at provincial government; they're looking at municipal government, so representation and what percentage of people in elected office municipally, Edmonton and Calgary, are women. In industry: who is in leadership positions, who is in management positions? Again, Alberta, Calgary and Edmonton, ranks very low, so women aren't in those leadership positions. How come? You know, that is, again, because of gender bias a lot of times. So what can we do as a provincial government to actually enhance opportunities for women in those roles? That adds to their equality in our society.

Another is health and well-being. That's another measure. It's sort of about the stress they experience, and of course the reports of

the stress for women in Alberta are high, likely to do with all these other indicators.

Then the fifth indicator is education level, so: do they have high school? Do they have, you know, a trade? Are they in postsecondary? Anyway, it is sort of some pretty damning statistics for women's equality in our province, women having the support.

Of course, Bill 14 does talk about the fourth indicator that this study references regarding security, women's security in terms of their rights to their person to not be violated, to not be assaulted, and when that does happen: what kind of justice can they seek? If they're going up against a judicial system that doesn't respect them or has all sorts of stereotypes and biases, then, of course, they're less likely to even bring forward their issue, and sometimes when they do, they're retraumatized.

This training is important and key that it go forward, so I'm pleased that the government is bringing that forward. I guess I just want to say that there is so much more to be done, as I said, referencing this study. I mean, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives does amazing work, and I just really encourage other members of the House to look at the work they do. Certainly, this area that they've done research in really shows some very concrete ways we can make our society more just and fair. So I just encourage members to look at that. I think we all want people to be treated fairly and justly, so let's make that happen.

Early in my career as a social worker I did work in child welfare, and I had a myriad of cases. I guess I want to share a case where I was a supervisor in child welfare. Of course, we worked with legal aid when we had to go to court as social workers in child welfare cases, and my caseworker came to me and said to me: "I don't know what's going on, but the legal aid lawyer isn't listening to me. She's dismissing what I have to say." We had an understanding through work we'd done with the police that the father of the children who were in custody was actually grooming them and was a pimp, really, and was grooming his own children, who were under the age of six, to get involved in sexual activities. She said: "I've talked to our lawyer about this, but she just is always too busy to listen to me. She doesn't hear me. What can I do?" I said to her, "Okay; when is court again?" She said, "Tomorrow morning," so I said, "Okay; I'll go with you." So we're, you know, outside the courtroom. I go with my caseworker, and I tried to talk to the lawyer, and it's what she says. It's totally that. She dismisses what we say. She's had enough, and she's not listening to me. She's not fulfilling her responsibilities.

I'll have to conclude my story there, and I'll have to share some more later. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to start off by thanking all members of the Chamber that have engaged in discussion over this really important bill, and I want to thank the minister for bringing this forward. We've heard from four social workers on this side. Now we're moving to teachers.

[Mr. Jeremy Nixon in the chair]

You know, I've had the opportunity to take different sexual awareness training myself as a teacher working with some of Edmonton's most vulnerable youth, teaching at Inner City High School, and recognize the importance of this training. Again, I'm supportive of this bill and will make that clear at the onset, that this is important. We've seen other jurisdictions, Mr. Speaker, including at the federal level, that have in the recent past introduced legislation similar to this. I'm very happy to see Alberta is also bringing this forward.

The question that I have, and I hope that – I appreciate that the minister has been engaged this morning on this bill. When we move into committee, I'm just curious to know why – so this is great for new judges, but the first question that pops to mind is: what about existing judges that haven't had this type of training? What are some options that maybe the minister is thinking of as to why it wasn't included in this bill? I know that in other jurisdictions some have looked at providing this kind of training and social context training for judges as well as, as put by colleagues of mine who've talked about – you know, again, it's important to have that training for new judges. What is the plan for ongoing or continuous learning? When you think about those that work with youth or children that require first aid training, for example, we're required every so often to renew our credentials, to ensure that it's fresh in our minds and we know what to do. The question is around sexual awareness and context training. Is there a plan for ongoing training, or is this meant to be done once or through a series of workshops?

Again, Mr. Speaker, these are questions I have for the minister. What kind of training will be included, and who will be doing this training? Again, different jurisdictions in Canada have different bodies that are responsible for training their judges, so I'm curious, for Alberta here, what the minister's vision is around who's responsible for establishing these educational seminars in Alberta for provincial judges. Will this be found in a statute, or is this a policy? Will this be determined through regulations? These are questions that I hope the minister can answer when we get into Committee of the Whole.

11:50

You know, it's clear, Mr. Speaker, that this type of training is absolutely necessary. We have examples here in Alberta of judges that have quite frankly made some unbelievable comments and have blamed victims of sexual violence, which is abhorrent, quite frankly. So if this legislation will help to ensure that that never happens again, then this is a very positive step for the province of Alberta.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I appreciate, again, that, you know, right now, I believe, it's the Court of Queen's Bench that undertakes training for judges and new judges, including one of their committees, the education committee, so my understanding is that these types of conferences and training are paid for via grants from the government.

You know, my reading of this bill is that there are no legislated requirements for ongoing training, again, for sitting judges, which includes training for new judges for the first five years, so I'm curious to know what guarantees can be given to members, and how can the government guarantee that sexual assault law and social context training will continue and will not be at risk of potential future budget cuts?

Mr. Speaker, you know, we recognize the importance of this training and how it needs to continue on whether or not the province is in the middle of a boom or a bust. So what – not even assurances. As I've spoken to a number of times in the last couple of days, verbal assurances are not backed up through action or legislation. So this is where on this side of the House we're really looking for these types of commitments to be written into the legislation so that future ministers, future governments cannot make a decision to reduce funding for things like sexual awareness training and social context training based on the state of the economy. These are priorities that need to continue whether the province is experiencing \$100 barrel of oil, as it is today, or experiencing \$27 barrel of oil, as it did under our government.

I appreciate that this bill, again, will require that anyone seeking appointment as a provincial judge will be required to undertake sexual assault law and social context training. Again, as I've mentioned, you know, I'm curious to know who is responsible for that training.

You know, the other question is around – and maybe this is going to be left to these bodies – how do we guarantee that the pretraining and posttraining will line up to ensure that there's cohesiveness in the justice system, particularly for sexual assault and, again, for intimate-partner violence cases as well? That, I hope, the minister will comment on. Again, I'm curious to hear the measures and assurances that the minister will have to require training for sitting judges and if the minister has had an opportunity to speak with the bodies that represent sitting judges and what their proposals are. I would imagine that they're open to this training as well. I'm curious to know where that fits.

I do know, Mr. Speaker, that federally when a bill was introduced – actually, it was passed in third reading in May of 2017 by an Alberta MP. There were questions around, you know – because in the federal piece of legislation there also is missing training for current sitting judges, so there were questions that were asked by a couple of MPs. To my knowledge, there weren't adequate answers given as to why that was not included. Now, again, the minister, I hope, during Committee of the Whole will be able to address these questions.

As well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's great to see a number of other provinces also bring forward legislation similar to this to ensure that we are doing everything we can to eliminate victims of sexual violence from being revictimized and, as well, ensure that our judicial system and judges have the adequate training to ensure that victims aren't revictimized.

Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat. Again, looking forward to this debate continuing. I appreciate that the minister has brought forward this piece of legislation.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? I felt like we were on a bit of a theme. Perhaps we want to go to the Member for Edmonton-North West?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I'm very happy to see this piece of legislation come forward. As has been stated by many of my colleagues on this side of the House, of course, I think that it's great that this will be for new judges, but as has been stated by several of my colleagues, the concern is the existing judges.

The reality is that – you know, I'm going to tell you this. I remember having a discussion with my mom one time, and we were talking about feminism. She's a good Latina feminist, right? Like, since I was a little boy, she had me ironing my own clothes, washing my own clothes, all that kind of stuff. She's like, "I'm not your maid; you've got to do your own stuff," which I was happy to do. I mean, for me, I don't expect anybody to do those kinds of things for me, but she raised me that way.

I remember we were having a discussion about this kind of thing, similar, not this particular issue about judges, but it was in the same vein, Mr. Speaker. I had said to her, "You know, it's a good thing that times are changing and that these kinds of antiquated ways of looking at the world are starting to go away." And to that she responded, "I've been fighting these kinds of things for" – she said her whole entire life. She said that even during the time she was a young woman who had grown conscious about these kinds of issues, there have always been men who have agreed with this. So

it's not necessarily that these are antiquated ways of looking at the world but people who have just firmly stood up and addressed injustice when it happens.

Even back then they knew it was wrong. They knew that these kinds of things were wrong, to treat people unjustly based on a person's gender or sex. It was just wrong. Now, what I would argue is that it's taken us this long to catch legislation up, to recognize

that something has just been wrong for so long. You know, I'm so happy that I had that example, in my mother, to tell me that it takes courageous people to stand up and speak truth to power.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 20, 2022

Day 21

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 20, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, seated in the Speaker's gallery today are two of my guests that I had the pleasure of having a chat with earlier this afternoon. Naslund Lazenby and his father, Mike Lazenby, are friends of mine, and they are special guests of the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon. Please welcome them to the Assembly.

Hon. members, also in the galleries this afternoon are Tim Schindel and Blair Nielsen from Leading Influence. They are guests of the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has the call.

Support for Ukraine and Ukrainian Refugees

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been watching the situation in Ukraine closely. As the MLA for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and chair of the Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations I wrote the Prime Minister back in January asking for strong sanctions to deter Vladimir Putin and his evil imperial ambitions.

As the situation escalated, I was proud that Alberta acted quickly to provide aid for Ukraine. Our government gave \$6 million to the Canada-Ukraine foundation for humanitarian aid and \$5 million to the Ukrainian World Congress's Unite with Ukraine campaign, which will provide essential military equipment to the Ukrainian territorial defence force, and \$350,000 for the Ukrainian Canadian Congress for their Alberta Stands with Ukraine campaign. This morning I was exceptionally proud to stand with the Premier and the minister of labour and the Minister of Advanced Education to announce more than \$2 million in new funding that will be used to support Ukrainian refugees coming to Alberta. The money announced today will be used primarily for settlement and language services delivered by newcomer organizations across the province.

This brings Alberta's total assistance to Ukraine to more than \$13 million, and for that I want to say thank you: thank you to the Premier, thank you to our government, and thank you to all the advocates who are working so hard to support Ukraine in its time of need.

Alberta has a long history of Ukrainian immigration and a population of more than 350,000 people of Ukrainian descent. Our history is everywhere, from the wonderful restaurants like Taste of Ukraine, where we were earlier today, to the Vegreville Pysanka Festival, to UFest and the giant pysanka in my riding of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

These refugees have been through a lot, but I'm confident that our people in our newcomer organizations will be able to lessen their burden. I believe I speak for the entire Legislature when I say that my heart is with the people of Ukraine as they fight for their freedom and sovereignty. For those who are coming: welcome to Alberta. [Remarks in Ukrainian]

Health Care System Capacity and Front-line Workers

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, front-line health care workers in Alberta are crying for help. They're exhausted after two years of this UCP government's attacks, two years of being pushed to the limits by a government that repeatedly acted last and least to contain the spread of COVID-19 and put political interests ahead of public health.

Here's what those workers are saying. From a rural ER doctor:

I assessed a patient in their car in the parking lot today. Why? Because all of our isolation rooms were filled. Why? Because EMS is so short staffed it takes 20+ hours to get a sick kid and fractures transferred.

From a pediatric ER doctor:

Our waiting rooms in Alberta children's hospitals are packed to the gills by afternoon. 50 children in the waiting room is the norm, and has been for weeks... Most of my colleagues are so burnt out that they can't even see it... so very sad, and frightening for future healthcare.

From an anesthesiologist in northern Alberta:

ICU and hospital capacity appear steady in this wave of the pandemic... but 1000s of surgeries have still been cancelled, primary care capacity has fallen precipitously and healthcare worker burnout is worse than ever. Healthcare systems are still falling apart.

From a physician at the Royal Alex hospital in my constituency:

We are a collapsed healthcare system with overcapacity meeting us at every corner. Nurses are burnt out and short staffed. Physicians are not at their best. And we simply do not have beds... We are asking our teams to work with less resources... Patients wait hours and hours for an assessment in the ER, only to wait hours (days) to get an inpatient bed... we are now in a 6th wave where our wards are already crumbled... it's a wonder any of us are still standing. The trauma and memories of December 2020 flood back quickly... It's in every pair of eyes I see on the ward... I hope our government will listen to those of us screaming with hoarse voices.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve a government that invests in and supports our public health care system and the workers who make it possible, that builds them up instead of tearing them down. That's our promise, to listen to and work with health care workers, to undo the damage done by the UCP, restore access to care across our province. That's what an Alberta NDP government will do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a statement to make.

Nanton Grain Elevators

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Livingstone-Macleod is full of many great historical landmarks. Earlier this year I rose in this very House to highlight the history of the Crowsnest Pass, with train robberies, police shootouts, and the Roxy Theatre being added as a provincial historical resource.

I once again have a chance to speak about another historical landmark in my region being preserved and recognized for its ties to Alberta's rich history. The grain elevators in Nanton, which were recently featured on many news networks, are nearly 100 years old. In the early 2000s the abandonment of the Canadian Pacific Railway threatened these historic elevators, that stand along highway 2, with demolition. The town of Nanton formed a historical society with the original goal to save the largest of these remaining elevators. The Save One society has been working hard for over 10 years, putting in incredible effort, and thanks to the many volunteers and local businesses, they were able to save not one but all three of the remaining elevators.

On April 9 I joined the society and members of the community to celebrate the Nanton grain elevators' provincial historic resource designation. Thanks to the Minister of Culture and his work, these grain elevators continue to stand and tell the story of hard-working farmers in southern Alberta and will do so for years to come. It's because of the work of citizens of Nanton and the work they've done for years rallying together for the protection and preservation of the town's historic resources. As the MLA for Livingstone-Macleod I'm so proud of my constituents and their drive to save these historic landmarks in southern Alberta.

It's also my job to help in any way I can, so I've been speaking with the Minister of Culture and his office to confirm what funding is available to these organizations to help them in this initiative so they can continue to revitalize and maintain these historic landmarks in Nanton. I look forward to seeing the grain elevators stand tall for years to come, and I appreciate the hard work of the residents of Nanton. I thank them for their continued persistence to make sure they remain in the community and they're a towering reminder of Alberta's rich farming history.

Thank you.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Ganley: A decent place to live, food, family, a job that pays the bills, a warm place to sleep, a chance to contribute, a doctor when you're sick, education for your kids, a life, a government that enforces the law equally and tells the truth. Most Albertans don't ask for much. They care about their neighbours. They want to build a better world. They want their children to have access to the same opportunities they did or even better.

But this UCP government can't seem to understand that. They're so wrapped up in their ideology and their infighting that they have completely lost sight of the fact that Albertans are struggling, struggling with those basics, struggling to keep the lights and the heat on and food on the table. They have become so far removed from the everyday lives of the people they are supposed to serve that they think it's okay for people to have their heat turned off in a snowstorm. There are thousands of people in Calgary who have their power cut off, but this government: all they'll say is, "That's their problem; just call the company and hope."

Government is supposed to be there for the people. It is the people of this province we were elected to serve, not large, profitable corporations, not insurance companies. People. This government has billions for profitable corporations, but they need to cut a retired firefighter's wife off from her drug plan to save money. Insurance companies charge Albertans even more while they struggle. The UCP claims that it's necessary. Then they try to hide the facts. The people of this province aren't asking for much, just a decent life they can afford, schools for their kids, a curriculum to actually prepare them for the modern world, an ambulance in an emergency. They want a government they can trust. The UCP can't deliver: they can't be trusted, and, worse, they call people names for even daring to ask, the people they are supposed to serve.

Albertans deserve better. They deserve a government they can trust. Fortunately, they'll have the chance soon.

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

Sikh Heritage Month

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the month of April Albertans marked the beginning of Sikh Heritage Month. This is a great time for us to recognize the many past and current contributions of the Sikh community in making Alberta the

province that it is today. Since the arrival of the first Sikh immigrants in the early 19th century, the Sikh community has helped make Canada a stronger country through its accomplishment in many parts of our society. Whether it's politics, sciences, arts, business or sports, the Sikh community has helped shape Canada's cultural fabric. Our country is the proud home of more than half a million members of the Sikh community, making Canada home to one of the largest Sikh diasporas in the world.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, sadly, a policy implemented in 2016 under the previous NDP government restricted many Sikhs from applying to work as a correctional peace officer. A policy that required all applicants to be clean shaven was recently removed, now allowing those of the Sikh religion an equal opportunity to pursue a career in that field. Our UCP government was elected as defenders of religious freedom and rights in Alberta. I'm proud to see our government taking steps as it further creates Alberta as a place of belonging for all individuals no matter what their religious beliefs may be.

The values of equality, selflessness, openness, and compassion are the core principles of Sikhism, and these values will be highlighted during Vaisakhi and Nagar Kirtan in Calgary and Edmonton next month. As a member of the Legislature I invite all people to participate. Have a great Sikh Heritage Month.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Southern Alberta Concerns

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, during this break, while the government was focused on the internal drama and leadership issues, I had the opportunity to spend some time with the people of southern Alberta. I was able to travel to the communities of Medicine Hat, Claresholm, Fort Macleod, and Lethbridge, meeting with Albertans to hear their thoughts, concerns, and what they wanted to see for the future of this province.

The UCP talks about swagger. They paint a glowing picture of Alberta, but they are ignoring the very real concerns, the fears that Albertans are telling them and telling me. I have heard the fear of the future of health care and heard from the people who are scared about the prospect of nearly 90 job losses in Claresholm because of this government's health care privatization agenda. I heard concerns about education and how this curriculum doesn't support schools and students and the future that we need to get there. I heard deep concerns about affordability, concerns about the cost of fuel, and how this government isn't doing enough to bring down the cost of fuel for Alberta farmers and ranchers. I heard about skyrocketing utility costs that are hammering rural communities and how the UCP has done not nearly enough to provide relief to those struggling families.

This government may boast and brag about a balanced budget, but if they bothered to listen to the Albertans in the communities they claim to represent, they would hear that these people feel left behind, burdened by UCP policies that take more and leave them with less. But more than anything, I have heard that the people of rural Alberta are ready for change, how they are tired of this government that ignores their concerns, takes them for granted, and piles on more and more while delivering less and less.

Mr. Speaker, if this government was not so focused on themselves and on the upending drama of the UCP in its leadership race, they would hear the concerns that I've heard on my tour of southern Alberta and I hear every day. Southern Alberta deserves a voice, and they're not getting it from this UCP government.

Federal Emissions Reduction Plan

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, on March 29, 2022, we heard Trudeau promise that Canada would have net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. And while we all know that Trudeau never keeps his promises, this announcement is very concerning. When we put a magnifying lens on this net-zero carbon emissions plan, we see that Trudeau's ideal target would mean cutting emissions equivalent to Canada's entire oil and gas sector, agriculture sector, and electricity sector combined. This is insane. But what's even more insane is that we've had pipeline after pipeline cancelled in the name of reducing emissions and moving towards renewable energy sources.

Then on April 6 Trudeau announces \$12 billion in funding for a deep-water drilling site offshore Newfoundland and Labrador. Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. I'm in complete support of this energy project and its role in Canada's energy security, but I am completely baffled as to why the approval process for oil projects ends in such different results on the east side of Canada compared to here in Alberta.

This decision is just another example of federal government hypocrisy, and Albertans are starting to figure out that this hypocrisy is targeted. Why would he strike down Alberta pipelines, enforce massive carbon taxes, announce huge emissions reductions, decisions that adversely impact Alberta's oil sector, just to approve an oil project in eastern Canada? I mean, we all know that Trudeau's Greenpeace minister, who has spent most of his life protesting the oil and gas sector, even breaking the law to do so, is going to make terrible decisions, but this plan is just that, pure hypocrisy.

Mr. Speaker, at least now we all know that Trudeau is full of it when it comes to our pipelines and the emissions arguments. He's just shutting down our pipelines because they're tied to Alberta, so let me be clear. I will stand for Albertans, and I will stand for ethical Alberta oil.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Former Municipal Affairs Minister's Travel

Mr. Schmidt: Yesterday the Ministry of Municipal Affairs came to the Public Accounts Committee, and it was a remarkable meeting. It was a clear demonstration of the dysfunction and double standards of this government.

Let's rewind the tape back to the fall of 2020. The government was slow to act, and the second wave of COVID was hammering the province. Our health care system was at the brink of collapse. Finally, the government started to act. The Provincial Operations Centre was raised to status level 3, a state of emergency was declared, and the government told all Albertans that they were cancelling Christmas. No travel, they ordered. Don't visit your friends. Don't visit your family. It was too risky. And most Albertans listened.

But as we know, one of the key ministers at that time did not listen. The Minister of Municipal Affairs decided that she was special; the rules didn't apply to her. The minister responsible for emergency management and the vice-chair of the Emergency Management Cabinet Committee abandoned her post and left for Hawaii. This Albertans know, and they are still angry.

But what we learned yesterday at Public Accounts was even more remarkable. Apparently, the now fired minister who left the country didn't tell her department or the Emergency Management Agency that she was leaving. Let me say that again. We were in a state of emergency, the Provincial Operations Centre was operating at level 3, and of the 20 senior officials who came to Public Accounts

yesterday, not one knew the minister had bolted for Hawaii. This is a profound failure of leadership and a profound failure in the machinery of government. Either the former minister was so useless that it didn't matter if she was around, or this government is so broken that during an emergency she could abandon her post without telling the 600 people who work for her that she was leaving.

One thing is crystal clear from yesterday's meeting. Albertans deserve better. They deserve a government that does its job, ministers that don't abandon their posts during tough times, and after the next election Albertans will get the government that they deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Economic Recovery and Unemployment

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unemployment is a scary thought for all Albertans and, of course, a reality for some. Albertans need to be able to work to provide for their families and to make a living. Alberta's unemployment rate has dropped to 6 and a half per cent, which is lower than when this government took office. Despite the challenges we have faced over the last two years, considering a world-wide pandemic as well as the 2020 energy price crash in oil, Alberta's unemployment rate has continued to drop.

Compare this to the NDP record of increasing unemployment and chasing away investment. Not only has our government been able to decrease the unemployment rate, Mr. Speaker, but Alberta is now leading the country with an employment rate of 64.7 per cent and a women's employment rate of 60.7 per cent. Alberta is coming back, and we're coming back stronger than ever. Just in the first quarter of this year Alberta has gained 22,000 new jobs and over 150,000 new jobs since January 2021.

As of now labour shortages are one of the things holding us back, and our government is addressing those issues through the Alberta at work program. Through Budget 2022 we are investing \$600 million over three years in this program. Alberta at work is designed to help Albertans build the skills necessary to support themselves as well as their families. In a statement issued by our Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation following the March 2022 labour force survey, he said:

Our economy is turning a corner. After two extremely challenging years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Alberta is returning to a more normal way of life. With the lifting of public health measures in the province in early March, more Albertans are returning to the workplace, getting back to work, and getting back to business.

Alberta's economy is coming back, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta recovery plan is proving its success.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, today's StatsCan report on sky-high inflation should be a wake-up call for this UCP government: 6.7 per cent. We know it's even worse when it comes to groceries. Alberta families will pay an extra thousand dollars this year alone. Why? Well, because breakfast cereal: up 12 per cent. Butter: up 16 per cent. Pasta: up 18 per cent. Now, the Premier could help today by reversing his pernicious, insidious bracket creep tax grab that's worth almost the same amount. Why won't he?

1:50

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see that the NDP has finally discovered inflation as the number one issue facing Albertans right now, the rising cost of living made dramatically worse by their carbon tax. They conspired with Justin Trudeau to make the cost of everything more expensive. They supported his 25 per cent increase in that carbon tax on April Fool's Day, and they want to more than triple it from where it is today. That makes energy more expensive, groceries, food, home heating, and everything. When will the NDP finally come on the side of taxpayers and oppose these carbon taxes?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, way back in 2019 it used to be government policy that if inflation went up, Albertans got more back on their taxes, but the UCP broke their election promise and froze the basic personal exemption in what the Premier himself used to call a sneaky tax grab. Fast-forward to today. Inflation is exploding. Almost half of Alberta families are just \$200 away from not being able to make ends meet. Simple question, again, to the Premier: why won't he reverse his sneaky tax grab? It's not about me; it's about the guy in the Premier's chair for the moment.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, first of all, 40 per cent of Albertans pay no provincial income tax. We have by far the most generous basic exemption in the country, the lowest income taxes, no sales tax. We're the only province with no land transfer tax, the only province with no capital tax, no payroll tax, the lowest business taxes. But the biggest tax increase that's driving inflation and the cost of living comes from the Liberal-NDP carbon tax. Why, three weeks ago, did the NDP stand up and vote in favour of Justin Trudeau's 25 per cent increase in the carbon tax?

Ms Notley: Not answering the question.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it gets worse. Economists talk about inflation inequality, where low-income people actually pay a higher inflation rate because inflation rises on necessities faster, but this government has chosen to pile onto these low-income families. They've frozen income support, kicked 40,000 people off their drug coverage, cut rental supplements, cut affordable housing. If the measure of a leader is how they treat the most vulnerable, then what does it say about a government whose policies are designed to hurt the most vulnerable?

Mr. Kenney: That's manifestly untrue. In fact, the budget for Community and Social Services and those various support programs is increasing in the budget that the NDP is opposing. This government is taking more action by far than any government in Canada to help people address the rising cost of living. That's why we have suspended the Alberta fuel tax. It's why we're providing the \$150 rebate on electricity, and we're capping natural gas prices at \$6.50. Altogether on an annual basis that amounts to about \$2 billion of consumer relief from Alberta's government.

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

Education Funding and Curriculum Redesign

Ms Notley: Quote: this is the most difficult budget that we will have faced in my nine years as superintendent. Mr. Speaker, that's the Edmonton public schools district superintendent announcing that, thanks to this UCP budget, 1,700 students will not be funded in Edmonton this year alone. This decision means fewer teachers, fewer extracurriculars, and, worst of all, fewer supports for children with a range of learning challenges. Can the Premier explain why

the UCP's plan for Edmonton includes watching 1,700 kids enter the school system with no new funding?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, in this balanced budget there is a 1.7 per cent increase, a \$700 million increase for Education, but here's the difference. We've been able to increase support for vulnerable people, through Community and Social Services and Children's Services, for education and health care while maintaining Canada's lowest taxes and getting to a balanced budget. Why? Because this government has been focused on economic growth, on job creation, and that's why we're leading Canada in job growth and economic growth.

Ms Notley: Interesting story, Mr. Speaker.

You know, last night I got time to knock on some doors in Edmonton. In two hours I met two speech therapists who've seen the care they offer children cut back, a parent whose child lost the funding that helps her with her extra learning needs, a mom with kids whose classroom is overflowing, and a nurse so deeply concerned about the UCP curriculum, she may take her kids and leave Alberta. Why doesn't the Premier start listening to these Albertans, unlike his minister who is briefing him right now? They know the real consequences of UCP decisions on their kids, and they are not good ones.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the Edmonton public school board has a billion-dollar budget, and they have a \$38 million reserve. They're receiving a 1.7 per cent increase in their per-pupil fund this year.

She says that it's a very interesting story, Alberta's economic growth. She couldn't be more right about that, to see the best year ever in exports, the best year ever in manufacturing, the best year ever in oil and gas, the best year ever in forestry, the highest revenues ever in agriculture, the best year ever in film and television, and billions more coming in hydrogen and petrochemicals, all of it turning into new jobs.

Ms Notley: And tens of thousands of kids with special learning needs without any of the support they need. That's the story.

This Premier is either uninformed, uninterested, or simply unable to grasp why Alberta families do not trust the UCP when it comes to education. They've cut RCSD. They've cut PUF funding. They refuse to fund enrolment growth. They've lost a thousand teachers, and their curriculum is an embarrassment. Why does this government care so little about our future generations? Why are they so quick to do everything they can to sacrifice our public education system?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is investing \$1.4 billion in support for special-needs kids in our education system. That funding went up last year; it's going up again this year. We can only increase investments in services like that if the economy is growing. We went through four years of economic devastation and a jobs crisis created by the NDP's high-tax, high-debt policies. Because we are now leading the country in growth, we've been able to balance the budget and invest in critical services like this.

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

Insurance Company Profits and Premium Costs

Ms Phillips: When asked about hundreds of millions more being billed to Albertans for car insurance, the Premier brushed off any suggestion of doing anything differently. Instead, he used scary words like "Soviet-style insurance system." The Albertans I talk to: all they want is cheaper car insurance. They're drowning in bills, and all this Premier has is tales of a bogeyman. Well, lo and behold,

Premiers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba have public auto insurance. Is the Premier really declaring that his good friends Scott Moe, Brad Wall, and Brian Pallister are all Soviets in disguise?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the NDP – I can't believe they're pretending to care about this, because they don't want people driving. That's why they have a carbon tax. You know, when it comes to driving, I have a question for the NDP: do they support Justin Trudeau's new tax on pickup trucks? He wants to add a thousand dollars to the cost of buying an F-150 . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The Premier is the one with the call.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, does the NDP support their ally Justin Trudeau's proposed pickup tax on pickups and SUVs? That would be between \$1,000 and \$4,000. That's a heck of a lot more. The reality is that insurance premiums are coming down and partly as a result of this government.

Ms Phillips: The Premier went on yesterday to say that he didn't recall meeting with any insurance lobbyists, but as *Calgary Sun* columnist Rick Bell points out, his own former campaign manager, Nick Koolsbergen, is now a hotshot consultant who lobbied the Premier's office and key advisers about lifting the insurance cap to give companies even bigger profits. The lifting of that cap shot insurance rates up by 30 per cent in a single year for some drivers. Has the Premier or any of his ministers or key advisers ever discussed removing the insurance cap with Nick Koolsbergen or any member of his Wellington Advocacy lobbyist firm?

Mr. Kenney: Well, no, I have not, Mr. Speaker. I've met with the insurance companies to ask them to reduce premiums and to ensure that we are providing financial services to the Alberta oil and gas industry, something the NDP never did.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, under the NDP more and more insurance companies were leaving the Alberta market, making it increasingly difficult for people to get insurance at all. Many people had to pay 100 per cent of their premiums up front. And now their solution is to replicate the disaster of ICBC and to nationalize the industry to remove any competition. That would be a disaster.

Ms Phillips: So here we have it straight from the Premier. He meets with insurance company lobbyists, and they get whatever profits they want, but the Premier is not listening to ordinary people just trying to drive their car and – I don't know – appropriately put gas in it.

The Premier and the Finance minister have claimed that insurance companies weren't making money and that that's why they had to jack people's rates, but the facts tell a different story. Even before the government lifted the cap, these companies were netting a billion dollars in profit. So when the Premier said that insurance companies weren't making any money, did he actually mean they needed more than a billion dollars in profit? Just how much more did Nick Koolsbergen tell the government to scoop from Albertans' pockets?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the NDP hates all of the good news in this province. They hate the fact that we're leading Canada in economic growth and in job growth, and apparently they also don't like to hear the fact that insurance premiums are coming down. Right now seven insurers have filed for rate reductions since the fall of 2020 . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Okay. Okay. It's important for the Speaker to be able to hear the Premier. You might not like the answer, but he's entitled to give it.

Mr. Kenney: . . . including a 7 per cent proposed rate reduction from AMA. This government took action to limit certain soft injury personal issue awards that were driving up costs. What we need is a competitive marketplace, and that is resulting now, finally, in lower premiums.

Utility Costs and Rebates

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, while the UCP has been doing basically nothing about skyrocketing utility costs, Alberta families have been drowning in debt. But all the current government has for them are weak attempts to deflect responsibility. They point to everyone but themselves. They even try to blame others for a transmission overbuild created by Conservative legislation. But a new study from the University of Calgary has found that it is actually corporate profits that are driving up costs on Alberta families. This is a major issue for Albertans. Why is this government trying to hide the real reason for skyrocketing costs?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, when the NDP cries crocodile tears about utility prices, it's like the arsonist being concerned about the fire that he set. They put 7 and a half billion dollars of additional costs on electricity consumers . . .

Ms Gray: Point of order.

Mr. Kenney: . . . by building more infrastructure for transmission. They costed \$1.3 billion in their power purchasing agreement fiasco. They cost billions for ratepayers through their ideological rush to shut down our coal plants, the most reliable, low-cost form of energy production, and then they imposed their carbon tax on Albertans. Mr. Speaker, this government is providing nearly \$2 billion of relief to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and a point of order is noted at 2:03.

Ms Ganley: That overbuild was Conservative legislation we opposed. Check the *Hansard*, Premier.

The Premier gloats about forthcoming rebates, but they should have been in place months ago. The UCP has been promising, waffling, planning, and failing to deliver for months now while Albertans struggle. It snowed last night a lot. It was cold. Does the Premier really think that families should go without heat and be left to sit in the dark while he sorts out how to deliver his underwhelming rebates?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, 7 and a half billion dollars of additional transmission costs, \$1.3 billion in penalties to the power corporations, billions of dollars to shut down the coal plants, and then billions of dollars out of consumers' pockets through their carbon taxes: that is why electricity prices have gone up. Thankfully, we have a government that is acting with our electricity rebate, our pause on the fuel tax, and our cap on gas prices, providing greater relief for consumers, the greatest relief of any provincial government in Canada by a country mile.

Ms Ganley: I think most Albertans will trust the U of C over this UCP government.

Mr. Speaker, the rebates are tiny; some would call them paltry. They don't even put a dent in the thousands owed by some Alberta

families. Even the UCP MLA for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland admitted it in this House. All the UCP government has are excuses and attempts to shift blame. I'm going to ask one more time. Does the Premier think it's fair that power companies quintupled their profits while Alberta families owe thousands in outstanding utility bills and are being threatened with shut-offs?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the member knows perfectly well that utilities are heavily regulated in terms of what they can charge. But the NDP approved 7 and a half billion dollars of costs that have to be repaid by consumers. Their carbon tax: they want to quintuple the carbon tax. That will be the single biggest inflationary driver in electricity bills.

But, Mr. Speaker, I have some good news for the House. We promised an independent audit of the NDP's power purchasing agreement fiasco. Fasten your seat belts because that gets released tomorrow. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Alberta at Work Program

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been through tough times with the pandemic and the crash in oil prices, but Alberta is also looking up, with great economic news that we've heard lately. Yesterday I was able to learn more about the good news for Alberta workers as part of the Alberta at work program. This is welcome news for my constituents and Albertans. To the Minister of Labour and Immigration: in what ways will these critical investments help Albertans share in the province's successful economic recovery, especially underrepresented groups, including women, Indigenous people, and newcomers to Canada?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for that very important question. Budget 2022 made a record investment of more than \$600 million to help make sure that we have all kinds of programs that will help fellow citizens who are out of work, looking for employment, or help them to upgrade their skills. I am confident that the record investment that we are going to make with the Alberta jobs now program, the Alberta at work program, the Canada-Alberta job grant program will help Albertans who are looking for employment, especially youth, immigrants, and Indigenous people.

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, given that knowledge and skills of workers are a key factor for economic growth and given that education increases the efficiency of each individual worker and helps them get the skills they need to participate in Alberta's recovery plan and given that businesses are looking for new skilled workers, to the Minister of Advanced Education: could you explain how our government is connecting students to fulfilling career paths that are key to Alberta's economic growth? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Minister of Advanced Education is the only one with the call.

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question from the member. You know, there are a number of initiatives that we're undertaking right now to do just that. In fact, we're investing \$235 million over three years to help connect more Albertans and more students to meaningful job opportunities. As part of that, we're investing \$171 million over

three years to create 7,000 additional spaces at our postsecondary institutions in in-demand programs like tech, aviation, health care, and many more.

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, given that vulnerable Albertans can and should be a part of Alberta's economic recovery plan and given that we also consider them to be involved in the workforce and support them in doing that and given that Alberta's government has always been the social safety net for Albertans and will continue to do so, to the Minister of Community and Social Services: what additional programs and services will be developed to support the most vulnerable and help them with employment? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Minister of Community and Social Services.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for a great question. Yes, my ministry will invest an additional \$20 million to support vulnerable Albertans so that we can get innovative, customized support to help them remove barriers from employment. Not only do we provide the social safety net for vulnerable Albertans; we want to empower them to reach their full potential.

Private Health Services Delivery

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are rightly worried about the UCP's plans to dismantle and privatize health care. Just this week we've seen how the privatization of labs has been a dismal failure, but the UCP see delays, inefficiency, and public dollars going to private profits instead of care as a success. I've heard concerns and worries from eye patients in Calgary that ophthalmology surgeries in the Rockyview hospital will be moved and contracted out at the Holy Cross Centre, bringing into question future access and quality of eye care. My question for the minister is simple. Are ophthalmology surgeries being moved from the Rockyview to be contracted out privately? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. You know, the hon. member raises the issue of privatization. Quite frankly, that is not the case. We need to get past the public-private delivery debate and focus on our need to make the system work better for all Alberta patients. That includes saving money so we can keep investing in services without going to the taxpayer for every dollar. It includes contracting more services using public dollars, publicly administered, like we're doing, like we have done for decades. While in power, members opposite used chartered surgical facilities. We'll be using those as well. There will be an announcement in the near future.

2:10

Mr. Shepherd: Now, given that the Ontario Conservative government's privatization of ophthalmology surgeries resulted in a 25 per cent increase in cost per surgery and loss of capacity in public hospitals for crucial and emergency eye care and given that previous Alberta Conservative government actions to contract and privatize eye surgeries resulted in longer wait times when they made those moves and given that Saskatchewan's surgical initiative, which the UCP have based their plan on, has not led to reductions in the surgery wait-list at all, how can the Minister of Health justify plowing forward with privatization when it's failed across this country for decades?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, that simply isn't the case. If we actually take a look at cataracts, wait times for cataract surgeries have dropped to the lowest levels in the last seven years. Why? Because during the pandemic we leveraged chartered surgical facilities to be able to get caught up. Our wait-lists are far too long. We're concerned about the Alberta patient. We're going to leverage not only the chartered surgical facilities but the public systems to be able to get more surgeries done so that we can actually provide the services that Albertans need and want. They're in pain, and we need to help them get healthy, and we're going to deliver that.

Mr. Shepherd: Now, given that reports and data that the UCP have built their plan to privatize on were released before the UCP threw our system into chaos by fighting with doctors and nurses, firing Dr. Yiu, and charging forward with a privatization agenda, all during a global pandemic, and given that the UCP should recognize, if they care about patients, that, following what they've put Albertans through with their chaos in health care, Albertans value stable and publicly funded care more than ever, will the Minister of Health commit today, here and now, in this House to pause all plans to privatize care till after the next election? Let Albertans decide the future of public health care.

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it absolutely clear: leveraging chartered surgical facilities is publicly funded health care. It is publicly funded. It is publicly delivered. What our approach is is actually addressing the issues that we had with tremendously huge wait-lists. We made a commitment in our platform that we would get that done. Unfortunately, we're not going to be able to get it done by next year, but we will get it done. We ran on a platform that we'd use chartered surgical facilities. We are going to deliver on that, and we're also increasing our capacity within our public hospitals. This is public health care.

Calgary Downtown Revitalization

Member Ceci: While the Premier was busy prepping a speech to his members to save his job, our caucus was focused on developing plans to revitalize and bring new energy to downtown Calgary. Our plan focuses on economic diversification, the creation of an innovation district, and direct funding to support the Calgary plan. We also propose small-business support, events and festivals, transit, more child care spaces, affordable housing units downtown, and support for mental health and addictions. Since the government has been too busy with infighting, we've done the work for them. Will they support our plan so we can restore vibrancy to downtown Calgary?

Mr. Schweitzer: Oh, Mr. Speaker, it's time for a little bit of NDP legacy here. When the NDP literally told people to go to the province of British Columbia for employment – but let me tell this right now. Do you know that two cities in the province of Alberta, Edmonton and Calgary, are in the top 10 for the most affordable cities in the entire world? That's big news, and people were starting to move back to the province of Alberta in the middle of last year. When will the NDP start cheerleading for Alberta?

Member Ceci: Given that they're affordable if you have a job and that we have the highest unemployment in Calgary at this time of all major Canadian cities and given that over a year ago our leader promised a plan to revitalize downtown and that we delivered and that over a year ago the Finance minister said that there'd be no help for downtown Calgary despite struggling . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. This may be a first, but I am having a hard time hearing the question, and he does have a right to ask it. You might not like his question, but he has the right to ask it.

Member Ceci: . . . with vacancy rates not seen since the Great Depression, the highest unemployment rate among all Canadian cities – and, thankfully, we reversed that course when we were in government – to the minister: where's the plan? Why haven't you made it ready? Where is it? Would you like to read ours?

Mr. McIver: Well, here's the answer, Mr. Speaker. I'll have to talk fast: \$59 million, University of Calgary; \$41 million for SAIT; \$38 million for the office of the chief medical officer; \$22 million for a new interchange; \$20 million for the Repsol centre; \$5 million for the Calgary Stampede Foundation; \$5 million for downtown revitalization; \$474 million, Springbank off-stream reservoir; \$466 million for three years as part of the \$1.5 billion Calgary green line project; \$387 million for the Calgary ring road project; \$332 million for the Calgary cancer centre; \$195 million for Calgary Deerfoot Trail upgrades; \$99 million for Peter Lougheed Centre; \$91 million for Bridgeland Riverside continuing care; \$80 million for Glenbow revitalization; \$73 million for Rockyview . . . [some applause]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Member Ceci: Given that he said \$5 million for downtown revitalization and given that in the last election the Premier promised that his corporate handout would fill the office towers of downtown Calgary – he even accelerated the giveaway and said that companies would be irresponsible if they didn't relocate there; since then the number of head offices has dropped, Mr. Speaker – and given that in the UCP's budget all they could muster for downtown Calgary was a paltry \$5 million, that only amounts to 2 per cent of what was requested by the city, and the Calgary Chamber president said that that's absolutely inadequate.

Mr. McIver: I've got more, Mr. Speaker: \$80 million for Glenbow revitalization downtown; \$73 million for Rockyview general hospital; \$65 million for Foothills medical centre; \$64 million for the Court of Appeal downtown; \$45 million for Mount Royal University, repurposing existing facilities; \$42 million for the cyclotron facility in Calgary. We are committed to every part of our province, but the question was about Calgary. We just ran out of time. We're doing more than they ever thought of. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Alberta 2030 Postsecondary Education Strategy

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, Budget 2022 will get Albertans back to work. This is ambitious given COVID-19, labour shortages in oil and gas, and digital disruption changing the nature of work. I've heard from constituents, especially those in trades, about how tough it is to gain new skills and explore other fields to earn a living. To the Advanced Education minister: how are the budget and the Alberta 2030 skills for jobs strategy going to support lifelong learning, and how can they help diversify skill sets that align better with the needs of the job market?

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

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great question from my colleague. I appreciate that. As I was mentioning a moment ago, Budget 2022 contains \$235 million in investment over three years to do precisely what the member is asking, to help

ensure that our graduates are aligned with the skills and labour needs of our future economy. Specifically, we're providing \$171 million to create 7,000 additional spaces in high-demand programs, in everything from veterinary medicine to aviation to tech to health care. As well, we're providing additional investment to support and bolster apprenticeship and trades training to help more Albertans find successful and rewarding careers in those areas, and there's more as well.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's economic prosperity is dependent on retaining talent both local and international and given that Budget 2022 seeks to improve talent retention by enhancing student skills via work-integrated learning opportunities, to the same minister: how will our government ensure accessibility to work-integrated learning and especially for international students who may be limited by work permits and perhaps some other legal requirements?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The topic of work-integrated learning is a very important one. The data is very clear. Students that have an opportunity to participate in an internship or a co-op opportunity are employed faster and earn higher incomes immediately after graduation than their counterparts. That's why Budget 2022 includes \$6 million in new funding over three years to create additional work-integrated learning opportunities in the province. These opportunities help students get a foot in the door with an employer, help them to learn real-world work experience and be better prepared for the job market.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Budget 2022 will boost trades in Alberta by investing over \$30 million to expand apprenticeship education and given that at the tabling of Bill 67, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, one major sentiment was that the trades have been somehow treated historically as less worthy than other postsecondary options, to the same minister: how will this \$30 million investment enhance the parity of esteem in the trades?

2:20

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, firstly, let me say, Mr. Speaker, that our government firmly believes that a trade certificate has the same value, merit, and worth as a university degree. That's precisely why we're investing \$30 million over three years to support and bolster trades and apprenticeship education in the province. More specifically, we're providing \$15 million over three years to work with our incredible trades partners, organizations like Women Building Futures and Careers: the Next Generation. We'll have more to say about that in the coming months. As well, Budget 2022 includes \$15 million to help create new apprenticeships of the future.

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

Health Care Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is dealing with another wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, I'm hearing again and again from Albertans and constituents who are saying it's getting harder and harder to find a family doctor or access emergency treatment without lengthy wait times, all while the

policies and actions of this government are leading to record numbers of health care professionals leaving this province. To the Minister of Health: why does it seem that it's government policy to do everything it can to drive away public health care workers and doctors from this province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. I'd like that member to check his facts. Actually, we have more health care professionals working in the province, not less. The most recent report from CPS has indicated that over Q1 last year we have 99 additional doctors, who actually came to work in Alberta. In addition, nurses: over the past two years we have hired 1,800 more nurses; paramedics: 230 additional paramedics; AHS staff in our budget: 2,300 additional AHS staff. We are focused on delivering health care.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the College of Physicians & Surgeons is reporting that nearly triple the number of physicians are leaving our province in 2022 compared to previous years and given that the Alberta Medical Association has suggested that the most important step in stopping physicians from leaving Alberta is negotiating agreements with doctors, after this government scrapped the previous agreement in 2019, and given that the former CEO of Alberta Health Services was fired by the UCP for standing up for public health care, to the same minister: what is the government doing to assure Albertans that this trajectory towards health care crisis cannot continue?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As noted in my previous answer, we are actually expanding our health care capacity. We're focused on hiring more health care professionals in the province. In fact, the hon. member is right: there are doctors who actually do leave. However, there are more doctors coming in. That is normal. We are increasing, as I indicated before, Q1 versus Q1, an additional 99 doctors. We are doing more because we know that we need more health care professionals to deliver the services that Albertans need. We are investing an additional \$600 million in operating expenses this year, \$600 million next year, \$600 million the year after that. In addition, we are investing in capital and infrastructure. We will build the system and . . .

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that what the minister said only drives home the point that what they are doing is furthering American-style, chartered private medical facilities, that they're pushing forward these increased risks to our public health care system and given that Alberta's health care workers have worked so bravely in stepping up during this pandemic, putting their own health and safety at risk to ensure Albertans can remain safe and receive quality public health care, to the same minister: how can the government justify its push for wage rollbacks, laying off health care workers, firing the head of Alberta Health Services for standing up for public health care and still say they're upholding the public health guarantee?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I just want to be crystal clear: we are not laying off health care workers. I was very pleased that an agreement was reached between AHS and United Nurses of Alberta, which increased the wages and also provided incentives

for nurses to be able to work in rural Alberta. We recognize that there are challenges in certain areas with certain professions for health care workers, particularly in rural Alberta. We have dedicated \$90 million last year and another \$90 million this year to be able to address this issue. We are focused on building our health care capacity. We are focused on ensuring that Albertans receive the health care we need. Our budget is delivering it, and we're going to continue to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is next.

Extreme Heat Mitigation

Mr. Schmidt: A report from the Intact centre on climate change at the University of Waterloo says that alarm bells should be ringing about the risk that intense heat poses. The report, entitled Irreversible Extreme Heat, calls on governments to consider extreme heat to be a natural disaster. We've already seen the consequences that intense heat can impose with news that the June 2021 heat wave resulted in the deaths of 66 Calgarians. Can the Minister of Environment and Parks state categorically what this government is doing to protect Albertans from extreme heat so that we don't see the same sort of tragedy again this year?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta continues to lead the way when it comes to investment in reduction of GHG technology inside this province, but I can tell you that what we will not do is join that member and his friends in Extinction Rebellion and the federal government and continue forward with an insane climate change plan that we've seen come from the federal government this last couple of weeks that would result in 150,000-plus jobs in this province going away. Shame on that member for supporting that type of argument going forward. When will he stand in this place and condemn the federal government's carbon tax?

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the report states that the prairies will feel the effects of extreme heat and urges governments to engage in better planning to incorporate heat concerns into city planning codes, address options like public shade, trees, artificial canopies, and incorporate water-based cooling systems like ponds and sprinklers, but given that this budget plans to cut and ultimately eliminate climate resilience projects, going from \$50 million to zero, meaning that municipalities and Albertans are on their own in the event of future extreme heat events, will the minister rethink this senseless cut and make the investments needed to avoid future tragedies like we saw last year?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, this government just announced \$10 billion in project investments on GHG reduction technology that creates 16,000 jobs inside our province in partnership with our industry, a sharp contrast to that hon. member and his colleagues inside the federal government and the NDP-Liberal coalition, who announced a plan just the other day, supported by the NDP in Ottawa, that would result in production cuts inside this province and hundreds of thousands of jobs being lost inside this province. Shame on him for supporting that.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that this report is just the latest evidence that as a province we face more extreme weather events that put Albertans at risk and should be planning and investing to mitigate these as best we can but given that this government's priority, based on their own budget documents, is to invest less, if anything at all, and given that this government has already told municipalities that

they won't see a cent of provincial support when it comes to future disasters, these extreme weather events pose a serious threat to Alberta's economy and our people. Will the minister reverse his truly senseless cuts and invest to protect Albertans from the threat of climate change?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, what a ridiculous question. This government just the other day announced the process for the Springbank dry dam, a major piece of flood mitigation, very important for the city of Calgary, that his government failed on; continues to work on the new Bow River dam and historical investments in irrigation all across this province that also help to mitigate flood events. That's the way forward, continuing to invest in real projects that also create economic wealth, unlike his new boss, Justin Trudeau, who continues to force his NDP allies to support insane climate plans that continue to devastate economies across the country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Contrary to the position of the NDP, it is time for a curriculum update. Seeing as it's not been updated in many years and considering that students' grades were declining in literacy, math, and reading, the current curriculum just isn't up to par anymore, but unfortunately due to social media misinformation a few of my constituents have expressed concerns about how our government consulted with experts, principals, and teachers. To the Minister of Education: can you set the record straight about the review process you went through on the K to 6 curriculum?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. This is the most transparent and open curriculum review process Alberta has ever seen. During the drafting process the K to 6 Curriculum Working Group included approximately a hundred teachers from right across the province. We opened a public survey, gave every Albertan an opportunity to share their feedback on this curriculum. We also hosted virtual engagement sessions, had ongoing conversations with education partners and piloting teachers, provided a million dollars in curriculum engagement grants to support partner groups conducting engagements with their communities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that a common complaint we often hear is how little our students know about financial literacy and how, because of that, our students are not properly prepared for the future and given that in your announcement last week you mentioned that fundamental financial literacy is one priority of this new K to 6 curriculum and given that the NDP failed to update the curriculum to set our children up for the future, to the Minister of Education: how are you incorporating this financial literacy into the K to 6 curriculum? [interjections]

2:30

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Students will begin learning financial literacy skills starting in kindergarten and each year through to grade 6 and the physical education and wellness

curriculum being implemented this September. We heard loud and clear from parents that they wanted their children to have the skills and the knowledge about finances, and the curriculum delivers on this. Students will learn about money and how to responsibly manage it so that they are financially secure and successful in their lives. We owe it to our kids to do this.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you to the minister for that answer. Given that we all want Alberta's education to be considered as a gold standard in Canada and given that there has been a review process with experts, teachers, and parents but given that some parents in my constituency have expressed previous concerns about the age appropriateness of certain parts of the curriculum, to the Minister of Education: can you please explain to Albertan parents how the revised curriculum is age appropriate?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've stated many times, we have been listening to the feedback from all Albertans and education stakeholders on the draft K to 6 curriculum. We heard concerns about age appropriateness and content level in some of the subjects, and we listened by revising the drafts more than once to address these concerns. We've also scaled back the number of subjects that will be implemented this fall and made sure that the three subjects we are implementing are age appropriate and that the concerns with scope and sequence have been addressed.

Government Policies and Cost of Living (continued)

Member Irwin: Phoebe lives in my neighbourhood, Parkdale. She's got a baby. She's recently back to work but is absolutely struggling to make ends meet. Her power bill last month: over \$900. Phoebe is just one of my many constituents being hammered by a cost-of-living crisis created by this UCP government. While our government acted to protect Albertans from outrageous price spikes and the kind of crisis we're seeing today, the UCP lifted the caps on electricity and then sat back watching as life became more and more unaffordable. Minister, a \$50 cheque won't keep Phoebe and her family afloat. Will you act?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the NDP caucus, that tried to unionize the family farm, is now asking about the high cost of electricity, which is high because of their short-sighted energy policies. I've said it before: everything they did on the electricity grid caused prices to go up. The best way to keep prices down is to keep the NDP away from our electricity grid.

Member Irwin: Given that it's not just that minister who doesn't think that supporting struggling Albertans like Phoebe is in his job description – the Minister of Finance is sitting back and doing nothing to help my constituents either. He hiked their auto insurance rates by up to 30 per cent by lifting the cap with no warning and then called this price hike courageous. Wow. Can the Finance minister explain how my constituents are supposed to make ends meet when he keeps pulling the rug out from under them? And can he just admit that Albertans can't trust the UCP when it comes to helping them make ends meet? Do better, Minister.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP, when they were governing, brought in a rate cap, simply put a Band-Aid on a

problem in auto insurance that was resulting in insurance companies pulling back products, ultimately reducing capacity in the province, with the end goal to nationalize the insurance industry in the province. We're dealing with the systemic issues that are driving up costs. We brought in Bill 41. It's making a difference. Premiums are coming down.

Member Irwin: Let's try another minister. The Education minister ignored the needs for a new Delwood school in my constituency, and she refused my offer to join me and our Education critic to tour the building, and this minister refuses to listen to my constituents' concerns about her terrible Dumpster-fire curriculum, and at the same time our government is benefiting from high oil prices . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Member Irwin: . . . the Edmonton public school board is facing a dramatic funding shortfall. Can the Education minister answer just for once, please, the people of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and explain why my constituents are paying more, getting less, and being ignored by her government.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to share with the member opposite that I just have received an invitation for grand openings of seven new schools for Edmonton public school division in the next couple of months. Seven new schools: two in the southwest and the rest in the northwest. Edmonton public school division in 2020 had 4,700 fewer students than they predicted and last year 1,000 fewer students than they predicted, yet we were funding to the higher levels. If they're having problems with their budget, I can certainly help them. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. [interjections] A point of order is noted at 2:34 by the Deputy Government House Leader.

Technology Industry Development

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I had the honour of introducing Bill 203, that would have established a venture fund for Albertans to invest in Alberta's future. The fund was designed to directly invest in the growth of Alberta's tech and AI sectors and exclusively support early-stage companies, start-ups, and scale-ups. Initially members from the other side seemed to support the bill. In fact, a UCP MLA even called it, quote, the most Albertan concept ever. End quote. Two weeks later they did a complete one-eighty and killed the bill in committee. Did the Premier or minister instruct private members to kill this legislation, and why?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, to the sole member of the capitalist caucus on the other side, we on this side look at the best practices around when it comes to making sure that we use taxpayer dollars wisely. Now it's time to tell them why that was such a failed idea. All they have to do is take a look at the NDP in Manitoba and the crocus fund. Just google it: crocus, Manitoba. They will find the millions and millions of dollars that were lost with that exact scheme. We will not do that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bilous: It would cost the government zero dollars.

Given that this government has cut several programs designed to support our tech sector, causing us to lose ground to other provinces, and given that investing in the fund would have restored competitiveness and supported economic growth, diversification, creation of jobs, and long-term economic well-being in the province and given that we had two very accomplished stakeholders present

at committee in support of this bill but the UCP couldn't provide a single person from industry to speak against it – the bill actually came from industry. Why is this government ignoring entrepreneurs and job creators in the tech sector?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, again, to all the folks, the millions of people watching online: crocus, Manitoba. Just google it. That's why this is one of the worst ideas that we've seen.

But let's talk about diversification in Alberta's economy. Let's start with the film and television industry. The NDP failed – failed – the film and television industry while we've doubled that in one year. The tech sector in Alberta: thousands of positions. It's growing so fast, we had to increase enrolment at our postsecondary institutions.

Mr. Bilous: Given that the concept of a venture fund and an advisory panel on technology and innovation were proposed in the Innovation Capital Working Group, your group, Minister, in a report written by industry experts on ways to attract investment and grow the tech sector and given that I've been consistently hearing from these leaders and the need for both of these – the minister has previously said that this shouldn't be a partisan issue. Is this government so blinded by their own partisanship that they won't even take good ideas from industry if they're brought forward by us?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we are so proud of the tech and innovation space in this province. Under the previous government venture capital funding was \$37 million; last year, \$561 million. Thousands of jobs are being created in this province. We're attracting major investment. RBC's innovation hub is here; Mphasis; Infosys; the largest investment, with Amazon Web Services, in our province's history in the tech space. We have to create programs to fill these jobs. That's a winning record.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South has a question.

Teacher Disciplinary Process and Bill 15

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ATA union is in conflict of interest running teacher discipline. Bill 15 takes teacher discipline away from the union. The ATA union does not like Bill 15. It reduces their power. The NDP also does not like Bill 15. Maybe this shows that the bill is a good idea. To the minister: why is Bill 15 a good idea?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 15 will reform the teaching profession discipline process to make the education system safer for students, their families, and teachers. It will further protect students and give parents peace of mind by enhancing the accountability and transparency of the teaching profession, removing any perception of bias that comes from having a union oversee the discipline of its dues-paying members and bringing Alberta in line with comparable provinces and other regulated professions. It is absolutely a great idea.

2:40

Mr. Stephan: Given that there are over 45,000 teachers yet over the past 10 years, with the ATA union in charge, there was not a single hearing for teacher incompetence and given that nobody believes that in the past 10 years there was not a single incompetent teacher in Alberta, to the minister: does this show that the ATA union may be incompetent in identifying incompetence?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. No competency hearings have taken place since the ATA assumed responsibility for the matters of professional competence, in 2009. Under Bill 15 any individual would be able to file a competency complaint with the registrar, who would then confirm if the teacher holds a certificate and then send the complaint to the commissioner to be addressed. The commissioner would review the matter and may initially either dismiss the case, recommend a penalty under expedited process, or use consent resolution agreements, dispute resolutions, or mediation to resolve the issue. We need this process.

Mr. Stephan: Given that the majority of teachers are competent, seeking to be excellent to teach and serve children, and given that children are the heart of our education system, not the ATA union, and given that Bill 15 seeks to put the best interests of children first in the teacher discipline process, to the minister: how will Bill 15 both increase student safety and strengthen the teaching profession?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker – and thank you to the member for the question – the vast majority of teachers in the province are absolutely wonderful professionals, amazing, caring individuals that have the best interests of students at heart. But when cases of teacher misconduct do occur, it is important that the students and their families know that their cases will be taken seriously and reviewed by an unbiased party. Bill 15 will elevate the status of the entire teaching profession with the appointment of an arm's-length commissioner who would oversee professional conduct and competency complaints against teachers and teacher leaders across this province. This is so necessary.

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to present the committee's final report on Bill 203, Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. This bill was referred to the committee on March 17, 2022. The report recommends that Bill 203 not proceed, and I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 203.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the motion for concurrence is a debatable motion. I see that there are members in the Assembly who have already risen to provide notice that they, in fact, would like to provide comments on concurrence, which will take place on the next available Monday.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Bill 18 Utility Commodity Rebate Act

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and move first reading of Bill 18, the Utility Commodity Rebate Act.

More than ever Alberta families, farmers, and entrepreneurs are struggling with high energy prices. These high energy prices are caused by the NDP's short-sighted policies when they were in government, that made everything more expensive in the utilities world. While we are embracing long-term solutions, Mr. Speaker, we're coming up with short-term supports, and I'm happy to say that this government is taking action. If passed, this legislation will protect Albertans during times of high energy prices with targeted rebates.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a first time]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:03 the Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I do not have access to the Blues, around 2:03, in response to a question, the Premier used language something like: it's like the arsonist pretending to care about a fire he just set. Arson is a Criminal Code offence. It's a criminal offence. I rose under 23(j), which prohibits members from using insulting language, using that kind of language. I may refer you to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 623.

The proceedings of the House are based on a long-standing tradition of respect for the integrity of all Members. Thus, the use of offensive, provocative or threatening language in the House is strictly forbidden.

Although the Premier was referring to the opposition as a group, I believe, still I think that referring to the opposition or any member of the opposition as criminal, that kind of analogy, should be out of order. It's against the traditions of this Assembly, it's against the rules of this Assembly, and as such it should be ruled out of order.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to suggest that this is not a point of order but, rather, a matter of debate. I don't have the benefit of the Blues either, but if I recall correctly, the Premier at the time had said, "It's like the arsonist is worried about the fire," something to that effect. I know for a fact the Premier was not calling the members opposite arsonists though I would suggest that that caucus is a Dumpster fire. I would suggest that this is a matter of debate. If the Premier had actually said that a member of that caucus was an arsonist, that would certainly be out of order, and I acknowledge that. But he did not say that. Rather, he made an association of suggesting that they're actually worried about insurance rates when the reality is that they are the ones who jacked them up. Not a point of order but, rather, a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule, and I do have the benefit of the Blues. The hon. the Premier at 2:03 said the following: "Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, when the NDP cries crocodile tears about utility prices, it's like the arsonist being concerned about the fire that he set." Then he went on to provide the answer to the rest of the question, and a point of order was called. I would agree that the hon. Premier was not referring to members of the opposition or individuals or even as a group but, more so, speaking to what an arsonist would do. This is not a point of order. It's a matter of debate. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:34 the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Supplementary Questions

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order with regard to the use of supplementary questions. It is a tradition of this House that the first and second supplementals of a question are in some way related to the initial question. In the case of the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood that was not the case. That member also didn't even use the traditional use of the word "given." The first question was about utility prices; that went to the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity. The second question went to the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, and the third, of course, was about curriculum. These matters are not related: curriculum, insurance rates, and utility prices. I would ask that member to try to abide by conventions of this Chamber by using supplementals in an appropriate manner.

The Speaker: The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

2:50

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have the set of questions before me that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood asked. Certainly, she asked about utilities, she asked about insurance, and she went on to talk about education. She concluded her question with: why are my constituents "paying more, getting less, and being ignored by the UCP"? I think it was in the same context that in terms of education they are getting less. Education has become more expensive for them. The theme of the question in general was the cost of living, that is impacting Albertans. Whether that's utilities, insurance, education, under this government everything has been made more expensive. The question was following that theme.

The Speaker: I am prepared to rule, and I do have the benefit of the Blues.

Are there other submissions?

Seeing none, I agree with the Deputy Opposition House Leader with respect to that the three questions were about the utility costs, the insurance costs, and the education costs. The hon. member also made the submission that they were questions of constituents, and I think that there has been a significant amount of latitude for such questions. But in this case in particular, because of the theme of the costs, this is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Hon. members, yesterday a point of privilege was raised by the Member for Central Peace-Notley. At that time I provided comments with respect to Standing Order 15(4) about a member who is subject to a point of privilege being raised being present in the Assembly. Earlier today I received correspondence from the Government House Leader indicating that their schedule may or may not allow for them to be present during debate and, as such, suggesting that the debate could proceed in their absence should the Speaker deem that appropriate. I have deemed that appropriate given the notice that the Government House Leader has provided to me. I'm happy to table that correspondence in the Assembly tomorrow at the appropriate time.

We will now hear the point of privilege that was raised by the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley. The hon. member.

Privilege Threatening a Member

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today out of a necessity to fully conclude the unfortunate and disgraceful matter that occurred in this House during the most recent Thursday

afternoon sitting. As my fellow members are aware, we bore witness to a new low for this Assembly during the final afternoon sitting before the break. The exchange I'm referring to includes words I cannot repeat here and, perhaps most shockingly, was conducted by the Government House Leader, as the title states, a leader in this Assembly, at a time when Albertans find themselves deeply concerned about the attitude of the upper echelons of the UCP government and how that trickles down into the general attitude of one of the most divisive governments in the history of our province.

I will do my best to describe the exchange and kindly ask for your latitude, Mr. Speaker, in my attempt to do so. For those looking for the exact exchange, please see *Hansard* for Thursday afternoon, March 31, 2022, day 19, page 593. While a retraction has occurred on two matters, two matters from the exchange remain unaddressed. The use of a proper name was withdrawn. The use of inappropriate parliamentary language – I'm referring to the swear word – was withdrawn.

But two issues remain unaddressed. Number one, the threat against all members of the Assembly, which was an act of intimidation. I quote the Government House Leader: "I'll bring a standing order package back here right after the break to make sure you can't use tablings like that no more." The second, the way the Government House Leader challenged the authority of the Speaker during the exchange, was never apologized for. But I respect the Speaker to deal with that issue the way he sees fit and will withdraw that concern from my point of privilege.

I believe that the threat is a prima facie breach of privilege to the Assembly. Upon review of the standing orders, you will find Standing Order 15, which covers privilege. The relevant section of that standing order reads:

15(1) A breach of the rights of the Assembly or of the parliamentary rights of any Member constitutes a question of privilege.

(2) A Member wishing to raise a question of privilege shall give written notice containing a brief statement of the question to the Speaker and, if practicable, to any person whose conduct may be called into question, at least 2 hours before the opening of the afternoon sitting and, before the Orders of the Day are called, shall call attention to the alleged breach of privilege and give a brief statement of the nature of the matter addressed in the complaint.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, I have given the written notice as required.

Under (6) it says:

The Speaker may allow such debate as he or she thinks appropriate in order to determine whether a prima facie case of breach of privilege has taken place and whether the matter is being raised at the earliest opportunity.

To prove this is a prima facie case of breach of privilege, first, I will address the earliest opportunity requirement. Mr. Speaker, without the benefit of the Blues it was impossible in that moment to account for all of the many infractions of our rules that were made by the Government House Leader. Yesterday was the first sitting since the incident, and we have the full *Hansard* exchange now, something that was not available to us at that moment.

To understand what a breach of privilege would consist of, Mr. Speaker, I refer the members of this House to the Legislative Assembly Act. I will highlight the sections I believe to be key to the understanding of why this is a breach that falls between sections 8 and 13 of the act.

First, section 8, Jurisdiction of the Assembly:

The Assembly has exclusive jurisdiction in respect of

- (a) the determination of the lawfulness of its proceedings, and
- (b) the regulation of its proceedings and the conduct of its business and affairs.

To have the Government House Leader threaten – unilaterally threaten – to bring changes to the standing orders in order to protect himself, not the Assembly, when it is clearly the Assembly that makes these decisions.

Next, in section 9, Privileges, Immunities and Powers Generally:

9(1) In addition to the privileges, immunities and powers respectively conferred on them by this Act, the Assembly and its Members, and the committees of the Assembly and their members, have the same privileges, immunities and powers as those held respectively by the House of Commons of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, the members of that House, the committees of that House and the members of committees of that House at the time of the passing of the Constitution Act, 1867.

Clearly, we are extended the same understandings of procedure as other jurisdictions in regard to privileges and breach of privileges.

Now, in section 10 we find the pertinent language on breaches of privilege and contempts.

10(1) The Assembly may inquire into, adjudicate and punish breaches of the privileges of the Assembly and contempts of the Assembly.

(2) Without restricting the generality of subsection (1), the following acts constitute breaches of privilege or contempts to which that subsection applies:

- (a) an assault, insult or libel on a Member;
- (b) obstructing, threatening or attempting to force or intimidate a Member in any matter relating to the Member's office;

Clearly, this incident was a threat and an attempt to intimidate members from using the rights they have to table documents.

Section 12 also makes it clear that the Assembly is a court in this matter.

12(1) The Assembly is a court for the purpose of exercising its powers and jurisdiction under sections 10 and 11 and its decisions and orders under those sections are final.

Section 10(2)(b) is, of course, of particular note as it makes it very clear that an act of intimidation like that which occurred when the Government House Leader threatened to alter the standing orders is a violation that represents a breach of privilege.

In *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* there are numerous references to the rights of the House as a collectivity not to be intimidated and interfered with and the rights and immunities of individual members, freedom from obstruction, interference, or intimidation.

Members of Parliament, by the nature of their office and the variety of work they are called upon to perform, come into contact with a wide range of individuals and groups. Members can, therefore, be subject to all manner of interference, obstruction and influences. *Maingot* states:

Members are entitled to go about their parliamentary business undisturbed. The assaulting, menacing, or insulting of any Member on the floor of the House or while he is coming or going to or from the House, or on account of his behaviour during a proceeding in Parliament, is a violation of the rights of Parliament. Any form of intimidation... of a person for or on account of his behaviour during a proceeding in Parliament could amount to contempt.

That was 218.

Speakers have consistently upheld the right of the House to services of its Members free from intimidation, obstruction and interference. Speaker Lamoureux stated in a 1973 ruling that he had "no hesitation in reaffirming the principle that parliamentary privilege includes the right of a member to discharge his responsibilities as a member of the House free from threats or attempts at intimidation." As Speaker Bosley noted in 1986:

If an Hon. Member is impeded or obstructed in the performance of his or her parliamentary duties through threats, intimidation, bribery attempts or other improper behaviour, such a case would fall within the limits of parliamentary privilege. Should an Hon. Member be able to say that something has happened which prevented him or her from performing functions, that he or she has been threatened, intimidated, or in any way unduly influenced, there would be a case for the Chair to consider.

3:00

Let's be clear. The Government House Leader's interruption did in fact stop the tablings for that day, and the threat and intimidation clearly makes a case for the point of privilege.

In ruling on another question of privilege, Speaker Bosley stated further that the threat or attempt at intimidation cannot be hypothetical, but must be real or have occurred.

I think we can clearly say that this threat and intimidation was not hypothetical. It was real, and it did occur.

In order to find a prima facie breach of privilege, the Speaker must be satisfied that there is evidence to support the Member's claim that he or she has been impeded in the performance of his or her parliamentary functions and that the matter is directly related to a proceeding in Parliament.

This has affected myself and all members who now worry about tabling documents in case the House leader finds further personal offence and does in fact bring forward changes stopping this important part of members' business. In less than two weeks the House is expected to vote on a government member's private member's motion to review the standing orders. It is alarming to think that the House leader could at any time bring forward changes to the standing orders or use this review to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, this matter is directly related to a proceeding in this Assembly. The *Hansard* shows clear as day the threat to all members to alter the standing orders if tablings are used in a manner that this House has ruled already that they may be used as. This is a clear attempt to prevent myself and others from carrying out their parliamentary duties. We need to be clear that the tabling of documents is often requested when members quote from documents, so it's not only an opportunity but a requirement.

Mr. Speaker, this Legislature is not a one-man show, and no, it doesn't revolve around a small group of people that feel it is their personal playground that they can manipulate. This Legislature belongs to Albertans, who have chosen people to represent them here. We have rules and processes, and members' rights are protected. The Assembly decides the standing orders, not the Government House Leader, and to suggest otherwise is an insult to this Assembly and the people that have sent us here, that rely on fair processes to be applied.

All members of this Assembly should be alarmed by these threats and should stand together against them. There is no place for threats, intimidation, or bullying, and yes, there are consequences for actions that fall outside these rules. Mr. Speaker, I respectfully ask that you find this incident of threat and intimidation a point of privilege so that the appropriate consequences can take place.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of privilege, of course, is a very serious matter that members of the Assembly are all welcome to provide commentary to. I see the Deputy Government House Leader rising. I think it's appropriate to find out if there are other members of the Assembly that would like to speak to the issue prior to the response from yourself. Are you comfortable with that?

I see the Opposition House Leader. I also see the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has risen. We'll hear from the Opposition House Leader prior to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise to engage in the debate on this point of privilege. I will just begin by acknowledging, as has been acknowledged in this House many times, that rising on a point of privilege, the raising of such matters, is incredibly serious and, as mentioned in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 141, should not be "reckoned with lightly and accordingly ought to be rare, and thus rarely raised in the House of Commons" or here in the Alberta Legislature.

I rise because I agree with the Member for Central Peace-Notley that this is a serious point of privilege and to enter into the debate. As was argued by the Member for Central Peace-Notley while arguing the point of order on the day, which was March 31, when this occurred, the Government House Leader on that day, in my opinion, did threaten and intimidate not only the Member for Central Peace-Notley but the Assembly as a whole, threatening to change the standing orders to limit the actions of members of the Assembly once the House had resumed.

Now, as the Member for Central Peace-Notley just noted in his closing, the Government House Leader – when it comes to the changing of the standing orders, the standing orders are changed by the Assembly itself and by all members, but I must enter into debate that the Government House Leader has very real sway and power within this Chamber, within his own caucus, and is seen as a leader and someone who has influence in this place, so threats made by the Government House Leader come with very special weight in this place, and how that Government House Leader governs himself, I believe, has true impact in the business of this Assembly.

Now, as the member has recapped, this occurred while the member was making a number of tablings. The statements made by the Government House Leader captured on page 593 of *Hansard*, in my view, constitute a very real threat and a violation of both the statutes and precedents that govern the Assembly. Now, while the threat was directed at the Member for Central Peace-Notley, I will say that the threat to alter the standing orders, which are the rules with which the House regulates its proceedings, was considered by members of the Official Opposition caucus as a real and present threat, particularly in light of the tone and in light of previous changes to standing orders made by this government.

Tablings being a vital function for every member of this Assembly, all members of the Official Opposition took note of the threats that were being made because it is through tablings that we put the concerns of constituents on the record, back up statements made, and provide evidence.

Now, I would want to enter into this debate the Speaker's own words from November 3, 2020, found on page 2960 of that year's *Hansard*, that rulings "be guided by the precedent that is before us, the standing orders we have all agreed to, and the reference books that we all turn to." It's very clear to me that if the standing orders of the Assembly are to be used as a tool by the government to control and limit available actions of the opposition members and of independent members, how can this Assembly continue to function if the members exist in an environment of fear brought on by a Government House Leader whose actions exhibit not leadership but fear and intimidation? How can the Speaker continue to do his duty if these rules are subject to ire and the whims of the government and their House leader?

There are sources that are relevant to this matter, and while listening to the Member for Central Peace-Notley, I noted one or two sources that we found that were similar, so I will not repeat where I can avoid doing so. Certainly, chapter 1 of *Beauchesne's* states that “the principles of Canadian parliamentary law are: to protect a minority and restrain the improvidence or tyranny of a majority.”

The Legislative Assembly Act lists and constitutes the breaches of privilege, which I will not read in, but I will say that we agree with 10(2)(b), obstructing, threatening, or attempting. We would agree with the Member for Central Peace-Notley that the act of threatening here is the one of major concern for us.

In *Erskine May* paragraph 15.14: “To attempt to intimidate a Member in their parliamentary conduct by threats is also a contempt.”

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, items that are considered contempt, page 82:

assaulting, threatening, obstructing or intimidating a Member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties . . . assaulting, threatening or disadvantaging a Member, or a former Member, on account of the Member's conduct in Parliament.

The last one being particularly relevant. The threat came as a direct result of the actions of the Member for Central Peace-Notley due to his actions here in the Assembly. The description and relevance of the items he is tabling, which is, again, as you turn to *Hansard* page 593, amount to one sentence per tabling. It's important to note that there is no limit on the number of tablings that may be done at any given time per the standing orders.

We did also note Speaker Bosley's ruling on page 108 in 1986, but I will not reread it into the record.

I believe it is clear that on March 31 the Government House Leader did make an actual threat to obstruct the Member for Central Peace-Notley from the future performance of his duties, the tabling of documents, which is a breach of his privilege, as well as extended that threat in something that would impact all members of this Assembly. This is further proven when considering the reference on page 91 of *House of Commons*, that lists “the presentation or submission of a document to a House or Committee” as a proceeding in Parliament. Specifically, page 91 of *House of Commons* shows that he was performing his duties through a procedure in the House.

3:10

Finally, on this point I turn to page 60 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. “Any conduct which offends the authority or dignity of the House . . . is referred to as a contempt . . . It does not have to actually obstruct or impede the House or a Member; it merely has to have the tendency to produce such results.”

I will suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that in conversations I've had with my Official Opposition colleagues, there has been a very chilling effect by the Government House Leader's words in this place. Through his action he has not only breached the privilege of the member but has committed a contempt against the entire Assembly and every member of this Assembly.

Certainly, we know this is not the first time we've addressed the threatening of another member as a breach of privilege in the Assembly, nor is it the first time a member of the Assembly has used threats against a member in an attempt to limit the actions of a member. For this, I'll just draw your attention to a point of privilege raised on September 22, 1993, ruled on by Speaker Schumacher. In this case a member of Executive Council threatened to withhold government programs from a member's constituency. There are similarities in these cases, and I would point to the ruling in that case. In a clarifying statement the Speaker ruled that a prima facie case of contempt did exist, and in that case the

member in question withdrew and apologized prior to the point of privilege being finally raised.

In the case before us today, in this case, the Government House Leader potentially could try to use that argument. I would suggest that the Government House Leader did withdraw and apologize for the use of unparliamentary language as well as the use of proper names but did not for threatening the Member for Central Peace-Notley in the ongoing discharging of his duties. In my mind, this matter is very much still alive.

I urge the Speaker to look at Speaker Schumacher's rulings. I believe that a prima facie breach of privilege has occurred, and I urge the Speaker to provide the Assembly the opportunity to consider what actions would be appropriate.

I will leave this up to the Speaker and his ruling, but I do want to offer that in this instance we saw a pattern of behaviour that I believe will require more than an offer to apologize and withdraw. The members of this Assembly need assurances that these types of threats cannot and will not be tolerated in the Assembly or anywhere in this precinct.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to engage in this debate.

The Speaker: Thank you to the Opposition House Leader.

I might just mention to the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat that I appreciated the way that the Opposition House Leader attempted to not just repeat similar arguments, so I will encourage you to do the same. We don't want to set a precedent of violent agreement or matters of debate around points of privilege, but if you do have additional comments or content that may be beneficial for the Assembly as well as for the Deputy Government House Leader for them to conclude their arguments, it is reasonable for other members to provide additional submissions. I will call on you now, but if it is largely similar, I will likely intervene.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance, and I so appreciate what the two hon. members before me said. I feel it's so accurate for the level of intimidation, the level of threats. I'll do everything I can to have three new relevant points.

Absolutely, this is a question of privilege. It is directly related to the rights and privileges of this Assembly and every single member in here. The words “I'll bring,” the words “make sure that you can't [do that]” are very strong words. Mr. Speaker, it's maybe no coincidence that I didn't see any tablings today or yesterday. Is this threat hanging over our democracy?

I'll jump to, as both the hon. members for Edmonton-Mill Woods and Central Peace-Notley said, that we have a process for changing the standing orders. We have a process where all of us can go to those committees and argue, to make points, go to the media, do a dissenting opinion. The words “I'll bring” and “[I'll] make sure you can't” fly in the face of that.

Just quickly, it's so important, you know, for the 4.4 million Albertans that we're fortunate to represent. I think one of the phrases I've heard the most often in my 10 years here is: when you're first elected, it's like drinking from a firehose. So many Albertans rely on us to get their ideas, their tablings, their points to the floor, to the decision-makers. The fact that a key decision-maker, the Government House Leader, used the words “I'll bring” and “[I'll] make sure you can't” is egregious. It's horrifying.

I just want to remind you, Mr. Speaker, of the process. We have a Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing that meets to change the standing orders, that meets to discuss them, where any one of the 87 of us can go and put in our good ideas on behalf of the thousands of Albertans we represent. I wonder how the hon. members for Calgary-Mountain View, Edmonton-Meadows, Chestermere-Strathmore, Calgary-Fish Creek, and Red Deer-South

feel. They're on that committee. Are they going to be swayed by the words of intimidation that so many of us felt? There are others on that committee, and again any one of us could go, and the fact is that we haven't seen tablings in two days.

The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley alluded to that two Mondays from now we're probably talking about Motion 506 from the hon. Member for Banff-Kananaskis and – my goodness – the two things that she knew that the hon. Government House Leader's words fly right in the face of: "Be it resolved that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing." She doesn't say: I will; I will make sure. She's sending it to the committee, and the words she uses both in her point 1 and her point 2: increase collaboration and co-operation, "facilitate collaboration and cooperation among their members."

Mr. Speaker, absolutely, this is a question of privilege from a high-ranking government member in a position to control the process and the legalities. I'm sorry it happened because I think the perception of this and an obscenity that in 10 years I've never heard in here sets us all back, and that's why this is incredibly important.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others with new submissions or additional information that would be beneficial for the Assembly and the Speaker to make a decision?

Seeing none, as is common practice in the Assembly with respect to points of privilege, the member in question or the Government House Leader or their designate has the opportunity to respond to the arguments that have been made today or to delay that response to tomorrow or a future date. I'll provide the Deputy Government House Leader that opportunity now if he would like to respond. I'm welcome to hear the response, or we can delay till tomorrow. How would you see fit to proceed?

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, you know what? I will probably go ahead and respond today.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me start off by saying in response to this point of privilege from the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley that I do not find that this is a clear point of privilege. I believe it is not.

Let's review some of the facts that occurred on Thursday, March 31. This can all be found on page 593 of *Alberta Hansard*. The Member for Central Peace-Notley rose to do a lengthy series of tablings. I would argue that in doing this, he also monopolized a large portion of the Assembly's time. Some might even say that he was wasting the time of the Assembly by abusing the standing orders, which allow tabling returns to operate. While doing these never-ending tablings, he made multiple drive-by smears of the Premier and the Minister of Environment and Parks, going as far as to directly accuse the Government House Leader of misinforming the House, and he also said that the minister of parks tried again "to dupe the House." This is clearly unparliamentary language although the Member for Central Peace-Notley only apologized for the first instance.

But the Member for Central Peace-Notley has a bit of history, Mr. Speaker, in this Chamber of trying to find new and clever ways to call people liars in the Assembly. He has been called to order and made to apologize multiple times for these infractions. For example, on April 6, 2017 – this can be found on page 547 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day – the Member for Central Peace-Notley said: "Given that the government lied." A point of order was called, and his first instinct was to then pivot to the following phrase: "Given that the government misled the people." This

resulted in another point of order being called, and the Member for Central Peace-Notley had to apologize.

3:20

There are other examples of this as well. The Member for Central Peace-Notley is no stranger to the rules of the Assembly and has frequently sought to push the envelope. This isn't his first week. He knows the rules full well and what he is doing. Therefore, given that this member has a history of trying to abuse his position to call MLAs liars, then it should be no surprise that he was extremely frustrated to see him abuse the Assembly's time with nonstop tablings and using the tablings to call members of the Assembly liars.

Now, his letter yesterday raised two issues, Mr. Speaker. The first was that he alleges that the Government House Leader refused to come to order when called by the Speaker. There is nothing in *Hansard* that indicates that the Government House Leader did not come to order when called on by the Speaker. When reviewing *Hansard*, it is clear that the Government House Leader, when called on by the Speaker to raise a point of order, did so. When asked by the Speaker to apologize and withdraw the use of his unparliamentary language, the Government House Leader did so immediately and without reservation.

That is certainly not something that we've seen from the Leader of the Opposition, for example, who I've never seen apologize and withdraw for remarks made in this Chamber but, rather, makes the Opposition House Leader do that on her behalf.

I also know that the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud struggles with direction from the chair, when on March 14, when asked to withdraw and apologize, she only withdrew and then when pressed, apologized in offering this poor apology: "I apologize and withdraw for the sentiments of the members across the way." That was, of course, when the member accused members of this side of the House of condoning and engaging in rape culture.

Yet in all these instances the Speaker frequently states that the matter is either concluded or dealt with, so I don't think a point of privilege can be found with regard to the interaction between the Speaker and the Government House Leader, which leaves us the allegation that the Government House Leader intimidated the Assembly by indicating he was prepared to bring forward a change to the standing orders to prevent Tabling Returns and Reports from being misused by MLAs.

The Government House Leader said:

That is completely inappropriate and certainly should not be how tablings are used. Frankly, if that's how . . . member[s] [are] going to continue to use it, I'll bring a standing order package back here right after the break to make [it so] you can't use tablings like that [anymore].

First, let's establish that Tabling Returns and Reports has faced many iterations over the course of the Assembly's history. In the past an MLA was able to table a hamburger from the cafeteria. That's not permitted now under Standing Order 37(4). This meant that tablings are not some inviolate item of business that can't be altered by the majority of the Assembly.

Then, let's review how standing orders are changed in the Assembly. Any member may utilize the tools available to them to put forward substantive motions in the Assembly. These could be government motions, motions other than government motions, and motions under Standing Order 42. Any of these motions, if passed by a majority of the Assembly, can make changes to the standing orders. This occurred last session, when the private member Motion 518, sponsored by the hon. MLA for Peace River, saw the change from the previous question-and-comment period to the interventions we all know and dearly love.

The Government House Leader is frequently responsible for bringing forward government motions which propose changes to the standing orders. This government caucus is always looking to find ways to improve how the business of the Assembly is managed and how to prevent abusive behaviour. There is no threat or intimidation from any member of this Assembly putting forward motions or a member indicating that they are not.

So, very clearly, the Government House Leader did not threaten any member of the Assembly by suggesting that he was prepared, if necessary, to put forward a motion to change the standing orders if any member, and in particular the Member for Central Peace-Notley, were to persist in making nonstop tablings in order to make drive-by smears of members of this Assembly and, in doing so, delay the business of the Assembly.

Therefore, I respectfully submit, Mr. Speaker, that this is not a prima facie breach of privilege and encourage the Member for Central Peace-Notley to quit playing games and to follow the rules and practices and procedures of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, much has been said about the situation that did occur on the previous Thursday, prior to the break. I think it's reasonable that the Speaker take some time to consider what has been said today by both members of the opposition and by the Deputy Government House Leader, and I will report back to the Assembly at my convenience, possibly tomorrow but maybe Monday as well depending on the dialogue between the table and I and the considerations that will take place. I do take this matter seriously, and I do take the events of Thursday, March 31, seriously as well, and I'll consider all of those things when executing the decision that will take place.

Hon. members, we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 2

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: There are no amendments on the floor. We are on the main bill. Are there members wishing to join in on the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to join debate on Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. We know that this is omnibus legislation, which is typical of a fiscal statutes amendment act. Nine separate acts are being looked at, and most of it is pretty straightforward and isn't, certainly, anything to be concerned about largely except for one significant piece, and that, of course, is the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act.

You know, even today in question period this question was asked by our leader to the Premier about the government's decision to really tax inflation, and that's that bracket creep. We know that the Premier, when he was in government in Ottawa – he was an MP in cabinet. At that time, when the personal income tax system wasn't indexed to inflation, he slammed – I guess he wasn't in cabinet at the time; he was in opposition – the Liberal government and said that that was insidious and a pernicious tax grab.

It's about a billion dollars of Albertans' hard-earned money that now, because the UCP is deciding not to index this to inflation, which is the norm – it is just the regular process for governments across Alberta and federal governments. They generally do this. It's just seen as the normal protocol because they want to support, you know, their constituents, their citizens to have the same amount of money or to be kept up with inflation. But the UCP government, even though they're flush with money from oil and gas revenues, decided that, no, that money needs to be in government coffers and out of the pockets of Albertans.

That's happening at a time when Albertans are struggling with affordability. Everything is so expensive, and people are really, really struggling. This is something that is, you know, a hill to die on, as they say, so I cannot support this bill because this regular process of the indexation of the tax brackets is not happening. I will be voting against Bill 2 because of this issue, and I think everyone in this Chamber should because it's taking away from Albertans, and Albertans need to be supported now. You know, we know that inflation is, I think, about 5.7 per cent. I think it might even be higher now. I haven't seen the latest stats on that, but that's the highest it's been in years and years. If this is not the time to do it, I don't know when it is in terms of indexation of the tax brackets.

3:30

I mean, it's really a significant mistake by this government to go ahead with this legislation because it's putting significant hardship on regular Albertans. I think that just once again shows how we cannot trust the UCP. They're not thinking about the best interests of Albertans; they are thinking of, you know, their elite friends and cutting corporate taxes, throwing money away to nonexistent pipelines based on huge risks of who becomes President in the U.S. Of course, they guessed wrong, and – guess what – Albertans have lost billions of dollars because of that. We just cannot trust the UCP government, and this is just another example of how clear that is.

You know, if we just reflect a little bit on even what happened today in question period, the trustworthiness of the UCP is just clearer and clearer every day. It's honestly, sincerely quite disturbing for me to sit in this Chamber and hear the ridiculous – ridiculous – things that are said. Today in question period – I just made some notes – the minister says: okay; the NDP is going to unionize farms. That's ridiculous. You can't trust what they're saying. It's not even anywhere close to truth.

All they're doing is having cheap shots, sort of base comments, that aren't based in reality at all. And this is the government? I mean, isn't the government supposed to be leading the people? Have vision? Instead, it seems like they're just backed into a corner and they're squirming and they're saying ridiculous things. Yet they're in charge now, or for the time being, and they're, you know, demonstrating that they're not thinking clearly. They're saying things that are ridiculous.

Oh, yeah. The Minister of Health said that we have to get over this difference between private and public health care. What? We have to get over that? No, no, no, no. There's a clear distinction between that – and of course we believe in public health care. The UCP's focus on giving public dollars to private clinics doesn't make that public health care; it erodes the public health care system. You know, that was another thing that was said today.

Another thing is calling – you know, there's a professional regulatory college that does manage teachers. They have a regulatory process, and it's distinct from the union activities, but this group of folks can't seem to get that, so they just pile it all into one and say that it's all unions that are addressing this. That's not true at all. That's not how the Alberta Teachers' Association works. But they like to say these things that aren't true. It's not based in

reality, and it's ridiculous. You know, we just cannot trust at all what the UCP are doing.

And then they make – like, this is a cheap shot – that, you know, our Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview here is the sole member of the capitalist caucus in the New Democrats. They like to say that we don't know anything about business, that we don't know anything about financial management or anything like that, but I mean, again, it's just the furthest thing from the truth.

I mean, certainly, we supported small businesses when we were in government. We cut their taxes by a third. We asked profitable corporations, absolutely, to pay their fair share, and we did have their tax rate at a level that is commensurate with the rest of Canada, largely. It was nothing ridiculous. We didn't put undue hardship on them; it was just what's fair across Canada.

They also like to say that everybody ran away when we were government, but that's also not true. You know, I have some information here about capital investment in Alberta. In 2018 \$62.3 billion was invested, and that was under our government. That's the highest it's been up until this year even. Like, \$56.7 billion is what's projected by the UCP, but in 2018: \$62.3 billion.

To listen to the other side, like, they don't bother to understand what actually happened. They just say stuff. I don't know. The integrity is nonexistent. It boggles my mind to think that this is the way governing is being done in our province. I certainly know, from talking to many constituents, talking to stakeholders, talking to people across our province, that nobody is trusting them. They know that they just say stuff and that they like to spin things, but it's not based in reality.

Also, in 2019 it was \$59.4 billion, and then when the UCP came in, it was \$48.6 billion in 2020, and then in 2021 it's \$54 billion. So it's not what they say. They say: oh, nobody invested in Alberta when the NDP was government. Well, I'm reading you the facts here, and \$62.3 billion in 2018 is far greater than any other year since the UCP have been elected. But they don't bother to actually base what they say in reality.

You know, everybody who paid corporate taxes just sort of took off or was run out of town by us if you listen to the UCP, which also isn't true. We know that the corporate income tax was \$4.8 billion. That was the actual amount in 2018-19, and in 2022-23 – that's under the UCP, of course – it's projected to be \$4 billion. So it's less – it's less – than what it was when we were government. Again, I just kind of shake my head. I don't know what gives them the authority to just sort of talk out of their hats as if they can just make things up.

It's disturbing to me. I feel like – I don't even want to use that. I know that many Albertans are suffering because of the policies, and the UCP are picking a few elite sections of our population to benefit like wildfire. They're doing great. But guess what. Many Albertans aren't. Certainly, we know that, for example, seniors, which is an area that I care very much about – I had the honour to be Minister of Seniors and Housing when we were government. This bracket creep is causing seniors who get the Alberta seniors' benefit to have \$750 less – so this is, like, a couple – annually. That's a lot of money. That's a lot of money for many people. Maybe the UCP thinks: "Oh, it's a drop in the bucket. It doesn't matter. Whatever." It does matter, and it's creating some really significant hardship for people. You know, they have trouble paying their rent, with high utility costs now and groceries. I mean, we all know that things are getting much less affordable, and the UCP is making it worse.

Besides that, the UCP seems to like to say: "Oh, yes, we are supporting vulnerable seniors. We're supporting vulnerable people in Alberta. This is what we're doing here. This is what we're doing there." But you know what the reality is? They've cut significantly from seniors. For example, special needs assistance: this is, like,

helping seniors pay for medical supports. Maybe they need a wheelchair. Maybe they need a walker. Maybe they get a little bit of money for laundry. Those programs are being cut. Actually, back in 2020 \$8.6 million was cut from that budget. Just right off the – you know, easily, happily. The UCP seems to think that people didn't benefit, weren't supported by that. There are so many things. That's only one annual year, \$8.6 million since 2020. So that continues.

3:40

Also, nonprofits. You know, the UCP talks about wanting seniors to age in their communities. For seniors to age in their communities, there need to be supports – there's just no question about that – many kinds of supports. Certainly, there need to be oftentimes home care, medical supports, those kind of things. But there also need to be nonmedical supports. Guess who does those kind of supports. That's the nonprofit agencies in communities. It can be, like, snow removal. It can be just supporting socialization. We know that that's a huge issue. Many seniors may become isolated, and that negatively impacts their mental health. Of course, we know that with COVID that was even more profound. There are so many challenges in that area for many people, not just seniors, right across this province.

Nonprofit grants. When we were government, we gave \$2 million annually in nonprofit grants to agencies that support seniors to age in their communities; support them to be healthy; connect socially; some practical, nonmedical supports, as I said, like shovelling or maybe meal delivery. Meals on Wheels is an example of that. Quite quickly after the UCP became government, they cut those grants to less than \$1 million. It's \$900,000 now. It was during COVID that they cut that. That means that those supports aren't in place, especially at such a significant time. But, you know, seniors have to live within their means. That's what the Minister of Seniors and Housing said.

But – you know what? – it costs more in the long run. If people aren't supported, they can get more isolated, which can have more dire effects on their mental health. You know, our mental health affects our physical health. So that can cost our system more. I mean, there are the human rights and sort of supporting people to live in dignity. There are those kinds of compassionate arguments that, of course, are very important. But there's even an economic argument that the UCP is ignoring about why it's important to invest in these kind of public programs or public grants to nonprofit agencies.

I guess I'm appealing to more the economic aspects, which seem to be what the minister would always defend. We have to make sure that the, you know, finances are in order. That's the premier position. I'm just suggesting to her that she needs to look a little bit deeper to understand that indeed the government will save money if people aren't, you know, ending up in hospital or having some kind of an injury at home and then requiring much, much more supports.

It is challenging and, I think, very disturbing just how this UCP government operates and how sort of they're continuing to really put the burden on individuals, put the burden on Alberta families, and not support them. I mean, I think this bracket creep piece is very significant. This bill could shift that. It could be just in line with everything that other jurisdictions do. It's just a natural thing that's seen as sort of normal protocol, that the brackets be indexed.

I urge the government to not pass this legislation, because it does make it much harder for Albertans. They're taking a billion dollars out of Albertans' pockets.

I also, you know, just will say again that what they say matters, and it's important that they base what they say in reality. But in some of the examples that I gave today just in question period, it's really quite ridiculous. I don't feel very proud of this government,

that they are actually respecting the offices they hold. They are government, and that, I believe, is what they should be doing, but sadly it is not what they're doing. Despite their words that they are supporting vulnerable people, that they are supporting seniors, they indeed are not. Actually, they're making it much harder for them. Certainly, I know that through many conversations that I've had with seniors across this province.

So I urge all members of the House to vote against this bill. I mean, it's not something that's worthy of support. It just makes life harder for Albertans. It makes it less affordable for Albertans, and it really is kind of a sneaky way to take money out of Albertans' pockets. I think the government should not pass this legislation. With that, I will take my seat.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate on Bill 2? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise at this stage of debate for Bill 2. Of course, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, allows the government to implement a number of aspects of the provincial budget that was introduced at the end of February. Now, it is no secret that we take great exception to this sneaky tax on inflation that is contained within this bill and that is projected within the government's budget papers to remain in effect until 2025. This pernicious and insidious tax on inflation – not my words; the words of the Premier when he used to oppose this sort of thing – will cost Albertans more than a billion dollars in additional income taxes, a fact that was not contained within the budget documents but was confirmed with us by the minister within budget estimates.

I will note that that figure was provided to the opposition in the first year that this change was made, but as is quite typical with this government over time, a government that was not particularly given to being on the level in the first place has become increasingly less so. So we had to push and push and push for that number, and they finally did give it to us, so at least there was that, I guess. Small silver linings. That is probably the most egregious part of this legislation.

The Financial Statutes Amendment Act and the other pieces of legislation that should have come alongside this budget should have given practical effect to the utility consumer rebate, but this House only received that piece of very vague and inadequate legislation this afternoon. Now, it was pretty clear that this government had no intention of really paying attention to what was happening to people's bills in November, December, January, when it was actually happening, because the paragraph where they actually make a sort of vague throw to this natural gas rebate business was stuck into the budget strategic plan, and you could tell. It was practically in a different font. It misspelled Ralph Klein's name; the sentence was quite clunky. Clearly, the editors hadn't had a chance to look at it because they just threw some spaghetti at the wall and said, "Okay; that's good; people are complaining about their bills; our work here is done," showing, I think, the level of bandwidth and actual serious public policy response to the tremendous suffering that people were undergoing at that time. Just absolutely no regard for that.

I think one of the bigger pieces in this legislation, first of all, is around trust. I've talked about the bracket creep piece and how, you know, this is a Premier that called this pernicious and insidious and maybe, I don't know, busted out a thesaurus – they used to have them in hard copy back in the '90s, when he made those comments. There's just a greatest hits reel. There's, like, a seven minutes' compilation on YouTube of him discussing this. But at the first available opportunity, in the fall budget of 2019, he went back on

every single one of those words, and they were lengthy. It reminds me, quite frankly, of the time that this Premier was a minister in 2007 that brought in an excise tax on pickup trucks. It reminds me of the time this Premier was a minister in a government that phased out 12 of Alberta's 16 coal plants without associate regulations on coal-to-gas conversion back in 2012; said he'd reverse it during the leadership race and did not. It reminds me of the time this Premier was part of a government in which Harper gave a speech at the G-8 at the time, in 2007, in Berlin committing Canada to carbon pricing or the time that this Premier was part of a government that committed in 2010, by the time it was the G-7, to a net-zero policy or the many times that this Premier has railed about carbon pricing, yet in March here we have a ministerial order from his Minister of Environment and Parks raising the carbon tax to \$50 per tonne for industrial emitters.

3:50

You know, there is apparently what is said, and then there is what is done, and I've just provided not just the tax increase, that certainly annoys people, but members of the Premier's own caucus, other ways that perhaps what is said and then what is done: there is a tremendous gulf between those two things.

But the other piece of this bill that is really – it could be pernicious and insidious if I wanted to, you know, sort of strut around using big words to cover for other things, but that is this business of cash management and pooling cash management. Now, this is, on the face of it, probably a decent piece of public policy. GOA will now have access to all the funds from agencies, boards, and commissions that fall under government control. More importantly, the minister will be able to set the interest rate that those ABCs receive. Now, the government has given themselves the power to charge lower than market rates to these ABCs, like AIMCo or postsecondary institutions or others. The government argues that by centrally pooling cash, they improve their overall liquidity and need less cash overall across all public entities, and that will save on debt-servicing costs. That's probably true, but the problem here is trust.

You know, the minister assured us in no uncertain terms that the changes he was making to the Alberta Capital Finance Authority would have no material effect on municipalities and their cost of borrowing. He said: "Oh, no, no. That's not going to happen." It absolutely did happen. They turned around and went back on their word and charged municipalities more. When we asked in estimates how much this would actually affect the GOA bottom line, they said: oh, it's really quite immaterial. But municipalities have said to us that it is quite material for them.

So this is just for kicks. It's just for fun to cause significant hardship to municipal borrowing costs, when it doesn't even really, you know, make us or save us that much money. And more to the point, the minister and the government cannot be trusted when they provide these assurances to folks, because they just go back on anything they say. "Oh, we'll keep indexing AISH. Oh, no. Sorry." "We'll keep indexing tax brackets. No, no, no. We're not going to do that." At some point people notice. People notice.

You know, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act also gives practical effect to a number of other budget pieces, and one of them I asked the minister about during estimates. He was gracious enough to go back and forth with me, unlike many of the ministers, who apparently do not have the courage of their convictions. It's very clear to me that this one does, and that's a good thing. He knows his files. But when I asked the minister about the management pay freeze in agencies, boards, and commissions, I asked him point blank: "This is being considered? We're going to lift the management pay freeze on ABCs?" The minister said, "Yes, it's under consideration." And we all nodded, and I said, "But it's actually happening, isn't it?" And he

said, “Yes, it’s under consideration.” He didn’t say that it had already happened and he signed the ministerial order in February to make it happen at AIMCo.

Now, this is the kind of thing – like, why wouldn’t you just level? Why wouldn’t you just be on the level and just say: yeah, we did it. It’s not a big deal. I do not know why this government will not level with people. Just say what you’re going to do, and then go defend it and do it. This is just another reason why people just feel like they’re getting the runaround, and there’s no doubt in my mind that this has shredded public trust. So that’s why the government isn’t getting the political credit that perhaps they expected off of a balanced budget, because people do not trust the government. It’s contained within this legislation, one of the biggest reasons why they don’t, and that is that they have not restored the indexation of our tax brackets to inflation; that is to say, that we are paying more. We are paying a tax on inflation.

You know, at some point it goes to competence. It goes to intent. And, quite frankly, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act or one of the associated acts that came in should have given effect to this utility commodity rebate, this piece of whatever it is that just dropped on us this afternoon.

For a budget that brings in a commitment to a natural gas rebate, we’ve now gone back and forth and back and forth on when it’ll actually come in and at what price level. This bill doesn’t provide that. The budget should have. It was obvious to anyone last summer what was happening with both electricity and natural gas futures. It’s why I went on a contract. I went, “Whoa,” and I hectored all of my colleagues to do same, because we also teach financial literacy on the Official Opposition side.

But the fact of the matter is that anyone noticing what was happening in the power markets in response to the heat waves that we were having last year – there were already geopolitical instabilities. We already knew that this was happening, and if anyone was paying attention, I would assume that the government is paying attention because they pay an army of forecasters in the banks, in the private sector, and so on, to be that warning system. They knew what was happening with electricity and natural gas prices because we all knew, yet it is very clear that when they brought in this budget, they slapdashed a paragraph in there because, oh, sometime in early January before the thing went to print, somebody went: oh, I talked to one Albertan, and they seemed slightly concerned about their bills. That’s why there is not a substantive reckoning with affordability within this legislation, because folks were just not listening. It’s very clear that through the month of January people were really worried about their own palace intrigue and the ongoing tick-tock of the *Days of Our Lives* subplots rather than focusing on making life more affordable for Albertans.

With that, I think I have provided my comments. I am concerned about this business of that cash-on-hand pool and those central resources, very concerned about it, because the fact of the matter is that the province can provide whatever assurances to ABCs that they want. Those promises are empty at this point. Perhaps in 2019 those promises would’ve been taken at face value, but we are in 2022 now, and so many promises have been shredded, so much public confidence has been abused that there’s no way that we can take, short of a written guarantee – even still, you know, folks voted for the indexation of AISH, and that was promptly pulled. There is very little that the government can now do to restore that confidence, but they could do one thing, which is amend – at this stage could still do it . . .

Mr. Eggen: Right now.

Ms Phillips: . . . right now. Stand up and amend the personal income tax section of this act to reindex the brackets. Could have a

nice, you know, response to folks who are worried about affordability. This is within the government’s purview. I fully appreciate that, you know, the price of bacon or tomatoes or pasta is not within their control. When people go to the grocery store, these are the things they notice. But their income tax: folks just filed. Could get a retroactive rebate. Would be pretty nice. Could actually do something to help people right now instead of misspelling Ralph Klein’s name when you bring in a natural gas rebate on the back of a napkin, this legislation, four weeks later, that may or may not apply and potentially charge below-market interest rates to postsecondaries as their reserves get raided, because that’s a real possibility out of this.

With that, I will conclude my comments.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I’m pleased to rise and respond to some of the assertions that the two prior speakers have made. I enjoyed the previous speaker, the Member for Lethbridge-West. Some of those comments: I found them entertaining. Always appreciate the vigour and passion that that member brings, but I have to correct a whole number of inaccuracies here this afternoon.

Firstly, the member noted that the question was raised around the pay freeze related to agencies, boards, and commissions in estimates, and I responded truthfully and honestly during that time that we were considering – and, legitimately, we were considering – our approach around lifting that pay freeze. What we did do is provided some exemptions to the pay freeze where the agency, board, or commission could clearly identify that due to market reasons they were having trouble retaining or attracting staff. But we did not lift the pay freeze. My answer at estimates was, in fact, genuine and accurate.

4:00

Madam Chair, I also just need to say again for the record that within Budget 2022 we have not raised personal income taxes. Personal income taxes are at the same rates that they were in 2021 and in 2020 and, in fact, in 2019. I will say this because I have said it publicly, and I’ll state it again. When we have more clarity, fiscal clarity, in this province – and let me say this, that we are gaining more fiscal clarity as the weeks go by – as we start to see the assumptions that we made in Budget 2022 actually come to pass in terms of economic assumptions, we will reconsider reindexing the personal tax exemption. I stand by that commitment today.

I want to also respond to the concern around moving to the consolidated liquidity solution, the CLS, mechanism to manage our cash. This is a mechanism that I believe will serve Albertans and agencies, boards, and commissions very well. It’s a mechanism that was spawned in part by a recommendation from the Auditor General in his 2016 report, where he recommended that we review our cash management methodology and mechanism and consider changing it if the results of that review would warrant it. Well, Madam Chair, that’s what we’re doing today. The consolidated liquidity solution mechanism will in fact reduce government’s borrowing. That is material. That matters. That reduces the exposure of the government’s balance sheet, the balance sheet of the people of Alberta. It will reduce debt-service costs, it will leave more money for program spending, and maybe most importantly, it will update a mechanism that’s in dire need of modernization. Yes, that’s included in Bill 2.

Madam Chair, I want to make a few high-level comments about the budget because Bill 2 is really the budget implementation bill. I want to make a few comments about this budget. This is a budget that turns the corner on fiscal responsibility. This is a budget that

reports on our great fiscal progress over the last three years, and this is a budget that continues to position the province's economy for disproportionate investment attraction, economic growth, which result in expanded fiscal capacity.

That is reflected in our projections around the corporate income tax rate. The members opposite stated that, in fact, we were disingenuous with our assertion that corporate income tax revenues are projected to increase over where they were when the NDP was governing. Madam Chair, that is a true assertion because when the NDP was governing, over those four years, on average they collected approximately \$4 billion in corporate income tax revenue. Over the next three years we're projecting to collect approximately \$4.4 billion. That's on average \$400 million more per year than the previous government collected. Again, I just want to correct the record. We have been transparent. We have been accurate in our communication around this budget.

Madam Chair, I want to get back to this budget because, again, this budget ultimately reports on expanded fiscal capacity, which is reflected in every revenue line in this budget, and this did not come about by accident. This was a result of intentional economic and tax policy implementation. We reduced the corporate income tax rate by one-third to ensure that Alberta had by far and away the most competitive business tax rate in the country, one of the most competitive rates in all of North America. Why? Because we know we don't compete for capital only in Canada. We compete for capital globally and certainly within the North American context. We've put a real focus on regulatory modernization. Again, that's reflected in this budget. It's reflected in the revenue lines in this budget. It's reflected in cost savings in this budget.

There were a number of initiatives that we've implemented, including the innovation employment grant recapitalizing the Alberta economic corporation, the AEC. This is reflected, Madam Chair, in the fact that we are enabling captive insurance in this province. It's reflected in a very recent announcement, in fact, in some legislation that we have before this House around enabling a regulatory sandbox for financial services, and there's more. This economic growth resulting in expanded fiscal capacity did not happen by accident. It was intentional. It's a result of implementing intentional policy.

Madam Chair, I need to also just make reference to the fiscal discipline and the fiscal progress that Budget 2022 reports on. We inherited – again, we inherited – a government spend that was increasing by 4 per cent per year, and on a per capita basis the government was spending \$10 billion more than comparator provinces. This budget reports on our success at flattening that curve and, in fact, aligning our per capita spend by '22-23 with that of other provinces. We've done that thoughtfully and carefully and surgically in a way where we can still deliver high-quality services to Albertans but in a way that puts this province on a sustainable fiscal trajectory, which is critical to the well-being of Albertans today and in the future.

Madam Chair, one of the benefits of fiscal discipline is that it gives government an opportunity for reinvestment, and this budget reflects additional investment in health care: \$1.8 billion over the next three years. To do what? To expand capacity, capacity that has been demonstrated over the last three years to be in deficit, to be deficient. Included in this budget is, in fact, additional investment in skills, talent, and jobs, \$600 million over the next three years, investing in Albertans to ensure they have the skills they need, they require to participate in the new economy of tomorrow.

Madam Chair, Bill 2 assists us in implementing this budget, a budget that really positions this province for disproportionate investment attraction, economic growth, and expanded fiscal capacity, a budget that brings fiscal responsibility back to the

province, a budget that ends an era of downloading debt onto future generations, a debt they did not incur, a budget that positions this province for opportunity and prosperity and a future.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate on Bill 2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 2 in committee. I found it interesting to hear the Finance minister, with his budget speech, essentially coming back here to defend different elements of Bill 2. I mean, don't get me wrong. Certainly, Bill 2 has some very ordinary and regular elements to it that you need to help to implement a budget. But in doing so, it also highlights some of the very worst aspects of this budget and, as we have said time and again, the insidious and pernicious tax grab that lies within both this budget and Bill 2, which helps to enable the implementation of this budget. I mean, that's a good starting point for our criticism of both this bill and this budget.

4:10

Madam Chair, I would suggest that, you know, we take a step back and just think for a time. How is it possible that a government continues to lose the confidence of the population here in the province of Alberta when you have \$100 oil and a balanced budget, even with a modest surplus? I would suggest that it's quite a more significant surplus, really. It's just kind of tucked away for a rainy day when this government decides to call an election. But there are elements in this bill that provide clues as to why this UCP government is failing to gain the confidence of the people of Alberta at the same time when they've had this good fortune drop from the sky, right? Let's not forget that, really, this budget is balanced on the incredibly good fortune of a dramatic increase in the price of energy, an historic increase to the price of energy due to international events and demand around the world for both oil and gas.

You know, this whole nonsense about fiscal discipline and clever choices that this government made around this budget has absolutely nothing to do with the position that this budget is in now, which is a balanced or surplus position. In fact, where you can clearly see deficit: you don't have to look any further than this choice not to index tax brackets and to essentially tax inflation with this budget. The minister did mention that he would, upon reflection, think about changing the situation. I mean, obviously, it's there in the front window – or it wasn't in the front window. He was trying to hide it. Now everybody can see it, and it's having a serious effect of lack of confidence of our population towards this government and their ability to manage financial matters or any other things that they are responsible for in regard to health care, education, and the safety and the security of our population.

I was listening to the radio this morning, Madam Chair, on the way over here for the morning session. I confess that I sometimes do listen to radio stations that are firmly planted in the world of Def Leppard and April Wine, you know, long ago and far away. But it makes you feel good. It makes you feel young – right? – in a nostalgic sort of way. Lord knows that radio station I listen to from time to time, if it has a political bent to it, is decidedly conservative. You listen to Def Leppard and April Wine and Bachman-Turner Overdrive, and there's sort of a direct line you can follow to at least personally conservative thoughts. Again, it's a radio station that just plays music usually.

But, oh, no; from the time it took me to drive here, which only takes about 10 minutes because I live close by, they had a long rant about the UCP government. I couldn't believe it. They're saying:

you just can't trust what they have to say. I think his starting point – and I think it's a starting point of a lot of these kinds of conversations in between Def Leppard and April Wine – was talking about their car insurance, which has gone up upwards of 30 per cent for individuals across the province.

It's not like it's an option to have car insurance. It's the law. It's a law that's created here in this very Chamber to ensure that people have insurance. Thus, being a law that is required through this government, through this level of government, it should and must be made affordable, because it's not like you have a choice, right? You look at the design of Edmonton or Calgary or vast rural areas of this province. I mean, it's the size of western Europe. We need vehicles. You need to have an affordable way by which to keep that vehicle on the road. This government whipped that carpet right out from underneath everybody who has to have insurance, which is everybody who's driving legally in this province, and, for many people, simply made it unaffordable. I mean, that's something that people are talking about around the table.

You know, to suggest that it was a courageous thing to do – I heard the minister say that more than once. I was like: oh, my goodness; don't use that. I'm not going to give you free tips. But, Madam Chair, I think I'll give the minister: stop saying that it was a courageous thing to do, to increase people's car insurance by 30 per cent, because it has exactly the opposite effect of what people would think if the minister was being courageous. I would say otherwise. Just opening the barn door and letting everything run out – right? – that's kind of what it really amounts to. That adds up to a fiscal deficit for the vast majority of people who have to buy some form of car insurance here in the province of Alberta.

Again, other fiscal deficits on a personal level: they just keep adding up, Madam Chair. The increases to postsecondary tuition, say, for example, were absolutely unprecedented here in the province of Alberta, 21 to 23 per cent across the board, including extraordinary tuition increases that were approved by this government, by the Advanced Education minister, ranging from 20, 40, even up to 103 per cent increases for certain programs, right? That adds up not just as a deficit to families paying for tuition for their family members to go to school; it adds up to a hundred-foot brick wall around those institutions for people who simply can't raise that kind of money. Lots and lots of people just can't go because this UCP government chose to raise postsecondary education to unprecedented levels here in the province of Alberta.

I know what the argument is. It's the same argument that this Minister of Finance and the Premier uses, "Oh, we're just bringing it up to the national average; we had more or less, and now we're more like the rest of Canada," or something like that. You know, there are just so many ways, Madam Chair, by which you can play games with those kinds of numbers, right? I know for a fact that we have the very lowest student grant allowance for postsecondary, for example. That totally negates any idea that we pay less money for tuition here in the province of Alberta, which we don't.

I mean, this government has been, you know, dragging the same statistic around now for more than three years, right? We've got to remind this UCP government that you did not take power yesterday; it's been three years. Don't you feel a little older? I do. The numbers that you're using from 2018 or whatever are not accurate for today, so stop doing that. It's really not good fiscal management. That's a free tip. That's my second free tip of the afternoon.

Another issue is that when you're talking about, like, the public service – you know, there was some issue about lack of clarity of unfreezing the wages of the public service and so forth. I mean, be careful which rabbit hole you go down. While you may have done that or kept it frozen or whatever you did, you sure as heck did not do that, Madam Chair, with AIMCo's salary raises. They were very

healthy indeed. Sitting on the heritage savings committee, I can see that they managed to slip through extraordinary wage increases for members of AIMCo, right? That was done quite happily by this government while other sectors had to just fight tooth and nail for pennies on the dollar, to try to fight for a fair wage. You've got to be careful where you go with these things. Quite frankly, people can see through it. It's as simple as that.

In regard to energy, again, you know, we would expect that the province of Alberta and a Conservative government in the province of Alberta would at least have the energy file somewhat sorted out. But, oh, no, right? What we learned today, for example, from the news is that, number one, we have a 6.7 per cent inflation rate here in the province of Alberta this month. It's the highest rate in 31 years. A lot of what is contributing to that is a wild increase in energy prices, of energy costs for families, from electricity to gasoline prices and natural gas prices to heat your home, because we still have our furnaces on because it's flipping snowing here in April on the 20th.

We learned today from a very credible study from the University of Calgary that the electricity profits went up by a factor of five here in the province of Alberta, a five-times increase in profits since this UCP government took power and removed rate caps. I know that you need to have, you know, some measure of profit to ensure the integrity of our electricity system.

4:20

I know that the last time we had a Conservative government here it lasted 40-some years. Good grief. They invested an awful lot of money in the electricity grid system. I mean, we fought tooth and nail when we were a mighty caucus of four, suggesting that making those wild investments in super high tension wires and DC lines – a lot of it, we suspected, was for them to export electricity to the United States, which I'm pretty sure was true, right? It caused a social rebellion in central Alberta. That was the birthplace of lots and lots of Wildrose activity, because they were trying to run these big DC lines through places like Sundre and Rocky Mountain House and so forth. You know, we made a big stink about it, too, so this whole notion – I don't know why the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity, or gassy behaviour of some kind, seems to love to pretend that it was the NDP that did that; of course, it was the Conservatives. They built these high-tension lines. You see them. Look up when you're driving on highway 2. Those are the ones they built. The Conservatives built them, probably to excess, but that's where we're at now.

Where we are still at now as well is having a responsibility to provide affordable electricity for domestic consumption and for industrial consumption, too. This UCP government, Madam Chair – you know it as well as I do – is not fulfilling that responsibility at all, right? A five-times profit increase for electricity companies: they're making out like bandits, for sure. We know they are. The numbers are clear. I read the report from the University of Calgary this morning, and lots of other people are reading that same report, too.

The price of gasoline: again, we saw the provincial government pull back on the provincial tax on a litre of gasoline. But, Madam Chair, I need a reminder, if someone can tell me, just randomly: how long is that good for? Is that forever? Are they just going to not put the provincial tax back on? They have to at some point. I mean, that's a pretty big revenue stream for running the province. You can't just pull back on tax revenues forever. It's like you're living on borrowed time, right? You can do it for a little while, but you can't do it forever because you have to pay for health care and education and health and security and roads and all of the things that the government and the province are responsible for.

This whole notion of, you know, pulling back on those revenues: we saw the same thing with the corporate tax giveaway, the \$4.7 billion tax giveaway to profitable corporations. They said that this was going to be a trickle-down way by which we will build our economy. I mean, yeah, they laughed all the way to the bank, and – guess what, Madam Chair – those banks were located in the United States and in Europe and in small islands in the Caribbean. People took it as a chance to pay a dividend to their shareholders, and they said, “Thanks very much,” and away they went, right? I heard the Energy minister say some version of that very well: yes, of course, they had to pay a dividend because they weren’t making money for quite a long time when the price was only \$27 a barrel for the energy companies, say, for example. We gave them a \$4.7 billion shot in the arm, and yeah, they paid dividends. You bet they did. That money, by and large, just left town, left the province, and probably left the country, too. I mean, that’s the way these things work.

Yeah. I mean, you know, Bill 2 is just what it is. It has little different nooks and crannies, different elements that you need to do to implement the budget. Some of those things are fairly innocuous and so forth, but it shines a spotlight, once again, Madam Chair, on just: is this budget the best for what we need for right now for Albertans? Does it help Albertans to get ahead? Does it help to diversify our economy? Does it provide for a healthier Alberta, a better educated Alberta, and so forth? I would suggest that “no” is the answer to each of those challenges. What is the most important document that a government produces? An annual budget.

Again, it begs the question: how is it that through the miracle of energy prices going up so dramatically, \$100 a barrel oil, a balanced budget, a modest surplus, that with all of those things this UCP government still has not won the trust of the people of Alberta? I think that the government needs to reflect on that and reflect on it hard and start working on not just helping Albertans but building the trust that Albertans want and need for their government, right? I would suggest, of course, that the best way to do that is to change the government, but we’ll wait and work hard to earn that trust from the people of this province.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak to Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I’ve appreciated the conversation that we’ve had so far this afternoon. You know, for members on this side of the House as well, I appreciate the Finance minister rising to share his thoughts on what he called the budget implementation bill, kind of the act that will ensure that their budget is passed and everything that they’ve put forward in terms of ideas will be included in that.

Again, I appreciate that, and I took some notes on some of the Finance minister’s comments. As the previous member highlighted as well, it was interesting to hear some of those thoughts specifically around this idea that we’ve heard quite often at this point around the billion dollars that this UCP government is proposing get taken away from Alberta families in regard to the deindexing of personal income taxes. I find this issue incredibly frustrating in terms of the negative impacts that it’s going to have on Alberta families, particularly because of the history of this Premier around this specific issue. We’ve heard in the House before regarding that member’s work during his time with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and as an MP and time and time again railing about this idea of bracket creep, but the tables have turned now that this member is the Premier of Alberta.

Again, when the Finance minister makes comments like, you know, depending on the fiscal situation into the future, if we have, quote, unquote, additional fiscal clarity, the Finance minister might consider reindexing personal income taxes – and before that, the minister made a comment along the lines of, “Well, it’s not affecting people this year.” Okay. Well, looking into the future, we’re going to see a billion dollars, one way or another, taken away from Alberta families. Again, it was interesting the way that the Finance minister worded that because it almost made it sound like on one hand, “Oh, this isn’t happening,” and then in the next sentence more along the lines of, “Well, it is happening, but maybe based on the price of oil into the future we’ll be able to reconsider this.”

First of all, I think it’s important that there’s clarity in the discussions that are being put forward by the Finance minister. I think it’s very clear from the budget and from those comments that there is indeed a billion dollars’ worth of deindexing that’s going to affect the bottom line for Alberta families. It will possibly get worse as inflation potentially continues to grow. I think that’s important for Alberta families to understand.

There have been some decisions that this government has made based on their budgeting and their policies, and we heard from the previous member, the Member for Edmonton-North West, regarding the \$4.7 billion giveaway to the most profitable corporations in terms of the corporate tax cuts that this government not only put forward in the beginning but decided to fast-forward compared, I believe, to even what was in their platform. What we see again and again from this government is a decision to lower taxes for the most profitable corporations, which we continue to see are using those dollars from Alberta families to purchase stock buybacks, to use those funds to move their operations to other jurisdictions.

4:30

There are a variety of reasons for that, obviously, Madam Chair. Some of those reasons, as we’ve also heard, are reflected in the priorities of this government, specifically when we look at the idea that this government has continued to pull hundreds of millions of dollars out of the postsecondary institutions and at the same time increasing tuition for Alberta families. We heard it from the previous member regarding some of those increases in tuition, 21 to 23 per cent across the board regarding increases in tuition.

In some instances we see programs doubling, which is astounding, Madam Chair. I think that no matter what the original cost was or what the program of study was, to actually see a minister willing to fully support postsecondary institutions coming forward with doubling of tuition costs – of course, these institutions are having to do this because so much money has been scaled back from this minister and from this UCP government. It’s putting these institutions in a really hard place and, by extension, putting Albertans who are trying to access postsecondary studies in a tough place as well.

Further to that, Madam Chair, it’s putting corporations that are actually very interested and very invested in seeing the success of students and the success of our postsecondary institutions in a tough situation as well. Again, when we talk about retention and a skilled labour force, I think the ability of Albertans to obtain postsecondary studies in these emerging markets and technologies is a big part of that picture. I think that we’ve seen time and time again that it might even be a bigger part of the picture than the idea that this UCP government has put forward in regard to the massive tax giveaways that they’ve moved forward with.

It’s frustrating, in my opinion, that we continue down this path, especially at the same time that we are giving away this \$4.7 billion to these most profitable corporations, that, on the other hand, we

have the Finance minister saying: well, depending on how the books look, you know, next year or several years down the line we might reconsider the personal income tax bracket creep that we've included in this budget, that is going to take a billion dollars away from Alberta families at the same time as we're giving much more away to those profitable corporations.

I'll be interested to follow that conversation as we move forward. You know, as far as I might understand, the price of oil is going to be the differentiating factor on that. If it continues to stay above \$100, then maybe Albertans will be lucky enough to receive their billions if not more dollars back into their pockets that this government is choosing to take away from them. I am concerned that if we see that number regarding the price of oil going down, this government actually might go farther and increase the amount that they are taking away from Albertans regarding that bracket creep and regarding the deindexing of personal income taxes.

We've heard discussions around the decisions of this government in this budget to provide very little substance in regard to utility benefits to Albertans and the increasing price of utilities as well as their gas bills. It's unfortunate because we saw even as recently as this week the NDP opposition raising the issue that, I believe, EPCOR had put forward that there are as many as 1,000 Albertans who are going to have their utilities cut off in the near future, if that hasn't happened already, with the government ending the moratorium on utility cut-offs. Unfortunately, we received no answers regarding that issue, so it seems very likely that within a short period of time thousands of Albertans are going to have their utilities cut off.

Again, this is in the middle of a continued pandemic, where Albertans are increasingly struggling to find work. This is in the midst of record levels of inflation, where this UCP government is not only taking more dollars out of their pockets through bracket creep but also letting insurance companies take more money out of their pockets simply for the fact of increasing those companies' profits.

We saw that from the report from the superintendent of insurance. Unfortunately, this government tried to hide this report as long as they could, a report that had been posted for over 100 years straight, I believe 107 years, Madam Chair, and this UCP government decided to finally release it the day before a long weekend to ensure that as few Albertans as possible would be able to see that, but I can tell you that whether Albertans read that report or not, it has been very clear from the massive increases that many Albertans have seen, in some instances upwards of 30 per cent, that whatever lobbying this UCP government is doing and apparently the Premier has been doing, as the Premier stated in question period – whatever lobbying the Premier is doing to lower those fees is clearly not working.

Even with the decisions of this government to reduce the payout benefits for Albertans who have been injured in collisions, in some cases concussions that are life altering, the decision to change the minor injury regulations around payouts and the ability of Albertans to be fairly represented and compensated, even the allowance of this minister to see such big changes in that, Albertans are paying more but getting less, and this at the same time, again, continuing through the pandemic, where they are, in many cases, driving less. This isn't, for the most part, because payouts are increasing, that Albertans are seeing higher benefits from their insurance coverage. This is simply, as the documents quite clearly lay out, that Alberta insurance companies, or insurance companies that operate in Alberta, are clearly seeing higher and higher profits while so many Albertans are struggling.

That continues to be my concern, looking through not only the budget but the priorities of this government and the willingness for the UCP to allow such massive and drastic increases to the cost of Albertans. Again, we have to look at the big picture, Madam Chair.

You know, these sorts of issues might not be specifically within this budget, but they are decisions that have impacted the bottom lines of Albertans, just like this budget has. We saw it very early, and it was an issue that I campaigned on and heard from many Albertans that they were very concerned about. One of those issues was the reduction of overtime opportunities for Alberta workers. Especially this issue affects those working less traditional hours. It affects those people potentially in the oil sands and in factories. Again, we've seen the clawback of this overtime wage for so many Albertans.

Madam Chair, I can't fail to also mention the decision of this government to reduce the minimum wage for students that are under 18 years old. Now, again, I go back to my own history and the story of my mother, who was 14 years old and raised me from that age as a single mother, and I simply can't take at face value the idea that this government has put forward that it's actually a good idea to lower minimum wage for Alberta students under the age of 18. Again, thinking back to that story, as hard as my mother worked to ensure that she was able to continue working and go to school and support our family, this government is saying, "Well, you're going to make \$2 less unless you actually drop out of school." That is clearly how the legislation has been put forward, and I truly don't understand how we think this as a government and as a society is okay.

I will digress from that because, again, it's not specifically within Bill 2, but I think it continues this idea of piling on the costs and also the scaling back of income for Alberta families who are hurting so much through this pandemic.

4:40

Now, again, there are a number of issues that are affecting Alberta families, and I've had the opportunity to touch on a few of them, ones that are directly impacted by this budget, but I think it's also important to highlight some of the other changes that I've had the opportunity to talk about in previous readings of this legislation, a few of those issues concerning AISH benefits for Albertans with disabilities or who find themselves unable to work, also affecting the Alberta Works program.

I go back to the idea that the Finance minister raised regarding bracket creep and the deindexing of personal income taxes that this government has decided to move forward with. It almost seemed nonchalant, Madam Chair. I won't, you know, put any words or feelings in the member's mouth by any means, as best as I can, but it kind of seemed like maybe he hadn't necessarily had this conversation with his caucus, that as soon as possible we are going to move away from deindexing personal income taxes. But it does also remind me of the decisions that this government has made around deindexing AISH benefits and seniors' benefits even at the same time that this government actually campaigned on ensuring that that stayed in place.

With that, Madam Chair, I have many concerns with this legislation specific to the trust that this government expects Albertans to put in them, but I do not personally believe that they have earned that trust and especially not through this budget. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'll keep my comments fairly brief regarding Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. You know, I appreciate that the minister has been engaged in debate this afternoon around this bill. But, for me, the part that I think frustrates Albertans and those of us in the Official Opposition is that the current Premier and leader of the

UCP in the not-so-distant past spoke out vehemently against bracket creep, and there's lots of documentation of him attacking the government of the day federally on when they went to enact bracket creep. Yet here we have a bill that essentially enshrines this, yet we have a government that is dancing around the fact that the Premier, in his former role, attacked this concept and called it insidious. I know that my colleagues have quoted the Premier in his former role.

What this government is doing is taking a billion dollars of additional income out of the pockets of hard-working Albertans, the exact opposite of what they claim to do. I mean, this government has actually made the cost of living in this province more expensive for Albertans under their watch: increasing park fees, insurance rates going up, energy rates going up, reducing the Alberta child and family benefit, because it's not indexed to inflation. You know, in this Budget 2022 AISH recipients are going to lose \$3,000 in real purchasing power. Seniors are losing \$750.

You know, Madam Chair, at a time when inflation, as my colleague pointed out – in fact, when some of these notes were written on March 22, StatsCan measured inflation at a 30-year high of 5.7 per cent. I believe it was today or yesterday that that has gone up a full percentage to 6.7 per cent inflation in the month of March. And what we have are these, quite frankly, pathetic offerings from the government to help Albertans mitigate the rising costs. Of course, wages are not rising in tandem with inflation. Costs are going up all around us. Albertans are struggling to make ends meet. We know that many Albertans are a few hundred dollars away from being unable to pay their mortgage or their rents, and we have very little in the way of support from this government. Instead of leaving dollars in the pockets of hard-working Albertans, this government is picking their pockets through this inflation tax.

Madam Chair, it's disappointing that the government has the tools at their disposal to do much more. You know, I do want to highlight the fact that although this government continues to pat itself on the back, it basically hit the lottery. With the price of oil, western Canadian select, today hovering around \$90 a barrel, we know that the government is going to be rolling in a surplus. They already are but will conveniently choose the time of when to announce the surplus instead of providing Albertans with real relief today.

This government has made choices, and some really bad choices, over the past three years. You know, the race to the bottom on the corporate tax giveaway has given hundreds of millions of dollars back to companies who have said: "Thank you very much. We will go invest it in other jurisdictions, either in Canada or we'll take that money and go invest it in other countries." It has not resulted in job creation. We have a government that pats itself on the back for companies that have moved to Alberta because of the previous government's efforts in working with entities like Calgary Economic Development to attract companies. In conversations that I've had with these companies, including Amazon's AWS, when I asked them point blank, "Why did you come to Alberta?" not once ever have the companies that I've spoken with mentioned the corporate tax rate. They talk about access to talent, and they talk about quality of life.

Unfortunately, this government has shown its true colours and is attacking both of those things. We know that under the previous government four years ago we announced 3,000 new tech spaces. This UCP government, upon forming government, eliminated that program. Had they kept that program, we would have grads already being produced from our world-class postsecondaries. Instead, they cancelled that because of pettiness and recently said: okay; now we're going to fund 7,000 spaces. Well, that's great. When are we

going to see the first grads of those investments? Not for a long time, Madam Chair.

Meanwhile, when Amazon did a world bid for their HQ2, their second headquarters, Calgary put in a bid – I mean, a couple of other Canadian cities did, too – and we, our government, supported that bid. Calgary didn't make the final short list, and the reason that Amazon gave – because their headquarters were going to be hiring 50,000 people, scaling up over a 10-year period, they said: "Your talent pipeline simply isn't big enough. You don't have enough grads to be able to support the investment that we're looking at making." That's when our government acted very quickly to look at supporting our postsecondaries, but we've seen time and again actions of this current government gutting hundreds of millions of dollars from our postsecondary institutions and risking future potential investments that rely on a strong postsecondary system.

You know, Madam Chair, I will not be supporting this bill. It lacks meaningful action that would have real relief for Alberta families who are struggling to make ends meet right now. As opposed to providing real solutions, we have a hodgepodge of Band-Aid solutions by this government, scrambling, as we've seen today, with the announcement of a natural gas rebate that was written on the back of a napkin because it has zero details and will provide zero relief until maybe the fall – maybe – for some families.

4:50

An Hon. Member: Maybe.

Mr. Bilous: Maybe. That's not what families are looking for.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

Again, at a time when the government is bringing in unprecedented energy revenues, what we're calling for is for the government to pass some of those dollars on to Albertans, to put them back into the pockets of Albertans so that we can make their life more affordable. But this government is not, and for that reason I'll be opposing this bill.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? Seeing none, I shall call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Acting Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Any opposed? This is carried.

Bill 9 Public's Right to Know Act

The Acting Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. When this piece of legislation was introduced, it was certainly an opportunity to address many concerns that Albertans are facing when it comes to key issues within the justice system. Unfortunately, this piece of legislation does little to address the actual priorities of Albertans. We have a piece of legislation that does something that I believe the minister already has capacity to do, which is to complete reports on data. Yet that's all this

legislation really does. It gives him permission to do something that already can be done.

There are some significant concerns, when it comes to this bill, about what information will be collected, what information will be reported on. It's quite concerning when we've seen some of the behaviours of the ministers from this government when it comes to confidential, private information. We've seen this minister, when he was under the Ministry of Health, collect personal phone numbers from physicians and then call them. He felt that he was entitled to that information and used it in what I would suggest is a very inappropriate manner. So I question: what type of information is going to be collected, and what information is going to be reported?

It's very, very vague when it comes to talking about who is going to be impacted by this. I know that it talks about individuals on bail or parole, but what crimes are we talking about? Is there potential for any sort of conviction to be part of this report that the minister is providing to Albertans?

I think that when it comes to the safety of Albertans, we, this side of the House, believe that that is absolutely essential. We need to make sure that Albertans feel supported and safe in their communities, in their homes, on their commutes to and from their homes. However, this piece of legislation doesn't actually do that.

There are significant concerns when a government has made cuts to the victims of crime fund. That's a fund that was essential in supporting victims of crime. It was essential in making sure that those who have been proven through the court system to be a victim of crime receive supports and resources that are necessary to address things such as, you know, mental health and stability and counselling, those types of things, but this government chose to cut that.

When we're talking about Albertans' safety, I think the bigger picture is: what do we do to actually prevent crime? What do we do to make sure that people that are experiencing crime, when it is reported, have a police officer attend? Municipalities have had their funding cut for police. We have talk about a provincial police program, which I've heard over and over is something that Albertans do not want. We have concerns that are happening that when the matter does get to court, trials are being delayed. Unfortunately, Madam Chair, some of these trials, because of the extensive delays, are being thrown out. How does that support Albertans? How does that reduce crime? None of this legislation actually addresses what the major concerns are.

We have heard from racialized individuals in the province, and there was a report completed that provided some recommendations from the Anti-Racism Advisory Council on ways that data could be collected. Unfortunately, this bill, Bill 9, does not provide any tools that would support the recommendations that were brought forward. I think that if this government was true in their intent to support Albertans, to be transparent, to collect data in a manner that's actually useful, those recommendations would have been an easy win. That work has been done. They provided recommendations. They did consultations. They easily could have implemented that and put this into this legislation. However, it wasn't done.

I think, having come from a background in social work and having worked with both offenders and victims, there is an incredible grey area between the time that someone is accused of a crime and when someone is charged with a crime and when that matter actually goes to court. Then there's a verdict, a decision on that crime, and then the sentencing. What's the outcome of that? There are so many phases in between where it's determined that perhaps that individual wasn't guilty, that perhaps there wasn't enough data, that perhaps the person completed significant rehabilitative courses and requirements such as counselling while serving their time. That could change the need to

report. I wonder: who is making those decisions on who is being reported and at what point?

If someone is out on bail, they haven't been found guilty. They've been charged, but they're not actually guilty of a crime. There is a process in the province, in this country for what happens to an individual and what their rights are while they've been charged, out on bail, and have a trial. There's also something in this province and in this country called an appeal. So there could be a decision that's made, someone is found guilty, and they have the right to an appeal. It's not a new concept that people actually have been charged, found guilty, and are not.

5:00

I'm curious what the process is for gathering information, what information is going to be published. We have a system in the province of reporting violent offenders, high-risk reoffenders. When those individuals are determined by a panel of experts – not a minister; a panel of experts who have extensive knowledge of this individual's history, their crimes, their behaviour while incarcerated, their behaviour while in community – they are deemed a risk. A report is then distributed to the community, alerting them that this individual is a high-risk offender, and that information is made public for the safety of the community. Now, I know that that is an extensive process when it comes to making the decision to put this person's information out there. I don't see anything in this legislation that would indicate that such a robust process is going to occur. That to me is quite scary, Madam Chair. When we're talking about completing reports on individuals who are suspected or charged with a crime, that is a significantly grey area.

I know that when I was looking at buying a house, one of the things that the realtor had pointed my attention to was the city of Edmonton's crime map. I could click any community, and immediately all of the data would come up. It told me how many sexual offences, how many car break-ins, how many break and enters into homes. There were attempted murders. There was arson. Like, there was a complete list of data about that community. It didn't identify who did it, but it provided me as someone who wanted to move into that community a plethora of information about what was going on in real time in that community.

As a homebuyer I didn't need to know the name of the individual that did it. I didn't need to know the address of the individual that did it. I looked at the safety statistics that the city of Edmonton police had determined and put in that data. It was something that I trusted. I didn't need to know if they were out on bail, if they were out on parole. Those were things that weren't important.

I question what kind of information this ministry is going to be gathering and then who gets it. Are they going to be giving it to realtors when a realtor is showing homes in a community? They're doing a new build, so anybody who comes through that community can say, you know: "How many offenders live in this area? How many people are actually out on bail? Where do they live? Are they my neighbour?"

There's an idea and an understanding that there are people in the province that take on a belief and a value of being a vigilante. We have incredible access to information simply by just going on Facebook. There are groups all over the place that talk about, you know, "So-and-so did this, and so-and-so did that, and my neighbour has garbage piled up in their house, and I need to report it to bylaw," things that individuals believe are a crime that should be handled. If it's not being handled in the way that they believe, they want to report it and they want someone in the community to do something about it. There is an attempt to perhaps sway the police to maybe respond in the way that they hope.

Can you imagine what would occur if we're responsible as a minister relaying those reports? What if an individual is out on bail

and we see their bail conditions and that's my neighbour and I don't think that they're complying with their bail conditions? They might have a bail condition that says no cellphones. It's a common condition of bail. That person is out on their phone, I call the police to report it, and nobody responds. What do I do? Do I put it in this chat and say, "Hey, so-and-so at this address has a bail condition"? No mention of what the crime is, just that they're out on bail and that they're a risk.

People overreact. People take this information and feel that, you know, because people aren't doing anything about it, perhaps they should. We've seen in Edmonton people that are accused of being sex offenders, where people will petition and line up. Truckloads of vehicles will go up and down their street with megaphones, with signs saying: a sex offender lives in this house; we don't want them in our community.

Why would they think that the information that is provided in this legislation is going to protect the community? When we look at someone out on bail, when we look at someone who's got significant charges, there absolutely is a right for the community to know about their safety, one hundred per cent. Those systems are already in place. I have a friend who works with the police who is responsible for monitoring high-risk offenders, whose job it is to make their lives difficult. They show up when they're getting gas. They show up when they're getting groceries just to say: hey, I'm watching you. The police are monitoring these people that are deemed to be high risk to the community.

There isn't a report on it. The police are doing their job. I trust that when we have these police officers that are highly trained, highly skilled, and equipped to deal with criminals and criminal behaviour, they can do their job. I don't think that a minister should be deciding from the start of bail that the public needs to know about this. There are absolutely no criteria in here about the type of information that's going to be gathered, how long it's going to be stored, where it's going to be stored, for how long.

If this person is on bail and a report goes out and says that this person is accused of these crimes, these are their conditions – I know of many times that when there are continuous bail hearings and perhaps continuous breaches of those bail hearings, their bail conditions change. They could change monthly. Is a new report going to be issued every time those bail conditions change? And then what if this individual goes to court, has their day in court, and they're found not guilty? Is a new report going to be released identifying to the public that the person that we did a report on two years ago has now been found not guilty, and is it going to explain why that person was found not guilty?

There are just so many areas of concern when it comes to the reporting and the disclosure when it comes to this piece of legislation. There are some significant things that this government could do to actually help reduce crime. I think that when we look at the legislation, at the public's right to know, I'm not sure that there are any stats that show a correlation between crime reduction and information. There's no information in here that talks to – who did they talk to to gather this, to come up with this idea that this is the best way to tackle crime? What's the intention of this piece of legislation, and does the intention actually lead to the results that they're looking for? I don't see that in this legislation.

There's nothing in here that talks about hiring more prosecutors. When you're a Crown prosecutor and you have a stack on your desk, how realistic is it that you're going to have an actual ability to go through in a timely manner all of the charges and all of the individuals that deserve their day in court? Those are some key things that need to happen in order to ensure that crime is reduced in the province and that Albertans are actually safe in their communities, and I don't see

that in this bill. It's glaringly obvious that it's not there. There need to be concrete steps from this government to address crime.

5:10

None of the constituents that I've talked to have said that they sure wish the minister would report who's out on bail and what their charges are. That does nothing to speed up the process, to have an individual have their matter heard in court. That does nothing to support those that have been victims of crime. What we have seen in actions are cuts to those services, a lack of support and resources where it really matters, a threat to create a provincial police system. These are actions that don't match what they say their intended outcome is, Madam Chair. I look at this, and I question: what is the intent, and who are they listening to? It's not Albertans.

Albertans are asking for tangible action to support them in what they need. They need the ability to feel safe. They need the ability to make sure that when there is a crime, they have a police officer respond. They need to make sure that if they're a victim of that crime, they have supports and resources in place to help deal with the trauma of what happened. They need to make sure that once their matter gets to court, there's a prosecutor that has the time and ability to really sit through and make sure that whatever the charges are, they're actually dealt with so that an appeal doesn't happen if this individual is guilty. Those are some of the things that cause people to be found not guilty because of human error. Human error happens when you have way too many files.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Before I get started on my own comments, I just want to make it absolutely and abundantly clear, because I heard comments coming from the other side, that the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs was speaking specifically about error in the justice system and not about defending sex offenders. I want to make that absolutely, one hundred per cent clear. I heard comments coming from the other side, and I just want to make sure that... [interjection] No. It's offensive. It's incredibly offensive, the comments that I heard, okay? I just want to get it on the record, Madam Chair.

The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs made incredibly good insights into this particular bill. Of course, this is an incredibly vague bill. Really, all of the things that are described in this bill: the actual minister already has the power to actually do them. It's basically like a job description, essentially, because the minister can already do these things. Why do we need a piece of legislation before us that basically gives us the minister's job, something that's within the purview of the minister already, when so many more important things could be addressed by this government when it comes to correcting the justice system?

One of the things that I'm very passionate about and very dedicated to when it comes to the justice system is how colonization has impacted specifically Indigenous people here in the province of Alberta and throughout Canada and how they're overrepresented in the prison system. Now, I've been on record before on this particular matter. What I find incredibly outstanding and quite concerning is that even though Indigenous people make up approximately 7 per cent of the Canadian population, we have 23 per cent of Indigenous men in prisons and then not only that; 27 per cent of Indigenous women in prisons. We have to ask ourselves: okay; why is this the case? What is the root of this in the first place?

I would suggest that what really needs to be looked into is how Indigenous people and their behaviour are sometimes criminalized.

It has to do with racism. It has to do with how they're being treated within the judicial system, how they have a lack of supports when it comes to fair representation within the judicial system, and these are things that this government could be concerned about. They like to talk a big talk about dealing with the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Madam Chair, but we don't see much action from this government. I'm really sorry. Like, to the minister of Indigenous affairs: planting a tree and making a little garden on the grounds of the Legislature, which is something nice, is symbolic, but it doesn't go to the root problems that we are facing in the province of Alberta. It doesn't do enough. Just like this bill doesn't do enough, the minister of Indigenous affairs, when it comes to reconciliation and the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is not doing enough. We see that over and over and over by this government, where they just – it's a lack of action.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

Now, I think that so much could be done when it comes to making sure that Indigenous people get fair representation within the judicial system. You know, I have a friend who was commenting to me about this thing called justice circles within the judicial system. It's something relatively new that exists. They came up with it probably – you know, it's been in process for about five years, but a lot of people don't know that these justice circles actually exist. The Edmonton Police Service decided to pilot this particular project. It's been ongoing now for a few years, and I think it's the best invention and a way of reconciling two cultures and two peoples and actually to address the criminalization of Indigenous behaviour, as has been seen historically here in the province of Alberta and throughout Canada. This is, like, a real approach, a real alternative, to making sure that Indigenous people are treated fairly within the judicial system.

Now, within these justice circles you have elders from community, people who know the justice system very well, who are invited to – the individual who has committed a crime is actually invited to sit down with law enforcement, with people from their community, the actual person they actually committed the crime against, with elders, and they discuss what were the ramifications of that person's wrong decision and how it impacted the community, how it impacted the individual specifically. This is a real alternative to getting us moving forward as a province, and it is a real alternative for actually implementing the calls to justice of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for making sure that Indigenous people are treated fairly.

When it comes to pieces of legislation coming out of the Ministry of Justice, I'm going to continue speaking about this because it's something that I think that we should investigate further, something – again, I stated that the Edmonton Police Service actually put these justice circles in, implemented them, pilot projected them. It's a real alternative out there rather than the traditional sentencing form that actually happens now within the Alberta judicial system and is actually providing real, substantive change in the community.

5:20

I can't remember the exact numbers off the top of my head because I don't have the report in front of me, but the actual incidents, the number of people who actually end up recommitting a crime after going through the justice circle alternative sentencing program is very, very, very low. I hope that I can bring this up in debate in future, and I will bring more information about these justice circles into the House and table the information because I honestly think that every member of this House, if they are truly dedicated to wanting to make sure that Indigenous people are fairly treated within our judicial system, will want this to be implemented

on a grander scale throughout the province of Alberta, and I hope that it's something that, over the years to come, will be an alternative that is done throughout the entire country.

When speaking during second reading on this particular bill, I spoke significantly about the fact that the victims of crime fund was actually raided by the UCP, and we thought: okay; well, maybe there will be an alternative type of funding for victims of crime. That's what we were expecting to see from this government when they brought legislation forward on this particular topic, but here we see that this vague bill, which allows the minister to actually already do the things that he's doing, doesn't address committing any more funding to victims of crime and helping them out in any way. I think that that's something that members opposite should be asking themselves. Like, bring a real piece of legislation before us that is actually addressing the issues.

Now, there are a number of nonprofit organizations that actually help victims of crime, and they were at the forefront of actually calling this government on the fact that they were cutting the victims of crime fund. They advocated specifically to this government, and again I'll make the argument that so many times when we see the pieces of legislation brought forward by this particular government, we see that they only listen to the people that actually share their ideological perspective. And then what happens to the rest of Albertans? They like to say that they're listening to Albertans. They like to say that they're listening to Albertans, but in sad fact, Madam Chair, what we see is that they listen to people that share their ideology.

You know, as legislators in this House you would think that we would make decisions based on research, on data, and so often we hear from members on the other side of the House anecdotal information. You've heard the saying before – and it's one that I like to repeat – that the plural of anecdote is not data. I can understand that you may have this one experience or you heard about this one story or this one person brought up this issue to you and it was one experience, but you can't make legislation based on one experience. You have to look at the overall data of what's actually being demonstrated. What are the tendencies? What does research show about these things? Then you make informed decisions, and you propose legislation based on that rather than on anecdote.

Now, that's not to say that that one person doesn't deserve to be listened to, but you cannot let a small group of people drive the agenda of the entire province. You know, unfortunately, we saw that with the anti-COVID convoy. We saw a small group of people actually pressure this government, and this government bent – or the government caved, I should better say, caved to the call of this small group of people and decided to lift restrictions without looking at the data, I'll say, and look at us now. Look at us now. It's a shame, the number of deaths that have actually happened in this province as a result of COVID. And that's what happens when you're not making legislation or governing based on data.

You know, that's a perfect segue into another issue that I care about immensely when it comes to justice, not just justice but in general in terms of governance and democratic participation by individuals in our democracy here in Alberta, and that is the collection of race-based data. This could have been a bill dedicated to exactly that, and the Member for Edmonton-City Centre put a lot of time, dedication, as many members of our caucus did, in consulting with racialized people here in the province of Alberta to actually address the issues that they were most concerned about. But in order to address the issues that they're most concerned about, we need to collect data.

Like, I can't tell you how often individuals in my own constituency: they'd be asking me why racialized people are overrepresented at the

lower levels of the government bureaucracy and how come not more racialized people are directors, executive directors, assistant deputy ministers, and deputy ministers of the government. This is a real concern, and the only way that we can attempt to even address this within government is to, first of all, collect the data so that we can actually see what the real data is when it comes to – and it doesn't have to be mandatory. You can make it voluntary.

Many of the individuals and organizations that we consulted when it came to issues of racial injustice here in the province of Alberta – when we did that as a caucus, I think we held six, if I'm not mistaken, in total, six consultations with racialized individuals here in the province of Alberta and organizations that they represent, people that care deeply about the systemic injustices related around racism here in the province, and there's so much work that needs to be done.

But that first step that we need to take is collecting the data, the race-based data. I want to applaud the Member for Edmonton-City Centre for leading us on that particular endeavour and making sure that people were being reached out to and hearing what the follow-up was. It's quite unfortunate, though, that we're not getting support from the other side of the House on this particular issue.

The member brought in the private member's Bill 204. Of course, I'm biased. In my humble opinion, it was an incredibly good bill, well written, identifying exactly what needed to happen here in the province of Alberta for us to move forward on dealing with issues of systemic racism, yet we see the members on the other side of the House wanting to squash this particular private member's bill.

5:30

I look out at members on the other side of the House, you know, and this is what I can't understand, Madam Chair. I'm just so curious to understand what's going through the heads of the members on the other side of the House, because I would think that this is not a partisan issue. I'm so curious to know what they're thinking. How can they be against the collection of race-based data if this is going to get us to where we want to be, making sure that all individuals, all Albertans, all people who call Alberta home are going to be treated more justly within our political system?

You know, this is another thing where I feel like we get lip service from the members of the other side of the House when it comes to multiculturalism, when it comes to actually communicating to Albertans that, yeah, we all want an Alberta where it doesn't matter what faith you are, it doesn't matter what ethnicity you are, it doesn't matter what nationality you had prior to coming here to this great province, but now you're an Albertan, and it doesn't matter what the colour of your skin is. We say that, but then when it comes down to every word in legislation, we're not seeing it come to fruition from this government. And you can bet that when I'm out in the communities talking with people, I speak about the fact that all we're getting is lip service from this particular government when it comes to these issues.

Don't get me wrong. I think it's really important to protect the private property of places of worship. It's important. Nobody wants a swastika or racist, negative terms being scrawled on places of . . .

The Chair: Are there other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and provide a few comments at this committee stage on Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. I'm trying to see if I can find a rename for this act. It might be: the public's right to ask the question as to whether this bill is even required and whether the minister already has the powers that are enumerated in this act. Or it might be: the public's right to ask the question if the minister does not have

specific powers in order to report this data and needs to overstep even further, then perhaps it might be the public's right to ask the question of what the budgetary implications of a Charter challenge are. Might be a little long.

But this bill, reading it through, does not seem to solve any real problem. The minister can already publish this data. The minister could have reported on this data already. So here we are discussing this when we could be discussing far more substantive matters with respect to crime.

Now, I believe that people, regardless of any ideology or other priors, if you will, want to be financially secure, physically safe, and socially free. That's what people want. You go and talk to them. That's what they want, and they want the government to get out of the way and help them do the things to make them financially secure, physically safe, and socially free. So the extent to which this bill might do things like violate personal information or privacy, that violates the third principle here, which is socially free.

I would like to see the minister's opinion from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner any time government brings forward legislation that has to do with the collection of information or private data or the dissemination of information such as this, especially with any identifying information. They run it past the OIPC, or at least they should. It is at the committee stage when this is the appropriate time for the minister to respond to those questions, for Executive Council to discuss those matters with the public, and I think they should.

There is no question that we do have law enforcement resourcing issues. Law enforcement, like health care, is a people-intensive service. Despite all of the technology and new ways that we find for people to be able to do their jobs, the fact of the matter is that boots on the ground, delivering the service, is the most expensive part of this service, and it is that part that has been cut. Those transfers to municipalities have been held constant now in the JSG budget for some three years, not adjusted for inflation, which is a real thing that we're learning, or population growth. The policing grants to municipalities have changed considerably. So the boots on the ground are, in fact, diminished. Even in the priority area of rural crime reduction, with the addition of what the province called RAPID, which was allowing fish and wildlife officers, for example, to respond to rural . . .

Mr. Bilous: RCMP.

Ms Phillips: Yeah. RCMP calls, I guess, is the way to put this. I don't want to characterize them as crimes, but do responses to calls for service. That's the right language. Even there, you know, the government's sort of crown jewel, signature piece of, "Oh, we're going to get tough on rural crime; we're going to do something about this," well, we just learned literally today, Madam Chair, that 10 of those fish and wildlife officers have been removed from that service. That is a lot of boots on the ground, especially if you are deploying them to specific problem areas. Ten of them just – after all of that training, which they do require, because you're not going to, you know, send a fish cop without proper training into an RCMP call for service, in a possibly very volatile situation. Yet those folks were – the Crown invested in that service, and that was cut, and we just learned that by a news release today. In the rural communities where those folks were responding to RCMP calls for service, there are 10 fewer pairs of boots on the ground to do that job for people who are victims of crime.

Now, I myself have seen quite a bit of increase in crime in my neighbourhood. I think in the last year or so I've had to file at least three reports. I am now the source of camera footage for all of my neighbours when something happens, which is frequently. It got

dialled up so much over the summer that the community association began to engage much more fulsomely with the city council. My neighbours, who are, you know, the most granola-crunching lefties that you'll ever meet, are sick of it. We are all sick of it. In fact, I wasn't altogether pleased at 2 a.m. when somebody was trying to break into my house. It is not something that we want to wish on anyone, being a victim of any kind of crime.

In particular, when we see crimes that are of such severity that they, in fact, affect a person's ability to accomplish any of those three things that I talked about, being financial secure, physically safe, and socially free – for example, the kinds of egregious crimes like sexual assault or those kinds of other assaults that fundamentally alter the course of someone's life, someone's life chances, their ability to get any kind of postsecondary training, their ability to navigate the world without the scars and the constant mental presence of PTSD. And that's where the victims of crime fund was supposed to go for all of those years, towards that kind of healing so that people could in fact accomplish those overarching goals that I believe we all have. Yet there, what did the government do? They raided that victims of crime fund under the auspices of hiring more Crown prosecutors, said that they were going to return some of those benefits to victims of crime. But, really, the amount of supports were cut down to a point where they were, essentially, meaningless. Those kinds of supports that were there before are no longer there.

Where are the Crown prosecutors? I just noticed a couple of weeks ago the Crown prosecutors in the news saying that, you know, time to go on strike. The resources aren't there. This is the dead end that these constant cuts in Justice and Solicitor General have driven us into.

5:40

So the public has a right to know all right, the right to know: where are the resources for law enforcement, and how long is it going to take when I phone the police, when I do a call for service, for them to come to my house at 2 in the morning when someone's trying to break in? Whether there's going to be enough resources there to respond to – I was talking to some friends on the north side who own a liquor store, and they say they don't even bother calling anymore. That's not the police service's fault when there's not enough folks to be able to attend; that's the fault of the resources there.

The fact of the matter is that those challenges are real. They exist. Some of them are as a result of the budget legislation, that we just have been debating for the last couple of weeks, and some of them, which is what happens after that crime has gone through the justice system, are as a result of what the province did in 2020 around the victims of crime fund. That could have been fixed in this legislation; it could be fixed right now; we're in Committee of the Whole. Now, there's no question that other pieces of reporting, that are actually within the bounds of the Charter and our personal information protection of privacy act, could have also been included in this legislation.

Now, my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, I think, spoke in a far more erudite way than I could ever do on this topic; however, I will say this: the public does have the right to know where the response to the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls inquiry is, which reported in June of 2019 with 231 recommendations. The minister received a report on January 5, 2022, saying, "We'll release our response to the report sometime," in due course, I guess. That's an answer that we sometimes get. It's not a good one, but it is one. The public has the right to know what's happening with that. These are big problems to solve. They require

resources. They do, in fact, also require having good evidence and good data.

We have a bill in front of the House right now, again, that could be imported into this legislation at this stage of debate. It has happened in the past; private members' legislation has in fact been adopted by government, by Executive Council, as government legislation and then brought into the Chamber. I have a couple of memories of this happening in the Klein years. There's no question that this legislation would be significantly improved, because then it would actually give more practical effect to this legislation and probably help even the government accomplish its goals just a little bit more, because this legislation does not.

Now, I want to just return to a point that my hon. friend from Edmonton-Castle Downs made, which is: what is the point? What are we doing here? Why are we doing this? What would be the point of having more information by judicial district than is already contained within Statistics Canada's crime severity index or that the minister is not already empowered to do? So what is the point? What more information is this bill allowing the minister to cherry-pick? It's not really the public's right to know; the minister's right to decide what you get to know is maybe the better name for this bill. You know, what is accomplished by publishing this by judicial district? What will be published by judicial district? Will it be different information for different places? That's a question that I haven't seen articulated anywhere.

As the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs said, you know, there are crime severity index statistics and other things when you're buying a house, when you're deciding on your kid's school, that kind of thing. For sure, the public does pay attention to those things. I know I do. But I'm not sure what more information I actually need other than that I would like my property taxes to go towards fighting crime in my neighbourhood. I would like my provincial taxes to go with those municipal disbursements to appropriately fund a well-trained law enforcement service.

I would like public resources stewarded in a way that reflects both common sense and the will of the people with respect to how our law enforcement contract with the RCMP is developed and maintained, with appropriate consultation with municipalities and in a way that doesn't cost us an extra \$300 million just because sometime 20 years ago Stephen Harper wrote a firewall letter. It doesn't really seem like a super solid reason to make a massive public policy change and put public safety at risk while we do it because we are just worried more about the colour of the uniforms or whatever than we are about making sure that our communities are safe.

Those are the kinds of things that – I mean, some of it is maybe legislative, but some of it's just: get up in the morning and go do the job. That's where we haven't seen that commitment to the physical safety of Albertans from what the government funds and what their priorities are.

You know, this is something of a husk of legislation. There's not much to it, and that's fine, I guess, if the job here is to kind of fill the agenda full of things that everybody on the government side can get behind so as to not risk a piece of legislation crashing on the rocks because the caucus is so divided. I mean, I guess that if that's what we're here to do, that's fine. It's the government's prerogative. But the fact of the matter is that there are serious problems to solve, and the government should get busy doing that instead.

The Chair: Are there others wishing to join the debate on Bill 9? I will go to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Chair. First, I want to thank the Minister of Justice for creating this critical bill. I believe all

Albertans want to have relevant and timely information provided to them about crime in their communities, and bills like these are vital to those communities and for the knowledge of all citizens about the state and safety of those communities in which they live, so I rise today to speak in support of Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act.

Madam Chair, Bill 9 is a bill meant to highlight the importance of transparency and accountability within the government of Alberta regarding the criminal justice system and crime in Alberta. The government of Alberta has sought to continue to do better in providing accountability and transparency in its relationship with the public, and these are critical pillars in our democracy. This bill will only strengthen the Alberta government's ability to provide relevant justice information to Albertans, increasing that accountability and transparency.

Bill 9 would ensure Albertans have relevant information about crime within their communities if passed. It will strengthen the public's ability to understand the Alberta justice system and increase awareness of activities and dangerous individuals within their communities. Passing this bill is common sense. I hope my colleagues in the opposition can push past any hesitations on their part and support this bill as it will only strengthen our communities, our democracy, and our criminal justice system no matter who is in government.

While our government has been moving forward on steps to decrease crime, rural crime is still a significant issue for many people living in rural Alberta, including constituents of mine in Lethbridge-East who have property or family who live outside the city proper. My constituents and all Albertans deserve and have the right to know about crime rates within their community and within Alberta. Providing Albertans with an annual report on crime will ensure that Albertans can make the correct choice on how to go about their lives within their community.

After the Premier toured rural communities in 2019, our government heard time and time again that there needs to be an improved system to increase the accessibility to crime data within rural communities. Madam Chair, these recommendations to disclose crime rates come straight from Albertans. Promise made, promise kept.

5:50

Bill 9 will ensure that Albertans from rural, metropolitan, or mid-sized cities will have up-to-date information about crime in their area provided to them in a user-friendly manner. Now, some may argue that this bill will increase the amount of red tape reporting. The last thing that our government wants to do is increase red tape, particularly around reporting on such vital statistics. That is the opposite of what this government plans to do, Madam Chair.

We will be committing to working closely with the RCMP, municipal police forces, multiple court systems within Alberta, the government of Canada, municipalities, and Indigenous councils and bands in streamlining, collecting, and delivering this needed and wanted data. The obligation of the government to provide reasonable and pertinent data to its citizens should not be construed as red tape even though it does require additional work on behalf of the ministry, which it should be its duty to do.

Some also may fear that this bill will place monetary burdens on municipal police forces and other entities within the judicial system of Alberta. That is an unwarranted fear, Madam Chair. The Ministry of Justice has available funds to produce the necessary infrastructure to ensure that the monetary cost of collecting and distributing this data does not fall onto police forces, municipalities, or other governing bodies. Any expenses attached to this bill are superseded by the importance of collecting and distributing data to the greater public as having easy access to this vital information is necessary for Albertans.

Madam Chair, I'm concerned that Albertans cannot already access data on crime within our communities. Families and citizens of Alberta rely on knowing what is going on within their community to ensure that children, spouses, and families are safe when moving through their day-to-day lives. Although this bill does not directly tackle the issue of crime rates in Alberta, it starts a process of ensuring that Albertans are up to speed on what is going on in our communities at large. The government must take the lead and the responsibility for providing relevant crime information to all Albertans. From there we can ensure that families feel safer within their respective communities and then continue to move forward on preventing crime in Alberta.

I'm extremely proud of Lethbridge's new police chief and the tremendous work he and his force have done and undertaken independently to provide some of this level of data within specific jurisdictions within Lethbridge to correct errors of the past and provide transparency, accountability, and stability to its citizens for the future. We must do more for our families and communities across the province.

For these reasons, I urge my fellow members of the Legislature to support Bill 9 and the lives and livelihoods of all Albertans. This piece of legislation is a strong step in the right direction.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question on Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act.

[The clauses of Bill 9 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 2 and Bill 9.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 2 and Bill 9.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:54 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, April 20, 2022

Day 21

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gottfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gottfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 20, 2022

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry. Are you moving Bill 2 on behalf of the minister?

Mr. Nally: No.

The Deputy Speaker: Are you moving some sort of motion?

Mr. Nally: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given how important it is to provide support to Albertans facing higher utility bills, it's important for this Assembly to immediately pass Bill 18. Therefore, I rise to ask for unanimous consent to waive the necessary standing orders in order to proceed immediately to second reading of Bill 18, the Utility Commodity Rebate Act.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Deputy Speaker: We'll proceed with the hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 2

Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise tonight to move third reading of Bill 2, the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

Bill 2 would implement many of the technical measures introduced in Budget 2022. Budget 2022 marks a fiscal turning point in the province. It marks a time when we stop adding to the debt burden of future generations of Albertans, and that's why, Madam Speaker, fiscal discipline remains the cornerstone of Alberta government's fiscal plan. Measures presented in Bill 2 will further integrate financial responsibility across government operations, leading to better outcomes for Albertans and a stronger financial position for the province.

I would encourage all members to support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join in on the debate on Bill 2? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise and have another opportunity to speak to Bill 2. Bill 2 is an implementation act which implements a budget, a budget with which my colleagues and I disagree for multiple reasons, and I am happy to go on to talk about those.

This is a budget which, first off, it needs to be noted, has been balanced because oil prices are high. The UCP would love to run around and tell you about how this was because they punished

Albertans and they hurt working people and they punished families, and that's why the budget is balanced, but the truth is that this budget is balanced because oil prices have gone up.

Mr. Long: To 70 bucks.

Ms Ganley: Yeah. They're not 70 bucks. You might want to check that one out.

Mr. Long: It's balanced on \$70 oil.

Ms Ganley: Oh, boy. Heckling that's wildly incorrect. Okay. [interjections] Yeah. I mean, you're welcome to stand up and join debate if you'd like to join debate, but maybe you just want to shout from the sidelines.

Mr. Shandro: How about through the chair?

Ms Ganley: Oh, boy. We're sure in a feisty mood this evening, aren't we? [interjection] Okay. Apparently, I'm going to spend the evening getting yelled at with misinformation about the price of oil and random insults.

Mr. Shandro: Just consider decorum.

Ms Ganley: I should consider decorum? You're the one shouting at me. I have the floor.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

We are not off to a great start, so let's reset everything here. The only person with the floor in this debate right now is the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I will thank the hon. Minister of Justice to keep his comments to himself.

We're here to discuss Bill 2. [interjections] I'm not really sure why this is so funny, but here we go. We're here to discuss Bill 2. Apparently, the members opposite think this bill is absolutely hilarious, or maybe he's actually looked up the price of oil and realized how wrong he got it. Anyway, Madam Speaker, the point is that this bill is bad. It's bad because it implements a budget that does nothing for Albertans.

I had the opportunity earlier today to speak about the priorities of my constituents and about the priorities of the people across this province, and those priorities are the ability to have a decent-paying job, to be able to pay for their mortgage, to be able to pay for their utilities, to be able to pay for the cost of living, to have a decent lifestyle. They would like as well to be able to . . . [interjections] Honestly, I don't really know what the Member for West Yellowhead's problem is this evening, but I have the floor.

An Hon. Member: She's wasting time.

Ms Ganley: Okay.

An Hon. Member: Carry on.

Ms Ganley: I'd be happy to carry on. Do you think you can maybe hold your comments? No? Okay. Fair. Well, apparently, this government isn't interested in hearing debate this evening, which is, I guess, pretty much in line with their general behaviour towards the people of this province, so I shouldn't be totally surprised that they have nothing but sneers and insults.

This government has brought forward a budget that doesn't respect those priorities, that doesn't respect the priorities of the people of Alberta. This budget is balanced off the backs of the people of Alberta. The average family will lose \$500 just because

of the changes in the basic personal exemption in the income tax act. This is something that the current Premier used to rail against when he was in opposition in the federal government. He called it pernicious, he called it insidious, he talked about nasty tax grabs, and now he brings forward a budget that does exactly that, that takes money out of the pockets of working Alberta families.

In addition, we're seeing families lose from the child tax benefit. Madam Speaker, I think one of my favourite things that we accomplished while in government was cutting child poverty in half. We cut child poverty in half in the province, and that was in large part because of the Alberta child tax benefit. It supported working families to make sure that they were able to provide a decent standard of living to their children, and I think that that was incredibly important.

I think it's also worth noting that this budget has deindexed a number of benefits that this government promised to keep indexed. When we were in government and we brought in an act that indexed things like AISH and seniors' benefits and a number of other benefits of which many Albertans rely, the UCP voted in favour of it. They said they would maintain it. They said they were in favour of it. They spoke at great length about the importance of that measure, yet as soon as they got into government, they repealed it. For a recipient on AISH: they lose about \$3,000 in purchasing power. I mean, that's incredibly hard.

In addition, they've been altering the way the seniors' benefit works. They've altered who is eligible for the seniors drug plan. I know that they think it's hilarious to talk about how the seniors drug plan should only be for seniors, but, Madam Speaker, I think it's worth understanding who it is we talk about when we're saying that. I've certainly heard from families who are in situations where, whether through the devastating loss of a loved one or a loved one's struggles with mental health or addictions issues, the grandparents have taken on custody of the children. I think that's the right thing to do. I think that that's something they do out of love for their family, and I think that it's something that a government should respect and support. I think that throwing those children, those dependants, off the seniors' benefit is absolutely the wrong thing to do. We saw recently a report that came out that demonstrated just how many people were thrown off as a result of those decisions.

Those are a number of ways in which, you know, this government has been extremely problematic for families. It's worth talking as well, I think, about other costs that have been rising. Recently we saw a report released, very, very late, into insurance costs and demonstrating the hundreds of millions of dollars more that families were paying in insurance costs. Unfortunately, the government has sort of supported that happening by removing the cap, and that has been very, very challenging. Some people have seen it go up as much as 20 per cent or 30 per cent, and of course, you know, their incomes have not gone up with that. Add to that the fact that they're losing a lot of their purchasing power by this deindexation that the members over there used to rail against and now apparently support this year. A lot of families have had incredible struggles with that.

7:40

This is a government that tried to hide that report. They tried to keep it from Albertans. They claimed that the information was available online until we proved that that wasn't correct, and then they had to correct themselves and release the report. So it's no great wonder, I suppose, that no one trusts them.

Adding on to utilities is also the cost of tuition. Tuition is increasing. In some programs it's increasing by sort of massive percentages. This is incredibly challenging for people. The higher tuition gets, the more it is the case that someone who's entering university is entering based not on their merits, based not on their

academic record or their abilities but instead based on the relative wealth of their parents. I think that that's wrong. I think that people who want to access education should get to access that education based on the work that they put in and the work that they did and their sort of ability to work hard for that and not based on the family into which they were born. People don't choose to be born rich or choose to be born poor; they're born where they're born. I really think that this government's choice to punish them by cutting off their access to education is just wrong. Those students deserve to learn just as much as any other students. I think that's incredibly problematic.

On top of increases in tuition fees, we have increases to the interest charged on student loans. The interesting thing about this is – so what happens is that the government borrows money; the government loans that money to students. It used to be the case that the government loaned that money to students at the same rate that they've borrowed it. They don't do that anymore. Now they add on an additional percentage. Essentially, what they're doing is making money off student borrowing. I also think that that is incredibly problematic.

As I'm sure many members of this House are aware, I've gone back to school a number of times. You know, I have talked to a lot of students, and particularly when I was in law school, where we're subject to differential tuition, a lot of people came out of that with a lot of debt, like, six-figure debt often, which is pretty hard to get out from under. It forces people to make choices in their career, where they may want to choose to go into a public interest pursuit, but they're not able to because they're having to pay off that debt. It forces them to choose what they're going to go on to do in terms of graduate work. It limits their choices. It limits their choices to pursue what contributions they can make to the world around them. I think that that is incredibly problematic.

First they get hit with tuition fees, and then they get hit with this increased interest. It just makes it harder and harder for those who have put in the work, who have the grades, but just didn't happen to be fortunate enough to be born into a rich family to make it through university, because it has just gotten out of reach. That's incredibly problematic as well.

Other things in this budget. I mean, certainly, the government seems to love to go on about the Education budget. I think it's worth noting that the thing we educate at the government of Alberta in Education are students. They're not capitas. They're not dollars. They're students. When there are more students in the system and the same amount of money, that means there's less money for each student. Most people would call that, I think, a cut. There have been a lot of years of cuts. I, personally, am incredibly aware of this because I have a daughter who's starting public school in September, and when she enters, she will enter a system in which there are tens of thousands of additional students and a thousand fewer teachers, not to mention the number of fewer educational assistants that will be available for those students.

This is all incredibly problematic. I think it is emblematic of a government and a caucus that doesn't understand the priorities of Albertans. Like I said, those priorities are generally pretty straightforward. They would like their children to have access to the same or better opportunities that they had access to. That requires education. It requires advanced education. It requires that everyone have access to a doctor.

There's another area in which this budget and this government have fallen down. You know, if you live in Lethbridge, it's next to impossible to access a primary care physician right now. That's challenging. It's genuinely challenging for people. They're having to drive several hours to access primary care in another location. It's all well and good for the government to tell them that they're

thinking about working on a plan to someday have a plan to implement something to work on it. But it's been years like this, and that is an incredible challenge for individuals. They don't want to wait. When your kid is sick and you have to drive them two hours to see a doctor, that's not something you're willing to wait years for someone to fix. I think that that is incredibly problematic. What people want is access to education, access to doctors, to an ambulance when they need to call an ambulance. They want a job that can pay their bills. These priorities of Albertans just aren't reflected in this budget. They aren't reflected at all.

We see a government that has, you know, billions of dollars to give away to profitable corporations, that defends increases in insurance, that defends an Americanized health system, that takes away overtime pay from workers. This is problematic. This affects people. It affects the people around us in this province every day. I think, at the end of the day, this government would be well served by listening to those Albertans and by listening to what it is that they are going through and to what it is that they want and what it is that they need.

I think it's worth talking a little bit as well with respect to one of the bills – I guess I can't talk about another bill that's before the House. This government has indicated to folks that they want to come forward and assist them with the cost of their utilities. I think that's great. The problem is that this has sort of been delayed and delayed and delayed and delayed, and I think that fundamentally what they fail to understand is that this is urgent. It's genuinely urgent for people. I don't know. I mean, I sat in a government. I've seen a fair amount of legislation drafting happen. I'm, I've got to say, a little surprised that it takes five weeks to copy an act from 2001. But I think the situation is urgent.

You know, those are the things that I am primarily concerned about: people's access to education, to teachers, to a modern curriculum that will help them as they go forward in the world, people's access to health care, to doctors, and to an equitable health system. I think that that's worth pointing out as well.

7:50

You know, there's a lot of talk about publicly funded versus publicly delivered. It's worth noting that pretty much every credible study ever done has demonstrated that adding a private tier to a health care system assists everyone only in situations where more money is put into the system. If no more money is put into the system, if the same amount of money is put into the system, the addition of a private tier not only doesn't help people, but overall it drives metrics downwards. The reason that happens is that the private facility can take the simplest of the surgeries, the least complicated of the patients, that require, you know, less time, less stay in the hospital, probably less time in surgery, and they get the same amount of money, leaving the public system with patients that require more care, to be dealt with with the same amount of money. So instead of those who need the most care getting the most care, those who need the most care get the least care, and that sort of slows the entire system down. That's been, I would say, fairly heavily demonstrated, and I think it's problematic.

Ambulances: also another area. Nobody ever wants to call 911 because their kid is choking and hear that there's no ambulance available for them. Nobody wants to call for their loved one having a heart attack and hear that there's no ambulance available for them. That's incredibly problematic, and it's a problem that really ought to be treated with significantly more urgency than this government has treated it with. It's a huge challenge.

Other priorities include, you know, decent-paying jobs that are able to cover the cost of living. We talk a lot about the cost of living going up. It's going up for a number of reasons. Obviously, tuition

and the servicing costs on that tuition are directly within the control of the government. Electricity and insurance rates were both subject to a cap that's been removed, so again government decisions. There are some other costs that, arguably, have other causes.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate on Bill 2? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to join debate on Bill 2. Like my colleague, I'll stand in opposition to this bill as well. It's difficult to have respect for a bill that does not continue the fight against child poverty that we started. We reduced child poverty by 50 per cent in two years as a result of the government programs that were there. This government has chosen to stop that and to let child poverty increase.

I was incredibly proud of the work we did, and my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View has talked about some of those programs, the Alberta family benefit, so that children can have at least an equal start from the get-go. What they make of that start becomes up to them further down the line, but at least they have the opportunity. This government, as I've said, has done the opposite with regard to that, so I will not be supporting this Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

You know, I also agree that it's fairly simple, the kind of focus, I think, of a government. There's a focus on the important things that governments can do around education, around access to health care, around respecting workers in this province, around doing their part to ensure there's a decent quality of life for every Albertan. Just on those four brief points that I've mentioned, my colleagues, both the critics for K to 12 education as well as PSE, have pointed out how the significant cuts to both of those programs have caused significant disruption across this province, hundreds of millions of dollars removed from both of those systems, which has left them scrambling.

Even today the superintendent of the Edmonton school board talked about how this is the most difficult budget. He's been there for nine years. He said that this budget is the most difficult one for the Edmonton school board that he has ever had to face. Now, he's not talking about the NDP years of '15 to '19. He's talking about this budget from this UCP government. It's corroboration there of the lack of interest and care this government has taken to ensure that important systems like the primary education system in this province stay strong and healthy and do the best job they can for our young future leaders.

With regard to health care we know that hundreds of millions of dollars, again, have been taken out of that system, that there has been open warfare between huge sectors of the health care system, whether you want to start with doctors, whether you want to go to nurses, whether you want to talk about allied health professionals. They have all suffered under this government and are exhausted, have worked through two years of COVID, and protected the people of this province. They get in return from this government the derision that comes across because of the ongoing fights with those sectors.

You know, you just have to look at the number of closures of health facilities or reduced services of health facilities across this province under this government. I saw a number of them were closed. I think it was up to 20 that I actually counted up that were either reduced services or closed, and the citizens in those areas could not go to them, or they had to wait incredible amounts of time to be seen. My colleague the critic for Health talked about – I think it was just earlier today – how one doctor had to see a patient in the parking lot, in that person's car, because there was no room in the emergency ward to see that person. Now, that's happened under this

government, this government that talks about balancing the budget – balancing the budget – and I think we're making it very clear that it's balanced on the backs of Albertans and the services that they depend on.

Respect for workers in this province. You know, every Albertan wants to be respected. They go to work. They want to come home at the end of the day healthy and happy and continue to provide that support through their wages to their family. Again, fights with members of this government bureaucracy: prosecutors, Crowns. As a result, we have a demoralized public service, who are just waiting for the opportunity to see a government change so that they can be actually respected in their workplaces.

Lastly, the quality of life. I think it's pretty remarkable that Alberta continues to have a decent quality of life when they've got the UCP at the controls of government. I know from my own critic portfolio that municipalities are saying that their lives in municipal government are extremely more challenged as a result of not only cuts. Certainly, there have been hundreds of millions of dollars of cuts to municipal programs, things like MSI. You know, \$5 million were directed towards the city of Calgary to help revitalize the critical central business district that is downtown Calgary. Five million. When the city of Calgary put up 200 and about 30 million dollars to incentivize and improve the downtown, which has taken such a hit as a result of the change to the oil situation in this province that now 30 per cent of the towers in downtown Calgary are vacant – and potentially they're not going to get filled up by oil businesses anymore.

8:00

They're going to have to look at diversification. They're going to have to look at other businesses who will come into the downtown but not only businesses. They're going to have to look at – and it's happening right now with regard to HomeSpace – you know, refurbishing older buildings so that they house people, and that's being done right now. The report that we put together called revitalizing downtown Calgary, that can be found at albertasfuture.ca, explains how we would work with the city of Calgary to make that happen, while this government: all that can be found in its budget is \$5 million for the downtown.

The other thing that I wanted to talk about in addition to balancing the budget on the backs of Albertans is that, you know, a lot has been made by the amount of personal income tax revenue that's coming into this province as a result of not indexing the tax brackets. I heard the Premier earlier tonight talk about: "Well, we might do that. We might do that. We're going to take a look at it." This is the third budget where Albertans are paying more and more in taxes, where other provinces – in the government of Canada the norm is to index brackets. It was not a surprise to me that this government decided not to do that because they were looking for any way to continue down the road of sharing those profits, sharing those monies with corporations in this province.

Another thing that I think we need to look a little longer at is how the \$4.7 billion in corporate tax giveaway was, for instance, said to fill up the downtown Calgary towers. Well, that's not happening. That won't happen. What will happen is, under a different government, working with the city of Calgary to ensure that the downtown gets the care and attention it needs as the most important central business district in this province.

The budget also talks about the estimated inflation. Already it's pretty offside with the inflation that's currently present in Alberta. It's offside by about half the amount, which is going to be – and we're already seeing it. Albertans are struggling with the costs and the impact on their daily budgets as a result of the high increase in

inflation. This government has got no help for that. Well, they do talk about helping with electricity and helping with natural gas. Natural gas may be coming sometime in the future – it's not here – in terms of a rebate. And electricity: we know there'll be \$50 for Albertans. That's starting sometime in the future. Again, this government is overpromising and underdelivering, overpromising or not delivering at all, overpromising and bungling rollouts. That's what you see in this fiscal plan. That's what you see in this Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

Madam Speaker, the budget provides no real relief to families in this province at this time. That's something that when we were government, we were most mindful of. Families are the backbone. Families and the workers that are embedded in those families are the backbone of this province. But this government, the UCP government, seems to believe that insurance companies are the backbone of this province. They seem to believe that corporations who can count on \$4.7 billion of tax giveaways are the backbone of this province.

That's not why any of us, I think, got into politics. Perhaps I'm being too generous with the other side, but I think people got into politics because of a desire to ensure that there was a good quality of life for their neighbours, for the people in their communities, you know, that they help work out the problems and issues that would be brought to them. I didn't get into this to ensure that insurance companies could walk away with billions of dollars in profit and Albertans would suffer as a result. I didn't get into it for that reason. I got into it as a result of an interest to try and change policy at the local level, and I think many of us did.

But this statutes amendment act is not something that I think Albertans should be rightly proud of. The balanced budget is only in name. It's as a result of being able to ratchet down supports for Albertans, and my colleagues have talked about some of those supports, whether they be in the lack of indexing of AISH, of seniors' benefits, of income support programs. All of that saves you a lot of money when you're not investing that money in people and they're not investing that in the economy. So, yeah, you can get to a balanced budget if you start to turn the tap on the things that people depend on, people are supported by.

If you turn it down significantly, then you've got problems in your health system. You've got problems in your judiciary as a result of more people needing to go for health care, more people winding up on the streets, more kind of conflict with the law. But those things aren't counted by the budget that we have before us. Those things are overlooked, Madam Speaker. Those things are pushed down to the personal experience, to saying that, you know, that's their problem. They're somehow lesser as a result of not being able to have the . . . [Member Ceci's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I look forward to speaking tonight to the Legislature and talking about the Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, and making some comments around that as well as the budget that it actually implements. I'd like to start by saying that even as earlier as today in the Legislature – maybe it was yesterday – we heard a number of MLAs remark about their meagre beginnings and how proud they were of what they were able to rise above. I think there are a lot of similar stories in this Legislature, and it has been a theme throughout other Legislatures in the past, where MLAs and their families have started with basically nothing or went through hard times and have come through the other side and made good.

It makes me wonder, Madam Speaker, given this budget, especially from members on the government side, how easily they forget those hard times and when they were or their family was in financial trouble or just getting by or scraping by or maybe not quite making it, how easily that period of their life is forgotten or just pushed aside when considering, in cabinet or in caucus, budgetary measures that will end up extending the period of time for many, many Alberta families that they will end up remaining in poverty or an impoverished state and struggling to get by or not really getting by or making do or doing without.

I, too, came from a family of six which went through some difficult times. There was no money left over at the end of the month after my father suffered construction accidents, and we knew we'd be wearing our cousins' winter coats the next year. My mom never had a winter coat, a new one, for 17 years, the whole time I went to school until after I was in high school. I mean, lots of stories abound in this Legislature about that type of difficulty in families.

8:10

It, I think, behooves us as MLAs, Madam Speaker, to remember those times and reflect upon them and incorporate that understanding into the Legislature, into the budgets that we build so that the onus is never forgotten, is always upon us, is always upon legislators, especially the Finance minister, to never forget those who are hardest hit, those who are suffering the most, those who are just scraping by, those who, through no fault of their own, are not able to provide the means to sustain themselves. These are the people that should be uppermost in the mind of any Finance minister in order to ensure that these people have a dignity and quality of life that we would be proud to say that we provided to our own family, because, in fact, these people are part of the Alberta family.

That's something that I'm saddened by when I see some of the measures in this legislation, in the budget indeed that has been before us and in the implementation act that we're debating here tonight. This government is operating on a wing and a prayer. They're winging it, and they're praying that the price of oil will once again resurrect their chances at the polls and get us out of the economic crisis that's been caused by a number of difficulties, including the pandemic that we've been going through in Alberta in the last couple of years. But, Madam Speaker, the government says one thing and does another in attempting to convince Albertans that happy days are here again and that the pandemic is over when, in fact, the happy days are happening for a select number of people.

But the pandemic certainly isn't over. We're looking at a sixth wave that's oncoming, and we may not know exactly when it hits because we don't have the data to verify exactly what's going on in the province with respect to the COVID infection rate. A lot of us are in the dark to know exactly what risk that we're facing, and it's a risk that I think has caused a lot of economic damage over the last two years, whether you'd be in business, whether you're in family. It's something that the budget doesn't take into account because, of course, costs are going up for everybody, and those individual families who are suffering with COVID and have had family members who had to isolate, leave their jobs and employment for periods of time are those that are being hit even harder than everybody else during the pandemic, that is on its way up again.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

Now, for example, I have in my constituency a number of seniors' bungalow complexes, and one would think that these adult bungalows of significant square footage with double-attached garages would have in them fairly well-off people with substantial means. In fact, if indeed you do the door-knocking that I've done in the constituency, you find out that these folks as well are just – just

– getting by, if they're getting by, because, of course, they will suffer in their elderly years some debilitating diseases and injuries, and there are costs there that they've had to bear.

This measure in the budget is going to cost the seniors big time. A seniors couple getting the Alberta seniors' benefit will lose \$750. That's a chunk of change when you look at an individual, say, who's worked in a clerical position for a significant part of her working life after raising a family, may have an income around the \$30,000 mark. You take \$750 out of that and you're taking away something that every month you might have enjoyed: a night out maybe, a movie, a new pair of pants once in a while. That \$750 is real money, real money that the Finance minister has to be aware will be felt, will be a loss that's felt by an individual who's getting the Alberta seniors' benefit, and if they lose that, it affects their quality of life.

If you're looking at another failure of this budget and of this government, it's women, Madam Speaker. Women, in fact, were the hardest hit in the employment sector. They were the ones who first lost jobs and lost them the most, and they're the last ones to have the jobs recovered. They're still behind in that regard.

The young high school grads: unemployment is very, very high among our young people. This budget doesn't address their abilities to enter the job market.

I'm thinking most often about the AISH recipients. I have in my constituency of Edmonton-McClung three complexes that are operated by Civida, formerly capital region housing. Of course, if you knock on doors there, you'll find stories of various range which usually involve some sort of single parent and broken home and perhaps an illness, could have been an addiction issue of some kind, domestic violence, lots of different situations which find people ending up in affordable housing. These individuals are often on AISH as well. If you're looking at losing \$3,000 in real purchasing power, which is what happens to individuals on AISH as a result of this budget, and you're looking at earning approximately \$22,000 on an annual basis, take that out of your wallet on an annual basis, Madam Speaker, and see how much more difficult it is for you to get by. It's not a simple thing.

I think all of us can relate to that. There are thousands of people in Alberta who live on that kind of money, who exist on that kind of money. Taking \$3,000 out of their pockets in purchasing power as a result of the failure to index to inflation the benefits is something that I'm hoping this Finance minister argued against in cabinet, but apparently he wasn't able to convince the rest of his colleagues to see the wisdom of protecting the most vulnerable people in the province. I can't imagine it was him making the proposal. I'm sure he was defending those individuals but, unfortunately, wasn't able to win the day.

I did mention earlier, of course, about the fact that this government is singing *Happy Days are Here Again* and the pandemic is over. You know, my mother received a phone call about a week ago. It was from a woman she's known since childhood from her small village of Thorhild, Mary Yachimec. She was in tears because her son Bobby Yachimec, a fellow that I'd known, a little bit older than me, had just died. He'd contracted COVID-19, and he ended up having a case of pneumonia, and he died – it took him about three weeks – aged 72, otherwise healthy.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

So to be told that things are behind us and COVID is in the rear-view mirror and it's a mild disease doesn't give me any comfort, Madam Speaker. I certainly fear that we are going to see increasing evidence about the long-term effects of COVID, long COVID. It appears from the emerging science that anybody who's infected has

a chance of having some form of brain damage. It's something that we hope doesn't become established as scientific fact, but it certainly seems to be emerging as a residual effect of this so-called mild disease.

Now, one of the things that we'll also see as a result of this budget is that the Alberta child and family benefit not being indexed to inflation is going to cost Alberta families about \$450. That's once again another failure of this budget and this Finance minister to look after people in this province when, in fact, the coffers of the government are filled with oil money as a result of the global price of oil going up due to global conflict. The government is still suggesting that the plan to balance their budget is one that they made a great success of.

8:20

In fact, what they've done is balance the budget on the backs of those least able to afford it, and that always seems to be the go-to place for Conservative governments. Rather than looking at ensuring that always those people able to afford it least, those who are hardest hit, those who are underprivileged, those who are disabled, children – all these individuals are seemingly the last ones to benefit and the first ones to pay when it comes time to balance the budget under a Conservative government. It pains me to see this story repeated generation after generation. It was one that I saw growing up under Progressive Conservative governments and, previous to that, Social Credit governments.

It doesn't seem to be that a budget is really balanced if indeed you have these outstanding debts to pay, these debts, these real unpaid burdens that need to be borne by the provincial government to keep people afloat. How can one say, Madam Speaker, as a Finance minister or as a government, that the budget is balanced when we're taking \$3,000 away from AISH recipients, when seniors are being deprived of \$750 of benefits, when a family is losing \$450 a month? Those additional cuts to the pocketbooks of families are what's adding up to this Finance minister's claim that the balance has resulted from having a sharp pencil. Without a sharp pencil – another way to describe a sharp pencil is a sharp, pointy stick. That's what he's done to Alberta families, and he's got the numbers he's wanted to arrange to have a balanced budget by hurting Alberta families.

Indeed, the really challenging part for me, Madam Speaker, is that this government seems to say and do one thing and then actually execute in another way. They like to say things loud enough and long enough, and they hope that people will accept what they're saying as the truth. It assumes a certain amount of stupidity.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to join the debate? The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the chance to speak on this important piece of legislation, and I wanted to correct a few things. It's interesting to hear the folks on the other side complaining. I heard them complaining about the empty towers in downtown Calgary. In fact, it's really interesting to hear from the worst Finance minister in the history of this province when the government that he was in charge of the financial affairs for drove out \$100 billion worth of investment, mostly from energy companies that had their head office . . . [interjections] See, he can't stand hearing the truth, so he's trying to interrupt me here. But he can't stand the fact, the absolute fact, that their government drove \$100 billion worth of investment out of this province. Companies, including Murphy Oil, Total, many, many others: \$100 billion worth of investment; 180,000 jobs. They drove out all this investment. They drove out all of those jobs. The fact is that now

they're complaining that the office towers are not full. Well, if you wanted to look for why they're not full, look for the people that left town when the NDP was in government.

Member Ceci: Look over there.

Mr. McIver: I can see. I have to say that I've got the floor, and I intend to speak right now. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker, the fact is that they drove people out, 180,000 people, and many of those occupied those buildings in downtown Calgary, those buildings that, until the NDP showed up, were paying a big portion of the property taxes for the city. Now they actually have the chutzpah to come in here and complain that the office towers are empty when they are the absolute source of the emptiness.

They didn't just drive them out gently; they told them that they weren't welcome. They had an Energy minister go into the head offices with their financial reports and say: write me a cheque for that because that's my money. Of course, that actually was the shareholders' money. The fact is that they had an Energy minister that told Albertans to go to British Columbia if they wanted to keep a job. That's what the NDP did. They were unbelievably bad for Alberta, which is why they got fired after one term. Madam Speaker, the folks . . . [interjections] See, I love it. They can't stand hearing the truth about their terrible track record.

In fact, you've got a former Finance minister that is guffawing over a balanced budget. I appreciate that when he was the Finance minister, one year he'd come in with a budget that was \$1 billion less deficit than the year before and pretty much had a parade for himself right here in the House because he was coming so much closer to balancing the budget. Now he's actually making fun of a government that actually succeeded under our current Finance minister. This is a Finance minister where, when he had that parade for himself, at the rate that he was going, it would have been 95 years to balance the budget – 95 years – and he actually is in here complaining about a real balanced budget . . .

Member Ceci: Real on the backs of Albertans.

Mr. McIver: . . . that this government and this Finance minister put – well, let's talk about whose back this is on.

At the rate the NDP were going, the biggest threat to providing health care, education, social services, income supports to Albertans is having a government that can't afford to pay for those things, which is exactly the straight line an NDP government was headed for, either bankruptcy or a complete inability for the government of Alberta to pay for the services that Albertans most needed, under the leadership of that former Finance minister, the same person that actually has the tenacity, the incredible gall to come in here and complain about a real balanced budget and a balanced budget in the same year with record investments in health care, record investments in social services, record investments in education, record investments in mental health care and addictions care, the things that the NDP used to care about when they were honest with themselves.

When they were honest with Alberta, they used to actually care about those things. Now they actually make fun of a budget that is both balanced, with record investments in all the things that they used to care about, and puts Alberta in a position to pay for the things most important to Albertans not just this year but for years going on, because that is what a balanced budget does for you. That is what sharpening your pencil does for you. That is what getting better value for the taxpayers does for you. You can provide the things that Albertans most need forever, not just till you get kicked out of office in four years.

I mean, listen, let's look at Bob Rae in Ontario as an example of where the NDP was headed. Everybody was getting raises. Everybody was happy. All of a sudden the workers for the government found out they were getting every second Friday off. Beautiful till they found out that their pay just got cut by 10 per cent because they weren't getting paid for that second Friday that they got. That is the NDP way of doing government. That is the NDP way of doing finances: spend it till you haven't got it, and then take it away from the people that are doing the work, and expect to be thanked for it. Well, they weren't thanked for it either. Bob Rae and his crew got tossed out, and this crew across the aisle got tossed out. [interjection] Sure, hon. member.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, hon. minister. It's a great opportunity to jump in here. You had touched on something that I thought maybe you could elaborate on a little bit. I know the members opposite could never balance the budget. Heck, they couldn't even balance a diet. But I will say that I do remember Rae days, and I do remember how that really affected public-sector workers in Ontario. Maybe the minister could talk a little bit more about the devastation of the NDP in other provinces and this province and how it was going to take us so much work to get back to balance, but with the genius of our Finance minister and the Premier we are there already, something that the members opposite couldn't have done, not even in their wildest dreams. In fact, with the current projection of \$70 oil they still would have run a massive deficit, something that we have overcome. Maybe the member or the minister could talk a little bit more of the devastation of the NDP in other provinces and even here.

8:30

The Deputy Speaker: A great time for the Speaker to maybe offer some remarks on the matter of relevancy. Just a reminder that we're on Bill 2 and that the remarks should be tailored as such, which I know the minister is more than capable of.

I'm going to take also a minute to remind all members that the minister is the only one with the floor at this time. There is a significant amount of heckling, which the minister has stated he quite enjoys, which is why I have not intervened up until this point. But just a reminder that what goes around comes around, and I don't think we want to proceed down this path for the rest of the night.

Lastly – and my apologies; I promise I will let you have the rest of your time, Minister – when a lack of acknowledgement on an intervention has been made, that is considered an acknowledgement and an unaccepted intervention and should be taken as such. Try and proceed in such a way. If it is ignored, that is considered a nonrequest to the intervention.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will continue to talk about the bill and why it's important. It's part of this government balancing their budget. Really, it's important to point out the opposite, what the NDP did comparatively, which is why they should be voting for Bill 2, which is before us. This is a bill that will allow Alberta to pay for those social services, those income supports, the health, the education forever, which will also make Alberta more competitive to provide job opportunities for young people.

I heard people across the way talk about young people, yet they drove them out. When the NDP was done after four years – and we haven't recovered from it yet, Madam Speaker. We've got a lot of work to do. The NDP created such a negative employment situation that unemployment amongst those less than 25 years old is at a

terrible high, and they're still at high rates. They're still at higher rates than we want, but the fact is that right now there are jobs.

In many areas there are more jobs than there are people to fill those jobs. I heard the Premier tonight on Facebook Live talking about, you know, that if you search oil and gas jobs or search jobs in almost any industry, you will find hundreds if not thousands of them unfilled right now. When the NDP was done, there was hardly a job in sight in the whole place and people were leaving Alberta as fast as they could. Now we actually have a different problem, one this government needs to do more work on, to get more people in here, because we have so much work.

We have re-established Alberta as the economic engine of Canada, something the NDP tried very hard to stop – well, succeeded at, actually. If there's one thing they succeeded at, it was at taking the Alberta swagger away, taking away Alberta's place at the top of the economic ladder of Canada. They started with a government that was at the top and took it to the bottom in four years and then wondered why they got fired. It might have been because they weren't paying attention to what matters to Albertans.

That is why we need to support Bill 2. It supports job development. It supports opportunities for our young people, to keep them here. It supports postsecondary education and much more. The minister here always talks in question period about the fact that there's much more support for low-income Albertans and those that might otherwise not be able to support postsecondary education. That's the future. That's the future. Under the NDP the future was running out the door. We haven't solved that yet as our government, but by gosh we're sure working hard at it, and there are way more opportunities for them now than there were two and a half years ago, when this side took government.

Madam Speaker, that is why it's important. That is why, when the other folks laugh at controlling expenditures – I don't know why they do. We balanced the budget. Again, it's really important. This is why they should support this. We balanced the budget with record spending for health care, record spending for education, record spending for social services, record spending for addictions and mental health. We actually are supporting the things that Albertans care about much better, in a much stronger way than the folks across the aisle did when they botched government, and we're in a position to do it potentially forever, because that's the beauty of a balanced budget. I've got to say that it wasn't easy – there were some hard decisions made – but we are supporting the most important things, more than the NDP ever thought about, and we're setting the province up for success again.

With that, Madam Speaker, I think that says what needs to be said. You've got a tale of two governments, a tale of two Finance ministers, a radical success versus a radical failure across the aisle, and that's why we should support Bill 2.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak at third reading of Bill 2. I had the opportunity to speak at second reading. It's always great to speak again. You know, I was going to start to complain that it was starting to get a little cool in the Chamber. I was feeling this blast of air conditioning coming from this side, but then I just felt this large blast of hot air from the other side, and now I'm all warmed up again.

I'm feeling good, Madam Speaker, and I'm pleased to speak to Bill 2 again. A couple of things to say about this bill. The first is that what I find very striking is that this bill really solidifies the decision by this government to continue to tax inflation, which really is on the backs of Albertans. You know, we've been, on this

side of the House, raising this issue for some time. It's a bit of an in-the-weeds kind of thing that not a lot of people would see happening, the decision to deindex personal income tax from inflation, which really means that all Albertans are going to be paying a little bit more.

What I find striking, Madam Speaker, is that in the number of times that we have brought this issue up, we have never actually heard the Premier or the Finance minister actually respond to that, like, actually acknowledge that they have done the very thing that the Premier used to call insidious and a sneaky tax grab. It is such a blatant hypocrisy for claimed fiscal conservatives. The Premier railed against it when he was the head of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and spoke about it at length and critiqued it, and as an MP he spoke up. Yet not once has the Premier even acknowledged it, nor has the Minister of Finance. Now, listen, this government has done a lot of things that are hypocritical, a lot of things that they've gone back on their word on, but on this one they remain incredibly silent consistently. Just once I would appreciate one member of that UCP caucus, one member of that front bench to actually stand up and acknowledge that they are doing the very thing that they claimed they would not do.

Now, we know that Albertans have kind of gotten used to that from this government, but this one is, like, key to the heart of who they are as fiscal conservatives, key to the heart of who the Premier is, key to the heart of who I suppose the Minister of Finance is, key conservative values about not taxing individuals' income tax, certainly not increasing their income tax behind their backs, yet they've done that very thing. The fact that they continue to remain silent and all their heads are down and they're not going to stand up and speak to this very issue – and I'm certain they'll stand up and they'll yell at us and do all kinds of other things, but none of them can actually stand up and speak to the fact that they are doing the exact thing that they claimed they would never do and that is core to who they are.

Let's be honest. At this point do they even know who they are, honestly? Like, what are their values anymore? What are their principles? They can't seem to agree with each other. They can't seem to listen to Albertans. One side is calling the other side lunatics. The other ones are calling them – I don't know what they're calling them behind their backs. We can only imagine, I guess, based on what we hear on recorded tapes of conversations. I don't even know if this caucus has a clue what their values and principles are. Frankly, the bigger issue is that Albertans don't know either.

This is something that I would love, for one member of the UCP caucus to stand up and admit: yes, we have done the very thing that we said we wouldn't do, which is bracket creep. Just, like, say the words. The Premier has said it many times as an MP, but will they say that in this House, admit that they did bracket creep?

We hear a lot of bluster about two things. One, I'm not surprised that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and many other UCP members will stand up and want to rail against, you know, the NDP when we were in government, from 2015 to 2019. Of course. What they're hoping that Albertans will forget is that they've actually been government for three years now. So they can talk as much as they want about what happened in 2015-2019, but where are they on their record from 2019 to today's date? On their record – let's be honest. Before this international rise in oil prices this government was actually going to have the largest deficit – the largest deficit – of any government in this country. The only reason they don't is because they won the lottery.

Now, they won the lottery, but Albertans have not. They got a special benefit of rising oil prices, which they know they did nothing to create. So that balanced budget, as they keep talking

about – this is the second issue, Madam Speaker – is good for them, but as we are seeing from this bill, from everything we're hearing, which I know they're hearing from their constituents as well, is that it is not helping Albertans.

8:40

Albertans are paying more every step of the way. They're paying more in income tax because of this government. Their benefits don't get them as far as they used to. In fact, they're actually losing money because of the rise in inflation. We know that Albertans are paying way more in utility rates, way more in electricity, way more in car insurance, all the things that this government not only lifted the caps on, which would be a huge benefit for Alberta families right now as they're trying to pay the bills – all of those rebates that they've now promised: we actually found out they're not coming for months and months and months.

Now, I know it takes months to do a leadership review for this party. I understand, especially when the rules keep changing and they're fighting with each other, that that can take a long time, and we all hang in the balance. But you would think they'd be able to – I don't know – copy a piece of legislation that was already written and produce that in faster than five weeks. You'd think, by how quickly they, say, fired the Election Commissioner or fired 20,000 EAs at the beginning of a pandemic, that they'd be able to create regulations to actually benefit Albertans right away.

An Hon. Member: They fired you guys.

Ms Pancholi: I think, actually, that if we had an election tomorrow, we would find that this government would also be fired pretty darn quickly. I invite them to call the election.

Honestly, given the chaos that's going on in their party right now, maybe some of them want an election. Maybe some of them don't because they wouldn't get their seats back. I understand there are going to be conflicted feelings about that. But over here we're pretty confident that an election is something that Albertans want, and we're pretty confident that it's something that we would welcome as well.

Madam Speaker, I think this government should take a look in the mirror and take a long, hard look at their record, because it isn't so shiny. While it may be good for the bottom line of their budget, balancing their books, Albertans are paying the price. They see and they know that this budget has been balanced on their backs, and now it's about time, I think, for this government to take accountability for that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Happy to take the opportunity to talk a little bit more about our government's record and the things that our government has accomplished. As the member says – and I agree that it's not useful and worth while to talk about what happened between 2015 and '19. We all want to erase that period from our minds because it was a very dark time in the province. I remember, when I was out door-knocking in that period, that when I would ask people at the doors what their number one issue was, a lot of people would just laugh and smirk at me and say: I don't know; get rid of the NDP. That was their number one issue.

You know, I'll happily agree with the member that we shouldn't focus on that period. Let's talk instead about the last three years and what our government has been able to accomplish. Let's look at the record. First and foremost, as it relates to this bill, Madam Speaker, we've been able to deliver a balanced budget, the first balanced

budget in more than a decade, and we did so with the same oil price projections that their government used. So to try and assert that we've balanced the budget because of a large cash windfall due to large energy prices is simply not true. We're using the exact same predictions for oil prices at \$70 a barrel that the members opposite used.

But you know what the difference is, Madam Speaker? Under their projections, their revenue projections of \$70 for a barrel of oil, their government would continue to see massive deficits, but because our government made challenging and difficult decisions to get reckless and uncontrolled spending under control, we have now been able to present a balanced budget to Albertans. This is important because a balanced budget will ensure that we have the capacity to continue to invest in needed and necessary social programs that, I believe we can all agree, are necessary and worth while to contribute.

Apart from delivering a balanced budget, Madam Speaker, let's continue to look at our record over the last three years. From an Advanced Education standpoint, as I've mentioned in this House many times, we're investing \$171 million over three years to create 7,000 additional spaces in our postsecondary institutions. That's more spaces than the NDP created during their time in government. But, again, let's not focus on their time. Let's focus on what we're doing. As well, we're providing \$15 million in new spending to create new bursaries for low-income students. We're investing \$12 million over three years to continue to ensure that our scholarships are able to meet demand. We're investing \$30 million over three years to expand apprenticeship programming to ensure that all Albertans are able to find successful career pathways. We're investing more in work-integrated learning to ensure that Alberta students can benefit from co-op opportunities and internships. We're investing more in supports for Indigenous learners to ensure that every Albertan can access postsecondary education.

As well, we're seeing record investment in many other areas of our economy: film, television, the tech sector. All of these aspects and facets of our economy and society are increasing significantly, and that's a direct result, Madam Speaker, of the actions that our government has taken over the last three years.

I'm happy to spend the 15 minutes that I have here before you this evening and talk about our government's record in doing precisely that. I won't do that. I agree with the member opposite. I won't spend the entire 15 minutes – she has my word on that – but I'd be happy to because I am very proud of the record of our government in delivering what we were elected to do in 2019: balancing the budget, strengthening the economy, returning job and economic growth to the province, and fighting to build pipelines. Madam Speaker, that is precisely what we campaigned on. That's precisely what we are delivering.

I'm proud to stand by that record, and I'll be doing that by supporting this bill this evening. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate? Seeing none, would the hon. minister like to close?

Mr. Toews: Yes, Madam Speaker. I would like to make a few comments in closing tonight. I've been listening with interest to the debate on both sides of the House. I appreciate all members engaging on Bill 2, the budget implementation bill. I do need to correct the record. Now, my colleagues have done a good job, I would suggest, already of really correcting the record, but some of these points bear repeating.

We certainly heard the members opposite talk about the fact that this budget is balanced simply because of the high price of oil. Well, Madam Speaker, oil is high today. WTI was over \$100 today.

That's a high price of oil. But I want to remind all members of this House that we didn't use \$100 in our projections for the price of west Texas intermediate, the price of oil. We used \$70 for the upcoming year, \$69 for the mid-year, and \$66.50 for the out-year. So, yes, higher energy prices were part of the story but only a small part of the story.

In fact, had we continued on the spending trajectory that we inherited from the members opposite, Madam Speaker, we would not have a budget surplus this current fiscal year, the next year, or the following year; we would have deficits in all three years. In fact, for the current fiscal year, which is the first year of this budget, instead of a \$500 million projected surplus, we would be projecting a \$6 billion deficit.

Madam Speaker, fiscal discipline, fiscal responsibility matters. That's what the members on this side of the aisle have brought over the last three years, and it has been a team effort. But there's more than fiscal discipline, albeit fiscal discipline is so important, to this budget.

I want to talk about one other thing. As we have worked hard to bring fiscal discipline, we've done it surgically and thoughtfully. We've done it by maintaining the highest levels of support for seniors of any province, the highest levels of support for families of any province. We've done it with the highest levels of support for the most vulnerable. Why, Madam Speaker? Because that matters to Albertans and that matters to this government.

We've done all of that and still balanced the budget. We've done all of that yet have turned down that spending trajectory, that irresponsible spending trajectory, that would have left this province with perpetual deficits, downloading irresponsible fiscal decisions onto the next generation. We will not do that. This budget demonstrates our resolve, Madam Speaker.

But there's more. Budget 2022 was about positioning the province of Alberta for investment attraction, disproportionate investment attraction, economic growth that leads to expanded fiscal capacity. Madam Speaker, there are a whole number of pieces that go into a business environment. One of those is our tax rate. Tax rates matter. Business tax rates matter. In fact, I can point to an investment project here just outside of Edmonton. Fortune Minerals has announced that they're going to build a plant just out of Edmonton. Why did they choose Alberta? This was their rationale, and they made it public. Because of Alberta's preferential corporate tax rate. Corporate tax rates matter.

8:50

Madam Speaker, I need to also state this. We've dropped Alberta's corporate tax rate by one-third to attract investment. The result of that measure, along with a number of other measures to position this province to be most competitive, has resulted in economic growth, expanded fiscal capacity, where we will be collecting on average \$400 million more per year in corporate tax revenue over this fiscal plan than the members across the aisle, when they were in government, collected over their four-year term.

I know my time is almost up, but Budget 2022 is an inflection point in this province, when we round a corner. It is the time when, ultimately, we position this province not for perpetual deficits, not for downloading irresponsible fiscal decisions onto the next generation, not for sending tens of billions of dollars of investment out of the province, creating job loss and business loss for thousands and thousands of Albertans, but in fact, Madam Speaker, Budget 2022 is about ensuring this province has a future, ensuring the next generation of Albertans can choose Alberta to raise a family, pursue a career, start a business, live in prosperity, and live in freedom.

Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure tonight to recommend to every member of this House to support Bill 2. Let's pass this bill. Let's support the budget. Let's put this province on a sustainable fiscal trajectory. Let's put this province on a trajectory where the next generation can live in freedom and prosperity.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 13 Financial Innovation Act

[Adjourned debate April 19: Mr. Bilous]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join the debate on Bill 13 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise again this evening to speak this time about Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act, in second reading. I've been doing a little bit of searching to prepare myself to make remarks this evening about this piece of legislation. To be clear, the legislation, I think, is a necessary addition to our laws on the books in the province to govern appropriately new innovations and technology and financial services companies that are arising to meet the needs in a very fast-moving, changing world.

The biggest issue that I think can be had with this piece of legislation is not that it's not needed; it's just that it gives the Minister of Finance unwieldy powers, asking us to trust him. This legislation, like many other pieces that we've seen before us from this UCP government, is a piece of legislation which demands that the government be trusted to not go too far one way or the other in making regulations, in this case in a new field.

If one simply does a quick search to find the number of different types of fintech companies that are out there, whether here in the province, across the country, throughout North America, or globally, it's a massively multiplying and exponentially increasing field of new fintech companies to serve any variety of needs that one might imagine.

It's actually very interesting to see some of the things that are coming up, whether it be a firm like Catalyx, that provides blockchain trading platforms, or PayShepherd, a fintech payment platform. ATB Financial is in fact listed as one of those in Alberta that's involved in fintech. If you just go right on through, you can find places like Chroma technologies, financial technology and property solutions toward the rental experience; Bitcoin Well, a Bitcoin ATM company headquartered here in Edmonton. There are lots and lots and lots of companies that are fintech company start-ups in many, many, many cases that, I think, should be covered under legislation so that they have a, quote, unquote, sandbox that they can be governed within.

The trouble with the legislation as we see it before us today, Madam Speaker, is that this sandbox, this framework that these companies will be regulated within, basically, is filled with players that are decided upon by the Finance minister according to the legislation. Whether or not it is something that needs to be done is not the question with this legislation. It's, in fact, a sector that employs more than 60,000 Albertans and growing, and we support the innovation in this space to grow and diversify the economy, but it's the latitude that is given to the minister involved that we have concerns with.

These powers might assist a regulatory sandbox, but they also require the Assembly and the public to just trust the government to do the right thing, and in this province in many, many ways, I think, it's been demonstrated that we have lost trust in this government, and unfortunately that's caused people to lose trust in government itself. It doesn't matter whether we're talking about supportive services to human beings like AISH, as we talked about, whether it's education, firing educational assistants and getting into major spat with the ATA and teachers in general, firing doctors and ripping up contracts. Any manner of portfolio that one wants to speak about, Madam Speaker, this government has found a way to create distrust and disharmony.

That's why it gives me pause to see in Bill 13 a piece of legislation that once again requires us to fully put our trust in this case in the ministry and the Minister of Finance. I think the better way of going about it was to not have all that authority rest with the minister himself and to narrow the discretion that he has under the legislation.

As you look at the field itself, it's truly an exciting field. It almost bears some resemblance to the oil patch and its resourcefulness as far as new companies are concerned and how companies, local ones, many of them, are seeing a niche opportunity and taking advantage of it by creating a start-up. But, indeed, that entrepreneurialism, which is part and parcel of our province and many jurisdictions throughout the world, still has to be governed by rules and regulations which protect the public.

The financial services sector is one that's undergoing a great revolution globally, and the public deserves to know that it can trust that financial services sector. Typically when an Albertan goes to bed and they've got \$5,000 in their savings account, they feel pretty comfortable that when they wake up in the morning, that \$5,000 will still be there and that that financial institution wouldn't have failed. I think that's the kind of confidence that the people of this province want to have in their financial services sector and in the fintech sector that will be regulated by this Financial Innovation Act, that the government has so much control over through the Minister of Finance.

9:00

There are a number of entirely appropriate safeguards that ministers can apply, but they're not quantified in the legislation as it would be impossible to know what's appropriate for new ideas that don't exist yet. They could include, for example, a capital threshold to support a venture, appropriate insurance coverage, risk management procedures and policies. Certainly, Madam Speaker, if one is to take even a cursory look at the multitudes of small companies, small start-ups that have begun here in this province and around the world to identify and then serve a niche sector of the financial services sector, it certainly begs to be properly regulated so that people are protected. You know, appropriate insurance, risk management procedures, and capital thresholds to support the ventures are governing guideposts that one would hope are things that the minister would be having within the legislation.

Finally, Madam Speaker, any certificate issued by the government would be made public in this case. If the regulator – for example, the superintendent of financial institutions of Treasury Board and Finance – finds that any company breaches their terms, the fines are up to \$100,000 for a first offence, \$200,000 for a subsequent offence.

Now, it's been legislation that's been received warmly by a broad cross-section of people in Alberta. Indeed, the intent is, of course, to provide comfort in, actually, its implementation as we progress through the period of time that we have right now, where it's – I wouldn't describe it as the Wild West, but it certainly is a very, very

effervescent field in financial services. It's exciting, and there are tremendous business opportunities that exist. It's a realm where, while not deterring the entrepreneurial activity, you also want to make sure that there are sidelines and goalposts that are not breached. The minister has tremendous scope and power in this legislation and discretion, which I think may be beyond what the minister should be exercising in the regulation of this new industry.

Now, another element that we seemingly have come to the surface regularly when we speak about our financial services sector or any sector that has clients and collects data – the real estate industry was no different when I was working in it. It had many, many rules around the protection of data and the privacy of your clients. But when it comes to protecting the privacy of Albertans and the powers to issue exemptions to our privacy laws, is there anything that's on or off the table here for this government? How will consumers know, Madam Speaker, that when they're using a new product or service or technology that's operating within this regulatory sandbox – if it's regulated at a much lower level to allow the preponderance of successful new start-ups, is the government prepared to consider some type of a warning label to individual consumers so that they really know what they're getting into?

In this country we have a very large and well-deserved faith in our major financial institutions. We have a trust in them because they've earned that. We know they're not going to fail. They're very, very well regulated. We know that our banks and our trust companies and our credit unions are very, very sound and secure because they're regulated quite well, and they're respected around the world for that. That's the type of faith and confidence that we need to ensure Albertans have, and those investors from outside Alberta who want to come and invest in these start-ups must have that faith and confidence in these start-ups because of the regulations that govern them. That's what I hope we don't lose by having too much discretion given to the minister in applying the regulations to these start-ups in this new regulatory sandbox, as it's called.

It's legislation that would create a sandbox where financial services companies and financial technology companies could test new products and services and technology, and it's the first sort of regulatory sandbox of its kind regulated directly by a provincial government, as in this case by Treasury Board and Finance. It builds on a regulatory sandbox initiative that was started under the previous NDP government in Alberta and in other provinces in the securities space, which is regulated by the Alberta Securities Commission in Alberta. It's something that is novel, but it's not brand new.

It's important, I think, to keep in mind the goal of these new regulatory sandboxes, to ensure that the public confidence is secure, to know that we have in this country a banking and financial institution framework and network that is the envy of most of the world, Madam Speaker. We have had a history of very, very solid Canadian banks emanating out of sort of the British banking system, a counterpart to those that have developed in the United States, and we have had very, very few financial institutions fail in this country, because of our acceptance of very, very careful regulation and tight regulation to ensure that the soundness of these financial institutions is never brought into question. I think that even during some of the most extreme times in the financial meltdown in 2008, 2009 we never came to the point that many other financial institutions in the world came to, where it was thought that they might actually fail. There were measures taken by government to assist then, but we withstood those tumultuous times because of the strict regulations that Canadian financial institutions must adhere to.

I think the same type of attitude, the same dedication to careful regulation has to be maintained in this legislation in a new field, which is really burgeoning. It was quite astonishing to see the numbers of small start-ups in Edmonton and Calgary, provincially, and throughout the country, in Canada. We're not talking tens and twenties; we're talking hundreds of small fintech companies, small start-ups. Of course, with the start-ups, Madam Speaker, as in any business, you're going to see significant failures. Some of them just won't get off the ground. Some will get to a certain level and fail for a variety of reasons. Quite often scaling up is a difficulty. Indeed, all the more reason for the government to be very, very careful with legislation regulating this new sandbox that the new, exciting companies will be playing in. It's serious business, because we're looking for investment.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. I do appreciate and acknowledge the comments by our opposition member previous. I think he has pointed out some key messages, that we do have to regulate this in a very careful way. That's why it's my pleasure to rise and thank the minister, through you, Madam Speaker, for the great work in bringing this bill forward, particularly to second reading, Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act.

Our government has been working continually for Albertans in nearly every economic sector. Alberta's economy is more diverse than ever as we intensely focus on creating more jobs and building our economy.

A little bit of history from what we were able to dig up in this sector. From 2000 to 2020 Alberta's real gross domestic product in the financial services sector grew at an average annual rate of more than 4 per cent, outpacing growth in all other provinces and contributing over \$14 billion to the provincial GDP in 2020. Nearly 63,000 Albertans were employed in the financial services sector in 2019, and we want to continue to build on this growth and the attractiveness of doing business in Alberta.

9:10

In Bill 13 the proposed rules will make it easier for entrepreneurs anywhere in the province to test products in the emerging field of cryptocurrencies and online banking. If passed, this bill would set up what is known as a regulatory sandbox, allowing companies, under strict government supervision, to test new programs and products, with temporary exemptions on select regulations and requirements. Companies would also gain access to certain information, with strict parameters and individual permissions governed by the Minister of Finance and his advisory team. These are just some of the reasons I think Bill 13 is essential to the growth of our economy here in Alberta, by exploring, challenging the status quo and engaging with industry to provide new and innovative ideas to all Albertans and potentially all Canadians.

The government of Ontario had the Capital Markets Modernization Taskforce, which recommended the creation of an Ontario fintech regulatory sandbox and a Canada-wide regulatory sandbox for all financial services. So this idea isn't only being considered here in Alberta. This regulatory sandbox is already being used in various industries and sectors world-wide in places like the United Kingdom, the United States, particularly the states of Arizona and Wyoming, Hong Kong, and Australia. The regulation helps create tech jobs and keeps these regions at the forefront of cutting-edge financial technology, which also attracts world-class companies and minds searching for new ideas. No other Canadian province or territory has yet established a regulatory

sandbox for the finance and fintech sector, but Alberta seeks to be the first.

Regardless, the Canadian Securities Administrators, the CSA, in partnership with the Alberta Securities Commission, the ASC, established their securities-related regulatory sandbox in 2016. The establishment of an Alberta regulatory sandbox would be complementary to the CSA and ASC's regulatory sandbox and provide the certainty, security, privacy, and governance needed for the financial technology sector to operate here in Alberta more fully.

Margaret Paproski, the chief operating officer, general counsel, and co-founder of InvestDefy, stated on March 31:

I applaud the Alberta government's commitment to supporting innovators and businesses in financial services and fintech with its proposed Financial Innovation Act. With so much regulatory uncertainty making it difficult to create and launch cutting edge products, the regulatory sandbox is an extremely welcome initiative and demonstrates Alberta's commitment to being a leader in this space.

That's something I think we should all be proud of.

I want to take a moment to talk about some of the specific criteria each of the applicants would have to meet to be eligible to operate under this legislation. The first: the physical presence requirement. Applicants must maintain a corporate physical presence right here in Alberta, meaning that applicants must have an office in Alberta or senior staff living in the province of Alberta.

The financial services requirement: the regulatory sandbox is designed for companies that offer financial products or services. This isn't just a broad, blanket legislation applying to all kinds of different sectors but specifically to fintech and financial products.

The innovation test: applicants must adequately explain how each eligible product or service is considered new and original or a new adaptation or a material improvement on another product or service. Applicants would not receive exemptions for products or services currently offered in Alberta by other companies. They must be new.

The business plan requirement: applicants must provide a sound, viable business plan, including details for testing their financial product or service and plans to exit the regulatory sandbox.

In addition to these requirements, there are also case-by-case dependent requirements like risk management policy, security, privacy, and insurance qualities that would be decided by the minister's expertise and governing advisers.

Lastly, I wanted to talk about the attention to detail to ensure transparency. The government will be making a website available to the public, which would outline, one, the name of each participant issued acceptance; two, a description of the product or service each participant is offering through the sandbox; three, a list of the exemptions provided to respective participants; four, any terms, conditions, or restrictions imposed by the minister on a case-by-case basis; and five, any amendments, revocation, or cancellation of the acceptance certificate.

Once and if passed, the goal of this bill is simply to create a regulatory sandbox for financial services and fintech companies in Alberta. Alberta would be Canada's first province or territory to establish a regulatory sandbox for these sectors. These measures would ensure that Alberta remains a growing destination of choice for financial services and financial technology companies, growing business and creating jobs. It will benefit Albertans through innovative products and services for generations to come as well as diversifying our economy even further. Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for bringing this bill forward. I would ask that all of our colleagues in this place support this bill.

Thank you.

Member Ceci: I appreciate the opportunity to address this at second reading, Financial Innovation Act, Bill 13, and I appreciate the Member for Lethbridge-East for sharing some information that I think will be helpful to Albertans. This is a new area to venture into, and we need to be as clear as possible so that Albertans understand what their government is doing. There obviously is a huge interest not only from the 63,000 employees who work in this area but also potentially for the new sector that will flourish and develop in Alberta as a result of this bill. I'm certainly hoping that that's the case and that we see even more billions added to our provincial GDP. That can only be a good thing for Albertans.

I do want to say that I'm glad to hear ASC, Alberta Securities Commission, mentioned. They have always been stalwarts in terms of ensuring that the securities sector, the security space, in this province remains strong and trustworthy. They do good work in terms of ensuring that the capital Albertans invest and others invest in securities is regulated, that the commission goes after people who are taking advantage of the investments of Albertans.

I remember that back when I was Finance minister, I got a call from the Finance minister of the day, who was a member of the Conservative Party of Canada under the Harper government, and he said: "I want you to essentially get rid of the Alberta Securities Commission. I want you to consolidate it across the country. We want to consolidate it across the country." And I said: "Why would I do that? We have different companies. We have an energy sector here that we know well and our Securities Commission knows well. They can stand up for Albertans better than a consolidated commission out of Toronto likely could." And he said, "Well, I think you're going in the wrong direction." I said, "Well, I don't think so."

Alberta needs its own security commission, and the Member for Lethbridge-East was correct in saying that they were innovative and they were strong and they did things that this Financial Innovation Act is building off of. We may not have had that – we likely wouldn't have had that – had I listened and taken the direction of the federal Finance minister at the time of the Conservative Party of Canada.

I, too, want to say that there are positive aspects of this bill. I think it is something that should get a lot of airtime, publicity. There should be media about it so that Albertans can understand what this bill is all about. I think on this side we have general broad policy agreement in this approach, and I would stand up and support it. I will stand up and support it.

9:20

It's new legislation, however, so that's why I am suggesting that we need to be speaking about it frequently through potentially our own communications to our citizens, because where it is a regulatory sandbox, that's new terminology for Albertans. I think it's a place where new products and services and technology should be tested so that we keep, essentially, a bit of a tighter grip on it initially so that it proves itself over the long term. I do think it's important that there be the necessary expertise, whether that be in Treasury Board and Finance and bureaucracy, where this initiative can be understood, transparently worked on, and ensured that we're not going down the wrong road.

For the kinds of exemptions that will be sought out by companies that want to work in this area, they are significant in number, so we need to ensure that the decisions made in this area – because they're not unsubstantial. I mean, they're in the following acts: the loans and trust act; the Credit Union Act; ATB Financial Act; Consumer Protection Act, with the additional approval from the Minister of Service Alberta in that area; personal information and privacy, with additional approval from the Information and Privacy Commissioner;

the Financial Consumers Act; and other acts that could be added via regulation at a later date.

The Member for Lethbridge-East talked about how entry into the sandbox can take place. I won't go over that. But that's useful to know as well because there is direct skin in the game or investment in Alberta that must be a case. They must make it in terms of making a business case for participation in the sandbox.

The information about the exemptions that are granted: I think it's necessary that that information be clearly laid out in terms of the conditions and the restrictions, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, as well as an expiry date so that Albertans can know what decisions are being made on exemptions that other businesses have to meet or not get exemptions for but in this space they're granted so Albertans on their own can come to some understanding if there is additional, I guess, benefit for the entrance into the sandbox for Alberta.

I wonder about the size of the penalties, fines for offences, with \$100,000 being for the first offence and \$200,000 being for any subsequent offence, when companies are found in breach of the terms that they have already been approved of having. I just wonder if that's an adequate amount, seeing the potential problems that will be caused to Albertans if offences are committed.

I'm glad, as the Member for Lethbridge-East talked about, that there is a cross-section of support for this endeavour in this province. I'm glad to understand that and hear that. I think that shows that things potentially are on the right track. The challenge, I think, will be to ensure that the broad powers given to the minister in this case have some checks and balances along the way and that there is transparency in terms of the decision-making that is made by the minister with regard to these businesses that are starting up in this space, because we do have some pretty problematic decisions that have been made by government as a whole over the last two and a half, three years, and I wouldn't want to see those recreated in this space as well, nor would Albertans benefit from some of the bad decision-making that has been made, for instance the pipeline investment of \$1.3 billion that was made by this government with no return at all.

Those are some of the concerns that I would kind of just want to put on the record, recognizing that this is a start and needs to see some positive steps taken. I'm willing to give it that support so that it can take those steps but with some caution around the lack of transparency, the size of the fines.

I'll sit down. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise just to add some brief comments here around Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. I think my friends from Edmonton-McClung and Calgary-Buffalo have pretty much spoken to most of the points I want to make, but I guess there's something I do really want to highlight here.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I guess, to begin with, when it comes to innovation, I'm certainly in favour of that. You know, getting a chance to do new things, cool things that make things easier for people: that's always a desirable effect. Of course, when those things do go sideways – and you can certainly ask my wife this. When she doesn't get the services that she is expecting and certainly that she's paid for, I could probably go up onto the roof of my house and find a few missing shingles because of those cases. I don't think there's anything wrong with Albertans demanding a certain level even when we're talking about

a potential new innovation, say, for instance, around financial services, which is what Bill 13 is starting to enable here.

As my friend from Calgary-Buffalo had mentioned, the one concern I do have in this bill is around the great leeway that this bill does grant the minister. You know, I can't help but think again: serving back in the 29th Legislature, members of the government bench, members of the government caucus who also served during those times had significant concerns every single time it was thought that extra abilities, extra powers, extra creative decision-making was being allowed to a minister. I can't help but wonder what members who had served back at that time would have thought when reading through Bill 13, because those are some of the concerns I have. Really, at the end of the day, what you're asking members of this House and quite more broadly the public in general: trust us; trust us to get it right.

Well, there's my concern with this, Mr. Speaker, you know, trusting the government, trusting the Premier. I trusted the Premier to disclose his donor list. We see how that worked out. Albertans trusted him to disclose his donor list, and that never happened. The government had said: well, trust us; we're going to give this very big corporate tax giveaway, and it's going to create 100,000 jobs and it's going to fill the business towers.

Mr. McIver: Check.

Mr. Nielsen: That kind of fell up a little bit short, to the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

They said: trust us on the new curriculum revamp. We've seen how that has gone over with people, you know. "Trust us to fix the insurance premiums." Those have been running wild. I've got constituents that have come to me and said that their auto insurance went up 46 per cent, their condo insurance went up 57 per cent. Yet the Premier went and asked, "Please reduce the premiums" and somehow managed to haggle – what? – a 3 per cent to 5 per cent reduction after them going up 10 per cent to 30 per cent on average. There was the trust.

9:30

Again, my friend from Calgary-Buffalo also mentioned that we trusted you: you bet \$1.3 billion on Donald Trump, and you lost that bet. You know, the government said, "Trust us to get the word out around our energy sector; it's only going to cost \$30 million a year," bumbled two logos, and the biggest thing we have to show for it is chasing after Bigfoot. What's next? "Trust us to go after Ogopogo." I don't know.

Bill 13 significantly asks us and Albertans to trust them, so I'm really going to try to encourage the government that you need to work on this trust issue because it hasn't been going very well for you so far. I just really wanted to highlight that, Mr. Speaker, at this point.

I think what I will do is motion to adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 14 Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022

[Debate adjourned April 20: Member Loyola speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has risen.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is absolutely an honour to rise in this Chamber and to speak to Bill 14. In fact, I did not get a chance to speak in the Chamber yesterday, so as is my tradition, I'd like to just acknowledge all the front-line workers who are

continuing to work so hard for all of us. Of course, we are still in a pandemic, so a shout-out to all those workers in health care and education and retail and on the front lines, wherever you are. You're seen and you are valued.

You know, I'm actually quite pleased to be able to speak to Bill 14, Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022, and, in fact, to be able to speak to it as the critic for Status of Women, because, of course, it was the Associate Minister of Status of Women who has sponsored this bill. Yeah. Gosh, this is a bill that is certainly overdue and a long time coming.

I'm very happy, actually, that I get – I was joking about the fact – to speak before the two lawyers who are planning to speak, not that I'm referring to their presence or absence but, spoiler, they will be speaking on this bill. I'm happy that I get to speak before them because I will admit, of course, that my knowledge of the legal system is not quite as strong as the members for Edmonton-Whitemud and Calgary-Mountain View, but, you know, I can talk about this a little bit from just what I've heard from stakeholders and from stories that have been shared with me.

I shared earlier today that one of the most powerful parts of my job – I don't know if all the MLAs would agree – for me is to be able to hear people's stories and to meet folks. Actually, earlier today I met two lovely young women here in Edmonton who are both health care workers. One is a respiratory therapist, and the other is a nurse. Their names are – I'm sure they won't mind because I already posted on social media – Sabreena and Anna. I met them because they actually met at the beginning of the pandemic. They are going to get married in September, and they asked if I would be their wedding officiant. Yeah. It's really exciting – and they're both, obviously, doing so much on the front lines of health care – just to be able to meet them.

I tell that story and just, you know, the power of story because when I saw this bill come up, I thought about the survivors of sexual assault and sexual violence who I've been able to connect with in my role as the critic for Status of Women. A few stories stand out, but I'll share one, and that's the story of Emma Nikolai-Wilson. She actually stood with us when we opposed this government's horrific cuts to victims of crime. She had reached out to me, and she said that she was willing to share her story of sexual assault. Don't worry; I am tying this back to the bill, and I'm not going to solely use this as an opportunity to remind this government of their poor choices in the past but to talk about why we need to be taking sexual assault and sexual abuse seriously. I know that no one in this Chamber would disagree with that sentiment.

Emma is one of the, believe it or not, 1.95 million people in Alberta every year who have survived sexual assault or sexual abuse. Basically, I mean, you're talking about close to 1 in 2 Albertans experience sexual violence of some form. That's according to data from the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, and those are just staggering numbers, absolutely. You know, we know that one of the significant challenges when it comes to sexual assault and sexual abuse is that numbers show that roughly only 5 per cent of survivors in Canada report the incident, so you can't even imagine how many people are struggling, suffering in silence. Yeah. I think about people like Emma, who shared her story with me. I can think about others who've shared their just incredibly heartbreaking stories of sexual violence, and it's on all of us as legislators to hear those stories and to act.

You know, this is why I'm happy to see that this government is making it a requirement for sexual assault training for judges to be a requirement. I do want to get on the record, though – and as I've already alluded to, I know my colleagues will be able to expand in even more detail on some of the concerns that we have, but I saw this actually right away when the bill was introduced as a concern

– that the sexual assault training actually applies to future judges; it doesn't apply to sitting judges. I think what the government said in response is that they're hoping that sitting judges will get training through existing education plans.

Well, it's hard. You know, they're kind of justifying that they'll address this eventually, but I think it's hard to trust that that will in fact be the case. Again, I can come back to the example of victims of crime and the slashing of those funds and being told, as an example there, that: "Oh, no, no" – I try not to use the word "victims," but of course that's the name of the fund – "survivors will have supports." Sure enough, I heard from countless Albertans who didn't get supports, who were denied claims.

This is what we've raised, and I truly actually believe that we might be able to get some movement from this government on that decision on victims of crime. We know that survivors of sexual assault, sexual violence: many often don't report, and if they do report, they take their time reporting because it's incredibly traumatic, right? So the changes to the victims of crime fund meant that if survivors didn't apply within a 45-day window, they would be denied. That's exactly what has happened to some folks. I give that context to say that you can imagine why we are concerned. We are skeptical about this government just promising that they'll address some of these issues later on.

9:40

A couple of things, a couple of other concerns that I want to raise. I will actually point out that I'm going to use the words of somebody who's far more versed on these issues than I am, and that's Jennifer Koshan. She is a law professor at the University of Calgary. I think she's only so far issued a tweet thread, but I think – I'm looking at my colleague for Edmonton-Whitemud – she is planning on writing a blog about this. Yeah. I've read much of her work before, and although I still often need it explained to me by my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud, she does do a good job of distilling some of the issues.

She did this with one piece of this proposed bill in front of us, Bill 14, and that's on the definition of – oh, I'm sorry; I closed my window; here we go – social context. This bill, Bill 14, that we have in front of us is built on some of the work in federal Bill C-3. In Bill C-3 they explain social context "to include education on systemic racism and systemic discrimination as well as myths and stereotypes associated with sexual assault complainants." I can share that with *Hansard* because I am quoting her tweet directly. One of the issues that we see here in Bill 14 is that this term is not defined, and that's troubling at a time when, you know, we should be absolutely equipping judges, well, all Canadians in fact, with an understanding of systemic racism and systemic discrimination and taking an intersectional lens to look at the causes of some of these issues. She points out as well myths and stereotypes associated with sexual assault complainants.

I mean, we know, anybody who's followed some of the past on what led up to Bill 14, the issues with – was it Justice Robin Camp? – you know, the perpetuation of rape myths, of awful stereotypes. It's clear not just in the justice system but in the justice system as well that these myths persist, right? So what an opportunity – perhaps it's the teacher in me – to really educate and to talk about or to dig into some of the bigger issues around myths and around stereotypes.

Again, I really want to reiterate the piece around systemic racism as well, right? You know, we've talked in this Chamber about the barriers that racialized folks have experienced in navigating the justice system. No one in this Chamber needs to be explained the fact that Indigenous folks are overrepresented in the justice system. This is why we need to ensure that judges are equipped with a really

broad understanding of these issues, including systemic racism, systemic discrimination as well, and just really given a good understanding of what social context issues really mean, and I would add to that looking at issues around gender.

We also know that there are – you know, there is homophobia and there's transphobia in the justice system as well. Perhaps it's not always as obvious. But again, this is where taking that intersectional lens is so critical. I know intersectionality is not a word that this government seems to embrace, and I'm not saying that just to start anything. It was, in fact, their Premier who said that intersectionality is a, quote, unquote, kooky theory. We've seen that very ideology play itself out in the crushing of GBA plus, gender-based analysis plus, across this government. For folks who don't know, GBA plus is a really important policy lens to ensure that policies and programs from governments are very much analyzed from an intersectional lens before being passed and before impacting the lives of Albertans. I've called on the previous Associate Minister of Status of Women and the current minister – I called on them both – to do better because when asked if there was any sort of lens being applied to legislation, policies, programs, the answer is no.

That was something that I was so proud to see under this government, under the NDP government, because when there is a gender-based lens applied, we know that the results are better as well. I know I'm explaining it in a simplistic way, but the reality is that I'm concerned. I'll come back to Bill 14. I'm concerned, when we've got a record like that from this government, that we won't see the proper education and training for judges that they ought to have. So I'm calling on this government to really think about that as well, and like I said – I know my colleagues are going to speak to this as well – I do hope that we get some responses from this government on some of the questions that we're going to raise.

Again, I'm happy that this piece of legislation is before us – and perhaps there will be some amendments forthcoming – but we've got an opportunity to make a really important bill, a good bill a lot better and a lot stronger. I think everybody in this Chamber can agree that on an issue as important as sexual assault and sexual violence we want to get it right. When you've got experts in law urging you to amend and to make it better, I think we should listen to them.

With that, I think I will wrap up my remarks here right away and again, you know, just point out that I am happy to see this from this ministry, but I urge the minister to take our points seriously.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate this evening? The Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the call.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this incredibly important piece of legislation. I'd like to start out by saying that I am supportive of the bill insofar as it goes, but I think that there are a few things that could be done to make it better. I think it's worth starting with the importance of this bill.

There is a long-standing legal tradition of sort of separation of powers between the legislative branch, which is us, and the judiciary. It's important that people not be intersecting unnecessarily into each other's jurisdiction. I think we see in the U.S. a system where judges are elected. That has some problems because it can sort of result in the pushing to do things that people are reactive to in the moment. Rather than thinking of the system, rather than thinking of the overall law, it can cause people to react in the moment, and that's problematic.

Our system doesn't suffer from that problem, and I think that's important, but a problem that I think it potentially does suffer from is somewhat of a problem with inertia. There has been a lot of movement in the science and the understanding of trauma and the understanding of how individuals behave after a trauma, and I think that while the law itself has done a good job of keeping up with that, we need to make sure that the people who hold the discretion of the application of that law, in this case judges, are keeping up with the advances in the law.

The law has been clear for a long time that certain myths and stereotypes are impermissible and that a judge cannot use those things in their reasoning. So questions about, you know, "Why didn't she report it right away? Why did she put herself in that situation? Why didn't she wear a longer skirt?" those pieces of analysis, aren't allowed anymore. Unfortunately, some of those myths stay with us in society and have followed us to the justice system. That is incredibly problematic, so it is very important that we make advances in this way.

9:50

I will give credit to the Provincial Court. I know they have done a lot of work around offering this training and ensuring that all of their judges are in a position to take it. There are some systems in place to deal with problems that arise. I, obviously, got a very sort of up-close and personal encounter with this when I served as the Minister of Justice in this province. I received a letter from several professors, several of whom had actually taught me, about a case that had occurred before the Provincial Court of Alberta in which a number of those myths and stereotypes were used in the reasoning. That was incredibly troubling. The transcripts were long. I read them in detail, and I ultimately took a very rare step, potentially unprecedented in the history of Alberta, of writing to my federal counterpart to make a complaint with respect to that judge.

The reason for that was that the treatment of the victim in that instance by the justice system was deeply inappropriate. The application of reasoning, questioning like "Why didn't she keep her knees together?" reasoning around whether or not she had consensually engaged in activity because she was homeless and she was essentially trading that for a place to stay, was extremely problematic, and the myths and stereotypes in the decision were very troubling. Ultimately, the judge was removed from the bench, which I think was the right outcome, but we need to keep in mind that this is just one case, and there are probably many in which similar things have occurred.

Even when we're talking about cases, we're talking about a very small fraction of the sexual assaults that are actually occurring out there, because the evidence is quite clear that women do not report, and they don't report in part out of fear for how they will be treated by society and how they will be treated by the justice system. There are a lot of problems, and this is definitely a solution to one of them, so I don't think it should be understated, the importance of this. However, I think that by itself it is insufficient.

One of the things that happened early on in the UCP's tenure is that they made changes to the victims of crime fund, changes that I think are extremely problematic. Essentially, what those changes did: prior to that, the victims of crime fund, which is a surcharge placed on – it actually primarily comes from speeding tickets, but basically most financial things that go through Provincial Court have a victim's fine surcharge on them, and it goes into the victims fund. The victims fund is intended to be used to support victims of crime in this province. The UCP changed that so that was no longer necessary. Now the victims of crime fund is essentially used to fund other projects. Now, I'm not presuming that those projects are bad – many of those projects are fine – but those should be funded with

government funds, because the results of these changes are that a large portion of the fund is now going to fund government services and not going to victims of crime. The government actually refused, at that time, an amendment that would have ensured that at least a certain portion of the fund was reserved for victims' programming.

The result of this is that the funding that goes to groups that support victims has been decreased when, in fact, it needed to be increased, and victims have been denied benefits. One of the ways in which this happens is that certain streams of benefits have been cut off, so that's extremely problematic. Another way in which this has happened – and this is important when we're talking about victims of sexual assault – is that they have put in place a time limit of 45 days. The victim has to apply to the fund within 45 days.

I don't know how many members of this House have had the misfortune of knowing someone who has been the victim of a sexual assault, but 45 days isn't enough time. People are still processing their trauma and what has happened to them, and they may not choose to come forward in that amount of time. They may need longer than that, and in fact I believe that these victims who have survived a sexual assault – we're talking about people who have survived sexual assault. They have had agency taken away from them in a very deep and personal fashion, and we should give them as much agency over how they process that as we can.

That was one of the reasons why, when we were in government, we removed the limitations period on their ability to sue in civil court. The civil process you can now pursue at any time so that people are not forced into making that decision by an arbitrary timeline. They have the time to process it in whatever way they see fit, and then they are able to come forward when they choose. Having this 45-day limit on the application is extremely problematic.

Now, it wasn't a lot of money that people got, maybe enough to cover, you know, some portion of the counselling they needed or to take some time off work just to emotionally process what had happened or maybe even to pay for a course they had to withdraw from at school because they just weren't able to cope in those circumstances. It wasn't a lot of money, but it was meaningful and it was something, and it was something that we could do for them. I think that that's a big part. So I think that this, without reforms to that victims of crime act, is not sufficient on its own.

I think another thing worth noting are a couple of issues with the bill itself. One of the questions that we've had sort of around this is about definitions of terms. It requires education in sexual assault law and social context issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've already gone on longer than I intended.

Social context issues is a term that is taken from federal legislation, and in federal legislation social context issues is defined. The reason I think that that is important is because it is defined to include systemic racism. That is important. I think it is important that we put into legislation the requirement that some of the training be around systemic racism.

I mean, certainly, in my experience many lawyers don't even really understand what that means. Many lawyers still think and many justice system participants still think that when you say "systemic racism," what you mean is that the individuals in the system are racist. That's not what it means at all. What it means is that the results of the system in its entirety have a differential impact on people of different races.

I honestly don't think that anyone who is paying the slightest bit of attention to the justice system can deny that that is the case. The incarceration rate for Indigenous people is wildly disproportionate, and that is a result of the systems. What else can it be a result of? If

you are getting an outcome that doesn't reflect the distribution in the population, if you're suggesting that the system isn't responsible for the outcome, what you're suggesting is that certain people have a greater proclivity to criminality, which is obviously false. It's obviously not true. So I think systemic racism is fairly well demonstrated, and I think it's worth using that definition in this legislation to make sure that those issues are being recognized by the system as a whole.

10:00

Finally, another one of the questions I have about this is that since this legislation occurred at the federal level, there's been a lot of conversation about survivors of domestic violence and whether there should be training specifically in that because it is a very similar problem to the way sometimes the system misfires with respect to sexual assault law. The law is clear that you can't use myths and stereotypes, but sometimes those myths and stereotypes still get used because the people who apply the law are members of society, and society still, unfortunately, suffers from those biases. That is clearly the case with domestic violence as well, so I think it's worth considering the inclusion of that sort of training as well.

Again, we get the same sort of recurrent themes both in society and potentially in the legal system, where people are, you know, "Well, why didn't she leave sooner?" or "Why didn't she seek help sooner?" or a series of questions like that, that we know just are not reflective of the way people process the trauma. A lot of people stay because there are children involved, because they have no place to go, because they wouldn't have money to buy food, because maybe they don't have a work permit in this country and they wouldn't have anywhere to go. They don't have any family or friends to protect them. Even if those things aren't the case, there are many psychological reasons that people won't necessarily leave in the first instance.

I think it's important to recognize these things, and the bill, again, as far as it goes, I think, is very important. It definitely is a step forward. I think there are some things we can do to make it a bigger step forward to make sure that it is more inclusive, so hopefully we will have a chance to bring those amendments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 14, the Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022, and in particular it's a pleasure to follow the comments from my colleagues the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, both very thoughtful sets of comments about this bill and incredibly important, reflecting their commitment to these issues as well.

I want to begin by, as well, expressing my happiness, my pleasure that this bill is being brought forward before this Legislature to require training around sexual assault and sexual violence for judges. I do think it is important legislation that I believe pretty much, I'm assuming, most of the members of this House are going to feel that they want to support given that the objective of the legislation, which is really to make sure that those in positions of judgment in our court system are operating and assessing their judgment in a way that is free of myths and stereotypes around sexual violence, is something that we're all committed to. I support the basis of this bill.

However, as my colleagues have mentioned, there is some room for improvement here, and I hope that the comments that we're making today and suggestions that we're making are met with that

spirit of: let's try to make this bill as good as possible and really achieve the objectives that I believe we're all committed to in this House. I want to give credit to Professor Jennifer Koshan, who has certainly provided her insight, but she's one of many legal academics, practitioners, survivors of violence, sexual violence who have brought forward their experiences, and we can learn from that information and those experiences to improve this bill, I believe, to better serve survivors of sexual violence.

My colleagues have mentioned a number of them. As indicated, you know, the reason why this topic has, well, gotten a lot of media attention was because of the comments specifically of an Alberta Provincial Court judge, Justice Camp, who, during a trial on sexual assault in 2014, made a number of shocking comments that revealed not only that myths were still certainly present within the judicial system but were actively being applied by a member of the judiciary. I think we were all rightly shocked to hear some of those comments. I actually thought about whether or not it's appropriate to repeat the comments only because I always worry about revictimizing those who have survived it to have to hear these comments again. But it is important context to know that we had a sitting judge in the Provincial Court of Alberta who, during a sexual assault trial, said the words, "Sex and pain sometimes go together. That's not necessarily a bad thing" and said, "Young wom[e]n want to have sex, particularly if they're drunk" and also said, "Why couldn't [the complainant] just keep her knees together?" Those words shocked many of us. Of course, it led to an inquiry into Justice Camp and led to this public conversation around judicial training around sexual violence.

But we have to be clear, as my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View indicated, that this was a high-profile case. The concern is that this may have and likely is occurring more often than we know about, and I'm sure there are many practitioners of the bar, many survivors of sexual violence who have experienced this. Sometimes it's as obvious and as explicit as these comments, and sometimes it's not. It's underlying some of the decisions that are being made and the judgments that are being made, so that's why we talk about this now, and it's a good thing that we're talking about it, and it's a good thing that we're bringing forward legislation to require judicial training around this.

However, there's room for improvement, as I mentioned. As noted, you know, Bill 14 does indicate that newly appointed judges – or nobody may be appointed as a judge unless that individual has completed education in sexual assault law and social context issues. I echo the comments of my colleagues that we should follow the lead of the federal legislation Bill C-3, which does actually provide a definition of social context. That is a very broad term, and upon just reading it in this legislation, in this bill, it's not clear what is meant by that.

I think it is important to be clear what we're talking about. Since we are saying that newly appointed judges must receive training in this area, what do we mean? Training in what? So I think it's important for us to consider amending this legislation, if that moves forward to Committee of the Whole, to consider adding a definition of social context issues that mirrors – unless there's other feedback as to how it should differ, but I believe I support the definition in Bill C-3 which talks about looking at systemic racism and systemic discrimination.

I believe that's incredibly important because, as my colleagues have noted, intersectionality is a key piece of sexual assault and sexual violence. I think we only have to think about, for example, another shocking case, the Gladue case, which was an Indigenous woman, where there was actually a debate – I mean, this woman died as a result of a very violent, violent activity, and there was some suggestion that she consented to it, and that was a matter of

debate in that case. I'm not sure if we necessarily would have been having those conversations in the same way had Cindy Gladue not been Indigenous. That underlies so much of the discussion that happens around sexual violence.

We also can't ignore that women with disabilities are actually at higher risk of sexual violence as well. In fact, I note that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View mentioned, you know, if any of us in this House have the misfortune of having known somebody who has been sexually assaulted. Actually, the statistics show that not only do we, all of us in this House, know somebody who has been sexually assaulted; there is a chance that 30 per cent of the women in this Assembly have been sexually assaulted. The statistics show that women over the age of 15 in Canada: almost actually close to 39 per cent have reported that – not reported. They report not solely to the police, but they have indicated that they have experienced sexual assault.

This is not an uncommon issue. It's incredibly common. What is uncommon is actually that it gets to the courts. Only about 5 per cent of sexual assault cases actually end up being reported to the police, and then even fewer than that move on to the court system. The reality is that many of us have been impacted or know somebody directly close to us who has been impacted by sexual assault.

How those matters are dealt with in the court system is critically important because we know that myths and stereotypes actually prevent reporting. It is very much that fear of being judged when you go into the space, all of the rape myths that many of us, unfortunately, have heard before: how the woman was dressed, was she intoxicated, what was her past sexual activity? All of those things are not only sometimes explicit but very implicit in some of the decisions that are being made. That discourages women from actually reporting.

10:10

If we're going to be serious about dealing with sexual assault and violence, we actually need to be encouraging women to understand that it is a safe space for them to be able to report, that they can go forward, that they will be believed, that they will be heard, and the matter will be dealt with. Certainly, we need to be clear that we need to make this legislation as good as possible, but this is only one small piece of addressing it. So I encourage that we consider moving forward by including a definition of social context to address those systemic racism issues and systemic discrimination.

I also note that the federal Bill C-3 also – when it talks about the judicial training that's required in sexual assault, it actually indicates in the legislation that that sexual assault education training must be developed in consultation with sexual assault survivors and persons and organizations and groups that support them as well as in consultation with Indigenous leaders and communities. I think that's a really important piece because when we're talking about sexual assault training and education, again, what do we mean by it, and who's going to be involved in the development of that training? I think that's something as well for this House to consider.

I also want to note that Bill 14 as drafted only applies to individuals who may be appointed in the future as judges or those who are currently on the eligibility list. It does not mandate sexual assault education training for existing judicial members. I think that is a concern. I was just actually having a conversation with my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood about what training I received when I was in law school, which was now 20 years ago, and did we talk about sexual assault myths and sexual violence myths? You know what? We didn't explicitly. It was sometimes. It was brought up by the nature of – depending on the professor, depending on the nature of the cases that were brought up, and

sometimes in conversations in classes that conversation happened and we did discuss it a little bit, but it wasn't actually part of our training to become lawyers.

Now, I'm not familiar with whether or not that's now required. I hope it is certainly part of at least the criminal law and family law courses, but certainly there are many sitting members of the judiciary who have not had any exposure to training around sexual assault and sexual violence. I think that we can certainly consider in this bill the potential for requiring an undertaking that they do some kind of training like that.

I also want to pick up on pieces that were brought up by Jennifer Koshan around similarities around domestic violence. The way Professor Koshan put it was very good. She said: we have an opportunity here with Bill 14; why don't we expand it to include training around myths and stereotypes around domestic violence? This is an opportunity because, as noted, there are certainly many similar stereotypes that apply to domestic violence. You know, we've all probably heard or read stories about where there was this implied sense of, "Well, if a woman was really being assaulted or there was really domestic violence going on, why did she stay?" or "If she fought back, maybe it wasn't so bad to begin with." There have been stereotypes in family law for many years around that domestic violence is only raised or intimate-partner violence is only raised in custodial disputes, implying that perhaps they should not be believed.

So there are many myths and stereotypes that apply in the domestic violence context that we have an opportunity to address here as well. We have an opportunity to be leading in this issue by bringing forward required training for new judges on those myths as well, and I think there is a lot of good research and academic work that's been done as to how that can be implemented. So I hope that's an opportunity that this government takes in the spirit, of course, of making the best legislation possible.

Lastly, I want to mention that, you know, I appreciate that there have been a number of pieces of legislation since this government was elected that are around the issue of violence against women. We've seen Clare's law and human trafficking legislation as well as now this piece. This is important. I'm not going to deny that. I think that's good work, and I think members of this side of the Assembly have supported those pieces of legislation.

However, I do have to comment on the fact that whenever I do see legislation or action taken by this government specific to women, it seems to be around this idea of women in positions of victimhood, positions of violence, and there are bills that are brought forward that are focused on legal mechanisms to address that. Those are important. Those are important parts of the work that we need to do to address violence against women. However, this government also continues to ignore the other factors that lead to both physical, financial, and so many other types of insecurity for women. Those issues may not be within the law and order framework of this government's, I guess, predilection to go towards, but certainly they are equally as important in addressing issues of violence and also to treat the security of families and children and women as a whole.

We can't talk about family violence or sexual violence without also addressing issues of poverty, without also addressing issues of access to affordable quality child care, which gives women the security and independence to be able to work, to go back to school, which sometimes gives them the ability to leave violent situations. We can't talk about addressing violence against women without also talking about drug poisonings, without talking about housing insecurity and food insecurity. All of these factors lead to situations where women are not supported, don't have the ability to be able to

leave violent situations, whether that be domestic or intimate-partner violence or whether that be sexual violence.

I appreciate the efforts that are made to bring forward law and order type of measures. This is a good bill. It can be better. But we cannot ignore all those other pieces that provide women the agency to be able to speak out when they experience violence and to also experience independence so that they can extricate but also not have to be in situations where they are facing violence. I'd like to encourage this government to look at this issue a little bit more holistically than only about law and order preventions. We have to be talking about poverty and financial security. When I read the reports of the children and young people who have been in the child intervention system and died from care, these issues are prevalent throughout. I encourage this government to consider these issues and to look into the issue more broadly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Bill 14 for second reading, the Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the opportunity this evening to rise and to add a few comments. You know, like my friend from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I now get the opportunity to try to follow up from two amazing colleagues who are lawyers. Frankly, it is a little bit intimidating, to say the least.

So far this evening I've heard some very, very great discussion about this bill, and it got me to thinking here just a little bit, and I feel like there's something I need to – I don't know if it's to get it off my chest or have it come out from my heart when listening to the story of this judge, the decisions the individual made around a case, and hearing about the comments: well, why didn't she keep her knees together? You know, Mr. Speaker, this is the 21st century, and quite frankly I don't understand why some men can't get their big-boy pants on and start owning up to the decisions that they make. But, more importantly, when are the rest of the men going to step up and call them out for it? That's the big hurdle there.

You know, I really believe – I guess this training, I'm hoping, will help, but there's a broader message here, as was said, you know, that kind of systemic issue, the societal issue: well, she made me do it. That's ridiculous. You decided. Start owning up to it, and the rest of us need to call those individuals out on it. I'm hoping that maybe within my lifetime we'll see that societal shift.

10:20

I guess one of the things that I wanted to briefly comment about on the bill: I agree fully with both of my colleagues. You know, we have a good bill here. I think it can be better. We have some opportunities here. The bill suggests that we train judges going forward. If I can be quite frank, Mr. Speaker, not good enough, okay? We also need to train the judges that we have here currently, right now. Everybody has seen these videos in the courtroom, these ridiculous outbursts that we've seen on cases. It's unacceptable, so we also need to deal with who we have right now.

Here's how I kind of – again, not being a lawyer, not having the opportunity to participate in that world, I have to try to relate it a little bit with my own. Before my life as an MLA I was responsible as the co-chair of the health and safety committee in my workplace. I was also responsible for all of the training of anybody who was going to operate power equipment within the plant, and that included a forklift, a power jack, you know, anything else that required moving stuff around. It wasn't enough for me to just simply train them once and then that was done. We had to renew that training on a regular basis.

Now, here's the thing. I found that there were times when I retrained individuals on a forklift and then when they go to do the test again, they're doing some strange things that I never taught them to begin with and were not acceptable. Actually, there was even one time where an individual passed the training with flying colours, and a month later I see them in the middle of the freezer spinning doughnuts on a forklift. I pulled the person's certificate right there. I think through Bill 14 we have an opportunity not only, again, to get future judges training but the current personnel that are available to us right now.

We also need to come up with some kind of ongoing training system on a regular basis to make sure that the information is current, nothing has changed, and that they're still actually indeed practising what they originally learned to begin with. As I said, all it takes is one to kind of, you know, make all those efforts useless for all the work that we put in.

But it's not enough just to put that in place. There's a responsibility on government to be able to fund that ongoing training as well, so my hope is that the government is looking at not only actually funding because, as my colleagues have pointed out, we've seen some reductions in funding in the justice system. There are a lot of problems right now. I hear it from folks within the system. As it is now, there's some trouble brewing, you know, with prosecutors. I'm certainly hoping the government is going to be able to work their way through that so that we don't have any kinds of disruptions and any other larger problems.

My hope is that as we move through the process of debate, as was mentioned, and get into Committee of the Whole – I think my colleagues have some very, very good suggestions which could

make this even better. I mean, let's not just settle for mediocre. Let's, you know, as they say, shoot for the Cadillac because by not doing that, we're doing a disservice to Albertans. For the victims, as my colleagues have pointed out, who struggle for a very, very long time trying to process what they've gone through to finally get to the point where they can maybe tell somebody and seek justice and restoration, only to hit a brick wall once they get to the system would be just incredibly, incredibly disappointing.

I do hope that as maybe we craft some of these suggestions, the government will look very seriously at them. Again, we have an opportunity not just for our future judges but what we have currently providing service to us here in the province right now as well as a continuous ongoing program to, I guess, to some degree, recertify individuals so that they still continue to practise the good things that they've learned around this. My hope is that we'll see some of that.

With that, I will conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to add comments to the debate this evening?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a second time]

The Speaker: The deputy government whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 9 a.m. Thursday, April 21, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:27 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, April 21, 2022

Day 22

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
 Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
 Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
 Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
 Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
 Alberta Hansard

Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Jason Kenney | Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations |
| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gottfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gottfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, April 21, 2022

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 18

Utility Commodity Rebate Act

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity has risen.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise to move a critically important piece of legislation at second reading. I'm referring to Bill 18, the Utility Commodity Rebate Act.

We all know that Albertans have had a difficult time over the past two years. We've witnessed as much with our own eyes, and we've heard the stories from families, friends, and the constituents we represent. First there was the pandemic, accompanied by massive economic hardship and a historic crash in energy prices. Now, driven by geopolitical uncertainty, supply chain disruptions, and a federal government intent on sending spending through the roof, families and businesses are dealing with the worst inflation in decades, which has led to higher prices for everything from food to fuel. For many Albertans coping with steeper bills, the pressure on their wallet is becoming unbearable. Alberta's government has heard their calls for help, and we've moved quickly in response.

First and foremost, Bill 18 will provide Albertans with some desperately needed fiscal relief. On March 17 we announced electricity rebates to protect families, farmers, and businesses from the worst effects of skyrocketing energy prices. These rebates will provide \$50 a month for three months to compensate for the higher cost of electricity experienced in January, February, and March. That amounts to \$150 in critical assistance for nearly 2 million homes, farms, and small businesses so that they can have some relief on their utility bills. The best part: this rebate doesn't need any complicated application process or confusing documents. We're working with retailers so it will go directly onto their bills, saving Albertans time and money. Families shouldn't have to go into debt to cover their basic living expenses or have to make the choice between putting food on the table or keeping their lights on, and small businesses struggling to recover from the worst effects of the pandemic shouldn't have to cope with even more burdens from energy inflation.

Amid these challenging times we are taking real action to make life a little bit easier for everyone. Our proposed legislation will create a mechanism that lets us roll those rebates out to Albertans swiftly and effectively. Through this bill we are integrating utility commodities under a single legislative framework. The Natural Gas

Price Protection Act does not allow for rebates on electricity. In the interests of efficiency, Bill 18 will replace the original natural gas protection act in order to implement both rebates under the same act. Under this new legislation Alberta's government will have the tools to respond to these high prices we've been seeing and provide much-needed relief to families and businesses. It's not just the right thing to do. Heat and electricity are essentials. They're key to getting through an Alberta winter, and they're an unavoidable cost for just about every small business. This legislation ensures that we can move quickly and effectively to support Albertans against high commodity prices. Alberta's economic recovery and Albertans' peace of mind demand nothing less.

Since the beginning of the pandemic we've been ready with emergency measures for difficult situations, and at this time of price uncertainty that's not going to change. You can see that in other steps we've taken to make life more affordable for Albertans, like removing the provincial fuel tax at the pumps. Later this spring we will be introducing legislation to enable unlimited self-supply of energy with the option to export as well as energy storage. These new tools will help increase competition, add more supply, and bring down energy prices over time. Our government is also reviewing the province's distribution and transmission policies, and we're working with agencies and industry partners to maximize system efficiency to make sure we're getting everything we can out of ratepayer dollars.

Mr. Speaker, there is not a single conversation that I have about utilities that doesn't start and end with affordability. At a time when we have a federal government that is determined to hammer the pocketbooks of families, retirees, and students for just heating homes and, of course, a hangover from the ideologically driven policies of the NDP, this government is stepping up. Unfortunately, we were handed a broken system by the previous government thanks to their short-sighted approach to energy policy. They spent \$7.5 billion on transmission. Seven point five. We all know that new transmission is needed at times, and maintenance, of course, has to be done, but to send such a massive amount when it was clear our economy couldn't support it: an absolute shame. Albertans will be footing the bill of that mistake for years.

To give the members opposite some credit, they were not guilty of starting that overbuild, but they were absolutely guilty of not stopping it. They approved the build-out during the years they sat on this side of the House. They can't blame anyone but themselves for that, Mr. Speaker. When we came into office, we stopped it, and we are making sure that taxpayer and ratepayer dollars are treated with the respect they deserve. Fiscal responsibility is critically important when it comes to the electricity grid, and that's a quality that the previous government lacked on all fronts.

Adding onto that \$7.5 billion loss, their ideological agenda and dedication to their leftist extremist friends lost Albertans another \$1.3 billion through the Balancing Pool. Again, Mr. Speaker, fiscal responsibility is not a luxury for government; it is a necessity.

To top it off was their job-killing carbon tax, forcing families to pay to put the lights on. We put a stop to that, too, Mr. Speaker. All of these are contributing factors as to why Albertans are being forced to pay such high utility bills right now, and all are examples why we cannot let the NDP near our electricity grid ever again.

We are committed to fixing those mistakes and to providing real support to Albertans while we do that. Bill 18 will enable us to provide that support. Mr. Speaker, Bill 18, the Utility Commodity Rebate Act, is part of the suite of measures we're taking to maintain energy affordability in both the short term and the long term. From fiscal responsibility in the transmission and distribution systems to modernizing our grid to allow more supply, the tsunami of new generation that is set to come online, we're looking for ways to

improve affordability at every turn. At this current turn it is the rebates that we can offer to Albertans through the Utility Commodity Rebate Act.

I urge the members of this Assembly to support Bill 18 so we can start to implement the promised electricity and natural gas rebates and get the money into people's pockets. I would say that this is our duty as elected officials, to see this bill passed and get these rebates out as quickly as we can. Albertans deserve nothing less.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, we have an opposition – a hostile opposition – that is fighting us at every turn. I came into this Chamber last night at 7:30. I stood in front of those cameras, and I asked for unanimous consent so that we could go to second reading of Bill 18. Do you know what they said? No. They refused to go to second reading of a bill that will get \$280 million worth of supports out to Albertans.

Now, really, should we be surprised? Let's go back a couple of years. This was the caucus that filibustered a bill that would provide support to victims of human trafficking. That's right, Mr. Speaker. Victims of human trafficking, and they filibustered it. So we should not be surprised that the NDP is choosing to filibuster this. Now, I'm going to give them one more chance. This is a piece of legislation that will provide . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister. There are lounges. I'm hearing a lot of conversations happening, so I was wondering if maybe those individuals having those conversations could take them out to the lounges on either side of the House. The individual with the call is the hon. minister, and as everybody knows, there will be an opportunity to respond as well.

Please, hon. minister.

9:10

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess they're laughing because they think it's funny that Albertans are struggling. Well, we don't think it's funny.

I'm going to give them one more chance. The Chief Justice will be in this Legislature at 3 p.m., and with their help we can get royal assent on that bill. We can push this piece of legislation through that will get \$280 million into the pockets of Albertans. But in order to do that, we're going to need them to work with us. At 3 o'clock this afternoon I encourage the NDP – no, Mr. Speaker; I invite the NDP to work with us to help get \$280 million into the pockets of all Albertans. This is not the piece of legislation that you want to filibuster. This is the piece of legislation that you will want to support. I implore them. I invite them. Now, I can appreciate that the Energy file is a difficult file for the NDP, and not because their Energy critic doesn't know the price of electricity. That's part of it, but the Energy file is difficult for the NDP because they bungled it so badly.

I will be releasing an audit later on today that has audited the Balancing Pool's \$1.3 billion losses that happened on their watch. Now, just to put it into perspective, the Balancing Pool was an agency that actually contributed \$4 billion back to ratepayers until the NDP decided to use it to pursue their ideological agenda. I know they're angry. They should be. They should be angry at themselves for doing this to Albertans, but this is a chance for them to show all Albertans that they will support them in their time of need. Mr. Speaker, \$280 million: we would like to get it into the pockets of Albertans as soon as possible.

Please, Mr. Speaker, through you to the hon. members, stop the gaslighting. Help us get this money into the pockets of Albertans, because they're struggling.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

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

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think, since the minister raised it, that it's worth discussing what our duty to Albertans is in this place. I think that duty starts with trust and it starts with honesty. That minister could certainly learn a few lessons about both of those things.

Ms Issik: Point of order.

Ms Ganley: We were sent here to fight for Albertans, and no matter . . .

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called. I see the government whip has risen.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Ms Issik: Under 23(h), (i), and (j). I think that she just basically told us that the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity was a liar or misleading the House.

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, this is not a point of order. The member did not either say that they're a liar or imply that in any way whatsoever; it simply was debate about the level of trust that this government has with the people of this province. Clearly, evidence would indicate that there is good reason to believe that that is a debatable point and one which we will continue to bring up in this House.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I don't have the benefit of the Blues. I believe that there was something in there with regard to that it could have been abusive language. However, that wasn't the point of order. I didn't hear it quite perfectly, whether it was directed at the government or the minister individually. I think that if it was something that was directed individually at the minister, then perhaps there's an apology there. But I don't have the benefit of the Blues, and I don't have perfect recollection of what was exactly stated.

What I will do is that I will take this opportunity, however, to remind all members that in order for us in this House to have effective debate and do our jobs effectively, obviously, decorum is required. I think that there have been a few comments that have been made, from all sides, that have worked against decorum. I would just take this opportunity to remind all members that effective debate is the goal.

At this point the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the call.

Debate Continued

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let us begin with what this bill does. It sets up a framework to allow a rebate. What does this bill not do? It doesn't guarantee a timeline and it doesn't guarantee a rebate, and that is precisely the concern that our Official Opposition has. It is our duty to stand up for those thousands of Albertans who are writing in to us who are struggling with the rising cost of living due directly to decisions of this UCP government.

They removed the cap on electricity. Electricity rates have skyrocketed. They made decisions around insurance that have

caused insurance rates to skyrocket as a result of removing the cap, and then they attempted to hide the report that proved it so that Albertans couldn't see. No one, Mr. Speaker, trusts this government to move forward with this file, so the fact that we are in a position where literally no member of the opposition has spoken to the bill yet and the associate minister is trying to pass it off to Albertans as a filibuster is absolutely absurd.

Let's begin with the history of this file. In the fall, when this Official Opposition began calling on this government to do something about electricity prices, the associate minister rose in this House and said before all members of this Assembly, on *Hansard*, on the record, that he planned to do absolutely nothing – nothing – because skyrocketing prices, Albertans unable to afford their bills were just the market working.

Fast-forward a little bit and we have the government announcing that they're going to do a natural gas rebate. I'm sure that was a great relief to many Albertans in this province who were struggling. Except, Mr. Speaker, the program wasn't real. The government came in, they introduced a budget, and they introduced a program that wasn't going to help Albertans now. It wasn't going to help them until next fall. And when they introduced it, they didn't even introduce it with its own line item of funding because they were hoping that they could hide from Albertans the fact that there was no money allocated to it. Now, they claim it's part of some giant contingency slush fund, but all that is is an attempt to obfuscate from Albertans, an attempt to hide what's actually going on.

So we had the fake natural gas rebate, and the government is still claiming that they are going to do precisely nothing on electricity. Then suddenly they changed their minds. Now they want to do electricity. Now suddenly it matters. That's fine. They come forward with a rebate that their own members have referred to as paltry because it barely touches – it barely touches – the hundreds and thousands of dollars that some Albertans are behind on their bills.

We drafted legislation, legislation that would prevent those Albertans from being disconnected from their utilities. That disconnection ban lifted on April 15. The government refused to hear from us. They refused to even debate it. They refused to have a conversation about it because they didn't think it mattered.

We went into session on February 22. It's not quite two months ago, Mr. Speaker, but it's pretty close. It's pretty close: February 22. We've been in session for two months, and two months later the government comes racing forward with this bill, a bill which is essentially copied and pasted, with minor alterations to include electricity, from a bill that existed in 2001, and we are led to believe that now suddenly this is an emergency. The same government that mere months ago was claiming that this was something they shouldn't do anything about, that this was just the market working, is now telling us that it's an emergency, that they need to rush this legislation, that took them two months to copy and paste, through the House without doing our due diligence on behalf of Albertans.

Now, I know that this government likes to claim that they were sent here with the biggest mandate. But, Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition was sent here for a reason, too. We were sent here to hold this government to account, and this government has proved on file after file after file that they can't be trusted. They come forward, they say, "Trust us; trust us on curriculum; trust us on public health care; trust us on education," and they proved untrustworthy on every single one of those files. On everything that has come forward that is of importance to Albertans, they have proven that they cannot be trusted.

They rescinded the 1976 coal policy with the stroke of a pen with no announcement. They didn't tell people what was coming. Then

they brought it back in and claimed they cancelled all the leases except that they didn't cancel all the leases; they cancelled some of the leases. Mr. Speaker, the list goes on and on and on.

9:20

So I think it is our duty in this place to take the time necessary to attempt to improve this legislation, improve it because, again, the legislation is a framework that enables. It does not require the government to do anything, so we are simply meant to take on faith that this government, which has dragged its heels over months, which has waffled back and forth on whether or not Albertans need help or deserve help with respect to the costs that this government has foisted upon them – we're just supposed to trust that they're going to do that?

Suddenly it's an emergency? This government has had months – months and months and months – of doing precisely nothing on this file, but because the associate minister woke up yesterday and decided to copy and paste some legislation, suddenly it's an emergency? Mr. Speaker, it has been an emergency for months. This government has had the capacity to do something about it for months, and they have chosen not to. So to come before this place and claim that the problem isn't a government that has dragged its feet for months and months, that the problem is an Official Opposition filibustering by not even yet having spoken to the bill is just preposterous.

I think there are a few other things that ought to be addressed in the associate minister's comments because I think that it is worth setting the record straight. Let us begin back with the previous Conservative government and a series of bills, bills, Mr. Speaker, which built transmission lines, bills that the NDP opposition objected to in the strongest possible terms. We warned Conservative governments of the day that this would cost Albertans money, that Albertans would be paying for those transmission lines for decades, that they were not necessary. We warned them, and they didn't listen. They didn't listen, and they forged ahead with their ideological bent, ensuring that money was going to their friends.

So they forged ahead with those lines, and, yes, Mr. Speaker, they did result in an overbuild. But the suggestion is that when the NDP government came into office in 2015, we ought to have – what? – gone and ripped them out with our bare hands? The Conservatives had already built them. Contracts were signed. There was no getting the money back. In addition, I think it's worth noting that if you go to the projections – and these are documents that exist. If you go to the projections in terms of what projected transmission growth was and how it scaled down under our government, it proves definitively that the associate minister is – let me be charitable here and say: deeply confused about his own file.

This government is, you know, trying to blame everyone but themselves. Mr. Speaker, in addition to this, we saw a report come out yesterday from the University of Calgary that talked about why electricity costs have skyrocketed, and it is because profits have quintupled. That is the cause according to this paper by the University of Calgary, according to objective analysis, but the government doesn't want to talk about that. The government wants to wave their hands and make up stories and talk about things that never happened.

Mr. Speaker, I think the other thing worth noting, the difference between this government and the NDP when we were in government: every decision we made was made in the best interest of Albertans, of regular people walking around out there, because that was what we were focused on. That is who we were sent here to serve. The government could really stand to remember that when they stand up in this place and they try to create stories about why things are happening when they have been in power for nearly three

years – nearly three years – and they think that they are in a position to blame literally everyone else for problems which they created.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, the idea that this legislation is the only possible way forward is completely disingenuous. There are multiple ways that this government could have proceeded. In addition, if this government's plan was to use this legislation, they could have introduced it on the 22nd of February. We're currently in April. This is a huge concern, the idea that they couldn't possibly have drafted the legislation any faster, that the Official Opposition has to let it fly through the House despite the fact that it doesn't contain any requirement to provide a rebate, any requirement to provide a rebate on a certain timeline, any requirement about who is getting the rebate. Yes, it's legislation that existed before. It existed in 2001. Yes, the government has altered it to include electricity, and that is just fine. But it's worth discussing the fact that the government had alternate policy options.

When the NDP was in government, we had a rate cap. That rate cap was already in place. They repealed it. They could have brought it back. They could have distributed the money directly to Albertans. If this was the mechanism they chose – and that's their choice; they're the government; they can choose any mechanism they like – they could have brought this legislation before this House on the 22nd of February. If – I don't know – they were still working to get their act together, which seems to be a pretty consistent problem on behalf of this government – maybe they were arguing about which one it is. Maybe they just couldn't focus on this file because they were too focused on their leadership review. Who knows why it took so long? Mr. Speaker, even if that was the case, the leadership review happened on the 9th of April. They could have sent us the legislation to look it over. They could have had that conversation with the Official Opposition. They could have given their own members the heads-up that they intended to move this ahead.

The associate minister tries to write this off as a filibuster. Mr. Speaker, I was in the House last night. I saw a bill get called and the Minister of Finance rise to move that bill and the associate minister come running in and jumping up in front of him. Even their own members didn't know that he planned to ask for unanimous consent to move that forward, so the idea that the Official Opposition ought to have known is preposterous.

Mr. Speaker, I think this is a government with a demonstrated lack of concern for the lives of Albertans. We have seen the associate minister over and over again rise in this place and belittle those concerns, belittle the costs that Albertans are facing, belittle the struggles that Albertans have when choosing whether to keep the lights on or whether to buy their groceries. Those are concerns that the Official Opposition has been listening to, that we have been raising, that we have been bringing forward for months now, and the government has been ignoring it.

Then they announced a natural gas rebate. It was a fake program. It wasn't even coming in until next fall. They didn't anticipate that it would spend any money at all. They said on electricity: they didn't need to do anything about it, that struggling Albertans was the market working. Then they come forward and say that they're going to provide an electricity rebate but no timelines, no mechanism, no discussion of when any of that is going to happen. Then we all wait. We wait for weeks and weeks and weeks. Then the associate minister, finally, five weeks later, manages to copy someone else's homework and brings forward a bill, a bill that guarantees nothing, and comes running into this House and expects the Official Opposition to pass it with zero scrutiny, with zero

concern for the fact that we are passing legislation that doesn't guarantee anything.

We could pass this legislation, and then the minister could decide not to provide the direction to the companies, and there would be no rebate, Mr. Speaker. We could pass this legislation, and there still wouldn't be – and the minister himself admitted it. He admitted it in a news conference. He was asked when this rebate would be in the hands of Albertans, and he said: well, um, you know, we're kind of hoping that the companies will work with us, and we kind of hope that maybe it's going to come out in June, but maybe it might be July. I think this idea, especially with the minister having admitted before the media that the soonest they could possibly get this rebate out the door is June, that somehow the fact that this bill wasn't passed in under six hours is the holdup, that that's the problem, is just absurd. What it is is an associate minister who is embarrassed . . . [interjection] I am happy to give way, but I am the first speaker, so no; no giving way.

9:30

The Acting Speaker: There are no interventions at this point. Thank you.

Ms Ganley: Sorry.

This is an associate minister who is, I mean, essentially embarrassed by his mishandling of the file, and he is attempting to blame it on everyone else. Well, I don't think, Mr. Speaker, that we're willing to let him do that, and I don't think that Albertans are going to buy it. I really don't think that Albertans are going to buy it. It's clear that Albertans have been asking this government about this issue for months, and the government has been failing to respond to them. So I think the attempts to blame everyone else and to claim that it's someone else's fault – I mean, add to that the fact that the associate minister is in charge. It is his file. The person who is responsible for doing something about the file is him, but he has chosen to do nothing.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? They can fling whatever they want at us. They can throw whatever wild allegations and bizarre stories their minds can invent to try and deflect from their complete and abject failure on this file, to try and deflect from their total incompetence in bringing forward this legislation, but Albertans aren't going to buy it, and it certainly will not make me sit down and stop standing up for the constituents I was sent here to serve. It certainly will not make my colleagues stop standing up for the Albertans we were sent here to serve, because those Albertans are struggling. They are struggling under UCP policies, UCP policies that have seen taxes rise, that have seen insurance rise, that have seen utility costs rise, tuition rise – the cost of borrowing on that tuition has risen – all due to the decisions of this government.

We will not stop standing up for those Albertans because whatever – whatever – the associate minister thinks he was sent here for, we on this side were sent here for Albertans. We were sent here to stand up on behalf of Albertans and to ensure that their voices are heard in this place. Nothing that they can create, no story that they can manufacture will make us stop doing that. I sincerely believe that Albertans understand the truth of this matter, that Albertans know who is on their side and who is standing up for them.

I would urge the government to take a more genuine approach to this file and to start talking about the real reasons that underly the concerns, to begin being willing to work with Albertans and with the Official Opposition and with experts in the public. There are solutions. If this government can just stop standing up with their ideological bent and start listening to Albertans and listening to ideas and having rational conversations, there is a way forward, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I will say, you know, that I sincerely hope that we can get this done and I sincerely hope that this government starts taking their duty to the people of this province a little more seriously.

The Acting Speaker: Are there other members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. Of course, it is the right of members of this Legislature to speak to the bill, and this is our very first chance to do so, in spite of the fact that we have been accused of filibustering a bill that we hadn't even had a chance to speak to. I guess, you know, as well as other things that I keep suggesting we send over to the government side of the House, perhaps we can include a dictionary. This is a very interesting bill to look at, particularly when we want to look at the history of this bill and how it arrived in this House and what has led up to this moment.

First of all, we know that the UCP is doing exactly what the UCP always does, coming too late and coming with too little for the people of the province of Alberta, just like they did in so many other areas, of course, most noticeably COVID, which resulted in a significant increase in the number of deaths in this province as compared to the per population rates of deaths in other provinces.

The same thing is happening here in terms of utility rebates. First of all, we have to remember that it was just last year that the government brought in a bill on this very same topic and failed to do it right in the first place. Again, just like they have with many other pieces of legislation, they've had to come in and correct themselves and change their own bills within the year. We've had a number of examples of that, and often it's just because they are completely on the wrong side of the issue; for example, with coal mines. When the people of Alberta clearly told them that they had to do something that they did not want to do, of course, they came in in that case and did too little too late, as they have in so many other situations in this province and in this Legislature.

Here we are reading a bill that could easily have been introduced a year ago, when these discussions were first happening. But what did the associate minister of gas say to this House when he was asked at the time about whether we should do something? He said that what they were going to do is absolutely nothing, and he emphasized the word "nothing." Then he went on further to explain that it's just the market doing what the market does, and the market is working perfectly, and therefore we won't intervene. We know that the natural position of this government and this minister is not to protect Albertans, is not to stand up and take responsibility for things but, rather, to allow the whims of circumstance to have a serious effect on Albertans without any kind of attempt by the government to do something about it and protect Albertans at a time when they need some protection from the circumstances of the era.

In this case, in fact, the government could have simply chosen to do nothing from the beginning because there was a rate cap in place. If they had done nothing, as they said they were going to do, then Albertans would have been protected to this very day. The legislation was already put in place by the previous NDP government, and that rate cap would have made sure that people already now in 2022 – in fact, it would have been in place in 2021 – would have been receiving those kind of protections that now this government is trying to figure out how to get to. Too little too late.

I think this is interesting, that we know what their position is. We know that they removed the protections for Albertans. We know that they said that they were going to do nothing. We know that they said that was just the market doing whatever it was going to do. Suddenly this morning we have the associate minister making statements such as – and I wrote this down at the moment, so I'm

going to quote it – Albertans should not have to choose between "putting food on the table or keeping their lights on."

I can tell you that having come from academia recently, before I got elected, if that kind of statement were made in an academic setting, you'd be charged with plagiarism for taking somebody else's speech. I think that this minister fails to acknowledge that that kind of comment, that kind of statement, has actually been taken from and borrowed from the opposition, who've been asking for this for a long time for these very, very reasons.

Suddenly we have the minister go against all of his instincts and arrive in this House quoting the words of the opposition and other people and suddenly see the light on why they are wrong in this piece of legislation, just as they have been with so many others such as COVID and coal mines and so on. [interjection] I will cede.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. You know, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think we just saw this bill introduced on our desks yesterday, right? I would suggest as well that it's not an insubstantial money bill, which is fine. I mean, we do want to make life easier for millions of Albertans in regard to their energy costs. I think that's a given, but we will have to work out just how much money this is – right? – and to make sure that it is spent and is disbursed in the most equal and efficient way possible. So I think amongst the many questions that I have is: what are those mechanisms? What are those ways by which we can execute what's obviously needed and do it in the most efficient way possible?

9:40

Mr. Feehan: I'd like to thank the member for that intervention because I think it does highlight a significant point, and that is the fact that while this government is now saying this morning that this is really important and that they need to subvert democracy in this province in order to move this forward, it's clear that they have done nothing to prepare for this moment, including the fact that they have just introduced the budget into this House in which there is no specific line item dedicated to this particular topic. So it tells me that there has been no real planning here in this event.

The government did not actually sit down and cost out the costs that are involved in this particular case, and they did not look at the fact that were the rate cap in place right now, Albertans would already have been benefiting from the legislation that was already in existence in the House. They didn't cost out for Albertans what the actual expenses of their delayed and problematic introduction of legislation is at this particular time.

You know, we have done a number of things to try to make sure that Albertans are in good shape in this province and are able to get through these difficult kinds of times, but this government, of course, has failed to stand up any time with that. For example, we brought in some legislation to try to extend the disconnection ban for people who are struggling at this particular time. Did this government stand up and support that? No, they did not. They did everything they could in their power to ensure that that did not happen in this House and that the legislation did not proceed forward. We know their actions speak louder than their words, that they have failed to put money into the budget for this, they have failed to plan for this, they have actually taken away the protections, and they've failed to put in new protections that have been suggested by the opposition side of the House.

In fact, we see this happening all the time. They've taken the rate cap off not only electricity but also insurance, and then in that case they hid the report that would demonstrate the fact that their move in that particular case was again hurting Albertans unnecessarily because it turns out the insurance companies were receiving great, significant profits and didn't need to have the rate cap removed

from the insurance company point of view. You know, I think it is really problematic that we find ourselves in this place, and it's really discouraging to see a government try to subvert democracy by trying to eliminate the process by which the people's representatives can actually question a bill that's being brought forward and then complaining that somehow, without even having spoken to the bill, we're filibustering the bill.

Yet if it was that important, why would the government not have put into the bill some timelines for the actual implementation of the bill and the processes that will allow that to happen? It's really important for them to not talk about it in the Legislature, but it's not important for them to actually give the rebate to Albertans. There's no timeline that forces them to do that. We know that even if we did filibuster, which of course is an absurd thing to be saying – let's say that we took two months – it still wouldn't change the date at which Albertans got the rebate because the rebate would be coming out in June or July at best, at a time when utility bills are not at their highest.

You know, what Albertans needed is they needed some help this winter. It was a very difficult winter for many Albertans. Costs were going up in many ways, many of those directly related to government actions in this House: taking the caps off utilities, taking the caps off insurance, and generally just imposing difficulties on citizens in this province. They didn't stand up, and they didn't do that kind of thing.

Now, we know that the minister has complained that the NDP were involved in . . . [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry. Yes, I will cede.

Member Loyola: Please don't be sorry. I was so enthralled with your comments and insights. Of course, I know that many of my constituents have been reaching out to me on this particular issue. You were speaking specifically about help directly for Albertans this winter. I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about some of the e-mails, correspondence, phone calls that you've been getting at your constituency office regarding this particular issue, Member.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you to the member. Of course, you know that I have received many, many such e-mails and so on, as I'm sure you have and I'm sure the government members have. In fact, we know they have because they're often CCed to us on the opposition side because they've heard so little back from their own MLAs.

People have indicated that they have had problems with situations, including one situation, a very difficult situation in my constituency, where someone simply ended up losing their house and having to move into an apartment because they simply couldn't pay their utility bill living on a fixed income for many years now. That fixed income has not gone up because, of course, government policy has kept the income fixed, and as a result they simply had to make the decision that they could no longer afford to live in a house and had to move to an apartment where the utility bills were included, and therefore the total cost to them was significantly smaller. You know, it's just one individual personal tragedy, but of course it's been duplicated time and time again, as we know from the many letters we've received about people who have not been able to survive this winter and could have used support from the government over the last six months to get through this difficult time.

I know that the associate minister has complained about the cost being related to transmission, which he admits in this House was actually something that was proposed by the Conservative government at the time and opposed by the NDP government. Then he goes on to complain that the NDP government didn't actually trash the decisions of the previous government when we were in office, which, you know, is a fascinating way to talk about how

government should proceed, that it's our fault that we didn't stop them from being bad. That kind of thinking is something that I think is problematic.

Of course, in the same breath he complains about the fact that when we did make some changes in the Balancing Pool, it turned out that they had put a poison pill into the contracts, so it cost us some money. He's actually suggesting that we should have done in this case what he says we should not have done in the other case, so clearly he is confused. Clearly, he does not have a logical approach to whether contracts should be cancelled or not. You know, he's simply using these as talking points in order to pull the long con that we see happening here with the people of Alberta.

This government has not stood up and been on the side of Albertans, and now they try to pull this ridiculous process here in the House where they prevent the representatives of the people of Alberta from even questioning the bill and then complain out loud to the public that somehow we are stopping the bill from proceeding when, in fact, anybody who understands the process of parliamentary democracy understands that that is not in the least bit true. [interjection] Sorry. An intervention? Yes.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Member, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford's comments on this bill and was hoping that the member could talk a little bit about timelines. We've talked about when – I know that the previous speaker had mentioned when an iteration of this bill first was tabled in the Chamber many, many years ago. But just looking at the timelines around when the Official Opposition was calling for supports and real help for Albertans as prices were skyrocketing and the fact that this bill, Bill 18, was tabled yesterday and in a passionate and off-putting speech the minister on one hand was attacking the Official Opposition and in his next breath asking for the support of the Official Opposition to pass this bill expediently through the Chamber – yet when could this government have brought forward a bill of this nature? When could they or should they have acted? I would love to hear the member's thoughts.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you to the member for that intervention. I think it is clear – and it does need to be repeated again in this House – that this government has had plenty of opportunity to bring this forward. It was at least in the fall that we were standing up in this House asking for the government to take action on utilities. That's when we were told that they would do nothing, words from the associate minister's own mouth, and we were told that this was just the market doing what the market does and that they wouldn't interfere with the market.

9:50

We know that they've had at least six months to work on this, to get this together. In fact, they could have done this all when they introduced the first failed bill, and now they're introducing the second failed bill. We know that if it was really that important to them, they could have done it in the first week we were back in the House, and that's almost two months ago. Two months ago they could have come in and resolved this and got money in people's pockets at the time they needed it most, in the middle of winter, when they really needed to protect their homes from the assault of the difficult winter that we had. So there's been plenty of time here now, and the government is trying to divert people's attention away from the fact that they have failed to act. They've acted last and they've acted least again, as they tend to in almost all situations that are important to citizens in this province.

I think that it's really shameful of the government to be in this place where they are blaming Albertans for wanting democracy to

actually occur in the process of protecting Albertans at a time when rebates or some other kind of intervention is necessary. They could, of course, if they wanted to, go back to the really good, decent legislation that was previously in existence under the NDP government and put a rate cap back on the utilities. It would be a great situation here in this province if we had done that because we would have been able to see not only the utility companies making a reasonable profit at all times through that process, but we would have seen Albertans being protected from huge increases. I can tell you that many Albertans have told me that the increase in their utility bills has been in excess of 100 per cent over the period of time.

This is the kind of thing that I think is problematic. This is the kind of thing I think this government should take some responsibility for. Unfortunately, this government's failure to take responsibility in this case is no surprise given their failure to take responsibility for almost any of the other really terrible pieces of legislation that they brought into this House. I may have to ask: why has this government not had its eye on the ball? Why is it rushing in at the last moment, trying to do something that they could easily have done in the fall sitting or could have done early on in this sitting, right in the middle of the winter that required people to pay these exorbitant utility bills?

The answer is, of course, that they were too busy being focused on their own internal fights, their own internal squabbles, and the leadership review in which their own leader has, apparently, less than 35 per cent of the support of the province of Alberta and, it would seem, has probably low levels of support even within the party. But, you know, we all have to wait now. We all have to wait until mid-May, when the results of their leadership review are over, before we see a government actually focused on governing, and that's a shame. That is something that's very problematic. Democracy has really been taking a hit under this government, has taken a hit in terms of the government trying to move ahead in this particular case without actual proper debate, as they have in other situations. It's taken a hit every time the... [Mr. Feehan's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Other members wishing to enter the debate? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide a few comments at the second reading stage – I am the third speaker at this stage – of the Utility Commodity Rebate Act. I am one of the first speakers to provide some comments from the floor of the Legislature for this matter proposed by Executive Council. It is up to all members – it is indeed our right – to discuss this bill and to propose amendments to this bill for, you know, a period of time whereby all of us members, private members, feel that the people's work is done and we have represented our constituents appropriately.

I was reflecting last night, Mr. Speaker, on why it is that the province seems so unwilling – they're able – to solve the problems that are preoccupying ordinary Albertans right now, whether it's insurance or electricity and natural gas prices. I went back to some notes that I took in 2019 after watching the prosecution of the campaign by what has now become the modern conservatives and certainly a movement that is untethered from its previous iterations as something of a brokerage party.

In the modern conservative movement losing in theatre is the goal on public policy. On any matter of public policy it's fine not to solve the problem because that will then destabilize our faith in institutions, in politics, democracy, what we can do collectively.

You know, it's just this constant process of working the refs, of dumping money on lawyers' lawns for fool's errand Supreme Court references that are just a spectacular loss in terms of the carbon tax, in terms of yelling at various external actors. We certainly see this as a feature, not a bug, of modern conservative parties throughout western Europe as well. There's always a bogeyman. It's usually taking a page – our playbook here took a page out of Orbán's playbook, certainly, in Hungary, blaming someone else, external actors, foreign-funded, shadowy figures. But for most political parties in the history of liberal democracies winning in practice should be the goal; that is to say, solutions should be the goal.

But that's not the goal, and continuing that politics of grievance is actually what we see playing out in this little micronarrative as well. I point us to last summer, when the hon. members were talking about: what was the timeline of the Official Opposition raising this issue? Well, I recall in the summer, during the heat wave, standing up with the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View discussing the spike in power prices and the risks to the grid and affordability during the heat wave in July. After that news conference we went and got something to eat, and we wrote out a list of possible actions the government could take. We pulled up a couple of industry experts on the phone and put them on speakerphone, ran a few things past them to get their thoughts. That's what winning in practice rather than losing in theatre looks like. It's trying to find solutions, and that is why people sent us here.

I go back to my notes from 2019, just after the election. You know, the UCP went into this election believing they would win 80 seats, but they didn't get that, and they won't get an easy ride in the Legislature either. They will be opposed by a group of women and men who are honest, hard-working, and practical, who will name it when they give gifts to their corporate friends, when they bring in policies that do not have people's best interests in mind. Those were my thoughts before coming into this Chamber in, whenever it was, May 2019. We see that kind of hubris of just refusing to solve a problem reflected in this budget.

The budget address: let's go to that, on February 24, 2022. On page 9 we see the slapdashery, the ad hockery of even grappling with this question of utility prices.

Pushing up costs for Albertans... has elevated concerns over the costs of utilities. To alleviate the fear of spiraling utility costs, and to allow Albertan's...

Misspelled.

... to benefit from an owned resource, budget 2022...

"Budget" is not capitalized, so clearly these paragraphs were not edited. [interjection] Yes, I will give way.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Member. I just really appreciate what you're focused on right now, and I just wanted to ask you to speak a little bit about the fact that the budgets themselves were established over the last couple of months and only introduced into the House fairly recently, and they did not include clear direction as per the bill that we're bringing in the House today. It seemed to indicate that at the time of writing the budget, while they certainly had been challenged on the opposition side of the House to do something about this on many occasions, they had not in fact planned to do this as recently as a month or so ago and didn't put a clear line in the budget to indicate that they wanted to do this. I wonder if you just might spend some time talking about what it is that you found as you looked through the budget about their really lackadaisical attitude toward this.

10:00

Ms Phillips: Yeah. I mean, when we looked at the budget documents, one of the first things we did was look for the line item

of where this reference to the natural gas rebate would be. I'll go back to the speech on page 9:

... allow Albertan's ...

Misspelled.

... to benefit from an owned resource, budget 2022 implements a consumer price protection mechanism, similar to the measure Ralph Klien ...

Misspelled.

... put in place in 2006.

If natural gas prices exceed 6.50 a gigajoule, a utilities rebate will be triggered.

To be clear, the word "rebate," if one executes a simple control-F search in the budget speech, appears precisely once, and that's here.

This means Albertans needn't fear a run up in natural gas prices of the variety currently experienced in Europe and Asia.

Okay. Now, first of all, the government's own budget documents, their projections at the time, do not show at any point over the fiscal forecast period natural gas going up above \$6.50. It is now for obvious reasons having to do with the geopolitical instability and the war in Ukraine.

Having said that, this was clearly shoved into this speech at the last minute because the, you know, grammatical car crashes that we see in this section do not appear in the rest of the speech. It's clear that the rest of the speech was drafted, and then somebody woke up sometime in mid-February and went: oh, I talked to a single Albertan one time, and they seemed really worried about utilities, so maybe we should shove something in here. When we then asked TBF officials during the briefing, "Okay; so where is the budget line item?" "Well, that doesn't exist." "So where is anything for electricity?" "Well, that doesn't exist." Just absolutely no grappling with what we had been hearing from people since the previous summer, as I described.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

We understood right away that the natural gas rebate was fake and the electricity rebate was invisible. Again, continuing grievance and blaming someone else is the point, not actually solving the problem. If the problem wanted to be solved, there was a piece of legislation that they had scrapped that they could pull off the shelf and bring back in, which was very clear of where the money was coming from and where it would be going to and what aspects of the bill would be affected in terms of our electricity bills, and that was the rate cap. [interjection] I recognize that my friend from Edmonton-Ellerslie would like to make an intervention.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, hon. member, and exactly that. I was hoping that you could cover a little bit more of the rate cap, how that actually worked in favour of Albertans when we were in government, and what you're hearing now from your constituents in terms of how they appreciated that rate cap when it came to their utility bills. I would be happy to hear more about that.

Ms Phillips: Indeed, the rate cap was for the actual use portion on people's bills, and I fully recognize that there are other parts of the bill, the transmission and distribution costs, which are different across the province for different types of consumers. However, that was one piece that could be affected. In fact, I heard from a constituent just yesterday, who phoned us up and said, "So where's this rebate that I've been hearing about?" and I have no more answers after the introduction of this bill than I had before the introduction of this bill, which says something about the quality of this legislation.

The minister said yesterday, "Oh, well, the electricity thing might happen, you know, in the next few months," and "Oh, the natural gas thing might happen next year." That's what he said in the news

conference yesterday. There is no more clarity today than there was yesterday, and that is the fundamental failing of this bill. There's no one thing that you can point to and say: okay; here's how we were going to solve the problem. Again, solving the problem is not the point. Blaming someone else for our problems is the point.

Now, I've heard a little bit of other blame having to do with transmission and distribution, so I want to just put a few things on the record here because how quickly we forget. Let's go down memory lane. On November 25, 2009, Bill 50, the contentious piece of legislation that would remove the requirement for public hearings on new power lines, passed third and final reading.

Here's what Brian Mason, the great Brian Mason, had to say, with a mighty four-person opposition. Quote: I think people are going to be reminded of this every month when they get their power bill; it's almost like there's going to be a rider – PC arrogance, PC extravagance – on everybody's power bill every month. Sound familiar? Arrogance, extravagance: these are words now applied to this group of new Conservatives. For these guys it was after 35 years. For the new crop it barely took them 35 days to have those sorts of monikers applied to their approach.

Now, here we have Wildrose Alliance MLA Paul Hinman, a blast from the past: we needed a competitive and efficient power line, not one that's overbuilt, overpriced; it's not in the benefit of the Alberta advantage. Interesting.

Now we fast-forward to 2011, when the mighty Brian Mason releases a report saying that the Alberta NDP leader Brian Mason says that power bills will jump dramatically in the coming years as the government pushes ahead with massive new transmission lines. This is from April 21, 2011. [interjection] Yes, my hon. friend.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I just noticed that you're going back a little bit on this and indicating that it seems that government information was available quite some time ago about the potential for an increase in electricity increases and that the reason why the cap on our electricity was brought in under the previous government was, in fact, quite evident. I just wonder if you might speak to the fact that in spite of the evidence that was being provided clearly by the civil service at the time and would have been fully available to this government for the last three years, they chose not to intervene at any time in a three-year period and now suddenly they are trying to rush through a bill in the House in less than six hours. It seems the hypocrisy involved in that is quite extreme, and I think it's worth noting that when you've had three years and the evidence clearly available to you, doing things at the last second is not possible.

The Acting Speaker: Just before the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West continues, there are also two extra minutes added because that was your third intervention as well.

Ms Phillips: Okay.

The Acting Speaker: Perfect.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, there's no question that it was known to this House and to the people of Alberta that those PC decisions that were taken in 2011 were going to have an effect over the long term. These are massive decisions, multibillion-dollar projects. They don't show themselves on people's bills overnight. Yet here we are in 2011. Mason pointed to a study done by the Alberta Direct Connect Consumer Association of large industrial power consumers. The study suggests the transmission costs on power bills are set to jump by 65 per cent in the next two years. Mason says that these hikes will happen because the province is overbuilding power lines.

Then later on May 9, 2011: Alberta's New Democrats say the provincial government is being willfully blind to evidence that new power line construction will send electricity bills through the roof. Mason said that it's time the province repealed legislation passed two years ago that allows cabinet to approve power line construction without public hearings if it deems the lines are necessary.

Now, of course, this minister has suggested that it would have been more prudent to cost the taxpayer billions of dollars extra by breaking contracts, which is not a way to welcome in new investments. It certainly does not inspire confidence in the power market, and it certainly would have undermined our ability to attract the lowest cost renewables in Canadian history or make sure that we had the right investment climate in place for coal-to-gas conversion, something that the Harper government failed to do in 2012, when they phased out 12 of our 16 coal-fired electricity plants, of which this Premier sat at the cabinet table, twiddled his thumbs, and did not give a thought to the workers that he would be affecting by those decisions of 12 of the 16 plants being phased out.

Be that as it may, now his idea is that we should have ripped up those contracts, yet this minister hasn't. Even though he rails about the coal-fired electricity phase-out, has he ripped up the contracts? He certainly has threatened to do so, not inspiring confidence for investment in renewables.

10:10

He has also sat by while the Minister of Environment and Parks raises the carbon tax on industrial emitters to \$50 per tonne. Apparently, that's not really a carbon tax. It is. It's absolutely a price on carbon. They haven't repealed the carbon competitiveness, the output-based allocations program, none of those things.

So, again, solving the problem, however the problem is defined on the other side, is not the point. The constant grievance is the point. Theatre is the point. Artifice is the point for these modern conservatives, not actually meeting the concerns and solving the problems of ordinary people.

I will cast my mind back to right around the time of estimates debate when there was an audio that came from the Finance minister's town hall where a woman came to him and said: "I have thousands of dollars in utility costs. What are you going to do about it?" He said: "Yes. My wife tells me we also have thousands of dollars in utility costs." Anyway, he did not propose a solution to the problem. No wonder his budget address had this kind of slapdash, grammatically incorrect sop to caring, maybe in a perfunctory and performative way, about the rising cost of electricity. You notice even in the budget address it says: not to solve the problem, but to solve the fear of the problem. In other words, we're not going to do anything at all to help people.

So you'll have to pardon the Official Opposition, who were sent here to practically solve problems, who were sent here with the faith that we will put people first, that the point of being here is to focus on solutions, not grievance. You will have to forgive us for wondering out loud why now the Chief Justice is going to be used in some kind of performance art and some kind of kabuki theatre this afternoon at 3 o'clock to solve this particular issue.

We would happily have even come back into the House early because everyone knew that electricity and natural gas bills were rising. We would have happily come back into this House to solve that problem early in February, as we would have been just as happy to come back in here and make legislative amendments to the Traffic Safety Act so that we could clear out that \$44-million-a-day disgrace that was happening down at the Coutts border and hurting the southern Alberta economy. We would have done that, too,

because our job is to come in here and propose solutions, not to bang the pot of grievance.

So that is what we will focus on with our amendments, with the process. We will respect the rules of this House. We will not try to abuse the process. We will make sure we are doing the people's work. We will make sure that even while the Conservatives on the other side and this modern conservative movement just go around spinning false narratives, telling fairy tales, trying to scare people with, you know, a bogeyman of who we are and what we might be – they can go around telling all those tales about us, but guess what. We will tell the truth about them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and offer a few thoughts and share some views of constituents on this issue of Bill 18, the Utility Commodity Rebate Act, because as all of the previous speakers before me have mentioned, Albertans have been loud about the price of electricity and the price of natural gas, and they want the government to do something about it. I thought I'd first share some of the e-mails that I've received to my office in Edmonton-Gold Bar and then discuss the likelihood of this piece of legislation meeting the needs that the people of Edmonton-Gold Bar have identified.

The first e-mail that I'd like to share was sent to me on Monday, February 14 of this year, "Happy Valentine's Day; your electricity bill is a thousand dollars," essentially. It says:

Good afternoon . . .

I'm writing to you today expressing concern about the recent increase in utilities rates. My heat and power rates have more than doubled in the last month. I was quite shocked to see such an increase.

. . . So many families are struggling in this current environment, and unexpected charges like this can be incredible hardships for many.

I spoke to a neighbour whose bill was close to \$1000 last month. And a fellow business owner who had to make the difficult choice of keeping an employee on staff or keeping the lights on in his business. Unfortunately he had to let an employee go. This is not sustainable for anyone.

I urge you to explore the increased charges so many Albertans are facing, and identify solutions to reel in the charges suppliers are grasping for.

That came from Lindsay, who is a resident of Edmonton-Gold Bar.

On February 8 I had another e-mail with the subject Concern regarding Utilities. It says:

My name is Serenity . . . and I am a full time University Student as well as a mother to two young children. I am writing to you today in order to highlight some concerns regarding the utility distribution charges here in Edmonton.

As you already know, times are tough right now, and Covid has hit our world hard. I am utterly disappointed to see how high the utility bills are becoming here in Edmonton. It feels as though the Utility companies are taking advantage of Albertans, and kicking us while we are already down.

Our usage of power, water and gas has been quite standard with only small fluctuations, yet my most recent bill is more than double what it usually is. \$750 in utilities this month, with nearly \$400 of that being distribution charges!

How are we supposed to feed our families when the cost of living is constantly rising, and most of us are on fixed incomes?

The price caps need to come back, Albertans deserve fair prices and shouldn't have to choose between heating our homes, or putting food on our tables!

I really appreciate you taking the time to read through my concerns, and I look forward to hearing from you!

All the best,
Serenity.

My heart goes out to this person because, of course, as a university student not only is she faced with the tremendous spike in electricity and natural gas prices, but the Minister of Advanced Education has jacked up her tuition and other related university fees as well. So she's been hit hard by a number of terrible policy decisions that this UCP government has made.

On February 15 I had an e-mail from Deb about unacceptable utility rates.

I am a homeowner . . . and I am writing to complain about the ridiculously high utility rates that I, and every other Albertan, is paying. I don't get charged all kinds of fees and distribution charges for my water, why do I pay more in charges and fees than the actual cost of the product for my gas and power?

On my latest bill (Statement date January 22, 2022), the cost for my electricity was \$107.24, and I paid an additional \$140.25 in charges & fees. The cost for my natural gas was \$112.77 and I paid an additional \$243.90 in fees and charges. More than twice the cost of the product. My senior mother, living in a 1 bedroom [apartment], receiving a \$500/month subsidy to afford her rent . . .

Another piece of important government support that has been either frozen or cut by this terrible UCP government.

. . . was charged \$79.71 for her billing period of [December 10, 2021, to January 11, 2022]. During that period, she was at my house for an entire week! She used 220 [kilowatt hours] of electricity and was charged over 16 cents per [kilowatt hour]. The cost of her electricity was \$32.39, and she paid \$47.32 in admin fees, distribution charges, transmission charges, etc.

Deb says that

this is robbery. Yes, I did call Epcor and get my mom locked into a much lower rate for her electricity, but it's all of the additional charges that the average person cannot afford.

I hope that the associate minister listened to that last point very closely, because we've heard him stand up time and again and tell Albertans to just go to their utility and beg for lower rates, which does absolutely nothing to address the distribution charges that people are paying. So that's an important point that Deb raised for that.

She goes on to say that

these incredible fees and charges have to stop. Albertans are being taxed and charged to death. I pay over \$5,000 [a year] in property taxes, my provincial taxes go up and up . . .

Something that this government has refused to address.

You know what doesn't go up?

She goes on to say:

My income. Not one penny. So I would like to know what the province of Alberta is going to do to bring these fees and charges down. When will Albertans quit being [gouged] with unaffordable fees and charges for the basic utilities we all need?

An excellent question, Deb. I wish the associate minister had come into the House today with answers to that question, but unfortunately he did not.

10:20

That leads to the next point that I want to make that Deb raised in the last e-mail that I read into the record. When will Albertans see relief from high utility prices? Well, according to the piece of legislation that we have here in front of us for debate this morning, we don't know. Not only do we have no indication from the piece of legislation that we're debating here this morning; the associate minister – sorry; I forget his title – had no further answers when he introduced this legislation in a press conference yesterday afternoon.

Now, I managed to catch a couple of clips from that press conference, and it was so uniquely bad, Mr. Speaker, that you could have sworn that it was ripped from the television show *Veep* or one of these other political satires. It was so terrible that you would have to believe that it was fiction, because you wouldn't think that any minister would actually hold a press conference and embarrass himself so badly in front of the entire province of Alberta.

He was asked over and over again: when will people see the rebates? He couldn't provide any answers. He refused to answer the question. The best that he could come up with is that maybe, if we go to the utility companies on our hands and knees and beg them to co-operate with the government, we might be able to get a rebate into the hands of people by July or end of June at the very earliest. Well, that is cold comfort to the people who have already paid thousands and thousands of dollars in electricity and natural gas bills over the last three months and won't see any reduction in their bills in the upcoming months.

I'm proud to stand with my colleagues, especially my friend from Calgary-Mountain View, the Official Opposition critic for Energy, when she says that it's our job to make sure that we hold the government accountable to the promises that they've made and pressure them into actually committing to a timeline for getting the rebates into the hands of Albertans and just coming clean with how much they can expect to be rebated.

That's the other piece that isn't clear here in this piece of legislation. We've heard rumblings and commitments made at the last minute from the Premier and other members of Executive Council about how much Albertans can expect to pay. We think that they're going to get \$50 for an electricity rebate, which is not even 5 per cent of what some of the constituents in Edmonton-Gold Bar are getting. You know: "Here's \$50. Hope you can cover the other \$950 that you were charged for electricity in the month of February." That's not help. [interjection] I see that my friend here from Edmonton-West Henday would like to intervene, so I will entertain that intervention.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've appreciated the comments so far, and like the member speaking, I also appreciate the comments that have come forward from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View as well and appreciate the work that that member has done on this file, specifically thinking back to a few weeks ago when that member called for a reinstatement of the moratorium on utility shut-offs, something that this government has been unwilling to follow through with.

When we're talking about real support for Alberta families, I mean, we've proposed as a caucus many more supports past that, even early on in the pandemic, so I find it very rich that the associate minister of natural gas is now coming back and telling us we need to rush this through when for essentially several months if not even years, looking back to early days of this pandemic, when the utility cap came off and the government decided not to reinstate that as well – I mean, there have been so many opportunities for this government to take action to show Albertans that they truly support them when it comes to lowering their bills, but they haven't.

Thank you.

Mr. Schmidt: I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-West Henday for raising this important point, and it builds on something that my friend from Lethbridge-West highlighted in her speech as well, that the point of the modern conservative movement isn't to provide meaningful solutions to the people of the province of Alberta; it's only to drum up grievances and assign blame to other actors in the hopes of, you know, whipping up the mob and generating political support from that. That was a tactic that was

incredibly effective in the 2019 election, when the UCP was not in power. But I think they so effectively whipped up the mob, they made promises to the people of Alberta that they were going to be able to fix all of the problems that we were facing, and now they've fallen flat.

The old trick of whipping up the mob doesn't work anymore because everybody knows that they have the power to make progress on these issues. They have the power to implement solutions, and they don't want to do that. That's quite clear from the bill that we have here today. As my friend from Lethbridge-West said: complete political theatre.

There is a whole host of other public policy options that is available to the government that didn't even require this piece of legislation to be brought forward. As my friend from Calgary-Mountain View said, they could have left the electricity rate cap in place. Just a reminder: we capped the electricity price at 6.8 cents a kilowatt hour. The regulated rate option right now for EPCOR customers is something around 10.6 cents a kilowatt hour.

Had the government done nothing but just left the rate cap in place, electricity consumers in my riding would be paying 30 per cent less for electricity than they are right now. That's all the government had to do: nothing. I don't know why they didn't choose to do nothing, because they've done nothing on a whole host of other issues. I would say that doing nothing is their strong suit, but they couldn't leave well enough alone. They had to lift the electricity cap, and now the people of Alberta are paying, literally paying, thousands of dollars for that poor public policy decision.

That was one thing they could have done. They could have simply written a cheque to Albertans. They could have sent out a \$50 cheque to every household in the province of Alberta. That doesn't require a piece of legislation. I'd like to hear the minister of electricity tell us why he couldn't just write a cheque. I suspect that that might actually impact the bottom lines of the electricity distributors whose interests he is so interested in protecting.

We saw that during the initial stages of the pandemic when the government brought forward utility deferrals. Well, heaven forbid that EPCOR or Enmax be out money because people can't afford to pay their bills during the worst economic downturn that this province has seen in its history. "No. We need to keep EPCOR and Enmax whole, so we're going to lend them a bunch of money to cover the unpaid bills for Albertans." I suspect that's exactly what's going on here, too. This government needs to make sure that its rich friends in the electricity industry are still making more money than they've ever made before, and that's why the people of Alberta have to wait six months to get a \$50 cheque.

It's extremely frustrating that the people like Deb and Serenity and Lindsay in my riding have to wait and wait and wait at least six months, probably more. They may never even see a natural gas rebate, because we still don't have any details about how much money they're going to provide.

Mr. Eggen: They could shut their power off, then, too.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. As my friend from Edmonton-North West says, in the meantime they could have their electricity and natural gas completely shut off, and this government wouldn't lift a finger to do anything to prevent it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I see the hon. government whip has risen.

10:30

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, you know, it's pretty unfortunate that the NDP have chosen to play politics with Albertans' utilities bills.

[interjections] Well, it is. They're seemingly intent on making sure that Bill 18 is prevented from being passed this morning. Let me be clear. By not providing unanimous consent last night and wasting time this morning, they've basically made sure that they've stopped \$280 million from being returned to Albertans. By the way, that amount is more than the NDP spent on their precious rate cap.

Again, it's disappointing but hardly surprising, and it's with deep regret that we've run out of time this morning. We won't be able to have Bill 18 get royal assent this afternoon. At this time I'm going to move to adjourn debate.

Thanks.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 9 Public's Right to Know Act

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General has risen.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be here today to move third reading of Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act, which will make it easier for Albertans to find information about crime in their community.

We believe that people have a right to know how crime is affecting their community, and this legislation is delivering on a platform commitment of ours to bring in legislation that will affirm and strengthen that right. Now, if passed, this legislation would require the provincial government to report crime and justice system metrics annually. This would involve publishing information like police-based crime data on the government of Alberta website and by tabling the information in a report to this House every year. Now, it's important to point out that while, to some, this may seem modest, I can say that it is not the case. We are merely at the starting point here.

It's important to note that this is enabling legislation. What it does is that it creates a framework for reporting crime and justice metrics not only now but as well into the future. Additional metrics can be reported as they become available to us and as we work with our partners to develop those new metrics. The minister of the day would then have the ability to enter into information-sharing agreements to obtain and then publish the data respecting crime and the justice system. Now, indeed, this is just the beginning, and there will be increasingly more data and more helpful information to a variety of Albertans in the coming years.

This piece of legislation that we're debating here, Mr. Speaker, is a first in Canada. Alberta is proactively taking a leadership role and modelling the way for other provinces. No other jurisdiction has stand-alone legislation requiring the government to report crime and justice system metrics to the public at defined intervals. This annual reporting requirement would enhance transparency by creating an expectation among the public that the government will provide Albertans with this information at regular intervals and ensure it's easy to find and easy to understand. Now, to that end, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General is looking at ways to present the raw data that we receive in more user-friendly ways. That could mean, for example, giving people the ability to examine trends over time.

Contrary to what members opposite have claimed, access to this kind of data is indeed a priority for Albertans. During a tour of the province in 2019 a former Minister of Justice and Solicitor General heard from many rural Albertans who were concerned about crime, and they also told him that they wanted more information about

what's happening in their communities. Our conversations with Albertans indicate that there's a strong appetite for this kind of information as well as valid reasons for people who want it.

Transparency is an important principle, but increased openness isn't the only benefit to legislation like this. We've all heard the saying: knowledge is power. There's a reason that expressions like this have become part of our everyday language. It's because they're often true. Information and easier access to it empowers people to make better decisions. Improving access to crime data could help decision-makers at various levels develop policies and to take actions that are based on evidence. A troubling crime trend could expose gaps in services and lead to the development of new initiatives or perhaps even new enforcement strategies.

At a more basic level this is also about giving Albertans the ability to make better decisions about their personal safety. Knowing property crime statistics in their community may cause someone to take added steps to protect their homes or their businesses such as installation of better lighting, security, other measures to deter thieves. What these examples have in common is that in all of these cases having better access to information can result in better outcomes. An informed and empowered public can help build safer communities for everyone in Alberta, and it starts with ensuring that folks have easier access to information.

I hope that members on both sides of the House will support this legislation for what it can mean to Albertans and how it can help them out in the years to come. I ask that we move third reading of Bill 9.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

To respond, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act, but before I launch into the bill, I just want to make a comment about the previous bill that was under discussion, Bill 18, and the final comments made that the opposition was being criticized for not giving the government . . .

An Hon. Member: Unanimous consent.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much.

. . . unanimous consent to move the bill expediently through, yet then the government adjourned debate. If the bill was that important, we should have continued to discuss it.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt; however, I think we are on third reading of Bill 12, so if we could please bring our comments back to the task at hand.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Bill 9.

The Acting Speaker: Sorry. Bill 9 in third reading.

If the hon. member could continue.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make that comment so that it's clear to Albertans at home that were wondering why the Assembly was not continuing to debate a bill that was so important yet brought in six months late.

But here we have Bill 9, the Public's Right to Know Act. You know, I do have a number of questions. My first reading of this bill is that everything in this bill the minister currently has the authority to do, so what we have here is either a job-description bill or a bill that allows the minister to check a box for a promise made, yet an ability the minister already had. The minister can commission reports.

Mr. Shandro: You don't know the difference between "can" and "must."

Mr. Bilous: The minister who is now yelling across the way. This bill could have and should have done much more.

I want to talk a little bit about, Mr. Speaker, the fact that this very government raided the victims of crime fund in a bill that they brought forward a couple of years ago. This bill had the capacity to be able to ensure that every dollar from the victims of crime fund would go to victims, yet it was expanded to cover a myriad of programs to which there have been a number of articles and stakeholders and not-for-profit groups who support victims of crime who were devastated and frustrated with this government and were sounding the alarm bells before this government made changes to the victims of crime fund.

Previously, since that fund was initially established in the province, all funds were going to victims. We know, Mr. Speaker, that some of those victims – well, I mean, they're all victims, but many of them suffered incredible atrocities and needed long-term support in order to, for some, get back to functioning, so those funds were critical, but the funds were limited.

10:40

I'm happy to table this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, some articles that I'm going to quote from. You know, first of all, an article that appeared in the CBC, *New Victims of Crime Benefits Delayed, Existing Alberta Program Limits 'Naive,' Advocates Say*, and in this the first challenge that these organizations had is that victims had 45 days after a violent crime to apply for benefits. Now, I'm no expert in this area whatsoever, but putting a limitation of 45 days after someone has experienced something extremely traumatic seems a little absurd to me. That window is so small for a person who's been a victim of a crime to apply for support. It's pointed out that Albertans used to have two years from the date of crime, and that was backed up all the way to 45 days, which is a significant change. I can tell you that the CEO of the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton had said that "this is really naive and, quite frankly, uninformed, to make a decision about what it means for a survivor to even acknowledge to themselves what happened, let alone report," which I think is a very compelling argument.

There's now also a limit of \$1,000 on reimbursements for counselling, which is nowhere near enough to cover the amount for treatment most victims need. Again, if you think about, Mr. Speaker, the fact that a one-hour session is on average about \$200 – so for a victim of a crime they would have maybe five sessions total. Again, you know, others had called this move ridiculous.

You know, it's troubling, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to pull up another article that talks about a number of not-for-profits. There's a group in this next article – it was on CTV news – entitled *Concerns Raised over Planned Changes to Alberta Victims of Crime Fund*. Here's an example of a group that represents 73 victims' services organizations in the province, so quite a large umbrella organization, that was raising the alarm bells over the proposed, at that time, changes that the UCP government were going to make to the victims of crime fund. Again, the frustration is that it would "allow the provincial government to raid a fund that was meant to support people and families hurt by crime." This is something that could have been in this bill: real, meaningful action to either restore the money that was taken out of that fund or to add new dollars into the fund to support those.

Now, my understanding is that when this bill was first introduced or around that timeline, the minister made comments around even the necessity of this bill and whether or not it is necessary to do what the bill enables the minister to do. You know, the challenge

that many of my colleagues have raised regarding this bill is that it does not address the concerns that Albertans have and it doesn't specify which data has to be recorded or collected. Now, I'm sure the minister – as his colleagues have been doing for every bill we're debating in this Chamber: "Oh, no. That's in the regulations. Just trust us. Trust us, trust us, trust us." The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that – and I think all parties in this Chamber are pretty aware of Albertans' level of trust in this UCP government.

So here was an opportunity to provide race-based data that would give real information to be able to look at what changes need to be made and where the system is failing people. That's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker.

Now, my understanding, again, of the data that this bill enables the minister to report on is that the minister already had the ability to create reports and share with the public. Again, it's not in the bill as far as what data is actually going to be collected. I think Albertans have reason to be concerned as far as what data will be collected, what data will be shared. I'm curious. I'm sure the minister already heard this question, but without this bill would the minister be able to publish a report on individuals on bail or on parole, as was promised in the platform? I would like to know why the minister chose not to include specifically which data will be included or disclosed. I don't know if the minister knows that and doesn't want to disclose it here in the Chamber or if the minister doesn't know as of yet. You know, maybe this bill was written hastily. I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker. Our job is to try to get answers to these questions.

Now, I'm not sure if the minister is going to be supporting Bill 204, that's in committee right now, but before this House, that was put forward by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, which proposes the collection of race-based data, which is what many communities have been asking for in order to identify exactly where the problems lie and provide us with information to be able to make data-driven decisions. I hope that the minister will support that.

Again, Bill 204 will allow the collection of data about the justice system. Many of the constituents I've spoken with have felt frustration with our current justice system, identifying that there is significant room for improvement on it. Collecting data to be able to make informed decisions on how to improve our system, I think, is a good thing. I would hope that all members of this Chamber would support improving our system to ensure that Albertans have access to justice, quite frankly. That bill also would create the Anti-Racism Advisory Council to make recommendations based on data collected, which, again, in my opinion, is a good thing, to have the input and advice of a council.

Now, this current bill, Bill 9, does none of these things. It doesn't provide any tools to create recommendations based on the data presented. There's no direction. There's no guidance through this bill on, again, what information will be collected, how it will be used, who will have access to it. I think the bill in and of itself, from what I can see, Mr. Speaker, does nothing to address crime. As I had mentioned, it doesn't restore funding to the victims of crime. It doesn't prioritize the new victims of crime model. It doesn't prioritize hiring more prosecutors, which is one of the challenges that our system is currently facing and why we have so many cases being thrown out. The timelines lapse because there simply aren't enough prosecutors. Why doesn't this bill work to address that issue? I mean, there was an opportunity here that the government has missed. It doesn't present a plan to make sure that criminal cases are not thrown out due to delays in prosecuting them within the Jordan time frames, which, again, could've been in this piece of legislation.

10:50

As well, Mr. Speaker, I know that the associations for our municipalities, both Alberta Municipalities and the Rural Municipalities of Alberta, RMA, have been telling this government to abandon this idea of a provincial police force and to focus on addressing the root causes of crime.

Now, what's fascinating, Mr. Speaker, is that while we are debating this bill, recently – in fact, I learned of it yesterday – 10 fish and wildlife officers are being dropped from a task force that was created to respond to rural crime. Significant dollars were spent training these officers, equipping them with everything from body armour to carbine rifles, et cetera, which at first I found curious but then recognized that our fish and wildlife officers are often in remote rural areas of Alberta and can respond in a more timely manner to rural calls for help. I can only imagine how the organization within fish and wildlife had restructured in order to take on these new responsibilities, staff up, train, procure equipment, et cetera, and with a stroke of a pen they're no longer part of that task force.

My question, Mr. Speaker, is to the minister and to the government. There are fewer officers now responding to rural crime. For a government and a party that brags about being tough on crime, they're the opposite. The UCP are weak on crime and clearly are not prioritizing the safety of rural Albertans. I would love for the minister to stand up and explain to the Chamber why they dropped these 10 officers from responding after they had been trained. This isn't just taking one little course. This is so that fish and wildlife officers have the knowledge of all sections of law and the Criminal Code to be able to lay charges, to act, in essence, as an RCMP officer.

My understanding is that the training went on for more than a year, and suddenly, with no word from the minister or this government, they're dropped. Who's going to pay for that decision? You know who's going to pay for it, Mr. Speaker: rural Albertans, the very ones who have been talking about wanting meaningful action, which this UCP government promised in their platform and now they're failing to deliver.

Again, this bill could have addressed the backlog in our court system, and it didn't. It could have dropped this – I'm trying to think of a parliamentary way of framing this concept of an Alberta police force, which clearly is just trying to pander to the extreme of this government's political party. You know, Mr. Speaker, I even asked some of the accountants over there: show me the math. Show me the math on creating a provincial police force. How many millions of dollars would that cost? Millions. How long would it take for that police force to have a system that actually can talk to the existing RCMP system?

Albertans aren't asking for a provincial police force. Don't take my word for it; go and talk to the Rural Municipalities of Alberta. Don't even talk to just the association. Talk to the actual individual municipalities, rural municipalities, and how many of them are asking for an Alberta police force? Now, maybe there are one or two. I don't know. Every one that I've spoken with has said: "Nope. Not a chance. We'd like to see more funding." What they didn't want to see was what this government did, which was download the costs of policing onto municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, for those reasons and many others, I struggle with this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise to speak to Bill 9, Public's Right to Know Act. I appreciated the conversations that we've heard so far this morning and even before

that. You know, some of the comments that I had planned to make through this time that I have speaking to Bill 9 will likely reflect some of the words that we just heard from the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview because I also share many concerns, not only with the legislation itself but also what is clearly missing and also the bigger picture of some of the other pieces that we've seen the government move on that have had negative impacts and consequences on the justice system and supports for victims of crimes across the province.

First of all, I would again repeat that this legislation does little to address the priorities of Albertans. You know, we see in this legislation very vague references to the ability that is going to be given to the minister, but it does seem that for the entirety of what we're seeing in here, it's very likely that the minister is able to produce and request this information in the first place. I'm not entirely sure exactly why we need this legislation in the first place. I would be happy to hear some specific examples from the Justice minister, if they so choose to rise and speak to some of the, maybe, information that they've requested in the past that they haven't been able to have provided to them and exactly what they expect to get into the future from this legislation if it were to pass.

Again, from what we see in here, like many other pieces of legislation that this government has brought forward, it's very vague and leaves the opposition and many Albertans wondering exactly what the intentions were when this bill was introduced.

Now, specific to some of the things, some of the issues that we've seen and the decisions that this government has made, I think that we've heard to some extent discussions around the victims of crime fund. I plan to spend some time on that. Specifically, again, the previous member referenced this article from the CBC dated January 10 of this year and concerns that have been brought forward by many advocates within this field, but specifically in this case Mary Jane James, the CEO of SACE, the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton, which is located in the constituency of Edmonton-West Henday. The work that they do is so important, and the education that they provide is so important, and the value that they bring as advocates and as supporters of the work of protecting and supporting survivors is so important.

It's always a concern when the government is bringing forward legislation that is bringing out advocates like members from the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton and they're putting forward that there are red flags in what the government is proposing. Again, I think that we've had ample opportunities or this government has had many opportunities to rectify the problems that they've created. I think that this legislation itself could have potentially been another opportunity for that, but instead, again, we see vague commitments to collecting data with little information about what exactly we might be collecting.

11:00

Just reflecting on the decision that this government made to, quote, unquote, expand the ways that the money from the victims of crime fund could be spent, first of all, we saw about 60 per cent of that fund being diverted to other programs. On top of that, in this last budget we've actually seen a 12 per cent cut to that fund. In both of those circumstances that is very concerning. We see money being diverted to paying for courts and policing initiatives and, well, they say, hiring more Crown prosecutors. It doesn't seem like that's going so well even with the added funds that they're taking away from victims of crime, Mr. Speaker, but the fact is that they are now allowed to use that money that was once entirely designated for those who are trying to deal with traumatic experiences and get the supports and therapy and everything else that comes along with it.

The previous member also reflected on the fact that the government has moved to put a \$1,000 limit on reimbursements. We see stories from previously, before that limit was put in place, where Albertans who have been victims of crime have been reimbursed or received compensation of upwards of \$10,000 in some cases. That is entirely understandable, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, that we should be doing everything we can to support these people. Unfortunately, this government has gone in the exact opposite direction. This is just one more instance of the government completely failing on the Justice file, really, across the board.

I would say, specific to this issue, that what is potentially most concerning or most questionable about the decisions of this government is the fact that so many of them come from rural communities. I would say in many instances that the need to support victims is – or not the need, but the barriers to supporting victims in rural communities is potentially higher than we might see in urban settings. Obviously, we have more associations and advocates within our urban centres and potentially more opportunities to receive supports, whether it is from police or advocacy organizations or wherever a victim or survivor might feel safe going to. Instead of ensuring that those funds are in place and that we keep that two-year time limit, we actually saw the government go backwards, down to a 45-day time limit, which, again, might be even worse for those people in rural communities who have been victimized in one way or another. I find that concerning and question why so often the decisions of this government are actually negatively affecting rural Albertans potentially even more so than those in urban centres.

You know, we heard from the previous minister the idea of Jordan's principle and the risk of cases being thrown out because of ongoing delays based on the lack of supports in the justice system. It was also very interesting to see from the current Justice minister, when the idea that this was happening, that there was more than 3,000 cases in the Provincial Court alone that were at risk of being tossed out, that when that story initially broke, the minister actually said that this wasn't the case, that even though they've gone past this 18-month timeline, there's no chance that this is going to happen. Again, advocates from within the community came out and said that the minister was wrong. Defence lawyers came out and said that, absolutely, it's possible that, you know, upwards of 1,282 violent cases are at risk of being thrown out in the Provincial Court. So it's hard.

Again, when we look at Bill 9 and the vagueness and the lack of detail and the fact that we're being told that much of the important parts of the legislation will come through regulations, it's hard to believe that the government is on the right track, with the vagueness of it and with the track record that this government has already put forward and also with their inability to be straightforward with Albertans, Mr. Speaker. I think that the discussion around the Jordan case is a great example of that. I think that the denial of the truth or denial of the facts around the victims of crime fund through this process leaves Albertans concerned about the track record of this government.

Further, like the previous member, I have great concerns, and I know Albertans by and large have great concerns about the fact that right now, as brought forward again on April 6 of this year – the document is titled Alberta Crown Prosecutors Meet to Consider Strike. Again, we have the Crown prosecutors in the province who, rightfully so, are concerned that even though in the UCP's platform in 2019 the Premier committed to hiring 50 new prosecutors, at this point there are still 37 vacancies. So now they are considering job action because of a lack of resources, a lack of what seems like respect coming from people above them in terms of the minister and the ministry's office potentially as well as the caseloads that

continue to grow and grow. They feel that they're being unheard or aren't being listened to, and they are considering job action now.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

Across the board it seems like the justice system or the responsibilities of this minister aren't being taken as seriously as they should be. The resourcing isn't there. There are major concerns. I think the previous member said that this government calls themselves tough on crime, but it seems like quite the opposite when we look at the decisions that they've made. I would reflect on the fact that not only are we seeing policing costs downloaded onto municipalities, even before we have this discussion about moving to a provincial police force, but they are also taking more portions of things like traffic tickets. They're taking with both hands, Mr. Speaker, not giving back with any hand; taking with both of them. Unfortunately, what this means is more costs on Alberta municipalities, which in turn means more costs on Alberta residents across the board for the money that is being taken away from municipalities, but it also means less services provided by those organizations within their community.

That really goes back to the point here of Bill 9 and the Public's Right to Know Act. Though very vague, you know, the idea of increasing the transparency and oversight and opportunities for the Justice minister to request information: I absolutely feel that in principle the idea that is put forward in this legislation is something that I am willing to support. Again, the main concern here is the lack of clarity in what exactly the minister is hoping to get out of it and also the lack of clarity if it is going to result in, essentially, more paperwork or more work for these organizations within our community on the ground, who – we, of course, with the scaling back of funds from this government, need to ensure that there is adequate staffing, whether it's policing in rural communities or otherwise, and we continue to talk about the fact that they need to be out in the community. As best as possible we need to ensure that they're in the community supporting families and not necessarily stuck behind a desk.

Now, if we are going to ask them to provide more data for the work that they're doing, which is – again, I support that idea, but we need to ensure that the resources are in place, to ensure that it's not going to mean a reduction in the people in the community and on the street level.

11:10

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I do believe that I, again, support in general the principles that are put forward by Bill 9. I have major concerns about the direction of this government overall when it comes to the Justice ministry and the justice system, but with that, I will take my seat and hear from some other colleagues.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Looking for other members wishing to join debate. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and of course yesterday during debate on Bill 9 in Committee of the Whole I made reference to dealing with issues of justice as they relate to the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the prison system here in the province of Alberta but, as well, federally. I just wanted to take this opportunity to delve a little bit deeper into what I brought up then in debate, which were the sentencing circles. I promised that I would during third reading mention it a little in more detail.

I do have a description here that I wanted to share with everybody now, and I remind all the members of the House that this is so important because this is a practice that's already taking place in many jurisdictions across Canada. The Edmonton Police Service

decided to pilot a project very recently in the last couple of years, and I want to encourage all of us to promote this because I honestly believe that this is a nonpartisan issue, that we need to work on it in terms of reconciliation with Indigenous nations all across Canada. Of course, it's a great alternative to making sure that these situations can be dealt with in a more productive manner for Indigenous people and that is more fair, I would say.

According to the document that I have, it says this, and I'll quote directly from it, Mr. Speaker. I'll be sure to table this later on today.

A sentencing circle is a community-directed process, conducted in partnership with the criminal justice system, to develop consensus on an appropriate sentencing plan that addresses the concerns of all interested parties. Sentencing circles – sometimes called peacemaking circles – use traditional circle ritual and structure to involve the victim, victim supporters, the offender, offender supporters, judge and court personnel, prosecutor, defense counsel, police, and all interested community members. Within the circle, people can speak from the heart in a shared search for understanding of the event, and together identify the steps necessary to assist in healing all affected parties and prevent future crimes.

Sentencing circles typically involve a multi-step procedure that includes: (1) application by the offender to participate in the circle process; (2) a healing circle for the victim; (3) a healing circle for the offender; (4) a sentencing circle to develop consensus on the elements of a sentencing plan; and (5) follow-up circles to monitor the progress of the offender. The sentencing plan may incorporate commitments by the system, community, and family members, as well as by the offender. Sentencing circles are used for adult and juvenile offenders with a variety of offenses and have been used in both rural and urban settings. Specifics of the circle process vary from community to community and are designed locally to fit community needs and culture.

On top of that, I want to say that I highly encourage all members of the House – a good friend of mine produced a short documentary on this particular issue. You can go on YouTube and find it just by typing in “sentencing circles,” and you can actually see the Edmonton Police Service member that actually participated in one of these sentencing circles, what they thought about it, you know, what their prejudices were before going into the sentencing circle process, and then, of course, what they thought about it once they finished the actual process.

Again I will reiterate that this is the type of legislation – these kinds of programs I wish we as a government or the government and we as a Legislature were focusing on to actually bring real solutions to real problems, and in this case the real problem being the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the prison system.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my chair. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, I'm prepared to ask the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading (continued)

Bill 12 Trustee Act

[Adjourned debate April 19: Mr. Nielsen]

The Acting Speaker: Looking for members wishing to speak to Bill 12, the Trustee Act. I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide some comments here at second reading of Bill 12, the Trustee Act. This is quite a lengthy piece of legislation. It's quite complicated as well, so it is for that reason that I am very grateful for the detailed and very careful work of the Alberta Law Reform Institute. These folks do something of a yeoman's task of combing through old pieces of legislation, pieces of legislation that, as identified by various members of the legal profession, require update, and make recommendations to government on how to do so after a typically lengthy and detailed consultation process with members of the legal profession and provide that analysis in both a practical way based on how those pieces of legislation have worked or not worked and also an analysis that is oftentimes interjurisdictional in nature and that references some of the academic reckoning in various law faculties with these types of pieces of legislation.

Now, a trust is, of course, a fiduciary relationship between an individual and one or more persons to hold property and to use and make decisions about that property for the beneficiaries of that trust, many different types of trust. Some of our legislation was very old, and this was the case across the country. Indeed, there is an entity called the Uniform Law Conference of Canada, which undertook a project on trustee legislation reform across the country. They made a recommendation at the time in 2012 that the Uniform Trustee Act be adopted in Alberta, but the Alberta Law Reform Institute then examined those recommendations and indicated that there were a few aspects of that work that needed to be tailored and clarified for Alberta's particular needs, understanding, as we do, all of the areas of provincial jurisdiction around property that this law reform project would affect.

I want to pause for a moment here and reflect on the value of organizations like the Alberta Law Reform Institute. There is a reason why they are so well respected within the legal profession and why they merit public support as well.

These are the types of what I like to call drumbeat-of-governing processes, that are tremendously time consuming, do not result in, you know, lightning in the sky, people's typical understandings of what we do here in the Legislature, but they are nonetheless extremely important to the maintenance of rule of law, to the equal application of the law to all individuals, to ordinary concepts of fairness that any ordinary person can understand and accept, the appropriate continuation of the business of our courts such that we do not have legislation that is antiquated or difficult to interpret or resulting in varying interpretations that then result in appeals after appeals or other inconsistencies or outcomes that, in fact, disadvantage certain groups.

11:20

This is the kind of work that, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, is quite boring in nature. Certainly, when I read through the written Trustee Act at first, given as I have some background in law courses but not having gone to law school, the Trustee Act was certainly one that reading it through made my eyes glaze over, and I had to go and read the Alberta Law Reform Institute paper, that they subsequently put out a couple of years back, to understand exactly what we were talking about here. I think that's normal even for people in the legal profession. If you don't have an expertise in these particular areas of law, the eyes may also glaze over with respect to this piece, which is why we need those experts to inform the debate through, like I said, the practical use and application of these legal frameworks but also the work of legal academics and scholars, and the Alberta Law Reform Institute contains both of those types of people.

That's how you get the best evidence-based decision-making. That is how a government that is interested in the best outcomes for

public policy conducts itself, and we would do well to revisit some of those anchors and guardrails of not only the Westminster parliamentary system but also of a properly functioning liberal democracy. Yes, we are assembled in here, a group of ordinary people. Some of us are lawyers, and some of us are not. Some of us have different backgrounds, but the fact of the matter is that we must trust and respond to appropriate expertise and evidence and not shout it out of the room because it does not automatically confirm our priors, especially if our priors happen to be a predilection for serving particular groups of folks who are not interested in evidence, the scientific method, or the rule of law.

Now, in terms of what this bill actually does, there have been amendments to the Trustee Act, but it's never been comprehensively reviewed. It's largely based on an 1893 English statute. Now, that, on the face of it, makes the case for why it might need to be updated. Our property relationships to one another were quite different even prior to the Charter. Certainly, division of property, holding of property between men and women, for example, or on the basis of national or ethnic origin was something that was already beginning to change prior to the Charter, and of course we have seen a number of changes in this regard after the Charter. That in and of itself would signal that the Trustee Act may have some inconsistencies or some places where it crossed threads with established practice around making decisions to protect and benefit others in terms of the beneficiaries.

This piece of legislation establishes more provisions for the day-to-day management of trusts, and certainly that is a piece that is very, very important to the public interest when we examine who, in fact, becomes someone who has their property managed in a trust relationship. The fact of the matter is that there are newer types of trusts, for example, for folks with disabilities, trusts that manage inheritances or significant financial gifts while receiving AISH.

For example, our government passed legislation in 2018 to make this possible, the Henson trust legislation, which, if memory serves, was repealed in some sort of ridiculous omnibus exercise undertaken by this current government. I suppose that's another thing that we'll have to fix because the fact of the matter is that an appropriate and appropriately respectful way to approach trusts for people receiving AISH benefits is something that is most certainly in the public interest. It defies logic why that would have been something that was repealed. I'm happy to be corrected that it wasn't, but I think it was.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Ms Phillips: Yes. Okay. I mean, it just makes absolutely no sense why anyone would do that, but that is the situation that we're in.

The history of this particular conversation around trusts, of course, resulted in the Alberta Law Reform Institute publishing a discussion paper. There were consultations, as I indicated. There were 23 new or modified recommendations. It appears that Executive Council has included many of those recommendations in this legislation. That is a good thing. I certainly support this piece of legislation's expeditious passage through this Legislature.

I will say, however, that there's no question that both this bill and Bill 9, I mean, that we just spoke to – Bill 9 I spoke to yesterday around second reading, and then we just finished with third. This Bill 12 has moved into this current stage of debate rather quickly as well. There's no question that other pieces of legislation could move at a similar pace, certainly, if the government didn't see fit to adjourn debate on their so-called priorities.

There's no question that the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General has a number of important files to balance, this being one of them, and there's no question that some pieces of legislation

move quicker through this House than others. But, you know, along with this and Bill 9, if the minister was at all worried about the effect on folks whose affairs are managed, for example, via the office of the public guardian and trustee, then there would have been some reckoning with the challenges that the OPGT has had within this bill, and there is not.

For example, when there are victims of crime who are also folks whose affairs are managed by the office of the public guardian and trustee – those folks sometimes were former children in care, and their affairs are still managed by the OPGT as adults – what they can qualify for when they are a victim of crime: it's the OPGT that goes and gets them whatever they're entitled to. You know, it's the government of Alberta, it's the province that acts on their behalf because their affairs are under trustee of the government. So if they're a victim of a crime or even a victim of a car accident in a civil litigation affair, but certainly if they're a victim of a crime, it would be the OPGT that goes and tries to get those folks whatever they need. They don't have parents or anyone else to advocate for them. It's our job. By our, I mean with a capital "O." It's the province's job to meet those folks' needs.

What has happened since the raiding of the victims of crime fund is that those folks don't get anything if under the care of the province they somehow experienced an egregious crime such as sexual assault or aggravated assault. They don't get anything anymore. You know, I think there are five counselling sessions or something. Like, come on. Give me a break.

11:30

Some of that could have been contained, some of the challenges for folks whose affairs are managed by the provincial trustee relationship could have potentially been at some point in this Legislature. The problems with the victims of crime fund could have been appropriately reckoned with. Given that the legislation changing it was introduced in June 2020, there was supposed to be some sort of review around what victims of crime are actually getting. It never happened.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 12, second reading? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer a few brief comments on Bill 12, the Trustee Act. I want to, first of all, thank all of my colleagues ahead of me for speaking. Again, I think it's worth highlighting some of the comments that my friend from Lethbridge-West made in regard to this bill, that we're happy to see that in this particular case the government has consulted with academics and legal experts and adopted a number of the recommendations that have come forward from those people who looked closely at this issue of trusts and made significant recommendations for reform. Certainly, I would encourage the government to take that approach to a whole host of public policy decisions and not just making it up as they go, as they seem to have done on a number of other important files.

You know, I can't help but wonder what the state of the eastern slopes would have been if the government had just conducted this kind of public policy review at the very outset of its term instead of scrapping the Lougheed coal policy and then continually walking back that decision and finding some kind of a cobbled-together way of appearing to be responding to the massive backlash that it suffered while also still intent on catering to the big coal interests that this government clearly favours over the interests of average landowners.

You know, it's incredibly concerning to me, Mr. Speaker, that the Coal Policy Committee that the government struck made a number of recommendations to the Energy minister that she has

been completely silent on, a whole host of recommendations that the government refuses to even acknowledge were made in that report, much less address in other areas of public policy.

Had the government taken the approach that they've taken with this Bill 12 to other issues like the coal policy issue, I think Albertans would be in a much better place. The eastern slopes would have their future much more secure, and this government wouldn't find itself with such a severe trust deficit as it does now.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

You know, on the issue of a trust itself, I first of all want to declare that I have absolutely no conflict of interest whatsoever with this piece of legislation just by virtue of the fact that I have nothing to leave behind when I die, Mr. Speaker. As soon as I expire, the only thing that I will leave to my dependents will be a bill for the cost of cremating and disposing of my remains. I have no earthly possessions, nothing of value. In fact, the only inheritance, I think, might be the gas that they will be able to siphon out of the van and perhaps put into their own vehicles. That's it. Sorry, kids. You better keep your old man around for a lot longer because this is as good as it's going to get. There's nothing that I'm going to leave behind.

Having declared absolutely no conflict of interest, I'm pleased to offer some other comments on this piece of legislation, and I do want to pick up on something that, again, my friend from Lethbridge-West raised in her remarks on this issue, and that was the issue of Henson trusts, because I had a number of people come into my constituency office from the period of 2015 to 2018, when our government had been elected and before we took issue to allow for the creation of these so-called Henson trusts. There were a number of families in Edmonton-Gold Bar who had dependents who were receiving AISH and wanted to be able to leave behind a little bit of an inheritance but were afraid to do so because that would mean that their AISH benefits would be clawed back.

Now, I know that to members of the UCP clawing back AISH benefits isn't a severe concern, but to the families of people who are recipients of AISH, clawing back AISH benefits is a concern, and these families were put in a tremendously awkward circumstance because they wanted to be able to provide for their dependants who were not able to provide for themselves, yet by doing so, they would actually make their dependants worse off than if they had left them nothing.

That struck them as being incredibly unfair, and that struck us as being incredibly unfair, too, so that's why we took the opportunity to amend the legislation to allow for the creation of these Henson trusts, so that families of AISH recipients could leave behind a small inheritance for their loved ones who are recipients of AISH without putting them at risk of losing their benefits. I think that was an important public policy decision that left the families with their minds at ease that their loved ones would be taken care of once they passed away. It also, you know, provided for a suitable public policy position, I think, for the people of Alberta, one that the people of Alberta were happy with. I think everybody thought that that was a reasonable state of affairs; everyone, I guess, except this current government, which decided in one of its pieces of omnibus legislation to repeal this concept of Henson trusts and again leave the families of AISH recipients uncertain about the future of their loved ones once they've passed away. That's extremely unfortunate.

But saying that, I think that overall this piece of legislation is a much-needed update to the legal framework around establishing trustees, and as I said at the very beginning, I'm very pleased to see that the government relied heavily on the advice of experts like the Alberta Law Reform Institute when it decided to bring forward these changes. It is a little bit concerning to me, Mr. Speaker, that

the act only implements about 80 of the 90 or so recommendations that the Alberta Law Reform Institute made to the government on this particular issue, and I'm curious to know why those outstanding recommendations weren't adopted in this piece of legislation.

Is it that the government needed more time to work through the implications of those recommendations and that they intend to bring forward legislation at a future date to address them? Did they reject them out of hand for reasons that are unknown to us? Or did they simply – I don't know – get bored with the issue and couldn't go beyond 80 recommendations because at that point it was probably whisky o'clock on the sky palace terrace and they couldn't be bothered to complete their work anymore? I don't know, and it would be interesting to hear from the Minister of Justice or any other member of Executive Council why the government refused to address these outstanding recommendations.

11:40

But on balance I think that this is overall a significant step forward in the legal framework around trusts and trustees, and for that reason, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to join my colleagues here in the Official Opposition in supporting this legislation.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to spend a little bit of time on Bill 12, the Trustee Act. As with a number of the bills lately, I have certainly found some things to be very positive about and wish to support. I think that's a particularly important area for us to be moving forward on because, as we know, the original Trustee Act was based on legislation that is literally over 100 years old, and it's really time to bring it home to this Legislature, to take responsibility for it within the context of this province, and to ensure that the Trustee Act and all the recommendations that had been brought forward are put together in such a way that it benefits the people in the province of Alberta.

I'm glad to see that the process by which we have arrived at this date has been one which I think we all can celebrate here in this province, and that is that those people who are most informed about the topic were brought together and had an opportunity to put together a review of the issues that are inherent in the area of trusts, which, of course, included not only members of the Law Society but also some members of the public who experienced some of the significant consequences of when things go wrong in the situation of trustee positions.

I'm very glad to see that the report that came out in January 2017, called A New Trustee Act for Alberta, Final Report of the law commission society, was largely adopted here in this particular piece of legislation because, you know, what we have is exactly what we like to see here in the Legislature, and that is people bringing forward recommendations based on their vast lived experience, their academic knowledge, and their legal expertise and bringing forward recommendations that are about doing some of the mundane things that most of us don't even know that much about. People that have the ability to understand the small-detail work that has to go into establishing a law such that people will be able to practise it well without too much lack of clarity in the future – I know that you can never make things a hundred per cent clear, but having this great group of people put together a good list of recommendations and then have the government adopt most of those recommendations is good.

Of course, over time we'll spend some time making sure that the recommendations that have not been adopted by the government are re-examined, just to make sure that maybe they shouldn't be included into this bill, you know, just to follow up in terms of government decision-making, but the adoption of the majority of these recommendations is good. Starting, of course, with the adoption of the Uniform Trustee Act, I think, is a good starting place. You know, this is certainly an act that we can be supportive of because we know that the place from which it has been derived has been one that has been nonpartisan. It has been focused on the law. It has been focused on the outcome of the people that will experience it. I noticed that the standards which are being put in here in all of the different sections – there are sections on who is appointed as trustees, when that trustee resigns, when there's a transfer of trustees. All of those pieces, which are the minutiae of this type of law, have all been set down on the underlying priority that we seek to reach the highest possible standard of skill and professionalism amongst our trustees, and I think that's an excellent place to begin.

It allows, of course, courts to make very clear decisions about whether or not the decisions made by trustees on behalf of others have in fact met those high standards, because the standards are clearly laid out, which is something we've been asking this government to do in a number of other acts. Can you please lay out what the standards are? Can you please lay out what it means, you know, for you when you say that you're going to produce a report? For example, in the last bill we just talked about, on the public's right to know, there is the overarching legal structure that says that a report will be produced, but then it does not say what's in the report. It's due to that lack of detail that brought us to great concern in Bill 9, so now it's nice to see in Bill 12 that we actually have a little bit more detail, that more is being provided to people who are involved in the trustee relationship. Therefore, it's providing some clarity to the court system.

I understand that the government is hopeful that this actually will mean that we'll have a reduction in the number of cases that go to court and end up in conflict or that if they do go to court, they're much more quickly settled, because the rules are established in such a way that there will be clarity as to whether or not the rules were followed fairly quickly. I know that right now the courts in Alberta are in a very difficult position. We do not have the number of appointed judges that we might have had if the government had submitted the list of needs to the federal government, as had been requested and was not fulfilled by this government, so we are short on the number of judges. We have court prosecutors threatening to strike because of the difficulties in the court system. Overall, there's just been some – it's been a very problematic few years under the UCP government in the court system, so it's nice to see that we actually have something coming forward that's going to benefit the court system and help to take some of the pressure off. Therefore, I certainly want to support it.

I'm also very encouraged to see that there is a continuation of the current prudent investor rule, that ensures that investors cannot take, you know, wild chances with the monies invested in their trusts, that they must always act in a prudent way that is for the best interests of the person who is the recipient of the trust. Now, we know that the government has had a problem with that in the past as well, under AIMCo, when they lost a billion dollars because they decided to experiment with very high-risk investments and lost a significant amount of money for the province of Alberta under the UCP government. In this case I'm very happy to see that there is a prudent investor rule, one which I think government should always kind of maintain as they move forward because I think it's important that people who are responsible for the financial well-being of others be in a place where they have to understand that

they cannot just assume any kind of possible consequence for their behaviour because it's not them that will have to bear those consequences. That prudent investment is a rule that I'm very happy to see in this list, and I wish, of course, that the government would exercise it themselves in terms of their own investment behaviour.

I also want to spend a few moments on the concern we have regarding Henson trusts. Having been a social worker for much of my career, I certainly have worked with a significant number of people who have had a need for a trust from their family because of their inability to care for their own financial needs. In my career I did spend time working in child welfare, of course, where we had some people who were unable to take care of themselves. I also worked at the Glenrose hospital in the area of people with disabilities and so on, so I have seen circumstances where we have individuals, because of no fault of their own – sometimes, for example, when I was at the Glenrose hospital, people had acquired brain injuries or were born with a disability, some congenital factor which prevented them from being able to, you know, take on responsibility for their own well-being.

11:50

I know that all of these people generally are taken care of well by their families and, of course, by many public institutions from the time that they are born till they are 18, but then what happens is that at the age of 18 a lot of that responsibility suddenly shifts to public institutions like the office of the public guardian. Of course, the actual source of income for these individuals shifts to the program which we refer to as AISH, assistance for the severely handicapped.

Unfortunately, this government has made a number of decisions with regard to people living on AISH which are problematic. They have failed to raise the rates as inflation goes up. They deindex them. They have delayed the AISH payments for three days at the end of every month, which makes it very difficult to pay your bills on time. Of course, they did all of this just to make their budget look slightly more balanced at an earlier time, no real function either for government or for the people involved. It was just simply a self-preservation act on the part of this government.

It is very discouraging, then, to see them pile onto the people who live on AISH, people who have the inability to care for their own needs, this issue of removing the Henson trust during an omnibus bill in which they just slid this in amongst many other things. The purpose of the Henson trust was really quite clear, and that was for families to participate in the well-being of their family members beyond their own life.

Now, many of us choose to do that. You know, many of us have spent a great deal of time ensuring our finances are in order so that we can pass on the benefits of our successes in our lives to our own children. This should be equally true of people who have children with disabilities. In my own case, for example, if I were to die in the next little while, all of that which I own will be passed on to my children, and it would not be subtracted from their income. They would be able to receive those monies. In fact, I could even right now provide significant amounts of money to my children as a gift, and it would not even be taxable at this time.

Unfortunately, if you're on AISH, all of that goes out the window. Gifts from your own parents suddenly come off your income. If your parents have put money aside in order to be able to provide you with resources for the rest of your life through a Henson trust, that would have been protected if the legislation had been left alone. But this government chose to remove that, and as a result, now if you set money aside for your children, that money is taken off their income, you know, which essentially means that if you have been a responsible and caring parent and you've set

money aside for your children, you essentially are saving money for the government. You're not saving money for your children. You're not providing them with the ability to do things.

Having worked with many disabled people in my career as a social worker, I know that their life is not a rich life in terms of finances. They do not have the wealth to do things they want to do. I remember one young man I worked with at Camp He Ho Ha, where I worked for three summers, put myself through university, by the name of Ricky. I ran into him on Jasper Avenue one day. I asked what he was doing, and he said that he just sits on Jasper Avenue with his coffee cup there on the end of his wheelchair. He cannot speak very well, so it's an elongated conversation. People put money into his little cup. He doesn't even ask for it. But his disability is so obvious that people come along and put money into his cup.

I said, "Oh, what do you plan to do with that?" He said, "I'm going to buy myself something to play music with." I mean, he had to go out onto the street to ask other Albertans to contribute to his life just so he could listen to some music, which is one of the few pleasures that he had available to him because his disability was such that he could not feed himself, for example. He could only move around in an electric wheelchair, because he did have enough control to be able to manipulate the chair itself. I just thought: you know, living on AISH, which is what he was living on, is not a very nice situation to be in. By the time you pay your basic rent and the extra costs of your disability, often things like wheelchairs and other kinds of things you might need or lifts in the toilet and other things like that, you really have no money. So he was actually in the position of having to sit on the corner of Jasper Avenue, collect money so that he could buy himself a small stereo of some nature.

We just thought it was really important, when we were in government, to have a Henson trust that would prevent that kind of thing from happening, and now this government has taken it away.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'll keep my comments very, very brief. I think, as you can see, that our caucus has concurred that this bill is necessary and provides a good function, an improved function for trusts here in the province of Alberta. I certainly just want to reiterate how it reflects positively on how a bill should be researched and solicited and consulted with the people who actually use that law. This being a reflection of the Law Reform Institute consultations as well as a reflection of the Uniform Law Conference of Canada – right? – from a number of years back, it seems to hold up very well not just as legislation for the province but as part of having some concurrence with other forms of trust law in other jurisdictions across the country. Based on all of those things, I think that we can certainly support this bill, and I appreciate the minister and his department for doing work to get it done.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any others wishing to join debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question. I have noted that there is an opportunity to close debate, which has been waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:59 a.m.]

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The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Thursday afternoon, April 21, 2022

Day 22

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
 Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
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Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
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Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UC)
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
 Premier
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
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Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
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Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)

Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
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Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
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Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
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Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
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Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
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Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
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Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
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| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

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| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
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Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
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Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Gotfried
Loyola
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Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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Lovely
Pancholi
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Turton
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Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
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Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 21, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please remain standing as we will be led in the singing of *God Save the Queen*.

Hon. Members:

God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble Queen,
God save the Queen!
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the Queen!

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Queen Elizabeth II

The Speaker: In April 1926 Alberta's fifth Legislature was getting ready to adjourn in advance of the general election to be held in June of that year. However, I imagine the enthusiasm for the upcoming election was slightly overshadowed by the competing headlines across the pond when the Duke and Duchess of York welcomed their first child, Princess Elizabeth. As we all know, Elizabeth would go on to become the Queen at the ripe age of 25. Although officially celebrated in June each year, April 21, today, marks Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the II's actual birthday. Of course, this year is even more to celebrate as Her Majesty celebrates her 96th birthday and marks the 70th year of service during her platinum jubilee.

As we honour this occasion, I remind members that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta invites you and all Albertans to join in the jubilee celebrations by composing a congratulatory message for Her Majesty the Queen. Details of the messages can be found in the visit section of assembly.ab.ca.

Please join me in recognizing the devoted service of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II today on her 96th birthday. [Standing ovation]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am pleased to introduce to you eight guests seated in the gallery today from Black Canadian Women in Action. They are guests of the Minister of Labour and Immigration. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also joining us today are four special guests of the Member for Edmonton-North West: Volodymyr Bril and Iryna Bril, two Ukrainians who have recently come to Alberta as refugees. They are accompanied today by Marni Panas and Alex Panas, two constituents who are billeting them here in Edmonton. Thank you so much for joining us today. I invite you also to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Members' Statements

Ukrainian Refugees

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this entire House stands with the people of Ukraine. I think I can speak for all of us here that we are deeply moved by the suffering being inflicted by the illegal and aggressive

invasion by Vladimir Putin's Russia. But in the midst of this tragedy that has created millions of refugees, torn families apart, taken lives, and destroyed livelihoods, there are moments that remind us of the good that still exists in the world.

We saw the efforts of the former Premier and Deputy Premier filling a plane with 35 tonnes of aid to Ukraine, and that same plane brought dozens of Ukrainian refugees back to Edmonton. The support for the people of Ukraine from Albertans has been amazing, and I thank each and every person who has stepped up to do what they can.

Today I want to give a special shout-out to some of my constituents. In the gallery are Marni and Alex Panas, who have taken in two refugees recently arrived from Ukraine. Also joining us in the gallery is Volodymyr Bril and Iryna Bril, who arrived here from Ternopil in Western Ukraine, not far from Lviv. We all know the map of Ukraine very well now, don't we? Volodymyr and Iryna escaped Russian bombing to Edmonton, where Marni and Alex, who are also of Ukrainian descent, opened their doors and their home to them. It's a good thing you got a bigger house, hey? I am proud to be able to introduce them as such wonderful, compassionate people to this Assembly and all Albertans, and I am proud to represent them here today.

They are not alone in stepping up to support the refugees in Ukraine. Local families across Alberta have opened their homes to those fleeing the violence; 50 Ukrainians arrived in Jasper, for example, to find welcoming homes and businesses. While I wish that the reasons for these refugees to come to Alberta, to find safety and security from a horrific invasion, had not come to pass, the compassion of Albertans like Marni, Alex, and so many others continues to show to the world what a welcoming place our province, Alberta, is. [Remarks in Ukrainian] [Standing ovation]

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

Balancing Pool

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've seen time and time again that during their time in government you can't trust the NDP with Alberta's economy. Today the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity released an independent financial review of the Balancing Pool which further confirms what we already know, that the NDP value their leftist extremist friends far more than the hard-working Albertans we're all here to serve.

The review found that during their ideological mismanagement of the Balancing Pool \$1.34 billion was lost between May 2015 and April 2019. This loss was a direct result of decisions made under the previous government and will have to be paid off by ratepayers until 2030. At a time when utility bills are rising and Albertans are struggling to manage the burden of inflation, the NDP shouts outrage. What they should be shouting are apologies and taking ownership of the \$1.3 billion fiasco that they caused. These massive losses are a direct result of their ignorant and ideological market meddling.

While in government the Alberta NDP did nothing to enhance future capacity and oversaw an additional \$7.5 billion transmission build-out that wasn't supported by economic growth forecasts. That's a total of \$9 billion that they are forcing ratepayers to pay off, not to mention the effects of their job-killing carbon tax and all the investors that they sent running out of the province. They failed to address the long-term issues facing Alberta's electricity system and left Albertans to pay for their mistakes. We will not be doing the same.

With the expiry of the PPAs at the end of 2020 we will be taking steps to dissolve the Balancing Pool, which included releasing this

independent review while ensuring that no future government can incur losses through this agency. We're doing the hard work to set our province and the electricity grid up for success in the future, which starts and ends with maintaining affordability.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Federal Emissions Reduction Plan

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For many years the Trudeau government attacks on western Canada and its industry seemed to have no bounds and no end, from the cancellation of pipeline projects to Bill C-48 banning tankers on the west coast to Bill C-69, better known as the no-more-pipelines bill. During a time when energy security is paramount and there is a world-wide demand for ethical energy, instead of reducing barriers and supporting the Canadian energy sector, the federal government continues to increase barriers, putting our global competitiveness at risk.

The 25 per cent increase of the Trudeau-NDP carbon tax on April 1 when Albertans are already struggling to make ends meet shows how out of touch he is with the impacts his policies are having on everyday Albertans, but it doesn't end there. Most recently Trudeau and his minister of environment have slyly inserted a discriminating tax against pickup trucks as part of their plan to reach their delusional emissions reduction targets. This hefty, unreasonable Trudeau truck tax is a direct attack on Albertans, who purchase about one-third of pickup trucks in all of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps our privileged Prime Minister, who is accustomed to trust funds, does not understand the concept of hard, demanding work, the type of work that requires hauling of equipment, tools, and materials that can only be done with trucks. Perhaps our Prime Minister does not understand our agriculture, energy, and forestry industries here in Alberta and the industries' reliance on trucks to continue to contribute billions of dollars, hundreds of thousands of jobs, and economic prosperity to all of Canada. Perhaps our Prime Minister does not understand that certain road and weather conditions require such vehicles for transportation and human survival.

Mr. Speaker, this is an attack on our Alberta way of life, our ability to earn a living, and on our very means of survival. The fact that the Trudeau government and his NDP allies would accept this as any type of benefit highlights the delusion that Trudeau purports.

1:40 Utility Rebate Programs and Legislation

Mr. Nielsen: Let's talk about this government's record on utilities. It was months ago when our caucus raised the issue of utility bills hammering small businesses and families. The associate minister proudly told this House that his plan was to do – and I'm directly quoting – nothing.

Then, months later, the Premier decided that action needed to be taken and committed to looking at a natural gas rebate. Our caucus stood with families who told us they were being forced to choose between groceries and paying their bills. Then, in February, the government introduced a budget that didn't mention an electricity rebate, and while it did have a natural gas rebate, it had no details, funding, or plans to implement it. It was a fake program.

Our caucus proposed a bill that would protect Albertans from having their power cut off. The UCP voted it down right before a snowstorm hits Alberta.

Now they have their own bill, a bill that doesn't guarantee rebates, a bill that has no timelines for providing support to Albertans. The minister who proposed it was asked multiple times

when Albertans might see these rebates, and not one time could he answer this simple question. It took the Premier and the minister weeks to realize their rebates needed legislation, a textbook case of total incompetence, Mr. Speaker.

Now, as Albertans cope with utility bills that have reached the thousands and have been climbing for months, this government has done nothing for them – nothing – just like the associate minister promised, clearly as he always planned.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans need relief. Albertans need support. They need a government that has their best interest at heart and is motivated to serve them. They aren't getting this from this selfish, untrustworthy, and incompetent UCP government. So while the UCP is content to sit back and watch Alberta families struggle, our caucus will continue to be their voice and to advocate for real actions to help them. Albertans deserve better than the UCP.

Extremism and Political Discourse

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, the other day Alberta Health Services announced that Verna Yiu would not continue as CEO. In response, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona went on Twitter to decry the decision and called my colleague the Member for Peace River an extremist because he dared to publicly challenge AHS leadership during the pandemic.

If it's extreme to represent my constituents in this Chamber like the Member for Peace River did or to question the decisions made by public health officials or defend thousands of public health care workers from being fired or university students from getting kicked out of school for not being vaccinated, then colour me extreme as well. But let's get serious. We shouldn't throw the word "extreme" around too lightly. It's not extreme to challenge the mainstream.

It is, however, extreme for the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood to tell Albertans that Extinction Rebellion and their radical views to blow up pipelines have a place in our classrooms. It's extreme that the NDP have adopted the Leap Manifesto at their annual general meeting in Edmonton, the same Leap Manifesto that calls for the complete shutdown of Alberta's energy sector, abolishing hundreds of thousands of mortgage-paying, grocery-buying jobs. Extreme is the Member for Edmonton-City Centre fund raising off a pandemic or the Member for Edmonton-South illegally hacking the Premier of Alberta's personal health information. Finally, extreme . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Interrupting Members' Statements

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika is making a member's statement that I appreciate has some vigour involved in it. Members of this Assembly make these sorts of statements on a very regular basis. Whether you are on their team or not, both sides have heckled during this particular member's statement. Everyone is held culpable in that, but as a result the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika is going to be able to start again from the beginning, just as I have allowed the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud in other places to do the same. I hope that we can contain ourselves over the next two minutes while the member has the floor.

Extremism and Political Discourse (continued)

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The other day Alberta Health Services announced that Verna Yiu would not continue as CEO. In response, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona went on Twitter to

decry the decision and called my colleague the Member for Peace River an extremist because he dared to publicly challenge AHS leadership during the pandemic.

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We shouldn't throw around the word "extreme" too lightly. It's not extreme to challenge the mainstream. Extreme is the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood telling Albertans that Extinction Rebellion and their radical views to blow up pipelines have a place in our classrooms. Extreme is an NDP that adopted the Leap Manifesto at their annual general meeting in Edmonton, the same Leap Manifesto that calls for the complete shutdown of Alberta's energy sector, abolishing hundreds of thousands of mortgage-paying, grocery-buying jobs. Extreme is the Member for Edmonton-City Centre fund raising off a pandemic or the Member for Edmonton-South illegally hacking the Premier of Alberta's personal health information. Finally, extreme is the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, while in this Chamber, accusing me and other male members of the UCP caucus of supporting and engaging in sexual assault and then refusing to apologize for those disgusting and heinous remarks.

Mr. Speaker, this is the people's Chamber, where healthy debate on their behalf is a central pillar of our work, so the next time the Leader of the Opposition wants to go on social media and insult another member, calling them extreme, I suggest she first open up the camera app to selfie mode, take a good hard look, and ask herself: who's the real extremist?

RamadanBasket.ca

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, Ramadan is a very important time of year for Muslims all around the world, during which followers of the Prophet Muhammad – peace be upon him – are called to the spiritual refinement. This is achieved through fasting, prayer, study, and, most importantly, what is known as zakat. This word is often translated as "charity," but that is an incorrect translation. The word "zakat" in the Quran is described as giving to the poor what is owed to them because of the corruption, sin, and oppression that takes place upon the Earth by people. That is to say, where unjust conditions have occurred, it is our responsibility as Muslims to contribute toward redistribution of wealth to make sure that those that are going without are cared for.

One group that is doing their part to redistribute wealth is RamadanBasket.ca, a local fundraising initiative by dedicated members of the Muslim community. This initiative started here in Edmonton in 2016 to feed those less fortunate overseas in several countries in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Europe during the month of Ramadan. The group wanted me to highlight specifically that this initiative has zero admin fees, so all money collected goes straight to the families being helped. This year they will surpass \$500,000 collected, bringing the total number of families fed to 25,000 during Ramadan. RamadanBasket.ca has brought the whole Muslim community together to work on one united project. Participants include schools and most local masjids in Edmonton and several across Alberta. In order to raise money, local volunteers do everything from organizing bottle drives to setting up donation booths at many local businesses, and these endeavours have been covered by local media. For two years in a row now RamadanBasket.ca has been supported by local athlete Alphonso Davies.

It is my absolute pleasure to recognize these amazingly hard-working volunteers, that have made RamadanBasket.ca a huge success. I congratulate them for bringing their faith into action by helping so many families around the world. May their efforts be recognized by all, including our Creator, and may they be blessed for their good deeds during this blessed month of Ramadan and all year-round.

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

Umoja Community Mosaic

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I often like to take the opportunities in here to highlight good-news stories from Calgary-Currie. Today I rise to tell you about Umoja Community Mosaic, a Calgary-based charity which is the next chapter of its previous brand, soccer without boundaries, started in Calgary-Currie. Now, as you know, before becoming an MLA, I was not very politically involved. I was a lawyer paying my bills. I started a local company, I built it up, and every business deal I did included fund raising for charities. That is how I met some amazing community leaders. That is also how I met Jean Claude Munyezamu.

Jean Claude Munyezamu is the founder of Umoja Community Mosaic. He escaped the genocide in Rwanda, found his way to Canada. Then in 2010, noting that children in his neighbourhood were getting into trouble, Jean Claude took some soccer balls to a nearby park on a Saturday morning, and soccer without boundaries was born. Now, what he probably wouldn't tell you is that he actually had to clear the park first of a bunch of drug dealers who had set up shop there.

From its humble soccer beginnings Umoja Community Mosaic has grown to provide many, many community services. It now provides culturally sensitive food hampers to over 3,500 people in need. The soccer program now has over 650 kids. There are after school programs, community-based tutoring, arts, crafts, music programs, and I could go on.

1:50

Umoja and the good work that it does would not exist without Jean Claude. He has received more awards and accolades than I can even list, including the 2019 immigrants of distinction award, the 2021 community justice award for leadership. He is an antiracism pioneer. He is a true change-maker. It is organizations like Umoja Community Mosaic that need our support, so if you can, please donate. Go to www.umojamosaic.org/donate today.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has question 1.

Utility Costs and Rebates

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the UCP unveiled legislation to implement a utility rebate they promised Albertans months ago. I would say that it's a case of better late than never except the minister said that Albertans will still have to wait months more. The minister gave many excuses yesterday, but it all comes down to this: it will be months before Albertans see a single dime of relief. This is a brutal failure by the UCP and a demonstration of total incompetence. To the Premier. You're already months behind. Why will it take several more months to help Albertans struggling to pay their energy bills?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, this government is taking real action to help address the rising cost of electricity, which is largely the result of reckless NDP policies like their power purchase agreement fiasco. Just today the minister for natural gas and electricity released our promised audit of the PPA fiasco under the NDP, demonstrating that they cost electricity consumers \$1.3 billion on that alone in addition to their carbon tax, their 7 and a half billion dollars on transmission costs.

Mr. Speaker, we want to get that relief to Albertans, so why is the NDP holding up the bill and delaying that utility relief?

Ms Ganley: That is categorically false, as usual.

Let's talk about the bill we're here to debate. The House is a place of democracy, and as a member of the Official Opposition it is not my job to rubber stamp the government's bills. It is our job to make them better. You know what would get these rebates moving faster, Mr. Speaker? A real legislated timeline, a commitment in writing to force the UCP to get the money flowing. Would the Premier support adding a legislative timeline to deliver this rebate? Yes or no?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I have to apologize to the House. I was inaccurate earlier on when I said that the NDP's power purchase agreement fiasco cost ratepayers \$1.3 billion. In fact, the audit conducted and released today demonstrates that it was \$1.34 billion – \$1.34 billion – on top of \$7.5 billion in unnecessary transmission costs, on top of their carbon tax, on top of the billions from shutting down the coal plants. Shame on them for driving up electricity prices for Albertans and for blocking today's relief.

Ms Ganley: Blaming others is all this Premier knows how to do. It's weak leadership, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier wants to talk about the past, but he doesn't want to talk about the Conservative decision to overbuild transmission lines. He doesn't want to talk about the failure of the deregulated market to actually increase competition. He doesn't want to talk about the fact that power companies are jacking up their markups to squeeze more profits out of Alberta families. Will the Premier commit to an independent public inquiry into power costs to give Albertans the full picture, not UCP half-truths?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we just released an independent audit of the NDP's PPA fiasco: \$1.34 billion down the toilet. She talks about these decisions as though they're just in the past. Here's what the NDP doesn't understand in their illiteracy about economics and about energy markets. Those prior errors – shutting down the coal plants, the carbon tax, the PPA fiasco, the overbuild on transmission – all of those are costs now passed on to taxpayers, so why won't they support the bill to get that relief to Albertans right away?

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

Automobile Insurance Industry Lobbying

Ms Phillips: Now, Mr. Speaker, Albertans have been absolutely side-swiped by massive increases to their car insurance. They want to know why. Part of the problem here is that the UCP government removed the NDP's cap on insurance premiums after a few meetings with their friends in the big insurance lobby. Now, yesterday, when I asked who these lobbyists met with, the Premier said: oh, not me. Okay, then. Let's find out who. Will the Premier table all meeting minutes, agenda items, correspondence, and calendars detailing UCP meetings with insurance lobbyists today?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, that's patently ridiculous. There are 25,000 people who work in the government of Alberta, and I don't track every single meeting. I can say that I never met with any lobbyist to discuss lifting the cap. We received advice from Treasury Board and Finance – and it was accepted by cabinet – to stop the flight from the Alberta market of insurers, the situation where tens of thousands of people could not get insurance and where many people were having to pay 100 per cent of their premiums up front because the NDP had made such a hash of the insurance market. Thankfully, we now see premiums coming down, and we implore the insurance companies to continue that downward momentum.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I don't trust this Premier's word, MLAs on both sides of this House don't trust the Premier's word, and Albertans don't trust the Premier's words. Here's what we do know. UCP insiders, including the Premier's close friend and campaign manager, Nick Koolsbergen, lobbied the government to take the cap off. The Premier caved, and now Albertans are paying hundreds of dollars more. So once more: will the Premier tell us exactly who in cabinet or on their staff met with car insurance lobbyists and table those documents?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member knows perfectly well that lobbyists have to report meetings with public office holders.

The reality is this. The NDP screwed up the market. They were driving insurers out of Alberta. They took no action. This government did. We brought in legislation to limit soft tissue personal injury awards, that were increasing significantly the cost of insurance. We've taken measures that have brought more insurers back into the market. That is exactly why premiums are now going down.

Ms Phillips: You know, the Premier spins this story about the hard-knock life of the multibillion-dollar insurance industry and says that they have it so tough. He says that they were looking to leave the province. None of them did, and in 2020 those companies raked in \$1 billion more in premiums than they paid out in claims. Albertans are shedding no tears for them. Why did the Premier let these big, profitable companies take Albertans for a ride? Why did he put his lobbyist friends first and Alberta drivers last? And for the last time, Mr. Speaker, where are those meeting documents?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, once again, the NDP completely screwed up the insurance market such that companies were no longer providing coverage in Alberta. Many people – I recall that three years ago we were all as MLAs hearing from constituents who said that they could not get insurance, and they couldn't afford to pay up front for the whole year. That's the disaster that they left us with, which is why we brought in Bill 43, that has begun to reduce the cost of payouts by insurance companies. That's why premiums are now coming down.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is next.

Calgary Storm Damage Recovery Funding

Member Ceci: On June 13, 2020, a terrible hailstorm swept across northern Calgary and nearby communities. It severely damaged homes, vehicles, businesses, and farms. The storm caused more than \$1.2 billion in damage, one of the most expensive natural disasters in Canadian history. But that's just the beginning. For months and months the Premier and his UCP government turned their backs on the people of Calgary. Why did the UCP refuse to activate the disaster recovery program to help families and businesses recover from the hail damage that they suffered?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, we were all disturbed to see the huge costs imposed on many families, not just in northeast Calgary but other parts of southern Alberta, during those hailstorms. I am pleased to report that one year out over 90 per cent of claims have been fully resolved, and the remaining 10 per cent outstanding were well into the claims process. I don't know why the NDP is trying to politicize the process. Where people have home insurance, they've received the benefits that they are entitled to. In other cases they're working through that. That's exactly how it should work.

Member Ceci: Many northeast residents who didn't have hail insurance got no help from the UCP, and the residents who did have that insurance got the runaround from their insurance companies for months. There are families and businesses in northeast Calgary, we've just heard, who still haven't gotten their claims paid out two years later. Of course, the UCP took the side of their friends in the insurance industry. Premiums are soaring even while some families are repairing the damage out of their own pockets. Why did this Premier and the UCP government refuse to help the people of northeast Calgary and choose, instead, to help their wealthy friends in the insurance industry?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: What in the world is he talking about, Mr. Speaker? People buy insurance. When they incur damage, it's validated, and they get their payments. They get their benefits. That's exactly the legal obligation of the insurance firms. Is the member now suggesting that the taxpayer should be forced to insure losses for people who do not acquire insurance? Then why would anybody buy insurance? It's called moral hazard. It would impose billions of costs, of dollars on taxpayers. I guess that's the socialist way.

Member Ceci: What this member knows is that the UCP refused to help Calgaryans, but other levels of government did so. The city of Calgary provided \$3,000 rebates for homeowners to replace hail-damaged roofs with new hail-resistant roofs. It's such a good program that they're oversubscribed. They have many more eligible households than they can afford at the city of Calgary. Here's the promise: an NDP government will bring provincial dollars to this program, make sure every eligible household in Calgary gets help with hail-resistant roofs. That's a promise.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the disaster assistance program provided significant funding to uninsurable losses under the same policy the NDP government had in place. You know, what a shell game. Here they are trying to politicize this. The insurance policy of this government is the same as the NDP government, which is to say that people have an obligation to insure their homes against damage of this nature, and now the NDP is saying that we should remove that obligation and move it all onto taxpayers. That's why, if they were still in office, we'd have a multibillion-dollar deficit.

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Member Irwin: Teachers involved in the writing of curriculum seems reasonable, right? Well, according to at least one UCP MLA, not so much. In a meeting with the Coaldale council the MLA for Taber-Warner stated that he wasn't sure having teachers involved would be critical in determining a good curriculum, that same UCP curriculum opposed by teachers, students, parents, school boards, Indigenous communities, francophone Albertans, and so many more. Does the Premier share his MLA's view that excluding teachers makes the curriculum better?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, teachers have been deeply involved in the development of the revised curriculum. Over a hundred teachers have been involved in the formal consultation advisory committees with the Minister of Education. The revisions have been delayed to take on board more constructive input, for example in the social studies curriculum. But the real question is: why does the NDP oppose world-leading techniques for language arts and math instruction based on the best practices around the world? Why do they want to continue to hold Alberta students back? Why do they oppose these meaningful improvements in both reading and mathematics?

Member Irwin: We know that when it comes to this curriculum, the UCP has a clear vision. The Premier's racist friend, who slammed the Pope's apology for residential schools, got to hold a pen while teachers are told by the UCP that their involvement isn't necessary to create a good curriculum. Albertans know that the opposite is true. Can the Premier explain why Chris Champion got to write the first draft of the curriculum while teachers are cast aside and told that their input isn't necessary?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, in their ideological zeal to impose their left-wing agenda in the schools, the NDP is jeopardizing life-learning chances for Alberta students. Sarah Sarich, the president of Decoding Dyslexia, wrote yesterday in the *Journal* that the new English language arts curriculum "will prevent the systematic discrimination of students who struggle to read and has the potential to dramatically improve literacy rates for all Alberta students." Why does the NDP oppose the right to read for Alberta students?

Member Irwin: Albertans know that this government doesn't value teachers, something that was only confirmed when we saw the MLA for Taber-Warner tell his constituents that involving teachers wouldn't make the curriculum better. Since this government is funding 1,000 fewer teachers, showing that not only did they not value teachers in curriculum; they don't value them in the classrooms either, does the Premier think that excluding teachers and continually disrespecting them will get his Dumpster fire of a curriculum a passing grade? Let me tell you that Albertans are saying loudly and clearly: it's a huge fail.

Mr. Kenney: Again, the NDP is trying to hold back significant improvements in math proficiency and in literacy. Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies, a very powerful advocate for elementary education, says:

It took eight years of advocacy for me to see this . . . [a curriculum that] is clear, concise, age-appropriate and well sequenced. It is a curriculum that sees and realizes our children's fullest potential. They will have the confidence and skills to pursue their dreams and succeed not only in the STEM fields, but also in life.

Mr. Speaker, why does the NDP oppose this concrete progress for elementary school kids?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has a question.

AIMCo and Heritage Savings Trust Fund Performance

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AIMCo is a very important Alberta institution that generates returns for all Albertans in the heritage savings trust fund but also for thousands of public-sector servants whose pension contributions rely on AIMCo investment performance. The professional experience of investment managers at AIMCo means high returns for pension holders, which in turn reduce contribution rates. To the President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance: what is the state of AIMCo's investment performance for 2021?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that great question because I'm very pleased to rise and talk about the status of AIMCo's returns. In fact, yesterday AIMCo announced a record annual value-add of \$7.7 billion. That's over and above the benchmark rate. For the year-end, December 31, the total fund return was 14.7 per cent, 8 per cent over their benchmark. I'm very pleased to say that this marks the strongest year of returns ever for AIMCo.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that that is absolutely amazing news and given that during the Budget 2022 consultations and following the news of Alberta's first balanced budget in more than a decade Albertans wanted to know what was happening with the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and given that AIMCo announced incredible results for 2021 yesterday and that the heritage fund has also had incredible results presented in Budget 2022, can the Minister of Finance tell us what the status of the heritage savings trust fund is today?

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

Mr. Toews: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to provide that information. The heritage fund has seen seven quarters of positive returns. In fact, in the first three quarters of the previous fiscal year the fund generated more than \$2 billion at a rate of 14 and a half per cent. At the end of December the heritage savings trust fund had an \$18.9 billion balance of net assets. We remain focused on ensuring the heritage fund continues to be a source of pride and security for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in 1976 Premier Peter Lougheed established the fund to provide for future generations and that over the years government after government has pulled money into general revenue and given that our government has balanced the budget and is looking forward to contributing to the heritage savings trust fund in the near future, can the Minister of Finance tell us what his vision is for the heritage savings trust fund going forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. One advantage of fiscal discipline is a balanced budget. An advantage of a balanced budget is that it gives a government and a people options. We committed to reinvesting any surplus back into the heritage savings trust fund this year. I will reiterate that commitment today in front of this House and in front of Albertans.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Renaud: While this government can't even figure out how to get the utility rebates they promised out the door, Alberta families are struggling with inflation. The Calgary Food Bank is reporting a year-over-year increase in demand from 11 to 20 per cent. Over 47,000 were served last month, an increase of over 10,000. The Premier and government are ignoring the increasing number of Albertans who need support to actually put food on the table. What tangible support can the Minister of Finance offer these families

who've been left behind by government? They really are struggling to make ends meet right now.

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member's question because there's no doubt that inflation is creating cost pressures for all Albertans and many Alberta households. That's why we moved forward with the electricity rebate. Every household will receive an electricity rebate in the weeks and months coming up. On top of that, we have suspended the fuel tax. Again, every Alberta motorist, every small business will not pay any fuel tax for the first quarter. That may be extended for the full year. On top of that, we're delivering responsible fiscal management.

Ms Renaud: I'm talking about real people right now.

Given that this punishing inflation is making these hurtful UCP policy decisions even worse and given that the UCP chose to use inflation to take thousands from seniors, disabled Albertans, and students and given that the Calgary Food Bank is reporting that they're dealing with people who are at a crisis level right now, who have used up all of their resources, will the Finance minister step in by ending his policy of using inflation to take food away from the most vulnerable?

2:10

Mr. Toews: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, we're moving forward with a number of initiatives that will provide relief for Alberta households and families. Moreover, Budget 2022 was about positioning this province for increased investment attraction, increased job creation, increased opportunities for every Albertan. Right now there are tens of thousands of employers right across the province looking for additional employees. Now is a great time for Albertans to step into that labour market, a great time for employees to take on a job or upgrade a job.

Ms Renaud: Given that this government has systematically made life more difficult by deindexing benefits that were already poverty level – the Business Council of Alberta is reporting a 4 per cent decrease in average household incomes – and given that this would be an ideal time for the UCP to end their policy of taking a billion dollars from Albertans in the form of a sneaky bracket-creep tax hike, so that families can afford to buy groceries, or reindex benefits at the very least, will the Finance minister admit that Alberta families are struggling to put food on the table right now and do something? End this . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are taking action right now, again, with a whole host of relief programs, including the suspension of the fuel tax. We're positioning this province for increased opportunities for every Albertan, and on top of that we're delivering responsible fiscal management. We inherited a fiscal train wreck from the members opposite that would have given this government no options to provide relief today to ensure our programs are sustainable for tomorrow. We're taking real action.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Advanced Education approved enormous, exceptional tuition increases for next year and then keeps bragging in this House that Alberta's tuition isn't that expensive because last year Alberta was still below the national average. Since this minister won't level with students and families

about the real cost of education in Alberta, allow me to do so. Over their degree, this is how much more the University of Alberta will pay than the Canadian median: law, \$6,600; business, \$6,400; engineering, \$1,300; dentistry, \$45,780. How can this minister defend those . . .

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I didn't quite hear a question in there. You know, I think we've been over this in the past, but I'm happy to go over it again for the benefit of the member. According to Statistics Canada tuition in Alberta today remains below the national average, and with respect to some of the programs that the member is referencing, many of those programs also continue to remain below the national average. As a quick example, the University of Alberta's MBA will be \$24,000 for new incoming students. Across the U15 it's \$29,000, so prices in Alberta continue to remain competitive.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this minister claims that these enormous hikes are a good deal because they will increase program quality for students but given that the students in the programs don't seem to agree – student representatives and programs have spoken out against tuition increases because of the massive cost to students and lower quality of education – and given that the minister himself gave himself the power to approve these increases without the support of students, something that would not have happened under an NDP government, if the minister's gigantic increases are such a good deal, why do students not want them?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite mentioned, these increases must go to improve the quality of the program, and that's precisely where those increases will go. The institutions have submitted very robust proposals providing details as to how those increases will improve the quality of the program, and that'll indeed be the case. As well, a section of that revenue will also go to strengthen student assistance and provide more support and financial assistance to students in those programs, but again, as I referenced earlier, many of those programs still remain competitive with the national average.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the minister claims that he cares about student consultation but that FOIP requests by the student union have showed that the deans of the affected faculties did not think that they had enough time to do a consultation properly and given that all of these consultations were crammed into final exams in June 2021 and into the busy first weeks of September classes, so the rushed amateur-hour proposals that this minister approved are a direct result of these timelines, why did the minister force students and universities to rush to develop these important proposals in such a short time?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, we didn't force and rush anyone to do anything. The universities have the discretion to submit the proposals whenever they want, and it's completely within their discretion. There are no timelines as to when the proposals must be received. In fact, when we first received the proposals, we sent them back to ask the university to engage in more consultation. I have no idea what timelines the member is referring to because there are no timelines in the process. It's completely up to the discretion of the universities and the institutions as to how they want to manage that process.

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

Nurse Practitioners and Physicians in Southern Alberta

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nurse practitioners are an important part of Alberta's health care system. They are registered nurses with graduate degrees and perform many similar duties that physicians do such as diagnosis, treatment, prescription of medications, and many more. With the current struggles facing our rural health care system, nurse practitioners might be a great solution to a very real problem. Can the Minister of Health please tell this House about his department's efforts to bring more of these talented health care workers into our communities?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Nurse practitioners can provide many of the same services as doctors, and they play a vital role in our plan to address the ongoing concerns concerning rural health care. That's why we initiated the nurse practitioner support program. We also updated regulations to increase their scope of practice, allowing them to complete driver medical examination forms and work as medical directors and provide real-time advice to paramedics. We'll keep working to ensure nurse practitioners can provide quality health care for all Albertans, particularly in rural Alberta.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. As I mentioned earlier, given that nurse practitioners can perform certainly not all but many of the same functions as physicians and given that timely access to quality health care is a major concern for the residents of Lethbridge and the surrounding area, through the Speaker to the same minister: does he see an opportunity for nurse practitioners to be more involved in southern Alberta's health care system, and are they looking to attract these practitioners to Lethbridge?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the hon. member for his advocacy for Lethbridge. We recognize the need in Lethbridge and in other communities. We started the primary care nurse practitioner support program to hire 80 new nurse practitioners. AHS has already hired 50 new nurse practitioners and is currently in talks with 20 more candidates. There are 2.8 full-time equivalent NP positions located in Lethbridge, and they're under active recruitment right now. Albertans deserve the same level of care regardless of where they live. We are endeavouring to deliver that.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and once again to the same minister for his answer. Given that I've raised the recent issue of the lack of doctors in Lethbridge directly with the minister and given that my constituents are rightly concerned about their access to quality health care as a result and given the government's commitment to addressing the health care of rural Albertans, can the minister give an update on the current efforts to attract more doctors to Lethbridge and ensure southern Alberta maintains access to the quality health care that they deserve?

Mr. Copping: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker, to the member for his continuing advocacy. AHS is currently recruiting 26 family medicine positions in Lethbridge, and they've interviewed to date 23 candidates. Ten of those candidates have committed to work in Lethbridge and are awaiting their CPSA assessments. Another five physicians already working in Lethbridge as locums have been offered permanent positions there, and three of them have accepted. I hope to see them stay and work in Lethbridge and see new physicians join them in the coming weeks as I provide more information to my colleagues here in Lethbridge.

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

Rural Physician Recruitment and Retention

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UCP's attacks on Alberta's health care system are harming families in every part of our province. Dozens of communities have partially closed hospitals. Tens of thousands of people in Lethbridge can't find a family doctor, and now this shortage is spreading into the Bow Valley, where there isn't a single doctor in the region accepting new patients. In Canmore those without a doctor now are losing access to a walk-in clinic. We haven't heard a word about this from the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, so I'll ask the Minister of Health. Why under the UCP government are whole regions of Alberta continuing to lose access to a family doctor?

2:20

Mr. Copping: I thank the hon. member for the question. This is an important issue. We recognize that there are challenges in finding primary care in rural Alberta. Mr. Speaker, this is an issue not only affecting Alberta, but it's affecting all provinces across the entire country. As I indicated to my hon. colleague from Lethbridge, we are utilizing PCNs to be able to help fill the gap, plus we are actively recruiting family doctors across the entire province. I can advise the hon. member across the way that AHS and Covenant are recruiting to fill two recent family physician vacancies in the Canmore region, and we're going to continue to work . . .

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

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that this is an issue this government has actively made worse because given that last week I stood with Dr. Brendan Flowers, a family physician who practises in Canmore, one of the most beautiful places in the world, yet they are struggling to find doctors willing to work there, and given that as doctors retire without being replaced, the workload on Dr. Flowers and his colleagues is increasing, putting him at risk of burnout and early retirement, and given that Dr. Flowers said that decisions of this UCP government are making it harder to attract doctors to Alberta and the Bow Valley, what specifically is this minister doing to undo the damage his government created?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, let's set the record straight. A recent report demonstrated that if we compare Q1 last year to Q1 this year, 99 more doctors came to Alberta than left the province or left the practice. We are committed to being able to increase our supply of health care professions in rural Alberta. That's why last year we committed \$90 million to rural programs, and this year we committed the same amount. You know, we've been through two years of challenges through the pandemic, that has put stress on the system, but we are focused on getting practitioners in health care in rural Alberta.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the minister can spin, but Albertans see the reality on the ground and given that the Alberta Medical Association says that the rate of doctors retiring has doubled in the past two years under this government and given that Alberta's medical schools are reporting dozens of unfilled family residencies this year and given that the hostility from this UCP government to doctors, the entire front-line health care team is clearly not only driving current doctors but also future doctors away from working in Alberta, will Albertans have to wait for a change in government to see new doctors come back to the Bow Valley and other communities in need across Alberta?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I just want to be clear, and let's set the record straight. We are investing in our health care system: an additional \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year, \$600 million the year after that, \$1.8 billion. We are investing in capital at some of the highest levels ever, \$3.5 billion over the next few years. We're investing in rural health care, and this is a challenge not only being faced in Alberta, but it's being faced across the country. We have more doctors here now. We have more nurses. We have more paramedics. We are supporting our health care system, we will support our rural docs, and we will support to make sure that rural Albertans can get the health care that they need where they need it.

Federal Housing Funding

Ms Sigurdson: With the cost of living continuing to increase, many Albertans are struggling to afford a home. I was glad to see that the recently released federal budget recognized this and expanded the national housing strategy to spend a total of \$72 billion on affordable housing. Sadly, the UCP has continually left federal money untouched, ignoring the calls of municipalities, housing providers, and business leaders. Will the UCP finally change course and work to access every single federal dollar possible for affordable housing?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are in fact taking the time to review the recent federal budget and its commitments to housing. I know that my colleague looks forward to getting more details in the coming days, particularly in terms of how much new federal housing funding will be allocated for Albertans and how the new dollars and initiatives will align with Alberta's 10-year affordable housing strategy. We are committed to working with community partners and governments at both municipal and federal levels on this very important issue.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that downtown revitalization and economic recovery requires investment in affordable housing, chambers of commerce and business associations across the province have advocated for permanent solutions to address poverty and homelessness. Given that this federal funding is a great way to quickly use available space in communities and convert it to housing, with so much new funding available will the UCP finally work with communities, become a true partner, and invest in new affordable housing?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, we are absolutely committed as a government to partnering with our municipal and federal partners in this as well as community organizations.

You know, in the first question the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, asks about leaving federal dollars on the table. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is actually quite shameful that the NDP are once again not telling the whole picture when they do in fact know better. They're fully aware of the terms and conditions for Alberta to receive federal funding under the NHS, including what Alberta's maximum allocation will be and how much Alberta will receive in relation to other provinces.

Ms Sigurdson: Given, Mr. Speaker, that \$187 million was left on the table and given that a clear solution to access more federal funding for housing is for the UCP to simply invest their fair share as well as work with municipalities and providers to navigate federal programs and given that the UCP have left housing providers high and dry – I've heard from some who have taken funds away from their needed services to hire consultants to navigate federal programs; this could all be avoided if the UCP were simply a willing partner – why does the UCP refuse to do the bare minimum to receive available federal funding?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, once again, the NDP are fully aware of the terms and conditions for Alberta to receive federal funding under the NHS, including what Alberta's maximum allocation will be, \$561 million, and how much Alberta will receive in relation to other provinces and territories, as they signed the original agreement in 2019. It is, however, our government that has continuously pushed for more flexibility and collaboration with the federal government to find better housing solutions for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a question to ask.

Educational Curriculum Redesign and Student Assessment

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For far too long students in Alberta have struggled to learn to read and write. Families have had to spend thousands of dollars on tutors, and those who can't afford it have simply fallen behind. Alberta data shows that approximately 30 per cent of students are struggling readers, and that is only what we know from the very few school boards who track that data. Many do not. To the Minister of Education: what is this government doing to ensure that our students do not fall behind?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recently released the final curriculum for K to 6 English language arts and literature. This curriculum was developed using expert advice and world-class research. We are taking a scientific approach to improving literacy rates. This approach also includes the introduction of mandatory learning assessments for language, a key UCP commitment in our 2019 election platform. Promise made, promise kept.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her answer. Given that the minister did explain that this is a science-based approach, while all I'm hearing from members opposite and from the teachers' union is criticism, and given that members opposite are loud and angry and the ATA is spending thousands of dollars to convince Albertans that this is an evil and racist curriculum, I'm wondering: what do the experts say? Does the minister have any experts who have spoken out in support of this approach to curriculum and assessments?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly do. When asked about the new mandatory language assessments, Pamela Guilbault, superintendent of Lakeland Catholic, said, and I quote: these assessments are necessary because they provide important information about student learning, which allows our teachers to apply ongoing research-based instruction as well as literacy and numeracy intervention. Dr. George Georgiou of the University of Alberta said, "The new English Language Arts and Literature curriculum is grounded in research and allows for explicit and systematic instruction in foundational skills."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are University of Alberta professors, there are parents, and there are other advocates who support this curriculum and given that many of these experts specifically support the math curriculum and given that the NDP would prefer that our students flounder in discovery math in their classrooms, can the minister assure this House that these new assessments will also support students struggling to keep up in math class?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer is yes. We've released a strong new mathematics curriculum and, with it, new mandatory learning assessments that build on the important work we did this school year to identify struggling learners. Dr. Martin Mrazik of the University of Alberta said:

The revised K-6 Mathematics curriculum includes strengthened content that fosters core competencies in math. This included reinforcing basic fundamentals in a well-sequenced manner that will promote a student's understanding of math in a real-world context.

Our kids need this so desperately.

2:30 Medical Diagnostic Imaging Test Coverage

Mr. Nielsen: As of March 31 last year this government decided that diagnostic imaging services like X-rays, ultrasounds, bone scans, MRIs ordered by chiropractors, physiotherapists, and audiologists would no longer be covered by the Alberta health care insurance plan. They decided that the best time to act on this was in the middle of a pandemic and that it was completely fine for Albertans to pay out of pocket. The colleges of chiropractors and physiotherapists have conducted research and found that it is crystal clear that this policy is severely detrimental to Albertans, to their health, and to their finances. Will the minister listen to Albertans and reverse these failed changes?

Mr. Copping: Well, I thank the hon. member for the question. This is an important issue. As the hon. member is aware, we did an assessment of the provisions of the services being ordered by chiropractors, for example. They weren't able to do this in other provinces, and we looked at this. We understood that many people who are actually advised of the service had private coverage. We also understood that those who actually needed to be able to do this and didn't have private coverage would have the opportunity to go see a family doctor to do this. We did this as a cost-saving measure, but I'm happy to speak with the physiotherapists and the chiropractors to better understand their report and understand the implications of that.

Mr. Nielsen: Given that the ACAC reported that one Albertan had to live with an untreated heel fracture for over a year because of the

inefficiency created by this policy – this was one of many testimonies they collected – and given that this policy has only created more red tape for Albertans to jump through and that it forces them to wait while their pain increases, their bones degenerate, their surgeries are pushed back, how can the minister justify this policy? Does he know how it's affecting Albertans? Can he tell us about it, or has he been sitting bone idle as Albertans suffer because of these hurdles the government has created?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to learn more about that particular incident, because, as I indicated, you know, the change in the policy was about who is able to requisition an insured service. A doctor is able to requisition an insured service like an MRI or a scan, so if the individual in that particular case went to see their doctor and there was an issue there, that actually would be requisitioned by that individual. Alternatively, many individuals have private plans, so if a chiropractor does a requisitioning, then it would be paid for under the private plan.

Mr. Speaker, again, as I previously indicated, we put this in as a cost-saving measure. We did an assessment on this. However, if there are other assessments out there that suggest that there are other ways to do that, to provide better care and manage our costs, I'm happy to take a look at it.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, given that the report, that I know the minister has, has found that government costs for diagnostic referrals and report interpretation were nearly \$4 million more in '20-21 than in 2019-20 – Mr. Speaker, this cost was currently zero before that – and given that this obviously doesn't support the policy goals of cost containment, especially when adjusted for COVID, I once again ask the minister: will he rescind this detrimental policy and commit to involving Alberta's chiropractors, physiotherapists, audiologists, and the rest of the trained Alberta health care force before he decides to play with Albertans' well-being . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I already indicated, you know, this was introduced as a cost-saving measure, and part of the approach in terms of the cost-saving measure was to be able to not only leverage the private plans but also to ensure that people could actually still get the services through doctors. Again, as I indicated in my previous responses, if there is other evidence that shows that we can provide better service and manage our costs, I'm happy to talk with the associations in that regard.

Southern Alberta Concerns

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, during the break, while the UCP were focused entirely on their internal drama, I had the opportunity to travel through southern Alberta to meet with the people this government has left behind and to hear their concerns, their fears, and what they want to see for their future. Southern Alberta and Lethbridge in particular have been hit hard by this government's war on doctors, and as a result there are tens of thousands of people who aren't able to access primary care anymore. Can the Minister of Health say right now how many doctors have been hired to replace the physicians driven out of Lethbridge and southern Alberta?

Mr. Copping: Well, I'd like to thank the hon. member for the important question. As I already answered with the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, we have put in place mechanisms to be able to improve primary care in Lethbridge. We are recruiting over 20 doctors in Lethbridge; 10 of them already have agreed to say yes, and we're waiting for their accreditation. We also have offers open

for locums for doctors in Lethbridge, Mr. Speaker. That's the success of our system, because, as you know, we don't hire doctors, but we are working very hard to ensure that we can attract doctors to the right locations.

Ms Sweet: Well, given that Lethbridge lost 40, that's a problem.

Given that I heard loud and clear that good jobs are the path to thriving rural communities and given that instead of investing in diversification and investing in rural economies, this government is actively eliminating jobs and the economic drivers in southern Alberta and given that one only needs to look at how the UCP's health care privatization agenda has cost four jobs in Claresholm – and likely another 90 are following very shortly – how can the Minister of Health or the minister of rural economic development claim to support southern Alberta when they are removing the economic drivers in our rural communities? Will they commit to reversing these job losses in Claresholm today?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated previously in this House, there is a challenge with attracting and retaining health care workers in rural Alberta, and this is a challenge being faced not only here in Alberta but across the entire country. We are committed to being able to attract and retain not only doctors but all health care professionals, and we are backing that up with dollars: \$90 million last year, another \$90 million this year. Programs include the rural remote northern program, \$57 million; the rural medical education program, \$6 million; the rural community rural clerkship program. I can go on. We are focused on doing this, and we're having success. An example we just talked about is Lethbridge, and there'll be more to come.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government hurt rural families and communities by firing tens of thousands of educational assistants, not properly funding education, and leaving boards out to dry during this pandemic and given that the crisis that they've created in education is only made worse by their failed curriculum, rejected overwhelmingly by the teachers, the parents, the students, the school boards, the academics, the Indigenous communities, all in rural Alberta, and given that in order to build thriving rural communities, access to education is a must, rather than trying to defend the failed policies of this government and the lack of action, will the Education minister look at the camera and promise to bring those educational jobs back to rural Alberta?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, that is just a load of bunk. There is no truth in it whatsoever. None whatsoever.

In terms of the curriculum I just want to read from a rural assistant superintendent from Westwind school division: I appreciate the listening voice the government has been throughout the piloting of the new K to 6 curriculum in our division; I appreciate that they listened to some of our views in terms of the reasonable rollout plan; it may not have been exactly as I planned or I would have picked, but at least I can say that I feel that I have been listened to and heard and . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie has the call.

Federal-provincial Child Care Agreement

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many working families rely on child care, and I was grateful on their behalf when we announced a made-in-Alberta child care deal with the federal government. I was even more pleased to see Alberta among the first provinces to roll out affordability dollars to both parents and operators. As a

result, I'm hearing from my constituents in Grande Prairie that are now saving real hard-earned dollars on child care. To the Minister of Children's Services: how many families are benefiting from this deal, and what kinds of savings are they seeing?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to thank the member for the question. Nearly 83,000 kids and their families are now benefiting from fee reductions, on average by half, right across this province. Fees will continue to decrease as we move through this five-year plan. Since signing the agreement, more than 28,000 additional children are also receiving a subsidy. Enrolment has gone up 30 per cent as parents are going back to school, getting back to work, and driving our economic recovery. This deal has in fact been great news for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again, through you, to the minister for that answer. Given that we know that parents need the benefit of options and flexibility when looking for child care and given that many parents rely on the variety and flexibility offered by many private spaces and further given that nearly 60 per cent of child care programs currently in Alberta are private spaces, to the same minister: what is being done to expand and protect these spaces in private child care across Alberta?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a great question as we fought hard to include private programs in our made-in-Alberta agreement, many of which are run by female entrepreneurs. We negotiated as well for an additional 2,700 privately operated spaces to be included in this agreement since signing it. Just like for day homes and preschools, operators who were left out under the former government, we wanted to make sure that absolutely no licensed spaces were left out. We're working with the federal government on our expansion plan, and we'll have more details on new spaces very soon.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, through you, to the minister. Given that we know this deal was built following the first consultation with the child care sector in over a decade, a consultation that I was honoured to lead on behalf of the minister, and given that this minister clearly listened to Alberta parents and operators when creating this plan and further given that this is a five-year project that will include more savings for parents, workforce supports, and training for educators, can you outline for the House what's next for Alberta parents in the child care sector?

The Speaker: The minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member noted, this is a five-year plan, and there is absolutely more to come. We chose to roll out affordability dollars first because we are here to represent working parents, get them back to work, and make sure that they can take part in our economic recovery. More spaces will be created in both facilities and day homes. I do want to thank the Member for Grande Prairie for her hard work in the first consultations in over a decade in this area. Round-tables are right now under way confirming exactly how we should invest dollars into our workforce

and supporting our early childhood educators. We're also going to be investing in staff and training the ones who are already in the system.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 15 seconds or less we will proceed to the remainder of the Routine given that Royal Assent will take place this afternoon.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has a statement to make.

Support for Ukraine

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some would argue that everything in life is relative, yet others believe that there are moral absolutes, where an action or belief is right all of the time, in any circumstance and in any era. For instance, a society that nurtures strong, creative, self-reliant people is better than a society where its people are dependent upon some version of an all-knowing and all-controlling government, that a commitment to limited government, majority rules, and respect for individual and minority rights is always better than supporting the unchecked self-interest of authoritarian rule.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is not one of two morally equivalent nations. The facts are clear. Russia attacked Ukraine. Russia is an authoritarian state that has killed opposition politicians, restricted a free press, arrested dissident citizens. It is Russia that is bombing civilians, targeting hospitals and civilian infrastructure, and threatening its peaceful neighbours with the use of the atomic bomb and chemical warfare. To consider the actions of the two nations as morally equivalent is a grave injustice to the people of Ukraine.

Albertans' support for Ukraine is not purely familial, cultural, or historical, but it is one built on the very foundation stones of deeply held common values. These democratic values are worth defending. In the Drayton Valley-Devon constituency the Breton Agricultural Society hosted a community supper that raised \$40,000, a figure that will be multiplied three to four times by funnelling the donations through the Foodgrains Bank. The Rotarians in Drayton Valley organized a community supper that raised over \$50,000. The Zirka dancers in the community of Calmar raised close to \$6,000. Private citizens have banded together and sent over plane loads of humanitarian supplies, and these are just the efforts that I am aware of.

Clearly, Albertans understand that they must support those who defend freedom and democracy. The people of Alberta and Ukraine show a common set of values that are eloquently expressed in the Alberta motto, strong and free, and Albertans are prepared to help defend these values in Ukraine.

Premier's Leadership

Mr. Loewen: The Premier insists on absolute loyalty from everyone. That's being a team player. This aligns with the strategy that turning a blind eye to flagrant blunders is required on his team. The Premier's most important promises have all been broken. He pledged servant leadership. Instead, he wants an election if you don't support him. He wants a new base. He allowed interference in nomination races, and he had his cronies alter the rules of his own leadership review. Servant leadership? Promise made, promise broken.

The Premier promised a grassroots guarantee but made the rules for recall and citizens' initiatives virtually unattainable and delayed

implementing them. Grassroots democracy? Promise made, promise broken.

The Premier swore he would fight for a fair deal. Instead, he stops at only words. As a result, the federal government has completely ignored the results of the equalization referendum. But don't worry; he'll write a letter. Fair deal? Promise made, promise broken.

The Premier's mishandling of the pandemic has impacted every single Albertan in this province. He promised to fight against vaccine passports. He promised to vastly increase ICU capacity. He promised no mandates. Instead, no more ICU capacity, he brought in vaccine passports, and he allowed thousands of Albertans to be fired while him and his cronies partied on a patio. Promises made; promises broken.

To my constituents and all Albertans, I must tell you that I am tired. I'm tired of corruption. I'm tired of policies being made to benefit the few. I'm tired of money being spent wastefully. I'm tired of complacency. I'm tired of politicians who are all talk and no action. I'm tired of an entitled, elite political class that doesn't care about Albertans.

I dream of a day when I can retire and hand this province off to my children and grandchildren. This is their world. We need to leave this province in better shape than we found it. We all have a role to play. We must be vigilant. We must never stop participating in democracy, and we must resist the temptation to become demoralized. We can change things, and together we will.

In this House our loyalty and duty is to Albertans, not to the failed leadership of one person. This is a duty I am proud to accept. How about you?

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 17 Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise and introduce Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

This bill proposes changes that add clarity and flexibility to bereavement and reservist leave and preserves the status quo for postsecondary bargaining agents. Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, to preserve and improve employee protections.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General.

Bill 20 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, being the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta.

Bill 19 Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022.

The changes proposed in this bill will better protect condo owners from unnecessary costs, and I'm looking forward to the debate on this important legislation.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of e-mails that I read into the record during debate on Bill 18 this morning.

Thank you.

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, I have the requisite number of copies of a document that describes and well defines what sentencing circles are all about, which I brought up in debate earlier today and yesterday afternoon.

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you. I have several tablings, Mr. Speaker, and I beg your indulgence. The first is the requisite copies of a document from 2009 outlining the indomitable NDP leader Brian Mason's concerns about the effect on electricity bills due to PC policies on transmission lines in Bill 50.

I have the requisite number of copies as well, five copies, from an April 21, 2011, document that I referenced in bill debate this morning from the indefatigable Brian Mason on how power bills will jump dramatically as the PC government pushed ahead with massive new transmission lines. There's those five.

And yet another document from May 9, 2011, from the inimitable Brian Mason discussing how the provincial government was wilfully blind to evidence of new power line constructions that would send electricity bills through the roof. That one is 2011 as well.

2:50

I also have the requisite five copies of the executive summary of a University of Calgary School of Public Policy document released a couple of days ago – it's been referenced a few times in bill debate – entitled *Why Are Power Prices So Darn High?* by Blake Shaffer, David Brown, and Andrew Eckert, to make sure that we have that for the record as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this afternoon Royal Assent will take place. It was scheduled for approximately 3 o'clock. We are going to stand in recess until 3:05.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:51 p.m. to 3:05 p.m.]

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Royal Assent

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Her Honour the Honourable the Administrator will now attend upon the Assembly.

[The Premier and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Administrator]

[The Mace was draped]

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please. Mr. Speaker, Her Honour the Honourable the Administrator awaits.

The Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit Her Honour the Honourable the Administrator.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Administrator and the Premier entered the Chamber, and the Administrator took her place upon the throne]

The Speaker: May it please Her Honour, the Legislative Assembly has at its present sitting passed certain bills to which and in the name of the Legislative Assembly I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

The Clerk: Your Honour, the following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed:

- 2 Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022
- 4 Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022
- 5 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022
- 6 Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022
- 9 Public's Right to Know Act

[The Administrator indicated her assent]

The Clerk: In Her Majesty's name Her Honour the Honourable the Administrator doth assent to these bills.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Administrator and the Premier left the Chamber]

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Please be seated.
Ordres du jour.

3:10

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 15 Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and move second reading of Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022.

Bill 15 is about reforming the teaching profession's discipline process to create one system that serves the best interests of students, their families, the public, and the teaching profession in Alberta. This legislation builds upon the important work started with the students first act, which passed last fall. Mr. Speaker, Albertans deserve greater accountability, transparency, and timeliness in the teaching discipline process, and so do teachers. Bill 15 does just that while also ensuring legislation and related regulations that oversee these processes do not present a conflict of interest.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Alberta is the only Canadian province where the teachers' union has the sole responsibility set out in legislation for overseeing complaints of alleged unprofessional conduct and professional incompetence filed against their union members. There is no other

avenue to address a complaint that questions a teacher's suitability to hold a teaching certificate. Mr. Speaker, this simply cannot continue, which is why the teacher discipline process needs to be improved with Bill 15. This legislation would create the Alberta teaching profession commission and appoint a commissioner to oversee teacher and teacher leader conduct, incompetency complaints for the profession regardless of where teachers are employed or their membership status in the professional association.

The goal is to have one legislative structure to govern matters of discipline for the entire teaching profession by one organization using a consistent, effective, and efficient process. Mr. Speaker, currently Alberta has a dual-system process where the Alberta Teachers' Association oversees discipline for its active members while the Alberta Education registrar oversees the discipline for all other teachers. The new model would ensure that all teachers and teacher leaders, including superintendents, are subject to the same disciplinary system. Bill 15 would bring Alberta in line with other jurisdictions and regulated professions such as nurses by eliminating the conflict of interest where a union could advocate for its members while also overseeing disciplinary matters.

Let me be absolutely clear, Mr. Speaker. The commissioner would be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council following an open competition and would operate at arm's length from the ministry. There are numerous examples where individuals are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. In fact, officers of the Legislature such as the Ethics Commissioner and Privacy Commissioner are all appointed in this way and do objective work on behalf of the Legislative Assembly and the people of Alberta. I expect the same from whomever is selected to fill this commissioner role.

Contrary to narratives I've heard from the Alberta Teachers' Association and even the members of the opposition, Bill 15 would not give the Minister of Education the ability to influence or control the commissioner in the course of their duties or those of their office. And, to be frank, Mr. Speaker, Bill 15 is not about consolidating power in the hands of the minister's office, as some critics have argued. This is about protecting students, not punishing the hard-working and dedicated teachers and teacher leaders across this great province. In the discipline model proposed in Bill 15, all complaints would be received by the registrar at Alberta Education and referred to the commissioner, not to the minister, for further action.

Mr. Speaker, let me explain how this would work. Under Bill 15 the commissioner would have the authority to address and investigate a complaint. The office of the teaching profession commissioner would review and investigate the matter and may initially dismiss the case. They may recommend a penalty under an expedited process or use consent resolution agreements, dispute resolution, or mediation to resolve the issue. If the commissioner determines that the case warrants a hearing, a hearing would be conducted by a panel. The panel would be comprised of teachers and public members who would render a decision on the matter and put forth a recommendation to the Minister of Education. Mr. Speaker, this is not a wholesale change from the current process, and we are simply making improvements to the process that will benefit students, parents, teachers, and teacher leaders.

Currently the Minister of Education has the final say on decisions made under the registrar's hearing process and also has the final say on decisions that recommend suspension or cancellation of certificates under the ATA's discipline process. This is because the Minister of Education also holds the authority to issue a certificate in order to practise in the teaching profession.

Mr. Speaker, these change won't happen overnight, and we know the education system will need support to make the transition to the new system. To do this, we will ensure a smooth shift transition from

the current system of teacher and teacher leader professionalism to the new commissioner model with transitional regulations.

For discipline matters that are under way when the new act takes effect, transitional regulations would allow throughout the first half of 2023 for matters to continue in accordance with the rules under which they were started. During this transitional period the responsibilities would shift, where appropriate, to the commissioner and office of the commissioner as well as the newly appointed members of hearing and appeal committees, but the previous rules would be followed, and some matters such as hearings that are currently under way would continue until completion or June 2023, whichever comes first. The goal would be an effective and smooth transition while ensuring procedural fairness in dealing with current complaints.

Mr. Speaker, we engaged with key stakeholders and education partners in February to hear their perspectives. This did include the Alberta Teachers' Association as well as other education partners and victim advocacy groups. We also reviewed best practices in Canada. Two provinces, Ontario and Saskatchewan, have self-governed professional regulatory organizations that issue teaching certificates and oversee matters of professional discipline for their teacher members, but they also have no union functions. British Columbia dismantled their teachers' college in 2011 because of a strong influence from the B.C. Teachers' Federation that did not ensure public interest, resulting in the creation of a commissioner's office, that has been successful in that province.

In all other provinces and territories the provincial government is responsible for issuing teaching certificates and also plays a varying role in overseeing teacher discipline processes that bring into question suitability to hold a teaching certificate. There are additional checks and balances in place for many of these jurisdictions such as adjudicative committees comprised of teachers and public members or commissioners who operate at arm's length but have accountabilities to the Minister of Education in carrying out disciplinary functions. Mr. Speaker, it makes sense to keep the certification and discipline functions within the same organizational structure, and, as I've stated, Bill 15 would bring Alberta teachers into alignment with other Canadian jurisdictions.

This new model would not impact the role of the Alberta Teachers' Association or the College of Alberta School Superintendents in their other roles and duties as professional organizations. In fact, it will give them the opportunity to focus on those important functions. A focus on professional learning is essential in maintaining the status of any profession, and it will enable the ATA and CASS to ensure teachers and teacher leaders in this province are current in their practice and enhance their skills to ensure student success.

This model will also not impact the ATA's role as it pertains to collective bargaining. Alberta's government remains committed to strengthening the teaching profession through improvements to transparency, accountability, and public assurance. It is abundantly clear that Bill 15 demonstrates this commitment, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have raised concerns about the ATA playing both a union and a disciplinary role for its members and the potential for conflicts of interest that can arise due to this dual role. We know this simply cannot continue. The students first act strengthened transparency, accountability, and safeguards for students, but it did not change the underlying structure of the discipline system. Bill 15 is the next step.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 15 will restructure who is responsible for teacher discipline in Alberta, create a single streamlined process, and separate discipline from advocacy functions. A commissioner model balances the need for an impartial and fair process with government's desire to increase oversight to protect students and the public interest.

Bill 15 will reinforce that there is a duty to report to police when there may have been serious harm or a threat to student safety. This is something already required under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, but as evidenced by recent cases, there seems to be confusion on who the duty to report falls on. Mr. Speaker, Bill 15 will clarify this process and affirm that everyone and anyone who is aware of potential abuse of a student or a child has a duty to report to police.

3:20

The online teacher registry established under the students first act will also be further enhanced. Bill 15 will make all hearings, appeals, and ministers' decisions as well as consent resolution agreements completed with the commissioner where there is a finding of unprofessional conduct or professional incompetence – they will all be made available to the public.

Bill 15 would also see the Alberta Teachers' Association and the College of Alberta School Superintendents continue to focus on professional development and other member-focused services and advocacy.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation would balance the need for an impartial and fair process while ensuring greater transparency and accountability in addressing discipline matters in the teaching profession.

Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to bring Bill 15 forward. I hope that everyone in this House can agree that student safety should be paramount, and I look forward to discussing and debating this very, very important bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. To respond, I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and speak to Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. It's got a long name. I appreciate the minister standing up and sharing her thoughts and her vision of what this bill is intended to do. Because of that, I actually have quite a few questions just based on some of the comments. Again, because we're in second reading, I hope that the minister will just appreciate my questions and maybe be able to come back at some point with an answer in regard to what we're going to be bringing forward.

A couple of things that came to mind for me when the minister was speaking was this idea of the commissioner. This is, I think, one of the things that I'm really struggling with understanding when it comes specifically to this bill. The reason for that is that there's no other profession – nurses, doctors, social workers, which is what I was – that has what would be classified as a commissioner. They don't have that same requirement or structure. We take our commissioners quite seriously, I would say, in this Chamber. I mean, again, we heard the minister referencing comments around the Ethics Commissioner, for an example. Commissioners that are in that role have a responsibility to have to report to Legislative Offices. Their budgets are brought to elected officials. There is an accountability measure that is built in place that specifically relates to those roles. The reason for that is because their role is to basically hold the Legislative Assembly to account and to ensure that there is ethical accountability and all of those requirements that we see.

For me, what I think I'm not understanding and what I'm missing is that I don't see how that structure would then exist underneath this current piece of legislation. To create such a powerful role – I see commissioners in those contexts, especially if we're going to compare them to levels such as the Ethics Commissioner. Our

Privacy Commissioner would be on the same level. Our other officers that are responsible to report to the Legislative Assembly, our elections officers, all of those roles are at a very significant level, and they are very close to the government and to the elected officials.

When we look at this legislation, this position is being created – again, the minister clearly also said that this role would then make it so that the government wouldn't have influence, yet it is a role that is going to be appointed through an order in council. It is a role that would have conversations with the government, that would have conversations with elected officials. Currently within the commissioner system that we have set up within this Chamber, again going back to the example that the minister used, the Ethics Commissioner, there are annual reports that are drafted. There is an accountability component to that. I don't see – and very specifically legislation that clearly articulates the role of the commissioner. I don't see within the legislation the accountability components, the same requirement to report back, the piece that regulates and administers, and the discipline components.

Ultimately, if there is a penalty that we – like, if the Ethics Commissioner decided that there was a penalty for a sitting MLA, that there was something that didn't happen – let's say that we didn't do our ethics disclosures on time – there's an ability within the legislation to administer a penalty. That just happens. There is no minister that signs off on that penalty. If the Election Commissioner determines that there has been a breach of the Election Act, there is no minister that signs off on that and says: okay; well, you can initiate a fine.

So to have a structure within this bill that says, "Well, there is a commissioner; they have all of these powers and responsibilities, but ultimately the recommendation still has to go to the Minister of Education to sign off and say that this can happen" doesn't make sense. It is not built into the same structure as all of these other commissioners' roles, so I think there is fairness in the question of, then: why is it being built this way? Why does the minister still have to have involvement and influence?

I think this is the question that Albertans are asking when they speak to – when the ATA asks these questions, when teachers ask these questions, it's: why, then, does the minister still have to have a level of influence? That's the trust question. That is the part where, when the government says, "Just trust us; this process is going to be fair and transparent and all of the things, and it will do what we say it's going to do," the response to that is, "How do we trust it?" How do we trust this legislation and this decision when it is set up in a way that actually does not align with the norm? The norm of how our commissioners currently work is that there is no minister involvement at all.

There's no minister that signs off on any decision that any of our legislative officers make, so why would we have a one-off? The one-off is what people are concerned with because it's not actually mimicking the structure. I think that's the question and the conflict that the government is going to have to reassure teachers and parents and the ATA as to why it has to be this way. I'm concerned. I'm concerned that that is the structure that has been created, yet the minister is the ultimate sign-off. There is still a level of influence there that I don't think is necessarily answering the trust question, and it's worrisome.

I mean, I think, clearly, what we see is that there is a conflict between the current government and the ATA and the relationship, and – you know what? – we've seen it in other provinces. It's not unique. What I do actually find kind of unique, though, with this legislation – and, in fact, the minister spoke to this – is that they've adopted a model that is very similar to British Columbia's. Well, if we looked at any province in Canada that had the most conflict with

teachers, I would say it would probably be B.C. Teachers go on strike there all the time, so to follow the B.C. model, I find, is a little bit interesting because it's obviously not a system and it's obviously not a structure that is necessarily working well.

I don't know why the minister wouldn't look at Ontario and Saskatchewan's model and say: maybe that one makes more sense; we should look at adopting that. I mean, the minister did reference that those were other models that were explored and evaluated, so I guess my question to the minister around that, too, would be: why choose the one province that seems to have the most conflictual relationships with teachers if there were other jurisdictions that obviously had models that maybe worked a little bit better?

3:30

I think, again, the major concern that we continuously hear around this legislation is that relationship piece between the ATA, the teachers, and the government. For a piece of legislation to be drafted that mimics the most conflictual relationships across the country and not look at the models that actually are a little bit more harmonizing and work better together does send a signal. It sends a very clear signal that the conflict is okay. "It's okay to have conflict, because we know it doesn't necessarily work well in other jurisdictions. It's not necessarily working well in B.C., but we're going to pick that one out of all the other models."

The other thing was a question that came to mind as well. The minister had spoken about, you know, the current impacts and whether there is a disciplinary process happening or not. I am curious, and I don't know if the minister can actually answer this. How many teachers are currently even going through this process?

On this big shift, this big piece of legislation, this requirement to create a new body with a commissioner, create a new budget for a new office, all of the things, I'm curious: how many teachers will actually be forced to go through this process in a given year? Will the monetary requirements, the setting up of a new office, the salary associated with a commissioner, all of those things, justify the number of teachers that actually go through a disciplinary process, or is this creating something purely based out of a conflictual relationship and that we're going to hold the ATA to account?

For a fiscal component, a fiscal party that believes that we should be cutting red tape and believes that we should try to minimize the amount of expenditures in government, then why are you creating a new office? Why are you spending a whole bunch of money on new salaries? Like, what is the benefit? What is the outcome? How many teachers are going to go through this for the return on the investment that this government is going to make in a new office for a new commissioner? [interjections] The government doesn't like it when I talk about fiscal policy because they don't think NDP people can, but unfortunately we can. They're starting to talk back to me, which I'm used to. That's fine.

The piece about it, though, is that this can be done, and this can be done in other ways. Now, again, we see it with the United Nurses association. They have a disciplinary process. We see it with the Alberta physicians' association. They have a disciplinary process. Social workers, which is what I was, have a disciplinary process. My profession didn't have a commissioner, and we were dealing with vulnerable children every single day, all the time. My responsibility as a child intervention worker was to make sure kids were safe, so I'm very aware of what we're talking about. My profession didn't have a commissioner.

I had the same accountability within my profession. There is no question. In fact, my accountability and people watching what I was doing because of the children that I was working with was very, very high. Very high. There are mechanisms that already exist in other professions that do this.

Mr. Yao: It's not demonstrated here.

Ms Sweet: Well, then, my question would be: why does it have to be a commissioner? I'm fine. It's okay. I mean, if members want to ask me questions, I'm more than happy to talk about this. It doesn't pass the test . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. It will be me who decides, unfortunately.

I would just ask the member that if there are comments that need to be made, perhaps wait until your opportunity to respond, which I believe, actually, might be next.

The hon. member, please.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I thought you were doing an intervention. I was like: I don't think I get any in my 20 minutes, not as first speaker.

Again, just to follow up on some of the processes, I mean, if the government wants to answer the question about how many current teachers are going through this process and how many have had to go through a disciplinary process, I'd be very interested to know that information. How prevalent is this that it is actually requiring such an extreme response by creating a whole commissioner's position? If there's something wrong and there are concerns with the disciplinary process of how teachers are being held to account, the investigation, all of the things, that's fair.

I found it very interesting, though, that I also heard the minister make comments about: well, people didn't know who to report to. I have a really hard time believing that, and the reason I have a hard time believing that is because I was a child intervention worker, and many of my referral sources were teachers. In fact, the majority of my referrals were teachers because they see kids every single day. They would report on their colleagues if they ever deemed a child at risk. If there is a concern around teachers not knowing who to call and who to report to, then that is a question and an issue that the Minister of Children's Services should be addressing when it comes to education. That is an issue that the Minister of Education should be addressing when it comes to making sure teachers know who to call. Albertans can call 911. They can call their local police officer. They can call 211. They can call Children's Services: 1.883.429.2001. I believe that is the number. There are many people that can be called, and I know people do it all the time, because this was my job.

To hear that this needed to happen as well for clarity, for teachers to know who to report to, that is not a function of legislation. It is a problem around education and the minister having a responsibility to make sure that the professionals within this profession know who to call and working with their partners within cabinet to make sure, if there is a concern that teachers don't know who to call to make sure kids are safe, that there is an education program being set up by the Minister of Children's Services to make sure professions are being educated, no different than medical professionals and no different than day care and child care providers. Those conversations, those programs exist. Those educational tools are provided to those professionals on a regular basis to make sure they know who to call. I have a hard time believing that that would create a concern around legislation.

What I think is happening is that, again, it is an overreach of power by this government when it comes to how to create and how to address an issue. I am not saying that that isn't an issue, by any means. I spent 12 years of my career working in child intervention services. I take this issue very seriously. But to create a commissioner for one profession and not for doctors and not for nurses and not for social workers and not for all of the other professions and to create such a

high level that it's almost equivalent to a legislative office and to still allow the minister, then, to sign off on any disciplinary process, that is speaking to a direct involvement in one profession and choosing that profession over every other profession.

We've seen a theme and conflict with this government and the teaching profession. I think the struggle that is happening here is: why does it have to be to this level? Was there not an opportunity to create similar mechanisms, like every other profession in this province, that address these issues? The physicians' association, the nursing association, the social workers' association: all of those have mechanisms, and they've worked. If they haven't worked, they've never been brought to this Chamber to be discussed and turned into a new piece of legislation. There is something uniquely different here that the government has not been honest and transparent with Albertans about, about why this needs to be to such an extent. That is where the trust issue comes from. That is what Albertans are concerned with. Why is it that it has to be in this structure that . . .

Mr. McIver: She's going to get union support.

Ms Sweet: The minister across will say that this is about union support. The reality of it is that there are many other unions in this province that have structures that are not set up this way. The ATA is an association; it's not a union, to clarify.

The point of this is that there is a significant difference. There is a significant difference. I struggle with the fact that there is such a difference and the fact that the government doesn't seem to want to engage with this conversation and wants to heckle and wants to try to make this about making sure children are safe. I think it's disingenuous of this legislation because that's not what this is doing. There was legislation that we had, that was just in this Chamber a while ago, that was addressing those issues.

3:40

This is about a structure, which is very, very different. This is an administrative piece of legislation. The level at which the government has chosen to try to create what they are trying to determine as being a separate piece of legislation and at arm's length from the government is also disingenuous. The commissioner would be if the government couldn't sign off on the disciplinary piece. If the minister would like to amend the legislation that removes the minister from signing off on the disciplinary piece, then you know what? I guess there wouldn't be an issue.

But the issue is that you can't say that it's one and not the other, because if you're saying that it's a commissioner who's going to be at arm's length, then a commissioner gets to invoke penalties and gets to invoke all of those things without the sign-off of the minister. But this isn't how it's set up. It's either one or the other, but right now the way the government has set it up is that it's not one or the other. The government wants to be able to have the vision or the optics of making it look like it's arm's length because they're making it as a commissioner position, but in the fine print the minister still signs off on the disciplinary approval. That's not truly what a commissioner is. Then why is it a commissioner?

Mr. McIver: To track the kids.

Ms Sweet: That's not the case.

I disagree with the minister when that's what their message box says, because that's incorrect.

But the point of this is that there's something that doesn't make sense, and it doesn't add up, so the government needs to stand up and explain why that is.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next member who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and speak in favour of Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. I first have to give a shout-out to my good friend from Red Deer-North, the Minister of Education. No one has demonstrated to me such strength, such fortitude, such ability to take such abuse, because God knows in our question periods I see an opposition that increases in their decibels as they attempt to intimidate and bully the good Member for Red Deer-North. I find that absolutely disgusting. Perhaps it's because she's a woman that they feel that they can do such things. It is true. We can certainly measure that very, very easily, so I would certainly take that challenge on any day of the week.

Now, I believe this bill will go a long way to increasing protection for both our children and our teachers, because this is just a much-needed bill. Parents should not have to worry about their children falling victim to inappropriate conduct by one of the educators who have been entrusted with the well-being of their children during the school day.

I want to give a shout-out to my good friend from Edmonton-Manning because she talks about the trust and the norm. First off, let us talk about trust, shall we? And let us talk about these comments that I just made that parents should not have to worry about their children falling victim to people who are in positions of authority, people that we entrust our kids to.

To be clear, Mr. Speaker, I'm not against unions. I was a former member of the International Association of Fire Fighters, and the fights that we fought were good fights to ensure that safety measures were in place for our members, that we had the right equipment, that we were supported appropriately, and that things like mental health supports were in place after we experienced such negative incidents. But in this case the ATA has demonstrated that they're just really a bunch of political hacks. They do not demonstrate a level of quality that we want to see in a group that is there to build their members.

I must say, as an example, that during the NDP government of previous years, 2015 to 2019, when the NDP government chose to overhaul the entire curriculum, they did not release any names of anyone involved in that restructuring and redevelopment of that curriculum. They would not release names. The ATA did not say anything publicly to criticize the NDP government. They said nothing even though the fact was that there were extremists that were identified as being members of those folks that were developing that curriculum.

Nowhere have we seen an organization like that advertise so much political advertising that attacks one government or one group while negating the effects of the others. I find it just absolutely disgusting that this labour organization chooses to spend their money on advertising and attack ads as opposed to developing their members with balanced education. I have had teachers from my region, from my community whisper in my ear that they dislike the education that the ATA has been providing them for the last half a dozen years because it demonstrates a certain level of socialism and social justice that they don't necessarily agree with.

It paints a picture of a very hard-left union. It's really disappointing that such a group is in charge, when their members have to whisper in my ear that they do not feel that they have the freedom to speak the truth, and it is disappointing that they have to speak to the fact that they aren't being supported, that they are actually being provided with, for all intents and purposes, propaganda. That is really

disappointing, yet the members across the way continue to support this group.

If the ATA were to take a different approach, perhaps more balanced, and do what they do, which should be to support their members in certain labour issues perhaps, I might have a different perspective, but all I've seen is – I'll say it again – political hacks, people who do nothing but attack one governing party and support the other. They do not demonstrate any level of nonpartisan perspective, and you can see that when they discuss the curriculum. Mr. Speaker, they are attacking our government on the Indigenous content in the new curriculum that my good friend from Red Deer-North has instituted based on all of the advisers and teachers that were building this curriculum.

I did a review of this up in Fort Chipewyan, and I displayed all of the content on Indigenous peoples. When the folks came through and looked at it all, the only thing they told me were two things: (a) we shouldn't be teaching about residential schools in grades 1 through 6 because it is too harsh of something that they want these kids to learn. They don't think that residential schools should even be taught in grades 1 to 6 whereas the ATA, if you look at their talking points, were saying that we weren't teaching enough about residential schools. So who's doing the consulting there?

Secondly, the other thing that they wanted to see in there was more language. They wanted to see the languages of the Cree and the Dene promoted. You know what? That's respectful. We have schools that are teaching Ukrainian and other languages, even Japanese and stuff. I think that's fantastic. Bilingualism is very important. I think Canadians would be well to do to learn other languages. Again, there is a blatant demonstration of ATA bias in attacking what they perceive to be as an inequality, yet our government is demonstrating a high level of quality in providing Indigenous content.

Now, the . . . [interjection] Yes, please.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. I just wanted to get up and answer a couple of the questions that were asked by the members opposite in terms of: why a commissioner? Why this arm's-length approach? I was happy to see the opposition really speak to the fact and recognize that a commissioner is a highly ethical – it elevates the whole office. It is an individual who is highly skilled, highly ethical. In fact, the B.C. commissioner for their teaching profession is a former ombudsman, has an extensive legal background.

The reason why we wanted to go with this model – and we looked right across Canada. We did a jurisdictional scan. We looked at every province. We looked to incorporate the best elements of every province, so we do have elements of the Ontario process as well as the Saskatchewan process.

I think I'm running out of time.

3:50

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much.

Do I have the ability to give my good friend the opportunity to speak one more time?

The Acting Speaker: If she stands up, you can offer the intervention.

Mr. Yao: To finish her fine thoughts, please.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. We did look at all of those elements, all of the jurisdictions and took the best elements. We saw that B.C. has the commissioner, a highly skilled, ethical individual that works at arm's length. When we look at the fact that the minister has the responsibility for the certification of teachers, we felt it very, very important to continue that process, that the Ministry of Education is, in fact, the one that certifies teachers in this province. To have a commissioner that would be acting totally

independently would not serve the best interests of the whole process. We will continue. It is the Minister of Education's ability right now to ensure that they have the ability to cancel and suspend teachers' certification in this province, and that will continue with the commissioner role.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Back to trust. The Alberta Teachers' Association union is in charge of the discipline process for their members, but unions are designed to protect and advocate for their members, not necessarily discipline them. As such, we know that there are many cases where there has been inappropriate conduct with a student that has led to the offending teacher being removed but not necessarily being disciplined. These people, these individuals, these teachers, these bad apples, if you will, move on to another jurisdiction and continue on. That's shameful if the ATA executive chooses to protect their reputation by not identifying these members that might be bad apples. [interjection] Please.

The Acting Speaker: This will be the third intervention. They're a minute long each, and two minutes will be added to your time as well after.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, you know what will increase trust? Having public assurance. The fact that the commissioner will provide annual reports, that there will be hearing dates that will be posted, that decisions will be posted on the registry that every Albertan can have access to: that creates trust because there's transparency, there's accountability, there's the ability for every Albertan – right now the member opposite said that her profession has a different process. But you know what? That profession is separate from the union. No other profession has the union overseeing their discipline process. When we look at what happens currently under the ATA process, under their code of conduct a teacher actually has to go and speak to another teacher before they report any issues that they have with that individual. We need a single code of conduct for all teachers.

Mr. Yao: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you so much to the Minister of Education for that clarity. Again, she points out some good thoughts there, and that is that Alberta is the outlier in the nation in regard to professional conduct as well as their labour side of things. Certainly, it's good to see the separation of these two jurisdictions with the hope that we can have a fair process that protects children and not enables them.

My good friend from Edmonton-Manning also talked about – well, she talked about the norm, and that is the norm. That's what our good minister is attempting to do with this, to make sure that we're in alignment with the other provinces and territories in these two groups and that there's no conflict of interest. Again, the ATA, unfortunately, has made decisions over the years to not prosecute their own members, but what they don't realize is that there are bad apples everywhere in every single profession. Whether it be physicians, teachers, firefighters – you name it – there are always some bad apples, and they have to be addressed and dealt with in such a manner.

This single system for addressing complaints under the newly created Alberta teaching profession commission, which will be headed by a commissioner to oversee the teacher and teacher leader conduct and conflict complaints for all teachers and teacher leaders equally: that is fantastic. Under this system the registrar at Alberta Education will be responsible for the intake of all complaints, and this will avoid duplicate complaints.

Then these complaints will be forwarded to the Alberta teaching profession commissioner, who will have the authority to address

and investigate a complaint and determine the most appropriate course of action to take regarding a complaint. I think this is fantastic news because it increases accountability and transparency by expanding the online teacher registry, established under the students first act, by making publicly available the information on hearings, appeal dates, et cetera, as the good minister had explained to us earlier.

Again, these changes will ensure that the entire teaching profession is protected by bringing all teachers and teacher leaders under one reformed disciplinary process and put forth the best interests of students and their families and teachers and the public at the centre of the teacher discipline process. This is a fantastic bill that just makes sense. Again, it is definitely reflective of the good minister that has crafted this up, and I think she's doing excellent work for Albertans and for children. Whether the ATA realizes it or not, I know the general population of teachers respects and appreciates this bill and understands that. For the average taxpayer, they can probably rest assured that their money won't be spent on political advertising and perhaps will focus more on the education of their teachers to ensure that they are also supported.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the teachers' union claims that this bill is an attack on teachers, the teaching profession, Alberta's education system as a whole. In fact, again, I just disagree with that entirely. When you look at the actions of the Alberta Teachers' Association executive over the last five, six years especially, it's just disappointing to see how they behave and they act and how political they have become. I had a parent write to me to ask why I criticize the ATA executive because they're a neutral, nonpartisan group, and I literally could respond with good honesty and facts about a lot of the partisan messaging and rhetoric that they have.

I can certainly demonstrate that now with, again, the curriculum criticisms. Still to this day they're very effective at their communicating because I'm still getting some parents that are expressing concerns about this widespread curriculum change even though the fact is that the good minister has actually pared it down and is providing it piecemeal for certain subject matters and certain grades, and she's doing a good, responsible . . . [interjection] Say again there?

The Acting Speaker: Through the chair. There will be opportunities after your comments for others to comment as well. However, comments, as always, go through the chair. At this time there are no more interventions, unfortunately.

If the hon. member could please continue.

Mr. Schmidt: It's okay if I heckle him, though, right? I can still do that.

Mr. Yao: Yes, you can continue to heckle there, Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I'm sure you're still recovering from your holidays overseas as well – hey? – after criticizing some of our members.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I would just remind that we are currently on second reading of Bill 15. If we could please keep our comments towards the bill.

Thank you.

Mr. Yao: I digress, Mr. Speaker. My apologies for responding to the heckling from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. He's got a big mouth, and he just continues on.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I don't think that that would be considered parliamentary to directly . . .

Mr. Yao: You know what? I apologize, Mr. Speaker, and I withdraw the comment.

The Acting Speaker: I consider the matter completely closed.

Please, if the hon. member could continue.

Mr. Yao: To clarify, I do have the utmost respect for teachers and the work they do as they prepare our children for the future by making sure that kids have the skills and competencies needed to succeed. I believe that virtually all teachers have that quality to ensure that, but again we now and again have our bad apples, and we have to make sure that they are addressed in the most appropriate way so that our kids are protected, not only our kids here but in other jurisdictions as well.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I just want to sum it up and say that teachers need not be worried about this legislation. This is in the best interests of everybody involved. Again, if they have any worries about trust and the norm, as the previous member who spoke, from Edmonton-Manning, had stated, this bill does exactly that, ensures that there is trust, ensures that we are in the norm with this, that we are doing what all the other provinces are doing, that has been proven time and time again to be the most effective level of managing these issues.

4:00

This bill is a common-sense approach to teacher discipline, and I will proudly vote for it. Again, I strongly encourage all members of this House to do the same, to vote to support this bill. I want to thank the good Minister of Education for her hard work and her endeavours as she continues to do the best things for our children. God bless her.

Thank you so much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 15, Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. It's pretty clear, from the previous speaker and many of the actions of this government, that this government is afraid. They are not able to actually let civil society operate. They need to control everything. This bill is taking away a profession's self-regulating authority, which is a fundamental principle of any profession. It's ridiculous.

There are five main characteristics of being a professional. You have a self-regulating profession, and this is taking away that opportunity for teachers. There's a code of ethics, standards of practice sometimes. Sometimes there are different words for these things, but these are the values, beliefs, principles of any profession that you adhere to. On a regular basis, you know, each year – for example, I'm a registered social worker in the province of Alberta. Every year I must review once again my code, my standards, make sure that my continuing competence is up. If there is a complaint placed against me, of course, I must go through the regulating process. I mean, this is just an ongoing thing of being a professional. There's also a special scope of practice. There's a unique area of practice that you have that's exclusive to your profession. There's a knowledge base that, actually, professionals within that profession seek to augment. They do research to add to that knowledge base. Then there's mandatory registration so that all members of that profession are part of that. So there are five characteristics of a profession, and this government in one fell swoop in this bill is just annihilating a significant piece of that.

It's so disrespectful and untrusting of teachers. It is just abhorrent what they're doing, and they think they have the right to do that, but this is a fundamental piece of being a professional. Around the globe this is fundamental. It boggles my mind, but all I can figure

out from what this government does repeatedly on many issues, and certainly on this one, is that they're afraid, that they're terrified, so they have to muzzle and keep people quiet. This is what the minister is doing here. She is taking control and hurting an independent profession to be able to self-regulate.

You know why it's important to self-regulate? Say I have a complaint against me, and someone who's reviewing whatever the situation is doesn't understand the values of my profession, doesn't understand the code of ethics, the standards of practice. They don't have a good understanding of what my responsibilities are in that role. That's why self-regulation is so important, so that I'm not being assessed by a lawyer. A lawyer doesn't know what I'm doing. Certainly, if anybody has been cross-examined in a courthouse – and I certainly have when I used to be a social worker in child welfare – the lawyers just denigrated your profession. They made fun of you. That's kind of how the law system works.

But in this there's a sincere attempt to look at the kind of work that you do and understand it. You understand it from the value base of your profession. That is being totally wiped out by this government right now. Again I just say: why are they doing this? I think they're fearful, and they want control. They don't really – even though we hear some of the rhetoric that they want to hear from people, they don't. They only want to hear from certain people. The rest of us professionals – I mean, they tear up the agreement with the docs unilaterally. The Minister of Health: it's one of the first acts he did. It's ridiculous. It's despicable. It's sickening.

You know, we've just been through this pandemic. We're not through it. It's still with us today, but – guess what – let's attack people who are working the hardest to take care of Albertans who are overcome with COVID. Let's attack health professionals. Let's cut the wages of health professionals. I mean, please. I don't understand. You know what? Albertans don't get it either. Albertans don't trust this government. It's so clear. They know that they're certainly not caring about the professionals that put themselves in harm's way during this pandemic. They're showing so little respect.

I mean, I have a lot of teachers that have reached out to me. Certainly, in my riding there are many teachers. You know, class sizes are ballooning. There's so much responsibility. All the protocols around COVID, all the challenges of going online, all the things that they've done: this government doesn't care about that. This government just wants to make it harder.

Of course, we've all talked about the fiasco of the curriculum many times. I mean, the previous speaker said: "Oh, yeah, the curriculum is great. We shouldn't talk about this, and we shouldn't talk about this." That's not how education works. Of course, we need to be age appropriate, but kids need to hear about the realities that have gone on and certainly our colonial history. We know very clearly that the Northwest Territories always used Alberta's curriculum, and they are not, because of the abysmal job that the UCP have done on this matter. So, please. Like, this is a government afraid, and this is just another way for them to control a profession that they don't like their views or their values.

It's just like my profession, social workers. Last year, last spring, there was a bill passed in this House that meant the Alberta College of Social Workers had to separate. It had to have the college separate from the association. You know, the Alberta College of Social Workers isn't very big. It's only about 8,000 members. This is the death knell. This is the death knell for the association.

I worked there for 10 years before I was elected in this House. I'm very proud of the advocacy work we did, how we worked with government. I know I was involved with lobbying government to have an independent Child and Youth Advocate during that time. That work is important. That is civil society work. That's professions,

regular citizens speaking up about what they care about. But you know what this government thinks when people do that? That they're troublemakers. They shouldn't be listened to. They have to be silenced.

You know, the separation of my profession and making that happen is actually – I mean, the new association hasn't quite been created yet although it's in the process – silencing a lot of members of the Alberta College of Social Workers. It really breaks my heart because it feels like that is a really vital part of a healthy society, that people have outlets to speak about it. Certainly, as a social worker my values of social inclusion, making sure that no one is left behind, humanitarian values, social justice values: all of these things are so important to me. Of course, they brought me into this House. That is why I actually became a politician. I wanted a bigger platform. I wanted to be able to have more authority and power to speak about these things. I didn't think that when I came into this position, my profession would be attacked and that would be the thing the UCP thought was important. Like, why silence people who have important views to share? To hear the members opposite, they just think that, well, you know, you shouldn't care about social justice. Well, why not? I don't understand that.

4:10

It is about silencing people. It is about silencing professions. I really ask the members in this House to vote against this bill because it is taking a fundamental characteristic and responsibility of any profession to self-regulate, taking that totally out of that, so it really weakens the profession significantly. You know, I really want to ask the members opposite: why are they doing this? They're doing this because they're afraid, and they don't care about civil society. They only care about people who think like them, and it's so clear from all the things they've done, so many things they've done unilaterally to be disrespectful and not be inclusive. It's evident in so much of what they're doing.

Besides the Alberta College of Social Workers, which is the profession that I belong to – they're separating that – there's another college that certainly I've had contact with, but it came out of the Association of Counselling Therapy of Alberta. This government promised them some time ago that they would create a regulatory college for them, and they did all the homework, got everything going. Guess what. Now they don't want to do it. Now the minister is dragging his feet on that. This is just another example of how much the UCP are afraid of professions and certainly don't want to give them any kind of rights or authority.

We know that people having a regulated college of professionals is actually in the public interest. It actually protects the public. Certainly, you know, teachers, of course, are dealing with people in the school system, young people. These are children. I mean, in the Alberta College of Social Workers we work with children all the time, and we're a self-regulating body. Certainly, health professionals do that. So who's next? Who's next? Who else is going to be stripped of this self-regulating power? You say that it's for the kids, but is it? I think that there's another hidden agenda perhaps that the minister needs to be more honest about, that it is: "Okay. These guys are bugging me, so I'm just going to give them a bit of a hard time here. I'm going to take away this fundamental power of being a profession."

This legislation is just – again I will say it – really denigrating teachers, and it's not respecting civil society. It's not making sure that citizens have voices to speak up in our province, and it's certainly not about protecting children. It's not. It's not at all. It is a political game by this minister and this government to take control of the self-regulation of teachers in our province because they're mad at teachers. You know, we definitely cannot trust the UCP

government. I mean, this has been demonstrated time and time again, and we see it.

I was, like, stunned that this was something that was pretty quick legislation that came through when my professional college was split. You know, honestly, it is the death knell for their ability to advocate, speak up, which is, of course, what we want in a civil society, but not if you're afraid. The UCP seems to continue to be too afraid to actually have robust public discourses, political discourses, because – I don't know – they have thin skin or they don't have very good arguments and they don't have to speak about them or explain them. I'm not quite sure what it is exactly that they're afraid of, but it's just been demonstrated time and time again: if you're not following our rules, if you're not doing what we say, we don't want to hear from you or, hey, we're going to cut your funding. Certainly, I have lots of contacts with the nonprofit sector, and people are afraid all the time. It's happened so much already.

Seniors and Housing: when we were government, we put \$2 million into nonprofits, seniors' centres, things like that, to support people to age in their communities. Guess what the UCP did. As soon as they got in, they slashed that budget to below \$1 million. You know, this makes so much sense, to keep people in their communities. But guess what. Nonprofits can't say anything because they're afraid. They feel like they'll be even more likely to have budget cuts, and then they'll be able to do even less.

You know, this is a punitive government. If you speak up against them, hey, they're going to discipline you for that. That's exactly what this bill is about. It's about keeping the ATA weak.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

The next hon. member that caught my eye is the hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for the opportunity to rise late on a Thursday afternoon and speak to Bill 15. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity. I'll just start off by reiterating something that the minister said when she introduced the bill for second reading. She said that this really is about protection for students and not about punishing teachers. I just wanted to reiterate that.

Like many of my colleagues on this side of the House, I'm rising today to express my support for this bill. I've had some conversations in my constituency office with teachers and administrators, trying to figure out what the purpose is. They had valid questions, and we've answered those questions. I really believe that this is important legislation, and it's coming forward at an important time. It will reform the discipline process for teachers, teacher leaders, and administration to make the education system safer for students. Members opposite have said, you know: "Why? Why this?" Well, that's the answer, to make the system safer for students. This is about our kids and their kids.

Bill 15 will create a streamlined, effective, consistent, and efficient discipline process. The disciplinary process will have a set timeline, where action must be taken within 30 days of a complaint. I also think that's critical. As it stands now, it can take a long time, and teachers can remain in the system, where there's question. It's not good for the teacher, it's not good for the classroom, and it's not good for the students that may be involved. I really think a key element to this is the timeline. An additional 30 days will be provided for these measures to begin.

Mr. Speaker, right now the Alberta Teachers' Association functions as judge, jury, and lawyer, right? They're there to determine the proceedings, but they're also there as an advocate for the defendant. That seems a bit flawed to me. They have disciplinary power, and because they also serve as the union, I believe it increases the chance of

a conflict of interest and certainly the perception of that. Our priority is the safety and education of students. This bill will enhance the accountability and the transparency of the teaching profession. I actually have spoken to teachers who support that theory, that concept, that intention. It will further protect students and give parents peace of mind.

Mr. Speaker, the decision to put forth this legislation is not one that was taken lightly. I want to thank the hon. Minister of Education, as others have this afternoon, for all the hard work that she's put into this bill and all of the dedication she's demonstrated in not wavering in her commitment to Alberta students.

The goal here is to implement the best practices, period. After examining other key provinces and other comparator provinces as well as other Alberta professions like engineering and nursing, in all cases the union and disciplinary functions were carried out by separate organizations, and I think that's key. We've heard from members opposite who said that that's not the case. Well, that is the case, Mr. Speaker. This is how we came to the decision to implement a structure that combines the effectiveness of the commissioner model in British Columbia with the arm's-length features of Saskatchewan's teacher regulatory board.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is behind as many other provinces already have their own disciplinary bodies. The current disciplinary structure has been in place for 85 years, and it's time for change.

One of the members opposite said that we were motivated by fear. I'm not motivated by fear, Mr. Speaker. I'm not scared to make change. That's why I ran for office. I'm not scared to say that we need to make a change here, because we need to protect students.

The existing system is difficult to navigate, and it causes a fear of reprisal from one's own association as it currently sits. In contrast, Bill 15 empowers teachers and administration and allows for the duty to report under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act to be carried out dutifully.

4:20

A concerned parent found it disturbing that, and I quote: the ATA felt they had no duty to report criminal acts involving children to police because they felt it might jeopardize their own hearing process. End quote. That's the reason, Mr. Speaker. That's why we're here today talking about Bill 15. That is the point. The goal here is to protect students, Alberta's children, and ensure that they have a safe environment to learn in. Alberta currently does not have a sole organization to protect and advocate for them, and with this bill that will change.

A commissioner's office balances the need for an impartial and fair process with the government's desire to protect student interests. Any and all accusations that this change is a direct attack on teachers is simply a tactic being used by the ATA or the members opposite to create fear amongst their members in an attempt to retain their own power and control.

That's not what this is about. This shouldn't be about politics. This should be about kids. The implementation of Bill 15 would lead to greater accountability, public assurance, and consistency in addressing complaints under one legislated governance structure. [interjection] I see the minister is rising to intervene, and I welcome that intervention, Mr. Speaker.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. I just want to build on what I'm hearing from my colleague. What I heard from the members opposite was that they're really more concerned about protecting the union than they are about protecting children. This is not about protecting the union. This is not about retaining power within the union. This is about making sure that there is an independent, fair,

accountable process so that when these terrible situations happen – and I again want to reiterate that the vast majority of teachers are amazing, caring, wonderful individuals, and they have our respect – there has to be a process in place that is fair and transparent.

The members opposite said that we are not listening. You know what? We are listening. We're listening to parents. We're listening to victims. We are listening to victim advocacy groups. We're listening to child advocacy groups. We are listening to teachers. We're listening to administrators, to superintendents, who all have said that we need to change this process.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister took the words right out of my mouth. The next sentence I literally was going to say is that the vast majority of teachers in this province are professionals who value and protect the safety of students. They care about their students, and they will likely never have any involvement with this process.

That's not what Bill 15 is about. It's not about vilifying good teachers; it's about dealing with the ones that aren't. That's the point. This legislation will elevate the status of the teaching profession by removing any perception of conflict of interest. I've had teachers tell me that in my office.

The Alberta teaching profession commissioner will have the authority to address and investigate a complaint and determine the most appropriate course of action to take regarding that complaint, but as is currently the case under the Education Act, the minister will have the final decision on a penalty for unprofessional conduct or professional incompetence.

That's a second piece of oversight, and I don't see the problem with that. I actually think that enriches the system. Transitioning and implementing a new system can be challenging, and we've heard that this afternoon. During this period the responsibilities would shift, where appropriate, to the commissioner and newly appointed members of hearing and appeal committees, but the previous rules will be followed. As a result, procedural fairness will be followed while also ensuring an efficient transition into a fully operational single model for teacher and teacher-led leader professionalism in Alberta.

I'm going to wrap up because I see that the time is getting close to the end here, Mr. Speaker.

The cost of implementing this change? I can tell you the cost of not implementing this change: our kids. The fact is that this change is not about politics; it's about doing the right thing for students and the right thing for the profession. An examination of sexual assault cases involving staff in kindergarten to grade 12 schools in Canada carried out by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection found that 714 employees or former employees were linked to sexual offences against schoolchildren between 1997 and 2017. This is unacceptable. That's 714 too many.

What Bill 15 is trying to do is deal with that issue. We do not want any more exposure for Alberta's kids. Blatant abuse of power by adults in positions of power is a type of behaviour that should never be tolerated, no matter who you are, in this province.

I'm going to skip over some of my notes because, again, I see our time is short. [interjection] Does the minister have another intervention? I welcome it.

Member LaGrange: Yes, just a really quick one. I had heard a question about: what is the return on investment? Like my colleague, the return on investment is: what is the cost of the damage to our children, to their futures? I have heard stories from victims that now are suicidal because of the damage that has been done by a teacher, someone that they should have been able to trust. The trust that's broken between children and their teachers, the trust

that's broken with the parents: this is a lifetime of damage. This cannot continue, and if we can do anything that makes it better, why wouldn't we do it? We have a system that's been in place for over 85 years with little to no change. We have a dual system. Why don't the members opposite want to see a single system that is actually going to be independent, arm's length, accountable, transparent to the public?

Mrs. Allard: Thank you. Like many others in this House, I am a parent. I'm a parent of three now adult children, but how would I feel if something had happened to any of my children during the course of their education? Horrified, Mr. Speaker. I cannot imagine it, and I would not forgive a government that turned a blind eye knowing that this was a problem, period. Again I commend this minister for her dedication to Alberta's kids and to my kids and to your kids.

Mr. Speaker, the impacts of the misuse of authority have devastating and long-lasting effects, as the minister just mentioned. There are students who have contracted incurable sexual infections from teachers. That's an extreme case, but that's the impetus behind Bill 15. There are children that have told us that they had to keep their mouth shut for three years and that that was one of the most horrific and destructive experiences of their life. We don't want that to ever happen again in Alberta schools. Again, the vast, vast majority of teachers are incredible, wonderful people. This will not

impact them at all. We're finding the bad apples and getting them out of the system.

In instances like the ones I just mentioned, kids are robbed of their childhoods. They're made adults way too young, and there's no way back from that, Mr. Speaker. The damage is done. These events are horrific, and they're heartbreaking, and they should never occur, full stop.

While we do everything in our capacity to prevent these situations, sometimes they still happen. When they do, there needs to be a body to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions, and that's why, Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly support this change in legislation, and again I thank the minister for her work on it.

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

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we've accomplished a ton of work this week here in the Legislature. I'm grateful for all the hard work of members on both sides of the House. At this time I would move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, April 25.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:29 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 3rd Session (2022)

Activity to Thursday, April 21, 2022

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act (\$) (Kenney)

First Reading — 4 (*Feb. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 94-97 (*Mar. 7, 2022 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 140-44 (*Mar. 10, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 230-34 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cQ-0.7]

Bill 2 — Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 312-19 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft.*), 391-95 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve.*), 484-90 (*Mar. 29, 2022 aft.*), 565-71 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve.*), 599-604 (*Apr. 19, 2022 morn.*), 661 (*Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 699-707 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 715-24 (*Apr. 20, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2022 c4]

Bill 3 — Special Days Act (Orr)

First Reading — 124 (*Mar. 9, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 327 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 343-45 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 346 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 375-78 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 379 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 389-91 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; SA 2022 cS-16.3]

Bill 4 — Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022 (McIver)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 163-77 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft.*), 360-66 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 396 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 519-23 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 571-79 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force April 21, 2022; SA 2022 c5]

Bill 5 — Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022 (Sawhney)

First Reading — 202 (*Mar. 16, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 319-26 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft.*), 469-71 (*Mar. 28, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 523-24 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 537-43 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 c6]

Bill 6 — Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022 (Orr)

First Reading — 228 (Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 502-505 (Mar. 29, 2022 aft.), 513-14 (Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole — 562-65 (Mar. 30, 2022 eve., passed)

Third Reading — 594-98 (Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed)

Royal Assent — 767 (Apr. 21, 2022 aft.) [Comes into force April 21, 2022; SA 2022 c3]

Bill 7 — Appropriation Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 272-73 (Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed)

Second Reading — 310-11 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft., adjourned), 327-36 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned), 345 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole — 366-75 (Mar. 23, 2022 aft.), (Mar. 23, 2022 eve.), 395 (Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division)

Third Reading — 411-14 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft.), 419 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division)

Royal Assent — (Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; c1]

Bill 8 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 297 (Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed)

Second Reading — 311-12 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft., adjourned), 336-43 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned), 345-46 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole — 379-89 (Mar. 23, 2022 eve.), 395 (Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division)

Third Reading — 414-19 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft.), 419 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division)

Royal Assent — (Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; c2]

Bill 9 — Public's Right to Know Act (Shandro)

First Reading — 309 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 447-54 (Mar. 28, 2022 aft.), 455-63 (Mar. 28, 2022 eve.), 643-51 (Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed)

Committee of the Whole — 707-13 (Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed)

Third Reading — 745-49 (Apr. 21, 2022 morn., passed)

Royal Assent — 767 (Apr. 21, 2022 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cP-47]

Bill 10 — Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022 (Aheer)

First Reading — 408 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 463-69 (Mar. 28, 2022 eve.), 543-50 (Mar. 30, 2022 aft.), 604-10 (Apr. 19, 2022 morn.), 661 (Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed)

Bill 11 — Continuing Care Act (Copping)

First Reading — 432 (Mar. 28, 2022 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 550-56 (Mar. 30, 2022 aft.), 634-42 (Apr. 19, 2022 aft.), 663-72 (Apr. 20, 2022 morn., adjourned on amendment)

Bill 12 — Trustee Act (Shandro)

First Reading — 483 (Mar. 29, 2022 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 651-61 (Apr. 19, 2022 eve.), 749-54 (Apr. 21, 2022 morn., passed)

Bill 13 — Financial Innovation Act (Toews)

First Reading — 535 (Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 624-33 (Apr. 19, 2022 aft.), 724-27 (Apr. 20, 2022 eve., adjourned)

Bill 14 — Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022 (Issik)

First Reading — 535-36 (Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 672-81 (Apr. 20, 2022 morn.), 727-33 (Apr. 20, 2022 eve., passed)

Bill 15 — Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022 (LaGrange)

First Reading — 592 (Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 767-76 (Apr. 21, 2022 aft., adjourned)

Bill 16 — Insurance Amendment Act, 2022 (Toews)

First Reading — 622 (*Apr. 19, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 17 — Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Madu)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 18 — Utility Commodity Rebate Act (Nally)

First Reading — 693-94 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 735-45 (*Apr. 21, 2022 morn., adjourned*)

Bill 19 — Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022 (Glubish)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 20 — Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Shandro)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Eastern Slopes Protection Act (Notley)

First Reading — 156 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 432 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly; motion on concurrence to take place Monday, April 18, 2022*)

Bill 202 — Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022 (Loewen)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly*), 433-40 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; proceeded with*)

Bill 203 — Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act (Bilous)

First Reading — 228 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 693 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly, motion on concurrence to take place Monday, April 25, 2022*)

Bill 204 — Anti-Racism Act (Shepherd)

First Reading — 408 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 205 — Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022 (Sigurdson, RJ)

First Reading — (*Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022 (Jones)

First Reading — 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill Pr2 — Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022 (Nixon, JP)

First Reading — 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, April 25, 2022

Day 23

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
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Orr, Hon. Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
 Deputy Government Whip
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
 Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
 Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
 Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
 Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
 Alberta Hansard

Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Jason Kenney | Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations |
| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gottfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Frey
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gottfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, April 25, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Ariana Whitlow. I would invite you to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, this morning I had the absolutely privilege of meeting a very special guest who's now joining us in the Speaker's gallery. It's my great pleasure to welcome His Excellency Toomas Lukk, the ambassador of Estonia, accompanied by Anne-Ly Ader, first secretary at the embassy of Estonia in Ottawa, and Mrs. Külliva Kangur, honorary consul of Estonia in Alberta. Hon. members, there are approximately 2,700 Estonians in Alberta, comprising 10 per cent of all Estonians in Canada. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. [An electronic device sounded] Oh, my. That sounded a lot like a cellphone ringing in the Chamber. I look forward to the member, being honourable, noting that it was theirs and making a donation to the charity of their choice on behalf of the Speaker

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Members, as you are aware, recently I put out a call to all Albertans to contact my office if they would be willing to lead our Assembly in the singing of our national anthem. We've been overwhelmed with responses by Albertans, and this afternoon I was pleased to welcome our first anthem singer following that call. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to members of the Assembly Ms Ariana Whitlow. Along with being a highly accomplished and passionate singer, actor, dancer, Ms Whitlow holds a place near and dear to my heart because she is also the daughter of the late Speaker Gene Zwozdesky, the former Speaker and minister and long-standing, beloved Member of the Legislative Assembly. Ms Whitlow, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. I know that your dad would have been so very proud of you, not just today but every day.

Hon. members, this afternoon we have one School at the Leg. joining us. They are a group from the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora, the St. Pius X elementary school.

Also joining us in the galleries today: guests I had the pleasure of meeting earlier. Guest of the Member for Camrose: Aiden MacKey. Also joining us in the gallery is Josh Traptow, the CEO of Heritage Calgary and a guest of the Member for Calgary-Klein. And finally, please welcome Al Nagel, the CEO of Alberta federation of rural electricity. He is a guest of the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. I invite you all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, for more than 20 months I had the honour of serving on the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls to provide recommendations to the Alberta government to address the calls for justice in the final report of the national inquiry. I'm grateful to the Minister of Indigenous Relations for entrusting me with the role and will forever be changed by the impact of my conversations with the incredible working group members with whom I served.

Mr. Speaker, according to data from the report Indigenous women in Canada are three times more likely to be victims of violence than non-Indigenous women. In Alberta 206 Indigenous women were murdered between 1980 and 2012. One morning in our working group we discussed the potential to improve our police service and justice system. During that conversation I heard from fellow working group members about the distrust towards police. When I asked for more details as to why, one of the members was willing to share a heartbreaking yet straightforward perspective. She said: when I was a little girl, my grandmother taught me, when I saw a police officer, to run and hide in the bushes because whenever police came, either an adult went away and never came home or a child went away and never came home. As her words sunk in, I reflected on what my mother taught me when I was a little child: if you're ever in trouble, run and find a police officer.

Mr. Speaker, I share this story to highlight how different the journey and perspectives are for our Indigenous women, our brothers and sisters. It is vital to consider this is as we begin this journey of reconciliation. We may not know where to start with the journey of reconciliation or if we will ever truly end, but the road must be travelled with patience, understanding, and a desire to honestly try to see the perspective from the eyes of our Indigenous brothers and sisters. With the 113 Pathways to Justice recommendations now delivered to the Alberta government, I look forward to seeing them implemented through various ministries and through legislation. Our province prioritizes healing from the past and a more robust outlook, a hope for the future for Indigenous people and their communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Family Doctor Shortage in Lethbridge

Ms Phillips: In the past three months Lethbridge has lost 13 more doctors. Since 2019, when the UCP took over, southern Alberta has 62 fewer doctors. That's the net; 43,000 residents of Lethbridge don't have access to a family doctor, and no clinics are accepting new patients. This crisis is getting worse. The urgent care centre in Coaldale has been closed for two years, and the UCP MLA for Taber-Warner recently revealed that there is no plan to reopen it. Those are the facts.

Last week the MLA for Lethbridge-East and the Health minister predictably told people that a couple of new doctors and a handful of maybes is good news. Well, Lethbridge, don't let them tell you things that are not true. We have lost five times that many doctors in two years. We lost them because the UCP went to war with doctors. They tore up their agreement. They have attacked them in the media, on social media, and here in this Chamber all through the pandemic. They're not fixing the problem because they are more focused on infighting than on health care.

Now, the Member for Lethbridge-East is the Premier's man in caucus, rallying the troops, sticking up for the Premier, carrying his water. He spends his time defending his indefensible Premier rather than defending the right of parents to get care for their sick kids. Albertans rightly do not trust the UCP with their public health care. The fate and future of public health care relies on removing the UCP from office. Almost half the city of Lethbridge does not have a family doctor now, but once there is a change in government, we will make fixing that our priority. Call the election. Lethbridge is ready.

1:40 Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, April 24 to 30 is National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week. This week is a time to raise awareness about the critical need for tissue and organ donation across the country. The key to success starts with raising awareness. Currently 90 per cent of Canadians say that they support organ donation, yet only 32 per cent have registered their intent to donate. The disconnect between those willing to donate and those registered is concerning. There are currently 4,400 Canadians waiting for a life-saving organ transplant, almost 700 of which are here in Alberta alone. As a reference it can be up to a seven-year wait for a kidney, with many more awaiting tissue transplants. Sadly, on average 250 Canadians die each year on a wait-list. Each year less than 2 per cent of opportunities for organ and tissue donation exist.

As a member of the Legislature I feel that it is crucial that we work together to create the best system possible. That is why, with the help of transplant organizations across Alberta, I've introduced my private member's bill, Bill 205, that, if passed, will strengthen our referral process and expand education and awareness. Since engaging in this process, the families that have reached out to me have truly moved my heart, Mr. Speaker, like Cindy Krieger, who shared how the decision of her daughter Morghan to donate saved countless lives, or the story of Jennifer Woolfsmith, who lost her 22-month-old Mackenzy, and the solace it provides her to know that the decision to donate was a gift of life to four other children.

It takes only two minutes to register to donate, and one donor can help save up to eight lives and make life better for up to 75 people. Don't forget that it is never too late to become a donor, so please take two minutes today and become a tissue and organ donor.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Southern Alberta Concerns

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I've had the pleasure of touring southern Alberta on so many occasions and talking to Albertans about their priorities. I met with local residents, businesses, health care workers, educators, and more. I did this so I could hear first-hand what those communities need to be able to grow and thrive. The people I met with were worried about their local health care and education. They are concerned about job losses and want a government that will invest in them. They told me loudly and

clearly that they want to have a partner and an ally, something they're not getting from this UCP government.

While I was visiting rural communities, this government was doing what they do best, ignoring the people they were elected to represent. They continue to engage in their infighting and the internal drama that Conservatives are known for. The Premier's staff compared his caucus to clowns. The Premier's office called his caucus sad and sour. You can feel the desperation from over there, Mr. Speaker. To tell you the truth, not a single person that I met with told me that that's what they really need, petty name-calling from the supposed leadership of this province. Even the UCP MLAs know this. One of the candidates for their leadership race warned them that their rural seats were at risk because of the bad policy calls and because of the work being done by this Official Opposition.

But I want to offer my colleagues in the UCP a hand of friendship and offer to help out. I commit to them that since they are more focused on their internal policies rather than the concerns of their constituents, too busy focused on protecting the Premier's job rather than creating and protecting jobs in rural Alberta, I'll take it off their hands. Let me assure them that on this side of the House I will continue to represent their constituents, because they continue to abandon them. Albertans deserve a government focused on them, and while they won't get it from the UCP, it won't be long before they have the opportunity to elect a new government that will.

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

Alberta at Work Initiative

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of our continued efforts to strengthen Alberta's labour market, our government introduced the Alberta at work initiative. Alberta at work aims to get more Albertans working in jobs that support their families and improve their lives. To accomplish this, five collaborating ministries will invest \$600 million over the next three years in a variety of programs to support training and remove potential employment barriers for Albertans.

The Alberta at work initiative focuses on building strong foundations by allocating \$87 million to support STEM and trades training. In addition, \$295 million is being invested in the creation of training opportunities in high-demand fields to develop the skills of our workforce. Every Albertan should have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from our province's economic recovery. Our government is dedicating \$23 million to help low-income students advance their careers by joining high-demand programs. Another \$41 million over three years is available to service providers working with Albertans who are unemployed, marginally employed, receiving income supports, or from underrepresented groups. Over the next three years \$23 million will be invested into the Canada-Alberta job grant, which helps employers hire Alberta workers and helps businesses develop the skills they need to grow and diversify.

Mr. Speaker, we are ensuring the success of our students by investing \$235 million into programs to support enrolment growth, microcredentials, expanded apprentice education, and additional work-integrated learning opportunities. To continue to break down potential barriers, \$20 million is being allocated to Albertans experiencing long-term unemployment to facilitate their return to work. Thanks to investments like these, more than 32,000 people were able to leave income support programs and get back on their feet last year alone.

The Alberta at work initiative is a great example of collaboration across government for the betterment of Albertans, and I am pleased to support it.

Iftar Event at Rahma Mosque in Edmonton

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, this Saturday I was honoured to be able to join the Rahma mosque community in breaking fast as the month of Ramadan comes close to an end. Hundreds of Albertans gathered with food and water to celebrate iftar, the breaking of the fast. I would like to thank my many colleagues, particularly from Edmonton-Mill Woods, Edmonton-Whitemud, and Edmonton-West Henday, and the countless community leaders and members who joined with me for this important celebration. As the MLA for Edmonton-McClung I am honoured to be able to represent such a diverse and welcoming constituent group in this Legislature, and it's a special privilege to be able to represent the Rahma mosque.

As one of the five pillars of Islam, fasting calls on Muslims to reflect on and show compassion towards the less fortunate. It is also coupled with acts of charity, where individuals are encouraged to increase their generosity and donate for causes like hunger and poverty alleviation. But, most importantly, Mr. Speaker, Ramadan is also a time of community. By opening their doors for community iftar, the Rahma mosque provides an excellent opportunity for people of different cultural backgrounds to form new friendships and share in the feeling of generosity. Muslims do Ramadan as an opportunity to recognize their connection to faith and human communities. As the month draws to a close, we wish them blessings for their good deeds within their communities.

At a time when we are seeing increasing instances of Islamophobia in Edmonton and Alberta, events like this that bring the community together are more important than ever. Alberta has always been a welcoming home for Muslims, with the first mosque in Canada being built in Edmonton, with the Al Rashid mosque, that was built in 1938. This iftar event is one that celebrates the Muslim community and the best of Alberta. I was honoured to play a role in organizing this event and look forward to many more in the future. I encourage all Albertans to join with others in the community to celebrate an iftar meal at their local mosque.

Thank you.

Health Care Funding

Mr. Turton: Mr. Speaker, as many in this House know, health care is one of the most important items on the minds of Albertans, especially over the last two years. Spending the time, energy, and money on health care is something that this government has and will continue to do, and this is proven in what is outlined in Budget 2022. I've heard and seen members opposite say that this government is leaving empty promises for Albertans. They claim this government is not putting money where their mouth is, but that is simply not the case. This budget is the largest health care budget Albertans have ever seen.

In 2018 the NDP government spent just over \$20 billion to support AHS initiatives, but this UCP government is expected to spend over \$22 billion in this year's budget, a 7.9 per cent increase. Let me say that again. Our budget outlines an almost 8 per cent increase in spending for health care compared to the previous government. That includes \$2.2 billion to build, expand, and maintain health facilities, and \$64 million for response capacity in EMS. We're also committing \$20 million in new funding for mental health, addiction supports, and \$90 million per year to bring new family physicians to rural and remote communities. As a result, this province will see the highest number of doctors, the highest number of nurses, and the largest capital investment for health care in our province's history. Our seniors will also see record-setting funding levels, with nearly \$3.7 billion going towards the supports they

need and require when it comes to programs like continuing care. Those are big dollars and commitments, Mr. Speaker.

As MLA for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain I want my constituents and all Albertans to know that they can sleep comfortably knowing that this government cares about their well-being and the health of their families. This massive and unprecedented commitment shows that we will continue to support and increase the publicly funded health care system that our residents need for many years to come.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Utility Rebate Timeline

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling with the rising cost of living, and they need help now, not later. It's been months since the Premier announced, reluctantly, that the government would provide rebates on power bills, paltry rebates but rebates nonetheless. Sadly, because this government is so mired in scandal and drama, it's way behind. Our party is proposing a timeline that would ensure Albertans see these rebates, already promised, arrive in their pockets no later than May 31. Will the Premier provide this guarantee for Albertans who are so tired of waiting on his empty promises?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, let's be clear that Alberta is taking more action than any government in Canada to help people cope with the rising cost of living, particularly energy, not only with the \$150 electricity rebate but with a cap on natural gas prices and the 13-cent-a-litre abatement of the Alberta fuel tax. We'd like to get the electricity rebate in people's hands as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the NDP is standing in the way. Why did they deny consent? Why did they block this bill last week? Will they co-operate with us? We can pass it this week if they co-operate.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've outlined what they have to do for us to pass it this week, but instead what we're getting from this Premier are excuses. If I was over there, they would have gotten the cheque already. The urgency is real. We're hearing from Albertans who are so behind on their bills that they face shut-off, and all they get from the minister is a 1.800 number. It is not good enough. We propose a ban on utility shut-offs until at least October to allow time for rebates to arrive. This would protect Albertans who can't wait for the Premier to get his act together. Will the Premier agree with that? Then we could pass it really fast.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this bill could be done and dusted by this evening if the NDP got out of the way and actually accepted to pass it quickly. She said that Albertans would have got the cheque if she was Premier. I'll tell you that what they got was the NDP's hand in their pockets, taking thousands of dollars out of the pockets of individual Albertans with their carbon tax. If they're actually concerned about power prices, why did they build 7 and a half billion dollars of transmission infrastructure, why did they shut down the coal plants in a hurry, and why did they bring in their carbon tax?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, the Premier should really read the report from U of C into power costs, because the leading cause isn't any of the things he's identified; it's profit. It's power companies jacking up their markups just to turn a bigger buck. The falsehoods, the blame, the excuses: they all arrive very quickly. You

know what doesn't? The rebates. Our party is proposing that any future rebates delivered to Albertans must arrive within 30 days of Treasury Board authorization. Does the Premier support putting that level of accountability into the act, or is he going to run from that, too?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, last week we released the independent audit of the NDP's power-purchasing electricity fiasco: \$1.34 billion that they wasted. Why? Because of their ideological zeal to shut down the cheapest and most dependable form of baseload power. But the biggest driver now in electricity costs is their carbon tax, and they voted in this place two weeks ago to support Justin Trudeau's 25 per cent increase of the carbon tax. They want to quadruple it. Shame on them.

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

Ms Notley: None of that's true, Mr. Speaker, but nonetheless.

Physician Supply

Ms Notley: Since this UCP government was elected, the number of doctors leaving Alberta each year has increased 60 per cent. What does that trend mean? In Lethbridge 40,000 people have no family doctor, not a single doctor accepting new patients in the Bow Valley, scheduled ER closures across rural Alberta, and now eight rural communities that have lost obstetric services. Will the Premier today stand and apologize to the families who are losing medical care in their communities across the province of Alberta?

Mr. Kenney: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, she said that none of that was true. Is she now saying that she opposes the carbon tax? Should we bring back that motion where they can vote against the planned increases in the carbon tax? They brought in the carbon tax. They shut down the coal plants. They overbuilt the transmission infrastructure. They had to pay \$1.34 billion in penalties. If Albertans are paying more in electricity, they have one person to blame, and it's the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: We're talking about doctors, Mr. Speaker, since 188 have left Alberta since December alone. Why? Because the Premier ignores their issues, clearly, because he tore up their contract, he disrespected their profession, and he refuses to listen to their advice on public health, and now the expectant mothers who live in eight rural communities – north, south, central Alberta – cannot have their babies where they live. This is a fundamentally important health care service, and this Premier is letting them down. He won't even talk about it. Why won't he take responsibility for his failures on this issue?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'm pleased to report that Alberta has seen, according to the CPSA, a net gain of 99 physicians versus the same quarter of last year. That's to March 31. So we have more physicians. We have more physicians per capita than the rest of Canada. We have more nurses working in Alberta than ever before. We've added \$2 billion to the baseline Health budget. But when she says that we didn't listen to doctors' advice on COVID restrictions, she really means the Twitter donor doctors, and they would still have us in a hard lockdown if they had their way.

Ms Notley: Just keep insulting the doctors, Mr. Speaker.

You know what? Albertans can't get a family doctor. They can't give birth in their community. They can't schedule their emergencies. So if the Premier thinks that there are more doctors in

Alberta, I suggest that he get out the old Ford photo op, he get on that little puppy and he goes south, where he will find 31 fewer doctors compared to just a year ago and 13 that have left in just three months in Lethbridge alone. Why won't the Premier take responsibility for the mess he is making in health care and the hurt that he is imposing on Alberta families?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, again, we have 99 more doctors working in Alberta in the first quarter of this year versus the first quarter of last year. We are attracting more physicians, and indeed we're investing \$90 million into the retention and recruitment of rural physicians. That's \$90 million more than the NDP. And to put that in context, that's for about 800 rural physicians. We have the strongest incentives for rural physicians of any province in Canada, and I'm pleased to report that there are 1,800 more nurses working in Alberta Health Services than under the NDP.

Calgary Storm Damage Recovery Funding

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, I was proud to join our leader last week to commit to Calgarians whose homes were destroyed in the record 2020 hailstorm that an NDP government would be there for them. We committed to backfilling the city of Calgary program to install hail-resistant roofs. This program will cost less than \$5 million. The Premier ridiculed our commitment and then made up figures about how much it will cost. Can the Premier tell this House why he doesn't care about tens of thousands of Calgarians, including my constituents, whose homes were destroyed by hail?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, let's be clear. What the NDP is engaged in is the most cynical act of failed vote-buying that I've ever seen. You know, it costs about \$17,000 to put in a metal roof on an average home. There are about 150,000 homes in northeast Calgary. They're talking about a bill for taxpayers of at least 2 and a half billion dollars, and I've got news for that member of the NDP. People in northeast Calgary: they work hard, and they pay a lot of taxes, and they don't expect . . . [interjection]

The Speaker: The Premier has the call.

Mr. Kenney: They work hard. They pay a lot of taxes, Mr. Speaker, and they don't support the kind of cynical vote-buying scheme of the NDP. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, the only person trying to buy votes was the Premier at the Genesis Centre in northeast Calgary this weekend.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Sabir: The hailstorm happened two years ago, and still today there are claims that are pending, and this government hasn't lifted a finger. Some people are considering moving altogether. The stress of the damage caused to their homes, the delays in settlement, and the lack of support from government is too much. Is this government really going to sit there and do nothing as Calgarians pack up their lives and leave their communities? [interjections]

2:00

The Speaker: It's important for the Speaker to be able to hear the question as well as the answer.

Mr. Kenney: You know, why is it that the NDP is proposing that only a small number of Albertans would get this new free roof

program? You know what? Hail happens all across the province, Mr. Speaker. Hail happens all across the province. There are about 1.5 million dwellings in the province. To install new roofs for 1.5 million dwellings would be in excess of \$20 billion. Welcome to the NDP's new fiscal reality.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order was noted at 2 o'clock as well as again at 2:01.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, it gets worse. The Premier has insulted northeast Calgary residents over and over. First, he brushed off their concerns about skyrocketing insurance claims after the hailstorm. Then he blamed northeast Calgary for spreading the COVID-19 virus. For the record we have the highest vaccination rate in the province. But then the Premier had the audacity to go to northeast Calgary Friday night and beg people to vote for him in his leadership review. Will the Premier admit once and for all that he doesn't care about the people of northeast Calgary?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the fact that the majority of northeast Calgarians voted for this government to get Alberta back on track. I'm proud of the hard work being done by northeast Calgary MLAs. And do you know what northeast Calgarians tell me? They tell me they want to keep their taxes low. They want a strong economy. They are great entrepreneurs and hard-working people, and what they don't want is a multibillion-dollar tax bill being passed on to them by the NDP because of reckless and cynical left-wing vote-buying politics.

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

Anti-Racism Act

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the UCP members on the Private Bills Committee voted to block debate on my private member's bill, the Anti-Racism Act. The bill, aimed at addressing systemic racism, came out of extensive consultation with racialized communities, academic experts, and a recommendation from the government's Anti-Racism Advisory Council. BIPOC Albertans were there at the committee to watch the proceedings and were shocked to see government members declare that this bill, which has long been called for by racialized Albertans, was not worthy of being debated. Does the Premier agree with his committee that tackling systemic racism in Alberta isn't worth debate in this Chamber? Will he join us next week in voting that it should be?

Mr. Kenney: Well, of course, racism is a critically important issue, which is why we have debated it many times, including through government motions, in this place. There was not a vote to block the bill at committee but a recommendation against it. There's an invitation in the deliberative legislative process for the NDP to work with government members. The question is: if that bill was so important, why didn't the member bring it forward when he had a majority of members in this Assembly? Why wasn't it important to the NDP government? Why did the NDP government do nothing about carding, nothing about street checks, and nothing about the barriers to economic inclusion through foreign credential recognition? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition had lots of chances to ask questions. If she'd like another one, she's more than welcome to do so.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: What a shameful response from this Premier.

Mr. Speaker, what I will say is that, unlike this Premier, when I learn more, I do better. That's why I brought forward this bill, which would address a long-standing call of racialized Albertans by establishing the frameworks and standards to enable the collection of race-based data, supported by communities, academics, health care experts, even this government's Anti-Racism Advisory Council. If they are so committed to addressing systemic racism, legislation like this is a critical step. If the Premier won't vote to even allow Bill 204 to have debate, will he commit that he will take the recommendations of the bill and that he will step forward with a government bill to accomplish this this session?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we have a deliberative process for legislation. I haven't read the bill. I haven't commented on the bill. It goes to the committee. Members study the bill. I know that what he's asking me to do is to tell members to vote against their judgment. I won't do that. The real question is: why did that member and his party vote against this Conservative government bill to ban the often racist practice of carding? In four years the NDP did nothing to address that often racist abuse of police power. This government brings forward a bill to ban carding, and the NDP voted against it. Why?

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, what we did was debate that bill, introduce amendments brought forward to us by members of the community who expressed concerns that that bill had loopholes and did not do enough. We did our job, unlike this Premier and unlike the members of that committee who were unwilling to even take the time to actually look at what the bill would accomplish or bring forward a cogent argument against it. All it requires is for this House to have the opportunity to fairly debate. If the Premier won't support that, will he at least commit that he will sit down and speak to the stakeholders that his committee members shut out to hear their concerns?

Mr. Kenney: Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. In four years in office the NDP did absolutely nothing about carding. They did nothing about the often racist practice of carding . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Premier.

Mr. Kenney: I know they hate hearing the truth, Mr. Speaker. The record is clear. For four years they did nothing about carding. When this government brought forward a bill to ban carding, they voted against it. This government is taking unprecedented action to combat the reality of racism in our society, including banning carding, limiting street checks, appointing a special liaison in the hate crimes unit to work with communities, creating the security infrastructure program, the fairness for newcomers office, and so much more.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has the next question.

Surgery Wait Times and Chartered Facilities

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last election and over the last three years I've heard concerns from many of my constituents about long surgical wait times. I wanted to take this opportunity to let them know that I have heard them. I am proud to be part of a government that campaigned on reducing wait times. The pandemic has made that harder by forcing us to postpone some surgeries to free up resources to support the ICUs. To the Minister

of Health: what is our government doing to ensure that Albertans receive critical surgeries in a timely manner?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the important question. The member is correct. COVID-19, unfortunately, has forced us to slow down scheduled surgeries at several times, but we're making progress in spite of it. The overall wait-list continues to come down. Most recently it was about 73,000 compared to 76,000 in March. Just last week we reported that we cut the wait time for cataract surgery nearly in half, from 19 weeks to 10 weeks. That's the shortest in seven years, shorter than at any time under the previous government.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that it's good news to hear that cataract removal surgery is shorter today, even after two years of COVID-19, than at any time under the previous government and given that I've heard it claimed that cataracts are just an exception, as if that particular wait time was the only problem we inherited from the previous government, to the same minister: are cataracts an exception, and what are we doing about all other surgeries?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for the question. Cataract surgeries are not an exception. Wait times also went up under previous governments for hip and knee replacements, heart surgeries, for MRIs and CTs, for some cancer surgeries as well. Emergency delays, discharge delays in hospitals, and access to continuing care got worse without a pandemic. That's why we campaigned on reducing wait times and improving access to our health care system. COVID made it tougher, but we're continuing to work on delivering on our promise. We will do that.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his efforts. Given that I've heard that we've achieved the reduction in wait times for cataract surgeries by contracting more surgeries to chartered surgical facilities and given that the NDP appear to have an ideological focus on eliminating chartered facilities, could the same minister clarify: what is the role of chartered surgical facilities, and what are the plans for them going forward?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. We're doing exactly what we promised, funding more surgeries in hospitals and chartered surgical facilities to reduce wait times. We need to maximize our resources, so we're increasing capacity in hospitals and in CSFs. Contracted surgeries are publicly funded surgeries. Patients do not pay, just like visiting their family physician. Any space freed up in the hospitals is used to do more surgeries in hospitals, so more complex surgeries are done there. The previous government contracted surgeries, just like we are. The difference is that on their watch wait times went up, but they're going down on ours.

Support for Small Business and Economic Recovery

Mr. Bilous: New data shows that retail sales in Alberta are down in February, the fourth decline in the last six months. When you

factor in inflation, sales are down 6 per cent. That's effectively a 6 per cent cut to revenue, yet the UCP keeps piling costs onto businesses and consumers that are hurting them and hurting their viability. Our recovery is still very fragile, but the UCP is already declaring mission accomplished, patting themselves on the back, and saying that we're in a boom despite that small businesses are still struggling. How could the UCP be so out of touch?

2:10

Mr. Schweitzer: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you: after four years of the NDP, where they chased business out of Alberta, we are proud of our record, 6.5 per cent unemployment. Just to educate the members on the other side, that is a lower unemployment rate than when this government formed office, when they were in power. We're going to continue to have the best possible business environment. We're leading the country in growth. We're creating jobs and diversifying our economy.

Mr. Bilous: And there are fewer head offices in Calgary under the UCP.

Given a 6 per cent drop in sales and that the UCP is doing nothing to support these businesses and given that many small businesses I've spoken to are still struggling from the pandemic, many waiting for supports the government promised months ago – the government has failed small businesses over and over – and given that the UCP is actually adding costs onto businesses with higher utilities and insurance, if the UCP won't provide direct supports to these small businesses, will they at least stop making a bad situation worse by increasing costs?

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank goodness the NDP was not in office during this pandemic because they would have shut down small businesses for years at a time. We're going to be there with them. We're open right now. We're moving forward to live with this pandemic. Moving forward, Mr. Speaker. On top of this, we've created the best possible business environment, lowering our corporate taxes from 12 per cent down to 8 per cent. On top of that, the NDP increased taxes, their carbon tax, chasing away businesses. We are diversifying when it comes to manufacturing, when it comes to aviation, when it comes to logistics. Our economy is thriving.

Mr. Bilous: Given that the minister missed the questions, that are based on small businesses, and given that at the national level year-over-year retail sales rose by an impressive 7.6 per cent in February, a full 6 per cent higher than Alberta, and given that once inflation is factored in, this is a decline in Alberta while the rest of the country managed to grow and given that Alberta's unemployment rate lags the national rate, with Calgary having the highest unemployment rate among major cities, why is Alberta lagging the rest of the country on these key indicators, and more importantly why are Albertans and small businesses falling further behind under the UCP?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy is booming right now. People are moving here for the first time in about seven years. The NDP chased away thousands upon thousands of people from this province. Right now there's this thing that is happening in Calgary – I live there – where we're starting to see licence plates again from other regions of the country, people that are moving to Alberta. Now, why are they doing that? Affordability. Calgary and Edmonton are two of the most affordable cities in the entire country. Alberta's economy is diversifying, creating jobs.

Obstetric Services in Rural Alberta

Member Irwin: This government is failing rural Albertans when it comes to access to health care in their communities. In Whitecourt

Alberta Health Services paused obstetrical care at the Whitecourt health care centre for a month due to limited physician resources. Patients are trying to work with their family doctors to ensure they have the supports needed to safely deliver their babies, yet last week the Health minister boasted about the record number of doctors in Alberta. What message does he have for families in Whitecourt who are being told they can't have babies in their own community?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. Alberta, like all provinces across the country, is facing challenges in terms of recruiting doctors, particularly in rural areas. We understand that that is a challenge, and that is why we are investing more than ever to build capacity within our health care system: \$600 million this year, \$1.8 billion over the next three years. As indicated by the Premier earlier, we're also investing an additional \$90 million to be able to attract and retain workers, particularly in rural Alberta, and I'll speak more to the details of those programs.

Member Irwin: Given that it appears that the minister's plan isn't working, because this government's war with doctors hasn't just impacted expectant parents in Whitecourt – in Provost there is no surgical coverage for C-sections due to a lack of physician coverage; in Lac La Biche there are no obstetrical services because of a lack of physician coverage – can the Minister of Health explain to folks in these communities why he is boasting about his government's record when it comes to doctors while parents are being told to just wait because there aren't enough doctors in their communities to deliver babies?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as indicated, this is a very important issue. The comment made by the member opposite that Albertans are being told to wait simply isn't true. We are focusing on providing the services. We recognize that in certain areas there is a shortage. Now, we have a detailed plan to work on that, \$90 million this year. We announced – and I was pleased – the RESIDE program, the rural education supplement and integrated doctor experience, which is supporting 60 doctors, physicians, annually to practise in rural or remote communities. In addition, we understand that obstetrics is challenging in terms of finding individuals, and I will speak more about that in the next . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Member Irwin: Given that the former Minister of Health created this crisis by starting a war with doctors, at the beginning of the pandemic, might I add, and that one of his biggest boosters was the Minister of Environment and Parks, who's also the MLA for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, and that in both Rimbey and Sundre there are no obstetrical services on-site because of a lack of physician coverage, what message does the Minister of Environment and Parks have for parents in his riding who can't safely deliver a baby in their communities? Does he regret putting the interests of the former Health minister above the health of his own constituents?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as previously indicated, we understand there is a challenge in rural Alberta, particularly in regard to obstetrics, which is very specialized, and AHS is working with family physicians to be able to provide those services in other areas. We are working towards attracting and retaining physicians, family physicians and those involved in obstetrics, with that specialty. We'll continue to work on that, and we've devoted \$90 million to be able to do this. We are

working with other plans in terms of the increased training within our province. We will deliver on providing better health for Albertans.

Electric Utility Oversight and Power Prices

Mr. Barnes: ATCO Electric has agreed to pay a \$31 million penalty after an Alberta Utilities Commission investigation. ATCO deliberately overpaid for sole-source work on a transmission line, and the reason for this overpayment scheme was to guarantee that ATCO would maintain a deal to work on the Trans Mountain pipeline and a guaranteed rate of return of 8.5 per cent. This is the type of thing we expect from Quebec's SNC-Lavalin, not ATCO. Given that the provincial government regulates electricity transmission, Minister, please inform Albertans when and how you became aware of this fraud against Alberta ratepayers?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a system in this province where the Market Surveillance Administrator polices the electricity industry. We've got the Alberta Electric System Operator, and we have the Alberta Utilities Commission that actually does the investigations. So in terms of when I found out, I found out about it the same time that that hon. member did, when it was in the paper and the Alberta Utilities Commission released their statement to the public, because they don't clear their decisions through government. They are an independent agency. That member ought to know that.

Mr. Barnes: Given that as a result of this highly fraudulent scheme Alberta ratepayers have once again been stuck with a high utility bill and given that Alberta ratepayers have already been paying more for the massive overbuild of Alberta's electric grid under the former PC Redford government and given that ratepayers face pressure from inflation, the federal carbon tax, as well as this government's industrial carbon tax again being passed on to Alberta families, can the minister tell us: how much are Alberta ratepayers being overcharged because of this scheme, and where is the \$31 million fine? Is it going to be returned to Alberta families, or is your government going to hoard it?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, our government has done something that the previous administration did not do. We stopped the overbuild of the electricity transmission system. The Alberta Electric System Operator recently released their report for their forecast for the next 10 years, and they can clearly show that they have deferred a billion dollars' worth of transmission infrastructure. In addition, they're forecasting that they're going to spend between \$150 million to \$200 million a year versus the \$2 billion a year that was spent by previous governments.

Mr. Barnes: Given that ATCO's fraudulent scheme may never have come to light without a whistle-blower coming forward to warn the Alberta Utilities Commission and given that it begs the question, "How many other you-scratch-my-back-and-I'll-scratch-yours schemes are taking place that leave Alberta ratepayers on the hook for these crooked dealings?" can the minister tell us if he intends to beef up the AUC's investigative powers or whether there will be additional sanctions against ATCO to crack down on these types of fraudulent schemes and restore all Albertans' confidence in our electrical system?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like the hon. member is complaining that the system worked. We have an Alberta Utilities Commission that did the investigation, and they brought about their appropriate ruling. In addition to that, we have a system that's managed by the Alberta Electric System Operator, and it's policed by the Market Surveillance Administrator. I would say that the system is working. However, if that member is aware of anything that I'm not, then he should refer that to the Market Surveillance Administrator.

**2:20 Deaths of Children in Care
and Youth Transitioning out of Care**

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, on Friday it was confirmed what we already knew: 2021 was the deadliest year on record for children in government care; 49 children and youth died. This is a 44 per cent increase from the year before. I have continually raised this troubling trend in this House since last year, but the UCP has ignored these warning calls. Thirty-nine of the children and youth who died were Indigenous, yet the minister's recent review indicates that no consultations were done with Indigenous families, elders, or communities. How can the Minister of Children's Services expect to change these trends if she won't engage with the very families and communities that are affected?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said a number of times before, this for our government is a call to action. That is why I did ask the ministry for an additional review into what has happened here. We are not ignoring anything. We took action. We committed to transparency and accountability. I'm also happy to report to this House that when it comes to the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care, this is something that we are committed to. We are making progress on the all-party panel for child intervention recommendations; 23 of those have been now completed, with three in progress, which is definitely an increase over just a few months ago.

Ms Pancholi: Well, the minister has ignored these families.

Given that the minister's report, which she only released a week ago, includes no action items to deal with increasing caseworker vacancies, burnout, caseloads, and turnover and given that the last report of the former Child and Youth Advocate points to the redeployment of a specialized caseworker in one instance which impacted a youth who died and given that the advocate highlighted the negative impact high caseloads are having on youth in government care, why is the minister refusing to take action on the caseworker staffing crisis in her own ministry that is directly affecting the safety and well-being of children and youth in care?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again, as typical, not one thing that the member opposite has said is accurate or correct. When it comes to staffing front-line child intervention, this is one of the most important things that we do as a government. This is one of the most important roles, I do believe, and also one of the most challenging. I am so grateful for the caseworkers who have supported kids and families, some of the most vulnerable kids and families in this province, over the last two years. We continue to hire caseworkers any time that there is a vacancy. We also are working on a recruitment plan, especially for rural and remote communities.

Ms Pancholi: There are no new caseworkers hired by this ministry this year.

Given that the issues faced by youth and their families in the child intervention system are complex and often systemic and include poverty, food insecurity, and housing insecurity and given that safe housing is even more important for youth transitioning out of care and that deaths in that age group have been more rapid – they have tripled, actually – under this government and given that the former Child and Youth Advocate found the ministry's response of focusing on the shelter system inadequate to support these young people, does the minister believe that shelters are all these young people deserve, and if not, what actions are forthcoming to address systemic issues like poverty and access to safe, affordable housing?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, one of the things that I've continually said in this House when it comes to supporting the most vulnerable children and youth is that it's also focusing on better transitions for young adults who are transitioning out of the child intervention system. This does in fact require multiple ministries to work together on this. It's why we introduced the new transitions to adulthood program to make sure that instead of being a financial program, we do have a program that asks young people those questions. Do you have housing? Can we help? Do you know how to apply for a lease? Do you know how to find a doctor or mental health supports? Now we have caseworkers dedicated to that very specific work to make sure that we're focusing on a successful transition into adulthood. That is important . . .

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

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Ms Hoffman: This government is doubling down to defend their horrible curriculum, the process that most charitably would be described as chaotic and rushed. Rather than working with teachers, community leaders, parents, and academics to get a draft that Albertans can be proud of, the minister refused to listen and only backtracked at the last minute, causing more chaos and more confusion. Schools boards have overwhelmingly rejected this minister's drafts. Rather than doubling down to defend her failed curriculum, will she admit that she missed the mark and delay implementation until a reasonable number of public, Catholic, and francophone boards are willing to pilot the curriculum?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that the school systems will be ready. In fact, we've allocated \$191 million over the next three years, \$59 million in this upcoming year. I'm hearing from school authorities. They've already started along the process of ensuring that they have professional development and the resources available for their teachers so that they can implement in September of 2022. Looking forward to it.

Ms Hoffman: Given that they all still hate it, Minister, and given that 97 per cent of teachers say that they won't be ready for a new math, English, phys ed curriculum as well as wellness by September and given that the minister's only response has been to praise her own process, one that's been universally rejected by Albertans, and given that the minister has a thousand fewer teachers in school now than when the NDP was in government and that students have suffered significant learning loss under her leadership, will she at least get out of the way and let educators start over with her Dumpster-fire curriculum?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I was up in the Fort Vermilion area the other week, last week, and I was so happy to go into a classroom, an elementary school classroom. In that whole school they've been implementing the draft curriculum since last September in math, English language arts, and phys ed and wellness, and you know what? They're seeing two levels of growth, two years of growth, in mathematics, three years in English language arts. Doesn't every Alberta student in elementary school deserve that? We believe so. [interjections]

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

Ms Hoffman: Given that the minister had to drive eight hours to find one school division willing to pilot her Dumpster fire of a curriculum and given that last week we learned the true feelings of this government towards teachers when the Member for Taber-Warner told the Coaldale council that involving teachers is not necessary for a good curriculum and given that the Premier refused to condemn these antiteacher claims last week – let's hope that the Minister of Education will at least stand up for teachers today – will the minister admit that removing teachers from the curriculum-writing process was a huge mistake? Will she admit that kicking teachers off and inviting Chris Champion in was wrong, and will she apologize for her colleague's disrespectful remarks towards Alberta teachers?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite should apologize. She continually trashes the curriculum when, in fact, she admitted two weeks ago that she hadn't even read it yet. We are bringing in a curriculum in math and English language arts . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we had the most transparent, open engagement process with hundreds and thousands of individuals right across this province, including teachers, including superintendents, including education partners, all of them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When new educational programming is introduced, as the former member mentioned, and modifications are made to what students are learning and the age at which they learn these items, difficulties can arise. Given that these challenges commonly include a shortage of resources during the transition, limited time for training, and high work volumes as the new material is adopted system-wide in classrooms, to the Minister of Education: what is the implementation plan to support the new curriculum, and how will you ensure it is resourced appropriately when implemented across Alberta in the fall to facilitate this transition? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Member LaGrange: Thank you for the great question. We are taking a staged approach to implementing the new curriculum. Beginning in September 2022 English language arts and mathematics will be implemented for students in kindergarten to grade 3 as well as physical education and wellness for K to 6 students. Implementation of the new subjects by common grade groupings such as K to 3 and 4 to 6 will ensure successful implementation, and \$59 million in this upcoming year has been allocated to help prepare teachers, parents, and students for the new curriculum. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister. Given that the draft curriculum for kindergarten to grade 6, set to be implemented this fall, represents a massive program shift for both educators and students and further given that there will be adjustments required for both students and teachers throughout this transition period, to the same minister: what consideration is there for students this fall that began their schooling under the former curriculum? For example . . . [interjections]

2:30

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. It's one thing for members to heckle; it's an entirely other thing for members to have conversations across the bow while their colleague is asking a question. Perhaps it would be reasonable to allow her to do so in a manner that the Speaker could hear.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Education: what consideration is there for students this fall that began their schooling under the former curriculum – for example, a child going into grade 3 – and what is the plan for a smooth transition of their current knowledge into the new curriculum to mitigate any potential gaps?

Member LaGrange: Thank you again for a great question. This implementation rollout is based on the expert advice that we receive from the Curriculum Implementation Advisory Group. Focusing on K to 3 mathematics and K to 3 English language arts and literature will help younger students strengthen their numeracy and literacy skills, which are essential for early-years learning. The new K to 6 physical education wellness curriculum will support students in learning how to build resiliency, manage their health and mental well-being as well, Mr. Speaker. These are great subjects that our students need to have the improvements in.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker and through you to the minister for her answer. Given that the new curriculum includes wellness education to support the mental health, safety, and well-being of students and we know that general wellness is the basis for long-term health outcomes for our kids as they grow, again to the Minister of Education: why is the financial literacy piece of this curriculum, including banking, being incorporated into gym classes, and how will this support a physically active cohort of students who are already more sedentary coming out of the pandemic?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Let me be clear that the physical education and wellness curriculum is more than just gym class. The new phys ed and wellness curriculum has also been finalized to support elementary students in developing life skills and building resiliency to manage their physical and mental health and well-being, which also includes learning about financial literacy and consent. These additional learning outcomes will not prevent our students from participating in physical education, which we all know is so critically important to our young people.

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, the south Edmonton hospital is critical to so many people living in Edmonton and nearby municipalities. Our

NDP government was proud to approve this project in 2017 and pledge to have it open by 2026. This government abandoned those timelines. They said that they intended to start construction in 2023 and open it by 2030, but then another change: earlier this month the government's own website for this project pulled the 2023 start date, and now it's blank. Is the minister really delaying the south Edmonton hospital yet again?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Budget '22 includes \$371 million over three years towards a \$930 million total investment, with additional funding to be provided in future years as project planning progresses. We made a commitment on the south Edmonton hospital. This is part of our budget, and we're going to deliver on this. As an overall approach to expanding capacity in health care, the overall \$3.5 billion that we've committed over a three-year budget – we know that we need to expand capacity, and we're going to deliver.

Member Loyola: Well, given that the Minister of Infrastructure doesn't even seem to know what's on his own website when it comes to the south Edmonton hospital and given that this same site also removed the project costs for this project and that we know that the government has made the ridiculous decision to move to a P3 construction model and given that schools in south Edmonton were massively delayed by decisions from previous Conservative governments to go the P3 route, can the minister confirm that his move to a P3 construction model is part of the reason constituents in Edmonton will now wait four extra years longer for a hospital that they desperately need?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, as you know, this is a large, multiyear project. Budgets move across the years based on the progress of the work. Right now the work is going on. As regards the P3s: we campaigned on it. We are going to implement P3s where it makes sense, where there is a value for money. In this particular case we haven't got to that stage about the procurement method. When we know, we'll let him know.

Member Loyola: Given that the UCP can't be trusted with health care, can't be trusted with construction of hospitals, managing a pandemic, clearing the surgical backlog, and taking real action to improve mental health services, will the minister admit once and for all that he, like so many on the government bench, has failed when it comes to building the south Edmonton hospital, and will he come clean on whether he's actually trying to sabotage construction of the hospital so he can kill the project once and for all?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Mr. Panda: Sabotaging is only in their DNA, not in our DNA. The project is progressing well. There are 24 health projects happening across the province. In your own region, Mr. Speaker, in central Alberta, last year we approved \$1.8 billion for the Red Deer hospital, so we are not sabotaging anything; we are actually adding capacity in the health system to deliver care where it's needed, when it's needed.

The Speaker: The point of order is noted at 2:35.

RAPID Force Fish and Wildlife Officer Deployment

Mr. Schmidt: It was a big plan of this government to enable members of the sheriff highway patrol and fish and wildlife enforcement services as part of their RAPID response to tackle rural crime. The move was met with criticism and concerns. According

to AUPE at least 10 fish and wildlife officers originally assigned to RAPID are now being dropped. This would mean 10 fewer officers being able to support the government's plan to have fish and wildlife officers to respond to calls by citizens, making response times worse. Why is the government dropping 10 officers after just recently preparing them for the RAPID response and risking making response times worse?

Mr. Shandro: That is untrue, Mr. Speaker. Since the RAPID response program began, six months ago, we continue to make sure that all Alberta fish and wildlife officers have included in their training the module for the RAPID training. We have the same number of officers who are responding to priority 1 calls as before. There's been no reduction in the amount of officers, and everybody who is responding to the priority 1 calls is getting the wage top-up.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that training fish and wildlife officers for the RAPID response has cost a lot of time and money and given that these resources could have gone to good use supporting fish and wildlife officers in doing their jobs and given that Alberta sheriffs have a smaller budget this year than in 2018, these resources are badly needed. To the minister: how many resources have been diverted from sheriffs and the important work of fish and wildlife officers to the government's RAPID response, that it's now scaling back?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're very proud to have implemented the RAPID response program and make sure that we are adding our Alberta fish and wildlife officers to being able to help with rural crime, something that, by the way, the NDP refused to address in their four years, but we're going to take it seriously. This is one of our tools in making sure that we use our Alberta fish and wildlife officers and making sure that all of them have included in their training the module that is providing them the training of RAPID response and making sure that we have those resources available to us to help reduce crime in our rural areas.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that Albertans cannot trust the UCP with protecting public lands and resources and given that Albertans are seeing more and more chaos in the justice system and that the UCP has proven to be incapable to address the concerns of Albertans and given that the UCP government has made cuts to undermine important public services before and officers are concerned about what is to come in the months ahead, do these 10 reductions just show that even the government believes their RAPID plan failed and that we will see further reassignments going forward?

Mr. Shandro: Once again, Mr. Speaker, that isn't true. There has been no reduction in the amount of officers responding to priority 1 calls. Now, we do know that for many different reasons not every fish and wildlife officer can respond to a priority 1 call, but everyone who is responding to a priority 1 call is continuing to do so. Everybody who has been responding to a priority 1 call has been and will continue to get the wage top-up.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

High Level Disaster Response and Recovery Funding

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I represent the constituency of Peace River, and I couldn't be more proud. Inside my constituency is the town of High Level, a hard-working economic engine of Alberta in the oil and gas industry particularly. These northern communities like High Level are no strangers to damaging natural disasters – forest fires, floods, and others – so to

the Minister of Municipal Affairs: when can the town of High Level expect their full reimbursement from the disaster recovery program that they incurred from the Chuckegg wildfire?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for being such a strong advocate for High Level. The member would be interested to know that High Level has already received over \$7.2 million in disaster recovery money from the province. That's out of the current cost estimate of \$9.7 million. DRPs are administered out of the Alberta disaster assistance guidelines to determine eligibility of expenses and to maximize the federal reimbursement available. Reconciliation of the file is in progress, and we should have another \$2.3 million by the end of . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

2:40

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that northern Albertans are faced with natural disasters – as I said, wildfires and floods – and given that the town of High Level has encountered many of these in recent years and that they've put a proposal forward for a multipurpose community evacuation centre, the question to the Minister of Infrastructure is: have you been briefed on this, and how are you responding to my constituents?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I have visited High Level with that hon. member twice, and I can understand and also appreciate that the town council is very passionate about that project. I also know that High Level is a border town, is an important hub for the north region and for the neighbouring First Nations. While I can't promise the funding right here and now, I can work with the hon. member and his community to find innovative and creative ways to finance that project. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of my communities have undergone natural disasters and received no funding for new aluminum roofs or houses that burned down and given that after these natural disasters many of them struggle with all sorts of issues, including mental health, and we have huge lineups to get access to mental health in our community, can the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions please let us know what he's doing or what can be done to find support for communities in my constituency, including High Level? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The associate minister has the call.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Of course, Alberta is very focused on ensuring that all Albertans have access to a range of mental health supports to improve their mental wellness. This includes the good people, of course, of Mackenzie county and High Level, which is why we've created funding to enhance mental health supports in that north zone. This includes the recent hiring of a new mental health therapist, a nurse practitioner, to help residents improve their mental wellness. Of course, we've streamlined the 211 system to make it easier for people to access mental health supports. Anyone can call 211 and get connected today.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will return to Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Anti-Muslim Discrimination and Hate Crimes

Member Loyola: Mr. Speaker, I'm rising today in support of the Muslim community in Alberta and to condemn those who would seek to harass, terrorize, or inflict their hatred on them. On Thursday the Edmonton police confirmed that two mosques had received packages containing white powder. It is concerning that this occurred during the holy month of Ramadan, a time when mosques will see many gatherings for prayers, fellowship, and to break their fasts. While both counts turned out to be innocuous substances, this is still an unacceptable act that requires immediate action from all levels of government and law enforcement to ensure that it never happens again. I'm glad no one was harmed by this, but I'm worried about the chance of copycats and backlash from the racists who think it is okay to terrorize an entire community because of their hateful views.

This cowardly act, designed to cause panic, fear, and create frustration in the community, must be condemned by each and every leader in this province and country. Every single Muslim deserves to feel safe in Edmonton, Calgary, all over Alberta and everywhere. At a time when racialized Albertans are seeing increasing instances of hate crimes and intolerance, it is distressing to see someone specifically targeting the Muslim community during such a holy time. It is concerning to see increased cases of Islamophobia around Alberta and Edmonton, vandalism of mosques, attacks on women wearing hijabs, and it shows that we still have a long way to go to address racism. We must take those steps together as a province to ensure that these instances of hatred and violence are driven out of Alberta.

Despite this tragic news, I'm proud of Edmonton's Muslim communities and mosques, who opened their doors to people of all faiths and backgrounds during the pandemic, who welcomed everyone during the final days of Ramadan. While some show us the worst in humanity, the resilience, strength, compassion, and welcoming of Alberta's Muslim community shows us the best.

Hailstorm Recovery

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, in July 2012 Cardston was hit by a devastating hailstorm. What seemed like a lifetime only lasted 20 minutes as baseball-sized hail pelted the town. When it was all over, the destructive storm caused in the ballpark of \$100 million in property damage, and that was just for a town of 3,500 people. In 2020 a hailstorm ripped through northeast Calgary, one so devastating that it ranks as the fourth-costliest natural disaster in Canadian history, at nearly \$1.2 billion, and some of the property damage is still visible to this day.

But these are not isolated storms. In August 2019 grapefruit-sized hail smashed parts of west Edmonton, destroying property and farmers' crops. In July 2021 Red Deer had its own bout with hail that caused flood and massive property damage, and in July 2017 the small town of Evansburg in northern Alberta was hit with hail the size of billiard balls.

Mr. Speaker, Mother Nature doesn't care where you live, but the NDP sure do. That is why the opposition leader announced last week that, if elected in 2023, they would buy everyone in northeast Calgary a brand new roof that is hail proof. Why, you ask? It's simple. The NDP want to buy votes with taxpayer money, and it

won't come cheap. Let's do some quick math. There are about 150,000 houses in this part of Calgary. Multiply that by \$17,000 per roof. This puts the price tag of this crazy idea at over \$2.5 billion of taxpayer money.

Mr. Speaker, this isn't some episode of daytime television where the opposition leader comes out and says: you get a new roof, and you get a new roof, and so do you. This is the people's money. They expect the government to spend it wisely, not use it to buy target seats. The next time the NDP shed hail-sized crocodile tears about a natural disaster in some part of the province, just remember: Alberta taxpayers aren't buying it, especially not for 2 and a half billion dollars.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to present the committee's final report on Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre. This bill was referred to the committee on March 24, 2022. The report recommends that Bill 204 not proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 204.

The Speaker: This is a debatable motion, and I see a number of members have risen, providing commentary that they would like to join in the debate for concurrence, which will take place at the next available Monday.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 22, Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

I also rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 24, sponsored by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 18, the Utility Commodity Rebate Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in second reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

I also rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 25, sponsored by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 18, the Utility Commodity Rebate Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Finally, I rise to give oral notice of Government Motion 26, sponsored by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 18, the Utility Commodity Rebate Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

2:50

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Bill 21

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

With Bill 21, our sixth red tape reduction bill, we are continuing to cut red tape that will support investment and economic growth, reduce unnecessary regulation, improve service delivery, and make life better for Albertans. The amendments included in this bill will speed up government approvals, enable local solutions for local problems, and streamline and update legislation for greater clarity. We are committed to cutting red tape by one-third, and Bill 21 is one more step to help us get there.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I hereby move first reading of Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a first time]

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Copping, Minister of Health, responses to questions raised by Mr. Shepherd, hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre, and Mr. Loewen, hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley, March 15, 2022, Ministry of Health 2022-23 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order.

At 2 o'clock and 2:01 the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order. I understand that he intends to withdraw the point of order at 2 o'clock and debate the point of order at 2:01, but I will wait to hear his remarks.

Point of Order Remarks off the Record

Mr. Schow: Yes. Mr. Speaker, thank you for acknowledging me. I rise on a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). At the time the Premier was speaking, in answering a question in the first set of questions of the day in question period, when the Leader of the Opposition said – it was so important to say it twice – in a heckle: you're making things up. This is certainly one indirect way of saying: you're lying. It imputes false motives to a member, which would be a contravention of Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). I would ask that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona or on her behalf the Opposition House Leader apologize for and withdraw those remarks.

The Speaker: The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly didn't hear that heckle, so I will leave it to you to decide.

The Speaker: Well, hon. members, certainly, if the Leader of the Opposition did say, "You're making things up," that would be a point of order because the Speaker has ruled on a number of occasions that that particular language is a point of order. In particular, on page 6144 of *Alberta Hansard* from November 16 – I'm sure you will all remember such an auspicious occasion – a member of this Assembly had to apologize for saying just that.

Having said that, while I heard many things that the Leader of the Opposition heckled today, I did not hear that. If the hon. Deputy Opposition House Leader also makes such an assertion, I am unable to rule. According to page 624 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* we all know that it says that the Speaker cannot be expected to rule on comments that they may not have heard. As

such, this is not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Also, at 2:35 the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order. I'm not sure if he would like to . . .

Mr. Schow: Withdraw.

The Speaker: He's withdrawn that point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

Privilege Threatening a Member

The Speaker: Hon. members, last week there was significant debate around a point of privilege, on which I am prepared to rule. However, I believe that the Deputy Government House Leader has a statement he would like to make.

Mr. Schow: Indeed, I do, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for recognizing me. On March 31, 2022, during extensive tablings that included multiple cases of unparliamentary language being used by the Member for Central Peace-Notley, the Government House Leader rose on a point of order. During the argument of this point of order the hon. Government House Leader stated that he would bring forward a standing order motion so that members opposite could not abuse the tabling process.

On this side of the House we maintain that stating that a motion be brought forward for members' consideration and debate in no way constitutes a threat and certainly was not intended as such. While no offence was intended with the remarks, the member opposite has indicated that he felt offended during the exchange. As such, on behalf of the Government House Leader I happily withdraw any remark that occurred during that exchange in the point of order on March 31, 2022, that may have caused the offence.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I find it quite unique that the Government House Leader would provide a statement for a colleague to read on such a serious matter.

Having said that, I have been in correspondence with the Government House Leader today and have accepted his absence from the Assembly as a significant, serious, and reasonable absence from the Assembly. Because it's important that the statement be made prior to the ruling and while there may be areas of disagreement in the statement of the Deputy Government House Leader, I will, as I have in the case of members of the opposition, accept the withdrawal on a point of privilege and consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Motions for Concurrence in Committee Reports on Public Bills Other than Government Bills

Bill 201 Eastern Slopes Protection Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to this bill, the motion for concurrence with respect to the Eastern Slopes Protection Act. I think it's worth going through two things by way of speaking to this bill, the first being: why is this bill important? The second is the history of this matter, because I think the history of this matter demonstrates fairly clearly some very interesting things.

This is not the first time, Mr. Speaker, that this bill has been introduced. The Leader of the Official Opposition introduced this bill in the last legislative session as well, and knowing that they intended to prorogue the session, the members of the UCP voted for it to go forward to the House to be debated. Because they knew that this issue is incredibly important to Albertans and that they would expect their representatives, the elected members of this House, to debate it because it is of major interest to members of the public, the members of the government voted for it to go forward.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Then they prorogued the session, Madam Speaker, and the bill comes forward again. Lo and behold, in an instance where they would have to vote against it in this Assembly, they used the committee they created for the purposes of preventing private members' bills from the opposition getting to this House for its intended purpose, to prevent bills by members of the opposition from getting to this House.

I mean, it's not just bad policy, Madam Speaker, but it is incredibly cynical. [interjection] And it represents a policy and an attitude, an attitude being displayed by the Member for Calgary-Klein, who's chirping at me right now, in great spades. It represents the UCP's view of the people of this province, that they would vote for the bill to go forward when they knew it would never reach the House and that they would use the committee they created to prevent debate of the ideas of the Official Opposition from moving forward.

It's disrespectful, Madam Speaker. It is disrespectful. It is disrespectful, as the Member for Calgary-Klein was being disrespectful just now. It is disrespectful as the government staff is disrespectful.

Mrs. Frey: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mrs. Frey: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j), imputing false motives to another member. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View very clearly stated that the Member for Calgary-Klein was aiming to be disrespectful. That is not fair, nor is that accurate. She should withdraw her comments, apologize, and stick to the bill.

3:00

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

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In fact, you know, this is clearly a matter of debate. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View was trying her best. She was clearly being heckled quite closely, and I know that the member involved is going to be having a conversation about that. So I would love for the Member for Calgary-Mountain View to be able to continue her debate as this is clearly not a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we've just begun this afternoon's debate, and here we are in a familiar spot. This isn't a point of order. This is a matter of debate. However, there was very clearly some stuff happening here that was perhaps a whole lot more than it should have been. I've noticed that members in this Assembly seem to be working things out on their own in the background, which is great. I encourage all members of this House to settle their debates outside of here, should they be personal ones.

I will ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View to continue her debate.

Debate Continued

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. That is, I think, what's problematic about the history of the particular bill.

Now, the second thing I wanted to speak to was the bill itself and why it is so important to the people of this province. Madam Speaker, it's worth noting that the government members are going to take the position that there's a ministerial order in place in this instance, and they are correct. There is a ministerial order in place in this instance. Why is a ministerial order insufficient? Well, a ministerial order is insufficient because it can be repealed with the stroke of a pen. Repealing important protections on open-pit coal mining in the Rockies with the stroke of a pen with zero public debate, with zero public consultation, is exactly the reason we find ourselves in this conversation in the first place.

The history of this matter is that the government repealed the 1976 coal policy, a policy that has been in place, much as the name would suggest, since 1976 protecting the mountains from strip mining. This was something that was important to Albertans in 1976. It continues to be important to Albertans in 2022, Madam Speaker, and the government repealed that with zero consultation. There was a massive public backlash because this is an important issue for Albertans, but of course the UCP chose not to bring it before this House. They did it quietly on a Friday afternoon, trying to do it in secret, after being lobbied by coal companies.

So the Official Opposition brings forward this bill because the problem that we are trying to solve is twofold. It is both a problem about coal mining in the Rockies and Albertans not wanting coal mining in the Rockies, but it is also a problem about a government repealing important protections with zero public consultation with Alberta. The only way to achieve both of those goals is to pass this act. Now, obviously, we're not here talking about whether or not we're passing this act. We're here to concur in a report, a report from a committee that was created to prevent the debate of opposition bills.

After they rescinded the coal policy, after there was a massive public backlash, the government committed to coming forward and preventing those contracts they signed from going forward. That was, well – it can charitably be described as a splitting of hairs that I think was inappropriate. There had been a whole number of applications that had come in during the time that the protections were in place, that were basically on hold while those protections were in place. When the protections were lifted, all of those applications went through. Now, new applications also came in, and the government got rid of those new applications, but they certainly left the public with the impression that they got rid of all of the applications. That is not correct. They got rid of only the new applications, so a number of projects did in fact proceed forward. That is the reason that we bring forward this bill: because the government can't be trusted on this issue, and Albertans know that the government can't be trusted on this issue.

Albertans deserve to have a public debate in the Legislature – the Legislature – which is their House. They send elected representatives here to have public debates on issues that are important to them, but the UCP members of that committee have voted to prevent that debate from occurring. They didn't just vote against the bill; they didn't just vote not to protect the eastern slopes from coal mining; they voted not even to discuss it in this place. So this one hour, this debate on the concurrence in the motion, is the only public debate that Albertans will ever get on this. I think, Madam Speaker, that that is incredibly

sad. I think that that is a disservice to democracy, and it is a disservice to the people that we serve.

It is also a disservice to the future of this province, because the reason Albertans so vehemently oppose this is because of the effect that it has on our beautiful landscapes, on landscapes that make us who we are. These are part of us as Albertans, and they are important to us. That is why Albertans responded so strongly to the UCP's removal of those protections, and that is why I think it is the obligation of every member of this House to vote against concurrence in this report and to ensure that the bill can proceed to the House so that we can have the debate on these issues that are important to Albertans.

It is also important to Albertans that we protect our water and our land for future generations. We all know that water is a resource becoming increasingly important and increasingly rare. And this, the removal of the protections that this bill is meant to reinstate, has a huge impact on that. They have a huge impact on the protections of our land and water, protections that are important to the people of this province. So I think that the actions of the UCP members on the committee, in denying so much as debate on a bill that is this critical, that is this important to the people of Alberta, are disrespectful. I think it's disrespectful to their constituents.

I think it suggests that they don't understand how important this issue is. It's one thing, Madam Speaker, to disagree on policy; it is quite another . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am rising today to support the recommendation that Bill 201 should not proceed. Alberta is one of the few locations with ethical coal mining operations and policies, and we take the process, of course, very seriously. Suppose we were to think about some of the first coal and mining policies introduced in Alberta. In that case, you will see that they proceed after years of research and public consultation. Thanks to that research, Albertans can enjoy the Rocky Mountains, and the world has access to an ethical and safe supply of coal, of other minerals.

Madam Speaker, as the scientific knowledge and findings develop, so do Alberta's mining practices and those around the world. Two springs ago we began consultation on a new policy to strike the right balance between protecting the areas we cherish and the need for economic opportunity for rural communities in the province. As a direct result, the Coal Policy Committee was formed. The committee conducted meaningful consultations to ensure the development of modern coal policies by Albertans and for Albertans.

Madam Speaker, the Eastern Slopes Protection Act is extremely hypocritical and divisive. And, what's more, the Leader of the Opposition and MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona failed to address any of Alberta's coal policies while in power. Perhaps that's why she's in opposition now. But those are not the main issues with it.

In fact, in 2017 the NDP government and the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona, while she was Premier, approved a two-year drill permit for Altitude Resources to drill and define the potential coal resource at its Palisades property. If the opposition truly has an issue with coal mining and policy in the province, then they had the opportunity to address this for the four years that they were in government. But, instead, here's what they did, Madam Speaker. They supported six category 2 leases, that are currently being explored on category 2 land, and even issued a letter to the AER requesting that the application for the Ram River proceed.

3:10

In addition to their hypocrisy, Madam Speaker, is their claim that the decisions made by the government were unilateral or malicious in

nature. That's so far from the truth. The Coal Policy Committee was formed to lead a comprehensive engagement to ensure everyone's views are represented. We heard from Albertans north to south, urban, rural, Indigenous – you name it – as well as other various communities and organizations, and the coal policy received more than 170 technical submissions, more than a thousand direct e-mails, 25,000 responses to the survey initiated by the government, and had round-tables with approximately 35 Indigenous communities.

That's as diverse as a consultation gets, yet the NDP continues to stand here and light their hair on fire about a lack of public consultation. So let me ask you this: who did they consult? Did they reach out to anyone?

Madam Speaker, I could go on and on about the NDP's assurances on this bill; however, it all comes down to their claims being accurate and not in favour for Albertans. Currently Environment and Parks regularly monitors water quality, including selenium levels, at 116 river and tributary sites across Alberta plus an additional 31 tributary sites throughout the oil sands monitoring program. In addition, all exploration and development are now restricted in the eastern slopes on category 2, 3, and 4 lands.

On top of that, Madam Speaker, you know, our government has made historic investments, the largest investments in the province's history, in irrigation. We've also made historic investments in drought mitigation with that irrigation investment. We've also talked about flood mitigation. So if the NDP wants to talk about water, they can talk about water all they want, but they've done absolutely nothing in their four years or as opposition – I don't even think they've talked about this – to deal with water insecurity for farmers, especially in drought-ridden areas like southern Alberta, that I represent. So it's hypocritical at the very least.

Alberta will continue to provide feedback to Environment and Climate Change Canada about the federal coal mining effluent regulations, which are expected to be finalized by the end of 2023. Madam Speaker, I'm opposed to Bill 201 because I reject the shameful and divisive politics of the NDP, and I urge all other members of this Chamber, on both sides of the aisle, to do what is best for Albertans and the environment, not a hypocritical bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am certainly enjoying this very public debate that we're having here in the Legislature on Bill 201. Thank you, all, for taking part in this important discussion. I rise today to state that Bill 201 should not proceed. Let's be honest here: this bill is not necessary.

The Minister of Energy went back to the drawing board on March 4 as it was made clear that our government and Albertans want to get the coal policy right. I want to thank the minister for listening to Albertans. I'm very comfortable that the minister and this government are getting it right. The NDP's private member's bill is hypocritical and a distraction from the Coal Policy Committee's meaningful consultations, which are an essential step to ensuring that the modern coal policy is developed by Albertans for Albertans.

However, Madam Speaker, there is no need to take my word for it. I trust the more than 170 technical submissions as well as over a thousand direct e-mails related to this topic from Albertans. How about the 25,000-plus survey responses from Albertans? The consultation did not end there. There were more than 70 meetings with interested parties, including industry, nongovernment organizations, Indigenous representatives, academia, subject matter experts, and 15 municipalities. Consultations also included bilateral meetings and virtual round-tables with approximately 35

Indigenous communities to go along with three tours of coal-producing regimes. All of the examples I just mentioned seem like consultation to me. I actually think that if we were in the opposite seats here and the government was pushing this bill forward recklessly without actually properly consulting with Albertans on this, we would be being criticized right now for not doing proper consultation. That's why I'm opposed to moving forward with Bill 201.

I'm also confused as to why this bill lists category 1 lands. The Leader of the Official Opposition and members across are well aware that coal exploration and development has never been allowed on category 1 lands, which include national parks, provincial parks, wildlife sanctuaries, just to name a few. So why waste the paper writing this thing?

The government has also heard the Coal Policy Committee loud and clear. That is why the ministerial order expands the halt of coal exploration on category 2 lands to also include exploration and development on category 3 and category 4 lands as defined by the 1976 coal policy. The restrictions on activity on category 2 lands has been in place since April of last year, so what we see, based on the language of Bill 201, is again virtually identical to the policy already in place. This bill is redundant.

Madam Speaker, Bill 201's aim is to cancel all coal activity as well as under category 3 and 4 lands unless these leases were issued prior to May 1, 2020, and hold approvals for actively operating mines or processing plants. Our province has always – always – had a strong track record in regard to reclamation of land. The bill does not specify whether reclamation activities will be permitted to continue; however, these activities will be required even if a lease is cancelled. Now, the previous government had an opportunity to act on the coal file. They did. It's interesting that the former Premier and the former Justice minister, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, did not act on this, and I wonder why they did not act when they were in power. Was it not important to this government?

There are six category 2 leases currently being explored; four began exploration under the 1976 coal policy. During her Premiership, when she had the opportunity to address this policy, her government supported these initiatives; the Member for Calgary-Mountain View supported these initiatives. The NDP went far enough as to issue a letter to the AER requesting the application for Ram River to proceed. I guess they had the political capital to burn at that time. Madam Speaker, I know that this is not question period and, thankfully, the NDP are no longer in government; however, if I were to pose a question to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona or the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, it would be based on the current bill. Is she now opposing the types of projects that her government supported only a few years ago? If so, what has changed?

The hypocrisy doesn't stop there, Madam Speaker. In March 2018 the Member for Lethbridge-West and former minister of the environment was questioned about development of metallurgical coal in the eastern slopes. In response she said, "Of course, Alberta does have a number of metallurgical coal interests and [we] will continue to develop those [interests]." Again I would ask: what has changed for these members since they were in government and now are opposition?

I would also like to highlight another redundancy. One amendment states: restricting coal exploration and development in the eastern slopes until land-use planning is completed. Madam Speaker, I am thrilled to tell members opposite that that is already in the coal report, which the government is currently acting on.

Madam Speaker, I want to remind the House that the committee's report and recommendations in combination with input from Indigenous engagement processes make it clear that modernizing Alberta's management of coal resources is a complex undertaking

that must be done with care. It does not mean cancelling projects that are already under way by the snap of a finger. What do you tell the workers in this industry when they are out of work and not able to feed their families? We will not be putting hard-working Albertans out of work or endangering projects that are safely already under way. This is just more evidence that our government is there for the hard-working men and women of Alberta who are safely, responsibly harvesting our resources. The bottom line is that the coal report was done with thorough consultation with industry, municipal governments, Indigenous communities, experts, and, of course, everyday Albertans.

I cannot speak for the NDP and who they may or may not have consulted with their bill; however, I have the utmost trust, faith, and confidence in the Minister of Energy and the government to get this right. With industry being consulted, this will help us create a coal policy that will protect our most precious spaces while also creating a business environment where responsible projects will not simply be cancelled because of ideological drive. I am opposed to Bill 201, and I urge all members of this Assembly to vote in favour of nonconcurrency.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

3:20

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the chance to respond to the last couple of speakers, some of the things that they were mentioning in their comments. You know, maybe I'll start off here: we keep hearing about: "Well, why didn't the former government do this? Why didn't the former government do that?" Well, the former government didn't, under the cover of evening, right before what I believe was even a long weekend, remove the 1976 coal policy just like that. They probably thought: "Oh, 1976: that must be red tape. That's just old. Let's just get rid of it." That is what triggered this whole exercise, so it's funny that the members opposite seem to leave that detail out, okay? This has been going on, certainly, for a very long time. Alarm bells were raised when that happened.

Now, all we need to do is look to one of the provinces right beside us to see a living example of what happens when our water system gets contaminated. You can always go down that road: oh, you know, the human body needs selenium. Sure, in very, very tiny quantities. But when you're sitting here measuring down from that disaster that happened to our neighbours and you're – I think it was something like 20 miles downstream from the event – seeing levels something like five or six times higher – like, lethal – than the human body can absorb, that needs to be the moment to pause. Listening to the one member talk about the historic investment in irrigation in southern Alberta – absolutely great; totally onboard with that – that would be a complete waste of money if we contaminate the water. People won't be able to drink it, we won't be able to irrigate with it, and all of that money that we just spent on all of that great infrastructure is now put to waste. That is what people in southern Alberta had a really big problem with.

Hence, leading to Bill 201, the exact same bill that members opposite voted in favour of at the Private Bills Committee, that it should be debated. Nothing changed, so as a member who's sat on this committee since the beginning of the 30th Legislature, I've clearly seen members who have sat on that committee, through a concerted effort, deciding that private members' bills from opposition members don't deserve debate in this House. The ones that did, clearly, we've seen are far enough down on the list, and we all know, from the limited amount of time private members get in this House, that those bills wouldn't be debated. How do you get

from supporting a bill to be debated in this House to all of a sudden not? "Oh, well, the government took action. We did all kinds of consultation." Great, so all of that effort and all of that work and the best thing that could come out of that, Madam Speaker, was a ministerial order?

Everybody knows, and if you don't, you should learn, that a ministerial order as fast as it's tabled can be taken away. Just look at the 1976 coal policy. That was actual legislation; gone, snap of the fingers. You think a ministerial order is going to slow things down? Come on. I'd hope that you were all able to get to this House with some degree of understanding. I keep arguing over and over and over again in this House, Madam Speaker, about language. Where does it say in that ministerial order that it cannot be cancelled unless approved by this House? Spoiler: there isn't. There's no language for that, so it can be removed by the decision of one person, snap of a finger, no problem. We're left to, basically, that same thing that we've heard over and over again: well, just trust us; we'll get it right.

Well, I hate to tell you this. I can't trust this government, because the leader of this government couldn't manage a simple promise of delivering a donors list. How am I supposed to trust something much larger, then protecting our water system? That's what triggered Bill 201 and why we need to get something in place. That way it comes before all of us. We get the opportunity to go back and talk to our constituents if that's the case, if some kinds of changes need to be made.

If you're sitting here telling me that Bill 201 is useless, that the government is taking action, then I have to ask the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Environment and Parks: where's the legislation to guarantee the safety? What's taking you so long?

Again, going back to this whole: well, the past government; the past government. You've all been in charge for three years. I remember members of the government caucus, members of the government bench, back when they served in the opposition, were busy telling us that same line after six months, let alone three years. Start owning what you're doing.

Madam Speaker, this bill needs to be debated in this House where Albertans can watch. You thought it was worthy then; it's still worthy now unless, of course, you're trying to duck Albertans. Here we go back, full circle, again to that whole trust issue. I've heard the Minister of Municipal Affairs before, in the past, saying: we need to work harder to regain the trust of Albertans. I agree; you do. You have an opportunity here.

We need to vote against the committee's report. I know that members of the opposition that sit on that committee, including myself, disagreed emphatically with that. We provided a minority report to say as much. At the end of the day, if it doesn't pass, then so be it. At least it was debated in this House.

I know that my colleagues have more to say on this. Hopefully, I've managed to get my point across. I'm certainly going to urge members to vote against the report from the committee, and hopefully we get a chance to talk about Bill 201 and maybe a few other opposition bills in this House.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the motion for nonconcurrency for debate of Bill 201, the Eastern Slopes Protection Act. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this; however, I'm disappointed that this will be the only opportunity that I have to speak to this bill and that this is the only opportunity for this Chamber, for the members of this Legislature, to debate this bill.

I've been quite surprised to hear some of the arguments coming from the members from the government side with respect to why we should not even consider this bill in the Legislature. I actually want to highlight again that that is what we are discussing here today, whether or not we should even debate Bill 201 in the Legislature. We certainly know that government members may have different views about certain provisions in Bill 201. They may take issue with it. They may raise some of the concerns that they've raised here today in the concurrence debate or in the committee, but that should be properly had in a debate on the merits of this bill.

What's troubling about this is that if we look at what Bill 201 is about, it is about protecting the eastern slopes, full stop. That's what it's about. And there should be almost unanimous understanding that that is what Albertans want from the members of this Assembly by now. I actually fail to understand how this is even up for, I guess, any discussion, because I don't think there's been one issue that has so galvanized Albertans from all different stripes, from rural, from urban, farmers and ranchers, and people who love to hike and experience our eastern slopes for their beauty. Whoever you are, it has been overwhelming.

I am willing to bet, Madam Speaker, that every single Member of this Legislative Assembly, regardless of which constituency we represent, has been inundated with correspondence on this issue, and the overwhelming consensus is that Albertans do not want coal exploration on the eastern slopes of the Rockies. In fact, that is also the conclusion that was reached by the coal committee in their report, that very conclusion.

3:30

Why, then, would the members of the government caucus be so opposed to debating a bill that does just that? They may say that it's because, yes, there's a ministerial order that has already been passed and therefore it's not necessary. That's something that we could have a discussion about in debate on this bill. We could actually have that discussion about: what's the difference between a ministerial order and legislation? Policy and law geeks like me would love to have that discussion. But the biggest difference, Madam Speaker, of course, is that a ministerial order can be changed by one minister by simply rescinding it by the stroke of a pen, and it's over.

If it's in legislation, however, Madam Speaker, as you know, that comes before this Assembly. Whether it be amendment or passing such legislation, it has a fulsome debate: three readings, the opportunity for amendments, an opportunity for Albertans to watch through, you know, Assembly Online or to read *Hansard* debates and to put forward arguments to have their MLAs represent them in the Legislature. The democratic process: that's what that's about. That is the primary difference.

We could discuss that in a debate on Bill 201. Instead, the government members of this House are saying what they have said over and over again in their time as government, which is: trust us. Now, they've said that over, and they've proven to Albertans over and over again that they cannot be trusted. There's no issue that that is more true of than on the coal issue.

I heard members, the Member for Calgary-Klein, say: oh, if this issue was so important to us, why didn't we pass the eastern slopes act when we were in government? The answer to that, Madam Speaker, is plainly obvious. It's because when we were in government, the 1976 coal policy was in place. We didn't need to pass this legislation. The need for this legislation arose only as a result of the conduct of this government, which was to eliminate with the stroke of a pen a policy on a Friday before a long weekend, hoping that no one would notice. Now they're asking Albertans to

trust them that they won't do the exact same thing on the exact same issue again.

I think what we have determined, Madam Speaker, is that on many issues this government can't be trusted: on what they say about health care, on what they say about education, on what they say about the economy, on what they say about how they're going to be good stewards of taxpayers' money. We can't trust them on any of that, that they're not going to make things more expensive, that they won't increase taxes or fees on Albertans. We can't trust them on any of that, but certainly there is no clearer example of what Albertans can't trust them on than coal.

I know that that's the case because, Madam Speaker, even this past weekend in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud – I was out door-knocking this past weekend, a beautiful day for it, might I add, gorgeous weather for knocking on the doors, lots of people excited to talk to me, and I was excited to hear what they had to say – do you know what issue kept coming up again? Coal. I want to give a shout-out to Ken, who I spoke to at the door this weekend. Ken said to me specifically, "I don't trust these guys on coal as far as I can throw them." He said: "Yeah, yeah. They're now saying that they're not going to do coal development, but they said that before, and guess what they did? They got rid of that coal policy."

This is in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Now, my constituents may not be directly affected by any resulting coal exploration on the eastern slopes. They may not have their ranches, their farms, their drinking water – although, by the way, it does affect our drinking water eventually, they may not be as directly impacted as constituents of many of the other MLAs who sit in this Chamber. But Ken and many others do not trust this government on coal, so when the members of this caucus stand up and say that they don't even want to debate a bill that will put into legislation the things that they claim to agree to, which are actually preventing exploration of coal on the eastern slopes – that's what the report said. That was the conclusion overwhelmingly, what Albertans wanted.

They claim now to be the grand stewards of the eastern slopes, so why don't they want to even debate a law that would protect that? Perhaps, once again, when given the opportunity to earn back Albertans' trust, they're going to throw that in Albertans' faces again. Honestly, Madam Speaker, this is an opportunity. The government should be thanking us for providing them this opportunity, or thank the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona for bringing forward a bill to put into legislation, to codify what they claim to be the case, which is that they do not support coal exploration on the eastern slopes. Instead, at a committee, which has every single time prevented the debate of private members' bills from the opposition members from coming forward for debate, this committee has stopped it once again.

I honestly feel like this is a missed opportunity for this government to try to earn back a little bit of trust, but perhaps they're not trying to earn back trust. Perhaps they're actually once again showing their true colours, which is that they're not interested in protecting the eastern slopes. They got their hand slapped pretty hard by Albertans when they eliminated the coal policy and then tried to pretend it wasn't happening. This government came up with lots of fictional stories about what was going on and what wasn't going on. They couldn't even own up to it right away when they did it and admit that what they were doing would permit coal exploration on the eastern slopes. So they've lost the trust of Albertans, and this was an opportunity to regain it. It sounds like they're not interested in regaining that trust. They're interested in, perhaps, coal exploration on the Rockies.

Certainly, this ministerial order could be struck out as I know the cabinet members who have done that with ministerial orders, who have issued them and revoked them without any debate in this House. They know that. In fact, many ministerial orders are not

even publicly available. They're not even published. This was a shock to me when I actually worked within the public service, that there are many ministerial orders that Albertans might not even know of. Perhaps, in this case, they'll once again try to strike it down, and nobody will know.

So I have to say, Madam Speaker, that I'm deeply frustrated not only by the fact that this government won't even take those opportunities that are presented to them to really gain back Albertans' trust on the coal issue – they have this opportunity, and they're not taking it – but I'm also deeply frustrated for the state of democracy in this province right now. Not one single private member's bill from a member of the opposition has come forward for debate in three years. Not one.

I do recall that when the NDP were in government, there were several private members' bills that were passed by opposition members. I know we discussed some of them. Some of them had been brought in, at least had a fulsome debate. It's no doubt that this government has a majority in this House. If they don't like a piece of legislation, they can prevent it from passing – they can – with their numbers in this House, but the fact that they're even afraid to have that debate speaks volumes about who this government is and why Albertans continue to not be able to trust them.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate on the motion for concurrence? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is, as always, an honour and a privilege to rise in this House. I was chatting with a school group not long ago, and a couple of people kind of asked what the hardest part of my job was. I always stumble on that question because I have to talk about the fact that we are so privileged to be in this Chamber. You know, I'm one of only 87 MLAs, so I think it's just a good reminder to think about the role that we have.

As always, the first time I rise during a week, I would like to also give a shout-out to all of those on the front lines who are doing so much for all of us as we are still in the midst of a pandemic.

I talk a little bit about, you know, the privilege that we have as members. I lay that as some context to my argument today because the opportunity to present a private member's bill is a very rare one. It's a privilege that many MLAs may not even ever get a chance to do. I have not been lucky enough to have one myself. I know that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona was incredibly lucky to be drawn first. I'll have to check with her. I can't recall actually if she's had multiple opportunities to introduce a private member's bill. I mean, she has been around a long time. That's not an ageist joke; she's just one of our longest serving members, I think in the entire Chamber, in fact. It is such a privilege.

I know the work that my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona put into this bill and, of course, the previous iteration of it as well. You know, I know the consultation that was done, so for the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat to ask about consultation is just quite disingenuous and quite disappointing, I might add.

3:40

Oh, gosh, I'm getting serious *déjà vu* from quite recently having the honour of sitting on the private members' bills committee and seeing my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre – the truly countless hours that were put into his bill, Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act, and just how much consultation was done. You know, I sat back, and I can't claim to have helped to write the bill, but I certainly sat in on many consultations. These were consultations

that took place on weekends, where community members, primarily racialized community members, gave up their time, volunteered their lived experience, their expertise, their knowledge, their wisdom, resulting in a bill that everybody in this House could and should be quite proud of. It was absolutely – and I'm not even exaggerating – heartbreaking to see what took place just the other day on that bill. I was going to say which day, but now the time is just all confusing to me. But it was quite, quite recent.

You know, so that Madam Speaker doesn't get concerned about my staying on track here, I'm framing all this to give a little bit more context. I can echo some of what my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud just spoke about. I've been able to serve on this committee, the Private Bills Committee, since it was formed, and we've seen a clear pattern from this government. Bill 204, just the other day, was another bill in a long, long list of many that this government refused to move for debate in this Chamber.

You know, if the Member for Calgary-South East would like to join debate and present his position on this, I'd love to hear that, and from other members from Calgary, too. You know what? I've spent a number of hours knocking in various Calgary constituencies, and I love being able to talk about door-knocking in Calgary. I've knocked in a number of members' ridings, and protecting the eastern slopes, protecting our mountains comes up a lot. It really does.

I've knocked on doors in Calgary-Klein, in Calgary-Foothills. Oh, gosh, the list goes on. I don't need to tell you the whole list. I'm going back, in fact, in early May, and I'm going to be knocking on many more. I've even knocked in Calgary-Mountain View, so I'm not just going after seats we plan to flip. You know, I know that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, who spoke quite eloquently about this bill, hears about it at the doors a lot.

You know, often my line when I talk to Albertans is: I'm there to listen. I don't want to plant any seeds. I just say, "I'm your MLA" if I'm knocking on the doors in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, as I was this weekend in beautiful Highlands. If I'm knocking in another MLA's riding, I say: I'm so-and-so from Edmonton, and what issues are top of mind for you? I can tell you that the top issues that I've heard recently in ridings outside of my own are health care; education, primarily curriculum; and mining, coal mining; and protecting our environment.

It truly should be, you know, incumbent upon all of us in this Chamber to be listening to our constituents. I don't know how much the members opposite are knocking on doors in their ridings. I know I do hear from a fair number of folks who say that they haven't heard from their MLAs a whole lot. I would urge them perhaps to get out there and do so and take a similar approach. Ask your constituents what they're hearing, because what you get in your e-mail inboxes or even on social media is not necessarily representative of the broader community. Often the people who reach out to you are the ones who might be incredibly passionate about issues. They're a little bit, perhaps, more engaged than other constituents. So when you come to constituents, constituents who aren't expecting you, and you put them on the spot – I mean in a respectful way, of course – it's really interesting to see the responses that you get. I would urge the members of the UCP to be doing that, to be listening, not to be explaining away decisions that aren't supported by our constituents. That's what we're hearing today. That's what we've heard from the members who've stood up to try to defend their position on Bill 201, the Eastern Slopes Protection Act.

I can't wait until the next time I'm in Calgary-Klein, which will be, hopefully, fairly soon again, you know, to talk about the fact that we are protecting the Rockies. We're protecting the eastern slopes. We're protecting our mountains from further coal mining. Sadly, I was here in the Chamber and heard their current MLA

denying this reality and refusing to stand up against coal mining on the eastern slopes and against the specific legislative requirements on environmental effects.

Water, right? Sorry; I have this in my notes here, too. I meant to touch on a point around water. Apologies; I didn't get everything down that that member said, but one of the members talked about: why isn't the NDP talking more about protecting water? I can tell you, defend her honour, that the Member for Edmonton-Manning, who is, of course, our agriculture critic, has done a great deal of consultation. She's been on the road a whole heck of a lot, talking to rural communities and talking about the connections with the environment. I know she's talked to me about irrigation, some of those issues that are probably mostly above my head, I must point out. She's done that consultation. She was just on the road for, I think, a full week quite recently, talking to folks who are directly impacted.

You can say, you know, that, well, it's the surrounding communities around the eastern slopes that are most impacted. Well, no. I distinctly recall talking, the last time I spoke to the previous iteration of this bill in the Chamber, about the fact that the water sources are impacted up here in the Edmonton area as well, right? There are deep interconnections there. It's not just an issue that impacts those communities surrounding the eastern slopes; it has an impact on all of us. I hope we can acknowledge this.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to join in the debate on the recommendation of the committee. I speak to strongly encourage all members of this Assembly to vote against concurrence, to vote for this Assembly to consider this piece of legislation fully here in the Alberta Legislature. I believe that the Eastern Slopes Protection Act deserves a full and robust debate in the Assembly, an opportunity to listen to the feedback Albertans have given to put protections into legislation that cannot be undone with the stroke of a pen. I will speak more to my reasoning and my support for the Eastern Slopes Protection Act. I do want to echo what we've heard.

Right now we have a single hour to debate what the committee has recommended to this Legislature, which is that the Eastern Slopes Protection Act not be debated, the same thing that this committee has essentially recommended for all NDP private members' bills, the exception to that, of course, being when this committee first reviewed the version of the Eastern Slopes Protection Act at a time during the last sitting when the government knew that the session was going to be prorogued. At that point the members of the committee said, "Yes, we should debate this legislation," knowing full well it would never actually get that opportunity, a level of hypocrisy that really is quite startling. Of course, the same members who voted that, yes, it did deserve debate in this Assembly, when it was brought back again in the exact same form, with the exact same logic and reasoning behind it, then changed their recommendation.

It's been very frustrating during the past three years as members of the Official Opposition because of how this government is using the committee to ensure that no private members' bills from the Official Opposition ever receive full debate in this Assembly. So many suggested bills have deserved that debate. I think that it is an abrogation of this Chamber's duties and quite shameful.

3:50

When the standing orders were originally changed by the UCP government to insert a committee that would essentially vet whether a private member's bill deserved to be brought forward or

not, allowed debate or not, we said during the debate of those standing order changes that it would be used to suppress issues that deserve debate in this Chamber.

Private members' business does not receive very much time in this Chamber, Madam Speaker, and the choice from the UCP government to interfere with and to suppress private members' business: we argued against that when the standing orders changes were brought forward in 2019. And now three years later we continue to see the same behaviour and the same application of those changed standing orders, in this case not only to not allow Bill 201, Eastern Slopes Protection Act, to be fully debated in the Alberta Legislature, but the members of the committee said, "Yes, it should be debated" in one form, because they knew it would never actually happen, and then when it became Bill 201 in this sitting, they changed their mind.

I believe I heard my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood talking about the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, who has moved this bill, and wondering if she'd had the opportunity to have a private member's bill before. The answer is no. As a member of this Assembly since 2008, when she first won her seat, Bill 201, Eastern Slopes Protection Act, is the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's very first private member's bill, which perhaps goes to show how rare the opportunity is for members. You literally have to win a draw, a lottery, Madam Speaker, to have the honour to bring forward these pieces of legislation.

To now know that Bill 201 will not be debated is incredibly frustrating, specifically because of the substance of the bill. I've spoken now about how frustrated I am that the process is what it is and that the government is not allowing these bills to be debated. I'll speak briefly now about why I believe Bill 201, the Eastern Slopes Protection Act, should be debated. I would strongly suggest that for the past two years the province has been engaged in an incredibly important conversation about coal mining within . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but under Standing Order 8(7)(a.1), which provides up to five minutes for the mover to close the debate, hon. members, I will now call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for concurrence carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:53 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|---------|------------|------------|
| Aheer | LaGrange | Schulz |
| Amery | Long | Singh |
| Copping | Luan | Smith |
| Fir | McIver | Stephan |
| Frey | Nally | Toor |
| Horner | Nicolaides | Turton |
| Hunter | Pon | van Dijken |
| Issik | Savage | Williams |
| Jean | Schow | Yaseen |
| Jones | | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------|---------|----------|
| Bilous | Gray | Pancholi |
| Dach | Irwin | Renaud |
| Ganley | Nielsen | Shepherd |

Totals: For – 28 Against – 9

[Motion for concurrence carried]

**4:10 Bill 203
Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act**

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, on April 20, 2022, the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills presented the report of that committee on Bill 203, Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act, and requested concurrence of the Assembly in that report, which recommended that the bill not proceed. As a member other than the mover rose to speak on April 20, 2022, debate on the motion will proceed today.

The motion to concur in the committee's report on Bill 203 has already been moved, and I will therefore now recognize any additional members who wish to speak. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Happy to rise this afternoon to try to maybe persuade members of the government side to finally debate any private member's bill that's been brought forward by an opposition member. I likely won't succeed but will certainly give it the old college try, as they say.

Bill 203, the Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act, sponsored by my good friend from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, proposes to create a venture fund that does not risk a single penny of Alberta taxpayer dollars, giving them the ability to invest in Alberta's future through tech, through AI, basically an opportunity that Albertans haven't seen since the Great Canadian Oil Sands project under Ernest Manning and the Alberta Energy Company. Right now Albertans do not have the ability to be able to participate in these things unless they're in a very specific position. What a great opportunity for Albertans to be able to invest in the success of Alberta right here in Alberta, again, something that happened which kicked off a sector of the Alberta economy which, you know, very unabashedly, every member of the UCP supports, as they should. So why would you not give Albertans a chance to duplicate that experience that they had back then?

Like I said, Madam Speaker, I mean, as a member of the private members' committee since the beginning of this 30th Legislature I don't know what words I could even use – disappointing, frustrating, surprising, completely confused – about why a bill that was clearly supported by very, very successful business people here in the province with regard to investing in Alberta businesses, investing in start-ups, why they would not listen to those individuals. I can only come up with the one reason, and that was because it was an opposition member that brought this bill forward, a very good piece of legislation.

Now, I know that there have probably been some arguments about: well, you know, there was no consultation around who could manage this type of endeavour. Well, if there was such a great concern, Madam Speaker, around that, why didn't the government members invite stakeholders that could have spoken to that? I'm actually going to go out on a limb here. I'm going to bet that there weren't any. I'm betting that what little consultation members opposite partook in: all they heard was good stuff, because that's what there is.

It's about allowing Albertans to share in the prosperity. You know, I've said it time and time again: tech, AI – I mean, please. We had an opportunity to jump on this train in the past, and unfortunately it didn't happen for whatever the reasons were. I remember this back when I was in college and whatnot. Some opportunities had presented themselves to Edmonton, and, you know, whatever the decisions were at that time – I wasn't as engaged – all I remember thinking was: wow, what a great opportunity. Unfortunately, it wasn't taken advantage of, and look where things went. Very few times do you get a second go-around to do that.

I always use the example, because it's so blatant, Madam Speaker, of the gaming industry. You know, again, in what little free time I have, I get to participate and play games, including developed by our very own company here in Edmonton, with BioWare. When I was really excited about this, that industry was poised to be a \$150 billion industry by 2023, so you can imagine my surprise when I decided to do a little checkup and see how things were going, to see if maybe things had improved even a little bit further, and it actually doubled. Right now: a \$300 billion industry. Why don't we get a piece of that action? Why don't Albertans get the chance to get a piece of that action? Well, they could if we could set up the conditions for them to be able to participate, just like they got the opportunity to participate in driving what would become one of Alberta's major economic sectors.

I have absolutely no doubt that tech and AI are going to jump up there very, very quickly, but if we don't act now, Albertans, through, actually, no decision of their own, are going to lose out on that opportunity. Why? Because the government doesn't want to entertain an opposition bill? If it's really that problematic, why don't you consider amendments? I mean, I would certainly never speak for the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, but, you know, I have a bit of an idea that perhaps he would entertain some amendments to the bill if there is such a concern around it, thereby taking a bill that Albertans get a chance to participate in and make it even better. Like I said, he's done his homework. He's had major stakeholders speak in support of this bill. But, unfortunately, we're not going to get the opportunity to really debate the bill, because all there is an hour here. That's not debate.

Madam Speaker, why would we deny Albertans at least the opportunity to learn why they're not going to get a chance to participate in the success of Alberta companies? We've got some great opportunities here. Like I said, BioWare: a huge success story. What are they, 25 years now here in Edmonton producing world-wide games? I play them; they're fantastic.

Mr. Bilous: And Aaryn Flynn, one of the cofounders of BioWare . . .

Mr. Nielsen: Aaryn Flynn, one of the cofounders of BioWare . . .

Mr. Bilous: CEO of Inflexion.

Mr. Nielsen: . . . CEO of Inflexion, supports this bill. I feel like I'm stealing from his notes here almost. But it is a good point, you know, seeing as how I am on the subject, and I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for pointing that out, seeing as I am talking about it.

4:20

Are you telling me that you don't trust his opinion? The amount of success that he's had here in the province of Alberta, the jobs that have been created – and I know that these jobs are not minimum wage jobs, by any stretch of the imagination. My understanding is that there is still roughly somewhere between \$70,000 and \$80,000 a year, on average. That's a good, mortgage-paying job. They're probably even higher than that now. Again, my stats are probably a couple of years out of date here. Why would you deny Albertans an opportunity like that?

We could get a chance to debate this bill. We could quickly, probably, get it into Committee of the Whole. We could address the concerns that members opposite probably have.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise once again to discuss this motion for nonconcurrency on Bill 203, the Alberta venture fund, brought forward by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I'd actually thought that one of the government members was going to speak, because he seemed interested in speaking, but I'm happy to take this time.

I once again have to raise my concerns about the fact that not a single private member's bill from the opposition side of this House has been brought forward for debate in the three years of this Legislature under this government. This is incredibly undemocratic. We have heard discussions over and over again about how rare it is for private members to have the opportunity to bring forward a private member's bill. I should be so lucky, Madam Speaker, to have the opportunity as a private member to bring forward a bill. It hasn't happened to me yet, and I understand – for example, today we discussed private member's Bill 201, which was the first time the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, has had a chance, since being elected in 2008 as an MLA, to bring forward a private member's bill.

At every step this government seems to be undermining our democratic institutions and the ability to even debate those bills that are brought forward by private members. Let's be clear, Madam Speaker, that we could hear spirited discussion about the nature of the provisions of Bill 203 – what's good, what's bad, what could be improved – and amendments could be proposed. I know that the members on this side of the House would be welcoming in hearing those amendments. Those are the opportunities that this legislative process affords us. Yet for some reason this government is so afraid of any true democratic engagement and even the consideration of ideas from others – well, anybody other than, in fact, even just the cabinet members, because it's well established by now that members of the backbench of the government don't have their voice heard either. So, really, it's only those core 20-odd people in cabinet who appear to have any say over any legislation that's considered by this House.

I want to speak to Bill 203 and just – you know, I was looking over some of the considerations that were made by the committee members when looking at Bill 203. There are not many situations, Madam Speaker, where I and the Member for Banff-Kananaskis are in agreement, but I noted a comment that she made in debate on this bill that I actually very much agreed with. I believe, when considering it at committee, the Member for Banff-Kananaskis said: "I think there are several of us who are quite intrigued by the concept of this bill. I think it's the most Albertan concept ever if it can be executed properly, allowing good-hearted people to invest in good-hearted, homegrown companies."

Madam Speaker, that is actually precisely what this bill is about. It actually capitalizes on what Albertans do best, which is that we are risk takers, we are innovative, we are creative, and we take leaps forward on things that sometimes other people in other provinces don't. It's the reason why our oil and gas industry has been so successful; it's because people took risks. People took risks in innovation, and they took risks in terms of technology. They did that, and that's what, apparently, is very strong about Alberta. So why would the government members of this House not want to support even the debate of a bill that does precisely that?

Let's be clear. Bill 203 would have established the Alberta technology venture capital fund under the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, and this fund would do what we've heard members of the government talk about. We want to encourage venture capital. We want to encourage start-ups. We want to encourage that innovation. What it would do is that it would allow Albertans to invest a small amount that, you know, could be manageable by an individual Albertan who maybe is not able to make big investments

in other start-ups, but they could contribute in a small way to make an investment into an Alberta company. It's a win-win in that Albertans could invest their own dollars and see potentially great reward, but they're also investing it in Alberta companies.

Those two things are things that I would think there should be agreement in this House that we want to support. It appears that that's something that the government claims they want more of, venture capital. They want more investment in tech. We've heard the Premier and the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation, you know, talk about, with big, loud voices, how Alberta has got its swagger back, but when they're given a good idea, which even members of the government caucus agreed were good ideas, to actually create this venture capital fund, which would allow individual Albertans to invest in Alberta companies, they say no.

There are two reasons. There are the reasons on paper that they say no, and then there is the other reason. We'll get to that. The reason on paper that they say no is, shockingly, because they thought it was too risky for Albertans. First of all, there are no taxpayer funds involved in this, so it's not a risk of taxpayer funds; it's individual Albertans making their decisions about how they want to invest their dollars. To say that Albertans can't be trusted with making potentially risky but also potentially innovative decisions about how to invest their dollars: I am shocked to hear government members say that. Why don't they trust Albertans to be able to make really strong and creative and groundbreaking investment ideas? Isn't that the basis of enabling business and breaking down red tape and trying to encourage and attract investment in business?

It's harbouring that kind of risk taking. Of course, any time there's an investment in a start-up, there's risk involved. Nobody is trying to hide that or belittle that. Certainly, those Albertans who are deciding to invest in this would be – I believe it was part of the bill that there'd be education about this so that they would understand what their investment is going towards. I can't believe that the government, this government, doesn't trust Albertans to be investors. It's quite shocking, Madam Speaker, actually. That's their reason on paper, that for some reason all of a sudden they want to make business decisions for Albertans. They know better, and they're worried about Albertans' ability to make those decisions about when to invest in a venture capital fund.

The other reason is simply because this government can't conceive of any idea other than that coming forward from the 20 people in their cabinet. Maybe it's 20. Is it more than 20 now? I can't even remember. Who could keep up? There are so many associate ministers. Is it 24? Any time there's somebody who they need to make happy, they get an associate minister job. Yeah. I think there are quite a few. I think – what is it? – two-thirds of Calgary MLAs now have a cabinet position of some kind. It must be a little bit frustrating for all the rest of their caucus. In any event, anybody other than those 20 people, 24 people, in cabinet who get to actually put forward bills: nobody else seems to have a good idea that's heard by this government, certainly not members of the opposition.

Again, as I said in my earlier comments, Madam Speaker, you know, this is only about debating a bill, right? We're not even actually supposed to be discussing the substance of the bill right now; we're just supposed to be talking about whether or not it should be heard for debate in this space. Why would the government caucus be so opposed to debating this bill in the Legislature? Is it because they don't want Albertans to hear that they don't trust them with being investors? They don't trust them in making investment decisions? That's a shocking position. I mean, it is their position, apparently, if you look at the committee. That is their position. Maybe they're hoping that nobody reads committee transcripts, and maybe I'm the only one who does.

They're trying to avoid having that debate here in this Chamber, but ultimately this is a good-idea bill, and we can talk about how to make it better, how to change it, how to mitigate some of those risks, perhaps. That could be done within the process that this Chamber set up to do, which is to debate a bill, make amendments. I don't know if it's laziness about not wanting to do the work, or is it that they just don't want to contemplate good ideas if they don't come from that front bench? That's certainly what it feels like on this side of the House but certainly what it feels like to Albertans who see that not one single private member's bill from the opposition MLAs has been brought forward.

I will say once again, Madam Speaker, that when we were in government, there were a number of private members' bills brought forward by at that time opposition members that not only got to see the light of day for debate but were passed in this House with the support of government members. Yet this House is so afraid of the opposition, of anybody in their backbench, that we don't even debate bills in this space anymore. As a private member myself I find that deeply discouraging, but all Albertans should also find it deeply worrying, because there is a blanket of silence that this government places on anybody except for those 20 people.

4:30

I think Albertans are getting sick of it. I know they're getting sick of it, Madam Speaker. I know I certainly am. So I look forward to an opportunity where private members in this House have the opportunity to bring forward bills with good ideas – it doesn't matter where it comes from – to represent their constituents, local issues, local ideas, issues that may affect people all over this province. Nobody has a right to the good ideas. They come from all of us. We have a right in this limited time, this limited space in this Chamber to actually hear those.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate? I'm seeing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to this bill. It's disappointing that the government is shutting down debate on this bill, especially because of the ideas of this bill. The two things it would do is that it would create or legislate a technology innovation advisory council to the minister, which is what industry is asking for, and two, it would create a venture fund and unlock, well, hundreds of thousands, potentially, of Albertans to be able to invest millions.

Honestly, I think this fund could have easily surpassed \$1 billion, so unleashing \$1 billion of private capital into Alberta start-ups and companies looking to grow. I promise you, Madam Speaker, that that would have turned the heads of investors, venture capitalists around the world. Silicon Valley would have been looking at Alberta and asking: what is going on there? You know, the minister talks about Alberta by 2030 leading the country in venture capital investment. This bill would have helped the minister and this government deliver on that commitment.

Now, I'll talk about the merits of the bill and, you know, why the government should reverse their decision, but I also want to talk about the different steps that brought us here today. I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that when I first introduced the bill, I had a number of UCP MLAs reach out to me to get together to ask questions about the bill. They were intrigued by the idea. They had some concerns. We talked them through. I'm not going to out the members to their own party, but I appreciated the fact that they were able to set aside partisan differences to say: "This idea is intriguing. Let's learn a little bit more about it."

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that the ideas for this bill came from industry. So when I say that I'm disappointed in the government's actions, you know who's more disappointed in the government? The very entrepreneurs and businesspeople of Alberta who were asking for this. This is not an NDP idea. It's not a UCP idea. It doesn't belong to a political party. Quite frankly, the fact that the government – and, again, it's the government. It's not the private members of the UCP. It's the government that has decided that this bill should not even be debated because it came from the NDP.

Madam Speaker, that is precisely what is wrong with this place. The state of Alberta politics is in really bad shape. The fact is that Albertans elected all of us – it doesn't matter which party you belong to – to come to the Legislature to represent them, to debate policy, to bring forward good ideas, ideas that are meant to be improved through the role of the opposition, which is why we have Committee of the Whole and the ability to amend legislation to make it better, because nobody has a monopoly on good ideas.

On this bill, as I made clear in both committee meetings, I am open to amendments from the government. If the government points out issues or flaws or shortcomings with this piece of legislation, I am happy to accept amendments, and I'm happy to share this as a win for Alberta. I said that to the UCP members that I spoke with and in the committee, and I mean that sincerely, Madam Speaker.

I'm not playing politics with this bill. It's a phenomenal idea that would help diversify the economy and grow Alberta businesses at a pace much quicker than the track that we're on right now. The beauty of this bill is that it is private dollars being invested. There are no government tax dollars.

Now, Madam Speaker, I can tell you and the Chamber and Albertans that I've been consulting on this concept for about six years now. I've spoken with dozens of venture capitalists, from some of the biggest names in the province to new and smaller VCs. I've spoken with entrepreneurs. I've spoken with small businesses in every sector.

The beauty about this bill, Madam Speaker, is that it would have supported the energy sector, the agricultural sector, life sciences, forestry, artificial intelligence. It would have improved and supported companies from every sector. Again, arguments of picking winners and losers don't apply.

Madam Speaker, the other disappointment with this is that, you know, again, we were all elected to this place to perform different roles, and the opposition, under the leadership of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, have made it abundantly clear that we will not just be an opposition that criticizes or critiques. We will also be one that proposes ideas. We want to be propositional, and I honestly believe that that's what Albertans are looking for.

Here is an example of a bill that was free from any partisan language, and the purpose of that, Madam Speaker, was to debate the concept of the bill and not to go back and forth, which sometimes occurs in this Chamber. The bill – here's the exciting part – was modelled on a fund that was created under a former PC Premier, Ernest Manning, who initiated the Great Canadian Oil Sands project.

That project helped unlock Alberta's potential in our oil and gas. It gave Albertans the ability to invest collectively, reducing risk. Instead of an Albertan having to go out and research all the different start-up oil and gas companies, they could invest in a fund that would go and do that due diligence for them. It had nothing to do with government. It was arm's length. They brought in industry experts to evaluate industry, which is how it should be done. And those investments, Madam Speaker, were the equivalent of about \$13,000 today, the amount that they were able to invest.

If you take that \$13,000 and you apply it to, say, 100,000 Albertans, you now have a \$1.3 billion fund. And I'll remind folks that Alberta's population under Premier Ernest Manning was much smaller than today. I mean, I can only imagine a fund being past a billion, maybe past \$2 billion. That would act as the magnet that everyone is looking for or hoping that Alberta will be for venture capital for companies.

We would have companies relocating from across the country and around the globe to participate in this kind of fund. We would give Alberta companies a competitive advantage over every other company globally. That opportunity is in jeopardy in this moment.

You know, Madam Speaker, what was frustrating for me was the fact that both parties were given the ability to invite stakeholders to speak on this bill, and I was ready for a stakeholder to come and maybe present, you know: is this the best idea? Now, I will tell you that in all of my consultations over the past six years I never had a single industry expert speak against this. Some had concerns, which we spoke through, which we talked through, as far as: how do you ensure that you set this up so that it's arm's length, and how do we ensure that it's not government picking the companies? We worked hard to do that.

4:40

Madam Speaker, I know my time is running short, but I want to use my last minute to thank a number of people who helped me on this bill. First and foremost, I want to thank the very stakeholders. We had two, Aaryn Flynn and Trent Johnsen, who came to the committee meeting to speak in favour of this bill. My third stakeholder was Brad Zumwalt, who was prepared to speak but had trouble connecting. And dozens and dozens of other stakeholders provided input into this bill and actually are disappointed because they were hoping – hoping – that for once we could set aside partisan differences, share the stage, and bring forward and pass legislation that would benefit Albertans.

I also want to thank our policy staff's Jan-Niklas, who did an incredible job helping me write this, and a shout-out to Parliamentary Counsel and Trafton for helping me to write this bill. As government we will bring this forward.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to the debate on concurrence on Bill 203. I will be voting against the recommendation from the committee seeking to deny this private member's bill even the opportunity for fair and open debate on the floor of the Legislature. I think my colleagues have pretty ably laid out our concerns with this new process, this additional red tape that this government decided to put in place around how private members' bills are presented, a drastic change from how that's been done for decades here in the province of Alberta.

I see the Minister of Municipal Affairs across the way. Certainly, he presided in a number of governments in which they allowed private members' business to proceed in a way that gave fair and open debate to every single bill. But he sits with a government now, Madam Speaker, that is looking to use mechanisms behind closed doors to silence anyone that they deem not worthy of making their voice heard on behalf of their constituents and on behalf of Albertans in this Legislature.

My colleagues have noted how rare it is to be chosen for a private member's bill, what a privilege it is as a member to have that opportunity. I can speak from my own experience at the amount of work it takes to sit down, consult on a bill, to draft, do that work,

the effort, talking with stakeholders, the excitement you feel at putting forward something that you truly believe would be good policy that could make a difference in this province. And I can think of no other word, Madam Speaker, than "contempt" for how this government approaches this process and the members of the opposition.

I recognize that we don't give them an easy time. I don't believe that's my job as a member of the opposition. I certainly try not to be any more disingenuous than the Premier himself or the members across the way in their attacks on us, either when we were in government or certainly as they continue now in government. But it is disappointing that on a bill like Bill 203, which has no partisanship attached – none, Madam Speaker. I've never heard the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, in presenting this bill, in bringing it forward, use it as an opportunity to attack and criticize this government despite many stumbles that it had in regard to tech and innovation in the province of Alberta.

Now, eventually, Madam Speaker, they did come around. You know, we had a change in the minister of economic development and trade, and certainly we saw an improvement after that, where he began to awaken to the importance of the tech and innovation sector in the province of Alberta, and we've seen much more positive engagement in policy, for instance. But the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview did not reference any of that. He simply brought forward a bill from his consultation with these stakeholders.

And let's be clear. He has built some excellent relationships – and he continues those relationships – with CEOs, innovators, entrepreneurs across the province of Alberta who are working in this sector, who respect the work of that member because of his engagement and his willingness to take actions and invoke policy that was brought forward from them, from the community, during his time as minister and again now as the critic. We hear from these government members complaining about how we as opposition criticize too much, but, Madam Speaker, when we bring forward real proposals with no partisanship attached, we're met with contempt and dismissal.

On the bill itself, as a representative for Edmonton-City Centre I certainly recognize the incredible importance of the tech and innovation sector. You know, it was back in 2019, around the time that this government ended and cancelled every credit that was available to support tech and innovation, including the SRED credit, which was a national credit, Madam Speaker. Every single province in Canada provided that credit; this government ended it.

In that year, this report was brought forward, from the Edmonton Downtown Business Association, called Accelerating Tech in Downtown Edmonton: Impacts and Opportunities. They talked about how Edmonton, at that time, was home to 394 tech companies – we know it's more today – the majority of them located here in my constituency in the downtown core. They noted that supporting and attracting more would take a major shift in mindset. They noted that of those 394 tech companies at the time, 44 per cent were considered start-ups, companies that could potentially grow into major companies with the right support and resources. As of 2018 there were just under 30,000 tech employees in Edmonton. We know there are more today. The number of employees in that sector had grown by 26 per cent over the previous five years, and the report showed that 65 per cent of Edmonton tech companies were looking for funding.

Now, I have great admiration for those who work in the tech and innovation sector, particularly in start-ups. Madam Speaker, it is the very definition of hustle. These are folks who have an idea, work with a very small team to build that idea out, have endless numbers of meetings with potential funders, work, on a shoestring, long hours,

often getting by on their savings while they develop an idea that they had. Funding is absolutely core to the opportunity to develop these technologies, these ideas, and the incredible economic benefits that come when those companies are able to succeed.

That's why we introduced things like the Alberta innovation tax credit, which is a credit that is available in many provinces across Canada to help support investment in Alberta tech and innovation companies. It has been incredibly successful in many jurisdictions; it was incredibly successful here. Same for the interactive digital media tax credit. These are proven policies and principles, and they are essential, again, to helping these companies grow. Indeed, there are hundreds more jobs here in Edmonton-City Centre because of those credits, because of those actions that helped support companies in their growth. There are companies that were start-ups four years ago that are now beginning to thrive and expand because they had access to that support here in my constituency.

The proposal from the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to create the Alberta venture fund is another potential tool in that tool box. It would be another way to support these start-ups, these companies as they are beginning, Madam Speaker, because these companies do not benefit from the steps that this government is proud of taking to stimulate the economy. They do not benefit from the corporate tax cut because they are not yet making a profit. They don't benefit from many of the steps that this government has taken. They would absolutely potentially benefit from an Alberta venture fund.

Indeed, some of the very folks who are the experts in supporting start-ups, in growing the tech and innovation system, folks like the gentleman from the A100 – Aaryn Flynn, one of the founders of BioWare, part of the A100, a group of investors across the province of Alberta who have an expertise in this field, spoke in support of this bill. He sat and he answered questions from members of government. He provided many compelling arguments that were summarily dismissed.

4:50

It is clear, Madam Speaker – and it is incredibly unfortunate – that no matter how good an idea, no matter how nonpartisan it may be, it is the intent of this government and its members on that committee to never allow any opposition bill the opportunity to have fair and open debate on the floor of the Legislature. That is deeply unfortunate.

You know, one of the arguments these members brought forward at committee – and it's interesting to me that not a single government member is rising in this House today to speak to this bill. I hope that's not because none of them have bothered to take a look at it. I hope it's not that none of them feel that it is worth speaking to Albertans about this bill. Not one has. But at the committee they brought forward a somewhat disingenuous argument, pointing to an investment fund in Manitoba that had not been successful, that had been government run, very different, Madam Speaker, from this particular bill, which risks not a single public dollar. Let's be clear on that. This is a government that was very happy . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak against this committee's recommendation that the bill not proceed. You know, I will echo some of the comments made by my colleagues, and they're absolutely right. That failure of all of us here to ensure that we open a path so that we can debate legislation, private member bills – we all know that

we don't have many opportunities to do that, but it's incredibly problematic today.

But it's actually not surprising, Madam Speaker. I'm sure you'll know that this is just a history. This is just the way that it's gone for this particular government. They are completely focused on themselves. They don't listen to Albertans. They certainly don't listen to good ideas from the opposition, because it's this governing party that believes that they know best about everything, and they actually don't. They've demonstrated that over and over and over again, yet they are still unwilling to let a debate proceed, a debate on a piece of legislation where the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has talked about the depth of consultation that has gone on for, I believe, six years, he said.

There was some interest and some support from members of the committee. Suddenly that changed. What changed? You know, it's funny. It's hilarious to me, in a really sad way, that we can hear – we saw some reporting recently. I think it was eight UCP MLAs that were willing to go on the record and talk about their leader and corruption that we all know exists in this particular party and talk about the internal problems. They're sure brave when it comes to saying things like that, but they are not brave enough to go against instructions and stand up and pave the way for a private member bill to be debated in this Chamber. That's why we're here. We all have different points of view. We all have different ideas, and the fact that all of them are standing together to deny an opportunity to debate this private member bill is incredibly problematic. It's incredibly disappointing.

You know, it's not surprising, though, because this has been years now of just chipping away at democracy. They can laugh. They can heckle, whatever they want, but it's happening. We saw it over and over again. We see even threats that standing orders will be changed if the person in charge doesn't like it. I hope that is not the case. You know, we saw at the very beginning of this government's mandate, we saw them fire the Election Commissioner, the independent Election Commissioner, that was investigating. That was a chipping away of democracy. We saw standing orders changed to actually limit all kinds of things that had not been limited before.

As we all know, we all have an opportunity or chance to have a private member bill come to this place so that we can debate it. The chances of us getting a number that actually helps is slim to none. Nevertheless, we participate in this lottery, and we hope that, in good faith, all 87 members of this place will actually take a fair look at the piece of legislation and then decide accordingly whether or not it deserves the time and space to be debated in this place. I think that just reading the legislation, even comments from some of the committee members, it is clear that this piece of legislation is that, as are the other two that have come up in debate this afternoon, the Anti-Racism as well as the Eastern Slopes Protection acts.

It is incredibly disappointing – incredibly disappointing – Madam Speaker, that members in this place that claim to have the best interests of Albertans at heart refuse to hear from members that are not part of their political party, even when we have good ideas, because they are too focused on what is good for them. That is called self-serving, and this is what this government is. It is absolutely self-serving. The interest of themselves is number one, not what's best for Albertans, not at all.

With that, Madam Speaker, I am going to take my seat.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members that wish to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for concurrence carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:56 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|---------|----------|----------|
| Amery | LaGrange | Schow |
| Copping | Long | Schulz |
| Fir | McIver | Singh |
| Frey | Nally | Stephan |
| Horner | Neudorf | Toews |
| Hunter | Orr | Toor |
| Issik | Panda | Turton |
| Jean | Pon | Williams |
| Jones | Savage | Yaseen |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------|--------|----------|
| Bilous | Irwin | Shepherd |
| Ganley | Renaud | |

| | | |
|---------|----------|-------------|
| Totals: | For – 27 | Against – 5 |
|---------|----------|-------------|

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Alberta and Canadian Federation

505. Mr. Barnes moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to deploy every legal, economic, and constitutional tool at the province's disposal to maximize its ability to achieve a fair deal for Alberta within the Canadian federation.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my honour and privilege to rise and introduce to this Assembly Motion 505. The motion is as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to deploy every legal, economic, and constitutional tool at the province's disposal to maximize its ability to achieve a fair deal for Alberta within the Canadian federation.

Madam Speaker, now, you may wonder why I chose to read the text of the motion aloud to you when you all have a copy of it readily available. Well, I am happy to explain. Renowned poet and writer T.S. Eliot once said: good writers borrow; great writers steal. I wish I could take credit for the text of this motion, but I can't. The motion is based on a quote taken directly from the Premier, from the Premier's speech to United Conservative Party members at the 2019 annual general meeting. You see, back then the Premier said that he had a plan to win a fair deal from Ottawa, a plan that would go beyond sending semiregular angry letters to the federal government. If he did have a real plan for real action, Albertans have yet to see it.

The purpose of this motion is twofold: first, it is to serve notice to Justin Trudeau that the days of elbow-bump diplomacy between himself and his good friend in Alberta have come to an end; second, it is to remind the Premier that his first duty is not to the federal government nor to corporate donors and their lobbyists and certainly not to international billionaires and celebrities trying to cram untested economic experiments down our throats. Whether the Premier likes it or not, his first duty is to Albertans.

About every six months or so this Premier has attempted to delay action and shift blame for his lack of progress in fighting for us and our families for a fair deal. The reason is self-evident. There simply has been no progress to speak of. He has not been able to secure changes to Trudeau's Bill C-69, the no-more-pipelines bill, which are necessary for our province to realize the full potential of its provincially owned resources and its great, hard-working people. All this Premier's so-called soft diplomacy has not prompted the removal of Bill C-48, the anti-Alberta tanker ban. Madam Speaker, the federal carbon tax has not been eliminated; indeed, it's even being steadily increased. The Premier has failed to negotiate the elimination of the cap to the fiscal stabilization program also, and maybe most importantly there have been no changes to the equalization program. In fact, there's been virtually no movement on this file whatsoever.

These are the five key issues that matter most to Albertans when it comes to obtaining a fair deal for our province, and the last one, equalization, is particularly important. Last October Albertans even voted 61.7 per cent in favour of removing equalization from the Constitution. In addition, this Assembly then provided a motion recognizing the results of this referendum. Madam Speaker, when it comes to fighting for a fair deal, Albertans have done their part. First, they elected this government. Then they approved the referendum. When it comes to recognizing the democratically expressed wishes of the public, this Assembly has also done its part. It's the Premier who has not, and while he constantly attempts to pass the buck and shift the blame for his lack of progress, Albertans know exactly who is to blame.

You see, shortly after the 2019 election this Premier appointed himself as Minister of Intergovernmental Relations. Fighting for a fair deal isn't somebody else's job; it's his job, and he has achieved nothing. In the private sector such failure to achieve results would be cause for immediate dismissal, cause to be sacked. In fact, this Premier has even fired ministers for much less.

With Motion 505 I am offering this Assembly an opportunity to remind this Premier of the promises he has made and his complete failure to deliver on these promises, but more importantly I'm offering you an opportunity – all of you an opportunity – to speak out for your constituents. It is not acceptable for this government to further delay or deny the democratically expressed wishes of both Albertans and this Assembly.

Unfortunately, this has become a habit for the gang of elitists running this government. Now, need I remind you that this cabinet under this Premier has delayed implementing the Citizen Initiative Act? This Legislature should immediately reform the Citizen Initiative Act by adopting my amendment from last year to make it possible for Albertans to have a referendum on independence, to hold Ottawa accountable, to give us a fair deal since this Premier is too much of an avowed federalist to get that job done.

They also delayed implementing recall. They also delayed implementing the opt-in provisions that would allow union members to avoid contributing to union-backed political campaigns. Now they're trying to run out the clock on defending Albertans' interests when it comes to fighting for a fair deal. They even scoff at their own party's policy on these issues and disregard the democratically expressed wishes of this Assembly.

Madam Speaker, enough is enough. For far too long the executive branch of this government has run roughshod over the legislative branch, and it has to stop. If you want to send a message to this government, colleagues, I am offering you a great place to start. I ask you to support my Motion 505.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by Brooks-Medicine Hat.

5:20

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I stand and speak in support of Motion 505, proposed by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, who is a principled conservative whom I respect and consider a friend. His motion deserves more attention than it receives. Many Albertans are concerned that we are sleepwalking into a disaster. It is time to raise voices of warning and to prepare. I am concerned that it may be too late.

Canada is spending itself into oblivion, threatening to drag Alberta down with it. Sticking one's head into the sand does not alter inconvenient realities. Alberta is regularly attacked by policies of economic self-destruction, undermining the capacity of Alberta businesses and families to provide for themselves and others. Why are we having to succeed in spite of Ottawa and not because of it? What does Ottawa do for Alberta? Madam Speaker, they are too expensive.

Madam Speaker, we need to protect ourselves. Alberta businesses and families should not be subject to unprincipled federal politicians who have demonstrated that they will not hesitate to attack the livelihoods of Alberta businesses and families to further their political ambitions for power. The fact that Alberta can be continually subject to plunder and attack from unprincipled politicians like Trudeau is proof positive that Albertans are suffering under a rigged partnership arrangement. There are deep structural issues in this so-called fiscal federation, federalism, which are bigger and transcend Canada being afflicted by the worst Prime Minister in Canadian history, aided and abetted by a destructive Liberal-NDP axis.

Albertans need to understand that the NDP will do nothing for them. Parasitic policies and plunder are their stock and trade. That is their world. How can they speak against it? Like the NDP, we need to accept the reality that the majority of politicians in Canada will do little or nothing to assist Alberta to get a fair treatment from this rigged arrangement that they politically benefit under. In fact, the Premier of Quebec has said that one of his favourite things about Canada is equalization. Madam Speaker, politicians like him are not going to help. They will hinder and oppose.

So, Madam Speaker, we are compelled to take matters into our own hands. How do we free ourselves as hosts of parasitic laws and Trojan Horses? How do we free Alberta businesses and families? The less Alberta needs Ottawa, the more leverage Alberta has, but Ottawa will resist efforts to need them less. It reduces their power.

Many Albertans rightfully ask: what true progress has been made to need Ottawa less? Madam Speaker, it is not enough to compare ourselves to a useless NDP. We need to be better. Here's an example. It was estimated that CPP contributions by Alberta businesses and families were about \$3 billion more annually than benefits paid to Alberta retirees, but since 2019 Trudeau has been jacking up CPP taxes so that this annual transfer from Albertans is now in excess of \$4 billion. This year alone maximum CPP costs increased over 10 per cent.

Madam Speaker, this is crazy. Under an Alberta pension plan, without Alberta being forced to produce billions in subsidies, rates for Alberta businesses and workers could be the lowest in Canada while maintaining retiree benefits. This could produce a game-changing competitive advantage, supporting businesses to hire more employees, with Alberta workers taking home more money. It is inexplicable to me that we are not getting out of the CPP, which every year is ripping off Alberta businesses and workers more and more, billions upon billions every year. Why are we not stopping it? The NDP do not get it. They never will. But in the private sector, in the real world, we would never stand for it. This is unacceptable.

What is our moral authority to hold Ottawa accountable if we fail to do our part? A requirement for fairness needs to be founded on principle. Alberta needs great self-reliance to free ourselves from hostile interference and insulate ourselves and our children from a looming \$1 trillion plus fiscal train wreck.

I support the motion of the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. Alberta must deploy every legal, economic, and constitutional tool to achieve a fair deal for Alberta. Albertans are tiring of overpromising and underdelivering. Less talk, more show. Trust is earned as one's actions are consistent with one's words.

In closing, Alberta is a land of prosperity. It is a land of opportunity. It is a land of freedom. We must be vigilant to keep it that way.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to join the debate under Motions Other than Government Motions on private member's Motion 505 from my colleague and, truth be told, one of my favourite people, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, who I also consider a very dear friend. I am very happy to be supporting private member's Motion 505. I totally agree. We are in a situation where every day it seems like another Albertan is coming up to me and saying, you know, how unfair of a deal we have in the federation and how much we need to do to change that.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to report, though, that I am proud of the progress that our government has made on this file. The Fair Deal Panel released a myriad of recommendations, and I'm happy to see that so much work has been done.

On a personal level, I was very proud to be involved with the Alberta firearms advisory council, chairing that as well as making sure that we appointed Alberta's provincial Chief Firearms Officer. Teri Bryant is the new Alberta provincial Chief Firearms Officer. She's from Calgary. She is a sports shooter and advocate, really everything you can possibly dream of when it comes to a Chief Firearms Officer. She's truly incredible, Madam Speaker.

I know that there were many people who were concerned about this office and the time it took to get it set up. So just for the record what was going on was that in other provinces where they had appointed a provincial chief firearms officer, it kind of – the cart came before the horse. We needed to make sure that we had the office set up, that the backlogs were cleared, that we had the ability to let her hit the ground running as soon as she started. So just a shout-out to Teri and all of those who work in the provincial chief firearms office, to Marlin Degrand at Justice, and to everyone else because they are truly fantastic people.

We also had recommendation 2, which was to “proceed with the proposed referendum on equalization, asking a clear question along the lines of” and then, of course, the question on equalization. Of course, we know that Albertans voted resoundingly to scrap equalization from the Constitution. So that's done. We have a clear mandate from Albertans, and we're happy to move forward with that.

5:30

Recommendation 21 – just a couple of highlights here – “vigorously pursue access to markets for Alberta's [resources].” This one's really exciting, Madam Speaker, because just last week or maybe two weeks ago we had Senator Joe Manchin up here in Alberta, and for the very first time an Alberta Premier has been asked to testify before the United States Committee on Natural

Resources. This committee is obviously very widely broadcast. It's obviously very important. The Premier will be taking a delegation down to Washington to fight for Alberta's resources and to really put us on the map. Alberta has a great reputation world-wide for our natural resources, and I am very proud to see Alberta leading the way on advocacy and our government being in front of that because we know that governments prior had been doing everything they can to block Alberta's resources. It's time that we stood up for that, and if the federal government is not going to do it, then, by golly, Alberta should.

We're also making significant progress on TMX. We fought to keep line 5 open. We know that the governor of that state – I believe it was Minnesota if I'm correct – was asking for that to be shut down, and we had done the hard work to make sure that it stayed open. We are at all-time record exports of Alberta oil right now, Madam Speaker. Drilling activity is up. Jobs are up. It's really fantastic news for Alberta.

We've also had democratic tools such as referendum and citizens' initiative referendum. We passed those bills. They've come into force, much to the dismay of the NDP. We have held Senate elections, Madam Speaker, and three fantastic Albertans were nominated by Albertans to be recommended to go to the Senate. Now, I'm not going to hold my breath waiting for Justin Trudeau to appoint these fantastic people, but I sure can hope. I guess hope is going to have to be a strategy in this one because we have to make sure that Justin Trudeau knows that it's not okay to sit on your hands when there are democratically elected, competent individuals waiting to take their seats in the Senate.

We are also continuing to challenge federal legislation that impacts Alberta. We're currently in court fighting C-69 – that's the no-more-pipelines law – and we're working to support First Nations who are opposing C-48. So C-48 is a tanker ban, and we know that the Prime Minister has been, in a word, hypocritical about this as he's allowed tankers on other coasts but just not in this instance.

I already spoke about the Chief Firearms Officer, but I'll plug it again just because that is a really big deal for Alberta.

We also have the recommendation that I heard the hon. member touch on, which is “a comprehensive plan to create an Alberta Pension Plan.” I will say, Madam Speaker, just as a point here – I know you'll be excited about this – that AIMCo just released some really great numbers. We have Alberta's investment management company. I think it was close to 14 per cent. It was a banner year. It was a record year for AIMCo. That is really fantastic news if the work is done to pull Albertans out of CPP.

We know that we need every tool at our disposal to make sure that Albertans are getting a fair deal from the federation, that the Prime Minister knows that we mean business. Of course, we are in a situation where in Confederation we are – you know, of course, there is a division of power, but what we need to do is fight back when that division of power is stepped upon.

We have seen the federal government encroach on the lives of private citizens through things like the use of the Emergencies Act. We stood up for Albertans against the Emergencies Act with government motions calling on them to stop what they were doing. We've stood up against federal travel mandates. We have continued to fight for Albertans and their rights and their freedoms.

I'm really also excited to say that, you know, we are continuing this work on the Alberta provincial police force. While there are many thoughts out there, I know that in some of the more remote and rural areas of my riding there are many people who are concerned with the response times of the RCMP and have a real issue with rural crime. Of course, those of us who live in cities, who have police a maximum of five minutes away, don't have quite the same issues, Madam Speaker, but it's high time that we listened to rural communities and we listened to those people who live in some

of the more remote regions of our province and give them the access to policing that they deserve.

Those studies are still under way, and we'll make sure that we are making a pragmatic decision on that. We can't just, of course, be the first ones to move and do whatever we want just because it's what we want to do. We have to make sure that the proper due diligence is done and process is followed so that we know that Albertans are getting the best deal possible.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would like to hand the floor off to another hon. colleague, but I just wanted to once again thank the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for his relentless advocacy for a fair deal as well as for giving me the opportunity to speak to such an important issue today.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre, followed by Central Peace-Notley.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Motion 505, resolving “that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to deploy every legal, economic, and constitutional tool at the province's disposal to maximize its ability to achieve a fair deal for Alberta within the Canadian federation.” I think that all MLAs in this Assembly today will support this motion. I mean, after all, how could we not? It seems pretty obvious that our province should be strategic in our dealings with other provinces and with the federal government. It makes perfect sense that in doing so, we would deploy every legal, economic, and constitutional tool at our disposal to achieve those strategic objectives. So I think I and likely all my colleagues in the Official Opposition will support the motion.

But I think it's very important to be clear that there is considerable breadth in considering: what are the strategic objectives on the part of the people of Alberta, and what tools achieve those for the people of Alberta without doing harm to the people of Alberta? Certainly, I'd say that we in the Official Opposition and many Albertans have a sharp disagreement with this UCP government on what constitutes Alberta's strategic objectives and priorities and some of the means by which they go about seeking to achieve them. I think a real government would see that ensuring we get the best deal possible involves diplomacy, partnership, strength of purpose, certainly, at certain points, economic linkages, strategic political advocacy, but unfortunately what we often have, I believe, with this government is playing childish games, empty posturing, shaking the fist while looking east.

As a result, we haven't gotten much for Albertans, and indeed many of the proposals this government has supposedly to fight for Albertans would do Albertans further harm. Just think about the \$1.3 billion that this government chose to waste on a pipeline to nowhere because they couldn't manage to do their job of actual advocacy to get that over the hill. That's one good example. They could have worked to build allies across the country. They could have worked to advocate hard south of the border. They could have avoided insulting key elected officials who were involved in that. But no; instead, they gambled \$1.3 billion of Albertans' money, and those dollars are lost.

In other instances we've seen failed stunts that have had a real negative impact locally cause a lot of concern for Albertans. For example, some of the members have spoken about the fair deal report and one of the proposals in there replacing the RCMP with an Alberta provincial police force. Now, to be clear, even that report showed that there was very little support from actual Albertans for that proposal, Madam Speaker, and indeed we continue to hear loud and clear from Albertans that they do not want that. They don't. All Albertans have learned just how expensive that endeavour would be. We'd be looking at spending at least \$366 million in transition

costs alone, borne by the taxpayers in Alberta, and even more concerning, with an APP we would lose \$170 million in funding every year from Ottawa.

Simply put, over the mandate of one government Alberta would spend over \$1 billion of our tax dollars on an initiative that, to be clear, taxpayers, municipalities, folks across the province, a majority of individuals have said they do not want. The fair deal report, as I said, shows that two-thirds – two-thirds; 66 per cent – of Albertans do not support an APP. They are dead set against it. You know, the Member for Red Deer-South talked about unprincipled politicians who do damage to working people as part of their own pursuit of power. What an apt description of this government's mindless pursuit of an Alberta provincial police force. Indeed, I think that as Albertans hear more and more about that, they like it less and less.

As I said, Madam Speaker, we are working to listen to Albertans. Albertans want their government to act strategically, absolutely. They certainly want a better deal in Confederation, but they don't support the agenda of this Premier when he tries to wrap himself in that flag. His priorities are not the priorities of Albertans. That has been made abundantly clear on a wide swath of issues.

5:40

Another example: leaving the CPP. Now, I recognize that the Member for Red Deer-South spoke very much in favour of this policy, but again, a vast majority of Albertans, tens of thousands, have written to us on this proposal, and the message has been very clear: hands off my pension. They do not want it seized by this government. They do not trust it in the hands of this Premier, yet this government continues to dangle that out there. That is not negotiation on behalf of the people of Alberta, because the people of Alberta have been very clear that they do not want it. They do not trust it. And, hey, there are many fair criticisms to make about Ottawa, the current government, without question. But let's be clear. One of the things that works best in this country is the CPP. Albertans rely on it; they trust it. They do not trust this Premier or this government or those members who continue to push for it. They may be speaking for a vocal minority, but the majority of Albertans are opposed. So the message is clear: this government should keep their hands to themselves, keep them away from Alberta's CPP.

Again, I agree that any government representing the people of Alberta should be acting strategically, should be using the tools and levers at their disposal to act in the best interests of Alberta, to fight for the objectives that Albertans elect them to do. We'll support this motion, but we will not support the objective that this government has of giving up \$170 million a year from Ottawa so the Premier can advance his APP agenda, wave a flag on something that no Albertan – or at least a vast majority of Albertans have been very clear they do not want it.

We will not support giving this Premier or his government control over Albertans' pensions, and we will continue to hold this government to account for attempting to claim that it is standing up for Albertans when they are standing up for themselves, when they are attempting to preserve their own political power, when, as they have on so many issues, whether it's on the coal plan, whether it's on the Alberta pension, whether it's on the Alberta provincial police – APP seems to be a common acronym; I just realized that. But on all of these issues – their curriculum, Madam Speaker – where Albertans have been very, very clear that they do not support this government, we as the opposition will continue to speak out because that also is supporting the best interests of our province and the strategic objectives of Albertans.

I thank the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat for bringing this forward and certainly reminding us of our duty as elected officials. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Pleased to get up today and support the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and his Motion 505. I'll read the motion. "Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to deploy every legal, economic, and constitutional tool at the province's disposal to maximize its ability to achieve a fair deal for Alberta within the Canadian federation." I think this is something that is very important to Albertans, and Albertans overwhelmingly support this. It's good to see that this is coming forward in this Legislature as a motion.

When we look at what the Premier said in the past on this, in the 2019 UCP AGM he stated: our government is prepared to deploy every legal, economic, and constitutional tool at our disposal to maximize our leverage and to win a fair deal for Alberta. I want to point out just a couple of little differences there in words. The motion says, "urge the government to deploy every legal, economic, and constitutional tool," and what the Premier said is: our government is prepared to deploy every legal, economic, and constitutional tool. I think that's maybe a bit of a problem because being prepared to do it and doing it are two completely different things. I think what Albertans want to see is that they want to see action and not a lot more talk about some of these things.

If we look to the fair deal report, that was produced for Albertans, I'm just going to read a couple of them, a couple of the recommendations.

Develop a comprehensive plan to create an Alberta Pension Plan and withdraw from the Canada Pension Plan.

Of course, we've seen absolutely no movement on that.

I'm just going to look at another one.

14. Create an Alberta Police Service to replace the RCMP . . .

18. Opt out of new federal cost-shared programs, subject to Alberta receiving full compensation.

I think we've seen this government opt in on a bunch of different cost-shared programs with the federal government.

Looking down the list:

24. Use democratic tools such as referenda and citizens' initiatives to seek Albertans' guidance on selected Fair Deal Panel proposals and other initiatives.

I think we've seen here where the citizens' initiatives, that was passed, I think, last July, was finally brought into action just a week or so ago. That, I think, is a big failure. Then when we look at the actual bill that brought in the citizens' initiative referendums, we see that the standards to actually make them happen are so high that it is possible that we may never see it actually take place because those standards are so high. So we've seen a lot of failures in the government and this Premier as they've tried to bring – well, they've not only not brought some of these things in, but they've actually created barriers for them to happen.

I wanted to read just a couple more things out of the Fair Deal Panel recommendations. It says:

However, we believe that if the federal government and the rest of Canada do not respond positively and quickly to Albertans' demands for a fair deal, then support for secession will only grow.

I think that's something that we are seeing here in Alberta, that support for secession is growing. A lot of this we can't blame on the federal government. We're not demanding it. We're not asking for it, so the federal government isn't even in a position to respond positively or negatively to what we would like: our demands, Albertans' demands, for a fair deal. Until we put that into action, then I think Albertans will

say: okay. They'll see how the federal government responds. We need to have that happen.

I'll just read one more part out of the Fair Deal Panel recommendations.

How will we know when we have a fair deal for Alberta? In the panel's opinion, we will know when Albertans trust people in Ottawa to act in this province's best interests, and when Alberta's position within the Canadian federation has been equitably reset.

Well, Madam Speaker, I think we can clearly see that there's no trust from Albertans in Ottawa and that it's acting in this province's best interest. I believe that so far we have failed on getting a fair deal for Albertans.

I just want to kind of leave with just one final comment here. This has been said by other people, too, but I just want to repeat it here. If we were in Alberta here right now and we were looking at joining Confederation with Canada at this time and we were offered the deal that we have now, would we take it? I think it's pretty clear that Albertans overwhelmingly would say no. I think that speaks volumes as far as our position right now within Canada and how Albertans view our position in Canada and how we feel that we're being treated. Therefore, I think we need to pass this motion, but then, further, we need to act on this motion and start getting a better deal for Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak to the motion?

Seeing none, I will ask the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to close debate.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and a big thanks to all my colleagues that spoke and for the support for this government using every legal, economic, and constitutional tool at its disposal. Of course, the hon. members for Edmonton-City Centre and Central Peace-Notley talked a lot about empty posturing and not much happening. I want to come back and talk about four failures of this government, but first – and I felt it and I heard it when my colleagues all spoke – this is about our constituents. This is about our families. This is about giving them every opportunity to go to work and reach the full potential that they can and that Alberta can.

5:50

Madam Speaker, what has happened instead is \$650 billion – \$650 billion – has left Alberta since 1961 and gone to Ottawa and been redistributed. What has that gotten us? Sometimes it feels like it's gotten us only abuse. Has that gotten us resource movement? Has that gotten us Northern Gateway, which would get oil and gas to India and China a day quicker or at all? That would go a long, long way to clean the air and, you know, make that more secure for our kids and our grandkids. Has that gotten us Energy East?

One of my hon. colleagues – I think it was Brooks-Medicine Hat – mentioned line 5. Quebec and Ontario and the Maritimes almost lost their energy security because our pipeline has to go through America. Alberta put all those opportunities out there for energy security for the country of Canada, and it was met with a lack of respect.

This government has, so far from doing everything, the big failures. The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre mentioned the \$1.3 billion lost in an empty pipeline, Keystone. Oil by rail: the previous government puts \$2 billion in oil by rail; the UCP government spends more than \$2 billion to get rid of it, claiming that that saved us \$400 million. The poor Alberta taxpayer, because of being landlocked by Ottawa, lost billions of dollars and didn't

move a single barrel. This government, this Premier applauded when the federal government bought Trans Mountain. What did Trans Mountain announce three or so months ago? No more federal money into Trans Mountain. Where's that going to go? Of course, this government put in a turn-off-the-taps legislation weaker than the predecessor NDP government. How that is using every tool in the legislative tool box is beyond me.

My hon. colleague from Red Deer-South talked about the fiscal train wreck of Canada. A couple of people have said to me, you know, in the last little while, "Well, thank God, Ottawa was there for CERB and for getting us through this pandemic," and, Madam Speaker, I don't know what the answer is to that. They printed \$400 billion. They increased the money supply by 20 per cent, meaning 1 out of every 5 dollars that's in circulation was put in by Prime Minister Trudeau in the last two years. That means that your family, my family, all of our constituents are paying inflation through the roof, and now we're looking at huge interest rates skyrocketing when all we have to do is give Albertans a chance to develop our oil and gas resources.

This is maddening, and it's important that this government do what the Premier promised at the 2019 UCP AGM. "Government to deploy every legal, economic, and constitutional tool at the province's disposal to maximize its ability to achieve a fair deal for Alberta within the Canadian federation." No more angrily worded letters. No more posturing with insignificant appointments. Madam Speaker, let's come to work every day for a fair deal for Alberta families and Alberta communities. Let's make Alberta the freest and most prosperous place in North America.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion other than Government Motion 505 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:54 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before we start, just a reminder that it would be very kind to the table officers counting the vote if there were to be silence while they do so.

For the motion:

| | | |
|---------|------------|------------|
| Amery | Jean | Schulz |
| Barnes | Jones | Shandro |
| Copping | Loewen | Shepherd |
| Fir | Long | Singh |
| Frey | McIver | Stephan |
| Gray | Nally | Toor |
| Hanson | Neudorf | Turton |
| Horner | Nicolaides | van Dijken |
| Hunter | Pon | Williams |
| Irwin | Renaud | Yaseen |
| Issik | Savage | |

Totals: For – 32 Against – 0

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 carried unanimously]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the House now stands adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6:10 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, April 25, 2022

Day 23

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
 Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
 Government Whip
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UC)
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
 Premier
LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)

Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
 Government House Leader
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Orr, Hon. Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
 Deputy Government Whip
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
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Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
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| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

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| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
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Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
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Loewen
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Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

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Sigurdson, L.
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, April 25, 2022

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 18 Utility Commodity Rebate Act

[Adjourned debate April 21: Ms Issik]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join the debate on Bill 18 in second reading?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:31 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer | Nally | Sabir |
| Copping | Nixon, Jeremy | Schow |
| Eggen | Orr | Schweitzer |
| Ellis | Panda | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Feehan | Phillips | Smith |
| Ganley | Rehn | Sweet |
| Gotfried | Reid | Toews |
| Hanson | Rowswell | van Dijken |
| Long | Rutherford | |

Totals: For – 26 Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 18 read a second time]

Bill 13 Financial Innovation Act

[Adjourned debate April 20: Mr. Nielsen]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to, you know, just reiterate the importance of Bill 13. I think that it definitely is necessary, and it's some important ways by which we can change financial products and improve consumer protection. However, I also know that there are always the bills that we have before us and then the time as it progresses. I'm just looking at Bill 18 and the urgency of getting some movement and progress around Bill 18, so I would like to request to adjourn debate and move to Bill 18.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 16 Insurance Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to move Bill 16 at second reading.

Mr. Toews: All right. Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I, in fact, rise to move second reading of Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022.

Bill 16 proposes measures that would help ensure an efficient regulatory framework, support growth of Alberta's insurance industry, and advance our efforts to modernize Alberta's financial services sector. Alberta's recovery plan, our strategy for economic diversification, recognizes the tremendous potential for expanding the financial service sector in the province.

To this end, I recently introduced legislation to promote innovation in the financial services sector by allowing companies to test new products and services. This legislation is the first of its kind in Canada, one that will spur investment in innovative and new technologies and position Alberta's economy for growth in the financial services sector. Bill 16 takes us a step further in these efforts with amendments to insurance legislation for commercial entities. The proposed amendments in Bill 16 relate to two insurance statutes, the Insurance Act and the Captive Insurance Companies Act. I'll go over the amendments to each, starting with the Insurance Act.

7:50

Proposed amendments to the Insurance Act are intended to advance government's efforts to increase insurance capacity in the province by facilitating access to reinsurance. Madam Speaker, reinsurance is insurance for insurance companies. As a result of scarce supply of insurance and reinsurance globally Canadian and Alberta's insurers are finding it very difficult to meet the demands of their clients in both commercial and personal lines of business. Increasing reinsurance availability in the province should have a positive impact on the overall insurance supply in the provincial insurance market. This will help ease the shortage and high prices and better position traditional insurers in serving Albertans and Alberta businesses.

Specifically, the proposed amendments would add reinsurance provisions to the Insurance Act, allowing provincially licensed insurance companies to focus solely on reinsurance and to enter limited partnerships. If Bill 16 is passed, Alberta would be the first Canadian jurisdiction to allow provincial insurers to have a reinsurance-specific business model and pursue limited partnerships for capital formation.

It's worth noting that the reinsurance industry in Canada is very limited and composed mostly of foreign-based enterprises. The majority are operating through a subsidiary and conducting business in Canada through a branch. In some instances their business activities are performed directly from abroad. To do business in Canada, reinsurers may choose to be licensed, often referred to as admitted, or unlicensed. Admitted reinsurers are federally licensed and supervised by the federal office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions. Much of the existing global reinsurance capacity is located in Europe, the United States, and Bermuda; therefore, it can be challenging to access reinsurance if you're a Canadian- or an Alberta-based insurer.

In addition, Madam Speaker, we're continuously seeing pressure to reduce Canadian insurance capacity through actions taken in Europe against insurers supporting fossil fuel projects such as Canadian pipelines. Add that to the current global hard insurance market, and I'm sure we all can appreciate the challenges for many commercial entities to meet their insurance needs. That's why it's imperative we do what we can to allow the insurance industry to attract capacity to Alberta and to help diversify our provincial insurance sector.

Diversifying Alberta's insurance sector has both short- and long-term benefits for the province's economy. Greater insurance

options will help commercial entities with immediate insurance needs. Greater activity in the insurance industry will help attract investment, strengthen Alberta's financial services sector, and support economic diversification. That's why in the fall of 2021 we passed the Captive Insurance Companies Act, which will come into force this summer and allow the formation of captive insurance companies right here in Alberta.

We're very excited to be only the second province in Canada, next to B.C., to come into the global insurance market as a captives domicile. The Captive Insurance Companies Act is expected to come into effect this summer once we finalize the accompanying regulations. Right now we're putting the finishing touches on the legislation itself, with an amendment being proposed in Bill 16. The amendment proposes new redomestication provisions for the Captive Insurance Companies Act to specifically address the relocation of foreign captives to the province. These new provisions in the legislation would help clarify how companies can bring their foreign captives to Alberta; that is, having their insurance companies together with the rest of their business geographically.

If passed, the amendment will ensure that forthcoming rules for setting up a captive in Alberta are straightforward. This will make it easier for Alberta businesses to evaluate decisions on bringing their foreign captives home and to do so without interruption to the operation of their captives. This is a very important consideration when making business decisions about relocating an existing captive to another jurisdiction.

I'm pleased we have an opportunity to refine our legislation before it comes into effect to ensure it's straightforward, on par with legislation of other captive jurisdictions, and, most importantly, built on feedback from experts and stakeholders. Alberta is well positioned to soon welcome captives.

In addition to new provisions on reinsurance and captive insurance, Bill 16 proposes several administrative amendments to the Insurance Act. This will help ensure a clear and efficient regulatory framework for the conduct of insurance business in the province and maintain adequate protection of consumers.

Overall, Bill 16 supports the positive momentum for creating opportunities in every sector of our rapidly growing economy. The proposed measures will help create a regulatory framework that will help generate more insurance activity right here in Alberta. This will lead to more opportunities for Albertans in sophisticated finance and insurance positions or careers and boost the investment potential of our entire financial services sector.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 18 Utility Commodity Rebate Act

The Chair: Committee of the Whole has under consideration Bill 18, the Utility Commodity Rebate Act. This is its first time in Committee of the Whole. Any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Yes, Madam Chair. Thank you very much. I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 18. As I think we have discussed

in the House and as we have voted recently, the Official Opposition in general is in favour of this bill; however, we believe that it can be made better in some ways.

With that in mind, I plan to move a series of amendments, beginning with this one. I'll wait for that to reach the table.

The Chair: Hon. member, please proceed to read it into the record.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 18, the Utility Commodity Rebate Act, be amended in section 3 by adding the following immediately after subsection (3):

(4) A rebate required to be provided under this Act in relation to the use of a utility commodity between November 1, 2021 and April 30, 2022 must be provided no later than May 31, 2022.

The purpose, Madam Chair, of this amendment is to put a timeline into place. You know, we've seen, with respect to natural gas rebates, a promise that it would be coming in the budget, and then in the budget it was sort of deferred until fall.

With respect to electricity rebates, we've seen six weeks and some portion of a week go by at this point since it was promised. My understanding, at least from the associate minister's comments in the media, is that we are not expecting that rebate until June or July. The purpose of this amendment, Madam Chair, is to bring that date back, because I think the issue that we have is that this situation is urgent. It is significantly urgent for Albertans, and you know another few months is likely to be far too much for those Albertans.

You know, we have certainly heard – and we've been getting volumes of correspondence, a lot of correspondence, on this issue – from people who are basically writing to us to say that they're making the decision between keeping the heat and lights on and buying groceries. That is a dire situation for many Albertans. It is a situation that is of immediate concern to them. The purpose here of this amendment is to ensure that this moves forward in a timely manner.

You know, this act, which is before us today, is an act which essentially mirrors a natural gas act from 2001 and just adds electricity into that act. It's very straightforward. It's a very easy drafting job. I would imagine it could have been done in one day, to be perfectly honest, yet we waited five weeks to see it come before the House.

The concern I have is that I'm not sure that the government feels the sense of urgency that Albertans feel on this file. What we are trying to do is to amend the act to ensure that that sense of urgency is through.

8:00

I know the government is going to say, you know, that we didn't pass the act in one day; therefore, we don't actually really want it to go through. Madam Chair, I think it's worth just taking a moment to outline why that is completely absurd as an argument. To begin with, like I say, this act itself is essentially a copy and paste from a previous act, just kind of adding in electricity. It could have been introduced the day after the rebate was promised. It was not. Instead, we waited five weeks, and apparently we're still going to be waiting another two months, till the end of June or beginning of July, before Albertans see relief. I don't know. It's clear to me that this could have moved faster than it did, and it hasn't.

So rather than simply opposing, rather than simply complaining, we have come forward to try and help make this legislation better, to try and do something that is important to all Albertans, to try and ensure not some sort of, like, fake, you know, "They didn't vote for the bill the same day it was introduced" but a real timeline – a real

timeline – that puts real money in the hands of Albertans in a real and timely manner.

I think, Madam Chair, that every member of this House owes it to their constituents to give real consideration to this. I imagine that the members opposite are getting the same e-mails we are from people who are not partisans. They are just desperate and under stress, and they need assistance now. Even though we believe that the amount of the rebate proposed by the government is insufficient – and it seems that at least some members of the UCP’s own caucus agree with that – we do think that sooner is better, and a more timely rebate is definitely better.

You know, there are people who are behind right now who face disconnection because this government was unwilling to support an extension on that ban, and I think that those individuals need the money. I would hope that many members of this Chamber understand what that’s like, when you have a sudden and unexpected increase in your costs. Albertans have seen a lot of sudden and unexpected increases in their costs. They’ve seen utilities going through the roof. They’ve seen car insurance going through the roof after the cap was removed on that by this government. They’ve seen tuition hikes. They’ve seen interest on student loan payments go up. All of these factors are coming together to combine to make sort of the perfect storm. These aren’t people who are being frivolous or wanting a new iPhone or something like that. They are people who are doing their best to pay their basic costs and get by, and they are genuinely struggling to do that.

I think we owe them that help. I think we owe them that help in a timely manner. So even though I continue to oppose the proposed amount of the rebate and I believe that it ought to be higher, I do think that we should move forward as quickly as possible. With that, I would urge all members of this House to vote in favour of this amendment because I think it will help constituents throughout the province.

The Chair: Hon. members, I forgot to note that this is amendment A1. Are there any members that wish to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:04 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------|----------|-------|
| Carson | Ganley | Sabir |
| Eggen | Loyola | Sweet |
| Feehan | Phillips | |

8:20

Against the motion:

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer | Nixon, Jeremy | Schow |
| Allard | Orr | Schweitzer |
| Copping | Panda | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Ellis | Rehn | Smith |
| Gotfried | Reid | Toews |
| Hanson | Rowswell | van Dijken |
| Long | Rutherford | Williams |
| Nally | | |

Totals: For – 8 Against – 22

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Back on the main bill, Bill 18, in Committee of the Whole, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. That was disappointing to see, but fortunately I am prepared with another one. I’ll just wait for that to reach the table.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A2. Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 18, Utility Commodity Rebate Act, be amended as follows: (a) by adding the following immediately after section 4(3).

(4) Despite any provision to the contrary in any other enactment, a distributor may not disconnect an eligible consumer from a utility commodity for non-payment of the cost of that utility commodity from the time a rebate is authorized under this Act until the rebate has been provided to the distributor’s eligible consumers.

(b) by adding the following immediately after 5(3):

(4) Despite any provision to the contrary in any other enactment, a direct provider may not disconnect an eligible consumer from a utility commodity for non-payment of the cost of that utility commodity from the time a rebate is authorized under this Act until the rebate has been provided to the direct provider’s eligible consumers.

(c) by renumbering section 6 as 6(1) and adding the following immediately after subsection (1):

(2) Despite any provision to the contrary in any other enactment, a contractor may not disconnect an eligible consumer from a utility commodity for non-payment of the cost of that utility commodity from the time a rebate is authorized under this Act until the rebate has been provided to the contractor’s eligible consumers.

That was a bit of a mouthful. What it means is that between the time a rebate is authorized and the time a rebate reaches the consumer, they may not be disconnected from their utilities.

Madam Chair, as you may recall, the Official Opposition drafted an act to extend the disconnection ban. Between October and April 15 of any year people cannot be cut off from their utilities for nonpayment. There are very good reasons for that: we are Albertans, we care about one another, and we don’t like anyone to freeze. Now, we offered a piece of legislation to the government, and we offered to work with them to get it through in order to extend that ban. It ran through the summer and would continue to sort of run into the ban for next year, so they’d have another year.

The reason for that, Madam Chair, is that these are extraordinary times. These are times when Albertans are under an extraordinary amount of pressure. We have seen, you know, high unemployment, jobs returning very slowly, a lot of people giving up looking at all. We have seen very little wage growth, especially for those earning less. We have seen a government who has used inflation to take more money out of the pockets of Albertans, seniors whose benefits were deindexed by the UCP who have less in their pockets, and many other people in a similar situation. People have less coming in at the same time we’re seeing unprecedented growth in costs.

When the UCP took the cap off insurance, we saw some people’s rates go up 20 or even 30 per cent. That was a big hit for a lot of people. We have seen utilities skyrocket since the UCP took the cap off electricity. Again, as I’ve mentioned, we’ve seen, I mean, some tuition going up triple-digit percentages, like more than 100 per cent. We have seen the UCP government essentially start charging people additional interest on their student loans. That’s driving costs through the roof for folks.

You know, this is a perfect storm of factors because of the policies of this government that have left people in a position where

they are not able to cover their basic costs with the income they are earning, and that has been extremely problematic. It has been stressful and challenging. Despite the fact that we don't hear them standing up and talking about it, I have no doubt that the members opposite have been hearing from their constituents, just as I have been hearing from mine, about these concerns.

My last amendment was to get the money out the door faster, to ensure that Albertans had the money in their pockets by the end of May, because, again, this government has been promising these rebates for months, and they haven't gone out. We know, according to the associate minister, that it will be at least two more months before people see electricity relief, and even then, \$150, something one of their own members called paltry, and it may be months more before they see relief on natural gas. That's problematic, and the people who have been writing in to us are hundreds or even thousands of dollars behind on their utility bills.

With the government having refused our amendment to get the money out the door faster, with the government having refused to work with us to ensure that Albertans are not cut off from their utilities while they are getting their feet back under them, we now have one more attempt, and that is an attempt to say that once the government authorizes a rebate, during the time that it takes them to process – and, I mean, with this government that seems to be a pretty long time – those rebates, people can't be cut off. So if people are sitting there expecting relief, having relied on the word of the government that relief was coming, they can't be cut off while they're waiting for that help to get there.

This is an incredibly small thing – an incredibly small thing – that this government could do, having done next to nothing to help people, having told them that it was the market working and that they should feel sorry for these poor insurance companies who are generating record profits. This is a very, very small thing that they could do to help Albertans, many of whom desperately, desperately need that help.

You know, I'd like to remind the members opposite that we were sent here to represent those Albertans. That is who elected us. Each and every one of us won an election. Each and every one of us had people come forward and put their faith in us that we would put their interests first, that we would be there for them and take their concerns seriously and bring those concerns to this place, this place where we collectively come together and make the rules that govern us all. I would remind the members opposite that it is those people that they work for. It is not corporations.

Madam Chair, with that, I will simply say that this is a very small thing. It's not asking the government to do anything additional. It's just asking them to give people the tiniest amount of relief and to allow them not to be disconnected in that period between when the government promises them something and delivers, which with this government could be a while, that period of time during which the money is travelling to our constituents who are waiting for that money, that they not be disconnected, that they not be left with no heat or sitting in the dark, that they can happily go out and spend that money on their groceries so that they can have both groceries and heat and power at the same time. That is not, I think, a tremendous ask, but I do think that it would be a tremendous help to those people who sent us to this place.

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join the debate on amendment A2? My apologies. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie caught my eye first, but if you want to give – there we go.

8:30

Member Loyola: Thank you, Madam Chair. As you can see, we're all chomping at the bit here to respond to this particular amendment.

Like many other members on my side of the House, I am absolutely one hundred per cent sure that they also have constituents that they've heard from, like myself. I remember – it's probably about four weeks ago now – that I had a constituent that was contacting my office because her electricity was being cut off. This is something that, of course, is unfathomable to me because we're going through a really tough time. We're going through a considerably tough time. We don't need to let people know that COVID was very hard on families. I can't tell you the number of people who I've spoken to who tell me that they're just one paycheque away from not being able to make ends meet at the end of the month, and some people are, like, \$200 away, we've heard.

I think that amending this bill to include this particular amendment, that has been proposed by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, is a no-brainer. I just can't understand why the members on the other side wouldn't want – well, first of all, I was completely surprised when they didn't want to accept the proposal that we had put forward to actually extend the opportunity for people not to have their electricity or their utilities cut off. The only way that I can understand what the members on the other side of the House are thinking is that they're so blinded by their ideology that government should just stay out of these things.

Of course, you've heard me say before that when it comes to supply and demand, there are going to be people who are priced out of the market, and there are people who are struggling because of COVID. COVID exacerbated the economic crisis that we're going through. I understand, you know, that members on the other side are all about making things voluntary. For the most part corporations, yeah, do their part but not always. It's a very difficult situation. I want to remind members of this House that for people who are going through potential cut-off of their utilities, it's so incredibly stressful. It's so incredibly stressful to have to go through that process. Even though you end up calling a 1-800 number and you work out some kind of an arrangement, the whole process is stressful for the person going through it.

I just don't know how else to state to the members on the other side of the House that this could be easily rectified by accepting this amendment into the proposed piece of legislation that you have brought before us. It would calm so many people who are actually going through quite a miserable time right now. To not do this would add insult to injury.

I highly suspect that members on the other side of the House are going to vote this amendment down, and it's heartbreaking, to be quite honest. I know for a fact that if I'm hearing from constituents that are having a hard time making ends meet, members on the other side of the House must be hearing also from constituents in their ridings that are also having a tough time making ends meet. It can't just be my riding.

I would highly encourage the members to, you know, give some sober second thought to this amendment – it's a no-brainer; it would help so many people – so that we can actually pass this amendment and make this piece of legislation that you've brought before us a little bit better.

With that, I'll take my chair, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Chair. Albertans want to live in a province where we can keep the lights on, and Albertans expect a government that will protect them as consumers – not to do everything but to do that which is in their power and to take common-sense approaches to protecting consumers – but we have a government who are in cahoots with companies who are making

every choice they can to increase costs for us and raise profits by now five times what they were last year.

Albertans have asked us for action. That is why we are debating this legislation now. This appeared nowhere in the government's budget documents. It was only after the outcry from Albertans. Albertans deserve the credit for the minimal amount of action that this government has already taken, but it is only on this side of the House, Madam Chair, where we have a group of people who are willing to actually make it real.

Now, this government was not interested in a legislated timeline to get money into people's hands. What they could do, at the very least, is protect people from utility cut-offs while they are waiting for the government to get its act together to send them the money to protect them as consumers. People need us to be there for them right now, while they're waiting for those rebates. We know that people need us to be there for them because they have asked us for this action.

We all as Albertans want a level playing field, where the government policy is targeted and reasonable and keeps us financially and physically secure. That's what keeping the lights on does for all of us and for small businesses and for farmers, but we have a government who are focused on tilting that playing field, Madam Chair. They are focused on tilting that playing field towards record profits that cost ordinary people more. Ordinary people pay for those profits, that have now gone up by five times.

This is a common-sense, very simple thing that the government could do, a very simple amendment to help people while they're waiting for those rebates. This is what Albertans can support and want to support, a targeted, common-sense, low-cost solution to protecting them as consumers. It is prudent. This measure protects the right people, not the obscene profits of the utility companies right now but ordinary people just trying to get by when the cost of everything else is going up. That is why this House must support this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thought one of my colleagues was going to have to hold me up. I would like to thank the member for the comments. I would like to invite them to leave the house of revisionist history and come back here under the dome, under the realm of reality, and we can be a little more accurate about the actual current events. The reason I say that is that we have an opposition like no other opposition in the country and certainly like no opposition this country has seen, quite frankly.

We'll start it off with the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, who in March was in front of a business telling everybody that electricity in this province was 15 cents. Well, in effect, that wasn't true. Electricity wasn't 15 cents. Electricity was 7.5 cents if you had a contract. If you had the regulated rate option, it was 10 and a half cents.

An Hon. Member: That's awkward.

Mr. Nally: Embarrassing, right?

So, depending on which price you looked at, the member was off between 50 to 100 per cent.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Nally: Well, Madam Chair, I would suggest . . .

The Chair: Point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Sabir: I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j). The minister is making allegations and references to things that are not part of this House's record. I think the minister should stay on the amendment and speak to whether he will support it or not.

Thank you.

8:40

The Chair: The hon. deputy government whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is clearly a matter of debate. I think the amendment, covering off quite a bit of things around electricity, cutting people off, the price of electricity – this entire conversation is very relevant to what the minister is talking about. The facts that he is pulling from, I believe, came right from media sources within the *Calgary Herald*, so he's accurate in what he is saying. If the members opposite don't like what he is saying, then I suggest that they just join into the debate and add what they would like to add. But it is certainly not a point of order.

The Chair: I would tend to agree with the deputy government whip on this matter. However, I think it's probably important to caution all members on the language that they use in this House and how it may incite others to not be very happy.

However, my caution has been given, and I'll ask the hon. minister to carry on with his remarks.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. I certainly don't want to be responsible for them getting all ginned up and excited tonight, so I will not reference the newspaper article where the member was quoted as saying that it was 15 cents.

The point that I'm trying to make is that Albertans deserve an Energy critic that actually knows the price of energy. The regulated rate is 10.8, by the way, in case the member was interested.

Also, you know, what we've heard from the opposition – I think that we need to change the name of this amendment. This is amendment A2. We just heard from A1. Let's change the name to the CYA amendment, because that's really what these amendments are about. They are a CYA amendment, and the reason I say that is because the NDP made a strategic error last week. You see, I came into this House, and in front of the members of the opposition I asked for them to work with us in a bipartisan fashion. I asked to have unanimous consent to proceed to second reading, and they refused. They voted to continue with the legislative process. They voted to get the rebates out longer rather than speeding them up.

Then the next day I pointed out to the members, again in a bipartisan fashion, that the Chief Justice was going to be in the House at 3 o'clock providing royal assent, and I invited the members to work with us to push this legislation through, to get the rebates into Albertans' pockets as . . . [interjections] You know, Madam Chair, it's hard to speak when they're lighting their hair on fire like that. We were certainly very patient to listen to them, and I would ask them to extend the same courtesy to us.

See, they made the strategic error because when they voted down the motion that would have sped up the legislative process, that was about six and a half hours after the Member for Calgary-Mountain View did a press conference telling all the media that the rebates were taking too long. That's right. They went in front of the media

and said: these rebates are taking too long. Then that member came into this Chamber and voted down a motion to speed up the process. Then they threw their hands up in the air. I mean, Madam Chair, talk about gaslighting Albertans.

I think that the members opposite are discovering that Albertans are on to them, and I think that the members opposite are discovering that Albertans are a little more astute than they thought. Albertans are not happy. They're not happy that these rebates are going to take longer because the NDP refused to work in a bipartisan fashion. We invited them to speed up the legislative process to help us push this through, and what did they say? They said no. Then they come in here and they gaslight Albertans. They come up with amendments that say: you know, we want to have this out by a certain deadline. Madam Chair, we could easily have made that deadline if we had had royal assent on Thursday at 3 o'clock, like we had suggested. Shame on the NDP.

Now, let's go back and talk about some more gaslighting. You know, the NDP talked about how the support that we're providing is not enough. Well, Madam Chair, the total amount of this support to Albertans is \$280 million. That's how much we're trying to rush out the door to support Albertans, \$280 million. Now, they will throw up their hands and say: oh, what about the rate cap? We're providing \$280 million over three months. The NDP's rate cap didn't apply to half of Albertans. If you were on a fixed rate, you didn't benefit from the rate cap, so they got nothing from the NDP. The other folks, that were on the regulated rate option, received \$108 million over two years. You know, I would suggest that the support that the NDP provided pales in comparison to the support that we are providing Albertans.

Now, in addition, we've also said that we're going to provide a rebate for natural gas, and again they gaslight Albertans or scare them. I'm not sure what they're doing. It's hard to keep track. But they tell Albertans that this is a fake rebate. Remember that, the NDP standing up and saying, "This is a fake rebate" and that it was a fake rebate because the trigger price of \$6.50 was too high? Well, in fact, I know that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View wouldn't know the price of natural gas, Madam Chair, but it's actually trading for \$6.75 today. Had this legislation been in effect, then the trigger price would have been released. Again, does that stop them from calling it a fake rebate? I believe I heard it as recently as today in this Chamber, so they continue to gaslight Albertans.

That's not the only support because – I bring this up only because the members talked about the cost of living in general. In addition to those two items that I just mentioned, Madam Chair, we also decided to pause the gas tax, 13 cents a litre on gas tax. That is providing, you know, \$8, \$9 every time an Albertan fills up the trunk, so it's real support that Albertans feel in the pocketbook every time. But in terms of the total support, actually \$1.3 billion is the cost of that support if it goes on for the full year. The total support package that we're providing is \$2 billion, yet the NDP would have us believe that the supports we're providing are not enough. Again, they continue to gaslight Albertans and frighten them.

But that's not even the real problem, Madam Chair. The real problem here is that the NDP lacks vision. Now, the reason I say that is that I'm not sure if they read the legislation. Well, in fact, they either didn't read the legislation or they didn't understand it. I'm not sure which. The reason I say that is that this is actually enabling legislation. See, we're putting this legislation in to enable us to be able to do this now and at any time in the future. But if we were to accept the amendments of the NDP as written, it would no longer be enabling legislation. It would be so prescriptive as to be

useless down the road, so if we were to find ourselves in this situation three years from now – and heaven forbid, Madam Chair; I hope that we don't – we would have to go through this process all over again. We have the vision that they lack, and we are putting this forward as enabling legislation so it'll be there to support Albertans whenever it's needed.

You know, this is a pattern. They routinely make decisions without understanding the consequences of their actions. It's not the first time they've done this. I remember Bill 6, and I only mention Bill 6 as an example of when they don't think things through. Bill 6 was the farm legislation, and we continue to hear from members there that claim to be driving through rural Alberta, but they can't be stopping in any of these small towns, Madam Chair, because they would be laughed out of some of these towns, because these farmers were upset when they demonstrated such poor understanding and lack of respect for the family farm. Had we actually accepted the initial iterations of Bill 6, there would have been porta-potties in farmers' fields, porta-potties in families' fields. We have a three-generation family farm. It's 2,400 acres in southern Saskatchewan, and my stepdad still goes out there on a regular basis to check the soil and the moisture, but I've got to tell you that he would laugh if I told him that he had to put a porta-potty in his field. But this is what the NDP do.

Now, let's come to something more damaging. Let's talk about the coal-to-gas conversions because this is another example of the NDP lacking the vision to see the consequences of their actions. They sped up the coal-to-gas conversions, Madam Chair, and they ran the victory lap with all of their environmental extremist friends, all of their progressive politicians, their leave-it-in-the-ground extremists. When they were done running the victory lap, they forgot to tell Albertans that, by the way, they just sentenced Albertans to higher electricity prices, and we're seeing it today. In fact, the NDP keeps mentioning the U of C study, which was not peer reviewed by the way, and that study references the coal-to-gas conversions as one of the reasons for the higher prices that we're seeing.

8:50

But that's not all. The NDP also spent \$7.5 billion on infrastructure when they were in government, Madam Chair. Now, they'll throw up their hands, and they'll gaslight Albertans, and they'll say: oh, we didn't approve that. Well, you know, I will be the first one to be fair to the NDP, and I will say that they did not start the overbuild on the transmission system. What the NDP is guilty of is not stopping it, and I am proud to say that this government stopped the overbuild. If you're wondering, in 2020 we spent \$100 million on infrastructure, and in 2021 we spent zero dollars on infrastructure. Compare that to the \$7.5 billion that was spent under the NDP.

The AESO recently released their forecast, and they indicated that they have deferred a billion dollars' worth of unnecessary transmission. Again, that was something that the NDP could have looked at. They could have deferred the transmission buildup, but they did not. In addition, the AESO forecasted that we will average \$150 million to \$200 million a year in infrastructure, again, versus the \$2 billion a year that was spent previously. Madam Chair, that's the problem with that caucus; they don't see the consequences of their actions because they lack vision.

Now, in case that wasn't example enough, you know, the Balancing Pool comes to mind. I released an audit last week that was the absolute smoking gun, Madam Chair. This audit, done by Deloitte, confirms that they spent \$1.34 billion in losses on the Balancing Pool.

An Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Nally: Yup: \$1.34 billion. Then they turn around, and they hang that on Albertans as a ratepayer. You may remember that there was a time when we had a Balancing Pool rate rider that actually paid money back to Albertans. The Balancing Pool has given back over \$4 billion to ratepayers.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

**Point of Order
Repetition
Relevance**

Mr. Sabir: Standing Order 23(c). The member is just persisting in completely needless, useless, repetition of things and not speaking to the amendment at hand, which requests the minister to consider putting it in legislation so that Albertans who get a rebate: their connections are not shut off. They're able to get the electricity, get the utilities they need. That's what the amendment is about, and I have not heard a single word about this amendment in the last however minutes.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is not a point of order. I don't think listing out the steps the NDP took to raise the cost of electricity is needless repetition. If they're tired of hearing it, they shouldn't have done it. The minister has the ability to lay this out simply because this amendment talks about stopping people from being cut off from their utilities because they can't afford to pay it. They can't afford to pay it because the NDP raised the costs too much for them, and that's what the minister is discussing. It's completely relevant.

The Chair: Oh, the speeches I've heard in terms of repetition. Hon. members, I think this is a good time to get back on track and, most certainly, specifically speak to amendment A2, which has lots of words. I'm certain that the minister's remarks will be a little bit more specifically about those as opposed to other things or more so relatable moving forward.

The hon. minister.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. You're absolutely right. I mean, Albertans are struggling with the high cost of electricity. Why? Well, because of the path that the NDP took us down. I won't belabour the point on the Balancing Pool. I think the point was made that \$1.34 billion was hung on the ratepayer, and that is not being paid back on a rate rider that we'll be paying till 2030. Yeah, electricity is expensive because of the NDP.

Again, this goes back to the gaslighting. The NDP come here, and they want us to do this and to do that. But we put a motion forward in this House to ask the NDP to work across the aisle in a bipartisan fashion to send a motion to Ottawa basically saying: do not increase the carbon tax on April 1. They actually voted against that motion, Madam Chair.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Nally: So on one hand they come in here . . .

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

**Point of Order
Repetition
Items Previously Decided**

Mr. Sabir: Again 23(c), persists in needless repetition or raises matters that have been decided during the current session. That matter was decided during the current session. Unless he wants to bring it back for debate or rescind that vote, I don't think it's in order for the member to discuss that. He should stick to the amendment at hand.

The Chair: The . . .

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are you to speak to the point of order?

Mr. Nally: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. The hon. minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is absolutely not a point of order. There is certainly no repetition in this. In fact, I'm bringing up the carbon tax for the first time. The carbon tax is one of the things that has increased the price of electricity, which is causing Albertans to suffer from utility insecurity. Some, unfortunately, are having conversations about disconnection because of some things like the carbon tax. The NDP had an opportunity to vote against that, and they voted to support the carbon tax by the feds. For that reason, I say that this is a matter of debate.

The Chair: I would agree. It's a matter of debate. Where this would come into an issue is if that specific topic were to come up over and over and over again, which has previously been the theme with some other things that have been said. So I would caution you again, realizing that this is a different matter, and encourage you to speak to amendment A2 or not at all, and we can vote on it and move on to the next thing.

The hon. minister.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair, but I'm trying my darndest to convince the members opposite of the folly of these amendments. Make no mistake, there is folly – there is folly – in these amendments. Yeah, the carbon tax is absolutely one more example, and the point that I was trying to make was that if they truly cared about the cost of daily living, they would have voted with this government to send a strong message to Ottawa to not increase the carbon tax, but they voted against this government and in support of the carbon tax. I don't know how they can come in here on one hand and complain about the high cost of electricity and then on another hand, you know, vote against that motion.

Madam Chair, I think I've clearly articulated, as clearly as I could today, about why we have to vote down this CYA amendment, so I'm asking all my colleagues to give careful consideration and to vote no towards this amendment.

The Chair: Any other members? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Oh, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to be short and sweet, I think, with this. Honestly, the minister just stood up and waxed on for quite a long period of time and actually didn't speak to the amendment, which is specifically speaking to the fact of how we can support Albertans who are at a vulnerable situation where potentially their utilities will be shut off. The minister clearly

doesn't want to speak about that because for some reason the government does not want to actually make sure that they're being held to account in this piece of legislation and make sure that they accept this amendment, where we can then ensure that Albertans will not have their utilities cut off if a rebate is to be paid out to Albertans. It's sad, and what is even worse is the fact that we just saw a minister, not only a week ago, standing in this very place talking about this piece of legislation, being asked questions about how it would work, and the response that we heard was: we don't know yet; it has to be put in regulation.

The government wants to rush. They want this bill put through. We're giving suggestions about how to make it better to make sure that the money – the whole intention of this is to support Albertans to deal with their utility bills at a time when they can't afford them. This amendment does that. It gets the money in the pockets of the people that need it and secures the fact that their utilities are going to continue to be available to them. It's pretty simple, yet the minister just stood up and spent 15 minutes talking about all the reasons why utilities are expensive. You're right. They're expensive. So accept this amendment, support Albertans, make sure their utilities are not cut off so that when they get the rebate, they can pay their bills. It's black and white. It's pretty simple. Just accept it, vote for it, and get it done. That's what's going to help Albertans.

9:00

The Chair: Any other members wishing to join the debate on amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am happy to take a moment to speak to this amendment, and I want to come at it from a very different angle because I think my colleagues have articulated extremely well the reasons why this government should be onboard here. But one thing that I think should be added to this debate is something about the serious consequences of taking away people's utilities, with a little bit more depth from my experience.

I was very disappointed, of course, when the government failed to agree to the previous amendment, because it brought timeliness into the bill. Of course, I believe that justice delayed is justice denied, and in this case I think the government has chosen to deny justice. But what's more concerning, for me, in this second amendment is the people who will suffer the consequences of having their utilities cut off.

Now, many in the House know that I was in social work for many years before I became elected. One of the things I did in my time as an instructor in the Faculty of Social Work, prior to coming in, is that I was a coauthor on the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect for the last two rounds of the study, that were done in 2008 and 2013. In that study one of the things that we found quite clearly in the analysis of the child welfare system in the province of Alberta is that the vast majority of the cases where children come into care or come to the attention of Children's Services, the child welfare system, is because of neglect, not because of abuse.

In fact, there has been some good analysis showing that lately the amount of child sexual abuse, for example, which is an area of my particular focus of practice for many years, has actually been going down through this study, so we're very grateful and happy to see that. That kind of abuse is no longer as horrendously high as it once was, but what we are seeing is that the cause of children coming into contact with the system is neglect. One of the significant aspects of neglect that contributes to contact with child welfare is people being unable to provide adequate home and shelters, including utilities.

I am concerned about this particular bill because I know that this government spends a significant amount of money in the child welfare system in trying to address problems that occur in family homes. We know that those problems are primarily neglect. We know that absence of appropriate shelter is one of the significant reasons why neglect is identified in a family. In this particular situation what we're asking is for the government to ensure that families do not get into the position of having their utilities cut off, because that would bring them to the place of potentially being identified by child welfare as unable to care for their children, which brings their children into care. From a straight sort of selfish point of view, the government could seek to attempt to try to save some money in the child welfare system by preventing families from being in this kind of crisis.

Now, the situation in this case is such that if you get your utilities cut off, it is because you have found yourself in a position where you're unable to pay your bills. The issue is just simply an issue of poverty. So if we cut them off because they are poor, then, essentially, we are making poverty; we are in a manner kind of criminalizing poverty. That's really not an appropriate thing for us to be doing. If people get their utility bills cut off, there is a double cost here because not only do they have the problem of trying to pay the bill, which they're unable to pay, but once you've had your utilities cut off, you actually have to pay a second reconnection fee to have your utilities turned back on again. So whatever deep, you know, well of poverty that you've been in is exacerbated by having the bill not only remain standing but being added to by having a reconnection fee associated with it.

I'm very concerned that this is a very simple way the government can try to help families from getting to that very horrendous, desperate place where families who cannot at this point already pay their bills are subsequently finding themselves further down the well in terms of being unable to pay their bills and therefore being subject to potential child welfare intervention because of the lack of appropriate shelter, including the utilities.

I think, you know, I certainly agree with the comments made by my colleagues prior about this bill, and I'd just like to add that it just doesn't make sense for us to be working with families to try to enhance their well-being on one hand and then creating circumstances where their ability to provide appropriately for their children is being taxed to the degree it is when their utilities are cut off. I'd like the government just to help us to avoid some of those circumstances and to help us decrease the demands on the child welfare system, which, of course, is being highly stressed right now because so many families have experienced dramatic increases in utility bills, and this government has done nothing for them.

You know, this government has certainly had months and months of time to look at this. The government took some actual, specific, direct action in removing the utilities cap, and therefore the government is actually complicit in this problem. Had they just left well enough alone, we probably wouldn't be here today, but they have taken action. That action has consequences. The government is responsible for those consequences, and ultimately the government will pay financially, but more importantly, families will pay in terms of the stress and potentially even the loss of their children through child welfare investigations.

I think it would cost the government nothing to just pass this amendment here, to just go ahead and say: "Sure. Why don't we just do that one thing. It won't really matter that much to us as a government. It won't hurt us in any way as a government." It just simply is a way of recognizing that some people find themselves in desperate straits and could use a helping hand, and the government by just simply passing one amendment can help some families with that stress.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak briefly to this bill. I was listening to the minister, and the minister said it's an enabling legislation. What we are trying to do with these amendments is that we want to put some certainty in this piece of legislation, that it's not just: trust us; we will get it right.

The reason that we don't trust the UCP, the reason that Albertans don't trust the UCP is that they are the least trusted government across Canada and across North America, if I could say that. Nobody trusts this government. They said and signed a public health guarantee. That was out the door as soon as they became government. They said many things during the campaign, but they never followed through on that, so we cannot trust this government on this legislation. There needs to be some certainty.

They already refused to at least guarantee that in five weeks' time Albertans will see a rebate. The government already delayed taking action on this file by almost six months. Utility costs have been going up for months now, and wherever we go in our constituencies, at different events, when we talk to stakeholders, they are concerned about the rising costs of utilities.

9:10

Well, somebody mentioned a study from the University of Calgary School of Public Policy where the number one reason for rising utility costs is that utility companies' profits have gone up by five times. The associate minister of natural gas rejected that study right away, that it's not peer reviewed, and then he went on to talk about many other things, none of them reviewed by anyone at all and not helpful either. This amendment at least will give assurance to Albertans that their utilities will not be cut off during the time they are getting this rebate. No one, no Albertan, should have to choose between their utilities and putting food on the table, and that's where people are at.

I was in Banff and door-knocking outside. We went to a house where one person told us that, basically, she has not paid the rent because at least she had some assurance that she won't be kicked out right away, but she paid the utilities so that after April 15 her utilities are not cut off. Albertans are struggling.

A few months ago the same minister stood in this House. When asked what he would do about the rising cost of utilities, the minister said, and I pretty much quote, that: news for the NDP, we won't do anything; the market will fix it. Clearly, the market didn't fix it, and now the minister is putting forward this legislation that enables him to intervene in the market. We need in it that there is some certainty, there is some date that Albertans can hope to get their rebates by, and there is some assurance that while they're waiting for the UCP's infighting to end so they can provide the rebate, their connection won't be cut off. That's what this amendment is about.

I urge all members of this House: think about your constituents. Think about those who are struggling to make ends meet. Think about those who are on minimum wage and fixed incomes. This amendment is about those people; it will help everyone in those circumstances. So please vote for this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others that wish to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to this amendment. I appreciate the robust debate that is going on tonight. Obviously, I'm rising to speak in favour of this amendment. I'm not sure why the government is so opposed to

an amendment that would ensure that utilities aren't cut off until the government's rebate program comes into effect or provides assistance to them. There are only a couple of reasons I can think of as to why the government would be opposed to this.

Madam Chair, if the government stands behind their rebate program and has refused previous amendments that would put a timeline and a collar around those rebates, so ensuring that Albertans will get that assistance – you know, I'm not trying to relitigate a previous amendment that was voted down in this Chamber, but I really don't understand why the government would refuse an amendment that ensures the money gets out the door unless they're planning to drag their feet. Otherwise, there's no coherent explanation for why they wouldn't agree to an amendment to get money out the door efficiently.

In this case, Madam Chair, facing utility cut-offs is a very real challenge for many Albertans. Members of the opposition, during question period and other times in this Chamber, repeatedly demonstrate correspondence we've been receiving from Albertans with ridiculously high utility rates. You know, I appreciate that the bulk of winter may be behind us, but even if that's the case, again, I can't think of a logical reason of why the government is refusing to ensure that folks don't get their utilities disconnected.

As my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford pointed out, the majority of Albertans that are facing utility shut-offs are those who are struggling the most to make ends meet. We've heard a number of stories of families and parents that have to choose between utilities and food. Madam Chair, I can't even imagine being in that predicament. I mean, I will acknowledge that I am extremely privileged, that I have never had to make that decision, but I can tell you that being a parent, I can only imagine the struggle that parents are going through.

The opposition once again is trying to bring forward reasonable amendments to strengthen the bill. This is where – and earlier today, you know, the Assembly voted down a previous bill. The challenge that I have is when party lines and partisanship can blind members of this Chamber from the real reason they were elected. Now, unless I've missed the boat in my 10 years of being an MLA, our job is to represent our constituents first and foremost. I appreciate that we are all here representing different political parties, but I would challenge any member for putting the priorities of their constituents second or third or fourth. If we are all here in the spirit of bringing forward the best possible legislation to support Albertans, then I'm really at a loss, Madam Chair, when government won't accept reasonable amendments.

I'm speaking from a place where when we were government, I remember on bills that I brought forward as minister of economic development and trade acknowledging and accepting amendments from the opposition because good ideas come from all sides of this Chamber. Any member that thinks that only they have the best ideas or their staff have the best ideas or their party has the best ideas, quite frankly, I think, has missed the boat, and if anything, their perspective is quite dangerous. I mean, again, our parliamentary system exists for a reason.

9:20

In this example we've got an amendment that would provide an extra layer of protection for the most vulnerable. I know that members on both sides of this Chamber have spoken about and advocated for protecting Alberta's most vulnerable citizens, so it's disappointing, from the sounds of things, that the government is not willing to accept this amendment and is resorting to bipartisan, hyperpartisan attacks. We're in a position where collectively as members of the Assembly we can ensure that before this legislation passes, it's in the best form and shape that it's in.

I find it amusing, Madam Chair, when members or ministers will either play semantics or talk about, you know, that previously the government asked for unanimous consent to speed this bill through. Where is the government's recognition that the opposition has been calling for these supports since last fall? For Albertans who pay attention to the Assembly and debate in this Chamber, they're thinking that it's absolutely ridiculous that the minister of natural gas stands up and tries to accuse the NDP of dragging its feet on this bill when we've been calling for this bill for months.

We're in a position, Madam Chair, where an amendment like the one that's before the Chamber right now can improve it, so I know that Albertans are getting less and less patient with the theatrics and the hyperpartisanship that is being displayed in this Chamber and looking for solutions, real solutions, to help them with their current affordability crisis. My hope is that members of this Chamber will acknowledge that good ideas come from all sides of the House. No party has a monopoly, and in fact governments that think they have a monopoly on the best ideas: friends, we have examples of governments around the world that are not democratically elected who think they have a monopoly on good ideas.

So in the spirit of co-operation, I ask all members to consider supporting this amendment.

The Chair: Are there others that wish to speak to amendment A2?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:23 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------|--------|----------|
| Bilous | Feehan | Phillips |
| Carson | Ganley | Sabir |
| Eggen | Loyola | Sweet |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer | Luan | Rutherford |
| Allard | Nally | Schow |
| Copping | Neudorf | Schweitzer |
| Ellis | Nixon, Jeremy | Shandro |
| Frey | Orr | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Gotfried | Panda | Smith |
| Hanson | Rehn | Toews |
| Issik | Reid | van Dijken |
| LaGrange | Rowswell | Williams |
| Long | | |

| | | |
|---------|---------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 9 | Against – 28 |
|---------|---------|--------------|

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main in Committee of the Whole. Any members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Me again, Madam Chair. I rise to propose another amendment. I will let it get to the table.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A3. Hon. member, please proceed to read it.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 18, Utility Commodity Rebate Act, be amended in section 8 by adding the following immediately after subsection (2): “(3) A

rebate under this Act must be provided within 30 days of the rebate being authorized under this Act.”

Madam Chair, what this one does is that it means that in subsequent instances, because, as the minister noted, the legislation is enabling and it can be used in subsequent instances, if a rebate is announced, it goes to Albertans within 30 days. This doesn't seem like an extraordinary request to me. I am sure that we are about to hear from the associate minister at great lengths about how it would be absolutely impossible to get a rebate out the door in 30 days, that he could never manage to do that, and a whole series of other bizarre allegations about things that never happened. But I think, Madam Chair, that it would be perfectly possible to get a rebate out within 30 days.

9:30

In fact, I think Albertans expect their government to be able to move at this kind of a speed. I believe someone used to say: moving at the speed of business. I think that's all we're asking the government to do. We're not even really asking them to move at the speed of business. We're just asking them to move at – I don't know – something resembling a reasonable speed, that if they promise Albertans a rebate, within 30 days Albertans will have that rebate in their hands. I don't think that's a particularly extraordinary request. I don't think that Albertans will think that's a particularly extraordinary request.

Now, the government having, of course, thus far voted down our attempt to ensure that the current rebate gets out the door by the 31st of March – “rather ironically,” I suppose, is the right word for this – while complaining that the opposition didn't pass their bill in six hours, they can't possibly get the rebate out the door by the 31st of March, which is more than a month away. But it's the fault of the opposition because when they requested unanimous consent to pass the bill – what? – roughly six hours after it was introduced, we didn't comply. I mean, I don't actually think I have to go on at length about that, Madam Chair. I think it's pretty transparent to anyone who happens to be listening that that's absurd and absurd on a special series of levels. This amendment would, I mean, simply force the government to keep their word to Albertans within a reasonable length of time.

The UCP came rushing forward with this bill, a bill which they have admitted is enabling legislation. It doesn't require them to do anything. It simply enables a rebate. They have refused to provide any sort of timeline on that rebate. We're now asking them to do exactly that. Why? Because this issue was raised with them months ago. It was raised by us; it was raised by Albertans. Many people raised the issue. The government did nothing about it. The associate minister rose in this place and said that he planned to do nothing. Then the government promised a rebate on natural gas, a rebate which – I mean, the associate minister literally just rose in this place and said: well, you know, if this had been passed, then people would already be getting a rebate on their natural gas. Except the Premier has said that the rebate isn't going to be until the fall, and then he said that, no, it might be earlier. Then the associate minister said that it won't be until the fall . . .

Mr. Nally: Electricity.

Ms Ganley: . . . so the natural gas rebate is all confused. I'll just remind the associate minister that this bill actually deals with both electricity and natural gas, so I'm well within my rights to speak on both.

The electricity rebate then was again also raised. It was also deferred for a lengthy period of time. It was promised; nothing happened. We called on the government to do the thing that they

promised to do, and then finally we see an act come before this House. Well, that's good, but the act, again, is enabling. It doesn't require anything. So we're asking for a time frame, and I think – you know what? – that's really reasonable because people out there, real people out there living their lives, are trying to pay their bills. They're trying to make the decision between their electricity bills, their natural gas bills, and their groceries. That is what people are doing out there, that is what they are writing to us about, and that is what this government does not seem to understand.

All we are saying is that when this government promises those people relief, they ought to provide it within a reasonable period of time. It's not an extraordinary request. Obviously, the members opposite think that it is an extraordinary request, but I don't think Albertans are going to see it that way, and I think that we owe them that. I think that we owe Albertans legislation that guarantees that when this government makes a promise, they have to follow through within some period of time, because demonstrably the government will not do it on their own.

Madam Chair, I am sure that we are about to be delighted by another series of bizarre allegations and a long attempt to describe how a government that has had this problem for months and done nothing about it and has admitted after the introduction of this act – has admitted – that they don't think they can get this money into the hands of people before June or July, makes some sort of attempt to blame the opposition for not passing the bill in six hours – well, again, it's absurd.

Just for the record, for members who maybe haven't sat in cabinet or maybe aren't familiar with this, there is absolutely no prohibition on drafting regulations while an act is still before the House. So I will call the government's bluff, and I will say that I would be delighted to see the regulations turn up the very day after we pass this act, but, Madam Chair, I don't think that's going to happen. I think that this has been one hundred per cent bluster. You know what? Even if the regulations do turn up the day after, I don't think we're going to see the rebate the day after. I mean, the government just voted down an amendment to get the rebate out the door by the end of May, so they clearly don't have any particular confidence that they can manage that.

Again, I think, to be clear, we have been calling for the government to do this. They ought to do this, providing Albertans with some sort of certainty as to the time frame in which they're going to see this money and in a situation where they are generally struggling. You know, seeing the money several months from now is not sufficient to them. They want to see it soon, and that, Madam Chair, is why we have brought these amendments. It is why we have attempted to ask the government to get the money out the door in a timely manner. This will be the second attempt at that. It's why we have asked the government to prohibit Albertans from being disconnected from their utilities while the government is dithering and unable to get the rebate out the door. They voted that down, too.

But, Madam Chair, I suppose I will simply say that hope springs eternal, and perhaps some of the MLAs on the government side will take this opportunity to stand up for their constituents.

The Chair: The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. It was just shared with me that the fastest way to get these rebates into Albertans' pockets was to not have lost \$1.34 billion on the Balancing Pool. That would have been the preferred approach, but I digress. Here we are.

Apparently, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View is embarrassed, and the hon. member is embarrassed because I've

called her out for not knowing the price of electricity. In addition, that is the same member that went in front of the media and demanded that we get these rebates out quicker, and that same member voted in this House against getting the rebates out any quicker than we could have. The gaslighting that happens on that side of the House is unbelievable.

You know, I think that we need to change the name of this amendment, too. We're going to call this amendment the Failure to Consult amendment. You see, had the members opposite actually consulted with industry, then they would know that these utilities actually have different enterprise resource planning software, ERP. Now, these enterprise resource planning softwares aren't something where you can just go in and change a billing cycle in five or 10 minutes. It actually is much more complicated than that. I can remember when I was in industry and we had enterprise resource planning software – it was SAP, a great program – you actually had to have SAP consultants come in here to change anything that was SAP related. Madam Chair, the NDP would know this had they done the slightest amount of consultation with anyone from industry, but they did not. Just like everything else the NDP has done, it is littered with unintended consequences.

Again, my ask of everyone on this side of the House is to urge you to vote against this amendment. This would be just one more example of charging forward without knowing the consequences. Such has been the history of the NDP, so I ask the hon. members to politely turn down this amendment.

Thank you.

9:40

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair. That was a great example of where this place has gone to, where the minister gets up and resorts to personal attacks, a level of arrogance I haven't seen since the Redford government, as opposed to talking about the amendment. The fact of the matter is that this amendment is putting a time frame on the rebates. Now, I appreciate that the government needs to work with industry, but asking for a time frame on this I don't think is unreasonable. In fact, when we look at the UCP promise of the electricity rebate, we're now moving into week 10 of the announcement of a rebate without the action of a rebate. [interjections] I know that the minister is yelling right now, and, you know, I'd be happy to go for a coffee with him and explain the ins and outs of how the government could move faster on a number of these programs, so . . . [interjections]

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Bilous: Again, we're talking about an amendment to improve this bill. We're at a place – I believe this is the bill that's replacing the previous failed no-rebate rebate bill. Thirty days, according to the minister, is unreasonable. I would love for the minister to propose, then, a more reasonable timeline.

I'm just nostalgically thinking of a time, not that long ago, in this place where spirited debate could exist in a way that was trying to get to a better outcome. Sadly, the state of our current Legislature – there's a reason that Albertans are disappointed in politicians, because we've somehow forgotten how to have a constructive conversation. Disagree with the ideas a hundred per cent, but by all means, please then present an alternative as opposed to just personal attacks.

If 30 days is unreasonable, fair enough. Then, Minister – through you, Madam Chair, I would ask the minister then to propose a counter. What is a reasonable time frame? Is it 60 days? Is it 90

days? I appreciate that the minister likely has more frequent conversations with industry than the opposition does. That's not for lack of trying; that comes with the position. If we pull out the partisan conversations, it's a reality. And I know this because I was a minister, but that's irrelevant.

The point is: how do we strengthen this piece of legislation? How do we ensure that rebates are going to get out in a timely fashion and that Albertans are going to get them in their pockets? Here we have example after example where my colleague is proposing amendments, and as opposed to the government standing up and speaking about why they are not necessary or how they won't in fact do what we believe they will do, we have a bunch of political staffers behind closed doors writing hyperpartisan comments and speaking points that result in a debate that goes into the mud and is all about character assassination as opposed to the spirit of policy debate.

I look back at exchanges between former Premier Peter Lougheed and Grant Notley, who was a two-member caucus, and the two of them would have extremely spirited debates about policy but were completely respectful with one another and respected each other. In fact, it was Premier Lougheed who ensured that there was a state funeral for Grant Notley when he died. He didn't have to do that, and if they were mortal enemies, he probably wouldn't do that. But I look at where that debate was in our history in Alberta and I look at where it is today, and quite frankly, Madam Chair, it's no wonder that Albertans are disappointed.

Again, whether we're talking about natural gas rebates, whether we're talking about electricity rebates, whether we're talking about how to diversify the economy, Albertans want to see the best policies put forward. They don't care who it comes from, and I think we often get lost in our own Twitterverse, for lack of a better frame, that just reinforces our own point of view as opposed to expanding our point of view, which is the point of the Westminster system, why we have multiple political parties represented in the Chamber. If we don't want to hear any other point of view, then what's the point of having democratically elected representatives from multiple parties?

Mr. Eggen: Democracy.

Mr. Bilous: What's the point of having democracy?

Madam Chair, the point is that what's disappointing for Albertans is that we have lost the ability to have a respectful debate about policy. So I'm hoping the minister will rise and speak to why this amendment is not necessary or if the 30-day time frame is unreasonable and if there is a more reasonable time frame for an amendment like this. How can we ensure that the rebate gets out the door in a timely fashion without a response of, "Trust us; we're going to do this"?

I appreciate how legislation and then regulations work. I also appreciate the fact that to get something on a cabinet committee agenda takes months, and anybody who stands up and argues differently: their nose is going to grow, because it takes time. It doesn't happen overnight. If this bill was passed in all three stages right now, the regulations would not be dealt with tomorrow. They would likely not even be dealt with at the next cabinet meeting.

But the point is, for the purpose of this amendment, Madam Chair, that if 30 days is not the right answer, then I hope the minister can provide the House with, in his opinion, a more reasonable amendment and then possibly comment on if he would entertain such an amendment, and if not, please share with Albertans why not.

The Chair: Any other members to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour and a privilege to rise this evening to speak to this very important amendment, and I thank my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View for bringing it forward. So far all of the amendments, obviously, as you can see from the voting record, I've had the opportunity to put forward my support for, because they've all been extremely important to Albertans.

We've heard again and again this evening and over several months now that Albertans are looking for support, and they're reaching out to our offices. This is one opportunity, with the amendment before us, to ensure that this is strengthened in a time where the government continues to say that they are ready to move forward with these rebates as soon as possible and, you know, casting aspersions that it's the opposition holding up this legislation.

9:50

But I would repeat that the fact is that if they have these regulations ready, as they claim to, and that it is indeed this debate that is holding it up, then they really should have no issues with moving forward with this amendment that has been proposed by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and I would say the exact same thing for the past amendments that we saw in terms of ensuring that the rebate is put in place by the end of May, that there's a moratorium on utility shut-offs for Albertans until a time where the associate minister and the government are prepared to move forward with that rebate. I think those have all been very reasonable amendments, just like the one before us, and I am deeply troubled, as the previous member pointed out, that we have come to a place this evening and several evenings before it, Madam Chair, where we spend more time attacking each other than debating the substance of the amendments before us.

At the end of the day, Madam Chair, I was sent here and all members of this House were sent here to represent their constituents but also be there to say and show that they support those members of the public when the time comes, and that time of need is here right now. Of course, the time was several months ago to take action on this legislation, but here we are several months later with a piece of legislation before us which, in principle, very willing to support and do our best to move it through the Legislature. But, unfortunately, there are no timelines in this legislation for when Albertans are going to see utility rebates. There is no dollar amount attached to how much Albertans are going to see rebated to them. All we can do in the opposition is try to improve this legislation in good faith to show Albertans that this government is really willing to take action.

Up to this point, through the decisions that this government has made to vote down amendment after amendment, it seems quite clear that this legislation was nothing more than a photo opportunity for this government to roll out the red carpet for themselves over and over again while not actually providing any real support to Alberta families. It's incredibly disappointing, again, when we have such a reasonable amendment before us. Albertans are expecting us to work together in this Legislature to create the best legislation, to create meaningful change across this province, and right now what Albertans need is support through utility rebates, and in the absence of that, they need support through a moratorium on utility shut-offs.

We have come way too far through this pandemic and through the lack of support from this government, and it's truly unfortunate that we aren't seeing a government willing to put forward the rebates that they so claim to want to put forward in the legislation itself. So here we are again in the opposition giving them an opportunity to show Albertans that they want to take real, meaningful action and that the policy decisions around rebates are

important to them, more important than the grassroots guarantee that the Premier committed to himself and to his caucus members, which has all but eroded to this date, Madam Chair.

With that, I would again urge all members to support this amendment. I feel that it's very valuable, and I look forward to supporting it myself. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to amendment A3?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:54 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------|--------|----------|
| Bilous | Feehan | Phillips |
| Carson | Ganley | Sabir |
| Eggen | Loyola | Sweet |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer | Luan | Rutherford |
| Allard | Nally | Schow |
| Copping | Neudorf | Schweitzer |
| Ellis | Nixon, Jeremy | Shandro |
| Frey | Orr | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Gotfried | Panda | Smith |
| Hanson | Rehn | Toews |
| Issik | Reid | van Dijken |
| LaGrange | Rowswell | Williams |
| Long | | |

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|---------|---------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 9 | Against – 28 |
|---------|---------|--------------|

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 18, in Committee of the Whole. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: If at first you don't succeed, Madam Chair, try, try again. Okay. I have another amendment. Sorry. I'm just making sure I've got the original here. There you go. I'll wait for that to reach the table.

The Chair: It's of medium size. This will be amendment A4.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 18, Utility Commodity Rebate Act, be amended by adding the following immediately after section 8:

Report

- 8.1 If a rebate is authorized under this Act, the Minister must
- (a) prepare a report setting out how the conditions set out in section 2(1) were met in respect of the rebate, including any causes of an increase in the price of that utility commodity,
 - (b) lay a copy of the report referred to in clause (a) before the Legislative Assembly within 60 days of the rebate being authorized under this Act, and
 - (c) within 10 days of laying a copy of the report before the Legislative Assembly in accordance with clause (b), provide a copy of the report to the Market Surveillance Administrator to consider whether an investigation is warranted under section 42(1)(a) of the Alberta Utilities Commission Act.

Once again, Madam Chair, a rather – well, I guess, as you said, a medium-sized amendment. So what this does is that it requires in instances when a rebate is provided that the minister provide a report setting out a number of things, but I would say most importantly, including the causes of the increase in the price.

Madam Chair, had anyone been listening through the debate today . . .

10:00

Mr. Eggen: They are.

Ms Ganley: They may have been, okay?

For the many people out there listening through the debate today, they may have been rather confused because both sides appear to be operating from entirely different sets of facts, and that is confusing. As has often been said, every person is entitled to his or her own opinion but not to their own set of facts.

What this is meant to do is clarify for Albertans what's going on. We have a report out of the University of Calgary which indicates that a large portion of the upswing here has to do with profits, profits that have, according to that report, quintupled. Quintupled is kind of a fun word to say five times. Five times as high as they once were is – I don't know – I would say, a significant increase. That seems pretty significant to me. I think that's relevant to Albertans.

But then we have the associate minister standing up over and over, first of all referring to some legislation that was passed by previous Conservative governments, which sort of overrode the system and allowed the construction of very large lines that are costly. At the time the Official Opposition railed against it. Oh, we weren't the Official Opposition; I apologize. At the time the NDP opposition railed against that. There are some quotes in there. You can go back in *Hansard*. Both the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and the leader of the NDP at the time, who was the Member for Edmonton-Highlands – the previous one, obviously, not the current one – were quite clear. In fact, I believe the previous Member for Edmonton-Highlands referred to it as, you know, that you're going to see a rider on your bill that's PC arrogance, or some words to that effect.

The point of this report is to clarify the facts, Madam Chair, and the reason I want the facts clarified is because I believe they show what I have been alluding to all along. I think this is worth while. I think Albertans deserve to know. I think that when prices go up like this, Albertans deserve to know the reason for that.

Now, the thing I think Albertans deserve more than that is a substantive rebate, a rebate within a reasonable time frame, not to be disconnected from their utilities while they await such a rebate, but all of those are things which the government has already rejected this evening. So I am left with this, which is to say an amendment to make sure that Albertans at least understand the facts that are before them so that we can have a rational conversation, and I think that that is what, Madam Chair, democracy is meant to be at its best, a rational conversation, where, you know, we all operate from the same set of facts.

I think, Madam Chair, the thing I would say in closing is this. The set of facts before us is as follows: we are presented with a bill, a bill which enables but does not require rebates; in that bill are no numbers on how much the rebates will be; in that bill is no requirement to provide those rebates within any sort of reasonable time frame. That's problematic. I think it's problematic because Albertans are struggling now, and I think anyone who denies the fact that these Albertans need these rebates, that they need them in a timely fashion is just not paying attention.

The associate minister says that it would be impossible to provide these rebates in a reasonable timeline. He said that we haven't done any consultation. Well, Madam Chair, I can assure you that we have done plenty of consultation. We have consulted with the people who are most important to us as elected representatives, and that is the people who sent us here to this Chamber, the people of Alberta, the people who have written in to us, telling us that they are hundreds or thousands of dollars behind, telling us that they cannot afford life under this UCP government, telling us that their insurance has gone up and their utilities have gone up and their tuition has gone up and the cost of their interest payments has gone up, all due to actions of this government.

So I would say, Madam Chair, that the people who have failed to consult are the members opposite. The people who have failed to consult are the government members who haven't spoken to Albertans, who don't seem to understand the urgency of this situation, who think that they can wait months and months to do anything about this problem and then convince Albertans that it must be the fault of the Official Opposition because they didn't pass the bill in six hours. I say it again: it's absurd. We have done our consultation. We have talked to the people who sent us to this place, to the people who we all serve, to the people to whom we ought to be accountable, the people of Alberta.

With that, I will say that this is one last attempt to ask the government to do something. If they refuse a timeline, if they refuse a rebate that would actually make a difference to Albertans, if they refuse to prevent Albertans from being cut off from their utilities, at minimum they can present them with the facts. At minimum they can tell them why it is that the cost of electricity has gone up. I don't think that that's a terribly difficult request. I am hopeful that maybe just this one small thing the government can do for the people of Alberta.

With that, I would urge all members to vote in favour of this amendment.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Chair. This evening has been a master class in gaslighting. In fact, it's been the very definition of gaslighting. You know, I can't believe that the NDP will complain about the speed at which rebates are getting out to Albertans, and then vote against getting them out any quicker. That is the very definition of gaslighting, and this is all we've seen this evening.

The really frustrating part is that when you come up with four amendments like this, I mean, this really – four amendments: that means one thing to me. That means filibuster, Madam Chair. It means do everything that you can to distract from the real issue, which is that they made a strategic error last week and they're embarrassed and they're trying to distract from what they did last week.

In the time, the two and a half hours, that we have spent doing this, we could have gotten through third reading of this legislation, and that would have meant that I was then going to be the Minister of Justice's problem, because then I would have went to him at the end of the night and said: when can we get royal assent on these items? But I won't be doing that because we're not ready for royal assent because we're still in Committee of the Whole debating the fourth amendment.

You know, the lead headlines in the *Sun* and the *Journal*, Madam Chair, are actually about paralysis by analysis. That is exactly what the NDP is doing. They are burying us under paralysis by analysis with four amendments. I don't know if there are more coming. I certainly hope not.

Madam Chair, I'm going to ask again. We've time allocated. We've had no choice but to do that. My ask of the NDP is to stop the gaslighting, stop the paralysis by analysis. Help us pass this legislation and get rebates to Albertans because that's what matters right now more than anything.

The Chair: Any other members to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Yeah. Madam Chair, the minister who just spoke should be embarrassed from his comments. First of all, debate for two hours in this Chamber is not filibustering; what it is is ensuring that there is proper, adequate, democratic oversight on a piece of legislation. All of us were elected to this Chamber to do our job, and if the minister has an issue with that, well, he's welcome to go to other countries around the globe that don't have democratic debate and have a one-party state where you only hear one side and things are expedient.

10:10

I'm quite happy to live in a country that has multiple parties elected to hear multiple points of view. In fact, regardless of the number of votes the UCP received in the last election, there are 24 members who were elected representing a significant number of Albertans, and one would argue that no single member in this Chamber – no single member – received 100 per cent of the votes in their riding, which means that Albertans have diverse political views. So I will not be lectured or accused of gaslighting for doing my job, which is to provide thoughtful amendments to legislation. It's the actions and words of the previous speaker that showcase why Albertans are so frustrated with their elected representatives. I did not hear one single reason of why this amendment before the Chamber is unnecessary.

The amendment here, Madam Chair, is talking about the minister preparing a report as to why a rebate would be warranted. Honestly, I think that's just good policy. If we get to a point that a rebate is triggered because the price gets to a point that is untenable for many Albertans or unaffordable, then the government is going to investigate as to why that happened. We're talking about a legitimate investigation.

I mean, the challenge with this place is that it seems like every day in question period history is being rewritten. The overbuild of the electricity transmission lines was first commissioned under Ralph Klein, and then it was actioned by former Premier Stelmach's government. I know this, Madam Chair, because I was involved in politics at that point. Now, I'm happy for other members, if they were also actively engaged in 2006, to get up and speak about the then policy of the former PCs. Then that continued under Alison Redford's government. To my recollection, there are five MLAs in this place that were here at that time.

My colleague the Member for Lethbridge-West cited a number of different news articles in which the former leader of the Alberta NDP, Brian Mason, in between 2004 and 2008, talked about the overbuild and how much it was costing Albertans and even made a comment about how on Albertans' electricity bill there should be a line that talks about the PC overbuild of the transmission lines. That's accessible. Just google it. It's an article that existed pre-2008.

Then in 2012 I, the Member for Edmonton-North West, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, and the former leader continued to talk to Albertans about the fact that the PC government committed billions, and we learned the real reason for the transmission overbuild. Even though it was being billed and sold to Albertans as "This is necessary," nobody believed that. It was to

export electricity to the United States. Pull up a map of Alberta and look at the transmission line, where it goes. It goes from north to south.

So when members of the UCP get up and talk about, “This was the NDP overbuilding the transmission lines,” that’s patently false. It was a decision that we fought against, in total, for probably about six years, maybe a little longer than that. I encourage all members of the public to go on *Hansard*, because we are all on *Hansard* speaking against this. It’s ridiculous for government members today to make the claim that these current high prices are because of an NDP policy. It’s patently false.

I will circle back, Madam Chair, to this amendment. The point of this amendment is only to direct the minister, for lack of a better term, to investigate: when rebates are triggered, what was the trigger? Let’s dig into that. Now, despite what the minister says, entities like the AER and the AESO were commissioned to provide oversight, but keep in mind that these are Crown corporations who report to government. The buck stops with the elected officials, period.

To blame a Crown corporation or, you know, to blame a previous government that had nothing to do with the transmission overbuild and, in fact, at countless moments in the Legislature and outside of the Legislature – in fact, the Member for Edmonton-North West and I were talking about the number of rallies that we spoke at opposed to the overbuild. It’s countless. [interjections] I can hear members of the government chirping, because they don’t like to hear the truth. They don’t like to hear the fact that this government is falsely accusing the opposition.

I love when members talk about: what did you do for oil and gas? Well, we committed 50,000 barrels per day to Keystone XL. What have you done for Keystone? Nothing. We moved Canadians; 4 in 7 Canadians were in favour of the Trans Mountain pipeline. We moved the needle to 7 in 10 Canadians. What have you done? The revision of history is ridiculous.

I believe and I know that both parties support our energy sector. Both parties support our oil and gas workers. We know that our oil and gas sector is the lifeblood of this province. We know that we have incredible potential in a number of other sectors, including hemp and opportunities that were realized by the previous government to support the development on the full value chain of areas like hemp, value-added ag, forestry, life sciences, biotech.

I apologize, Madam Chair. I’ve really digressed from this amendment, so I will circle back to this. I appreciate the latitude members have given me in this speech. Thank you.

10:20

This amendment is here to provide oversight and to ensure that there is an adequate – “investigation” is not the right word, Madam Chair – exploration as to why the rebates are triggered and then to share that with Albertans. I think that’s a reasonable request. I think that if the government is truly interested in transparency and accountability and showing Albertans why a rebate was triggered, then I see no reason as to why members of the government would vote against this. So I encourage all members to support this amendment.

The Chair: Any hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just will take a few moments here. I noticed that the minister of natural gas has been presenting himself as an expert on gaslighting. He uses the word quite frequently when he speaks, and I am willing to accept he is an expert on gaslighting, at least the actual doing of it.

I think that the simple explanation for all of this is that the minister has been complaining that because we did not agree to his planned subversion of democracy by changing the rules of the House and debate and passing this bill on the day that he presented it – in fact, he already had said that we were filibustering before even a single person had spoken to it. In fact, the reality is that the government side has said that when this bill is passed, it will be July at the earliest before anybody sees any of this money. It’s also true that if we debate this bill now, as we are supposed to under the democratic process, and continue to debate this bill in the usual manner in which it’s done and pass it in the usual manner in which it is done, the rebates will arrive in people’s homes in July of this year. So regardless of whether we’ve had these debates or not or whether or not we gave consent to the government to subvert democracy, which, thank goodness, we did not, the rebates were going to arrive in people’s homes at exactly the same time as per the government’s scheduling.

All of the statements that the minister made are clearly gaslighting, are clearly not about what it is that the minister is saying they’re about, because the outcome, regardless of the minister’s ridiculous statements, is exactly the same. So it’s quite clear that it wasn’t about getting the money out earlier that the minister was interested in. The minister was simply interested in stopping the democratic process in this House from occurring because of the minister’s embarrassment and not actually wanting to do what it is that this bill is doing.

Now, we know that because when the minister was asked to do something about it a year ago and the members on this side went, “Well, what will you do about this problem?” the minister proudly stood up and said, “Nothing.” Then he eventually got forced into making some move forward and suggested that he wanted to do this as quickly as possible but then has done everything to make sure that we cannot do this as quickly as possible, has stopped every one of the amendments that might have moved this forward. Actually, it was the government side that adjourned the initial debate on this, which we could have had more of on the day that it was introduced so that we could have gotten it through faster.

In fact, this government is not wanting to do what this bill is doing, and I suspect that they’re hoping that if the circumstances are right, they will never have to do it at all. You know, I accept the suggestion of the minister of natural gas that he knows a lot about gaslighting, because he certainly demonstrated a lot of it in this House. Nothing that the government has done demonstrates anything other than the fact that they intend to engage in a process that gives the minimal amount to the fewest number of people at the last possible date.

Now, I think we’ve heard that from this government before with regard to protecting our children from COVID, for example, and many other kinds of acts in this House, so we are not surprised. But what we see is them pretending to do otherwise and accusing the opposition of not going along with their pretense. What the minister, when he gets into one of his rants, is really ranting about is being caught, being caught out saying one thing and actually doing another. I think that kind of behaviour is fairly classic for this government and is really unacceptable.

If this government wanted this money to be in the hands of Albertans today, it would be in the hands of Albertans today. They could simply have had all of the stages of this bill proceed in the timeliest of manners, but they chose not to. They adjourned the debate initially. They could have agreed to any of the motions put forward, the amendments put forward, to ensure that the legislation included timeliness and that the government was forthright in the decisions that they made, but they have refused to do that.

So when the government pretends that somehow they would have acted sooner if it weren't for the opposition, we know they are indeed, as the minister says, gaslighting. He is right. He just simply needs to point that finger at himself, because the answer is that regardless of this process, this money was going to come out on the same day. All of the excuses that he provides are clearly without justification and are an attempt to treat Albertans as fools, something that I think is completely unacceptable and should have this government feeling shame, but they apparently are incapable of that.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other hon. members to join the debate on amendment A4?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:27 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------|--------|-------|
| Bilous | Feehan | Sabir |
| Carson | Ganley | Sweet |
| Eggen | Loyola | |

10:30

Against the motion:

| | | |
|----------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer | Luan | Rutherford |
| Allard | Nally | Schow |
| Copping | Neudorf | Schweitzer |
| Ellis | Nixon, Jeremy | Shandro |
| Gotfried | Orr | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Hanson | Panda | Smith |
| Issik | Rehn | Toews |
| LaGrange | Reid | van Dijken |
| Long | Rowswell | Williams |
| Totals: | For – 8 | Against – 27 |

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: We are back in Committee of the Whole, no amendments on Bill 18. Any members to join debate?

If not, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 18 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report Bill 18.

[Motion carried]

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East and the Chair of Committees.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 18. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, does the Assembly agree in the report? If so, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. In my opinion, the ayes have it. That motion is carried and so ordered.

The Deputy Government House Leader is rising.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We had a lot of great progress this evening debating Bill 18. I think it's a really important bill, and I'm grateful for everyone's participation. With that, I actually rise to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 77(1) and any other necessary standing orders in order to proceed immediately to third reading of Bill 18.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 18

Utility Commodity Rebate Act

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the members opposite for allowing us to go immediately to third reading.

This is an important piece of legislation at a time when Albertans are struggling. We know that there's some great news out there. We know that a lot of the things that we have put in place are working. We are seeing a balanced budget. We're seeing some 130,000 jobs that have been created. We're seeing an economy that, quite frankly, is on fire, so there's lots of great news, but we also are seeing some inflation, and we are seeing the cost of living is now on people's minds because everything is getting more expensive. Of course, there are a lot of reasons for that, and we can look to the coal-gas conversions that have made electricity very expensive. You know, we could also look to the carbon tax.

We have been saying this from day one, Mr. Speaker, that you should not be taxing Albertans for heating their homes in the winter. It's just fundamentally wrong to do so. But, you know, progressive politicians across this country have this childlike enthusiasm for continuing to raise carbon taxes and making everything more expensive for Albertans, and it's wrong. But this is where we are.

We also have a situation where we have an overbuilt transmission system. I have tried to be fair to the NDP, Mr. Speaker. I have been the first to admit that the NDP did not start the overbuild, but they didn't stop it either. We did stop the overbuild, and I've given many examples.

In 2021 we spent zero dollars on transmission, and it's because we have brought fiscal responsibility to the electricity grid. Unfortunately, we still have to pay back the \$7.5 billion, and this is what's causing everything to be more expensive. Utilities are going up, and layer on top of that, Mr. Speaker, the geopolitical situation in Ukraine right now, and that is continuing to increase prices. We have an energy crisis in Europe, and make no mistake: it is on our

doorstep and it is coming our way and it's causing everything to go more expensive, particularly in the utilities.

For that reason, we have put forward this rebate legislation so that we would have enabling legislation that would allow us to provide immediate relief to Albertans. This would be short-term relief while we do the longer term work involved in lowering prices. Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all of my colleagues, I would encourage the members opposite to support Bill 18 so that we can get these electricity rebates out to Albertans as fast as possible. I encourage everyone to support Bill 18.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, third reading of Bill 18, Utility Commodity Rebate Act. Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to third reading, and the associate minister has asked quite nicely for support of this bill. I wish there was a timeline, some certainty, when Albertans will get the rebate. The government has been dithering on it for the last six months. I wish there was a ban on shut-offs so that Albertans

have some assurance that their utilities won't be cut off for nonpayment, but it's not there. Let's hope that the government realizes that it's a serious issue and moves at the speed of business and does something that benefits all Albertans.

Thank you. With that, we will be supporting this piece of legislation.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the associate minister to close debate if there are none. The hon. the associate minister to close debate? That is waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a third time]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More progress, which is just wonderful to see in this Chamber. But I think that it's time to call it a night, so I do move that the Chamber adjourn until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

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

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, April 26, 2022

Day 24

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, April 26, 2022

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 15

Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate April 21: Mrs. Allard]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to my colleagues for gathering this morning as we consider government Bill 15, which is currently titled Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline. That's the subtitle, actually; Education Amendment Act more generally.

I just want to start by saying that every child in Alberta deserves a high-quality educational opportunity, which should be consistently available for every child no matter where they live, no matter which system their parents choose – public, Catholic, francophone – and that system, that school, should be supported with excellently trained professionals, who have access to a number of different training programs here in the province of Alberta.

I did my education degree at the University of Alberta but know many exceptional teachers from the University of Calgary, Lethbridge, Concordia right here in Edmonton, and the list goes on. We have some of the best education programming available anywhere in the province, and the Minister of Advanced Education is probably well aware of the exceptional programs we have in Alberta to ensure that teachers can receive the right kind of support and educational opportunities to be prepared for the classroom.

One of the classes that actually really got me excited when I was doing my after degree in education was law and ethics. It is a mandatory course at most postsecondary institutions, maybe even all. From the ones that I considered, it was certainly a mandatory course for every aspiring teacher.

For good reason, Mr. Speaker, because we all must, when put in a position of power and trust – power and trust for a variety of professionals, including teachers, of course, but also health care professionals, doctors. Members of this Legislative Assembly are certainly put in a position of power and authority and trust when it comes specifically to political staff working in this building. Lawyers, of course, are in a position of trust; engineers, who we

count on to design critical infrastructure to ensure that we are all safe and can move freely. All of these professionals are in significant positions of power and authority and hold a great deal of trust in society. Ensuring that we have proper oversight and mechanisms in place to ensure that professionals in positions of trust are held to a high, high, high degree of accountability and that everyone can drop their child off at school with confidence that they will be safe, protected, and respected in that learning environment is crucial.

One of the other components that very early on in that law and ethics course, and maybe even in some others, was instilled in us deeply was that teachers are in loco parentis. They're in the role of the parent when it comes to that time of responsibility when they are working together with that child. So that really is a significant degree of confidence and trust that's placed in teachers.

I have to say that when the minister started sort of foreshadowing this legislation and highlighted some egregious examples of times where teachers broke that trust and harmed children, of course, every Albertan who heard about those was heartbroken, devastated, and a high degree of not just empathy but imagining if that was your child or somebody you cared about was front of mind for many Albertans. At that time the Premier and the Education minister and others in cabinet said, "This is one of the reasons why we need to change things," because they believed that the current system didn't work because of specific cases that they highlighted from the past.

I want to say that nobody wants teachers who break that trust to be in the classroom, not another teacher who's in that school, not a member of the ATA disciplinary board, not the minister, I hope. I don't think anybody wants somebody who breaks the trust in a professional capacity, and of course today we're here talking about teachers specifically, to continue in their profession when they have caused significant harm.

I also want to highlight that one of the number one issues that was highlighted about the one specific case that received the most attention was the fact that the ATA didn't notify the police. The number of people who were informed about that egregious act: not a single one notified the police, not local folks closest to the child who found out about the issue, not the ATA, and definitely not the minister. There is a well-documented paper trail between the minister being the one who actually asked to revoke the teaching certificate and therefore received information. All of the information that the current minister received was received by prior Conservative ministers at the time that these horrific incidents took place, and none of them notified the police.

I think that there is certainly an opportunity for us to improve on the process to ensure that police notification is initiated by one or all parties when it comes to any type of horrific breach of public trust when it comes to any professional in this province. I certainly wish that the school or the ATA or the minister would have notified the police. When I read the subtext of what the minister was saying, I hope that she feels the same way as well rather than trying to specifically attack one of the groups that was privy to that information.

Again, every child in Alberta should have access to a high-quality educational opportunity with high degrees of trust, with reasonable class sizes, with appropriate oversight and professional development for all adults working in that building with that child or team or young adult. We are put in a high degree of trust as teaching professionals, as principals, as educational assistants, as school leaders to ensure that every child in that building has access to the right supports when it comes to educational supports as well as a high degree of confidence in the safety and well-being of one another.

The minister has highlighted that it is an incredibly small number of teachers who've broken this trust, and that is something that I

hope all of us and all Alberta parents can reflect on, that the vast, vast, vast majority of adults who work in schools with kids are there for all of the right reasons, and they want to do their absolute best to make sure that every child has an opportunity to succeed and feel safe and supported at school.

We know that the opportunities for that additional support under the current government have been significantly breached. Reflecting on the first Education budget, there were promises made by the Finance minister in this House that enrolment growth would be funded, and of course it was not. Immediately the government froze the Education budget even though the number of students was continuing to grow in the province.

Then, not long after, the public health crisis of COVID-19 hit and immediately – well, not immediately. The first week the minister sang the praises of folks like educational assistants and school bus drivers who were continuing to find ways to support families. In this very Legislature she talked about school nutrition programs that had been suspended but bus drivers were delivering food hampers to families in need throughout the province. About a week after she made those very remarks, she gave notice to every school district that they must terminate educational staff who weren't providing direct teaching support. That meant the school bus drivers. That meant educational assistants and many others who were working in schools to find ways to support kids in one of the scariest times of their lives, certainly, when the world changed significantly on a dime.

10:10

Then when we actually look through the budget documents – you can compare the tables of certificated staff, which are teachers, and noncertificated staff; typically educational assistants would be the vast majority within that line item – you see that over the three budgets that we've seen from the current government, from the UCP, the number of certificated staff is down almost 1,000. The minister has said, "Well, that's not in this year's budget," because they adjusted the tables for last year's budget to show a significant reduction in the number of teachers, but the black-and-white truth is that if you compare when the NDP was in government to this current budget that's just recently been passed in this House, the UCP is planning and has delivered 1,000 fewer teachers for Alberta students.

If you want to talk about opportunities to provide support and trust and collaboration for kids, making sure you have exceptional teachers who are well trained, who are held to a high degree of accountability when it comes to their behaviour, their conduct, and their delivery of educational supports and information to children, I'm with you. You can't do that in a sustained way by continuing to reduce the number of teachers in schools. [interjection] I welcome the interjection from my colleague for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been listening closely to my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora. I certainly appreciate the thought she's brought forward, and as she was speaking about the situation in schools – the loss of staff, the incredible pressure those staff are under, the vindictiveness, perhaps, in some respects with which this government has approached the teaching profession – it's certainly put me in mind of the challenges that we are facing in health care in the province of Alberta at the moment, where I don't think we've ever had a more exhausted and demoralized workforce and indeed the challenges, the understaffing that has been created by the actions of this government and the pressure that creates and the difficulty that creates, then, in providing the level of care that is expected for patients and the situations, in fact, dangers, that could present. I was wondering if the Member for Edmonton-Glenora

would agree that we seem to have a bit of a parallel here in this behaviour and that, you know, trying to disempower teachers further or attack them in the way that this government has could further jeopardize that situation.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start my response by saying that a strong foundation in public education and public health care are two of the main reasons why I find myself aligned with the NDP and have for quite some time now, because not only is the NDP the party that brought medicare to Canadians, something that I am incredibly proud to continue to be a steward of as we serve as Members of this Legislative Assembly, but because of the opportunities that I had growing up as the daughter of two teachers, going to public school, most of that time in northern Alberta in a small village called Kinuso, and the impacts that that had on creating opportunities for me and many of my classmates to reach our full potential.

In quality public education, which everyone should be aspiring to, I hope, in this place, every child is in and every child has an opportunity to succeed, and to have the right conditions in place to make that happen, as my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre says, you need to have adequate supports, so you need to have a teaching complement that is reasonably sized, that has fair class size conditions so that teachers can work closely and track the learning and progress of all the students that they are in charge of. We continue to see under this current government, as has been highlighted, now 1,000 fewer teachers when the number of students has not gone down, really, when you look at the numbers when the NDP was in government versus today, and we know that the educational needs have grown significantly.

The term "learning loss" is often used, and I probably have used it myself. I want to be clear that kids didn't lose learning; they lost the opportunity to achieve greater knowledge. When you look at where they're at in terms of their projected growth, if you look at assessments like MIPI or the SLA in terms of where you're at today and where you're projected to be two years from now, almost every child in this province saw setbacks from where their anticipated growth was headed. [interjection] I see an opportunity for an interjection, and I welcome it from my colleague for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. You know, I know she's quite passionate about education, and she and I have actually had the opportunity to visit a few schools together, both in person and virtually. We were at a school not too long ago – gosh, time is confusing – and it's a school where they're very much stuck for space. I was thinking about the member's comments on learning loss and just thinking about how a school like that that we visited, where the teachers and the staff and the students are dealing with so much and they're doing so in a space that's not been adequately funded – they're doing so in a francophone setting, and they're doing so in a space where everybody is doing all they can to make it work, in the midst of a pandemic, might I add. I just wanted to ask the member to tell a little bit more about what she's hearing from the schools that she's visited.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks very much to my colleague for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for the opportunity to reflect on what kids are facing in schools today. The school that she speaks of is one that I am proud that the NDP opened in the time when we were in government, and certainly the demand has far exceeded original projections for the community that it serves in Sherwood Park. Now is the time to grow that building significantly to ensure that it can continue to meet the Charter-protected rights of minority language

speakers in the province of Alberta, French speakers in the province of Alberta, and to ensure that all the parents who choose francophone education for their children have an opportunity to see their kids reach their full academic potential and language and culture potential as well.

One of the number one issues that folks have raised with us over the last six months in particular, I'd say, are the significant impacts to child and adolescent mental health. When we were in government, I was proud to serve as the Health minister, and one of the projects that I was very keen to see evolve and move forward was the number one priority for the Royal Alex hospital, and it also became a very high priority for the folks at the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation. It was to build a stand-alone child and adolescent mental health facility here in Edmonton between the Norwood long-term care facility, which is being renamed Gene Zwozdesky, and the Glenrose.

The purpose of this stand-alone health facility would be to provide in-patient and out-patient services and one-stop opportunities for families to know, if you live in central or northern Alberta or in the capital region, where it is you can receive the expert support in a stand-alone health facility. This is still needed even though the current government, the present government, has decided that it's not a priority for them. It is absolutely a priority for families in Edmonton and surrounding area, and it is a priority for those who work in health care and in education. This doesn't mean that there aren't currently ... [interjection] Oh, another opportunity for an interjection by Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Edmonton-Glenora. I know it can be a little bit tricky at times with interventions, but I appreciate so much your willingness. You know, just your comments on health and health care and the connections to education – you and I have talked a lot about a holistic approach to education, particularly mental health. One of the things that I'm so proud of is our advocacy, your advocacy in particular – that member's advocacy, I should say – on the need for mental health supports. I know you don't have a lot of time left, but I wondered if you might just touch on the critical need to continue to take, when we're, hopefully, back in government, a holistic approach to education, wherein the health of every student is prioritized. We know this pandemic has exacerbated the mental health crisis in schools, and without investment, without supports, I fear very much that students' mental health is going to continue to be further impacted.

Thank you, Member.

Ms Hoffman: May I have a time check, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker: Yes. I was actually going to let you know that instead of one and a half minutes, you have three and a half minutes according to what I believe.

10:20

Ms Hoffman: I will take that opportunity to say that the stand-alone health facility would be absolutely a significant benefit to the people of Alberta, for the mental health of children and all of us. We also need embedded in the health care system, in the education system opportunities for enhanced support and mental health awareness and crisis support in schools.

This is one of the reasons why we've proposed for quite some time during the pandemic that we get Alberta back to having a counsellor in every school.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you. I apologize. It's only 45 seconds left.

Ms Hoffman: Okay. Thank you.

Having a counsellor who is available in each and every school: these are things that could be done to make sure that children who are in positions of harm or who have been hurt by somebody in a position of trust or otherwise have an opportunity to actually receive the additional mental health supports that they are so rightfully in need of and that the government should be providing. I would love to see the government take some time to bring forward a bill to actually address the mental health of students who have been facing significant hardships, whether it's by the pandemic or whether it's by others who are in positions of trust.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I believe the individual who first caught my eye was the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise here today to take this opportunity to express my support for Bill 15, Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. Firstly, I would like to express my appreciation to the minister for taking this important step, that brings changes to support our Albertan families first but, most importantly, our children. As well, I commend the minister for taking time to hear the feedback that many of the parents, educators, teachers, teacher leaders, stakeholders, and licensing staff had given.

Mr. Speaker, let's not forget the great efforts our teachers in Alberta have dedicated, especially in the past couple of years, where there were difficult decisions made by our government. If it had not been for our teachers' and our teacher leaders' resiliency and great efforts, our children and families would have been faced with numerous challenges within the education system. This province has been one of the best education systems. It provides quality education through the standardized curriculum, our highly qualified, government-certified teachers, and our modern schools and technology across rural and urban Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, let me remind you that the teachers' union has spent millions of dollars on advertising campaigns to instill fear in Albertans and teachers alike, arguing that changes to the present disciplinary framework will demolish the teaching profession and damage the whole education system. This tale is completely false and incorrect. Bill 15 is introduced in the Legislature to only enhance the standards of the teaching profession by eliminating potential conflicts of interest, increasing openness and accountability, providing peace of mind to parents, and, most importantly, protecting our children.

In Alberta the government has made a promise to take important actions to reform and revise our laws that will benefit Albertans all across the province, and Bill 15 aims to improve the discipline process for all teachers and teacher leaders in order to serve the greatest interests of our kids, families, educators, and the general public.

Mr. Speaker, our system allows our children to become the best, fullest versions of themselves. It teaches how we can become self-aware and conscious about the world we live in, and Albertans and families have been trusting this government to ensure improvement and opportunities continue to make the lives of our children better.

The Alberta government is revising the teaching profession's disciplinary procedures in order to make the educational system safer for kids, their families, and instructors. This involves the establishment of the Alberta teaching profession commission and the appointment of a commissioner to oversee teacher and teacher leader conduct and competency complaints on a reasonable basis.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 15 will protect the entire teaching profession by bringing all teachers and teacher leaders, regardless of who they work for, under one reformed disciplinary process, bringing everyone together under a common touch point and putting the best interests of students, their families, teachers across the education system, and the public at the centre of the teaching discipline processes.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is the only Canadian province where the teachers' union has sole responsibility, set out in legislation, to deal with the discipline for their active members, with no other alternative. If this is not a clear indication for change, then I don't know what it is.

Bill 15 will put Alberta in step with other jurisdictions and regulated professions such as nurses by removing the conflict of interest that exists when a union advocates for its members while also conducting disciplinary proceedings. In addition, Bill 15 would reinforce requirements for stakeholders in the education system and employers to report to police where there may have been serious harm or a threat to a student's safety.

It would also expand on the employer's duty to notify the registrar when conduct-related employment action is taken against a teacher or teacher leader. This enhancement would minimize information gaps that would threaten student safety. This legislation builds on the students first act, which received royal assent on December 2, 2021. The online teacher registry enabled under this act will make publicly available all hearing, appeal, and minister's decisions where there is a finding of unprofessional conduct or professional incompetency as well as making hearings and appeal dates public.

Mr. Speaker, the students first act amends the Teaching Profession Act, the Education Act, and the College of Alberta School Superintendents Act and was introduced to create a public, online, and searchable database of Alberta teacher and teacher leader information, bringing Alberta in line with other provinces, as well as requiring school authorities to conduct criminal record and vulnerable sector checks when hiring a new teacher or teacher leader and again every five years throughout their employment as well as improved oversight and timeliness of disciplinary matters for teachers and teacher leaders.

Furthermore, the students first act now requires the Alberta Teachers' Association, the ATA, to inform the Ministry of Education about all complaints made against its members, including when a complaint is filed, and improves the efficiency of disciplinary processes by simplifying the ATA's disciplinary committee structure to align with the structure and processes used by the College of Alberta School Superintendents and Alberta Education's registrar.

10:30

Mr. Speaker, this database would allow parents to view the status of teacher and teacher leader certificates, including if certificates have been suspended or cancelled for unprofessional conduct or professional incompetency. This will balance individual teacher and teacher leader's rights to privacy, procedural fairness with the public's right to know when a teacher or teacher leader has been disciplined for a serious matter.

Again, Mr. Speaker, let me remind everyone in the Chamber that the great majority of teachers in the province are professionals who are concerned about the safety of the children in their charge. By eliminating any idea of a conflict of interest, the act would raise the status of the teaching profession as well as improve the teaching profession's accountability and openness, that will protect kids and provide parents with peace of mind.

This legislation will build a healthy and trusting relationship with families that have been frustrated for many years with the lack of support they received from the previous government. We are

continuing to prioritize children and families by working to improve Alberta's teacher and teacher leader disciplinary systems from kindergarten to grade 12. The initiative of the ministry will strengthen the education system by increasing accountability, openness, and timeliness while ensuring that the laws and related rules that supervise these procedures do not constitute a conflict of interest.

Through Budget 2022 Alberta's government continues strong support for the education system. It provides an increase of more than \$700 million over the next three years to support teachers and to address cost pressures in transportation. This increased funding also recognizes enrolment growth. It includes a 1 per cent increase to both base funding and operations and maintenance funding. In 2022-2023 this increased funding will ensure that school authorities can hire the required number of teachers and support staff, address increases in property and vehicle insurance premiums, support schools in maintaining enhanced cleaning protocols, and mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on student learning. Targeted funding of \$110 million over the three years, including \$30 million in 2022-2023, will enable schools to support students experiencing academic challenges and create school environments supporting student well-being and positive mental health.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I just want to reiterate that this legislation will not only make the educational system safer for kids, their families, and their teachers, but this act will improve the standards and will help us identify gaps within the education system. I just hope that every member of this Chamber respects the rights of a safe education system for our children. Again, I commend the minister for having made this bill into reality for the benefit of the entire province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise this morning to add some first initial thoughts here around Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. I guess before I get to a couple of the comments from the previous speaker, first I'd just like to thank my good friend from Edmonton-Glenora for the insight that she brings to this subject because of her experience as not only a school trustee but also as a school board chair, and obviously for many years she served very, very well there with one single focus – and that was on: how do you get the best outcome for our students, our young emerging leaders, here in the province? – you know, in that former role, at least in the Edmonton area. So I just want to thank her for that.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when I look at Bill 15, I can't help but feel like this is a little bit of a get-back-at piece of legislation. The reason why I feel that way is that I understand – I don't think there's any teacher anywhere that doesn't want the best outcomes for their students. They want them to be able to learn in a safe environment. But just like anything else, unfortunately, you're always going to find at least one bad actor. I could say that about large corporations. I could say that about a trade. I could say that about a politician. When you start to go down the path where you're constantly butting heads and then all of a sudden you see something that sort of creates a bit of an upheaval – as we all know, the curriculum has been a very contentious piece coming forward, and the ATA has been very, very vocal about that. Now all of a sudden: well, you guys aren't doing your job.

Now, I understand that the case that this is mostly based off – again, as I've told this House time and time again, it always seems

to come down to the language, and the language that was available at that time: we can certainly have a debate about whether that was, you know, right or wrong. Clearly, it wasn't enough, but those were the steps that had to be followed at the time. So, as my friend from Edmonton-Glenora said, it looks like the ball was dropped at the minister's level, the minister of the day.

You know, we've seen some significant difficulties imposed on the teaching profession over the course of this government's term. We've seen significant funding decreases in education, hence some of my initial comments to the previous speaker talking about increasing funding. Let me ask this question, then, Mr. Speaker: if we are funding education at the levels that they need to be able to hire teachers and staff, then why do we have Bill 21 in front of us right now, which seeks to extend the time that education boards can dip into their reserve funds to be able to pay for things? Why is that necessary if we are indeed funding at an appropriate level?

We know that's not happening. We're short a thousand teachers. We have a lot of students that won't actually have specific funding for them, so we're forcing boards to have to be very, very creative and teachers to be very, very creative to be able to provide that service to those students. I think that kind of debunks that just a little bit, you know. I would expect, then, if that was indeed the fact, that funding is at appropriate levels, that we shouldn't need that section in the bill that has just been tabled in this House yesterday, Bill 21, to seek to extend, allowing boards to dip into their reserve funding to pay for things.

Getting back to the things on the ATA side, as I said, they've been very, very vocal. This seems like a little bit of, as I mentioned in my earlier comments, a piece to get back at education. There are two courses I think you could have taken this. You could have actually dealt with the shortfall in the current language rather than creating this commissioner position. Let's be honest. Really, this is about the minister. This is about the minister having all kinds of authority to be, well, quite frankly, judge and jury or jury and judge and maybe even ultimately executioner. Who knows?

10:40

You know, members of the government bench, members of the government caucus who served in the 29th Legislature, as I said, very consistently and persistently were very, very opposed to any additional measures that were given to a minister. Yet here we are, and all I'm hearing is crickets. Did you actually believe that at the time when you said it, or is it just, "Well, now I'm in charge, so it's very, very convenient now, and it works for me," which, of course, means that you didn't really actually believe it to begin with? Again, this is a very significant piece being allowed to the minister around that, so I question why that's happening.

The other direction that it could have gone – and we've seen this now with, for instance, chiropractors and physiotherapists and whatnot, having their profession split up into two organizations, kind of like the nurses. You know, you have the professional organization that will deal with the professional issues, and then you have UNA, which deals with the members, the advocacy on behalf of the members, things like that. Why didn't you go in that direction, then, and force them to split off into two? That would certainly solve it. Then you would have a profession dedicated to only dealing with that, and then you would have the other half that would deal with the membership. Again, I can't help but keep coming back to that, well, this is a little bit of a get-back at the ATA for speaking out quite loudly about the changes in the curriculum and the unwillingness of them to support it.

You know, when we've placed teachers at such a disadvantage, I mean, the work that they've tried to accomplish over the last year – I've got a few friends. They're teachers. I've heard the struggles

that they've gone through. I have 26 schools in Edmonton-Decore. All three high schools north of the Yellowhead freeway – all of them – are in Decore. So needless to say, I get the opportunity to speak to teachers, and I hear about their struggles. Saying that you'll be able to hire a few more teachers is not enough. I'm telling you right now that it's not enough.

As my friend from Edmonton-Glenora mentioned at the beginning, all of the cuts that happened right at the beginning of the pandemic, where all of a sudden 25,000 teaching professionals were gone, EAs – one of the biggest things I've heard is about the educational assistants and the lack of them.

Mr. Hunter: It happens every summer. [interjection]

Mr. Nielsen: Oh, I see there's an interjection from my friend from Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to my colleague from Edmonton-Decore. I'm hearing the other side shout: well, it happens every summer. What was different this year is that kids were still expected to learn. Disabled children were sent home to learn online with no support, and the one lifeline they had, the trained educational assistant who, in many circumstances – I actually talked to a family from the Member for Taber-Warner's riding who said that the educational assistant would call in the morning to help wake up the child, who they had this relationship with for eight months, and have a conversation about what the day was going to look like and how they were going to support them in learning online, and then that lifeline was cut off.

Mr. Speaker, this was incredibly different than what had happened in previous situations because in previous situations kids weren't expected to still be learning. They were on summer break, and this was no break, I will remind all members of this Assembly, when it comes to the hardship kids faced under the leadership of the UCP during the pandemic.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for those comments. I appreciate that. Yeah, I've heard the exact same thing. The comment of "Well, it happens every summer; it was in summer when this happened": you know, again you're flying out comments to try to sound like you're being oppositional, but the facts don't back it up. I consistently see that with this government. Facts don't line up with what they're saying. What they say about legislation isn't lining up, and it's persistently, consistently butting heads every single time, okay?

You know, it would be one thing if I'd heard from only one or two teachers of the struggles, the large class sizes, trying to manage all the students, and then on top that the students that do need that extra attention, that do need that extra help, aren't getting it simply because the teacher physically cannot provide all that help and still be able to teach their students. It's one thing if I've heard it from one or two teachers; the problem is that that's not the case. I'm hearing from dozens.

As I said, 26 schools in Decore. You know, all three of my high schools are full. My Catholic high school has portables at the back of the building that, quite frankly, are unsafe, but that's a discussion for another time. They need those for students to learn in. That's no longer enough. They're actually going just down the street to St. Cecilia junior high to hold classes there in their classrooms. It's been quite the juggling act. Teachers are trying to manage those situations.

I'm hoping that, you know, the member from the government caucus who was speaking earlier is correct, and there is actually funding. There better be a lot of it because we need space in Decore,

we need teachers in Decore, we need EAs in Decore. That's not to mention the rest, all of your ridings where there are schools.

You know, I was surprised at the number of class sizes there were. I remember the work that the previous government did trying to build schools, trying to modernize schools, and it had a slight effect, a very, very small one. But that just goes to show you just how far behind Alberta was in terms of its school infrastructure.

I know there's a lot of growth out in northeast Edmonton, and my friends from Edmonton-Manning and Edmonton-Castle Downs have some growth up in that area. That doesn't begin to touch the growth that we've seen just in south Edmonton. There's a responsibility on our part to be able to provide that infrastructure that's there.

You know, I've always found that when you treat people with dignity and respect, you pay them a decent wage, you give them some benefits, you genuinely praise them for the work they do, they'll step up, they'll bend over backwards, and somehow they'll come up with solutions to some pretty amazing problems. Teachers are no different. Going after them like this was not the solution. And based on your own words of the past, again, handing all this authority to the minister was supposedly against what a large portion of you agree with. I bet you that if you'd have gone to the ATA and said, "I think we're going to create two sides to the coin here, have you split up, just like we've done to other professions over the course of this term," like I mentioned earlier, chiropractors, physiotherapists, I can't guarantee they'd be happy, but they'd certainly be a lot less angry than they are right now.

10:50

You've pretty much pointed a finger and accused them of not doing their jobs, and that's not the case. They did their jobs based on the language of the day. Am I happy about that outcome? Absolutely not. Can we always do better? We should, but this was certainly not the way to do it.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak at second reading today of Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. I want to begin by thanking my colleagues for some of their comments already. You know, I want to begin that when we're talking about teachers, the primary thing that I think we're all concerned about, of course, is the special, unique, and trusted role that teachers play in children's lives. They are professionals who are trained and are held to professional standards with respect to their competence and, obviously, instilling not only the love of learning but, of course, the basic skills, also critical thinking skills, and all the important parts that teachers play from early age all the way through the end of high school.

Teachers play that role, but they also play a really important role considering the amount of time that they spend with children, and my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Glenora referred to this. We actually know that, legally speaking, teachers are considered to be in loco parentis, which means they are standing in the role of the parent, not only because of the hours of the day that they spend with children and students but also because of that role that they play in teaching and mentorship, the closeness. We know that that's incredibly important and that there are actually standards of care that are higher for teachers because of that unique role and because, of course, of the vulnerability and young age of children even all the way through high school. That role is critically important.

When we're talking about Bill 15, I think we're all united in this House in wanting to ensure that children and students are safe and are protected, but also I hope we are all united in the goal that they have every opportunity for learning. I sometimes have some questions around that, though, Mr. Speaker, about whether or not we're really united in those goals, but around safety I think we can all agree.

I say this, you know – I'll come from a few different perspectives on this. One is that I worked in my career for many years both within Alberta Education but also for school boards managing issues, to some extent, of teacher discipline and concerns around conduct, not so much around the performance, obviously, or competence, because that's really not the area in which I worked. However, I will say that I think it's important to note that in a profession as large as the teaching profession is in Alberta, as it is across the country, it is easy to pick out really bad examples of bad judgment, sometimes criminal judgment and action, by not just teachers but even those who are responsible for managing those situations, those who it's been reported to, who have not, I guess, taken action properly, and it's easy in those situations to point to those and paint a brush of all teachers.

But we have to remember, to begin with, when we're talking about these issues, that we are talking about a very, very small percentage of teachers, just as is the case, unfortunately, with the general public and with professions at large. Certainly, you know, as a member of the legal profession I'm sure everybody has a story of a lawyer who has not performed properly or has not complied with what people, the general public, would expect as high standards of ethics and conduct. There are bad actors in every group. There is no doubt about that, and we need to make sure that we have appropriate mechanisms to make sure that we can quickly and effectively respond to those issues.

In this case there's an added onus because of the fact that they're dealing with children. So I want to highlight that we are all committed in this House to making sure that we are taking appropriate steps to address really significant conduct issues, that may put children and students at risk, as quickly as possible. But we also have to remember that it is just a small percentage, and we should be careful not to brush all teachers with that same brush, I guess, that same colour, because really we know what an important role teachers play.

Actually, one of the issues that came up at the beginning of the pandemic in my role as critic for Children's Services, which highlighted the important role that teachers play, is that we know that when students had to move online to virtual learning, particularly in that initial shutdown but also as, like, progressive waves happened after that, the second wave, the third wave, many students were often sent home, but particularly in that first, initial shutdown the biggest risk that many children faced, who were already vulnerable, was that they actually would not have issues of safety that may be occurring at their home reported.

What I mean by that is that child abuse that may be taking place at home – teachers are actually often the only trusted adults in a vulnerable child's life, and when they're not around teachers, when they're not in classrooms where teachers can see what's happening, can see, perhaps identify some challenges that that child is facing, there were fewer reports of child abuse, not, of course, Mr. Speaker, because child abuse wasn't happening. In fact, it may have been happening at higher rates because of the isolation that families and children were experiencing. The lack of access to teachers actually ended up putting children at higher risk because there were fewer adults around to actually make those calls and reach out and support them. So that just highlights, again, my view of why it's so

important to recognize the role that teachers play and the high standard that we hold them to.

I mentioned, of course, that I have my own personal professional experience with school boards and with Alberta Education, working with teachers. Of course, as MLAs we all hear from our constituents, whether they be teachers, whether they be parents who have concerns, who want to make sure that teacher discipline is addressed properly.

But, of course, I'm also a parent, and many of us in this room are, and I send my children off to school every day, and they have wonderful teachers who, over the past few years of the pandemic, in particular, really rose to incredible levels of excellence and professionalism, of stepping forward in remarkable ways to accommodate the shift in learning but also to keep our children feeling safe and secure when they're at school, calming some nerves now and then, making sure to find creative ways that they can still engage in learning even when they couldn't do field trips or they were doing virtual learning.

I was constantly in awe of my children's teachers in terms of what they did to support student learning. But I also know that I am trusting every day that my children are safe and secure, and I'm so glad that I have a hundred per cent certainty that my kids are safe and secure in their schools with their teachers. That's a comfort that we all deserve and all children deserve as well.

So I think, certainly, steps that are taken to ensure student safety are important. However, I have to say with respect to Bill 15 that there are a number of concerns regarding the particular model that this government has chosen with respect to basically giving the Minister of Education the ability to appoint somebody and making the Minister of Education the judge and jury in terms of teacher discipline, and that actually is not consistent with how other professions are managed.

You know, I'm sure every member of this House is very familiar with a number of colleges, colleges of social work, of physicians and surgeons. The Law Society is another example, for the legal profession, where there is a separate college that actually is the one that assesses conduct and can do investigations and hearings and determine that.

What Bill 15 is asking Albertans to do is trust that the Minister of Education, essentially, can do that, and if there is anything that Albertans do not have right now, other than extra dollars to pay their bills because the cost of living has gone high because of the way this government has raised fees and costs for all Albertans, it is trust in this government, particularly the Minister of Education. It's actually hard to just pick which minister Albertans trust the least, but on this front I can certainly say with confidence that the Minister of Education is probably one of the least trusted ministers with respect to the decisions she's made and how they've impacted learning and students and teachers and schools. I know my colleagues have listed a number of examples.

11:00

I just want to point out a few things. There are number of issues with respect to not enough school infrastructure, and I need to say, as the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud, that southwest Edmonton is bursting at the seams. I am beyond disappointed. Reflecting the concerns of my constituents, our local high school, Lillian Osborne high school, is a great school, but it is bursting at the seams. For that reason, the school board has had to go to a lottery this year, which means even parents and students who live across the street from that school may not get in. In fact, those decisions are rolling out as we speak. It has been a priority for many years that the Edmonton public school board has put forward to this government to build a new high school in southwest Edmonton, and they failed

to do so. So I can't let a conversation or an ability to talk about education without representing my constituents who are deeply frustrated with this government's lack of planning for high school space in south Edmonton – I have to comment on that.

When I think about two of the issues that came up during the pandemic that really hit me hard as a parent, that really concerned me, and that I feel we're going to, unfortunately, bear the consequences of for years to come, and not just we as a society but specifically these children and these families, I think about how many young children did not enter into kindergarten or prekindergarten programs in the 2020 school year and the year after that, the huge drop in enrolment that we saw in early childhood education programs, particularly kindergarten, because it is optional in this province for kids to attend kindergarten and this government made parents feel that it was not safe.

I can tell you first-hand I heard from parents. My daughter was in kindergarten in 2020, and parents of kids in her age group who were coming up with her from daycare: I had those parents saying to me, "Well, I don't feel like it's safe to send my kids to school right now because this government has not done anything to assure me that schools will be safe in the pandemic; I don't feel comfortable, so I'm just going to keep my child home." That may be an individual parent choice, but it has implications for that student's learning, and it has implications for all of us. We should all be deeply concerned about the learning loss that has occurred in those critical early years for far too many young Alberta students. They are going to have greater challenges succeeding as they go forward through school. These were kids who were anticipated to enrol in kindergarten and did not. So that is a big challenge that we're going to be facing.

The other thing I have to comment on, Mr. Speaker, in the context of education is that if I had to pick one comment that I heard repeatedly during the pandemic that hit my heart deepest, it was how many parents of children with disabilities that I spoke to who said to me that they felt that their child simply lost a complete year of schooling. They just didn't get school that year, the 2020 school year. That happened, going forward earlier, because they lost their EA for a quarter of their previous school year, when the shutdown happened and this government fired EAs. They lost their EA. Then when they came back in September, most of them did not feel comfortable going back to school, so they were at home. They were not getting an EA. Literally, parents with defeat in their voice is actually what resonates with me, that they actually said to me: well, my child did not get an education this year.

We should all view that as an utter failure. We should all take responsibility for that, but in particular the Minister of Education and this government have to take responsibility for that. In our society if any child feels like they could not get an education when they're entitled to – we are supposed to be one of the wealthiest provinces in the country. We're supposed to have the best education system in the country, and we're saying that certain children were just failed. That's why Albertans have trouble trusting this government on education.

I could speak about numerous other things, Mr. Speaker. I could talk about the curriculum. We've all heard from our constituents on the curriculum. Again, as a parent of two young kids in elementary school who are actually going to be learning from this curriculum starting in September . . .

Ms Issik: Bill 15. We're reading Bill 15.

Ms Pancholi: . . . I have read that curriculum, Mr. Speaker. I have read the updated curriculum. My children are going to be learning from it, and it fails to address a number of the concerns that have

been raised. It's disappointing to hear that, you know, the Associate Minister of Status of Women wants to heckle on the curriculum, because I'm certain she's heard from her constituents as well. I'm deeply disappointed that this government is not addressing the concerns about the curriculum, and kids like mine are going to have to learn from it.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to Bill 15, you know, student safety is a high priority, is the top priority for all – all – of us in this room. But the mechanism by which we do it, I think, needs to be challenged when it's placing far too much authority and responsibility for teacher discipline into the hands of a Minister of Education that, frankly, does not have the trust of Albertans, and unfortunately for very good reason she does not.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move to adjourn debate.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 16 Insurance Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate April 25: Mr. Toews]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen to debate.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. Certainly, the question of insurance is one that has seen much discussion in debate in this Legislature, much more so recently as we've had revelations of the high profits that have been made by insurance companies in the province of Alberta at the same time as this government chose to remove the cap that was in place to protect Albertans against soaring insurance rates. Certainly, many questions about what lobbyist the Premier was meeting with and other folks in his cabinet, some of his former staff and advisers involved in that lobbying effort.

Of course, Bill 16 is not dealing with that kind of insurance. Bill 16 is dealing with a more corporate end of insurance. This is building on some of the previous work that the Finance minister brought into place regarding captive insurance. Specifically, this bill is doing three basic things. It's making some changes to how the captive insurance companies will function. As I said, late last year we saw that the minister brought forward and the members of this Chamber did pass legislation, the Captive Insurance Companies Act, allowing captive insurance companies to be set up, be licensed, and operate in Alberta.

This legislation is making one substantive change to that legislation, creating something called redomestication provisions. That specifies how an Alberta-based company that has a captive insurance company operating outside of Canada can bring them home while continuing to operate so that there's no disruption in coverage. Certainly, there are good reasons why a company might want to do this. I think Alberta does have higher regulatory standards than places like, say, Bermuda. Companies will have to pay some higher taxes, but they will save on other costs and risks, like, say, perhaps to do with foreign exchange.

Now, with the introduction of the Captive Insurance Companies Act, certainly, our caucus did put forward a bit of skepticism that companies would move their captives to Alberta. I was not in the technical briefing, but it's reported to me that officials in that briefing did state rather bluntly that they were pleasantly surprised with the uptake on this, with companies actually beginning to do

that. Suncor, apparently, for example, was quoted in the government's news release. It looks like they are planning to repatriate their captives. That, admittedly, has the secondary benefit of creating some additional tax revenue for the province. On that, you know, Mr. Speaker, I will not always criticize the government. I will recognize when something they have done is successful, and in this case it seems that there is some benefit that is coming from this.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

Now, the government is also making some changes to allow Alberta to license stand-alone reinsurance companies in Alberta. That's insurance for insurance companies. Whether those companies will be raising their own policy rates, I suppose we'll have to wait and see, Mr. Speaker. But, generally speaking, the reinsurance industry is dominated, apparently, by about 50 large players on the global scale, with the top five holding the majority of that market share. Increasingly, those companies are unlikely to insure insurance policies for certain sectors, and one of those is, unfortunately, the oil and gas sector.

Certainly, we recognize that the oil and gas sector continues to be an important part of the Alberta economy, and it requires that insurance to continue to function. With this legislative change my understanding is that the government is hoping that the enormous amount of capital that's circulating in our oil and gas industry here in the province of Alberta could be pooled to create a local reinsurance company or potentially companies.

11:10

At this point – I am certainly not an expert, Madam Speaker – it's unclear, I guess, whether this would work. Certainly, the potential liabilities that are involved are rather large. Companies will need billions of dollars of coverage, but this legislation is simply creating that policy space for that potential solution. It's, I'd say, a good-faith attempt to try to find a solution that doesn't represent any significant downside risk for the province. I have no issue with that provision.

Lastly, it's making things easier for Alberta companies, to my understanding, to access unlicensed insurance. Now, currently Alberta companies only access insurance from unlicensed insurance companies when there is no domestic insurer that will write an insurance policy for a particular risk. Now, certainly, there are some risks involved with using an unlicensed company. For an unlicensed insurer, say, who is domiciled in – well, I don't mean to pick on Bermuda, but it seems to be a handy example. They don't pay – there's really not much recourse for the companies here. It creates difficulties across jurisdictions. The only reason, though, that a company goes down that path with those risks involved is because they don't have many other alternatives. Again, creating a captive insurance company is one such alternative, so if they want to access that unlicensed insurance, companies either go through a government-licensed special broker or they just simply go out and find a policy on their own.

This legislation makes changes to the tax rate that's paid on the premiums when companies don't go through a special broker. Now, as mentioned earlier – well, as has been noted, I guess, Alberta is currently in a hard insurance market. This change brings us more in line with other provinces, makes it easier for industry to access a viable insurance product even if it is from an unlicensed provider. Certainly, I think that as a general matter of public policy we want our industry to be insured so that in the case of a catastrophic event the associated costs aren't ultimately borne by taxpayers.

In general I don't have particular concerns with this bill, but when we are talking about insurance, as we are here in Bill 16, certainly,

Madam Speaker, I think it is worth noting that while all of this may be useful and helpful for the industry and may ultimately have some benefit for the people of Alberta, one of the major challenges that we continue to have in insurance is one that goes completely unaddressed by this government, and that is the soaring rates of auto insurance in the province of Alberta.

You know, we have seen that since 2019, when this government came into power and chose to remove the cap on insurance late that summer, the average auto insurance premium has climbed by about 30 per cent in Alberta as compared to about 17 per cent in Atlantic Canada, 4 per cent in Ontario. That was just over the course of 2020, Madam Speaker. We know that it has continued to go up since. Certainly, that is something I have heard about from many of my constituents. Certainly, none of my constituents have written to me about their concerns about captive insurance.

Now, again, that doesn't mean that – as I've said, we support this legislation, the direction it's being taken. Certainly, it's important to ensure that companies have access to insurance to protect against liabilities coming back to the taxpayer and to keep those dollars within the economy in Alberta. But, also, dollars in the economy of Alberta come from individual taxpayers, who are paying sky-high auto insurance rates thanks to decisions of this government.

Indeed, the report that we finally saw released by this government, after significant pressure, after they've made deliberate changes to try to hide that report, shows that the car insurance industry in Alberta charged Albertans hundreds of millions of dollars more in premiums after this UCP government removed the cap on insurance. They shamelessly generated massive profits on the backs of Albertan drivers, and they are doing it with the help of the UCP government. Now, again, that report was something that had been released every year for 107 years, Madam Speaker – 107 – and this government decided that they wanted to try to hide it because they did not want the public to know that the car insurance industry collected \$1.15 billion more in premiums than they paid out in claims. In 2019 and 2020 they collected \$1.324 billion more than they paid out.

Again, Madam Speaker, we recognize the importance and the value of the insurance industry. Certainly, again, when we're talking about captive insurance, as we are here in Bill 16, and other changes to make it easier for companies and corporations to be able to access the insurance they need, certainly we recognize the value of that to the economy. Likewise for Albertans, for them to make their contributions to the economy, many, many, many of them need to be able to drive, and the ability for them to afford to keep a vehicle insured means that they are able to contribute more to the economy, and this government has chosen repeatedly to make that far more difficult.

As insurance companies are charging millions of dollars more to Alberta families and business – let's not forget that this affects corporate vehicles as well. Many, many businesses will have a fleet of vehicles that they use to earn their income to pay their taxes to contribute to the economy, and their jobs, their businesses have been made more difficult to operate because of choices by this government.

Certainly, again, we have no objection to the changes that are being made here to benefit some corporations in the province of Alberta and some businesses in the province of Alberta, some of which indeed make significant contributions to the economy, but we cannot forget that there are small businesses, individual Albertans who are trying to earn a living, and this government is making it far more difficult, far more expensive, far more costly for them to do so, and we hear nothing from the government members about concerns for those businesses, but that just goes to show again, Madam Speaker, that this is a government, in many respects,

that is far more concerned about large corporations, their wealthy friends, than average Albertans, small businesses in the province of Alberta, who contribute so much to the economy provincially and locally, provide the majority of jobs in this province.

Now, of course, there have been real questions about this. Certainly, we know clearly, reading this bill, who likely spoke with the Minister of Finance about asking for these changes. It's quite clear who the corporations were that benefit, and, again, knowing that, we can again say that we have no real disagreement with this bill. It makes good changes, and there has been much more transparency here than, I think, we have seen from the Premier and his staff, certainly the ministers, in regard to the lobbyists on raising the auto insurance cap.

You know, the Premier has gone on the record multiple times saying that he doesn't recall meeting with any insurance lobbyists, but we know that his own former campaign manager and staffer, Mr. Nick Koolsbergen, is now one of the consultants who lobbied his office, his key advisers, about lifting that insurance cap to give these companies the opportunity to significantly raise costs of Albertans, taking billions more in premiums at a time when Albertans were struggling and continue to struggle, Madam Speaker. So when we talk about Bill 16 and captive insurance, certainly, it's clear here who the minister was talking with and the reasons that it was undertaken.

Here we have the other side when it comes to average Albertans, small businesses, who make significant contributions to the economy, and indeed under this government people paid more in personal taxes last year than was taken in in corporate tax. So the people who are taking the disproportionate burden under this government are paying more in insurance, and the Premier is refusing, the Minister of Finance is refusing, this government is refusing to provide transparency on just who they spoke to in the insurance lobby to make those decisions, which clearly have not benefited the average Albertan.

Now, we recognize, again, that pieces in Bill 16 here indeed may benefit the Alberta economy by bringing some of these captive insurance companies home from foreign jurisdictions to pay tax here. That is a benefit. Ensuring that oil and gas can continue to operate, certainly, as an important part of our economy is a benefit. Where is the benefit, Madam Speaker, in forcing Alberta families who are struggling with soaring inflation even as this government rides that wave of inflation with their unindexed personal income tax? They take more money away from Albertans every single year. Where is the benefit for the Albertans, then, who are being charged the soaring insurance premiums by insurance companies who are pocketing billions?

11:20

Certainly, we know that in the run-up to the last election we had UCP MLAs who were talking at great length about the costs that were being put on Albertans' business, churches, other locations, quoting extremely large numbers about those costs, but we hear little from government members now about the costs that their government is imposing on Albertans.

I find it extremely unlikely, Madam Speaker, that the Premier cannot recall having met with a long-term colleague, someone he knows as well as Mr. Koolsbergen, that this government has no idea or claims perhaps that it just simply cannot recall who they might have met with. I think that is information Albertans deserve to know. Frankly, this government's loyalty should be to Albertans, not to lobbyists for the insurance industry, not to the insiders, the corporations that want to line their pockets on the backs of Albertans. Of course, we know that seems to be who this government chooses to favour in respect to its policies.

Certainly, we think about the government's current utility rebate, which it was complaining that the opposition was holding up. Well, Madam Speaker, the government is basically saying: hurry up and wait; pass this bill so we can eventually maybe get some money out in July, August, maybe September. Rejected amendments that were brought forward that would have got those dollars out quickly to Albertans, but it rushed to hand favours out to corporate entities. The insurance cap was off within months of this government coming into office, of course, likely due to the able lobbying of Mr. Koolsbergen and his compatriots. The government rushed to lower that corporate tax rate to the point now where Albertans individually are paying more personal income tax than corporations in the province of Alberta.

So while in general we do not have a particular issue with the provisions that are put forward in Bill 16 and we recognize the value of some of these steps that are being taken, other pieces we'll wait to see what the potential benefit might be. Certainly, we, again, as I said, had our skepticism around some elements under the captive insurance act. But we have seen that some of what the minister suggested might happen, in fact, has. It's unfortunate that we have not seen that reciprocated, that when they removed that cap and we warned that that was going to cause huge costs for Albertans, the government did not listen. And when we have called on them to take clear steps to help ease the cost burdens on Albertans, that are soaring under this government, many because of active choices this government has made as it prioritizes corporate Alberta over individual Albertans, they have chosen not to listen.

On this side of the House we will continue to support when there is legislation that we feel could be of value or certainly where we feel that the government has done its homework and appears to be coming forward with something of value, but we will also continue to call this government out when it continues to take steps that seem to be far more rooted in its own ideology, that fail the people of Alberta, that continue to drive up costs at a time when Albertans are already hurting. Certainly, that is a major concern.

I should also note, Madam Speaker: not only car insurance; condo insurance. Here's a representative for Edmonton-City Centre. We have a phenomenal number of condo buildings. Indeed, I personally have lived in and owned a condo, and I am well familiar with how much condo insurance rates have skyrocketed over the last couple of years. It is creating an immense burden for many condo owners because when those policies rise by thousands of dollars, that goes immediately on the backs of those owners in terms of their condominium fees. So not only are individuals, thanks to this government, paying more in terms of their car insurance, paying more income tax, continuing to pay soaring utility rates on a wing and a prayer that this government will eventually get around to figuring out how to deliver a rebate; they are now also facing the burden of additional costs on their condo fees because of soaring condo insurance.

Madam Speaker, I have not heard a word from the Minister of Finance, indeed from the Minister of Service Alberta, from any member of this government recognizing the immense costs that this is creating for individuals who simply want to be able to own a home, not a word of acknowledgement that those Albertans are paying much higher costs, are facing a much higher burden because of choices by this government.

As I said, no major concerns with Bill 16. We certainly appreciate the number of housekeeping bills this government has brought forward this session, dusting out the closets as it were, I suppose. A lack of substantial legislation, perhaps, certainly very little to actually help Albertans with many of the significant concerns they have, but despite those concerns, we don't have any particular

concerns with this particular act, and I imagine that I will likely be voting in favour of Bill 16.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak? The first speaker who caught my eye was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the chance to add some comments here to the debate on Bill 16, Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. I have to admit that when I first saw this bill appear on the Order Paper – you know, we've heard the government talking about all the work that they're going to be doing on insurance companies and changing legislation to make life better for Albertans, reducing their costs and things like that – I was cautiously optimistic. I really was. Then Bill 16 came out, and it seems a little thin for substantive changes to insurance.

Now, I don't think I have any concerns with the language that's proposed in Bill 16 around captive insurance. I know there are some challenges within, for instance, the energy sector, finding insurance. I appreciate that the government has moved to address those, but I have to ask: what about the challenges that Albertans have finding insurance?

You know, I've brought this up before in this House. I remember having a senior in my office who brought four bills to show me. One showed what his insurance was at the start of the year, before the insurance cap was removed, and then he brought me the one where it started after the insurance cap was removed. For a senior, having your auto insurance go up 47 per cent creates a challenge to say the least, but that wasn't all. He also brought me the two bills from his condo insurance. His condo insurance went up 56 per cent.

Now, that's certainly one of the high ends that I've seen and heard of. I have seen much lower. I've seen some people saying: yeah, my insurances have gone up 10 per cent. I know my insurance at home has gone up roughly about 15 on our house. You know, the Premier stood in this House and very boastfully talked about how he went to the insurance companies and asked for their help for Albertans to try to reduce their costs, and the Treasury minister talked about how they're going to be approving some reductions in around the 3 to 5 per cent. Well, again, going with this one insurance example from one of my seniors, 47 and 56 per cent, how is 3 to 5 per cent going to help them? Not to mention everything else that's been lumped along the way by the UCP government making life more expensive.

Again, here's language not lining up again. We hear talk about how we're making life better for Albertans. Their bills aren't showing that. So why didn't we see some changes in this bill to help Albertans as well? Like I said, I've always said that I don't have a problem with businesses making a profit, creating some wealth. I get that. But when you're building it on the backs of people, now I start to have a little bit of an issue with that. I think you can make a profit without unnecessarily gouging Albertans, and that's what we're seeing in insurance right now.

11:30

We all know about the report that came out on insurance, of course, at – what was the time? – 4:37 or something like that, 4:40 p.m., on the last day of a four-day long weekend, not just a long weekend but an extended long weekend. We know, Madam Speaker, that that was done very, very intentionally. We've seen it done before with a report that, quite honestly, doesn't paint a very favourable light for this government. They try to very quietly put it out there, and hopefully nobody notices. Well, not only did we in

the opposition notice it, but there were Albertans that noticed it. I quickly got a flurry of calls and e-mails about that saying: "What? Were they trying to sneak this in?"

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

You know, when it comes to, as all of you have tried to say over and over again, building the trust or rebuilding the trust, actions like that do not build that trust. It's no wonder, like I said, that people seem to think politicians are sneaky and trying to do all kinds of unsavoury things. It's actions like that that create that perception to begin with.

As we know, it wasn't good news for Albertans. We knew it wasn't. Frankly, I was astonished, Mr. Speaker, just how unfavourable it was. I know that my friend from Edmonton-City Centre had mentioned that. I mean, profits over a billion dollars. Again, I'm not begrudging them, but a billion dollars in direct profits versus what they're paying out? I'm sorry. They're building that profit on the backs of people, especially during a pandemic, when people weren't driving quite as often. Stay-at-home orders there for a while: those were never factored in. People started to work from home: that wasn't factored in.

Yet I guess the only reward that Albertans are now getting for literally paying the price of that is somewhere between 3 and 5 per cent, which the Premier, again, as I mentioned, boastfully stood in this House and talked about. I mean, you know, if that's the kind of advocacy that Albertans are going to get, maybe the Premier should hire Koolsbergen back to advocate to the insurance companies for some reduced rates.

You know, Mr. Speaker, why is it that we continually see opportunities for the government to be able to take actions to help people? You boasted about it. You said that you were going to do something. Bill 16 was that opportunity to do that, and you've dropped the ball. I guess that maybe there's something else that will be coming here in the session to address this, not just some kind of – I don't know – fake rebate, like we've seen for the gas and electricity. I remember talking about it in question period. One of my constituents comes in with a \$500 bill for one month, and all he's being offered is \$50 for that one month. That's \$450 that he still has to come up with.

You know, we're debating a bill right now that doesn't say when that 50 bucks is going to show up. I'm going to take a guess here that it's sounding like it's not going to show up in their actual pocket, that you'll just give it to the corporations. Maybe you should just give it to Albertans and let them decide where they want that 50 bucks to go.

I see a lot of rhetoric, but I guess, to wrap things up on Bill 16, again, I don't really have an issue with the bill itself and what it's trying to accomplish. I don't really see a reason at this time to not support it, but I'm not going to stand in this House and congratulate you for yet again siding with the big corporations when, really, you should be siding with Albertans. The corporations don't vote for you. It's the people of this province that vote for you. Maybe you want to at least try to coax some of those, because I'm certainly hearing a lot of people not very happy with you right now.

I'll wrap up there and look forward to the rest of the debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 16. Bill 16 is a good example of one of those quiet bills that probably won't get very much attention in the community yet is quite a reasonable thing for the government to be doing. I

want to spend a little bit of the beginning of my time here just talking about some of the things that I appreciate about the direction of the bill and the purpose of it, with, of course, commentary about things that I hope the government might consider. Then perhaps I'll add a few little commentaries about some of the other things that I certainly wish the government would do with regard to insurance in this province.

At the beginning, I understand that we are in a difficult time for insurance, particularly with regard to the industrial and energy sectors. It's often referred to as a hard market, a situation where, because of a variety of factors, certain corporations, partly perhaps because of what it is that they actually do or the circumstances that they're in, find it difficult to get the adequate insurance that they need, and of course if they do not have adequate insurance, they could be in a very difficult situation if a crisis occurs. If, for example, a tailings pond happened to break and cleanup was required, we certainly would want all the corporations to have the resources necessary to appropriately engage in that cleanup, and if they don't have appropriate insurance, it may be very difficult for them to do that.

You know, I don't think Albertans are against corporations having insurance, but I think we should also pay some attention to why it is that we have a hard market with regard to industrial- and energy-sector insurance costs. There are a variety of reasons, of course, but one of those reasons is that many of the major financial organizations in the world are making decisions about the types of things that they want to insure. It's not simply whether they can make a profit or not. Rather, they are using value-based decision-making. BlackRock, for example, has made decisions not to do investments in certain areas.

We see other companies making similar kinds of investment decisions, and I think that we should pay some attention to that here in Alberta if we are going to be in the right place, the right time with regard to our future in this province. Now, we know that what's happening is that there are many corporations that are incorporating what is often referred to as ESG, or environmental, social, and governance, factors in their decision-making. What that essentially means is that corporations are acknowledging that while businesses have a fundamental task of providing profits for their shareholders or for their owners if it's an independently owned business, that doesn't mean that those businesses somehow are exempt from the fact that they are owned by human beings who have values aside from acquisition of profit.

11:40

Essentially, what this is: it's a request by the community to bring some balance to the work that we do. The community is saying: certainly, we understand that business has a function and that business should pursue that function to the best of their ability, but they cannot do so without looking at the externalities. One of those externalities is based on our values of ensuring that people are treated fairly and equally, that the environment is preserved not only for ourselves but for our children's generation, and that, you know, individuals such as the Indigenous community, who have been systematically excluded from the benefits of the profit-making that has happened in this province over the last hundred years, should be considered with somewhat of a preferential eye to ensure that they find their rightful place in amongst all of us who benefit from corporate governance and profit-making in corporations.

My point here is that this bill is allowing corporations to engage in some new kinds of behaviours, which is, I think, satisfactory, but it is not addressing the underlying cause as to why they need to engage in those kinds of behaviours. It's not actually saying: "Why is it that there is a hard market? Why do we need to have alternative

arrangements for insurance?" There is certainly an incredible insurance industry in Canada and around the world. I mean, when I lived in Waterloo and I was taking my master's degree many ages ago, perhaps even before the Speaker was born, I was able to see the benefits of having insurance companies, as many of them are headquartered in Waterloo, and see how they contributed to the community and employment and so on. So I know that we have a very strong insurance system in this country, and I would have expected, you know, that it would have been adequate.

I see, however, there are a number of things that this government is choosing to do. The first one, of course, is the redomestication of companies that are used to provide the insurance, if necessary, in the hard market. We know that a number of companies have previously created these kinds of organizations in order to provide themselves with insurance but have had to establish them outside of Alberta, so this bill allowing them to bring those dollars home to Alberta to help the Alberta economy seems quite appropriate.

I'm a bit curious as to why this was not included in the bill that we addressed in the fall given that that was the very focus of the bill in the fall. Perhaps it could have been included at the time, but I certainly am not one to condemn a government for finding its errors and correcting them. I certainly wish the government would do it on a regular basis. Of course, we've seen them return to this House a number of times to improve bills that they didn't adequately address when they first introduced them to the House. In this case the idea is that the redomestication of these companies, these captive insurance companies, would be a boon to the province of Alberta, hopefully increasing capital in the province of Alberta, potentially increasing even revenues to the province over the future. So I'm glad to see that happen.

I'm also happy to see the potential for supporting growth in the reinsurance area. Of course, something that I think is very important is that we understand that insurance companies are a complex web of insurance and reinsurance, which ensures that if a particular tragedy occurs, the pain from that is spread as wide and as far as possible so that no particular institution or government or province bears the full brunt of whatever it is, whether it be a natural disaster or something more horrendous such as war, for example. I'm happy to see that this bill is actually making some moves on the reinsurance area, and I support the government in hoping that maybe a strong reinsurance industry could be centred here in Alberta. As I say, you know, when I was in Waterloo, I certainly saw the benefits of it there. I'd love to see Edmonton or Calgary or perhaps Red Deer or Lethbridge or Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie all be considered as good places to establish reinsurance corporations so that we in the province of Alberta would have the insurance that we need for adequate protection.

The third area that this bill covers and that I have a little bit of concern about is the area of unlicensed insurance. Again I want to point out that we have to look not just simply at what's happening here in this bill but the reasons why this bill was brought forward in the first place. That is that there are some corporations that find themselves in a place where they're simply unable to get insurance, and this bill is trying to open up the door a little bit, just a bit, to allow more access to unlicensed insurance; that is, unlicensed in Canada, maybe licensed somewhere else but within the Canadian regulations.

Now, this is of concern to me because if people are unable to get insurance in the Canadian licence system, which, as I had described, is quite substantive and quite successful and quite storied, in fact, in Canada, then it seems to me that there's something of a message there from, you know, the corporate community about the risk factors involved here. If we are setting up a circumstance where

businesses can just ignore the feedback that what they're trying to engage in is too risky even for our local insurance agencies, then I'm a bit worried that we're opening up a door that basically tells people that they don't have to pay attention to risk.

That worries me for the consumer at the end. We know that if you go to an unlicensed insurance agent, they are agents that are headquartered in countries other than Canada, and as a result it creates a jurisdictional problem if there ever is a dispute in this area, because you cannot go to Canadian courts to resolve the problem. You have to go to the courts of another country, which is problematic and increases the risk that insurance will not be paid out when it's supposed to be. You may have the insurance because of the availability of unlicensed insurance being available to you, but you may never get a benefit from that if that insurance company is outside of our jurisdiction and we cannot force them to do the things that they need to do. I realize that that's a very, very tiny piece of the insurance system, and as such it's not something that would make me not want to support the bill, but I am concerned that we are sort of opening a door.

There's always the wedge issue, you know, and I think we should pay attention to that. I don't necessarily use wedge concerns to prevent me from making choices, but it certainly makes me want to pay attention to them and to follow up to see if the wedge does indeed get wider as time moves on.

You know, in total, I've said that I have some concerns here. I think the particular moves the government is making are at least satisfactory, but I'm concerned that they're not actually paying attention to the underlying problem here, and we should pay more attention to those underlying problems so that we don't have to worry about them when we bring forward these kinds of pieces of legislation. We certainly know that this government is quite good about creating more space and more space for corporations to do well, but I'm very concerned that they have done very little to protect individual citizens in this province. As they increase the opportunity for corporations to do more of a wide range of things, I have to ask: are they increasing risk for individual insurance holders here in the province? I'm worried because I don't believe this government has a focus on individual citizens in this province and the risk factors that they have to deal with.

11:50

We know, for example, that this government removed the insurance rate cap and caused insurance rates to go up dramatically for individual insured Albertans. As many of the other MLAs have indicated, people came into our offices with increases in insurance that were easily 30 per cent and often more for things like house and car insurance, not across the board, of course, but the fact that the cap was removed did allow that to happen.

Then, of course, we subsequently learned that all of this was occurring at a time that the insurance costs to the industry were going down, perhaps associated with COVID, and that their profits were going up, so what we had is a circumstance where Albertans paid about \$385 million more in insurance at the same time that the insurance corporations made over a billion dollars more profit. Now, of course, this was not disclosed in full transparency to the people of Alberta. In fact, a report that had been presented by the province of Alberta to Albertans for over 100 years was suddenly not reported in the same timely manner in which it had been reported for all those many years and was only released on the Easter weekend, when nobody would see it. That is a total lack of transparency.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members – I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was going to wait to see if any government members wanted to add their comments to this piece of legislation. It's unfortunate, once again, their silence. Anyway, happy to rise and speak to Bill 16, Insurance Amendment Act, 2022, and, you know, thank my colleagues who have gone before me to do a really great job outlining what this piece of legislation is. I'm just going to emphasize a few points since perhaps some of the government members weren't paying attention.

Anyway, this latest piece of legislation is an interaction of changes to the Insurance Act and is focused on a couple of insurance products that are unique. I'm sure I'm not alone in this Chamber in stating that I had to do a little bit of research to understand fully what these products are and why the changes to this legislation were needed. You know, it does make sense. It's a need for insurance products in industrial or energy areas, and they're the really niche products. As a caucus I think that based on our review of the information, we don't have concerns with these changes. I guess it remains to be seen sort of how successful these changes will be in creating solutions for companies that have asked for the changes, but we'll have to monitor that and see.

This legislation, though, unfortunately, makes zero changes to insurance products that all of us, I think, have heard from in the last couple of years; for example, home insurance. Some of my colleagues talked a little bit about condominium insurance, auto insurance, and life insurance, which continue to be problematic in many ways in that they are becoming affordable to a lot of Albertans.

This piece of legislation basically does three things. The first thing is that it makes changes to captive insurance, which, you know, basically, as some of my colleagues have described it, is self-insurance. Last year we know that the government passed the Captive Insurance Companies Act, which allowed captive insurance companies to step up, get licensed, and operate in Alberta. The legislation makes one substantive change to that recent piece of legislation, and it created redomestication provisions, which basically allow these captive insurance companies that were operating outside of Canada to come into Alberta. Now, of course, there are a lot of regulatory differences, and as some of my colleagues noted, we'll have to monitor and see how that goes.

The second thing that it does is that it makes changes to allow Alberta to license stand-alone reinsurance companies. Now, for those of you that don't know, for the nine people watching at home, reinsurance is insurance for insurance companies. Generally speaking, this market is dominated by about 50 large global players, with the top five holding the majority market share.

The third thing that it does: it makes it easier for insurance companies to access unlicensed insurance. Alberta companies only access insurance from unlicensed insurance companies, so insurers that are not licensed in Canada, in circumstances where no domestic insurer will write an insurance policy for a particular risk. Now, using unlicensed companies presents a new set of risks because if a foreign unlicensed insurer is, say, in Bermuda and doesn't pay, there's little recourse for companies here in Canada, here in Alberta. You know, obviously, there are some risks involved. As my colleagues – and I'm adding my voice to that – have said, we'll have to monitor this and see what happens.

The legislation also makes changes to the tax rate paid on premiums when companies don't go through a special broker, and then the legislation goes into a fair amount of detail about that.

As mentioned earlier, Alberta is currently in a hard insurance market, which means that these changes bring Alberta more in line with other provinces and makes getting a viable insurance product

easier for industry, the key word being “industry.” No problem with this if this is a niche area or these were legislative changes that needed to happen to support industry – obviously, that supports our economy – and all of those great things.

I have no doubt that there was some serious lobbying going on to get this work done, which brings me to my point about lobbyists, Mr. Speaker. You know, earlier this morning some of my colleagues and I attended the Public Accounts meeting. It's our one opportunity to ask questions with the Auditor General there and officials from different ministries, to be able to ask questions around their annual report and audit and policies related, decisions related. One of the lines of questioning that we pursued was around lobbyists: can you tell us about the Premier's office, the work in Executive Council around lobbyists, in particular the insurance industry? We know that there have been a lot of things going on.

Sadly, I just wanted to note on the record that the people that were sent to answer questions – I actually felt fairly bad for them – were unable to answer most of our questions, so it was incorrect people sent. You know, always willing to give a little bit of the benefit of doubt, but it certainly seems like there's an attempt to not answer questions or to deliberately muddy the waters or not to pursue any kind of transparency.

What we do know is that there are a number of things that have happened around insurance that are problematic. We know that the superintendent of insurance, an official of Alberta Finance, has released an annual report for the last 107 years. We know, as my colleague just mentioned before me, that not everyone probably knew about that, and I'm sure not everyone eagerly anticipated to read it, but it's an important document that talks about the difference between premiums that are collected and then what is paid out in claims, basically describing the profit margin. What is a profit margin? That is not a bad word. That is not a bad phrase. That is a good thing. But to have an officer of the Finance ministry release a report allows us as legislators to look at that and to see: are the policies that are being passed in this place doing what they're intended to do? Is it benefiting Albertans? Is it benefiting industry? Is there a solid balance?

You know, I would submit that the fact that it was hidden – and by “hidden”: it wasn't released when it should have been released or as it had been released for the last many, many decades. Why is that? Why was that being hidden? Well, I would suggest that in 2019, when the UCP removed the rate cap on insurance premiums after lobbying records clearly point out some busy beavers in the lobbyist department in this area, that they had some influence – too bad we couldn't get answers this morning, Mr. Speaker. We did try. Hopefully, the officials that did show up will take those questions back and table written responses to that committee, but that remains to be seen.

You know, I would just like to add my voice to what my colleagues have said before me about premiums that have gone up during a pandemic. We all know that we've been driving less. We all know that people have been literally working less. They have less money. This government has failed to address those issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I hesitate to interrupt you.

However, under Standing Order 4(2.1) we are now adjourned until 1:30 today.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, April 26, 2022

Day 24

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 26, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm very pleased to introduce to you a group of officials visiting from the United States. Many of you had the opportunity to meet them earlier today, but I hope that you will join me in welcoming the U.S. consul general to Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Northwest Territories, Holly Waeger Monster; accompanied by Karen Choe-Fichte, minister counsellor for economic affairs; Nathan Donohue, deputy principal commercial officer for the U.S. Commercial Service; and Connie Haider, commercial specialist. Joining them are: Andrew McIntyre, Matt Morrison, and Christina Steed. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, it's with the greatest admiration and respect – there is a gratitude to the members of the families who have shared the burdens of public office and public service. Today I would like to welcome the family members of Dr. Winston O. Backus. His family is present in the Speaker's gallery today. Dr. Backus was the former Member for Grande Prairie, who served two terms in the Assembly from 1971 to 1979. He passed away on June 15, 2020, at the age of 99. I would like to ask each of his family members, as I call their name, to rise as they have been introduced: Dr. Backus's wife, Myrtle Backus; his daughter Myrna Sherstan; and grandsons Jesse Sherstan and Cody Sherstan. Please rise. Thank you so much for your service to the province of Alberta through your family members. Now accept the gratitude of members of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, also seated in the gallery today is Marilyn Buffalo, the chief executive officer of the Nechi Institute: Centre for Indigenous Learning. She is a special guest of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Government Record

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, families in Alberta are struggling. They are coping with higher income taxes, higher insurance premiums, higher utility bills, higher school fees, higher tuition, and it goes on and on and on. These are times where families are being forced to make tough choices about whether or not they can afford to buy groceries that week or if they need to pay their utility bill. Families are being forced to take vehicles off the road because they can't afford the insurance bill this government is delivering to them. These are serious times that require a government focused on addressing these issues, but instead they've got a circus running the Legislature.

The Premier is campaigning for his job round the clock and has dispatched the majority of his staff, that should be working to support Albertans, to save his job instead. The Premier is even going to those same families, that he doesn't think deserve support to recover from the fourth-largest natural disaster in Canadian history, to beg for their votes. The Premier's staff are attacking UCP MLAs, calling them clowns, sad and sour, and more. This would be

hilarious if it wasn't coming from the very same people who are supposed to be addressing the cost-of-living crisis they created.

It makes sense now why it's taken 10 weeks and counting for this government to get around to delivering their utility rebates, because it's not a priority for them. This is a government that spends more time clowning around and engaging in the drama created by the nonleadership of the Premier.

Albertans during this crisis are looking for a government that prioritizes them, that ignores the drama, ignores the politics, and focuses on making life better for Albertans, for them. The UCP has made it clear that they aren't interested in that, so when Albertans go to the polls for the next election, they will have a clear choice between the NDP, who is laser focused on them, and the clowns in the UCP who can't get their act together. I think, Mr. Speaker, I know who Albertans will choose.

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

Government Policies and Southern Alberta

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last few days I've heard NDP MLAs stand up and pretend to care about southern Alberta, but for the years they spent in government, the NDP failed southern Alberta and failed to make any progress on the issues that matter most. They've made all sorts of claims, but, fear not, I'm here to set the record straight.

Our United Conservative government has made huge investments in southern Alberta. We scrapped the NDP's carbon tax, and we did what they could never do: we balanced the budget. Our United Conservative government has negotiated a \$780 million deal on rural broadband. We funded the single largest investment in irrigation, a lifeline for our drought-stricken agriculture industry, and approved several new projects, including the Snake Lake reservoir in Brooks-Medicine Hat.

We accelerated capital maintenance and renewal funding. We've committed \$90 million to recruit, attract, and retain rural doctors, and we've provided the John Ware youth empowerment program with \$150,000 so that newcomer youth are able to be connected to employment services.

We've completed new school projects in Tilley, and we're building a brand new francophone school in Brooks. We've expanded mental health and addiction services through the virtual opioid dependency program and the digital overdose response app, and – get this, Mr. Speaker – we provided \$825,000 to Our Collective Journey to enhance their recovery coaching program, but most recently we delivered on funding for HALO air ambulance, an essential service that southern Alberta relies upon. The NDP failed to provide stable and predictable funding, but because of our United Conservative government HALO has a multiyear commitment for \$1 million per year to keep HALO in the sky. This came as a direct result of advocacy from UCP MLAs like the MLA for Drumheller-Stettler, the MLA for Cardston-Siksika, the MLA for Taber-Warner, and myself.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, southern Albertans know that this government is here to deliver on the promises that we made. We don't just talk the talk; we take real action. Southern Alberta and rural Alberta will always have relentless advocates in our United Conservative caucus, and I'm proud to be one of them.

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

Pacific NorthWest Economic Region

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I proudly reflect on the incredible personal, cultural, and economic bonds we share with our closest neighbours, friends, and allies to the north and south in the United States of America. Through the Pacific NorthWest

Economic Region, of which I'm humbled to serve as president, we're able to align the shared interests and economies of: Yukon, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, B.C., Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Washington, and, of course, Alberta.

The bridges we build through our engaged, cross-sectoral working groups, forums, and annual summits are instrumental to regional collaboration and deeply impactful in relationship building and advocacy on common interests between our two nations. Now more than ever it is clear that strengthening ties with the United States is essential not only to Alberta's and Canada's interests but to a shared vision with respect to economic and strategic priorities.

Our shared history and the democratic principles we respect and uphold are but a few of the strengths we build upon each and every day in mutual prosperity in the world's largest trading relationship and along the planet's longest undefended border. PNWER has a strong 30-year history and vision for the shared potential of our two countries while embracing the influence that nonpartisan organizations and people of like mind can have on policy development in our respective jurisdictions and in our national capitals.

Mr. Speaker, the 31st PNWER annual summit will be hosted by Alberta in Calgary this summer, and with all of your support and the attendance of public, private, academic, and nonprofit stakeholders our collaboration and focus on a bright, ambitious, and responsible future will be both immersive and inspiring for those that share our vision for friendship, collaboration, and prosperity for all.

Thank you.

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

Nechi Institute

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. In my time as Minister of Indigenous Relations I had the opportunity to visit many important organizations created and maintained by Indigenous people. These agencies are deeply entwined with the community and provide services based on intimate relationships that are simply not possible in non-Indigenous agencies.

1:40

One such agency is the Nechi Institute of Alberta. The Nechi Institute is recognized as one of the finest Indigenous training, research, and health promotion centres in the world. Nechi Institute is a powerful resource for Indigenous people and communities addressing issues such as: drug, alcohol, and gambling addictions; family violence; and prescription drug use. Nechi provides counsellors, health care workers, social workers, educators, community service agencies, government agencies, and other members of the helping professions with the tools and resources to help heal the pain and devastation caused by addictions and abuse.

Unfortunately, in November 2019 the UCP government summarily evicted Nechi from the building it shared with Poundmaker's Lodge for 36 years without consultation. The government has never been able to explain the reasoning for this drastic assault either in the House or to the institute itself. When I questioned the minister about the issue, he assured the House that he would work with Nechi to find them a permanent home. Unfortunately, this never happened.

For the last two years Nechi has been housed in temporary trailers on the site of the former Edmonton Indian residential school. Elders have expressed concern that the trailers are likely on top of unmarked graves. Nechi has made numerous attempts to move forward with the government only to be met with cancelled meetings and ignored phone calls.

Today the chief executive officer of Nechi, Marilyn Buffalo, is here asking the government to come back to the table and help the institute to find a new permanent home, as they promised but failed to do over the last two years. This government claims to support healing from addictions. We see no evidence of that here. The institute is asking for help to continue to do the important work they have engaged in for over 40 years in Alberta. It is time for truth and reconciliation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Female Genital Mutilation and Bill 10

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to speak to Bill 10, Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. We've received some input recently, and I want to clarify that this bill was not introduced unnecessarily and is by no means redundant to any existing law. The bill is imperative for the protection of girls and women.

Female genital mutilation is a global concern, posing a serious threat to psychological, sexual, and reproductive health of girls around the world. We are putting forth efforts at a grassroots level and from a policy level, but the most successful interventions are led by communities affected by FGM and within the associations that are privileged to work within these communities and, ultimately, answer directly to them.

Mr. Speaker, in this way we uplift community through building and bridging capacity and supports, ensuring that survivors and opposers of this practice are not silenced. Countries in the United Kingdom have introduced education surrounding forms of honour-based abuse, and as of 2020 England introduced FGM education as part of the sex and relationships curriculum for secondary students. This includes education on physical and emotional damages caused by FGM. This is about educating and raising awareness for both the consequences and implications of FGM and the supports available to those who have suffered. Survivors must gain agency to speak about their experience because if social change does not happen, then the stigma and fear will continue, as will the status quo.

Mr. Speaker, this is about building trust and having the conversation surrounding the protection of girls and women no matter what college, agency, or organization is involved. The scope of this bill is not intended to undermine the credibility of regulatory agencies but, instead, to further focus on FGM. It is our collective responsibility to make sure that we are educated and not afraid to engage in important conversations around the health and well-being of our children, specifically girls.

I would like to thank all the consulted stakeholders and the agencies as well as members of the opposition for their excellent input. Mr. Speaker, this is about societal levels of influence. We need a critical mass of advocates to be speaking out; otherwise, change will not happen.

Jan Foster and Lethbridge Schools

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, this member's statement is for the memory of Jan Foster, who passed away on April 19 at the age of 81. Jan Foster was a seven-term Lethbridge public school division trustee. Her commitment to public education spanned 23 years of public service. Jan was as committed to her community as to her son Greg and his wife, Stephanie, and her two beloved grandchildren Aiden and Jordan.

For their sake Jan worked for schools that served the community and understood that schools themselves are a community. That's why she stood up for an inclusive curriculum that sets children up

for success. That's why she was a consistent advocate for more funding for children with diverse needs and a fierce defender of early-intervention funding for children with disabilities. She always made sure Lethbridge was heard, advocating for new schools and modernizations to keep up with our growing population.

Indeed, Lethbridge needs several new schools: one more elementary each in the public and Catholic system, at least eight modernizations in district 51, two modernizations in the Catholic system, and a gymnasium modernization at l'école La Vérendrye.

Given that our school-age population is growing, Lethbridge district 51 is disadvantaged by the UCP changes to funding, and we will have staffing challenges. The UCP decision to have 1,700 fewer teachers in the classroom province-wide this fall will have an effect on us down south. Our public district has been critical of the new curriculum, writing a letter as recently as two weeks ago inquiring about resources for implementation.

The last time I saw Jan last fall, though – I chatted with her on social media quite often – she was most worried about the curriculum. Her primary concern was for the students. Her focus was always on children. Perhaps that is why she fostered 60 children and at-risk youth over 15 years.

Rest in peace and rest in power, Jan Foster. We share your vision of public education as the most effective way to build the world we want for our children. You can rest now, Jan. We will attend the meetings, the school celebrations, and community functions for you. For your grandchildren and all children we will defend public education as fiercely as you did.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Federal Travel Vaccination Mandate

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is punishing Canadians because they made a different decision than what he wanted or commanded of them. As the world returns to normal, Trudeau and his coleader, Jagmeet Singh in the NDP, doubled down on the divisive policy, continuing to require double vaccinations in order to fly anywhere in our country. Despite Trudeau's top doctor saying that we need a, quote, more sustainable approach that needs to be taken, Liberals and their allies press forward with their politically driven policy that damaged the well-being of our country's social and economic strength.

Within weeks of the UCP removing vaccine passports here in Alberta, the federal government strengthened their ideological plan to punish the unvaccinated. While virtually all countries and jurisdictions world-wide have removed their mandates, especially on travel and flights, Trudeau still doesn't budge. He claims to stand up for minority rights while at the same time calling members of this minority racist, misogynists, and white supremacists. Mr. Speaker, Albertans are fed up with Mr. Trudeau and his antiscience and ineffective, capricious policy, whose purpose is to vilify good, honest, hard-working Canadians like those in Alberta who made a decision not to vaccinate.

These pointless travel restrictions can no longer be justified. New Zealand to New York, the world is taking off while Canada keeps millions grounded. Unvaccinated individuals, unable to visit their own family, deserve better from this government in Ottawa. They deserve a Prime Minister who listens and follows the science and cares for their families and his society, not someone caught up in the political theatrics of the woke left. Mr. Speaker, Alberta chose a different path, and soon every single province followed. Happily, COVID-19 is not threatening our health care capacity today, not here, not anywhere in Canada. With millions upon millions of

comparatively mild COVID-19 cases in Canada on any given day, this punitive policy has no public health benefit.

I ask that fellow Albertans here today enjoying the full freedoms of movement within our country do not forget those who are still not vaccinated. Don't forget those who cannot visit their family, who cannot go on vacation, who cannot attend a funeral of a loved one, or a wedding. I believe that we need to stand up and stand with those who are being punished by Mr. Trudeau.

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

Federal Travel Vaccination Mandate

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the world is opening back up and removing COVID-19 restrictions, including travel restrictions, the federal government of Canada is not. We're over the worst part of COVID-19 and have been out of a state of emergency for quite a while now. The federal travel vaccination mandate is simply unnecessary. To board a flight or to get on a train, anyone that is 12 years plus four months of age or older must be fully vaccinated. They must be ready to show their proof of vaccination at any given time along with several other rules.

Not only does a travel vaccine mandate prevent Canadians from travelling outside of Canada, but it prevents international travellers from coming into Canada as well, hurting our country's tourism industry. Mr. Speaker, Canada is an amazing place, and frankly people are less inclined to come visit our beautiful country when there are excessive, unnecessary mandates making it difficult.

Provinces within Canada are lifting most if not all of their COVID restrictions and vaccine mandates. Unvaccinated people are finally allowed to return to work, go out to eat, go to a gym, and enjoy the many things that they've been eagerly waiting to get to, except for travel. This mandate is causing red tape, and we are one of the only countries left to have it.

I've heard frustrations from many Albertans who disagree with the travel vaccine mandates regardless of their vaccine status. Those who are vaccinated are fed up with the difficulty of extra steps when they have to travel, and those who are unvaccinated are fed up with not being able to travel at all. I've heard one story about a girl who was unable to go to her grandfather's funeral and is still waiting to be able to travel to her home country to gain closure. Mr. Speaker, the time and the place to move restrictions is now. The federal government needs to get rid of the travel vaccine mandate and allow its citizens and international travellers the right to come and go.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Private School Financial Data Reporting

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the UCP tabled legislation that signalled the government's intention to stop reporting tuition amounts at private schools. This issue matters to Albertans because at a time when the province is cutting significantly from public education, Alberta is maintaining the most generous subsidies for private schools anywhere in Canada. The higher the tuition at these schools, the greater their exclusivity. Why is the Premier trying to hide this information from the very Albertans who subsidize these private schools?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Unfortunately, there's misinformation on the other side coming towards us because, in fact, private independent schools do have to report on their audited financial statements, both the public and the private money that they get. They only get 70 per cent of public dollars. What we're actually doing under Bill 21 is increasing the accountability and the transparency on this. They will in fact have to report online their financials as well as to their parents. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a tremendous amount of confusion on this because the UCP is always muddying the waters. Yesterday the red tape minister was explicit: Alberta would no longer collect this kind of financial information from these publicly funded institutions, and officials at her briefing provided documents confirming that. Then the Education minister fired off a late-night tweet saying the opposite was true, almost like these folks don't talk to each other. One of these ministers is either incompetent or intentionally misinforming the public. Which is it, and which minister?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction was correct in explaining that we are in fact increasing transparency and accountability. What we are no longer requiring is a duplicative, redundant piece of information, because we do have that information already coming in audited financial statements. In fact, I believe the members opposite missed the line in the publication where we said that we would be reducing the collection of financial data. Not eliminating; reducing. There is a big difference.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are two stories, and let me say that this is about trust, and the story coming from that minister is coming from a minister who doesn't enjoy a whole lot of trust. Albertans won't know how much private schools charge to get through the door at a time when the Premier is telling students in the public system to make do with much, much less. His cuts to PUF for 5-year-olds with special needs is just one of many examples. Why don't the parents whose kids are struggling with overflowing classrooms and fewer teachers get to know all the details about the private schools they are subsidizing but cannot afford to go to themselves?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, that's absolutely ludicrous. In fact, independent schools get 70 per cent funding for operational uses and no capital funding whatsoever. They save dollars for Alberta taxpayers. That being said, this is all about red tape reduction, which the members opposite continue to put on all of our school systems. We are very deliberate about ensuring that we no longer have redundant, duplicative information which we already have through audited financial statements and many other documents.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Private School Financial Data Reporting and Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to kids' education, the UCP's priorities couldn't be more wrong. Right now class sizes are

growing, and we're losing teachers. Students have suffered learning loss throughout the pandemic. There have been serious cuts to supports for children with disabilities. But the Premier's priority isn't to support children struggling in public schools; it's to hide financial reporting for private schools. To the Premier: before he stops collecting this information, can he stand in this House and tell Albertans what the average tuition is to attend a private school in Alberta?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to share the fact that, in fact, the member opposite continues not to do her homework. We added an additional 160 teachers in this upcoming school year. At least that's what school boards are telling me. In fact, they are the ones that are hiring. We've added \$700 million to the overall . . .

Ms Notley: Read your budget.

Member LaGrange: Yes; I have read my budget, and I wish you guys would as well because, in fact, we have added \$700 million over three years for operational, an additional . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: . . . \$110 million for mental health and wellness, 191 additional million dollars for implementing curriculum.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, under this minister's leadership there are 1,000 fewer teachers in schools than there were when the NDP was in government. I know the Premier has friends who want to open more private schools in Alberta, but that's no excuse to underfund public education. Some private schools charge \$20,000 or more to attend, and it's public schools that are taking the hit. Edmonton public: there are 1,700 students who are unfunded this year alone, Minister. Why is the minister covering up the finances for private schools flush with cash while cutting supports for kids in public schools?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite continues to provide misinformation. In fact, if she read the budget and if she continued to look at the estimates, what I provided in estimates, 160 more teachers is not a cut in the number of teachers, \$700 million – I'm proud of the fact that we added \$45 million to address learning loss disruption just this very year. We're seeing tremendous results as a result of that. Edmonton public school division has notoriously reported the wrong number . . .

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

Ms Hoffman: The minister actually wrote me this morning to pump her own tires and pat her own back about the job she's doing in public schools. Seriously. After that she spent the whole night on social media justifying a bill that puts the finances of a private school on a pedestal while the budgets of public schools are being slashed and burned: unfunded students, no new schools in major cities, a curriculum supported by virtually no Albertans, no mental health supports, less supports for disabled students. Does the Premier really think that this minister should be congratulating the UCP when the vast majority of Albertans are giving this minister a big red F?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite is continually upset because we're seeing success in our education system. In fact, we've added additional dollars. I have

school authorities constantly thanking me for the additional dollars, the additional supports, the fact that we have engaged. I have school authorities saying that they've never seen this level of engagement on a new curriculum. We are proud of the fact that we have put children first. While the members opposite continue to politicize education, I'm focused on student learning and improving it.

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

Postsecondary Student Financial Aid

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this morning I was at the University of Alberta, where I heard from a number of students who had been facing significant challenges due to UCP cuts to student aid. Across the province students are struggling. Tuition is skyrocketing, loan rates are going up, and this UCP government has both underfunded student aid and refused to spend the money that they actually allocated for it. At a time when tuition is skyrocketing and student debt is even more expensive, the UCP is withholding student aid money. Can the Premier explain why, when students need the help the most, he is withholding their supports?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That statement is completely false. We're doing nothing of the sort, but I'm not surprised to hear statements like that coming from the NDP because, as the member said, we're cutting student aid. I can't understand. We're providing \$15 million over three years in new spending to support student aid specifically for additional bursaries for low-income students; as well, \$12 million more in new funding for existing scholarships and bursaries. Only in NDP land is more funding a cut. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, last summer the UCP combined eligibility grants under one main student grant program. The current offerings don't even come close to covering the amount that they need nor the number of students who are eligible, \$59 million in needs-based grants. Even just to reach the national average, Alberta needs to spend somewhere around \$150 million, nearly three times as much. Is the Premier really going to stand in this House and tell Alberta postsecondary students that they deserve a third of the financial assistance that other learning in other provinces is actually eligible for? Is that really how to encourage people to attend our colleges and universities?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to tell students in the province that they need and deserve more in financial assistance, which is exactly what our government is doing. As I mentioned a moment ago, we're providing \$15 million more over three years to create new bursaries for low-income students; as well, \$12 million over three years to support our existing scholarships and other awards. There's more work that we need to do when it comes to strengthening student assistance, but we're moving in the right direction. I want to thank our student leaders, who have been advocating for this and bringing this to the attention of government.

2:00

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister can talk to someone who I was talking to, a woman named Christina, this morning. She was eligible for aid, but she lost her grant because of the government's refusal to spend the money that was there. She had to drop out of school. Christina said, and I quote: the whole situation has ruined my motivation to attend university again;

student aid is supposed to be there to help students, not stress them out financially while they are attending. Unquote. Will the Premier, the minister, or anyone else on this side of the House explain how ruining Christina's postsecondary aspirations is actually good for our province's future?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're taking serious action under Budget 2022 to create more opportunities for students. We're investing \$171 million over three years to create 7,000 additional spaces at our postsecondary institutions, \$15 million over three years to support new bursaries for low-income students, \$12 million over three years for existing scholarships, \$30 million over three years to expand apprenticeship education and trades education in the province. We have a robust vision to strengthen postsecondary education, unlike the members opposite.

Utility Rebate Timeline

Ms Ganley: Alberta families are struggling, and this government simply doesn't care. If they cared, they would have acted on skyrocketing utility rates in November. If they cared, they wouldn't have waited weeks before finally bringing in legislation. If they cared, the minister would be able to answer a simple question like: when will Albertans get the money? Instead, he told Albertans they would have to wait at least a couple of months more. To the minister: when will Albertans actually see this money?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly recognize that there are affordability concerns here in the province of Alberta, affordability concerns brought on by a whole host of reasons, in part due to the tax, spend, and borrow fiscal policy of the Trudeau-NDP alliance. That's the reality. Now, we're bringing in real relief measures for Albertans, including a utility rebate for every electricity consumer. More details very shortly.

Ms Ganley: The Premier seems to be just fine with leaving Albertans in the dark, literally, rather than protecting them from out-of-control utility costs. Our amendments to get the money to Albertans by May 31 were rejected. They opposed our amendments to improve the legislation by preventing power shut-offs. Albertans are losing patience with this dithering government. Can the Premier explain why he thinks Albertans deserve to have their heat or lights turned off while he dithers, blames, and fails to deliver?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we are bringing real relief to consumers with an electricity rebate. We're working with electricity providers to ensure that customers are not shut off... [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: ... that there's a pathway forward to keep them connected.

But, Mr. Speaker, the members across the way are pretty disingenuous being concerned about electricity affordability. It was their policies that created the conditions for the high costs we're experiencing today: the carbon tax, the excessive build of

the transmission system, and the early purchase payout of the coal agreements.

Ms Ganley: Despite the increasingly desperate spin coming from over there, Albertans know that the UCP government lifting the rate cap is to blame for skyrocketing electricity prices. Albertans are being forced to choose between their groceries and heating their homes, and they need help now. The associate minister opposed our amendments to ensure that future rebates would be to Albertans within 30 days. Can someone over there tell this House how long they think Albertan families should have to wait to get their paltry rebates: 10 weeks, 20 weeks, 50, forever?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're moving forward with electricity rebates. More details to come very soon. But we're taking other action with respect to affordability. We immediately suspended the fuel tax, recognizing that the fuel tax adds costs to Albertans. That is real relief experienced every day by every family, by every senior, by every nonprofit every time they fill up their vehicle with gas. We're bringing real relief to Albertans. The members opposite simply jacked up costs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross has a question.

Sexual Assault Awareness Training for Judges

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Public confidence is a fundamental component of a strong and effective justice system. It is because of this that lawyers and judges must be diligent when engaging with all those involved within our court system. This is even more prevalent when sensitive cases involving sexual assault come before judges as the court must be especially compassionate when hearing these matters. To the Associate Minister of Status of Women: what is this government's plan to ensure that survivors of sexual assault are treated with dignity and respect within the court system of this province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's government has introduced new legislation, Bill 14, requiring individuals applying to be a Provincial Court judge to complete sexual assault law and social context issues education before they're eligible to be appointed. If Bill 14 is passed, it will foster stronger confidence in the administration of justice; encourage greater engagement in the justice system by victims, Indigenous people, and people from minorities and vulnerable populations; and encourage more reporting of sexual assaults, which will contribute to reducing sexual assault in Alberta, which is ultimately the goal.

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for your answer. Given that there have been past examples where sexual assault survivors have been revictimized in the court system and given that there is a desperate need for sexual assault training to be developed in a manner that is survivorcentric, again to the Associate Minister of Status of Women: how do you expect to tailor this sexual assault training program for judges to ensure that training is survivorcentric?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. First and foremost, we need to remember that judicial independence is of paramount importance. The actual training will be run through the province's Judicial Council or a similar governing body. It's government's role to set up broad requirements and work with judges to ensure the training requirements are being met. The end goal is that victims of sexual violence and their families are not retraumatized during the trial process and that all people who come into the courtroom are treated respectfully and fairly. Sexual assault survivors deserve to know that the judges who oversee their cases are fully educated in sexual assault law and will not make mistakes in . . .

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you once again to the minister for that answer. Given that Bill 14 states that a judge in Alberta must complete sexual assault law and social context training after being appointed and given that there are numerous judges already in the Alberta court system that do not have this training, to the same associate minister: how will the government ensure that current judges are trained in this invaluable sexual assault training?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Ms Issik: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're going to work with the provincial Judicial Council to ensure that new and sitting judges receive the training promptly while fully respecting judicial independence. Judges have their own education plans and regularly update their skills and knowledge, and we'll ensure that sexual assault and social context training is part of that ongoing education. Sexual assault law and social context issues education for Provincial Court candidates will provide candidates with the knowledge, awareness, and skills to avoid being influenced by attitudes based on stereotypes or prejudice. This will help victims and their families feel safe and secure in the knowledge that future hearings will be fair, impartial, and free from mistakes.

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

Hospital Emergency Room Wait Times

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Emergency department wait times are soaring in Alberta, forcing people to go without getting the care they need. AHS data shows that in 2022 10 per cent of patients are leaving our emergency rooms in Edmonton without care, an increase from 7 per cent in 2021, so 3 per cent more people walking out of Edmonton hospitals because of the wait times created by this government. Can the Minister of Health tell this House exactly how many Albertans have left without getting care because his predecessor and the Premier decided to repeatedly push our hospitals to the brink?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the hon. member for raising this important issue. We've acknowledged several times that the system is seeing a high number of patients. Some of the larger hospitals in Edmonton and Calgary are over 100 per cent occupancy, and I want to thank all of our health care workers, who are delivering incredible service at this point in time.

But, Mr. Speaker, this issue is not unique to this period in time, and it's not unique to Alberta as well. You know, the increase in pressures on hospitals happens on a regular basis. It's seasonal. We understand that, and that's why we need to fix it, and we are investing in the capacity in our system to be able to do that.

2:10

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that this minister may want to speak to the actual front-line staff and given that, as has been reported by emergency room doctors, people who aren't able to access emergency departments are often forced to return sicker and more critical than before and given that this then puts their lives at risk in addition to the additional pressure on our front-line staff, who are already dealing with the ongoing impacts coming from the pandemic and risking their ability to provide care, and given that this is making an already difficult situation in our hospitals even worse, rather than these same old talking points, what is this minister doing today to ensure that someone who seeks help in an emergency room can get it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are investing in capacity in our system. We are investing \$600 million this year, another \$600 million next year, and a third \$600 million the year after that. That's \$1.8 billion to expand capacity in our hospital system. We appreciate the tremendous work that's being done. We do have seasonal increases in our emergency departments, but we need to fix that. That shouldn't happen every year, and it's happening here in Alberta, and quite frankly it's happening in provinces across the country. We know we need to address it. That's why we're investing in building capacity. That's why we're hiring more nurses. We're hiring more EMS. We're investing across the entire system.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that it was only here in Alberta that this government thought a pandemic would be a perfect time to start a fight with doctors, a catastrophically bad decision that Albertans are still paying for, and given that the Premier and the Health minister have an open invitation to tour the Royal Alexandra hospital here in my constituency of Edmonton-City Centre, will the minister and the Premier take the time to tour this or any hospital that asks them to, speak with the staff, that are struggling with this unprecedented pressure, struggling to provide care, and see firsthand the devastating consequences of the UCP's failed decisions in our health care system?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I speak with AHS and practitioners on a regular basis. I understand, as I indicated earlier with Dr. Hinshaw in our weekly reports, that there is stress on the system. That's why we're acting. We should not have stress on the system. This shouldn't happen every year. That's why we are investing over \$600 million this year, \$1.8 billion over the next three years to expand capacity, to increase the number of nurses, increase the number of health care professionals. We have increased 1,800 nurses over the last two years, and the staff in AHS is going to go up by 2,800. We are investing in health care.

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

Nechi Institute

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Nechi Institute is recognized as one of the finest Indigenous training, research, and health promotion centres in the world. Nechi is a powerful resource for Indigenous people and communities addressing issues of addictions and family violence. In November 2019 the UCP evicted the Nechi Institute without consultation from the location at Poundmaker's Lodge, that they had used continuously for 36 years, with only three months' notice. Marilyn Buffalo, the CEO of Nechi,

is here in the gallery today. Will the minister tell her why he evicted her and Nechi from their building?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We had the lease expire with the Nechi Institute, who was sharing the facility with Poundmaker's Lodge, which is offering critical Indigenous addiction treatment services in that area. When the lease was lapsed with the Nechi Institute, we couldn't extend that because Poundmaker's Lodge wanted to expand the services, critical services, for addictions treatment.

Mr. Feehan: Given that the minister promised this House in 2019 that he would personally assist Nechi in finding a new building and given that the minister has broken his promise and failed to do this, leaving Nechi stuck in derelict trailers on the grounds of Poundmaker's Lodge, and given that this is hampering Nechi in continuing their important work at a time when the drug poisoning crisis is more deadly than ever in the Indigenous community, will the minister tell Marilyn Buffalo why he has not taken her phone calls, not met with her, and not delivered the help he promised in this House?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, respectfully, when the member opposite is claiming that there is no consultation, it's not true. Alberta Health and Alberta Infrastructure offered them help, which they declined to take. That is the fact.

Mr. Feehan: Incredible.

Given that Poundmaker's Lodge is on the site of the former Edmonton Indian residential school and given that elders have reported that the trailers Nechi has been forced into are on top of unmarked graves of children who are buried at the school, can the minister explain to Marilyn Buffalo, who is here to hear your answers, and to all Albertans why he has refused to keep his promise and refused to address this intolerable situation for the Nechi Institute?

Mr. Shandro: Well, that's not true, Mr. Speaker. Staff from both Infrastructure and Indigenous Relations will continue to work with the Nechi board of directors on resolving their concerns. The Poundmaker's Lodge, though, has reported no further issues, and the Nechi continues to provide training through distance learning. This is why it was important for us to make sure that the Poundmaker's treatment lodge continues to have its opportunities to expand and be able to work with us in providing more services to Albertans who need the addiction recovery treatment that they needed, the residential treatment. The Nechi Institute will continue to provide those services at a distance. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Rural Health Care

Mr. Loewen: Health care continues to be one of the greatest concerns of rural Albertans. When a community comes together to raise money for medical equipment, as a government we must work collectively to facilitate their efforts. In the past the Fairview community bought a bilirubin tester, that took nine months and five levels of AHS bureaucracy to gain approval. Albertans need us to do better. Now the community is working to gain approval to purchase a CT scanner for their hospital. Another CT scanner in the Peace Country will help with patient safety and reduce ambulance trips. Minister, will you please provide an update on when we can expect an answer on this important acquisition for rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. First of all, I want to recognize the dedication and selflessness that Fairview residents – I met with representatives on a couple of occasions – have for their community in raising money for a new CT scanner. That is the Alberta spirit. But this simply isn't about placing a piece of equipment in a space. It also means staffing the clinic with specialized health care professionals. The member knows that AHS has challenges recruiting and training staff in rural and remote communities, and we are working to address that. We will continue to engage with local leaders on the best way to provide rural health care for all Albertans.

Mr. Loewen: Given that there are other health care issues in rural Alberta and that one of them is the lack of health care professionals and given that there have been many talented, aspiring health care professionals forced to leave Alberta and even Canada to receive their medical education and after completing their education elsewhere faced the arduous and lengthy process of receiving approval to practise in Alberta, forcing them to practise elsewhere, and given that this has left OR rooms in Grande Prairie underutilized at the expense of patients in need, Minister: what work is being done to find a more efficient process to bring our health care workers home?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the hon. member for the question. The mechanism that matches medical school graduates with residencies, the Canadian resident matching service, is a nationally administered program. Now, while the process is not directly in our control, we are working in collaboration with the ministries of Advanced Education and labour and the medical schools of the U of C and the U of A to improve the way we train doctors in our province. We're also providing \$6 million over the next three years, through the RESIDE program, to attract 60 recently graduated doctors to communities of need in Alberta such as the town of Fox Creek in the member's constituency.

Mr. Loewen: Given that rural Alberta was chosen to be one of the first areas in Alberta to implement connect care and given that there have been many concerns expressed regarding connect care and the amount of time it takes doctors, already in short supply, to input data while navigating this complicated system rather than focusing on patient care and given that locums, which are substitute doctors desperately needed to provide coverage and keep rural hospitals open, are being driven away due to their dislike of connect care, can the minister please tell us if AHS and the ministry are working on creating processes that will make connect care a less time-consuming process for doctors?

Mr. Copping: Thanks again to the hon. member for the question. Mr. Speaker, connect care is an AHS resource dedicated to charting a patient's progress. Consistent charting is an important piece that enables care teams to support patients and gives patients access to their own information. We recognize that this does create challenges for physicians who have multiple roles within AHS and at their own private practices. I want to assure the member that Alberta Health is working with AHS and the AMA to work through these problems to ease the transitioning to connect care.

In addition, we continue to invest in attracting and retaining doctors across all of rural Alberta; not only the RESIDE program but the \$90,000 that we devoted . . .

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

2:20 Homeless Supports and Affordable Housing

Ms Sigurdson: Edmonton is set to lose 44 per cent of emergency shelter capacity serving people experiencing homelessness by June. Nearly 3,000 people are currently experiencing homelessness in Edmonton, with 800 sleeping outside each night. Sadly, the UCP have been inconsistent with emergency shelter funding, forcing shelters to close. They have ignored requests from the city to build permanent supportive housing and have left hundreds of millions of federal housing dollars untouched. Why is the UCP forcing so many Edmontonians to sleep on the streets?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of community services.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for raising this very difficult, complex issue here. Supporting our homeless population, helping them find the pathway to recovery, is important for this government. We invested \$49 million with Budget 2022 committed to supporting homelessness initiatives. In Edmonton Homeward Trust received \$29 million of that portion there. On top of the resources we committed to, we established a provincial task force. We're looking for a comprehensive, co-ordinated approach addressing this complex issue.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that I stood with our leader and the Member for St. Albert in Trinity Lutheran church in September, where an emergency shelter had just closed because of funding cuts, and given that in the last two years the UCP have underbudgeted regarding homeless supports by tens of millions of dollars while poverty has increased, why is the UCP continuing this failed plan of underbudgeting for the most vulnerable, leaving them no place to stay but on the streets?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, nothing can be further from the truth. This government continues to commit our support for this sector here not only with increased resources there, but also we're taking a different approach. Those one-off, isolated approaches no longer address this issue. That's one reason we have the provincial task force established. The Edmonton city manager is a member of that task force along with a federal government representative and significant other stakeholders in the community. We're working hard to address this complex issue here.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the solution to homelessness is investment in affordable housing and given that the national housing strategy has billions of available dollars and that Alberta needs to step up to get their fair share and, however, given that the UCP have continually ignored the city of Edmonton's request for permanent supportive housing and have left hundreds of millions of federal housing dollars untouched, when will the UCP be announcing details of how they leverage every available dollar from the national housing strategy to provide Albertans access to a home?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is so shameful, that the NDP once again totally don't understand. We've been telling once again, more and more, repeated again that we spent every single federal dollar. We have allocated \$561 million in cost matching for the next nine years to build affordable housing. I don't understand what the hon. member doesn't understand. Maybe math is hard for her.

Thank you.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:24.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Bilous: A recent report shows that rising interest rates are driving Albertans toward bankruptcy. While the picture was not good for Canadians in general, from the effects of rising interest rates coupled with soaring cost of living, Alberta was in worse shape than the rest of the country. Currently 52 per cent of Alberta households are within \$200 of not making all their financial obligations by the end of the month, yet the UCP keeps piling on costs. Income taxes, property taxes, tuition, park and camping fees, utilities, and insurance have all gone up under the UCP. Why is the UCP adding these costs onto Albertans already struggling to make ends meet?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're working hard to ensure that Albertans can in fact live in the most affordable jurisdiction in the country. That, in fact, is true. We have the lowest business taxes, the lowest personal taxes, no sales tax, no payroll tax, no land transfer tax, no capital tax. Folks are moving from every province into Alberta right now. Why? Because there's opportunity, because our economic policies are attracting tens of billions of dollars of investment, creating jobs and opportunities for all Albertans.

Mr. Bilous: Given that Albertans are only \$200 away from not being able to pay their bills at the end of the month and given that the UCP's income tax increase will cost Alberta families \$900 per year by the end of their fiscal plan, cuts to AISH will cost recipients \$3,500 per year, and cuts to low-income seniors on the seniors' benefit will cost \$900 per year and given that utility bills have increased by hundreds of dollars after the UCP lifted the rate cap, can the minister explain how exactly this government's plan to push Albertans into bankruptcy is good for the economy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I reject the assertion in that question. We did not reduce AISH payments, we've not reduced seniors' payments, and we've not increased taxes. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Members of the opposition don't just get to yell at the government at their pleasure. They're welcome to heckle strategically. As you all know, the Speaker is a former heckler. You're welcome to heckle strategically, but just yelling at the government is not a heckle.

The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll repeat that. We have not raised taxes, we have not cut AISH, and we've not cut seniors' benefits. Alberta maintains the strongest, most generous supports of any province in the country. On top of that, we're positioning the province for disproportionate investment attraction, and we balanced the budget.

Mr. Bilous: Deindexing is a cut, and it's in your budget.

Given that Albertans are in the worst financial shape in the country according to a report by MNP and given that Alberta's unemployment rate is higher than the national average, with

Calgary having the highest unemployment rate in the country amongst major cities, and given that the UCP keeps adding on costs to Albertans already struggling to find work and make ends meet, why are Albertans falling further behind under the UCP? Would somebody please step up and take responsibility for your budget?

The Speaker: That sounds like a preamble, and it's in the standing orders.

The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Most major banks and economic think tanks are projecting Alberta to lead the nation in economic growth not only in 2022 but in 2023. Our policies are working. Investment is pouring into this province. Jobs are being created; in fact, employers are struggling to find employees. That's why we've invested \$600 million in Budget 2022 to reskill Albertans, to ensure they can take part in the new economy, the economy of the future. Our policies are working. Alberta is back. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Economic Recovery Plan

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past two years the COVID-19 pandemic caused huge disruptions in Alberta's economic growth. Thousands of Albertans lost their jobs as a result of the world-wide response and damages caused by COVID-19, including many of my constituents of Calgary-Falconridge. Now that we're learning to live with COVID, Albertans need to know whether or not the UCP plan is working to get Albertans back to work. To the Minister of Labour and Immigration: is our plan working?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Last week our government introduced a game-changing \$600 million investment in Alberta at work to support education, on-the-job training, and to reduce barriers for underrepresented groups. Alberta's unemployment rate is lower than it's been since December 2018, and each month it keeps getting lower and lower. Alberta's recovery plan is working, and more Albertans are sharing in our province's success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Alberta's economy was severely damaged by the previous NDP government's job-killing policies and given that their taxation on corporations led to billions of dollars of investment leaving Alberta, putting thousands and thousands of Albertans out of work, and given that our government was elected to clean up the mess made by the members opposite, to the same minister: how are we cleaning up the NDP's mess and getting Albertans back to work?

2:30

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

Mr. Nicolaidis: Sure. Thank you. As my colleague has mentioned, we have a lot of work to do to clean up the mess that the NDP left us. But rest assured, the cleanup crew is here, and we will get things done, including the \$600 million investment that my colleague

mentioned to the Alberta at work initiative. This initiative is going to help Albertans who are struggling to find employment find those job opportunities. It's going to help other Albertans reskill and upskill for the jobs of the future, and it's going to help young Albertans make sure they have the skills they need to succeed.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Alberta is currently in a labour shortage crisis and given that our government has committed hundreds of millions of dollars to helping Albertans get job training through the Alberta at work program, thus attracting more workers and tradespeople to come work in Alberta, to the Minister of Advanced Education: how will this \$235 million investment into postsecondary help address the skilled labour shortage?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you. As the member mentioned, we are investing \$235 million in Advanced Education over three years. A big portion of that, \$171 million, is going to create spaces in our postsecondary institutions. We'll be creating so many spaces, Mr. Speaker, 7,000 additional spaces, in our postsecondary institutions in high-demand areas, including aviation, tech. As well, we're providing \$30 million over three years to support trades and apprenticeship education. We are focused on ensuring that Albertans have the skills they need to succeed.

Education Policies and Funding

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, every day this UCP government is making life more expensive for Alberta families. Thanks to the UCP, families are paying more for income tax, more for property tax, more on tuition, more interest on student debt, more for car insurance, and more for utilities, but it doesn't end there. The UCP is also driving up school fees with their cuts to school districts. In Sherwood Park, Elk Island schools announced a 20 per cent increase to transportation fees for students. Why is the UCP making it more expensive for kids in Sherwood Park to get to school?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that 98 per cent of all the funding goes directly to school authorities. School authorities have the ability to set their school fees, and they set school fees. Besides for busing, et cetera, they also set them for extracurricular activities and field trips. This is what school fees are for. Under the previous government they were very upset that there were controls on school fees, et cetera. They were not happy when that happened. We fixed their mess.

Ms Hoffman: Given that at the Parkland school division transportation fees are going up by \$70 in some cases and even more than \$100 for a maximum family rate and given that families in Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, and surrounding communities are already struggling under all of the mounting costs that this UCP government is piling onto them – the NDP government did work to lower school fees, and we would have continued that work, but this minister repealed our legislation – Minister, will you explain to parents why this current government has cleared a path for massive school fee hike increases and why it's set on making things more expensive for kids trying to get to school?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the one thing I hear continuously – and I still hear it – is: thank God the NDP aren't in office. Just to clarify, in 2019 we had 711,000 students, and our

budget was \$8.2 billion. Right now in this upcoming year we have 716,000 students. We have an \$8.4 billion budget. I've increased dollars to transportation 5 per cent to the year before, 5 per cent to last year, and 4.6 per cent in this upcoming year.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the current government is deliberately underfunding public education and given that the UCP is forcing parents to pay more in school fees at a time when many Albertans are already struggling to make ends meet and given that the UCP is forcing a rushed curriculum on students that's not supported by parents or teachers and fails to support students, why is this government forcing struggling parents to pay more and get less support, and why are they forcing a broken curriculum that parents don't support, teachers don't support, school boards don't support on Alberta students?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to hear from the Queen of Misinformation, but I want to clear things up. In fact, school authorities: as I said, we've added an additional \$700 million over three years. We have \$191 million for the curriculum implementation. We have an additional \$110 million to address mental health and wellness. That's on top of the \$45 million I added last year in terms of dealing with learning loss. School boards have gone from \$363 million in operating reserves to \$464 million as of August 2021.

Ms Gray: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order?

Ms Gray: Yep.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:35.

Drug Poisoning Death Prevention

Ms Sigurdson: The UCP's response to the drug poisoning crisis has been shameful. They have denied evidence about harm reduction [interjections] so they could fulfill the Premier's campaign of stigmatizing proven life-saving methods. January was the deadliest month on record from drug poisoning; 160 Albertans tragically lost their lives. Over five Albertans died a day. [interjections] My question to the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions is simple: when will Alberta stop breaking records for deaths and start to see a decrease in drug poisonings?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Sorry. I'm just a little distracted by your colleague the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Perhaps he might come to order.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I thank the member for the question. As I've said many times in this House, the loss of one life is one too many, especially in the addiction crisis. But let's be clear. What is the NDP's plan? The NDP's plan is for publicly funded addictive drugs. That's right. The NDP wants to put drugs on the streets. They want to put hydromorphone on the streets. That is their plan. I don't see how more drugs helps a drug situation. [interjections]

The Speaker: I might just caution members of the opposition, whoever is making comments like, "Sit down," that that may seem

to be intimidating another member. Of course, members have the opportunity to rise in their seat and answer the question.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP has continuously stated that harm reduction methods do not work, like the minister just said, and given that I've been advocating for increased affordable housing with mental health support and given that here in Edmonton emergency shelter beds are set to decrease by 44 per cent in June and that continued requests by the city council for permanent supportive housing so people with mental health concerns can get help while having a stable home have been constantly rejected by the UCP, why is the UCP opposed to providing mental health support and stable housing to the most vulnerable?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, you know, I know the NDP always want to talk about the science and believe in the evidence, but the NDP had an opportunity to hear evidence from people from Harvard University, from Stanford University, from Yale University. You know what? They quit. They don't want to hear the evidence. They don't want to hear the truth. We're listening to the evidence, and we are trying to move forward in helping people with severe mental health and addictions issues.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the January deaths from drug poisoning in 2022 are 21 per cent higher than 2021 – 758 Albertans died in 2021, which is double the total in 2019; the UCP's approach is clearly not working – and given that the UCP has focused on recovery but that cuts to social services such as deindexing income support and AISH, not funding permanent supportive housing . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has every right to ask a question and the Speaker to hear the question. If she wants to rewind about five seconds, I'd be happy to allow her to do that.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP has focused on recovery but that cuts to social supports such as deindexing income support and AISH, not funding permanent supportive housing, and cutting critical mental health supports do not serve the mission of recovery, to the associate minister: over five preventable deaths . . .

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

2:40

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, the drug crisis is affecting not just Alberta. I know the NDP wants to think that it's only an Alberta issue, but it's not an Alberta issue. This is a Canadian issue. This is a North American issue. You know, their close friend and ally in the federal Liberal Party – let me be perfectly clear. They are supporting publicly funded drugs. Even the federal minister, their close friend and ally, has indicated that these are addictive drugs. I do not see how, in any rational mind, we can put more addictive drugs on the streets of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members . . . [interjections] Order. Order. Order. That concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period. In 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Oil and Gas Transportation Infrastructure

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government is creating new opportunities for Albertans, and Alberta's economy has been on the right path with the implementation of Alberta's recovery plan. One of the core pillars of this is the diversification of Alberta's economy. As part of this plan there has been a tremendous focus on diversifying accessibility to Alberta's enormous energy supply.

With the ongoing invasion by Russia in Ukraine, the global energy market will change significantly. As a result, there will be likely growing demand for responsible and ethically produced Alberta oil and gas. The future of Alberta's energy supply requires us to make rapid and long-term investment in oil transport infrastructure. In order to achieve this, it is critical for the federal government to do more, remove regulatory gridlocks that deprive our energy supply to global markets.

Alberta and Canada need to work at developing an oil-handling system which will reach large cargo vessels in Churchill port in Manitoba, that would enable the export of energy from Alberta. Developing access to tidewater infrastructure from Alberta will serve as a gateway to supply our energy to the world. The financial gains of this project will definitely improve the competitiveness of our energy while also providing long-term opportunities for many within the province and the country. I urge the government to look in this direction and also put more pressure on the federal government to repeal bills C-48 and C-69, that have limited the movement of the province's oil.

The future of Alberta's energy supply requires us to make rapid and long-term investment in oil transport infrastructure, and the time to act is now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Toews, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, responses to questions raised by Mr. Barnes, hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, Ms Phillips, hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, and Mr. Loewen, hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley, on March 8, 2022, Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance 2022-23 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:24 the Opposition House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During a question set talking about emergency shelter capacity, the real need for Edmontonians experiencing homelessness to have supports in affordable housing, and other issues of great significance, I rose under 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder," because, as we know, in this House personal attacks and insults are not in order, and the minister said to the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, "Maybe math is hard for her."

Now, Mr. Speaker, I believe this is a point of order, that that type of insult in this House is unparliamentary. I would also like to note that the last time a member of the Conservative front bench told the NDP that math was hard, it was just a few weeks before Albertans chose an NDP government. Time is a flat circle. I believe we may be repeating history here, but certainly that language was unparliamentary.

Thank you.

The Speaker: It almost sounds like she's continuing debate.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that this is a point of order. I would suggest that it's a matter of debate, specifically for the use of the word "maybe." The word "maybe" in itself suggests that this is a matter of debate. The hon. Minister of Seniors and Housing was commenting on the mathematics that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview was using in the questions that she was posing to the minister. I recognize that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview did not like the answer and certainly, I guess, also didn't like the response that maybe math is hard. But from the fact that she used the word "maybe" and that other things have very similarly been said in this Chamber that have not been called points of order, have gone through, passed the smell test, I would argue that it's not a point of order but, rather, a matter of debate, maybe a matter of debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am prepared to rule, and I do have the benefit of the Blues. "I don't understand what the hon. member doesn't understand. Maybe math is hard for her." That is the statement that the Minister of Seniors and Housing made at 2:22. I would like to note that while the words themselves are not unparliamentary, I think that it is well accepted that this statement, that has become part of the political discourse in our province over a number of years, certainly has some insulting overtones to it. While I'm not entirely convinced that it raises to the level of a point of order, I will offer a very direct encouragement to the Minister of Seniors and Housing. Particularly, directing a statement that may be considered to be insulting at any one particular member is, of course, where caution ought to be used in the future. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded. This is not a point of order.

However, at 2:35 the Opposition House Leader rose on an additional point of order, which we will hear now.

Point of Clarification

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, prior to that point of order, just under 13(2), the argument that the Deputy Government House Leader made, that making insulting statements would be parliamentary if we put "maybe" in front of them, like "Maybe the Deputy Government House Leader is bad at his job": could you let me know if that would be acceptable or unacceptable? I would like to provide guidance to my caucus, and I found that reasoning to be quite suspect. I suspect we do not want to see that behaviour in the House, but I look forward to your guidance. I'm just unclear if it was found to be parliamentary because of the word "maybe." Is that comment . . .

The Speaker: Oh. No. I would suggest that the words themselves, "Math is hard," are not unparliamentary, and given the context in which they were used, I would suggest that it didn't raise to the level of a point of order today. However, I did provide significant caution to the minister in light of the fact that such a comment was directed specifically at an individual. Of course, the use of the word "maybe" doesn't give licence to use unparliamentary language. Just because the Deputy Government House Leader said it doesn't mean that it's fact. While I appreciated his submissions, they were inconsequential to the fact that I didn't find a point of order. Maybe not inconsequential.

Ms Gray: I appreciate that clarification, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for your indulgence there.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Ms Gray: At 2:35 I rose under, again, 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." The Member for Edmonton-Glenora was asking about a 20 per cent increase in school fees when the Minister of Education referred to her as the queen of misinformation, directly calling her a liar. I do not believe this is a matter of debate. I do believe that is an insult. That is a nickname that is not referring to a colleague in a respectful manner. I believe this is a point of order.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been called many things in my life but inconsequential is not one of them. Of course, I kid.

I will get to the matter at hand. I don't find that this is a point of order, particularly because I do believe that in many instances there are members of the opposition who maybe try to pass misinformation as fact. I believe the hon. Minister of Education was pointing out that fact, and maybe that's what was so frustrating to the hon. member opposite and why the point of order was called, or maybe it was the use of the word "queen." I do know that the members opposite have a disdain for — they do not like the monarchy. Maybe it's the title. Maybe princess or duchess would be more appropriate, but I don't believe this is a point of order. [interjections]

I will retract and apologize for those comments. I'd just retract and apologize.

I will say that I don't believe this is a point of order, but I will leave that to your judgment, hon. Speaker.

2:50

The Speaker: I couldn't disagree with you more in this case. To be overly certain, I didn't say that you were inconsequential. I said that the argument was inconsequential, and perhaps that was a bit of an overstatement as well.

In this case, however, I would say that it is unparliamentary to refer to an individual as the queen of misinformation. I have ruled on numerous occasions with respect to the language around misinformation, including on June 7, 2021, page 5238 of *Hansard*. If anyone is inclined to look those comments up, I encourage you to do so. But this is a point of order, and I'll have the Deputy Government House Leader apologize and withdraw the comments.

Mr. Schow: I withdraw and apologize.

The Speaker: I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.
We are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Second Reading Bill 13 Financial Innovation Act

[Adjourned debate April 25: Mr. Eggen]

The Speaker: Are there others? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud would like to join in the debate on Bill 13.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just getting my timer going here. I want to, you know, speak fulsomely if I can.

I'm pleased to rise at second reading of Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. I want to begin by saying that I believe that overall we support this bill, and I believe that the type of innovation that it is setting out in this bill is something that we certainly do support.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

We know that the financial services sector within Alberta employs over 60,000 Albertans, and we have consistently stood in this space and talked about the need for innovation and for attracting talent and investment into Alberta and finding new ways to do that. It's one of the reasons why, in this House, the members of the Official Opposition have been fiercely advocating for a postsecondary system that actually, you know, attracts people and actually keeps Albertans here.

We know that within the energy sector, within the transition to a new energy economy there is enormous opportunity for innovation, and of course the oil and gas sector is using a great deal of technology and automation and robotics to really make their systems more efficient. We also know that we need more innovation because that efficiency and automation often do not actually translate into more jobs necessarily, but we do know that there is a great opportunity for more jobs in Alberta by encouraging that innovation.

We've seen, certainly, that, you know, members from the Official Opposition with respect to – actually, I'm thinking specifically about Bill 203, that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview introduced, which, unfortunately, the government decided is not worthy of debate in this House. It talked about an Alberta venture fund, which is also about encouraging Albertans to do what they do best, which is to take risks and to invest in Albertans. It was the opportunity for Albertans to participate in a small way by innovating and investing into venture funds right here in Alberta that would support Alberta companies.

For some reason the government of the day thought that this was too risky. They believed it was too risky to allow Albertans to, you know, do what we do best: be entrepreneurial, take chances, come up with new ideas, and innovate. They didn't trust Albertans to make those investments on their own, which is shocking. However, we certainly do, so I think this idea of a Financial Innovation Act – clearly, there is some risk that the UCP is willing to take, just not on good ideas from the opposition.

As I understand it, Bill 13 would essentially create what's called a regulatory sandbox, and financial services companies and financial technology companies could basically test out new services or technologies in sort of an environment where there are lowered or limited regulatory frameworks, so basically have an opportunity to innovate and to try out new things and, yes, to take some risks in an idea where regulatory thresholds are somewhat lowered, so to enable that.

Then, of course, if it's successful, you know, that work would come out and be subject to the full regulation that exists for other companies. It's to lower the risk for these companies to try new things and to make it easier and cheaper for them to do that, but it has to have, of course, some guideposts around it because while that's a good opportunity, we want to make sure that we are protecting consumers very carefully who may be investing in these kinds of new financial services and innovations. We want to make sure that they have the protections necessary so that they understand the risks of investing or even purchasing services and goods from a company that has a lower regulatory threshold. But we also want to make sure that those who are making the determination of which financial services should be allowed to operate in this regulatory sandbox have the expertise necessary to determine when it's safe to do so.

As I understand it, you know, it would allow specific companies to apply for a certificate to the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance for temporary relief from certain laws and regulation. I understand there are a number of pieces of legislation that these companies would be exempt from. It includes the loans and trust act, the Credit Union Act, the ATB Financial Act, and the Consumer Protection Act, which I have a bit of concern about, and the personal information and privacy act as well as the Financial Consumers Act, and we know that more legislation could be added by regulation. So, essentially, a company would apply, as I understand it, to the minister for a certificate to be exempt from these regulatory requirements.

I understand that there are some kinds of – you know, there are eligibility requirements. The company must be an Alberta company, physically located here in Alberta. They must be able to demonstrate to the government that their product is new and original, and they must demonstrate that no other company is currently offering the same products or services, and they have to, of course, submit a business case. These are sort of the requirements to apply for a certificate, and then those exemptions can be granted. I understand that they will be explicitly listed on the certificate, so at least consumers have an idea of which regulatory requirements this company is exempt from.

Again, I think that there is certainly some benefit to this, and we certainly see an opportunity from what's set out in Bill 13 and an opportunity for innovation in this space, but I also know that there are some risks that we need to be clear on. First, as I mentioned, this puts a great deal of onus on the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance to be able to apply those eligibility requirements, look at the business case, understand the innovative nature of what's being proposed, and make a determination that that company should be eligible for an exemption.

There is a risk, I believe, and as I understand it, we're talking about very novel companies and novel financial services, something that maybe lots of folks here have heard about, talked about; you know, cryptocurrency and all of that and Bitcoin. Even people who are well versed in these kinds of things find it difficult to fully comprehend, perhaps, what cryptocurrency is, and I will acknowledge that I have tried to go over it a number of times in my head. Every time I think I've got it, then something changes, and I still have to reflect on what I thought I knew.

So it's certainly a challenging space, and we need to be sure that those who are making determinations as to whether or not a financial services company should be exempt from regulatory requirements has the requisite knowledge and expertise to be able to make that risk assessment. It's relying heavily on the government ministry itself and the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance himself. I think we need some assurances that there is the appropriate level of expertise, both within the existing ministry but also, certainly, with the existing minister, to be able to make that kind of assessment.

You know, I think that sort of speaks to the even broader issue here. Really, this is going to be a certificate issued by the authority of the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance, which asks for Albertans to place their trust in the minister to make good and sound decisions. Now, as we know, the current Minister of Treasury Board and Finance is the same minister who has, you know, given in to insurance company lobbying and allowed for insurance companies to make a significant amount of profit on the backs of Alberta drivers, many of which weren't even driving their vehicles much in the last two years but saw their insurance premiums go up. This is the same Treasury Board and Finance minister who lifted the cap on insurance rates.

3:00

It's the same Treasury Board and Finance minister who also advised on the decision to throw away \$1.3 billion on the KXL pipeline, a pipeline that everybody was advising was not going to happen unless Donald Trump was re-elected. I mean, that's just this minister. He's the same minister who has overseen, against what I believe are his core principles and values as a so-called conservative, allowed for bracket creep, allowed for the hike of personal income taxes without even being honest about what was happening and still refusing to acknowledge it. I mean, there's very good reason for this.

And let's be honest. This is also the Finance minister who, up until the, you know, windfall of large oil price increases in the last few months, was about to enter a budget with the highest deficit ever recorded in Alberta. Certainly, Albertans would have a lot of reason to not have a great deal of trust in the Minister of Treasury Board and Finance, at least this one. Of course, more generally, I could use up a significant amount of time going through all the reasons why Albertans don't trust this government and the Premier in particular, but we don't have time for that.

The other risk associated with this bill is really about consumer protection. It's really about making sure that consumers understand that they may be purchasing services and engaging in financial transactions with a company that is subject to a lower level or exempt from certain regulatory requirements. We need to ensure that there's some kind of education being done to the public or some kind of warning label or some kind of way of transmitting to the consumer that they understand that there may be greater risks associated in this space. You know, there's also a worry that people might just simply transfer their current confidence and trust in our public financial institutions such as major banks and just simply think that the same requirements are applying to these kinds of new financial innovation and financial services companies, which won't be the case under this bill. Those are the kinds of things that we need to be cautious about.

Overall, I think our caucus has been very clear in our support for innovation, and I look forward to hearing more thoughtful debate on this subject. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other – I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 13, which is the Financial Innovation Act. I want to start by making it clear on the record that in general I'm supportive of this bill. I think members should probably vote in favour of this bill. I just have a few concerns, and I think that they are concerns that arise from the level of discretion and a lack of understanding of what the process is going to be for the evaluation of these applications.

Obviously, the act builds on a regulatory sandbox initiative started under the NDP government through the Alberta Securities Commission. Generally I think that was a good initiative, I mean, obviously. These sorts of ideas can be very useful. They can spur innovation. They can sort of create new – they can allow new businesses with new ideas to flourish in an existing environment, and I think that's really important. I'm actually really glad to see the government at least taking steps in this direction because they tend to privilege economic development measures that really, really work for established players generating large profits to the detriment of new entrants to a market.

For instance, this government: obviously, their sort of big throw when they first got into government was to drop the corporate tax rate.

Now, that tax rate is applicable only on companies that are generating \$500,000 a year or more, so it is beneficial to those companies but not to new companies because, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you're well aware that a new business doesn't generate \$500,000 worth of revenue in the first year. That almost never happens. In fact, most businesses don't generate revenue in the first year. Most times it takes a little while to sort of get up to speed. It's very unlikely that a measure like that would help a new business or innovation.

Now, it's not surprising that that was the direction of the government because it was a government who said that diversification was a luxury, something we didn't have time for, something we shouldn't be interested in. It doesn't surprise me, but this represents a pretty big reversal, a reversal in direction, and I think that's good.

There are a number of other things I'd like to see them reverse; for instance, the Alberta investor tax credit. That was a program with a demonstrated history of attracting new businesses. It was a program with a demonstrated history of creating jobs. That's the challenge with the direction that this government took. They gave away billions of dollars to corporations. They got no jobs in return because that wasn't where the market was at the time. So they helped only established players, and they didn't help them in a way that created any jobs for Albertans. It just essentially sent profits overseas. This initiative looks like a good initiative. I'd like to see them take more of these good initiatives. The Alberta investor tax credit, as I mentioned, under our government was working really, really well.

They love to talk about the tech sector. Well, initial growth was spurred under our government because we made investments, and then the UCP cut those investments, so companies that were looking at coming here – because companies get legal work and I guess I talk to other lawyers, I heard from a number of people that companies that had been planning to relocate here or create an office here didn't do that because the government cut the program, and then they brought it back. Now it's starting to spool up, but the net result of this government's refusal to invest in good economic policy was that we are now behind the rest of the country in terms of that growth. That isn't to say that we aren't seeing growth, because the UCP government thankfully chose to eventually reverse course and get back onboard with initiatives that were working under the NDP government, but the result of that is that we were behind, so that's problematic. Those are the things I think are good about this bill. Those are the reasons I think it's good.

The reason I think it's problematic is that it gives enormous power to the minister. That isn't to say that there's never a need for that; it's just to say that with this government in particular I think it requires a little more explanation of how a few things are going to be handled. For instance, how are we going to ensure that there is still consumer protection? This is a government that has a long history of privileging the interests of large and wealthy insiders over the interests of regular Albertans. How do they plan to protect those Albertans?

Another big question is: how do they plan to adjudicate who gets these regulatory exemptions and who doesn't? Again, this is a government with a demonstrated history of not being particularly trustworthy when it comes to picking policies as opposed to picking friends. This is a government with a long history of demonstrating that they can't assess risk particularly well. I mean, the problem ultimately is what I would describe, Mr. Speaker, as a loss of trust. The public has lost trust in this government, so they need more explanation of how the rules are going to be applied and how those rules are going to be applied fairly than they normally would.

Now, this is sort of a concept that I'm borrowing from employment law. One of the things that can happen if you do something bad at your job and it's not bad enough that the judge or

the arbitrator or whoever it is that's deciding thinks you should lose your job: sometimes you can lose your job anyway, and that happens because there is a breakdown of trust. So when you wind up in a position where the employee and the employer are just – basically, there's so little trust between them that the relationship is nonfunctional. Any little thing that happens going forward in the future is going to, like, turn into a huge sort of catastrophic breakdown because everyone assumes the other party isn't acting in good faith. Essentially, what we have with this government is that the public assumes that this is a government that is not acting in good faith because of, again, a demonstrated history.

Some of the things, I think, that could help with this, that could go a long way to help with this. This government could learn to admit when it's wrong. When it makes a mistake and chooses to reverse course, it could admit when it's wrong. It's reversed course on a number of issues, this government. For instance, Mr. Speaker, they repealed the 1976 coal policy. They tried to go ahead with coal mining in the Rockies. Now, some projects have slipped through. But when they reversed that, there was no standing up and saying: "Yep. Turns out we were wrong. We totally misread that situation. We didn't think about it deeply enough." I really think that this would go a long way to re-establishing trust with Albertans.

3:10

Maybe it's just because I was at the hydrogen conference this morning, Mr. Speaker, but I think, you know, the public's confidence in this government would have been assisted a lot – rewind to 2020. The NDP releases a plan on hydrogen, and the UCP laughs. The minister says: it's ridiculous; hydrogen will never come that fast. The idea that we would export by 2030 is absolutely absurd, says the associate minister. And then they release a plan that has us doing exactly that, largely borrowed from our plan. So what happened in between? I just feel like it would go a long way to build trust if the associate minister could just stand up and say: "Yep. I was wrong. I was wrong when I laughed at green hydrogen and said that we would never make it in Alberta. I was wrong when I said that we would never export by 2030. I was wrong when I said that all of these things were out decades." I think that that would go a long way to re-establish trust.

In addition, with respect to this bill you have a situation where the applicants, the people being asked to be exempt from the regulations, are potentially people who know the government; again, demonstrated history of sort of, you know, friends and insiders. This is a government who, at the same time that they wouldn't let physicians use complex modifiers on telehealth during a pandemic, brought in a company to do telehealth. You know, it's pretty clear that there was some wink, wink, nudge, nudge in there. So I think this is incredibly problematic.

The big questions are: does this government have the expertise to credibly assess these proposals and still protect Albertans, and can they be impartial? I mean, if we just look at, for instance, in terms of their credibility, the issue around rebates, right? This issue comes up in November. The government says: we're going to do nothing. Then they say: we're going to do a natural gas rebate. But then the budget comes out, and it turns out that by "we're going to do," they mean, you know, eight or nine months from now, and at the time their current projections weren't showing that obtaining. As it turns out, it did.

But the point is, again, that then they say: we're going to do an electricity rebate. We wait. We wait. We wait. There's no word. There's no news. There's nothing. Then comes legislation. Okay. Fine. It took them weeks to sort of essentially crib previously existing legislation. They bring in the legislation, and on the same day that the associate minister says, "Oh, there's no way we get these rebates to people until,

you know, June, possibly July," they charge in and say, "Oh, the opposition didn't pass it in six hours, and that's the problem." The same day – the same day – the associate minister said: "We don't get them out until June. It's going to take us at least two months, and, oh, a six-hour delay is a really big problem for us."

Ms Gray: Ridiculous.

Ms Ganley: Ridiculous. Lack of trust.

Insurance caps: also a big deal. This government came in. They got lobbied by an insider. They remove the insurance cap. Insurance rates skyrocketed. There was an outcry from Albertans. They said: "Oh, no, no, no. There's no possible other way this could have happened. The insurance companies absolutely needed it. Everyone would have gone bankrupt without it." And then, mysteriously, the report that tells us how much insurance companies charged in premiums versus how much they took in in claims just doesn't appear that year. It just doesn't appear. The government trots out. They say: don't worry; all the information is online.

We proved that that is not, in fact, the case, Mr. Speaker, so finally they publish the report, trying to blame the civil service and blame the insurance companies and blame everyone but themselves, who chose not to publish the report, for that. When we see the report, we see that they took in more in premiums than they paid out in claims, significantly more, and, in fact, that that differential has expanded in the interim. Again, it's difficult for Albertans to have confidence that vesting all of this discretion in the minister will result in an outcome that is beneficial to everyone. I mean, the question is, again, whether they're going to protect consumers appropriately and whether they're going to pick companies appropriately. The best company with the best business case may come forward. What if they're not friends of the UCP? What if it's 2020 and they're coming forward with a hydrogen proposal when this government is saying, "Oh, pooh-pooh to hydrogen," before they decide to change their mind?

You know, the problem is that they just don't seem to make judgments based on the facts and the evidence before them. I think – ah, yes – this is a question of risk assessment. That's what the government is going to be doing. They're going to be looking at these companies and saying, like: what is the risk to consumers versus what is the potential benefit to innovation? This is the same government that bet on the re-election of Donald Trump when the polls were showing he had less than a 50 per cent chance of success.

Mr. Rutherford: They showed Hillary as a winner, too.

Ms Ganley: This is a government – well, I mean, that's fine, that the polls may have been wrong about Hillary as well, but we didn't make a \$1.3 billion bet with taxpayers' money on her election. I think maybe that's the problem there.

This government went ahead and made that bet. They made that bet without consultation with Albertans. They made that bet without proper financial transparency with Albertans, and they made that bet in what – I don't know. I'm not a big gambler myself, Mr. Speaker, but I think a lot of people would have looked at that and said: "Okay. So we're going to put down \$1.3 billion. We have less than a 50 per cent chance of success on any reading of the situation. I don't know. Does that seem like a good bet?" I don't think they would have made it with their own money.

Ms Hoffman: Betcha five bucks they wouldn't.

Ms Ganley: Yeah. You know, I'm not going to take that bet from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora because I don't think that the UCP would have made that bet with their own money. I would be

really surprised to hear that that was the case. I think they only made it because they had taxpayer money to spend.

I think that that is the main concern, that this is a government with a demonstrated history of an inability to credibly assess risk. And even if we assume that we clear that hurdle somehow, that we have some sort of policy or procedure that is printed online for Albertans to see in terms of how this government is going to assess risk, then the next hurdle arises, and that's a hurdle of: how do we know . . .

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. The Financial Innovation Act is poised to be the first of its kind in Canada, one that will spur investment in innovative and new technologies and position the Alberta economy for growth in the financial services sector. This forward-looking legislation provides space for innovation, disruption, and truly incredible minds to bring forward their products in Alberta. This will empower Alberta's fintech entrepreneurs to make full use of their creativity and test their products and ideas right here at home.

If passed, the proposed legislation would create a regulatory sandbox, as many have talked about this afternoon. That regulatory sandbox will make it easier for finance and fintech companies to develop new products and services in Alberta and will diversify Alberta's economy in this space. The regulatory sandbox would offer companies time-limited relief from certain legislation and regulations, making it simpler for them to research, to test, and to adapt their new technologies and services to the needs of Albertans. It would also help companies collect information on new products and services to determine if they are providing value for their customers. A regulatory sandbox would drive increased innovation and competition in Alberta, which could potentially give Albertans greater access to more products and services at a lower cost.

While this sandbox will be the first of its kind in Canada, there are models and best practices that we can use and follow. To the member previously talking about the questions around what I heard was safeguards: I think that's one of the challenges with legislation like this. It being an innovative bill and trying to legislate innovative practice, it's challenging to know how to define the specific guidelines because by definition it's going to be ill defined; hence, the regulatory sandbox. That is, in fact, the guardrails, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, there are models and best practices that we can use, that we can look to as examples that have worked in other jurisdictions. In Canada there's currently a regulatory sandbox in place for the securities industry, for example. Other countries are also using regulatory sandboxes as tools to drive innovation and economic growth while providing that safety within the sandbox, those guardrails.

3:20

Alberta would be the first province in Canada to establish a regulatory sandbox for the finance and fintech sector, giving companies additional ways to grow their business and create jobs. It will help financial-related companies expand their offerings to create new jobs right here in Alberta while preparing for Canada's launch of open banking.

We want Alberta to be ahead of the curve, Mr. Speaker, not behind. A regulatory sandbox would provide time-limited exemptions from the following legislation and related regulations: the Loan and Trust Corporations Act, the Credit Union Act, the ATB Financial Act, the Financial Consumers Act, the Consumer

Protection Act, and, finally, the Personal Information Protection Act.

Specific exemptions would depend on what kind of relief each applicant is seeking and whether or not the government can safely provide those exemptions as requested. This would be determined on a case-by-case basis as the government needs the flexibility to weigh the relative merits and risks of each application. All legislative exemptions would be disclosed publicly. There's one safeguard there. We believe this will be a strong incentive for fintech companies to move to Alberta and create jobs here, with the added benefit of further diversifying our economy and adding to our growing reputation as a hub for world-class financial services and fintech companies.

To help review applications, the government has formed a working group, including officials from the following: Treasury Board and Finance, Jobs, Economy and Innovation, and Service Alberta as the ministries responsible for some of the related acts. The office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner would also be consulted on exemptions to the Personal Information Protection Act, and their approval would be required for exemptions to proceed, another safeguard for Albertans and consumers in general. The office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner was consulted during the development of the legislation, and the feedback they provided has been incorporated into the drafting of the legislation.

Successful applicants would have to meet all of the following main criteria. First, they would be required to maintain a physical presence in Alberta. In other words, they would need to have an office in Alberta or staff living here in Alberta. Second, the regulatory sandbox would only be for companies that offer financial products or services. Third, applicants must adequately explain why the product or service should be considered new or a material improvement to an existing product or service. Applicants would not receive exemption for products or services that are already offered in Alberta by other companies. Lastly, applicants would have to provide a sound and viable business plan for the testing of a financial product or service. The plan must also demonstrate how they plan to exit the sandbox given that participation would be time limited as defined in the legislation.

I want to assure all members that consumer protection is strongly represented in this legislation, which is specifically designed to ensure companies participating in this regulatory sandbox are held to high professional standards and meet specified eligibility requirements.

These criteria: for example, participating companies may be subject to additional terms, conditions, and restrictions such as consulting a qualified expert or auditor, limiting the number of customers who can purchase the product or service being tested during the testing phase, having adequate capital on hand to support the venture, providing proof of appropriate insurance coverage, implementing specific financial security or surety requirements to mitigate risk and losses, developing new risk management policies and procedures, or having a way for customers to voice concerns and get them resolved, a mechanism for consumer protection and consumer feedback to be captured within the sandbox.

Mr. Speaker, the Financial Innovation Act signals that Alberta is willing to work with innovators and businesses seeking to offer innovative products and technologies. Alberta is willing to allow access to our residents these services, leading the way for Canada. Alberta's regulatory sandbox would provide a strong incentive for financial services and fintech companies to move to Alberta. This would add to Alberta's many other advantages in attracting new business, and it would do so without compromising consumer protection or government oversight. In fact, the sandbox would foster open and constructive dialogue between the government and companies seeking to enter the market. I think this is unique,

because this would help those companies get a better sense of the rules and regulations as they exist and open a new pathway for them to become fully regulated market participants.

Mr. Speaker, the world of finance is rapidly evolving, and our government understands that we need to partner with businesses if Alberta is going to stay ahead of the curve. Cutting red tape and making it easier to do business in Alberta is a crucial part of our strategy to grow the economy, to support job creation, and to make Alberta the best place to live, work, and raise a family. I would encourage, therefore, all members of the Assembly to support Bill 13.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will cede the rest of my time. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the Financial Innovation Act, and I want to start by saying that if the goals of this bill are to grow and diversify the economy, if they are truly to support innovation, then I think that we probably have some alignment and some agreement on where we want to move. The biggest issue with this bill, however, is that it requires a high degree of trust, trust that the regulation-making process or the regulatory sandbox, as referred to, is going to actually protect consumers, and putting these powers through regulation certainly requires consumers to have trust that the government is actually going to act in their best interests.

What we've seen for the last three years is a disregard for that, a disregard for the public money that is invested by the people of Alberta in their government to be able to make prudent financial decisions on their behalf, decisions that should be working toward economic diversification, toward creating a strong, diversified economy with jobs that people can count on to pay their mortgage. What we have seen is a significant reduction in the number of full-time jobs in this province, jobs that people can raise a family off.

The government seems to chase short-term headlines and sacrifice long-term prosperity, so while we have tremendous partners working to ensure a strong reputation nationally and internationally when it comes to emissions and responsible leadership around energy development, we have a provincial government that chooses instead to pick fights regularly with parties that are superfluous to the actual activities of the industry.

For the government to continue to put money into what they refer to as an energy war room while also gambling more than a billion dollars, at least \$1.3 billion, on a pipeline that doesn't exist based on the government's hopeful prediction that Donald Trump would win the last U.S. presidential election is completely irresponsible and demonstrates just a couple of the reasons why Albertans have lost trust in this UCP government.

Trust is the key issue here. I have to say that I don't think that there are issues with what we've been told the goals of the bill are. I think that the goals, if they are indeed around supporting more innovation and economic diversification, are things that we in the NDP have been championing for decades and wanting to make sure that we have a strong, diversified economy. But this government has shown time and time again that – the Minister of Finance, the sponsor of this bill, for example, said that diversification was a luxury that we just couldn't afford.

Well, Mr. Speaker, many would argue that we can't afford not to diversify, that we must make sure that we have robust sectors, including the energy sector, traditional energy, of course, being a big piece of that but other types of energy, including renewables,

including hydrogen. The hydrogen conference is happening right now here in Edmonton; 4,000 people downtown talking about an industry that we can be leaders in, and we know that the government didn't want us there to talk to people about what the actual vision is for our province and for the energy sector as it relates to hydrogen.

We should be working in partnership across the aisle and with industry and with investors from a variety of sectors to make sure that we can continue to be energy leaders in, of course, oil and gas but also in other spinoff energy opportunities that we have. We also need to be diversifying the economy in other areas, so significant investment in tech and in other growing sectors would be a wise investment from the people of Alberta in ensuring that we continue to have a strong and growing economy.

The fact that this bill asks this Assembly to put such a high degree of trust in cabinet to develop regulations that will deliver when, I would say, arguably, when you look at the history of Alberta, there's probably the least amount of trust in this cabinet of any government caucus that I've seen in the last at least 30 years . . .

3:30

Mr. Yao: Go back to 2015-19.

Ms Hoffman: I didn't catch that.

Mr. Yao: I said: look back to 2015 to 2019. You'll see an untrustworthy cabinet.

The Acting Speaker: Through the chair, hon. members.

Please continue.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the fact that we have, arguably, the most untrustworthy cabinet, from its own government caucus, that we've seen in at least 30 years in this province, the fact that we have a government that is creating legislation that requires them to do the bulk of the work through regulation rather than having the open, transparent process that this Assembly offers through three full readings and proper debate, publication of the actual legislation prior to its passing, the fact that the current cabinet is calling on their caucus and all members of this Assembly to trust them when this is the least trustworthy government in Canada and probably in Alberta's history I think begs a lot of questions around whether or not we should trust the government to actually follow through on what they are saying the intent of this bill is.

With all of that being in mind, Mr. Speaker, I'm inclined – because I want to be able to have faith that the government will do what they say they are going to do, and I also have faith that there will be an election. There must be an election at some point within the next year. According to the law it will be next May. We'll see if this Conservative government decides to follow the law or not, but there will be an election and there will be a new cabinet, and at that time I imagine there will be a higher degree of trust and confidence in the cabinet of the government of Alberta to deliver on the intended goals as outlined through Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act.

With that in mind, I am inclined at this point to support this bill in its current iteration, but I do look forward to continued discussion of the legislation, specifically the government trying to restore some trust, because it certainly has been hindered significantly by the actions of the current government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert has stood up.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 13, Financial Innovation Act. Certainly, as my colleagues have said, there are a lot of positive aspects to this bill, and I, too, would like to go on the record to say I'll more than likely support this bill and, you know, hope for the best. I think it's important to support innovation, but there are a lot of concerns and questions that still remain, so instead of chirping about all kinds of things, perhaps this government will actually listen to the genuine questions and concerns that we have and genuinely bring back some information that will cause us to have more confidence in this bill. I think if that was the case, that we did have more confidence in this bill, we would not continue to hammer away at the same questions.

These actually are questions. The themes of these questions we ask frequently, because this government has been unable or unwilling – I'm not sure which; maybe both – to stand up and answer the questions and provide Albertans with some sort of reassurance that they actually can be trusted and that passing this legislation will mean that, you know, they will do the things that they suggest that they will do.

In any event, there are some things. You know, the substance of the legislation: there are a number of points that I'd like to make. First of all, the power to exempt new financial products from consumer protection laws. The concern, of course, is that exemption from the consumer protection laws can be abused, and you would hope that most governments would not set out to do that; however, this government doesn't have a great track record of actually putting consumers, Albertans, first and putting their interests first, so it would be terrific to get more reassurance. We know that it's critical, that consumer protection is critical, particularly when traditional safeguards are not in place, and with these being such new and innovative pieces of legislation and products, I would suggest that that would be even more important in this case, to provide consumers with some reassurance.

The second thing for this plan I think to really work is to have a bureaucracy with the technical capacity and sophistication to understand the new and innovative ideas and to regulate them properly. Now, I wasn't at the technical briefing, Mr. Speaker, but I understand that there was a discussion around this. That's not to say that it's a bad thing, that every ministry or every organization has every skill and ability that is required to go forward into the future. That's not a bad thing. It's actually a great thing to identify when there are weaknesses or holes and new skills that maybe you should recruit for, you know, to give Albertans some reassurance that perhaps the technical capacity or experience isn't there. "What are the steps this government will take?" instead of "Just trust us; we've got this": I think it would go a long way to reassure Albertans.

You know, I'm sure members know this, that Albertans just do not have a lot of faith in this government. And when you don't have trust, you have fear and you have an unwillingness to go forward and really listen to anything. We saw that repeatedly with COVID, Mr. Speaker. As we continued to see wave after wave, we saw the trust in government just – it was diminished. The government may have been saying really useful things, really positive things, but a lot of Albertans were just tuned out because they felt that they could not trust what was being said. So that is second.

Third – I think my colleague did mention this earlier – is that, you know, Albertans and Canadians in general rightly have a great deal of trust in their financial institutions. I think we're all fairly confident that what we deposit or what we invest with our financial institutions: that things won't change too much, that they won't instantly go bankrupt, and that we have some security. I think additional measures and transparency are indeed required to ensure that risks are never passed on to Albertans and consumers.

Finally, there is a legitimate concern with public disclosure. Government is telling the public that any company with a certificate and operating within this sandbox or expanded sandbox will be listed on a government website. That's pretty much it: on a government website. Well, I mean, I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but there are a few government websites that I frequently check, and sometimes, for no reason at all, information just goes – it's just gone, and there's no reason, there's no rhyme as to why it's gone or changed. So I think that Albertans need more than: check the government website. For one, most Albertans aren't sort of as tuned in as we are to what is happening. They aren't checking for updates, they aren't getting all the press releases, and they aren't going back daily to see what's up, so I think it would be really good to have some clear information. You know, just going on to the government website doesn't really say much at all. It doesn't give any kind of reassurance at all.

Let me give you a quick example that happened recently. For the entire time that I have, you know, been the opposition critic for Community and Social Services, one of the things that I do fairly regularly is check in with open data. There are a few things that I check. A couple of them are wait-lists. There are two, actually, fairly large programs that combined are worth close to \$2 billion. I would suggest that's pretty significant. Both of these programs, thankfully, used to publish information about their waiting lists. Now, it's a little bit tricky because most people just looking at it wouldn't understand that it's a waiting list because they don't call it a waiting list. They call it in service or in planning or, you know, waiting for a caseworker, whatever, but it's actually a wait-list. There are different tiers of the wait-list.

I was checking it, and then it was gone. It was just gone. I asked the minister, you know: what's up with the family support for children with disabilities wait-list? Last time I checked, there were about 4,000 children/families in there waiting for service. That means that perhaps they were in planning, perhaps they were waiting to be assigned a caseworker, but they were still waiting for services. And the minister said: yeah, there's no longer a wait-list. Poof. Gone. My example, my story is just to illustrate that to tell someone, anyone, "Just trust us; check the website" really is not good enough, not good enough at all.

3:40

There were a couple of other questions, I think, to raise in debate. Hopefully, at some point somebody will stand up and provide some information or some answers. One of the questions that I thought was really important is: how will consumers know when they are using a new product or service or technology that is operating within this sandbox and therefore is regulated at a much lower level, as I mentioned? Is the government prepared to consider some type of warning label so that consumers actually know what they're getting into? You know, like my colleague for Edmonton-Whitemud, on numerous occasions I listen to different experts, different podcasts about these products to try to understand: what are the benefits? What are the opposite of the benefits? What are the dangers? What are the risks? Trying to understand it – and obviously things are changing so rapidly that it is actually quite difficult to follow. I think in order to get Albertans as excited about using these products as I'm assuming the government would like, why not provide some more information for Albertans?

Going back to some of the earlier comments, as I said, this is, obviously, a piece of legislation that, if done correctly and it's the right time for it, could actually go a long way to support innovation and to continue to grow and diversify the economy. I think that, regardless of what side of the House we sit on, we all have the same goal in that area. I think that when the economy is strong and

flourishing, it's good for everybody. I would hope that, you know, our comments here – we do want to support this legislation, but it would be really terrific to get additional information.

Now, I really would like to say that the thing that troubles me the most is that – basically, my biggest concern with this legislation is that we're being asked to just trust this government. This piece of legislation gives enormous abilities to the minister, and this government has just an awful, awful track record in this department, the Finance minister in particular. As a part of the Public Accounts Committee I could go on sort of for a very long time on what, you know, some of the issues are. There are so many times that this government has said, "Trust us; no, we're not doing it for a bad reason; we're doing it to help Albertans and make life better" when we know that is incorrect. We bring evidence. We show them the information that is accurate, and still – and still – they refuse to see what's right in front of them until sometimes they're called out by the Auditor General.

Let me give you an example. In 2020, I believe it was, the Treasury Board and Finance – well, Community and Social Services; I blame them squarely, but both ministries, let's say – decided that they were going to change payment dates for people that receive income support and AISH. Traditionally people receive these payments a few days ahead of the first of the month. Now, it's a little bit chaotic and sometimes a little bit tough to tell when that would be because it was always really different. I'll admit that it wasn't a uniform date. It was always a little bit different, particularly in December. It was quite a bit before Christmas, so that would leave a longer period of time into January before people got their payment. Without very much notice at all – I don't think it could've been more than maybe a month and a half at the time; actually, people found out on social media – they were told that their payment dates were going to change. "It's for your own good," says the government. "It's for your own good. We're doing this because we care about you."

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Hear, hear.

Ms Renaud: That's not true. That is incorrect. The Member for Calgary-Klein thinks it's a good idea that they changed the payment dates and actually believes, according to his heckle, that they did change the payment dates to help Albertans, when we know it is not true.

We know that people struggled. They didn't get their payments until the first of the month. People couldn't pay their rent on time. They could not buy their bus passes to be able to ride the bus on the 1st. So many examples all over the place we saw instantly when those payment dates were changed. Now, it was so bad that we wrote a letter to the Auditor General, and we asked them to look at this. The problem was that the UCP was trying to make their bottom line look better than it actually was by putting some expense – actually, over \$150 million worth of expense – into the next year. They actually booked 11 months of 12 months for expense for income support and AISH. That is wrong. You're not allowed to do that, so there had to be a correction. There was actually a special auditor's report. So for the Member for Calgary-Klein to say, "Hear, hear" when I talk about the payment date changes, either he's just, like, tuned out or has no idea what he's talking about. You know, Mr. Speaker, I don't get it.

That is just one teeny, tiny example of why Albertans don't trust this government. So when the Finance minister . . . [interjection] Sorry?

Mr. Luan: Can I have a chance to intervene?

Ms Renaud: Intervene? No. Thank you.

The other thing. You know, just this morning, actually, another good example of the lack of trust is that the government told Albertans to trust them about auto insurance: just trust us. We were asking questions: "Where is that report from the superintendent of insurance? Why after 107 years are we not seeing this report being released on time?" "Oh, just trust us. No problem. Don't even worry about it." Well, it turns out that during a pandemic, when Albertans were struggling – they were struggling, Mr. Speaker. They were struggling to pay their premiums. They weren't driving their cars like they were.

We knew – I mean, we didn't know for sure at the time, but we could anticipate that profits were likely going to be higher because there were fewer accidents, fewer cars on the road. I can remember during that first wave going to St. Albert and my office and actually taking a picture of the streets. I stood there. There were no vehicles at all, whatsoever. So it didn't take much for us to put it together to think there are likely going to be fewer payouts because there are fewer people driving for fewer hours. It kind of made sense.

So we didn't see that report. "Where is the report? What are you hiding?" It turns out that what was being hidden from Albertans was a huge amount of profit. The profit margin was huge during this pandemic.

Mr. Luan: Not true.

Ms Renaud: You know, they can chirp, whatever, and just say that it's not true. It's factual. It's in the report. It's actually factual. If the member would like to continue to be Trumpy and allege alternate facts, that's fine. Albertans know the truth. The truth is in the report, Mr. Speaker. The report was very clear.

So that is a second example. I mean, I could go on for the next week about the ongoing examples of why this government can't be trusted.

Now, we appreciate this piece of legislation that wants to go in a new place. What we're saying is that this government needs to be very clear and stand up and talk about what consumer protections will be in place and what you are going to do . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Member Irwin: Wonderful. Thank you. Very hard to follow that. I think I can speak for everyone on this side when I say that I'm absolutely shocked that, again, no one from the UCP is willing to stand, but they are willing to continue to beak at us nonstop, including Calgary-Klein, Leduc-Beaumont.

Ms Pancholi: The associate minister.

Member Irwin: The associate minister. Anyways, the list goes on.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are currently debating the bill. I would look to the hon. member to please direct her comments towards the bill and the debate at hand.

Thank you very much.

Member Irwin: Wonderful. Yes. Absolutely. I am very happy to speak quite briefly to Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. I just, you know, need to get it on the record that it is quite surprising that we're not hearing from any of the government members other than heckles.

You know, I won't speak long, as they continue to heckle, but I did want to just quickly touch on a couple of points around Bill 13. My colleagues have done a fantastic job, particularly my colleague

who just spoke. It's always hard to follow the Member for St. Albert, because she did an excellent job of unpacking some of the broader concerns around trust in this government.

I've done some reading on this, and I must admit I am certainly not an expert in this area, in the fintech, financial technology, sector, but I always want to learn. When I heard about a sandbox, I thought: "That's fun. Let's go play in the sandbox." But, in fact, it's a regulatory sandbox. A regulatory sandbox is a safe space in which companies can test innovative products or services without immediately meeting all regulatory requirements. Wow. There's a lot there although I do find it interesting that this government is supportive of safe spaces in some regards, just not in schools.

3:50

I want to just highlight that, you know, we've said, my colleagues have said that we are on the record in support, broadly, of this bill. Obviously, I was not a part of it when we were in government, but I was proud to see the work that the NDP government did when it comes to supporting the fintech sector and the tech sector broadly. I think about some of the investments that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, when he was minister, made to really expand those sectors and to attract talent to our province.

I find it hypocritical, you know, to hear the government speak and in reading their media releases on this, speaking about how this will help to entice people, fintech companies, to move to Alberta – more competition, lower costs, all these buzzwords – yet this is the same government that wasn't willing to support my colleague's private member's bill on creating a venture capital fund that would do something similar, obviously not in the same sector per se but would also have a focus on innovating and attracting investment and getting folks to move to our province. It was quite, quite disheartening to hear.

I know my colleague – I just want to get it on the record on his behalf – did a whole lot of consulting with folks on this bill. I also know that he spoke – and he shared this in the Chamber the other day; that was yesterday, in fact; time is confusing; that was just yesterday; it feels like we haven't left – in the debate on concurrence and explained that he's actually spoken to a number of UCP MLAs about this bill and had a lot of support, but when we came to the Chamber, unfortunately they were unwilling to support it.

Again, while we are broadly, generally supportive of Bill 13, I find it rich that this government isn't willing to support bills that come from our side of the House. You know, we've talked a lot about the fact that a private member's bill is a privilege, yet we've seen consistently from this government a refusal to support any bill that comes from the NDP. That one on tech: shot down. Another one, on antiracism, from my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre: shot down. Again, I need to get that on the record.

I won't speak too much more on the concerns on Bill 13 because I know that many of my colleagues have. I just want to summarize my remarks by noting again that our concerns here are around trust; you know, trusting this government that they can protect consumers – right? – that they can protect privacy when it comes to some of the specifics around Bill 13. As we've outlined, as my colleagues have outlined in a far more eloquent way than I can, this is a government that has a track record of a lack of trust.

We'd like to hear – I haven't had an opportunity to hear from government members just around some of the ways in which they are going to guarantee consumer protections, how they're going to guarantee consumer safety. You know, as noted, we absolutely respect that this is an innovative approach, and as noted, it's one that has happened in jurisdictions globally, but we've not seen – I believe it was the Member for Grande Prairie who pointed out, too,

that this would make Alberta the first provincial jurisdiction to play in the regulatory sandbox, so to speak. We just want some assurance from that side of the House that consumers and Albertans will be protected.

With that, I will end my remarks. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question, noting that the opportunity to close debate has been waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. members. I would like to call the committee to order.

Bill 12 Trustee Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered at this time? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak today to Bill 12, which is a new Trustee Act. I would like to say that generally we are supportive of this. I am, obviously, familiar with the Trustee Act and the trustee system. In, I'm going to say, 2017 or 2018 this department was moved from – what was it at the time? – Community and Social Services into Justice, so there was actually quite a lot going on at that time. It probably needed a new act.

We had recommendations, I think, from the Uniform Law Conference that ultimately moved over to the Alberta Law Reform Institute. Both of these organizations, incidentally, Mr. Chair, deserve a lot of praise for the amazing work they do. The Uniform Law Conference of Canada makes recommendations in terms of, essentially, standardizing laws across Canada. A lot of these are laws which are applicable in each jurisdiction, and obviously it can be deeply confusing to people who move from one area to another and the law changes for no obvious reason, just for sort of historical context factors. You know, it was done that way in that particular province and always has been that way.

So the Uniform Law Conference makes a lot of recommendations that make laws better, that ensure sort of proportionality and fairness, that deal with laws that have for whatever reason not struck the correct balance, or, you know, society itself is evolving at a considerable rate. Sometimes those changes – for instance, technological changes – can have an impact on the way the law operates, and the Uniform Law Conference of Canada makes recommendations in terms of ensuring that the laws keep pace but also in terms of ensuring that the laws are uniform, as the name would imply, across Canada.

I had the opportunity to work with them on some recommendations they made around criminal justice systems that were discussed at federal-provincial-territorial meetings, which is sort of where the federal Justice minister and the provincial Justice ministers get together and talk. There's kind of a joint jurisdiction. The federal government has the Criminal Code, and the provinces have administration of justice, so if everybody doesn't work together, things don't work exceptionally well.

Yeah, there were a lot of changes that needed to be made. I think that the importance of making those changes and the speed at which those changes needed to be made were brought to bear by the Jordan decision at one point, but I didn't want it to go by without acknowledging the incredible work that they do. Now, they made recommendations, and those recommendations were sort of considered by the ministry and by the Alberta Law Reform Institute in the Alberta context in terms of how they could be implemented here, and ALRI made recommendations with respect to this act as well.

I would also like to take a moment to talk about the fantastic work that the Alberta Law Reform Institute does and to do a thing that we don't see often in this place and say that I am really glad to see that the Minister of Justice – I don't think it was the current one. I think it was the Minister of Justice who is now the minister of labour. But the grant to ALRI was restored. When this government came into office, they cut the grant to ALRI, and the grant to ALRI was restored in the last Justice budget, and I was really glad to see that because the Alberta Law Reform Institute does really, really great work. You heard it here first. There is one instance in which you see a member of the NDP opposition actually saying that the government managed to get something right. I was glad to see that grant restored. I am glad to see that ALRI can go forward and continue to do the work that they do, and I'm glad to see the government sort of moving forward to recommend implementation on that.

4:00

Now, that being said, I do have a couple of questions that I'm hoping can be answered. One of them isn't directly about the act itself. One of the projects that was under way, shall we say, when the government change occurred was a project to get a new computer system in. That system isn't actually funded directly through the government. It's sort of funded through a mechanism the trustee's office has itself in terms of collecting money to ensure that the trustee's office can continue to run. That computer system had had – there had been an RFP process that didn't quite work out, so the system hadn't gone in yet.

I feel like in the first budget we saw out of this government, I didn't see that computer system in there. Even though it isn't government public funds that are necessarily going in – it's funds that are gotten through the office of the trustee that go to fund that – it does sort of flow through the government books because of consolidated budgeting.

I'd be interested to know if that project had gone ahead and how it went and whether that's been implemented. That was a really, in my view, important piece of this, the technology, ensuring modern technology and proper security. When we're talking about the office of the public guardian and trustee, they have information about people, people's private information. That information is sensitive. Yeah. I'd be interested to know how that went.

I'd also be interested to know how this squares with recommendations that came out of the office of the Auditor General. I actually don't say this to be partisan or to be difficult for the government. I'm aware, again – this office came to me with some recommendations from the Auditor General already that had not been addressed, and these are challenging issues. They really are. I don't for a second minimize the sort of difficulties in terms of addressing the recommendations.

That being said, I think the Auditor General is right. I think the recommendations are correct and that they do need to be addressed and that it is worth moving forward on this, so I am seeing a report from March 22, 2022, that is published on the Auditor General's website, that indicates that some of those have not been addressed yet.

Now, admittedly, it is a recommendation. The recommendation is to improve and follow policies and procedures. This recommendation is being repeated at this time.

We recommend that the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee:

- review and assess whether its policies are appropriate, and procedures are adequate to mitigate the risk that client assets could be mismanaged
- improve [the] processes for ensuring compliance with policies and procedures.

I think it goes without saying that everyone in this room is likely familiar with the office of the public guardian and trustee, but they deal with very sensitive matters for very vulnerable clients. It is, obviously, extremely important. Now, I'm not saying that that means it's easy. Something can be important and also be difficult, and this is an issue which, in my experience, is quite complicated and quite difficult. I suspect I may be throwing the minister a softball here because I suspect that the implementation of this act is part of responding to these recommendations.

Generally the way it works is that you've got an act, you've got regulations, and then you've got policies. If your policies aren't working, it could be the policies themselves, or it could be either of the two levels above that. If your policies aren't working, it could be the policies. It could also be the regulations. It could also be the legislation.

It may be the case that this is, in fact, an answer to that question, this act itself, but I would love to hear the minister or someone from the government address that and explain how this addresses this recommendation from the office of the Auditor General and sort of what subsequent actions will be taken. I assume there will be development of regulation, but I'd be interested to know sort of where those are in the process. That is one of the questions I have about this.

I also have a question around some of the definitions in the act. One of the recommendations – sorry; I've got a lot of windows open here – from the Alberta Law Reform Institute, specifically recommendation 11:

The new [trustee] Act should provide that a “represented adult” means: a represented adult under the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act; an incapacitated person under the Public Trustee Act; or any person for whom an enduring power of attorney or personal directive is in effect.

That definition is not in this act, and I would be interested to know why that is. In light of the substance of the act, in light of the material that is covered, it seems like “represented adult” would be something you would want to define.

I am curious, I would say, as to why that isn't in here. In fact, “represented adult” is not defined at all. The majority of the definitions here are in section 1, so unless it's defined, and it may be the case – sometimes this happens, that it's defined elsewhere in the act, but not that I have found. So I would like to know why it's not defined – I think, at first flush, it ought to be defined – and specifically why it isn't defined in this way. My understanding of the history of this matter is that the consultation that was done sort of leading up to this particular report was done jointly by the Alberta Law Reform Institute and the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General. I assume they had input into these recommendations, into what questions were asked, into how this was dealt with. I'd be really interested to know why that is the case.

I would also be interested to know, and again, I'm hoping – it's committee, so everyone can kind of jump up as they see fit in response to whatever. I would like to know if there are any other recommendations in here that weren't implemented, and I would be interested to know potentially why that is, because I

think, again, that ALRI does really good work. I mean, that isn't to say that governments have never, for good and solid reasons, deviated from the recommendations. I'm not by any means suggesting that this is the end of it. I just think that it raises an interesting question of why it is that such a sort of critical and central term to the subject matter before us, to the act itself, would not be defined in the act. I would love to know that.

In addition, the government has kind of brought this forward as: this will free up some court time. I don't question that, actually, at all. I suspect that that's probably true. I think it would be interesting to know how much court time they think that would free up, if there's some sort of estimate on that. It's been kind of my experience that when you move things out of the court, other matters come in. I mean, God, it's been probably 20 years that the backlogs have been building in the court system at this point. It is a difficult issue, but I'd like to know how much of a contribution we expect this to be. There are, obviously, initiatives.

4:10

Again, this is one of those interesting areas where there are a lot of bipartisan initiatives, right? We started the e-courts project. We brought in criminal e-file. You know, that was fairly far down the chute, and this government continued that. They continued sort of moving forward with that. Now, obviously, even if you're filing things electronically, like, the document itself still has to align with the letter of the law, so you're still going to need a court clerk to look it over, whether it's coming in electronically or otherwise, but, I mean, those things do sort of move things along. They bring things up.

I can remember instances – I think that anyone who has ever practised law has encountered these instances – where the file didn't wind up in the right courtroom, so presumably rather than having paper files running around through the elevators and coming in and out from the doors behind buildings, having things electronically available in the courtroom, that you just have to access, would probably resolve a lot of those issues and make things easier, because if something wound up in the wrong courtroom, it did tend to take a while to resolve.

I think, you know, again, this is an issue that I don't think is particularly partisan; it's an issue that I think is important to Albertans moving forward. With that, I think I will just say that those are the questions I have. I hope we receive answers. Just to sort of sum up, the things I asked about were: whether, in fact, that new technology computer system has been successfully implemented, as I think that's an important part of this; whether or not this act and the regulations and policy that will follow will, in the minister's estimation, address the concerns of the Auditor General, which are still outstanding, and some recommendations which were repeated just last month, because I think that that is important as well; what the minister thinks the time frame is on that; and how much we expect this to help in terms of the court backlog. Oh, and – see, it's a good thing that I've summed up; even I forgot the last question. Also, why it is that it doesn't include a definition of a represented adult and, specifically, why it doesn't include the definition in recommendation 11 of the Alberta Law Reform Institute report.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will take my seat and thank you for this opportunity. Oh, I think we'll be probably supporting this bill. I should maybe mention that.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. A pleasure to rise in committee on Bill 12, the Trustee Act. Always a pleasure to follow

after my colleague the former Minister of Justice to talk about the Trustee Act. It's a bit daunting to do that, and I'm sure that those who are following this debate closely will remember my very riveting comments at second reading on Bill 12, the Trustee Act. But I do think it's important to reiterate at the committee stage here, where we do have a bit more informality and can get a little bit more into the nitty-gritty, that generally speaking, as the Member for Calgary-Mountain View so very aptly concluded her comments by saying, we are likely to support this bill. It actually seems to be, you know, a much-needed modernization and transformation of what really was very old codification of very old English legislation around trustees, long overdue, I think, for modernization.

It appears – this is the work that I'm still working through, because it's not a small piece of legislation and it is a brand new act, that work of comparing what's in Bill 12 to what, predominantly, I think, the proposed bill is based on, which is the recommendations coming out of the Alberta Law Reform Institute and their recommendations which were developed. There are 90 of them. I think that, actually, the last time I spoke at second reading, I kind of gave an overview about seven or eight of the recommendations, but there are 90 recommendations in that report around changes that could be made and should be implemented for trustee legislation in Alberta.

Now, not all of those recommendations but a large majority of them are based on work that had been done by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada in 2012. Obviously, this issue of modernizing trustee legislation is not unique to Alberta, so at that conference they laid out sort of draft legislation that could be used by any jurisdiction to kind of implement some basic principles, most of which have been developed through common law and were well understood by those who practise in this area of law and those who might have a trust to, you know, really standardize what those provisions would look like. Of course, the Alberta Law Reform Institute took that and applied it to the more specific Alberta circumstances and developed these 90 recommendations.

Now, as I understand it, the bill that's before us, Bill 12, the Trustee Act, incorporates roughly 80 out of those 90 recommendations. This is what I understand. Again, going back and comparing them, the recommendations to each provision of the act: I will confess that I have not done that in detail. But what I do note right off the top: just looking at it and understanding that even when it's been introduced by ministers on the other side or even by members on behalf of ministers, as what happened in second reading, it does appear that a number of the key recommendations have been incorporated into the bill. You know, I think it's important to note which those are.

Perhaps for those following along who are very riveted by this discussion of the Trustee Act, I mean, again, a trust is essentially, basically, an individual or a settlor who assigns a trust and says that somebody else will be responsible for managing their property and assets to the benefit of a certain other individual, named the beneficiary. You know, we are kind of familiar with that concept. The reason why it's called a trust is that there is a lot of trust within that relationship. Somebody is bestowing upon another person the ability to make those decisions about their property, but those decisions have to be made in a certain way. Sometimes the settlor might actually be very specific about what those conditions may be, but then the law is also specific about, in some respects, how that can be used and how that must be exercised.

Those recommendations – I note, for example, that probably one of the key issues, sort the guiding principle behind trustee legislation and the way it has been implemented to date, is, of course, that there is the prudent investor rule, which is basically that, you know, the person who is managing the trust must do so to the standard of a prudent investor. So they have some due diligence that they're required to meet. I think that clearly was the way we've been treating trusts within this province

for many years, for decades and maybe over a century, actually, but now it's clear in the legislation that that prudent investor rule will continue to apply to trusts, which is important.

One of the pieces that I note – well, I can't seem to tell whether or not, actually, in the bill it is clearly defined. It does still set out the sort of standard of care, which is, you know, the expertise level that must be met by trustees. It says that a trustee must exercise ordinary care and diligence when dealing with trust property, so there are expectations around reading the documents, having a good familiarity with them, seeking more information where you need it, basically, exercising that relationship with due care and diligence.

However, I believe that under the Alberta Law Reform Institute recommendations they actually recommended a two-tier standard of care so that the average trustee – which could be, honestly, any person, right? It depends on the wishes of somebody. It could be that an average person without any specialized expertise whatsoever would be expected to exercise that ordinary diligence and care. However, if the trustee is a professional, perhaps a professional financial manager, maybe has unique skills, those professional trustees must actually exercise a higher degree of skill. So it's two-tiered. It's basically saying: well, who you are determines what your expectations are in terms of managing this trust. I'm not sure that I see that reflected in Bill 12.

I think that goes back to a question that I asked at second reading of this bill. I have not yet heard a response about if the government members or the ministers could set out which of those 90 recommendations were not accepted, the 90 recommendations from the Alberta Law Reform Institute, and why they weren't accepted. As well, I believe there were a number of comments where those recommendations were varied. An appreciation of sort of which of those specific recommendations were accepted, which were varied, which were not accepted, and perhaps the why would be informative.

4:20

I see there are a number of other pieces in here that, again, were part of the recommendations; for example, that where there's more than one trustee appointed, they can make decisions by a majority, that unanimous approval by action does not require to involve the trustees. I think that's, you know, simplicity in being able to move forward in a timely way on issues that require unanimous consent from all trustees.

You know, I see that the bill has provisions around appointing temporary trustees, about how to use and apply extrinsic evidence to determine what the settlor's intent was. The settlor, again, is a person who sort of created the trust or appointed the trust. Oftentimes there may be debate about, "Well, what was their intent?" especially if they set some conditions as to how the trust must be exercised. So how to determine what the settlor's intent was, especially if the settlor is no longer around and able to speak to that: I understand that the bill does that.

Now, of course, we know that overall the intent of this bill is to codify and simplify and modernize trustee legislation, but also a key objective is to minimize the amount of time that trusts are being dealt with, negotiated, you know, mediated in the court system, essentially, to free up time in the court system. Of course, that is an objective that in all circumstances we would support. The idea of if matters can be resolved outside of the court system: that's a good principle to begin with. It increases access to justice. People being able to resolve their disputes without incurring significant costs and resources: always a good thing.

However, you know, I do want to note – I think it is worth noting, because it is something that, certainly when we're talking about freeing up the court system, is a very pressing issue in Alberta right now. I would love to hear some concrete actions being taken by this

government around the issue of the almost 3,000 cases that are at risk of being thrown out for undue time under the Jordan ruling in Alberta right now. We know that there are almost 3,000 cases that are at risk, and of those 3,000 cases 1,200 of them are for serious violent offences that may be thrown out of the court system, thrown out altogether – the charges may be thrown out – because of the undue delay in them being heard in the court system.

Now, I say that we know that there are 3,000; however, it should be pointed out that apparently the current Justice minister did not know that. He actually went on the record and said that he believed that there were no cases that were currently subject to the Jordan ruling, which turned out, with a quick reference check by many of the many lawyers who work in this field, to be untrue and incorrect. There's actually, as I mentioned, almost 3,000 cases. It's a pretty critical thing for our Justice minister to have a good handle on the current caseloads and those at risk of being thrown out as a result of undue delay. I certainly hope that the Justice minister has done his homework and will actually be addressing this concern.

Now, a key way to address that, Mr. Chair, of course, is the challenge of not having enough prosecutors. We have certainly – well, I recall, not so fondly perhaps, that very early on in this government's term there was a lot of bombastic chest beating about all the prosecutors they were hiring. I believe the then Minister of Justice, who's known for speaking at a high volume, was very emphatic and enthusiastic, talking about all the prosecutors they were going to be hiring. It turns out that that has not taken place. In fact, this is why we're facing the situation, again, of almost 3,000 cases of charges – criminal charges, Provincial Court charges, and charges of potentially violent offences – that may be thrown out.

You know, I think we have to again look at the fact that there is a – the current government is not acting as if they've been the ones who've been in power for the last three years. They're still wanting to point fingers to the past, but they are now responsible for the state of things in this province, particularly when it comes to an overexerted and overstretched justice system and court system. In many other respects – the strain on our public health care system, the undermining of our public education system, you know, all of those pieces, Mr. Chair – it's actually now this government's responsibility. They have been in power for three years although it feels like they spent most of that time in fighting with each other.

I appreciate that this act will come forward and may do some of the work to sort of alleviate some pressure on the court system. A lot more work needs to be done, Mr. Chair. I do certainly hope that the current government caucus members can take their attention away from the soap opera drama that is their current political lives and dedicate some, just a fraction, of that attention to the pressing needs of Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 12, the Trustee Act, in committee. I'm not sure if others in the House have noted yet, but I am the first male speaker on this side of the House in the opposition to rise this afternoon, following an unbroken chain of very learned women who have been talking about issues in this House. It's a very difficult place to be because the calibre of debate that's been carried so far this afternoon by my previous speaking colleagues, all of whom have been learned women, is something that I seek to rise to at least achieve close to their level of eloquence.

I must note that it was a pleasure over the last couple of hours or so to audit the eloquence that has been uttered by all the previous speakers from our side of the House, all of them being most learned women. I wanted that to be recorded because it was very special, and I was honoured to be in the audience listening to their eloquence and their arguments, and I hope to add something of value to their responses and their input on this debate this afternoon regarding the Trustee Act in committee.

Now, Mr. Chair, all of us have in some way or another been exposed to elements of the Trustee Act in our lives as individuals and families or involved in business or in our careers, but we don't take enough time to realize how important trustee relationships are to our everyday life and the operation of business and government, in particular, and also how we transact ourselves in terms of the phases of our life, whether it be birth, death, marriages. All of these involve trust, and especially as we age, there are trust relationships which take place to give powers to individuals to look after the affairs, either business or health, of others. So the evolution of our trust legislation is equally important, and I know it has been some time since the Trustee Act was amended in large measure. In fact, we have a new act before us, and I'm glad to finally see a new framework for trust.

In my business past, as you will be aware, in the real estate industry my life dealt with trusts every day. Whether as an agent or simply when I managed a real estate office as a sales manager, we were constantly involved with trust situations and administering trusts and ensuring that trusts were handled properly. When, in fact, something went south, something failed, a business transaction failed, it was a result, in almost every case, of a breach of a trust, where somebody had made a promise and never followed through or didn't follow the rules regarding that promise. I think, Mr. Chair, that kind of demonstrates how important the relationships are which are governed by the Trustee Act.

Now, this new framework is a process that was very robust, and much of it follows the Alberta Law Reform Institute recommendations, which are being implemented as a result of consultations with them. However, there are not elements of this bill that address many, many pieces of the justice system that are still actually in need of great attention. We've seen it in health care and education and now in the justice.

4:30

I don't know if the trust that's involved in the Trustee Act is something that Albertans have with this particular government. There are examples of lack of trust that the provincial government has engendered in the population in most of our pieces of legislation that we've seen go through this House in the last three years or so, and I think it's something that is an unfortunate development. We see breach of trust as something that the government claims not to be doing, but when in fact we look at the legislation being presented before the House in many cases, it actually does one thing and tries to say another.

More to the point on the background of the legislation before us right now, Mr. Chair, is that in my role in the real estate business before entering government as a member of this Legislature, I know that there was a need to replace the existing Trustee Act with the new act. I know that one of the positions that I shuddered at being put into as a real estate office manager was trying to adjudicate between opposing adversarial parties – for example, a buyer and a seller – when both were claiming the monies in trust, their deposit monies in a real estate transaction, when a transaction had failed, both claiming that they were rightfully owed that deposit.

That is a very, very difficult position to be in, when you have extremely upset people very, very clearly demanding that they

should get the money. As a real estate manager, in the earlier part of my career you had to really decide who got the money, and of course that put the manager at risk of perhaps finding themselves the subject of a lawsuit. As the regulations progressed, the real estate managers were able to pay the monies of a disputed deposit into trust, and of course the courts then decided. That's an onerous and costly and time-consuming process, and in the end it leaves many people not feeling that they had a satisfactory resolution because of the cost and the time involved.

I know that there have been amendments to the Trustee Act over time, but this is the first time that it's been comprehensively reviewed. It's largely based on an 1893 English statute that really has fallen out of step with modern practices and issues, notwithstanding some of the developments, such as those I mentioned in the real estate industry, where it has been amended and allowed deposits, for example, to be paid into trusts when there was a dispute between parties.

Now, it does clarify the duties of trustees, the piece of legislation before us, the Trustee Act. It keeps the prudent investor rule that existed in the old act.

However, it does have some new provisions. It establishes a process for trustees to resign or to be removed. I'm sure for any of us who have had the opportunity to read a will, if you've been an executor or you've been given the authority as a trustee to look after somebody's estate or their health or their matters in the event of illness or dementia, the process for somebody to resign or to be removed is a necessary element, and it can relieve particularly family members of a lot of undue stress, which is inherent in that process because you've got some very emotional issues involved quite often, whether it's with a loved one whose care you've been assigned or been entrusted to look after. It doesn't have to be family, Mr. Chair. It could be, for example, in a condominium situation where you're involved as a trustee. You need to be able to have provisions that allow somebody to resign effectively or to be removed if indeed they are ineffective in that position.

I know that this bill has made an effort to look at the Alberta Law Reform Institute recommendations and has in fact implemented a majority of them. There are, I think, 80; 80 out of 90 recommendations from the Alberta Law Reform Institute have been accepted and adopted and implemented into this legislation.

Now, the government is arguing that this new framework will free up court time. It's supposed to add more clarity and hence reduce instances where beneficiaries, for example, and trustees have to go to court. That's a good goal, for sure, but we don't know for sure if that's in fact going to happen. So we'll be watching for that and making sure that indeed it actually in practice reaches its stated purpose.

Now, one of the examples, Mr. Chair, of a newer type of trust is trusts for persons with disabilities. They're trusts that maintain inheritance or significant financial gifts, for example, while receiving AISH, something that our government passed legislation to make possible in 2018. Prior to this there were no parameters which governed or made possible for an individual on AISH to receive an inheritance or a financial gift without having his AISH funds or her AISH funds clawed back.

I was involved in one instance prior to becoming a member of the Legislature, so previous to the 2018 legislative changes that our NDP government made to make this possible. I was involved in one situation with an individual who did receive an inheritance. It took a long battle by very dedicated social workers, who were working, for the most part, pro bono, to insist that this individual's inheritance from parents, designed to allow the person to live with dignity while they were still receiving the AISH benefits and, in fact, designed to allow the person to buy a small apartment condominium with that inheritance and, in so doing, would cost the government less. His housing cost went down as

a result of having a small mortgage payment versus higher rental payments. It was a very difficult argument to be successful at winning.

Ultimately, after close to a year, Mr. Chair – and all credit to the individual social worker who was working on her own time to make this happen and tenaciously insisted that this was the just thing to do, that it was the right thing to happen before the legislative changes in 2018, that we brought forward, allowed it to happen. This individual still lives in his apartment condominium, a very small one. It was, you know, affordable at the time. It made that person's quality of life so much better than it otherwise would have been. So that's why it is important to renew the types of trusts that are available to individuals, for example, with disabilities.

This new act, hopefully, will allow the incorporation of new situations that happen to arise more easily than the previous act allowed and won't necessitate the, you know, year-long effort of a social worker in a particular case to implement special circumstances to allow somebody to benefit from a bequeath or an inheritance that would otherwise be simply clawed back from their AISH payments. That relationship was one that always impressed me, Mr. Chair, and I'm so glad that in 2018 we were able to bring in legislation that allowed an AISH recipient to receive an inheritance or a significant financial gift without having the AISH benefits clawed back.

4:40

While there definitely are laudable goals in the Trustee Act, there are many things in the justice system that remain untouched and not noticed or not dealt with by the current government. I recently had a conversation with an individual friend of mine I've known for many years who just retired after 38 years as a criminal Crown prosecutor with the federal justice system. I'm looking forward to conversations with him soon and hope to even have a discussion about the Trustee Act and how it may have affected his role as a federal prosecutor in Alberta, if he indeed had still been employed in that role, but also get some better feedback on what the bill might entail for others that he would have had under his tutelage in the justice system.

Further to that, on April 6 of this year the Alberta Crown Attorneys' Association accused the UCP government of chronic underfunding, which they alleged has caused a crisis in the justice system. Mr. Chair, this is not news. This is not new. Unfortunately, across the country, in jurisdiction after jurisdiction the justice system has seemed to be the department least able to defend itself as far as demanding proper funding from Treasury Board and Finance and Finance ministers across the country, and it begs the questions as to why. Why indeed do we see our justice system underfunded? Well, look no further than who the clients are that are served by the justice system, especially in the criminal justice system. You find, of course, that they are, generally speaking, people with low means and little voice, and that's the reason we find that the underfunding has been a lengthy and long-term and chronic problem right across the country and particularly in Alberta.

Now, it's gotten to such a point, Mr. Chair, that the association highlighted that there are significant vacancies for Crown prosecutors, and they even threatened to strike. Now, that's a severe move for Crown prosecutors to threaten to take, and it's strong evidence of a malady that's deep and very, very serious within our criminal justice system, when we have our Crown Attorneys' Association threatening to strike to get their point across but, more to the point, to actually ensure that they are properly funded so that they can function properly.

The government chimes all the time about wanting to have justice and eliminate the revolving door of the justice system and get rid of the recidivism that seems to be taking place, yet one of the things that causes the justice system to fail, Mr. Chair, is that the funding of the criminal justice system and the Crown prosecutors doesn't allow for a timely prosecution of justice. It means that there are too

few Crown prosecutors and too few public defenders to look after the huge need that is there, that individuals involved in that system really have a right to expect.

I know that when I volunteered as a court intake unit officer with the Solicitor General's department years ago – and this shows how lengthy and long term the underfunding has been; we're talking in the '80s, Mr. Chair – you would have a duty counsel rifling through a very thick pile of files to quickly try to determine whether or not he could successfully ask for bail for a client that he may have just met moments before, but he had probably 15 or 20 people like that to deal with that morning.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to address this bill for my second time. The first time was at second reading. I really appreciate my colleague from Edmonton-McClung and his review of many parts of this bill but particularly the one aspect that I think is called the Henson trust, that part of this bill.

I, of course, was here in 2018, when amendments were made to the previous bill with regard to being able to allow the situation to unfold the way he spoke of it. I was so pleased to hear of the intervention of social workers for that young person to allow the young person to be able to keep the monies that were bequeathed in a will to them and not suffer the injustice of being cut off an important income support program, which obviously was needed for that young person to survive.

I was here, as I said, when that amendment to the previous bill was introduced, and I didn't know all the background – I knew some of it; I didn't know all the background – that my colleague from Edmonton-McClung was able to recount just now. It gives me as a social worker great pride to know that members of the professional occupation that I'm a member of were instrumental in getting after that change, that was necessary not only for that individual, obviously, but for others in that same situation that would follow.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

The other thing that was recounted by my colleague from Edmonton-McClung and indeed my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View – and I'm not sure if there are others on our side that have addressed this, in support, I might add – is that it is a very comprehensive piece of legislation. Very glad to see that brought to this House. Instead of acting in a piecemeal fashion to address amendments that make sense coming forward, as we did with the previous bill, we're able to see a comprehensive set of legislation particulars brought before us and deal with those here.

I know, for instance, that one thing that was mentioned when the bill was introduced at second by the Calgary-Cross MLA – I heard him talk a lot about the modernization of this act in today's situation, the need to modernize it with respect to the new business potential that could be undertaken under this act. One of the areas that I've been able to research in my time here and spoke about at second reading was real estate investment trusts. I mentioned to members who were here at the time that I represent an area that has a significant number of older buildings that are purchased by REITs, various REITs, whether they're domiciled in Alberta or indeed across the country in Toronto. The activity in that regard has caused some concern for the people I represent in Calgary-Buffalo, particularly with respect to the affordability of their housing going into the future.

4:50

I was asking questions at second reading, in particular, around real estate investment trusts and their impact with this new Trustee Act or

how they would be impacted. Would they be better off? Would there be some borders put on some of their activities to benefit the great number of renters that there are in Calgary-Buffalo and indeed in Alberta? One of the criticisms that has come from advocacy groups with regard to REITs is that they operate with a lot of government support, whether they are taxed at a lower rate than other corporations, whether they can access Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation monies at a lower rate than other businesses can borrow monies. It's all within the view that, you know, housing is important, and if REITs are going to invest in housing, build housing, that's a good thing. But there are risks. There needs to be a balance with regard to the ability of REITs to access preferred fiscal situations. The balance, in the view of many, is that there needs to be a responsibility REITs have not to increase rents at an unsustainable rate for, particularly, people with lower incomes.

Those were a number of questions that I directed towards the sponsor at second reading. I have yet to understand answers to any of those questions, but I think they're critical for the perspective that my constituents have.

I, of course, listened with interest to know some of the background with regard to the previous Trustee Act and the need to replace it with one that's more modern. I think colleagues who have spent time in the legal profession have done a good job of kind of ascertaining that the number of stakeholders that worked on this act have great reputes and that they have made significant recommendations that should be implemented. Indeed, I am standing to agree that I think they should be implemented as well.

I do want to, in the few minutes I have, just say thank you to the former MLA for Calgary-Currie for being a capable advocate and sponsor with regard to the changes to the previous act, that have made life better for people who are on fixed incomes, particularly those who are on AISH.

I'll sit down and see my colleague rise and address this now. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: I see the Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen to speak.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I rise to speak to Bill 12, the Trustee Act. I want to begin by saying that I think that this is an important topic, one that did come up in door-knocking in prior elections. Originally, when I thought about who might have trustees, I was thinking about seniors or people with significant disabilities. But it was a little girl – she was probably 10 at the time. Her mom was talking to me about her having a trusteeship because her dad had passed away when she was an infant and left her part of his estate. He and the mom weren't a duo, but his daughter deserved an opportunity to benefit from his life's work and his life savings, and his earnings were put in trust to her.

They definitely highlighted some of the frustration they had in being able to access her trust, her assets, to be able to do basic things like go for dental care, buy back-to-school clothes, and a number of other things. Their frustration wasn't with the staff. The staff who work to serve these folks who have assets in trust work incredibly hard, often have too many people on their caseload, and are doing their best with the resources that they have. I want to thank that little girl and her mom for taking the time to talk to me about some of the opportunities for improvement in terms of trusteeship and the way assets are governed for those in need.

I do know, personally, of a few people who have also experienced, mostly through wills or through other types of asset sharing from folks who love them, the need to have somebody help steward their resources in trust. I'm glad that we are considering this bill today. It's nice when you have an opportunity to rise as an opposition member

and speak generally in support of a government bill, and that's where I will begin my remarks today.

I have to say that the rules around temporary trustees, for example, are, I think, prudent and things that we need to make sure we have in place as well as enabling trustees to make majority decisions and rules around reporting of trustees to beneficiaries and the establishment process for trustees to resign or be removed. Obviously, folks wouldn't enter into those decisions lightly, but making sure that everyone knows what the process is and what the steps are I think is important.

Just to back up a little bit, there are essentially three key characteristics of trusts: certainty of intention, certainty of subject matter, and certainty of the objects or the assets that we're referring to. The old Trustee Act mainly dealt with trusts established under wills, like the one that the little girl in my riding, of course, was experiencing. But there are other examples of trusts: charitable trusts, trusts benefiting people with disabilities, as was mentioned, or businesses as well. Making sure that we have updated legislation to reflect the fact that sometimes family dynamics are different, that sometimes relationships and why people might choose to bestow assets onto another individual are complicated, and making sure we have a modernized piece of legislation to help address that I think is important.

I do want to reflect a little bit on remarks from the former Minister of Justice on sort of how we got to some of this discussion today. It's my understanding that the Alberta Law Reform Institute created a report in about 2017, I think it was, and a discussion paper with 23 modified recommendations of the original 28. I believe that some of the recommendations are guiding this legislation. I would love to have an opportunity for the Minister of Justice to respond to those in greater detail to clarify for us if all of the modified recommendations are actually being implemented in this piece of legislation, if there are any that have been omitted and, for those that have been, the rationale as to why those amended recommendations aren't necessarily moving forward in this bill. I think that that would be important for us to have as we consider how to move forward with this legislation.

I also want to say that while I am hopeful that this piece of legislation is going to meet the desired intent of modernizing the way that trusts are stewarded and the types of transparency as it relates to trusts, there is a lack of trust with this government and certainly with the Justice ministry. Just to sort of reflect on some of the decisions that have been made in the tenure of the current government, one of the big ones, of course, is that the government is continuing to flirt with the idea of creating a provincial police force. This is probably one of the most unpopular proposals that the current Premier has floated, maybe second to wanting to take people's pensions and do better with them under his leadership than those with the actual pensions themselves feel they are currently being stewarded. That was probably the biggest rejection I've seen in the last few years, people not trusting this government with their retirement savings.

5:00

But another very big one, that I know members of this Assembly went out to do consultations on in various communities around the province, was around the idea of a provincial police force rather than other relationships we have with the RCMP or with municipal policing. I would say that I'm relieved that that hasn't proceeded at this point, but the fact that that's still something under consideration is highly problematic.

The current government also made the decision to charge a nonrefundable fee of up to \$150 for those who wanted to appeal traffic tickets. Maybe for some people in this room a \$150 fee might not be burdensome, but for a lot of folks that would be a significant barrier to

justice and being able to argue one's time before the courts and to be able to defend themselves. Fortunately, the current Justice minister has decided to throw the former Justice minister under the bus and reverse that decision. That's a good thing for ordinary Albertans, that they won't be subject to that \$150 fee to be able to have some justice when it comes to traffic violations or concerns.

Then, of course, I want to highlight – the changes to the victims of crime compensation fund, I think, are mean. I think that for a government that speaks a lot about law and order, to treat victims and the compensation that they have previously been entitled to, the money that those victims are entitled to, as the government's own slush fund is incredibly disrespectful to survivors and to folks that deserve to have an opportunity to see some retribution for horrific crimes often perpetrated against them.

There is not a high degree of trust when it comes to justice and the current government. That's what gives me a bit of a lump in my throat when I say that I'm planning on speaking in support and voting in support of a government justice bill. But the bill itself, I think, is probably fine. It's the intent of the current government and those who are entrusted to actually execute the law and deliver for the people of Alberta that I still have hesitations about, but generally at this point I will say that I am speaking in support of this bill.

I move that we adjourn.

The Acting Chair: No.

Ms Hoffman: No? I'm just going to sit down, then.

Ms Gray: We're not adjourned.

Ms Hoffman: Oh, sorry. My apologies.

An Hon. Member: No. You're great.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks. I'll cede the remainder of my time to somebody else, who can decide what we're going to do next. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to speak to Bill 12?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question on Bill 12, the Trustee Act.

[The clauses of Bill 12 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Acting Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Opposed? Carried.

I see the hon. deputy whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 12.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 12.

The Acting Speaker: Does the Assembly concur with the report? All those in favour?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 11

Continuing Care Act

Mr. Eggen moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment April 20: Mr. Feehan]

The Acting Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act? I see the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, and on the referral amendment, I believe, to pause and refer this to committee. This is actually my first opportunity to speak to this particular piece of legislation. In just a quick review of *Hansard* on this debate I think I'm fairly confident in saying that my colleagues have raised a number of excellent questions and pointed out a number of deficiencies in this legislation in terms of explanation from government about what the purpose is of something or perhaps to explain in a little further detail about the direction that they'll take around regulations. I have not seen the government respond in a way I think that's satisfactory, so again I will support a referral to committee.

You know, once again, this is another piece of legislation that is all about: trust us; we'll get things sorted out in the regulation. But there is actually an inherent danger to that, and I would like to start off by giving all of the members in this House just an example of what I mean by that. In the piece of legislation, if you look on page 67, that is where the government is very clearly repealing legislation with this new piece of legislation. They've repealed the Long Term Care Information Act, the Nursing Homes Act, Resident and Family Councils Act, and then Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act.

The one piece that I'm going to focus on is actually the Resident and Family Councils Act. You can find the replacement on page 34. It starts on 34 and goes to 35. Basically, what this is is the government telling us, you know, what the legislation that's being repealed will be replaced with. Now, on first glance, it doesn't look like it's all that much different, but it actually is. I think it's really important to draw members' attention to what those differences are, and then all members can reconcile with themselves: are you satisfied with this? Does this work for you? Because I think it's taking us in a questionable direction.

In the first part it talks about, you know, obviously:

A resident of a continuing care... or supportive living accommodation, a resident's legal representative or [an] individual considered to be a... resident's family...

It goes on.

... may initiate the establishment of a resident and family council for the residents of the continuing care home or supportive living accommodation.

It goes on to talk about the resident being able to identify relatives, friends, guardians, caregivers to be considered members of the family. No problem here.

It goes on to talk about:

Where there is no resident and family council in place . . . [the] continuing care home or supportive living accommodation . . . [or the] operator shall post a notice in a prominent place . . .

Talking about, you know, the establishment of this committee. And then that's pretty much it. Now, government will say: "Well, yeah. Don't worry about it. It's in the regulations." But I would like to draw members' attention to the piece of legislation that is being repealed and the information or the legislation pieces that are actually being lost. I think really important pieces are being lost, Mr. Speaker.

I don't know if other members of this House have had an opportunity to attend a resident council meeting, but I have. I actually was invited by a number of residents of Chateau Mission Court in St. Albert, right on the beautiful Sturgeon River, and it was interesting. That's operated by Homeland Housing, and it's an organization that does wonderful work. But I went to the resident council meeting and – as you can imagine, Mr. Speaker, it was a very unique agenda – talked about the kinds of fish that were served on certain days, some people not liking the fish sticks and preferring more fillet and, you know, some of those things. But those things are important to residents: where the flower beds were going to be, and then there was a new swing that was purchased, and would that be in the front or the back? I mean, these are important discussions for people that call Chateau Mission Court home.

But, you know, that's really not what I want to talk about. What I really want to focus on was that there was a lot of work by the organization and by the residents to get them to that place, because the legislation that was brought in under the New Democrats between 2015 and 2019 gave some teeth to this.

I'd like to draw your attention – if any members are interested in the legislation, one of the sections is called establishment of a resident and family council. It actually in the legislation gives direction to the operators to communicate the importance of these councils, to literally tell them about posting and give them timelines about, you know, if this isn't followed through, let's say – let's say there doesn't appear to be interest or people don't want to get involved. It encourages the operators or explains to them how to get people involved, because there's an incredible value to people, especially when they're in continuing care, whether that be in a nursing home or supportive living accommodation.

5:10

Now, I'd like to explain to members that supportive living accommodations aren't just for, let's say, seniors that are living in a lodge or something like that. This could be a group of four people with disabilities that are living together in a condominium or living together in a house and are sharing supports. Those also apply here. Those resident councils – we actually call them just resident meetings – are very important to prevent problems and actually encourage and support quality of life for people that live there. But, again, without legislation I believe the operators – and I'm certainly not pointing fingers and saying that operators wouldn't want to do this – are so overwhelmed with the day-to-day work that this may not be a priority if it is not legislated, which is the precise reason that this legislation was done.

Let me tell you that it was a really great day for people that are in continuing care to actually have a legislative voice either for them as a resident or their family members, friends, or guardians. Actually makes a big difference. This legislation talks about: if there isn't one in place or within six months – you know, coming to

"every 6 months thereafter until a resident and family council is established." That's key, and that is missing in this new piece of legislation that has been introduced by the UCP. It actually tells people, like, if it's not there – you know, they're not saying, "Impose it right now," but they're encouraging it. Actually, this legislation went through and talked about how to do that.

The other thing that it does is that it legislates some assistance. As you can imagine, Mr. Speaker, to have – and I'm going back. Maybe I'll give you an example of where I worked. There were some homes where there were up to four people that lived together that had developmental disabilities, that shared expenses and shared staff. We did this before this legislation came in, but what we would have is that they would have – they're called a roommates' meeting. But they had an agenda. The staff were required to help facilitate that meeting, not by running the meeting, not by contributing to the meeting but by helping them take minutes, for example, helping them keep a record of their decisions and what they wanted to talk about. But because we were able to support that work, it got done on a monthly basis.

I can tell you that to have people – I mean, it's hard enough sometimes living with people that you're related to. You don't always get along in terms of the menu or housekeeping duties. It is exceedingly difficult for people that are unrelated or don't have a long history with each other, in many cases, to get along. To get along is important for quality of life. So something like a council is not just preventative, but it encourages relationships and all of those things.

I understand that the new piece of legislation does talk about this particular piece of legislation that was repealed. It does replace it with something, but it's less than. It's less. The standard is lower, so the chances of it happening are less, and then the benefits are less. So my question is – I can understand wanting to consolidate a number of pieces of very complex legislation that touch on very complex issues. I can totally understand that. But it's really important that we don't lose the really good things that are in other pieces of legislation and the really good things that contribute to the overall well-being of Albertans. This is not partisan in any way. I would be saying these very same things if the legislation around the family – I'm losing it here.

Ms Hoffman: Resident and family councils.

Ms Renaud: Yeah. Resident and family councils.

I would be saying that very same thing if another government had introduced it because I think we can all admit that we've all probably been into some form of continuing care, whether it's a small group home for people with developmental disabilities or it's a lodge or a nursing home or perhaps it's more assisted living of some kind. I think that we can all admit that there needs to be some work done. People aren't always satisfied and happy there. It can be a really difficult time of life not just for the person that's living there but their family and friends. And to have something like this, a mechanism to try to make things better specifically for the people that live there, not the people that work there, not the operators but the people that live there, to have a specific piece of legislation dedicated to their well-being and their future was a really good thing.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you.

Ms Renaud: Yes. Thank you to the former Health minister.

I'm very, very disappointed, actually – there are a number of other things I'm disappointed about, but I wanted to give this thorough example for the House to understand that when you vote no to sending this to committee to do a more thorough review of

this legislation, to make sure we don't miss good things, that's what you're voting for. And it's not just that. There are, actually, a number of pieces of legislation that are being repealed.

[The Speaker in the chair]

One of the other pieces of legislation that is being repealed is the supportive living – SLALA is what I always call it. It's not called that. It's called the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act. Now, I can think back to, you know, when I worked in the sector with people with disabilities, to when this legislation came in. Then there were amendments made, and then there were safety standards that were introduced, inspections that were introduced. Let me tell you that it was difficult.

There are, actually, accommodation standards and licensing. This is a process for, let's say, a group home in this case. So it's 4-plus. They fall under this particular piece of legislation. It was very methodical licensing and very methodical inspection. Now, at first, when I saw the inspection checklist, I was a little bit overwhelmed and, really, to be honest, questioning some of the things that were being done. But as we did it for a few years – and things have evolved since then. You can get, like, a multiple-year licence with little mini check-ins every year. But when I think back to these, these were actually so preventative in so many ways.

What is worrisome to me, Mr. Speaker, is that by repealing the SLALA legislation, by repealing this particular piece of legislation and then not thoroughly addressing some of the issues that I think were outlined in the old piece of legislation around licensing and inspections, all of this is left up to regulation. Once again, we arrive back at the place where it's: just trust us; we'll get it sorted out in the regulation.

Again, Mr. Speaker, sadly, Albertans don't have a lot of faith in this government, and rightly so. They have seen time and time again where, you know, "just trust us" has not really worked out. We have seen that this is a very secretive government, I would suggest the most secretive in Canada. Transparency seems to be sort of their kryptonite. We ask questions; we don't get answers. I'm on the Public Accounts Committee, so every week when we're sitting, we have an opportunity to ask questions about different ministries. More often than not we just get, "Yeah; I can't answer that question; I'm not the right person" or "Yeah; I'm new here" or "No; you're going to have to ask someone else."

It is just so much a lack of transparency. When I see a piece of legislation like Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, I think we can all agree in this place that it is incredibly important that we get this right. This is the well-being of so many Albertans that is at stake, because, really, we rely on this legislation. For the operators: we need to know what they're doing; we need to know what the standards are. By repealing such large pieces of legislation but then making the changes so vague and leaving so much up to legislation, Albertans are asking. Really, this government just doesn't have a track record where we can say: "You know what? We trust them because they've demonstrated to us that they've gotten it right before."

Some of the other pieces that I was a little bit concerned to not see addressed when there are clearly so many problems were around staff ratios, around more clear, decisive language, around fees that can be charged. Let me just say – you know, I am running out of time, but I know my colleagues have talked about this at length. The fact that we do not have an independent seniors' advocate is incredibly troublesome. It is incredibly troublesome. I mean, with what we've just come out of – well, we're still going through COVID-19 – how much we learned, especially during that first year and then again in the second year, and we're starting to see some

things happen right now. People that are reliant on continuing care truly are at risk.

I would urge all members of this place to vote to send this piece of legislation to committee to have a better look and to see: are there things that we're missing, and can we make this better?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment REF1 to Bill 11, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address the referral amendment. We are, of course, all going through a time of thinking about the impacts COVID has had on the residents of long-term care facilities and continuing care and the regrettable situation that unfolded across the country, not only this country but others, where those kinds of institutions are in place for the care of primarily elderly people. We know that the National Institute on Ageing has said that 1,677 residents of continuing care have died from COVID-19 in Alberta as of April 12, 2022. That alone, I think, should be reason enough to send this to a committee to look further into this and to allow Albertans the opportunity to witness discussion amongst legislators and to understand the views of professionals in this area, experts in this area with regard to not only this bill but the impact that COVID has had on Albertans in continuing care situations.

Alberta is not unique, as I said. We, of course, in the early waves saw the unfolding of tragedy go on in the province of Quebec – and I think it was repeated, to a degree, here in Alberta as well – to the extent where military personnel were called in to help in nursing homes and continuing care facilities and were shocked by what they witnessed in terms of, particularly, the lack of care residents in those facilities experienced.

No one who has elderly relatives wishes for them to be in a situation like that. In fact, it's probably universal to wish that our relations who need continuing care, who need any type of organized care, either coming into their home or them going into a facility, would have the very, very best opportunities to experience a high quality of life in those facilities. But, regrettably, that's not what happened in many situations, both here in Alberta and other parts of the country, when COVID overwhelmed the abilities of those facilities to provide appropriate care, appropriate, high quality of life care.

That's why I agree with my colleague from Edmonton . . .

Ms Renaud: St. Albert.

Member Ceci: Oh. Yeah. Not even Edmonton. Sorry. St. Albert. You practise that all the time, Mr. Speaker.

Member Irwin: He's new here.

Member Ceci: I'm relatively new here.

My colleague from St. Albert talked eloquently about the advocacy that she has provided for residents in long-term care situations and the understanding she has of where that care has changed over time. Not only those residents but the family members of residents have a great stake in wanting to see this act the very best it can be for today's present-day Albertans but also for those in the future.

I believe that no action should be taken here on this bill until we fully understand more about where Albertans are with regard to the care of their loved ones in continuing care facilities and long-term care, commonly called nursing homes, as well as the care provided to people in their homes.

It's with regard to the last area of care, I guess, or sphere of care, that I'm starting to get more and more of an understanding of some of the challenges of relatives and extended family. You know, people want to stay in their homes, Mr. Speaker, and when they lose the ability to fully care for themselves and family is sometimes overwhelmed as a result of trying to provide that care for their loved ones, then they rely on the government and local agencies to supplement what they can't do themselves. What I think we need to do is hear more from recipients, and that's what a referral to committee would allow us.

People talk about wanting more home care for a wider variety of needs in their own homes. We know, of course, that the ability to have that available to Albertans would save Alberta a great deal of money through budget monies of health services or other programs that generally are tapped now to provide care to Albertans. It's not unlike, you know, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, that kind of thing. So if we can make that happen.

I know that the promises from the government more than a year ago talked about the desire to increase home care to Albertans, and who can disagree with that, Mr. Speaker? But it hasn't happened, and we need to understand why it hasn't happened and focus attention on that issue. We also know that the UCP talked about how the number of hours of care that residents would receive in long-term care situations should be higher than they are now, today. I can't think of anything sadder, more maddening than to know that there are residents in long-term care who are waiting long periods of time for the bell they push to be answered or for the care that should be delivered to them on a regular basis to be delivered. That, again, is something else, I think, the UCP promised to fix. It hasn't been done, and we need to know why.

Of course, what COVID, across the country as well as here in Alberta, has shown us is that the numbers of staff working in long-term care facilities or continuing care facilities has been inadequate and that the protocols that the chief medical officer of health talked about early on, when the wave of COVID deaths was taking place, was that for the interests and the health of residents, not only residents but the people that work in those facilities, there should be limited transmission, that working in fewer places to make ends meet for the employees was a good thing for the residents and the employees. The government worked, as this government did and others across the country through the federal government, to top up wages of employees in those situations so that they could count on one place of work as opposed to knitting together two or three places of work for a full-time salary. That's again something that the UCP talked about wanting or promised that should happen, that there should be an increase in the proportion of full-time staff available to residents in long-term care situations.

5:30

I'm not aware that any of those three things that I've talked about have been done to date, which is another reason why a referral to the Families and Communities Committee would be a helpful thing for Albertans to understand the actions of the government with regard to the seriousness of this situation.

I can't go much further without talking about how disappointing it is to see Bill 11 kind of put off until the future significant regulations that will really make or break this bill. The fact that we can't see those, what is before or being contemplated in regulation at this point in time, is essentially a trust-us-and-we'll-take-care-of-things move. There's too big a risk, I think, not only to the long-term efficacy of Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, and the fact that we don't know if it'll have the proper agency to address what is important to Albertans who are requiring continuing care, but the risk is too big an ask for – in addition to the residents and Albertans who love those residents who are family, it's too big a risk for

workers in those long-term and continuing care facilities across the province.

Asking for "just trust us; we'll get it right" hasn't worked out very well with regard to this government on previous legislation they've brought forward. It shouldn't be asked of Albertans who have to spend their lives, what's left of their lives, in continuing care settings. We need the government to be not only transparent and up front, but we need a fulsome debate with full understanding of what regulatory power the government believes it needs with regard to this Continuing Care Act. The number of – I guess a way to put this is that the government doesn't have the greatest track record with being proactive around the needs of long-term care residents in that early on in the pandemic, as I mentioned, not only in this province but in other provinces, the significant brunt of deaths occurred with residents of continuing care. That's another reason not to allow the government to say: trust us; we'll get it right.

You know, there's great stake Albertans have in this, that people in long-term care facilities have in this. Without their opportunity to understand where government is going, there's no guarantee anything different will occur in subsequent pandemics or subsequent significant impacts that threaten the lives of people in these situations. We know that the facility-based continuing care review had numerous recommendations about how to improve and increase the amount of home care provided, to improve working conditions, and to increase full-time staff, but this bill is silent on any of those things. There are consultations that have been done that have not been made public, which is another reason why . . . [Mr. Ceci's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Speaker: On amendment REF1 are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 11's referral to Families and Communities, to take a pause on this piece of legislation to take a deep dive into many of the components of it, which I think deserve greater scrutiny. I hope to make a compelling argument as to why by focusing on one significant element of the legislation that I happen to have some familiarity with from my past as a nursing orderly trainee. I will get into that momentarily.

I wanted to, first, frame the discussion that we have in a slightly different way than other speakers have so far, and that is to really get at the nub of what we're speaking about, Mr. Speaker. That has to do with the fact that what we're talking about, and everybody's mentioned it, is care. People in need of care are who we are talking about. That definition of care is a very wide-ranging thing. It can be something that describes the services that are received by somebody in long-term care, a nursing home otherwise known, or somebody who's in a situation of designated supportive living or in home care, for that matter. But that care is something that we gloss over when we talk about that word. We should really think about what it means. What is happening in that relationship between the caregiver and the individual receiving that care? It can mean some very intimate things. That defines why it's so important that the individuals providing that care are involved in a system which recognizes what they're doing.

For example, you can have a situation in a long-term care facility or designated supportive living which begins early morning, when the person gets up, or a person may be an overnight caregiver, and they're making sure that the individual doesn't have difficulties overnight, whether it be breathing or falling or any number of respiratory issues or medications that are on a drip. It could be IV situations. Generally speaking, what you end up having is an individual who, say, during

their daily care will respond to the resident, go to their room in the morning, rouse them, get them up.

This is, you know, part of the daily activity that I was involved in. You do a proper face wash. Sometimes if the individual is not ambulatory, if they're bedridden, then you have to do a wash of the individual's face and perineal care while they're in bed and get them prepared to at least, hopefully, sit up to take some form of breakfast. That also involves using, quite often, a foam sponge to clean the mouth and get the hygiene of the mouth properly looked after. Then, of course, there's some type of a breakfast that would take place. In many cases, Mr. Speaker, the individuals, if they're in severe straits, will be those that will bite on a spoon. I've had that, where a person was a grinder, and they would actually take the spoon right out of your hand if you weren't careful. You learn these nuances after looking after somebody over a period of time.

That's why it's so important, no matter the situation, Mr. Speaker, whether you're looking after somebody in an institution, in a long-term care facility, or in their home, to have continuity of care with the same individuals involved. Familiarity is developed over time. You get to know that individual, their nuances, their conditions, their needs, their wants. You get to know them as a person. And that individual becomes familiar and comfortable with the caregiver over time. That is a really important element of what we're talking about that may be getting lost in the nuances of just talking about the different styles or, you know, designated supportive living or home care.

5:40

The main goal, Mr. Speaker, should never be lost. The main goal is benefiting the individuals receiving care, to improve their quality of life, their daily life on a moment-to-moment basis so that they're not sitting on a commode for hours on end because the individual doesn't realize what their bowel movement habits are. Something as simple and basic as that is realistically what we are talking about when we talk about care, those daily commitments to understanding how that person gets through each day and what their particular conditions are.

What happens quite often, Mr. Speaker, is that we have a revolving door of part-time people, whether it be in institutions or even in a home-care situation, where Alberta Health Services does provide home care – that's the option that's in place – and you don't end up with the same people looking after the clients on a regular basis, and it's very, very upsetting to that individual because you're dealing with very intimate care, basically just as you would with a child, the bodily fluids.

There is a daily workspace of anybody who's looking after somebody in continuing care, whether it be at home or in an institution. The dignity of that individual is something that must remain intact if you're going to look after their overall health, and it is something that is very, very fragile. When you are relying upon somebody else to look after your daily needs, your physical needs, you depend upon them. That is something we shouldn't ever lose sight of.

The reason I'd like to see this bill referred to Families and Communities is so that we can talk more about the intimacy of that care relationship, Mr. Speaker. It seems as though the bill itself may have had its priorities in reverse when it seems to herald a savings of \$452 million as a result of shifting residents from long-term care into home care, which is a laudable goal because most of us, I would venture to say almost all of us, would prefer to live at home even when we are in need of care.

I think it's great that the government is looking to shift more people into a home-care situation, where they can receive services there. But what exactly that means is something that we've got to look a little bit more closely at, Mr. Speaker, because when indeed somebody is in an institution, they may or may not have the same

individuals looking after them regularly. We do have a situation where part-time help is a problem. We rely upon part-time employees too much, because it's cheaper to have them hired, and they don't get the benefits that a full-time employee has.

When it comes to a home-care situation, Mr. Speaker, many Albertans don't realize that you will have an option to have services brought in by AHS employees, who would be public servants, and, once again – no fault of theirs, but there's a difficulty with maintaining continuity of the same individual coming on, you know, a daily and a weekly basis to provide those services, or you can have the option of having a self-managed care system.

When the government talks about a savings of \$452 million as a result of shifting people from institution-based care to home care, my suspicion is, Mr. Speaker, that that \$452 million savings is coming as a result of privatizing the service. In other words, rather than having a public servant in an institution or through AHS coming to the house, we're looking at encouraging the privatized contracts to happen with individuals who would come to provide that care. The savings is going to be happening because you end up having people operating at a much lower rate of pay to be contracted by individual families to come to the home to provide these services under a self-managed care contract.

Under this contract, Mr. Speaker, whether it's AHS or a self-managed care contract, there's an assessment that's done to determine what level of services the individual would be eligible for, and then, as a result, the family, if it is a self-managed care contract, would receive a monthly amount. From that, they would have to pay the caregivers of their choice to come in and provide the services.

But the difficulty lies, Mr. Speaker, in that the savings that they are claiming to get from having this devolution of services to home care isn't something that necessarily should be the source of money used to provide more hours of long-term care and increasing the hours of direct care in other supportive living situations. If indeed there's more money required in those situations, it should be funded. But to say that we need to direct those savings, that we need to generate those savings on the backs of the individuals who will be providing the care to those who are needing home care is not just.

The savings of \$452 million, I postulate, Mr. Speaker, are going to be coming from the lower wages and benefits that are being earned by individuals who are providing services under self-managed care contracts, and that is not the way to seek extra funding to shift over to another area of home care. The savings that we know are going to be coming out of the pockets of already not really highly paid workers is something that we should be considering carefully in committee when we look at Bill 11 should this referral motion be successful. I take nothing away from the individuals who are contracted to provide home care to families who are under self-managed care contracts, but I think the system should be set up to properly reward those individuals in the same way that they would have been had they been working in an institution providing the same care that these individuals who are now going to perhaps be looking at living at home receiving care would be receiving.

Whether or not that person is under a self-managed care contract or whether they're working through AHS, they should be receiving, I think, a guarantee of a relatively similar amount of money for providing the same amount of care. That, I think, would then diminish the so-called savings that the government is claiming to have, the \$452 million, and force the government to properly fund out of general revenue the monies that are required by long-term care or designated supportive living.

We're not talking, Mr. Speaker, about clearing the streets or shovelling snow or the roadway systems; we're talking about daily human interactions and daily care for people that we love. In many, many cases they're the elderly; they're our parents and our grandparents. Also, there are people with long-term care conditions, and it could be even as young as children, people who have been, unfortunately, victims of vehicle accidents or other types of tragedies, where they need long-term care.

Unfortunately, too, there are many young adults who are in long-term care, seniors' types of accommodations, who cannot otherwise be accommodated in Alberta because the facilities don't exist. That's the tragedy that needs to be addressed, and that's something that we could do with Bill 11 if it is referred to the Families and Communities Committee to take a look at, the issue of young individuals who are, in some cases, on an ongoing basis going to university to upgrade their education and coming back to an institution which is largely designed for the elderly, with no social life and no interaction with their peer organization or their peer age group because of the fact that the facilities for that age group of persons requiring long-term care just don't exist. As far as a policy to implement the changes to long-term care, that's one thing that really should be addressed, and I hope to see that in committee on Bill 11.

5:50

The Speaker: On amendment REF1, the hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and honour to join in debate on Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, here at second reading and to speak to the referral that Bill 11 be sent to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities, where it can have more analysis and discussion.

I have to start by thanking the hon. colleagues who have spoken to Bill 11 so far today. I know that there's been debate at second reading across multiple days as this bill has been considered. I just want to reflect that in listening to colleagues who have brought forward perspectives from their previous employment, work – the Member for St. Albert, who has worked within aspects of the system, and listening to my colleague speaking just now about his history of having family within the continuing care system and the experience that they've lived – bringing those aspects into the debate, I think, has raised the level of debate on Bill 11.

I certainly, personally, very much appreciate hearing their perspectives, because having a strong and healthy continuing care system is incredibly, incredibly important to all Albertans given the number of Albertans who rely on these services. Alberta right now has more than 33,000 supportive living spaces, more than 15,000 long-term care spaces, and there are already 127,000 Albertans receiving home care each year, so we know that continuing care impacts the lives of many, many Albertans. On top of that, we know from the reviews that have taken place, specifically the facility-based continuing care review, which I'd like to speak a little bit more about, that the number of Albertans who are going to require the support of the continuing care system is growing, so making sure that we are getting this right is incredibly important.

Now, within Bill 11 we see a number of things happening, including multiple acts being replaced with a single streamlined piece of legislation for continuing care. The Member for St. Albert raised a number of concerns that I'd like to take a moment just to echo, including that in the consolidation of other pieces of legislation into this single Continuing Care Act, which is being

done to improve transparency and accountability – it makes sense, especially when you're dealing with legislation as old as 1985, regulations similarly as old, and a system that has grown up with inconsistencies, to try and bring that together.

But the point the Member for St. Albert made, that I think is incredibly important, is that within the pieces of legislation that are being combined into the Continuing Care Act, there were varying levels of care or standards. In the Continuing Care Act before us, which is replacing the Nursing Homes Act, the Long Term Care Information Act, the Resident and Family Councils Act, and the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, the member pointed out some very specific areas where we may be losing positive standards, positive minimum standards, because of that consolidation.

That is one of the many issues that I think a referral to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities would allow us to take a moment to take a closer look at. Certainly, having the Continuing Care Act be there to support Albertans and to support a strong and improving system, particularly coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, where we've seen we are getting close to 1,700 residents of the continuing care system having passed from COVID-19 – and we saw in so many ways where the continuing care system had weak spots, had challenges.

Now, in bringing forward Bill 11 to address gaps, to try and improve the system, my understanding, through reviewing some of the *Hansard* from what the minister moving this bill has said and my understanding of the government's progress, is that this is part of the overall review of the continuing care system, which has included some reviews that have led up to this. I mentioned that I wanted to talk briefly about the facility-based continuing care review, of which we have a final report that was released on May 31, 2021, so 11 months ago, approximately. That review included a great deal of consultation and a final report that included 42 recommendations to transform and modernize Alberta's facility-based continuing care system.

Now, I raise this report because the government has been engaged in important work to evaluate and, ideally, reform and improve the continuing care system, but when we look at Bill 11, very few of those 42 recommendations have been implemented in this piece of legislation, and there are significant stress points and areas of concern within our continuing care system that Bill 11 fails to consider. Having the Standing Committee on Families and Communities be able to review Bill 11 and find out more I think would be really important. Now, the final report is out. Certainly, one of the requests I would have for the government would be perhaps more detailed information about the input and the feedback that went into that review.

I see that we only have a few more minutes before the afternoon session will be, unfortunately, ending, so I will spend my final few minutes speaking about one aspect of the continuing care system that I'm concerned is being deferred to regulations. A great deal of the work in Bill 11 is being deferred to regulations, and from the FBCC review what does not appear to be covered through Bill 11, although I'd certainly be happy to be corrected, are those issues that will help support workers in this sector, workers who often are working part-time or contract-based work, workers who in many cases are underpaid, workers who are mainly women, workers who are dealing with incredibly high levels of staff burnout as well as incredibly high demands on their time and on their work.

Certainly, the FBCC review flagged a number of challenges, including labour supply and staff shortages, that exist today. As already mentioned in my remarks, with the increasing percentage of Albertans who are requiring support from a continuing care

centre, we need to have a very strong system in place to try and address that. When during the COVID-19 pandemic the single-site staffing was put into place, certainly it was something many people were aware of but not everyone. It became a higher level of awareness of how many of these workers were working in multiple facilities because they could only, in some cases, get part-time hours in multiple places and then of the impact of a pandemic and the public health impacts of that. Also, having these workers, working in precarious positions, not able to get full-time hours and benefits, I think, speaks to the need for the sector to have a real workforce strategy.

This is something that has been acknowledged in other provinces as well. Ontario, in particular, has committed huge amounts of money – I believe it was \$1.9 billion annually – to hire more workers, to bring the benefits for those workers more in line with what you would expect, to make sure that there was increased funding.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt. However, the time allotted for debate in this afternoon's session has elapsed, and the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, April 26, 2022

Day 24

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 26, 2022

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 11 Continuing Care Act

Mr. Eggen moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment April 26: Ms Gray speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are on REF1 of Bill 11. Are there any members looking to debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has risen.

Mr. Yao: Oh, what a great way to start off.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so pleased to be able to make the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo's evening by starting off debate this evening. I promise that member that I'll keep my fingers in my pockets because I know how sensitive he is about that issue.

I'm pleased to rise and share a few comments on the amendment that is before us, and that is to refer Bill 11 to committee. I think it is prudent to send this bill to committee for further review because this bill is a quite extensive overhaul of existing legislation with respect to continuing care in the province of Alberta. The act rescinds a number of pieces of legislation, a whole bunch of acts related to continuing care, particularly the Nursing Homes Act, the Hospitals Act, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, and the co-ordinated home and community care regulation, and attempts to put all of the legislative and regulatory framework for continuing care in the province of Alberta into one overarching piece of legislation. This is no small task.

I think that the work needs to be examined in detail by members of the Legislature in a committee, because in that way we would be able to dig into sections of the legislation in great detail, ask some members of the public, some stakeholders to come and present to the committee and share their opinions on this new piece of legislation, how they think it will improve or affect the continuing care landscape in the province of Alberta. This is something that requires careful consideration, and I think it's only fair that we hear directly from stakeholders about what the impact of these legislative changes will be. Up until this point the only people whose word we can ostensibly rely on is the minister's.

You know, I think the minister is a decent enough guy as far as he goes – and I will say that he is a significant improvement over his predecessor; that's for sure – but unfortunately he is part of a government that is deeply distrusted by the people of Alberta. So for him or any member of Executive Council to come in and say that this is a piece of legislation that is worthy of support of the Legislature even though it completely transforms the legislative and regulatory framework with respect to continuing care, I don't think

that that's adequate. The people of Alberta would not be happy with us if we just came in here and took the minister's word for it that this is the right thing to do. That's one of the reasons that I think the members of the Chamber should vote to send this piece of legislation to committee.

Not only, though, do Albertans deeply distrust what the UCP government tells us on any given day on any given important piece of public policy, but we know that when it comes to managing continuing care, particularly through the pandemic, the government has miserably failed the people of Alberta. As we've heard time and again in debate on this piece of legislation, over 1,600 continuing care residents in Alberta, tragically, have passed away due to COVID-19.

Now, when you're dealing with numbers that high, it's easy to let it just go over your head. What does 1,600 people mean? Well, let me try to put that into some context to make that number more real, I guess. You know, I have a number of high schools in my riding, Mr. Speaker. McNally high school, of course, tragically, has been in the news quite a bit over the last couple of weeks. That school has only about 900 students. Just imagine if every single student at McNally high school suddenly passed away from COVID. We would still only be at half of the number of people who have died from COVID-19 in continuing care because of this government's mismanagement of health care in the pandemic. That's two high schools, two complete high schools, that are lost.

I remember reading an article in I think it was *The Atlantic*. Ed Yong is a journalist who's been providing excellent coverage about the COVID pandemic with a focus on the United States, but I think that the COVID experience in the United States can be applied to a number of other countries, including Canada. What he found – I hope that I have it right. What this article that I recall reading stated was that for every COVID death there are at least nine people who are grieving that person's loss, nine people for every COVID death who are left behind to mourn the loss, bear the burden of grief, wondering what they could have done differently, I guess, to save their loved one.

In this case, 1,600 continuing care residents in Alberta have passed away. Not only is that a staggering number in its own right, but that means that almost 15,000 people had a loved one who was in continuing care whose loss they are continuing to mourn to this day. Fifteen thousand people. That's about a third of the residents of Edmonton-Gold Bar, for example. We've got about 45,000 people who live in Edmonton-Gold Bar. If we put all of those people in one place, at least a third of the neighbourhoods that I represent would be mourning a loss to COVID-19. This is a staggeringly high number, Mr. Speaker.

You know, the fact that nobody from Executive Council, particularly the Premier, has even apologized for a single death, not once – 15,000 people who would at the very least appreciate words of comfort or solace, compassion, empathy from the government, some kind of acknowledgement of their pain, and there is nothing coming from the government in that respect.

It makes one wonder if they even care that 1,600 people have needlessly lost their lives to this disease that they failed to take seriously. They certainly acted way too late even though the warning signs were quite clear five or six waves in a row. Now we don't even hear about COVID anymore. The Health minister makes an announcement once every week, and he limits that to 30 minutes a week, not even enough time to give journalists an opportunity to ask him any questions about what's going on with the state of the pandemic, with the state of our continuing care system, with the state of our health care system in general. It's as if the government just wants COVID to go down the memory hole, for people to forget about it.

7:40

That's why I think it's really important to send this bill to committee, Mr. Speaker, because there are at least 15,000 people who want to know what this piece of legislation will do to protect other families from losing loved ones in this pandemic. It's not over. Just because the government refuses to release any data, refuses to conduct adequate testing, refuses to do any form of contact tracing, refuses to provide timely data – the pandemic is still occurring, and we know that seniors in continuing care are at extremely high risk of contracting this disease and dying from it still.

I think that would be an interesting question for the committee to look into: what will the changes that are being brought forward in this legislation mean for the spread of COVID-19 in continuing care facilities? Is it adequate to prevent the spread of COVID-19? Is it adequate to prevent further hospitalizations and deaths of continuing care residents?

Now, call me a wide-eyed radical, Mr. Speaker, but I don't believe that living in continuing care should be a death sentence. But for at least 1,600 Albertans it was. What more do we need to do to protect people in these continuing care facilities from suffering that same fate? Is this legislation going to be enough, or is there more that needs to be put into this legislation that could be helpful in preventing the disease?

You know, some of my colleagues have raised a number of issues that are not addressed in this piece of legislation regarding standards of work, regulations regarding staffing levels, those kinds of things. Those are critical to not only providing good care under any circumstances but to providing safe care during a pandemic.

You know, I will give the government credit for at least getting one thing partially right. They were dragged, kicking and screaming, into issuing a single-site work order for continuing care facilities, and that was the right thing to do. I shudder to think about how many more people would have died in continuing care facilities had the government not even had the decency to implement that simple measure. But the fact of the matter remains that there are a whole host of additional measures that need to be implemented to keep continuing care residents safe and as healthy as possible.

You know, Mr. Speaker, my impressions of what goes on in continuing care facilities are heavily coloured by the experiences of my oldest daughter, who began her practice as a health care aide in a continuing care facility here in the city of Edmonton in December 2020. I note that that's an interesting juxtaposition, that my daughter was going to work to take care of continuing care patients when members of Executive Council and their companions in the government caucus were jetting off to Hawaii for a bit of a break.

That wasn't the case in our family. My daughter was putting on her scrubs and going to work, doing everything she could to keep the residents in her care safe and healthy and provide them a decent quality of life. That work has been incredibly stressful over the last year and a bit. She has come home in tears more times than she has come home with a smile on her face because of her experiences at work. She's got a workload that is far beyond her capacity and the capacity of all of her companions at work to manage. She deals day in and day out with work colleagues who are stressed to the maximum level because . . . [Mr. Schmidt's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to get up and speak to this referral motion because I believe it's so important that we do so. Already in debate I've highlighted a

number of issues where this bill actually falls amazingly short. I've had exchanges with the minister already on some of those, but I hope to raise a few more today. I acknowledge that Bill 11 is really, you know, an administrative piece of legislation to consolidate bills and regulations and make administrative updates, but we have yet to hear from this government, for example, on the recommendations from the facility-based continuing care review. The minister could've taken this opportunity to bring forward into this House a bill that actually dealt with those recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, here I believe we have another case of this government refusing to actually listen to Albertans and simply going full steam ahead on its own ideological approach. To me, I see it like night and day. You know, I've said it before and I'll say it again, that this government tends to listen to the people that share their ideology and that's it. It's quite unfortunate because, of course, we're here to govern for all Albertans, and as the members on the other side of the House can see and the members over here to my right can see, there are another 24 members in this House that don't particularly share your ideological perspective, and like that, Albertans voted for us to be in this particular space and hold this place, this chair.

I think it's imperative that especially when it comes to continuing care – and, I mean, we've highlighted this before, the fact that 1,600 people lost their lives during COVID. Like, to me, I just find that unfathomable because it's something that could've been avoided had a proper, adequate approach been taken. Now, I get it, you know, because often when we get into debate around COVID, members on the other side are saying: oh, well, did you want to shut down the economy?

An Hon. Member: Yup.

An Hon. Member: No.

Member Loyola: You know, I'm hearing it echoed by murmurs on the other side of the House right now. By no means did we want to shut down the economy.

That's what you get from the other side, Mr. Speaker, this rhetoric of it's either this or that. Always. It always comes down to you're either with us or you're against us. There's no measured approach or capacity – no, not capacity; I would say opportunity to really reflect that it's not the economy over lives or lives over the economy. We can work out in a measured way practical approaches that deal with the issues at hand. We need to get beyond the rhetoric.

I truly would like to get beyond the rhetoric, you know, because it's getting to a state where it's – well, never mind my opinion. Never mind my opinion. Albertans are getting sick and tired of the rhetoric. They want to see concrete action taken. For them, their loved ones are so important, as our loved ones are to us. We're talking about 1,600 people in continuing care.

7:50

I understand that the minister is bringing forward this piece of legislation here, but we have so many other things to deal with. For me, it's – I mentioned it before in debate, when we were on the general bill, and I think it warrants repeating here, and that is the fact that when it comes to the workers in this particular industry, they tend to be racialized Albertans, new Canadians. They don't have benefits. Often they're working one or even two jobs to be able to make ends meet. You know, I'm not even going to get into the fact that Albertans are going through a really tough time right now in terms of affordability.

What I am saying is that the approach that this government and previous governments – I'll be honest, Mr. Speaker. It's the actions of previous governments in continuing care that have got us to the

stage where we are today, previous Conservative governments. When continuing care went to the profit model, I would say that the quality of continuing care went down. Companies were more focused on their bottom line than actually caring for these – I mean, don't get me wrong. I understand that they hire people to do that work. The people that they hire to do that work I believe are committed and dedicated, and they love doing that job, or else they wouldn't be in that industry. I take my hat off to them, and I applaud them because I wouldn't be able to do that job of caring for people in continuing care. I wouldn't be able to do that job. I mean, don't get me wrong. You know, I have a big heart, but let me tell you, having to take care of people day in, day out: maybe I could do it for a while, but I couldn't do it as a job.

I believe that this government desperately needs to hear from those people when it comes to the issues at hand and the fact that, you know, we – the bill does not do enough. It doesn't even answer, doesn't even address this particular issue when it comes to the people who work in this particular industry. It begs me to ask the question: is the government going to share the consultation report on the bill itself, and what is specifically supported by stakeholders, and where are the gaps when it comes to this? Again, when it comes to staffing, it's a shame that a lot of these workers are in a situation where they had to go from one facility to another facility. We saw that, unfortunately, because of the fact that they had to go from one job to another job, there was a risk of them actually spreading COVID to other facilities. What were the companies doing in order to reduce that risk? That's not being addressed when it comes to this particular bill.

According to the facility-based continuing care review, it mentions that close to 6,000 more staff need to be hired. Six thousand staff need to be hired. Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, I would hope that he could address, like: what is the minister actively doing in order to make sure that those 6,000 staff members could be hired? And why is that not being addressed in this bill?

In my own particular opinion I believe that there's much that this bill does not cover, which is why we need to refer it to committee so that we can hear from more people on exactly what this bill will actually be doing. Of course, it is a huge concern that – for example, let's even get to the seniors in our community. You know, while we were in government, we had the independent Seniors Advocate. That's something that was taken away, but I think that it would go a long way, especially when it comes to continuing care, for the minister to really consider: how do seniors advocate for themselves to this government and to this Legislature? We need more accountability. We need more accountability when it comes to seniors, particularly those seniors who are in continuing care.

It's a shame that this government actually decided to get rid of that office. I think that it would be a good opportunity to hear from stakeholders that do seniors advocacy to actually address some of the issues that they're most concerned about when it comes to continuing care and the fact that we lost so many people during this COVID pandemic, which, of course, is ongoing.

Regardless of what this government wants to say, there are still people dying because of COVID. There are still people that are contracting the virus to this day. Yes, it might be fewer, but it's still an issue. You know, I'm not even going to get into it with the minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, on the effects of long COVID on people and what this government is actually going to do in order to address that particular issue, which I think is something that we can't put on the back burner. We've got to deal with it and how people's lives have been impacted by COVID.

I heard a story about a young man who actually, you know, ironically – I didn't even put this together until now – used to work

in continuing care. He actually ended up contracting the virus and now has long COVID. He was a young, healthy man in his 20s. Now he runs out of breath just making his bed. That's the reality that we're dealing with. This is an individual who used to work in continuing care, of course a new Canadian from a racialized community. What's this individual going to do for the rest of his life? Like the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I wish that this government would actually speak to these people, that they'd have an opportunity to provide feedback, to tell their stories so that they can feel, at the bare minimum, just listened to. It's a grave situation for these individuals. When I heard his story, I couldn't help but just be incredibly saddened by it, a young man not being able to work anymore because he just becomes incredibly exhausted even just making his bed.

So I think that there are a number of reasons why this legislation needs to be referred to committee. It doesn't address any of the, I would say, important and pertinent issues that we could be dealing with when it comes to continuing care here in the province of Alberta. I'd love to hear more from the minister on these particular issues that I'm raising, because we need to get to some kind of resolution on these issues. These concerns I've been hearing from a lot of people in the community. I've been hearing from a lot of people in the community who have been drastically impacted, you know, with a loved one in care. Some of them have passed away.

8:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Health has risen.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. members for Edmonton-Gold Bar and Edmonton-Ellerslie for engaging in the debate on the referral amendment with regard to Bill 11. I'd like to take a moment to answer some of their questions and, as well, speak to the referral amendment.

First off, Mr. Speaker, it appears that, you know, there are two arguments why the members opposite are suggesting that we take the bill and refer it to committee. The first is in regard to lack of consultation, and the second is in regard, quite frankly, to their arguments that we need to do more in this bill. I want to deal with both of those.

First, in regard to lack of consultation, I'd like to share with the hon. members across the way that there has been significant consultation and significant demand for changes that we're making in this particular bill. You know, over the years many continuing care stakeholders have asked the Ministry of Health to review Alberta's legislation to address the challenges that exist in the system, and the legislation review was part of our broader commitment to transform the continuing care system, to do everything that we can to ensure Albertans have access to high-quality continuing care.

We engaged numerous continuing care stakeholder organizations and received 33 written submissions that identified issues and recommendations for improvement. Additionally, input was received through a home-care and nursing home regulation review that took place. The legislative review was also informed by advice and recommendations from the facility-based continuing care review, which received feedback from over 7,000 Albertans, including residents, family members, caregivers, operators, and community organizations.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank everyone who was involved in terms of developing this, but there has been significant consultation, and quite frankly we don't need to do any more consultation. We need to move forward with this bill, and time is of the essence, but I'll get to that in a second.

The second reason that the members opposite suggested that this should go through referral is not about what's in the bill but about what's not in the bill. [interjection] To the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar: I'll finish my remarks, and then I'll provide an opportunity for you to speak. But thanks for rising.

They speak to a number of issues, and, Mr. Speaker, I fully appreciate that these are real issues. These issues were identified in the facility-based continuing care review, issues regarding, you know, the number of spaces, issues regarding the need to move to home care, issues regarding staffing and how we provide staffing, which is particularly challenging. And we have turnover.

Mr. Speaker, I want to point out to the hon. members that these are important issues, but the reality is that these issues are program issues, these are policy issues, and these are regulation issues that are addressed through regulations and programs and policies today, and quite frankly that is the appropriate place for them to be addressed tomorrow. Sending this to committee to deal with those issues: that's the wrong place. The right place is when we actually do the regulations and we do the policies as government, as we announce our response to the FBCC. I can tell the hon. members that we are taking the facility-based continuing care review very seriously, and we've actually started the transformation. Where the transformation has to happen is in policy, it's in regulation, and it's in the budget.

At the end of the day, it's the money that we put into the system that is incredibly important to get the results. Mr. Speaker, in Budget 2022 we are spending those dollars to start the transformation. We have input significant dollars, you know: \$1.7 billion for community care, an increase of \$122 million, or 76 per cent, from '21-22; \$1.2 billion for continuing care, an increase of \$16 million, or a 1.3 per cent increase; and, most importantly, \$750 million for home care, an increase of \$81 million. That's part of the transformation to be able to enable home care, more slots, because we understand – we heard it from the FBCC; we heard it from the review – that people want to be looked after in their homes, and we will expand that.

This is, Mr. Speaker, a first step – quite frankly, this legislation is a first step – to be able to take all of the legislation that right now is scattered across our legislative environment. There are holes in between. What will this legislation do? Well, it'll do a number of things. We will have one overarching piece of legislation. This will provide consistency and alignment across the continuing care system. It will replace multiple acts with one piece of modern, streamlined legislation. It'll improve transparency and accountability, which is incredibly important, particularly learning lessons from COVID. It will enable a person-centred, flexible, and innovative system of care for Albertans now and also in the future and establish a consistent approach and alignment for legislative requirements and services across the continuing care system.

It'll address gaps in our current legislation and provide greater authority to effectively monitor and enforce compliance. No longer will we only have either “do nothing” or “pull the licence or the certification,” but we'll have a middle road, where we can apply administrative penalties. What's important, Mr. Speaker, is that we provide the service that Albertans need in continuing care facilities, in the continuing care environment, and ensure that we change behaviours to enable that.

This legislation, Mr. Speaker, starts the journey, just like Budget '22 starts the journey in terms of our transformation. The appropriate place for the details, what the hon. members across the way are saying are not in the act, is not in the act, and they actually even recognize this with the language that they use in terms of regulation. That's where it belongs. It belongs in regulation. We

need flexibility to modify and change that over time. We've had significant consultation. The members opposite are quite right. This is a matter that we must address, and we must address it now. This legislation will enable us to do this. It'll enable us to start addressing all of these issues once we move into the regulatory framework.

Sending it to committee, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, is not a good use of our time. A good use of our time is actually passing this legislation, putting it through the Legislature. Then we can continue the challenging and hard work – and it'll take some time – to continue to work with the stakeholders and continue to hear from Albertans to get the regulations done and then also respond to the FBCC, apply the budget dollars associated with that so that we can actually improve our continuing care system.

Mr. Speaker, I'll take just one more moment, and then I'm happy to take a question from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I'll ask all members of the Chamber to vote against this referral amendment. I'd ask you to support the legislation for what it is, which is bringing disparate pieces together in one place to provide a single framework so that we can continue the important work of improving the continuing care system.

I appreciate the comments from the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, you know, that this shouldn't be ideological. This should be a focus on “How do we improve our continuing care system?” which we're doing. This is a first step to put in place a framework. I'd ask the members opposite to evaluate it for what it is, which is that, which is a framework. This is far better than the legislation that we have here. It will enable us to make meaningful steps moving forward.

If the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would like to ask a question or make a comment, I'm happy to listen.

Mr. Schmidt: I appreciate the minister's willingness to engage in debate on this matter; I truly do. The question that I have is asked in good faith. I appreciate that he is saying that we are at the beginning of a journey to reform continuing care and, hopefully, for the better, but I think an important part of the journey is reconciling with the past, particularly with the past mismanagement of COVID. What forum will the minister provide the people of Alberta to share their stories and experiences with loved ones who were lost in the continuing care facilities due to COVID so that they can at least have their experiences heard, validated, and acted upon by this government? Will the minister commit to providing that kind of forum to the families who have lost loved ones in continuing care during the COVID pandemic?

Mr. Copping: I thank the hon. member for his question, and I appreciate that people, sadly, passed away due to COVID and in continuing care facilities. This has happened not only here in Alberta but, quite frankly, around the world. As I indicated previously in this House in other questions and debate, there will be a comprehensive review of the government's response to COVID. But I would like to point out that we already have heard in terms of some concerns that were raised on COVID in our facility-based continuing care review.

8:10

One of the key items that came out of that, which we're already taking action on now, Mr. Speaker, is a recognition that, you know, when we took a look at the data – and this is a general observation – the correlation was generally between not public or private or not-for-profit, but it was, really, older facilities versus newer facilities. Really, what that was about was about those facilities where there were shared rooms or shared bathrooms, which tended to have a

higher propensity for outbreak. Not all the cases, but there are certain – Bethany, for example, is an exception to the rule on some of this. But we’ve already learned from that, right? We’ve already heard the concerns raised associated with that, and we have taken action on that.

We’re actually moving away, quite frankly, and we’re actually providing the funding to move away from dual-occupancy rooms and moving to a single base room. Mr. Speaker, you know, I’m very pleased that our budget, Budget ’22, not only includes additional funding for continuing care spaces, but it also includes operating expenses. We will have an additional 1,500 more rooms built this year in continuing care, and those are single-occupancy rooms. We are also investing another \$204 million in capital in terms of additional continuing care spaces. That includes our standard congregate care spaces but also smaller – we’re looking at RFPs right now – more homelike or campuslike spaces, that are very small and in a smaller number, those types of continuing care facilities. We’ve already put out an RFP for Indigenous communities to build facilities, because we recognize that people want to live closer to home. Also, there will be an RFP for renovations of current facilities in certain areas, and that’s just the first step.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard and taken the lessons learned already in regard to COVID. We are investing capital. We’re putting our money where our mouth is, right? We’re investing capital and additional funds to be able to support the start of our transformation. But, again, the first step in getting our legislation right is this bill, so I’m asking all members to vote down the referral, to actually move forward in terms of supporting this bill so that we can get it right and can move on to the next step, which is doing the policy changes and doing the regulations, you know, in concert with operators, in concert with individuals who use the system, to make sure that we get the regulations right so that we can transform the system and respond to the facility-based continuing care review.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise to speak on this referral motion. I’m grateful that the minister has taken the time to be in the Chamber to hear the debate as well. I think that is exactly how things should go when we are proposing large pieces of legislation that have an effect on people’s lives in such a direct way.

In order to illustrate the point that I think some of my hon. colleagues have made around the need to have some public conversation around what happened over the last couple of years for folks in continuing care – it’s not just people who had COVID and perhaps had complications and then died from it but people who were accessing medical care in the continuing care system during COVID, and the types of challenges that they and their families went through at that time were considerable. What it did was that it laid bare, Mr. Speaker, essentially, the fact that continuing care is barely adequate during normal times and broke in many cases under the strain of the pandemic.

I will tell one story, and that is of one of the minister’s own constituents. She lived in Calgary-Varsity. When I helped pack up her house, it had been 50-some years that they lived in Varsity. About a year ago, over Easter, Mary Braun had a stroke. She was scheduled to go into an assisted living facility with her husband, and that never happened. She moved between acute care and continuing care for the next several months, about six months, eight months, in which her one son that lived in town visited her at least once a day if not twice to make sure that she was getting the hours

of care that she needed, because the people who were there either in the acute-care system – but, more specifically, once she was moved to continuing care, she did not have what she needed.

The folks who staff continuing care facilities are run off their feet. They are ill-equipped to provide the level of care that someone at that level of health risk needed. They’re oftentimes health care aides, the HCA, or those kinds of designations. They are not RNs or nurse practitioners or even often LPNs. So the level of care for someone going through rehabilitation, a very elderly person, from a stroke was not there – was not there – for her.

She needed to be in the hospital, but a pandemic was being managed according to hospital capacity, which then affected people who caught COVID, for sure, but as well those who didn’t but needed the health care system. Taking the health care system to the brink meant that Mary Braun’s life was deprived in her end days of the level of care she needed, and ignoring what doctors were saying about the management of the pandemic likely cut her life short during the fourth wave. It meant that in her dying days she was cared for by people who gave their all but who didn’t understand why their government didn’t value their work and was attacking them at that time.

Now, we have a mixed-market system that sometimes can and does regress to the lowest common denominator in continuing care. What the pandemic has taught us is that that does not serve people when we have people in continuing care who do not get the level of care that they deserve. You can queue-jump if you’re willing to pay for it. You absolutely can. That presents an awful set of decisions and dilemmas for families to make very difficult decisions when they are going through very difficult end of life and end-of-life care decisions as it is.

In a better managed system Mary Braun’s husband of 62 years wouldn’t have been across town when she died because there would have been a way to make sure that that assisted living and continuing care system merged so that he could have been there. In a better managed system she wouldn’t have been moved three times in search of relief from the heat because of a completely nonsensical policy of no one being able to open a window during a heat wave, so the rooms were 40 degrees. Elderly people, who are probably not eating enough, probably not drinking enough anyway, stroke patients who cannot eat and drink in the same ways that we can were sweltering, perishing in that heat for bureaucratic reasons.

Now, the goals of legislation need to be that we have standards and targets and rules that we run our system by. This legislation does that, but it does not set fees, set out conditions and standards around occupational health and safety or other pieces that we know we need to protect those workers, make sure they’re not doing the kinds of lifting and so on that will hasten their exit from this important work. It does not set out staff-patient ratios and hours of care. Now, the minister may be right that some of these decisions are best subsumed to regulation, but I would submit to him that probably not all, that at least in some cases, when we have such a clear crisis in long-term care, in assisted living facilities, when the pandemic laid bare so many failures of policy, of regulation, all of the things that the minister says are under the iceberg of legislation – and he is quite right. There must be one or two that we can elevate into saying, as an expression of this Legislature, that these are the rules, thus far and no further.

8:20

Even better, given that these are people who have given their entire lives to this province and have worked extremely hard to build their lives here, in the minister’s own constituency in Mary’s case, educating children for 50 years, maybe legislation isn’t just about saying, “Here are the basic rules,” but maybe legislation also

aspires to something better for people in their last days, because when all that is left is a twice-daily visit from the most proximate son to make sure that you have something to eat and drink, when all that is left is the daily advocacy from a family member to make sure that you are not sweltering in the 40-degree heat, you need the public, you need this Legislature, you need your community and your neighbours to care about what those standards are and to do better.

One year ago the minister's own review indicated that 6,000 FTEs were required to solve the problem, that we needed to increase the proportion of full-time staff, increase the amount and hours of care, and ensure better conditions of work. Those promises are not fulfilled in this legislation. It is not just people at the end of their days to whom we owe that respect and that dignity and that public responsibility for how we leave, but it is also to their families. So we don't just do it for the care and comfort of the elderly, as if that should not be enough, because it should and it is. But the amount of stress that we put on families, the decisions that people have to make, whether to hire more care, whether to go into for-profit long-term care at the cost of thousands upon thousands of dollars a month just to get what one would consider basic – those are not decisions that family members should have to make, and we should aspire to better.

I think a very quick committee exercise might be able to identify one or two of those metrics or standards or targets or staffing ratios or commitments or absolute public policy goals that we will not waver on, that a cabinet table cannot simply brush aside. Those are endeavours that are worthy of this House, that are worthy of people being able to point to to say: see, we believe in this, we care about this, and we want to alleviate the suffering that this system currently does not advertently cause but definitely inadvertently causes.

I cannot tell you how depressing it is, Mr. Speaker, for a family member to be riding in an elevator in a continuing care facility with an outside medical professional who was coming in to visit a patient and being told that the facility is just a place where we warehouse the dying. We can do better than that. We can do better than that for people like Mary and her family, who navigated this long-term care system through COVID-19. She was a public school teacher her entire life. She educated generations of children. I met someone recently that learned to read because of Mary Braun. So I think we can all take up our share of the work and the burden of making sure that the legislative framework that we have for long-term care is also literate in terms of its standards and what it sets out as our goals as a society.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 11. I believe we're on REF 1, a referral from my hon. colleague to not have this piece of legislation read a second time but to have it referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities. I really need to acknowledge the powerful story that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West just shared. I think that hearing Mary Braun's story and her experience was something that this Legislature needs to hear.

There are over 1,600 continuing care residents in the province that, tragically, passed away from COVID. Mr. Speaker, I know that my office has been inundated with heartbreaking, tragic stories like that of Mary, that we just heard. I think the importance of giving voice to those family members, those loved ones, those caregivers is so important, because the best way to learn is to

examine what went wrong, and the best way to do that is through human experience, through human story, to hear from those that were directly impacted by those loved ones in continuing care.

I think that referring this to committee is exactly what needs to happen. I don't believe that waiting for government to make up the regulations is something that we can trust. We watched this government during – I'm not even sure which wave it was, to be quite honest: took grieving families' right to seek justice away. I heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar ask: how are those that were impacted going to be able to share their stories? The only way to truly make a change is to hear those stories, be present and listen and then learn from it and do better. I think that having it in front of committee – I think you would have a lot more than a few individuals respond, because my office hears from individuals all the time, whether it's a friend who is caring for a loved one or a family member or a staff that works in these continuing care facilities. These stories need to be brought to light. They need to be shared.

We saw what happened when the military went into different provinces across Canada to support the continuing care facilities and the horrific stories that came out of those experiences. To me, Mr. Speaker, the only way that we can truly have an impact and make meaningful change is through having those shared, and having the referral to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities does exactly that. I used to chair this committee, and I can tell you that when we did outreach and asked for community engagement, we had huge success. It was a place where people could submit their stories, their recommendations, their ideas, their thoughts to members that were tasked with doing just that. It wasn't something that happened behind closed doors around a minister's cabinet table. It was wide open for the community to see. Members of the public could come and sit and watch and engage through writing in a submission, asking to present in person.

I have to tell you that being able to be part of that process is so meaningful. Healing occurs when that happens. When we're talking about the importance of this legislation and the desire that the minister shared to get it right, I think this is the logical next step in getting it right, being able to refer it to a committee where that direct focus work can actually occur. I would encourage all members to really reflect on the messages that you've been hearing because I know that it's not just Edmonton-Castle Downs and members of the NDP caucus that are receiving this information. It's being CCed to the minister's office. It's being CCed to the seniors office. We need to bring it to light and share it in committee.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take my seat. Thank you.

8:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members joining debate on REF 1? I believe you opened this. I think there's actually only one. I believe that Edmonton-Rutherford has spoken to this. Yes, you have. There is actually only one member of that caucus, I believe, who hasn't spoken to REF 1. You have already spoken. [interjection] Yeah, to REF 1. You were the – one, two, three. I believe you were the fourth speaker. There is one should he so choose.

Hearing none, I am prepared to ask the question.

[Motion on amendment REF 1 lost]

The Acting Speaker: We are back on the main bill, Bill 11, Continuing Care Act. Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Calgary- . . .

An Hon. Member: Bhullar-McCall.

The Acting Speaker: . . . Bhullar-McCall. I was close, though.

Mr. Sabir: I rise to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 11.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Bill 16
Insurance Amendment Act, 2022**

[Debate adjourned April 26: Ms Renaud speaking]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, you know, here we have another example similar to the bill we just finished debating, or the referral on the last bill that we just finished debating. We have such serious issues that need to be dealt with in terms of insurance. We've spoken at length in this House already about how – you know what I find funny? You know, what I find funny, Mr. Speaker, is that repeatedly the Minister of Finance will get up and he'll be like, "Oh, prices are coming down," but that's after they've gone up 30 per cent. To get up and have the gall to say, "Oh, well, they're coming back down a little" after they've gone up 30 per cent: pardon me for saying so, but to me that's like a slap in the face to Albertans. Really, it is. It's a slap in the face, right? I mean, there's no other way to describe that, to be like: "Hey, we're taking this cap off. Your prices are going to go up by 30 per cent. Oh, but you know what? They've come down just a tiny bit. They've come down just a tiny bit."

At a time when inflation is at its worst, repeated legislation brought forward by this particular government has increased prices on Albertans in dramatic ways, especially during COVID. That exacerbated the economic crisis. Here they had an opportunity to actually address Albertans and the fact that their insurance has gone up so high, yet we got this piece of legislation before us right now. So I find it incredible that they would bring this in. Like, I understand – okay? – maybe this is something that obviously needs to be done in order to help out companies. I get that. But then I ask myself: why is this the priority when Albertans are the ones that are suffering the most?

Albertans are the ones that need some kind of help when it comes to insurance costs. That's the real issue here. That's what most Albertans are concerned about. I mean, I can't tell you the number of e-mails I received regarding this particular issue. To me – yeah, there's no other way to put it, Mr. Speaker – it's a slap in the face. Yet again this UCP government has refused to take any action whatsoever to reduce the auto insurance bills that are punishing families since they removed this rate cap, and Albertans would like them to answer for that.

You know, I see that the members from the UCP caucus are copied on the same e-mails that I'm getting, so I have to ask myself: why are members of their caucus so silent about this? Why do they refuse to even get up in this House and actually discuss what could potentially be done? Give us some kind of an alternative on your side of the House that would actually deal with the skyrocketing costs of insurance in this province. But all we get is rhetoric from the other side, them just blaming it on us, like we do everything in this House. They've been in government for three years, yet all they can do is go to their rhetoric of: well, what's happening right now is your fault.

When it came to utilities, you know, they got up repeatedly in this House and blamed the whole utility costs on us, yet we demonstrated that this is the result of them privatizing the system, actually going all the way back to the decisions made by previous Conservative governments, including Ralph Klein, Stelmach, and Redford. It's incredibly disingenuous – incredibly disingenuous –

that members on that side of the House, the minister of natural gas himself get up and blame high utility costs on the Alberta NDP. Incredibly disingenuous.

You know, they like to say that we're responsible for historical revisionism. It's them, Mr. Speaker, who are guilty of this, not us, and they need to address it. They need to address it. Here was an opportunity for this government to actually address the skyrocketing, high insurance costs that Albertans are experiencing right now, at such a drastic time that is COVID, yet we have nothing.

You know, they refused our proposal for a legislative committee that would investigate why auto insurance premiums are so high. Why? Why not study this in more detail? Again, Mr. Speaker, why not have an alternative to actually address the issue? No alternative, no opportunity to actually put together a committee that will delve into why the cost of insurance is so high, but we've got plenty of rhetoric, blaming it all on us, again another reason why Albertans cannot trust this government. They just cannot trust this government when it comes to this particular issue. [interjection] For sure. Go ahead, Member.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, this is the second speech I've heard this evening from the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie saying that we have to stop throwing stones in a glass house. To me, it looks a lot like the kettle calling the pot black. The previous sentence before the intervention was accepted was: you have to stop just blaming us. Also: this is just the Conservatives' fault, going back to Klein. If the member has an issue with a particular piece of the legislation, I encourage him, I challenge him to cite the problem with the bill exactly. Please pick one section of the bill you have an issue with. I'm happy to engage on that. But a general sort of mudslinging of saying, "Conservatives blame us, so we blame you back" and also "You can't do that" is not helpful to the debate in the House.

Member Loyola: Well, thank you for the intervention from the member. Unfortunately, you don't get to dictate debate. You don't get to dictate debate.

Of course, where I was is that this government can't be trusted because all they do is bring rhetoric into the House. They don't give opportunities. I mean, yesterday alone, Mr. Speaker, we had four proposed amendments for one of their pieces of legislation, and they turned down each and every one of them.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Member Loyola: And they're proud of it, which shows that, you know, they can't play with others in the sandbox.

8:40

Mrs. Frey: How many amendments you did accept from the opposition?

Member Loyola: I can tell you that we accepted. We accepted. I don't have the exact number off the top of my head, but I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we did accept amendments from the opposition while we were in government. I remember doing it.

To date this government has yet to accept even one amendment from the opposition, which, again, just goes to demonstrate that all they're focused on is their own ideological approach. They listen only to people that share their ideological perspective, and they do not even want to consider amendments that will actually help Albertans, Mr. Speaker. There were four amendments that could have helped Albertans.

You know, this is the thing: we have, again, repeated pieces of legislation that come before this House that don't even deal with the priorities that Albertans have when it comes to the high cost of

living here in the province, inflation. We could be dealing with so many issues, yet we get these bills on – I'm sure they're needed; don't get me wrong, Mr. Speaker. But what I'm talking about is prioritizing and working on behalf of Albertans and making sure that certain things are getting addressed, like the high cost of utilities, which we were debating last night.

They weren't capable of accepting even one of our proposed amendments here in the House last night. I can only hope that with this piece of legislation we can actually – well, there's the thing, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that over the last three years this government refused to accept even one amendment. It actually gives you no hope that they're going to accept any. There's actually no political will on this front bench to actually work with us for the benefit of Albertans. That's what we're seeing from this government.

It's not a strange thing to say that they're just so focused on their own ideological approach that they refuse to actually debate any of their bills or accept any amendments or work with us in any particular way to actually . . .

Mrs. Frey: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called.
Go ahead.

Point of Order Relevance

Mrs. Frey: Yeah. Under 23(b), relevance, Mr. Speaker. I am really confused as to when the member has ever cited the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. FYI, that is the bill we're on right now, Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act. I haven't heard him say "insurance" in the past three minutes. I've heard the same rinse-and-repeat speech that we've heard on just about every single bill from that member, so I'm curious if he could get back on the task at hand, or maybe he needs new talking points.

The Acting Speaker: Anyone willing to respond? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not a point of order. It's possible that the member didn't like what my colleague was saying. We are on second reading. We are discussing the principles of the legislation, and usually there is a broad, I guess, range of things that we can talk about. Insurance is one of those things that directly has bearing on the cost of living that Albertans are facing. He was certainly bringing up relevant examples of how other things are adding and piling on to this insurance. I think that he was well within his right when he was discussing about the cost of living.

The Acting Speaker: Well stated, and I agree.
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Debate Continued

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, let me get to this point, then. If they're not happy with the fact that the primary concern of Albertans is the fact that the cost of everything is going up – and, yeah, I was giving the example of utilities and the fact that they refuse to accept any amendments on any of the things that we had proposed yesterday in debate. Fine. After a hundred years of this government producing a report on insurance to Albertans to let them know what was actually happening with insurance premiums and profits in the industry, they decide that they're going to cover up this report. They're not going to release it. They're not going to try to talk about it, of

course, this after a 30 per cent increase to Albertans when it came to their insurance.

An Hon. Member: Can you table that?

Member Loyola: I have several e-mails from constituents stating so.

Mr. Speaker, this is what Albertans are concerned about. This government tried to cover up the fact that immense profits were being made by insurance companies when it came to Albertans because they know that the costs had gone up significantly, and then when we called them out on it, they finally decide to release the information, to release the report. I can tell you that Albertans are even more irate than ever. At a time of economic crisis worsened by COVID, the fact that insurance companies raised costs to such a considerable amount on Albertans – and then they see how much in profit these companies were making: again, another slap in the face to Albertans. That's what this is truly about.

I would like this government to actually prioritize – I would like this government to actually prioritize – the needs of Albertans. When we have a bill like this, which I get – I understand that it's necessary, and I'm not particularly against any part of this particular bill. My primary focus is Albertans first, Mr. Speaker. This government could have used this opportunity to bring forward a bill into this Legislature that would actually deal with the primary concern that Albertans have, which is the high cost of insurance. This government has refused to work with the opposition in any way in order to address any of the issues, has turned down the request or proposal to actually have a legislative committee that could actually delve deeper into these questions.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate an opportunity to make a couple of comments on Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. I guess, you know, I generally feel okay about this bill. I know that there are some elements of commercial insurance that needed to get cleaned up. Indeed, it's an emerging market in regard to industrial insurance, especially insurance for the industrial space around energy, right? It seems obvious that the energy industry is having a harder time acquiring insurance, especially for conventional drilling and so forth.

8:50

You know, one of the background issues that I would think is making that more difficult is that it's becoming clear that over a long period of time lots of drillers – it seems to be part of their business plan to go out, create a company, drill, extract, then leave and somehow disappear or go bankrupt or change the name or do some other legal thing that would somehow extricate them from the responsibility they have to clean up that well. We've seen some version of that played out tens of thousands of times around the province of Alberta. Thus, we have the huge abandoned well problem that is all of our problem, really, just because so many companies maybe chose to do that even as part of their actual business plan to extract the oil or gas from any given site.

Over a long period of time – of course, insurance companies don't fool around, right? They look at probabilities, and they make calculations as to, you know, how likely they are going to have pay out on any given policy. I would suggest that part of the issue around energy companies having a hard time getting insurance is this long-standing circumstance where lots of people were engaged in this kind of irresponsible behaviour, drilling and then leaving, changing the name, going bankrupt, setting up something else, and

away they go, right? So whenever we look at having to reform the insurance acts, amendments, in this province for industrial commercial insurance, I think we need to look at the larger landscape in which that insurance is functioning.

It seems to me that, you know, industrial companies and energy companies in particular are constantly looking for different ways by which to get insurance and new insurance vehicles, and I think that part of our responsibility as a provincial Legislature is to make sure we create a landscape that is fair and just and invites insurance companies to function here in a reasonable sort of way, because if it seems like it's a bit of a Wild West where people are allowed to engage in this kind of rogue activity, then insurance companies will say: well, we're not going to participate in that, thank you very much.

Part of what I see with this commercial insurance situation is that, of course, people are having to go overseas more often to get insurance for their industrial commercial insurance. Again, Mr. Speaker, any time that we see some business activity going overseas, then we're less likely to be benefiting from that here in the province, right? If people have to go to Bermuda or whatever to get their insurance and not get that insurance here, locally, then somehow that seems like lost business to our own province, right? That's an issue, I think.

I just want the government, perhaps during the course of discussions around Bill 16, to let us know: like, what's the plan here? It seems to me that – I mean, again, I can see the utility of having to make some of these reforms, but at the same time it just begs that question, for sure.

Of course, the other issue, much larger issue, is that, you know, considering all of the personal insurance issues that we have here in the province of Alberta, I think that, again, this just leaves the door wide open for people to say: well, yeah; let's talk about insurance; let's talk about my own personal property insurance and insurance on vehicles and so forth. We know that those forms of insurance are contributing significantly to the inflationary pressures that families are feeling here in the province of Alberta, more than other jurisdictions. Well, people will often try to say: oh, well, it's all the same in all the other places in the world, too. But in Alberta we have a very special problem where auto insurance, for example, and personal property insurance are increasing at a rate higher than other jurisdictions right across the country or even right across North America.

When at the very same time that food prices and energy prices and really pretty much the cost of living in general are going up, tacking on this outrageous insurance increase for property insurance and car insurance in particular just pushes a lot of people over the edge, especially when we consider that over the last 24 months or more people were driving a lot less. I mean, I know that I was, certainly. It bears out from statistics across the province that people were driving less, travelling less because of COVID restrictions. At the same time as that, their insurance went up significantly. You know, when people look at why and where and what is the cause of this, it points right back to this Legislature.

Just as a word of caution, when you put out a bill with the word "insurance" in it, you know, sure as heck you're going to attract lots of people that are very interested and will read it. Their anger will only continue to simmer when they see that, in fact: oh, the government is not actually dealing with my insurance problem, but they seem to be dealing with some other more esoteric industrial insurance issue that other people must need somehow, but it doesn't affect my problem that I have because I can't afford to insure my car. Like, that's the context in which we're operating, Mr. Speaker, and I think that we need to respect that because it's real, right?

Words are real, and they have meaning, and there's an insurance problem in this province right now.

Another issue that I just wanted to ask and put it out there rhetorically – and then, hopefully, the minister responsible will talk about this, right? – is this whole issue around unlicensed insurance, where you use a, quote, unquote, special broker. You know, those words: again, perhaps I don't understand what this is, but it seems a little bit dodgy. A foreign unlicensed insurer – like, really? – domiciled, say, in Bermuda doesn't pay. I mean, all of those words together, Mr. Speaker, will make you kind of sit up and go: "What? Like, is this something you get when you go to the back of a bar in Bermuda somehow and you can access that special unlicensed insurance?" I mean, insurance is all based on trust and law and, like, established procedures, so anything that doesn't sort of use the words that would describe that, to me, I think, is a red flag.

I'd like the minister responsible – I presume it's the Minister of Finance – to explain that. Are we in such a dire circumstance for getting industrial insurance that we have to somehow aid and abet unlicensed insurance brokers from foreign locations in order to try to get some version of insurance to function? I mean, I just find that a little bit – you know, at first blush, maybe there's an explanation, and, sure, I bet the Finance minister will do that for us because that's just the kind of guy he is, right?

Anyway, I mean, those are the main issues that I saw from first glance around Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act. I mean, I know that there's some version of this that I could see government – let's say us – doing, you know, some version of these things, but we would certainly do it, Mr. Speaker, in concert with reforming the overall insurance landscape here in the province of Alberta, because that's on fire, in case you didn't notice, right? People are literally having a hard time paying their property insurance, their house insurance, their perhaps life insurance, and especially their car insurance.

Well, I could sort of – I always try to visualize, right? Let's say we're trying to do some insurance amendment act, two thousand whatever, for industrial insurance. I'd say: "Okay. Yeah. Let's do that, but let's make sure that we solve this personal insurance problem because it's on fire, right?" We would all say: "Yeah. Let's do that, and we'll have two insurance bills at the same time." And people would say: "Wow. You guys are really acting on this insurance thing, not just for the big energy companies, God bless them, but for my family, too, which I care about even more."

With that, Mr. Speaker, those are my constructive criticisms about this one, and I hope that my questions will be answered. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

9:00

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm enjoying the debate tonight. Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022, enables new insurance options for businesses, which will support jobs and economic growth in Alberta. Alberta businesses looking to bring their foreign insurance captives home will be able to do so without interruption to their operations. This bill also facilitates access to reinsurance, which is basically insurance for insurance companies, hopefully helping to address some scarce insurance options in portions of our market.

Facilitating access to reinsurance in Alberta's market will have a positive impact on expanding insurance capacity, which I know is a priority for everyone here, which, in turn, should help traditional insurers in serving Albertans and Alberta businesses. In fact, if Bill

16 is passed, Alberta will be the first Canadian jurisdiction to allow provincial insurers to have a reinsurance-specific business model.

Currently the reinsurance industry in Canada is limited, comprised mostly of foreign-based enterprises located in Europe, the United States, and Bermuda. This makes it more difficult, as you can imagine, for Canadian or Alberta-based insurers to access reinsurance. It's critical that we do everything we can to enable the insurance industry to build additional capacity in Alberta and to help diversify our provincial insurance sector. Bill 16 does this, again, by enabling Alberta businesses to bring foreign insurance captives home without affecting their operations and by facilitating access to reinsurance. Bill 16 also proposes a number of administrative amendments to the Insurance Act to enhance clarity and the efficiency of our regulatory framework.

It's a step forward. I don't see any major issues. I think it's a great bill, and I would encourage the members opposite and my colleagues to support it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer some of my comments on Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. I, first of all, want to start off by thanking my colleagues from Edmonton-Ellerslie, Edmonton-North West, and Calgary-South East for their comments on the legislation this evening, and I would like to do my best to add my own comments, building on the things that my predecessors mentioned in their remarks.

I want to particularly thank the Member for Calgary-South East for a very concise summary of the bill. He said that he would do nothing less, and he's certainly done nothing more, but I do appreciate the concise summary from the member, getting us back to what the bill entails. As that member said, this bill makes several changes to the insurance industry here in Alberta. It makes some changes to captive insurance companies and allows for captive insurance companies to redomesticate here in Alberta, bringing captive insurance companies home without any disruption in coverage.

As some of my colleagues have mentioned, a lot of these captive insurance companies are currently domiciled in Bermuda. Allow me to take a brief tangent, if you will, Mr. Speaker, on the topic of Bermuda. I want to extend my congratulations to the Canada under 17 women's soccer team, who defeated Bermuda this afternoon with a score of 5-nil. So congratulations to them. Of course, the U-17 Canadian women's soccer team has an important connection to Edmonton-Gold Bar. The grandfather of one of the players on the team is a resident of Gold Bar and a friend of mine. We are all very proud of the accomplishments of the under 17 women's Canadian soccer team in their defeat of Bermuda. So, you know, Bermuda, we came for your soccer team today; we're coming for your insurance companies tomorrow. You've been given notice. Bermuda, of course, is a jurisdiction that is no stranger to piracy. I guess we are raiding their insurance companies now but not at the end of a gun or with the use of a ship but with the stroke of a legislative pen. Anyway, this is probably good news for the insurance industry in Alberta.

The other pieces of this legislation allow reinsurance companies to be licensed here in Alberta for the first time. I think that this is an important step to addressing some of the really pressing issues around liabilities in the oil and gas sector in particular. It's my understanding that the government is making these changes in an attempt to allow insurance companies that are insuring oil and gas

operations to apply for reinsurance to limit the risk to taxpayers for being on the hook when it comes to the massive oil and gas liabilities that can exist in the province of Alberta. This is an incredibly important piece of public policy that needs to be addressed. I am not convinced that just allowing reinsurance companies to set up shop here in Alberta will be the solution to the problem, but I don't think that there is any a risk to the taxpayers in allowing this to happen.

Then, finally, the bill makes it easier for Alberta companies to access unlicensed insurance. It sounds like a risky proposition to me, Mr. Speaker. I certainly wouldn't want to encounter an unlicensed driver. I wouldn't want to go to an unlicensed doctor. In fact, I'm afraid when I come across an unlicensed dog. So the concept of unlicensed insurers sounds a little bit risky to me, but I understand that there's a small market for that, and I think that these changes will probably be good, on balance, for the province of Alberta.

But, Mr. Speaker, one of my main concerns about this legislation is not the legislation itself but what's left out. As my friends from Edmonton-Ellerslie and Edmonton-North West have indicated, the people in our constituencies are not gripped every day with the issue of reinsurance or whether or not they can bring their captive insurance company home from Bermuda to set up in their garages in Edmonton-Gold Bar. I don't think that there's a single person who has written to me on this very issue. Nobody has said: you know, I sure would like to start a captive insurance company out of my garage and diversify the economy that way. This is something that only very sophisticated, high-finance types really operate in or understand and will benefit from. I don't think the average person in my riding will see any tangible benefit to their daily lives because of the measures that are contained in this bill.

But what they are gripped with is the rising cost of insurance across the board for all of the insurance products that they do buy. Now, my friends from Edmonton-North West and Edmonton-Ellerslie tonight have raised the issue of the skyrocketing cost of auto insurance, and I would echo those concerns. It's incredibly concerning to me, Mr. Speaker, that according to the government's own report auto insurance companies raked in \$400 million more in premiums in 2020 than they did in 2019. Four hundred million dollars more in premiums. That's as if every man, woman, and child in the province of Alberta wrote a \$100 cheque to a car insurance company for nothing, for getting nothing more than the services that they got in 2019.

Now, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, there aren't very many families in Edmonton-Gold Bar who can afford to have every member of their household write a \$100 cheque to an insurance company. They could certainly put that money to much better use. If you've seen the price of groceries in the grocery store these days, you know that \$100 will buy about four gallons of milk, two boxes of cereal.

9:10

My point, Mr. Speaker, is that the price of groceries is exorbitantly high; \$400 wouldn't even cover my electricity bill last month or my gas bill. The people of Alberta are facing incredible cost pressures in their daily lives, and they don't need to be sending a \$100 cheque over and above what they sent to their car insurance companies last year. That's patently unfair. I certainly wish that this legislation acted on the concerns of everyday people with the urgency that they've acted on the concerns of the big insurance companies.

But it's not just automobile insurance that has gotten incredibly expensive. I continue to receive letters into my office every day about the rising cost of house insurance, and these letters have prompted me to look at the rising costs of my own house insurance.

I'm paying \$300 more a year to insure the same house that I was in 2019. And let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the way I look after my house, it's certainly done nothing but gone down in value. Shingles need to be replaced; the windows are old. My kids are incredibly irresponsible and reckless, left massive holes in the carpets and in the linoleum, and they've let the faucets in the bathroom leak to the point where I don't think that anything can be fixed anymore. I'm sure that the city of Edmonton property evaluators say, "Well, let's take 20 per cent off what we evaluated this shack at last year," yet I'm paying \$250, \$300 more than I was in 2019 for this same house. That's not fair, and there's nothing in this legislation to address the rising cost of house insurance.

I know from the letters that I'm getting into my constituency office that I'm not alone. My friend from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall could fill up entire volumes of *Hansard* with stories about the rising cost of house insurance in the northeast part of Calgary. In fact, he's done a pretty good job of building a very successful political career on the issue of the rising cost of house insurance in northeast Calgary, because it's that serious an issue. The government is completely silent on it.

The one final area of insurance that is also going up is life insurance. Mr. Speaker, you know, people who take out life insurance policies want to know that after they leave this world, there will be a little bit of money left behind for their loved ones to look after their funeral expenses, maybe all of the related losses to losing a loved one, that those expenses are covered.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The cost of life insurance is going up significantly, too, in the province of Alberta. So why is it that the Minister of Finance has made the great effort, worked in great detail, to solve what I would say are legitimate concerns about the insurance industry in Alberta but ones that don't benefit everyday, average Albertans? Why couldn't he put that same effort into addressing the insurance concerns that everyday, average Albertans have? Take some meaningful steps to get the cost of car insurance under control, get the cost of house insurance under control, get the cost of life insurance under control so that the people in my riding and the people in the ridings of Calgary-Bhullar-McCall and Edmonton-Ellerslie and Edmonton-North West can rest assured that they can afford to pay the bills and make sure that their loved ones are looked after when they die, that their cars and any damage that they would incur while driving are covered and any losses to their homes are covered.

It's extremely frustrating, Mr. Speaker, that the priorities of this government are always on big business and in this case big insurance companies. Everyday Albertans are forgotten and in this case are left to pay the price for this government's concern with the insurance industry bottom lines.

In closing, I will say that I will vote for this bill. I don't think that there's anything here that is going to damage the people of Alberta greatly, but again I don't think there's anything in this bill that will benefit the people of Alberta significantly either.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is second reading of Bill 16. Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide some comments at this stage of debate, where we have a motion to refer this Bill 16 for some further consideration. I do so largely because of what is not in this bill, as my hon. colleagues have indicated. What is on people's minds is their house policy, their business

policies, and most certainly people's auto insurance policies. There is no question that the amount of correspondence that we have received on this matter since the removal of the cap on increases has been dwarfed, only really leaving aside the COVID-related correspondence, by curriculum and certainly in the office of Lethbridge-West the tremendously unpopular move to strip-mine the Rocky Mountains for metallurgical coal.

But auto insurance followed closely by utility bill costs are certainly on people's minds, and one of the things that could be in this bill, seized as it is with the importance of various commercial insurance arrangements, is better disclosure to people. There is no question that after 107 years the superintendent of insurance would release a report on the claims ratio of how much insurance companies brought in in premiums versus how much they paid out in claims. Now, the legislation indicates that the minister may make this report public. Here is a fantastic opportunity via Bill 16. Certainly, the public was not amused when they found out from the Official Opposition that this 107-year tradition of telling people what the claims ratio is – that is to say, how much money insurance companies are making from us, direct debited every month. People were not amused when they realized from the work the Official Opposition did that this information had been withheld from them for the first time in 107 years by this government.

Certainly, when it was revealed that auto insurance companies brought in \$385 million more this year than over previous years in premiums at a time when, of course, people were phoning them and having policy changes and all sorts of things because their driving habits changed so much, the people were very alarmed, and that's just another reason why people do not trust this UCP government. It's one more reason why a good, solid conversation with the voters of this province might be both edifying for the members of the government side but also give some insight into the types of action that people want to see because it is not just auto insurance, as my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Gold Bar indicated.

9:20

People are also quite concerned about their home insurance policies, the actual extent of the coverage. As we learned in northeast Calgary, insurance doesn't cover a whole bunch of things that now happen with alarming regularity, particularly in Calgary and in central Alberta, that is to say very devastating storms, particularly hailstorms.

But, you know, back to my original point, there is no question that this legislation could have provided that disclosure to Albertans and just simply edited the "may" into a "shall," and then people would know. They would know how much insurance companies were bringing in in premiums versus how much they were paying out in claims and whether that ratio reflected the public interest, because ultimately that's what we're here to do, not to make sure that insurance companies are making wild profits, which they, in fact, did in Alberta. It might allow us just a bit better peek behind the curtain so that we can actually work on solutions to a quite difficult problem, the question of Alberta's insurance market, both on the commercial side, with which this bill concerns itself, but also for individuals and certainly businesses, smaller businesses.

There's no question that a committee, which was proposed by this side of the House, was, in fact, a good idea to find solutions. Perhaps if the specific amount of a rate cap was not a tenable solution, we would find that out via committee, but the government voted that down because ultimately they are not interested in saving people money at all. They are interested in at least moving forward with that \$385 million more that they took from Albertans, that the insurance companies took from Albertans during a pandemic year,

that they were enabled to do so by policy, by a specific policy choice of this government, one of the first things they did.

We also would learn about the hardship that people have gone through over the last couple of years, with workforce attachment being far more uncertain through pandemic time, through even things like whether people are going to go to university or what kinds of programs they are going to take, all of these kinds of things, living arrangements. All of that was upended during the pandemic. Then, lo and behold, people were getting 30 per cent car insurance increases in the mail as well.

Now, I went and had a look at SGI's annual report on this matter of transparency and just speaking to people about the public and making a case for, you know: where's our money going, what are we paying for, and what are we getting for it? They are pretty easy, simple, straightforward questions to answer for the electorate. Voters like it when a government levels with them, which is why they were outraged when that report that had been published for 107 years was withheld from people.

I went and looked at Saskatchewan's auto fund 2020 annual report. Now, of course, the Premier has dismissed Premier Scott Moe's commitment to the Saskatchewan auto fund and Brad Wall's before him as a Soviet policy. Okay; Brad Wall is a Soviet, I guess. But last year, under the Moe government, the Saskatchewan auto fund took in roughly – I mean, it's not quite apples to apples in terms of the claims ratio and how they present their financial statements, but it was roughly the same amount. It was roughly 1 to 1 of premiums to claims, not this wild ratio where you see far fewer claims being paid out than you see premiums in the system that we have here.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker – not only that – but from what I can tell here, the auto fund gave, in turn, \$85 million in premium relief to drivers in Saskatchewan, a far smaller province than here and probably a lot fewer sort of large vehicles that people use for small business and that kind of thing just because it's a smaller economy, and interestingly the Saskatchewan auto fund also funds STARS air ambulance and a few other pieces off their investments because, of course, there are a number of investments made by the auto fund to ensure that the auto fund is always there, that insurance product is always there for people.

So, you know, the fact of the matter is that the insurance market is not as difficult for other drivers as it is here in Alberta, and there have to be some solutions for people, but all we see before this House right now is a bunch of solutions for the commercial sector.

Now, this is not to say that the bill before us right now does not have merit. In fact, there are a number of initiatives in this bill that we do not take issue with whatsoever. The changes to captive insurance companies such that there is a redomestication provision: that is an appropriate response to some of the challenges of the hard insurance market here in Alberta, and in fact folks were pleasantly surprised with the uptake in the captive insurance market. Firms will potentially have to use higher regulatory standards and potentially have to pay a little bit more in tax than they would in Bermuda, but they save on other costs and risks such as foreign exchange. This may have an additional benefit of creating both some additional tax revenue for the province if large firms like, for example, Suncor repatriate their captive insurance and also contribute to a financial services market and a financial services sector and the diversification thereof in this province. That's a good idea, and we should do it.

There are also provisions in here to license stand-alone reinsurance companies in Alberta. The government is hoping that the enormous amount of capital circulating in Alberta's oil and gas sector might be pooled to create a local insurance company. It is unclear whether this will work as there are potential liabilities and

they are enormous and companies need billions in coverage, but this legislation does create a policy space for a potential solution. Fantastic. This is a good-faith attempt to find a solution that does not represent much in the way of downside risks to the province.

Were we to take this same approach for ordinary people, people would be so much better off. There are a variety of creative solutions in here for the hard market that is the commercial insurance market, but absolutely no consideration is given to ordinary people who have also seen their insurance costs skyrocket. Creative solutions for some, and a great big hundreds-of-millions-of-dollars bill and 30 per cent increases for others. The fact of the matter is that the vast majority of us are the others.

This bill also makes it easier for Alberta companies to access unlicensed insurance, and some hon. colleagues have expressed some concern about that, but the only reason a company goes down this path is because there are few alternatives, and in fact the insurance product is licensed somewhere. It is just simply not licensed here due to its niche characteristics as an insurance product, so companies can go find a policy on their own, or they go through a special broker. This legislation makes changes to the tax rate paid on premiums when companies do not go through a special broker.

The tax rate change is significant here, Mr. Speaker, going from 50 per cent to 10 per cent. That's not significant compared to other provinces, and what it might mean is that there are no instances where companies do not report in to the superintendent of insurance that they are accessing an unlicensed product that is licensed elsewhere. In that sense this is a common-sense change, again, a creative solution for very, very specific, small, niche groups of people and small corporate interests – well, they might be large corporate interests, but they are a relatively small slice of the insurance market – but nothing for the vast majority of ratepayers.

That is why this bill should be referred, because for once, you know, I think it's time for the government to hear from ordinary people on this and on this issue, and for that reason I believe that that amendment should be supported by the House, and now I would like to move to adjourn debate, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

9:30

Bill 15
Education (Reforming Teacher
Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate April 26: Ms Pancholi]

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is next.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to address this bill. I always enjoy my time here in the House and am disappointed when I'm told I've already spoken to a bill and can't do it again, but here I am speaking for the first time on Bill 15 at the second stage. I ought to, you know, address a few sort of contextual issues, as is appropriate at stage 2 of the bill, about what this bill is about.

I think the fundamental thing that I want to say in a direct way is that the government has failed to articulate a problem for which they are creating a solution. They certainly have suggested that they want to divide the ATA, but they haven't actually demonstrated that there have been significant or even examples of problems with the current situation.

I know I have on occasion heard members opposite make statements about problems, but fundamentally I don't think they have a foundation in the actual experience of the current circumstance.

That's the politest way I can say it. And I believe that if the government is saying that we need to have a change in the system, they actually have a responsibility, then, to articulate what it is that is problematic with the system the way it is.

For very many years in this province the ATA has had responsibility not only for their contractual obligations to their members in terms of employment and negotiation with school boards and so on but has also had responsibility with regard to discipline.

However, if we look back on the history of the legislation and the powers available to the ATA, the ability to do things with regard to that discipline has been limited not by the ATA but has been limited by the government. As such, in cases where horrendous things have happened – for example, I know that at least once in the House someone had suggested that there was a situation of a teacher who committed a sexual offence against a child or multiple children and was not removed from the profession, and this was blamed on the ATA. Yet if we look back on the legislation, they actually had no authority to do that. They did exactly what they could, and they certainly did bring the case to their disciplinary body, and they went to the full extent of the ability of the ATA at the time, the disciplinary body, to deal with that particular case.

So it's not that I don't see that there may indeed be a problem. I fundamentally believe that any teacher that has had sexual contact with a child should be immediately and permanently removed from the teaching profession, no question about that. I spent much of my career trying to make sure that kind of thing in fact happened.

The simple solution would have been, of course, to provide the power to the ATA to do exactly that, to make the decision that a person would lose their licence and be able to remove that person's ability to teach. And, hopefully, we could work it out with jurisdictions across the country such that it wouldn't only be jurisdictions here in Alberta but, of course, across the country. If there was a problem with that, if that has not been happening, then we should have just made sure that the ATA had the ability to do that.

I just don't see that the government has articulated that the ATA having the dual responsibility led to any particular problems. It certainly, you know, has argued that it is somewhat unique in its set-up. That is, that it's not similar exactly to the teaching professions across the country, and it's not exactly the same as the circumstances in other professions in the province of Alberta. But to suggest that we change something merely because it is unique is an inadequate argument. There has to be some argument that in its uniqueness it is failing to perform some function or that it is doing something that it should not be doing, neither of which has been presented as arguments by this government. As such, I just don't think that there has been the basis for this bill to be brought into the House.

Now, it's also ironic that in arguing that this current situation is unique and needs to change, the government's solution is actually to create a new situation which is itself also unique as compared to other situations in the province. In this particular case what we are seeing is that the decisions that could have been handed to the ATA and allowed for in the current situation are now being pulled into the minister's office, and the minister is being put in the position of creating a board of people who are appointed by that minister and who make all the decisions with regard to the code of conduct and the penalties applied to teachers who are found to be in violation of that code of conduct.

This is giving a huge amount of responsibility to a minister who is extremely unlikely to have any particular knowledge about the teaching profession, you know, may incidentally have had some involvement. Occasionally, I suppose, in the history of this

province there may be a minister who actually was educated in education and did have a knowledge of these kinds of things, but it's not normal for us to require a minister to have training in the particular area in which they are a minister, for some good reasons sometimes, because we don't want their personal prejudices from their own personal experiences to interfere with the decisions that are made. In this particular case what we have is the minister taking over massive amounts of responsibility instead of leaving it with the profession to be a self-governing profession.

I think there are numerous examples of professions which are self-governing that have done so quite reasonably well for many decades in this province. The Law Society comes to mind, for example, a self-governing profession that has a board. The benchers, as they're often referred to, are not appointed by a minister but, rather, are voted in by members of the Law Society, and they make all of the explicit decisions about what will happen. In fact, one of the government ministers is in front of that particular board right now for some of their behaviour while being a member of the Law Society. We know that the idea of a profession self-governing and using members of the profession to sit on the board, as elected by members of that profession to represent the values of that profession, is widely used in professions throughout the province.

As such, you know, there's nothing unusual about that kind of thing occurring. So the minister stepping in in order to draw power into herself or whoever happens to be sitting in that chair to appoint the members of the committee, to set the terms of the codes of conduct, to set the punishments is really taking the power away from the people who have the greatest expertise with both their training and their lived experience and moving it into the hands of people who ultimately don't have that expertise, as ministers don't tend to in any ministry. This is not any particular criticism of this minister or ministry in general. It's just a fact that ministers don't tend to actually be trained in the profession for which they are responsible in their ministry.

9:40

You know, I guess I'm very concerned that this choice was made. The minister could have addressed whatever they imagine to be the problem, although they haven't articulated a problem, as I've said. They could have done that by just simply establishing a process within the ATA similar to the Law Society, in which a separate entity within the ATA is established and voted on by members of the ATA in order to deal with this as sort of an internal college, not dissimilar to the types of colleges that are done in other professions. Nursing, for example, has a separation, but it does not go to the minister to make decisions about bad nursing practice. It goes to the appropriate place in the nursing college. So there were various solutions here.

I'm very concerned that the minister has the right to put people on this board, because, you know, frankly, that puts us in the position of: do we trust the minister to make decisions about appropriate things? I've got to tell you that, after my experience with the education curriculum that we've had over this last year, I don't believe that we have the trust in this minister.

I can't tell you the number of people in the Indigenous community that were outraged that Chris Champion was brought in to write the curriculum given the things that Chris Champion had said. So if the minister is picking people like that to write curriculum, people who clearly know nothing at all about important factors in curriculum development, for example, such as age appropriateness, scaffolding of information, all of those really important pieces in actually establishing a curriculum, and instead brought somebody in who happened to have a philosophical

opinion that apparently the minister agreed with, that turned out to be quite outrageous to the Indigenous community.

Now we're asking that minister to, again, appoint people to a board who are not members of the profession but who the minister wants to have on that board. Given the history I think it's very problematic.

I know that working with the Métis community, for example, looking at the curriculum, the members of the Rupertsland Institute spent a significant amount of time looking at how they could put together information on Métis history, cultures, and traditions that would have been spread throughout the curriculum from kindergarten up to grade 12 at an age-appropriate level and would help to enhance people's knowledge of the Métis, an often-neglected community in our society. After having conducted extensive work on that, when they actually read the curriculum, they were devastated to find that the vast majority of the information that they had presented and the work that they had done was not represented in the curriculum.

That's the problem here. That's the problem when you allow governments, that change in terms of their ideology, that change in terms of their personal belief systems, to actually set down important pieces like curriculum or, in this case, discipline. Those things should be left to people who are the most versed in the area. You know, accountants should take responsibility for the misbehaviour of accountants, doctors should take responsibility for the misbehaviour of doctors, and in this case teachers should take responsibility for the misbehaviour of teachers. If they are not for some reason, then you have to look at the structures that prevent them from doing so. Do they have the powers? Do they have the resources? Do they have the understanding of the needs in this particular case?

I guess I'm just really concerned, so I have to ask myself: if the government has failed to articulate a reason why we need to move ahead and they're acting in this extraordinary way, creating an entity that's not, you know, consistent with the usual practices in this area, then there must be some other reason why they put this bill together. I have to look at the history of the relationship between this government and the teachers in this province. We can just look at everything. I've already mentioned the curriculum and how there has been very little support from the professionals, both from the academics, universities, and teachers in the classroom, for the process of the curriculum and for the curriculum itself.

I also look at the other actions by this government, who have continuously done things like taking teachers' pensions away without any consultation with the teachers at all. It seems that there's one attack after another on the teaching profession. We certainly hear the Premier attack the teachers on a regular basis on some ideological stance, often which is not based in reality, and it's very discouraging to see this.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate on Bill 15? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. It is meant to reform the discipline process for all teachers, teacher leaders, and administration. It's taken me some time to make up my mind on my support of this bill. I think I've looked very deeply into the amount of work the minister and her ministry have done to develop this, and I've spoken to a number of teachers in Lethbridge that have called me on this. I think their viewpoints would be generally undecided or opposed to it, and I have taken their consideration and their talking points to heart.

As I looked further into this bill, I thought of some of the experiences that I've gone through. My background is in construction, engineering. My wife is an emergency room nurse. Her profession has a union; mine did not. One of the considerations that I gave great time to was that as a contractor our work was always independently inspected by a municipality or another governing body to see the work that we did. There are jurisdictions in Canada that don't necessarily have that same process, or if they do, there are many stories. In fact, there are TV shows about it, about general contractors and the job they do. So as a professional in the construction industry I was always very glad to have my work inspected by an independent body so that one of my jobs would never be on one of those television shows showing the train wreck of what happens when things go wrong. From that perspective, having an independent body review work and provide discipline in governance was actually a comfort, not a concern.

One of the other factors that I consider is being a father to five children, all of whom have gone through the public school system in Lethbridge. My youngest is now in grade 11. So we've had a tremendous amount of experience with multiple schools, from French immersion, different elementary, different middle, different high schools. I worked in the schools, and I have nothing but praise for nearly every single teacher that my children came into contact with, whether they're male, whether they're female, whether they're old, whether they're young, whether they were experienced or just starting out in that profession. I found that they provided and they had a singular objective to see that my children succeeded in their classes. I thank them for that. I believe my wife and I developed a very strong relationship with those teachers and are very proud to support those teachers and those public schools that they attended.

Beyond that, my mother was a teacher for almost 40 years, and currently my sister and her husband are both teachers in B.C., so I have some personal connection with the industry. I'll share a little bit more of a story, a couple of personal stories, actually, that create a juxtaposition in my argument in defence of this bill. Way back, a long time ago, my mother was a teacher. I can remember back to when in B.C. teachers were not unionized and they went through that process of becoming unionized. My mother and several others were hopeful – they didn't necessarily want to become part of the union – but I saw as a young boy the power and the potential negative of a very strong governing body, which basically forced and bankrupted several teachers or ruined their careers and forced them to become part of that union. So I had a very early exposure to a distrust of a union that did not work necessarily in the best interests of all its members though they would argue that they did work for the best interests of the majority of their members.

9:50

The opposite position was the story with my wife as an ER nurse. She was on duty several years ago when a significant negative outcome event took place, as can happen from time to time in emergencies. This particular scenario ended up with an investigation. There were legal questions, and it was actually a very scary time for my wife and for us as a family. I will say that the united nurses association, that union, stood by, provided counsel, advocated one hundred per cent for my wife. She felt very taken care of and very protected by the union body set in place to advocate for her, as I believe a union should do.

How a union can be the advocate and defend someone in a position like my wife or a teacher if they were in a circumstance as well as provide the opposite side of the argument and be the discipline or investigative body: it does create a conflict, in my

mind. I don't see how they can do that well, and I think that's at the bottom of it.

That's what concerns me about the current system as well as it being 85 years old and seeing some of our closest neighbours in terms of provinces, Saskatchewan, B.C., moving in a different direction. I believe that this should provide confidence to teachers, actually, that their union can work without a duplicitous mandate, not only to defend them but also to discipline them. I think that that unifying fact should be a comfort to many teachers as well as remove any question marks that there may have been in terms of conduct. I believe that that can be seen as a benefit and a positive and not a negative.

So having weighed these facts and these considerations from my own life, both from contracting and engineering and those independent bodies, from the experiences I grew up with with my mother being a teacher, and now as an adult my sister and her husband being teachers, and my wife as a nurse who is part of another very large union here in Alberta, I believe that this reform is due. I believe that this reform is reasonable and well considered, well thought through.

Having looked at the bill, it is not a small piece of work. I believe that it represents a considerable amount of thinking, of dedication, and protection not only for teachers but more specifically for students and parents, and having given that type of consideration to it from my own life experience and to represent the people that elected me from Lethbridge-East to be here and represent them, I would urge every member in this House to support Bill 15 and see it passed for the betterment of our education system, for our students predominantly, for teachers, and parents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? We'll go to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the Member for Camrose.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I want to take this opportunity to make a few comments of my own on Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. Let me first start off by thanking my friend from Edmonton-Rutherford for his thoughtful comments. Let me also say that I savour every word that comes from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford's mouth now that he has expressed his intent to retire at the end of this term. Knowing that his time here with us in the Legislature is growing shorter by the day, I will appreciate every intervention that he makes in debate. I think that's an important reminder, that none of us knows how long we are here, and we should treat each other with the same appreciation and respect that we treat our friends who have already announced their retirement.

I also want to say that I was pleasantly surprised to hear the Member for Lethbridge-East say something positive about unions. We haven't heard a whole lot of positive talk about the role of unions in the working life of Albertans. The Member for Lethbridge-East should be commended for recognizing the benefits that unions play for hundreds of thousands of Albertans in this province, and I appreciate him bringing that to light. Now, he may get himself in some hot water with the Premier for making these positive comments about unions, but that doesn't make the comments that he said any less true. I appreciate him bringing that comment to the floor of the Legislature.

Before I address the particular clauses of this piece of legislation, let me just first start off by making a comment on the issue of student safety, because we've heard the minister and many of her colleagues in the government caucus say that these amendments are designed to address the issue of student safety in the classroom.

Now, I will say that student safety has been top of mind to the citizens of Edmonton-Gold Bar for the last month following the tragic murder of Karanveer Sahota, a 16-year-old student at McNally high school who was beaten and stabbed to death by, allegedly, seven other youths who attacked him at a bus stop outside of that school on April 8.

I had the honour of attending his funeral on Sunday. It was attended by hundreds of friends and family members, community members who were there to mourn his passing. I know that the entire McNally school community is grieving a significant loss and grappling with what the future of student safety looks like in their school. I think we can all agree that no student should lose their life at school. To my knowledge, Mr. Speaker, this is the first time that a student has been killed in an attack like this in an Edmonton school, and my thoughts and support are with the McNally community as they grapple with the issue of how to keep their students safe from an incident like this happening again. I certainly hope that all members of the Legislature do everything that they can to provide the resources to our schools to make sure that an incident like this happens never again in the province of Alberta.

It's extremely unfortunate, though, Mr. Speaker, that that task is made much more difficult by the budgetary choices that this minister has made. When Edmonton public school board has a shortfall in funding of 1,700 students, that's more than an entire high school; that's two McNally high schools who have no funding whatsoever. So here we are in a position where McNally high school has to make some incredibly difficult decisions about what they need to do to promote and enhance student safety in their school building and on their school grounds with no resources at hand. The minister has cut their budget. The minister has cut the Edmonton public school board budget by the equivalent of 1,700 students.

I'll take the minister at her word that she is genuinely concerned about student safety, and I will issue her a challenge. If she is genuinely concerned about student safety, not only will she focus her efforts on passing this piece of legislation, but she will go back to Treasury Board and find the money for Edmonton public schools to provide the safe and caring educational environment that every student deserves and provide them the resources to do that.

10:00

The next comment that I want to make, Mr. Speaker, is on the issue of what a self-governing professional association looks like in the province of Alberta. My friend from Edmonton-Rutherford went on at length about this, but I want to underline the point because I think it bears repeating. I appreciate the minister's intent to create a self-governing professional body for teachers that is separate from the union, but that's not what she's done here. She's created a system where the government holds all the tools, holds all of the levers of power over professional conduct and discipline.

Now, it's my understanding that this system will allow the minister to create a code of professional conduct. Well, Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge, there is no self-governing professional association in the province of Alberta where the minister imposes a code of professional conduct. That certainly wasn't the case in APEGA, the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta, which I was a member of. I had the privilege of serving on APEGA's investigative committee, where we were tasked with investigating complaints against our members for violations of the code of conduct. That code of conduct was developed by the members of the association itself. It wasn't imposed upon them by the minister. It was up to the engineers and geoscientists to decide what a sufficient code of conduct was for its

members and to hold its members accountable to that code of conduct once it was established.

If the minister is sincere in her intent to create a similar professional association for teachers, then she wouldn't be in a position of imposing a code of conduct onto teachers. She would allow the teachers to develop that themselves and then allow teachers themselves to hold the members accountable to that code of conduct. I think it's the issue of holding teachers to account that is the crux of the matter here, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] I see my friend from Edmonton-North West has gotten out of his chair. I had first assumed that he was going to the bathroom, but he's looking at me with a question in his eyes, so I will take that.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Well, thank you. I appreciate it. I guess I'm curious, because we were having this discussion this morning, with – you have the UNA and then you have the AARN, right? And then LPNs have their version of their professional association. These magazines come to my house because I've got both in my house. With APEGA, like, do you know much – I want to ask, through the Speaker, how this kind of evolved. It's a professional association. You said that you served as a geologist in APEGA. How did this sort of evolve over time? I'm curious because, of course, if we want to treat professions the same, then we should probably look at these similar parallel structures and how they evolved and how they support the profession.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-North West for his question. I wish I could provide a more complete answer. I don't know how the practice of engineering and geoscience has evolved over time, but I do know that professional engineers and geoscientists have been a self-governing profession in the province of Alberta for many decades. This is legislation that goes back many, many decades. Certainly, as a professional association they've learned from their experiences in the past and revised their codes of conduct and investigation processes, discipline processes as a result of that. I think that the people of Alberta can rest assured that the practice of engineering and geoscience is in good hands because a self-regulating professional organization like APEGA is the responsible body for setting out the expectations for the work of these people and then holding them to account.

Now, I will say that, you know, it's not entirely up to the professional association to conduct their business as they see fit. The legislation is prescriptive somewhat in what it can do when it comes to investigating members and disciplining members and what it can't do.

I know that APEGA has been engaged in a review of their governing legislation for a number of years, and I certainly hope that the government takes a serious look at what can be done to improve the professional practice of engineering and geoscience in the province of Alberta. But the point remains that the minister is largely hands off when it comes to the practice of engineering and geoscience in the province of Alberta. I think that it would be only right, then, that the Minister of Education be similarly hands off when it comes to creating a self-governing professional association for teachers here in the province of Alberta.

It's incredibly concerning to me, as my friend from Edmonton-Rutherford pointed out, that members of the professional conduct and competency panel would be appointed by the minister. Now, I understand that it's the minister's intent to appoint teachers and members of the general public, and that's, I think, not a bad idea as far as it goes. But as my friend from Edmonton-Rutherford pointed out, a truly self-governing professional association would have the

majority of its members selected by members of the association itself and not by the minister.

Now, it is not uncommon for members of the general public to be appointed to the boards of professional associations by the minister. That's certainly the case with APEGA. We did have public members appointed to the board by the minister for that organization. Let me just say that, you know, the effort and commitment that public members made varied. We certainly had some very dedicated public members. We also had some public members who were appointed, I think, as a gift from their friend, the minister at the time, and didn't take their responsibilities very seriously.

It's quite concerning to me as a member of a professional association like that when we have no recourse when we've got members on our board who are not taking their responsibilities seriously and not living up to the expectations that are placed upon them as public members who are appointed by the minister. Professional members don't have any power to remove them or replace them. But it's not a big issue in an organization like APEGA because the majority of members are selected by the membership itself and they're subject to regular elections, yearly elections. I think that if the minister was intent on creating a truly self-regulating professional association, she would incorporate that kind of model and not this one that we're dealing with today.

You know, one final issue, Mr. Speaker, that I'd like to address before time runs out is this issue of sufficient sanction. If the model that the minister was presenting here today was sufficient to dissuade teachers from acting inappropriately with their students, then I will vote for it immediately. I wouldn't even debate it; I would just say, "Let's pass this as quickly as possible" and get it in place. But the fact is that there is no investigative and disciplinary system sufficient to prevent teachers from acting inappropriately with their students. The minister has trotted out a few examples and hasn't said explicitly but has implied heavily that if we had only had this model in place, then those teachers wouldn't have been able to do that.

10:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose if she still chooses to do so.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise in support of reforming the teaching profession discipline process. I'm happy to stand behind this bill which makes the education system safer for students, their families, and teachers. Reforming teacher discipline is important to me, and I hope it's just as important to everyone here today.

The disciplinary system that is currently in place is 85 years old. I would like to think a lot has changed within this time. It's disturbing to know that the ATA has spent millions on media campaigns against to create fear and division among Albertans. They continue to fight, with false claims, to keep this archaic structure in place and, quite frankly, their perceived total control over the education system.

They are doing all of this with the support of the NDP. The members opposite are fighting, in collaboration with the ATA, to keep transparency away from the process and to keep the conflict of interest. The ATA collects union dues and is mandated to advocate for all their members. Why are they fighting to keep the disciplinary power of the members that they rely on for their funds? Why are the NDP fighting to keep it? I find these actions irresponsible. They claim to care about students and teachers, but this is just another one of their facades so that they can help their

union friends keep their power, power that belongs to the people of Alberta.

I'm happy to see Bill 15 includes the creation of an Alberta teaching profession commission along with the appointing of a commissioner upon its creation, ensuring an independent and transparent disciplinary process. This will lead to more appropriate and timely actions on cases that are brought forward.

Most teachers are dedicated professionals who love their jobs and care about the future growth of all students and children, which is why we need to come together in supporting this bill. This bill will bring all teachers and teacher leaders under the same process no matter who they work for. The central focus of this new disciplinary process will be the best interests of students, their families, and teachers across the whole education system.

Everyone needs to be under the same reformed disciplinary process, that is separate from the ATA. With the ATA handling all disciplinary processes, the number of cases that involve conflicts of interest will continue to rise. By separating them, we are eliminating any perceptions of conflicts of interest, making the process fair and one that we can trust.

Bill 15 makes the disciplinary process fall in line with other jurisdictions and regulated professions across the province such as nurses. Some of the best parts of this legislation are the increased accountability it will bring to the education system along with an increased transparency. Many constituencies across Alberta are seeing the construction of additional schools and school expansions while welcoming new families from across the nation and the globe.

I had the pleasure of recently hosting the Premier in the Camrose constituency. We had a tour of the recently completed Chester Ronning school, meeting all the wonderful students and staff. We also attended the sod-turning of a new high school, the Elk Island Catholic school.

I want to pause there for a moment and just emphasize the fact that my mother was a teacher, and I'm very proud of the teaching career that she had. I have a sister in Saskatchewan who is also a teacher. They work very hard, and they care very deeply about the students, as the majority of teachers do.

This legislation will give all families in Alberta, as they choose to enrol their kids in our education system – they can do so confidently, bringing more opportunities to public, Catholic, and private schools. Everyone has the right to choose what school they get their education from. They also deserve the same environment that is provided to any other school.

I encourage all my colleagues to not just support this bill but also support better environments for current and future generations. I want all students to grow up and learn in the safest environments possible. By supporting this bill, we can come together to do just that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Mrs. Frey: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

Committee Membership Appointment

21. Ms Issik moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the membership of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills be replaced as follows: that Mr. Singh replace Mrs. Frey.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18. Are there any members wishing to provide comment?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the member to close debate.

[Government Motion 21 carried]

Adjournment of Spring Sitting

23. Ms Issik moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the 2022 spring sitting of the Assembly shall stand adjourned upon the Government House Leader advising the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is not a debatable motion. As such, I will put the question to the Assembly.

[Government Motion 23 carried]

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply Report

22. Ms Issik moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly extend the deadline by which the Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply must submit its report to the Assembly in accordance with clause 6 of Government Motion 115 from April 30, 2022, to June 30, 2022.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18. Is there anyone that would like to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 22 carried]

The Speaker: The chief government whip is rising.

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 9 a.m. Wednesday, April 27, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:18 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, April 27, 2022

Day 25

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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

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Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
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Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
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Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
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Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
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Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
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New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, April 27, 2022

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Prayers

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

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 11

Continuing Care Act

[Adjourned debate April 26: Mr. Sabir]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are debating the main bill. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to the Continuing Care Act. This is, I believe, the first opportunity I've actually had to speak to this bill. I think it's a bill – I don't want to say that it is incredibly important, because the bill itself isn't, but it ought to be incredibly important to the lives of residents of continuing care. What this bill actually does is sort of put a series of acts together. Now, I chaired the Legislative Review Committee of cabinet for four years, so I'm aware of the importance of keeping legislation up to date and putting things in the right place and having functional provisions. I don't want to suggest that that's necessarily wrong. I think the problem with this bill is what it doesn't do.

We are living through a pandemic and have been doing so for two years now, and there have been a lot of deaths, unfortunately. That is the sad truth. There have been a lot of deaths, and a lot of those deaths have been in older people. That has been hard for them, hard for their families, and because of those risks a lot of people have spent a lot of time locked down in facilities, and that has been extremely challenging, too. I think anyone who has ever observed the progress of dementia in a loved one can tell you that the inability to get out and socialize, the inability to engage in society: those things have a big impact on the progress. That's tragic because you don't get that back in a lot of cases, Mr. Speaker.

I don't think it's possible to overstate the importance of what we're looking at here today because it saves the lives of people who – well, not what we're looking at; what we ought to be looking at. I should be clear about that. This was an opportunity. It was an opportunity to make major change in a system that has developed over time, and I don't really think it's fair to place blame. I think the system has developed over time, people have certain efficiency goals that they would like to achieve, and sometimes they can pursue those goals with blinders on, so to the exception of all else.

Sometimes they can think of our seniors, of our parents and grandparents and loved ones of the people who have built our communities, as bodies in a facility and sometimes they can think of them as costs, and therefore they can focus on efficiency to the

exclusion of all else. I think that if the last two years have taught us anything, it ought to have taught us just how wrong that point of view is. If the past two years have taught us anything, it should have taught us that human lives should be viewed as human lives; they should not be viewed as costs on the system.

This act should have done a lot of things which it doesn't do. There was a report here in Alberta that came out of sort of continuing care and the difficulties that arose. Some of the commitments that this government made were around more home care, increasing the number of hours of care, and increasing the proportion of full-time staff. I agree with 100 per cent of those. Those are incredibly important things.

One of the things that I'm proudest of is the work that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, when she sat as the Health minister, did to increase the amount of home care available. The truth is that increasing home care is, in my view, the way of the future. Now, that won't alleviate the need for long-term care, particularly dementia care, as we move forward with what is likely to be a sort of crisis of dementia care resources. But moving to home care for those people who don't yet need to be moved into a facility is, I think, incredibly important. This bill doesn't do that.

The number of hours of care: that's also a big one. Again, this sort of drive towards efficiency and failing to see that the people in question are, in fact, people and not numbers has resulted in fewer and fewer and fewer hours of care. Honestly, the provincial standards in this regard, provincial standards which, incidentally, this government altered to decrease, are insufficient. Those hours of care can give people back years of their lives. They can give people back quality of life. Those are things that should matter to us.

Finally, the proportion of full-time staff. That's important for a couple of reasons. This is a thing that happens. When we get into these conversations, people are like: well, efficiency, fewer dollars per unit; that's the best possible way to go. But they don't consider any of the collateral cost. They don't consider the fact that if you treat people better in a lower level of care facility, they won't move to the hospital as quickly.

I used to volunteer in a hospital, Mr. Speaker. I volunteered on a neurorehabilitation unit. One of the people that was there was, actually, roughly the same age as me, but he had suffered a brain injury. He was in the neurorehabilitation unit, and he belonged in a long-term care facility. He resided in that unit for the better part of two years, as I recall. It was a terrible use of resources and not good for him either. So ensuring that we have the necessary number of spots is incredibly important.

The proportion of full-time staff: why is that important? Well, because, again, this race toward the fewest dollars per unit, which I actually think is misnamed as efficiency – I actually don't think that, if you view the system overall, we should be calling that efficiency. Sometimes the things we measure are not the right things. In this instance we tend to measure the dollars per unit, and the result of that is that you wind up with part-time staff working everywhere because homes don't have to pay benefits for part-time staff. They maybe don't get the same vacation. They maybe don't have the same level of pay. That is bad. It is bad for efficiency overall. It is bad for the residents because, you know, if you're in a position where you've contributed your whole life and now you're needing a little help for various reasons, it just seems respectful to be able to know the person who's taking care of you. Some of these tasks are very personal, and yeah, I think it's just respectful to allow someone to work with the same provider and to have those providers there full-time.

It's also better for the care providers. You know, this is a problem in the world generally, and it's a problem increasingly. We call it the gig economy in sort of younger people in the economy. Having to race between multiple jobs to try to make enough to pay your rent and buy food and raise your children: this is a problem. It's a problem with which government ought rightly to concern itself. This isn't how we want the world to be going forward. It's not unreasonable for people in a developed country, in a country with the wealth that Canada has, in a province with the wealth that Alberta has to think that they should be able to, with or without a university education, go to work and work a reasonable number of hours and work at one job and be able to have a life, buy a home, and raise their kids. That's not an unreasonable dream. It's a dream that a lot of people have, and I think it should be a lot more achievable than it currently is for young people coming up through the system, for new immigrants coming into the country.

9:10

Increasing the proportion of full-time staff, in my view, is something that has benefits for the residents of these homes, it has benefits for the system overall, and it has benefits for the economy overall in terms of, you know, allowing people to have the style of life that, say, people had 30 years ago, which is really all anyone is asking for. Those are the things the act doesn't do and that I think it ought to do.

There were a lot of recommendations in this report. There are 11 sort of policy directions, if you will, and 42 recommendations, and one of the ones that I want to talk about, and I guess I've been talking about it already indirectly, is about establishing quality of life as the number one priority and goal for Alberta's continuing care system. It almost sounds so obvious, like it shouldn't need stating, but if you actually look at the system and the way it's operating now, it definitely needs stating because, again, in this sort of relentless lens, this lens where we want to decrease the number of dollars per unit at all costs, we only look at the one system, so we look at the continuing care home and we say that we want to decrease the number of dollars per unit, but what we don't look at is how decreasing the number of dollars per – and the unit is a person. Just keep in mind that these are people. They're seniors who have contributed to our province and who have built it.

By decreasing those number of dollars per unit, you get a more rapid decline generally in terms of medical things and particularly in terms of dementia. What you have is a result that those people have to be moved to a higher level of care more quickly, and higher level of care beds are much more expensive. This is the other thing that gets missed when we're talking about the system. I will often hear, when I'm talking to people out in the community: oh, private providers are more efficient because they get more beds per dollar. The thing is that people are comparing apples to oranges because a dementia care bed requires way, way, way more staffing than the lowest level of care, which I believe is 4 if I'm remembering correctly. I may have reversed it. I can't remember whether it goes 1 to 4 or 4 to 1. The point is that the lowest level of care bed is, like, say, a staffing ratio of 1 staff to 10 patients, and the highest level of care, the dementia care beds, are a staffing ratio of, like, 1 or more staff to 1 patient, so yes, of course, it costs more money because it requires more care. So when we consider efficiency, we ought to be considering those effects as well, and we don't.

I think the saddest thing about the strict focus on dollars per unit, about the strict focus on making it less expensive to care for people in a very narrow view of less expensive, is the impact it has on the quality of life of those people. Those lives are worth something. The happiness or unhappiness of those people is worth something, and we should consider that in our deliberations, and the current

system in the way it's set up often doesn't. I think there is a lot that can be done to improve that, and I think this bill doesn't do any of it.

Another one of the policy directions, number 2, is closely related. It talks about enhancing the overall care “with emphasis on residents living with dementia.” This is a huge one. People have been predicting for quite a while a sort of mass wave, as sort of more people age, of dementia patients. That is something that we are going to have to grapple with. It's going to land at some point, and no doubt someone, some silly thing like the Canadian Taxpayers Federation or whatever, is going to jump up and down and say: look how crazy this government is; they're spending, spending, spending. But the truth is that we've been predicting that demographic shift for years, and it's coming whether we want it to come or not, so we ought to be thinking about how to take care of that and how to take care of those people and how to ensure that we give them the best quality of life possible.

Yes, of course, we should be considering the overall cost to the system. That's why moves like more investment in home care so that when someone is at a place where they still need a lower level of care, they can stay in their homes – that is vastly less expensive for the system. Vastly less expensive. And it's much better for the individuals as well because they're able to stay in the communities that they have lived in for their whole lives. They're able to continue to engage in what they have engaged in.

What I really feel, Mr. Speaker, about this act is that it is a missed opportunity.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to address this bill. I spoke to it as recently as last night on the referral motion. I think, reflecting back on some of the words that I said and some of the words that my colleagues said last evening, that I'd like to extrapolate a little bit and maybe improve upon the things that I tried to communicate about this bill, Bill 11, Continuing Care Act.

First, before getting into the bill, I just wanted to recognize that the preamble on page 4 of the bill has a series of whereases. I often look to those, if they are part of a bill, to kind of get a sense of what the government or the minister really feels about the bill that they're bringing forward. The third one struck me. I'll just read it into the record: “Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to ensuring that the delivery of continuing care and the design of the continuing care system in Alberta are based on a person-centred approach.” That certainly speaks to me and, you know, my personal experience not only as a professional social worker but as a person who has had relatives, over the course of my lifetime, go into continuing care and require home care and other aspects of care for themselves that are aspects of this bill or part of this bill.

The person-centred approach, those three words: the concept is one that I'm familiar with. It's client centred in terms of social work. It's doing things from the experience of the person who has to live them or trying to understand how best to design a system so that the person is at the centre of it and their needs are considered in the system that they're experiencing or are a part of or are being taken care of by. I want to start off with that concept and how important that is and then reflect on the bill itself and some of the recent experiences that we've had not only in Alberta but in Canada with respect to the various waves of COVID that have been across this country, that people have experienced.

I think I wouldn't be out of line by saying that the person-centred approach that happened, that people experienced in, for instance, continuing care centres was not very good when COVID was

ravaging continuing care centres across Canada. We know that in parts of Canada the military was brought in to supplement, to help, to, in some cases, totally take over from the exhausted or the workers in those places that couldn't keep up with the needs of people in their charge.

We know that in this province – and my colleague has just kind of reflected on it as well – over 1,600 continuing care residents, Albertans, tragically, passed away from COVID-19, and that tragedy must be a call to action to do better in the future. Regrettably, I don't see where this bill is taking that call to action seriously.

9:20

I also believe that too much in this bill will be left to regulations, and it's impossible for me or others to know if the call to action to do better will in fact be followed through with by government. When things are left to the regulations, they will be presented as opposed to transparently talked about, as in this place here where we have an opportunity to see what, in fact, the regulations could be or if the government intends to make regulation. They're not here, and that's a problem.

I reflected on her words, I saw that she talked about St. Albert last night when we were debating, and I must tell you that I feel like I've been schooled a little bit in just reading some of the things that she talked about. When I was up talking after her, I was mostly focusing on older Albertans, elderly Albertans and believing that they were the bulk, that they were most of what was thought about in terms of the Continuing Care Act, this bill.

When I reflected on her words, I saw that she talked a lot about younger Albertans who were disabled and who need to rely on the care provided by others, so younger Albertans also are people we need to think about who would benefit from improvements to continuing care situations, whether those are supported living accommodations, facilities, or home care. I've known many disabled adults who have lived their entire lives in their own homes, but they rely on personal care attendants, both living with them and those coming into their homes. So Bill 11, rightly, should do more and be transparent on how it's going to improve the lives of those Albertans. That's something my colleague from St. Albert kind of impressed upon me when I was reading this *Hansard* from last night and previous days.

I also want to talk about the importance of home care generally and how I believe, as I said last night on the referral amendment we had before this House, that home care is something that we need to invest a lot more in in this province. I don't get the sense from any of the whereas that that's a goal of this bill and future budgets. We know that a pound of prevention equals a – no. The other way around. An ounce of prevention is a pound of cure. Home care is that prevention that keeps people as well as they can be in their own homes. Certainly, I have experience with that not only with my own immediate family but with extended family as well.

I know the workers in those situations are doing the best that they can, but there are many improvements – both they and my own observations of those experiences tell me – that can be made to that program not only investmentwise but in other ways as well. The quality of life of people can be improved dramatically with home care, good home-care staff, good home-care programs, but there's never an adequate amount of time those workers can spend with, in my observations, their clients. There's never an adequate amount of time. They're always rushing to get to the next, the next, the next client.

There certainly needs to be more staff not only in home-care situations but throughout the whole continuing care system, the supported living system. I think that the employment situations in

those facilities are very truncated in terms of being able to hire people full-time. It seems that too many employees of continuing care facilities have to stitch together two or three, you know, jobs to make life work for them and their families and to get a full-time salary. We need to see that change.

I know that the federal government – as well, I think that there was some topping up by this provincial government and provincial governments across Canada – topped up the salaries of employees in continuing care facilities so that they could work in one place as opposed to a couple of or three places over the course of their workdays or workweek and that that decreased the spread of COVID in the early days while it was ravaging those facilities and, you know, not coincidentally improved the quality of life of those workers when they can count on being in one spot as opposed to having to move once or twice a day to different places to work.

Just before I go on to reflecting on the bill again, I want to talk about dementia. I think it was my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View who talked a lot about her experience of working in neuro wards and with people who have dementia, volunteering. That is something, I think, that is on the minds of so many people now in the world in terms of, you know: what can they do to off-set or delay or recover from dementia? It's a very personal thing to me as well.

The act is not as robust in terms of what it could say about this whole area that would give more – not hope for a cure; of course, that's not what this act is intended to do – hope to people whose loved ones have dementia and need to go into continuing care facilities, which, thankfully, are starting to be more specifically attuned and built and staffed and programmed to the needs of people who have dementia.

I know that in the southeast part of Calgary, Dover, Southview, there is a new facility that's opened up there just within the last two or three years. In addition to taking tours of it when it was under construction and officially opened, I hear good things from people in the community who know people who are residents of that facility. They call it a neighbourhood. It's designed on a neighbourhood basis, or another word I've heard them say is that it's a butterfly facility in that there's a lot of contact with the residents and they can be in a lot of different places to help their adjustment to that disease.

This bill could have, I think, pointed more towards how it would address the needs of those individuals who have dementia and given more comfort to the families who have loved ones who have dementia. It seems like more and more Albertans, more and more elderly Canadians are experiencing that, and it's a great concern.

9:30

The other thing that I wanted to talk about with regard to Bill 11 is that, of course, we know it'll collapse many different acts into this bill, which is a good thing, but it needs to be more transparent, and I think I've made that point clear. The bill is – I guess the way I think about a bill is: if I was the minister, would it hold me accountable to . . . [Member Ceci's speaking time expired]

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has risen.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise in this Chamber and drink a little bit more coffee. Feeling the need for coffee this morning. I don't know about the rest of you. You know, it is hard as well just to – I came in just as my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View was speaking, and from what I heard, it

was a very thoughtful analysis of Bill 11, and then Calgary-Buffalo followed, and equally thoughtful. Anyways, my point is that it's hard to follow Calgary, so I will do my best to represent Edmonton.

All right. It is an honour. I have not had a chance yet to speak to Bill 11. You know, as I've read through the bill, the Continuing Care Act, it just had me thinking about seniors and about the vulnerable folks in my own community. Actually, I was reflecting on the fact that – and just let me preface this by saying it's not “woe is me” because I am incredibly privileged as an MLA, but I was thinking about how I've not had a chance to really visit a lot of seniors in my riding over the last while simply because I just really want to be cautious, and of course for a while there a number of the seniors' residences in my riding were closed to visitors. So I thought about me and thought about how I miss that, but more importantly I think about seniors who have experienced such high levels of isolation and loneliness.

It's hard, you know. Two years of, for many folks – I just think about being a senior who may not have loved ones in the area and needing that sense of community and not being able to connect. So I'm thinking about them, and I'm thinking about vulnerable seniors in my own area. Just this morning I shared a post from my friends at Operation Friendship Seniors Society. They're an organization that I always love to give shout-outs to. I know the focus of the bill – and don't worry, Mr. Speaker; I will connect to the bill. I know the focus of the bill is protecting those who are continuing care residents, but I think about how Operation Friendship Seniors Society supports a lot of seniors who are unhoused or precariously housed in our riding. And there are a lot of them beyond our riding as well lately; certainly a lot of folks in my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre's riding as well. He and I tend to see the most visibly unhoused folks in our communities.

Yeah. Just thinking about, you know, those front-line organizations and those health workers who are supporting our seniors no matter what situation they find themselves in, whether they're housed, they're unhoused, they're precariously housed, and so on. So I think about them.

I also think about some of the continuing care operators in my riding and how, you know – I won't claim to speak for any of them – I can imagine, to echo my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview's comments, who, of course, is our critic for Seniors and Housing, they would have wanted to see more in a piece of legislation.

You know, when this bill was first introduced, she talked about the fact that, listen, we've had over 1,600 deaths in continuing care due to COVID-19. She notes that many of these deaths were preventable, and she was hoping for significant and transformational changes to the continuing care system to be announced, like improving working conditions for continuing care staff or increasing the amount of full-time staff to provide care.

But, unfortunately, what we see in Bill 11 are primarily housekeeping changes, and we've seen that with a lot of bills, to be honest, from this government so far this session. It seems to me – and trust me; I don't have the energy to get a lot of folks up and heckling today, although feel free if you choose – like this is a government and a Premier so focused on just saving themselves and a Premier just saving his own leadership that, you know, at a time when governments should be really assessing the impacts of this global pandemic on their citizens and looking to fill in those gaps that have been so clearly laid bare due to this pandemic, instead of responding with transformational change, with real, tangible legislation and policy that would truly improve the lives of Albertans, this is a government that's choosing to really do a lot of housekeeping, a lot of throwing a bunch of things into bills and calling it red tape reduction or whatever it might be.

That's disappointing. That's disheartening to see, so I echo the comments of our critic for Seniors and Housing, from Edmonton-Riverview, and want to get on the record my disappointment.

What I started to say there is that I can think about the folks who operate in this area of continuing care in my own riding and how much they've been through. I think about the Chinatown Care Centre in my riding, not necessarily in Chinatown proper depending on how you define the borders, minor details, but in the Boyle Street neighbourhood, for sure. You know, that is a centre that has – gosh, I don't know the exact numbers, but they lost a lot of their residents to COVID, Chinese elders who'd built the communities.

I talked to one person. She doesn't live in the area, but her grandfather was in the Chinatown Care Centre, and she just expressed that it didn't have to happen. He was old. I didn't pull up the details, so I can pull those up. I can't remember his exact age, but I believe he was in his 90s. She said: “Yeah, you know what? He was old, but he was healthy, and he shouldn't have died.” What happened at the Chinatown Care Centre is that COVID just spread so rapidly, and it impacted a lot of residents and staff, too.

I think about them and I think about the impact there on my constituents and how they deserved better and how we would hope – in fact, I remember that I wrote a letter along with my colleague at the time from Edmonton-South to the centre and talked about the fact that we were there to support them and that we wanted to do all we could to protect their residents and pointing out that we along with our Health critic and our Seniors and Housing critic would ensure that we would be speaking for their residents. You know, I'm disheartened to have to report back that, sadly, we didn't get a lot of action and we didn't get a response from this government that would really invest in the continuing care system.

9:40

You know, I think about Chinatown Care Centre, I think about Virginia Park, I think about all these centres in my riding where workers are doing so much and have tried to do so much to protect their residents in a very difficult time. But they need support. They need support, and they're not seeing that from this government. I guess I shouldn't be incredibly surprised, with a government that has at every opportunity chosen not to side with workers, right? It wasn't that long ago – and, gosh, the list of this government's record on workers is a long and troubling one.

I think about how just recently, you know, this government chose, at a time when, wow, we should be very much supporting those front-line workers, to propose significant rollbacks to a range of health care workers, including social workers, mental health workers, respiratory therapists – right? – folks who, oh, my goodness, have truly been on the front lines of saving lives of COVID patients. This has been this government's response. Again, I know I shouldn't be shocked. But I think about respiratory therapists and workers like that, who've done so much.

I just met with a respiratory therapist, gosh, was it – last week, I believe, who was just telling me a little bit about her work. I can't imagine how hard it's been. In fact, you know, she was there with her – I think I mentioned this already in the Chamber, but it's just such a cute story – soon-to-be wife, who's a nurse. I will be marrying those two in September, in fact.

Ms Hoffman: No. They'll be marrying each other.

Member Irwin: Well, yeah. I know I can't marry – you know what? You're just so pedantic there, Member for Edmonton-Glenora. Okay. I won't be marrying them both, but I will be officiating their wedding. I prefer to just say: marrying them both. It gets, you know, people talking. For *Hansard's* record I am still

single, still looking. Sorry. I went off on a tangent there. The point being – for all those women in my age range reading *Hansard*, that will be great. Anyways. Getting off track here, and I'm turning quite red as well.

The point being that I chatted with this nurse and respiratory therapist, and they talked about how hard it's been. One was headed to night shift that night; the other one was going off to work in the morning. I think about folks like that, you know, who've just worked ridiculous schedules over the last two years. Anybody in this Chamber who's talked to health care workers is most certainly hearing the same thing from health care workers. This pandemic, despite what some folks in power might say, is still going on, and our health care system is still under significant strain.

All right. Back to Bill 11. Sorry for that little tangent there. You know, I want to just get on the record. This is a bill that doesn't fulfill the Minister of Health's own promises. What did that Minister of Health say here in this Chamber? He said that he would increase home care, he said that he would increase the amount of hours of care that residents would receive, and he said that he would increase the proportion of full-time staff. This bill does none of that. Again, it does a lot of minor administrative changes, housekeeping changes, consolidates pieces of legislation and regulations. And, as one of my colleagues has already stated, we're concerned about how much in this bill is being left to regulations.

You know, we have a great team with a lot of analytical folks, who will be going through that, but we're worried. We're worried that this bill is leaving a lot to regulations. And those regulations are set to come through in the spring of 2023. I don't know if anybody in this Chamber has been paying attention, but there's a lot that's expected to happen in the spring of 2023, probably sooner, hopefully sooner. Albertans are hoping for sooner, that's for sure. But to be serious, this is too big a risk to ask residents and workers in long-term care to just wait, right? They've waited long enough. They've been through two-plus years of a pandemic. It's another example of Albertans not being able to trust the UCP.

Let's as well get on the record the fact that this is the same government – speaking of trust, they've not acted on the recommendations from the facility-based continuing care review. What are they waiting for? What about consultation? Will this government share the consultation report? Who have they spoken to? What specifically in this bill is being supported by stakeholders? Again, there's not a lot of meat here – there's a lot of housekeeping but not a lot of substantive changes – because when we talk to front-line workers, when we talk to residents, when we talk to families impacted by continuing care, this isn't what they're asking for. They're asking for what was outlined in the review. Where is that information?

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for her thoughtful remarks and also for bringing a little levity to this morning's debate. I am happy to speak to Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act.

I have to say that generally it feels like the kind of bill – and being the former Minister of Health, I want to say that I'm quite familiar with the legislation that's being amended even though there are many acts that are being amended through this one bill. I spent a considerable amount of time with the Hospitals Act and with the continuing care provisions as it relates to that, and one of the reasons is because in long-term care – there are different types of continuing care in Alberta, and they differ significantly between supportive living at the lowest levels or dementia care or long-term

care. One of the biggest differences between lower level supportive living and long-term care in terms of the legislation that governs it is that when you are in a long-term care, you are essentially living in a hospital. You require medical care, and therefore the provisions of the Hospitals Act apply to the care you receive in long-term care.

Some of the biggest differences between lower level continuing care and the highest level of long-term care are around “Who pays for drugs?” and the fact that when you're in a hospital, that's covered under the Canada Health Act. In turn, the provincial government is responsible for paying for medications in those settings. Not the case when you're in continuing care even though a lot of people who are in continuing care designated supportive living level 3 certainly can't live on their own and require constant medical care. It's considered a different level of care, and therefore the provision of medications is not included in the suite of services that they receive in their home, the home they plan on living in long term.

Another one is the requirement around having a registered nurse on-site, essentially a charge nurse. Even in long-term care one registered nurse is not usually, I'll even say, enough. I think a lot of people expect a higher level of nursing care than what is currently provided under the legislation. There are buildings not far from here, for example, where there will be one or two charge nurses for 100 or 200 residents. That is not a high RN staffing ratio, but it is legislated. If we move to the lower standard universally for continuing care across the board, there won't be that requirement anymore around having a registered nurse on-site to provide the oversight for care. That does leave me with some concern.

I know that generally as we've seen many of the changes this government has made as they relate to health care, driven – for example, in their first budget, where one of the first things they talked about was that they were going to be removing folks from the seniors drug coverage in Alberta, which caps the payment of prescriptions at \$25 per prescription for the copay portion. Before, if you were a senior who was on the seniors drug plan and you had dependants and others in your life, like a spouse or – sometimes people will have dependent adult children or even be raising their grandchildren. Because it was your drug plan, you could opt your family members and your direct family members in to be a part of your drug plan as well.

One of the first things this government did in their first budget is kick all those dependants off, so only the seniors were eligible, and the dependants had to be on other programs privately delivered or the low-income programs, which, of course, have an even higher copay. Seniors regularly will tell me – and I'm sure that they tell other members of this House – that that \$25 copay is significant for them. So to have to pay even more for their dependent children or grandchildren or their spouse was a significant burden for many seniors in the province of Alberta.

9:50

When I was the Minister of Health, I was very proud to be able to bring forward the requirement to have patient and family advisory councils. That model is something that happened in other parts of the country but also what happens in other parts of Alberta in other sectors. For example, having a background in education, I was really proud of the work that we were able to do in a collaborative way with parents through school councils, school councils tied to individual schools but also collectively through the Alberta School Councils' Association. The reason why we have – and sometimes people say, like, PTAs or these types of things. There are types of models that exist in other places, but in Alberta it was legislated that a school must make efforts to form a school council.

It is an advisory body to the administration of the school and the other leaders of the school authority, those primarily parents, but there are also often students who participate in school councils, members of the staff. There are some, I know, where there is a senior who lives close by and feels a deep connection to the school or a parent whose children have aged out but had spent so many years contributing to that school that they wanted to stay on for a few years longer after their child was gone. It actually creates a formal body for schools where people can come in and they can collectively give feedback to administration to help guide decision-making processes.

My grandmother was living in long-term care, and my mom regularly attended I think they were called family meetings, where she could come and give feedback on my grandmother's behalf. My grandmother: when she moved into long-term care, it was very hard on her emotionally and psychologically, and she knew that her body wasn't as strong as it once was, but her spirit had never wavered. She was born in the '20s, grew up during the Depression, a hard-working farm girl who at the point when she became a teen moved off the farm to help earn some money to support the family and worked in a hospital as probably what we'd call now a health care aide, without any training. This is what a lot of women, first-generation or second-generation women, in this province did to support their families and to support their broader communities.

When it was my grandmother's turn to move into the kind of facility where she once worked, that was very hard on her. She also struggled with the way some of the staff treated her, and that was also very difficult because, of course, you're in a position of vulnerability. I'm not saying that anyone did anything untoward, but she, like many seniors, struggled to accept their help and wanted to be treated like a peer, not like a dependant. Having a place where my mom could vocalize those hopes on my grandmother's behalf – sometimes my grandmother went to those meetings with her – made a big difference.

There was also a significant Chinese population at the long-term care facility, and there were some family members who would come and talk about the dietary requirements and their hopes for their family members around – for example, the congee was not up to par at the General at the time. They were able to give some advice, provide recipes, and give some feedback.

When I was in a position as minister to try to take some of these models that had sprung up organically in some centres and, I would say, centres that were doing a good job at trying to involve residents and family members in addressing the concerns that they were facing, I thought: why don't we take the best practices that we see here in a number of different care centres? There were many that were very enthusiastic and happy to invite me and others to come participate in their resident and family councils even if they had a different name. Then there were others that didn't have anything in place. We worked with administration. We worked with the public service to create the Resident and Family Councils Act. I am grateful that we were able to get there.

We still know that not every centre will have a resident and family council, but they do have a requirement to post about the opportunity to have one, to invite people to meetings on I think it's an annual basis right now – maybe it's twice annually – and to create space and an opportunity for people to vocalize their hopes in an advisory capacity as it relates to their care. Knowing that this act impedes our ability to ensure that that continues, I think, is problematic.

That's one of the reasons why I was so hopeful that this would go to a committee and we'd have an opportunity to consider this matter wholesomely and ensure that the voice of residents and family members was something that would be enshrined moving

forward as well as the requirement to pay for medications for those who are in long-term care and the nursing requirements. I think that those are things that were put in place for good reason, and I think maintaining some oversight in that regard would be beneficial to the residents and to us as the stewards of these publicly funded and some publicly delivered care centres that we have throughout our province.

Also, I know I've been speaking a lot about seniors. It's not just seniors who live in long-term care or supportive living settings. As our colleague from St. Albert often points out, there are many adults with developmental disabilities or people who've acquired a variety of illnesses or injuries. I think about the young mom with a brain injury who was on the same floor as my grandmother for a while, and her daughters, who were six and eight, would come every weekend and spend the entire daytime of their weekend with their mom in her long-term care home. I think about the young man with MS who couldn't live on his own anymore and deserved to have a very high quality of life and to have his home, his long-term care centre, as his place of celebration and to be able to thrive and enjoy his hobbies, his personal choice, and to have a sense of community there.

By doing something that's packaged as housekeeping, that takes away some of the individuality of different types of centres – I think that there could be some risk. I won't say that I think that that's the government's intention. I think it probably is the government's intention to cut drug coverage for people who are living in long-term care. I think it probably is the government's intention to get rid of registered nurses in a number of these centres. The registered nurses were something that was also in their first budget. The number of registered nurses, FTEs, that they were planning on contracting in the province of Alberta was significant. Of course, I'm glad that they didn't have an opportunity to execute that plan because we certainly have needed every nurse that we've had in the province of Alberta, and we need more. That's what a lot of families, I think, especially learned over the last two and a half years.

Over 1,600 continuing care residents in Alberta have, tragically, passed away from COVID-19, and this tragedy should have been a call to action for all of us to ensure that we have single-site staffing capacity. A lot of people say: well, as long as they're getting the hours, it doesn't matter. Like, let me tell you why it's good for patients to have single-site staffing, and then let me tell you why it's important for workers. When you think about being in that vulnerable position of requiring somebody to care for your most basic needs, including feeding you, toileting you, providing your medications, which if you don't have those consistently, can have very negative outcomes to your health – having to accept the care of somebody else is hard enough. Having to accept the care of somebody else each and every day is humiliating for a lot of people. Being able to build a trusting relationship with a few caregivers that you can have an ongoing relationship with is good for the patient in terms of their own self-worth, their own confidence, and their own vulnerability.

But it also means that that caregiver can notice changes in behaviour and changes in medical conditions. You don't need to be necessarily a doctor or a nurse practitioner to be able to pick up on some of those things. It was the health care aides who often would flag for us when my grandmother – and they wouldn't necessarily say these words. You know, for a lot of seniors living in long-term care, they suffer from urinary tract infections. For many of them, it can cause significant psychological trauma when your body is fighting an infection, and it would be the health care aide who helped provide my grandmother with meals who often would pick up on it: something is a little bit off with your grandma. Then we

would be able to talk to the charge nurse, a registered nurse, and get some blood work done and urine analysis and be able to treat the issue at hand.

10:00

Having that type of information available is good for patients. It's also good for workers because they can be at one site and can focus more fully on their patients, and they can hopefully get enough hours to be able to support themselves and their families.

That's some of the nervousness, the hesitation that I have as we continue to consider Bill 11. Really, this does, once again, come down to trust. Do you trust the government, when it comes to developing regulations, to put your family at the forefront?

With that, I move that we adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 16 Insurance Amendment Act, 2022

[Debate adjourned April 26: Ms Renaud speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are on Bill 16. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise this morning to speak about insurance and the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022, Bill 16, which I will say is a very clear example, once again demonstrating the government's priorities in this province.

The legislation before us, of course, opens up the Insurance Act, and while the act is open, the government has chosen to deal with measures that I would say serve the macroinsurance industry, the upper echelons of the insurance industry, while there are many issues of the insurance industry concerning consumers of insurance products, individual Albertan consumers, that have left the attention span of the government. The government has chosen to once again serve the corporate end of the insurance spectrum but not the consumer spectrum, and they once again refuse to take any action whatsoever to reduce auto insurance bills, that are punishing Alberta families and businesses since the UCP removed the rate cap.

Now, we don't have issues with what this bill actually does. We don't have concerns with its content. What it does is allow profitable insurance corporations to repatriate insurance companies that are now operating offshore, captive insurance companies, and it allows companies to do things which would satisfy the needs that they have in a large insurance world, where particularly the oil and gas sector is having difficulty becoming insured. The captive insurance market and repatriation of some of these companies is something that has been welcomed by some in the energy sector hoping to take advantage of the pools of capital in that sector, and the intent, I believe, is to have those pools of capital used to self-insure.

We appreciate that element of the legislation, but while the bill is open, there are hundreds of thousands of Albertans who are really struggling with their insurance costs, particularly automobile insurance. Highly profitable insurance companies charged Albertans \$385 million more in premiums in 2020 than they did in 2019. Well, that's a lot of money sucked out of the pockets of Albertans to go pay for something they really don't have a choice in having. They need to have their car insurance although, Mr. Speaker, I must say that some people are parking their cars, not because of the pandemic, which is something that was done during the height of the pandemic. People weren't going to work. They

weren't commuting as much. Of course, car insurance companies as a result had fewer payouts and as a result were much more profitable, and that's where some of that \$385 million more in premiums came in versus the amount that was paid out.

They're making enormous profits as a result of that, but Albertans were hurting, Mr. Speaker. They were suffering at the hands of these companies who were profiting enormously but not allowing the consumers to benefit from the lower payouts that they were making.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, the people of this province have lost faith in this government, because they see the priorities of the government always focusing on the larger corporate world and not on the individual consumers and citizens of the province, and the hope is always that there will be a trickle-down effect to the citizens and the consumers in this province as a result of giving benefit to the corporate world.

In this case insurance companies, profitable insurance companies, were allowed to charge fees that were much higher than necessary in the insurance climate that we were facing in 2019, and as a result Albertans paid more than they needed to at a time when they were having costs escalate in all kinds of places.

A lack of trust emanates as a result of government decisions such as this piece of legislation we have before us, where sort of the macrolevel insurance evolutions are tended to but where the government is paying no attention to elements of the Insurance Act that could have been changed to benefit everyday Albertans. They're putting the profits of insurance companies ahead of the budgets of everyday working families. All of us know this, and all of us feel this, especially younger people who are trying to insure a vehicle to get to work. In many cases employment requires that a person have a vehicle, and of course that vehicle has to be insured by law, and it presents an entry barrier to young people trying to get into the workplace if indeed insurance is unaffordable. This legislation does nothing for those families, for those young people trying to enter the workplace facing barriers to employment such as high and unaffordable insurance costs.

We must do better. We can do better. I think the government should have taken more time, when this Insurance Act was open, to take a serious look at other elements of the insurance industry that could have been considered when there were changes being made to the legislation.

Why is the government taking no action as to the auto insurance premiums, which are skyrocketing? We had a rate cap, and the government today says that, of course, they removed it as a result of their desire to let the market find its own level of insurance premium. Yet, indeed, the cap protected Albertans. It was a 5 per cent rate cap, and it protected Albertans. It wasn't an artificial cap. It was a cap that allowed insurance companies still to be profitable yet made insurance affordable for Albertans. Once again the priorities of the government showed clearly that their interests lie with the insurance companies, not with Alberta consumers and citizens and voters.

Consistently that's the theme that we find in pieces of legislation that keep being brought forward by this government, in particular this one, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. You know, even things like the requirements for insurance companies to report on an annual basis: why not make it necessary that the Minister of Finance must by law – by law – prepare the superintendent of insurance's annual report every year? Now, for over a hundred years that annual report was presented voluntarily because it was an expectation, a custom that it be done in this House, and it didn't happen this year, Mr. Speaker.

10:10

This year the government decided not to present that report in the regular way, that has been done for over a hundred years and by making a public announcement. In fact, it basically tried to hide it by not saying anything about it. This information has been produced like clockwork for over a hundred years. Now, of course, the government is saying: "Well, it's available online; therefore, we didn't hide anything. It's there for the public to see." Yet there was a difference in procedure, which is important to note, and that is that the announcement wasn't there, and the public presentation of the report wasn't done as it had been for over a hundred years.

It seems to be a practice of the government, Mr. Speaker, in other areas as well to use the excuse: the information is available online; therefore, we don't need to make a public announcement. They just quietly allow the information to be put online without any public disclosure or announcement. They're trying to pull the same stunt with the private school fee payments. The government is saying: well, the full disclosure is available online. I think that we'll probably end up seeing a number more of this type of effort on the part of the government to fail to announce publicly the reporting, the financial reports of different elements of the government operations, whether it be insurance company reports, whether it be private school funding.

Just simply allowing things to be reported online without any annual announcement about it is a dereliction of duty. It's a way the government is using to allow information to just simply fade away, to fade to grey. It's a tactic that I think is rather shameful. I hope by feeling the backlash from the public and by us in the opposition raising concerns about this practice, it will encourage the government to see fit to properly exercise its responsibility to bring forward reports in the manner that they have been traditionally for over a hundred years – for example, the superintendent of insurance annual report on an annual basis – and publicly announce the report rather than just simply having it available online without announcement whatsoever.

There are other elements of the legislation, Mr. Speaker, that should have been brought to light and haven't been. The Insurance Act is not open to anything except, as I said, the macro level of changes. We still can't get answers from this government on insurance and lobbyists. Like, how many times did members of Executive Council or political staff in this government meet with Nick Koolsbergen or his Wellington team on insurance? Why do insiders get access instead of Albertans? The result of that type of influence on government policy is that when such acts as the Insurance Act are opened up, the legislative changes that are made serve those lobbyists' interests. They don't serve, necessarily, the public interest, the consumer interest. They serve the interests of the lobbyists, who have at heart the corporate clients' benefits in mind.

That insurance change as a result of the lobbying here in this bill, this piece of legislation, in and of itself is not what we have an issue with. The changes that have been made are, I think, good attempts to address global insurance issues that particularly the large oil and gas companies have in obtaining insurance and reinsurance for those companies that do actually insure the large oil and gas companies. It's just that the lobbying that is done is the end of the government's investigations into what could be amended while the act is open. There's enough discontent, there's enough heartache, there are enough people who are hurting badly as a result of the skyrocketing insurance premiums in this province right now that that in and of itself should have been a, quote, unquote, lobby effort that the government listened to. But it's falling on deaf ears.

We constantly hear a retort from our – hearkening back to the rate cap that we had in place when we were in government, a 5 per

cent cap on insurance premiums, which made insurance affordable and still allowed the insurance companies to be profitable. The government decries that as an interference in the marketplace, when, in fact, what it did was respond to the very desperate hue and cry from the public that they are not able to survive economically in the workplace by being forced to pay these enormous insurance costs.

That's not the only thing they're getting hammered with, Mr. Speaker. That's on top of a huge escalation in food costs, in rent costs. The price of everything is going up as a result of very many global events that are coalescing all at one time, and it's the government's responsibility to do what it can on a local basis to try to lessen that burden, and it has not addressed the requirements to exercise that responsibility in this legislation.

The latest changes to this Insurance Act are focused on a need for insurance products in the industrial energy areas and niche products and their specific concerns within the sector that are supported by the energy sector, which is a good thing, but, once again, the total and sole focus of this government has been on the macro elements of the insurance sector.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you for that introduction, Mr. Speaker. To follow my colleague from Edmonton-McClung, I just want to speak to – this is my first time speaking to the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022, Bill 16, and of course we all know that this act will amend the recent act that was before this House in the fall, which allowed the creation of captive insurance companies, companies that will provide insurance for their host company. I think all of us learned a great deal from that fall review of captives and their need to be present in Alberta.

I can remember the discussion taking place from the Minister of Finance talking about how this was a hard insurance market and that the creation of captives would facilitate the availability of insurance for companies, particularly within the energy sector, the oil and gas sector in this province. This amendment will further assist that sector in particular, which is an important one to this province and has been the source of a great deal of GDP growth over time since the '50s, '40s in this province. We're going to 80 years or so of the sector being an important employer, generator of wealth. Having problems with that sector being able to get insurance for their operations is obviously a problem, so we need to consider this bill in that light.

I think, as my colleague was saying, while there are no specific concerns with the changes proposed in Bill 16, and these changes were supported by validators in the energy sector as well as task force members, which is indeed really helpful in terms of important stakeholders to reach out to, there is much missing with this opportunity to open up the act for the second time in six, seven months. While I will talk about what's missing shortly, I just want to reflect again on what this bill does do.

10:20

The need for insurance for particularly the energy sector can't be overstated, because of the important corporate and public policy reasons that I'll elaborate on. We, of course, know that from time to time catastrophic incidents can occur, have occurred across the world with regard to producers of energy, whether that is – well, it has happened across the world, has happened here in this province. So catastrophic events need to be backstopped with appropriate insurance through those companies. The industry needs the ability to access that insurance. And when there is a hard market and

difficulties in accessing insurance at a reasonable price, the Minister of Finance appropriately brought forward to this House ways to address that in this province. That was the previous bill – I don't remember the number – that we dealt with in the fall, and this one now.

We want industry to be insured appropriately so that any catastrophic events and the associated costs can ultimately be addressed by the company and by the industry. We don't want those costs to be borne by taxpayers or passed on to taxpayers in the event that a company lacks the appropriate funds through insurance to deal with that situation, whatever that catastrophic event could be. So viable insurance products. This bill talks about the domestication of stand-alone companies that are somewhere else coming back to this province. It facilitates that to happen. So I'm certainly onside with that.

There are a number of terms here that are new to me, of course. One is that it creates a redomestication provision, specifically how Alberta-based companies who have a captive insurance company operating outside of Canada – I think they call it extraprovincial jurisdictional or something like that, which basically means outside of Canada, likely in the United States or Bermuda, for example – can bring those home and continue operating here without any disruption in their coverage. That's critical because though the chances are small potentially that there is an interruption in coverage between the bringing home of a company that is in, say, the United States to Alberta, there is a chance. And that's what insurance does. It derisks those situations.

So that's a good reason to support this bill, and I will support this bill. There are other things, of course, that companies might want to do, but that's one good reason to do that, to support this bill.

It also talks about the taxation of premiums. It goes on and on and on that what this does is lower the taxation on premiums. I don't necessarily have a problem with that. I know that many stakeholders have looked at this and said it's okay. It works. It'll help companies repatriate their insurers here. So I'm okay with that, too.

A second thing this bill does is that it makes changes to allow Alberta to license stand-alone reinsurance companies in Alberta. There are several pages of that. I certainly learned from doing my own research that the reinsurance industry is dominated by large players and that some of those large players, not unlike investors, are having some challenges with energy sector companies and are helping, I guess, to create a hard market for being able to access insurance.

Companies doing this, taking up this bill and repatriating their reinsurance company and creating a captive: you know, it's probably companies taking their action to ensure that they control their own destinies rather than be at the whim of other companies that are less knowledgeable about their processes and the kinds of business they do.

The oil and gas sector has certainly had some challenges with finding appropriate capital, but we have that capital here in this province. There are many who have grown up, investors who have grown up with the industry and are comfortable with it, and they would also probably be the people who would look to start up reinsurance companies in this province and know the risks they're dealing with, probably more so than others who are not residents of Alberta. With this legislative change the government is hoping, as I just said, that the enormous amount of capital that's in Alberta's oil and gas sector might be pooled to create a local reinsurance company or companies.

The bill generally has the recommendations from the task force, and industry has indicated in terms of validation that it's a good-

faith attempt to find a solution that, in my view and the view of others, does not represent a downside risk to this province, so that's a positive step in the right direction.

The third thing I'd like to cover briefly is that this bill will make it easier for Alberta companies to access unlicensed insurance. Unlicensed insurance is not fly-by-night or sketchy in any way; it just means that those insurers are not licensed in Canada. They're in other places. Alberta companies only access insurance from unlicensed insurance companies in circumstances where no domestic insurer will write an insurance policy for a particular risk. So in those cases, where a company does not repatriate or create a company for reinsurance on their own, this act will facilitate them to access reinsurance companies elsewhere.

There's talk, of course, about a special broker using a current domiciled insurance company to get an unlicensed insurance company to provide insurance, so that's something that's in this bill as well, and the taxation on premiums is identified here as well.

I just want to make a few comments about the hard insurance market that my colleague talked a little bit about. When we were government, we worked – and it was particularly around the auto sector insurance, or auto insurance. There were challenges in that, and we did significant work to try and make sure that there was fair treatment with both the companies and Albertans. The cap on premiums was not intended to be a forever thing. It was intended to be a "let's get down to work and figure this out" approach, very much meeting with the presidents of companies. There were numerous meetings and a multitude, a number of presidents – I think there were, like, over 20 or so – that weighed in on what we were doing and what we were requesting of that industry.

10:30

The cap was an attempt to generate their willingness to work together and to provide information to the government of the day or the superintendent of insurance of the day that would help the government better understand what the increases to premiums that they were requesting were based on.

We set up a task force with each other and were doing that work when it was interrupted by an election. Work was suspended and ultimately stopped by the incoming government. But it was a genuine attempt to try and understand what the costs to the industry were all about and why that was being transferred into increases in premiums and what the government could do to reduce those costs. We were on that track of doing that work.

But that's not what the hard market for this area is, that is talked about in particular. We've learned a great deal with regard to, as I said, captives, that was brought in in the last bill. This amendment is to facilitate, again, the efforts of the energy sector in particular.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. This is actually my first opportunity to speak to this bill, so it's a pleasure to put my comments and thoughts on the record with respect to this. I think my colleagues have done a good job of talking about what this bill does, and I think we've already indicated that we do generally support the content of this bill and the efforts that are made here to, you know, create some new, I guess, insurance products and opportunities in Alberta. The hope is that these changes will actually be useful. I know some of them are a bit – well, we don't know yet for sure what the outcome of them will be, but certainly we support that.

If I can go over a little bit about what the bill includes and then make some broader comments with respect to insurance in Alberta right now as this is certainly the topic of this bill. You know, the bill does open up the Insurance Act once again in Alberta and makes a few changes. In this Legislature we considered changes earlier this year – my apologies; it might have been last year – to captive insurance to allow Alberta companies to basically insure themselves. It's different from self-insurance in that it's actually setting up a separate company, a subsidiary company, to insure the broader parent company. We supported that bill when it came through the Legislature.

I understand that the proposed Bill 16 makes a few other additional changes; for example, with respect to the Captive Insurance Companies Act. The legislation now, as my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo and my colleague from Edmonton-McClung set out, makes some changes to that bill to allow for redomestication of those captive insurance companies, specifying how, specifically, an Alberta-based company who has a captive insurance company that's operating outside of Canada can bring that captive insurance company back home while continuing to operate so that there's no disruption in coverage. Certainly, that sounds like something that is – there are good reasons why companies would want to do this.

We understand, of course, that, you know, if an Alberta-based company is operating in another jurisdiction, where there may be more lenient or less stringent insurance requirements and regulatory requirements, a company bringing their captive insurance company back to Alberta may be facing more stringent regulatory requirements and standards here than in a place like, say, Bermuda. They will of course pay higher taxes here. But there are savings on other costs, and that may be a benefit to some Alberta companies who choose to do that. That's one provision of this bill, to redomesticate those captive insurance companies back in Alberta.

Bill 16 also makes changes to allow Alberta to license stand-alone reinsurance companies in Alberta. Reinsurance is, obviously, insurance for insurance companies. I understand that the hope, I believe, with this change is that some of the capital that's currently circulating, particularly in the oil and gas market, could be pooled to basically create a local reinsurance company. This, I understand, is not a guaranteed outcome – and certainly it has some potential liabilities – but it does create an opportunity or at least a space in which a possible solution may arise. Certainly, that sounds like something that companies will have to consider and see whether or not mitigating the risks is possible or worth while to them. Certainly, if it's creating a space for that kind of opportunity, it seems like a good idea.

Of course, the third thing that this bill does is that it allows or makes it easier – I shouldn't say allows – for Alberta companies to access unlicensed insurance. Alberta companies currently only access insurance from unlicensed insurance companies in circumstances where there is no domestic insurer that is able or willing to write an insurance policy for a particular risk. This will allow these companies to access unlicensed insurance. You know, it brings it more in line with other provinces and makes getting a viable insurance product easier for industry. Again, this is important. We do have a vested interest in Alberta in making sure that, for example, our oil and gas industries are able to access the insurance that they need. Especially in the event of a catastrophic event or a huge challenge, we want to know that those companies will be able to manage that risk and access insurance.

You know, broadly speaking, Mr. Speaker, Bill 16 does seem to be something that I'm willing to support, and I believe that some of my colleagues have indicated their willingness to support this bill. However, I think it's important to note that when we think about

insurance – and I'm not sure what members of the government caucus are doing, but I know members of the opposition caucus have been very busy knocking on doors, not just in our own ridings but across the province, to talk to Albertans and see what's on their minds, and insurance comes up quite regularly.

I'm certain that if I were to tell Albertans – and, in fact, I'm going to test this theory out when I go out door-knocking in my constituency this week – that the current government is bringing in legislation around insurance, many Albertans would expect that that means this government is doing something to address the very real rise in insurance costs that are affecting them in their day-to-day life, which is insurance costs on auto insurance and home insurance and life insurance and all the day-to-day products that Albertans rely upon. I'm certain that many would say: oh, great; that's good. I know that I've been hearing from my constituents – I know all the members in this House have – about the steep increase in insurance premiums since this government has come into power. Certainly, that would be what their expectation is.

If this government, at a time when Albertans are struggling with high insurance costs, is bringing in legislation around insurance, it must be to help them out: that would be the assumption. As I said, I'm going to test this theory out when I go door-knocking, because every single time I go door-knocking, insurance is raised by people at the doors. So I'll ask them, I'll say: "What do you think? They're bringing in legislation." They will probably be very excited, and then I'll get to say: "Oh, I'm sorry, but once again this government is actually not bringing forward legislation that would help you with your household budget costs and your daily costs. That's, actually, not at all this government's priority. That's not what this bill is about. This bill is about, you know, creating new insurance opportunities for industry, for companies, okay?"

You know, nobody can doubt, as we've said, that this is something we support, but it is not what's most pressing on Albertans' minds when they think about insurance. In fact, we know that not only has this government not brought forward anything to help people with their average insurance costs; they've actually deliberately, intentionally made this more expensive for Albertans, and we know that this is precisely what they were lobbied to do, Mr. Speaker.

10:40

As we all know now, the NDP had a cap on insurance rates, that actually would be incredibly helpful to Albertans right now. But what we know – and this is a matter of public record – is that this government was actively lobbied by the insurance companies to lift that rate cap. In fact, Mr. Speaker, you know, for example, the biggest lobbying company, Wellington, that did the lobbying of the insurance companies, was incorporated as a lobbying entity on March 26, 2019, just a few weeks before the provincial election in 2019.

As we all know, on April 30, 2019, the Premier was sworn in. A mere three and a half weeks later, May 24, 2019, according to the lobbyist registry, Wellington registers as an official lobbyist and indicates that their reason for lobbying is to "advocate for market-based auto insurance rates vs an artificial rate cap." That was their filing, May 24, a mere few weeks after the Premier was sworn in. Guess what, Mr. Speaker? A few months later, August 30, 2019, this government lifts that insurance cap and speaks highly of the rate-based market for insurance.

Now, it's not really a surprise that this government did that. We always knew that they were not in support of things that make it easier for average Albertans to pay their bills, but we know that they were specifically lobbied by some very specific interests to do precisely what they did.

Now, in 2019, you know, that was under cover of a lot of things that were happening, but we know that many Albertans reported their insurance rates going up, their premiums going up upwards of 30 per cent. That was a significant amount back then. It's even more in terms of the impact on daily budgets now because of the cost-of-living increases, inflation increases, and then, of course, all the things that this government has done to make life more expensive for Albertans, whether it be property tax increases, utility rates going up. They're paying more in school fees and postsecondary tuition. For a while there they were paying more in child care fees. They're paying so much more. So when you pile all that on, the increase in insurance is significant.

We also know that when the government – it was surprising. It's a hard thing to sell, but, my goodness, the Minister of Finance has worked really hard to sell this, that we should be feeling sorry for the insurance companies because, you know, they really just wanted to get new products out into the market, the poor, poor insurance companies. Then, of course, to fulfill that narrative or complete that narrative, we know that this government took the unprecedented step of not actually releasing the superintendent of insurance report, which had been released every year for 107 years. Why would they want to suppress that report? Why would they not want to release that information for Albertans?

An Hon. Member: One guess.

Ms Pancholi: Yeah. There is only one guess. I wonder if it's because it shows that – guess what? – the insurance companies have been doing just fine, in fact not even just fine; they've been profiting even more significantly than before.

That actually doesn't fit with this government's narrative about insurance companies, so they suppressed that information and finally had to succumb because of the pressure put on by the Official Opposition and then the rising swell of Albertans saying: "Well, hang on. Where is that report? What does it say?" Then, you know, as is prone to happen, the day before a long weekend they tried to bury that report. But it came out, and what does it show? Well, yeah, it shows that, actually, insurance companies collected \$1.151 billion more in premiums than they paid out in 2019 and that in 2020 they collected \$1.324 billion more than they paid out. Keep in mind, as all of us remember what was happening in 2020, that it was the pandemic. Many people were working from home, many people had parked their cars, some people had lost their jobs, so actually Albertans were driving less, but insurance companies were making more.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to talking to Albertans when I go door-knocking in my constituency and, of course, you know, when I go door-knocking in various other constituencies like Calgary and around this province and saying: oh, did you know that this government is bringing forward legislation on insurance but not to help you – not to help you – because this isn't the government's priority?

We see that with the same approach they've taken months after, again, the Official Opposition had been calling and Albertans had been certainly writing their MLAs across this province about the increased utility rates. You know, first of all, the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity was saying that everything was working exactly as it was supposed to and they weren't going to do anything to help Albertans. Months later they finally agreed to bring forward some semblance of legislation to actually deliver a utility rebate but with no timelines.

They actually rejected amendments put forward by the Official Opposition to make sure those rebates were delivered in a timely fashion. We think Albertans should have gotten this months ago

but certainly by the end of May. Couldn't this government commit to doing something meaningful to help Albertans with their daily costs by the end of May? Perhaps they're too distracted with something else, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps that's why they can't deliver for Albertans, because they're too busy trying to deliver for the Premier. So once again Albertans aren't seeing any of the benefits. They can't even get this government to take these issues seriously.

On the one hand, I could say that it's kind of, you know, unfortunate that the government brought forward a bill on insurance at a time when Albertans are struggling with insurance rates and they are doing nothing about it. At worst – and I think, unfortunately, we have to believe the worst at this point, Mr. Speaker – it shows that once again this government is not interested in looking out for average Albertans, is not interested in meaningful solutions to help Albertans pay their bills and to get by and put food on the table and to participate in the local economy. They're not interested in those things. We always do know where their priority is, and it's on saving their own skins, perhaps supporting their own Premier. Perhaps it's infighting, perhaps it's undermining, but it's not on Albertans. When that's the case, everybody pays except for the lobbyists.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe I see the hon. member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rose slowly because I thought perhaps the Finance minister would want to, you know, refute some of our statements, but he must . . . [interjection] Yeah, I know. I'm not saying whether he's here or not, but I thought he may want to join debate.

Ms Hoffman: Maybe after you.

Member Irwin: Perhaps after me. That's right. Actually, he's also free to intervene as well, interject. Yeah. Absolutely. I welcome interjections.

Okay. It is a pleasure to rise again. I will try to keep my marital status out of this speech.

Mr. Schow: He's already spoken to the bill.

Member Irwin: Oh, well, he can interject.

All right, Mr. Speaker. Let us speak about Bill 16, insurance. Now, it is challenging to follow my colleagues, who have just laid out a pretty good analysis of this bill, but I will try my best. You know, like my colleagues, like my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud, I can also point out that insurance is an issue that comes up a lot at the doors and not just in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood but, as my wonderful colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud pointed out, when we door-knock in other ridings. In fact, I know we're both planning to go to the lovely city of Calgary soon and both plan to do much door-knocking while down there. I can predict quite reasonably that insurance will come up at the doors.

As I've stated many times in this Chamber, you know, I do my best to endeavour to really listen to folks when I'm at the doors. I don't say: "Oh, what issues are top of mind? How are you feeling about insurance?" No. I leave it pretty wide open, so unsolicited feedback on just rising costs, affordability in general. On its own you might say, "Okay; well, auto insurance is probably not debilitating to folks," but for some it is. In fact, it's the entire suite of changes or, I should say, lack of changes, inaction from this government that's really impacting affordability for my constituents, right?

We're talking about things like increases to home insurance as well. We're talking about things like tuition. We're talking about – you know, obviously, inflation: I know we cannot solely blame this government for that. I understand. But when a government has an opportunity to address affordability and then chooses not to, that's concerning. Déjà vu from when I spoke – oh, gosh – less than an hour ago on the previous bill, continuing care: that was an opportunity for this government to really address the gaps in the system and present legislation that could be transformational and could tangibly improve the lives of Albertans.

10:50

Similarly, again, another bill in front of us, Insurance Amendment Act. You know, this could have been an opportunity for this Finance minister and his government to really address the affordability crisis that so many Albertans are facing and to lower insurance premiums for our constituents, but instead they chose not to. Again, you know, a number of sort of housekeeping-type changes that won't have a direct impact on Albertans. Instead, a bill, a piece of legislation that supports insurance companies.

I want to talk a little bit about – you know, I found this fascinating. I found it fascinating that – and my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud pointed this out quite well – we've seen from this government multiple times, in fact, a government that is willing to put profits ahead of people, corporations ahead of constituents. I'm not sure what other forms of alliteration I can do, but the point is that this is a track record with this government, continuously choosing corporations over their constituents.

A great example of this would be what we saw – oh, gosh, I think it was released, yeah, just prior to the long weekend. This UCP government dropped a report that showed that insurance companies are reaping higher profits than ever before, and they're doing it with the help of this UCP government. Don't quote me on this; let me point to evidence. I'm reminded of yesterday, the evidence, the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions pointing out that this opposition might like evidence and science. Yes, we do. We do like evidence and science. So it was the superintendent of insurance 2020 annual report that specifically outlined that the car insurance industry charged Alberta drivers \$385 million more in premiums in 2020 than they did in 2019, and, no, those profits didn't trickle down to Albertans. Absolutely not. It boosted their own pockets and expanded their already-gross margins. No surprise.

I'd love to hear why. Again, we haven't yet heard from the Finance minister his justification on this, but as my colleague pointed out, the UCP attempted to suppress this report for the first time in 107 years. So, folks watching, of which I know there are at least probably three, you know, when this government talks about transparency, accountability, you cannot trust them. You cannot trust them one bit. Why would they cover up that report? Because this report showed that the car insurance industry collected \$1.151 billion more in premiums than they paid out in claims in 2019, but in 2020 they collected \$1.324 billion more than they paid out. Interesting numbers.

And that Finance minister, as my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View pointed out in response to this very interesting report, likes to say that these have been tough times for the insurance industry. Well, that's absolutely factually untrue because these are highly profitable companies that are truly fleecing Albertans with the help of the UCP. Again, this is at a time when, you know, the UCP is choosing to make everything more expensive for Alberta families.

So we called on, my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View called on Albertans to really – you know, every time you see your

car insurance bill, remember that this is a UCP government that chose to ensure that your premiums continue to rise, the same government that chose . . . [interjection] You know what? I will absolutely defer to the Finance minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to express my appreciation to the member for giving way. I just want to – I know I only have a minute here – make a couple of comments. I need to correct the record. Firstly, Bill 16 is about, again, further enabling captive insurance corporations in Alberta, further ensuring that we have another insurance product in the province, and also enabling the business of reinsurance to take place in the province of Alberta. It's about adding capacity and competition, something the members don't talk about because their solution is always a rate cap. It's a Band-Aid. We observed what happened when you put a Band-Aid on an issue without dealing with the systemic problems: it results in a pullback of capacity. That's what took place in automobile insurance. This government has worked to correct that. We did it in Bill 41.

Member Irwin: Thank you. I appreciate the minister interjecting. Yes. Absolutely. You know, what's interesting is – again, we've talked a little bit about some of the ins and outs of the bill, but your intervention doesn't answer why at every opportunity you continue to prioritize profits before people and why you continue to choose those already-profitable corporations' best interests instead of the best interests of the people that you represent. So again I would ask: why? Why hide the superintendent's report after 107 years? Why did this UCP government and this minister choose not to be transparent?

Again, we've pointed out that we don't have major concerns with the content of this legislation, but it's what's missing that we're concerned about: no relief for drivers, no relief for homeowners that are seeing soaring home insurance policies. I mean, as we've seen, just ask the residents of northeast Calgary to talk about what they've faced with hail damage.

You know, again, if we didn't see a track record with this government on insurance, of one that continually shows that Albertans can't trust them – again, after 100 years why would this Finance minister not want to produce that report, right? He finally released it, but only – only – thanks to the good work of my colleagues, like my colleagues from Calgary-Mountain View and from Lethbridge-West, putting pressure on this government to come clean and to be transparent.

All right. I'll get a couple of questions on the record before I end my remarks. Why is this government taking no action? How many billions in profits are enough for your friends in the insurance industry? If the Insurance Act is open, why not make certain that the Finance minister must by law prepare the superintendent of insurance annual report every year? Again, why try to hide it?

We're not getting answers from this government on insurance and on lobbyists, and as my colleague from Edmonton-McClung quite aptly pointed out – how many times did members of Executive Council or political staff meet with Nick Koolsbergen or his Wellington team on insurance? Why is it that time and time again lobbyists, insiders, friends of this government get their ear, yet Albertans who are struggling – and we've stood up. We've had Albertans share their stories on the rising costs that they're facing, including rising auto premiums, and this government refuses to listen to those voices. Why are you not listening to the people that you represent?

I'm certain he's busy, but I have to believe that the Finance minister in the Grande Prairie-Wapiti region is hearing from his residents up there. I've spent some time in Grande Prairie. You

know, lots of big pickup trucks up there, right? I'm looking at the Member for Grande Prairie, too. I know she's probably hearing from her constituents about rising auto premiums. So why isn't this government listening?

11:00

All right. Again, I'll just get on the record our grave concerns. You know, we've been quite clear that it's not the content. The minister is pointing out to us at every opportunity that the rate cap is our solution. Well, we know that this government has refused to take action, any action, since they removed that rate cap that was put in place by our NDP government. We are proud of our record on insurance because we didn't see these skyrocketing increases impact our constituents like this government is seeing right now.

With that, I just want to point out and summarize that, you know, these rising costs are just one example of many that our constituents are facing, and I and my colleagues here in the NDP opposition will continue to speak out and stand up and amplify the voices of our constituents who are struggling right now with affordability. It's one more example that we cannot trust the UCP government.

I'm not sure how much time I have, but I will . . .

The Acting Speaker: Two minutes, but it'll be increased if you give way.

Member Irwin: Sounds good. I give way.

Mr. Toews: All right, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for giving way. I just want to again correct the record. This government has taken action on automobile insurance. We, in fact, took action in Bill 41. We dealt with the systemic issues, certainly some of the systemic issues, that were driving up claims costs, soft injury costs, that were creating more contention in the courts around insurance and driving up premiums.

Mr. Speaker, again, I want to point out for the record that we've had seven insurance companies now apply for a reduction in premiums. That's encouraging. That's contrary to the narrative we hear across the way. The members opposite, when they were in government, simply brought a rate cap in and did not deal with the systemic issues that were driving up costs.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to correct the record.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Just for clarity, to the hon. member, for graciously allowing more than one intervention, it means that there are two more minutes added to your time. So there are four minutes now.

Member Irwin: Oh, goodness. I may not take that full time, but it is nice to give way to the minister even though what he is saying is not supported by the evidence. You know, he is claiming to be clearing the record on this. He can speak all he wants, saying that he's taking action on insurance, but that is not trickling down to our constituents, right? This is not having an impact on the bills that our constituents are seeing. They're seeing rising auto insurance premiums. Again, the minister can claim that they're taking tangible action, but it was steps like ensuring a rate cap that truly supported and helped our constituents.

You know, with that, I'd be willing to speak more on this bill, but I know we will – well, actually, I don't know if I will have another opportunity. Regardless, I know the time is such that I will adjourn debate.

The Acting Speaker: It's my understanding that you're making a request for a motion to adjourn debate, correct? Yes. All right.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 12 Trustee Act

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. deputy government whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be here today to move on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General third reading of Bill 12, the Trustee Act, which will make it more efficient to manage trusts and lessen the need for Albertans to go to court.

We believe it is our responsibility to continually revise and reform legislation to meet the needs of the modern world and the needs of Albertans. I have been encouraged by the lively debate on this important legislation. If passed, the new Trustee Act would replace existing legislation, which is significantly outdated and based on mid-Victorian era legislation. The new Trustee Act would clarify a trustee's role and their administrative powers, outline specific processes so that in many instances trustees and beneficiaries do not need to go to court, and set out clear provisions to support and improve day-to-day functions of trusts and provide a basis for trusts that do not have extensive terms or that do not cover off all the situations the provisions apply to while making sure people can still set their own terms.

Mr. Speaker, before I conclude my remarks, I would like to just address a few questions that arose during the second reading debate, beginning with Henson trusts. Quite simply, Bill 12 has nothing to do with Henson trusts – as I attempt to flip the page, Mr. Speaker – and Bill 12 does not affect a person's eligibility for government benefits such as the AISH program. I'd also like to be clear that Bill 12 adopts 87 of the 90 recommendations from the Alberta Law Reform Institute. The three recommendations that were not adopted were minor housekeeping provisions. I would encourage everybody in the Assembly to support Bill 12. I will conclude my remarks with that.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join debate today on Bill 12, the Trustee Act, and I certainly look forward to, in due course, expressing my support for the large gist of this Trustee Act replacement that we're looking at. It's not an amendment. It's a new Trustee Act, as the member who just spoke rightly referred to. It was certainly a process that has taken some time. It's welcome to see the act before us now because, of course, the legislation has been in need of updating for a long time.

I think all of us who have been in a position of being asked in the past to be perhaps an executor for the estate of a family member or friend at some point may have considered it to be an extreme honour to be asked to act in that position and perhaps, once actually exercising that role, realized that it was a fairly onerous responsibility to undertake because of the trust requirements that an executor, for example, is forced to undertake. There were lots of situations that were not readily defined under the old act and left the individual who was the trustee in the case of an estate wondering exactly what options existed. There was a lot of clarification that was needed.

This act, I think, goes a long way to doing that because, of course, it adopts about 87 of the 90 recommendations of the Alberta Law Reform Institute but also was based on Bill 12, the Uniform Trustee

Act, 2012, as developed by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada. The ALRI tailored that to reflect Alberta's trust law practice over the course of a number of years. I know the initial report was brought forward for public discussion in 2015, and now, of course, we're looking at 2022, so it's been a long time in the development process, with lots of discussion back and forth within the legal community and within those who are involved in trusts. I think that the result of all that discussion has come to serve us well and that this bill before us addresses many of the long-standing deficiencies of the former act.

Often, Mr. Speaker, as I alluded to when I was talking about people being named as executors, trustees are lay people. They don't have specific knowledge of what it is to be a trustee, and until they actually have the appointment invoked and are in that position may really be unaware of the responsibilities that they have agreed to undertake. I think that this act and the recommendations that have been adopted therein from the Alberta Law Reform Institute go a long way to providing guidance to an individual who has accepted a trusteeship role, particularly if they are a layperson, because it does give specific and very detailed references to numerous situations that may occur during the course of a trusteeship that will potentially involve an estate or an executor role.

11:10

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, what it does as well – and I commend the Alberta Law Reform Institute for bringing forth this recommendation, and I'm glad that we see it in the legislation – is that it creates a two-tiered standard of care. Of course, as a layperson who finds themselves in the position of a trustee, one would not expect the same standard of care from that individual as you would from a professional trustee. The legislation recognizes that, and I commend the drafters for that. Now, all trustees must exercise ordinary care and diligence, as the recommendations say, when dealing with trust property, but professional trustees must exercise a greater degree of skill. This tiered standard will ensure that any trustee who brings or should bring special skills to the performance of his or her trustee duties will be held to a higher standard. That, I think, is something – it is a principle in the legislation that is well founded in reason. The public who engages a professional trustee has a right to expect a higher standard of care from that trustee than they might from Uncle Sam or Uncle Sally, who happens to be named as an executor and is a layperson in that same role. I'm glad to see that element embedded in the legislation as a principle.

The Alberta Law Reform Institute final report really drills into the minutiae of the scenarios that might come forth during a trusteeship. I'm glad that we are finally getting to a point where a layperson, in particular, and not only that but a professional trustee as well can have clarity and rely upon the legislation in such detail as we find it to seek answers without perhaps going to court. The answers are there in the detailed responsibilities that are laid out in the various scenarios that are dealt with in the 87 recommendations that were adopted. It goes a long way, I think, Mr. Speaker, to addressing the concerns that many have expressed over the decades leading up to the development of this legislation. They were in, basically, a black hole of information where the only recourse was to go to the courts because there was no clarity to the existing legislation. I'm pleased to see this legislation.

But you know what, Mr. Speaker? On other fronts within the justice field in this province there are serious deficiencies that haven't been addressed but that could have been while the justice system was being considered for legislative change by the government. For example, we've recently had the Alberta Crown

Attorneys' Association accuse the UCP government of, quote, chronic underfunding, which, they allege, has caused a crisis in the justice system. It seems that it's probably reached a point beyond which we may have ever seen in this province, where the system is so badly in need of greater funding that the Crown prosecutors' association has even threatened to strike. That's a pretty serious measure that they are threatening to take. There are some developments on this front now, but it highlights just how difficult the situation has become and how threatened the system of justice in this province is due to the lack of funding that they faced for a number of years and gotten to the point at which the Crown prosecutors have threatened to strike to highlight the need for proper funding of the justice system in this province.

It comes at a time, Mr. Speaker, when according to the association over 3,000 cases are beyond the 18-month timeline established by the Jordan decision, the 18-month timeline since charges were laid. The government has not addressed this chronic underfunding situation. It chose to, you know, deal with the Trustee Act, which is good, but there are other elements in the justice system that one would have hoped would have gotten the light of day and the attention of government, particularly one that is so extremely dire that the Crown Attorneys' Association, of all organizations, has threatened to strike to highlight the crisis in the justice system that's been caused by underfunding.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Another element of our justice system, Mr. Speaker, that all Albertans are seized with is the notion and the proposal or the desire of the current government to establish an Alberta provincial police force, something that is most unpopular with Albertans, and they have expressed this widely. The government seems to be ignoring that. Even though it would cost approximately \$170 million to transition if the RCMP were replaced with an Alberta provincial police force, that consideration, that economic consideration, seems to be of no consequence to the government, who blindly seem to want to simply replace the RCMP as a pet project of theirs. Now, additionally, that transition cost would be between \$366 million to \$371 million according to a study commissioned by the government.

Now, that indication by the government to want to replace the RCMP with a provincial police force is something that they've refused to respond to when the public has so vociferously indicated that this isn't a direction they want to go in. That's, I think, a failure on the government's part, when it's dealing with justice issues in the province, to properly respond to. The notion should have been dropped a long time ago. Why the government keeps alive the idea that they plan to potentially replace the RCMP with a provincial police force only speaks to their desire to serve a small percentage of the electorate, a base portion, which they require. If they feel that they wish to call an election and hope and try to win it, they have elements like this, like the proposal to replace the RCMP with an Alberta provincial police force, to act as a lure to that element of their electoral base that would support it.

But, by and large, Mr. Speaker, it's not a popular notion in the province, and most Albertans, I would say a large majority, would wish the government to simply drop it. If there are investments to be made in policing, as there are in the justice system in general, as the Crown prosecutors so rightfully claim, that money should be invested in the current RCMP police force that we have in Alberta rather than in the notion that the UCP government has to replace them with a provincial police force, which will cost a whole lot of money that otherwise should be invested to solve issues with the current difficulties that the RCMP may be facing in enforcing the law in the province.

Bill 12, the Trustee Act, is a piece of legislation within the justice realm that we welcome and we largely support. I think it will offer benefits to the world of estates especially, and the legal community, the legal profession will probably be sighing some relief knowing that individuals who are laypeople and acting on behalf of a family member or a friend in an executor role or in other trust situations will have better guidelines or a manual of guidance to refer to while they're exercising their roles as trustees, therefore keeping them out of the court system. I know that the professional trustees also will be comforted to have the detailed guidance as well of the many recommendations that were adopted from the Alberta Law Reform Institute that are forming part of the new Trustee Act, because it also will clarify amongst professionals what the practices should be.

11:20

On those two fronts I think the legislation will be welcomed. I think it is a model, perhaps, for legislation of this import, when we're not just amending an act, Mr. Speaker, when we're actually replacing an act which encompasses such importance as the trusteeships and how they operate in the province, to really have a very well-seasoned consultation. That, I think, is what we've seen here, where there have been over seven years of discussion and heavy involvement by members of the legal community, many of whom have been anxious to see these changes and have been unending in their volunteerism, in many cases, to be willing to sit on committees and talk and discuss amongst themselves and with the Alberta Law Reform Institute and respond to questions and discussion papers to develop these 87 recommendations.

Many thanks are owed to the legal community and many individuals who are noted in the Alberta Law Reform Institute's final report, because these things don't happen by themselves. They take hours and hours and hours of work and dedicated study on the part of professionals who spent the time to put it together. I think the quality of that time and that work is reflected in the recommendations that were ultimately made in the Alberta Law Reform Institute's final report. Knowing that, you know, the initial report was put forward for public discussion in 2015 and that that process has been ongoing since then shows us the depth of knowledge and the importance that the legal community attaches to the new Trustee Act.

If this standard was applied to other pieces of legislation, particularly to replacing an existing act rather than simply amending it, I think that we'd end up with better legislation in the final analysis. That's one of the reasons, Mr. Speaker, why I'm willing to support the Trustee Act. I think that it gives one a level of comfort knowing that the amount of deliberation and debate that went into it was very exhaustive and that the results are before us now in 87 recommendations out of 90 that were accepted. That doesn't happen because the recommendations were made lightly or simply drawn up in a hurry. That happens because they were well considered, well debated, had lots and lots of consultation and back and forth amongst members of the legal community and those who were affected by the measures of the Trustee Act.

As a result, we have a piece of legislation that the opposition is willing to support and that the government, I think, has rightfully brought forward incorporating the Alberta Law Reform Institute recommendations, that have been in discussion for so long and have been brought forward so carefully. I have no qualms about supporting the Trustee Act.

However, there are, as I say, numerous issues within the justice system that, hopefully, the government will turn their attention to that are equally compelling if not more extremely concerning than the Trustee Act, that is now before us. Those, namely, are the crisis in underfunding in the justice system as well as the government

proposal to replace the RCMP with an Alberta police force, which the people in this province don't support. The small percentage that do is simply a group that's being pandered to by the UCP government, and we wish they would stop it.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 12, the Trustee Act, at third reading. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to my colleagues who have spoken previously here today, the Member for Edmonton-McClung, as well as at previous stages of the bill. I also want to recognize the government whip, I believe it is, who introduced third reading.

My sincere hope was that some of the questions that had been asked in committee and in second would have been addressed in the response here at the beginning of third. Unfortunately, I think many of those are still outstanding, and I'm sure my colleagues will have more to say to remind the government of the specific questions that were asked at prior stages of the bill that we were hoping to get some clarity on.

As you've probably heard us say at prior stages, we are inclined to support this bill. It would be a lot easier if we could get some answers to the questions that we've actually asked. I think that any time a government bill comes forward that isn't going to make things worse and might actually make things better, it would be nice to have some collaboration on both sides so that we can feel enthusiastic about supporting the bill. I'm going to be frank that the reason why we have trepidation is because of this government's record on many issues.

This, of course, is a justice bill. I will recap just a couple of the justice issues that we've faced in the three – I was going to say “in the three short years”; for some people, they feel like three long years – years that the current government has had the honour of serving the people of Alberta as the actual government.

So let's go through a bit of a recollection of some of the chaos that has ensued in response to the leadership of the current UCP government. For example, one of the things that the Premier has sort of postured about quite significantly is his desire to create an Alberta provincial police force. This is something that has been incredibly unpopular with Albertans and municipalities alike. I think that there is a very clear lack of trust between this Premier and this cabinet and the UCP and the people of Alberta when it comes to following the law and their relationship with law enforcement.

For example, knowing that many members of the government caucus have been part of an investigation as it relates to the Premier's leadership legitimacy to date – and probably questions will continue to rise in the days and weeks ahead. When the government is under investigation by the Election Commissioner and, rather than comply with the type of questioning that's happening and be forthright in trying to rebuild that relationship and have trust and transparency, instead the government fires the Election Commissioner, it creates a high degree of distrust and then, of course, posturing when we know that there's an RCMP investigation into removing Alberta's relationship with the RCMP and instead having an Alberta provincial police force. This creates great uncertainty, and it creates a greater lack of trust.

As it relates to the Trustee Act, Bill 12 is being sponsored by the Member for Calgary-Acadia, who is the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. Having this as some of the known history as we navigate a new justice bill and when we ask questions that we think are fair and reasonable about, for example, the Auditor General's recommendations and how this bill will implement those and we don't get any answers from government members even as we're

here in third reading, it is no wonder why Albertans find it difficult to trust this government.

11:30

I also want to touch base on another change that was made in justice, and that was around the removal of having access to adjudicate a traffic ticket without having to pay a significant fee. At the same time the government brought in a fee up to \$150 to appeal a traffic ticket. We know that the then Minister of Justice was pulled over for a traffic violation – I believe that it was distracted driving – and rather than pay the fee or go through his own process, that he was in the process of creating, where people would have to pay up to \$150 to be able to appeal their traffic violation, the minister, the Member for Edmonton-South West, decided to pick up the phone and personally call the chief of police.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt. However, I have provided the widest latitude possible with members of the opposition discussing the activities of members of the government. However, I have a real tough time connecting many of the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to how they are relevant to the Trustee Act other than that they are two justice-related pieces of discussion. I'm not convinced that that is relevant to the debate here today. I just provide some caution with respect to relevance to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Debate Continued

Ms Hoffman: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to rearticulate the direct connections. May I have a time check, please?

The Speaker: There are nine minutes and 36 seconds remaining.

Ms Hoffman: Great. Absolutely, this is about justice. The bill, in fact, is about trust. It's about trustees: people who are entrusted to take care of, often – assets is one of the main examples that I used in a prior stage of the bill – assets bestowed upon an individual. Regularly some of the examples I've had are minors who might have a parent who has passed away and has bestowed their life's earnings, their savings, their net worth to their minor child, and that needs to be taken care of in a trust. Trusts and trustees, of course, by their nature, are in positions of power and influence, as the government is, as the Justice minister is.

As it relates to Bill 12, the Trustee Act, the question, of course, is – in the reading of the bill I don't see a lot of significant concerns, but I would like to be enthusiastic in supporting the bill rather than not finding any overt negative consequences, which is why my colleagues and I have asked a number of questions about prior decisions as they relate to trusteeship and how this bill will address those recommendations that have been made by folks like the Auditor General as it relates to the Trustee Act. I do want to say again that trust is a significant issue of concern. When it comes to the government saying, "Don't worry; just trust us on this justice bill," there are a lot of current examples as to why the UCP can't be trusted.

I do want to say that in terms of the text of the bill I think that there are some pieces in it that are important for updating. We have had trustees in the province for a significant amount of time, but being able to update legislation to reflect some of the changes that have happened over the last several decades, I think, is important. I am confident that there were a significant number of public servants

who worked to make sure that things were addressed, like establishing the process for a trustee to resign or to be removed.

This is something that some of us have probably heard through casework in our offices, because you are in that relationship of trust, and the example again of a minor child having access to assets that have been entrusted to them through somebody's estate. For example, if an individual is having a difficult time getting access to the assets that they need to be able to live their lives and achieve full and proper care, things like money to be able to access optometry or dentistry or some of these things aren't yet covered under universal medicare, that people are still expected to pay out of pocket for, being able to have a relationship with a trustee to ensure that that's done in a fair and timely fashion is crucially important. Sometimes those relationships break down or sometimes trustees – for many people this is their occupation, and sometimes they will maybe move on to a different occupation or retire, so having a very clear and well-documented process about how somebody is to resign or be removed, I think, is important. I believe the bill does lay out those provisions.

Also, rules around temporary trustees. This is something that, I imagine, happens from time to time. There might be instances where somebody acquires a short-term injury that impedes their ability to make their own decisions, and making sure that there is a process for somebody to be put in that role of trust but for it not to be presumed that it last indefinitely, I think, is important because we all know that there are times where people are put in a position of trust that isn't warranted, whether it be as a trustee or whether it be in this Chamber or whether it be in other occupations in society, Mr. Speaker.

We also know that there is some clarification around enabling trustees to make majority decisions, and there will also be rules around reporting of trustees to beneficiaries, and I think that that is incredibly important. I know from a lot of folks who've practised family law how contentious it can be when things aren't clearly laid out, when expectations aren't well documented, and when agreements are assumed rather than put in writing, and that is, I think, always difficult when people are in difficult financial situations and when grief is involved. It certainly complicates a lot of those relationships, and those are some of the most difficult stories, I think, that I've heard around when somebody passes, the estate becoming a significant bone of contention between family members.

So making sure that there is a greater degree of transparency around the rules of reporting of trustees to beneficiaries, establishing trustees to make majority decisions, rules around temporary trustees as well as the establishment process of a trustee to resign or to be removed, I think, are probably steps in the right direction. I know that the Auditor General wanted us to take additional steps to improve the work and the role of trustees in the province of Alberta, so it would be helpful if the government were to be more forthright on those types of discussions and what role they played in this bill.

I also believe that at the introduction of third the Member for Leduc-Beaumont mentioned that there were some pieces, I think three recommendations, that were referred to as insignificant or housekeeping that didn't actually make it into this iteration of the bill, so my question would be: if they're insignificant or if they're just housekeeping, why wouldn't they be in this bill? Why wouldn't we ensure that all of the recommendations were addressed? Certainly, it is a significant process to open legislation up again and to update it. When we do have an opportunity before this House – this is one of the reasons why I think that the three stages that we go through are so important, because it gives us a chance to go

through proposed legislation in a thoughtful way. Laws aren't intended to be changed on a whim. Rules should not be changed on a whim. We are in this place to bring forward thoughtful recommendations, thoughtful debate, and to do our best work.

I know that there are some rules that have been changed in this place many, many times. I think the standing orders – I've lost track of how many times. I think it's more than 10. It might even be 11 times now that the standing orders have changed just in the three years of this current government being in this place. Again, those are the rules that we agree to function based on. But it shouldn't be standard practice that regularly we come to this place and we change the rules. And it stands for other laws, too. When we bring in legislation, we should have a high degree of confidence that it is our best work, that all of us, all 87 of us, have put our best thoughts, our best work, and taken the advice of others, like the Auditor General, into consideration when we are amending legislation.

11:40

It would have been nice to have had more fulsome responses to the questions that my colleagues have asked. I imagine some of them will reiterate the concerns that they expressed previously since we haven't yet had a response. Hopefully, a later speaker on the government side will actually address some of those outstanding questions of concern.

To reiterate, there are three essential characteristics to create a trust: certainty of intention, certainty of subject matter, and certainty of objects. It would be great if we saw that certainty, if rather than just say, you know, that there were some small housekeeping things that didn't make their way into the bill, we actually saw some clarity around what those recommendations were and why they didn't make it into the bill. If they are simply housekeeping, it would make sense that they actually be incorporated in this draft so we can put forward our best recommendations and put forward a law that we can all be proud of and stand by, which is, of course, our job.

The Alberta Law Reform Institute report of 2017 is something that we should be using as the foundation to make sure that this bill that we are considering has the proper oversight, forethought, and rigour to make sure that it's something that can stand the test of time. We shouldn't be changing rule books. We shouldn't be changing laws 11 times, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is the second time I've had the opportunity to speak to this act. I'd like to speak a little bit about the conversation so far. When I rose to speak about this act the last time, I indicated that generally I was in support, but I had a few questions, questions which didn't get answered. The interesting thing about this is the why of it. Like, why? Why be belligerent about answering opposition questions just for the sake of it? It makes literally no sense.

The questions were whether there were any other recommendations that didn't make it in besides the definition. The answer was that there were three, and they were housekeeping. There was a question specifically around the definition. That's apparently one of the housekeeping things. Why not just provide a response? Like, it's not that difficult. No one is asking the minister to do this work himself. Just by way of process when a bill is up for debate, whatever ministry holds that particular bill, there's an entire comms department in the ministry. Somebody reads *Hansard*, they take out the questions, they draft answers, they send it to the minister's office, and the minister can choose to do with that what they want.

When I was the minister, what I often did was go back and say: "You know, I don't think this answer is fulsome enough. I'm not sure you, like, fully – this isn't satisfactory to me. Could you provide a little bit more information? Maybe we can make a change to the bill." There was an ongoing conversation about being respectful of my colleagues on both sides of the House. I actually believe that the work that gets done in this place is relevant and important. I believe that whether or not people are watching at every moment, this is their House. The people out there send us here to be their representatives. The purpose of representative democracy is that not everyone can be in this place, not everyone can read the legislation, not everyone can have a fulsome debate about it, so they elect people from among them to come here and to do that work on their behalf.

It is important work. Whatever the government may think of the House or this place or the people of this province or the conversations around democracy, it's important. [interjection] Oh. Yes. Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to my colleague for accepting the intervention. I just was wondering if – we were office neighbours, and I definitely know that she had exceptional staff, many with law backgrounds themselves. If she could talk a little bit about the process and the relationship between the minister, political staff, and the public service in getting fair responses. It's not just the minister. It's not just a handful of political staff. But there is a public service that is certainly willing to get information when asked. So I was hoping that the former minister could maybe talk a little bit about the process and making sure that people's questions were answered, questions that had been asked maybe from members of other parties but certainly deserved an opportunity to be heard and addressed in this place and on record for all Albertans to be able to access. There are times when legislation isn't clear, and the debate that is brought forward in this place helps provide that further clarity to those who are interpreting the law as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much for the question. I do think it's important to understand what these folks are doing. They are servants of the people of Alberta. Everyone who comes to this place, whether a private member, whether a minister, whether a public servant, whether political staff, is meant to be a servant of the people. We are ultimately here to engage in democracy, to engage in that political debate. So when acts would come forward, members of the then opposition, when we were in government, would bring forward questions that maybe were new. I mean, it's entirely possible. That's the purpose of the conversation, that sometimes ideas or thoughts or interactions that are novel come up.

You know, the *Hansard* goes through to the department staff, and the department staff come back and provide responses. Then there's sort of an ongoing conversation between different levels on how to move those responses forward or whether we think they're sufficiently responsive. My political staff and myself would ensure that the responses were, in our view, sufficient.

I mean, it isn't just the opposition that does this. I've seen a number of statements. There are fewer reporters than there used to be, and often you'll just see the statement that was sent out by the minister kind of, like, full text in an article. Statements are often what I would call nonresponsive. They're like an attempt to hide information. Now, I had a press secretary when I was a minister, and her job, most of what she spent her time doing was reviewing those responses to make them more responsive, to put them in language that media and the public understood to ensure that we

were being as transparent as possible on the issues because it is incredibly important to do that.

Now we have press secretaries who spend their time spamming the Internet with misinformation. I mean, it really is embarrassing, and it ought to be.

Ms Gray: Thank you for allowing an intervention. I am sensing a great deal of frustration. The question I have is that we heard the opening speech at third reading delivered by the government whip, which began with: we would like to address the questions that have been asked during debate. I and other members of the opposition were listening carefully to what answers were provided. I just wanted to ask: is your frustration because the answers provided were to a couple of questions while so many other questions were not included? Were they complicated questions? Were they detailed questions?

You were listening to the opening speech at third reading, and the responses to the questions you had asked: I think you found that they were not there. That has kind of brought us to this point, where you're talking about the process. But have you put on record all of the questions they did not answer?

Ms Ganley: Good question. An excellent point. I'll thank the member for that question because indeed I have not. The questions that were asked were: the one about whether any other recommendations didn't go through. We've heard that there were three recommendations that didn't go through. They were all referred to as housekeeping. One was specifically about the definition. I don't think it was particularly housekeeping, so I don't actually think that that was a responsive answer, I would say. Another was about a report from the Auditor General. The report from the Auditor General: these recommendations were made before I had the file, they were made before the UCP had the file, and they've been reiterated a number of times.

11:50

One of those recommendations is about policy controls and how to ensure that there is appropriate policy control and control over – improve and follow policy and procedure. Specifically, what they say in the report is “review and assess whether its policies are appropriate, and procedures are adequate to mitigate the risk that client assets could be mismanaged” – pretty big risk, I'd say – and “improve its processes for ensuring compliance with policies and procedures.” This is something that has been repeated a couple of times by the Auditor General, and what I asked was simply – and you could actually refer to this question as a puffball.

For those who aren't familiar with the term, it's a term used in question period to refer to a question where a government member stands up and essentially asks the equivalent of, like: could the minister tell us why he or she is so awesome? This could be perceived as such a question because it's entirely possible that this act itself is responsive to the recommendation of the Auditor General to improve policies and procedures, because generally policies – so it's legislation, regulations, policies. Those are the three levels. Sometimes the policies are insufficient because the legislation doesn't allow them to be sufficient.

So it's entirely possible that what I asked was for the minister to stand up and tell me why he's so awesome and doing such a great job, yet the government chose to be nonresponsive to that, which is just – it's such a weird choice. Like, why? [interjection] Oh, yes. Sorry. Another intervention.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you to the hon. member. I just wanted to join in a little bit on this because I'd like to hear a little bit more about

the specific questions you asked and why they weren't raised. I also wanted to mention that I actually had the opportunity to work, you know, to be on the other side of things. You mentioned about how, like, these are questions that fulfill debate and you can have their answers. We've already indicated that we generally support this bill. They're just to fulsomely explain what the contents of the bill were.

I've sat on the other side of being a public servant and had ministers under the Progressive Conservatives who would come to me and say: “The opposition has asked this question. I'd like to be able to answer it, whether publicly in the House or to provide an answer to them.” These are not gotcha questions, right? They're genuine questions to fully understand. So, you know, what do you think, given your experience as a minister, would have been a reasonable way in order to address some of these questions? And please go on with any other questions that you had asked that had not been addressed by the ministries.

Ms Ganley: Thank you to the member for that, because she's absolutely right. There is an entire department that works incredibly hard to get answers to these questions for people. This current UCP government has been just nonresponsive – nonresponsive – and the thing is, you know, the members opposite feel like I'm being partisan about this, but the truth is that there are members over there who were private members in the opposition when we were in government, and many of them can probably tell you that I was fairly responsive as a minister. I tried to do my best job because I thought it was in the public interest. The fact that the current UCP ministers are nonresponsive isn't just disrespectful to me as an opposition private member; it's disrespectful to every private member in this place because they aren't in the cabinet discussion either. They don't get those answers either. But they may well be hearing these questions from their constituents as well. So I think that's incredibly problematic.

Just to make sure I get it on the record, because, as it turns out, I've been more long-winded than intended, as always. Just to get it on the record, the fourth question that I asked was about a computer system. It's a pretty straightforward question. Did you get the computer system in or not? It's not difficult to answer the question: they did or they didn't. I can probably go back and check the multiple years of . . .

Ms Rosin: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

Point of Order Relevance

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, we've been sitting here for – I don't know – so long I feel as though I've lost track of time. Sorry. This is under 23(b), speaking “to matters other than . . . the question under discussion.” I fail to understand how question period or puffball questions or ministers' responses to e-mails or the willingness to engage the opposition has . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. If the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud wants to join in the point of order, I'm sure that she'll have plenty of opportunity to do so.

Ms Rosin: Again, Mr. Speaker, we are on the debate of Bill 12, the Trustee Act, and I just fail to understand how the opposition's, perhaps, disgruntlement with the engagement from government members has any relation to the matters at hand.

The Speaker: Well, I couldn't disagree more. It's very clear that the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has been referring to questions that she asked during debate about this very bill. It's very clear that this is relevant to the discussion, and she can continue should she choose to do so.

Debate Continued

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. So the point was that I asked a question about the computer system at the public guardian and trustee's office and whether or not that had been implemented because it was, in my recollection, relevant to the policy controls that the Auditor General had asked about, which may in fact be related again to this new Trustee Act. I'm a little surprised that this has generated so much emotion, but there it is.

The point is that – I mean, it has or it hasn't. The RFP went out; the computer system was built. I'm not sure. I suppose I could go back and check the estimates, but the point is that normally a minister in this place would feel the need to be responsive to that question, would get the response from the department and put it into the speech, whether the speech was delivered by someone else or not. It just seems a little bit peculiar to me that they would avoid answering such a simple question just because they could avoid answering it. It just seems nontransparent and inconsistent with the duty of members and ministers in this place. I do find that a bit frustrating.

It's worth talking a little about the definition. The definition in question, that was suggested to be put in, was a definition of represented adult. I've actually now gone back to the ALRI report and to the bill. ALRI had originally and the Uniform Law Conference had originally been recommending a definition of incapacitated person to include different definitions in different acts just so everything works together. There was some public consultation. I'm on page 38 of the report here, and it says:

ALRI received feedback on the proposed definition for "represented adult". Specifically the feedback indicated that replacing the Uniform Act term "incapacitated person" with the term "represented adult" could create difficulty in practice.

Using the term "represented adult", as that term is used in the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act or the Public Trustee Act, will require that a court order be obtained for the appointment of a trustee or guardian for an incapacitated person. However, other adults who have lost capacity may be represented by an instrument other than a court order. The definition of "incapacitated person" should also capture people who have lost capacity and are represented under enduring powers of attorney or personal directives.

I mean, that sounds kind of long and boring, but it's actually fairly important, so I wouldn't call it housekeeping. I would not classify it as that. Now, as it turns out in the act, they have stayed with the definition, and the definition is almost identical to the definition recommended here for represented person, but they have instead stayed with "incapacitated person" as a term.

I guess, Mr. Speaker, the point of that rather long-winded discussion of which term is defined and which term is used is that there was an answer to that question. It wasn't a particularly complicated answer. The ministry could have chosen to provide it, and the minister hasn't just because he could. It just seems so weird to me that in an instance where you could have an Official Opposition enthusiastically supporting a bill rather than, "Gee, I guess this seems okay," you wouldn't provide those answers. We're not here asking questions about the bills to irritate the minister. We're here asking questions about the bill because, again, we were sent here . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt; however, the time for debate this morning has elapsed, and the House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, April 27, 2022

Day 25

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 27, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Members, we have some very, very special guests from our brothers and sisters in the flatlands of Saskatchewan. Members are joining us in the Speaker's gallery today. Hon. Bronwyn Eyre, Minister of Energy and Resources, is accompanied by chief of staff Carter Zazula and Deputy Minister of Energy and Resources Susanna Laaksonen-Craig. Please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us in the galleries today are two constituents of the Member for Calgary-Hays, the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Please welcome Shannon Sereda and her son Jax Sereda. Also joining us in the gallery today is Blair McCormick, executive director of Calgary Fetal Alcohol Network. He is a constituent and guest of the Member for Calgary-Bow, the Minister of Advanced Education. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River has a statement to make.

Holocaust Remembrance Day

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and recognize Yom ha-Shoah, also known as Holocaust Remembrance Day. Yom ha-Shoah is Israel's day of commemoration for the over 6 million Jews that perished during the Holocaust at the hands of the Nazis. The Holocaust, also known as Shoah in Hebrew, is arguably the darkest chapter in human history and something that we all have the moral duty to remember, as difficult as it may be.

While Yom ha-Shoah is a time for sombre remembrance, it is also a time of recognition of the strength and the will of the Jewish people. The Holocaust took from the Jewish people much life. Under Nazi rule the Jewish resistance included everything from taking up arms against the Nazis to smuggling food to prisoners and helping prisoners escape the death camps. The primary goal of the Holocaust was to eradicate Jews from existence, but this proved to be an impossible task, thanks in part to the work of the Jewish resistance.

It is not uncommon to hear stories about hate-motivated violence being targeted at Jewish people today in Alberta and across Canada. We as legislators and leaders must show zero tolerance against anybody showing discrimination or anti-Semitism against Jews or any other groups and work together to find solutions. I am proud that our government has taken action to fight hatred against Jewish people and others by providing grants to help synagogues and other religious facilities purchase security equipment and training to prevent hate-based attacks. I am encouraged by the work of Alberta's Anti-Racism Advisory Council, which is advising the government on how best to address the issue of racism and promote tolerance and inclusion.

It is all our responsibility to ensure that the evils that occurred during Nazi Germany never happen again and that the stories of those who were imprisoned, tortured, and murdered in the Holocaust can never be forgotten. Yom ha-Shoah is not a holiday. It is a time to rededicate ourselves to the hard work of eradicating hatred, discrimination, and anti-Semitism wherever and whenever it occurs.

Hydrogen Strategy

Ms Ganley: Investors across the globe were watching to see what plans this UCP government has to grow our hydrogen sector. All they got was a reannouncement of a hydrogen centre for excellence, a \$50 million investment, but no real plan to grow the sector. The Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity could not say how many jobs will be created or point to any emissions targets they were working towards. The centre doesn't even have a physical centre to work out of. The hydrogen sector is growing fast, attracting millions in investment while this government continues to drag its feet.

Over 17 months ago we released a comprehensive hydrogen strategy that would have set Alberta up for success. Our proposal would get Albertans to work immediately with well-paying, secure jobs in numerous pilot projects and spur construction of hydrogen infrastructure. The current government's plan doesn't have a plan to export Alberta-made hydrogen any time soon. Its target for export is 2040, which is simply too late. Getting our hydrogen to foreign markets early is crucial to securing market share and establishing ourselves as an energy powerhouse beyond oil and gas. Our strategy would begin to export hydrogen well before then. We would do this by working with industry, Indigenous communities, and federal partners to construct needed infrastructure for export.

Creating an ambitious plan to grow the hydrogen sector is not easy. We know because we did it. I want to encourage all Albertans to head to albertasfuture.ca and let us know what they think of our action plan that will help to grow the hydrogen sector. I'd encourage the government members to read it as well. They might actually learn something that could help them to create good jobs for Albertans and attract billions in new investment.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright has a statement to make.

2022 Chevrolet Good Deeds Cup Champions

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to stand here today to recognize a city in my constituency, Lloydminster, and the 2022 Chevrolet good deeds champions, the U13 female Lloydminster Blazers. This is a great deal for my constituency as it is the first time a female hockey team has won as well as the first time a city in the prairies has won the Good Deeds Cup. This wonderful event has gone on for the past six years, and in that time they have challenged over 10,000 hockey players across Canada to go out and do good deeds in their communities. These hockey teams have made a huge impact, with over 1,000 good deeds completed and \$550,000 donated to charities across Canada.

This season Chevrolet shifted the focus of this event to make hockey and arenas more inclusive to people from all backgrounds and abilities. The Lloydminster Blazers' focus was ensuring that their arena was built to be accessible to everyone in the community. Part of the reason they won was contributed to the event they ran, the tri-para event, to raise awareness on the importance of building an accessible and inclusive arena.

In addition to them winning the championship, Chevrolet donated \$100,000 to the Blazers to be put towards Inclusion Lloydminster, which is a nonprofit organization. A member of Lloydminster, Ross Ulmer, owner of Ulmer Chevrolet, has graciously matched this donation, giving the U13 Blazers a total of \$200,000 towards Inclusion Lloydminster and the new arena. This donation will be directed towards making the soon-to-be-built 2,500-seat arena in Lloydminster more accessible and inclusive.

I'm proud to stand here today to congratulate my community and the U13 Blazers on not only this incredible championship but the initiative they are taking to improve accessibility and inclusion in Lloydminster.

Seniors' Supports

Ms Sigurdson: In my role as MLA and critic for seniors and in my own life I'm fortunate to be able to spend time with seniors in this province. They're a font of wisdom, a depth of understanding, and a source of many laughs and joy-filled moments. Seniors built this province and deserve to age in dignity.

Sadly, folks across the aisle don't seem to share the deep respect I have for elders, and I worry that under the UCP they are being left behind. The cost of living is going up, inflation is increasing, yet this government is neglecting seniors' concerns. The cost of utilities: up. Groceries: up. Insurance: up. The seniors' benefit: well, though it's more important than ever before, seniors' benefits are not up. This is shameful. These are not the only places that seniors have felt the pain of choices made by the UCP. We have seen cuts to special needs assistance, cuts to grants, cuts to housing support. It's death by a thousand cuts, Mr. Speaker, but the UCP don't care about the impacts of their thoughtless policies. They terminated the Seniors Advocate, a role which improved lives during our NDP government. The advocate stands up for the interest of seniors and provides support to them.

Now, to add to all of this, the UCP's continuing care bill leaves consequential amendments to regulations, meaning seniors won't actually know what impacts the legislation may have on their lives. Over 1,600 residents died in continuing care during the pandemic, and the UCP does not understand the situation's urgency. Seniors just can't trust the UCP. They make big promises, but at the end of the day a promise is worth nothing if you don't deliver.

The NDP will deliver, Mr. Speaker. We will stand with seniors. We will ensure benefits are indexed. We will put forward meaningful changes. We will reinstate the office of the Seniors Advocate. We will put actions behind our words. You can trust us to follow through.

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

1:40

Electric Power Prices

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again our government must clean up another mess left to us by the NDP, left for Albertans. The NDP failed to address long-term issues within our system, and now everyday Albertans are paying for their mistakes. The NDP's disastrous mismanagement of the electricity system lost approximately \$1.3 billion in ratepayer money, which now must be paid back by Alberta ratepayers until 2030. What a shame that our children must pay the price for such terrible policies enacted by the NDP. Thank goodness Albertans fired them in the last election. On this side of the House we stand with Albertans.

Now, with the support of the NDP, the federal Liberals are doubling down on their Alberta-punishing carbon tax, which will only drive up the price of living and drive down the quality of life for all Albertans. The Alberta NDP thought that they had a long-

term solution for energy prices, but their short-term, narrow-sighted, Band-Aid fix to energy through the means of a rate cap has now created a \$108 million bill that Albertans still have to pay.

On this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we do not believe in borrowing from future generations to pay this month's electricity bill. That is why this government has created a long-term, stable plan to level the price of electricity so all Albertans can keep their lights on. We will be supporting a competitive market that provides consumers with choice and strengthens the electricity system. Other plans to assist Albertans will include fixed-price contracts to equalize payment plans and floating regulated rates.

Our plans are already working. We have seen more than \$5 billion in investment announced for generation projects since 2019, including more than \$2 billion for renewable energy projects. The proof is in the pudding. This government has created long-term plans to keep energy costs down while still investing in green energy projects.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government House Leader

Ms Hoffman: For those of us lucky enough to be elected by Albertans, to be able to come to this place and advocate for the people we represent and for the issues facing this province is one of the top privileges of our lives. Our caucus is full of people who came to this place with a respect for democracy and for the Legislature, that has served Albertans for over 115 years. I wish I could say the same was true for everyone across the aisle. Promising to work hard and stay humble, we have seen a government motivated solely by self-interest.

There is no clearer example of this than the person the Premier chooses to be his voice in this House. The Government House Leader was forced to apologize after his vulgar remarks and for saying that he would change the rules of this place because he was annoyed, the Government House Leader who won't answer simple questions about UCP policy without baseless smears, trying to silence those who disagree with him. He refused to apologize to this Assembly for taking part in a boozy, white tablecloth dinner on the sky palace patio in violation of the rules that he demanded others follow during the pandemic. He fired a single mother who came to him reporting sexual harassment, and when caught trespassing by a landowner, he threatened to shoot her.

Albertans deserve better from the leadership of this government, from a Premier that they can trust, and from his right-hand man, who they clearly can't respect. The Premier promised that he and his team would work hard and that they would stay humble. Albertans see through this, Mr. Speaker, and they want a government who will work with them, not bully and threaten those who disagree with them. We need a better Government House Leader in this Legislature.

Better yet, we need a better government. Alberta's NDP is here, and we are ready to serve Albertans by making their lives more affordable, creating good-paying, stable jobs, strengthening public health care and education, and restoring Albertans' trust in their government.

Thank you.

Addiction Treatment and Recovery

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, Trudeau disagrees with how Alberta is dealing with the opioid epidemic, and our major cities are asking for hard drugs to be decriminalized. Fortunately, Alberta is doing her due diligence with our Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply, and we've heard expert opinions from folks that understand the science, folks like the director-general of the Portuguese Ministry

of Health responsible for addictive behaviours and dependencies, the face of Portugal's drug policy reform unit.

We've heard from the director of a local detox centre with pre- and posttreatment programming up in Fort McMurray. We heard from clinical psychologists, comprehensive family physicians, psychiatrists specializing in addiction, and professors from schools like Yale, Harvard, and Stanford, people who are subject matter experts in things like addictions, mental illness, homelessness, and substance abuse, people with qualifications in fields like medicine, forensic psychiatry, addiction neurobiology, addiction recovery, and rehabilitation. We heard from a comprehensive family physician focusing on complications from injection drug use and a professor teaching Indigenous cultural safety. We had the only bipartisan drug policy adviser to three U.S. presidents and a policy adviser to other nations like Australia, South Korea, and the United Kingdom.

Invitations were sent out to folks that participate in safe supply programs in provinces like B.C., but unfortunately none were willing to participate. I'm guessing it's because they had no evidence to support their claims.

Fortunately, this government is guiding the mental health and addictions system to be recovery oriented based on studies and science. We've created 8,000 new treatment recovery spaces and eliminated all the user fees. We're developing five new therapeutic communities, created licensing and accreditation standards for other facilities. We're developing drug treatment courts, and we've increased funding for law enforcement and are allowing police to provide on-demand treatment.

We know that consumption sites and decriminalizing drugs do not make communities safer. Setting up an environment to allow individuals to recover from drug addiction does. Behind every addiction is a human being worthy of a healthy life filled with dignity and purpose.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Alberta at Work Initiative

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past two years our government has been working hard, putting in place policies to bring us through difficult times and put our province onto the path of economic recovery. I am pleased to say that Alberta's economic recovery is now in full swing. Because of our government's leadership, jobs lost during the pandemic have returned, but there's still much more to do.

A recent chamber of commerce survey confirmed that half of Alberta businesses are still facing staff shortages. These businesses have indicated that they aren't getting enough applications or the applicants lack the skill set necessary for the position. Skills matter, Mr. Speaker. A skilled workforce is at the very heart of competitiveness and prosperity, and outstanding careers are built on skills. Our government recognizes the importance of access to employment supports so that Albertans can develop the necessary skills to fulfill these roles.

To address this need, our government recently announced \$600 million over three years for the Alberta at work program to address labour market needs. The money will be invested in a series of programs to support training and to remove employment barriers due to race, ethnicity, age, gender, and abilities. Under this program \$87 million will go to support STEM and trades training, \$295 million will go to create training options in high-demand fields, \$100 million will go to training for work and the Canada-Alberta job grant to support the unemployed and employers, and \$23 million will go to help low-income students join high-demand

programs. This builds on the work that we've already done to enhance and support skilled trades apprenticeship training to ensure that thousands of young Albertans have access to postsecondary education and hands-on training needed to help meet our future labour market needs.

These announcements will ensure that Alberta's workforce is better positioned to meet current and future economic needs. Because of our government's leadership, Alberta's economy is back, and the future looks so bright.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

New Schools in Camrose and Premier's Visit

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During constituency week the Premier visited Camrose for a tour of the newly opened Chester Ronning school and the sod-turning for the new school planned for the Elk Island school board. The last time the Premier was with us, we participated in the sod-turning event for the Chester Ronning school. I was delighted to share in the beginning moments of the school and the finished results with him. It was very fitting and well timed that the Premier's visit coincided with this important time for the students and staff.

The one item that everyone commented about was the windows. The previous school was built in a round shape in brick and originally had no windows at all. The environment was not conducive to student learning, and windows were added. The biggest request for the new school – you guessed it – was windows. And there are many windows, big windows, that allow a sky view, and coloured glass to enhance the design. The school turned out absolutely beautifully.

Additionally, there were several RAP students who participated in the construction of the building. My hope is that we'll be able to share it with their children, who will hopefully attend the school that their parents helped build. I am so pleased at how well it has turned out and how beautiful it is and was glad to bring the Premier through to speak with the Battle River school trustees, staff, and students.

After our visits to the new school site for Elk Island Catholic school and the tour of Chester Ronning school, we ended the day off with a visit to Hart House Wine & Tapa. This gastropub is locally owned and operated, with great food, and is an area favourite. I can't wait to show the Premier around to more locally owned businesses in the Camrose constituency in the future. I also welcome all my colleagues to come and check out the great locations that the Camrose constituency has to offer. Come and visit.

1:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to moving to Oral Question Period, I would like to make a brief statement. The statement is not with respect to the fact that the Deputy Government House Leader had a conversation with me here at the dais. Those two events are separate.

I would like to remind members that while members' statements have the widest latitude of freedom of speech here inside the Assembly, I do want members to think carefully about the words that they use in those statements and how they may impact other members of the Assembly and in particular when making what may be considered to be accusations about what members of the Assembly do, have done, or may do.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Physician Recruitment and Retention

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, all Albertans deserve access to a doctor in their communities. Sadly, this Premier ripped up the doctors' contract and then led a prolonged fight with physicians throughout a global pandemic. Today a new report shows that the number of doctors and PCNs across the province who are accepting new patients has dropped by half under just two years of this government's leadership. Why doesn't the Premier rise and apologize to the tens of thousands of Albertans who can't see a family doctor right now because of this UCP government's incompetence?

Mr. Kenney: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, there are significantly more doctors working for Albertans today than under the NDP. In fact, there's been an increase of 99 physicians billing in Alberta over the first quarter of this year over last year. There are an additional 1,800 nurses more than under the NDP and, in addition, an increase by 230 in the number of paramedics working at Alberta Health Services versus this time last year. This is a reflection of our historic investments in health care, a \$2 billion baseline increase in the budget for Alberta Health.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier continues to cherry-pick the stats and then tell us that there is nothing to see here, but yesterday, or two days ago, Albertans did have something to see. They saw a lineup of 14 ambulances outside the Red Deer hospital. Sources tell us that this is because they've lost nurses, hospitalists, radiologists, anaesthetists, urologists, general surgeons, and good old-fashioned ER docs. The lingering hostility from this Premier's refusal to negotiate a respectful contract is creating parking lot emergency medicine. When can Albertans expect this Premier to step up, sign a proper contract, and stop the bleeding?

Mr. Kenney: Well, in fact, we did negotiate a respectful contract with tens of thousands of Alberta nurses. After they went through four years of no increases under the NDP, this government has provided significant and meaningful increases in compensation in an agreement that was endorsed by 86 per cent of Alberta nurses. It's true that there's been a significant increase in the number of emergency visits in Red Deer, partly because of the rise in COVID-19 cases requiring hospitalization plus staff absences due to illness. It's not the first time. Certainly, under the NDP we saw a stress on emergency wards at various times . . .

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: With all that so-called pressure, this Premier's Health budget plans to cut \$800 million compared to what they spent last year. It's like talking to a brick wall, only thicker. Meanwhile new stats show more doctors are leaving, ambulances lined up outside the ERs, AHS telling women they can't deliver babies – north, south, east, west – in Alberta, and whole cities without access to a family doctor, Mr. Speaker. Instead of taking any responsibility, the Premier puts on a blindfold to go along with the earplugs. What will it take for this Premier to open his eyes and do something to fix the mess he's made?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the NDP leader just uttered an absolute bald-faced falsehood when she claimed that we cut the Health budget by \$800 million. In 2020 the budget was \$21.378 billion, and in the budget just adopted for the fiscal year ahead, it's \$22 billion. There was a \$900 million increase in the baseline budget last year, a \$600 million increase in the baseline budget this year in addition to nearly \$3 billion of COVID contingency funding for the

health care system to the highest levels in Alberta history, the second most expensive . . .

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

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, he's reading the budget wrong, but different conversation, different time.

Personal Income Tax Deindexation

Ms Notley: Alberta families are under immense pressure from the rising cost of living. Inflation is at a 30-year high, and Albertans are paying more for food, clothing, and everything else. As columnist Rob Breakenridge correctly pointed out yesterday, the Premier's tax on inflation will now take a billion dollars out of the pockets of families at a time when they can least afford it. This regressive tax grab has to end. To the Premier. We've asked this before. Why won't he act today to reverse his unfair and ever-growing tax on Alberta families?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, there's no wrong way of citing the budget numbers. They're just simply numbers. I know the NDP is not good with numbers, which is why they ran up record deficits while raising taxes and wrecking our economy. The Health budget was \$20.285 billion. That's the baseline budget in the budget that she voted against. She voted against the \$600 million increase, \$22.018 billion. That's a \$600 million . . .

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: You know, when it comes to helping Albertans, it's all about delay with these guys. On Monday they voted against a deadline for delivering their rebates to Albertans, and meanwhile the Finance minister is musing about maybe getting rid of this mean-spirited tax some time next year. That is too late. A recent survey shows that Albertans are the most financially stressed in Canada. Over half are worried about managing their debt. Albertans shouldn't have to wait for an election year for the Premier to undo his broken promise. Why won't they reverse his unfair tax now?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this is a tax-cutting government. This is the government that eliminated the largest tax increase in Alberta history, the NDP's carbon tax grab, that is costing Albertans, the average family, \$600 a year. But the NDP is not satisfied with that. They want to collaborate with their ally Justin Trudeau to increase that by fourfold.

Speaking of Justin Trudeau, Mr. Speaker, why did the NDP sign their coalition agreement with him without demanding an increase in the Canada health transfer for provinces like Alberta?

Ms Notley: Well, the Premier knows that Albertans actually get 90 per cent of that one back, and interestingly that rebate shows up on time.

Meanwhile this Premier is hiking insurance premiums, raising tuition, jacking up school fees, raising property taxes, and abandoning Albertans while their utility bills go through the roof. Mr. Speaker, families will lose \$500 per year because of this Premier's regressive tax on inflation. Now, the Premier claimed on Facebook that he's keeping an open mind, so let's test it. If we did his work for him and drafted a bill to scrap his tax, would he support it, and why not?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we said all along that partial deindexation of the code was a temporary measure to help us address the massive structural deficit left behind by the NDP, which was threatening the

province's fiscal future. Thanks to the fiscal discipline of this government, discipline constantly attacked by the NDP, we have presented the first balanced budget in 14 years. We're leading the country in economic growth and in job creation. Yes, as I've said in this place before, that liberates us to give options for tax relief, broader tax relief, for Albertans, starting with the elimination of the fuel tax.

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

Ms Notley: They gave \$4 billion or more to profitable corporations and took a billion dollars out of the pockets of families.

Provincial Elections

Ms Notley: Albertans have had it with this UCP government – the incompetence, the infighting, the indifference to the public – and this week they're opening the newspaper and seeing speculation of an early election. It seems, quote, unquote, Conservative strategists are lining up some options for the Premier should his leadership vote result be less than stellar. Now, Alberta has a fixed election date, one these guys put in, that has the vote on May 29, 2023. Simple question: will he respect it? Yes or no?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to see that the NDP leader is eager for an election. She'll have to wait, though, because it'll be in May 2023 per our commitment to hold a legislated election date.

With respect to the corporate income tax, Mr. Speaker, the NDP raised it. They raised it by 20 per cent, and revenues went down for four years. This government brought in the job-creation tax cut, and now revenues are skyrocketing. Why? Because this economy has taken off. Albertans are getting back to work, and the recovery plan is working.

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, his claim that they'll respect the May date is encouraging, but that's not the same tune the Premier sings behind closed doors. Inside UCP caucus meetings the Premier threatens to call an early election just to intimidate his own members into staying silent. His definition of being too tolerant of dissent is to wield democratic processes like a weapon for his own self-preservation at the expense of Alberta democracy. Does the Premier not realize that Alberta's democratic system should never ever be used as his own personal caucus management tool?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I've never said any such thing. That is complete rubbish. I've pointed out publicly that in our Westminster parliamentary democracy if a government loses confidence, there is an election. This government is not going to lose confidence. This government is going to continue to drive Alberta forward into a period of renewed prosperity, leading Canada in economic growth, in job creation, in diversification, in tax reduction, and, yes, we're achieving what we said we would do: creating jobs, growing the economy, getting pipelines built, and building a stronger Alberta.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, not a day goes by that Albertans don't come up to me and say that they cannot wait for the next election. While I tend to agree, the lawyer in me has a rather strong preference for following the law. However, Albertans are well aware that this Premier will do whatever he can to skew the rules in his favour. His track record on democracy is one of secrecy, scandal, and suspicion, so I ask him this: will he stand and declare that any Premier who breaks or tries a last-minute rewrite of election law is not worthy of re-election?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's pathetic to see how desperate the NDP has become, that they're spinning these conspiracy theories. This government was elected on a commitment for democratic reform, which is why we brought in the recall law, the citizen initiative referendum law, the Senate elections. It's also why we brought in a specific date for the next election, so that the Premier can't play games like she did. That has been passed into law. This government will respect that law, and I'll tell you that the most important thing is that Albertans will have a chance to choose between going back to the economic disaster of the NDP or forward into an era of prosperity.

Insurance Premium Tax Revenue

Ms Phillips: Albertans pay a tax to this government on their insurance policies. As premiums rise, so does the insurance tax revenue the government collects. Budget 2022 projects that insurance premiums and UCP insurance tax revenues are set to soar. After population and inflation are accounted for, this government's own documents show that car insurance premiums will rise by nearly \$900 million over the next three years. Just how cozy is the Premier's relationship with big insurance lobbyists that he is willing to campaign on taking another \$900 million out of Albertans' pockets?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The opposition's math and the poor use of data is atrocious. They're taking two different data sets, conflating the two, and drawing a conclusion that is nowhere near the truth. Here's the truth: seven automobile insurance marketing companies have offered and requested reductions in automobile insurance premiums. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition has had an opportunity to ask a question. If she'd like to do so, she's welcome to but not while the minister is answering the question.

Mr. Toews: Seven insurance companies have applied to the rate board for reductions, Mr. Speaker. On average automobile insurance premiums are going down according to the rate board. That's the fact.

Ms Phillips: Spin. All we hear is spin, but Albertans never hear the UCP talk about protecting consumers. Not once. Never. Page 205 of the UCP budget shows that since they were elected and over the next three years, they will take hundreds of millions more out of people's pockets in insurance taxes. Why is that revenue gushing in? Because insurance premiums are skyrocketing. If premiums are stabilizing, as we just heard the government claim, why is the revenue that you collect, that you take from people, skyrocketing?

Mr. Toews: I'll tell you why, Mr. Speaker: because the economy is rolling, because we positioned this economy to disproportionately attract investment, create jobs, and create wealth. That's reflected in this budget document. It's reflected in every revenue line of this budget.

Ms Phillips: More spin, more half-truths or quarter-truths, perhaps no truth at all.

Since this minister was elected, the taxes he takes from us have gone up 56 per cent, and he's only been elected three years. After population and inflation growth this government is projected to take \$900 million out of Albertans' pockets in car insurance premiums over the next three years. Why does his own budget show his car insurance premium taxes

going through the roof? How can he campaign on even higher premiums? Why not just protect consumers?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, the fast-and-loose use of data is atrocious by the members opposite. Here are the facts. On average, according to the rate board, the majority of insurance companies are applying for – hear it – a rate reduction. Here’s the other fact: our economy is starting to roll. The budget reflects it. Every revenue line in this budget reflects it. It reflects increased investment attraction, job creation, increased wealth creation, fiscal capacity, and a balanced budget. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Tourism Strategy

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, over the past two years Alberta’s tourism industry faced soaring viral case numbers, the disappearance of visitation, high unemployment rates, and now, just as things are widely reopening, crippling labour shortages. Alberta’s Rocky Mountains serve as the face of our province on the international stage, and supporting their industry through recovery and into future growth is paramount. Some suggest that mountain parks may recover far in advance of other destinations, which is great news for us, but, broadly speaking, can the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation tell us how the sector is doing today, as we approach the busy and important summer season?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. Obviously, the tourism industry over the last two years has been decimated by the COVID pandemic. We’re working with them hand in hand right now to get them back to prepandemic levels by 2024. That’s why we’ve provided Travel Alberta with over \$60 million over the next three years of additional funding to make sure that we can bring back those visitors to Alberta. We’re focusing on routes, we’re focusing on marketing, and also making sure that it is a world-class experience from corner to corner here in the province of Alberta.

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

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I’m glad to hear that recovery is well under way. There’s still so much work to be done. Our mountain towns are preparing for prepandemic levels of visitation already this summer, but we know that these numbers will not equate to prepandemic levels of revenue if the visitors are primarily domestic. Given that Travel Alberta data suggests that international visitors spend far more than domestic visitors every day, this demonstrates the importance of attracting them back and diversifying our tourism economy to offer them high-revenue experiences. To the same minister: what can be done by this government to facilitate this important work?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need to re-establish flights around the world. That’s why our project bootstrap work, in collaboration with Travel Alberta, is doing just that. They’re investing in the advance work necessary to create the demand to re-establish routes. They’re doing that with airlines. As well, we’re working on a whole range of strategies, enhancing Indigenous tourism opportunities here. People want to experience Indigenous

culture when they come to Alberta as well as food-to-table experiences. I’m a city guy, but there are all these farm experiences out there. People want to be there for that. They want that experience. Alberta has it for them.

Ms Rosin: Well, thank you again, Minister. Given the importance of Alberta’s tourism sector to the overall economic recovery of our province and given that 99 per cent of businesses in our tourism industry are small and medium sized, owned and operated by hard-working Alberta entrepreneurs, to the same minister: on behalf of the business community in Banff-Kananaskis, members of which were recently recognized as Alberta’s number one mid-sized chamber of commerce, how will our government carry out this strategy to guarantee the growth and success of Alberta’s tourism sector?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the member knows that Banff is the busiest national park in the entire country. On top of that, we have the second-busiest and the ninth-busiest parks in Jasper and Waterton. On top of that, we’ve got Drumheller. We’ve got the Peace Country. We’ve got your constituency of Olds, Mr. Speaker. We have so many opportunities to share the wonderful landscape and the culture of Alberta with the world. We’re also seeing right now the beginning of events coming back to Alberta. Just right now there are 2,000 people at the hydrogen conference, delegations from around the world. That’s the plan. We’re going to get tourism back here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has a question.

Red Deer Regional Hospital Emergency Services

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday Albertans spotted 14 ambulances lined up outside the Red Deer hospital carrying patients in need of care left waiting to access the emergency room, emergency patients left to be cared for in the parking lot. Imagine the stress and anxiety they and the paramedics caring for them felt. Parking lot medicine is not acceptable, but it’s happening as a direct result of the chaos in public health care caused by this government. Will the Minister of Health stand in this House and apologize to these patients and the people of Red Deer for failing them on their right to access quality health care when and where they need it?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I’d like to thank the hon. member for this important question. As we’ve spoken to many times in the House, the emergency system is seeing a high number of patients across Alberta. The Red Deer regional hospital centre has experienced a surge in demand in recent days due to high volumes of seriously ill patients, a rise in COVID-19 cases requiring hospitalization, and staff absences. On Monday the hospital activated overcapacity protocols to help address patient flow, including transferring existing in-patients who could safely have their care needs met at continuing care facilities or at home, discharging patients to community settings where it’s safe to do so. We are aware of the challenges that the system is facing, and I’d be pleased to speak more about our approach to actually address EMS in particular. We are expanding capacity across the entire system, including EMS, and in our hospital system.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that these pressures created by hospital beds that are closed, by the way, across central Alberta have added to this crisis and that that is on this government and given that while people are suffering in Red Deer parking lots, unable to get the care they need, and these 14 ambulances wait in line, they were prevented from being able to respond to other calls and given that this province is trying to claim its new EMS strategy will deliver better results for communities – they aren't seeing it – will the minister explain how this government let us get to this point in the first place and what he will do today to ensure we never have a line of ambulances trapped, providing care in a parking lot outside the Red Deer hospital, ever again?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows and we've spoken to in this Chamber numerous times, there has been an increase in call volume since last August, a 30 per cent increase, for EMS, and our government is taking action. A number of months ago we announced a 10-point plan to be able to address dispatch issues as well as resources. In Budget 2022 we put \$64 million into our EMS system to add additional resources, and that includes another 12-hour shift per day for ambulances in Red Deer. In addition, we appointed an advisory committee to look at issues across the entire system, and I'm looking forward to their report . . .

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that all of these investments, all of these plans are the government trying to fix the system they broke and pushed to the limits and given that this government undermined doctors, ridiculed nurses, has moved to cut wages across the sector and did so during a global pandemic, and are now moving to mass privatization while hospitals are still at the breaking point and given that the answers we're getting today are just not acceptable – the people of Red Deer deserve to be heard – and given that they're represented by a cabinet minister, the Minister of Education, will she stand and apologize for her failure to advocate for her constituents at the cabinet table to prevent these kinds of crises for the people of Red Deer?

Mr. Copping: As I've said before many times in this House, we are investing in our capacity system, in health care across the system, Mr. Speaker. That includes \$1.8 billion to expand the Red Deer hospital. We are focused on improving it. As I've indicated in this House before, this is not a new issue, that the hon. member across the way mentioned in regard to the unfortunate issue of people leaving emergency departments at the U of A hospital yesterday.* Well, under the previous government it wasn't 10 per cent, which was this most recent quarter. It was even higher; it was 12 per cent of people leaving. I say that not because the previous government didn't . . .

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

Wildfire Fighting Contracts

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, Albertans know about the threat that wildfire poses to our communities. Everyone remembers the devastation that was inflicted by the Slave Lake, Wood Buffalo, and Paddle Prairie wildfires. It's been reported that while firefighters are normally on contract until the end of September, this government has made the decision to end those contracts at least a month earlier. History shows we have fires in September. Can the minister of agriculture and forestry tell this House why this government is removing firefighters right now, when all the

evidence points out that we'll need them more than ever to keep our communities safe?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just start by saying, you know, that nothing is more important or more of a priority for this department than the safety of Albertans, the safety of Albertan communities, protection of their property, and that's why it's a little hard to hear. I know where this question came from. It came from – I know you'll be shocked – a misleading press release from the AUPE.

An Hon. Member: No.

Mr. Horner: I know. I wish it wasn't that way. The facts are these, Mr. Speaker. We flex up our staffing. We flex up our equipment, because – big shocker – there's snow on the ground a lot in the winter. I can get into that offline, about snow . . .

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

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that I actually have copies of those contracts and they compare to last year versus this year and given that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has reported that we should expect to see more extreme weather in the future, including wildfires, and given that I have heard that this government is ending wildfire contracts a month earlier and has even cut the budget for wildfire fighting by 8 to 12 per cent, putting communities at risk, can the minister look to the camera and explain to those communities impacted by wildfires and those that are fearful of the future wildfires how he plans on saving their communities that are at risk?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, there isn't a budget reduction, as that member well knows. We went through it in great detail in estimates. We have a stable budget after a very manageable fire season last year, where we not only protected Alberta and Albertans, but we were leaned on by Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, states, Mexico. We are doing things in this province in a way that we're looked to by our neighbouring provinces to help ensure the protection of all Canadians.

Ms Sweet: Well, again, given, Mr. Speaker, that the last wildfire we had was actually September 11 in Waterton and that we don't have staff that are hired until the end of September and given that short-staffing wildfire fighting forces will put lives, communities, and the economy at risk and given that while science tells us that we could face more wildfires in the future and that this government is leaving Alberta less prepared and given that two months into the wildfire season the UCP have left the workforce 60 workers short along with positions that are going to end early, can the minister explain: when will the wildfire forces be up and ready to go and trained . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, our last wildfire was not in September; we've had 123 wildfires since January 1. We continue to put out the wildfires outside of the legislated fire season. There are currently 12 wildfires in the province. Nine are under control. Three are being held. There were three fires that burned all winter. We continue to do our job, put out the fires. We flex up in the appropriate season. It's efficient for the province, the taxpayer, and it's safe. [interjections]

*See page 980, right column, paragraph 6

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Economic Recovery and Growth

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again Albertans have proven that they are resilient and up for any task, any challenge. The first three months of 2022 have shown that Alberta's economy is not only recovering, but the full truth is that it's rolling. Could the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation tell this House how many additional jobs we have seen created in this province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for the question. He is right; Alberta's economy is rolling. Since the beginning of last year we've had over 150,000 jobs. That bears repeating: 150,000-plus jobs since the beginning of last year. Right now Alberta's economy is more diversified than ever. [interjections] The NDP don't like that. They're chirping right now, but you know what? Our unemployment rate is lower than December 2018. Who was in office in December 2018? The NDP.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that that is great news and given that our economy continues to grow and given that new companies are coming to invest right here in Alberta and further given that these investments are in addition to the absolutely amazing, great local businesses that are already thriving here and around our province, to the same minister: could you tell us a bit about the industry sector's diversification that we are currently seeing throughout this province?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, when we started the recovery plan over two years ago, we knew at that point in time that Alberta needed to diversify, and it is happening faster than we ever could have forecasted. The film and television industry literally doubled. Right now across Alberta the largest TV series in Canadian history, HBO's *The Last of Us*, is happening. Our tech sector is absolutely booming. The first-quarter numbers that came out: over \$200 million of venture capital in the first three months. Contrast that to 2017. Who was in office then? Oh, yeah. The NDP. Thirty-seven million dollars in an entire year.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this growth hasn't happened by accident and given that there are so many other reasons to be optimistic about Alberta's economic future and given that our government has stayed committed to supporting economic growth in this province, could the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction tell us about how the government is reducing red tape to help these companies thrive here in Alberta?
2:20

Ms Fir: Well, thank you to the member for the question. Alberta's government committed to cutting red tape by a third, and with over 25 per cent cut so far, we are well on our way to becoming the freest and fastest moving jurisdiction in North America. Earlier this week we introduced Bill 21, which will help Alberta businesses by supporting mobile businesses by enabling intermunicipal business licences and streamlining processes, saving co-operatives over \$36,000 a year. In addition, previously we had brought in common-sense approaches and changes such as enabling the creation of

entertainment districts, streamlining grant applications for producers and food manufacturers, and so much more.

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Project

Mr. Dang: Over and over my constituents and I have called on this government to get the new south Edmonton hospital back on track. As we all know, it's been over 30 years since a new hospital was built in Edmonton, and the population has only continued to grow. During a time when Albertans have been struggling with so much, including the health care system almost collapsing due to the UCP's mishandling of the pandemic, and while we see the government boasting about its balanced budget, my question to the Minister of Infrastructure is simple. How can he justify the delay with no anticipated open date of the new south Edmonton hospital when it is such an important piece of public health care?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, a large project like the Edmonton hospital has to go through multiple sets of planning, design, procurement, and construction. I updated this particular member a few times already in this House and outside the House that we are going through those steps. Right now on the site the underground utilities are being set. That work is going on well except last year. Because of the ground freeze, there was a slight delay, but the work is tracking on time.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this minister originally said that it was going to be a five-year delay and then in estimates this year announced that it would be an indefinite delay for this project and given that this minister also previously stated that the government was considering using projects such as P3 approaches for this hospital and given that this has disastrously failed in other jurisdictions such as Saskatchewan and given that the government of Alberta and this minister in particular have a poor track record with P3 schools as well, can the minister commit that he will learn from these mistakes and not impose this detrimental approach and put the safety and well-being of our public health care system at risk?

Mr. Panda: I was looking up in the gallery. Even the minister from Saskatchewan couldn't believe about P3 failures there, so I don't know what the member is talking about.

We haven't decided this is going through a P3 procurement method yet, because we haven't reached that stage, Mr. Speaker, yet. We decide based on the best value for the taxpayers of Alberta and how we can utilize the private finance to build this facility on time, on budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the lessons this minister seems to be learning from Saskatchewan is how the Battlefords hospital's roof actually collapsed and closed all health care in that region for over a year and given that Albertans' health care system continues to be in danger due to this government's risky policies and given that the government of Alberta's projects website does not provide any information regarding the schedule of the south Edmonton hospital, can the constituents and Albertans that live in Edmonton expect and receive from this minister a clear date on when we can see a hospital opening?

Thank you.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, there are projects across Alberta happening. The infrastructure investment is unprecedented, including in that

particular member's own riding. The minister and I yesterday were there blessing the school site together with the Catholic faith community. I don't know what risks the member is talking about unless he hacked something and found some risk. I would ask him to share those risks with me, and I'll try to eliminate them.

Calgary Downtown Revitalization

Member Ceci: This morning the city of Calgary announced the first round of funding to support empty office conversions as part of their plan to drive down the vacancy rate and revitalize the downtown. Noticeably absent from any of this was the UCP. All they could muster for downtown Calgary in their last budget was \$4 million, an amount the CEO of the Calgary Chamber called, quote, absolutely inadequate. Meanwhile downtown Calgary continues to struggle. Why is this government refusing to lift a finger to support an area that has long served as a fundamental part of Alberta's economy and has generated tremendous wealth for the people of this province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've just received the downtown working group's recommendations, and we'll be making that public here in the next little while.

But thank God the NDP have not been in office for the last three years, Mr. Speaker. The reason why I say that is that this government has been laser focused on attracting investment and creating jobs, 150,000 jobs since the beginning of last year. Now, under the NDP licence plates from across the country disappeared. But all of a sudden people are moving again to Alberta. We will not apologize for our economic track record. It's amazing.

Member Ceci: Given that Quebec, Ontario, B.C., Manitoba, and Saskatchewan have lower unemployment rates than Alberta and given that Calgary's downtown vacancy rate still sits at 33 per cent according to CBRE, the highest level in the country – in fact, the number of head offices under the UCP has fallen – and given that Calgary still has the highest unemployment rate of any major Canadian city and given that we've already put forward our own plan to bring new energy to downtown, meanwhile this government sits on the sidelines and attacks everyone else's plan, is their only wish that . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, sometimes they toss you a beach ball, and I absolutely lob it. It's time for an NDP legacy tour for the worst Finance minister in Alberta's history. This government has balanced the budget. At the same time, we have talked in Alberta for decades and decades about diversification. Right now: the film industry, doubled; the tech sector, booming; logistics people are leaving B.C. They're coming to Alberta for logistics because of a business environment. The past Finance minister did not understand business. We do. That's creating jobs.

Member Ceci: Given that the UCP have contributed nothing to Calgary's revitalization plan downtown and given that we've released our own plan to support downtown Calgary, that includes direct support for the city as well as a focus on economic diversification, and given that just last night our caucus held a consultation on ways to further refine and improve our proposals and given that this Finance minister said that economic diversification is a luxury he can't afford and he

won't put money towards and that it's not his job to help the largest city in our province, that continues to struggle, is this government refusing to put a single idea on the table? We want to see them.

Mr. McIver: Oh, Mr. Speaker, we're acting on many ideas. I'll remind the hon. member of the Calgary rivers CRL, which will provide \$55 million a year for 40 years into downtown Calgary. That's \$2 billion, on top of the \$5 billion in this year's budget: Arts Commons, \$200 million; the Repsol centre, \$20 million; the Calgary Stampede Sam centre, \$5 million; the SAIT John Ware, \$41 million. We are busy helping Calgary.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Obstetric Services in Whitecourt

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Three weeks ago I stood here and asked about my constituents' options in response to a shortage of physicians with surgical skills in the Whitecourt health care centre. At that time the AHS north zone had told my constituents that the hospital would temporarily be unable to offer C-sections until April 13. But on April 8 Alberta Health Services announced that they were temporarily pausing all obstetrical services at the Whitecourt health care centre for a month. To the Minister of Health. My constituents are frustrated. They want to know what is going on and what is causing these physician shortages.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for representing his constituents. This situation is concerning. Families deserve to know that they can safely receive health care services wherever they are in our province. There are two physicians providing obstetric services in Whitecourt; however, a personal leave of absence and on-call unavailability mean the clinic can't operate at normal levels right now. I want to ensure that AHS plans to resume services in Whitecourt by May 8. Prenatal patients in Whitecourt will continue to receive care from their family physicians. We'll solve this problem over . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that obstetrics is a high-risk surgical practice that requires a team of experts with specialized skills and given that there are many doctors with international medical credentials wanting to move to Alberta to provide health care, can the same minister explain how we can swiftly evaluate international medical graduates so my constituents can receive the same level of care as any other Albertan?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obstetrics, like all specializations, is a highly skilled, highly specialized field of medicine. As a result, AHS works with the College of Physicians & Surgeons to ensure that every doctor applying to work in Alberta meets the same standards of practice. International medical graduates, or IMGs, must pass an assessment to certify that they meet the same minimum standard for any doctor trained in Canada. IMGs are valuable members of our communities. Recruiting and assessing more so that we can serve Albertans to the highest level of care: we are looking to recruit more, and we will do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, again, Minister. Given that for months now I've been unable to explain to my constituents why Whitecourt is lacking services and given that we need a plan to fix these shortages so that my constituents do not need to be transported to a city over two hours away for medical treatment, once again to the Minister of Health: how and when will this recurring issue be fixed permanently?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Copping: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member. As the member knows, there are 13 physicians practising in Whitecourt, seven of whom have hospital privileges. A lack of obstetrics-trained doctors in Whitecourt meant that AHS would temporarily divert expectant mothers to the nearby Edson health care facility or another location of their choice. Edson has well-established information and transfer processes with Whitecourt. We're committed to providing services for rural Albertans. We're spending \$90 million to recruit and retain rural doctors in Budget 2022, and we'll continue to focus on actually get doctors into rural Alberta.

Victims of Crime Program

Mr. Sabir: As the pandemic was starting, the UCP introduced a bill designed to reduce the supports available to victims of crime by dismantling the victims of crime fund. Since that time they have changed the supports available, and this has resulted in victims either having to pay out of pocket for recovery from their trauma or not having access to supports at all. Simple question: will the Minister of Justice commit to reversing these harmful changes that are retraumatizing victims?

Mr. Shandro: None of that is true, Mr. Speaker. What did happen is that the fund included other focuses as well, including focuses on public safety. We continue to provide funding to victims who require it. We have now received a report from two MLAs who have helped us with advice and recommendations regarding how victims' services funding can be provided and making sure that as much funding can be provided to victims and supports can be provided to victims in the community as possible. We're looking forward to moving forward with that report and being able to make sure that victims get the funding and the services they need.

Mr. Sabir: Given that victims of crime deserve to have access to the supports that they need to fully heal and given that leaving victims with the only option available to them, to sue the perpetrator through the court system, further traumatizes victims and given that the justice statutes bill currently before the Legislature solidifies this government's agenda to leave victims out in the cold, can the minister name any one person from one organization that supports the changes they made to this program or tells them that the reductions are . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, and that's why we've continued to work with our victims' services organizations throughout the province and continue to work with all the great engagement work that was done by the MLAs who helped provide those recommendations so that we can move forward in '22 to be able to work forward in working to improve the services provided to those victims, making sure that the services continue to be sustainable and available to those victims so that we can continue

to improve the entire system throughout the province for those victims.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the victims of crime fund has been raided to make up for the reckless cuts that this government made to the Justice department's budget and given that we know that survivors of crime, like Emma Wilson, have made it loud and clear that lack of supports is hindering healing and recovery and given that this government still refuses to release the report of the working group on support for victims of crime, what is this minister hiding? When can we expect to see the report? How much longer do survivors have to wait?

Mr. Shandro: Well, fairly soon, as I said, Mr. Speaker. In the meantime the interim victims' assistance program is available to support victims in ways that the previous program didn't. A couple of examples for the hon. member: helping victims with out-of-pocket expenses resulting from violent crime; giving victims of serious violent crime, including those who are victims of sexual assault and families of homicide victims, quick access to counselling; and then, as well, reimbursing victims and witnesses for the expenses that are related to attending court and for support reasons.

Condominium Owner Dispute Resolution Processes Health Card System Modernization

Mr. Carson: I was looking forward to finally seeing new condominium legislation in Alberta so that condo owners would finally have a tribunal process to settle disputes. This is a process that the NDP engaged on and something that the UCP claimed they would support. But with the new legislation completely ignoring it and while powers are being given to condo corporations to fine owners without due process, why is there no tribunal process in the bill, and when will the Minister of Service Alberta introduce one, or is this just another broken promise?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government has looked at options for dispute resolution for condominium owners, boards, and corporations, and we know that there is, in fact, value in a system that is an alternative to the courts. At this time we're not pursuing a condominium tribunal. However, again, as we know that there is value in this type of system, it's something that we're open to looking at in the future.

Mr. Carson: Given that without a tribunal if an owner opposes fees set on them, they will be forced to go to the courts and given that the UCP have made significant cuts to the justice system and, as a result, cases are moving slowly, condo disputes should be handled in a tribunal, not the courts. I'm concerned that this legislation will cause condo owners to be assumed guilty until they are proven innocent. Given that without a tribunal there is no due process, how does the Minister of Service Alberta justify condo owners being able to receive new fines without providing an easy way to challenge them?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said, while this is something that does have merit, it's not something that we're looking at at this time. In the meantime we do encourage condominium owners, boards, and corporations to use existing resources in addition to the courts such as alternative resolution services for mediating disputes.

Mr. Carson: Given that the Minister of Service Alberta finally admitted that he will not deliver on updating health cards from paper to plastic, it is clear that this is a trend of broken promises as he has also failed to deliver on creating tribunal processes for condo owners. But given that the minister has been working overtime to support the Premier on his leadership review and, in fact, is also weighing in on the federal Conservative leadership race, too, why is the Minister of Service Alberta so focused on partisan survival while failing to do his job and deliver on the promises he made to Albertans?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I know, in fact, that the Minister of Service Alberta would just be happy to have finally gotten a question from the members opposite, so thank you very much for that. We know that Albertans want more convenience with their government-issued documents. We've been working closely with the Ministry of Health to explore options to give Albertans the option to add their personal health number onto their driver's licence or ID card. The Ministry of Health has of course been focused on protecting Albertans throughout the pandemic, but we remain focused on making life better for Albertans and continuing to consider options to reduce red tape and modernize our services for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Alberta Health Services and Health System Capacity

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have seen very important changes to Alberta Health Services in the last month. AHS employees and Albertans with friends or family members in health care have been calling for the removal of senior management for years. For years Albertans have been frustrated, upset, and disappointed with long wait times, lack of access to physicians, and issues with EMS availability, just to name a few, but new management could mean more problems. To the Minister of Health: what is being done to build a better AHS system for employees and everyday Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for this important question. Albertans elected our government on an aggressive platform of renewal and transformation in health care, and we are keeping that promise. We promise to provide every Albertan who needs scheduled surgery within clinically appropriate wait times and are committed to similar improvements in MRI and CT scans, and we are making progress. These much-needed improvements will foster a better environment for patients and for staff as pressures ease throughout the system. We're also moving forward with the most significant renewal and modernization in continuing care and investing in capacity in our overall health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his response. Given that these changes to senior management will take time when it comes to choosing the right individuals for the role and given that the previous financial mismanagement and an unhealthy culture within AHS has been expressed by front-line workers, once again to the Minister of Health: with the restructuring of a \$23 billion company responsible for over 100,000 employees, will Albertans see a rebuilt AHS system with better financial management, better attitude, and a better culture and a healthy environment for front-line workers?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the member. Alberta's front-line health care workers are the backbone of our health care system. I'd like to take a moment to once again thank them for all their tremendous work, particularly through the challenging times of COVID-19. Front-line services and quality patient care are at the forefront of what we're trying to achieve. Whether that's adding surgical capacity through chartered surgical facilities outside AHS, including 35,000 recently announced publicly funded cataract and noncataract surgeries this year, or addressing EMS pressures through AHS's 10-point plan and through our advisory committee, we are investing in capacity.

Mr. Reid: Given that employees of AHS have endured and pushed through the problems and struggles of the pandemic for the last two years and given that they did so with limited health care capacity inside our hospitals and limited ICU units and given that so many nurses and doctors spoke up surrounding the issues when it came to capacity during the pandemic, again to the same minister: why was AHS unable to deliver the proper capacity levels needed during surging waves of COVID-19?

Mr. Copping: Thank you again to the hon. member. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's health care workers battled through extraordinary circumstances in the past two years, and again I want to say thank you. AHS did respond with capacity to meet the needs of each wave that we've experienced through COVID, but it came at a cost, in certain waves, in regard to postponed surgeries. That's why we're investing \$100 million each year over the next three years to increase and sustain 50 additional ICU beds, to bring ICU capacity in line with other provinces. Again, Budget '22 is committed to increased capacity across our entire system; \$600 million this year, the next year, and the year after that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Utility Costs and Rebates

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are living in unparalleled times, colleagues. The short-sighted, quick-fix solutions implemented by the NDP before Albertans fired them have caused a utility price emergency. Constituents in my riding of Sherwood Park are fearing that gas and electricity prices will become unmanageable and unaffordable in the near future. Albertans need relief now. To the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity: can you tell my constituents and Albertans when they can expect natural gas rebates to begin? [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite are getting a little fired up right now. But you know what? I can understand why. When they were in office, they were more focused on hiring people to come into your house to screw in a light bulb than they were focused on the economy. Right now Alberta is booming. We have over 150,000 jobs since the beginning of last year. We're also providing relief at the pumps, with electricity, and with natural gas. On top of that, there are jobs here in this province. That's a good sign. People are moving to our province because they believe in its future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that the energy rebate program will kick in next winter to ensure European-style price hikes do not become a reality in Alberta and given that the price of energy is unstable and unpredictable in current times and given that the citizens of Alberta live in various housing situations, to the minister: can he tell Albertans what living quarters will be eligible for the natural gas rebate?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're working on implementing the natural gas rebate at the fastest possible instance. On top of that, the member raises a very good point about energy security, something the members opposite know absolutely nothing about. The second-most powerful politician in the U.S., Senator Manchin, came to Alberta to work with our government to make sure that we have energy security across North America. The last thing we want is a European-style energy spike that the NDP want to bring to Canada.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that this government has created new and innovative legislation to help Albertans heat their homes through difficult economic times and given that the NDP-Liberal carbon tax will have extremely detrimental effects on Albertans' wallets and given that Albertans also face high prices for other utilities to run their households, can the minister tell Albertans how this government plans to assist with costs regarding electricity in these uncertain times?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're helping people at the pumps, we're helping people with electricity, and we're helping them with their natural gas bills. [interjections] The NDP are chirping right now. Where were they to oppose the carbon tax? Absolutely nowhere. They were arm in arm. They wanted it to go higher. We won't let that happen. We're going to continue to fight for Albertans every single day to make sure they have affordable power, an amazing way of life, and low taxes with a balanced budget in Alberta.

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to present the committee's final report on Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the hon. Member for Highwood. This bill was referred to the committee on March 31, 2022. The report recommends that Bill 205 proceed, and I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 205.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a motion for concurrence, that is debatable pursuant to Standing Order 18. This is an opportunity, if anyone would like to speak to the motion for concurrence, to please rise. I see the hon. member has risen. That debate will take place on the next available Monday.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give oral notice of Bill 23, Professional Governance Act, sponsored by the Minister of Labour and Immigration.

The Speaker: Are there other notices? Do you have a notice of motion or a tabling?

Ms Phillips: No. Another report.

The Speaker: Oh. Correction. Hon. members, I believe that the hon. the Deputy Government House Leader is just about to propose a unanimous consent request to return to Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees as, unfortunately, the Speaker passed over the chair of the PAC committee. I wondered if he might be willing to make a unanimous consent request to return.

Mr. Schow: Most certainly, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask unanimous consent from the Assembly to return to Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees (continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, with apologies.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just simply rise as chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I wish to table on behalf of the committee the appropriate number of copies of the 2021 annual report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and to assure the public that a copy of this report will also be available on the Legislative Assembly website shortly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, members.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development on behalf of the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Bill 22 Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity to move first reading of Bill 22, Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022.

This legislation will allow for much-needed modernization of our electricity grid, ensuring it can meet the needs of consumers for years to come while maintaining energy affordability.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there tablings? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West also has a tabling.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a couple of items that I have made reference to in debate over the last week or so. One is a letter to the Education minister from the Lethbridge

school division board of trustees indicating a couple of concerns, one with the requirements for assessment and reporting for learning loss funding and the other with some fairly sharp concerns about the implementation of the new draft curriculum.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Ms Phillips: I have one other, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please continue.

Ms Phillips: I have also the quarterly update of the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta on physician resources in Alberta, indicating a net loss of 13 doctors in Lethbridge alone and a number of other places losing physicians in a net way.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Nicolaidis, Minister of Advanced Education, supplemental responses to questions raised by Mr. Eggen, hon. Member for Edmonton-North West, March 16, 2022, Ministry of Advanced Education 2022-23 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 15 Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate April 26: Mrs. Frey]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise. I will keep my remarks brief as I know we have much to get on the record today and a few bills that we need to discuss. I haven't yet, but I did want to get on the record for second reading of Bill 15, Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. Now, I have to say, you know, that it's been a common theme today to have to comment on the fact that we've seen time and time again from this government multiple opportunities to present legislation that would really dramatically improve the lives of Albertans.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Just today I've already had the chance to speak to multiple bills, just this morning, upon reflection, Bill 11, which is the Continuing Care Act, and – gosh, what else did I speak about this morning? – Bill 16, on insurance. You know, those were opportunities for the government to really listen to Albertans and come back to their constituents and be able to say: "You know what? We are listening." And in the case of insurance, as an example: "Here's something, really, where you'll see an impact in your pocketbook, a positive impact for once, because we know many of you are struggling with higher and higher, skyrocketing auto insurance premiums." They didn't, right? Instead, they chose to just do a little bit of housekeeping. Same thing with bills 11, 12, others. The list goes on.

I frame my comments in response to Bill 15 in a similar way just because I hear nonstop from my constituents, not just teachers. I know many folks in this Chamber are probably tired of me talking about my time as a teacher and working in education. The Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* is shaking his head, meaning he probably would like to hear more of my tales from teaching, and I'd be happy to share those. But, you know, truly, I do pride myself in being very open to folks reaching out to me from across this province. I hear from a lot of teachers. I hear from a lot of parents.

In fact, I even hear from some students. You know, the former social studies teacher in me is always quite keen when students are engaged. After all, a key pillar of our, in fact, current social studies curriculum, that was developed under the Progressive Conservatives, one that received international attention for how visionary it was and one that I was proud to implement in the classroom as a teacher and also work a little bit on, a curriculum developed through a rigorous process, including countless stakeholders, including piloting in classrooms across the province and not just in one school division in northern Alberta that was willing to take it on, like we see with the proposed UCP curriculum – my point in saying all that about the current social studies curriculum, that I was proud to teach, is that a key pillar of that is active, engaged citizenship. So it sure is nice to be able to hear from students who are engaged in the process.

I say all this because of, you know, the issues that I hear from folks associated with schools, which is a whole lot of us. In fact, probably nearly everybody in this room has a connection to schools, right? Well, you all do, in fact, because you all have schools in your constituencies. But you also have family members who attend schools, who work at schools. You were all students at one point. What do we hear from those – I'll call them stakeholders, which is such a governmenty term – impacted by education? They talk about things like how COVID has impacted learning, learning loss.

My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora spoke quite eloquently on Bill 15. Gosh, it might have been yesterday. It might have been the day prior. It might have been two years ago. I don't know. Time is confusing. But the point is that she talked a little bit about that, too, about just, you know, the real fears from teachers and from education workers, EAs as an example, and parents about the impacts of COVID on learning.

We hear about the ongoing disrespect shown towards teachers and education staff over the last two-plus years – right? – with no more stark an example than the laying off of 20,000-plus education workers on a Saturday via Twitter from this Education minister. What a slap on the face that was, being told that they weren't needed, that their work wasn't valuable when these were education workers, particularly education assistants, who were doing so much, going above and beyond to support students in their transition to online learning. I had an EA reach out to me right after that happened. Was it May 2021? Again, time is confusing. My apologies. But I remember an EA reaching out to me and just saying, like: I'm not complaining, because this is my job, but I've literally been working nonstop; I've been connecting with students at home.

I'm hearing from, you know, folks in my riding, where we've got some incredible schools that support kids in what we might call the inner city, in my Boyle Street neighbourhood, St. Teresa of Calcutta school, an amazing school that does so much to support kids. But so many of them are newcomers, and many of them live below the poverty line and don't have Internet at home, as an example, right? Having education staff who are trying to help and trying to pivot, particularly when kids don't have the resources to learn effectively online at home: that's something we're hearing.

We are hearing from teachers and school staff and parents about the fact that: "Listen, we've got rising enrolment yet a thousand fewer teachers in classrooms. We've got a government that's

refusing to truly fund enrolment growth despite the spin that you'll hear from them. We've got a government that's refusing to invest in schools, refusing to listen to one of their largest school boards, the Edmonton public school board, that asked in their capital plan: hey, Delton school needs an update; it needs a modernization; it needs a new school, in fact." Delton school, I know, happens to be in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, so I'm a little sensitive to this one because that Education minister chose not to fund it, chose not to listen to the Albertans that she is purported to represent, right?

I could go on, my point being that it's really hard to trust this government on education when issue after issue – of course, you all know me, my love of curriculum. Working in curriculum for about eight years under consecutive PC ministers and then the NDP Education minister, you know, I saw how well and how thought-out curriculum was developed, taking an evidence-based approach, yet we've seen that this government has bungled that.

3:00

With this bill, Bill 15, rather than respect our teachers and ensure they have the resources that they need to help students thrive in a safe and caring environment, you know, they took away the supports that are needed. They're forging ahead with that curriculum; they're pausing on building schools. So no wonder. No wonder that when I and my NDP colleagues and perhaps UCP MLAs as well – I can't speak for them, but I know we talk a lot about what we hear from our constituents on this side. When we're out knocking on doors, when we're flipping through our e-mail inboxes, listening to our voice mails, checking our social media, no wonder that education is a top issue. It absolutely is, and it will continue to be.

Bill 15 does nothing to address the big issues in education that we are hearing about. You know, if our constituents don't trust this government on that whole list of education issues that I just mentioned, it's no wonder that they also don't trust this government when it comes to the professional conduct process and what we have outlined in Bill 15, a process where that minister alone can set the standards for professional conduct and she can change them essentially on a whim, unilaterally. That minister is asking Albertans, is asking my constituents who care deeply about education, is asking teachers, is asking parents, is asking students to just trust her. How could we possibly trust a minister who is asking Albertans to allow her to be both the judge and the jury?

Instead of listening to Albertans and making tangible suggestions for a piece of legislation that could support teachers and education stakeholders across this province, this government is forging ahead with Bill 15. With that, I know we'll have much more to say on Bill 15 in committee, and I'm looking forward to that conversation. I hope that we'll get an opportunity to hear more from the minister and as well from UCP MLAs, who I'm certain should have lots to say on this. I can't imagine – well, I know this for a fact. I've knocked on many of their – not many; I won't exaggerate. I've knocked on some of their ridings, and certainly education is a top issue. Curriculum comes up a whole lot on the doors, right? I must admit that I don't think – I'm trying to just rack my brain here – I've heard from constituents or from folks that I've met within other ridings across this province concerns about the professional conduct process, right?

With that, I will conclude my remarks, but I urge this government to think deeply about what its priorities are when it comes to education, because what we see here are certainly not those of Albertans. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to Bill 15? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Just Taber-Warner, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Just Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 15, Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. I want to thank the Minister of Education for bringing this bill forward. Let me start by saying that I have the utmost respect for teachers and the work that they do. In fact, my father is a retired teacher. He taught all of his life, my mother taught for about 10 years for kindergarten, and in fact I taught for two years as well. The first thing that I started with is teaching.

Teachers have a unique passion and skill set that enables them to mould young minds and to make sure they have the skills and competencies for future success. This government knows that the vast majority of teachers in this province are professionals who value the safety of the students in their care. In fact, Madam Speaker, I want to reiterate that. I have many friends who are teachers. I have no doubt that teachers, 99.9 per cent of the teachers out there, are doing it for the right reasons. They have to wear multiple hats. It's a very difficult job to be a teacher. I know. I did it for two years. The bill that we're talking about here is not to address those good teachers that we have in this province. We have great teachers. It's to address the ones that are falling through the cracks. This is why I am so in favour of this bill.

The Alberta Teachers' Association would like you to believe that this bill is an attack on all of those good teachers I just talked about, the teaching profession, and Alberta's education system as a whole, in fact. They have already spent millions of dollars, Madam Speaker, on media campaigns to create fear amongst Albertans and teachers alike. I have heard these people come to my office and talk to me about these concerns. When I ask them: "Where did you get this information from? Have you actually read through the bill? Have you actually chatted with the minister or the minister's office?" They say: "No. We got it from the ATA." That disinformation that's going out there is concerning.

Madam Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. This is nothing more than a tactic being used by the ATA. We've seen this happen multiple times. I saw this when they were concerned about the fund that manages their retirement fund, moving it under AIMCo. For months I had teachers coming to me, both teachers who were currently teaching and teachers who were also retired, saying, "How dare your government do this?" And I said to them: "Listen, the numbers are quite clear. The fund manager that they were using before versus the fund manager of AIMCo: those numbers show that the teachers will do better under AIMCo."

They had a very difficult time believing me, even though they knew me, because of what the ATA was telling them through multiple, multiple e-mails and pamphlets that they were sending out to these teachers. Madam Speaker, I always said to them: "Listen, I get your concerns. If it was my retirement, I would also be concerned. But the numbers, the reasons why: all of these things are going to be a benefit to you." Hindsight is 20/20 vision. If you look backwards, you can see, you know, where you were right or wrong. Fast-forward to today. We find out that AIMCo has outperformed the fund manager that they had before. Well, it's interesting, because if you talk to teachers today, they'll say: "You know what? You were right, and the ATA was wrong."

In this situation, Madam Speaker, I think that the ATA is also getting it wrong. I think that they are not taking a look at the information that we are presenting, and they have dug in and very passionately, I might add. I'm also hearing from other teachers saying, "How dare you do this?" I have to go back to those teachers

and say the same thing I said with the changing of the fund manager: “You know what? Hindsight is 20/20 vision. Let us work through this, and we hope that at the end of the day and we believe that at the end of the day that it will be more responsive to teachers, to students, to parents, and that the system will be better and more accountable.” It’s only the bad teachers who should worry as they will be losing a level of protection their union has previously provided. This is simply a good policy.

Let’s look at the reforms contained in this bill. The current teacher discipline structure in place is a dual-system model that has been in place for 85 years. Under the current model the ATA is responsible for overseeing complaints made against its active members, and the Alberta Education registrar is responsible for overseeing complaints made against non-ATA teachers and teacher leaders. The current system allows the ATA union to be in charge of overseeing the disciplinary process for its members.

Madam Speaker, we know that unions are designed to protect and advocate for their members in exchange for the payment of union dues. There’s nothing wrong with that. That is the natural process of what unions should do. I think we can see the conflict of interest here, however, and that is a problem. We know that there are instances when inappropriate conduct with a student has led to an offending teacher being removed from the school and simply being put in a new one.

3:10

I’ve heard lots of the members opposite stand up and talk about: give us evidence; give us the reasons why you’re bringing forward this bill. Madam Speaker, you only have to have one case for this bill to be important. Only one case would make it valid. For the hon. members to discount that: I find that absolutely deplorable. These are children. I have five children – they’re all older now – and I’ve got four grandchildren. I think that it’s absolutely incumbent upon each of us as lawmakers in this Legislature to make sure that we are protecting not just all of them but even the one that might get away. If we can provide a system, a robust accountability system to help even that one, then this bill is worth doing. I’ve actually heard that kind of argument being given by the members opposite multiple times, where they will talk about the one, the importance of the one, the individual. I think that in this situation I don’t hear that argument from them. I find that odd.

Now, we’ve seen also some evidence from a number of cases that the ATA does not understand their duty to report inappropriate conduct to the police in instances of serious harm or a threat to student safety. This is not discipline. This does not protect our children. The only people this does protect are those who are the bad actors. It is clear to see that the current system of teacher discipline is out of date and reforms are long overdue.

So let’s talk about Bill 15 and what it will do in terms of reforming the teacher discipline process. Madam Speaker, Bill 15 will create a single system for addressing complaints under a newly created Alberta teacher profession commission. This commission will be headed by a commissioner and will oversee teacher and teacher leader conduct and competency complaints for all teachers and teacher leaders equally. Under this system the registrar of Alberta Education will be responsible for the intake of all complaints. These complaints will then be forwarded to the Alberta teaching profession commissioner, who will have the authority to address and investigate each complaint and determine the most appropriate course of action.

This bill will increase accountability and transparency by expanding the online teacher registry, by making publicly available information on hearing and appeal dates; hearing, appeal, and minister’s decisions where there is a finding of unprofessional

conduct or unprofessional incompetence; any consent resolution agreements initiated by the new Alberta teaching profession commissioner; and dates of hearings and appeals. These changes will ensure that the entire teaching profession is protected by bringing all teachers and teacher leaders under one reformed disciplinary process and will put the best interests of students, their families, teachers, and the public at the centre of the teacher discipline process as well. This bill will bring Alberta in line with other jurisdictions and regulated professions by eliminating the conflict of interest where a union could advocate for its members while also overseeing disciplinary matters.

Madam Speaker, I think all members of this House would agree that children should be safe in their schools and that parents should not have to worry about their children falling victim to inappropriate conduct by the educators they have entrusted with the well-being of the children. I want to remind the members that when we announced this, there was someone from my riding that came forward, the Snows. Mr. and Mrs. Snow came forward and talked about how difficult it was for them. Their daughter was in an inappropriate situation with a teacher. That took five years to be able to work through the processes. During that time that teacher was still able to be involved with kids. That was a very difficult situation for the Snows, knowing that this teacher, who was very inappropriate with their daughter, was still able to perform as a teacher.

I know of another situation, Madam Speaker, where a teacher had molested a child, and that teacher did not lose their certificate to teach. That teacher, actually, was just moved off to another school. In another situation a teacher that had misappropriated funds was actually stripped of their teacher’s certificate. Now, misappropriating funds is wrong, and there needs to be some action taken on that. But there was inconsistency on why someone who misappropriated funds would lose their teaching certificate and someone who molested a person would not lose their certificate. That is something that I think this bill will be able to address to start talking about those inconsistencies and work through some of those things so that we have a system that is fair, accountable, and addresses these issues without bias.

Our government wants to ensure that students are safe at school, and this legislation will provide a fully transparent process to ensure that bad teachers are disciplined appropriately. This bill has a common-sense approach to teacher discipline that will enhance the accountability and transparency of the teaching profession and will better protect students and give parents peace of mind. I will be proudly voting in favour of this bill, and I would encourage all members of the House to do so as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to Bill 15?

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I’d like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 13 Financial Innovation Act

The Chair: There are currently no amendments on the floor. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Happy to rise this afternoon and expand on some of my comments that I started with

in second reading. Of course, one of the first things I had noticed about this bill was the amount of abilities that this bill is going to be granting the minister, something again, as I've said before, that members of the government bench and members of the government caucus that served in the 29th Legislature, shall we say, were not very accepting of when they saw that from the NDP government. It's always entertaining, actually, to see that all of a sudden now the shoe is on the other foot and it seems like a good thing to do. That was one of the first kind of flags I saw.

What it essentially comes down to is that, you know, the minister and ultimately the government is looking to not only this Assembly but Albertans to just simply trust them. As we know, that seems to be in very, very short supply from Albertans about the government. I think one of the comments I said earlier was: why trust a Premier, why trust a government when they can't even manage to disclose a donor list? A simple promise that the Premier made during the leadership race, when the UCP was coming together, and hasn't managed to deliver on that in three years. Yet here we are on something much larger, like Bill 13, asking everybody to just simply trust them.

You know, it's not simply just as much as a donor list. When we start to look at some of the other things that are on that list, it starts to cause a lot of concern around that. Like, for instance, with the big corporate tax giveaway that the government made, it was just simply: well, look, we'll give them this tax break, and they'll start creating all kinds of jobs. Of course, data has shown over the decades that that has never really transpired. But we were still going to go down that path again, and right out of the gate 55,000 jobs were lost. Again, looking back, all we heard was, "Trust us; this is going to work," and then doubled, even tripled down to accelerate that a little bit.

3:20

My colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood was just talking about the curriculum, the amount of rejection that we've seen from educators and from Albertans with all of the problems that are there: again, really starting to test Albertans' trust of the government. You know, we heard promises of: we're going to fix the insurance system, the big mess that the previous government made of that. Yet again I have constituents coming to me with increases, 10 per cent, 30 per cent on average, some higher than that. If that's your version of fixing, please stop because my constituents can't afford it.

You know, a \$1.3 billion bet on Donald Trump: like, that can really shake an individual's trust in their government, to make such a reckless choice. Thirty million dollars a year and the best that we can come up with is two copied logos and chasing after Bigfoot. I have to wonder if maybe Opopogo is next on the hit list.

I think, as I mentioned in my comments in second reading around Bill 13, one of the first things we see is the power to exempt products from consumer protection laws. There are certainly some concerns about how this potentially could be abused. Of course, I said that there are probably a few missing shingles off the roof of my house. Certainly, when my wife feels that she has not gotten what she was promised, whether it comes to a financial service or a product – I can just imagine that she's not alone in that belief, which is why people are very, very adamant when it comes to consumer protections around, say, for instance, financial services, which is what Bill 13 is proposing to bring in. We haven't really heard how this government plans to guarantee some of those things. You know, we can certainly start to go down the whole debate road of: well, that's coming in regulations. That doesn't give comfort to Albertans very much when they're being taken for a ride potentially. It would have been nice to see some of that work.

One of the other things that kind of came up was potentially the bureaucracy, not having the technical capacity or sophistication to potentially regulate some of this appropriately. So one of my first questions, you know, that comes to mind around that kind of topic is: is the government willing to fund the ability to create that? When I see the ability for them to potentially, I guess, contract that out, that would kind of lead me to believe that that's probably not the case. When I think about some of the times that the government has appointed people and such – I hate to say it – there have been very, very partisan appointments around there. Again, if you're going to be criticizing others for potentially doing that, to then turn around and do the exact same thing is a little bit hypocritical.

When I'm thinking about the government of Alberta contracting out, how are they going to be sourcing this, who are they going to be choosing, and are they going to potentially show up on a UCP donor list? I can't help but ask those kinds of questions. And, of course, now that we're in Committee of the Whole, hopefully, we'll get an opportunity to hear some of those answers.

When you are potentially looking at exempting certain things, it begs the question of: well, what are you prepared to exempt, and what aren't you prepared to exempt? It would be very, very interesting to hear from the government side what the plan is around that. What's on the table? What's not on the table? You know, get that kind of stuff on the record.

Certainly, when there are any kinds of challenges to regulations or legislation, part of some of that discovery is going back to the debates that occur in this House. If you want to make it abundantly clear – I've always said, Madam Chair, that when we're creating legislation, it's not for us. We know what's going on. We know potentially – well, sometimes we know what's going on, at least on the opposition side. What's the intention? Put it on the record so then there's no doubt. If there is an honest ability to want to create good legislation, you should have absolutely no problems putting things on the record that people can go back and read – no big deal – so that 20 years from now, when none of us are available here and we can't answer questions and we can't explain what the process was, they can simply read this and know exactly what's going on. That's the simplest way to solve this.

How are we going to be educating Albertans around this? You know, are we going to post something online for them to read, assuming they can navigate some of the times to be able to find those things? It's unfortunate I have to bring this up, Madam Chair, but is it going to be a case of: well, we're just going to do it now; we'll wait to see what happens; then we'll try to maybe fix it, and maybe then we'll try to educate people more on it. It's kind of a little bit of a backwards type of approach, but we have seen that so far through the 30th Legislature. Again, all it takes is one time for it to happen, and it starts to beg the question: well, what else is going to be happening with that?

Like, I'm not opposed to Bill 13, but I think there are some very legitimate questions that we have, that Albertans ultimately have. You know, a lot of times that's what forms some of our debate in this House, trying to get their questions answered that they bring to us. Hopefully, through the course here of Committee of the Whole we'll get some answers to those, like I said, specifically: what is the government planning to potentially exempt, or is there anything that they just absolutely will not grant an exemption to? I think that kind of information needs to be put out there on the record for all Albertans to be able to see so that they kind of know what they're dealing with.

And then any other riskier services or technologies that they'll be able to educate Albertans with – so I think I'll leave my comments at that point. I'm certainly looking forward to hearing more. There's

a good chance I may pop up again to have some other things to say based on what the debate is, but I appreciate the chance to expand on some of my comments.

The Chair: Any members to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. If passed, Bill 13 will create a regulatory sandbox for financial services and fintech companies. Regulatory sandboxes offer businesses temporary relief from certain legislative and regulatory requirements, enabling them to test innovative products and services and to expand their offerings to consumers. This particular regulatory sandbox would apply to the Loan and Trust Corporations Act, the Credit Union Act, the ATB Financial Act, the Consumer Protection Act, the Financial Consumers Act, and the Personal Information Protection Act.

Technologies and innovations tested could include application programming interface services, soft tokens, or biometric authentication. A regulatory sandbox is another step forward in diversifying our economy and attracting investment, fostering innovation while at the same time reducing red tape. Alberta is putting itself on the map as a destination of choice for fintech and financial services companies.

3:30

Applicants for exemptions would need to meet a number of criteria and may be subject to a number of terms, conditions, and restrictions which the government would determine on a collaborative, case-by-case basis. For example, applicants would be required to maintain a physical presence in Alberta. They would have to offer financial products or services and provide a viable business plan, including details for testing their financial products along with a plan to exit the regulatory sandbox. Applicants would need to explain why each eligible product or service should be considered new and original or, at a minimum, why their offering is a material improvement or adaptation from an existing product or service. Exemptions would be denied for products and services that are already available in Alberta. Protections and oversight will ensure Albertans and consumers are protected, and all legislative exemptions would be disclosed publicly, to the point of the previous member.

The government has formed a working group to review applications comprised of officials from Treasury Board and Finance; Jobs, Economy and Innovation; and Service Alberta. In addition, the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner would also be consulted on any requests related to the Personal Information Protection Act, and their approval would be necessary for any exemptions.

The regulatory sandbox created by Bill 13 will be the first of its kind in Canada serving the finance and fintech sector. This legislation is one of the many ways our government is making Alberta the destination of choice for technology and innovation, and I encourage the members opposite and my colleagues to support it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you. It's a pleasure to follow the Member for Calgary-South East and talk a little bit about this bill before us, Financial Innovation Act. I was listening carefully because of some of the information that the member was providing this House was very innovative: soft tokens, and there were two other things that

he mentioned that I quickly tried to write down. But I guess I got hung up on soft tokens and thinking about that and the fact that what's before us is quite new. As we heard just a second ago, the regulatory sandbox will be established to allow for fintech products and services to work in the space, work in Alberta, and provide those new offerings to Albertans.

I've been reviewing some of the comments made both by the Minister of Finance and the critic for Finance and other MLAs on both sides speaking to this issue, and I've kind of narrowed down some things that I want to discuss about the Financial Innovation Act. I'll put them in this order. I'd like to talk about four things, the first being that this is new, and we as a government need to act in a responsible, reasonable way so that Albertans can be protected from the offerings that will come forward. In that regard there's going to be some judgments from various ministers' departments on those offerings and whether companies fit into this space.

I just wonder. My colleagues here have put forward the question about wondering if we have the adequate expertise. Do we have all the horses needed to be able to make sure we get there in terms of assessments of the products that are going to come forward or services or ideas that will be coming forward with business plans? While I was the Minister of Finance and TBF, I got to know some of the people in that ministry, and they're stellar, but I wonder if there's been work to build up their skill sets around this kind of offering of analysis of business cases. I think it's been talked about that the government may have to contract those services so that they have the necessary skill sets. That would be the first kind of concern I have.

Just with respect to that whole issue I can remember many years ago, several years ago, under previous PC governments, that there was a desire to approve new kinds of financial vehicles for Albertans, and that was payday loans. It was something that before – I think I've got the dates – 2005, perhaps 2006, wasn't available to the extent they became available after the government approved their use, their presence in this province and Albertans' ability to go and get payday loans. We know from the feedback of people who have gone to and continue to go to payday lenders that they get into a cycle of debt and dependency on getting the next loan and the next loan and the next loan. That was something that the PC government at the time felt would be a new offering, a new, innovative thing for Albertans to be able to access.

I can tell you that the work I did before I was elected in 2015 was to kind of chart and analyze the impact of payday lending on a portion of Calgary, southeast Calgary. I can't remember the number of payday lenders there were at the time, but on one strip in Calgary there were somewhere around 20 payday lenders. It could be said that there was far too much money going into the hands of cheque-cashing payday lenders and far too little staying in the hands of people who either didn't have bank accounts or had defaulted out of their bank account from overdrafts and other kinds of things that they had trouble paying off. Anyway, they got into a cycle of debt and could only get out of that debt by some of the programs that were being offered to people in the southeast part of Calgary at the time, savings programs leveraged up with monies from agencies and charitable organizations and other kinds of people who, like myself, wanted to see a healthier process of people getting cheques, going to banks, keeping their bank accounts.

You know, in the past the PC government of the day approved that service, and it was not a good service. When we came into government, in 2015, we reviewed the whole area of payday lending and curtailed, ratcheted back that whole industry to the benefit of many Albertans and Alberta, where more money was kept in the hands of people to invest in the economy, to pay for their own particular needs.

That's one area that – you know, does the government have the competency to know what's in the best interest and protect Albertans? They certainly didn't back in 2006, when that was introduced. I just wanted to put that on the record now in terms of: do we have all of the resources necessary to ensure that the products and ideas that will be offered under this act will be protective, will be in the best interest of Albertans? Many, many people will come in with limited knowledge, and they'll believe the advertising as opposed to the reality, so we need to ensure that that's there from the government competency protection end of things.

3:40

The next thing I'd like to speak to is trust generally, and I know that my colleague focused a lot on trust. This legislation gives, of course, power to the minister and various ministries to assess and analyze business plans coming forward. That potentially is a risk if that trust is mislaid and if power is abused. In that case that's a problem for Albertans, and they're the ones who are going to be holding the bag. Regulatory sandboxes have occurred, have taken place in this province already.

With regard to the Alberta Securities Commission, certainly when I was Finance minister, that commission did stellar work, and we together pushed back on the federal government at the time, who wanted to harmonize and bring under one securities commission all work. We felt that Alberta had a unique situation, circumstances that required to continue on its own in terms of an Alberta Securities Commission, and we were successful in that. I'm pleased to see that that's been continued under this government in terms of supporting the Alberta Securities Commission to the utmost so that they can continue to provide that support for our capital markets here.

I want to touch on the third thing, and that's with regard to disclosure to Albertans the ongoing work of those that are successful under this regulatory sandbox and will be offering products and ideas and services to Albertans. I think it's really incumbent that the government ensure that any company that makes it through that sandbox alerts the public that they are dealing with something novel and particularly risky. I just brought that up in relation to payday lending. Many people got into payday lending believing that they could essentially handle the situation, and there probably should have been – “more warning labels” is, I guess, a term – more disclosure not only by the companies but by government indicating that involvement in a company that you borrow money from that is a lender like that can quickly spiral out of control and lose control of the ability to not owe those lenders the thousands and thousands of dollars that sometimes their customers were into them for as a result of borrowing monies.

At this point it's not clear to me how these new products, services, or technologies will be, how the disclosures and how the warnings and how the information sharing with Albertans will occur. I think the bill talks about websites and information being shared in that regard. I just wonder if that's – I question whether that's enough, and I question whether Albertans will be savvy enough to do their homework to the extent that it needs to be done, because many didn't do their homework when they took out payday loans and believed that they could stay on top of that.

That's just an example, more an analogy than a direct connection to what's before us, but it is a learning situation. It is a learning incident that, I think, should give pause to government, to know that in the past Albertans gave way too much credence to the presence of that bricks-and-mortar building being there and believing that it was there for their best interest. For some people who were able to manage that – it never seemed to be a very large majority – that's a fine thing, but most that I knew and talked to were regretful of their involvement with payday lenders in particular.

I know that we need to stay current and stay on an innovative edge in this province, and I'm glad that we're doing that. I think we have some good examples of positive ways that we've done that, either through the Alberta Securities Commission, and some negative incidents. The risks of going down this road are clear, but it doesn't mean that we shouldn't try as long as we ensure that there are the significant considerations and belts and braces put in place.

With that said, Madam Chair, I'm going to take my seat.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to Bill 13 in Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to speak to the Financial Innovation Act, Bill 13. I've spoken to this bill before, and I will like to add a few more comments this afternoon as the government prepares to implement what they are calling a regulatory sandbox, the first jurisdiction in the country to do so.

I think it's an effort to regulate a burgeoning sector of the economy that we see lots of examples of in Alberta. I see from the explosion of small companies that are looking to enter into the fintech sector with various products and services that it was one which merits the attention of government and regulators because, of course, consumers need the protection that the government can provide from any unscrupulous operators who might wish to bring on a financial product or service that could put them at risk. Also, Madam Chair, there's the other element as well, that the government is going to really want to have to take a close look at how Alberta jobs are protected as we see more and more financial technologies develop and evolve which potentially eliminate Alberta workers here in the province.

One example of this, Madam Chair, arose this morning as I awoke to listen to CBC Radio. It talked about a company. It was a news item about a company which is a fast-food company which is looking to eliminate the need to have order takers on-site – in other words, a human being taking your food order on-site – in their location. What will happen instead is that there has been a new technology developed where, basically, a Zoom call will be made, or it will be constantly in progress, whereby the order will be taken by somebody anywhere in the world. It'll be on-screen. It'll be a digitally operated system where that individual order from somebody who's drawing up either to the drive-in or inside the restaurant, wanting to order takeout food, will be speaking to somebody who could be on the other side of the world. It could be anywhere in the world where the wages are lower.

3:50

Now, in this case the interviewer spoke about this particular company using workers in Nicaragua, where the wage rate is about \$3.25 an hour. Now, granted, the cost of living in Nicaragua is much lower than it is here, but even on a pro-rated basis that seems like a huge discount towards – we would expect to pay somebody in Alberta a living wage to work and perform the same role. If indeed things like this, Madam Chair, successfully are rolled out by one company in a pilot project, one might potentially see this happen in the whole fast-food industry. You don't need to be a mathematician to really calculate the job losses that would happen in Alberta as a result of the implementation on a wide basis of this type of new financial technology or this new service in ordering fast food, as an example.

One of the reasons that the government not only has to look at consumer protection from the standpoint of fraud or from the standpoint of being overly risky but also from the standpoint of, “How will it affect Alberta employment?” is because many of the technologies that we see and the technology companies that are

being developed will obviously involve looking at savings and bottom-line results for the companies that they are trying to market their services or products to. In this particular case I'm sure it looks mighty appealing to many fast-food chains to look at saving themselves \$12 or more an hour on labour costs by replacing an Alberta worker with somebody who's in Nicaragua making \$3.25 an hour on a Canadian-dollar scale.

That is something that – I don't know if it's really contemplated by the minister as yet in the Financial Innovation Act, but it certainly got my attention when I was listening to the report on CBC this morning about a major fast-food chain adopting this practice on a pilot level, or a pilot scale. If indeed those kinds of savings are available, the ability to eliminate Alberta workers in favour of a remotely operated Nicaraguan worker or somebody elsewhere in the world who is working for \$3.25 an hour, that's a bit of a daunting thought.

Now, we do of course have, as a result of the pandemic, a shortage of those workers in that hospitality field, and that's largely caused by the problematic low wages that are involved in that field, but of course businesses will opt, if they can, if it's legally permitted, to go ahead and participate in something that's going to save them that type of a percentage on their labour cost by eliminating Alberta jobs and offshoring something as simple as ordering food at a fast-food restaurant.

It wasn't something that we could have contemplated a few short years ago, Madam Chair, but lo and behold, there are technologies that have been practised by us and everyone around the world during the pandemic that have gained strident use, and the public uptake of things like Zoom is pretty widespread. This particular fintech company has acknowledged that and implemented a pilot project with a major fast-food chain that could change the labour market in the fast-food industry. It's something that should be on the radar of the Alberta government if it is indeed concerned about protecting Alberta jobs.

Now, granted, offshoring labour and offshoring work to lower cost jurisdictions is not a new thing. Our utility companies do it. Banks do it. It's a fairly widespread phenomenon. Notwithstanding that, this is an expansion, and possibly a large expansion, of that offshoring and exportation of Alberta jobs that the government might want to consider looking at when it's regulating within the sandbox the new fintech companies. It's something that I wanted to bring up and know and understand if indeed it is in the purview of the government when it comes to the Financial Innovation Act and the regulations therein.

I'm not sure if indeed that's something that we may be able to hear about from the government. Let's see if indeed that is something that they have any thoughts on. That was one of the interesting pieces of the evolution of the fintech industry that I've come across very recently, and I thought it was pretty germane to bring forward this afternoon in debate. If you try to calculate just the number of workers that would be eliminated if indeed the fast-food industry adopted across the board this digitized order-taking system, you quickly come into the tens of thousands of Alberta jobs that would be lost. That's worthy of some serious consideration. If indeed we are going to be regulating these industries, we may want to take a look at what effect the adoption of that fintech strategy involved in some of these companies would have on employment. It's a concern at a time when our young people are having, really, a difficult time at significant step-up jobs, that we will be perhaps exporting a whole category of entry-level jobs out of the country. It's a serious consideration.

I'm also concerned about financial products being exempted from consumer protection. I know that the intent, I believe, is to make sure that the novel ideas that are contained in many of the new

fintech companies, whether it be a point-of-sale system or a new method of payroll or what have you – there's a vast panoply of different types of ideas and small niche opportunities that entrepreneurs have found in Alberta and are developing technologies to serve a need that they see available to them, but indeed the risk, of course, is that some of these can be abused. The consumer protections that need to be put in place are something that Albertans are rightfully concerned about because it's such a new field. It's one that I think regulators have to be careful about because it is a novel and rapidly evolving field of enterprise.

As a result of that, consumers feel that they are at risk of things that they may not be fully aware of, and as a result I think there's a special responsibility on the part of the government within this regulatory sandbox to ensure that certainly there's a wide berth given to the development of products and services, but that has to be balanced with the protection of consumers. That protection should never be sacrificed at the mercy of giving totally free rein to the new companies that have a developing technology that they wish to bring to the market.

4:00

The guiding principle should always be and the overriding principle should always be that our consumers are protected, and not only the individual members of the public, Madam Chair, when I talk about consumers. Many of these businesses, many of these new fintech companies that are being developed are business-to-business platforms. So there is a possibility that an individual business that wishes to take advantage of an opportunity to apply the technologies made available by a new fintech service or product could potentially be put at risk as a result. There are wide opportunities for potential abuse if indeed it's not properly monitored.

That's the responsibility of the provincial government when making this regulatory sandbox, that the oversight is there for businesses, large and small, that might take advantage of these new products and services and for the individual consumers who potentially would be at risk. On the individual basis, we're thinking more and more about data and privacy and loss of data and looking at personal identity being at risk. I'm not sure how well and deeply this has been contemplated in the legislation before us. In these exemptions that the minister is contemplating allowing within this sandbox is an inherent risk that there will be unscrupulous operators who would seek to operate within the smokescreen of those exemptions and take advantage of the public or businesses that they sell their products or service to.

The sector is a big employer right now, 60,000 people in the financial services sector. It's a large section of our economy. But the biggest concern, I guess, apart from the protection items, the consumer protection items inherent in this regulatory sandbox that the minister is looking to assemble with this legislation, is that the Minister of Finance is simply asking us to trust him. Once again, it's a theme that's been consistent with this government, whether it's asking us to trust them when they burned \$1.3 billion on a pipeline that didn't exist and was known to face opposition from the U.S. government. They made that bet knowing that it was – they were betting against the house, and they lost that bet. It was \$1.3 billion up in smoke. Certainly, there was no protection for Albertans there. The government made that bet knowing that it was probably going to fail.

Somebody who consistently has billions of dollars of accounting errors in his budget is not somebody whose trust we should be allowing him to have. We shouldn't be giving our trust to that individual Finance minister. Simply put, the track record of this government when asking for the trust of Albertans hasn't been good. It doesn't breed a culture of trust when we listen to what the

government is actually doing in terms of taking risks on behalf of the Alberta taxpayer. Giving away a \$4.7 billion tax break to major corporations, who, of course, took it offshore or paid back dividends: the minister, of course, asked us to trust them that that money would be invested on a trickle-down basis to Albertans, and of course that didn't happen. It was money that disappeared.

The ability to trust somebody is something that is earned, Madam Chair. Albertans in this province, clearly, are having great difficulty trusting the government. That's something we hear over and over on the doorsteps, right from one end of the province to the other.

Quite often, Madam Chair, if you're looking at a potential election that's coming up in any given jurisdiction in a western democracy, if indeed people feel that they're economically going to be better off in the future and they're hopeful, they'll sustain the government; if indeed they feel that they're fearful and that things are going to get worse, the government will potentially fall.

But those two rules or those two norms are coupled now with something that's a little bit different, and it really is a significant matter as we approach a potential election season in this province, and that is the matter of trust. It seems to be overriding anything. Like, the government has fallen into an absolute windfall with their treasury receiving billions of dollars in oil royalties as a result of geopolitical situations that exist in the world today, and, notwithstanding that, because of their own trials and tribulations leadershipwise within their own party and the turmoil and the schism that they've got going on there and because of the gambles that they've taken with Albertans' tax dollars over the course of their tenure in the last three years or so, that trust has been broken.

Because of the way that the health care system has been managed during the pandemic, because of the way that doctors have been treated, starting off with having a contract torn up, like, a bona fide, legitimate, signed contract destroyed by the government that was a party to the contract, that is something that is beyond the pale. Who does that, Madam Chair? Well, obviously, it's a government that is not concerned necessarily about the trust of this population. That was one of the first steps that went a long way to taking away a pillar of the trust that governments hope to have.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise and make a few comments and join debate in Committee of the Whole. I'm going to put my comments into two categories. I would like to respond to, I think, some of the thoughtful observations and comments from the Member for Calgary-Buffalo around both the value and perhaps some of the risks taken with a financial services regulatory sandbox.

The member was right to raise the concern around consumer protection. Consumer protection is critically important. I have to say, Madam Chair, as we were doing our policy work, as we were looking at other jurisdictions that had gone before us with this kind of a mechanism, with a financial services regulatory sandbox, that was a question I had. In fact, I posed the question to my officials, the officials that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo would know well. My question was: given the fact that we have other jurisdictions that have gone before us with this type of mechanism, have there been examples of where consumers' privacy has been materially breached or where consumers have experienced loss? In other words, have there been events and instances where a product offering has gone off the rails? That is a concern of mine, and the members are right to raise it.

The answer to that, Madam Chair, was that there were no documented instances where there was a material loss by consumers or a material breach of privacy. So while that does

not absolve this government and future governments of the responsibility to take every care and precaution in protecting the privacy and the information of Albertans to ensure that Alberta consumers are fully protected, it gave me confidence to continue forward with this initiative and with this mechanism. We have identified a number of data points, in fact.

Transparency is critically important. Again, I've heard that from the members opposite, and they're right to raise it. Transparency is critically important. There are a number of terms and conditions that the minister of the day can impose on an applicant, on a project proponent, on a company, business who would want to utilize this sandbox and offer a product with certain exemptions. But there's also going to be public information that will be required. I'm just going to go through that required public information.

The government will make the following information public on a website: the name of each sandbox participant issued a certificate of acceptance; a description of the product or service each sandbox participant is offering; a list of regulatory exemptions provided to each sandbox participant; any terms, conditions, or restrictions imposed by the minister on a sandbox participant; the expiry date of any participant's certificate of acceptance; as well as any amendment, revocation, and cancellation of a certificate of acceptance.

4:10

Madam Chair, a certificate can be revoked by the minister, and that's an important feature here to head off perhaps a product offering that is rolling out in a different way than it was envisioned. So, yes, consumer protection is critically important, transparency is critically important, and certainly we've considered those two essential features, and they are included, and rightfully so, in our approach.

I do want to make just a couple of comments in response to the Member for Edmonton-McClung, because while certainly a number of his comments I think were related to the bill, I have to say that that member went off. You know, this is Committee of the Whole time. I would like to discuss the details of the bill, but I do have to respond, Madam Chair, to a couple of the comments. Firstly, the notion, the insinuation that somehow we have been ultimately producing and presenting financial statements in material error: that's simply not been the case. We've had a clean audit report in every year-end financial audit that the Auditor General has conducted on behalf of this government. That's critically important. That's critically important, as I think all members on both sides of this House would appreciate.

You know, I can talk about the function of an auditor at year-end. An auditor engages typically a client, in this case the government of Alberta and various departments, on appropriate accounting treatment on complex issues. That does occur, and that takes place. It certainly took place with our government, and it took place with the members opposite. That's a reality. But that in no way, shape, or form means that the financial statements are anything but integral. I think it's critical that Albertans understand that and know that the financial statements presented by the government of Alberta are, in fact, integral and, in fact, have received a clean audit report.

I just have to make one comment with respect to our approach to positioning the Alberta economy for disproportionate investment attraction, because the member again talked about our job-creation tax cut. The fact that we reduced corporate taxes, business taxes, by a full one-third: that was not a giveaway. The member alludes to that as a giveaway; it's not a giveaway. In fact, we're just taking less from business owners and groups – businesses, companies, and others – who invest in this province and create jobs and create wealth, from which we all benefit.

Madam Chair, again, I just have to cite the fact and recognize that the business tax rate is only one feature of many that make up a business environment, either very competitive or not as competitive, but it is an essential feature, and it's an important feature. In fact, I can cite Fortune Minerals, who are planning to build a significant processing plant, refinery just outside of Edmonton. They cited the location, the geography relative to an important rail line, and the preferential corporate tax rate. Those were the criteria that ultimately landed them in Alberta. It does matter. That's reflected, again, in the budget that we presented and passed and the fact that, again, the corporate tax rate is just one feature of many in a competitive business environment.

But as we've worked hard to position this province to be most competitive, to have the most attractive business environment possible, we are seeing investment pour in, with announcements week after week, even these days. All that is to say that by reducing corporate income taxes and by modernizing our regulatory environment, I believe we will create the conditions for increased investment attraction, greater wealth creation, expanded fiscal capacity, and higher government revenues to pay for those important programs such as health and education and supporting our most vulnerable. It was no giveaway, Madam Chair. It was simply positioning this province for growth, wealth creation, and future prosperity.

Lastly, the member talked about our fiscal management in a bit of a disparaging way and, again, threw out the fact that, you know, we have a better fiscal result simply and only because of higher energy prices. That's simply not true. We used very cautious, credible WTI projections, oil price projections, projections of \$70 in the current year, \$69 in the mid-year, and \$66.50 in the out-year. Madam Chair, again I will remind all members of this House that had we continued on the spending trajectory we inherited from the previous government, we would not be showing a balanced budget but a \$6 billion deficit. That's a fact.

Madam Chair, again, I take exception to those comments. I'm very interested in debating this bill. I'm very interested in hearing from members across the way on this bill: some of the advantages, the opportunities, the risks, and the perils. Let's focus on this bill. Let's focus on ensuring this economy is positioned not only for growth but for diversification. I believe that's a goal that we all share in this House. Let's continue to focus on that goal, and this bill, I believe, further advances the effort and the objective of economic growth and diversification.

The Chair: Are there others that wish to join the debate on Bill 13? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thanks, Madam Chair. Yeah, actually, I'm very excited to get a chance to maybe go back and forth here with the minister a little bit. I was keying in on some of the comments of my friend from Edmonton-McClung. Back during the NDP government I got the opportunity to serve as the Alberta representative on CSG, got to attend a couple of PNWER meetings as well. I was actually invited as a panelist to one discussion around disruptive technologies. Back at that time it was right when Uber was starting to come into Alberta, essentially upsetting the entire cab industry in the province. At least speaking for Alberta, there is significant monetary investment for cab drivers with regard to licences and that.

Some of the other things that we started talking about – my friend brought up around remote cashiers. I started thinking about the self-serve tills at different stores versus actually having a cashier there. You know, the most famous one, I think, going way back in time, is when cars were built exclusively by people, and then, of course, automation and robots came in, which, unfortunately, started taking

jobs away from those individuals. Here in Alberta we have examples of driverless trucks in our energy industry. I think I heard once, for instance – I could be wrong about the company – that I believe it was Suncor that had purchased a hundred of these driverless trucks, which means that now there are a hundred people that don't have jobs in that area. I mean, innovation is going to go, new technologies will come in, and things like that.

I guess that when we're thinking about Bill 13 and financial innovation, I mean, let's think about how at one point in time everybody would go to the bank to deposit their cheque and do their business with the teller there and everything like that. Then, of course, the Internet came in, and all of a sudden we could do our banking online. We had a whole bunch of customer service representatives in the banking industry who lost their jobs. Now, ultimately there were some folks that still just would not do their banking online, and I was probably one of those holdouts for a little while, but even I eventually transitioned.

4:20

When we're talking about disruptive technologies and, you know, creating that sandbox for that innovation and testing those things, I guess the question would be: are there any kinds of provisions that this government will be looking at – and I'm not one hundred per cent sure if maybe that is addressed in Bill 13 – where the government might be, I guess, reviewing some of these new innovations or technologies that come in that on the surface sound very exciting and look like great opportunities but then, as my friend from Edmonton-McClung had said, might end up costing Albertans their jobs, like this new one of going in to order some food from somebody that's not even in the country, serving that person?

I'm wondering if, maybe by chance, the minister has any ideas on how that kind of thing could be mitigated or, you know, any plans to review some of these things so that rather than after the fact of a lot of people losing – because once they've lost their jobs, that's it. It's pretty much done. Maybe go into a little bit on any kind of plans where, if we do identify a disruptive technology – and I don't want that to sound negative. Those were just kind of some of the words that were used at the time to try to mitigate or help those folks out that might be finding themselves out of a job with a disruptive technology. I'd be interested to hear some of the comments on that.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Pleased to rise and make a few comments with respect to the question posed, I think a fair question posed. You know, as we take a look back through even recent history, there's always a tension between moving forward with innovation, with new technology, with new and novel ideas and methodology. There's a tension between what's gained in that approach and who might be left behind. That's a fair question, and it's a tension that I believe needs to be evaluated. I would suggest it's a tension that I believe we need to consider, but I believe that tension should not hold us back from stepping into the future but stepping into the future in a responsible, careful way.

One requirement for an applicant to be successful to get a product into the sandbox – in other words, a product that would receive some exemptions and some special terms to be offered in a limited way to test effectively here in the province of Alberta – is that that product would need to be new or novel. In other words, it could not be a product that an existing financial institution is already offering, and it would have to demonstrate some benefit to the public. Now, that benefit may be in a new or novel product that we can't access today, or it could drive an efficiency that ultimately, in a competitive world,

in a competitive financial services industry, will drive that efficiency and cost savings to Albertans and to consumers. Again, not just any idea is going to pass the bar. The product needs to be new and novel, and it has to demonstrate the likelihood, probability of some benefit.

With respect to the tension between moving forward with innovation and technology adoption and some of the risks that that can pose to, you know, folks all of a sudden finding that they don't have a job, that maybe they don't have a career, and that maybe they have to retrain, again, I appreciate that question, and I appreciate the tension. But, Madam Chair, I believe we need to, in spite of that tension, move forward with innovation and technology adoption for a couple of reasons. Firstly, historically we can look back at industry after industry where there was transformational change, massive efficiency and productivity gains that ultimately required far fewer people to create as much or more product.

I can look at agriculture. I've got a bit of a background in agriculture. If we take a look at agriculture 75 or 100 years ago, I mean, we were an agrarian society. Certainly, you know, up to probably the 1940s we were an agriculture society in many ways. So many people worked in agriculture. Our productivity was low. We were an agriculture powerhouse in Canada, but our productivity was low. And we were not unique. That was a global phenomenon at the time. But the green revolution came along. Ultimately, bioscience moved forward very aggressively. Plant breeding was taken on, and our genetics improved drastically. Agronomy moved forward very significantly. There was a much better understanding of what plants would need, what agricultural animal production would need in order to increase production and efficiency.

Then there was the technology revolution with respect to technology employed in production practices. Again, whether that was in the production animal agriculture or whether that was in crop science, all of that combined ultimately allowed us in this country and in other developed countries to produce exponentially more agriculture products with exponentially fewer people. No doubt at the time there were concerns around: "What are all these people in rural Alberta or rural Canada going to do? How will they ever get a job? How will they ever transition?" Those would have been real concerns of the day, and I'm hearing those concerns, legitimately, today. When we take a look back at history, we see that a new economy, innovation technology, requires different skill sets, but it requires people. It requires engagement.

Right now in agriculture we have tens of thousands of people that work in high-tech agriculture fields in this province, occupations and professions that couldn't have been envisioned 50 or 60 or 70 years ago. Instead of having, you know, an army of folks working in very laborious types of work in the fields, that work is done by only a few by using technology. Now we have folks working in research and development. We have folks working with soil mapping. We have folks working in cloud-based technologies that have moved the agriculture industry forward exponentially, which, I might add, is very important as we have a growing global population. So a bit of a long answer.

I really believe, with respect to financial services, that the same will be true. If we fail to move forward, our competitors will move forward, and we will simply be left behind. We will not be able to hold back our economy for the sake of ensuring that there's no change or disruption, to use the member's term appropriately. We, I believe, will have to embrace the future, and Bill 13 is about embracing the future. Is there some risk? There's always some risk, but I believe that as a province we need to move forward. As a province, that's our legacy. That's our history. We are a province, we are a people that are prepared to step out and take risks. I believe that Bill 13 and the creation of a regulatory sandbox, the provision of exemptions when a company or business wants to offer new and

novel products, is a way to step forward into the future, not without its risk. I appreciate the member raising the concern, but I believe we should and will and must step forward to embrace the future and this technology.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. I'd just also note that I appreciate the comments we've been hearing from the Finance minister and that he is actively participating in this debate and providing further information. That is certainly laudable and appreciated.

I recognize the importance and the value of looking at financial innovation. We've certainly seen opportunities arise, and if I may take a moment to tell a bit of a personal story, I've certainly seen some benefit myself. You know, a few years ago, back in 2016, I needed to make a purchase online, and for the purchase that I needed to make, the only option that that seller would accept was Bitcoin. This was something that was fairly new to me, certainly not something that I had any of, but I needed to make that purchase, so I purchased a small amount of Bitcoin so that I could do that transaction online. I was left with a small amount of Bitcoin left over, a trifling amount – it was maybe a few dollars – and I forgot about that Bitcoin. It sat there in that digital wallet for a number of years.

4:30

Just last year I received an e-mail notification that says: "Hey, by the way, it's been a while. We're going to shut down this account. You may want to just check and see if everything is okay." I said, "Well, sure." It was a little bit of jumping through hoops, took a little bit of work to go through and get in and reaccess that account, but when I did, I found out that that small amount of Bitcoin that I had left there was worth well over \$2,000. I can't claim, Madam Chair, that that was any savvy investment on my part, that I had done deep studies, say, of the likes of Mr. Pierre Poilievre, who's a big fan of these things. I can't say that I have his level of expertise when it comes to digital currency, but it turned out that having that small amount, hey, did end up yielding a considerable benefit.

Of course, I also recognize that for folks that are getting involved in these things, there is appreciable risk. Certainly, I know that, to my understanding, the value of Bitcoin has gone up and down quite a bit over the years. Certainly, there have been some who have benefited, and there have been some who have lost. Financial innovation can be very interesting, and offering new products and new opportunities for folks can be very interesting. It can potentially be beneficial. It can be very tempting for folks, but it can also come with a downside.

You know, I think about back in 2008, when we had the burst of the housing bubble in the U.S. We had a significant stock market crash, and that came about for a number of factors, a number of reasons. I mean, certainly, there were a number of people who were taking subprime mortgages who were not really in a financial position to be able to cover that. There were folks who were sort of taking advantage of the existence of these things, different investors, and approaching at times, to my understanding, some misrepresentation and taking advantage of that. Certainly, there were concerns about how some mortgage brokers were going about making those mortgages and those loans.

But, certainly, we also had folks who were trading in bundles of these subprime mortgages. That, of course, was a new product on the market, and that was something that a lot of people were getting involved in. Certainly, a number of people were making large amounts of money doing this, and they were considered to be very

smart and savvy investors at the time, but we saw how that resulted. That ended up with thousands and thousands and thousands of people, hundreds of thousands of people, having to default on their mortgages, losing their homes. It led to a massive stock market crash. It led to a serious impact on our economy, to the point where Prime Minister Harper himself, one of the more conservative Prime Ministers we've had, had to actually move forward with a stimulus budget, something I can say – I think all would agree – he was very, very reluctant to have to do. But the impact was that severe not only for the U.S. economy but for Canada.

Now, I'm not suggesting that any of the products that are likely to be developed in this regulatory sandbox that's being proposed by the Minister of Finance are going to be of that kind of a scale. That is certainly a more extreme example, but it is a cautionary tale, Madam Chair, of what can potentially happen. While I personally can tell a story of a real benefit, there are also many who can tell stories of real harm.

Now, that, in and of itself, is not a reason to be against this legislation. I think that in all situations, as the minister himself said just now, as he was talking about impacts on employment, we always have to weigh possible gain versus possible risk. And what the minister is proposing here, to my understanding, with this regulatory sandbox is creating a smaller area in which to try some of these ideas out to minimize the amount of risk that might come. If we find something that is successful within the confines of this regulatory sandbox, there could be an opportunity then to expand that to regulate something in a way that could potentially provide a larger benefit through a larger scale deployment in the financial services sector. And again I would say that that is not an unreasonable approach.

I certainly appreciate the thoughts, you know, that the minister brought forward as he was just talking now about the importance of diversification, trying new ideas. Certainly, that is a refreshing change from his remarks in late 2019, when he declared diversification a luxury at a time when his government was taking away all of the government supports for our tech and innovation industry, including some that had existed long before our government had been in place and that existed in every other province in Canada, like the SRED credit. But as I've noted in previous debate, this government has had a Damascus road experience when it comes to the tech and innovation industry, and certainly there have been some great improvements in their policy towards it.

But, really, the key issue here is a question of trust. Can Albertans trust that if they purchase these products, that if they engage in products that are developed within this regulatory sandbox, they are going to be adequately protected? It seems quite clear that the minister feels that it is the role of government to take those steps to protect them, to provide that consumer protection. He talked about how they looked at other jurisdictions to see whether they'd taken that step, what concerns there might be, talked with the officials, asked: have there been any examples of consumers' privacy being materially breached?

He said that, no, in fact, there were no documented cases of that, which is great to hear, Madam Chair, particularly since, you know, that was a concern that came up, at least, when I was at committee recently with my private member's bill, where government members, in their words, said that they could not let that bill go forward because they were concerned about privacy impacts. I noted at the time that members of this government were very happy to pass Bill 46 back in the fall of 2020, a bill in which there had been no consultation with the Information and Privacy Commissioner, which she flagged as severely concerning and indeed potentially taking Alberta backwards on the protection of Albertans' private health information, but the members of this government party rejected every single amendment

that was based on the recommendations from that Information and Privacy Commissioner and voted in favour of that legislation.

So it's good to hear that in this instance the Finance minister is indeed considering that aspect here, but it does lead me to question how this government approaches these sorts of situations. Again, here we have the government speaking up and saying: "Okay. Well, we believe we can provide adequate protection for Albertans who are facing potential risk from products that are developed within this regulatory sandbox. Indeed, it's been our job to do so, and we are capable of doing so." Yet when my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview brought forward his Bill 203 to establish an Alberta venture fund, these same members of that committee said that they were deeply concerned that, you know, this would look like the government was endorsing something that was potentially very risky for Albertans, that they felt that that was a reason that bill could simply not even be debated in the Legislature.

But here we are with the government bringing forward a bill which, again, will allow Albertans to make investments which potentially may be very risky for them, and suddenly the tune is different because it's coming from their Finance minister as opposed to a member of the opposition. In the last few days I've heard members of the government toss the word "hypocritical" at me and my colleagues. Well, I think it certainly fits here.

That said, I appreciated the remarks that the minister provided and the conversations he had with officials. They looked at whether there had been any privacy issues. They looked at whether any product offerings had gone off the rails, and there was apparently no documented case that they could find of a material loss for a consumer under a previous regulatory sandbox, products developed in such in another jurisdiction. Certainly, I appreciate that the minister considered that and looked at those particular issues.

I certainly agree with him that transparency is critically important, and as he noted, there are terms and conditions that the minister can impose. There are requirements for what must be posted online around exemptions, terms and conditions, restrictions, expiry date, amendments or revocation or cancellation of a certificate. But, again, Madam Chair, I would note that these government members, at least the ones that were at that committee, were deeply concerned about Albertans' ability to understand products that were put in front of them, financial products like the Alberta venture fund, so I have to ask, then: are we absolutely sure that government can and will provide this information in a way that is understandable by Albertans? It's excellent that this information has to be posted online, but the question is: how will this information be posted, in what kind of a format?

4:40

Certainly, Madam Chair, I am not someone who has delved deeply into financial services. Certainly, I have a financial adviser. I certainly appreciate their advice. We have conversations about how to invest for my RRSP and other things, but it is not a personal area of expertise. I am not sure that if this was put up on the website in fairly technical language, it would be something that I could say that I felt confident reading and being able to make a decision on. Now, perhaps the kinds of products that are being envisioned here are for folks who are more experienced. Perhaps that will be made clear. I haven't heard clearly on that from the minister, whether this is envisioned as something that's going to be for the general populace, for the average person, who may not have a high degree of literacy in financial services and products, or whether this is intended more specifically for those who do have that level of expertise and may perhaps be browsing and considering these on behalf of clients. That would be something I'd be interested in hearing a bit more clarity on.

The other thing that occurred to me as the minister was speaking on this point is: will there be – and again I’m not aware of it in the bill, but perhaps I’ve overlooked – or are there any limits or requirements on how these products may be advertised or promoted? That is the other question. Certainly, making these products available and having certain fences around them within the regulatory sandbox and certain requirements to be posted online, but the question is again: if these are products that are going to be offered to average Albertans, what requirements are there about how these products are described in advertisement or promoted, or how can they be promoted? Can one of these companies simply take out a Facebook ad and say, “Click here?” Could they just be put out on social media? Can they run advertising on television? What steps are allowed to be taken?

It’s possible that the minister is simply saying that these would be handled like any other financial product, that they would simply have the fences within. But then again, given that these are, for lack of a better term, experimental and certainly subject to unique conditions, are there provisions that that must be included and must be noted when these products are in fact being promoted? I think these are important considerations because, again, the largest component that we have here is trust. I appreciated what the minister laid out about the due diligence he has done and discussions he has had with his staff.

Certainly, if I may stray for a moment into the more political, as all members in this House are wont to do from time to time, Albertans have reasons to question trust in this particular Finance minister for some of the decisions that he has brought forward on behalf of his government; for example, this government’s insistence on continuing to dally with the idea of an Alberta pension plan when certainly the numbers do not seem to suggest that that would necessarily be a wise investment on behalf of Albertans, that there could be costs involved, and that a vast majority of Albertans do not want it. But this minister continues to say that they are considering it.

This minister sits at the cabinet table, where this government continues to pursue potentially the idea of an Alberta provincial police force, which again would raise costs for Albertans and would create new risks for municipalities in terms of the rising costs and put more burden on the backs of Albertans. They want to potentially force Albertans to make that investment despite the fact that Albertans have been very clear, two-thirds, that they do not support that idea.

When we were talking about trust in a government, that’s certainly a considerable issue that – of course, this minister was also at the table and writing the cheques for the \$1.3 billion on a pipeline that went nowhere as the Premier insulted elected leaders in the U.S., an investment that cost Albertans and for which they have received nothing. Now, again, Madam Chair, I freely admit that that is stepping more into the political than the direct question of this bill, but it is fact nonetheless.

We do, though, have questions, and we’ll continue to ask. Certainly, there is the potential that we will support this bill under the parameters that are set out. But we do continue to look at it and question and ask about some aspects, the power to exempt some of these new financial products from consumer protection laws. Now, I just outlined some of the basic concerns that would be there and some of the things I’m certainly curious about in how these products may be promoted, sort of how they may be advertised, how they may be put across, who may bring them forward, what shape they might take, how they might be described. Certainly, with the minister having the power to choose to exempt some of these products from existing consumer protection laws, that is something that should be very, very carefully guarded. That is a large power.

I know at times this government has been very fond of awarding some fairly wide and sweeping powers to its ministers. I recall Bill 10, the concerns that were raised around that, and then an entire summer in a committee that had to be spent and an entire bill of amending to undo the very things the government had been warned about.

Again, it is worth asking: what safeguards are going to be around the minister exercising this kind of power on something that could potentially impact Albertans? I appreciate, again, that the minister has talked about having considered this and looked at other jurisdictions, but the fact is that we are talking about new and innovative products.

My understanding is that Treasury Board and Finance, in fact, does not necessarily have the requisite experience on hand for this kind of work. They do not currently have anyone necessarily within the ministry who understands and has expertise in these particular kinds of new, innovative financial products. I’m assuming that the minister himself does not have this expertise, or at least he certainly has not indicated that he has.

Certainly, if he has experience in this, then I would be interested to hear it, but I think he is likely then, in making his decisions around which exemptions he might grant, going to be very reliant on expertise from his department, expertise that the department does not currently have. That was what we were told in the technical briefing from officials, that it might well be the case that Treasury Board and Finance does not currently have the expertise they need, but if required, they could put someone on contract. I would certainly suggest, Madam Chair, that that would be required.

I think that if we are going to have government making these kinds of decisions – and, again, members of this government have expressed their deep concern about how Albertans may be misled or may lack information or the ability to understand something as basic as an Alberta venture fund, so I imagine they are equally concerned, then, with these kinds of complex and new innovative products, that Albertans may have challenges there as well and may be potentially put at risk.

Certainly, I think it’s essential that the minister has expertise available to him to sit down and have these conversations, to provide him with much-needed guidance before making decisions like exempting some of these products from existing consumer protection laws. It’s certainly my hope that the minister is preparing for that now. I admit that, of course, we don’t want to presume the will of the Legislature and which direction we might vote, but certainly I would hope that they are starting to look at that possibility and consider individuals that could be sought out to provide that advice and expertise should this bill pass.

I think Albertans have a lot of trust in their financial institutions in general. You know, I can be fairly sure that when I put dollars in my savings account, it will still be there tomorrow. I have fairly good protections and assurances that when I make that investment in my RRSP, it will continue, those dollars will be there. I generally trust my bank with my mortgage. Albertans consider dealing with financial services companies as safe, and they should. In line with that, then, that ties in with what I have been saying. Albertans have that feeling of safety.

The Chair: Are there others to join debate on Bill 13? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. It’s my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 13 in committee. You know, seeing that we’re in committee and it was lovely to see the Finance minister pop up and correct the record or try to add some comments based on what was said, before I go into some of the other comments that were made and some of my concerns about this legislation, first, let me say that

I actually generally am in support of this particular piece of legislation. I would like to get some additional information around some of the concerns we've raised.

4:50

The Finance minister, a few speakers ago, actually, you know, talked about how awesome the government books were. Fair enough. I mean, the Auditor General has certainly issued a clean audit. However, I would like to add a few comments there, and I would like to qualify that. If you think back to 2020, there was a special auditor's report issued, and as a result the UCP government needed to correct a few actually fairly significant errors in order to get a clean audit. I think it's important that we get that on the record and that we don't forget this.

At the time our Auditor General, Doug Wylie, actually flagged \$1.6 billion worth of accounting blunders and oversights. There are three of them specifically: a couple of really big-ticket item ones and then one smaller one. The first one, of course, you will recall, was KXL. He noted that the government had to make a \$100 million adjustment to the KXL pipeline investment. The government made that investment before the fiscal year-end, he said, but the money wasn't reflected in the proper balance sheet. The Auditor General also said that the government failed to update its cash-flow model for the Sturgeon refinery after prices cratered earlier in that year, which was 2020, due to COVID-19 and a global oil price war, leading to a recommended \$795 million adjustment in expenses. Madam Chair, that's a pretty big error.

There was also another one that I talked about a little bit yesterday. It was an error around reporting expenses in the correct year. There was \$152 million added to costs for two income support programs, those being assured income for the severely handicapped and, of course, the other one being income support itself; that was, barriers to employment and expected to work. The problem, as I explained yesterday, was that the government stated that they were changing the payment dates to help Albertans, which we know is not true and ended up causing a fair amount of harm. Now, there were some reasons that they shared that, you know, probably could have flown, but at the end of the day there was harm. There was not enough notice. The big problem, as pointed out by the Auditor General of Alberta, is that 12 months of expenses were not recorded in the 12 months of the fiscal year, so the UCP government had to correct that error.

Overall, there were – what did I say? – \$1.6 billion in accounting errors, blunders, actually, that needed to be corrected in order to get the glowing report that the Finance minister talked about. So I just wanted to correct that.

Moving on, I think that we've heard again and again and again in this place that there is a lack of trust for this government. You know, let's be honest. There's probably not a lot of trust for any government around the world for a variety of reasons, but this one in particular, this particular government, the UCP government, is a government that has a huge trust deficit. So whenever we see a piece of legislation, I sort of look at it as: I think that this government needs to prove to Albertans that they have Albertans' backs, that they are indeed going to do what they say and Albertans will be protected and, actually, life will be made better by that particular piece of legislation. While I will be happy to support a bill that assists in diversifying the economy, that creates opportunity, and that supports innovation – I'm happy to do that – I would like some additional information.

As I mentioned before, one of the concerns that we have is that there is a power to exempt new financial products from consumer protections laws that can easily be abused. Now, you know, don't get me wrong. I am not saying that companies that are able to use

this regulatory sandbox, as it were – I'm not saying that their intent will be malicious in any way. I'm just saying that it's best to prevent problems before they happen.

Some of the new problems, you know, with fintech or whatever – and my colleague was really eloquent in describing some of them – are that sometimes these new financial products or these new innovative products have the same problems but just in a new form. For example, a loan is still a loan, electronic payments are still electronic payments, and they come with all of the potential sort of hazards or problems that the original products, or now kind of the old-fashioned products, come along with. However, we've had many years to establish some consumer protections around those older products that we may not see with a new one, with an innovative one that is able to use the regulatory sandbox.

My colleague also mentioned, that I would like to reiterate, a lack of transparency around cost and business models. Often these very new and innovative products can appear to be free or low cost, but they may not be. Sometimes there are hidden costs that don't even appear until after you're into the use of the app or the new product or whatever it may be, and they don't even appear until after you sign up and you're in the process. Sometimes those costs aren't necessarily sort of – the costs aren't financial. Maybe it's a cost around data sharing and, you know, all of those problems that come into play around sharing data and personal information.

This might not sound like a big deal when we're talking about this sort of innovative regulatory sandbox, but if you think about the vulnerabilities of some Albertans – and I would hope that products like this, like the ones we're talking about, would be open and accessible to all Albertans. There are some issues around very simple things like no human records, lack of consumer or customer service, or what happens when things go wrong. You know, I heard my colleague talk a little bit about his very interesting Bitcoin experience, but he had the wherewithal to actually figure out how to go back and find an old account and follow the steps required to do the work he needed to do to see that he ended up doing pretty well after the fact. But what about people that don't? That is often why we have some really basic consumer protections, to provide those safeties and securities for people that may not have the same level of skill.

Fast and easy sometimes causes a lot of problems. You know, fast and easy credit sometimes will create fast and easy debt. Sometimes a lack of regulation or the lack of oversight, the lack of consumer protection will sort of draw in people that perhaps don't have the wherewithal or the ability or shouldn't actually be incurring the additional debt. Sometimes slick mobile apps or things, different products like that, can gloss over or can miss some important protections.

Financial technologies or financial innovations, technological innovations, sandboxes – I mean, it's great. I think that this piece of legislation is building on something that has obviously started. It's nice to see for once sort of government reacting quickly and being innovative and trying to get ahead of things because, as we all know in this place, government can sometimes be really clunky and really slow. So this is good, to see this piece of legislation that will maybe do the opposite.

However, I think that if we want to do it responsibly and well, we need more than just standing up in this place and having, you know, government members or ministers stand up in this place and say: "Yes, we believe in consumer protection. Yes, we want to do the best. Yes, we want what's best for a diversified economy and keeping Albertans' money working for them and keeping them safe." I think that we've all learned that saying it is one thing; doing it is quite another. So I think it would be great if someone on the other side would just be more specific about what concrete protections will be

in place. What can you guarantee Albertans will be in place to keep their money safe, their investments safe?

A lot of upsides to financial sandboxes. Obviously, you know, it does encourage innovation, relief from uncertainty and regulation, and it's been great throughout some of the research that I've been doing and some of the reading and listening to the government talk about the upsides. But there are some downsides to a piece of legislation like this. The upside is that we get to test or companies get to test new approaches, sharing information, pilot projects and data sharing, all good things, all with the potential to do great things.

However, there are some serious downsides that I don't think we can responsibly ignore, things like – I'll say it again and again – the elimination of consumer protection, fair lending. My colleague from Calgary-Buffalo mentioned, you know, some of the dangers or why we need consumer protection in lending, truth in lending – what is the real cost in lending? – ensuring clear, plain language so that people understand contracts that they're getting into or the terms that they're agreeing to.

5:00

Another downside is the real risk assessment in the promotion. You know, when you start to promote risky innovation, sometimes in the speed or the desire to highlight the really exciting potential – I mean, I think we've all sort of seen that, bought into that – there is a failure to really say that to do your due diligence, you really need to assess this risk for you personally or for your company.

Vague promises of consumer benefit and innovation. You know, I think we've all at one time or another tried a new product, whether it's banking related or otherwise. We've all done that because it just looks so great, and sometimes what is too good to be true is just that.

A concern, too: I have read a number of accounts of a regulatory sandbox having pilots. You know, pilots without specific end dates can go on for a very long time, so have consumer protection or some rules around length of time. This may all be under consideration by officials already, but we as legislators in this place, who will be asked to vote on this legislation, don't know about that. It's always: "Trust us. We've got this. We'll do it in regulation." That may be the case, but it would be great to have more detail.

Finally, I think, you know, that when we talk about new markets and things, there will be an impact on competitors. Let's be honest about that. We've seen it time and again, and I'm not saying that that's necessarily a bad thing. That sometimes is just life, that as innovations happen and if other companies don't keep up and innovate, they will suffer some losses. But I'd like to hear more from the government about what kind of assessment was done to determine what those risks were to competitors.

So those are some of my concerns. I look forward to hearing more from the government about what they intend to do.

With that, I will take my seat. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 13 in Committee of the Whole?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 13 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 13.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 13.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 11

Continuing Care Act

[Adjourned debate April 27: Ms Hoffman]

The Deputy Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods rising.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, at second reading today, this afternoon. I had the brief opportunity to begin my remarks on Bill 11 while we were debating a referral amendment that would have seen Bill 11 moved to a committee for more discussion and more analysis. Now, we are no longer on that referral amendment, but I would like to continue some of the comments that I had started to make at that time, specifically because they are incredibly relevant to the main bill as well.

The Continuing Care Act, for those who are watching the debate at home or reading the *Hansard* after the fact, is a piece of legislation that has been introduced to streamline, to improve transparency and accountability, and is in essence taking four pieces of legislation and combining them.

In my initial remarks I reflected on concerns that there may be loss of some standards in the combination. Certainly, there are concerns with the volume of decisions that are being deferred to regulations through the implementation of Bill 11. Certainly, a lot of conversation has happened regarding how Bill 11 is intended to start implementing improvements to the continuing care system that the government has been consulting on, and in fact it released the facility-based continuing care review 11 months ago, almost a full year ago.

Now, the facility-based continuing care review included 42 different recommendations, and the minister at the time suggested the government would be working quickly to develop an action plan, to study some others. Certainly, when we saw Bill 11 introduced into the Legislature, the members of the opposition were eagerly looking forward to this piece of legislation, thinking that it would be related to some of the recommendations out of the FBCC report, particularly given that the minister at the time said that the recommendations on staffing and hours of direct care would be reviewed over the summer and acted upon in the fall. Here we are in the spring, moving into the

summer, and not only have we not seen action on staffing and hours of direct care, but these changes are not to be found inside of Bill 11.

When it comes to Bill 11, there are significant gaps. In my remarks to the referral I had just started to talk about the continuing care challenges that Alberta experienced, and there were challenges in continuing care across Canada. In Ontario we saw them take these challenges very seriously through a review and through a very strong commitment to improve, particularly, the staffing challenges.

Madam Speaker, a lot of the staff in continuing care are overworked. A lot of the staff are dealing with major issues of burnout. A lot of the staff have dealt with a lot of mental health stresses, particularly during this pandemic. We know, for example, that from the implementation of the single-site staffing through the pandemic, it really shone a light on how many of these staff are lower waged, working multiple jobs, and therefore not getting full-time hours or full-time pay or full-time benefits and therefore have to work in multiple facilities, which during a pandemic had major implications to our pandemic response.

I reference this because similar things were seen in Ontario, where the Ontario government has now committed to invest \$1.9 billion annually to create more than 27,000 new positions for personal support workers, which are the equivalent to HCAs here in Alberta, as well as RNs and LPNs in long-term care and that those additional funds would be used to increase the number of staff, to start addressing culture change, to start addressing workload and working conditions, and to really address retaining staff and improving conditions of care. Some of these things we saw out of the FBCC review, which had a section specifically addressed to dealing with some of the challenges we have with labour shortages and the current workforce, particularly given the increasing need for continuing care that is coming up.

I really wanted to get on the record here at second reading my disappointment in not seeing more through Bill 11 to address what is happening with the workforce that we currently have given rising resident acuity, the gap between training and experience, the challenging work environments, labour supply, and insufficient funding for staff wages and hours of care, all things that the government has now known for 11 months, longer if you consider the time period during which they were consulting.

5:10

As we talk about Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, and the work that has been done to consult on this, it really raises the question along: who has been consulted for this particular Bill 11 piece? Given what has happened within our province during the pandemic, has there been adequate consultation with the friends and families, the loved ones of those who've been impacted by COVID-19 in the continuing care system? I would submit to you, Madam Speaker, that based on the debate so far and based on the government not sharing more information about who they consulted with, how that feedback has fit in – yes, we have the final report of the FBCC, but that was of course completed 11 months ago and did not speak directly to Bill 11 – as there's such a gap between the 42 recommendations from the FBCC report and what we see here in Bill 11, it certainly has caused concerns for a lot of public health advocates, for seniors' advocacy groups, and for the Official Opposition.

Having said that as a bit of an introduction to my remarks at second reading, at this point, Madam Speaker, I would like to move an amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: This will be known as amendment RA1.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not carried out sufficient consultations on the contents of the bill with families whose loved ones lost their lives from COVID-19 while in continuing care.

Madam Speaker, this particular amendment, a reasoned amendment, is predicated on the real challenge the Official Opposition has had in trying to understand Bill 11's positioning within addressing the issues within continuing care. Has the input of the families who have lost loved ones from COVID-19 while in continuing care gone into Bill 11, and how is that reflected here in Bill 11 and the opportunity to potentially come back and introduce legislation that addresses the 42 recommendations from the FBCC report, including improvements when it comes to the workforce? That is one of the areas of particular concern that I have, but certainly there are a number of areas within those 42 recommendations of the FBCC report.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

This piece of legislation does not fulfill the UCP's own promise from a year ago to increase home care, the number of hours of care that residents would receive, or the proportion of full-time staff. Again, I will contrast this to the province of Ontario, where investments of \$1.9 billion annually have been put forward to address these very real concerns. Bill 11 consolidates but fails to make substantive and meaningful changes, and I believe that that may be because the government has failed to consult adequately with the families and those who use this current system of continuing care.

Now, as I've listened to my colleagues engage in debate on this piece of legislation, I have been struck by the personal experiences that colleagues are sharing and putting on the record, both their work experience from working in pieces of the system as well as their own personal experience in caring for loved ones within the continuing care system. One of the things that I know I have heard from families who have lost loved ones as well as from families who have loved ones within the system is the feeling that the UCP was neglecting seniors through the pandemic and that Alberta was lacking certain protections or measures that other jurisdictions had; namely, an independently accountable independent Seniors Advocate. The UCP removed the role of the Seniors Advocate, claiming that the Health Advocate would be sufficient. They also changed how they were searching for that Health Advocate to appoint someone with ties to their political party.

The Health Advocate here in Alberta has been relatively silent during the pandemic while, to compare and contrast, in B.C. the independent advocate made practical recommendations specific to making life better for seniors. I think that speaks to the need to have a Seniors Advocate here, something that is not happening within Bill 11, and again calls into question the consultation that has been carried out on this particular piece of legislation.

I would note that the Canadian Association of Retired Persons has been reaching out to MLAs across the province – so all MLAs are likely already aware of this – to call for an independent Seniors Advocate. Certainly, this is not something that is a partisan issue; rather, it is one of making sure that there is someone who has that lens, that eye, on to the issues that seniors are experiencing and is responding to that and providing recommendations to that effect.

You may be familiar, Madam Speaker, that the NDP has put forward a private member's bill to create an independent advocate. It would be ideal, through consultation with the families of those loved ones who have lost their lives from COVID-19, to see a Seniors Advocate role potentially incorporated through new and revised legislation to improve the Continuing Care Act. Let us not forget that as of April 12 1,677 continuing care residents of Alberta have passed away from COVID-19. That is a stunning number

when you hear that said. We've had a major tragedy within the continuing care system, and we need to be able to learn from it. Other provinces are learning from and responding to the challenges, not only receiving a report and then waiting 11 months and bringing forward legislation that doesn't implement those recommendations, investing real money and putting forward real strategies that will address many of the issues.

Again, I spoke specifically to the workforce challenges because as the labour critic that's an area that I know quite well, but the other areas of the FBCC report are equally important, including enhancing quality of care, recognizing cultural sensitivity and diversity in care, making more information accessible, increasing hours of care to residents – again, something that the Health minister at the time suggested that there would be action on; review through the summer, action in the fall. Here we are in the spring – soon we will be in the summer – and we have not seen that action.

Bill 11, as you may hear from my voice, feels quite frustrating because it misses the mark on what Alberta seniors and other Albertans are looking for from this government when it comes to our continuing care system. I do want to acknowledge that certainly the continuing care system is not just for seniors. We have Albertans of all ages who are within that system and deserve the highest quality of support from this government and from the system that is supporting them.

I move this amendment with the hope that we can actively see more consultation with these families and that the government will share the results of those consultations in a detailed way with this Chamber so that all members can be aware of the feedback that was being given to the government and how that feedback is being used to implement Bill 11, or future legislation, should this recent amendment be accepted.

5:20

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are on RA1. Would anybody wish to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton . . .

An Hon. Member: McClung.

The Acting Speaker: . . . McClung. Thank you very much.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Nellie would be proud.

I'm pleased to rise this afternoon once again to speak this time to RA1, a referral motion brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who I think rightfully focused many of her remarks on the thrust that we've had as opposition members to this Bill 11, and that has been a consistent theme and a current and ongoing insistence that the result of the pandemic and the deaths that have been referred to by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and others in this House – I'll once again restate that there were 1,677 deaths of residents of continuing care from COVID-19 in Alberta as of April 12, 2022. That's from the National Institute on Ageing.

That number is an astonishingly high and tragic number, Madam Speaker, and it's something that we had hoped would be a motivation for this government to go forward and address the huge gaps that COVID-19 has revealed and magnified, gaps in the continuing care system not only in Alberta; across Canada. But, for sure, Alberta was not exempted from the glare of those gaps as we saw those gaps reflected in the death rate that occurred in continuing care facilities in Alberta amongst particularly seniors but also others of different age groups who also use the facilities and live in continuing care facilities in Alberta.

Over 1,600 deaths, Madam Speaker. If you think about that, that's the size of, I think, the largest Alberta high school. It's a huge number, and every one of those individuals has families, extended

families, and friends who certainly did not anticipate that they would succumb to COVID-19 while in a facility purportedly under the care of professionals who would know what to do in a situation where there was an infection such as this running through a facility.

Many of these deaths were preventable, Madam Speaker, and that's the tragedy of it, that COVID-19 has shown that we have done a poor job in our continuing care facilities of preventing deaths that would be caused by something like an infection of COVID-19 in the continuing care system. These are gaps and situations that have been highlighted before but were neglected over time and that caught up with us in Alberta as well as across the country.

[The Speaker in the chair]

As the Member for Edmonton-Riverview so clearly stated in her opening remarks when Bill 11 itself was introduced in March 2022, the critic for Seniors and Housing for the NDP made a statement saying, of course, that many of these deaths were preventable and that she was hoping for significant and transformational changes to the continuing care system to be announced through the bill such as working condition improvements for continuing care staff and increasing the number of full-time staff to provide care. These have been some pretty basic ongoing demands of our continuing care system that remain unmet, and one would have hoped, as the critic for Seniors and Housing, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, made clear she hoped, that this piece of legislation would address more than the housekeeping items that it does. It does not provide the transformational changes that the continuing care system desperately needs, and given the tragic failures we have seen over the two years, it's another reason we really can't trust the UCP to do the right thing.

Now, we have been consistently calling for an independent Seniors Advocate. Indeed, our party presented a private member's bill to this House to do just that, yet that was ignored. That's another reason, Mr. Speaker, why we bring forward the amendment that we're considering today to not proceed with Bill 11 at this time but to further consult on the legislation so that the concerns of those 1,677 deceased, the concerns of their family members and their friends, can be properly heard and properly aired. That's where we're going to hear exactly where the gaps are and how people have been affected by those gaps. The individuals who are visiting on a regular basis the loved ones that they know in continuing care situations are the ones that can very, very concisely and correctly identify what the gaps are, what the problems are.

Many of us in this Legislature have had loved ones in continuing care. I know that I have as well. Certainly, it has been frustrating, in my experience, to not feel that I've been heard when bringing forward concerns about either my relative who happened to be in continuing care or situations that I became aware of while visiting continuing care locations. I mean, it doesn't take somebody with experiences I've had working in continuing care situations and having some training in that. The family members themselves are pretty aware that if you've got somebody sitting in a commode for three hours, there's a problem.

It's the case many times, Mr. Speaker, that one staff member doesn't know what the other staff member is doing – there could have been a shift change, two part-timers changing shifts, and communication didn't happen – and, as a result, somebody has been forgotten about. It can be a very difficult thing for anybody, never mind a senior, perhaps with dementia, who has been forgotten on a commode in the room for hours on end. Can you imagine the panic that that causes? Not only that; then, of course, they begin to seek their own solutions and attempt to get up when they may not be able to actually walk anymore, and it causes potential injuries.

That's just a small example of some of the concerns that I'm thinking that residents' family members will bring to light if indeed they are given the opportunity to properly bring their concerns forward by not having this bill continue and be read a second time now and that consultations be sought so that the family members will have the ear of the government.

The number of times that we've heard a family member's horror stories in the long-term care facilities has not diminished as a result of COVID-19. In fact, it became patently clear that the difficulties that we were concerned about before were exacerbated by COVID-19. The tragic number of people who died as a result is something that should have been a call to action to this government to do more than a compilation of a number of different acts to bring together the continuum of different continuing care facilities into one piece of legislation or under one legislative home. The expectation would have been, Mr. Speaker – and I think Albertans, rightfully, are wondering why this didn't take place – that there would have been a significant and realistic review of the difficulties that the long-term care facilities experienced during COVID-19 and are still experiencing. I mean, we haven't learned lessons yet, and this is what we should be doing from the loss of life that's occurred so far during the pandemic.

5:30

It's mind-boggling, to say the least, that the government hasn't seen fit to properly consult with a resource that is there at their disposal, a group of hundreds and hundreds if not thousands of people in this province who would be willing to come forward with their experiences that they felt as they witnessed the living conditions and the food conditions, the COVID-19 safety conditions or lack thereof during the pandemic and, as a result, had their family member pass away or their friend pass away. Believe me, Mr. Speaker – I'm certain I'm not wrong – when I say that there will be thousands of people willing to come forward, given the opportunity of a forum to properly discuss what they felt were discrepancies in care that should never have happened. People are not silent when it comes to the health or the life and death matters of family members, particularly those that are vulnerable and that are in care.

It's very clear to me, Mr. Speaker, that the government wilfully decided not to have such a conversation with individuals who've suffered the loss of a loved one during the pandemic in this province and in the long-term care facilities perhaps because it was politically dangerous to do such a thing, because there is ultimately responsibility for taking action or not in this province, and the government has chosen, very clearly, not to take action in this case.

I think that the amendment that was brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods is a deserved response to the government's unwillingness to face up to the tragedy that's occurred in long-term care. It gives them an opportunity to stop the clock and say: "Okay. Let's do more than just the amalgamation of the various pieces of legislation that govern the operation of long-term care facilities in this province. Let's find out what the deficiencies really were. Let's see if indeed we can prevent deaths in the future that are caused or had been caused by gaps in the system."

Glaringly in Alberta we've heard calls for a solution in terms of staffing that seemed to me would go a long way to alleviating some of the difficulties we faced during the COVID-19 pandemic in long-term care, and that is having full-time staff, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as has been alluded to by others, full-time staff come with a requirement to pay benefits, so there's a higher cost to an employer to have full-time staff members covering all the shifts rather than part-time. I'm not saying that there's not a role for some part-time, but by and large the continuum of care that people receive on a daily

basis is much better if they're being looked after by full-time people rather than two or three part-time people during the day.

You can even imagine it yourself, Mr. Speaker. If you've been in a hospital situation or you've stayed in a place where you needed care, if you had two or three people coming on a daily basis looking after you over an eight-hour period rather than one person, you would soon understand the level of knowledge that those people have, the three part-timers, versus what the full-time person would have of your needs and your conditions and your general state of health and perhaps your likes or dislikes of food, your capabilities, your physical ability to walk, or any number of things that you would expect a caregiver to be aware of. All of that is much better if you are being cared for by people who are with you for longer periods of time.

These are the things that consultation would bring forward and allow us to see more deeply where the gaps are, and that's why I support the referral amendment.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak to the referral? I see the Member for St. Albert is on her feet.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to this amendment, that it not be read a second time because there has not been sufficient consultation on the contents of the bill. I think it's very easy to demonstrate that.

Number one is that, you know, I don't know how many members – they like to heckle: did you read the report? Well, did you read the Meyers Norris Penny report about continuing care and the recommendations that were made? This was contracted by Alberta Health Services, and they were very clear about what needed to be done or what should be done. I would suggest, just based on the discrepancy from the report, the recommendations, what we heard from experts, from families, from individuals themselves, and what's in this legislation and what's missing in this legislation, that there has not been enough time to consult, let alone time to read the various reports.

In any event, about this piece of legislation and why I think it's important to take time and to speak to people and to hear their stories. Strangely enough, I'm going to tell you something that just happened – this just happened – and this relates to Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, and specifically relates to division 2, home and community care, and it starts on page 11. Obviously, it goes on for a little bit until page 12, but it talks about – for those of you that don't know, continuing care is a vast range of supports that provide supports for people that need them. One of those is self-managed care with home care. Home care has a number of different products; one of those is self-managed care.

People in this Chamber might be familiar with persons with developmental disabilities. PDD is what we refer to it as, and that is a financial program under Community and Social Services that actually pays for staff to allow them to live independently in the community or to be employed, people with developmental disabilities, obviously. So it doesn't cover people that do not have developmental disabilities. For example, if you have a spinal cord injury or something that just affects your physical being, you don't qualify for PDD supports. You would, in turn, have to go to home care, which is Health, self-managed care, if that's what you choose.

I just had a phone call about a young man, and I have permission to talk about him. He's 29 years old. As a youngster – I think he's got a bit of a following in the capital region; you may have heard his story years ago – I believe he contracted meningitis, if I'm not mistaken, and as a result, sadly, his arms and legs were amputated. Now, he currently lives with his mom, who is aging – and this is the story of many people with disabilities if they've lived the majority of their lives with parents

or other family members – and she is no longer able to care for him as she once did.

Now, thankfully, this young man and his mom do live in a home that's accessible, so they have stable, secure, accessible housing, which isn't the case for a lot of people, but I just want to put that on the record, that he does have that. But he asked for what he needs in terms of care, what his mother is providing right now. You talk about the unaccounted for cost of care in Alberta. This is a perfect example of that. She provides 24/7 care. As you can imagine, without arms or legs there's not much that you can do, Mr. Speaker. You require assistance with all aspects of daily living, not to mention that this young man is very talented in a number of areas and is just dying to work and support himself, but he's unable to do that without physical assistance due to the nature of his disability.

Anyway, after a very long process of applying for the supports through home care, which is a continuation of care, after applying for supports that he needed, he finally got – he went through all of the steps, the final appeal was heard, and then he waited for the decision letter. It actually arrived today, and the answer was: no, you cannot have supports 24/7 to hire staff that you need to help you. In one of the recommendations from that appeal panel – and, again, this is not the Appeals Secretariat with Community and Social Services. This is Health. One of the recommendations was: contact your MLA. That was literally the recommendation. There's a gap in the system. There's a huge gap in the system. Now, I'm not his MLA, but they did contact me. There's a huge gap in the system.

5:40

The reason I bring up this particular example, that just happened today, is because this illustrates very, very clearly that we have not, this government has not done everything it can to ensure that the continuation of care, the continuity of care, all of these things are included in this piece of legislation. So I bring that up.

Yesterday I talked a little bit about one of the other examples of concern that I had with this piece of legislation, and that was the wholesale repeal of very large and complex pieces of legislation that actually had been amended over many years, some of them to meet the needs of a number of different communities and a number of different specific needs. One of those that I really want to talk about again is the Resident and Family Councils Act. There's a wholesale repeal of that piece of legislation that I think was proclaimed in 2017 if I'm not mistaken.

Now, to the government's credit, they did actually mention it in their legislation, in their new legislation, which is on page 34. It talks about resident and family councils. It's quite lovely. It talks about, you know, if someone is a resident of continuing care, they do, if they request it, have the ability to form this council. And it goes on to talk about how relatives, friends, guardians are certainly welcome to participate in these councils. That's pretty much it.

On the surface it looks like, "Okay; that's okay; that seems fine; no problem there," until you look at what legislation was repealed and what was lost as a result of the repeal. Again, government will counter and say: well, you know, we'll just take care of that in regulations. Well, I think we've already established that there isn't a lot of trust with this government. I don't understand, Mr. Speaker, why they would repeal an entire piece of legislation and then just address it in a couple of sentences. In any event, what was lost because of the repeal?

I'd like to draw your attention to the Resident and Family Councils Act, 2017, under section 2, the establishment of a resident and family council. Now, keep in mind that all of this is gone. This used to be in place because this was a problem, and this was the enabling legislation that needed to be there to ensure that the work was done. You know, to the credit of operators of all different types of continuing care facilities and services, they're overwhelmed on

a daily basis with the work that they have to do. I know this. They have an extraordinary amount of work to do. However, I think that we have made the case – we made it in 2017, and we're making it again now – that if you follow, if operators follow this legislation and the spirit of the legislation as well, it can actually prevent a lot of problems. I know this first-hand because I've actually seen it.

Anyway, what is missing? This is what used to be in the legislation. If there's a "group composed of residents or persons of importance to residents or both . . . in place in the residential facility for any purpose described in . . . [the section], the group is deemed to be a resident . . ." No problem.

Where there is no family council in place in a residential facility, the facility operator – and this is key – must

- (a) post a notice in a conspicuous place in the . . . facility advising residents and persons of importance . . . the right to establish a . . . council,

To give examples.

- (b) ensure the notice remains posted until . . . a council is established.

This is very key, that this information, this education is there until – for people that are, let's say, in the more intense continuing care support, so more towards, like, what we would traditionally call, you know, a lodge or nursing home, family members and friends don't always visit every day, so maybe they may not see that posting until they go and visit. So it needs to be there longer. There needs to be more support to get this work done.

Here's another key one.

- (d) within 6 months after the coming into force of this Act and not less than . . . 6 months thereafter until a resident and family council is established, convene a meeting to inform residents . . . [and] families and persons of importance

which was already described

to residents of the right to establish . . .

So it's not just about posting the information and leaving it posted until a council is formed. It's about in-person education until that council is formed. These councils are that important. They are truly that important.

It goes on. Let me tell you that the purpose of establishing these is so important. I touched on a few things yesterday. This doesn't just apply to large facilities. I'll give you an example. I was invited to a resident council meeting at a facility in St. Albert. It's actually a blended facility, so there are more independent folks that live with people on another side that are more dependent and have more nursing care. It's called Chateau Mission Court. It was really wonderful to see this council because both groups – as you can imagine, the more independent seniors and the more dependent seniors had very different focuses, but this council laid out opportunities for everybody to have their ideas put forward.

Some of those were around menu, and it's prescribed in the old legislation that residents must have input into their menu. In an age when people are living on very tight incomes and particularly seniors are living on very, very limited income, they can't afford increasing costs that go on even at these facilities, and they do go up. They go up steadily. They go up by little bits, and people cannot afford it. Having these meetings is a venue for people to talk about the menu, nutrition. These might not seem like big things. These are very big things.

Recreation: another huge topic for facilities like this. Even for supportive independent living facilities, which we sometimes call group homes or things like that, where it can be as small as four people living together and sharing expenses, this legislation applies. It's so important to have these resident meetings because it forces them to talk about – you know, I've seen this in my time in my previous job, life, where you maybe had someone that was really

into heavy metal and the other three were not, and that could be a problem if there wasn't sort of a space to say: let's talk about house rules; let's talk about when the music has to be turned down.

Mr. Speaker, the value of this legislation that was repealed and then not replaced is that it forced the focus on the residents or the people that, at the end of the day, live there, not the staff, not the operators. They were just there in a support capacity, and they were truly there in a support capacity to take notes, to log the issues that were being discussed, and then to take them back to get information when those information requests were presented.

This legislation was very prescriptive, but it was really essential because, let me tell you, Mr. Speaker – I'm sure people in this Chamber know this – not all operators in continuing care are the same, and not all, sadly, provide the same level of care. That is just a fact. If you don't believe me, you can go through the Protection for Persons in Care Act, the reporting. There used to be online reports about the different allegations and investigations and then subsequent recommendations. It's there. You can see the types of problems that happen. With something like this, the value to prevent problems is huge.

The reason that I keep going on and on about this example is because this is just one of four pieces of legislation that were repealed in their entirety. I'm just checking that it was four; I do believe it was four. They were repealed in their entirety and basically, you know, a few sentences about: "Yeah, we're going to do this, and the rest will be in regulation. Trust us. We'll get it done properly."

Mr. Speaker, I'm worried. The state of continuing care in Alberta is not great for a number of reasons. I'm not saying that it crashed and burned in the last three years. There are some problems that have been around for a very long time. I understand the desire to make things simpler and to bring a number of pieces of complex legislation under one umbrella. I understand the intent may be good, but I am so worried that so many things will be lost as a result. In this day and age, when operators are so busy and so focused on so many different things, at the end of the day, it is going to be Albertans that suffer.

So it is for that reason that I actually support this referral, to just slow down and to do more consultation. You know, we were here yesterday debating. I haven't heard a lot of answers from the government. I hope we get those soon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Williams: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak on Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. It's an important piece of legislation, but before I go into details, I want to, first, acknowledge the very hard work that health care professionals have been doing, yes, over the last two years, especially throughout COVID, but for a very long time. Many of those are working in professional settings that are very, very difficult and trying and burdensome on them not just in terms of the professional obligations but the emotional burden that they face as well, the personal cost that it is to them.

I also want to acknowledge all the volunteers, particularly, that work in this space. When I did something at the request of the minister for the palliative and end-of-life care review, which is, you know, tangential and associated with this health care space, I was blown away by the degree to which that space was people who are caring for others voluntarily. These are volunteers in hospice societies. These are, to be honest, more than anything else, family members, individual family members that spend their time and energy, when they have jobs and children and obligations in their

communities, still caring for their loved ones. For my money, there is no better care than family care, where possible, in your home. That's what I think is most important for us.

That is why I think this legislation, Bill 11, is so important. What it does is that it takes six different pieces of legislation, with six different regulations and three different sets of standards, and it puts them into one comprehensive piece for uniformity. What it also does is that it opens up the ability for transformational change in our health care, particularly continuing care, where we're able to invest more, as we've done in this last budget, in home care. Now, this is an important investment. I say that not as a legislator today; I say that as an individual. Sadly, it wasn't from COVID this last year, but my mother did pass away. She passed away while in home care, where my brother and my dad were caring for her. It was incredibly good to have the resources we did for my mother as she passed. It allowed her to be a mom to me, a wife to my father, a sister to her siblings. It allowed us to be able to enjoy those last moments with her before she passed.

This kind of legislation allows us to further invest in those most important parts of continuing care, where we can put the decision-making and the care, the loving care that's just not possible anywhere else, back into homes. That, I think, is just so properly ordered, so right. I want to thank the minister for the work he's done on this legislation to bring us here. I do think it is terribly important for us to recognize the volunteers and particularly those family members who are caring for others, throughout the pandemic, of course, but for all of Alberta's history. We have to find ways for our laws and legislation here to work with their lives in their homes.

That's why this sort of simplification, that members opposite have said is a noble intent, is not only a noble and important intent, but it's urgent. It is important. Delaying this would be a problem. It would be a problem because there are many, many families that need to have that transformative change, that need to be able to get better access to resources, that need to have the standardization of care, these different levels of standards, in one place, and these different acts compiled in one place so that the system is less confusing. It is terribly difficult now for people in health care and continuing care to manage it, never mind individual family members who find themselves, sadly, in these difficult spots trying to work with individuals in the system. So this is an important initiative, and it's timely and urgent.

Now, we heard from a number of different members on the other side and, obviously, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who brought forward this amendment RA1, that the purpose is to try and slow things down for the purpose of consultation. I think it's noble, of course, and a good intention, but I think it's important also that we do talk a little bit about the consultation that's brought us to this point right now.

Over the years many of the different stakeholders in this space have been asking for a very long time for the review mentioned but then also for this updated legislation. They have been asking for many, many years for us to look at this. The original legislation, that we're really amending, first came forth in 1985, and that 1985 legislation is something that is outdated, Mr. Speaker, and something where we are not capturing all the different spaces we ought to be when it comes to this legislation, when it comes to these regulations.

I think it's important to understand the sense of how long the people who work in this space and the organizations have been waiting for us to get here. I am reluctant to say that we ought to be slowing things down. I think we should be prudently moving forward.

The good news, Mr. Speaker, is that after the consultation with a number of different stakeholder groups from across the province, we've had 33 written formal submissions, relatively lengthy submissions, on where we should be going when it comes to

continuing care. Those organizations submitted them, and that was a part that deeply informed the bringing about of this legislation to where we are today in second reading.

I think it's also important to understand that advice and recommendations from the facility-based continuing care review saw over 7,000 Albertans, including family members, residents, caregivers, operators, community organizations, and many of those groups I mentioned at the start were a part of those 7,000 individuals. Now, that wasn't exclusive to anyone who was in continuing care for any particular reason, whether it be someone there because of old age or struggling with dementia, early-onset Alzheimer's, COVID, or any of that. Every single Albertan had that opportunity, and it's right that every single Albertan should. I'm very lucky that, in the course of when my mother passed away, we were able to have the supports we needed. But were we not, this avenue would have been open to us in terms of consultation.

It's right, Mr. Speaker, to open it up to all Albertans. Any time an Albertan's life is taken away, it is a sad moment. It's very difficult for anyone to deal with, and I think we all have important stories to share. I want to recognize all of them. That sort of input should continue on through this Legislature, with us as MLAs reaching out to our constituents and the constituents feeding those stories in as we come in to debate the legislation, as we come to Committee of the Whole and put forward amendments. I'm sure members opposite will put forward thoughtful ones in the debate to come. I think it is important that we open it up to all Albertans, because not one life lost is any less tragic to any family because of how that happened.

I also think, Mr. Speaker, that it's important we recognize that if we were to continue going on and referring this to committee or, with this reasoned amendment, slowing this down for another round beyond the year already that we spent talking about this with the public, it would delay the ability for us to implement a lot of this legislation, which is absolutely fundamental to moving forward

with what I believe is transformative in our health care and continuing care. We owe it to our constituents. We owe it to those who work in this space, with all the sacrifices they've made, to give them a good piece of legislation. Of course we owe them that. I believe that's what we have here. There will be, of course, lots of work to be done.

As everyone in this Chamber knows, this is enabling legislation. A lot of those same standards we had before will be kept or increased when we come to this regulation, but the regulation is the right place for those details to be found, Mr. Speaker. It's where we have the ability to work very closely with different communities to inform ourselves as a government on what those regulations should look like, and of course we'll have the ability, as we see fit, as time comes, as things need to be updated, to change that regulation through orders in council.

This is an important point. From 1985 is a long time to go in a space that has changed dramatically in terms of standards of practice, best practices, levels of care, technology. I mean, in 1985 the fax was a very, very useful thing. Things have changed. To give you an illustration of where we're at now in technology and communications, you can imagine how much things have changed when it comes to continuing care as well.

I think it is incredibly important, Mr. Speaker, that we have a certain amount of agility in how we can move forward as a province so that we can continue to serve very well the seniors in this province, those who worked so hard to build the province, to give us the advantages we have today. We owe it to them, because of the sacrifices they've made, to get this right.

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member; however, the time allotted for debate in this afternoon's session has elapsed, and the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Day 25

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)

Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
 Government House Leader
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
Notley, Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
 Leader of the Official Opposition
Orr, Hon. Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
 Deputy Government Whip
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
 Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
 Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
 Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
 Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
 Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
 Alberta Hansard

Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
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| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
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| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

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| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
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Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
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Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
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Dach
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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
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Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Singh
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
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Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
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Turton
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Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Dach
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Guthrie
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Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, April 27, 2022

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 13 Financial Innovation Act

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise tonight to speak about and move third reading of Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act.

This legislation would create a regulatory sandbox to help finance and fintech companies develop new products and services in Alberta. Madam Speaker, the benefits of Alberta being the first province in Canada to offer this kind of service are apparent, and I'm proud to highlight them during debate of this bill. These benefits include economic diversification, job creation, strengthening Alberta's reputation as a province that welcomes innovators and new ideas, and, of course, the potential for new investment from a growing sector of the economy.

I want to reiterate today that the protection of Albertans' privacy and personal information is our top priority. We built protections into the legislation itself. Applicants would be required to meet stringent eligibility criteria. For example, they would be required to provide a business plan that includes details of what would be tested and how consumers would be protected. Any time we receive a request for exemptions to the Personal Information Protection Act, we would consult with the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and in fact that commissioner and Service Alberta would need to approve those exemptions before the application could proceed.

We're also taking steps to ensure Albertans are fully aware of the companies participating in the sandbox and the products and services that they're testing. A public website will disclose all relevant information, including the name of each participant, a description of the product or service, any and all exemptions for each participant, and any terms, conditions, and restrictions the participant must follow.

Madam Speaker, if you would indulge me for a few more minutes, I will reiterate the benefits Alberta will see from this proposed legislation one last time. At last count nearly 63,000 Albertans were employed in the financial services sector in this province. From 2000 to 2020 Alberta's GDP in this sector grew at an annual average rate of more than 4 per cent, outpacing growth in all other provinces. In 2020 the financial services sector contributed over \$14 billion to the provincial GDP. When we talk about diversifying Alberta's economy, this is the sort of thing we're talking about: taking meaningful steps to attract new businesses, investment across a broad spectrum of economic sectors, growing and diversifying our economy.

That's why, Madam Speaker, I encourage all members to support this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to speak to Bill 13 in third reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity this evening to enjoy this fine evening indoors and talk about this most important Financial Innovation Act. You know, as I read through the act and, of course, listened to the minister introduce third reading, I certainly am seeing many things to be happy with and things that I can support in terms of this particular bill. I'm sort of glad to see, actually, that the UCP kind of went to school on what the NDP did in their government when, through the Alberta Securities Commission, we also created a similar sandbox initiative, that turned out to be, I think so far, relatively successful. I'm glad you picked up on the idea.

You know, I think that it's quite a good step for a government to try to create space for innovation and creative business ideas, so I'd certainly like to see that happen. I mean, the advantage of this kind of a sandbox thing is that people get a chance to try out things that either regulations have prevented them from doing in the past or where the circumstances have just not been there for them to test the waters properly, with the right kind of supports and guardrails up in case. It's good to have a sandbox that allows that opportunity to kind of see: can we push the barriers out a little bit, can we go a little bit farther than we used to go, and can we do so expeditiously, with the right structures in place to allow that to happen?

The disadvantage, of course, with any kind of innovation is that you actually don't know a lot about it. The very nature of it is that things are going to happen that you couldn't have likely predicted. Now, of course, you do your job and your due diligence. You sit down and try to guess what kind of things will happen, and you try to make sure that you've got everything in place to ensure the integrity of the process as it moves forward. But the very nature of creativity is that you're exploring new areas and boldly going where no man has gone before. You never know what kind of troglodyte you might actually run into as you venture forth.

So we need to be a bit cautious here because certainly, with any kind of creativity, there is an increased risk factor. The protection of consumers I think is something that we need to keep centre and foremost in our consideration of the level of risk that we are prepared to accept as a society, because not all actors have been good actors in the history of humanity. Sometimes when people are allowed room, they take that to take advantage of others and to go into places and do things that were not intended but were also not outlawed.

That brings us to a place where we have to kind of look at: can we trust the government to be on top of this and make the right kind of decisions? Of course, we've had some real serious reasons to be concerned about our trust in government over the last little while. We've certainly seen a number of actions taken that, you know, leave people pause to be concerned. I mean, only yesterday I had the chief executive officer of the Nechi Institute in to talk about the fact that the government summarily evicted them from their place of residence, that they had been in for 36 years, and without any kind of consultation, just simply delivery of a registered letter saying: you've got three months to get out.

Of course, at the same time the government minister stood up in the House and assured the House – it's easily found in *Hansard* – that he would work to find a new location for them. Here we are two years later, and no work has been done in that effort. You know, it leaves us wondering: well, if the government doesn't say what it's going to do in this case, will they say what they're going to do in this other case?

You know, similar things can also be said about things like the doctors' contract, which was, again, summarily, single-handedly killed by this administration without consultation with the doctors. They just went in and said that this contract is no longer valid, with no appropriate negotiations, those kind of things, no notice. We

know that the government has taken positions like that that make us wonder: what happens when things start to go awry with regard to this new Financial Innovation Act? Will the government have the best interests of the public, or will they use it as an opportunity to pursue gain for themselves and not for the citizens of the province of Alberta?

We know, for example, that the government also made changes to the indexing of both AISH and the seniors' benefits and, of course, the indexing of your income tax, which, I'll remind everyone in the House, is due on Saturday, I think it is, so you'd best get it in. In that particular case, the government again made decisions to change the rules not for the benefit of the recipients. The AISH recipients have lost money as a result of this, the seniors' benefits recipients have lost money from this, and Albertans will be paying somewhere in the neighbourhood of an extra billion dollars in future years as a result of this change by the government. None of these things were announced ahead of time or consulted on. They were simply done summarily by this government.

7:40

So it leaves us in this place where people have to say: "Okay. If we are entering into a world where we are pushing the boundaries and looking for new, creative ways to move forward with our money, who is going to be there to protect us from the obvious increased risk that's associated with doing something that's new? Who is going to make sure that we are, as citizens in this province, well taken care of?" People are quite used to in this province having a sense of security in our banking because we have put in rules and structures over the last hundred years in Canada to ensure that people's deposits are protected and that there's security attached to them.

You know, in Canada when someone gets their paycheque put into the bank, there is no doubt in their mind, the average citizen's mind, that when they arrive at the bank the next day and they put their card into the machine, they will indeed be able to withdraw that money, because they know the system works that way.

I know that in the States they've had some problems with some schemes because they allowed some extra range. There was a credit union – I'm not sure that's the right expression in the States – in the States where people made their deposits, and the CEO essentially just took 100 per cent of them, then closed up shop, so they lost all of their deposits. They went into the CEO's salary. So we've seen financial innovation be terribly devastating in the States because of the lack of regulation.

We can go on and talk about a number of other crises that have occurred with regard to short-term credit and loans, the housing and loans debacle in the States, and so on. We know these things can go awry – we've seen terrible examples – and we have long taken pride in Canada that we watch these horrendous things happening in the States but actually not happening in Canada. Why do they not happen in Canada? Because in Canada we accept that the role of government is to ensure that people cannot take advantage of these situations. So we are in a place now of having to depend on the government to do exactly that.

But I ask the question of the government: what safeguards are in place to ensure that as these risk factors are met for the first time, we have the preparation, both in terms of the structures, the people, the technical knowledge, and so on to move ahead and, of course, the regulations that would allow us to actually move ahead? That's always difficult, I understand, because you don't know what the risk factors might be. Really creative people can be creative in quite horrendous ways sometimes. Of course, we wouldn't necessarily think that that would ever happen, but all of a sudden somebody

does something and we go, "Good Lord, we didn't anticipate this was going to come out of this particular bill," but it does.

So we have to ask the government: do you have sufficient safeguards in order to ensure that the citizens of this province are well protected? Do you have the technical capacity to deal with this in-house? If not, are there people who could be brought in to provide the technical capacity when the time comes? Do you need to establish now some contracts for people to be watching the process, people with the expertise to identify problems before they become big problems, while they're still, you know, in the nascent stage of development? Those are the kind of things that we really need to make sure of.

We also need to make sure that in this international world that we have, people don't come into Alberta, use it as a chance to do some things, and then shift all the monies and products offshore, where they cannot be held to account by Canadian laws and Canadian judicial systems. We just have to be cautious of all that. Now, I'm not anticipating, you know, that all these horrendous things I'm talking about will happen. What I'm saying is that they might happen, and it's the job of the government now to say: what will we do to ensure as much as possible that we prevent them from happening in the first place and that we are ready to identify them as they begin happening and before they become a real crisis for the average citizen?

I'm also very concerned about the level of information that will be provided to citizens who may engage in some of these new possible transactions. Their expectation is that these new vehicles, whatever they may be, will be, you know, essentially the same as the old vehicles in terms of their own risk factor, and that may not be true, so we need to have a pretty strong set of regulations about public disclosure that these are new vehicles, that there are potentials for risk, that you may find yourself in a situation that you would not normally expect using other vehicles that are available to you in the financial community.

You know, it's just an issue of being forewarned fairly, and that implies, of course, informed consent. You can only agree to engage in these transactions if you understand what it is you're agreeing to. There really needs to be a fairly stringent set of regulations around how these things need to be described not only to the citizens who buy them but, of course, to the professionals who helped market them, financial advisers and so on, so that they indeed are not able to sell these new vehicles unless they have been properly trained in the implications and the risk factors involved.

These are the kind of questions I have about this particular bill. I intend at this point to support this bill because I do believe in creativity. I do believe in innovation. I think that's how we move forward. Certainly, it's why I have long supported issues such as renewable energy, because I think it is about moving forward. It is about trying something new and making sure that we as a province are not laggards holding back, waiting for the last minute to get onboard, but really are at the forefront of innovation so that people come to us to seek that kind of knowledge, the same, you know, kind of thing that we were doing when we were building our renewable sector here in this province.

We understood that we may not be the only people in the world – maybe not the largest in terms of our CO₂ emissions, but if we learn to handle them very well in this province and to protect sort of a middle-class style of living while at the same time protecting the environment, that kind of knowledge would lead us to be experts in the world. People would come to us, and we'll be able to make profit from selling that kind of knowledge throughout the world.

The same thinking applies here in this case. The creativity is supported. The idea that we cannot go back to the past economy of the 1970s or 1980s, that we need to move forward into a new kind

of economy, is something that certainly we on the NDP side of the House have celebrated regularly. We wish that more often the government would be focused on where the economy is going and not where it has been.

I guess I will wrap up my ever-so-brief comments at this time by saying that I hope that all things go well from here on and that we actually as a province benefit from this kind of change.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to Bill 13 in third reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 13. My voice is a little off as I've been talking quite a bit today, but it's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 13. I believe this is the first opportunity that I've had to speak to this bill.

I have a number of comments I want to make. You know, I guess I can start off with my position on this bill, in which I do support this bill. I have declared on a number of occasions in this Chamber over the past several years that I am more than happy to give credit where credit is due, so I will thank the Finance minister for bringing this bill forward. I think there are quite a few elements of this bill that I can definitely get behind.

I know that my colleagues have outlined a few of their concerns. I listened to the Minister of Finance, when he moved third reading, talk about some of the consumer protections that exist in this piece of legislation before us, and I do appreciate that. I appreciate that, Madam Speaker, because it shows that the minister and the government have been listening to a number of questions that my colleagues have raised throughout the different stages of this bill, and I appreciate that the government is addressing them and taking those concerns seriously. That's nice to see.

7:50

In my comments on this bill I will take a friendly poke at the minister in that some of the concerns that have been raised by my colleagues and others around risk and risk mitigation sound awfully familiar, in fact, so familiar that I believe some of the UCP members raised those exact same concerns on my bill, Bill 203, creating a venture fund that Albertans can invest in. You know, with that, I say that with a half smile for the minister, which I'm sure that he appreciates, through you, Madam Speaker.

It's important, you know, to recognize that there are some risks. I was happy to hear the minister earlier talk about that companies that are looking for an exemption from the Personal Information Protection Act, or PIPA, have to apply for that exemption, that it's not granted *carte blanche*. I think that's an important measure, an important oversight. Glad to see that it's not just given *carte blanche*. Again, Madam Speaker, it's not because there is a lack of trust with our companies and financial institutions. I think it's just good oversight to ensure – and I would imagine that financial institutions welcome this oversight themselves. Why? In a given industry if there is a bad actor in that industry, it tarnishes all of their reputation, and financial institutions recognize that. Quite frankly – I mean, I'm sure the Minister of Finance can attest to this in his meetings with these institutions – they don't want to see bad actors. It hurts their reputation. It hurts the industry reputation. They want to see proper oversight when it comes to legislation like this one before us.

Now, again, I will, you know, make a comment that it is good to see that the Finance minister has finally embraced diversification. I'm sure that – and I say that partly in jest and partly in truth. I mean,

the reality is that there have been moments where I have misspoken in my political career.

Mr. Eggen: No.

Mr. Bilous: I know. They were really rare. In fact, you'd have to dig hard to find them.

I'm sure that that comment around diversification is one that the Finance minister shakes his head every time he hears the opposition repeat it. I will give him the benefit of the doubt, that that's likely not what he meant.

In all seriousness, it is important to recognize that, you know, yes, Alberta's prosperity has been largely driven and due to our thriving oil and gas sector. That, I don't think, anyone can dispute, not credibly, anyway. But I think it's important to recognize that Alberta has also been home to a number of other sectors that have flourished and flourished over a many number of years.

I always take pride in the fact that the city of Calgary has the second-largest number of financial institutions and headquarters in Canada. That's no small feat, Madam Speaker. Yes, you know, if you speak to someone from Toronto – it's a stereotype, but I feel like it's fairly accurate – they believe the universe revolves around them. It's nice to see that western Canada and Alberta punch above their weight when you look at the size of our population and the revenue and GDP that's generated from this province and from a number of sectors.

I mean, I'm happy to give a shout-out not only to the financial sector, which – Madam Speaker, I don't know if you know this. Well, you probably do, but many Albertans probably don't know that the financial services industry employs over 60,000 people. That's a significant number of Albertans who make their living working in the financial industry. I'm very proud of, you know, not only our energy and financial industries but our agricultural sector, our forestry sector. Alberta's life sciences is, honestly, one sector that probably doesn't get enough attention when you look at some of the breakthroughs in medicine and in innovative health devices that have come from Alberta. We know that we have an incredibly strong tech sector. We know we have really strong interactive digital media gaming companies here in the province.

We have a tourism sector that we recognize has been hit incredibly hard over the past few years with COVID, but it is a resilient sector that I'm confident, with the right supports, will make a significant comeback. I am glad to see that the government has looked at COVID as an opportunity to reposition some of our institutions, like Travel Alberta, to develop destination products, which is unique to the rest of the country. I've said this to the minister, you know, that I agree with it, and well done.

I think there are significant opportunities that our province has, and some of those have come from policy and from legislation. Some have come, quite frankly, from the innovative entrepreneurs that call Alberta home. Could that be because Alberta and the west had quite a few folks who settled from jurisdictions like Ukraine and other parts of the globe where they had to be incredibly innovative in making a living? You know, I'm proud to be part of a province that has such a rich history but has also turned out, I would argue, some of Canada's best entrepreneurs and innovative companies.

This bill before us creates a regulatory sandbox or at least puts regulations on hold temporarily and, as I had said, with some measures of oversight. They have to apply for those regs to be put on pause so that they can experiment. Now, I appreciate that as soon as we talk about that, there are concerns that members have as far as: how do we ensure that there is proper oversight? How do we

protect the privacy of Albertans? How do we ensure that companies who are coming here to experiment will in fact stay here to develop products and not take advantage of the legislation before us, come to Alberta, experiment on a couple of products, and then take those learnings elsewhere? I think it's paramount that Albertans will get to benefit from putting these regulatory requirements on hold so that companies can truly experiment and be innovative in their processes.

That oversight: again, I believe the minister addressed that, but I would feel more confident knowing that companies cannot use Alberta as a stopover on their way to a final destination to implement their learnings that they gather here in Alberta. [interjection] I see the Minister of Finance rising. I am more than happy to give way.

8:00

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry. I hesitate to interrupt. Just for the record – actually, my apologies. You may have an intervention.

Mr. Toews: All right. Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to respond to the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, who rightfully raises a concern that companies would come into Alberta and simply use us as a testing ground and ultimately leave the province. We're limited to a degree in terms of what we can do. We can't trap people here in the province against their will. But what we have as a requirement is, in fact, that a company be physically present in the province during the time that they're active, testing a new product, a novel product within Alberta. I believe that's the best we can do, and I'm convinced that when they move to Alberta, if in fact they've come to this province, that in fact, given the entrepreneurial culture, the optimism in this province, and the incredibly competitive business environment, they'll choose to stay.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you. Through you, Madam Speaker, to the minister: thank you for those comments. I appreciate that. I know that in my time in government we looked at, when it came to accessing health data, which – any life sciences company will tell you that Alberta is the crown jewel in North America because of the fact that we are the only jurisdiction that has a single health care delivery system. We are the only one. There is no other jurisdiction in Canada that has a single health care delivery organization. Because of that and because Alberta is such a diverse province, made up of 4 point something million, every company in life sciences that I had sat down with in our time in government was eager to come to Alberta.

One of the conversations that we would have is: how do we ensure that the data that they are accessing stays in Alberta? I appreciate that the minister has required companies to be active in Alberta. Now, I'm not sure – and, you know, I'll beg forgiveness of the House – if there's a time frame around that or if companies could, while they are under a certain company banner – that law applies to them. But if they shut down that company and open a new company in another jurisdiction, can they then transplant those learnings elsewhere? I'm not advocating, Madam Speaker, that we are trying to force companies to stay here or limit them to only operate in Alberta. I think that would be short sighted. I just want to make sure that whatever data or benefits they experience from being here in Alberta, because Alberta is being innovative and allowing for processes that currently don't exist anywhere else in Canada – I'm not sure about North America – they will use that data or those learnings here in Alberta so that Albertans can benefit from being the sandbox. Again, I think the minister partially answered that.

My hope is that there are other potential mechanisms to ensure that Albertans share in that benefit. Again, I'm not talking about limiting those companies from operating elsewhere. I'm not talking about them taking those learnings and applying them to other jurisdictions. I mean, I appreciate that that's how global commerce works. I just want to ensure that Albertans will continue to benefit from this for the long term. Again, as I've said, I think . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to Bill 13 in third reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 13. I can say that I agree with the idea in principle. Certainly, as my colleagues have mentioned, I do have questions. I do have concerns. We do live in an increasingly digitalized world where innovations, innovations in particular in the tech sector, are changing things, are changing economies, are changing the way of doing things rapidly around us. It's important that we also change and position ourselves, our economy in line with those developments, benefit from those developments and not get left behind. It's nice to see this bill coming forward.

The minister also mentioned that this is how the minister envisions to diversify the economy. Maybe nobody else from my side was there, but I was at an event in Calgary where the minister said that diversification was a long-term luxury, and . . . [interjection]

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for giving way, for an opportunity to once again, for probably the eighth or 10th time in this House, clarify those comments of over two years ago. The question that was posed to me was in the context of government revenues. At the time we did not have the luxury to diversify the province's revenues. That was critical. We were not in a position where we could look at adding another tax, where we could consider another revenue source at a time when we were looking to position our economy for maximum competitiveness and certainty. I appreciate the member giving way and allowing me to just provide clarity, once and for all, for the comments around revenue diversification with respect to government revenues. I fully appreciate diversification.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Minister, for telling us his view of what he meant, his, I guess, redefined position. While I was sitting there, I heard in no uncertain terms that the context there was that government was moving back towards the policies of the past. That was the context I understood. It was attended by business leaders. It was attended by industry leaders, which are far ahead when it comes to technological developments and diversification ideas. That was the question, the context of the question. The minister then said that diversification was a long-term luxury. But glad that it didn't take that long, and at least we are talking about it, and we are discussing ideas of how we can benefit from the technological developments around us and how we can use those to innovate and diversify our economy.

8:10

There are many aspects of the bill which are quite positive, which are quite clear, but there are many details that are left to regulations and not just regulations; pretty much ministerial orders and minister's discretion and the minister working with Service Alberta's consumer protection legislation, the in-charge minister, that will be Service Alberta.

I said that there is broad agreement on the policy approach, that we are taking steps to benefit from technological developments in trying to diversify our economy, but this legislation leaves a lot of

details out. I do understand that they can't put every detail in the legislation. Then it gives enormous powers to the cabinet and minister, and I'm sure that some of these powers will assist or may assist a regulatory sandbox. They may assist us to implement the regulatory sandbox.

But at the same time these powers also require that this Assembly and Albertans trust this government. That's a very challenging position to be in given the record of this minister and this government. We are finding it difficult to trust that this government will do the right thing, get it right. We are asked to trust that this government will take all steps needed and necessary to protect consumers, to protect Albertans' interests while these new financial products are developed and introduced in Alberta's market, especially those products that Albertans have not seen before, that they're not familiar with, and they may require a certain degree of understanding of fintech and new technological developments.

Madam Speaker, the key issue here is trust. The bill has positive aspects to it, but should we trust this minister and this government on this issue? [interjections] Some colleagues suggested yes, but I may say that this minister was taken to the cleaners on KXL, a \$1.3 billion tag for Albertans. Should I trust this minister?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Sabir: Then I can come up with new examples. Those who participate in debate: I might draw examples from their portfolios as well.

When Albertans were getting sick, when Albertans were dying, when their loved ones were dying, when the senior care system was struggling, again they asked us: trust us. The result is that we saw 4,000 neighbours – 4,000 Albertans died during wave after wave, wave after wave of this pandemic, and Albertans entrusted them to look after their health care system, their well-being. And, Madam Speaker, they did fail Albertans on many fronts. Throughout the pandemic they were fighting and bullying doctors, health care professionals.

Mr. Rutherford: Point of order. That was bad timing.

The Deputy Speaker: That was a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Rutherford: Madam Speaker, things were going so well there for a little bit. I rise on 23(b). I think the member has strayed quite far off the Financial Innovation Act, and I would just ask, through you, Madam Speaker, that we get back on topic and talk about Bill 13.

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

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. No. I think, Madam Speaker, it's clearly a matter of debate. The member is just making a direct connection between the elements of Bill 13, that require quite a lot of ministerial authority in the Finance minister, and then, you know, to the degree to which – can we trust that based on other clues that we've had over the last couple of years?

The Deputy Speaker: We're having such a pleasant evening, and I think we can carry on in that manner with some caution given to, certainly, the hon. member to make his comments most relatable to the bill and the debate at hand. I know he has the extraordinary

ability to do so. I very much so look forward to that continuation of the debate.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Debate Continued

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for your caution. It's my first time speaking to this piece of legislation, and at third reading usually there is a broad leeway, that you talk to the bill in its final form. As I mentioned, that bill leaves out many details. It boils down to the trust in the minister and trust in government, whether or not we should be supporting this piece of legislation. That's exactly what I was saying. There were certain questions that we should trust, and there are many examples – and I gave a few examples – where we shouldn't trust this government. For instance, when they were in opposition, when they were not in charge, they were against bracket creep, the tax on inflation, but when they were put in charge, that's exactly what they did. They signed a public health guarantee; they didn't follow through on that.

All these examples do require us to, I guess, question the government on the provisions of this bill and the things that are not included in this bill. For instance, there are some requirements that are identified in this bill. For instance, exemptions: when it comes to exemptions, then 8(1)(c) gives a whole lot of powers just on the minister's sole discretion, that he can exempt from "a requirement to engage qualified and expert third party consultants."

Then he can exempt from the Consumer Protection Act as well, which is, I guess, the most important aspect. We didn't see some clear safeguards other than again we are asked to trust the minister and the government. The provision says:

8(2) The Minister may, with the agreement of the Minister responsible for the Consumer Protection Act, exempt a Sandbox Participant from any provision of that Act or any regulations under that Act on [the] terms, conditions and restrictions agreed to jointly by both Ministers.

Basically, the entire consumer protection legislation: instead of finding some way, creating some certainty that there will be certain protections that will stay intact, that there will be protection that will not be compromised, the government chose to write the legislation in a way that the minister, with the help of a fellow minister – if they both agree on something, they can exempt the sandbox participant from the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, any regulation, order made under that act.

8:20

That's, I guess, a very broad power that government is giving itself. Consumer protection legislation is long. There are many different areas. There are many protections that they could have identified where we need not give ministers power to override those protections.

Also, this idea of a sandbox is not novel to this government. When we were in government, we came up with these ideas as well. We worked with the Securities Commission, we worked with Alberta Treasury Board, and we came up with a way to adjust the exploitations in payday loans. We came up with solutions for that. Our view was, our focus was that we were focused on Albertans. We were focused on consumer protection.

Here the government is singularly focused on doing this experiment on Albertan lives without saying anything in this piece of legislation on how they will be protected other than that that will be at the whim of the government and the ministers. So that is a serious concern because it's a new, novel idea and there need to be stronger assurances to Albertans that they will be protected and the consumer protection legislation and other similar legislation and

regulations will not be waived, sandbox participants will not be exempted from following those protections. We didn't hear that.

Then, even on publication of information . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate on Bill 13 in third reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity just to say a few words in regard to Bill 13 in third reading. I mean, generally I think it's clear that our caucus has found this to be more good than bad, right? There are a number of innovations here that reflect initiatives that we did take and move forward on when we were the government in regard to these so-called regulatory sandbox initiatives. So as an extension of those things, I guess, inherently we do find it to be a positive choice to make.

I think that there are a number of issues that we need to just be wary of when we're engaging in this kind of thing. I think that the issue of government competency in a new initiative like this is definitely something to think about. That's not to disparage the elected members but, rather, the capacity of TBF to be able to have the expertise to quarterback something like this – right? – because clearly from behind the scenes there's a lot that needs to be done. So I would implore this minister, Madam Speaker, to make sure that he is sufficiently surrounded and staffed with people that can administer this and to watch over it amongst the TBF department, because that's where a lot of this will lie.

You know, I think that another issue that we need to watch on an ongoing basis, presumably, if this passes here tonight – I've got a feeling it will. That is to make sure that there is sufficient public disclosure around the new products and services that might come of this initiative. I know that this bill inherently gives quite a lot of power and latitude to the minister, so that minister, with that power and latitude, can also make sure that there is sufficient oversight and that at every step of the way people are getting enough information about what it all entails, like consumer protection information, too, like some sort of a warning label thing where new a product, service, technology, whatever it is, you know, just given that people have to know that it's just not something that – maybe it's new, and people have to have some degree of buyer beware kind of thing, right?

Further to that, as well, there's a tendency, I think, amongst Albertans and maybe Canadians in general that we have quite a lot of confidence and sort of inherent trust in our financial institutions, so we don't want to have new operators taking advantage of that, right? You sort of just think, "Oh, well, a bank is a bank is a bank; they never fail," and away you go. I heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talk about American examples, where, you know, the banks fail on a more regular basis, and that kind of thing just doesn't happen as much in Alberta and Canada, so forthwith there is kind of an inherent sort of trust in our banks.

I've kind of noticed, doing – what was I doing? – my taxes and my ethics disclosure the last few days, that that trust is not necessarily warranted, you know? It's like trying to get something out of a stone sometimes with these banks, especially now that it's all online and there are no actual humans in a room that you can talk to. But that's my own little personal beef for the day. It is a reflection that usually I do trust my bank, too. They're not going to lose my money. I think a lot of Albertans feel the same way.

With a new thing, a new sandbox initiative like this we have to make sure that consumers are protected and their trust is reinforced. They'll say: "Wow, this is new, this is innovative, and I feel like the government has my back in this regard." With all of those things

together, Madam Speaker, I certainly do speak in favour of this bill. I've got a feeling that, you know, we'll all watch carefully, Minister, of course, to make sure that this gets off the ground and that it creates an interest not just here in Alberta but across the country and indeed around the world.

Thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 13 in third reading?

Seeing none, would the hon. Minister of Finance like to close debate?

Mr. Toews: I'm going to waive.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 19

Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and address the House this evening.

Before I do, with your indulgence, Madam Speaker, I just wanted to say hello to my good friend Denise and her son Roman, who are very keen to join us in the gallery this evening, all the way from Grande Prairie, Alberta. Welcome.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll get back to the business at hand. It's a pleasure to rise this evening and discuss amendments to the Condominium Property Act. Approximately half a million people . . .

The Deputy Speaker: My apologies, hon. member. You are moving . . .

Mrs. Allard: Oh, sorry. I rise to move second reading.

The Deputy Speaker: On behalf of . . .

Mrs. Allard: On behalf of Minister Glubish.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister . . .

Mrs. Allard: The Minister of Service Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: Please proceed.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you. Wow. I'm distracted. I'm distracted.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will start again. One more time, it's a pleasure to rise this evening and discuss amendments to the Condominium Property Act. Approximately half a million people, or 12 per cent of Albertans, live in condos across the province. This is a huge cohort of the population, Madam Speaker, and these Albertans cut across all age demographics. As we know, younger Albertans tend to make their first home purchase in a condominium unit, and we also know that many older Albertans like to downsize to a condo from their detached homes to benefit from all that condo living has to offer.

8:30

While condominium corporations manage their own affairs through their own governance, protections and standards for Albertan condo owners exist through the Condominium Property Act. Our government has made making life easier for Albertans a top priority, and oftentimes we do that by reducing unnecessary red tape that holds Albertans back from getting things done. That has

carried on into this government's approach to legislating requirements for companies, societies, and even for condominium corporations, Madam Speaker. I am proud of all the work the Minister of Service Alberta has done to bring common sense into our basic legislation. The most important part of supporting Albertans is our approach to legislation, and it's listening to stakeholders across industry who know best. You know, the minister is not an expert on condominiums, and I don't think many or maybe any in this House are. That's why we consulted with condo owner groups, condo managers, and condo lawyers. I'm pleased to share that it is their feedback that has informed the provisions contained in Bill 19, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022.

How did we get here, Madam Speaker? In 2019 we inherited a set of regulatory reforms to the condo property regulation written by the opposition during their time in government. The minister did his due diligence in reviewing the proposed changes to make sure that these made sense and were actually going to help condominium owners and corporations. It's a good thing we checked their work. The regulations as written were rejected by the condominium industry. They told this government that the NDP amendments to the regulation would have created headaches for condo boards and would in no way solve the major challenges faced by those who volunteer their time as board members. We ended up pausing the regulations to do a deeper dive, and I'm glad that we did.

The minister and his team at Service Alberta made improvements that cut red tape and actually made the lives of condo owners better. This government brought those regulations into effect in January of 2020. From there, our work was not done. While consulting with community members, our government heard concerns about unproclaimed act amendments that had been left over from a previous act for several years. Both involved very important matters for condominium corporations: the rules around voting in meetings and recouping the cost of damages. These provisions were to be implemented in the final set of regulatory amendments from the 2014 bill. When the folks in the condo sector talked about these leftover amendments, they were very blunt with us. They told us that those amendments as is were going to bring in too much red tape and be a financial and an administrative burden for condominium corporations. However, they knew that this government would take their concerns seriously, and we did, Madam Speaker. They knew that we weren't afraid of a bit of hard work to get these amendments right. The minister's department got to work.

Throughout 2020 and 2021 Service Alberta had regular meetings with a group of dedicated representatives from community groups representing condominium owners, boards, managers, and lawyers to develop, in conjunction with our working group, a better approach to voting and damage chargebacks, an approach that made sense, Madam Speaker. These amendments are practical, they're realistic, and, most importantly, they are aligned with what condo boards actually want and need while protecting owners' rights. They're the result of a lot of hard work but also a testament to our government's commitment to supporting a healthy condominium sector and to listening to those in that sector.

I'll now take a closer look at what our government has brought forward in this bill. With respect to voting, Madam Speaker, one of the unique aspects of condominium living is that as a condo owner you're basically a shareholder in the corporation that is responsible for maintaining the property, common, managed, and real. Roughly once a year as a member of a condominium corporation you get to attend an annual general meeting, or AGM, to discuss matters relevant to the operation of the development, including the

corporation's finances. At a condo AGM owners have things to vote on, big and small.

Currently voting in condominium corporation meetings is solely based on how many shares an owner has in the corporation, commonly referred to as unit factors. In unit factor voting, Madam Speaker, the votes from owners of larger units or owners of multiple units carry more weight than the votes of smaller units or of one unit. It's a proportional representation. For many larger issues such as large expenses or legal situations this makes perfect sense. Owners with a larger stake in the development should in fact have more say in things. But for smaller housekeeping matters, such as approving an agenda, unit factor voting isn't as efficient and is unnecessary. We've heard that it slows the meeting down, takes away time from the needed discussion, and takes away time to vote on more important matters.

The original 2014 amendments on voting sought to regulate various methods of voting such as show of hands and voting in writing. Our working group told us that setting complex requirements around different ways of conducting a vote was just far too cumbersome. Voting needed to be simplified. If passed, our amendments would enable an alternative method of voting on routine or simple matters in a condominium corporation meeting. Each eligible owner would have one vote regardless of the size or number of the condos that they own. In this way, voting can be as simple as a show of hands, and condominium corporations can use this simplified method whenever they need it.

We also wanted to make sure that we're not negatively impacting the current rights of voters. That's why any time the simplified version of voting is used, an eligible voter can still require that a unit factor vote be held instead, provided this is asked for before the simplified vote result is announced. This is a protection enshrined in the amendment act. If a condominium corporation prefers a different method, they will have the flexibility to do so. Corporations will be able to establish an alternative method through its bylaws, which owners vote on and must approve by a higher majority threshold. Condominiums want to have the flexibility to use the method that works for them, and that's what we're delivering today, Madam Speaker, should this bill pass.

With respect to chargebacks the other changes we're bringing forward today will provide condominium corporations with important tools to protect the financial security of all owners and their corporation. As any homeowner will tell you, one of your biggest fears is property damage inside or outside. In condominiums, where people own common property in addition to their personal unit, shared property damage can cause a whole bunch of headaches and costs. For example, guests could damage the hallway walls during a visit or while they are helping to move furniture in and out of the unit. This could amount to hundreds or even thousands of dollars in damage to the common property. Who pays for that, Madam Speaker?

For condominium corporations recouping the costs of damages can be a big expense, especially if the person that caused the damage doesn't want to pay for it or denies causing the damage. With our current laws condominium corporations often end up in court claiming costs of repair for damages attributable to owners or occupants. Obviously, going to court costs a lot of money for corporations and a lot of time for volunteer boards. Those costs often end up being shared by all of the owners in the corporation through increased monthly condo fees, special assessments, or insurance claims. Madam Speaker, this is unfair for the vast majority of condominium owners that are responsible shareholders in the condo corporation, who want their common property well maintained while keeping condo fees low and sustainable.

The 2014 amendment specifically sought to prohibit the inclusion of costs as a result of damages by an act or omission of an owner, tenant, or occupant as a contribution. This was wrong, Madam Speaker. If this had gone forward, corporations would have been left with no way to try to recoup those unpaid costs, leaving them having to go to court or else passing on costs to all owners to cover, including potentially the court costs incurred. Our amendments would allow condominium corporations to charge back damages directly to an owner, occupant, or the person for whom the owner or occupant is responsible, as set out in the regulation. This means that if an owner or occupant invites people over and they damage the hallways or the common room or they run into the garage door, the owner or occupant can be held responsible for repairing that damage.

The chargeback can include the cost of repairs or the insurance deductible cost, whichever is less, related cost services, as well as reasonable administrative and legal fees. This chargeback would be a contribution, so if they do not pay it, the corporation could place a caveat on the condo's title. Now the board will be able to also include reasonable administrative costs and legal fees when placing a caveat. Time and money will be saved by condo corporations, which will benefit the entire group of owners. It is hoped that this mechanism will lead to more predictable condo fees for all owners as unpredictable costs of damage can now be allocated solely to those responsible for creating it.

Finally, Madam Speaker, minor amendments. While the changes to voting rights and the introduction of damage chargebacks are the main focus of these amendments, there are some other minor changes we're making to improve the act. One of the most common questions that pops up in a condominium is the matter of who is responsible for repairing or replacing the windows and doors in the building. Is it the corporation or the individual owners? This is covered in both the act and regulation, which is confusing because the important information is not all in one place and not clear. It's often overlooked. These amendments we're proposing will make this easier to understand by moving all of the relevant sections from the regulation into the appropriate section of the act, so they'll be all together and in one place.

8:40

Exterior windows and doors will remain common property unless that particular condominium corporation's condominium plan had them listed as personal property in 2000 and also passed a special resolution before September 2002 to keep them that way. There will be no changes to who owns windows and doors because of these amendments. We're just making the legislation more user friendly and more clear for the benefit of all condo owners and all Albertans.

Another change is required in light of amendments we made last year to the regulation. In 2021, due to the removal of building assessment reports under the New Home Buyer Protection Act, we amended the condominium property regulation to replace our requirement for building assessment reports with a new converted property study. This study must be conducted whenever an existing building is being converted into a condominium and provided to potential condominium buyers before they could purchase a converted unit. Last year's changes strengthen consumer protection measures by creating clear, informative, and comprehensive requirements for the study and ensuring it is certified by an architect or an engineer. A number of wording changes need to be made to the act to reflect the new name of the study as well as to account for transitional considerations.

Lastly, we will also be repealing a couple of obsolete transitional provisions that have expired and are just simply no longer needed in the act.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I'm confident that these changes to the Condominium Property Act will bring immediate benefits to the more than 8,000 condominium corporations and 12,000 condominium owners in Alberta who are their shareholders. If passed, our government will continue to work hand in hand with the condominium industry to implement a supporting regulatory framework that will enable condo owners to take full advantage of the added flexibility we're introducing through Bill 19. I have to rephrase that. Sorry. It's half a million owners who are their shareholders. For these reasons, I am pleased to bring this bill forward and move that it be read for a second time.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Wonderful.

Welcome to our guests in the gallery. I hope you find this evening riveting. It's been a while since we had guests in the evening, so this is a first for us. Welcome, welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I will attempt to be as riveting as possible for our guests in the gallery although I'd like to get them to lower their expectations right from the get-go, and then they'll be less disappointed.

It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 19, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022. It's good to see that the government is bringing forward this piece of legislation. I have a number of questions. I have a couple of concerns. There are a couple of points, from my understanding of my first reading of this bill – again, recognizing, Madam Speaker, that first reading was recently tabled.

I want to start off my comments by just flagging to members – and I appreciate the member that moved second reading on behalf of the minister was, you know, reading second reading notes, and I appreciate most of the comments. There were a couple in there that were a little bit of a drive-by to our party, which I think is quite unnecessary.

I recognize that modernizing condominium legislation is important. Our government did start that work. I was, for a period of about six months, the Minister of Service Alberta. I did engage in a number of consultations with condominium owners, condominium associations who were asking for an update, which is completely reasonable. Members will hear in my comments that there are certain aspects of this bill that I do find reasonable and that I can support.

I'm hoping to bring to members' attention that, yes, we may have two different political frames on how we deal with situations, but the fact is that we're all wanting to get to the same outcome, which is improving the current condominium legislation.

You know, I'll be the first to acknowledge, Madam Speaker, that there are a couple of – I believe we amended this piece of legislation twice in our four-year term. Was there more work to do? A hundred per cent. I'm just trying to get away from this whole "let's always blame the other side for A, B, C, D, E, F, G" as opposed to: some important first steps were made, we're moving that another step forward, and let's continue to build. I guess I'm trying to say: let's look at this from a glass-half-full point of view as opposed to a glass half empty.

Now, it should be noted that, Madam Speaker, as you're well aware, we are in the middle of an affordability crisis here in the province of Alberta due to a number of factors. You know, in this piece of legislation I think that there was an opportunity to look at how, through modernizing condominium legislation, we can make it as easy as possible for Albertans to be able to get into the housing market. Many Albertan first-time homebuyers enter the housing

market through condominiums because their prices are often more affordable than single-family dwellings. We recognize that the biggest investment most Albertans will make in their lifetime is in their home, and Albertans should be able to protect that investment. It's important to ensure that condominium owners are supported and that condominiums remain affordable.

This bill does bring forward some new legislation that ensures that condominium owners are held more accountable for damages. Now, I appreciate that in her speech the member talked about how damage chargebacks will allow for condo corporations to charge condo owners for damages to common areas and property damage. It's my understanding that the government has identified this to be used for small fees. But as we've seen in many pieces of legislation, Madam Speaker, the details are left to regulations. Members of the opposition are not privy to those discussions on where that bar lies.

Again, as has been articulated many times in this place on a number of different pieces of legislation, the government says, "Trust us," and the opposition recounts numerous instances where the government has said one thing and done another and where when we talk to constituents and Albertans, they're telling us that they feel their trust is broken with the government or the government has broken their trust.

You know, my hope, Madam Speaker, is that the minister in Committee of the Whole will be able to provide a little more context on what kinds of damages or fees the condo board can impose upon condo owners. What is the government currently thinking is reasonable to put forward to cabinet to bring out in the regulations? The minister should have a number and should be well aware of it. Again, having served in this role, I know that the department would have already laid out a number of different proposals. So the minister, I hope, will be open and honest with the Assembly on his line of thinking and where he's looking at getting cabinet approval.

8:50

One of the challenges I have with this bill in its current state, Madam Speaker – and it's a pretty significant challenge – is that disputes that exist will have to go to the courts. This was something that through consultations that go back quite a ways – as far as what condo owners wanted to see, it was a dispute resolution tribunal. You know, I appreciate the government talks about how there still is due process. The challenge with the government – and it was asked today to the minister in question period, to which the minister responded that it's not something the government is currently looking at and it may come in the future. That's pretty significant.

A dispute resolution mechanism would do a number of things. One, it would ensure that condo owners have access to a process that is timely, will give them a definitive answer, and will give them access to justice. At the moment the only recourse that a condo owner has is to go to court. Well, we know for a fact that the courts are so backlogged today because of a lack of Crown prosecutors, which – instead of just saying that it's the UCP government's fault and they're terrible, I'll point out the fact that when we were government, our Justice minister was berated by the then opposition UCP about not appointing enough Crown prosecutors despite the fact that the federal government had a significant responsibility in that. Yet here we are today looking at putting a dispute resolution through the court system where there is a current lack of Crown prosecutors and more action should be taken by this government.

Mr. Shandro: You're not even going to acknowledge that I'm standing?

Mr. Bilous: I see the member is standing, but I'm not going to give way at this time.

The disappointment is that there isn't anything in this bill – and maybe this isn't the right bill – to be able to address the current backlog in the court system, but there is a backlog in our system. By not including a dispute resolution mechanism that would free up more court time, because it would be dealt with elsewhere, this is a challenge. This is a challenge that is going to burden an overburdened system. So, Madam Speaker, that's significant, the fact that there isn't a commitment from government with a time frame on when and how to implement this.

I know that in other jurisdictions, Madam Speaker, there is a tribunal system. In fact, I believe it's in British Columbia that there is a Civil Resolution Tribunal. So it'll be interesting to see – and I'm guessing maybe the minister has access to this information – looking at resolution times, so the length of time for a resolution, through a system like British Columbia that has a tribunal versus Alberta to this day, which system is more efficient, which system will save tax dollars. My guess is that a tribunal system, which diverts cases away from an overburdened court system, will be more efficient and get to a speedier outcome, which is better for condo owners but also will free up judges, Crown prosecutors, and court time. Maybe it's not Crown prosecutors, but going through the courts still is the use of court resources. That's a pretty significant piece that's missing from this bill.

There was a real opportunity, I think, to address a number of outstanding concerns. As I said at the outset, I'm not about to just stand up and criticize this bill in its entirety and, you know, blame the government for everything from the weather to – I don't know. I can't think of another example. The point is that I'm trying to look at this bill from a perspective of: what is in here that is positive, that I do like, and where can it be amended? Quite frankly, I think that's the primary role of the opposition, Madam Speaker.

Again, you know, I'll comment on – I'm sure I don't have too much time left, but I will comment on elements of this bill that I do like. The fact that changes to the voting process at condo meetings will allow easier access and quicker votes I think is a good thing. I know that that's what condo associations have been asking for. I appreciate that this government, through this piece of legislation, is continuing the work that was started under the previous NDP government. That's a compliment to both governments, which I appreciate is probably a rarity in this place.

Part of another area just of concern is again: how much of the detail is being left to regulations? I appreciate the argument that if you put everything into legislation and, let's say, there's a piece that the government gets wrong or that needs to be tweaked, it has to go through a lengthy process to be revamped. I get that. But there are a number of elements of this bill that are being left to regulations.

You know, I do appreciate a comment that the minister made in, I believe it was, his press release, when he just talked about some of the changes being made – for example, when we're talking about damage to elevators, garage doors, common spaces – that this legislation is intended to protect responsible owners and ensure that they're not bearing the costs of the irresponsible condo owners. I appreciate that. I think, in fact, most condo owners would also appreciate that, that there should be a certain respect of their shared areas. I think most people follow that, but of course there are examples of those who do not, and it can be quite costly.

I will wrap up my comments, Madam Speaker, by saying that, again, this bill, I think, has some elements that I could support. It's got some shortcomings. I'm hoping the minister will be open to a robust dialogue and potentially amendments coming from the opposition or government to augment and enhance this bill. I will state that we are in second reading. I haven't had a full, in-depth analysis of the bill at this point in time but wanted to at least get some of my initial observations of the bill on the record, again

recognizing that, you know, there is more work to be done in this area and that condo owners are looking for enhancements to existing pieces of legislation.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will take my chair. I'm interested and eager to hear comments from members. At this point I see my colleague the Minister of Justice rising, and I will give way.

9:00

The Deputy Speaker: Is this an intervention?

Mr. Shandro: Nope. No. He didn't accept the intervention.

Mr. Bilous: Oh.

Mr. Shandro: Oh. You are? I thought you didn't accept the intervention.

Mr. Bilous: No. I wanted to. I thought I was, but I just realized that I don't think I can give an intervention because I'm the first responder to . . .

Mr. Shandro: You said you were done.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, that's fair.

Are you done speaking then? You have about two minutes.

Mr. Bilous: Well, I'm in the middle of wrapping up. This was, like, the crescendo of my speech, and it's been interrupted, Madam Speaker. I hope that *Hansard* will – no; I hastily tried to give you the floor, through you, Madam Speaker, to the minister, although now I'm very interested to hear what he's going to say with his full 15 minutes.

With that, Madam Speaker, the jury is still out on whether I'll be supporting this bill or not. There are elements that I'm intrigued by. There are certain elements that I do support, and we'll see where we end up with this bill post Committee of the Whole.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise because I'm inspired by the words of my friend the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I've seen a theme in what he's said in the Chamber for the last week, I mean, I think even on Monday. We see his comments in the Chamber that evening, tonight: there's a bit of a theme of him advocating for being the elder statesman here in the Chamber, advocating for decorum, advocating for us to consider working together. On Monday I think he was saying that if only we could see fewer personal attacks, for example, in this Chamber. And as I walked home after hearing those words, which I agreed with, I just thought how frustrating it must be for him to be in a caucus that listens so little to him.

Now here he is advocating for us to be able to work together, be able to listen even if we come from different political perspectives in this Chamber, to be able to debate various pieces of, at some times, like this piece, nonpartisan legislation, to be able to come to the right solution for Albertans. Yet here we see the member, for whom I have a lot of respect, saying something that is grossly incorrect, that we have this shortage of prosecutors.

One thing he said that was correct is that when they were in government, the former Minister of Justice and Solicitor General under an NDP government did have that legitimate criticism, and they only had at that time 404 prosecutors, but today we have 453. And, yes, there are vacancies for us to be able to fill. I think there are 42 further vacancies for us to fill, and we have the commitment

to prosecutors to fill those vacancies, and that is frustrating for them, and we're committed to working with them.

But we keep on seeing the NDP saying things that are blatantly untrue, in particular when it comes to our workforce capacity. We keep on seeing the NDP saying for years that we have doctors fleeing the province, which is not true. We continue to see doctors, net increases in numbers of doctors, coming to this province. We've heard – I remember hearing in question period from Edmonton-Manning that we as a government have fired nurses. Blatantly incorrect. We have increases, hundreds if not thousands of increases, in nurses in government compared to when the NDP were in government. Now we have this comment.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I see you having concerns about the relevancy. I am answering to the advocacy of the member opposite and correcting what was said that was inaccurate. I thank him, though, for his words Monday night and tonight, and I hope that all of us do listen to those words, but I hope that he is included in the audience and listening to the words that he's saying tonight.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister, for that.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to actually get us back on to the bill itself after our meandering. I certainly don't agree with much of what I just heard. I think I could spend a lot of time arguing against it and demonstrating that it isn't accurate, but I think we should probably stick to the bill at hand, as I'm sure you would like us to do.

I want to just talk about a couple of different areas of this in our first conversation about this bill. Of course, I think that updating the regulations regarding condominiums is something that everyone, on both sides of the House, I think, would generally agree with. Of course, the NDP, when they were in government, introduced many of the changes that were required. Some of them we anticipated would be brought forward by proclamation by the UCP and were not. Much of what we're seeing here is work that was originally conducted in consultations by the previous government and introduced into legislation by the previous government but was hampered by the current government. I'm glad to see that after three years they sort of have found the light but, unfortunately, have done so in a pale way.

I certainly would have appreciated it had they just simply moved ahead with the regulations as had been written by the previous government because we wouldn't be having to spend our time now relitigating that which was already litigated in this House. And, really, it's not that contentious. We all in this House understand that buying a place to live is actually one of the significant historical moments in the lives of many people. Not often do you spend this kind of money on anything else. It's usually the largest purchase ever made by an individual, and it certainly allows them to participate in the economy in a very different way as they build equity and then they're able to use that equity to engage in a variety of other factors.

I certainly have learned the significance of having that kind of equity when I work with First Nations, where many people who live on reserve lands cannot develop that equity and subsequently have a great deal of difficulty in moving ahead financially.

So I welcome any attempt to move forward to make purchasing property more readily available to people in society and to ensuring that when they do purchase that property, they have every opportunity to be successful. But I also appreciate that that means they have responsibilities that go along with the privileges of ownership. In this case I see that the intent of the government here

is to ensure that that responsibility is, you know, appropriately handled in a good way.

I think I'd like to talk about two aspects of the bill that I think are problematic and that perhaps we can come to some conclusion on. The first one is short, because it's actually the change in the voting procedures. I know that the primary change here is moving from the ability to use unit votes – that is, each unit in the building gets one vote on a decision – to having owner votes; that is, if there are multiple owners of a unit, they can all vote in a meeting, and so on.

I understand the reasoning for this. You want to be able to have people come into a meeting. You want to encourage all participation of everybody in the building to come down and do part of this work of managing your condominium board and so on. So, you know, facilitating the ease with which all that happens seems to make some sense. And I wasn't particularly worried about this section because it actually indicates that while owner votes are being used, a request for unit votes can be made and must be adhered to if that request is made. So we are back to the place of one unit, one vote.

9:10

I wasn't going to comment too much on this section until I heard the Member for Grande Prairie talk about this section of the bill and suggest that it made some sense to move toward owner votes rather than unit votes, not for the reason I just explained, the ease of moving things along, but because she suggested that it makes sense that those who had more invested should have more voice. I think that's a very particularly dangerous idea. It's an idea that those with wealth have more voice in a democracy, something that I find abhorrent. Now I'm very concerned about whether or not I should support the bill because if we allow ourselves to believe that those with more money should actually, literally have more votes in this case – because they have a bigger unit and have more people involved in the ownership of it, is the argument that was presented – then we are suggesting that all people are not equal and that money trumps citizenship rights, and this is something that I cannot support.

Now, having come into the House wondering whether I will support the bill, I am nervous to support the bill. I only bring this up because of my concern at hearing the message being given by the Member for Grande Prairie, but I can see that as the bill is written, it actually does allow for people to request the unit vote and that that takes precedence once the request is made. It makes me feel like maybe I don't need to be completely nervous about that. I just was very concerned at what I heard and felt, that in a democratic society that kind of presentation of ideas needs to be addressed immediately. Having done so, I'll move on to the other concerns that I have with regard to the bill.

Now, the whole intent of this section of the bill is a problem that many condominium boards and condominium owners were experiencing with damages being done in common areas that were very difficult to recoup, and I realize that that is a problem. I certainly have had conversations with condominium boards in my area that had suggested that that was the issue. The problem presented to us when we were in government and, I assume, also presented to members opposite is that the only way, really, to recoup those costs was to take someone to court for the damages and sue them as someone who has done something to your property, not as a member of the condo but just as someone who – the same as if someone randomly had walked down the street and, you know, pulled your lamppost down. The condo owners were saying: "This doesn't make sense. We actually should have some mechanism within the condominium act to allow us to actually address these

kind of problems, to levy a fine just for the cost of the damage that's being done."

The whole point of this is to remove the problem of damages being done from the court system, so something I can support although I would've liked to have seen, of course, some more detail in terms of the thresholds that would be allowed. Are you allowed to do this for any amount of damage done, or is it, as in some places, like in British Columbia, only for damages under \$5,000? What are the mechanisms for ensuring that? Now, I guess some of that is going to come out in terms of regulations, so I will have to wait, but that always makes us nervous on this side of the House, because we certainly see that regulations are frequently used by this government to do things that were not what we expected to have happen, and it's very discouraging when we see it.

What they have done in this case is they have said to the owner-operators – that is, the corporations – that "We don't want you to have to go to court," and then they immediately set it up so that now the individual who is being charged has to go to court. We have a situation of what's good for the goose should be good for the gander, but it is not. In this case, as the Conservatives so often do, they came down on the side of corporations and went against the individual. So the individual doesn't have the privilege of going to a process that is outside of court in order to challenge any fines that are levied against them.

If the Conservatives felt that it was important enough to move this out of the court system in order to, you know, move it to an appropriate place in terms of handling it and to keep these kinds of things out of what is already an overburdened and difficult court system to get justice in our society right now because of the cutbacks and the fact that the federal government was prepared to provide us with more judges but this government failed to apply for them – we're in a difficult place in terms of the pressure on the courts right now, so I supported the intent here. And then what did they do? They put us back into the courts except that, in this case, they put an individual with fewer resources in the difficult place of having to do it rather than the corporation. So you protect the corporation, but you don't protect the individual. What does that say about your value system?

That's why I am concerned about this particular bill. They could have resolved this by simply doing nothing; that is, all they had to do was put forward the regulations as designed by the previous government for the enactment of a tribunal system for resolutions to take place outside of the court system. All they had to do was just get out of the way, yet again, as we have seen so many times with this government, they got in the way. They got in the way in order to make life better for corporations and more difficult for average citizens in this province, and that's very problematic.

You know, I tend to have faith in people, for the most part, in that if they've done something bad like, say, ruined a garage door, it was probably by accident. It's unlikely that you intentionally ran your car into a garage door in order to cause conflict or damage to a building, but you may have done so because there were slippery conditions or any other number of things. I think we should start in the place that the individual who is being questioned for the damages was not a horrible human being trying to do something terrible but, rather, someone who found themselves doing something by accident that was quite unfortunate and, as such, should be treated to the possibility that they can talk about what was happening for them, how it came to be, and to raise any mediating factors that would suggest that maybe it wasn't completely their fault and so that costs might be shared.

It seems like a fairly decent thing to do, especially for people who are having to live together because they have a shared investment

in a condominium, and a tribunal would have allowed that to happen. If the government had simply gone ahead with the tribunal as written up by the previous government, we would not be in the place of having this discussion today, and we would not be in the place of the Conservatives yet again making a decision on behalf of corporations that they will not give to individual citizens. Why they are always doing that I actually, really, do not understand.

Now, other places in the country have similar things to the tribunal, at least things that could have been used as a model if they didn't want to use exactly the one that had been set up under the NDP government. Ontario, for example, has an arm's-length one, and they just have a \$50 charge for every unit in order to help pay for those tribunal costs. Nova Scotia actually has a condominium dispute officer, so a person whose job it is to resolve these kinds of things. In all of these cases the government has not set up the individual against the corporation. They've simply provided an opportunity to do that without having to go to the courts. This government, though, has pushed us back into the courts, has made the decision that the burden for that court action is now on the person with the least amount of resources – and the individual always has less than the large corporation does – and it was unnecessary to do it. There is no imperative to go in this particular direction.

Thank you.

9:20

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 19 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to offer some comments as well on Bill 19, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022. Let me just, first, thank my colleagues from Grande Prairie, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, the Minister of Justice, and Edmonton-Rutherford for their thoughtful comments.

I just wanted to say that, you know, the minister meandered off topic, and I think my friend from Edmonton-Rutherford called him out on that. He was, like: "Hey, that's the opposition's job, to try desperately to fill time on bills. That's not the minister's job. He's got many more important things on his plate, including a pending Crown prosecutor strike." So I hope that he does his job and lets the opposition do our job, which is trying desperately to tie anything that we want to talk about to the things that we have to talk about, like the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, Madam Speaker.

I do want to talk about comments related to three things. First of all, I do want to address the issue of affordable housing, because I think that condominiums are an important part of the puzzle of solving the problems of affordable housing. I do want to talk about some of the issues that condominium owners in my riding are facing and how they're not addressed in this piece of legislation. Then I want to talk specifically about the issue of a condominium owners tribunal and why that's left out of the legislation and what I hope to see this government take action on in the very near future.

First of all, my comments on affordable housing. Madam Speaker, I have lived in the province of Alberta for almost my entire life, and I will say that the affordability crisis in this province is as bad as I remember it ever being, possibly with the exception of skyrocketing mortgage rates and inflation in the early 1980s, when Albertans were just leaving their keys in the mailbox and going back to Ontario and Newfoundland and wherever they came from before they moved to Alberta to work. It is harder now, I think, to afford a house in Alberta than it has been at almost any other time in our history.

We are certainly seeing the effects of this affordability crisis every day in the riding of Edmonton-Gold Bar. I saw an article reporting that the city of Edmonton is seeing skyrocketing homelessness rates. We certainly see that every day in Edmonton-Gold Bar. The boundaries of my riding include the North Saskatchewan River valley on the north side and the Mill Creek Ravine on the west end of the riding. Those river valley locations are now the homes of what appear to be hundreds of people who can't afford to live anywhere else. It's creating an incredible amount of stress not just for those people who find themselves without homes but for the people in the communities that neighbour those areas as well. It's creating a lot of hardship for everybody, and the government is not doing anything to support people in being able to afford a home.

I recognize, Madam Speaker, that affordability is not the only consideration when it comes to contributing factors to the houselessness crisis – there is a complicated web of circumstances that people find themselves in that contribute to being without a home – but the government is doing its level best to make sure that it doesn't address any of those circumstances whatsoever. In fact, we see the government walking away from a number of commitments that it had made previously to deal with this issue.

I'm thinking specifically about a couple of supportive housing projects that the city of Edmonton is building in my riding, one in King Edward Park and the other in the Terrace Heights neighbourhood. Because the provincial government has failed to live up to the expectations that it set for itself to provide funding for those projects, now the city of Edmonton is in the position of having to fund those entirely on their own, with no help from the provincial government. What were supposed to be incredibly innovative, very helpful supportive housing projects will be a shell of their original intent. I'm afraid that instead of helping to address the houselessness crisis that we see every day in Edmonton-Gold Bar, it will only make matters worse or, at the very least, be an expensive failed attempt at addressing the homelessness crisis. I certainly hope that the government turns its mind to addressing other issues of housing affordability to the same extent that it's turning its mind to addressing the issues that condominium owners face.

Now, I will say that this bill is remarkable in that it neglects to actually address the issues that condominium owners are talking to me about these days. Madam Speaker, the number one issue that I've heard from condominium owners over the last three years, since the last election, is the issue of skyrocketing condominium insurance. Almost every condominium complex in my riding has had somebody come forward to my office to tell me about the financial hardship that the condominium boards find themselves in because of skyrocketing condominium insurance rates. I know that many condominium corporations in my riding have had to level special assessments against their owners just to cover the massive increases in condominium insurance that those boards have faced over the last couple of years. That's not fair. It creates an affordability crisis that the condominium corporations are not able to address. It's well within the purview of this government to address the issue of skyrocketing condominium insurance, and they are doing nothing about it.

In fact, I'm beginning to think, Madam Speaker, that the more profits that flow into insurance companies, the happier this government is. We certainly see that with car insurance, we see that with life insurance, we see that with other types of home insurance, and we're seeing it with condominium insurance. It sure would be nice if we had a government that actually acted in defence of everyday, average Albertans instead of acting in the interests of profitable insurance corporations. That's something that I would like to see the government bring forward in the very near future,

action on the issue of controlling the cost of condominium insurance.

Lately we've also been hearing a lot from condominium owners in the Edmonton-Gold Bar constituency about the skyrocketing utility rates. Now, a good deal of condominium corporations levy a condominium fee against the owners and residents of the condominium corporation that includes some of the utility costs. It's either heat or electricity. Some or all of these costs are covered through the levying of a condominium fee, and many condominium associations now are faced with hiking their condominium fees significantly just to be able to afford the utility costs. That's also not fair.

It's even more frustrating for condominium owners in my riding because, unlike on the issue of condominium insurance, where the government has made no promises to provide affordability relief to those people who have to pay those costs, this government has made a promise to get utility costs under control. Yet we've seen them fail to live up to the commitments that they've made time and time again, ever since we heard the throne speech at the end of February. Condominium owners are waiting patiently, incredibly patiently, for relief on their utility costs, and there's nothing in this bill that will provide that for them.

I certainly hope that we hear from the government soon about when condominium owners can expect some kind of relief on their utility rates, because they can't afford to wait much longer. They've run out of patience with this government.

I want to turn now to this issue of a condominium tribunal, which is also not in this piece of legislation, but my friend from Edmonton-West Henday asked the minister to address the issue of condominium tribunals. When she responded to my friend in question period earlier this afternoon, she said: what a lovely idea; we should do something about that sometime. Unfortunately, what we're seeing is that now is not the time that the government thinks that they should do something about it, which makes me wonder, well, when? If the government thinks that it's a great idea, why not put it into this legislation now?

9:30

Because it's certainly the case, Madam Speaker, that condominium owners and condominium boards have long needed an effective dispute resolution system that diverts people from the courts. It will save those people time and money, and it will also provide people with modest means an avenue to seek justice when one would be denied to them because they can't afford to go to court.

Let me just say that I think that Alberta has long been an innovator in this space of providing quasi-judicial bodies to resolve disputes outside of the courts. [interjection] I'm sorry that the Minister of Infrastructure is so bored listening to the debate. You know, if he's frustrated with the things that I have to say, I challenge him, then, to bring forward amendments to actually address the concerns of condominium owners. I'm sure that he has the same complaints to his office that I'm getting in to my office in Edmonton-Gold Bar. The only advantage that I have is that I don't have the power, as a member of the opposition, to bring forward the kind of meaningful legislative changes to actually address those issues. But the Minister of Infrastructure does, so why doesn't he, instead of just expressing his discontent with having to be here, actually do something meaningful to address the serious and legitimate concerns that people who live in condominiums bring forward day after day after day?

On the issue, though, of tribunals, Madam Speaker. As much as I would love to see this piece of legislation contain some kind of framework for a quasi-judicial dispute resolution system, I have my

doubts that the government would actually fulfill its commitment even if it made one. The reason I say that is because we saw early on in the spring of 2020 the government bring forward changes to the residential tenancy dispute system to allow for mobile-home site owners to bring their disputes to the residential tenancy dispute resolution service, which was a much-welcomed change. But what I said at the time – and I tried to bring forward amendments to actually solve some of the problems that we were pointing out at the time, which, unfortunately, the government voted down without really giving a fair hearing to or even coming up with a meaningful compromise. We see those problems manifesting themselves to this very day.

You know, one of the things that we told the government at the time was that the cap on the damage limits that currently existed in the RTDRS were too low, that \$50,000 was too low; it needed to be raised. In fact, the government could just proclaim a section of the Provincial Court Act, as I understand it, that would raise the limit of damages that can be sought in the Provincial Court to \$100,000. They don't even have to make a legislative change. They could just proclaim that today if they wanted to. That's something that I think would apply to a condominium tribunal as well, because the damages that condominium boards and condominium owners fight over are significant.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I don't think that the \$50,000 charge would be adequate for a tribunal should the government ever put forward the effort to bring forward such a thing to the Legislature.

The other issue that we see . . . [Mr. Schmidt's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there are others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning is rising.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pleasure to rise to speak to the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022. I do want to follow up on the comments here on the tribunal that my colleague was speaking about, and the reason for that is that I'm a little concerned about how the process will work when it comes to individuals that may be residing in these condos or, for example, renters that may be living in these condos that may be considered nuisances – nuisance? It's late.

Mr. Neudorf: A nuisance.

Ms Sweet: A nuisance – yeah; thank you for the help – to their neighbours or may not be able to get along with their neighbours or however that would look, that ultimately would become targeted by their surrounding residents. The reason that I'm concerned about that is that if we start looking at a chargeback process, the chargeback process sets up a system where basically the individual is assumed guilty and must prove innocence versus being able just to be deemed innocent and therefore being proven guilty.

You know, an example of that might be something where it's a townhouse situation, and there are individuals who have shared walls, and somehow mice get into the building or something like that happens. It creates issues for more than one resident, but for some reason there is only one resident that is targeted as being the issue. There may not be enough evidence to substantiate that that's where the mice came in. There may be pre-existing relationships where there have been conflicts in the past, where people decide that that is the resident that they would prefer to maybe have move out, or they would like to make it as uncomfortable as possible so

that they choose to vacate the residence, or whatever that process is.

I think the issue here is that it doesn't set up an environment where we can ensure that people are being protected. That is where I struggle with this piece of legislation. I think that if there was a process within the legislation that would ensure that condo owners, or if they have renters, have a mechanism where they're able to go through a process that is a fair process, that is a balanced process and doesn't assume that the individuals are guilty first, then maybe this bill wouldn't be as problematic as I think it is. But that is where I fundamentally struggle. To not have a tribunal, which exists in other jurisdictions, that allows individuals to be able to go through somewhat more of a mediation process, then I think that it has a potential to be used maliciously. I'm not saying that the legislation is being drafted in that context. But because of how it is drafted, it could be used maliciously to target individuals residing in condos.

I think we all come from a place of good intention, and the intent is not to have that happen. However, I'm sure at some point all of us have lived in communal spaces, whether it be an apartment building, a condo, a dorm, any of those sorts of things, where there are tense relationships between your neighbours. Those relationships can sometimes escalate and can create very uncomfortable situations. This would be a tool, then, that could be used to try to penalize an individual or a group of individuals, to try to encourage them to vacate a premises or to make it financially inconvenient, I guess would be a word, to try to encourage them to move on. I don't think that we should be looking at a piece of legislation that has the potential to do that without putting safeguards in place.

9:40

When we look at other jurisdictions that do have this piece, this buyback component, we have seen that there is that component that is attached to it. We also only have one other jurisdiction in the country that actually does this, which I believe is Ontario. But if we look at British Columbia, we look at Ontario, Nova Scotia, they all have some form of a tribunal process.

In B.C. the tribunal process is able to resolve disputes for any amount and handles other issues that are under \$5,000. So if there is damage to your neighbour's property from bedbugs, for example, that may somehow get through the walls, that can go to a tribunal before it is deemed that that person is guilty. I think that's important to have because, again, to target – I think, you know, I'll go back to using the bedbugs example. Bedbugs spread quite quickly and are very hard to get rid of. If you're living in a condo situation that is an apartment-style condo or even a row house and bedbugs are able to get from one unit to another unit and to spread and you have to fumigate, you don't necessarily know. People can assume that there may be a specific unit where they're coming from, but you have to be able to demonstrate that there is evidence of that, and this doesn't allow that to happen. What this does is that it allows for someone to target a specific unit and say: that's the unit that has the bedbugs, and that unit now should be responsible to fumigate the whole building. It's a problem.

Again, if you were in B.C., that would go to a tribunal. The decision would be made. Evidence would have to be provided to substantiate that that person is actually, as would be said, guilty of creating that nuisance and creating that financial cost. In Ontario, you know, again, there's a tribunal authority which supports condominiums and does have a levy. You still have to pay an administrative fee, but it also can do, like, mediation and dispute resolutions. The same with Nova Scotia.

So I think if we're going to look at a piece of legislation that's going to enable this to happen, there has to be a mechanism in place

to create fairness. I would be curious to hear from the government why there wasn't a mechanism considered to ensure that condo owners aren't being deemed guilty immediately and why there isn't an appropriate process so that when these financial levies are being placed on to a condo owner, it is done within due process.

I mean, I think we've all at some point experienced a conflict where, you know, people get annoyed because their neighbours aren't shovelling their sidewalks or whatever, and you have to go and talk to their neighbour. Sometimes those conversations go well, and sometimes those conversations don't go well. I'm sure there are members in this Chamber who have worked in enforcement that have probably responded to some of those calls about conflicts between neighbours. How quickly those situations can escalate. So to put neighbours against neighbours to have to resolve these issues I don't think is necessarily the best approach, to be fair.

I think that, you know, we have a mechanism under the landlord and tenant act where if there is a dispute between a landlord and a tenant, they can go to the landlord and tenant act and they can have resolution and they can have mediation, and those processes can be followed to make sure that both parties are entering into the conversation with clear definitions and clear roles and responsibilities and outcomes so that if there is rent that is due or if there are damages to property or any of those things, there is a very clear, defined mechanism that's in place and there is an opportunity for someone to be an intervenor.

So why we wouldn't do something similar for that when it comes to condos I'm a little bit confused by, because ultimately those relationships are similar. You are working in communal spaces, and everybody has a financial invested interest in those spaces. Most condos are, obviously, owned. There is, as we all know when it comes to our financial investments, some emotional attachment to those investments, and you want to make sure that your investment is protected. I would have liked to have seen under this amendment that there is a mechanism for that to happen.

If the government doesn't think that the tribunal is the best mechanism, that's fine, but then what is the mechanism? What is the government willing to do to put in place to ensure that this happens? It can't happen under regulation. There have to be some teeth within the legislation that is enabling this to happen. To put it in regulation doesn't create the same form of legality, I guess, that you would need, especially when it comes to providing and enforcing some form of financial penalty. I mean, that is one of my biggest concerns. Again, I appreciate that the government is not totally keen on it, but I would encourage them to look at coming back to the Legislature and providing the tool that they would be willing to look at, then. When you start talking about being able to leverage penalties, which is what I think – you know, we talk about a buyback. That is sort of – it is a penalty, a lien on an owner. There should be something in place that allows that mediation and that adjudication to happen.

Now, in relation to some of the other pieces of the legislation around voting, I'm a little confused around why the government felt that if there are two people that are residents of a property, they both need voting rights. I'm curious to hear about what the need behind that was. I think that if you have one person in the home, odds are you're talking to the other person in the home and you probably have a consensus, but maybe you don't. I mean, it is stuff that's pretty simple. You're talking about agendas and approval of agendas. You're not getting into some of the more maybe controversial discussions around approving of, you know, upgrading of infrastructure that's going to cost and increase condo fees or any of that kind of stuff. I mean, I am curious as to why that was deemed a

necessity and why it needed to be legislated through this piece of legislation, but I guess it is what it is.

I mean, I think that is the biggest piece that I think I wanted to speak to, so I won't carry on farther than that. I would like at some point maybe someone from the government to explain, though, why we wouldn't try to create a tribunal, or whatever you want to call it, to ensure that mediation and adjudication is available and appropriate so that when these conflicts arise, they can be done in a supportive way and not create further conflicts that could escalate to uncomfortable situations for other residences.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 19, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022. I have to say that I really appreciate the comments of the debate tonight. You know, this is something that I can speak to with personal experience.

When I was considering a career in social work, I took a job through the city of Edmonton to become a mediator, and part of that training was being able to shadow mediators and be part of the process through the city of Edmonton. My very first real-life mediation was through a condo in Edmonton, and it was the condo board and the residents of that condominium. You know, I was able to see first-hand what, essentially, I guess, a tribunal could be. It was the city of Edmonton that provided a mediation service. I was there as a mediator. The whole purpose of that was to allow the condo residents and the board to come together, both share their sides.

9:50

I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker, if you've ever been part of a mediation, but it truly is a collaborative process, where the whole purpose of the mediation is to be able to collectively present your issues, your concerns, have the reasons why those concerns haven't been addressed, and to come up with a mutually satisfied agreement. It's traditionally lower cost. It's traditionally much more easier to arrange. From being a mediator and also later in my career working in the courts, I can say that a mediation is a lot more collaborative, friendly experience.

So when we're talking about condominiums – and, you know, I think this piece of legislation does have some things that make sense when it comes to the ease of voting, those types of things. Those make sense, but we're in the middle of an affordability crisis. We're in the middle of an Alberta court system that is not doing what it needs to do. There's a tremendous backlog.

I can't see how creating a piece of legislation where the first step is to force resolution through the courts is the answer. I know that through the court system there are many systems within that, like JDR, judicial dispute resolution. Those are opportunities within the court system itself that allow individuals to have something alternative to court. Even the courts have acknowledged that there's space where it should be resolved outside of the formal court setting. When I see this come forward and I see that it's missing, you know, kind of the piece that absolutely makes sense, which would be a tribunal, I'm just confused why that's been neglected, why the first step is to go to court when even the courts themselves are structured in a way that tries to use court as the last resort.

There are many different plays and features that are structured within the court system itself that would allow people to resolve their issues outside of needing to be in court. That's because the cost of running court cases is quite expensive. The manpower, the space, having lawyers and judges and clerks and all of those people

that are required just to have a hearing can be quite financially cumbersome, but it's time as well. Trying to find docket time is difficult. Trying to find time where all members can come together with that court time is difficult.

When I think to my experience in both the court system and the mediation system – and it's interesting that my first experience was through a condominium – it worked. Having a neutral third party bring the parties together in a space that was agreed upon by both parties was effective. It took a few hours, but at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, what happened was that they came to an agreement, which is binding through a mediation agreement. We had capacity as the mediators to create an agreement. It wasn't just an arbitrary meeting. There was a result at the end of it. I know that through a tribunal there is also the opportunity to have a court order at the end of it.

So it takes what the courts are already doing in the sense of trying to avoid court time, yet this piece of legislation goes straight to court. I think that when we're talking about ways to make life easier and more affordable for Albertans, doing that only makes sense, so I just am unclear about why that piece is missing. I know that when we were government, we had started that process, but that didn't translate. We know that that was being asked, and it's not reflected in this piece of legislation.

You know, when we look at investments that Albertans make, I would argue that probably a home is one of the biggest purchases. This is a thing that people aren't just going to want to leave unresolved. This is something that they've invested their hard-earned money into, their home. It's a place that is often a sanctuary for us, and when there is a dispute that requires intervention, it's something that should be dealt with efficiently and in a timely manner. Leaving that out of this just simply doesn't make sense, Mr. Speaker.

I know that the issues that I was participating in were things that the residents of this condominium had been struggling with for quite some time. Usually what happens is that it's attempted to be resolved at the board level, so it's quite extreme when it gets to the place where they feel that it can't be resolved, but the next step shouldn't be court. We're looking at a court system right now in Alberta that is incredibly far behind. There are trials that are being dismissed based on time alone, not on anything other than that. To think that something that's impacting your residents needs to go before a court is quite significant.

I think when we hear the government talk about really wanting to help and make a difference, there are pieces of this legislation that do make some changes and make some streamlining decisions, but I don't think court is the solution for condo owners when there is conflict. These are their neighbours. These are people that they live with, that they see perhaps every day. To make it such an extreme resolution doesn't make the situation any better, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that by the time, in my experience, matters get to court, everything else has been exhausted. It is kind of a last step, last resort, place.

I can tell you that the lawyers that I've worked with over the years and the judges that we've put matters before really try hard to try everything else – mediation, JDRs, even conversations off the record – to try and resolve things, so I think a tribunal would have been the logical first step when we're looking at resolving issues with condo owners. This isn't something that is a major corporation fighting this unknown entity. This is your neighbour, these are the people that you see every day, and it's your home. I would hope that a piece of legislation could have really incorporated what Albertans are asking for, and an easier way to dispute and resolve issues should have been included. Like, we have no understanding

why it wasn't included in the bill. We have no understanding if it was based on cost, if it was accessibility. It just doesn't make sense when the UCP had promised that they would create a tribunal, and then it's not in the legislation where it could have been created.

I think that, you know, being able to be in this position and have that insight into what Albertans are asking for is incredible, and I know that a tribunal is what has been asked. I think that when we're talking about legislation, we need to be honest about what's in front of us and what's missing. I think that that is glaringly obvious, that that is a big piece that has been left out of this legislation. I would

love to hear some of that rationale and reasoning, and I hope that in further debate we do get to hear this.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The deputy government whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 9 a.m. on Thursday, April 28, 2022.

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

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, April 28, 2022

Day 26

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, April 28, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 19

Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate April 27: Ms Goehring]

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm always delighted to rise from my seat in this Legislature to speak about real estate matters. Of course, having been in the industry as a real estate agent for 30 years prior to becoming elected, amendments to the Condominium Property Act are something that certainly interest me. I'm happy to engage in debate, and I look forward to a healthy discussion on this piece of legislation regarding changes to the Condominium Property Act brought forward by the Minister of Service Alberta.

I can't say that I'm overly happy with this piece of legislation and the proposals therein. We could have accomplished, I think, so much more, and what it attempts to do, I don't think it does well. We're in the midst of an affordability crisis in this province, and the UCP have done little to address that with respect to housing. The Condominium Property Act amendments are going to potentially add costs and risk to condominium property owners as a result of the changes that are contained in it. Housing is unaffordable to so many people as it is already, and even the inherent risk in some of these changes is something that might cause millennials, in particular, to decide not to enter into a contract to buy a condominium because of the potential loss of their equity as a result of a dispute that they have no means to resolve other than going through the courts. I'll talk a little bit more about that as my comments progress.

What the UCP has done with this bill is avoided something that we called for early on in changes to the Condominium Property Act which occurred in 2014, much of which was not proclaimed until later on. In fact, the UCP decided to delay the proclamation of much of the Condominium Property Act, 2014, to make changes to regulations, and some of those changes, actually, never got made. One of the things that I'm talking about is the establishment of a tribunal process which would have protected owners in the event of disputes and avoided a lot of court proceedings that were very costly and onerous and time consuming on the part of owners and condominium corporations as well.

Of course, the NDP government of the day had intentions to bring in a tribunal had they been re-elected. That didn't happen. The UCP decided against that, and of course we are at a situation now where there is no tribunal to resolve disputes between condo owners and corporations, and in fact that is something that will remain with these amendments to the Condominium Property Act because the UCP government and the minister have decided that they won't implement it.

That raises a serious question: why? The goal, of course, quite often in bringing forward legislation that has to do with business transactions and operation of buildings and so forth, including condominiums, usually is directed at minimizing the need to go to court to resolve disputes, and that's been inherent in some other pieces of legislation we've talked about this session. Yet in this particular bill that is avoided, and it could have easily been implemented. It would have been a very reasonable and welcome amendment or a piece of the amendment to this legislation that's before us today.

What we have instead is a piece of legislation that still allows the condo corporation, with its larger resources, to wield itself in opposition to an individual owner who may have caused damage through their tenant or just simply through a breakdown of perhaps a water pipe or something like that in their unit that may have caused damage to common property, and of course they would be liable to the condo association, potentially, for those repair costs.

A tribunal, in case of dispute between the two parties, certainly would have allowed for a much less onerous and costly and time-consuming resolution of that dispute. They can be very, very costly. You know, if you are on an upper floor and your water pipes break for some reason or leak and cause a mould issue all the way down the walls in the common property for floor after floor after floor, you can be speaking about not tens of thousands but hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of liability that the condo corporation may be seeking to eke out of the condominium property owner.

Whether or not that individual condo property owner's insurance is going to be adequate to cover such a potentially large bill would be in question. First of all, if there was a situation, in most matters, which are normally not that large, where the tribunal could be invoked or could be in place, you could avoid having the large cost of a court case, and both parties, I think, would have welcomed that. I don't understand why that tribunal was not put in place in this piece of legislation amending the Condominium Property Act.

There's also another element that has drawn my attention, and it has to do with the clarification by putting in legislation rather than in regulations the definition or, I guess, the liability direction on windows and doors. Who is responsible for damages resulting from issues arising from problems with windows and doors on condominium exterior walls? That has been a long-standing, big problem. Of course, we may all recall the so-called leaky condos issue right across the country and the severe damages and costs that they entailed, and quite often there were various significant questions and disputes between condo owners and condo property corporations as to who actually was responsible for those damages.

I might add to that list, on top of condominium exterior windows and exterior doors, the balconies. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, they were one of the major culprits in that leaky condo issue that occurred for a few decades. We've seen the results of that horrendously costly fault in design and/or construction occur many, many times in Alberta. In our city, here in Edmonton, examples are right close to the Brewery District, on a condominium right on 102nd Avenue, where a relatively new building was surrounded with scaffolding and stripped of its exterior cladding to repair the windows and balconies. In many cases what's happened is, of course, that they weren't sealed properly in installation, either the exterior foam

insulation that blocked the opening and sealed the window in place and/or the door frame.

Balconies, in particular, were built so that they sloped towards the building whereas the proper method, of course, is to have the balcony sloping away from the building so that water drained off. Water was in fact collecting on balconies and draining into the units.

9:10

These, once again, Mr. Speaker, are elements of condominium living that condominium owners may or may not be aware of when they first sign a contract to get into it, but that's all the more reason why we need clarity to determine who actually is responsible for the exterior walls and doors. Who are the owners of those exterior walls and doors? Are they common property, or are they part of the unit?

This legislation, the amendment we're speaking about this morning, seems to put the definitions of ownership into a rather rigid, legislated form which may not be as efficient as it first sounds. It might prove to be a pretty unwieldy way of dealing with the situation. I'd seek a bit more clarification from the minister on this. There are many, many different styles of construction and many different layouts, many different situations where you have windows, doors, and balconies on condominium buildings, and to rigidly define them by legislating where they may be either exterior units that are condominium-owned property, like condominium corporation owned property, versus a unit-holder's property or responsibility or liability might beg lawsuits in and of themselves just in fighting over that definition.

I do seek some greater definition of that part of the legislation so that the reasoning is clear behind using the legislative tool to assign liability and/or responsibility for exterior windows, doors, and balconies versus some other mechanism via regulation or just definition. I really would like to understand why the minister felt that this was the best way to solve the disputes.

I grant, Mr. Speaker, that there have been long-standing concerns about exterior doors, windows, and balconies. The condominium corporation bylaws and those that were originally established by the building contract, the owner before it was transferred over to the individual corporation, usually would describe and define who actually owns the exterior windows, doors, and balconies; who the responsibility or liability lies with, but it was not something that was set in stone. It was optional. It was up to the original drafter of the condominium corporation bylaws to determine who the responsibility or liability would lie with.

Perhaps it was the minister's intention to clarify in legislation exactly how that would be defined. I hope it wasn't to actually try to dictate each individual situation in a one-stop shop manner as to describing all of the exterior windows, doors, and balconies as always becoming the responsibility of one party or the other, because there are too many variances, I think, to use that one-stop shop methodology. That's one significant concern that I had, and I beg for more clarity on that.

Also, on the voting procedures in condominium corporation meetings, Mr. Speaker, I'm not a hundred per cent clear, and I'd like to, really, fully understand exactly what the minister's attempted changes are. My understanding, of course, is that now, if you have unit factor voting in a meeting – you'll have normally I think it's 10,000 or 100,000 unit factors in a whole complex – each unit, according to square footage, is prorated to be a percentage of those unit factors. Each owner is assigned that number of unit factors for that unit, based on the square footage, and that then would be transferred into a voting right capacity at a meeting. So unit factor votes would be something that would be a mathematical calculation to tabulate the strength of the vote, and that's why it

may be more complex to determine the outcome of a vote based on unit factors. You have to tabulate the unit factors based on the square footage owned by a particular owner.

What the legislation does, if I'm reading it correctly, Mr. Speaker, is that the votes on simple matters, like agenda changes or noncomplex issues, could be done by a simple one unit holder, one vote rather than breaking it down into unit factors proportionately for simple matters. More complex matters would potentially require a unit factor vote and all the calculations and so forth that are necessitated by that. But how, in fact, one would determine which issue would be available is then questioned.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to rise this morning to add a few additional comments here around Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022. I'll just thank my friend from Edmonton-McClung for his comments. You know, it's always great to have the opportunity to tap into somebody's experience, especially for spending 30 years in the real estate sector. That knowledge can really be helpful when it comes to trying to debate such a bill as Bill 19.

It's funny. The story you were talking about with regard to construction and drainage of water on balconies: I actually have a friend who, you know, many years ago, probably upwards of 30 years ago, had to deal with that exact problem. The construction was faulty. The water was draining into there. Needless to say, the blame kept getting pointed towards him. It resulted in a very lengthy process to try to solve that, cost him a whole bunch of money, and then when it was finally actually determined that it really wasn't his fault, he had to go through the whole rigamarole and process to try to recover monies that he had spent to do that. Such a ridiculous process, really, when you think about that.

Given that, you know, when it comes to home ownership or condo ownership – probably one of the single largest purchases that somebody makes in their lifetime is around a home. Obviously, keeping those prices affordable is always a good thing. When we can get people into a home or they get into a position of being able to upgrade, somebody else then gets a chance to get into the market.

When I look at Bill 19, for all the rhetoric that I've heard from the government, the chest-beating and all the name-calling and everything like that, why the minister, who agreed that we would need some sort of dispute resolution process or tribunal or, you know, adjudicator, whatever you want to call it – where is that here in Bill 19? It's not there. So if you want to sit here and talk about how you're making life better for Albertans, how you're trying to make it more affordable for them, probably the last thing you want to do is say: we realize you have a problem; go to the courts. I can tell you right now, based on my story that I said at the beginning, that that didn't work out that great for my friend. It cost him a lot of money. If you're going to save people money, then give them something that's cheaper, which would be some kind of a dispute resolution process, which is absent here in Bill 19.

What is it? Promise made, promise broken? It's kind of sounding a little bit familiar here, Mr. Speaker. I guess we'll just add it to the list of other things that, you know, have been promised and haven't been delivered. We've heard promises around helping people with their insurance rates, especially for condo owners. I brought this up several times now in various different debates.

9:20

A senior in my riding comes into my office with two bills: his car insurance bill and his condo insurance. Condo insurance had gone

up 57 per cent. For somebody on a fixed income that's a problem. I have to ask (a) where is this, you know, dispute system so that should he run into some problems, he's got a cheaper way to do it because he's busy paying his insurance hikes that you allowed to happen?

I guess that begs the next question, then, Mr. Speaker. I'm hearing: well, that's going to be coming. When? When is it coming? Next week? Next month? Next year? In due course? Heard that a few times in here. People need to know when that's coming. Kind of like their rebates. They need to know when those are coming, too, because they could use some help there as well. With everything that's been going up and dithering on getting some money out the door to people and then to present a bill where you had an opportunity to provide at least, you know, one relief system for one problem for a group of people, you leave it out. That's a little bit disappointing, to say the least.

You know, when we don't have that process, where are people going? They're going to the court systems. We've certainly heard about how backed up the court systems are. If that system is struggling, why, then, would you continue to push these cases into the courts? I'm not saying that none of them should get there. Certainly, if they start to get really complicated and, as I've heard, sometimes ugly, probably the court is where they're going to end up. If they're pretty straightforward, give them something cheaper, give them something easier. Get it out of the court system, free up the time, and you can start dealing with other matters in an expeditious way.

You know, I guess, by leaving out this system, it'd be interesting to know how you arrived at that decision. I know, Mr. Speaker, that I remember a famous thing that members of the government bench and members of the government caucus, when they served in the 29th Legislature – I believe even yourself, Mr. Speaker, might've asked once or twice during your time there: how about a cost analysis? Is it actually to the benefit of Albertans to push them through the courts, or would it be better for the economy, better for Albertans – reduce some red tape maybe – to provide a dispute resolution process?

I mean, at the end of the day, if, you know, the information that you have that informed this decision to not add this is indeed the best way to go, I'm happy to accept that. I can tell you right now that I can't just trust your word. I have some significant difficulties with that right now, Mr. Speaker. I mean, like I said, as I've said in other pieces of debate, I remember the Premier promising up and down during his leadership: I'm going to release my donor list. Great. That was awesome. Tick, tick, tick, tick, tick. We're still waiting. Haven't seen that donor list. A simple promise like that, and you wonder why I'm a little distrustful when it comes to the words: trust me; we'll take care of it.

I think more needs to be done. Perhaps maybe we could – I mean, it's second reading right now, so it's only, really, initial comments around the bill and how to, you know, ask some questions on how you've arrived here and stuff. Maybe towards Committee of the Whole we might miraculously see the minister come in and table an amendment to provide a dispute resolution process. That would be fantastic.

I know that some of my constituents would probably like to see that. I've certainly heard some concerns around that, and, as I said, the best I can do right now is just point them in another direction, saying, "You might want to talk to legal counsel and consider having to head to a court to be able to get a resolution." Of course, I always hear the same thing back, "Well, that's pretty expensive." "Yeah. It is. I'm sorry." But at the time when I was having those conversations, I was like: "You know, fingers crossed. It sounds like there might be some kind of process that will be coming in."

Well, now I get to go back and tell them, "Sorry; I guess that was just more hot air."

I will intently listen to the debate as we go along. I would certainly urge the government to try to do a little bit more here with Bill 19, and I look forward to hearing more comments.

Member Irwin: I've got an intervention for you.

Mr. Nielsen: Are they allowed?

The Speaker: Please feel free.

Mr. Nielsen: Oh, well, I would love to accept that intervention.

Member Irwin: All right. Thank you to the member for his comments so far. I know he's got a few more comments to share with us. You know, I know that member. I've spent time in his riding of Edmonton-Decore. There are condos. One of the interesting things about Edmonton-Decore is that there is a lot of sort of social housing and a real sense of community in a lot of those areas. I'm just wondering: has the member had an opportunity to talk to or hear from any condo owners in his riding? Has he heard any concerns? I'll be honest; I've not heard from condo owners in my riding. I'm just curious if you've heard any of the concerns that are outlined or aim to be addressed by Bill 19.

Mr. Nielsen: Thanks for that question. Yeah, I certainly do have a few condos that, you know, are in Edmonton-Decore. As I mentioned in my earlier comments, with the one senior that owns a condo who came in with his insurance bills, talking about his condos, I've certainly heard from some that experienced problems. I think the Member for Edmonton-McClung was also talking a little bit about the voting system. We'll have to see how these changes necessarily improve things. I mean, I wouldn't say that I've not heard concerns around that, not a lot, but let's be honest. Most people are pretty focused on their rising bills right now, everything from, like I said, their insurance to their utility bills, personal income taxes. They're losing ground in that department. Having that opportunity to at least make things a little better for them has certainly been something that's come across to me. [interjection] I must be managing to trigger a lot of questions here. I see my friend from St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you for allowing the intervention. You know, one of the things that you mentioned is the lack of a tribunal. Some of the examples we've heard from the other member is that in other jurisdictions there are tribunals for, like, dispute resolution, those kinds of things. Some of the correspondence I get from constituents that do live in condominiums are that they can't resolve issues around things like pets, odours, vaping, smoking, parking, things like that. It can be very expensive and timely and frustrating and can break down relationships in a condominium unit. It's hard to live close to people like that sometimes. I'm just wondering if it's been your experience at all to have any kind of casework or any sort of concerns around disputes like that in condominiums.

9:30

Mr. Nielsen: Yeah. Thanks for that question. No, I can't think of a specific case. I mean, I'd mentioned earlier in my comments around my one friend from years ago that had that problem with his balcony, and it turned out that it was constructed the wrong way. He was the one getting the blame for it, saying that he wasn't, you know, doing all the things he could do to mitigate that, but when it's simply built like that, what can you do?

Yeah, not necessarily in Edmonton-Decore, but I have heard of problems where a condo that used to be pet friendly had decided to

change that, so there was a rather large conflict, if I remember the story correctly, around trying to get the ability to have their pet kind of grandfathered in so that they wouldn't be forced to get rid of the pet. As we all know, our fur babies, whether they be cats, dogs, or other interesting pets, become, you know, a member of the family, so a change like that can be incredibly disruptive. Of course, I guess if it gets to the point where the condo group is coming together to vote on these sorts of things, those kinds of meetings can actually really start to degrade very, very quickly when you feel like you're trying to defend your four-legged member of your family. So I've certainly heard.

There's never actually been a case like that that's come through Edmonton-Decore that I'm remembering at this moment, but I've certainly heard about it, you know, through friends and family and whatnot. So having potentially a tribunal or some kind of dispute resolution which could be affordable – like I said, one senior that I have in my riding whose insurance went up 57 per cent, car insurance went up 46 per cent. Top that with all the other expenses that are going up, like utilities, and all of a sudden the prospect of going even to a tribunal, to be quite honest, could even be potentially a barrier even though costs might be significantly lower for them.

I think there's an opportunity to try to create an atmosphere so that people don't have to necessarily go through that because we know that going through the courts is a significant cost. I understand why. Lawyers, you know, have to be compensated fairly for their time and the cases they're doing. But I think there is a better way to be able to do that, and the government fell short here on this. Again, I'm really hoping that some of these stories that we're getting the opportunity to tell here will urge the minister to maybe table some kind of amendment to introduce that into Bill 19, which will allow Albertans another process.

If you're going to stand up in the House and say, "We're making life better for Albertans; we're making life cheaper for Albertans," then you actually have to do that. Like I said, so far we're not seeing that on a lot of files, but here's an opportunity where you can actually do that. So I'm certainly urging the government to reconsider that part of Bill 19.

But, again, I'm happy to listen intently to the rest of the debate here for Bill 19. You know, I guess as we get into Committee of the Whole, there will be opportunities to maybe get up several times, maybe do a little back and forth with the minister on things. What informed the decision not to put in that tribunal? What has he heard around some of the changes that they're proposing around the voting and how that necessarily will impact renters and condo owners?

The Speaker: On Bill 19 at second reading, the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill 19, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, this morning and to address some of the things that I've been listening to as well as the experience that I've had as an MLA for Calgary-*Buffalo* and, before that, Calgary-*Fort*. Both ridings have a number of condominiums, a number of rental apartments, and as I was just reviewing some of the constituent complaints that have come to my office over those seven years in those two ridings, I can tell you that a great number – the tenancy act or people in rental units is primarily the reaching out that has been done by constituents to my office, and of course we've tried to assist where we could.

There are issues of affordability not only for people who are renting but people who are purchasing condominiums. Calgary-

Buffalo, where I now represent, is probably the most dense community, the most dense riding in all . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt. However, I'd just like to maybe remind members, while there isn't necessarily one conversation that is catching my attention, the cumulative effect of conversations in the Assembly is making it a little distracting for the Speaker . . . [interjections] Order. Particularly when the Speaker is on his feet. One particular conversation is ongoing, and it vexes the Speaker. Maybe that's a bit of an overstatement. Anyway, the long and the short of it is that if you have conversations that you'd like to have, please take them to the lounges.

The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Member Ceci: I am shocked, Mr. Speaker, that people aren't listening with rapt attention to the things I'm saying. I'll try and be a little more, you know, expressive to you all sort of to get your attention.

I was saying, Mr. Speaker, that the great constituency of Calgary-*Buffalo* has numerous condominiums, from starter condominiums to high-end condominiums. About \$250,000 is a starter, to millions of dollars in downtown Calgary and the east side in the Eau Claire area, and they're gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous. I'm not invited into many of those high-end condominiums at this time. I hope to be there in the near future, perhaps doing coffee parties with constituents who want to fight for better condominium legislation, as we are doing on this side, or to thank me for fighting for better condominiums.

I was looking at *Hansard* of yesterday, and I see there's a dialogue, a question back and forth between our critic for Service Alberta and the Minister of Children's Services, who was answering questions of our critic. It focused primarily, Mr. Speaker, on the tribunal process that, interestingly, was promised way back in 2014, when this act was first initiated or first introduced to the House and passed. Here we are eight years later, and the tribunal process is still missing in action.

Four of those years, as you know, the NDP was the governing party of this province, from 2015 to 2019, and we were working on that and working towards bringing that aspect into the act, but here today the UCP government is presenting a bill without the tribunal process as part of this act. The dialogue that went on between the two speakers yesterday, our critic and the Children's Services minister, was all about the fact that the condo corporations' owners are left without a ready process to handle disputes in their condominiums.

9:40

I certainly know a little bit about that myself, being in a rental situation at this time where there's an ongoing dispute between owners. You know, it's gotten, from my perspective, a little out of hand because now the different regulatory bodies are being brought in. The city of Edmonton people are talking about going to the courts, and I just think how much easier it would be for those owners in that situation to be able to undertake a discussion at a tribunal and resolve or potentially resolve the problems that they have with each other at this juncture.

I'm also looking at the responses of the Minister of Children's Services, and it's somewhat unfortunate that while the minister talks about, you know, "We're not pursuing a condominium tribunal . . . at this time," she doesn't explain why. She says "at this time" several times and "people can go to court; we're not removing due process from those owners who want to go to court." She doesn't say "court," but she does say "due process" several times, and I'm reading into that. There's no kind of reflection about what

the roadblocks are for the government to undertake that action, which is seen by many as one of the biggest stumbling blocks of this act before us today.

I'm just looking at the crossjurisdictional analyses. Of course, with any bill or legislation that's brought forward, the administration, the bureaucracy, the public service will often bring forward crossjurisdictional analyses to kind of locate where Alberta is relative to other provinces and territories. I'm just reflecting on some of that information, when I read down, that B.C., Ontario, and Nova Scotia all have versions of condo tribunals, some for many, many, many years, and they have been put in place, as our critic and I are saying, to handle those issues – lower price issues or lower cost issues is perhaps one way of saying it – in a shorter time frame, and we all know that the courts, as my colleagues were reflecting on earlier before me, are backlogged at this time, taking a long time to get the case to court, and many times people aren't satisfied with the outcome when they go through that process.

But a civil resolution tribunal revolving around condominium disputes might be a way, should be a way, could be a way, I believe is a way to speed up the resolution of problems that owners have with each other and the boards, often, that get appointed, get elected to represent them.

I wanted to reflect on that and to thank my colleague the critic for Service Alberta for dealing with this issue just yesterday in question period and, regrettably, not seeming to get an answer to the important questions that he asked.

The other provinces, crossjurisdictionally, that have – I mentioned B.C. Ontario has a tribunal authority, the Condominium Authority Tribunal. All condominiums are levied \$50, I believe, a year to fund that tribunal. It's administered online, and the system goes through stages of negotiation, mediation, adjudication, and by all accounts it is a helpful process for Ontarians. Nova Scotia, similarly, has fewer condominiums there, less population, so they have an officer who is in charge of the condominium arbitration process. We probably wouldn't have just one officer in this province, being the third or fourth most populous province. As I said, in my constituency numerous new buildings are coming up, 25 to 40 storeys, that are owner-occupied condominiums or owner-rented-out condominiums. Helpfully, though, there are a number of new apartments going up that are rental, and that will help to keep the housing in downtown Calgary as affordable as possible.

But that brings me to another issue that I just wanted to bring up, and that's the rising costs of housing relative to inflation. It's a good thing that there's capacity coming along in the downtown core of Calgary. Interestingly, just yesterday the city of Calgary approved three office tower conversions. I guess "tower" might be a bit of a stretch. A 10-storey building is not a tower, necessarily, but it is going to afford eight of those storeys to be housing for people in the downtown. Let me see. That would be in the southwest part of downtown. Two others haven't had their openings or ribbon cuttings. Of course, they're not greenfield. They're conversions, so it would be a ribbon cutting for the fact that they're going to launch the start of the conversions in downtown Calgary.

That's something that the NDP has been supportive of, believing that it's a good thing to look at that 30 per cent capacity or 30 per cent vacancy in the downtown to be repurposed for other uses, knowing that it'll take decades for that 30 per cent vacancy to be absorbed by the regular business coming back into the downtown. It's something that was disappointing to hear the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation speak to and say: you know, we're believing that the downtown will basically recover on its own. That's not the way the city of Calgary believes things will go, Mr. Speaker. They believe that there need to be incentives to start the

repopulation of the downtown because the number of businesses that have left, the number of head offices that have left under the UCP is significant for downtown Calgary, and the fact that the city has set out a plan to incentivize – and the NDP, were we fortunate to be government, whenever that is, will support the city of Calgary in that plan.

I just want to say again, Mr. Speaker, that when I look at the bill before us today, I know that there are some changes that are being proposed to the way votes will be tabulated. I know there are some things missing in this bill that have been identified by me and my colleagues. I think the most significant change here is the voting process at condo meetings and certainly know that that can be problematic, and anything that improves that is a good thing. The cash calls at condos for fixing things in the common property are a regular occurrence, unfortunately. My own experiences early on – when I first got elected, my spouse and I had a condo up here and took care of our area as best possible and sold out before it was required to have a cash call of us.

Thank you.

9:50

The Speaker: Hon. members, are the others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, in second reading. A wonderful way to start the day is to talk about condominiums. I actually think about condominiums a lot in my life. I live in a condominium – shocking – and I have for, I guess, about 13 or 14 years now. So I have, you know, a lot of information about how condos operate, the good, the bad, and the ugly. But for the most part I think condominium living can be pretty terrific if you live in a condo that is managed appropriately and you have a board that is functional.

But one of the things, going back to this bill – and when I saw this piece of legislation come up, I was sort of excited, in a strange way, to be excited about legislation. I was excited to see what was going to be contained in the legislation. I certainly had a bit of a wish list of what I wanted to see in terms of not consumer protections but protections for both sides, for condo associations but also for the residents there. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, there are a few things in here that are good around voting, and I'll talk about that, but there's quite a bit missing, and what I think is really missing is the tribunal aspect, and I'll get to that.

But let me just say, for those of you that aren't aware of how condos operate or if you've not lived in a condo or you don't own a condo, that it actually can be a really terrific way to live. It is also particularly, I think, a good housing option for a lot of groups that maybe can't afford traditional single-family homes and things like that or even duplexes, townhomes, things like that. Those are groups that struggle to find affordable housing, struggle to find accessible housing, and those can be seniors, those can be disabled people, certainly youth, of course, singles, and then people looking for affordability.

I'll remind this House that when we talk about housing affordability, we're very specific. There's a specific definition for the words "housing affordability," or the phrase, and that is that no more than 30 per cent of their gross income is spent on housing. It's important to remember that when we talk about housing affordability. Now, when we talk about home ownership, it's a little bit different. I think they're saying that it's over 30 per cent – I think it's about 32 per cent – and in the case of condos that would include things like the taxes that you're paying and also condo fees and then some of the common utility costs, things like heat.

I think it is really important to recognize that condominiums are important, and they're important to provide housing. It's sort of dense housing, but in a lot of locations it's really ideal. My office in St. Albert is actually downtown St. Albert, which is lovely, by the way. If you haven't visited, you really should. Downtown St. Albert is really dense with condominium housing, and there's actually more going up. Right where my office is there are three large complexes, and it's all condominiums.

When I interjected earlier with the Member for Edmonton-Decore, raising some examples – as I do get a lot of e-mail from constituents that live in condominiums that have issues and that would like some information about how to navigate the process, or sometimes they just want to be heard about what they think is missing or some of the problems. Honestly, some of the disputes that they deal with, on the surface you'll think: well, can't you resolve that with your neighbour, or can't you resolve that within the board or with the property manager? Sadly, they cannot, and sometimes it can make your life really difficult if you are living in a condominium in a complex. The ones that I'm talking about are, like, apartment style. It can be really difficult if you don't get a resolution to issues that are really important to your daily living.

I don't mean to belittle any of these issues, but sometimes the issues are around pets. You know, I have pets. But sometimes they're around pets – and you can imagine what some of those issues are – as well as people who smoke or people who vape or people who use cannabis, let's say. Those are real issues and real concerns for people that live in condominiums, and sometimes in some condominium complexes there is no way to adequately resolve an issue.

Now, there are bigger issues, of course, around parking, storage, common-area damages, vehicles, all of those things. And the reason I'm raising these examples is that one of the things I was a little bit disappointed about is that there isn't a tribunal. I think, as my colleague from Edmonton-Decore and, I think, actually, my other colleague mentioned as well, that failure to do that will just mean that there will be more people looking for a resolution using the courts. That's not something anybody wants to see. Weirdly enough, if you just go online and google, like, "resolving condominium disputes in Alberta," you'll get a lot of law firms advertising. I imagine that they're making some business, making some money, not that that's a bad thing. But, you know, I think if we're going to look at what's best for Albertans, what makes life better for them, and what makes life affordable, we need to balance the interests of condominium associations and owners with the residents and owners. I don't think this piece of legislation does that adequately.

When I read the legislation and the research that was done, I was interested to see with the crossjurisdictional analysis that there are a number of provinces that actually have versions of condominium tribunals. British Columbia, Ontario, and Nova Scotia have different versions. The one that I actually spent a little bit of time looking at was the one in Ontario. It's called the Condominium Authority Tribunal. The acronym, which is fabulous, is CAT, so it's easy to remember. It's actually interesting, the way that they lay it out. I'm just going to refer you to some of the information that they have available online. You can see why this is an attractive process and why this would be helpful to resolve issues.

The CAT is actually an online tribunal dedicated to resolving and deciding condominium-related disputes. Now, keep in mind that this is in Ontario. The online dispute resolution system helps people resolve the disputes conveniently, quickly, and affordably. They actually back that up with the information that's available, so you can see that there are very definite timelines for each step. It describes the step, what is done, and then how much time that this needs to be completed in.

The first step will be, like, filing a case, so the applicant files the application with the authority. Actually, that can take one to three days. The delivery of notice: the applicant delivers the notice to the respondent, the intervenors; one week. Then stage 1 is the negotiation. Here's where it gets really important. We're not, you know, hiring lawyers, but there's actually an online negotiation. The users work together to resolve the dispute. I think we could all agree that any time that we can avoid litigation, if we can do any kind of mediation, dispute resolution, it's an ideal way to go and not just in terms of affordability for all parties but in terms of the ability to live together. I'm not saying – it's actually important. For people that live especially in these apartment-style condominiums, where you're sharing a lot of common areas, from parking to where you collect your mail to the main entries as well as your neighbours, it's actually important to do everything you can to live together amicably. I'm sure we've all heard horror stories when neighbours don't get along. Life can be very unpleasant and cause people to move and cause housing insecurity.

Again, just going back to the tribunal, that's why I think it's such a great idea. The next stage of this. Stage 1 is negotiation. Stage 2 is then mediation. That is a two- to four-week process. Here, if the users can't resolve in the dispute resolution in stage 1, this is where they use the CAT mediator, in stage 2. Stage 3 then is the tribunal decision. If the users can't resolve the dispute in stage 2, which is the mediation – so they've not been able through negotiation, which was stage 1; stage 2, mediation – they go to stage 3, which is the tribunal decision. If the users can't resolve the dispute in stage 2, then they actually hold an online hearing. I think that, you know, one of the – well, there aren't a lot of upsides to COVID. But one of the upsides that we have learned is just how flexible and how many uses for online meetings, hearings, things like that – I think that we've all come to understand that this is entirely possible and workable. This piece takes about one to two months.

10:00

Then following the hearing there's a deadline within 30 days. The CAT, which is the condominium authority, releases a decision. The decision goes to users, and then the case is closed. Again, that is done within 30 days. It's timely. It's important.

You know, the reason that I spent as much time as I did on this, to talk about what a tribunal can do, is that I'm incredibly disappointed that it's not here in this legislation. Given some of the legislation that we've seen come through in this session and knowing how long we've been discussing some of the issues around condominium issues, I'm surprised that we have not seen this. Anyway, it would be really great if at some point during debate on this piece of legislation somebody could provide some insight or some explanation. Perhaps there's another plan somehow to deal with the shortfall. I would certainly appreciate hearing that. If someone from the government side could explain why exactly the tribunal wasn't included in this bill, that would be most helpful.

If indeed there is a plan to create a tribunal and bring it online, however that will be done, when will that happen? What is the timeline? I think you've heard a lot in the last few days the opposition pressing about timelines. Timelines are super important, particularly when you have government focused on internal goings-on, and when their thinking is as short as election cycles, it's really important to have timelines and commitments to when these changes will happen. I think a timeline is essential. What will be implemented? When will it be implemented? It would also be quite helpful, you know, if one of the reasons – I wasn't around for the debate earlier on this piece of legislation. Is there anything around cost savings? I think we're always talking about efficiencies and

affordability. Are there cost savings for not having a tribunal and then having to default to other bodies to decide?

I think my colleagues talked about the chargeback system. You know, I did want to mention I do know that, because I have lived in a condo for some time now, condominium insurance has indeed skyrocketed. I don't blame everything on the government, but I blame a lot of it on this government. I think that they have made some decisions during their tenure that have really impacted affordability in all kinds of ways, and condominium insurance is certainly one of them. I know that I've had to increase mine based on changes that this government has made.

Now, I understand, I can appreciate that both representatives of condo owners who live there, say residents, and condominium associations or the property owners – like, we have to have a balance to protect the association and to protect the owner. Honestly, I think the best way to do that is to ensure that all voices are at the table in the creation of the legislation. I know this government has a pretty rich track record of following the advice of lobbyists. It's pretty clear. You can look in the lobbyist registry, and then you can do a little timeline about what happens and when. I have no doubt that their condominium lobbyists were busy to get some work done.

I'm not saying that all of the things in this legislation are bad. I actually think they'll be quite helpful. But I think there are some things missing. I would like to know: perhaps the minister or somebody in his place at some point during debate could explain what consultation was done with individual condo owners, specifically focused on what they need around dispute resolution. What are the different things that could be done to maintain affordability? It would really be nice to see, for a change, that there is a focus not just on corporations but also on individual Albertans.

Again, my biggest concern – just recapping quickly as I am quickly running out of time – is the lack of the tribunal. I think that we have heard musings from this government, talking about: "You know, trust us. We'll get it done. We're in process. It'll happen." Well, it didn't really happen. I think this is actually a fairly big hole, and I think it could have been a real win for this government to introduce this tribunal. Clearly, it has been successful in other jurisdictions, and I fail to understand why it wasn't included in this legislation. Again, as I said, if there's a reason why it was left out, I'm certainly willing to hear that reason.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to my colleagues who've spoken before me on this bill. It may not shock folks that I share some of the same queries that have been raised by my colleagues, and I sincerely hope that the government engages in responding to those specific questions.

Like many, I also lived in a condo for a significant portion of my adult life, and in many ways it was a very good experience. It, of course, enabled me to help build some equity, to have a sense of ownership and community in my home, and I got to know a lot of people through service on the boards that I served. Folks who step up to serve on condominium associations, on boards, typically do it out of a sense of service and a sense of pride and wanting to ensure that their home is as positive of a place as possible.

As has been highlighted by some of the previous speakers, it is very common for there to be moments of tension because multiple people share the same home. They maybe have different unit factors, they maybe have different square footage responsibilities, but ultimately they share the same home.

I'll speak about the two different buildings I lived in maybe briefly to talk about some of the different pressures that we faced. One was very much a starter condo situation. I was really proud to live there and grateful to my grandmother for sharing a portion of her estate with each of her grandchildren to give me the opportunity to have a down payment at a young age to be able to stop paying rent and start on the path to ownership. Not many people are fortunate enough to have a grandmother who decides to share. At that time entering into the market was much more attainable than it is now. The first home I ever bought was \$42,000. The first condo: \$42,000.

Member Irwin: No. Where was that?

Ms Hoffman: In Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: No way. When was that?

Ms Hoffman: In 1998.

At that time you could get a CMHC-approved mortgage with 25 per cent down. The idea of saving up that much money was scary, but given that tuition was much lower than it is today and that I was able to work a lot in high school and saved a lot and then also had a grandmother who helped with sharing portions of her estate when she moved into long-term care, it made it possible.

I can't think of many 18-year-olds I know today who would be in a position to be able to do that given the huge rise in housing costs. As mentioned by my colleague the Member Calgary-Buffalo, it's hard to find anything in his riding starting below \$250,000, which means that your 25 per cent down is significantly larger than what it was in 1998.

In that building we didn't have any bells and whistles. It was a walk-up. It, you know, had shared laundry. In the spring and the fall – it was close to the stadium – the smell of the many spectators using the plumbing system of that part of the city would create sometimes an aroma in the hallway that made everyone pause and dump buckets of water down all of the drains in the building to try to get things moving.

It was not a luxury condominium like you might find in some other parts of the city, especially today given the way things have moved, but we all were proud of our home. We all worked collaboratively to find ways to beautify it in the spring and the summer, and if our snow service didn't come before we had to head off to work, people would grab shovels, and we'd help each other out. It really did bring together, I think, a lot of the best things about condo living in terms of people working collaboratively and sharing in a really positive experience of being proud to be homeowners.

10:10

It was a building that when it was originally built in, I believe, the '60s or '70s was owned by one individual as a rental property. Over the years he liquidated some of those, and that's how we all ended up there. Many of the folks who ended up buying into that building had actually rented from him for quite some time, but because they were able to buy in the 40s and the 50s, they were able to save up enough of a down payment, many of them, to be able to own when that opportunity presented itself.

We are seeing those opportunities be fewer and farther between than we have certainly in quite some time in this province, maybe in the history of this province. Entering home ownership is a goal for many families that is seen as unattainable. Especially right now I want to recognize – and I know the condo market isn't in the same situation as the stand-alone housing market right now, but things are moving so quickly and people are paying above asking in many situations in the housing market. So I think that many people will

start to consider condominiums again as a possibility given the pressures on single-detached houses these days.

With that in mind, I think it is incredibly important that we create systems so that when there are points of conflict – and I definitely painted the rosier picture of my memories of living in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood in that first condo very positively. I was there for about a decade. It was a very positive experience. But there were also moments of tension and conflict. There were neighbours who didn't show the same kind of respect to the building that others did, or sometimes they would have house guests who would stay for extended periods of time that also didn't show respect to their neighbours and exhibited behaviour that was in breach of the condominium bylaws, bylaws that we all worked together to set and tried to reach consensus on when we amended them.

There were instances with a couple of neighbours that became especially tense and for good reason. For all of us this was our biggest asset in our lives. Our home was our biggest investment, and when we felt that somebody was doing something to jeopardize that investment, it caused grief, distress. Of course, the fact that it's our home and we wanted to be able to enjoy and take a sense of pride – it was contentious.

There are two things that I wish this bill did that I think are missing. Number one is the tribunal, having a process that doesn't involve having to put extensive liens on somebody's property, having to fine them excessively, having to involve the courts and the banks. It would be much better if there was actually a tribunal process that was affordable and accessible and ensured that every Albertan had an opportunity to have their voice heard when it comes to these tensions that exist around their home living situation. That's number one.

Number two, as I've mentioned, is the excessive inflationary pressures. I'm just talking about the cost to actually enter the market nowadays, but also there are excessive pressures when it comes to condo insurance. We've seen this carry over from, you know, the leaky condo crisis – that was primarily in British Columbia but carried over a bit here in terms of building materials – fires that have happened in condominium buildings, especially those where they're built quite densely next to each other and the building standard didn't take fire prevention as seriously as it probably should have. We've seen issues with rapid construction and, of course, what has been categorized as a boom-bust cycle here in the province of Alberta, where during boom times corners are cut.

We also know that in many other situations – the second condo I ever lived in I loved as well. It was a great experience, but it was built by a bunch of individuals who created a corporation, and then as soon as they built the building, each took a portion of the assets from the building of the units, sold them off, and dissolved the corporation. So there wasn't a mechanism to go after the builder for deficiencies because the corporation no longer existed. Sneaky and definitely problematic for the owners who were in the building. Having ways for people to have proper dispute resolution processes and also be able to have proper accountability to builders is something that I think should be a priority when it comes to bringing bills forward to this place.

I think there are some components in it that are probably moving in the right direction, for sure, but I think that some of the biggest pressures facing condominium owners and those who live in them are around the tensions between ownership and having a dispute resolution process for that as well as the inflationary pressures when it comes to insurance, as the big one, as well as general inflation that we're seeing when it comes to housing prices in the province of Alberta.

I know that condos, of course, are facing a different situation than the housing market, but housing is not as accessible as it was, you

know, in the '90s or definitely even earlier than that. I think it's important that we pause and find ways to create better legislation to ensure more people can have an opportunity to access first-time ownership as early as possible and that we set them up for success in terms of the living situation to ensure that they can live there long term with a sense of pride, without having undue distress with neighbours or in their lending situation.

We also know that there was legislation brought forward a number of years ago around doing long-term financial planning for condominium buildings. I think that was a smart decision. It was at the time, I think, seen by a lot of condo owners as an additional burden in terms of having to pay for this building envelope assessment in developing your five-, 10-, and 20-year plan. It was, of course, expensive to bring in these experts, who were so in demand as the whole province was moving forward with doing these types of reviews and entering into this type of planning situation.

However, I think it did create a more realistic scenario for a lot of condos that were being sold in the first five years with condo fees far below what was sustainable in terms of the market. Then what we saw were buildings having regular special assessments that forced people into selling their homes because they couldn't afford the special assessments; they had mortgaged themselves to a point where they were at their limit for what their monthly expenses could be.

Making sure that we have opportunities to focus this legislation on both affordability and also on the dispute resolution process, I think, is where I would urge the government to give some additional consideration, and I would certainly welcome any government amendments that help address those concerns.

With responsible owners, of course, there is this tension. There is regularly a sense of, "Well, I'm an responsible owner, and there are irresponsible owners in the building, and I shouldn't have to pay for their decisions that implicate and risk the equity that we've put into our asset and the enjoyment that we see in our home" rather than, you know, trying to create – and I think even some of that wording was used by the minister in presenting this bill. I get it. There is a sense sometimes of good guy, bad guy situations in times of conflict, but what I would really like to see is the government come up with a proper dispute resolution process rather than leave that adjudication up to boards.

Sometimes, when you're too close to the situation, it can be challenging to provide an objective view, and I'm saying this as somebody who had a loud and disruptive neighbour upstairs who certainly broke the bylaws on multiple occasions. I as a member of the condo board probably was a little extra close to that situation and couldn't have the same level of distanced judgment that is probably best served by somebody on a tribunal, who has a little separation from the closeness of the issue.

10:20

Those are a couple of the questions that still stick out for me. I do want to ensure that every Albertan has an opportunity to live in a good, safe home that brings them a sense of pride, and it is getting tougher and tougher under this government. We're seeing houselessness continue to rise. I think the idea of ownership is a pipe dream for many Albertans, and it really shouldn't be. We should be creating long-term, sustainable, quality jobs. People should be able to – I know that when I was a kid, we used to say, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" and everyone would talk about having one job and what that one job would be.

It certainly isn't that case for most Alberta families right now. The number of people working two or three jobs just to help make ends meet is continuing to grow, and the pressures put on them and

their families should be the government's priority, and they should be finding ways to make life more affordable for everyday families.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to join and follow my colleagues. Unfortunately, we've not yet heard from the government on this bill, but I'm certain it's simply because they're writing down all of our thoughtful questions and just preparing their answers. That's got to be it.

Mr. Jean: Absolutely.

Member Irwin: I thought so.

I've loved hearing the walks down memory lane of folks living in condos, particularly my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, who owned her first condo in beautiful Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Forty-two thousand?

Ms Hoffman: Yeah.

Member Irwin: Wow. That was impressive in 1998.

Ms Pancholi: A steal of a deal.

Member Irwin: A steal of a deal is right.

You know, I too would love to walk down memory lane just briefly here, and then I'll get to the content of the bill. Well, this is connected to the bill. Sorry. You've all heard this story many times about my first teaching job in Bawlf, Alberta.

Ms Pancholi: Bawlf?

Member Irwin: Yeah. Bawlf. That's right. Don't mock me, Edmonton-Whitemud.

I moved to Camrose in January 2006. That was, as you may recall, a bit of a boom time. Camrose, of course, is also a community where there are many students, and I could not find somewhere to live. I'd looked at one place that was a basement suite. Oh, gosh, it was a little bit scary. The fellow who showed me that was like, "Well, I do have one other place, but, you know, it's a seniors' condo." So here I was. I had just turned 21, and I thought, "Well, you know, let's take a look," because I needed to find something soon.

He didn't know I was 21, but he was like: "I know you're not a student. You're a teacher. But just come take a look." For those who know Camrose, we went over to Camrose Crown Care. It's that pink building right by the high school. I took a look, and there was a nice, beautiful, clean condo available. So there I was, a 21-year-old teacher moving into the Camrose Crown Care condos. Let me tell you that it was probably one of the best places I could have lived, because those seniors – and a lot of them were older seniors, too. Some of them had assistance in their condos. They were just so supportive of me. I'd come in, and they'd look after me and always were interested in how I was doing. I remember my neighbour Ernie was always checking on me, too.

Anyways, that was my first condo experience. I didn't actually own the condo, of course. I just rented it. But after I moved out of Camrose Crown Care, I did purchase a condo in Camrose, my first time owning something. It was an interesting experience. I can echo some of the comments from my colleagues who've talked about the concerns that they have heard from people. You know, it is a lot to take on, because when you own a condo, there are things that are beyond your control as a condo owner.

You know, I think we've talked a little bit about: people are proud when they own a place, whether it's a condo or it's a home. For many Albertans it's one of the biggest investments that they will make. It's important to make sure that condo owners are supported and that condos are affordable. [interjections] Lots of noise in this Chamber this morning.

Member Ceci: You need to be assertive.

Member Irwin: I know. I need to take the stance of Calgary-Buffalo and maybe speak louder and more passionately about condos. I thought I was pretty passionate, but clearly some of the members aren't intrigued.

Mr. Nielsen: Tell them about when you were living with the seniors.

Member Irwin: Right. Exactly. That was a good story I told about living in a seniors' condo, and the Fort McMurray MLAs weren't even listening. I'm disheartened.

Anyways, I do worry about some of the aspects of this condo bill. You know, one of the big concerns that folks have outlined is that we are concerned that this bill will add to the backlog in the courts for more serious matters, and it will take away due process from condo owners in terms of disputes. As has been outlined quite eloquently, there's no tribunal established in this bill, and that's disappointing because condo owners that we've heard from have been expecting one for quite some time.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

This government, this UCP government, had an opportunity in this bill to make it more comprehensive and to address that concern over a tribunal, and they've chosen not to. It's another example where this government has promised something, promised a mechanism, in this case of a tribunal, and chose not to do so, and that record of lack of trust from this government continues.

Another example of the UCP . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member. Hon. members, can we keep our side conversations to a minimum or go into the lounge, please. Thank you. I'm just having trouble hearing the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you. I truly appreciate that, Madam Speaker, because it's just getting hard to hear myself, and, you know, I do appreciate the sound of my own voice.

But this is another example of the UCP failing Albertans. You know, they've asked us on multiple bills – again, I'm getting déjà vu. I think I spoke to three bills yesterday where that theme of lack of trust in this UCP government continued, and I'm also getting déjà vu in the sense that so many of the bills that this government has introduced this session lack any meat, right? I won't say all the bills but the bills that we've been debating recently. When we've asked this government, "Who have you consulted, who are you listening to on these bills, and which constituents are you hearing from?" they fail to rise and to defend where they landed at with their bills. I really want us to hear and am hoping again – and I know I'm sometimes joking in my approach of saying that I want to hear from the members opposite. I do. I do actually hope that they will rise and respond to some of our questions, our questions about the tribunal and the lack of a tribunal in this bill.

Will a tribunal be implemented, or has that Minister of Service Alberta decided that he's not going to address that at all? Perhaps it's coming in regulations. I don't know. Has the minister done a cost analysis comparing, for instance, the cost of a tribunal to the

cost of forcing condo disputes to the courts? Again, we don't know. Is the minister concerned about implementing a chargeback system that can allow corporations to charge condo owners without a tribunal to ensure that there is accountability within the condo corporation? I do think some of my colleagues have talked about this a little bit, that there are concerns about accountability.

Condo owners: again, I can be totally honest and say that I haven't heard concerns. You know, I have condo owners, of course, in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. I haven't heard much on this front, but I do trust my colleagues who have spoken – Edmonton-Decore, Edmonton-McClung, St. Albert – on this bill in sharing the concerns that they've heard from their constituents.

I don't want to present the misunderstanding that there hasn't been consultation on this bill. We know that there has been, and I understand and I appreciate that both representatives of condo properties as well as condo owners have provided some insights and have provided some support to this bill, but I want to hear from the minister. We all do. We just want to hear a little bit more about the consultative process. You know, were there alternate positions presented by condo owners, by condo representatives, stakeholders who took different positions? Those aren't reflected in this bill, so we want to hear a little bit more about the process.

10:30

Again, I know we're going to have many more questions. We've got more questions as well about just some of the pieces around voting, and I think some of my colleagues raised this last night in the Chamber, too.

You know, I just want to end my remarks by echoing something that Edmonton-Glenora spoke about, and that's just that housing is a big issue, right? Housing is a big issue in the riding that I represent. I said that I don't hear a lot from condo owners, but I actually hear a lot from unhoused folks because I talk to them. As I've shared in this House many times, just every day on my journey to work, whether I'm biking or driving, I come across folks who are unhoused or who are precariously housed. Of course, this bill does not address housing, but I hope that the minister responsible acknowledges that this is an opportunity for this government to invest in housing so that all Albertans have a place to call home. I hope that we will see more bills from this government that address the immediate need for housing.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 17 Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Acting Speaker: Are there any hon. members wishing to speak to Bill 17? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise, and on behalf of the Minister of Labour and Immigration I would like to move second reading of Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

Bill 17 introduces changes that would improve Albertans' access to bereavement and reservist leaves and maintain the status quo at postsecondary institutions on bereavement leave. Job-protected leaves like bereavement leave and reservist leave allow employees to take time away from work to attend to personal matters without fear of losing their job.

Madam Speaker, few situations are more personal or more heartbreaking than miscarriage and stillbirth; however, Alberta's laws currently do not explicitly include miscarriage and stillbirth as situations for which employees can take bereavement leave. To

recognize the pain and grief felt by parents who lose an unborn child, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, will extend bereavement leave to employees who experience a miscarriage or stillbirth. Proposed changes would allow any eligible employees who would have been a parent to take bereavement leave in order to make this leave as accessible as possible for employees during a very difficult time. For example, biological parents, adoptive parents, and surrogate parents would all be able to take bereavement leave when a stillbirth or miscarriage occurs.

Just in this time, Madam Speaker, I would like to recognize stakeholders that inspired my own private member's bill, which, in turn, I would like to think, and I believe so, helped inspire Bill 17. Of course, I won the lottery, the private members' lottery, last year. It was so amazing to put forward my own private member's bill, Bill 220, to support women and families as regards expanding bereavement leave to miscarriage and stillbirth. We want to ensure parents have the time they need to mourn and grieve the tragic loss of losing an unborn child without the fear of losing their job.

In my engagement with stakeholders, Madam Speaker, I want to recognize the incredible efforts and advocacy and expertise of Aditi Loveridge of the Pregnancy and Infant Loss Centre in Calgary, an incredible champion for supports for women and families, including as regards miscarriage and stillbirth. I also want to recognize and thank Dr. Janet Jaffe from the Center for Reproductive Psychology out of, I believe, San Diego, California, an expert in this field. When I was engaging with Dr. Jaffe, she had a really profound impact on my own understanding of the tragic loss and the emotional trauma, the mental health trauma from miscarriage and stillbirth. In the academic literature it shows that it takes two years for the parents and especially the mother to grieve the loss of an unborn child, and 1 in 4 women, unfortunately, will experience miscarriage and stillbirth.

I also want to thank the economic stakeholders who helped inform Bill 220 and as well informed, ultimately, Bill 17, Madam Speaker, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business as well as the chamber of commerce, to give the economic lens to getting this right at least as a first step forward with the expanded bereavement leave. They were telling me that most employers, as compassionate people, were allowing for this, for people to take time off work that they needed to grieve, anyway, but we wanted to also ultimately – and they were supportive of it, these important business and economic stakeholders – support a bill of this nature to recognize, elevate, and clarify in law that this situation of miscarriage and stillbirth needed to also be afforded dignity and included in Alberta's labour code. I'm grateful to them for that.

I also want to thank the members of this Legislature who were strong champions, supporters of the original Bill 220 and this whole initiative to expand bereavement leave and stillbirth to be included for bereavement leave. To begin, I just wanted to recognize and thank, on the opposition side, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for, during the private members' private bills engagement, very thoughtful commentary and inputs. Also, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview made me think a lot regarding the various types of leave, very thoughtful, thinking about all the types. We have bereavement leave, maternity leave, personal family responsibility leave, et cetera. Incredible contributions. As well, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud gave a very passionate, persuasive speech, I believe, during concurrence. I want to thank that member.

Then, also, on the government side this was a really great bill that brought people together, as does now Bill 17. I want to especially thank the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat as a strong champion. The Member for Peace River, the Member for Drayton Valley-

Devon, and, of course, the Member for West Yellowhead: all strong supporters of families and women.

Madam Speaker, I am grateful for everyone's continuing hard work and advocacy on the issue that touches so many Albertans' lives.

Aside from expanding eligibility for bereavement leave, Madam Speaker, the rules for bereavement leave will remain the same. Employees who have worked at least 90 days for the same employer can take up to three days' leave per calendar year when a family member dies. The leave length is three calendar days per year regardless of how many family members an employee may lose in a year. However, employees may also be able to take job-protected personal and family responsibility leave or long-term illness and injury leave in certain situations involving pregnancy loss or if they lose multiple family members in a calendar year and use up to their three days of bereavement leave. In some situations, Madam Speaker, birth mothers may be able to take maternity leave if a loss of pregnancy occurs within 16 weeks of their due date.

Employees must give their employer as much notice as possible to take bereavement leave but are not required to provide a medical note or other information. This leave is unpaid unless an employment contract or collective agreement states otherwise.

Granting bereavement leave in situations of miscarriage and stillbirth allows employees to spend time with their families and take care of themselves while knowing they still have a job to go back to. It is one way we can improve Alberta's job-protected leaves to show consideration for hard-working Albertans when they need time away for personal matters.

Now, Madam Speaker, on the important component of reservist leave, proposed changes to reservist leave in Bill 17 recognize the vital role reservists play in protecting the country by making sure they can take the time they need for annual training while keeping their civilian employment. Reservist leave allows Alberta's reservists who have worked at least 12 consecutive weeks for the same employer to take unpaid time away from their jobs to take part in annual training and Canadian Forces operations, and we thank them deeply for their service.

10:40

Bill 17 proposes changes that would remove the current 20-day limit on annual training leave so that reservists can take as much time as they need. The MLA for Leduc-Beaumont, who is Alberta's military liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces, has heard from military stakeholders that some reservists do not have enough time to complete annual training and have been using other entitlements such as vacation time to do so. I want to recognize the amazing MLA for Leduc-Beaumont for his advocacy and all of the Canadian Armed Forces members who shared their views with him, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, Alberta has about 3,000 reservists, who devote their time and skills to the country by responding to emergencies such as fires and floods as well as serving on international missions. These brave men and women should not have to use vacation time in order to complete annual training requirements. Removing the 20-day cap on the amount of time reservists can take for annual training is a flexible approach that allows them to be prepared for deployments and protect their fellow citizens while also participating in the workforce and earning a living.

If they are deployed on Canadian Forces operations, reservists will continue to be able to take leave for as long as needed. Reservists are and will continue to be required to give their employers four weeks' written notice and include their anticipated return-to-work date before taking reservist leave, which can help employers plan for their absence.

If passed, the changes to bereavement and reservist leave will take effect upon royal assent as they are expected to have limited impact on employers, particularly for bereavement leave. Also, we want the changes to be in effect for annual training that may be occurring this summer.

Postsecondary changes. In addition to expanding protections for Albertans who need time away from work, proposed changes in Bill 17, Madam Speaker, would allow academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellow associations to continue to give their members experienced representation at the collective bargaining table. Under current legislation academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellow associations have the exclusive right to represent their members in collective bargaining and negotiations, but this arrangement was to come to an end on July 1, 2022. If unchanged, this would result in other bargaining agents being able to potentially represent their members as of July 1. Proposed amendments would preserve the status quo, giving the associations the exclusive right of representation indefinitely.

Academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellow associations have the experience and expertise to represent their members, Madam Speaker. They also have existing relationships with postsecondary administrations, allowing them to continue to have the exclusive right to represent their members and ensuring a continuity of experience and expertise.

Continuing to give postsecondary associations the exclusive right to bargain on behalf of their members aligns with other parts of Alberta's public sector. For example, the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees has the exclusive right to represent government of Alberta employees.

The change will take effect on July 1, 2022, rather than upon royal assent. This will align with other already-scheduled changes for postsecondary institutions, Madam Speaker, which will allow them to create employer organizations for collective bargaining as of July 1, 2022.

Madam Speaker, the proposed changes in Bill 17 improve or maintain protections for Alberta's employees. They allow grieving employees who have lost an unborn child to take a few days to focus on themselves and their families without having to juggle the responsibilities of a job at the same time. They honour our men and women in uniform by making sure that reservists can take the time they need to fulfill annual reservist training responsibilities while still having a job to go back to, and they preserve the status quo for academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellow associations to recognize the role they play in representing their members. For these reasons, I am proud to move second reading of Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to second reading of Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, moved on behalf of the Minister of Labour and Immigration. Bill 17 will touch on three particular areas in Alberta labour law, and I'm going to speak briefly to each of these three.

First, it expands the current reservist leave that we have in our Alberta employment standards by removing the language around "up to 20 days in a calendar year." Now, Madam Speaker, the reservist force is an important part of our Canadian armed services. Reservists are primarily part-time service positions who often have other full-time employment, and the leave, the job-protected leave, ensures that when they are going out for training activities or other

service-related activities, their employment is protected, that they have their position to come back to.

Now, as I understand it, the removal of this 20 days in a calendar year, Madam Speaker, brings Alberta more in line with other jurisdictions so that reservists are not having to use vacation time or other time in order to meet their commitments. My understanding is that when it comes to the reservist leave, making sure that the impact on employers is minimized is something that the Department of National Defence encourages its members to do. As well, we know that there are a number of programs that are available to support reservists as well as their employers, namely the reservist assistance program and the compensation for employers of reservists program.

I am supportive of this change here in the Labour Statutes Amendment Act that will ensure that reservists have the time that they need and the job protection that will protect the employment and have that available to come back to.

The second change within Bill 17 is expanding bereavement leave and making explicit that it covers miscarriage and stillbirth. Madam Speaker, pregnancy loss can be a very, very tragic and difficult time for parents here in Alberta, and including specific language as well as language that's been, as I understand it, written to try and be as inclusive as possible to parents in all different types of scenarios where pregnancy loss can take place is a good change to our employment standards. Ensuring that these employees have access to three days per calendar year through the bereavement leave program and including that explicit language of miscarriage and stillbirth is very positive.

Now, I understand that as drafted, this section will also cover terminations for medical reasons and abortion. But it is not explicit in how this language is drafted. When it comes to this particular section, it is absolutely positive, but I think that the UCP government, in the drafting of this section, has missed an opportunity to make sure that it is as inclusive as possible and covers as many scenarios as possible.

The fact that, in moving this, the language was used that we needed to explicitly include miscarriage and stillbirth – certainly, I think that in order to make sure that we are protecting all parents who are going through pregnancy loss for all reasons, including for termination for medical reasons as well as for abortion – we need to make sure that that is explicitly clear as well. As we continue on through the debate on Bill 17, I look forward to hopefully bringing that conversation here into the Chamber.

I believe that when the private member's bill which is related to this section was debated in committee, Aditi Loveridge, who is the founder of the Pregnancy and Infant Loss Centre in Calgary, who, again, the mover of this bill acknowledged, certainly spoke to the need to have that kind of explicit reference. It's very positive that termination for medical reasons and abortion are covered, technically. That means that Albertans who are experiencing that type of pregnancy loss will be able to use the bereavement leave. Unfortunately, without that being explicit, I'm concerned that Albertans won't be aware of that. Really, this is a matter of clarity, just making sure that what is happening is made clear for all Albertans who may be wondering or curious or needing to know if this counts towards their particular situation.

10:50

Now, when Albertans are accessing these bereavement leaves, we do want to put on record that privacy, confidentiality, the amount of information that an employee needs to provide to the employer – employees do not need to provide medical notes or other details in order to access the three days of bereavement leave. My hope would be that the government, through their labour ministry website, would provide guidance to employees about how they can be taking these leaves, the steps involved, what information

they would have to require, and what information they would not. In order to access this bereavement leave, employees, I think, will be wondering how much they have to tell their employer. We're talking about some very, very sensitive and very personal experiences and, I know, for many, many Albertans, they would not necessarily want to disclose full details about what's happening.

I do want to acknowledge that the job-protected family and personal leave is also available to Albertans, and having that job-protected leave, I think, is really important to support Albertans in all sorts of scenarios because the bereavement leave is limited to three days in a single calendar year. Certainly, we know that pregnancy loss can happen more than once in a particular year, especially for families that are trying to become parents.

Certainly, as I became an adult, even though we took the sexual health courses in high school, the high prevalence of miscarriage and other pregnancy loss was something that I wasn't fully aware of until I and my friends who are of child-bearing years, many of them were actively trying to become pregnant and trying to become parents. Then all of a sudden you realize that it's not as easy for many people as your sex ed health teachers maybe tried to scare you into thinking that it would be. You can get pregnant with one time, but also there are people who struggle for years trying to get pregnant.

People aren't always aware how common miscarriage is. I know a lot of women can sometimes carry very complicated emotions: grief as well as shame, or feeling like they have done something wrong or have a personal responsibility. I believe the mover in the speech mentioned that 1 in 4 pregnancies can result in miscarriage. It's quite high. Having open conversations about this is really, really important, and having access to the bereavement job-protected leave is positive, but having a strong job-protected leave system is really important.

I was very proud, as the minister of labour under the previous government, to expand our job-protected leaves significantly. Albertans had access to way fewer job-protected leaves than other Canadians, and it hadn't been reviewed. I believe that particular section hadn't been significantly reviewed and changed in decades.

Seeing this update today and the clarity provided for miscarriage and stillbirth is positive. Certainly, I would like to see clarity added for terminations for medical reasons and for abortion, which we understand are covered. That is the response we've received through technical briefings and that has been given to the media, but without it being explicitly included, Albertans might not be aware of that. If it is covered, making that explicit, I think, would be a very positive change and would match the feedback that we heard through the private members' bills committee, when experts like Aditi came to the committee to share their perspective on this section.

Very positive change to employment standards – we hope to improve it with some clarity as we get into debate on this bill through Committee of the Whole. I certainly look forward to hearing more from stakeholders as debate continues on Bill 17.

The final section is changes to the Labour Relations Code. We've got two changes to leaves in the employment standards section and then this change to the Labour Relations Code, and I want to speak very briefly to the history of this. Prior to 2017, within the postsecondary sector, labour relations and postsecondary, there was not the right to strike or lockout. They were not governed under a strike and lockout system. In 2015 a Supreme Court ruling, specifically the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour case in early 2015, deemed that all public-sector employees have the right to collectively bargain and the right to remove their labour as part of free association in a trade union or a faculty association or with some other bargaining agent.

As a result of that, the NDP government at the time needed to update Alberta's labour relations bargaining to make sure that public-sector employees had the right to strike, and essential services legislation was introduced. But at that time postsecondary, including faculty associations and others, was not included. We embarked on a very intense engagement with those stakeholders because postsecondary labour relations was in quite a different state. Probably from fall of 2015 until Bill 7 was introduced in spring of 2017, consultation with the postsecondary sector around labour relations was held, and major changes were brought in to make sure that the unique nature of postsecondary was taken into account while the constitutionally protected rights for collective bargaining were brought up into Alberta's labour relations system. A new division of the Labour Relations Code for the postsecondary sector was created at that time, and a collective bargaining process that respects the rights of workers and employers was put into place to meet the needs of the Supreme Court ruling.

Now, one of the pieces of feedback that we heard was that because postsecondary had never had the right to strike or to be locked out, the system would need some time to adapt to this. From 2015, when we started consultation, to 2017, when the legislation was put in, certainly the sector, through consultation with the government, knew that a new strike-lockout regime was coming. The exact form of that was what the consultation was put in place for. To that end, one of the pieces of feedback we heard was that moving immediately to allowing the workers to choose bargaining agents could potentially be disruptive. So exclusive bargaining rights were provided to faculty associations for a time of I believe it was about five years, with that five years expiring June 1, 2022, this year. The change in Bill 17 is going to enshrine that exclusive right so that these workers are represented by their current faculty associations. Without the change in Bill 17, the workers would have the right to choose their bargaining agent.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Certainly, we've seen a big shift in Alberta. Our postsecondary system didn't have the right to strike or lockout. Then the Supreme Court ruling came, legislation was introduced through Bill 7 in 2017, and now we have seen, particularly with pressure on the postsecondary system by the UCP government through significant, significant funding cuts, that we have had a number of strike and lockout situations. I'm thinking about Lethbridge. I'm thinking about Concordia here in Edmonton. The faculty associations have shown themselves to be responding to the difficult negotiating circumstances, again because of the UCP government's funding cuts to postsecondary, and have been able to secure agreements that the workers have voted for and are pleased with. It has not been easy. Strikes and lockouts are incredibly difficult, but having our collective bargaining system in a place that respects the rights to bargain of the workers is incredibly important.

11:00

Now, we are currently consulting with the faculty associations across Alberta about the change in Bill 17, because we now have – our postsecondary system has been under the strike and lockout regime and has had those rights. We've now started to see those play out in collective bargaining situations across the province. Bill 17 purports to remove the right to choose your bargaining agent, something that was coming. For the Official Opposition and for myself, given that our original consultations were held in that time frame of 2015 to 2017 – here we are in 2022 – it's really important to me that we find out more about what the impacted workers and associations think about the change in Bill 17 to provide exclusive right.

Now, the mover of Bill 17 did acknowledge that there are other areas where exclusive bargaining rights are provided. Specifically, he mentioned the scenario with AUPE, and that's certainly the case. I would note that there's a significant size difference when we talk about the size of the bargaining units when you're comparing AUPE to faculty associations at smaller colleges, universities around the province. I'm very curious how that might impact workers' opinions about their bargaining rights and the right to choose their bargaining agent.

Interestingly, we've sent out some initial queries, and we're hearing back that these important stakeholders, that this directly impacts, were not consulted by the UCP government, so I'm very concerned to hear that. At this point, when it comes to the change to bargaining, I feel strongly that respecting all workers' rights to free, fair, collective bargaining is incredibly important. Removing the right to choose their bargaining agent could be of concern, but we are hoping to find out more from stakeholders, their perspectives so that we can bring that here into the Chamber during continued debate on Bill 17.

The government is correct that Bill 17 in its current form would essentially maintain the status quo. What has been happening for the past five years, whether that is a good thing or not, I want to find out more. I do want to acknowledge that certainly the faculty associations have proven themselves to be more than capable in the bargaining that they've had with their employers to date, again, given the pressure the UCP government has put on the postsecondary sector. I certainly would suggest that removing the exclusive right wouldn't necessarily mean that other bargaining agents would become involved given that scenario, but it would become a possibility.

These are my initial thoughts on the three main provisions of Bill 17. I'm certainly supportive of the changes to the reservists' leave, supportive of the changes to explicitly include miscarriage or stillbirth, and very, very glad to know that terminations for medical reason and abortion are covered by these sections. I'm concerned that that's not explicitly included and how misleading that could be for Albertans, how difficult it could be for Albertans to understand that the bereavement leave applies for their scenarios as well, and I would like to see that potentially changed as we go through debate.

Finally, on the labour relations changes, given what I know of the history of this and that my most recent consultation with the stakeholders impacted is a little bit out of date, we're reaching out to the stakeholders to find out more about their thoughts. I hope to have more to say about those sections of the bill further on in debate.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this chance to respond.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise here this morning to provide some initial comments here around Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. You know, I guess, full disclosure, any time that I see labour legislation coming before the House, certainly the hair on the back of my neck stands up momentarily because, you know, we have seen some changes in the past that have not moved Alberta forward here. The good news is that I'm not seeing that here in Bill 17. I certainly have some questions that I will get to throughout my remarks about the bill. Obviously, we'll probably get a better opportunity later on in debate through Committee of the Whole to maybe get some answers to that and maybe even make some suggestions for some potential changes. I'll get to those also in my remarks here as well.

You know, I should point out, though, that it is interesting that as we debate this bill for the first time here today, coincidentally it also falls on the Day of Mourning, which, of course, is a day that we stop and recognize all the people who left us due to occupational hazards in the workplace. The loss of those members to their families is difficult. I think when we have the opportunity to talk about these kinds of things in regard to labour standards and things like that, we should always be keeping these things in mind. We always say that you should be able to go to work, put in a fair day's work there for a fair day's pay, and be able to go home to your family with, as my former president used to say, all 10 fingers and all 10 toes and be able to get up the next morning and do it all over again.

As my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods pointed out, we've got a couple of different changes here. I'll probably kind of go off some of her remarks here that she had brought forward. I will thank her for, you know, her time when she was labour minister and having to deal with some of the changes that occurred with that Supreme Court decision around the right for an individual to be able to strike. As we know, there were sectors, there were individuals that didn't have that. They should have. Personally, I believe that was a decision that was really a long time coming.

When you're looking at the workplace and collective bargaining and whatnot, really, the only thing that employees have to be able to try to convince the employer to, like I say, either improve working conditions, improve benefits, improve pay, or improve language, the only real tool they have in their tool box is to withdraw their labour. That's really the only avenue they have.

Now, as someone, again, who was very active during my time in labour with UFCW local 401, I visited many strike lines, I worked on a few strike lines, I've been on my own strike line. At the end of the day, you know, really, it doesn't matter whether it's a lockout or a strike, nobody wins out of that. It creates problems for the employees. It creates problems for the employer. Really, it comes down to just a failure to listen.

Out of that, obviously, as my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods was talking about, the changes in the postsecondary sector, one of those groups that, you know, back at a time when she had to try to navigate how to bring that forward to the Supreme Court, didn't have the ability to strike, and of course conversely, the employer didn't have the ability to lock them out either. Obviously, you don't normally see a lot of lockouts. You normally see a lot of strikes. Again, things have usually degraded pretty much when those start to become a reality.

11:10

You know, for myself, I guess I'm a little bit uncomfortable, would probably be the words I could use, around dictating the exclusive bargaining agent for the postsecondary sector. I know the example being used is that AUPE is the exclusive bargaining agent for the public sector, and, as everybody knows, AUPE is the largest public-sector union in the province and has been at it for a very, very long time, but when you're talking about basically a brand new sector having that ability, the reality is that that ability to potentially change your bargaining agent does, to some degree, provide a little bit of pressure on that bargaining agent to make sure that they do continue to do all the things that they should be doing.

I will be the first to admit that there are an example or two of what, I believe, are not very good unions. You know, UFCW has been very vocal about that with regard to how they treat their members, not necessarily bargaining in the best interests of their members. And when those kinds of situations happen, the only way the membership can resolve that is to potentially look for another bargaining agent.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, during my time participating with 401, I certainly heard stories – I've never been able to participate in the process – of members approaching 401 saying: "Our union isn't looking after us. Would you please represent us?" The first choice the 401 took was: let's talk to your bargaining agent and see how it is that they could improve. The reality of why they do that is because when you drop your bargaining agent, there is risk involved with that, especially if the bargaining agent has been around for a while and you've had a few successive contracts. I mean, any wins that you have had through the bargaining process, be it wage increases, benefit increases, stronger language around health and safety, some of the different leaves that are available – of course, I'll be talking about those shortly here – those are at risk because the employer can then turn around and start from ground zero. So it's not necessarily in the best interest to drop your bargaining agent, which is why 401 would always try to work with them to try to improve that relationship between their members and prevent any of those potential losses there.

I guess to kind of wrap up my comments a little bit around this section with the postsecondary units here, you know, when you're directing an exclusive bargaining agent, then, are there some checks and balances in place? In other words, if the membership is unhappy, they can't potentially go and look for another, so do they have the ability, then, to perhaps vote on changing the leadership? Sometimes that's what it is. I mean, not everybody gets into a position of leadership with others in mind. They're more interested in their own fortunes. That's the unfortunate part of that. So do members have opportunities with which to be able to change that leadership?

I know that for 401 there's always a cycle for that, where they get to choose the leadership of the union and even the vice-president, that are chosen from all over the province from different bargaining units and companies, so again kind of that check and balance that's in place. You still have the leadership from the bargaining agent, but then you have members that participate within those decision-makings. I'd like to know potentially what kind of checks and balances are in place.

The membership having the ability to have their say on any negotiations that take place. Again, if you have an exclusive bargaining agent, do they start going down that road where it's like, "This is the deal, and this is what you're going to take"? That, in my opinion, doesn't work out. I'll look forward to seeing some more discussions around that.

Certainly, as my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods had pointed out around the lack of consultation, that concerns me greatly. When you're starting to mess around with legislation and putting in exclusive rights, why didn't you connect with all sides, not only the potential exclusive bargaining agent but their membership as well to get that input to inform the best language possible? Like I said, at the end of the day – I've said this in other debates as well – when we're forming language here in this House, it's not for us. We know what was going on. We know what was said in the debate. You know, 20 years from now, when we're not around to answer questions or try to explain how things went, can somebody interpret clearly what's going on? We tend to miss that mark when it comes to that.

The other section here, around the changes to reservists. You know, Edmonton-Decore is in northeast Edmonton. Straight up 97th Street you head out to the Namao base. It's there. Not only do I have full-time members of the Canadian Armed Forces, but reservists live there as well. Any time that we can endeavour to be able to make things easier for them in terms of job protections and the commitment that they've made to service – as we know, there

are always changes in technologies, things like that. Just like regular forces members, reservists have to stay on top of that as well. So if they find themselves being deployed simply for training but then they start, as I say, watching the clock because their employer is expecting them back on, say, Monday but they're not actually going to be done their training until Monday, for instance, now that pressure starts to come back in order for them to be able to keep their jobs. We certainly don't want to see that kind of thing occur, so I think the changes here that are being mentioned for reservists in Bill 17 are good.

That now brings us to bereavement and the changes being suggested here. As the Member for Sherwood Park brought the opening comments on behalf of the minister, I would like to recognize him for his time when he brought Bill 220 forward to the private members' bills committee. I did get the opportunity, of course, to review that bill as a member of that committee, and I was happy to see that he brought that conversation to the forefront. I do understand, again, that he was bringing forward comments on behalf of the minister of labour, but there would be one tiny, little thing I will challenge him on in his remarks, and that was where he was saying that pretty much most employers understand when it comes to different leaves.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to Bill 17 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak in second reading of Bill 17. I actually am very pleased to be able to respond even to the Member for Sherwood Park, who introduced this bill as a private member's bill last session, or at least a portion of this bill, I should say, brought it forward as a private member's bill, Bill 220.

11:20

That was, I think, a rare opportunity in this House, where we saw absolute, unanimous consensus in this House around the need to offer some bereavement leave for those who have suffered pregnancy loss. It was very important to hear the perspectives of so many in this Chamber and to realize, you know, that we do actually have many things that we share values and views on, and one is supporting women and people who have suffered pregnancy loss and to recognize that there are things we can do to support those who have.

I know Bill 17 contains some other provisions that are very relevant. I don't take issue, particularly, with the provision around extending reservist leave and removing sort of that limit on how many leave days can be taken for reservists. I should note that that issue was also something that we had consensus in this House around when it was brought forward as a private member's bill from the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, which was that we do support, you know, encouraging those who participate as reservists and offering them the supports they need to be able to do that, because it's important to serve our communities. Lifting that 20-day limit is something that, again, we stand in support of in this House.

I do want to focus my comments primarily on the issue of the bereavement leave for those who've experienced pregnancy loss. I want to begin by acknowledging what many of us have in this House already; first of all, the work of those in our communities who provide supports to those who suffer pregnancy loss: doctors, medical practitioners, health care workers, and the important work of groups such as the Pregnancy and Infant Loss Centre in Calgary. I, too, as have many of my colleagues, have had the opportunity to meet with Aditi Loveridge. I know the great work and important work that she does.

As we've talked about in this House, it is true that in Alberta 1 in 4 pregnancies ends in miscarriage. That is a statistic. I just want to highlight that that means that even in this Chamber there are a number of women that likely, according to the statistics, have suffered pregnancy loss. I know some members of this House have shared their personal experiences, either about hopes of becoming pregnant as well as challenges, maybe friends and family. During the debate on concurrence on private member's Bill 220 I shared my own personal experience as somebody who has experienced pregnancy loss. In fact, I experienced two miscarriages prior to the birth of my son and then my daughter a couple of years later.

You know, when we talk about pregnancy loss, one of the reasons why we talk about that statistic, about how common and frequent it is, is because it's surprising to many Albertans and to many people to know that so many pregnancies result in loss. We talk about it because it is something that is still shrouded in secrecy. The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods talked about it very eloquently.

Yes, for women who experience it, there's often guilt. There's shame. There's grief. There are physical symptoms. There are a lot of complications around the feelings. But it also can be incredibly isolating. You don't know that so many other women in your life may have also experienced pregnancy loss, so you do feel very alone when it happens and because there are often complicated emotions, not just around the loss but oftentimes around the pregnancy itself. Sometimes a woman might not even be aware that she was pregnant until she experiences a miscarriage. There are many, many complicated feelings. Of course, miscarriage is often unexpected and abrupt, so when it happens, a woman is not prepared for all of those emotions and feelings. It is easy, as I did myself, to remain isolated and to not really reach out and seek support and to not even name what's happening.

For myself, Madam Speaker, you know, my pregnancy loss occurred only after about a week to 10 days of me even knowing I was pregnant. At that time my husband and I had not informed family or friends yet that I was pregnant. We were very early on in the pregnancy. It is something that we had debated for many years, about whether we wanted to have children. We were married for six years before we decided that we were ready and that we wanted to have children, and then when we did, we felt all that rush of joy that parents who want to become parents experience: the excitement, the knowing that your life is going to be radically changed in ways you couldn't even begin to fathom. You start to think, as a woman, about the physical changes that are going to be happening. I mean, for those seven to 10 days it was actually like a wonderful secret that we were enjoying, sharing this thing between us that we knew was happening. Then abruptly it was gone.

Because we had not shared with family and friends that we were pregnant or that we were even trying to have a child, we didn't know how to communicate that we'd lost the pregnancy. In fact, my mother only found out that I was pregnant because I was on hour six at the emergency room at the hospital and my husband had to go do something urgently. He didn't want to leave me alone, so he called my mother. The first time my mother found out that I was pregnant was actually when I had lost the pregnancy.

It was, you know, very emotional and physically uncomfortable as well. I mean, it came with significant pain and bleeding. This happened on a Saturday morning. It began on a Saturday morning, and then I went home, and then I went to work on Monday. In the context of bereavement leave – now, I went to work on Monday because I was still not comfortable sharing that I had even been pregnant, so I certainly wasn't comfortable sharing that I'd lost the pregnancy.

In retrospect, of course, I knew – you know, at the time I told myself that I was fine, that I was okay, that I'll go to work. I can tell you I was not okay. I think back, and there were a couple of meetings that I had during that time where I recall now that I was incredibly emotional about something that should not have been emotional, and I realize now that, of course, I was experiencing a lot of complicated grief and emotions and guilt and still some physical symptoms of my miscarriage. I didn't even know, really, in my mind at that time that it was a possibility to even say: I'm not going to go to work because I've experienced pregnancy loss. It was too complicated, and I didn't know how to do that, so I did go to work.

I want to take this time – I made these comments during debate on concurrence for private member's Bill 220, but I want to make them again because I do think it's important. When we're talking about leave and employment for women when they're pregnant, have lost a pregnancy, are on maternity leave, parental leave, all of those things, we can't talk about it in the absence of acknowledging that there are still some barriers that women face in the workplace that are related to having children.

One of the reasons, Madam Speaker, that I did not even think to take leave from work that day or that week or even articulate to my boss at the time was that I was afraid for my employer to know. I shouldn't say "afraid"; that's a strong word. I was uncomfortable at that time with my employer knowing that I was even contemplating having children. I was afraid that that would have implications for my work. I was not prepared to tell them that I maybe was actively trying to get pregnant, because I thought that that could affect the likelihood that, you know, major projects, major work would come my way because I was going to be seen as somebody who might be leaving in the near future to take a leave. I also knew that that might affect the quality of work that I was given, because if I was pregnant and had a baby and went on parental leave, I could be absent for a large period of time.

When we're talking about employment leave, I think that's an important aspect, but I still want to highlight how important it is to talk about the broader implications that still affect women in the workforce. Let me be clear. I had that first miscarriage, and I had a second miscarriage seven weeks later. At that time I ended up taking a week off work, and I took that week as sick leave. Now, I was fortunate to work in an employment situation where not only did I have a good number of sick leave days, but they were paid sick leave days.

11:30

While I support job-protected leave – I think it's incredibly important – I do want to highlight that there are still incredible barriers, particularly for women in certain employment situations. If they don't make a lot of money, to take unpaid leave is not an easy thing, and many women – not even just women. When we're talking about leave of this kind, while they may appreciate knowing they have job-protected leave, if it's unpaid leave, they still may not take it. And while I know that there is a hesitancy to require paid leave in legislation here – that's often left to employers, and I won't dig into the debate we had around paid leave during COVID – I don't want to stand here and pretend that unpaid leave is a solution for all women in the workforce. It can still present a significant barrier to know that they will lose pay to take these leave days, and that will prevent many women from actually seeking this leave.

I wanted to talk about that because I think it is really important to consider the context. If we're trying to lower barriers and support women who have experienced pregnancy loss, we have to consider that whole slew of all the other challenges they face in the workplace related to working in – you know, I'm a lawyer by training. I was in legal work. Enormous privilege. I mean, my pay

was above, obviously, the average pay of Albertans, and I still hesitated to talk to my employer about the reasons for my leave. So we can imagine that a woman making minimum wage, which – by the way, most of those who are earning minimum wage in this province are women, many of which are single mothers. They will have significant barriers still to seeking this kind of bereavement leave. I felt that that was important to point out.

My colleagues have mentioned, and I want to highlight as well, that I appreciate that there has been discussion publicly about what's in Bill 17 and whether or not the wording of Bill 17 leave extends to termination of pregnancy for medical reasons as well as abortion. I was very heartened when we had this discussion on private member's Bill 220 that there seemed to be consensus from all members of this House that any bereavement leave for pregnancy loss should include abortion and termination for medical reasons. I was very encouraged to hear that there was consensus. I think it's important, though, that that clarity be in the legislation. I understand that the minister has said publicly that it does not prevent taking bereavement leave for abortion or termination for medical reasons, but of course the language in the legislation is specific to miscarriage and stillbirth.

Again, we are talking about an unbalanced relationship where employees may feel hesitant and may not want to put forward that they've had an abortion or to make their case. My concern is that the way it's drafted right now, it may not be obvious to employers that that includes abortion and termination for medical reasons, and it puts, then, the onus on the employee to advocate for that. Let's be clear that this is already deeply personal. We've talked already about the shame and the guilt and the trauma, and that applies to women who have experienced abortion as well as termination for medical reasons. To put, then, that woman in the position of having to sort of educate their employer that this leave covers their circumstances as well, I think, is an unfair onus to put on women, again, especially if the goal is to support these women through these challenging times.

I do take this government at its word that they do intend to include abortion, they do intend to include termination for medical reasons in these provisions, but I think this is not just about providing assurance to us as the Official Opposition that this is included in the bill. I think it's incredibly important to provide that assurance to Albertans because, as we know, when legislation leaves this Chamber, it goes out into the world and into workplaces, and there are going to be employers and employees and Albertans who will be trying to understand and apply it in their day-to-day lives. It is our job, I believe, as responsible legislators to make it as clear as possible that we are including all these circumstances and not put that obligation on to employees, to try to inform their employers about that. You know, when we're talking about abortions, I mean, that's not a small portion of women. The average in Alberta – in 2020 12,000 women had abortions. And that's actually . . . [Ms Pancholi's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to Bill 17 in second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In the few minutes that I have before we adjourn at 11:45 to pay our respects in various ways to a couple of situations that are ongoing, I want to extend my thoughts of appreciation both to people on this side and people on that side, the Member for Sherwood Park, who spoke to this issue on behalf of the Minister of Labour and Immigration. Bill 17: this is my first time debating this issue in the House. I wasn't here for the debate of private member's Bill 220, but I'm heartened

to hear that there was so much consensus going forward with regard to the items, issues brought up in that bill and also this one.

I want to spend a few minutes speaking in support of various aspects of this bill, particularly as my colleague from Edmonton – where are you from?

Ms Gray: Mill Woods.

Member Ceci: Edmonton-Mill Woods. Well, there's a lot of Edmonton here.

Anyway, I just want to spend some time talking, as my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods did, on how the reservist leave, expanding that to the time necessary for the training for reservists to keep up their skills and abilities and serve our country, is a really positive thing. I learned, too, from my colleague that there are – and I think these are federal programs: the reservist assistance program and compensation for employers of reservists. There is a great deal of recognition both from the federal government and the provincial government now, that want to support reservists in their efforts and their training and their services. To know that there are 3,000 Albertans who will benefit from this change is a positive step in the right direction and one that we can all be proud that we've taken on behalf of that group of individuals.

The second thing I wanted to just recognize is, just as my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud was saying a few moments ago – and, certainly, not having the personal experiences that were just relayed to us in a sensitive and a passionate way by my colleague, I think and want to underline that being as inclusive as possible on this issue, particularly on the issue of termination of pregnancy for medical reasons and abortion, is important for the various reasons that were identified by my colleague. I think persons may not be aware that they are eligible for those three days of bereavement leave if it's not explicitly written down.

The fewer hoops a person has to undergo to take this leave, to be seen as entitled to this leave, is a good thing, is a positive thing. I know that on both sides of the aisle here there's a tacit understanding that that will take place, but as my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud and the previous speaker before that person spoke to this issue, if it's not clear, then it can be misinterpreted, and that's the last thing that a person in that situation needs. I would hope – I want to put on the record as well that I think that when we have the opportunity to be as clear as possible, we should be. The fact that it's left to a tacit understanding means it's not as good a bill as it could be.

11:40

The third thing that I wanted to put on the record, I guess, is that with regard to the exclusivity bargaining rights of the various

faculty or postgraduate and graduate students' representatives, I too don't understand why that is being extended at this point. There was an extension or a burn-in period from 2017 to this period of time, or July 1, 2022, but I don't understand the bargain that's been made to continue to extend that. I haven't heard that answered either from the Member for Sherwood Park, who raised it or spoke to this bill at second reading, introduced it, or indeed people on this side who have spoken to this issue. I think that it is – I'm uncertain why. I know that it's easier for those current representatives who are bargaining on behalf of those groups to have it extended and to be in an exclusive situation, but I don't know why they're being granted it aside from it's easier, and it's kind of like a not rocking the boat kind of thing. If somebody could speak to that at some point, that would be helpful for me to kind of think about where my support is going to go for this bill.

I certainly want to support other aspects of this bill, as I said, that I think make great sense, and I'm glad they're here. I'm glad that it's an improvement, a further clarification on I think it was Bill 7 or 6, that we brought in years ago.

The other thing I'd like to briefly, briefly cover is the previous legislation, Bill 220, expanding bereavement leave. That was introduced in 2021. As I said, I wasn't part of that committee that reviewed that, but it was really great to hear that there was so much collegiality going on in that committee. I think, you know, if members of the public understood that that was the case, they would perhaps have a different understanding of the work of this House and the collective members, too often seen as too partisan, where good ideas on one side are rejected out of hand because they come from a side that you're not a part of. But when I heard that we in that committee and, it seems like, today are able to get along with the recommendations in a bill or a private member's bill, that's a positive thing.

With that said, under the understanding that it's about 11:45, I will adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker: You have one minute.

Member Ceci: One minute? Okay.

The Deputy Speaker: Happy to adjourn, too.

Member Ceci: You're not of the understanding that it's 11:45?

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, no. That looks about 45. Hon. members, the clock strikes 11:45. The House stands adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 11:45 a.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, April 28, 2022

Day 26

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 28, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we'll now be led in the singing of *God Save the Queen* by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. I invite you to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble Queen,
God save the Queen!
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the Queen!

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Members' 10th Anniversary of Election

The Speaker: Hon. members, today marks a very auspicious occasion. April 23, 2022, marked the 10th anniversary of the first election of three of our hon. colleagues in this Assembly. It may interest you to know that there have only ever been 956 members who have served this Assembly, but perhaps more interestingly only 296 of them have ever survived to serve 10 years. I would like to invite the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to join me here at the dais to receive their 10-year anniversary pins. [applause]

It's my great pleasure to congratulate each and every one of you for reaching this milestone. Thank you for your dedicated service on behalf of your constituents. In particular, today we've had the pleasure to have some of your family members joining us here, who I will introduce in just a moment, but a special thank you to each and every family member, who has also made sacrifices for these individuals to serve for the time that they have.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us in the Speaker's gallery today are some very special guests of the hon. the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I'm pleased to introduce his family to you all, beginning with his partner Traci Bednard, his daughters Ella Violet Hudson and Olive Helena Ann Bilous. It's very clear she has her mother's genes.

Also joining them in the gallery today are his parents Orest and Mary Ann Bilous and his father-in-law and mother-in-law Barb and Gene Bednard. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Equally as important, in particular, for this hon. member, the Deputy Government House Leader, joining us today are his mother-in-law – I'm sure he's going to be on his best behaviour as a result – and his sister-in-law, Caroline and Lauren Malner. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members, seated in the galleries today are several guests of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I'd ask you to rise as I introduce you: Hazel Vicklund of the Peavine Métis settlement; Herb Lehr, president of the Metis Settlements General Council; Sherry Cunningham, vice-president of the Metis Settlements General

Council; and the chairs and councils of the eight Métis settlements. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Last but certainly not least, we have guests of the hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge joining us today. Please welcome Devinder Gill and Dharminder Sanghera.

And last but certainly not least are the children of the chief of staff to the hon. Minister of Transportation and the Speaker: Henry and Sam Hastman. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and Opposition House Leader.

National Day of Mourning

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year we set aside April 28 to remember those Albertans who died from workplace-related illness or injury. On the National Day of Mourning we remember those we lost and think of those they left behind. Last year there were 178 fatalities in Alberta, according to the Workers' Compensation Board, and thousands more who suffered work-related illness or injury. These are 178 Albertans who got up every day and worked hard to support themselves, their families, and their communities, and we must remember their sacrifice. A single death touches so many lives, leaving friends and families grieving, co-workers and communities heartbroken.

We must also think of those who were injured or suffered a disability as a result of a workplace incident. These incidents alter lives, often permanently. What makes them doubly tragic is that so many injuries are preventable.

Safe workplaces are not a luxury, they are not a nice-to-have, and despite what this government says, they are not red tape. They are a fundamental right. Every worker deserves to go to work knowing they will come home safely at the end of the day. Employers, workers, unions, industry organizations, and government all have the responsibility to make sure that happens.

Mr. Speaker, we should also reflect on what we have asked of front-line workers during this pandemic and what it has cost. Last year we lost 31 Albertans due to workplace-acquired COVID-19; 10 of those were health care workers who put their lives at risk to fight this deadly virus. We know it didn't have to be this way. New figures from the Canadian Institute for Health Information shows that Alberta health care workers contracted COVID-19 and died at rates higher than the national average. The irresponsibility of this government put our hospital systems under excruciating strain and put the heroes of this pandemic directly in harm's way. They deserved better. We must do better. Thank you to all Albertans who worked through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Teacher Disciplinary Process and Bill 15

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Alberta Teachers' Association released polling as part of their campaign against Bill 15. This is not the first poll the ATA has released that includes self-selected participation from their membership. The poll released yesterday polled 825 ATA members, which is less than 2 per cent of Alberta teachers. This polling concluded on February 17, yet this legislation wasn't tabled until March 31. Yes, that's right. They conducted polling on a bill that was not even tabled in this Assembly yet. Much like the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who several weeks ago criticized the

new curriculum in the media before she even read it, the ATA was polling their members and Albertans on a bill before it even existed.

1:40

As the Minister of Education has said many times, the majority of teachers and teacher leaders will never experience the discipline process. The same goes for the majority of Alberta families. I'm thankful for that. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, many of the individuals that have experienced the process have had negative experiences. Kelly Schneider, a former student at John Ware junior high school in Calgary, said, "The ATA's policy failed me as a student and, had it been changed, could have prevented many other victims of sexual assault." Todd Snow, a parent who experienced this process first-hand, said: "As parents we have been very disappointed in the current ATA disciplinary process. Students, parents and the public need to know we have an advocate separate from the teachers' union and that our voices will be heard."

The perceived bias of the union conducting hearings and recommending punishment in this process is not trusted by many victims, is not trusted by many parents, and has created serious problems within the disciplinary process. Mr. Speaker, Bill 15 aims to change that. Bill 15 will ensure that the entire teaching profession is protected by bringing all teachers and teacher leaders under one reformed disciplinary process no matter who they work for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

National Day of Mourning

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've seen just about every kind of work our great province has to offer. I've worked the rigs, the sawmills, the construction sites, the farms, the ranches, even pulled 40-wheelers down our highways, and more. Through all my experience as an employee and an employer, I have learned that there's nothing more important than safety on the job site. Today is the National Day of Mourning, when we take time to recognize all those who did not make it home at the end of their workdays.

Last year 178 Albertans, tragically, died while at work. Right now our government is working on improving our occupational health and safety standards to reduce these tragic incidents from 178 to zero. We updated Alberta's occupational health and safety code to help workers and job creators secure the safety of their work sites and support Alberta's economic recovery, something that hadn't been done since 2009. We streamlined the occupational health and safety code following intensive engagement with businesses and health and safety professionals, and we are keeping up to date with changing trends, arranging updates to the occupational health and safety code on a three-year staggered basis to ensure that we are keeping up with the industry best practices as technology rapidly changes.

Mr. Speaker, one workplace death is too many. Alberta has realized a slow decline in workplace accidents, injuries, and deaths over the past several years, but we must remain vigilant. I can say from experience that there is nothing more satisfying than putting in a hard day's work on a safe and responsible job site. On this National Day of Mourning we pray for those who have lost their lives, their friends, their co-workers, and their families, and we vow to work towards improving safety standards for all. God bless all those we have lost. We will continue to do better for all Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is next.

Métis Settlements Governance

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to be joined here today by many members of the Métis settlements of Alberta up in the public gallery. These are dedicated community leaders focused and working hard for the people and communities that they represent. I consider myself lucky to have been able to know and work with each and every member of this council and know them as friends and, more importantly, respect them as partners, something this government has refused to do.

There is no clearer evidence of the lack of basic respect for this group of exceptional public servants than Bill 57. This government passed Bill 57 without a second being spent on consulting with those who it would most impact. The UCP took away the basic democratic rights for the Métis settlements to determine how they want to be governed and, in fact, imposed a system designed to be dysfunctional. Lo and behold, they have created a system rife with dysfunction. The UCP requires unanimous consent of all eight settlements to access funding. This is a rule that no other organization is bound by but one that the UCP decided to impose without a word of consultation.

This means that there are unacceptable delays in their ability to access funding for basic services. This government has removed income sources from them, refused to provide adequate funding for the basic needs of the Metis Settlements General Council, and more. These concerns and worries are not new to the government. I have been raising them, the MSGC has been raising them, and community members have been raising them, but this government has steadfastly refused to listen or change course.

Mr. Speaker, to those in the gallery today, I want to thank them for their hard work and patience, and I want to apologize on behalf of this government, who doesn't value them enough to consult with them or to listen to them. They deserve better. They deserve a government that respects them and will treat them as the valuable partners that they are, and I want them to know that the Alberta NDP will always be there as full partners in reconciliation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Hydrogen Week

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week, April 25 to 29, is Hydrogen Week. Hydrogen represents the next great opportunity for Alberta's energy sector, with huge potential benefits for the economy and for the global effort to reduce emissions. Hydrogen is a low-cost carbon fuel. When it's burned for energy or used in a fuel cell, it only emits water. This means it has the potential to be a major source of clean energy to meet the world's needs. It can be used for powering vehicles, providing electricity, and generating heat.

Alberta already is the largest hydrogen producer in Canada. We have all the resources, expertise, and technology needed to quickly become a global supplier of clean hydrogen. Last fall our government released a hydrogen road map to outline a path to build on our existing strength and establish Alberta as a leader in the global hydrogen economy.

Hydrogen Week coincides with the first-ever Canadian Hydrogen Convention, which will wrap up today in Edmonton. This inaugural event has brought together some of the brightest minds and decision-makers from around the world. The convention is exploring the opportunities and challenges with hydrogen development and how we can raise awareness about this clean fuel.

It's all happening here in Alberta, just minutes away from the Legislature. Alberta is an energy powerhouse, and we have always been at the forefront of innovation. Our legacy in responsible energy development began with oil and gas, but we are leading the way in diversifying our energy mix to include solar, wind, geothermal, and, of course, hydrogen. The future of our hydrogen sector and our energy industry is bright, and our government is committed to bringing all Albertans along on this journey. I invite members of this House to join me in celebrating Hydrogen Week in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Eid al-Fitr

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the holy month of Ramadan comes to an end, Muslims in Alberta and around the world are getting ready to celebrate Eid al-Fitr. During the month of Ramadan Muslims have strengthened their bonds with the Creator and His creation through prayers, by fasting from sunrise to sundown, and exercising self-restraint and self-reflection and through acts of charity and kindness.

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of month-long fasting and is a time of celebration. During Eid al-Fitr the community will gather to participate in a special prayer and celebrate with family and friends. During these celebrations games and gifts will be given to children and young people, and special meals will be prepared and enjoyed together. In preparation for Eid al-Fitr, many will offer fitrana, a prescribed sum of money, to ensure the celebration can be enjoyed by all regardless of income or opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, as we prepare to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, I also encourage all members of this House and all Albertans to take this opportunity to connect with and get to know your Muslim neighbours. That alone can lead to a better understanding of our diversity and helps remove and eliminate the barriers that can lead to Islamophobia and hate.

It is also fitting that on Monday during Eid al-Fitr this Assembly will have the opportunity to work with Muslim communities, along with Indigenous and other racialized Albertans, and vote to have Bill 204, Anti-Racism Act, proceed for debate in this Legislature. This can help us move away from the status quo and support racialized Albertans by collecting race-based data to identify inequalities, disparities, and discrimination, including Islamophobia, which may be negatively impacting their lives. That would certainly be something for all Albertans to celebrate.

Happy Eid, and Eid Mubarak to all who celebrate it.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, there's no surprise that once again the NDP are blurring the lines and not painting the whole picture when it comes to affordable housing. In short, they are misleading Albertans. In the latest episode of NDP hysteria they have accused our government of leaving \$187 million of federal housing dollars on the table. Nothing could be further from the truth, and the Member for Edmonton-Riverview knows this.

Let's take a moment to paint an accurate reality that the NDP like to ignore. The agreement they're referencing is the 2019 national housing strategy. This strategy lays out how the federal and provincial governments will cost match new housing projects. It lays out the federal funding portion for the duration of those agreements. This includes the maximum every province would receive, including Alberta's portion of \$561 million. Mr. Speaker, this member knows this. If she doesn't, she's clearly not reading the

agreements before she signs them. To be clear, it was signed March 15, 2019, when she was the minister. Thankfully, a month later Albertans elected our government to ensure that every single dollar of the \$561 million would be effectively used to provide Albertans a safe, stable place to call home.

1:50

It is this government that consulted with the housing sector to release stronger foundations, Alberta's 10-year affordable housing strategy, that maximizes every federal dollar while ensuring flexibility for made-in-Alberta housing solutions. Stronger foundations was designed to ensure that Alberta uses every federal dollar in the most effective and efficient way to build houses for Albertans. By focusing on innovative partnerships, our government will add an additional 25,000 households, an increase of 40 per cent. Those partnerships will be community driven and focused for better community results, meaning that Albertans in need have a home and a sense of community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Edmonton-Glenora has question 1.

Health Care System

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, last year 178 Albertans died of workplace injuries. On the National Day of Mourning we remember them, and we pledge to do better. Thirty-one of those people died of COVID-19 contracted at their workplace, and 10 of those were health care workers. They were on the front lines of this deadly pandemic, and the government failed to keep them safe. Per capita more health care workers contracted COVID here than anywhere in Canada outside of Quebec. What does the Premier have to say to the health care workers who feel that he doesn't care about their health and safety?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the important question. Every worker's death is one death too many, and my heart goes out to every family who had people who died in the workplace and also people who died from COVID.

In regard to the study that the hon. member is stating, I can state that no employee of AHS passed away due to COVID. In fact, AHS – and I know our health care system puts in the highest standards to protect workers. Very few actually get it at the workplace, approximately 7 per cent.

Ms Hoffman: Minister, there were 10 health care workers who died in Alberta.

Public health care is a point of pride for all Canadians. The Premier ran on a public health care guarantee, yet photos emerged earlier this week of 14 ambulances with patients in them waiting outside the Red Deer hospital because they couldn't access the emergency room. It looked less like an emergency room and more like a drive-through. Premier, where was the public health guarantee for those patients, those patients in Red Deer that the government failed so badly?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we indicated yesterday, it is a challenge right now in terms of provision of health care services. Our system is under strain in major hospitals in Edmonton and Calgary and in Red Deer. This is a problem that we are seeing not only here in Alberta but across the country, and this is not a new

problem. Even under the previous government we had wait times that were far too high. You know, in terms of the amount of time that people were in emergency departments, it was actually higher under the previous government. The point is that this is a problem we need to fix, and we are investing to fix it by adding capacity.

Ms Hoffman: Parking lot medicine is not public health care, Minister. If the minister was doing his job, ambulances wouldn't be sitting in the parking lot.

This Premier told voters that he respected public health care in the lead-up to the last provincial election, but under his watch health care workers have contracted a deadly virus. Some of them have died. Patients even now are showing up at emergency rooms to be turned back to the parking lot. Will the minister admit that Albertans can't trust the Premier or the UCP to protect public health care because they're so focused on American-style privatization while Albertans are being left untreated in the parking lot?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, that is simply not the case. We are supporting public health care. We are making record investments to expand capacity in our health care system. We understand that there are issues in terms of being able to get access in certain areas and at certain times. This is not a new problem. This was even a worse problem under the previous government and governments before that. We know that the solution is to invest in capacity, and we are doing that: \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year, \$600 million the year after that. We announced a record investment of \$1.8 billion in Red Deer. We are going to deliver on expanding our coverage.

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

Health Care System Capacity

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 20 towns across Alberta hospitals have closed some or all of their beds, over the last two years the number of doctors accepting patients through primary care networks has dropped in half, and earlier this week the people of Red Deer were left with parking lot medicine as 14 ambulances waited to enter the Red Deer hospital. This is health care chaos under the UCP, with Albertans uncertain if they can enter a hospital or see a doctor. This Premier promised a public health guarantee. It's clear he broke it. Does this Premier, this government really think that protecting public health care looks like closed beds, lost doctors, and parking lot medicine?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated to the member previously, we are investing in public health care. We are living up to our guarantee to be able to make our health care system stronger than it was before. We are at \$1.8 billion over the next three years. That's in addition to the \$900 million we already added. Our investment in health care is the highest that it's been ever in the history of this province. I recognize that there are challenges. These challenges are not new. They're not new to the province of Alberta – we're facing this across the country – and they're not new to all governments in the past, but we are going to fix them.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, not one health care worker in this province buys what this minister is selling. Indeed, the president of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, Mike Parker, just said that the situation in Red Deer you can find spreading across the province. We've been hearing directly from health care workers in emergency rooms who are facing a breaking point as they're once again feeling abandoned by this minister, this government. Many can't take working with this combative government anymore and

are leaving the province or leaving the profession. Does the Premier or does this minister even have a clue about the depths of the problems that are facing emergency care with the level of pressure and an exhausted, demoralized workforce his government attacked and undermined for years?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, we have increased capacity in our health care system. We have hired over the last two years an additional 1,800 nurses, over 230 paramedics. We have just under 100 new doctors in Q1 this year versus Q1 last year. We are investing in hiring 2,800 AHS employees to be able to expand capacity. We understand that the system is under strain right now, and this has been a challenging time over the last two years with COVID. I want to thank all of our health care workers for delivering phenomenal services. We hear them. We hear that there's a challenge, and that's why we're making the right decision and investing in capacity across our system to be able to ensure that it can respond to the needs of . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Respectfully, Mr. Speaker, with the health care workers I'm speaking with, this minister's thanks ring hollow.

Albertans don't trust the UCP with their health care, yet still the current government is focused on privatization, forcing more private profit into our public health care, and when they fail to get a deal done with doctors and attempt to cut the wages of other health professionals, they still feel the need to direct public dollars to private profit. Front-line public health care workers don't even get an audience with this Premier. Can the Premier or the minister tell the House the last time that he spoke with a front-line health care worker, toured an emergency room, frankly, the last time he spoke to someone who could let him know about the chaos his government is causing in health care?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated before – and I want to set the record straight on a comment that I made yesterday in a response to the hon. member, but I ran out of time. I was talking about the emergency department, and I said yesterday that it was the U of A, but it was actually the Royal Alex.*

Under the previous government the percentage of people who left the emergency department because wait times were long was 12 per cent. Now it was 10 per cent, as noted by the hon. member earlier this week. Both of those are too high, but the fact is that this problem has been around for years. It's been around under the previous government and the government before that, but, Mr. Speaker, we are going to fix it. We are going to fix it because we're investing in capacity, \$1.8 billion over three years, and we're not going to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and Opposition House Leader.

Cost of Living and Wage Growth

Ms Gray: Every day we hear from Albertans who are struggling to make ends meet during life under this government. Folks feel they're working harder and harder only to fall further behind as costs increase due to inflation and the policies of this UCP government, and new data shows that this isn't just perception; it is reality. According to Statistics Canada wages only increased by 1 per cent in February compared to last year while inflation ran at 5.5 per cent. That means Albertans fell 4.5 per cent behind. Why are Albertans seeing their quality of life eroded under this government, and when will the Premier finally do something to help workers pay their bills?

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

*See page 917, left column, paragraph 5

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Affordability is a big priority. Opportunity for Albertans is a huge priority for this government. That's why we are bringing in the electricity rebate program. That's why we've suspended fuel taxes in this province. But, more importantly, that's why we prioritize investment attraction, economic growth, and job creation.

Mr. Speaker, as I travel across the province visiting with employers, almost all of them are looking for staff. Wages will be going up. We're going to continue to position this province for investment growth and job creation.

2:00

Ms Gray: A recent report found that workers in Alberta are struggling more than those in any other province since the start of the pandemic. While prices have increased about 7 per cent, average incomes have only increased by 3 per cent. There is the lowest wage growth in the country here in Alberta. As a result, many Albertans are finding it difficult to afford the basic necessities. Another report showed that over half of Alberta households are within \$200 of not being able to pay all their bills at the end of the month, the highest level in Canada. Why is Alberta last in the country for wage growth? Why are so many working Albertans on the verge of . . .

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we recognize that we are in an inflationary period. That has also informed our fiscal policy in this province. As I observe the federal government, who's had a tax, borrow, and spend fiscal policy, it's exacerbated inflation across the country. That's the same fiscal policy the members opposite implemented year after year after year. That's why this government inherited a fiscal train wreck. We brought in responsible fiscal policy. We're working on affordability measures. We're working on opportunities for Albertans.

Ms Gray: Not only are Albertans taking a pay cut; this UCP government is making a bad situation worse by piling on additional costs. This government has hiked income taxes by over a billion dollars while lifting rate caps on insurance and electricity prices. Now Albertans are facing skyrocketing bills while insurance and utility companies rake in massive profits. Albertans are being forced to choose between putting food on the table or paying skyrocketing rates to keep their lights on. To the Premier: why does the government keep making choices that cost Albertans more? Why have you spent your time in power making decisions that leave families worse off?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I absolutely reject the notion of increased taxes. The members opposite raised taxes. The members opposite increased regulation. Under the members opposite's watch tens of billions of dollars of investment fled this province, tens of thousands of jobs were lost. We positioned this province for disproportionate investment attraction, economic growth, job creation. We're seeing tens of thousands of jobs created in this province, expanding fiscal capacity. This is the future for Alberta.

Insurance Premium Costs

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, Albertans know that this UCP government is to blame for the affordability crisis here in our province. The UCP lifted the cap on auto insurance, told Albertans

facing 30 per cent increases to shop around for better rates, and declared mission accomplished because the Premier got a \$200 rebate on the truck he doesn't drive or know how to put gas in. The Finance minister has been claiming that rates are coming down, but five of the seven filings by insurance companies this month were for rate increases. How many more rate increases will the Premier let happen before he realizes that he is failing Albertans?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite had four years to bring in automobile insurance reform. What did they do? They simply put a rate cap on, a Band-Aid solution, which was no solution at all. It resulted in insurers pulling back products. It resulted in Alberta motorists not being able to find appropriate insurance. We're dealing with the systemic issues that are pushing up the costs, that are pushing up premiums. I'm happy to say that seven insurers have applied for rate reductions. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Mr. Carson: Seven of over 70, Mr. Speaker.

Aviva insurance requested a basic increase of 11 per cent. Dominion of Canada insurance requested a basic increase of 7 per cent. Sonnet Insurance, Security National Insurance, Premium Insurance all requested rate increases. People will be paying more for insurance because this government values the bottom line of insurance companies more than whether or not Alberta families can afford to buy groceries. Will the Premier really stand up and claim that rates are going down when consumers are facing an 11 per cent increase in basic auto insurance?

Mr. Toews: Well, Mr. Speaker, that 11 per cent is simply just not true. In fact, according to recent filings, on average – on average – rates will be declining by almost 1 per cent. That's on average. I have a list of seven insurers that are all . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: I have a list of seven insurers that are all applying for rate decreases. The members opposite simply punted the problem down the road. This government is working to fix it.

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, we know that the UCP lifted the cap on insurance increases likely because they owed a favour to their friend and key campaign adviser Nick Koolsbergen. The Premier has refused to release the information about who in his cabinet or staff met with the insurance lobby to take their instructions on lifting the cap. Doesn't the Premier think Albertans deserve to know who he is listening to? Because it's surely not them. Will the minister table in this House the names and dates of everyone in his staff or cabinet who met with the insurance lobby or Nick Koolsbergen? If not, what is he hiding?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, that is a ridiculous assertion. That is a completely ridiculous assertion. When the members opposite were in power, they brought in a rate cap. There's one outcome to a rate cap. Ultimately, insurers will pull back products, and that was beginning to happen. If left to its own, it would result in the complete collapse of the automobile insurance sector in the province, leading the government to have to nationalize it. The members opposite wanted to nationalize the automobile insurance industry. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Hydrogen Strategy

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week Edmonton is playing host to investors, innovators, and international delegates from around the world for the first-ever Canadian Hydrogen Convention. With a global market estimated to be worth as much as \$11 trillion, we know that hydrogen presents a massive opportunity in terms of investments, jobs, and decarbonization. What is this government's plan on how Alberta will harness this opportunity and set up our province for success in the hydrogen sector?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Alberta is already the number one hydrogen producer in the nation. With the hydrogen road map that the associate minister released last November, we have a clear plan for progress on hydrogen. We've already seen huge interest in the hydrogen industry by a number of players. There are four multibillion-dollar investment announcements that have already occurred, and there are more to come.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that on Tuesday at the hydrogen convention the Premier announced the clean hydrogen centre of excellence, an institution that is a keystone in the hydrogen road map, Albertans want to know exactly what the centre of excellence will accomplish and how it will help us excel in the clean hydrogen economy.

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member. On Tuesday afternoon the Premier launched the clean hydrogen centre of excellence with a \$50 million funding commitment over the next four years. The centre of excellence will help move forward made-in-Alberta solutions through research support, network building, and everything they could need to get Alberta ingenuity highlighted on the global stage. This government is committed to grabbing onto the hydrogen opportunity with both hands.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister of Finance for those fine answers. It is given that Alberta is in a race with the rest of the world to become one of the first to excel in the growing hydrogen economy. Alberta has every benefit and attribute it needs to be a global leader in clean hydrogen. To the minister: what are the next steps in the path forward as we invest and diversify our economy?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, our hydrogen road map has laid the path for our success in this industry. A number of steps are already under way like enabling additional opportunities for carbon capture and storage, not to mention all the early-stage technologies that will soon have the backing of the centre of excellence, Alberta Innovates, and the ongoing work of forward-looking companies like ATCO, who are pursuing their own blending project in Fort Saskatchewan. I can assure you that Alberta is moving full steam ahead on hydrogen.

AgriStability Program and Avian Influenza

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, when I've brought concerns about the uncertainty in agriculture due to the drought and the supply chain disruptions, the UCP have avoided answers. The minister is meeting with the federal and provincial counterparts next week, so I hope the UCP will finally sign on to the AgriStability deal, which producers have been united on for over a year. With the severe drought last season and the uncertainty of the avian flu now, the need for the money and stability could not be more clear. To the minister: can Albertans expect a deal to finally be done, or should we anticipate that available money from the federal government to support producers will be left on the table once again?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. It's a good question. There has been a lot of discussion over the past six months with our provincial counterparts. There are things being offered by the feds. There's a negotiation that will have to take place, and it's always made quite clear during these conversations that the different provinces have different needs and expectations out of the BRM suite. I had a conversation with the Saskatchewan ag minister just yesterday. I think we are well aligned with Saskatchewan and look forward to the conversations...

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the drought last season was so severe that municipalities across the province were declaring states of emergency and given that farmers are still feeling the impact of last season and are facing added pressures this year with increased fees to fertilizer, feed, seeds, and a huge insurance premium tacked on by the UCP, the need for stability and financial security is paramount. Will the minister of agriculture stand up in this Chamber and apologize to producers for not signing on to the AgriStability proposal last season and leaving necessary funding untouched, and how will he fill the gaps the UCP have created in their inaction?

Mr. Horner: I'm not apologizing to anybody, but I will make a pledge to Alberta's ag producers that we'll continue to have those conversations on their behalf. No one needs to educate me on the severity of the drought or the prolonged impacts that many are still feeling. Those conversations are going to be had, and they've been fruitful conversations to date. Great expectations for the next week.

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the avian flu has now been detected in 18 poultry operations and that as of April 21, 340,000 birds have been infected, the most of any province – the UCP needs to address this – and given that when I asked for a plan previously, the minister deferred to the federal government, but Alberta chicken producers need answers, support, and stability now, will he meet with the agriculture ministers across the country? How will the minister of agriculture ensure that Alberta chicken producers are supported as the cases of the avian flu continue to grow?

Mr. Horner: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we're doing a lot to support the producers in turkey, poultry, laying hens, every aspect that's being impacted by avian influenza. It is on our agenda at the FPT meetings. Eighteen infected premises in the province: that number is probably closer to half a million birds that have been depopulated

in Alberta. It's not nearly the most of any province. But what we are seeing is that the CFIA monies are initiated quickly and that depopulation is ongoing.

Public Transit User Safety

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have been shocked at the news of violent acts occurring on Edmonton's LRT transit platforms. On Monday a 78-year-old woman was pushed onto the tracks. She's in hospital, and it's reported that she might have to have her leg amputated. Now, the city of Edmonton is worried that horrific acts like this will scare people away from transit. Albertans should be able to feel safe when travelling on public transit anywhere in this province, and this government's silence is not helping. Can the Justice minister tell this House what support he's offering the city of Edmonton to ensure that people can access public transportation safely . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and, through you to the member, thank you for the question. It's a thoughtful question. First and foremost, anyone who takes public transit should feel safe. As announced on the 13th, we are committing \$79.5 million, which with federal government matching is almost \$159 million, to support 26 different Alberta municipalities. Now, the member asked about Edmonton in particular. For Edmonton, that would be almost \$67 million, and this is funding that will provide a top-up to assist municipalities that are feeling the financial pinch from low ridership over the last two years.

Mr. Dach: Given that the city is stepping up with more peace officers and outreach workers dedicated to transit security in February and given that the city of Edmonton's mayor has said that more needs to be done to address the root causes of crime around transit centres and given that this means investments in affordable housing, mental health, and support for people experiencing addictions, some things that the mayor says the provincial government needs to step up on, can the Minister of Seniors and Housing or the Community and Social Services minister rise and explain why they have not stepped up to support the city in tackling these very concerning issues? If the news this week isn't motivating them, what will it take?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe, first, I'll say about the funding that I was mentioning in my previous answer that municipalities can direct those funds as they see fit. That includes increased security. Now, the member opposite was also asking about the ways in which we're investing through Community and Social Services or through Seniors and Housing. The increased funding that we are providing – and maybe let me mention in particular the CSS budget, I think \$3.9 billion. That's a 7 per cent increase from last year, and we are going to continue to work in particular with the homelessness agencies to be able to help work with them and provide supports to . . .

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

Mr. Dach: Given that the mayor of Edmonton has stated that this government has not stepped up to provide this city with the necessary support to address the concerns of safety with public transit and given that the city is taking action – but with limited resources they've described the situation as, quote, Band-Aid

solutions – and given that it should not take people being injured or attacked to get this government to step up to ensure that every single Albertan can feel safe on our transit platforms, will any minister over there commit to taking real action today, or are they content wasting time talking while Edmontonians are feeling threatened?

Mr. Shandro: Well, we have and we will continue to be able to provide these supports to municipalities, Mr. Speaker, and to work with agencies to be able to address some of the issues that we see in particular with our urbans and our major urbans like Calgary and Edmonton. It makes sense that those who are directly responsible for the safety of users, like the transit operators and the cities that they operate in, take the needed steps for that safety. Just as the province doesn't direct the day-to-day operations of police, the province doesn't direct the daily work of municipal peace officers who work for the municipalities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Lethbridge Northern Irrigation District Water Supply

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Lethbridge Northern irrigation district was set to begin diverting water off the Oldman River to ratepayers in preparation for this year's planting season when the irrigation board was informed by Alberta Environment and Parks that water would not be delivered down the canal. I have been speaking to many producers who want to ensure that they will have the water they need for their livestock and crops. Can the Minister of Environment and Parks please update the House on the flow of water in the LNID?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, thank you to the hon. member as well as the members for Livingstone-Macleod, Lethbridge-East, and the Member for Taber-Warner for their tireless advocacy on getting water flowing inside the irrigation district for their constituents. I'm happy to report to the House today that two days ago the Piikani First Nation community has agreed to honour all of their water commitments and allow Alberta Environment and Parks to be able to access our headworks on Piikani land. I was on-site yesterday morning with our crews as they started up the headworks. I'm happy to report to you and to the whole House that there is water inside the canals and water on its way downstream to all the user groups.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. Given the importance of this government's relationship with First Nations and given that the Lethbridge Northern irrigation district's headworks are located on the Piikani reserve and given that the economic opportunity for the Piikani is important, just as it is for the producers in my area: can the minister explain to the House how the partnership with the Piikani nation is being advanced for the benefit of both the producers and the Piikani nation?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the Piikani nation is proud to have Alberta Environment and Parks' headworks on the reserve and proud of their relationship with Alberta Environment and Parks to be able to provide water to the irrigation district. That said, the Piikani have been asking for multiple governments to be able to have a bilateral process to address environmental, economic, and cultural concerns when it comes to the overall operation of the Oldman dam. I'm proud to report that two days ago Chief Grier and

all of Piikani council and Alberta Environment and Parks came to an agreement on that bilateral process, that has the Piikani honouring their water commitments and making sure that we can move together in partnership to be able to provide that water.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister for the answer. Given that access to water this time of year is vitally important so farmers can begin planting and given that over 750 head of cattle also depend on water from the LNID to sustain them through the summer and given that agriculture is one of Alberta's most important industries, especially in the south: can the Minister of Environment and Parks tell this House just how important a partnership in long-term prosperity with the Piikani is for producers?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This partnership provides water into an irrigation district that provides water for 750,000 cows, over 200,000 irrigated acres inside that portion of the province. It is the lifeblood of agriculture in southern Alberta, and we cannot do it without our strong partnership with the Piikani. It's unfortunate that former governments have not supported that partnership or built that partnership, but this government has been dedicated to a long-term relationship with the Piikani. It's working. It's why water is flowing downstream, and we're going to continue to be committed to making sure we can share our prosperity.

2:20 Métis Settlements Governance and Funding

Mr. Feehan: In 2021 this UCP government passed the Metis Settlements Amendment Act without consultation, imposing a requirement to obtain the unanimous consent of all eight settlements to access settlement money. Alberta doesn't require this extraordinary threshold of any other democratically elected body. Members of the Metis Settlements General Council are joining us here today in the gallery, so to the minister: why has this government chosen to hamstring the Métis settlements by effectively blocking their access to essential funding?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We did do changes to modernize the 30-year-old legislation to bring us to our shared goals of settlement autonomy and self-sufficiency while keeping the principles of the original act, preserving the land for the Métis people. There was a future fund set up, and it's coming to an end. There was \$140 million in there at one time. The fund has now been drained to under \$30 million. My changes remove the minister's veto power, giving more autonomy to the settlements. It also requires eight of the eight settlements to approve it, and this is going to increase the accountability and make sure that all the settlements have a say in any future expenditure. The NDP failed to make this change, and the result is a lack . . .

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we have seen the devastating impact of government neglect and lack of funding for essential services in many Indigenous communities and given that the Métis settlements require access to funding to provide basic services to families in their communities, is the minister willing to guarantee that he will ensure that the Métis settlements will be able to provide essential services such as the delivery of clean drinking water to their members?

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, the settlements, like, can apply for grants through the provincial government, as municipalities do, and I have a long list of grants I can go through that they have applied for for roads and water services. The intent is to leave the Métis settlements, put them in control of their own destiny. We want them to be independent, successful, and competitive. The changes will increase their council responsibilities to charge for services such as service and roads, reduce the cost and size of governments, reduce the role of the minister in the settlements, and put them in charge of their own destiny.

Mr. Feehan: Given that after hamstringing the Métis settlements' ability to access funds through this government's amendments to the Metis Settlements Act, the minister moved the Métis settlements land registry and the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal out of the MSGC's building, and given that this is depriving the MSGC of badly needed rental income, can the minister explain why he decided to strip the MSGC of these sources of rental income at a time when the MSGC is already suffering financial hardship at the hands of the UCP?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we've done is – we've always been asked the difference between a hand up and handouts. What we are allowing is: this is that hand up. [interjections] We made sure that when we set up the AIOC, the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, the Métis settlements were included in that, and we have several large corporations that . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

I just want to provide caution. The standing orders and the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* have much to say about bringing members of the gallery into the debate. I appreciate their presence here today, and I appreciate them being brought, but it's important that they're not brought into the debate.

The hon. member.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the members opposite, we want to empower the Métis settlements being in charge of their own destiny, not what they want to see, what's best for them, and that's why we've set up the AIOC to give them that opportunity to participate in these larger adventures out there, and there are several that are going to be coming their way.

Services for Transgender and Nonbinary Albertans Blood Donation Eligibility

Member Irwin: Canada has taken a step forward with how it collects census data, allowing all cisgender, transgender, and nonbinary individuals to report their gender for the first time, and last year more than 100,000 people identified as transgender or nonbinary, including more than 12,000 right here in Alberta. The collection of data is critical, but it's meaningless unless it's followed by substantial action. Can the government of Alberta provide any specific details or initiatives that it will launch as a direct result of having this census data available for the first time? We need specific actions, not empty platitudes.

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you very much, and thank you, through you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. It's important. We know that as public policy is designed, data is incredibly important to both understand the issues that you're looking at as you design policies but also to make sure that you can measure your policies after the fact. The data collection, we know, on many fronts is at a point where we can

do much more. We have the technology to do much more, and certainly my department is looking at data collection carefully, as are others.

Member Irwin: Given that I hope that this associate minister's interest in data would also apply to race-based data and given that one of the major barriers that trans folks face is access to timely health care, including long wait-lists, lack of physicians, surgeons, psychiatrists, discrimination in the health care system, and blatant transphobia, to the Health minister: at a time when this UCP government is allowing parking lot medicine with ambulances lined up and huge delays in access to health care, how can we possibly trust that your government will do anything to address the significant barriers that queer and trans Albertans face when accessing health care?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question. We understand that there are going to be some challenges with access, and that's why we are investing in capacity in our health care system. We are putting our money where our mouths are, investing \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year, \$1.8 billion over the entire three-year period, and that's in addition to \$900 million in terms of investment. That includes surgeries for transgender individuals engaged in those surgeries. We are continuing to fund that, as the conversation that I've had with the hon. member in estimates – we are going to provide better access to our system and provide increased capacity for all Albertans.

Member Irwin: Given that we're happy on this side of the House to see the news that the federal government is finally lifting the discriminatory blood ban that denied men who have sex with men from donating blood and that the Alberta government has an important role in supporting Canadian Blood Services to ensure accountability, quality, and safety of the national blood system in Alberta, what specific steps will the Health minister take to ensure that all Albertans feel welcome and safe to donate blood? How does he plan to increase blood donations at a time when they're very much needed? Please be specific again, Minister.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is quite correct. It's critically important to be able to support the work of the Canadian Blood Services so that we can actually – you know, blood: as the saying goes, "It's in You to Give," and we need to support that. I'm happy to take suggestions from the hon. member in terms of how we can improve that and work with my colleagues on this side of the House because this is an important issue. We need to increase the ability of Albertans and support them in donating blood so we can use that to be able to support the health of Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East has the call.

Teacher Disciplinary Process and Bill 15

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The vast majority of teachers in this province are upstanding professionals who put the safety and well-being of their students first, but Alberta's current disciplinary system is an outlier compared to those in other provinces. Unsurprisingly, this union-overseeing disciplinary system with clear conflicts of interest has resulted in very few teachers being reprimanded for serious misconduct. To the Minister of Education: aside from the union's clear conflicts of interest, what other factors

contributed to the decision to change the disciplinary body to an independent commissioner to handle misconduct complaints?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Alberta's government is reforming the teacher discipline process to make the education system safer for students, their families, and for teachers. This includes creating the Alberta teaching profession commission and appointing a commissioner to oversee conduct and competency complaints for all teachers and teacher leaders equally. Bill 15 will ensure that the entire teaching profession is protected by bringing all teachers and teacher leaders under one reformed disciplinary process, no matter who they work for. This will bring Alberta in line with other jurisdictions and regulated professions such as nurses.

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that there have been questions about how the new system will change the authority and powers of school districts, the union, and the ministry and given that regardless of the disciplinary body there is a need for a transparent correctional process when a teacher is found guilty of an offence, once again to the minister: how does Bill 15 change the abilities, process, and level of oversight by the ministry?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the member. The minister will retain current authorities under the Education Act, including the authority to appoint panel members, as is currently the case. The significant changes here are that rather than three different bodies overseeing discipline, the commissioner will oversee the process regardless of whether the teacher or teacher leader is an ATA member. The registrar will now be responsible for the intake of all complaints, and the commissioner will investigate them.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the minister. Given that this change came about due to concerns and complaints from parents and students about the union's leniency with teachers accused of misconduct and given that our government is committed to supporting children and parents, could the minister point out how the old system has failed parents and students through a real-life example?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. The most significant example would be the case of Michael Gregory. Complaints of physical and emotional abuse were filed against Gregory in 2006. The ATA investigated, and his certificate was suspended for only two years. Then in 2021 over 20 former students came forward with allegations of physical and sexual abuse and misconduct. In December 2021 senior ATA staff claimed that the ATA had done nothing wrong in 2006 and reiterated their belief that the ATA should not have reported the evidence of child abuse to police. That is one of the examples that shows that change is needed, and we are making this happen.

Provincial Campground and Park Fees

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, families across Alberta are starting to plan their summer camping trips and are looking to book one of the beautiful sites in our province. Camping has always been an accessible activity for families, but with the job losses we saw over the pandemic plus the skyrocketing cost of living, it's now more important than ever that Alberta families have access to this affordable option. However, affordability for families does not seem to be a priority for this government, who raised fees once again. To the minister: why is the UCP gouging Alberta families who are simply looking to plan an affordable vacation?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A simple answer is that we're not, and we did not raise camping fees. The hon. member is wrong.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that I'm sure the people of Alberta will not believe anything the minister says and given that this government's proposed fee increases could add upwards of \$150 to a family's two-week summer vacation and given that costs have shot up under this government, from taxes to school fees to insurance to utilities, and that all of these added expenses can mean the difference between a family enjoying a camping trip this summer or having to stay home, will the minister explain to the families deciding if they can afford the additional camping expenses here why the government felt it was appropriate to reach into their pockets to make up for government budgeting mistakes?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the hon. member is incorrect, but that's never stopped him before. What I can tell you, though, is that our parks system is up and running this year. Reservation systems are up, and we're anticipating another very, very busy year, and I'm excited to see Albertans go out and enjoy their backyard all across this province, north to south, east to west, where there are a variety of experiences across the almost 500 provincial parks that we have inside this province as well as the 60 per cent of our landscape that is owned by Alberta Environment and Parks as public lands. We're here. We're ready to serve. I hope everybody has a great summer.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that this isn't the only attack that the UCP has made on Alberta's families looking to enjoy the great outdoors – we saw a \$90 fee applied to Kananaskis, and users of the area have reported little improvement since the fee was implemented – and given that this government has already broken promises by allowing OHV users off the hook and given that the Alberta Wilderness Association cited these sorts of irresponsible backdoor deals the government put through with their Trails Act as a first step towards privatizing public lands that all Albertans should be able to enjoy, will the minister admit that raising fees on families and giving exemptions to others is a cash grab just to make up for the government's missteps?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's conspiracy theories never cease to amaze me. Given how far off he was in his first question, saying that there's a new fee when there is not, verifiable inside the budget, I don't see the point in even engaging with him on that anymore. That said, I do want to again, through you, let Albertans know that the parks system is up and running. We're expecting Kananaskis to be busy again this year all across the eastern slopes. There's going to be activity taking place. I hope

Albertans get out and enjoy this backyard, but best of all, those from outside the province are going to be able to come and enjoy this beautiful backyard as well and be able to make our tourism industry money. I'm looking forward to all that.

Disabled Albertans' Access to Government Services

Ms Renaud: When the ministry of social services has ableist practices and policies identified, it's expected that they'll fix them. I have correspondence from CSS stating that a client, not my word, has three days to reply with the document request. If the deadline is missed, the file is closed and labelled abandoned, meaning the person must reapply. People needing help from social services face enormous barriers, from even getting calls, answering e-mails, let alone responding to requests. A delay frequently means that rent can't be paid, groceries can't be purchased as benefits will be impacted. To the minister, any minister: how will you correct these ableist policies?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General is rising.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and, through you to the member, thank you for the question. It's an important question. We do have a commitment to work with those who are disabled throughout the province, to be able to work with them, get their feedback so we can best make changes to our policies to, as the member said, do our best to be responsive to those who suffer from disabilities to make sure that our policies are continuing to make those – we as the government are making those changes and getting that feedback from the communities. Thank you to the member for raising this issue.

Ms Renaud: Given that the Minister for Community and Social Services acknowledged changes to AISH and income support appeal hearings last week, indicating that disabled Albertans would no longer be able to present new information to be considered during an appeal hearing, and given that disabled Albertans do not currently receive accommodation to navigate a very complex and ableist appeal process, to the minister, any minister: please explain how disabled Albertans are supported to receive the best hearing outcome possible when they aren't accommodated with even the basic things or allowed to give the panel new and current information.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will always support the most vulnerable throughout the province. That \$1.4 billion: this is the highest AISH in the history of the province. I appreciate the member's question about appeals. I think it is a good question, and I appreciate those questions. After reviewing the AISH program appeal process, the regulation was amended to help ensure that folks with additional information to support their case can continue to work with the department before making an appeal. These amendments open the door for the department to resolve the issues before they move to the appeal stage and avoid putting people through . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Renaud: Let's try that again. Given that we now know that disabled and low-income Albertans appealing AISH or income supports have not been offered and given accommodations to enable them to receive the fairest hearing possible and given that the time between application and appeal can be very long, with appeals now being booked well into August, will the minister explain how preventing disabled Albertans from presenting new

information about themselves and their lives or providing accommodation for their disability during an appeal hearing makes life better for any of them?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The two most important things are for us to make sure that there's a fair, transparent, and consistent process but, second, as well making it easier for AISH recipients. People who are eligible for benefits shouldn't have to use the appeal process to be able to get there. Under the NDP the appeals process was chaotic, and policy was rarely followed. We now have established clear roles, and every Albertan will get a fair appeal. We'll continue to be the social safety net for the vulnerable and support them in their lives.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees and Student Financial Aid

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta 2030: building skills for jobs strategy is a 10-year plan for the postsecondary sector and the first in over 15 years. The strategy aims to lead Canada in providing world-class postsecondary experiences and credentials. Our students have expressed concerns about the rising cost of tuition, especially throughout the pandemic, where jobs were less accessible than before. To the Minister of Advanced Education: what student aid supports exist, and how are students' debts being managed, considering students in Alberta are living on tight budgets?

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

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A good opportunity to inform the House, of course, of the variety of supports that exist and that are available for postsecondary students. In fact, in this budget alone there's \$167 million allocated specifically for student aid. More specifically, it's about \$108 million that's available in scholarships and awards and approximately \$59 million that's available in nonrepayable grants and bursaries. I think Alberta's government firmly believes that all students should have access to the financial support that they need in order to access postsecondary education.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that tuition and affordability affect accessibility to postsecondary education and given that the UCP government is keen on expanding access and strengthening student experience on campus, to the same minister: what do you say to students and parents who feel that budget cuts to the postsecondary institutions will engender tuition hikes, which only limit accessibility to postsecondary education, and what limitations have been put on raising tuition costs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:40

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, one of the pieces that's available as it relates to tuition policy, of course, is a cap on tuition. A cap exists to ensure that tuition increases remain within a consistent level. That policy has ensured that tuition in Alberta remains incredibly competitive. Tuition in Alberta today remains below the national average. Any Albertan can look up that

information on Stats Canada. As well, in other areas, as I mentioned a moment ago, we provide additional support in student financial assistance.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that one of the key goals of the Alberta 2030 strategy is to encourage postsecondary institutions to be financially self-sufficient and self-sustainable and given that students contribute to institutions' sustainability through their tuition and fees, to the same minister: what do you say to students and parents who are skeptical about investing additional funds to maintain sustainability of their institutions to help ensure the quality of their education and diversification of the Alberta economy?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're providing \$171 million in funding to postsecondary institutions over the next three years. That's going under the banner of a targeted enrolment initiative. Those funds will go to expand spaces in very particular high-demand programs. We, in fact, have just received submissions back from our postsecondary institutions about how many spaces they can create and in what programs. We'll be scoring and evaluating those proposals over the coming weeks and be in a position to more publicly communicate which institutions will be the beneficiaries of the targeted enrolment funds in the coming months.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

In 30 seconds or less we will return to the remainder of Members' Statements.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Government Policies and Economic Recovery

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With a balanced budget, the lowest taxes, and the fastest growing economy in the country, it is safe to say that Alberta is back. Everywhere you look, optimism is abounding about Alberta's economic future, and United Conservatives have launched their new website, albertaisback.ca, to help share the good news with Albertans. Investors are choosing Alberta again, with companies like Amazon, Dow, Northern Petrochemical, Walmart, HBO, and more investing billions of dollars in landmark projects across our province. You can learn more about these exciting investments at albertaisback.ca.

We are keeping our promises: cutting taxes for job creators from 12 per cent to 8 per cent, scrapping the job-killing NDP carbon tax, and investing more than \$20 billion in infrastructure to build roads, bridges, schools, and hospitals for Albertans. In fact, we made 374 promises to Albertans in the last election, and so far we have delivered on 88 per cent of them, with more exciting news to come. You can track our campaign promises at albertaisback.ca.

We are fighting for a fair deal for Albertans by holding a successful equalization referendum, creating an Alberta Parole Board, and establishing a provincial Chief Firearms Officer. You can learn more about what we are doing to stand up for Alberta's autonomy at albertaisback.ca.

We are protecting education choice, getting woke politics out of classrooms, creating a curriculum that will set our kids up for success, and ending the egregious conflict of interest that allows the

ATA to investigate misconduct against its own members. You can find more about our education work at albertaisback.ca.

Here are some more highlights: 80,000 new businesses started in the last year, 145,000 jobs created since 2021, the highest farm cash receipts ever, the most oil and gas drilling ever, \$1 billion in new film and television productions, and record venture capital investment. Mr. Speaker, Alberta is back, and Alberta's future is bright. Alberta is moving forward. We will not stop or go back to failed NDP policies that kill jobs and investment. Visit albertaisback.ca to find out more.

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

Government Record

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the UCP government the future of families living in Alberta is in jeopardy. Young families are thinking of leaving this province due to the horrible and racist curriculum. Others are tired of waiting for affordable and quality child care while their cost of living continues to soar. It's clear that this UCP government is more in touch with those who frequent sky palaces than families and young people who worry about what their next month's insurance bill will be. Families see clearly that this government has the wrong vision for Alberta.

Instead of promoting a province that is diverse and welcoming to all, we see the government attack LGBTQ2S-plus youth. Instead of promoting a province that would excel at innovation and research, the government attacks and defunds our advanced education. These attacks on health care workers, teachers, postsecondary students and staff, not to mention the public service more broadly, during a global pandemic nonetheless have made Albertans feel that they cannot trust and cannot support this UCP government.

This government isn't focused on jobs. They aren't focused on the soaring cost of living or real impacts to Alberta families. Instead, they're focused on their wealthy friends and donors. We need a government that will step up and stand up for those we serve. We need to create a province that has a diverse and green economy. We need to create a province with communities and supports that work for everybody. We need to create a province that attracts young people. We need a government focused on the priorities that matter to Albertans, not to wealthy friends and donors. It's time for the UCP to get out of the way so we can start building an Alberta that works for everybody, an Alberta that works for families, and an Alberta that works for the people that actually live in this province.

Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner, Marianne Ryan, who has served in these roles for almost five years, will be retiring in June. It is not anticipated that a successor will be in place by this time, and the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices has recommended to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that Peter Sherstan be appointed Acting Ombudsman and Acting Public Interest Commissioner until such time as a replacement is appointed. This recommendation is reflected in the committee's report that I am tabling today.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock.

Bill 206 Prohibiting Ownership of Agricultural Lands (Pension Plans and Trust Corporations) Act

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill, Bill 206, Prohibiting Ownership of Agricultural Lands (Pension Plans and Trust Corporations) Act.

The availability and ownership of agricultural land for use by individual farmers and ranchers is important and is the foundation of our sustainable food production industry. As well, ownership of agricultural land by individuals is paramount in keeping our rural Alberta communities strong. Bill 206 aims to enable the long-term success and sustainability of our agriculture industry, preserve our food security, and, above all, protect the culture and well-being of our rural Alberta communities.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I move first reading of Bill 206.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Bill 207 Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 207, the Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, 2022.

The purpose of this bill is to increase the visibility of tow trucks and to make it safer for those operating their tow trucks. They're often in dangerous weather conditions and road conditions, and this is simply, Mr. Speaker, to increase the level of safety and ensure that they can get home to their families at the end of the day.

With that, I move first reading of Bill 207.

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a first time]

The Speaker: We are at points – correction; there were no points of order today, so you all get a gold star.

Ordres du jour.

2:50

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 12 Trustee Act

[Debate adjourned April 27: Ms Ganley speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be here today to speak to third reading of Bill 12, the Trustee Act, which will make it . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry. The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General is the sponsor of the bill and it was moved on his behalf, which equates to the hon. minister providing a second reading speech. I'm sure he'll have much more opportunity to provide his remarks at Committee of the Whole or if the opposition . . .

Some Hon. Members: This is third.

The Speaker: Yeah. Correction: Mr. Rutherford, the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, moved . . .

Mr. McIver: Point of order.

The Speaker: I apologize and withdraw for the use of a name.

The hon. member moved it on behalf of the minister, and as such the conclusion is that your speech has been given at third on behalf. You are able to close debate, as you have identified, or – you never know – perhaps the opposition will move an amendment on which you could speak to then.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to the third reading of Bill 12. I do not have any amendment to move, just to clarify.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I'm pleased to see that the government is bringing forward this important piece of legislation. This piece of legislation is largely based on the work of the Uniform Law Conference of Canada, their Uniform Trustee Act, and based on that, the Alberta Law Reform Institute initiated consultation, worked on that, proposed some variation. My understanding is, after reading the bill, attending the tech briefing, that this bill closely follows the recommendations made by the Alberta Law Reform Institute in their report of 2017. I think it's important that we have a trust legislation that is up to date. Although there were minor changes that have been made to trust legislation at different times, our legislation is still based largely on the 1893 English statutes. This one is the first comprehensive review of that act.

It makes some important changes. For instance, it clarifies the powers of trustee. It clarifies rules around investment of trust property. It also proposes a new standard of care for professional and institutional trustees, which is a really good thing because those corporations, those banks ought to be held to a higher standard because of their professional expertise. It also clarifies certain powers for the court to intervene where trust instrument is not clear and provides directions so that the trust instrument and the intention of the trust can be carried out as smoothly as possible. Then it contains rules around communication and reporting to the trustee also, very clear rules that will help trustees know what their responsibilities are, what their obligations are, and, again, help us with the smooth administration of the trust.

While this legislation closely follows the Alberta Law Reform Institute, there are certain exceptions, a certain few recommendations that were not included. I hope that when the minister gets up to close debate, he can share some rationale why those recommendations were not accepted.

Other than that, when we talk about giving courts more roles and power and authority to help with the administration of trusts, I think we also need to make sure that courts have all the resources they need for these additional roles and this additional authority. In the last three budgets the UCP government has made almost \$200 million worth of cuts to the Justice department alone. We've been hearing that they will hire 50 prosecutors; still there are not enough prosecutors because of the pressure put on by COVID-19 and Jordan delays. We are seeing many cases at risk of being tossed out because of those statutory requirements that offences be prosecuted within a certain time. Those are, I guess, concerns that if we are asking courts to do more work, we should also be making sure that courts have all the resources that they need to carry out their functions so Albertans will be able to get justice and have access to the courts in a timely fashion.

In short, we are in support of this piece of legislation, and I thank the government and the minister for bringing forward this thoughtful piece of legislation. With that, I will cede my time.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 12 in third reading?

Seeing none, I will ask the hon. Minister of Justice to close debate.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to close debate on Bill 12, the Trustee Act, which will make it more efficient to manage trusts and lessen the need for Albertans to be able to or to have to go to court.

Now, as we've said before, it's the government's responsibility to continually revise and reform legislation to meet the needs of the modern world and the needs of Albertans. Let's remember that this is a process which started, as the hon. member had mentioned, beginning with the Uniform Law Conference of Canada almost a decade ago and then the work that the Alberta Law Reform Institute had done for years after that to be able to get their report to government, back in 2017, to provide their advice on how the uniform act that was provided by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada – to be able to make those suggestions into an Alberta-specific suggestion to the Legislature and to government at the time, because this was back in 2017, considering some of the very specific practices that professionals use in Alberta and what's in the current Trustee Act and how we can continue with some of those practices. They did provide that report in 2017, which leads us to the 87 of the 90 recommendations which have been accepted in this draft.

Now, before I continue, I'd like to just summarize what was presented at yesterday's third reading. If passed, the new Trustee Act would then replace the existing legislation, which is significantly outdated. We're talking about mid-Victorian legislation that is out of date and focused mostly on trusts in wills. The new Trustee Act, as proposed here in Bill 12, would clarify the roles of trustees and their administrative powers; outline specific processes so that in many instances trustees and beneficiaries don't have to go to court all the time; set out clear provisions as well to support and improve the day-to-day functioning of trusts; and, last, provide a basis for trusts that don't have extensive terms or that don't cover off all of the situations the provisions apply to while making sure that people can still set their own terms.

3:00

Madam Speaker, as was mentioned yesterday by colleagues, Bill 12 has nothing to do with a Henson trust. That was one of the questions that we had from members opposite. Bill 12 also does not affect a person's eligibility for government benefits such as the AISH program. As a reminder from yesterday, I would also like to make it clear that Bill 12 adopts, as I said, 87 of the 90 recommendations that we received from the Alberta Law Reform Institute. The three remaining, that weren't accepted, were not adopted because they were minor housekeeping provisions.

For example, one of the recommendations from ALRI, the Alberta Law Reform Institute – I'm talking about recommendation 11, in particular – was about the definition for "represented adult." The recommendation was not adopted as the term that's used here in Bill 12 because that term that's used in Bill 12 is "incapacitated person." Now, using the term "represented adult" would have been inconsistent with definitions that we already have in the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act and the Public Trustee Act.

Another question was about exceptions with this legislation. Madam Speaker, it's important to understand the purpose of this legislation and how it operates. Bill 12 provides that the trust itself prevails over any contrary provision of the act except to the extent that the act provides otherwise. Now, the purpose of the legislation is to provide rules for

when a trust instrument doesn't contain an applicable provision. Accordingly, with the exception of a limited number of specific provisions in the act, a trust instrument prevails over the act. When the act does prevail over a trust, it is because the mandatory provisions in the act embody a rule of such importance that it shouldn't be able to be displaced by the person setting up the trust, that there isn't an opportunity for that in particular very important rule to be – well, not contracted out, because it's a trust, but contracted out in the legislation. The mandatory provisions relate to such matters as the power of the court to appoint, to remove, or to reinstate a trustee.

Madam Speaker, Bill 12 replaces the existing Trustee Act and improves trust management as a whole, and it does this by setting clear provisions to support and improve day-to-day functioning of all trusts. All of the provisions apply to all forms of a trust. There are no specific provisions that apply to only certain types of trusts. Therefore, real estate investment trusts are generally a type of trust to which the act applies.

There was also a question about the public trustee and the impact on AISH. First, let's be clear: Bill 12 applies to trusts only. Second, Bill 12 does not apply to fees or to AISH. Third, the public trustee is governed by the Public Trustee Act. To that end, any question about the possible implementation of technology that might facilitate any changes as a result of Bill 12 is not relevant. Madam Speaker, that reference is about the public guardian and trustee office and has nothing to do with the Trustee Act.

Similarly, any questions about outstanding recommendations from the office of the Auditor General are also not relevant. The OAG's recommendations relate to the office of the public guardian and trustee and, again, don't have anything to do with Bill 12.

Also, during debate there was also a question regarding how much court time the government is estimating this act will either save or add. The Alberta Court of Queen's Bench hears matters that are related to trusts either as a civil court matter or as a Surrogate Court matter; that is to say, those related to estates of those who are deceased. While there are no specific stats that we have on trust matters alone, over the last six years there were, on average, 46,000 matters that started in civil court each year. Almost 46,500 matters

started in the Surrogate Court each year. The Court of Queen's Bench supports initiatives that would divert matters from the court when other, more appropriate avenues are available. But make no mistake; Bill 12 will divert many trust matters out of the court system.

Madam Speaker, another question that was raised was about additional government consultation. There was widespread support for the report from interest groups, including the Society of Trust and Estate Planners, charities, the legal profession, and other professionals that are involved in or experts in trusts, and our proposed changes are consistent with what stakeholders like those have supported in the institute's report.

Madam Speaker, ultimately, Bill 12 would let trustees better serve beneficiaries and better manage trusts. We also believe that the experience of dealing with trusts, whether as a trustee, whether as a member of the legal community, a trusts and estates organization, the courts, an Albertan who's trying to set up a trust or as a beneficiary, should be as efficient as possible, should save money and reduce the need to have to go to court all the time.

This is exactly what these changes to the Trustee Act accomplish. They will improve all aspects of managing trusts and trust laws in our province. They also reflect our government's commitment to modernizing trust laws in our province, and I hope members on both sides of the House will support this legislation.

I ask that we move third reading of Bill 12. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've gotten a lot of great work done this week in the Chamber, and I move to adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, May 2.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:08 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 3rd Session (2022)

Activity to Thursday, April 28, 2022

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act (\$) (Kenney)

First Reading — 4 (*Feb. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 94-97 (*Mar. 7, 2022 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 140-44 (*Mar. 10, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 230-34 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cQ-0.7]

Bill 2 — Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 312-19 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft.*), 391-95 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve.*), 484-90 (*Mar. 29, 2022 aft.*), 565-71 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve.*), 599-604 (*Apr. 19, 2022 morn.*), 661 (*Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 699-707 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 715-24 (*Apr. 20, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2022 c4]

Bill 3 — Special Days Act (Orr)

First Reading — 124 (*Mar. 9, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 327 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 343-45 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 346 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 375-78 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 379 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 389-91 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; SA 2022 cS-16.3]

Bill 4 — Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022 (McIver)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 163-77 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft.*), 360-66 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 396 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 519-23 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 571-79 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force April 21, 2022; SA 2022 c5]

Bill 5 — Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022 (Sawhney)

First Reading — 202 (*Mar. 16, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 319-26 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft.*), 469-71 (*Mar. 28, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 523-24 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 537-43 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 c6]

Bill 6 — Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022 (Orr)

First Reading — 228 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 502-505 (*Mar. 29, 2022 aft.*), 513-14 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 562-65 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve., passed*)
Third Reading — 594-98 (*Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed*)
Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force April 21, 2022; SA 2022 c3]

Bill 7 — Appropriation Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 272-73 (*Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed*)
Second Reading — 310-11 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., adjourned*), 327-36 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 345 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division*)
Committee of the Whole — 366-75 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve.*), 395 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division*)
Third Reading — 411-14 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft.*), 419 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division*)
Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; c1]

Bill 8 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 297 (*Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed*)
Second Reading — 311-12 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., adjourned*), 336-43 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 345-46 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division*)
Committee of the Whole — 379-89 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve.*), 395 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division*)
Third Reading — 414-19 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft.*), 419 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division*)
Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; c2]

Bill 9 — Public's Right to Know Act (Shandro)

First Reading — 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 447-54 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft.*), 455-63 (*Mar. 28, 2022 eve.*), 643-51 (*Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 707-13 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 745-49 (*Apr. 21, 2022 morn., passed*)
Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cP-47]

Bill 10 — Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022 (Aheer)

First Reading — 408 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 463-69 (*Mar. 28, 2022 eve.*), 543-50 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft.*), 604-10 (*Apr. 19, 2022 morn.*), 661 (*Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed*)

Bill 11 — Continuing Care Act (Copping)

First Reading — 432 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 550-56 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft.*), 634-42 (*Apr. 19, 2022 aft.*), 663-72 (*Apr. 20, 2022 morn.*), 865-71 (*Apr. 26, 2022 aft.*), 873-79 (*Apr. 26, 2022 eve.*), 891-97 (*Apr. 27, 2022 morn.*), 936-42 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., adjourned on amendment*)

Bill 12 — Trustee Act (Shandro)

First Reading — 483 (*Mar. 29, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 651-61 (*Apr. 19, 2022 eve.*), 749-54 (*Apr. 21, 2022 morn., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 858-65 (*Apr. 26, 2022 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 903-09 (*Apr. 27, 2022 morn.*), 988-90 (*Apr. 28, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 13 — Financial Innovation Act (Toews)

First Reading — 535 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 624-33 (*Apr. 19, 2022 aft.*), 724-27 (*Apr. 20, 2022 eve.*), 807 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve.*), 850-58 (*Apr. 26, 2022 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 925-36 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 943-48 (*Apr. 27, 2022 eve., passed*)

Bill 14 — Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022 (Issik)

First Reading — 535-36 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 672-81 (*Apr. 20, 2022 morn.*), 727-33 (*Apr. 20, 2022 eve., passed*)

Bill 15 — Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022 (LaGrange)

First Reading — 592 (*Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 767-76 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*), 825-32 (*Apr. 26, 2022 morn.*), 884-89 (*Apr. 26, 2022 eve.*), 923-25 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 16 — Insurance Amendment Act, 2022 (Toews)

First Reading — 622 (*Apr. 19, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 807-808 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve.*), 832-37 (*Apr. 26, 2022 morn.*), 879-84 (*Apr. 26, 2022 eve.*), 897-903 (*Apr. 27, 2022 morn., adjourned*)

Bill 17 — Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Madu)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 968-75 (*Apr. 28, 2022 morn., adjourned*)

Bill 18 — Utility Commodity Rebate Act (Nally)

First Reading — 693-94 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 735-45 (*Apr. 21, 2022 morn.*), 807 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 808-22 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 822-23 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve., passed*)

Bill 19 — Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022 (Glubish)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 948-58 (*Apr. 27, 2022 eve.*), 959-68 (*Apr. 28, 2022 morn., adjourned*)

Bill 20 — Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Shandro)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 21 — Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Fir)

First Reading — 788 (*Apr. 25, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 22 — Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022 (Nally)

First Reading — 922 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Eastern Slopes Protection Act (Notley)

First Reading — 156 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 432 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly*), 789-95 (*Apr. 25, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; not proceeded with*)

Bill 202 — Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022 (Loewen)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly*), 433-40 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; proceeded with*)

Bill 203 — Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act (Bilous)

First Reading — 228 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 693 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly*), 796-801 (*Apr. 25, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; not proceeded with*)

Bill 204 — Anti-Racism Act (Shepherd)

First Reading — 408 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed*), 788 (*Apr. 25, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly; debate on motion on concurrence to take place Monday, May 2, 2022*)

Bill 205 — Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022 (Sigurdson, RJ)

First Reading — 592 (*Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 922 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly; debate on motion on concurrence to take place on Monday, May 2, 2022*)

Bill 206 — Prohibiting Ownership of Agricultural Lands (Pension Plans and Trust Corporations) Act (van Dijken)

First Reading — 988 (*Apr. 28, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill 207 — Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, 2022 (Rutherford)

First Reading — 988 (*Apr. 28, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022 (Jones)

First Reading — 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill Pr2 — Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022 (Nixon, JP)

First Reading — 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 2, 2022

Day 27

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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

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Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
 Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
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Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
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Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
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Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
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Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
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Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
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 Deputy Government House Leader
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Shandro, Hon. Tyler, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
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Sigurdson, Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
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Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
 Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
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Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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| | |
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| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

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| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Singh
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gotfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
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van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 2, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Hon. members, please remain standing as we will be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. I invite you to join in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Let's go Flames, I think, is appropriate here. Hon. members, please have a seat.

I feel like we almost needed a special prayer for the hon. the Minister of Health given such choices that he's making today.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a number of guests who are joining us. I'll invite the members who are waiting to proceed to their chairs while I am speaking.

Joining us in the Speaker's gallery today, I'm pleased to introduce to all members Arnold Viersen. He is the Member of Parliament for Peace River-Westlock. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I'm not sure that he was able to make it yet, but I do know that His Worship Greg Rathjen will be joining us here, the mayor of Bentley. If you are here, please feel free to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. I think he's coming in now, but don't all clap and make him feel embarrassed at this point. Welcome. Join us, Your Worship. It's not that we were waiting for you, but we were waiting for you.

Hon. members, also joining us today in the Speaker's gallery are some very special guests of the hon. the Minister of Finance. Please join me in welcoming Mel and Bernice Toews, his parents; and his wife, Kim Toews. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: We also have a school at the Legislature joining us today. They are from the constituency of Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. Wabamun school, please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Now, hon. members, I ask that you hold your applause until the conclusion of the remainder of the introductions today. Joining us in the galleries, there are 14 members of the Professional Association of

Resident Physicians of Alberta here today meeting with members for the Resident Physicians in the Legislature event.

Also seated in the gallery are guests of the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction – Darlene Rasmussen, Wayne Rasmussen, Kevin Kocher – and guests of the Member for Peace River: Ed Hoogerdyk and Will Faber.

Also joining us in the gallery: Allan Nielsen, a constituent and guest of the hon. the Minister of Children's Services; and Josiah Gurnsey, pastor of Thrive church in Calgary, a guest of the Minister of Infrastructure.

Also in the gallery: a guest of the Member for Calgary-Currie, United Conservative Party board member Maxwell DeGroat.

Finally, I'm pleased to introduce to you 10 ministerial interns who'll be working at a variety of ministries over the summer.

I invite you all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Economic Recovery and Growth

Ms Lovely: Mr. Speaker, if you listen to the members of the opposition on any given day, you will hear them constantly beat down and drag out our province. The socialists and their friends will constantly tell us what an awful place they think Alberta is. They will attack our economy and job creators, and they will tell you all about the terrible future that they think lies ahead.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a good thing that these talking points from the NDP are nothing but a left-wing delusion. Let me tell you Alberta's real story. It is the opposite of the NDP story of decline and downfall. The story of Alberta today is one of renewal and growth. We all know that we have been through some tough times in recent years, but Albertans have done what they always do. We have faced down tough times and come through stronger than ever with a bright future ahead of us.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP claims that people are running from Alberta, but nothing could be further from the truth. In the last half of 2021 net migration to Alberta was nearly 30,000 people. That is more than any time during the NDP government. The Alberta family is growing. The NDP also claims every day that we have faced economic doom and gloom. They could not be more wrong. Every reputable projection has Alberta leading Canada in economic growth not just this year but next year as well. Our economy is forecasting to grow faster than at any time under the NDP. The Alberta economy is growing.

You know what is not growing, Mr. Speaker? Alberta's debt. That's right. After four years of the NDP fiscal train wreck, the budget is balanced, and we are no longer burdening our children and grandchildren with tens of billions of dollars to pay down.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is growing, and our government will make sure that that continues for years to come. Thank you.

Economic Indicators

Mr. Bilous: For the past year the UCP has been claiming that Alberta would lead the country in economic growth, but preliminary data from Statistics Canada shows that that simply isn't true. In fact, figures released today show that Alberta was actually sixth in the country for economic growth in 2021, and to make matters worse, we still haven't recovered the losses from the pandemic. Our economy is actually smaller than when the UCP formed government.

But it isn't just GDP; Alberta is also lagging on investment, jobs, and wages. Capital investment is still well below levels seen under our government, and Alberta only attracted 4 per cent of venture capital investment in the country last year. Alberta's unemployment rate is still well above the national average, and Calgary continues to have the highest unemployment rate among major cities. A recent report found

that wages aren't keeping up with inflation. While prices have increased approximately 7 per cent, incomes have increased by just 3 per cent on average since COVID, the lowest wage growth in the country. As a result, Albertans are struggling more than Canadians in any other province, and many have cancelled a major purchase or are finding it difficult to afford basic necessities.

So while the UCP tries to claim that jobs and the economy are doing great, the facts tell a much different story and are just one more reason Albertans cannot trust this government. The fact is that Albertans continue to struggle under the UCP government, and when they are presented with the facts, the UCP just blames Albertans and tells them to get a better job. The answer isn't to get a better job. Albertans need a better government, and soon enough they'll have it, with the NDP.

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

1:40 Members of the Legislative Assembly's Role

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is actually my first member's statement since returning. I've sat in the House of Commons in Ottawa, and I've sat in the front bench here. I'm now enjoying the view from the back, this back corner, which reminds me that every seat in this place is important and everyone here serves Albertans. That is very important.

Having been away for a while gave me a chance to look at this place and see it the way everyday Albertans see it, and Albertans sometimes, too often, don't like what they see. Colleagues, you are all leaders here. You were sent here to fight for the wants and the needs of the Albertans you represent, for all Albertans. You represent the diversity and the unity of Alberta, and you must all do your part to make Alberta better for today's Albertans and tomorrow's.

We need to improve how we do things around here, how we write laws, how we govern, and how we show Albertans that we care about the things that matter to them. We all have our roles. Cabinet runs the powerful ministries. The opposition tries to hold the cabinet to account. But the most important role is that of the government caucus. It is the government caucus's job to know Albertans the best. They talk to the people who feel the pain and live the hopes of Albertans. They understand when the government is getting it right and also when the government needs to improve. Caucus meetings should be where the Premier and ministers hold the government to account by their friends in caucus. Lougheed and Klein understood this. They understood that caucus matters more than cabinet. Cabinet does things; caucus makes them do them right.

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, we need to improve how things are done here. I'll be talking about that more in the coming weeks.

Thank you.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are struggling because of this UCP government. The UCP hiked taxes by a billion dollars using a tactic called bracket creep, a move the Premier himself once adamantly opposed, deeming it insidious. The government is taxing inflation and taking money away from families at a time when they need it most. The UCP lifted caps on insurance, utilities, tuition – you name it – then stood back and watched as costs skyrocketed.

Not only is this government making life harder for Albertans; they refuse to take any responsibility or show any compassion at all. The Finance minister heard stories about people seeing 30 per cent increases in their insurance bills and, instead of acting to help them, told them to just shop around for better prices. The Finance minister heard from a woman who told him that her utility bill was over \$1,900, and in response he dismissed her concerns by telling her that his bill was also

pretty high. Now, when told that inflation is outclimbing wages and families are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet, he told those struggling families that the solution to their problems was to get a better job.

Get a better job: Mr. Speaker, that's the solution that this government has to this crisis that they created. Only this government, with this Premier and this Finance minister, could hear the concerns of Alberta families and make the deliberate choice to blame them, blame the families who, because of the decisions by the UCP, are forced to choose between groceries and heat, between their work vehicle and keeping their lights on. This is just the latest evidence that this government is out of touch with the people they claim to represent.

Albertans deserve a government that cares about them and ensures that they can make ends meet. The UCP does not care about Albertans – we've long known this – but the Alberta NDP does care, and if we are elected to government, we will show the compassion that this UCP government so desperately lacks.

Thank you.

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

Inflation and Provincial Cost-Reduction Programs

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the seasons are changing and spring brings with it new beginnings, Albertans continue to feel the lingering presence of high inflation. High inflation has forced Albertans to struggle with the continued rise in the cost of living. Even though Alberta remains the most affordable place to live of all the other provinces, Albertans are still affected by the rising global inflation caused by supply chain issues and high energy prices. With inflation hitting a staggering 6.7 per cent in March, Alberta remains slightly below the national pace of 6.5 per cent.

The Bank of Canada governor told the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Finance: "Inflation is too high. It is higher than we expected." The Bank of Canada governor has also noted that the federal carbon tax is aiding higher inflation, boosting it by nearly half a per cent. Our government is committed to doing what we can to counteract the insensitive federal carbon tax that is aiding in the rising cost of living for Albertans.

We introduced a pause in our provincial fuel tax. This will automatically save Alberta drivers 13 cents per litre while filling up at the pump starting on April 1. Our government will be providing a \$150 rebate to over 1 million homes, farms, and small businesses. Albertans will begin to see rebates on their power bills as early as June.

Along with electricity many Albertans have also seen higher natural gas bills there. To begin to protect Albertans from spikes in heating costs next winter, a rebate program will run from October 2022 until March 2023. This rebate will kick in if regulated natural gas rates exceed \$6.50 per gigajoule.

I am proud to be part of a government that recognizes our current reality and takes immediate action to provide support to Albertans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government Record

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, as we approach the next election, Albertans are getting a good look at the UCP. The UCP promised to work hard, stay humble, and earn every vote. They promised to be happy warriors and to raise the bar on decorum and more. They promised to be respectful and disciplined.

Instead, Albertans got a joke of a government, a government that, according to its own MLAs, rules by fear, is only looking out for

number one, has only the Premier's personal political future in mind, has created a culture of fear and intimidation, engages in bullying tactics, is corrupt, is arrogant, is about cronyism, is not engaged, is not accountable, and is not focused on what's best for Albertans. And that's just from the UCP members in this room.

There is more that we hear day after day on this UCP soap opera. The Municipal Affairs minister's former EDA president said that "this government is not transparent and . . . not grassroots." He called out the UCP, who claims its own members are lunatics and compares them to clowns and says that they are sad and sour. This former long-time conservative activist told the media that he is worn out making excuses to people who ask why this government is doing what it's doing, and I know he's not alone.

This government and the UCP are a mess, fixated on drama, division, and infighting, ignoring the people they were sent here to serve. The Premier promised to restore a culture of discipline after his MLAs thumbed their noses at the health rules and jetted off to tropical vacations while the rest of Albertans stayed home and followed the rules. He failed just as he's failing on his promise to stand up for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a team united around a strong, ethical, compassionate leader who is dedicated each and every day to delivering the best for Albertans and standing up for them. Thank you.

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

Cold Lake Air Show

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, with the weather finally warming up and summer on the way, we can start planning to attend a very exciting event coming up in my constituency. The Cold Lake Air Show has been going on for many decades and will be taking place again this year from July 16 to 18.

What some of you may not know is that Cold Lake is home to 4 Wing, which is the busiest fighter base in Canada. This base not only hosts Canada's world-class tactical fighter force training but also deploys and supports fighter aircraft at a moment's notice to fulfill the domestic and international roles of Canada's air force, and the Cold Lake Air Show allows people to see these hard-working fighters do what they do best.

Both the wing commander, Colonel David Moar, and Mayor Craig Copeland have been working together to continue the tradition of showcasing these talents and to bring people together in this beautiful part of the province. The Cold Lake Air Show kicks off with Full Throttle Festival on Friday, which will have family activities, live entertainment, beer gardens, food trucks, a classic car show, and a flypast. On Saturday and Sunday you'll see the outstanding demonstrations from Canadian Armed Forces members such as the SkyHawks Parachute Team, CF-18 Demonstration Team, the RCAF Snowbirds, and more.

As the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul I'm proud to represent a riding that is home to 4 Wing, and I want more Albertans to experience the thrill of those CF-18s flying by, that I often get to experience just by living in this area. Tickets are free for kids 12 and under and around \$25 a day for adults, so grab your tickets today from the Cold Lake Air Show website. Come join me in beautiful northern Alberta to witness the biggest military air show in Canada, and while travelling through the area, be sure to stop in and visit the many lakes, museums, and great restaurants the area has to offer.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Cost of Living and Economic Growth

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I can think of few things more arrogant than this Finance minister telling families struggling with higher costs that the best cure is to get a better job. We have record inflation, 6.7 per cent, and at the same time wages are falling behind. Albertans working hard for their pay need help with that inflation, not job search advice from high-powered UCP ministers who make over 200 grand a year. Will the Premier stand today and apologize to all Albertans for his minister's elitist attitude and disdainful advice?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, he said no such thing. He did say that a good job with a high-paying salary is a good cure for inflation, and that's why this government is focused on a strong economy and on job creation. That's why we're leading Canada in job creation and in economic growth, with the highest incomes in Canada. The reality is that with investments from hydrogen to film and television, from high tech to agriculture, from forestry to manufacturing, with a record year in exports, with oil and gas back, Alberta is headed into an economic boom, and Albertans will be benefiting.

Ms Notley: Well, no question, Mr. Speaker, the Premier likes to say that things are looking up, and he's right. Inflation: up. Insurance premiums: up. Utility bills: up. School fees: up. Tuition: up. Income taxes: up. You know what's not up? Full-time jobs. In fact, they're down compared to this time three years ago. What is up is part-time jobs. Just how many so-called better jobs does the Premier think each Albertan needs to have at the same time just to afford this failed government?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, after the economic, job-killing catastrophe of the NDP and their tax-hiking government, I am pleased to report that Alberta now has the lowest unemployment rate since December 2018. We have the highest employment rate; that is to say, the percentage of our population that is in jobs is higher than all of the Canadian provinces and territories. The Conference Board, BMO, RBC, TD, and so on all predict that we are leading Canada in both economic and job creation now thanks to this government's policies.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, we had the highest number of people employed before this government got in and started ruining things.

Now, last year the Premier tried to claim, as he just did, that Alberta would lead the country in GDP growth, but where did we finish? Well, sixth, after B.C., Quebec, P.E.I., Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Yukon. Moreover, according to ATB, Alberta has not recovered from our pandemic losses. GDP is still \$11 billion below what it was in 2019. Mr. Speaker, you know who does need a different job? This Premier. When will he realize that?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the NDP for leading question period today on the economy, and I want to encourage them to make that the key issue for the next 12 months as we go into the next election because what Albertans will see is: the fastest growing tech sector in North America is happening right here in Alberta, a 1,000 per cent increase in investment in our film and television industry, the best year ever in agriculture revenues last year, the best year ever in Alberta exports. Last year was the second-best year ever in Alberta manufacturing. We just hosted

Canada's first hydrogen conference, with major companies from around the world investing billions of dollars in this economy.

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

Health Care System Capacity

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this weekend Albertans learned that most major surgeries are being diverted from the Red Deer regional hospital due to staff shortages. Alberta's third-largest city: this impacts so many Albertans, including those waiting to see if they have bowel cancer or those managing pain from appendicitis. This government's failure to manage the pandemic has pushed health care workers to the brink, and now we are struggling to maintain care. What is the Premier doing today to address this crisis? Why has he failed Albertans so miserably?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, let me decode NDP talk for you. When the NDP leader says "a failure to manage COVID," what she means is that this government did not put Alberta in a hard, two-year lockdown. We know that the consequences of that to people's mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial well-being would have been catastrophic had the NDP been here to put us in a New Zealand-style deep freeze for the past two years. Now, this government is spending the highest amount ever on health care and investing \$1.8 billion in a new Red Deer hospital.

Ms Notley: What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that Alberta's third-largest city is diverting surgeries to other hospitals. That is what I am saying.

Now, in the media statement from Alberta Health this government acknowledged some, quote, regret that the situation has come to this, but that was a little too vague for me and the people of Red Deer. Will the Premier stand today and state clearly what he regrets? Is it his best summer ever, his privatization agenda, his fight with doctors, his general level of chaos in our health care? Which is it, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, the baseline budget for Health in Alberta today is \$2 billion higher than it was under the NDP. We continue to lead the country in health investments. We are leading in capital investments to increase capacity, a key learning from the COVID era. We've increased by 1,800 the number of nurses working in Alberta, by 230 more paramedics working now than was the case two years ago, and, of course, with more doctors working in our system as well. We expect AHS to ensure that these resources are properly deployed to address the urgent needs of Albertans.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, it isn't just the people of Red Deer; it's Albertans across this province who can't get the health care they need. Drumheller's operating room currently has a gap in coverage due to a lack of physicians. The Two Hills ER has no overnight physician coverage on weekdays. In Hanna seven out of 17 acute-care beds have been closed. Rocky Mountain House, Sundre, Rimbey, Drayton Valley: there are 21 communities with bed closures or space reductions or service loss across this province today. Can the Premier name a single community where health care has actually not gotten worse?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt that many of our hospitals continue to be under stress, both as a legacy of the last COVID wave but also we have had some increased pressure on the hospitals. That is particularly the case in central Alberta where there's been a disproportionate number of new cases and

hospitalizations in that region. But what are we hearing from the NDP? What they did from day one of COVID, which is to seek to exploit politically a public health crisis. That alone, I think, disqualifies them from being Alberta's government.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition for question 3.

Homeless Supports and Affordable Housing

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the temperature goes up, we can expect to see more and more Albertans struggling with homelessness and camping outside. The city of Calgary is tracking around 150 people across 80 encampments right now, but they expect that number to increase significantly in the next few months. Now, recent studies show that more than half of Albertans using emergency shelters are in Calgary, higher than any other area in the province. What is this government doing to better address this issue in Calgary, and please could the Premier be specific and refrain from name-calling?

Mr. Kenney: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I will refrain from doing what she does at every single opportunity in this place.

Alberta's government is maintaining funding for homeless shelters at nearly \$49 million while ensuring that those who require emergency shelters have a safe place to stay. In fact, we invested \$9 million in the new Herb Jamieson emergency shelter for the Hope Mission here in Edmonton. We announced a homelessness task force, co-chaired by Edmonton police chief Dale McFee, to look at the issue of minimum standards of care within the shelter system and a better co-ordinated community response.

Ms Notley: Maintaining shelter funding: according to Alpha House Society, who does outreach with these Calgarians, a big part of the problem is actually the lack of affordable and transitional housing. Outreach workers say that the wait-list is just too long. These Albertans often choose to live in camps instead of shelters, and that's why funding for shelters and detox spaces alone is not good enough. They need housing. Last year the UCP left \$187 million for affordable housing on the table in Ottawa. Why is the UCP leaving so many vulnerable Albertans behind?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I should have mentioned as well the some \$73 million provided by Alberta's government to homeless shelters through the COVID pandemic to deal with the surge in homelessness during that difficult time. We continue to maintain stable and generous funding to support the homeless populations. We want to thank those who work in this sector – the nonprofits and charities and the private donors – who make very important contributions to supporting those who live without homes.

2:00

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, at a time when more and more Albertans are struggling, the Premier's policies are pushing them out the door of their homes and onto the street. The UCP cut \$66 million from income support and kicked at least 2,600 people off their rental supplements. This government has put more focus on selling affordable housing than building it, and they were so late with their shelter money last fall that Albertans were already sleeping in the fall. Poverty is rising. So is homelessness. Will this Premier take any responsibility for the suffering he is causing at all?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, sadly, there have always been homeless people in Alberta, and sadly that continues to be a reality, but this government is taking action with our new housing strategy, with investments that are also being made together with the federal

government and municipal governments. But, you know, for example, I know that when the Hope Mission went to the NDP to say that they needed to replace their 60-year-old emergency shelter in Edmonton, the NDP slammed the door in their face. This government helped them open a new emergency shelter, that I have been proud to visit, that's offering a bed and safe roof over the heads of well over 200 homeless Edmontonians. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the UCP's culture of elitism was on full display last week as the Finance minister blamed hard-working Albertans for not making enough money to pay for skyrocketing tuition fees, soaring utility bills, and the government's billion-dollar bracket creep income tax hike. Get a better job: that's the arrogant and tone-deaf statement the Finance minister gives Albertans who are struggling with massive cost-of-living increases and stagnant wages. It's a sign the minister has lost touch with reality and the Albertans who are struggling to afford life under the UCP. Will the Premier condemn these remarks?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's absolutely ridiculous. We recognize there is an affordability challenge in the province of Alberta, and we're taking action. That's why we've come forward with the electricity rebate program. That's why we've created a consumer price protection mechanism for natural gas. That's why we've suspended the fuel tax, saving Albertans up to \$1.3 billion. The members opposite raised taxes. We're reducing them.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the minister's statement was ridiculous. Families are struggling because of the increased costs that this government and this Finance minister have inflicted on them, and his only advice is that they should try harder and get a better job. The arrogance of this government knows no bounds. The government promised Albertans wages would rise. Families are falling further behind. Inflation is outpacing wage growth by six times. To the Premier: when will you stop layering extra costs on the average Alberta family? Will you get serious about helping Albertans make ends meet?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're taking real action on affordability, up to \$2 billion of relief for the upcoming year. But, yes, the other responsibility of government is to position the economy for investment attraction, job creation so that Albertans can find their first job. Then Albertans can find a better job. Then Albertans can get a promotion. That is government's responsibility, something the NDP never understood.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, they are responsible for fewer full-time jobs now than when they were elected. They are responsible for a billion-dollar income tax hike thanks to sneaky bracket creep. They are responsible for skyrocketing tuition, for high utility bills, for insurance costs, and Albertans struggling because of their policies. Half of Albertans are \$200 away from being able to pay all their bills, but this Finance minister thinks the answer is to get a better job. Is the Premier really going to stand here and continue to pretend

his economic plan is working when Albertans are living paycheque to paycheque?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to be crystal clear. The only members in here who've raised taxes are the members opposite when they were in government. They brought in the carbon tax. It increased the costs for every family, every senior, every homeowner. They're supporting their friend and ally Justin Trudeau in pushing the carbon tax up four times. [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: They're supporting their friend and ally Justin Trudeau in pushing up the carbon tax four times by 2030. The members opposite have no grounds to complain about affordability. This government is taking action.

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

Technology Innovation and Industry Development

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We talk a lot about technology and the role it plays as a strong pillar for economic diversification. To that end, the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation recently released the Alberta technology and innovation strategy to help cement our province's reputation as a serious player in the tech and innovation sector. To the minister: can he please tell us why having this strategy is so important to the overall tech sector here in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are proud of the tech sector in the province of Alberta. They had a campaign: I Heart Alberta Tech. It's gone viral, and I encourage people to go check that out online. We're seeing rapid growth not only when it comes to the venture capital opportunities – we had 200-plus million dollars invested in venture capital in the first quarter of this year, another record in Alberta – but we're also seeing major institutional players like Rogers, and now it's an expansion of over 500 new jobs at its tech centre in the city of Calgary. It's bright times for the tech sector, and we're a hundred per cent behind them.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that, as the minister of Service Alberta has frequently said, tech is not just an industry; it is the future of every industry and given that the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation regularly talks about and promotes the incredible innovation we're seeing from Alberta-based entrepreneurs and given that we're seeing a lot of advances in the health care sector, can the same minister tell us how Alberta's government is supporting innovation with Alberta's health care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just today I had the opportunity to go to NAIT to announce \$1.2 million of financing for training and commercialization. I encourage everybody to take a look at what NAIT has to offer. I had an opportunity to go check out a simulated surgery today. I also had a chance to drive an ambulance. I must say that you wouldn't necessarily want me driving that ambulance, but it's amazing to see the training

opportunities for Albertans. NAIT is an amazing facility, and we're going to continue to make those strategic investments.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given the support of our government for advancing technology and innovation in our province and given the government's announcement this morning supporting health care innovations, partnerships with postsecondary institutions and small and medium organizations, can the minister please tell us how health care and the services that our residents require are changing and adapting to the challenges ahead and the role that technology plays moving forward?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we have going at NAIT – I'll use that as an example – is the training opportunities that are there for people that have new, innovative products. Trying to get them to commercialization, they have the opportunity to test it out on what that patient experience would be like as well as probably adding training opportunities for people for everything from an ambulance to a surgery when it comes to our hospital systems overall. It's amazing to see these training opportunities for people that need microcredentials, people that need all the skills training at the younger stages of their career. It's amazing to see this. It's going to help provide health resilience both for job opportunities but also for innovators that are creating companies.

Minimum Wage for Youth

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, each and every day thousands of Albertans go to work jobs earning minimum wage. During the pandemic many of these workers were on the front lines at stores, cafes, and restaurants. The Finance minister's comment to get a better job is completely condescending. It is yet another example of the UCP's lack of respect for the people of Alberta. Meanwhile this UCP government is looking to lower liquor servers' wages and has already lowered youth minimum wages, making their paycheques cover even less. Does the minister stand by his statement that the hard-working Albertans who serve our communities should find a better job?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I'll absolutely stand by my statement that it's government's role to create the conditions that make us most competitive, that result in investment attraction, that result in economic growth, that result in job opportunities for Albertans, that result in career opportunities that maybe didn't even exist five years from now. That's what I'll stand by.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that this UCP government claimed that it relied on expert advice to slash the wages of youth workers but given that now we see massive hikes to inflation that are drastically outpacing wage growth for workers, even those who haven't taken a pay cut as a result of this government, and given that this government could take a small step to show it's listening, that it truly cares by restoring the youth minimum wage today, Minister, let's see some compassion. Let's see something to help with the cost-of-living crisis. Will the minister restore wage cuts earned by youth workers right here and right now?

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

2:10

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. From day one of this government we have been working so hard to make sure that we create the environment to ensure prosperity in our province. In

Budget 2022 alone we allocated a record \$600 million that would help Albertans who are looking for work, who need to upskill their training and implement skills to make sure that the jobs are going to be there today and tomorrow. We are making those investments and much more.

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, given that youth workers are facing significant barriers to affordability and employment and given that some youth face substantial financial obligations like parenting and given that people like my own mother, who raised me as a single parent when she was only 14 years old, are being forced to drop out of school because of policies like the UCP's tiered minimum wage and given that under the UCP government youth retention in our province has plummeted, will the minister advise the House on why he doesn't care about our future leaders and why he stands behind policies that are actively driving them out of the province? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that the members opposite now care about jobs and economic opportunities for everyone. Between 2015 and 2019, under the NDP, there were a record 170,000 Albertans that they drove out of employment, more than a hundred billion dollars, that would have created good-paying jobs right here in our province from region to region, that were driven away by those members opposite. We will take no lessons from them on economic policies.

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

Health Care System Capacity

(continued)

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I was in Red Deer speaking about the growing health care crisis in Alberta's third-largest city: paramedics forced to provide parking lot medicine, Albertans who need surgery being forced to hit the highway to Calgary or Edmonton, expectant parents forced to travel hours from their homes to give birth, health care workers that are burning out. They want to give help but have literally nothing left to give. What is this Health minister doing right here today to put an end to this crisis, and what will it take to get real action? Serious injury? Death?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for raising the issue in Red Deer. Some general surgery patients are being diverted from Red Deer to other hospitals due to shortages of physician assistants and GP hospitalists who care for patients after surgery. There were seven patients who were diverted. I want to put this into perspective. Roughly 250 surgeries per week are performed in Red Deer; we had to move seven. But that's the strength of our system, to be able to move people around. Our system is under strain, but we are focusing on delivering more resources to our system, and I'll talk more about that in a moment.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that those hospitalists are under attack by this government and given that it's not just Red Deer – our inboxes are flooded with people who can't get the health care they need – and given that we've also heard of children being bumped from their beds in the children's hospital in Calgary and given that the South Health Campus in Calgary is also seeing surging emergency room wait times, can the minister advise where surgeries are going to be cancelled next? Where does he next expect

to find an ambulance stuck in a parking lot, unable to transfer a patient? At what point do we have to simply conclude that this government just doesn't care?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before in this House, our system is under strain right at this point in time. It's been a challenging last couple of years, but we understand this, and we are reacting to this. We are investing in our health care system: \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year, a total of \$1.8 billion over the next three years, the highest amount ever in terms of expenses for the health care system. In addition to that, we are investing in capital: \$3.5 billion, including \$1.8 billion over the next 20 years associated with the Red Deer hospital. We are increasing staff, and I'll talk more about that in a moment.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this government is continuing to undermine and attack staff, and given that all we hear from this government is more platitudes about what's being done, promises for the future and given that, clearly, whatever strategy this government has had for health care has failed because doctors are leaving and half as many are accepting new patients as two years ago and given that this government attacks health care professionals online, attacks patients, removes internal voices that dissent against their failed approach – just ask Dr. Verna Yiu – will this minister stand in this House, apologize for his repeated failures risking the lives of Albertans? At what point do we have to question whether he should still have his job?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is indicating that we are attacking health care workers. It's simply incorrect. We are investing in our health system. We are investing in our health workers. We have 1,800 more nurses today than we had two years ago. We have 230 more paramedics than we had two years ago. We even have 99 more doctors Q1 this year compared to Q1 last year. AHS: we're investing more money, and we'll be hiring 2,800 more staff in AHS to deliver health care services this year over last year. We're investing in capacity. We're able to deliver . . .

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

Fair Deal Panel Recommendation

Mr. Barnes: Two years ago the Fair Deal Panel called for immediate creation of a provincial police service. Now, even with a two-year head start, we are falling behind other provinces, with an all-party committee of the B.C. Legislature calling for the creation of a provincial police service just April 28. On April 1 Saskatchewan launched a 450-member provincial protective services branch while Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland all already have their own provincial forces. To the Premier: after two long years of consultations, studies, and delays, when can Albertans finally expect concrete action?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. As I've said publicly, both at Rural Municipalities as well as Alberta Municipalities at their spring conferences this year, I've heard from many of our municipal leaders that they have further conversations they'd like to have with our ministry regarding some concerns that they have with the PricewaterhouseCoopers report that has been received after the consultations that the ministry has had with Albertans throughout the province. We're going to continue to have those conversations

with our municipalities, be able to answer their questions, and be able to get their feedback.

Mr. Barnes: Given that last week this Assembly approved my private member's motion urging the government to deploy every legal, economic, and constitutional tool to fight for a fair deal, given that the Assembly previously approved a government motion to recognize the results of the equalization referendum, given that this referendum was approved with a clear majority, and given that both MLAs and the public have democratically expressed their desire to fight for a fair deal, when can Albertans expect this Premier to stop writing empty letters and start taking real action?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are taking real action. We've negotiated a much better deal, an excellent deal, with the feds around child care. We landed a billion dollars on well reclamation. We've made progress on fiscal stabilization – more work to do – and we have equivalency on methane and our TIER program. We're leading by example on wealth creation, and we're leading by example on fiscal responsibility.

Mr. Barnes: Given that I was proud to serve on the Fair Deal Panel – I can tell you that some of the most passionate testimony during the panel was relating to our own provincial police force – given the growing rates of crime, particularly rural crime, and given that the creation of a provincial police force is most strongly supported by rural Albertans while 58 per cent of Albertans use a tribal or municipal protection option anyway, again to the Premier: why does your government continue to ignore the will of rural Albertans and force them to contract with the RCMP?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, that's completely ridiculous, as probably most of what we hear from that member. But, look, here are the facts. We're going to continue to get advice on what is possible. The key, though, is that we have many problems with agreements that we have with the federal government. Regardless of what the solution is going to be, we have many important, key problems with police governance that we need to be able to fix either through that agreement that we have with the federal government – they provide contract policing to us and to our rural communities and 47 of our urbans. But we need to fix those governance issues one way or the other, and we will commit to Albertans that we will provide those . . .

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

Calgary's Economy

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, day after day we hear from the jobs minister about the fantastic job he's doing in Calgary, about how everyone is swaggering because of the UCP. However, while the minister is partying, Albertans and Calgarians are struggling with the aftermath of the UCP's decision to hike costs, kill successful programs, and fail to respond to the needs of Calgarians. Our caucus has proposed a downtown plan; the UCP has proposed doing nothing and hoping the problem solves itself. Can the minister of jobs please tell this House: how many head offices are in Calgary today versus when his government took office?

2:20

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, the unemployment rate is lower than it's been since December 2018, and we expect that it's going to continue to go down. Unlike the NDP, who told Albertans, "Go get a job in British Columbia; we've got no ideas in the NDP," we are

diversifying Alberta's economy: the film industry, the tech sector, logistics and manufacturing, and – oh, yes, two words the NDP will never utter – the oil and gas industry. It's thriving again in the province of Alberta.

Member Ceci: Given that we've lost 15 head offices in Calgary – could the minister stop yelling rhetoric and just admit to Albertans how badly this government has failed to keep head offices in Calgary? – and given that Calgary still has the highest unemployment rate of any major Canadian city and given that you'd think this is something the jobs minister would be concerned about but is too busy boasting about his swagger and sticking up for the least trusted Premier in . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

I hesitate to interrupt the member – and I appreciate that he continued to raise his voice – but it was difficult to hear him with some of the interruptions. He still has about 10 seconds remaining if he wants to conclude his question in a manner in which I can hear.

Member Ceci: Thank you.

This minister is too busy boasting about his swagger and sticking up for the least trusted Premier in Canada. Can the minister tell us the unemployment rate in Calgary? Be specific. Show there's some capacity for research over there.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, this government will never apologize for fighting for jobs for Albertans, unlike the NDP, who gave up on Albertans. You know what we've never heard from the NDP? Congratulations when it comes to bringing in new investment to this province. Amazon Web Services: crickets. Rogers Communications: crickets. When it came to RBC's innovation hub, crickets when it comes to the NDP. We know how to get investment into this province. We will not apologize for fighting every single day for jobs for Albertans.

Member Ceci: Given that Calgary's unemployment is 7.7 per cent and given that while everyone in this House enjoys hearing the joyous shouts of the jobs minister trying to deflect from his failures to revitalize the downtown of our largest city but given that I'm really concerned that he either doesn't know the unemployment rate in Calgary or refuses to tell this House and given that wages earned by Calgary workers haven't kept pace with inflation and that the economic failures of this government continue to pile up, is the reason the minister of jobs is doing such a bad job because he's badly informed, because he's ignorant of the reality, or both?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, you know what's interesting right now that's happening across Alberta? Canadians are moving to this province. And you know why? High-paying jobs and affordable big cities. You know what was extinct under the NDP? Licence plates from any other province. Nobody was moving here when the NDP were in office. Everybody was leaving. Now we have people coming to this province. You know why? There are opportunities in Alberta again. That's a record that we're proud of. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Utility Rebates and Small-business Supports in Morinville-St. Albert Constituency

Ms Renaud: Mr. Speaker, the people living in the constituency of Morinville-St. Albert deserve a real leader for their communities. The current MLA and associate minister of electricity promised a natural gas rebate but failed to deliver. Then he promised an

electricity rebate. Still nothing. It's been more than 60 days and nothing. Can the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity explain to his own constituents and all Albertans, for that matter, why he continues to fail them so badly when they need help the most, right now?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Apparently, we have a front-row seat to a master class in absolute gaslighting, Mr. Speaker, because that is absolutely what they're doing. We signed royal assent on the rebate legislation last week, on Friday, but you know what's interesting? We could have had royal assent a week before. In fact, we could have had royal assent six business days before, but the NDP voted against doing it. Shame on them.

Ms Renaud: Given that I've spent a lot of time communicating with the residents of Morinville-St. Albert, who tell me that after three years of the UCP they are looking for change, and given that they're tired of a government that drinks and dines on the sky palace patio, flies their friends on private planes while the Finance minister insults everyday Albertans by telling them to get a better job, will the associate minister of electricity stand in this House, yell a little less, and apologize on behalf of the Finance minister for insulting them? Or, actually, does he agree with the insulting comments made?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, last week we had Canada's first hydrogen conference. We had 2,000 delegates. We had 20 international delegates. This was an incredible opportunity for us to put Alberta on the map in hydrogen. Well, guess what the NDP were doing at that time. They had an eight-page grade 11 book report on hydrogen, and they were standing in front of the conference giving it out to passersby. They reminded me of guerrilla marketers in Vegas. It was that moment when I realized how irrelevant they are.

Ms Renaud: Given that small businesses I've spoken to in the constituency of Morinville-St. Albert are still – still – waiting in some cases for funding they were promised in earlier waves of the pandemic and given that this government's support for these small-business owners has come up short time and again – the funding provided, when it does come, wasn't even enough to keep the lights on – and given that those businesses deserve representation in this House, that they deserve an MLA at the cabinet table who supports them and doesn't just do what he's told, does the associate minister of electricity have an answer for these businesses that are struggling in his riding? They're drowning in debt. They truly are struggling.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, do you know what the residents of St. Albert deserve? They deserve an MLA that lives in their riding. That's right. They don't even have an MLA that lives in their riding. Well, let me tell you that despite that, we made a commitment that we are going to stand up and support Albertans. We did that with \$2 billion worth of supports: the electricity rebate, the gas rebate, the 13 cents a litre that we paused at the pump. That is \$2 billion worth of supports. We made a commitment to have Albertans' backs, and we will always do that for Albertans.

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

Community Facilities and Live Events

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have endured many challenges to their lives and livelihoods over the past two

years, and it's now time to heal, revive, and support community-spirited activities that we hold close to our hearts. Arts, culture, history, and heritage are paramount to community well-being and reflect upon the vitality and diversity we share and the uniqueness each of us brings to this great province in forming a brighter and more inclusive future. To the Minister of Culture: what is being done by your ministry to assist our dedicated and passionate civil society organizers so that 2022 can be a banner year for our community recovery and celebration?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for his question. I, too, love the dragon boat festival, which is in my very riding. Live events are an important part of Alberta's economic, social, and emotional recovery. Our government has and will continue to provide grant funding to assist organizations in hosting live events. Funding available is both operational and project based and is provided by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and through the community initiatives program. Alberta Culture Days funding is also available to community organizations to host events in 2022.

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

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that community associations and facilities are important to the wellness of our citizens and given that varied sources of funding are imperative to operations and facility upkeep and further given that many facilities are aging and require considerable life cycle maintenance or upgrades, to the same minister: what supports are available from our government for community organizers and their facilities as they focus on rebuilding the strong sense of community we value and desire in our great province?

The Speaker: The chief government whip.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, public facilities like community associations, I think we can all agree, have an important part in building healthy, vibrant communities across Alberta. Just last week we announced another round of funding for CFEP, or the community facility enhancement program, to support these organizations. These spaces provide a place for people to connect and are an important part of the emotional and social recovery for Alberta. If community organizers would like to apply, there are multiple intakes during the year. The next annual intake for CFEP large is on June 15 and CFEP small on May 15.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that outdoor festivals and events are pivotal to a community's vibrancy and given that celebrating heritage and diversity, including my personal favourites, that you referenced, GlobalFest, Calgary folk fest, dragon boats, and the Chinatown Street Festival, to name a few, is crucial to Alberta's fabric – oh, and did I mention the Calgary Stampede? – to the same minister: what is the ministry doing to promote the importance of and participation in outdoor public festivities in a post-COVID world?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is so great, I think we can all agree, to see people coming together and participating in outdoor events, especially grassroots events put on by local communities.

Our government is supporting these events with the Alberta Culture Days grant. Alberta Culture Days is a great way to celebrate the talent, community spirit, and cultures that make Alberta so special. Applications this year are open until May 12, and I encourage any community not-for-profit organization to apply for a grant and become a part of the month-long celebration.

2:30 Employment Leave for Pregnancy Loss and Bill 17

Member Irwin: Pregnancy loss can be a deeply traumatic experience, impacting 1 in 4 pregnancies. Along with this come many complex emotions: grief, shame, guilt, self-loathing, feelings of isolation, to name a few. Pregnancy loss can include miscarriage, stillbirth, termination for medical reasons, or abortion. All of these forms of loss are distressing, and we must ensure to be inclusive and compassionate to all forms it may take. Will the labour minister make Bill 17 more appropriate and comprehensive by allowing bereavement leave to include pregnancy loss alone rather than legislating specific types of pregnancy loss?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to have worked with colleagues and those in the not-for-profit sector to bring forward Bill 17. There's nothing more heartbreaking than a loss of pregnancy, and we want to make sure that the supports are there for those of our fellow citizens to be able to grieve with their family members in peace and quiet. I look forward to debating Bill 17 and making it law in this province.

Member Irwin: Given that there are significant barriers for those experiencing pregnancy loss, particularly in employment situations where someone cannot afford to take on paid leave and someone who may not have access to sick leave, and given that some people may experience the pain of multiple pregnancy losses, often within several months of each other, experiencing both physical and emotional pain, to the labour minister: again, will you expand the definition of pregnancy loss in Bill 17, and how are you ensuring that your government will make sure that all Albertans are supported during their recovery?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. Bill 17 has been crafted in a manner that ensures that you don't have to disclose to your employer the circumstances under which you are seeking the leave, and we're to make sure that anyone out there that has suffered a loss of pregnancy has the ability to benefit from Bill 17. I look forward, again, to additional debate on Bill 17 before this Assembly.

Member Irwin: Given that there's still a whole lot of lack of clarity here in terms of what types of pregnancy loss are covered and we know that this is an incredibly difficult topic to discuss with those closest to us, let alone our own employer, who may not realize that an employee does not need to provide medical details to access leave, does the minister think that it's appropriate for an employee to have to have a personal discussion or have to educate their employer on their own tragic circumstances to acquire bereavement leave? If so, how can you justify this to Albertans?

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, my thoughts of this nature are deeply personal to those of our fellow citizens going through these issues. That is why in Bill 17 there is no requirement anywhere in that particular bill to disclose the reasons for requesting bereavement leave under Bill 17. At the end of the day, we have

faith in our fellow citizens and their employers to make sure that this leave is going to be there for anyone that needs it.

Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: Last month Rocky View schools asked the province for \$1.6 million to help bring in 10 modular classrooms to accommodate new students who are choosing public education. On Thursday the UCP government said no. Actually, the minister gave the school district the classic UCP response. According to the board chair, quote: she's given us permission to use our own dollars. Can the Minister of Education tell her own UCP colleagues why she's refusing to help support the communities they represent in Airdrie, Cochrane, and Rocky View county who are choosing public schools?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. The school board from that area asked to utilize, move some modulars around, et cetera. What the member opposite didn't share was that they did this outside of the regular planning for capital. If they wanted to wait and allow for the capital expense to go through, that would've been a different conversation, but because of the fact that they have increasing reserves in their school authority, we certainly allowed them to go ahead and use the reserves.

Ms Hoffman: Given that there's no help from the UCP for public schools in Rocky View county or, really, most communities in Alberta and given that north Calgary itself has been shut out of school buildings by this UCP government and given that the UCP has found capital money for charter schools, why is the minister intentionally sabotaging the public, Catholic, and francophone schools that families rely on in north Calgary and its surrounding communities?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite continues to show that she doesn't do her homework. We are spending \$2 billion to build schools, over 66 schools across this province. We are continuing – in the francophone community there are over, I believe, eight projects ongoing right now. The member opposite should do her homework, but she doesn't, and I'm not sure why.

Ms Hoffman: If the minister read her own budget instead of trying to take credit for projects announced under the NDP, we'd see better answers in this House, Mr. Speaker.

Given that in Edmonton public schools there are 1,700 new students headed to schools for the first time this fall but the government refuses to fund them and given that Rocky View schools are also expecting their student population to grow this year and in the years to come, can the minister tell the families sending their kids to kindergarten in overcrowded classes in Rocky View schools this September why the UCP refuses to fund their families' educational choice, why the minister won't properly fund public education?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the members opposite that they did not support choice. When I went across this province, the one thing I heard over and over again: "Thank you. Thank you for supporting choice and funding it." We have increased the budget overall for education over three years by \$1 billion. The members opposite need to recognize that and appreciate the fact that our schools are well funded, and the Edmonton public in

particular is gaining an additional \$11 million on their over \$1 billion budget.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Opioid Addiction Treatment

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Justin Trudeau and the NDP are misguided when it comes to the issue of addiction. The belief that drug policy should be completely focused on decriminalizing drugs and that providing a free supply of narcotics and needles will result in better outcomes is questionable. Alberta's committee to examine this issue heard clearly from a range of experts that there is no evidence to support the distribution of public supply of addictive drugs. To the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions: how will this government address these different strategies?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I'd like to thank the member for his work on the select special committee on safe supply. What concerns me the most is what the Liberal-NDP alliance is actually advocating for. Let me be clear. What they're advocating for is a public supply of addictive drugs for which there is no evidence to support that policy decision. In fact, the evidence clearly says that the more opioids there are in the community, the more harms are caused to the community. So let's be clear. Just because we brand something an opioid and make it safe does not actually make it safe.

Mr. Yao: It is given that one expert, Dr. Keith Humphreys, chair of the Stanford-Lancet Commission on the North American Opioid Crisis, said this about the OxyContin era: pharmaceutical opioids were legally produced and regulated, "public health would benefit by increased [opioid distribution]", and opioids would only be taken as prescribed by those it was prescribed to. Mr. Speaker, this may sound familiar because the same points that were used to sell OxyContin are being used by activists today to sell safe supply. My question to the minister is: will it be any different today than it was then?

The Speaker: The hon. the associate minister.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much, and thank you to the member for the question. Let's be very clear. Dr. Keith Humphreys is one of the foremost experts in the field of addiction medicine not just in North America but on this entire planet. He led the Stanford-Lancet Commission on the North American Opioid Crisis. There is no greater expert than Dr. Humphreys. But let me be clear. Safe supply is not a medical term. It is a marketing term. Let's be very, very clear on this. I support the work of Dr. Keith Humphreys, and I support the work of the members of that committee.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. It is given that good governments should rely on data and evidence to make decisions, not just listen to the most vocal and aggressive advocates. There is no scientific data to suggest that facilitation and a public supply of addictive drugs is an effective way to manage an addiction crisis. Can the minister advise this House on the concrete actions this government has taken to address the addiction crisis and to help people get their lives back?

2:40

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. It is so important that we are trying to get people's lives back. The illness of addiction is something that has affected almost everyone, either directly or indirectly. We are committed to recovery coaches, the DORS program, the VODP program, which is an award-winning program. We created 8,000 spaces. We've eliminated user fees. Under the previous government only the rich were able to get treatment. We've eliminated those fees whereby everybody can get help. We are committed to a recovery-oriented system and care to help everyone.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will continue with the remainder of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Ramadan

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, today Muslims in Alberta join over 1.6 billion people throughout the world celebrating Eid, which marks the end of the month-long fasting during Ramadan. The holy month of Ramadan highlights and shows the best of not just the Muslim community but all of our communities here in Alberta. Throughout Ramadan community members and many of my colleagues from outside the faith joined in the celebrations and iftars, the daily breaking of the fast. This is an important aspect of Ramadan. The iftar is a community event, allowing for people from other cultural backgrounds sometimes to join in the celebration, enjoy new friendships, and participate in the generosity that is the core of the Muslim faith. I saw this myself many times this year at the iftar events that I was honoured to join. I actually cosponsored an iftar with the Palestinian youth council and was able to join the Islamic Academy and the Muslim Association of Canada school iftar events as well. Fantastic community events, all of them.

Alberta is stronger as a whole for the Muslims that live with us and are fundamental to who we are as Albertans and Canadians. The first Canadian mosque, for example, was built in Edmonton more than 80 years ago. And all this time we've helped to build this province, building it together with our Muslim brothers and sisters. Throughout Ramadan Muslim communities have celebrated and recognized their connection to faith and all communities.

Today in this Assembly we have the opportunity to come together, celebrate, and support the Muslim communities by voting to move Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act, through the debate in this Assembly. This legislation comes from what we have been hearing from racialized communities, including Muslims, and today all members of this Assembly should consider how listening could actually improve this community that is Alberta. This year's Ramadan celebration showed the very best of Alberta and showed the vital connections that Muslim communities have in every corner of the province.

Thank you so much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

2022 Provincial Legislation

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we start to approach the summer, I would like to recognize all the amazing legislation this

government, our government, has been introducing. Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, makes steps towards protecting the continuing care system throughout the province. It closes gaps exposed by the COVID pandemic and will strengthen the effectiveness of the additional 1,500 continuing care spaces being added to the health care system.

As a teacher I feel that Bill 15 is long overdue. The Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022, will bring greater confidence to the teaching profession disciplinary process currently controlled by the Alberta Teachers' Association. By removing their control and the conflicts of interest that come with it, we are creating a transparent and reliable system that Albertans can have confidence in.

Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, aims to improve and support leave for families that lose a child through stillbirth or miscarriage. It's important that we support those who deal with these losses and give them the time they need and deserve to grieve. This is just some of the amazing legislation that has been introduced, and I can't wait to see what comes next as we continue to improve the lives of all current and future Albertans.

Even though I'm not surprised, I still find it reckless that the NDP continue to side with their union buddies that are fighting to keep their archaic conflicts of interest that only benefit themselves. They continue to oppose a better future for all who reside in Alberta and choose to promote division amongst us. Mr. Speaker, it's time the NDP wake up, take out their union-certified earplugs, and listen to Albertans for once.

I'm proud to be part of a government that continues to listen and improve the health, safety, livelihoods, and education of all Albertans. Thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to present the committee's final report on Bill Pr. 1, Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-South East, and Bill Pr. 2, Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein. These bills were referred to the committee on March 22, 2022. The report recommends that Bill Pr. 1 proceed and that Bill Pr. 2 proceed with amendments. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on bills Pr. 1 and Pr. 2.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills, has requested concurrence in the report on Bill Pr. 1 and Bill Pr. 2. This is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18. If anyone wishes to speak to the motion for concurrence, that ought to be done now.

Seeing none, the hon. chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills has requested concurrence in the report.

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 23
Professional Governance Act

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 23, the Professional Governance Act.

The Alberta government delegates self-governing responsibilities for certain professions and occupations to professional regulatory organizations. Currently these organizations are governed by a confusing and inconsistent patchwork of nine separate acts and 28 supporting regulations. The proposed Professional Governance Act will consolidate, modernize, and streamline this patchwork into one umbrella act with one supporting regulation, making it easier for them to do their work of protecting the health, safety, and public interest of Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I move first reading of Bill 23, the Professional Governance Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

**Motions for Concurrence in Committee Reports
on Public Bills Other than Government Bills**

Bill 204
Anti-Racism Act

The Speaker: Hon. members, on April 25, 2022, the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills presented the report of that committee on Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act. The report recommended that the bill not proceed. As a member other than the mover rose to speak on April 22, 2022, debate on the motion will proceed today.

The motion to concur in the committee's report on Bill 204 has already been moved, and therefore I will now recognize any member wishing to speak. Are there members wishing to speak to concurrence? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am quite pleased to be able to have a brief moment to speak to this, because the government has done everything possible to ensure that the opposition has the least amount of chance to speak to these kinds of bills.

2:50

In fact, what's happening here is a continuation of the assault on democracy that's been consistent with the government ensuring that every private member's bill brought up by the opposition side has been prevented from even seeing the light of day in the House, which is an absolute attack on the Westminster democratic principles that have been established and have been maintained in this province for generations and, of course, in the Westminster system for centuries. It is completely repugnant that the government would continue to act in this way. They clearly do not appreciate democracy. They clearly do not understand the functions of democracy, and they are using their ridiculous ideology to prevent a discussion from happening in this House yet again, just as they have with every other private member's bill.

They should be fully ashamed of themselves, and they, you know, really need to go back and learn some basic facts about how democracy works and the fact that it is not about a single party governing at their own whim but a balance of views being presented, reasonably contested, and encouraging the best of ideas to rise to the surface after that kind of testing. This government has

failed completely to do that in every single case, and they're continuing to do that here, and I think the government absolutely should be ashamed of itself.

Now, with regard to this particular piece of legislation they are piling on top of the antidemocratic with the imposition of, essentially, a systemic racist model of understanding. Again, how this government can do these things without complete shame is just appalling to me.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

You know, I had the opportunity two years ago to meet with some young students at the University of Calgary who had proposed a process of collecting race-based data to this government and had come forward and challenged the university and challenged this government to proceed. This government completely failed to heed this kind of request, not because there isn't good, scientific reason to pursue race-based data but because this government simply is taking the position that: if we don't see it, it doesn't exist. This is a complete lack of developmental growth by this government. We know that children under the age of six months act in this way, that if they can't see it, then it doesn't exist. But by the time they're one year of age, they understand that things exist even when you don't look at them, yet this government is continuing this really childish attitude that not collecting data is the way to move forward.

I absolutely cannot support this government's motion because of that. It is clear that people of the Black, Indigenous, and people of colour communities have said time and time again that they are experiencing a problem with inequality with regard to the services that they receive largely from public institutions such as the police, social services, health care, and education. All of these areas are areas over which the government has some ability to make some changes.

What they don't have is the data to support where the changes should occur. What they're doing here is that they're saying: well, if we never learn where the problem is, then we don't have to fix the problem. What kind of an appalling attitude is that for a government to take? You know, this is the government that handed out earplugs in this Legislature, very antidemocratic behaviour right from the very beginning.

Now they are actually using this legislative earplugs set by denying the right for opposition members to bring forward bills even for debate. They know that they're going to be able to defeat them when they're in the House, so it's not as if somehow legislation is going to be forced on them. They can defeat it because they have a majority, but they do it anyways because they actually do not appreciate democracy and what holds it together.

Now, getting back to this bill, there are a number of very strong reasons why this bill should be brought forward. We know that if we actually use race-based data to gain a greater understanding of the issues in our society, then we'll be able to act differently. The advantages of having a race-based data collection process is that you can monitor the discrimination, you can identify and remove systemic barriers, you can address historical disadvantages, and you can promote substantive equality. Those seem like some pretty solid reasons, to me, to have race-based data collected.

If the government actually thought that there were, you know, some problems in the way it was worded or how it was framed, they could have allowed this to come into the House, where they would shape it, change it, and perhaps even introduce a bill of their own with regard to this, but they have not done so. They clearly do not wish to do any of the things I just mentioned. They don't want to identify systemic barriers because then it would be requisite upon them to actually do something about it, and they don't want to do

anything about racial discrimination. This is just an appalling position for this government to take. They could actually take the opportunity to really bring substantive equality into our public systems.

Now, we know that there are no rules written down any longer that say, “Blacks, do not enter” or “Do not serve Indians,” the kinds of things we saw in our history, and thank goodness we don’t have any of those things any longer in actual rules, but it doesn’t mean that the problem has gone away. The problem has shifted from some of the overt language that we used to see to a more subversive, systemic, and more difficult to see yet fully experienced by people of the Black, Indigenous, and people of colour communities. They can tell you that when they go in to receive services from places, they can see the difference between the services they receive and the services that people of the non-BIPOC community receive, and they can tell you, by demonstrating in terms of outcomes, how much they are suffering as a result.

In health care we see all the time that people in the Indigenous community actually have worse outcomes, and I’ve seen evidence on this with regard to people of the Black community as well. So it’s the reason why these communities are coming together and saying: it’s actually hurting us physically in terms of our actual outcomes in terms of our health, but it also violates our citizenship, our right to actually believe that we will have equality with our fellow citizens in terms of the nature and the substance and the direction of services provided to us. That’s what they’re telling us.

The only way to ensure that we are able to identify these insidious forms of racism is to spend some time actually analyzing the data to look for the situations in which it occurs so that we can build upon this good evidence a system that eliminates and removes this kind of racism. But a government that doesn’t understand democracy and prevents these things from coming to the House clearly doesn’t understand racism either. I think it is completely unacceptable that we find ourselves in this position, and I certainly encourage the government to reconsider this. For the members opposite not to vote for this bill is far too telling about who they are and why they are ill-equipped to run this province in this day and age.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next member who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague. The debate of legislation in this place and the democracy that follows with that is one of the most important things we do. On that I can agree.

One thing I just wanted to say – and I’ll just speak quickly to this – is that race-based data requires a lot of consultation and a lot of work. I don’t disagree with the premise of what’s trying to be done here, but I think for any of us who have had the privilege – and especially as a person who is of Southeast Asian origin and Caucasian origin, it has been my privilege speaking with many of the communities across this province, either previously as a minister or now, and race-based data can be very, very nerve-racking for folks that don’t understand how and why it’s being used.

3:00

I don’t disagree with my colleague. I think it’s really important. I think the minister would also agree with that. But what we do need to do is make sure that it is collected appropriately and that it’s used appropriately. I think there will be an opportunity, as more legislation comes forward, to actually see that happen. I would hope

that my colleague across the way from the loyal opposition – the character assassinations and the assumption around bigotry and around racism towards a very, very diverse caucus on this side I think are inappropriate.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I think that the proof is in the pudding of the legislation that comes forward in the future and the use of that legislation in order to do exactly what the member is asking to do. Having said that, though, I do believe, based on my very, very small part in this discussion, that there is really a tremendous amount of consultations and work that needs to be done to make sure – those of us who have dealt with racism in the past know how easy it is to use information that you give against you. Even being female has been used against women. It’s absolutely imperative that the data that we collect is used in an appropriate manner and that the legislation actually outlines that to make sure that the best version of that data is actually helping out exactly what the member was talking about, making sure that the data is fixing and helping to attain better policy that legitimizes the work that all of us are trying to do.

Also, the assumption, I would also say, Mr. Speaker, to not speak about the work that has been done: there’s been a lot of great work that’s been done not only by our government but by other governments as well. I think that to undermine that by suggesting that the decisions being made around this bill somehow undermine the antiracism work is going 10 steps backward. Whether or not we’re debating it in this Legislature, that democracy piece – I actually would prefer to be able to debate the legislation.

Having said that, I also believe that there’s a lot of work that needs to be done on a piece of legislation, where that debate can actually look at the work that we’ve done with consultation with multiple, multiple groups of multicultural groups and First Nations groups. Like I said, I will say this on the record here. I have had, oh, hundreds of conversations with various groups across the province, and I’m not saying this because it’s something I believe. This was information that was passed on to me by people who are truly concerned about what will be done with that data.

So while I very much appreciate the bill that was brought forward, I do believe that there is going to be an opportunity to debate that within the premise of a larger piece of legislation that will allow us to actually look at the data and how we’re going to present that data. I look forward to that day, and I’m very excited to be able to debate that in the future.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to be able to speak on Bill 204. Let me begin by thanking the Member for Edmonton-City Centre for bringing forward this bill. No one on the floor of this Assembly would contest that racism, discrimination, and systemic racism are real and continue to negatively impact people from cultural and minority communities, including our First Nations people, so I appreciate the intention, the good intention, behind the tabling of Bill 204.

That said, Mr. Speaker, I have taken some good time to read through Bill 204. It essentially has 10 sections in this bill. The major sections of the bill: you will find that section 2 speaks to the purpose of the bill; section 3 speaks to the establishment of an antiracism office and the appointment of an antiracism commissioner, something no other province except for one or the federal government has done in this country; then section 4 talks about the duties of the commissioner; section 5 talks about consultation; and section 6 talks about impact assessment.

Mr. Speaker, as my colleague rightly noted, a bill of this nature requires a great deal of consultation, not just from the activist class or from the academic class but from a wide range of cultural communities. From the inception of this government, on day one of this government, we began the hard work of making sure that we build an inclusive Alberta. You know, beyond the work that we have done out there, you don't need to look for that anywhere other than the composition of the members of the government caucus to understand why this is a deeply important issue for us. I am part of a caucus that is more diverse than any government caucus in the history of our province. Not even the members opposite, the NDP, could come close when they were in office between 2015 and 2019.

Mr. Speaker, I have also stood before the floor of this Assembly to say on complex, important matters of race and racism and systemic discrimination that the last thing we want to do is to adopt tools or an approach that creates a wedge between fellow citizens. Instead, we should endeavour to build bridges, build relationships, so that collectively we can tackle the issues that we face as a society. One of those issues that we face as a society today is racism, discrimination, and systemic racism. That is why – you know, I have already talked about what led me to the Legislature. It was a protest that was taking place on the steps of the Legislature between 2016, '17, and '18 by members of the cultural minority community when the NDP were in office.

Members of the community where I come from called upon the NDP to ban the practice of carding. They did not lift a finger. They did not do that. Instead – I tuned into question period to listen to some of the debate on this particular issue – the then Justice minister, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, dismissed the idea that carding was a problem. This was not 10, 20 years ago. This was just a few years back, in 2018. The Member for Edmonton-City Centre, who shares some cultural affinity with myself, stood before the floor of this Assembly and indeed in media interviews, saying at that point in time that he agreed with the then Justice minister that that was not a problem.

Mr. Speaker, when I brought forward the bill that would legislatively ban carding, the reason why we have so many young people, Indigenous people in our correctional facilities, the members opposite voted against that bill, the first of its kind in this country. Alberta is the first province to start to truly ban the illegal practice of carding. I have my own personal stories to tell about these issues. The members opposite: I would want them to walk the talk.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, we went on to institute, when I was Justice minister, the hate crime co-ordination unit within the Department of Justice. Never happened anywhere in this country before: Alberta will be the only province where you have a hate crime co-ordination unit within the Department of Justice. We went further to appoint a liaison on hate crime.

Mr. Speaker, in the dying months of the NDP they put together the Alberta Anti-racism Advisory Council, and I thank them for that. Even though it was a month before the election in 2019, I still thank them for that. When I have the recommendation coming out of that committee, that is working through cabinet, that includes – one of the recommendations is actually the collection of race-based data. That work is making its way through the government process. Then from nowhere and while the NDP knows that this government is working on the recommendations of that council – there are 48 of them; as of today 22 of them have been implemented – they brought a bill. Rather than taking into consultation different communities, they propose an unwieldy bill that would make it harder for government departments to function.

What we are going to do, in line with the work that has been going on since the inception of this government and with the report of the Anti-racism Advisory Council, is bring forward a bill, a workable, functional bill, that actually solves the problem and addresses the problem that we face, the gap in data, and how that impacts minority communities and First Nations people, not a political football.

You listen to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talking – I mean, calling names – about: this government didn't do that; this government didn't do that. Baseless. I will remind the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford – and I hate to say this, but I have to put it on the record – that between 2015 and 2019 the government that they led had only one Black member of the Legislature on their side. We may not agree philosophically with the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, but you will never deny that he's a brilliant, well-spoken member of this Assembly. In NDP's traditional fashion they appointed all kinds as members of cabinet, chairs of committees, associate ministers, yet nothing.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The next member to catch my eye is the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to the concurrence motion on Bill 204. I appreciate that members of the government have stood and spoken. Certainly, this is more engagement than we've had on this private member's bill than at any point in this process so far.

I think I've outlined my concerns with the committee process which this government has put in place, the incredibly weak, thin arguments that a sole two members of that committee brought forward. Others spent the entire committee meeting looking at their phones, Mr. Speaker. That belies the respect that this government has claimed they had.

That aside, I appreciate that we have had some members rise and offer some more substantive discussion on this particular bill. In response to some of what's been said, the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore talked about this kind of work, the collection of race-based data, needing wide-ranging consultation. The Minister of Labour and Immigration referred to the same. Indeed, that was a comment made in passing by the two members from the UCP on the committee that spoke. Mr. Speaker, this bill laid out a robust process that would have had to be fulfilled to develop the regulations which would govern what data was collected, how it was used. The bill laid out the requirement that that involve consultation with racialized communities across the province of Alberta. The bill does not mandate immediately stepping in and simply starting to collect. It puts out the process by which to undertake that which they say needs to be done.

Now, what I hear them saying is that they want to do that work first. They want to do it as a government before they bring out the legislation, but my question is: what would that look like? In Ontario, where they have brought forward legislation of this kind, indeed they brought forward the bill, set out the framework, and then embarked on extensive consultations to develop the regulations that oversaw the collection of that data. That is what I based this on. Now, admittedly, Mr. Speaker, I do not have the resources of government as a private member to go forward and speak with all of the racialized communities across the province of Alberta. Admittedly, I do not, and I did not claim that I did.

But those that the minister belittles as activists and academics and whose opinions he apparently thinks are not worthy have been doing this work, people from his community. Dr. Bukola Salami: extensive work and research benefiting our community. She is not to be dismissed as an activist, as a mere academic whose opinion

does not matter. She is someone who has done the real work benefiting communities in the field, stood with me in support of this bill. Indeed, it seems that the government is saying: “We’ve got this. We’re good. Thank you; we’re working on our own process, our own legislation.”

The Minister of Labour and Immigration dares to say that I introduced this bill as a political football, that somehow I was disingenuous in bringing forward this legislation after months of consultation, conversations with hundreds of Albertans, reaching out to those experts I could speak with, speaking with the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Let’s be clear. They are not raising this, Mr. Speaker, to say that this bill should not be passed or that this bill needs to be amended. They said: it should not even bother being debated; it is not worth our time.

I recognize that indeed there are historically reasons for BIPOC communities, for racialized communities to distrust government – absolutely, Mr. Speaker – which is why we laid out the robust process in this bill, carefully thought that through.

The minister spoke about: there is no province in Canada that has an antiracism office and an antiracism commissioner. As far as I know, there’s not any other province that has a Chief Firearms Officer, but this government decided that that was a priority.

If you want to talk about politicization, we can certainly talk about many ways in which this government uses its relationships with these communities to look for political gain, but that is not why we’re here. We are here to talk about the actual bill. The Minister of Labour and Immigration suggested that this is a bill that could create wedges between fellow citizens. Mr. Speaker, let’s be clear that setting up a structure to allow us to collect the data to identify where real issues and inequities exist and then having someone in place to work with government departments to address those inequities is not driving a wedge. That is an assumption on the part of that minister. That is simply setting up an actual process of accountability to get this work done.

Now, in Nova Scotia I know they don’t have – the office is not called an antiracism office and an antiracism commissioner, but they do have an office and a commissioner for work with racialized communities. Again, that was part of what we brought into this bill as a means of accountability.

3:20

The minister talked about the Anti-Racism Advisory Council. Yes, our government established that. We put them in place. They came forward with some excellent recommendations, and indeed members of that advisory council spoke out in favour of Bill 204 and its realization of those objectives. I wonder: has the government reached out to speak to the members of that first committee who made that recommendation to talk to them about their thoughts on the legislation it’s apparently developing, which the minister said we should have known about? Mr. Speaker, any time we have asked about the progress of the work on the recommendations from the Anti-Racism Advisory Council, we’ve gotten a series of talking points and, on occasion, attacks, but the minister says that we should have known this; we should have assumed. He calls Bill 204 an unworthy bill.

Mr. Madu: That was not what I said. Unwelcome, not unworthy. I did not say that.

Mr. Shepherd: I apologize if I misheard the minister. I will withdraw that comment.

But they suggest that this bill is not worthy of going forward. I would note that Dr. Jared Wesley, professor of political science, six years of experience in the public service, including leading in

developing policy development education within the public service here in the province of Alberta, said of Bill 204: “[It] is a great piece of legislation. Likely one of the most thoughtfully-crafted and publicly-engaged private member’s bills to come out of this legislature . . . It deserves a debate in the legislature.”

So the reasons I am hearing certainly are more substantive than the ones that were put forward at committee. But what I am hearing is that this government simply was not interested in working with me on this issue or having my bill be debated. They want to move forward with their own, and indeed, should that bill come forward, we will engage in debate on that bill, just as we engaged in debate on the minister’s bill on carding, which is more than he is willing to do here. The minister repeatedly criticizes, and I have stood in this place before and said that, yes, absolutely, I admit that we did not get that across the line. We did not take the action on carding that he brought forward.

But when he brought that bill forward, we debated the bill. We went out and we talked with community. We brought in amendments to the bill based on what we heard from people in the community and concerns that were brought forward, and we debated those amendments, and the minister stood and debated those amendments and gave his reasons for turning them down. Then, because we felt that there were loopholes within that bill and concerns that had not been addressed, yes, on principle we voted against that bill.

All of that, Mr. Speaker, is more than this government is willing to do on this private member’s bill. They are unwilling to actually do any work on this. They talk about the need for consultation, to hear from more people. Not one member of the government on that committee brought forward a stakeholder. Not one. I didn’t hear a single one of them come and say: “I went and I talked to my constituents. I reached out to folks, and here are the concerns they brought forward.” Indeed, what we got was a recitation of some weak talking points and key messages.

Now, again, I appreciate the contributions from the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, who has actually looked at this.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. member for – I believe the individual who caught my eye, though, was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I’ll clear that up after.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, am I allowed to speak to it twice? I don’t know.

The Acting Speaker: I don’t think that you can speak to it twice. That’s why I saw the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and then I was just going to clear it up.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, sir. I appreciate it. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Yeah.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 204. You know, it’s disappointing that, as opposed to rising to speak to the contents of this bill, we have less than half an hour to discuss the fate of this bill because a committee that has a majority of government members on it has once again decided to vote down this bill. I can tell you – you know, it’s extremely disappointing. I’ve spent 10 years in this Chamber, and it’s only recently that private members’ bills go to a committee that was quite frankly set up to kill bills and to do it in a way that was a little more discreet and private than through this Chamber. There is no other reason for it. It never existed in Alberta’s history.

One of my frustrations is that a government comes in and brings Ottawa to Alberta. A government that claims to be standing up for Albertans to Ottawa can't bring in enough of Ottawa's traditions to Alberta. Well, I'm proud of this place, of our traditions, and it's disappointing that this government – and later on today we're going to talk about another motion to amend the standing orders for, I don't know, the 10th time in the last three years – continues to dismantle the very processes and cultural fabric of this Chamber. I don't know if it's because their leader has spent too much time in Ottawa for whatever reason. I don't need to speculate. The point is that it's disappointing.

Here we have a bill that I know my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton–City Centre has spent years working on. You know, a great point was raised when the member was answering questions by the government side, that this bill was written in a similar spirit to the previous bill that the Chamber voted down in that it left many of the details to regulations, because cabinet has the whole civil service to support them in writing regulations. Mr. Speaker, do you know how many staff work on a private member's bill? Three; actually, two and then Parliamentary Counsel, which, again, I give the utmost kudos to because those folks work extremely hard.

The point is that the Member for Edmonton–City Centre has gone out and consulted, unless my numbers are incorrect, with over 600 Albertans and groups of Albertans on this legislation. We've heard an acknowledgement from the government that collecting race-based data is necessary, yet the answer is: we'll get to it sometime.

To the Member for Edmonton–City Centre's point, if there is something missing or wrong from this bill, then let's amend it. I believe that my colleague would accept government amendments to improve the bill, which this place was actually set up to do, yet we have an example, another example, Mr. Speaker, where a private member's bill doesn't even get debated in the Chamber. Yes, for people at home to understand, we're debating concurrence, which is a 60-minute time limit on whether or not the Assembly should agree to kill the bill before it even gets to second reading. Yes, I agree with my colleagues that this act is shameful, and it looks of cowardice, cowardice to debate the issue and, for government members, to put forward actual reasons as to why this isn't needed.

Now, I do appreciate that the Member for Chestermere–Strathmore did raise her concern about privacy. That's a very real and relevant concern, so I appreciate that. My understanding of the bill is that that is a very important issue that is also being addressed in the bill and part of the reason why the government regulations will decide which data is collected and how it's collected to ensure that people's privacy is upheld, because we also agree that that is paramount. One hundred per cent I agree with that.

I disagree with the hon. minister's comments about using this as a political football. I mean, you know, frankly, my colleague is bringing forward a bill to allow government to be able to capture important data that will help fight systematic, systemic racism. There's nothing partisan about that. I'm not about to stand and say: you did this, and we did this, and we did this, and you did that. I think that's ridiculous. The point is driving toward outcomes.

I also think it's silly to bring up comments of: we should have done it in your four years. Okay. Well, you know, for those who believe in God, God didn't build the world in two days or six days or seven. Six days; seventh is rest. Six days, but you know what I mean. You can't do it all in one term, right? So to attack a party or the opposition for not getting everything done is ridiculous. I think it's also, you know, disingenuous that the minister is trying to say that our government did nothing, which I know is factually false, and it's misleading Albertans.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, I wish all members were bound to stick to the facts. There was a bunch of work that was started under the NDP on antiracism. I know this because I participated in cabinet discussions about this, in caucus meetings about this. The work was started.

Mr. Madu: Give me one example. Point to one. Point to one.

Mr. Bilous: I'd appreciate, Minister, if I can speak. You had your turn. I listened respectfully.

We started a bunch of work. I know that the current government has continued some of that work. Again, the world isn't black and white.

Here we have a bill that my colleague put forward which – you know, I mean, maybe it's naive optimism that this bill could lead to the eventual elimination of systemic racism. But you know what, Mr. Speaker? Even if it impacted one individual and one individual's experiences with the system, then it's doing good, and it's worth while. Every member in this Chamber: we represent an incredibly beautiful and diverse province. We all represent constituents who have suffered discrimination, who have suffered from systemic racism, and here is an opportunity to address that, and the best argument that the government can come up with is: we'll come up with something better at some point down the road.

We're missing an opportunity here, Mr. Speaker. Albertans elected all 87 of us to do a job and to bring forward legislation that will improve the lives of Albertans, and it's infuriating to Albertans that the message over and over again is that only one side of this Chamber has good ideas or that only one side of this Chamber has ideas that are worth putting into legislation.

I was hopeful, when my colleague brought forward this bill, because the government has talked about taking more actions to combat systemic racism, that the government would look to this bill as one potential vehicle, a potential vehicle, that would help get us closer to the goal, that I believe we all share, of ending systemic racism. But what's disheartening, Mr. Speaker, is that the government is using these new standing orders to shut down debate and not even discuss the merits of these ideas.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful for this opportunity to stand in the Chamber today and to debate this motion for concurrence. You know, the other day I spoke in this very Chamber about the value of disaggregated data and how it can help us create good public policy and also help us evaluate the outcomes from that policy. It is important. I don't stand here today because I'm being partisan. I don't stand in support of this motion because I'm partisan. I stand in favour of this motion because it is so very important that we get this right.

You know, the Member for Edmonton–Highlands–Norwood spoke the other day about Statistics Canada publishing data on transgender Canadians, census data. This was the first time it was published, and I'd like to remind people that it wasn't so very long ago where, had you asked for that, had you asked transgender Canadians, had you asked 2SLGBTQIA Canadians questions to be recorded in the census, they would have been terrified.

We need to remember that why we are collecting this data is incredibly important, and also how we're collecting this data is incredibly important. A lot of thought and consultation needs to go into that process. We have very, very many communities in our province – BIPOC communities, Indigenous communities, First Nations, Métis communities – who all come from different

places in terms of how they feel about privacy, how they feel about authority, where they might have come from in their past, where they might have been discriminated against or terrorized. We need to recognize that there is a need to make sure that we do this properly. How we collect the data is important. Privacy considerations are important.

I want to thank the member across for bringing this bill forward in the first place. It is important. It's important work, and it needs to be done. But as was mentioned, you know, there are two staff to help write a private member's bill. I would argue that this bill actually requires the full force of everybody we can bring to the table to get it done correctly, because it's so important that it's done correctly. We must not cause any harm while we are collecting the very data to help us address the issues that we're trying to solve.

This isn't partisan. This is about doing the best thing, doing the right thing for Albertans, to really address the issues of racism that we face in this province, to solve the problems, to help people live freely and equally in this province. I know this is difficult – I know this is, because a lot of work has gone into this – but I think we can all come together and work for a very good bill in the near future.

I can tell you that as the Associate Minister of Status of Women I'm not prepared to wait another 10 years for this. We need good outcomes; we need them now. And we can have them, but we need to do it properly.

Mr. Schmidt: If not now, when?

Ms Issik: In the very near future as we work together and bring more resources to do it properly, sir, through you, Speaker.

You know, the member across had said that if it helps even one individual, then it's worth doing. Agreed, but in the process we must not harm other individuals. That's why it's critical that we do it correctly. That's why I'm standing in favour of this motion. Again, I appreciate the work that's gone into this, and I really hope that we can spend some really good time with communities consulting and making sure that we've heard from everybody and how they feel about how the data should be collected and that we are in agreement as to all the reasons why we collect the data.

Anyways, I'll leave it at that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to add my voice to the debate today on Bill 204, Anti-Racism Act. You know, like my colleagues on this side of the House previous to me speaking have said, we, of course, disagree with the report that's been presented by the UCP government. We believe that this bill does need to proceed, and we would like to debate it in this Assembly today.

3:40

Certainly, as a member of the private members' bills committee myself, it was extremely disheartening to see the UCP decide not to proceed with this bill. We know that certainly, here in Edmonton even, we've witnessed and learned of some very tragic events that were racially motivated. If there is not a time for this bill to be debated in the Legislature, I don't know when is. I mean, it is such an important concern currently in our society. Of course, any just society needs to make sure that all its citizens are respected, treated with dignity, and sadly that's just not the case.

This bill is, you know, one of many things the government should be moving forward on for all Albertans, regardless of whether they're like myself – you know, obviously, I'm a privileged white

woman – or someone who is an Indigenous woman or a woman of colour or a man of colour or anyone in the BIPOC population. Certainly, we all deserve to be respected. Because of how we dress, how we speak, the faith that we follow, we must have the right to practise – it is a human right that we be able to follow our own convictions, what we believe is true, obviously as long as it's not hurting another, but sadly this is a serious concern in our society right now.

There's something that we can do about it, and one of these things is some of the information that is shared in Bill 204, where we are collecting race-based data. One of the things that the UCP did say and the reason that they thought, "Well, we don't need this bill because we can already collect information through FOIP legislation" – but the tragic thing about that is that it's not being collected. It says that they may collect it, but they are not collecting it. So it's very important that, you know, this is a must. This needs to be collected so that we can make evidence-based decisions.

We understand the populations that we're serving, we understand what their needs are, and if we are just perhaps making decisions – if I'm making decisions just based on my own personal experience as a woman who grew up in rural Alberta, then moved to Edmonton to go to university, who has lived here since, and as a woman of the dominant culture, I'm excluding so many people's different lived experiences than my own, whether that person has disabilities, whether that person is a newcomer to our province, a transgender person, you know, someone with different experiences. That's why who's sitting around the table at these decision-making times, when people are making decisions – we have to make sure that everyone is included, and this is kind of a way to do that.

Certainly, I know that when I was Minister of Seniors and Housing, a lot of times it was dominant-culture people sitting at those tables. That doesn't mean that they're excluded from them, but we need to make sure that the voices of all Albertans are heard. Certainly, our population is becoming much more diverse, so it's so important. I don't have the lived experience of an Indigenous woman, or I don't have the lived experience of a newcomer to our country, so how can I make a good decision without being well informed? That's why this bill is so important, that we make sure that all the voices of Albertans are heard and that we make policy based on that. That's why I certainly encourage all members of the House to pass this.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

That takes us to 55 minutes of debate. Under Standing Order 8(7)(a.1), which provides for up to five minutes for the mover to close debate, I would invite the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills, the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, to close debate on the motion to concur in the committee report on Bill 204.

Mr. Rutherford: I'll waive.

The Acting Speaker: That is waived.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for concurrence carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:46 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------------------|---------|--------|
| Allard | Nally | Savage |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Neudorf | Schow |

| | | |
|---------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Copping | Nicolaides | Schweitzer |
| Ellis | Nixon, Jason | Shandro |
| Fir | Nixon, Jeremy | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Glubish | Panda | Singh |
| Gotfried | Pon | Smith |
| Issik | Reid | Toews |
| Jones | Rosin | Turton |
| LaGrange | Rowswell | Williams |
| Madu | Rutherford | Wilson |
| McIver | | |
| Against the motion: | | |
| Bilous | Gray | Shepherd |
| Carson | Phillips | Sigurdson, L. |
| Eggen | Schmidt | |
| Totals: | For – 34 | Against – 8 |

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Bill 205
Human Tissue and Organ Donation
(Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, on April 27, 2022, the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills presented the report of that committee on Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022, and requested the concurrence of the Assembly in the report, which recommended that the bill proceed. As a member other than the mover rose to speak on April 27, 2022, in that debate on the motion, it will proceed today.

The motion to concur in the committee's report on Bill 205 has already been moved, and I will therefore now recognize any additional members who wish to speak. Are there any members who wish to speak to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Highwood has risen.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to first start by explaining why I was so passionate about introducing this bill and now look to the House for support on concurrence so that this bill can move forward to second reading and further debate. I've told this story many times in the past few months, but I think it's important that I share this story with the whole Assembly today. Only a couple of days after being drawn fifth for a private member's bill in this session, Cindy Krieger, a local area resident, contacted me to share her tragic but inspiring story about her daughter Morghan. Morghan was in her early 20s and had previously left to attend school in Nova Scotia. While attending school, she, regrettably, suffered multiple severe seizures. Her mother made the immediate trip to her side at a hospital, and prior to her passing Morghan expressed her intent to give the gift of life and donate her organs and tissues, which helped save and improve so many lives.

In addition to stories that exist like Morghan's, in 2018 the country went into mourning due to the tragedy of the Humboldt Broncos bus crash. One of the men who lost their lives, Logan Boulet, had just signed up to be an organ donor. His choice to be an organ donor inspired almost 200,000 people to follow his example. Countless stories like Morghan's and tragedies like the Humboldt crash brought forward important conversations on the need to improve our organ and tissue donation system.

Honestly, as legislators it is our responsibility to do all we can to make sure we have the best system possible. It is important to note that we have fallen behind most other Canadian and international jurisdictions here in Alberta. We are currently the second lowest

provincially in deceased donation rates. Currently we have a seven-year wait for kidney transplant alone. My Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022, is a strong step in the right direction to build a system for the future, a system that will increase the number of lives saved.

The Alberta ORGANization Group, in line with many other foundations, has done immense work to identify gaps in current systems, and they have identified many recommendations that will improve the current system in Alberta. The most important recommendation that was identified was that of mandatory referral. Bill 205, if passed, will put in place three of the most vital recommendations to build a strong foundation for a much better human tissue and organ donation system here in Alberta. First, it will implement a mandatory referral process; secondly, it will improve agency guidelines; and lastly, it will improve education and awareness.

With regard to these changes first and most importantly is the implementation of that mandatory referral, a change from our current law of only mandatory consideration. Mandatory referral is a legal requirement that health care professionals report all patients who may become potential donors to their organ donation organization. This requirement is an essential building block of high-functioning organ and tissue donation and transplantation systems because it supports the timely identification, referral, and assessment of potential donors. Notifying the ODO reduces the effect of clinical bias or lack of knowledge regarding donation, which has been identified as the leading cause of nonreferral.

Mandatory referral is independent of the consent model and does not affect how families are approached to discuss the consent to donate. Registering as an organ donor or sharing your wishes with your family does not mean you will automatically become an organ donor. The pathway to becoming a deceased organ donor is complex because individuals need to die in special circumstances where donation is even possible. Contrary to common assumptions, those circumstances are very rare. As a proportion of total deaths in Canada approximately 1.2 per cent have the potential to become donors. Each patient who is a potential donor is rare, and identification and referral of those patients is the only way they will actually become a donor.

However, failure to identify possible donors is the largest factor in explaining differences in deceased donation rates nationally and internationally. Missed donor opportunities occur when potential donors are not identified and ODOs are not notified or referrals are received far too late. Missed donor opportunities also occur when potential donors are identified by the treating medical team but they choose not to notify the ODO. In cases of later nonreferral, life-sustaining therapy is withdrawn in a way that excludes the possibility of donation, preventing the wishes of the patient and their families towards donation to even be considered.

The benefits of mandatory referral ensure that every family and individual is given the opportunity to include donation in their end-of-life care if they so desire. The patient's medical suitability for donation is assessed earlier by clinicians who are experts in donation and transplantation. This may reduce delays for the hospital and ensure the availability of supporting infrastructure.

Assessment of donation suitability can occur in all instances, with the timely identification of potential organ donors helping to avoid missed donation opportunities. It ensures that a potential donor is maintained on life support, which is essential to the usability of organs. Family discussions can be planned when suitability for donation has been determined, which gives families the right information at the right time. This reduces uncertainty and disappointment on occasions when families are

approached too soon and then later told their loved one is not actually eligible to be a donor.

4:10

Secondly, amendments within Bill 205 will be made to the Organ and Tissue Donation Agency that will pave the way for annual reviews, reports, and suggestions submitted directly to the minister. This will help improve our tissue and organ donation year over year. Mandatory referral is only effective if there is a way to review referrals. This is a critical part of the bill to verify that a stronger system of donation is continued.

Lastly, the education component will be expanded to ensure the most current and up-to-date information, education, and awareness is issued to Albertans.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the medical specialist foundations, business community members, Alberta Health Services, registered donors, and recipients for the constant back-and-forth discussions I've had with them over the past few months, and I want to express my gratitude to the many individuals who brought forward their very moving stories as well as to the nonprofits, transplant institutes, organ donation advocacy groups, foundations, and physicians who have been instrumental in helping me to draft a bill that will create the fundamental pillars that will reduce wait times and ultimately save lives. It is for these individuals and those waiting on the transplant list that I would urge this Chamber to allow this bill to proceed to second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. Member for Highwood for bringing forward this private member's bill. I certainly see a lot of potential in regard to this private member's bill. We know that organ donation is, you know, sort of a work in progress here in this province and in many other jurisdictions around the world. We had to do a lot of education to allow people to understand exactly what it entails and just the value of it as well. Certainly, with the technology and the medical technology that we have available to us today, transplants have never been more effective, nor have they saved more lives, quite frankly.

The main problem is having timely dispensation of various organs when a donor is, unfortunately, in a position to do so. It's not to say that people have to be deceased or in imminent danger of being deceased in order to be a donor, right? I mean, kidneys are a good example of a donation system that involves people who are not dying and, in fact, are making a selfless choice to help someone else.

Again, it's very important for us to build an infrastructure for organ donation that is working within a public health system, right? We know that in other jurisdictions, places around the world, this can be a for-profit thing, and I don't think it's, Mr. Speaker, a better way to illustrate the absolute importance and paramountcy of having a public system to deliver health care for when you need it for you and your family than when we talk about organ donation, because you just couldn't imagine having anything that would resemble a private element of buying and selling body parts. Again, it's just a pretty good education moment for all of us to remind us about how important our public health system really is, especially delivering something at this level.

Yeah. I mean, I just had a chance to look at the bill here this afternoon, and I find the most intriguing part, certainly perhaps the

biggest innovation, is this mandatory referral element – right? – so that we are using the health system and compelling people to be diagnosed and to be analyzed if they have signed their donor card to just make sure that there is a plan that is taking full advantage of that in a timely sort of way. You know, I think that that's very clever. I'm guessing that this is somehow based on other jurisdictions around the world. I'd be curious to see who else is doing it, this mandatory referral element to this bill, to see how it's working in other jurisdictions. I would expect that it would be a marked improvement for sure – right? – because, of course, time is of the essence always in health care generally and certainly in organ donation specifically. You have to make these decisions around, especially, you know, certain organs like your hearts and so forth, eyes and corneas and so forth. I mean, these things need to be accessed within hours or even minutes, so I think this whole mandatory referral element that the Member for Highwood was describing is intriguing, and certainly I would encourage all members to allow this bill to move forward around that.

Just another thing I wanted to mention: again, the mandatory referral element. I mean, again, I'm not an expert, but I can just see this is not a small thing to do. It's not just, like, written on a piece of paper, and away you go, right? You need considerable resources to be able to execute a mandatory referral, and, again, you know, making sure that our public health system is sufficiently resourced so that we can do these things is absolutely essential. Running our acute-health hospitals like we are now, at 95, 97, 110 per cent literally on a day-to-day basis, leaves us no room, quite frankly, for expanding into what would be required in a mandatory referral system. So in order to successfully have an organ transplant system that would be province-wide and so forth, we're talking about capacity, Mr. Speaker, and we're talking about making sure we buttress our public health system so that you can actually pull this off.

What's happening in our hospitals right now is nothing like that, right? The whole concept of triage is being used on a daily, hourly basis, people just trying to get by on what is an emergency type of situation. I don't know if any of you besides myself, a few of my colleagues had meetings with the Alberta resident physicians society, who were just talking about how critical the situation is in our hospitals, in our intensive cares especially, but all elements of acute-care units are running far too hot, at capacity or over capacity, right across this province. We see it in, you know, Red Deer. We saw the situation there in the last 72 hours or so. I mean, these kinds of things are being replicated, Mr. Speaker, all over the place in our province, with emergency shutdowns and people just trying to triage a situation where the capacity of the hospital is strained to the limit.

So we want to move and expand into human tissue and organ donation with mandatory referrals built into it. That's great. I am totally behind that. I would work hard to ensure that we build a legislative framework which would allow that. But, of course, foundationally, Mr. Speaker, you have to make sure – you can't do it for free, right? You need to invest and build and expand the public health system to be able to accommodate for that. I mean, that's an obvious thing, but it's always worth mentioning, because if we have these wonderful new ideas and new technologies and, you know, a system to expedite organ donation and to move on that in a timely way like you have to do, then we can't just write it down on a piece of paper and hope that someone will do it. We have to resource that concept here through this Legislature as well. Yeah.

The other element to this, again: I think it's ongoing, and it sort of waxes and wanes, I've kind of noticed. I mean, I use myself, Mr. Speaker, as a litmus test as to whether I am conscious of the importance of signing my organ donor card, right? At different times they have an education program, and you get all excited about it and away you go, and then it kind of somehow disappears over time as

well. So for us to have a sensitive but emphatic education system for people to sign their organ donor cards and for families to understand what that means and building part of an end-of-life strategy or emergency contingency so the people know what's going to happen, what's going to come next, and what the mandatory referral thing means for someone who is a potential donor: that education all needs to be emphatic and it needs to be constant, right? You can't just say, "Oh, now we're done that," because people forget. That's the way we are; we need a refresher course on how these things work, and new people need to know that they can sign up, you know, as a choice for organ donation. I mean, it's not anything but a choice. That should be quite obvious but bears repeating as well. I mean, people have fear around these things, and we have to make sure that it's understood to be a life-giving choice and not anything but that.

4:20

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I will conclude my comments. This is a great idea. I think I could totally support this bill as long as we support the bill with the resources it needs in order for it to be successful.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022, also known as the mandatory referral act. I want to thank my colleague the Member for Highwood for introducing it. Over the last three years I've met with constituents with loved ones who are waiting for organ transplants and, sadly, constituents whose loved ones are no longer with us because they weren't able to get the transplant they needed in time.

Mr. Speaker, organ transplantation is the most clinically cost-effective treatment for organ failure, but every year Albertans die while waiting for an organ donation. These are our family members, our relatives, our friends, and our neighbours and colleagues. Those who remain on the wait-list often experience poor quality of life, depression, and can require regular medical appointments. On the other hand, individuals who receive organ donations often live with few restrictions. They can travel, spend more time with friends and family, return to school and work, become involved in their communities, and lead very normal lives.

While organ and tissue donation and transplants are life-saving and life improving, Alberta continues to lag behind other provinces and other jurisdictions in this area. Today over 4,500 Canadians are waiting for a transplant that could save, extend, or improve their life. Over 700 of those people are Albertans. Thousands more are waiting for tissue transplants. The good news is that one donor can save up to eight lives and enhance the lives of 75 more.

According to Canadian Blood Services upwards of 90 per cent of Canadians support organ and tissue donation, yet less than 32 per cent have made formal plans to donate. The number of organ and tissue donations further diminishes when you factor in that only 1 to 2 per cent of deaths occur in a situation where a donation is possible. The goal of an improved organ donation system should be to ensure that no missed donor opportunities occur to help meet the demand for human tissue and organs in the province. That is precisely what Bill 205 works towards.

One of the most significant changes brought forward through this bill is the implementation of a mandatory referral process in place of the current mandatory consideration process. This change requires physicians to refer a patient to the appropriate organ donation organization when death is imminent, which will enhance and

optimize our organ and tissue donation system. Mandatory referral increases the likelihood that sensitive discussions with families experiencing a tragedy about the potential to donate are conducted by specialists explicitly educated in this area. Professionally trained organ donation organizations are better positioned to engage with families. Streamlining the notification process will also ensure an adequate timeline for assessing the viability of potential donors and will decrease missed donation opportunities.

To emphasize the importance of mandatory referral, consider a recent survey of physicians on why they did not refer eligible organ donors. I should note the physicians surveyed could choose more than one of these options. Fifty-nine per cent of the respondents stated they did not make a referral because they deemed the patient not to be eligible, 45 per cent said the family was too upset, 39 per cent said they believed that the family had religious reasons not to, and, finally, 34 per cent said they did not due to their desire to leave the hospital unit. These are all understandable reasons, especially when you consider the stress and tragic circumstances, yet donation opportunities continue to be missed and lives continue to be lost. Mandatory referral will help to reduce missed donation opportunities.

This bill also seeks to advance education and awareness around the subject of organ donation. This includes improving the information provided to Albertans within our registries to better educate them on the organ and tissue donation process and its importance.

Finally, this bill will modify our agency guidelines. The changes to the Organ and Tissue Donation Agency will pave the way for annual reviews, reports, and suggestions directly to the Minister of Health to help minimize missed donor opportunities and build a more robust donation system.

Every so often we as legislators have an opportunity to make a meaningful, tangible difference in the lives of Albertans, to address issues that transcend partisanship and touch the very lives of the people we represent. That is what Bill 205 does by seeking to improve our organ and tissue donation process and practices, hopefully saving and improving lives. I hope that this bill will be a catalyst for further discussions and other changes that will also improve our system and bring government policy better in line with the supermajority of Albertans, who support organ and tissue donation.

I encourage all members to vote in favour of this bill. Again, a big thank you to my colleague the Member for Highwood for his work.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer a few comments as well in the debate on concurrence around Bill 205. Let me just, first, start off by thanking the Member for Highwood for bringing forward this bill as a private member's bill, and I want to thank my colleagues from Edmonton-North West and Calgary-South East for their thoughtful comments on the bill and why we should vote in favour of allowing it to proceed to debate here in the Legislature.

I just think it's really interesting, Mr. Speaker, that we've heard, in discussion around the aspects of the bill, the fact that this is a piece of legislation that is trying to address a serious problem that we all acknowledge exists. The rates of donations of organs are far too low, and the private member is taking steps to try to solve a problem that exists. Is it a perfect solution? No. In fact, the member who presented this bill admits such, and my friend from Edmonton-North West raised some additional questions with regard to how effectively this piece of legislation, if it's passed, would be

implemented. But we are voting in favour of allowing this bill to proceed to debate in the Chamber, recognizing that it is not a perfect solution.

It's incredibly interesting to me, Mr. Speaker, that we have admitted that even though this isn't a perfect solution, this is progress in the right direction, and therefore we are willing to entertain the possibility of debating this piece of legislation in the Legislature, but we weren't willing to extend that same consideration to my friend from Edmonton-City Centre's bill on collecting race-based data to combat racism. All we heard from the members opposite, when they engaged in that debate, was the fact that it wasn't a perfect solution so now is not the time to even consider making progress on that.

It's incredibly interesting to me, Mr. Speaker, the different thresholds for acceptability that we have when the government caucus members bring forward legislation for consideration by this House as opposed to opposition members when they bring forward private members' bills. It's incredibly distressing to see this double standard consistently at work. Not once have we seen an opposition member's private member's bill proceed past the committee stage and reach full debate here in the Legislature. Not once. You know, I wish the government members would hold every private member to a consistent standard of acceptability when it comes to whether or not the House should consider these things and not put on their partisan glasses, which they've said over and over again that they don't do. I guess it's just a coincidence that every single opposition private member's bill has been voted down by this House but that hasn't been the case for government members' bills.

Let it be said that even though I'm airing my grievances about the process, we, in practice, don't hold grudges here in the opposition, and we are in fact voting in favour of allowing this bill to proceed because we agree that it's progress. We're moving in the right direction on the issue of organ donation here with this legislation that's being brought forward.

4:30

So let's talk about it here, and let's allow other members to consider the issue and bring forward some thoughtful amendments, I guess, to address some of the shortcomings or weaknesses of the bill that will be exposed as debate proceeds. You know, one of the shortcomings that I think exists or has the potential to exist with this system that is being proposed to be set up here in this private member's bill is increasing education through the registry system. That's a good idea in theory, Mr. Speaker, but we've seen this government fail to make any meaningful changes to the registry system whatsoever, just simple promises that the government has failed to deliver on.

I'm thinking in particular about Alberta health care cards. It was there in black and white in the UCP's election platform that they would eliminate the system of issuing paper health care cards and move to a system of distributing durable health care cards made out of plastic or some kind of material that would last a lot longer than the paper that is currently used to make health care cards. They scrapped that idea. In fact, they kicked around the idea of maybe altering drivers' licences so that if you had an Alberta health care number and a driver's licence, that could be put together on the same driver's licence card, but that also went nowhere. This government will not make any meaningful changes on how Alberta health care numbers are presented to people.

So how can we trust the government to implement what is a significant change here through the registry system when they've failed to even demonstrate that they can make even a minor, simple change like issuing plastic health care cards or even changing drivers' licences to allow for the printing of a health care card on the driver's licence? They can't. I think that is a significant failing,

Mr. Speaker, that should be discussed at greater length as this bill proceeds to debate.

I want to pick up on another thing that my friend from Edmonton-North West touched upon in his comments regarding this bill, and that's the issue of public health care capacity. You know, right now no surgeries are being conducted at the Red Deer general hospital, as far as I understand. Everybody is being shipped up and down the highway to either Edmonton or Calgary to receive life-saving surgery. So it is good, in theory, to widen the accessibility of organs for donation, but in actual practice, if hundreds of thousands of people can't get access to life-saving medical treatments in the third-largest city in the province, all of these changes that the Member for Highwood is proposing are theoretical improvements. They won't lead to in-practice improvements.

So my friend from Edmonton-North West is quite right when he raises the issue about the ability of the health care system to be able to deliver these organ transplants in a timely matter. I'd submit to members of the House that if this piece of legislation were in effect right now, the people in dire need of organ transplants in central Alberta would still not be able to get the life-saving surgeries that are needed and that the Member for Highwood himself wants them to be able to get. Without some kind of meaningful changes to protect the health care system from collapse, all of this is just good intentions written down on paper with no meaningful follow-through.

You know, Mr. Speaker, in the last few minutes I want to just remind the House that COVID is still the top health care issue of the day here in the province of Alberta. The reason that the general hospital is no longer conducting surgeries is because the hospital is overwhelmed with COVID. By failing to address the underlying cause of the collapse of the health care system, all of these proposed changes that are intended to lead to better health care outcomes will lead to nothing, but we all just act as if COVID is done and hope that by creating other causes of problems in the health care system and maybe making some feeble attempts to address those, we will actually get to the root of the problem and make the system better, and that's not the case. I also worry about the suitability of people's organs because so many people have been infected. We know that COVID causes long-term organ damage.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has risen.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to support the motion for concurrence on Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. This bill has the goal of raising awareness for organ and tissue donations as well as encouraging more Albertans to sign their donor cards.

For me, there is also a deep and profound Lethbridge connection to this bill. Mr. Speaker, our nation was heartbroken following the tragic crash in Saskatchewan that claimed the lives of 15 players and personnel of the Humboldt Broncos from the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League. Many of us remember where we were when we first learned about the tragic crash on April 6, 2018. Lethbridge's own Logan Boulet was one of the 15 lives that were lost that day. Logan, a son, an athlete, and a defenceman, was 21 when he passed away, but a month before the crash he did something remarkable that saved lives. Logan signed his organ donor card. His gift of life benefited six people directly, which is remarkable. What it also did was start the Logan Boulet effect and inspired over 200,000 Canadians to do the same. In Lethbridge we remember Logan every time we drive by the Logan Boulet Arena and every year on Green Shirt Day, which takes place on April 7. Canada-wide it started a very important conversation.

One issue we have in Alberta is that we lag behind our fellow provinces when it comes to registered organ and tissue donors. As has already been stated, over 4,500 Canadians are waiting for life-saving transplants, including over 700 Albertans. Many more are waiting for tissue transplants that would vastly improve their lives. A major component of this bill is to improve the information provided to individuals within our Alberta registries to better educate Albertans on the process and on the importance of organ and tissue donation.

Mr. Speaker, another component of this bill I appreciate is the implementation of a mandatory referral process for physicians. This will require physicians to report all potential donors to the appropriate organ donation organization when death is deemed to be imminent. I can't even imagine how difficult those discussions might be. However, it's a conversation worth having and one that could have the potential to save lives.

This legislation also increases the chances to make sure that those discussions about a possible donation take place. It is so much easier to have those conversations with a trusted family physician well before a tragedy strikes instead of during a time of incredible grieving, anxiety, and stress. Losing a family member or a close friend is indescribable, so having the ability outlined for the highly trained individuals to have those conversations early and independently is prudent planning.

I want to reiterate that if a patient and his or her family does not want to be a donor, that decision will be respected. However, every donor decision made is a win and a legacy to the tragedy of Humboldt. What if someone was on the fence about this very sensitive topic? One signed organ donor card can save multiple lives.

Mr. Speaker, it's good to know this bill addresses improving agency guidelines. The changes to the Organ and Tissue Donation Agency will also pave the way for annual reviews, reports, and suggestions directly to the minister to help minimize missed donor opportunities and build a stronger system of donation in the future.

I'm also glad that education and awareness are an important aspect of this bill. It's intended to improve the information provided to individuals within Alberta's registries and better educate the population on the process and the importance of organ and tissue donation. Logan Boulet's decision directly resulted in six saved lives and, indirectly, thousands and growing.

4:40

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'm not here to tell any family what the right decision is for them – that is theirs to make – but to raise awareness of increased education and make the referral process for physicians mandatory to an organ donor organization are important steps to take. I wholeheartedly support this bill and the Member for Highwood in his work to, hopefully, save more lives. If one person's decision to donate his or her organs and tissue can save multiple lives, imagine what an increase of, say, 100 donors can accomplish. I see tremendous potential in this bill, and I commend the Member for Highwood for bringing this forward. As difficult as these conversations can be, they are necessary and should be continued, and this bill should continue into second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. I am going to begin my comments, as I always do on private members' day regardless of what the business is at hand, with providing some lament as to the state of democracy in this House and the abomination that it is

that members of any type, whether it is backbenchers on the government side or Official Opposition members, have to somehow seek concurrence of the House. That we have to go through this exercise in the first place is an absolute aberration of the traditions of this Assembly.

Now, I can appreciate that our friend the acting Premier right now likes to take his traditions from elsewhere, but in this House private members' business gets debated by private members, not at the whim of Executive Council, and this is really too bad because this is a really good bill. I don't like having to rise when I like what's coming from the members across the way and having to preface my comments with my usual lament for the state of democracy, but I will do it because the fact of the matter is that that's in the public interest.

It is not okay that we have to go through this hoop-jumping exercise every single time so that government backbenchers can be heard. Not at all. It is completely offside the traditions of this Assembly. Therefore, it is with a heavy heart that I provide critical commentary on a bill that is probably required.

Now my commentary. I will point out that many of the shortcomings that the government found with the previous bill could potentially – we don't know – be applied to this one. That is to say, it is complex, for sure, likely requires more stakeholder consultation, potentially could require some horsepower within the civil service for appropriate implementation, but that does not stop us from wanting to pass this bill, just as it should not have stopped the government from allowing the other one to proceed to the House floor, but we see the double standard at play here, Mr. Speaker.

Now, there is no question that we require a better framework for ensuring more expeditious donation of organs and tissue. There is no question that public policy sometimes lags public urgency and public need and, in fact, even public appetite, which I think is the case with organ donation bills. Number one, they require for their implementation in the first instance public education, as my hon. colleague for Edmonton-North West pointed out. It requires a functional health care system in which we have hospitalists, anaesthesiologists, physicians' assistants, and others actually working in hospitals, which is not the case in the Red Deer hospital right now and has not been the case in a number of other rural places.

It is well and good to ensure that we have better processes in place, but there is no guarantee whatsoever that our health care will be there for us in time given the calamity that has been visited upon communities not just in central Alberta but certainly across the province as a result of the unrelenting and specific war on doctors, beginning with the tearing up of the agreement prior to the pandemic, persisting in the war on public health care through the pandemic, and now, as we exit it, doubling down on what Albertans do not want, which is more chaos in the system.

Having said that, there is no question that this bill likely is a thoughtful approach to public policy, and it is for that reason that the Official Opposition will support its expeditious passage. There is also no question, though, Mr. Speaker, that it is likely that the development of the regulations and so on will require more consultation with the public and with health care professionals, with Alberta health care services, which is, in fact, as it should be.

Now, when our government passed a ban on eviction of domestic violence survivors from the residential tenancy arrangements in I believe it was the fall of 2015 if I am not mistaken, there was a great deal of work on the regulations that had to be done as a result of that bill, that I believe passed with unanimous support through the House. Not that that unanimous support necessarily meant anything when it came to, for example, the deindexation of AISH and income support benefits, which, you know, the Official Opposition at the time made great fanfare about supporting and then at their first available

opportunity reversed themselves on. That private member's bill, brought forward by Deb Drever, was in fact supported by the two opposition parties at the time, but it did require, complex as it was, a great deal of regulations that had to go through cabinet subsequent to that, and I have no doubt that this bill will be similar in nature.

You know, I think that that is fine, Mr. Speaker, but there is no question that you need leadership at the level of the operations of the Alberta health care system, which currently this province does not have because they saw fit to fire the CEO of Alberta Health Services simply because she had the temerity to express a fondness for public health care, which, in fact, Albertans have asked us to respect, and this government caucus has seen fit to disrespect that request on behalf of Albertans.

Now, I am pleased to see as the Member for Lethbridge-West – and, in fact, Toby and Bernie Boulet are constituents of mine – that this government has taken some of their advice. They have focused their advocacy effort since the loss of their son Logan on this matter of increasing organ and tissue donation given as it is that on Green Shirt Day, which is April 7, we redouble our efforts in public education, which, as I indicated at the very beginning, is the foundation of expanding our organ and tissue donations. Certainly, there are administrative processes and other health care processes that help, but in the first instance public education and public awareness are very important, especially in end-of-life planning. So I am pleased to see that this has happened and that the government has in fact consulted with and listened to advocates like Toby and Bernadine Boulet.

I would be remiss if I did not put a pretty fine point on the fact that Toby and Bernie have been very clear in all of their representations that a strong public health care system, a strong education system, strong support for communities, for infrastructure, for traffic safety, all of these things, also must follow if we are to appropriately recognize the life and the contribution and the legacy of Logan Boulet and all those who perished in the Humboldt bus crash. I believe that with this government – given the fact that they stubbornly refused to recognize the requests of that Humboldt family and those who perished in that crash when it came to appropriate amendments to driver safety and driver training.

I am pleased that April 7's legacy has actually resulted in more government action. I am looking forward to seeing that happen in other Legislatures across the country as well. There is no question that that advocacy by Toby and Bernie Boulet has actually been national in scope and in nature, and they have attempted and, I think, succeeded in taking their tremendous grief at the loss of their son and doing something positive with it. I think that there are not very many of us who can see in ourselves the strength to be able to do such a thing after such a devastating loss of a child.

4:50

There is more to be done; there is no question. Mandatory referral is yet another step in being able to address this issue of better uptake of organ and tissue donation, Mr. Speaker. The biggest thing is speed and having the right kinds of health care specialists on-site to be able to do those procedures, and that's what we don't see.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there other members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to concurrence on Bill 205. I want to start by expressing my gratitude for the hard work of my colleague the hon. Member for Highwood. I want to take this opportunity to thank him

for his dedication in bringing this important piece of legislation forward.

While the circumstances surrounding organ donation are typically tragic, Mr. Speaker, the decision to donate organs or tissue is a tremendous gift to give another person and their family. It's the gift of life. Bill 205 will improve the organ donation and transplant system, and for that I'm grateful. It will refine the organ and tissue donor registry. It will improve the education surrounding the option to register for organ donation and agency guidelines. Furthermore, the online registry will be improved by creating a clear path, making it easier to indicate one's consent.

As other speakers have mentioned, Mr. Speaker, while almost 90 per cent of Canadians say that they support organ donations, only 32 per cent have actually registered their intent to donate. Unfortunately, a very small number, approximately 1.2 per cent, of people that pass away are considered for organ donation in Alberta. Therefore, the more people who understand and choose to register and the better the notification system to the organ donation organizations, the more lives that will be saved. At this point in time, as others have said, there are over 4,500 Canadians waiting for a transplant that could save, extend, or improve their lives. Of those 4,500, 700 of them reside in Alberta. These numbers directly represent the urgency and the need for donors and a clear process here in Alberta. It is troublesome that Alberta has fallen behind other jurisdictions in terms of our rate of successful donation, which is costing Albertans on the transplant wait-list their lives.

Bill 205 is a major step forward, I would say, in modernizing Alberta's tissue and organ donation system. It's broken into four sections: first, breaking down how the tissue and donor registry will be improved; second, detailing the implementation of a mandatory referral process, which will decrease confusion for patients and ensure optimization of the process; further, agency guidelines will be refined, and as a result annual reviews, reports, and suggestions will be made to the minister to help minimize missed donor opportunities; lastly, this bill will enhance education efforts of organ donation and aims to elevate general awareness of organ donation for all Albertans. I think we could all agree that education is a big part of this, as many speakers this afternoon have mentioned, people understanding the importance of this.

Mr. Speaker, from what I can see, this bill will serve to facilitate a clear and simpler process to register for organ donation and ultimately to save lives. One organ donation can save up to eight lives, and a tissue donation can improve the quality of life for up to 75 other people. That is the intent of this bill, to do just that.

While I have the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to highlight a personal story about an inspiring Albertan, a retired nurse, actually, who has chosen to save a life through the donation of her kidney. She's a living donor. I first met Dianna Havin in a business setting over 20 years ago. We connected as businesswomen and even more so as businesswomen with young children at that time. Dianna has a very rare blood type, and as a retired nurse she understood how rare that would be and how critical it would be for somebody with that same blood type on a transplant waiting list. In a selfless act she chose last year to donate one of her kidneys. She's an inspiration to all of us. I just wanted to recognize my friend Dianna for what she's chosen to do, for her selfless act, to thank her and her family, her husband, Mark, and their children, for supporting her in that process.

Assisting others is always valuable, and it's notable that clinical studies have found that organ and tissue donation can help families and loved ones with their grieving process. At a time that can be very difficult to get through, many donor families take consolation in knowing their loved one helped save and/or drastically improve the life of another or multiple others. Donor families can also take

great comfort in the fact that their loved one continues to live on through others as life-saving donors.

Many have spoken about Humboldt. I won't repeat what has been said for the sake of time, Mr. Speaker, but I, too, am inspired by the Logan Boulet story and want to thank that family for their advocacy on behalf of all Albertans. The actions of one young man ignited passionate individuals around the world and spurred them to action.

I'll close with this: it's because lives will be saved that I wholly support Bill 205. Once again I want to thank the Member for Highwood for introducing such a crucial bill, for all the work he did in the background, and also for the countless individuals who have already made an impact on the lives of others by signing up to be a donor. As I previously stated, I am pleased to support this bill, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to join me in supporting Bill 205 and ultimately seeing more lives saved in Alberta.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will cede my time. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other members looking to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has risen, with about two and a half minutes.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. Like my colleagues who have spoken, we are certainly going to vote in support of concurrence for this bill. Really, this bill works to fix something that, you know, Canadians actually want fixed, so I commend the government for bringing this forward. It is, of course, what people have already spoken about, that missed donor opportunity. The bill would alleviate this difficulty. We know that about 33 per cent of Canadians have registered as organ donors. That's too low. We know that when Canadians are asked, surveys have said that 90 per cent would have said, "Oh, I'd happily donate my organs," yet there is a huge discrepancy there. Only 33 per cent have actually done that. So there is, really, a 57 per cent missed donor opportunity.

Here in Alberta we know that there are more than 700 people on the wait-list for organ transplants. Therefore, if the missed donor opportunity was eliminated, those 700 people would be well on their way to having a transplant and improving their lives. I think that this bill is an important bill that we recommend proceed, and it can make a significant difference, of course, for people's lives here in Alberta.

As I said, you know, for people who are on the wait-list, a significant number of Albertans, it would make a huge difference for themselves and their families. It makes it mandatory. A medical practitioner, having assessed that the organs are suitable for donation, then must refer the patient to an organ transplant and tissue donation agency. This is mandatory. It's not something that is going to happen if things all align. It's something that the health practitioner must do, so of course that is going to be very supportive of more people who have been assessed that their organs are useful for . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I hesitate to interrupt. However, under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides for up to five minutes for the mover to close debate, I would invite the chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills to close debate on the motion to concur in the committee report on Bill 205.

Seeing that that is waived.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for concurrence carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:59 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Aheer | Issik | Rosin |
| Allard | Jones | Rowswell |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | LaGrange | Rutherford |
| Bilous | Long | Schmidt |
| Carson | Madu | Schow |
| Copping | McIver | Schweitzer |
| Eggen | Nally | Sigurdson, L. |
| Ellis | Neudorf | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Frey | Nicolaides | Singh |
| Glubish | Nixon, Jeremy | Smith |
| Gotfried | Panda | Toews |
| Gray | Phillips | Turton |
| Hanson | Reid | Wilson |
| Totals: | For – 39 | Against – 0 |

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Review of Standing Orders

506. Ms Rosin moved:

Be it resolved that

- (a) the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing
 - (i) conduct a review of the standing orders, procedures, practices, and traditions of other Westminster-style parliaments for the purpose of identifying the rules, processes, or practices of those parliaments and their committees that facilitate collaboration and co-operation among their members and
 - (ii) recommend changes to the standing orders and practices of the Assembly, including its committees, that would facilitate increased collaboration and co-operation among all members of the Assembly,
- (b) during the course of its review the committee continues despite prorogation of a session of the 30th Legislature and may, without leave of the Assembly, meet during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued and
- (c) no later than nine months after the beginning of the committee's review the committee must submit a report on its review to the Legislative Assembly that sets out the committee's recommendations, if any.

Ms Rosin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In short, my motion tasks a legislative committee with the responsibility of studying the processes and procedures of other parliaments around the world to find the ways that we here in Alberta can work together more constructively, something that I've grown to be very passionate about over my course of three years in this institution.

Mr. Speaker, when I ran for public office, it was because I truly believed in the wonderful, beautiful concept of democracy, the idea that every individual could play an active role in creating the world

which they lived in, the idea that every citizen, regardless of their status or socioeconomic position, deserved a voice and the ability to be the determiner of their own destiny and the idea that we, the 87 individuals bestowed with the unique privilege of being elected to this House, could bring the citizenry's vision of a better world to life by listening, engaging, and collaborating. Perhaps I was an idealist. Perhaps we all were once, but unfortunately it doesn't take many days of sitting in this place, this incredible marble palace that was once built to be the house of hope and faith in humanity, to realize that the idealistic system which most believe exists is much different. That which I will be highlighting today may come as a bit disheartening to some listening.

I want to be clear that much good does still happen within these walls. Collectively, we have worked with bipartisanship to establish the first-ever legal definition of human trafficking, to stand up for law-abiding firearms owners, and to support our agricultural producers.

Yet by and large, this institution, once established to guarantee representation of the people who elected it, has fallen prey to hyperpartisanship. In fact, if we break down the voting record from the past session, out of 158 pieces of legislation, only 33 per cent of the time did the opposition and the government vote together in support of government legislation. From the surface this suggests that two-thirds of the time the opposition was completely unwilling to work with the government to advance what had the potential to be positive policy initiatives.

Yet if we look further into the data, a second side of the story emerges. Throughout debate on those 158 pieces of legislation our opposition proposed 216 amendments to that legislation. Now, before I go any further, I do want to recognize that many of those proposed amendments were, honestly, partisan junk. They were amendments to kill bills entirely, delay processes by months, or defer our work outside of this Chamber. Not every one of those 216 amendments was put forward with any amount of good faith, but, Mr. Speaker, many were. Of those 216 amendments, only seven were supported by the government, 3 per cent. The remaining 97 per cent were voted down largely without honest consideration by the members of this House as to whether or not they might actually make our legislation better.

5:20

Now, with the full information presented, suddenly the conclusion can clearly be drawn that both sides of this House do have an honest intention of drafting and passing good legislation, but we are too blinded by blue and orange to make those efforts a reality and to work together to transform good legislation into great legislation or to consider ideas that might be positive but that lie outside the hypothetical box of our party lines and ideology.

Similarly, two years ago the *Globe and Mail* reported that Members of Parliament in Ottawa voted along party lines 99.6 per cent of the time. Objectively, these statistics wouldn't be so damning if an honest effort was made along the way to collaborate on creating good legislation and doing our best to represent the people that sent us here. After all, the party system in our Westminster democracy does play an incredibly important role in preserving the ability of governments to govern and allowing voters to vote for a mandate that they know can actually be achieved, contrary to the American system, in which Presidents can maintain office without the majority of seats in their House or Senate and often struggle to achieve key priorities.

A strong party system and honest debate should not be the antithesis of each other. We should be able to debate, question, and amend legislation to the best of our abilities, then vote with our parties on the finalized version. Unfortunately, the behaviour that is more commonly exercised in this place and similar places all across the world is that of

shouting, hurling needless and outlandish insults across the aisle, fabricating unapologetic and undisciplined lies, spreading exaggerated misinformation for the sole purpose of furthering selfish party objectives, theatrically shredding up amendments for the cameras before even reading them, and entering into the debate with nothing more than phony, premeditated scripts and talking points to contribute.

Mr. Speaker, we all agree on the basics. Alberta is the greatest place on Earth, filled with the most brilliant entrepreneurial people, the most breathtaking landscapes, and the most ingenious businesses. I know we all agree on those fundamentals, so why can we not work together a little bit more to advance them? No individual, party, or leader has a monopoly on good ideas. The divulgence of democracy away from its idealistic roots may not be a reality that our broader society is ready to face, but we need to because democracy can continue to exist but only if we fight for it.

Now, I want to be clear that neither my motion nor my speech are intended to directly point a finger at the leadership of anyone in this Assembly. The hyperpartisanship of society is not a problem unique to Alberta; it's a crisis plaguing democracies all over the world. I also know that I'm not perfect, and I have certainly thrown my fair share of punches in this House, but honestly I do try to stay away from partisan rhetoric just for the sake of partisan rhetoric.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that democracy and our democratic institutions were established to truly serve the people, not just serve as a concept for people to believe exists somewhere off in a faraway land. The people of Alberta may not have the time nor the care to watch the televised proceedings of this House every day, but they deserve to have the confidence that they don't need to because whatever is going on in this faraway land is in their best interest.

I know that every member of this House was elected with honest intentions. As a member of the government caucus I can promise you that every piece of legislation put forward by this government has been thoughtfully constructed with the sole intention of building a thriving province where no dream is too big and no citizen is left behind. Similarly, I'm not a member of the opposition caucus, but I do believe that every member of the New Democrats shares a similar honest intention of making our province the best place to live, work, and build a future. Unfortunately, our democratic institution has become so that we are largely unable to share in those common goals that I know we all hold. The dysfunction is institutionally based, not intention based. I know this to be true, that deep down we all have pure intentions and that we can work together to accomplish so much good, because I've witnessed it.

There have been moments, and these moments have been the most rewarding and fulfilling of my political career. They haven't been the moments where I've made a splash on camera or received the loudest applause in the Assembly or gotten lots of likes on Facebook. The most fulfilling moments have been the ones that no one saw or witnessed, the moments when we worked together. To quote former President Harry Truman, "It is amazing what you can accomplish [when] you do not care who gets the credit."

Two of the moments that stand out to me were the time as deputy chair of the Public Health Act Review Committee where I and my colleagues whipped others to support several of our opposition's proposals that we believed to be reasonable and positive amendments. Similarly, just last month myself and several members of my caucus sat down with the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview to discuss his private member's bill. After our conversations we continued that dialogue with other experts in the field, many of our colleagues, and several ministries, and though we eventually came to our own conclusion, that the legislation in its current form would not work, and ended up voting against it, honest bipartisan conversations were had,

and a pure willingness to collaborate and really go to bat for an opposition member who had a potentially really good idea existed.

Mr. Speaker, these moments where representatives come together across party lines in recognition that all of us here are duly elected by the people and have an obligation to work together on behalf of those people to ensure that those people have a voice in this place should not be so rare, and they shouldn't need to exist outside the ordinary confines of the institution that was once established to accomplish that very outcome. This institution called democracy should be constructed of procedures and practices that foster collaborative behaviour rather than hinder it.

Mr. Speaker, I don't have all the answers on what reforms are needed. Perhaps we should utilize the less politicized committee format more. Perhaps we need revisions to the standing orders. Heck, maybe we should get rid of these desks and replace them with cozy benches. All I know is that we can find ways to work together to further the interests of the people we represent if we put down our arms.

So, Mr. Speaker and to all members of the Assembly, I hope today that you will all join me in exploring other Westminster parliaments across the world to better understand what works, what doesn't, and what we can improve here at home. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I see there are a number of you wishing to join in the debate. We're going to go with the Opposition House Leader, followed by the Member for Calgary-Klein, the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, and – holy cannoli. We're going to run out of time. Let's do that to start, and then we will see.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In debate on Motion 506 I bring to this discussion a great deal of frustration after three years in opposition working and attempting to work with this government in a number of ways. And in my role now as Official Opposition House Leader I have to be very, very blunt. Collaboration and co-operation have not been something that this government has sought. We have seen 11 changes to the standing orders of this place without working in collaboration or co-operation with the Official Opposition, and Motion 506, which proposes to send further changes to a committee that is dominated by government members, does not give me a sense of collaboration or co-operation going forward. I look forward to more debate on 506, but at this point I rise in opposition to this motion, and I do not plan to vote to support Motion 506, sending this to committee.

Changes to our standing orders began very early on in this Legislature, the 30th Legislature. On May 30, 2019, the first package of changes to the standing orders was brought forward. The government intended to bring a new tone and decorum, which, I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, has not worked well, and we have not seen that in this place. But right from that very first start of changes to the standing orders the Official Opposition at that point said that we should send these changes to the exact committee that Motion 506 is referencing, and the government members, including the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, voted against that and were not willing.

For three years changes to the standing orders have been imposed on members of the Official Opposition, oftentimes with very little consultation and certainly not seeking to find compromise with us, and it's incredibly frustrating because that is not how the Alberta Legislature has operated in the past. Eleven changes in a single Legislature: my understanding is that it is historic, Mr. Speaker, and it shows, I think, a government intent on imposing their agenda and their opinions on the Official Opposition repeatedly as we've been sitting here trying to make life better for Alberta families.

I think that examples of collaboration or co-operation would have been the government perhaps supporting more of the amendments

from the Official Opposition. I appreciate the Member for Banff-Kananaskis acknowledging that many of those amendments were voted down without honest consideration. That is my sense of it in many cases as well.

5:30

I will say to the Member for Banff-Kananaskis that 33 per cent voting with the government actually surprised me a little bit – that was a little higher than I thought it might be – but I have to disagree with the conclusion from the Member for Banff-Kananaskis because I don't think it shows that the opposition was unwilling to work with government. I believe strongly that government has very rarely reached out to the Official Opposition to find common ground.

Respectfully to the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, I don't believe that you've reached out to the Official Opposition to talk about this prior to the debate here in this Legislature. Certainly, in my role as Official Opposition House Leader I did not receive any overtures to discuss or to talk about this, which would have shown more interest in collaboration and co-operation.

The same day that we are discussing this and that the member is espousing the view that we should be able to work together more constructively feels very difficult after seeing the Member for Edmonton-City Centre's private member's bill defeated and knowing that we now operate in a Legislature where no opposition member's private member's bill has been able to proceed because this government chose to change the standing orders to impose a new committee process that no opposition member's bill can get through. Knowing that the private members' business, including private members' motions and private members' bills – it's a lottery system that few and far between get through.

The amount of time for private members' business is quite restricted, yet this government has chosen to essentially impede the ability. So now through these concurrence debates the government can vote down ideas rather than having to do it at second reading or at Committee of the Whole or to try and work with the opposition to amend things. I find that incredibly frustrating. Yes, we can look to other jurisdictions and other Westminster-style parliaments, but I suggest that we are better off to look within this House and to have conversations together about how we are functioning and what is happening in this Chamber, and there has been no willingness from this government to do that.

I think collaboration and co-operation would mean needing to perhaps consider not using the time allocation to limit debate on legislation as often as this government has, which I do not have the stats for but was very heavy handed and done a number of times. Co-operation and collaboration: perhaps having the Premier not handing out earplugs during early debates in this place, which set a real tone for this place. Collaboration and co-ordination would be supporting some of the emergency motions that the opposition has put forward under standing orders 30 and 42 as we went forward.

Now, the reality of what passing Motion 506 would mean for this place: it means a great deal of additional meetings, again, at a committee that is dominated and that government members have a majority on. I am very skeptical at how productive and nonpartisan that work could be, and that work would be taking place in the first summer that we have to connect with our constituents since the pandemic has really released its hold on restrictions and our ability to connect with people. So instead of connecting with constituents, to enter into a committee process that I do not believe is genuine, to analyze the standing order changes with members of a government caucus who have shown little to no willingness to collaborate and co-operate with members of the Official Opposition is quite frustrating.

Now, I believe that I have a reputation in this place as being someone who is collaborative. I've tried to work in a collaborative way with the ministers that I have been critic to. I was very, very pleased to have collaborated with the now Minister of Health but then minister of labour to pass job-protected paid leave for vaccination status. That was something we were able to accomplish together and I thought was incredibly valuable to the lives of Albertans. I have had several substantive amendments to pieces of legislation accepted by this government because of reaching out to the minister and having those conversations, but it's a bit of a one-way street, Mr. Speaker.

The government and the private members on the government side I do not believe have any genuine interest in collaborating or cooperating with the members of the Official Opposition based on my experience in this 30th Legislature. Even just how we've seen opposition members' voices drowned out through heckling and yelling when we are trying to debate legislation in this place has been very, very frustrating throughout my time here in this 30th Legislature.

Now, knowing that members of the government caucus, including the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, three years ago on May 30, so almost three years exactly in just a few weeks, voted against the opposition at that time, saying, "Let's work on this at committee," it's very disappointing to see it now coming back at the tail end of the Legislature, when we have very little time to even operate under any changed rules.

For these reasons, I will not be voting to support Motion 506, and I look forward to the debate.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have some prepared notes here, but I feel like I need to just address a little bit about what was said there. You know, understanding some of the frustration, of course, from members of the opposition, I think those frustrations actually speak to the importance of this motion and the need to review this. Some concerns are merited, some less so, but more to the point, we need to discuss this.

I don't at all question the sincerity of the private member that has put this forward, and I want to emphasize that this isn't government that's put this motion forward, that this is a private member who sincerely wants to address some of the concerns that she highlighted in her speech.

You know, I also want to note that I have seen – and the Official Opposition House Leader is correct – some really wonderful debate, constructive debate that has taken place here, and I've seen some less constructive debate, and most of the constructive debate that I have seen is when that Opposition House Leader is a part of it. I'm certainly all in favour of any efforts to improve decorum in this place and to improve constructive and collaborative debate because that's what my constituents sent me here to do, and that's what I'm hearing from them at the doors.

During my election night I addressed my volunteers and friends and family in a speech, and I closed my remarks to them that night talking about the division that I had seen that took place during the last election. The last election was very divisive, and we saw neighbours put against neighbours. In my own constituency I saw a house vandalized. A wonderful Filipino couple: written on their house was "Nazi" and "racist." Another house took a rock through the window. Another house: they just flat out refused to take my sign because they were worried about the reprimanding that they would take from their neighbours on this. All of this happened because they had my sign on their lawn. They were called racists,

they were called Nazis, and I heard this over and over again at the door.

You've got to ask the question: how did we get here, and how are we going to fix this? We need to fix this, and I think the first step in fixing this is acknowledging a truth. Author, psychologist, and professor Jonathan Haidt addressed a crowd at the Colgate University in 2019, and he came up with three untruths that are being taught right now. One untruth that I think is particularly relevant to today's conversation:

The untruth of Us vs. Them, which views life as a battle between good and evil people. This is the mistaken notion of the righteous mind that treats ideological opponents as bad people and presumes that one's own side has a monopoly on virtue.

Based on some of the language and the tone that we have seen and heard both inside and outside of this Chamber and also on social media, I think that addressing this mistrust will be central in our ability to address the growing divide that we see within our communities and in this Chamber.

5:40

It starts with us. This divide is centred on politics and has been made worse as politicians have used rhetoric designed to create fear and anger to drive their base, ignoring the centre. The result has been a growing dissatisfaction of the ever-growing majority of voters that are out there.

I wanted to make some points abundantly clear in today's conversation. First of all, I believe that we all want an inclusive community. We are all wanting a welcoming community. We all want good for our children. We all value and care for the poor and those who are vulnerable in our community. We care and want to help those with disabilities in our communities. We want all people to have access to health care. We want to leave a legacy for our children.

This past weekend I had the pleasure of going out door-knocking in my neighbourhood, and I spoke with one of my constituents who had a deep concern for the growing discord that we're seeing in politics and the growing divide that she's seeing in her community. I hear this at door after door after door in Calgary-Klein. It's a common and growing concern. The result has led to more and more people feeling disconnected and disillusioned with their government and their representatives on both sides.

The urgency behind changing the tone of the political debate, especially in this Legislature, cannot be understated. We need debate, we need discussion, and when that debate and discussion is discouraged and replaced by condescending speech and name-calling, we get into the yelling and the heckling that the good Opposition House Leader talked about. I wholeheartedly support any review that will lead to more decorum, more constructive debate here so we can have more robust discussion and debates on proposed legislation and motions.

Let's be honest. Not a single member here was elected on the premise of heckling and yelling and name-calling. Certainly, we won't get re-elected on that. That is why I rise today in support of Motion 506 and want to thank the Member for Banff-Kananaskis for bringing it forward. I truly believe that we all, every member here, has our constituents' best interests at heart when we represent them in this Chamber. However, sometimes debate in this House can be tense, as we have witnessed from time to time. It can get personal.

Mr. Speaker, the traditions of our new Westminster political system have been etched into stone long before Alberta became a province, and they have evolved over time. However, rules need to be reviewed, debated upon, and updated based on the times that we are living in. The timing of this motion is not lost on me considering the tone of the debate that we just observed earlier here today. I think it's a great idea to have a discussion about the rules governing

this Legislature, and I strongly believe it would be in everyone's best interest to have this discussion sooner than later.

I remember in a previous election I was door-knocking, and a wonderful lady opened the door. Her daughter was there working on her school work at the table, and we were having a great conversation about the future of education in our province and supports for students, more teachers in the classroom, the challenges that her daughter was facing, and how we help make sure her daughter has success. At that moment this woman's wife came up the stairs. She saw me, she saw my badge, and she started screaming: "Close the door. Close the door." And as that door was flying towards my face, I very quickly went: "Wait, wait, wait. Let me tell you what I used to do for a living or what I do for a living."

That door slowly opened up as I explained to her that I used to help homeless kids get off the street. I watched as her expression changed from complete anger to confusion because she had been told that Conservatives hated the LGBTQ community, that we wanted harm for her and her partner, that we wanted to take her child away from her. We got an opportunity to then – I spent at least 20 minutes at that door talking about what the truth was and what I wanted for her and her family. We were able to address some of those legitimate concerns.

I remember another door. I went up to the door. "I'm the Member for Calgary-Klein." He said, "I can't vote for you because your party is racist." At that moment my good friend and volunteer came up behind me, and he was born in South Sudan. We had the opportunity at that point to address what was going on there. I found out through that conversation that NDP door-knockers had just been through that community, and they were telling people that Conservatives were racist, that you couldn't vote for Conservatives. This is the type of politics that's going to destroy our democracy, and it's causing further division. The more we sit here and say, "They're bad" and the more the opposition sits and says that we're bad, the more people just come to recognize that this is all bad.

That's why I'm standing in support of Motion 506. Maybe it should have happened three years ago, but we are here now, and we have an opportunity to address the challenges that the opposition has brought forward, the challenges that Banff-Kananaskis has brought forward and discuss how we can improve decorum and improve collaboration and constructive debate. Our constituents are relying on us to do that, and our democracy is relying on us to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, followed by Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to speak in support of this motion. I think that there are a few things. I'm just going to speak for a small moment. One of the things that made me very proud when we had first entered into this House and had the privilege of being government was the changes to decorum. It seemed to be, you know, moving in the right direction, but I think we can all agree that that has declined immensely and that there have been moments in here where we can't hear anybody speaking, and it's not coming from one side or the other. It's everywhere, in fact.

There's equal frustration when members are doing members' statements or anything that happens to push the buttons of somebody who happens to be speaking and you can't hear people say these statements. I mean, there may be some rhetoric – there is – but a lot of times, you know, these members' statements are reflecting what's happening in our constituencies, people, really important issues, and things that people can actually really relate to.

It's one of those moments in the Legislature that's very much dedicated to our beautiful constituents, who put us here.

I think that the great thing – and I agree with my colleague from Calgary-Klein. Maybe this needed to come earlier. That's quite possible, but if I could add just to the debate on that, in doing a bit more research on this, I think it's something that as government we should probably try and do, like, every time a government comes in and look at it maybe six months before the next election to see how we've done so that concerns like standing orders and other things can be brought forward so that as we head into the next Legislature, we've had a chance to really revamp. The fact that this committee has met – what? – twice in 10 years I think really tells you that we've left an opportunity wide open to really, really look at the standing orders to see how we can improve. If we're not collaborating enough, if we haven't been thoughtful enough in our approach, then it's a really, really wonderful opportunity to take a look at that approach and see how we can do better versus, you know, the rhetorical attacks that seem to happen back and forth.

We all understand this is the theatre of the Legislature. That's going to happen, but this is one of those rare opportunities – I would like to thank the member – where we can actually look at the standing orders and see what we can do better. I'm very grateful that she's brought it forward.

I think, too, being able to look at other Legislatures to see where they've been successful and where they haven't is an important part of the expansion of what we do here because, at the end of the day, this is an evolving space. You always hope that you're moving towards and evolving and changing to understand. I think it was my colleague from Calgary-Klein who said, you know, that this is a different world that we're living in now than even when we first started. Very, very wise words from my friend. That wisdom is something that can be imparted into this work that we're going to be doing at this time.

I'll just finish with this. I have the utmost respect for all of my colleagues in this House. There have been many, many times where I've disagreed with multiple things, not just on the opposition side but even on my own side, but we do it with respect because there are bigger things at hand when we're talking about these decisions. We don't do any of these things lightly when we have these conversations, but we do it with respect and kindness and to hold each other in the highest regard. We're all serving the same cause here, for different reasons. In some form or another it's to keep Alberta prosperous and moving through, the purpose of ensuring what's in the best interests of Albertans. In my heart of hearts, I would love to see this Legislature reflect that respect, the respect that my colleagues have talked about, when you're at a door and you're trying to explain your side of things and you have a moment to show them your heart. That needs to be reflected here.

Again, I would just like to thank my colleague from Banff-Kananaskis for her excellent motion. Thank you so much for the opportunity to be able to debate this and to do better in the House.

Thank you.

5:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's great to see so many members are eager to speak to this motion. I'll thank the Member for Banff-Kananaskis for bringing this forward.

I wholeheartedly believe in the spirit of this motion. The frustration that I have with let's just call it the culture of the Assembly, with where we are today versus where we were – and I agree with other members saying that we have gone down a path that is much more

divisive. Unfortunately, more debate on individuals has occurred at different points in time versus policy. Interestingly, I actually had a conversation with the Premier about this very issue on Saturday. I think, you know, there are a number of reasons why we are where we are, and I agree with members who have stated that no one side of the House is to blame. All parties have contributed to that, including myself. But when I look at the intention of this, I mean, yes, I wish this would have been brought in years ago.

I appreciate the member bringing it forward today. Again, the best time to plant a tree: 50 years ago. Second-best time: today. I appreciate that. I believe in the sincerity of the individual member; I struggle to believe in the sincerity of the government. I'll give some examples, Mr. Speaker.

A couple of hours ago, today, we debated concurrence on an antiracism bill, that wasn't even allowed to go to second reading. The bill was nonpartisan, yet the debate was shut down. And my bill from two weeks ago, the Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act: the same thing happened. To the Member for Banff-Kananaskis, who mentioned that I did have an opportunity to sit down with a number of government private members – which I did appreciate; they took a genuine interest and, I believe, were sincere about the merits of the bill and wanted to see it move forward – the attitude toward the bill was a one-eighty from the first meeting to the second meeting. I appreciate that members have – and I'm not trying to relitigate the reasons that they gave of why the bill shouldn't proceed. I think they were a little light. Again, there was a willingness expressed to strengthen the bill, to accept amendments from the government side, to be able, for us as a Legislature, to have a shared victory, so to speak. There have been times that that's occurred.

You know, in my time in this Chamber one bill that I think of was the declaration of the Alberta Ukrainian-Canadian Heritage Day Act, that was passed in one day, all three readings, that required unanimous consent, to which all parties in the Chamber provided that consent. That's not the first time that's happened in Alberta's history. I think there have been about five. I will give a shout-out to the late Speaker Mr. Gene Zwozdesky, who brought forward the Holodomor bill back in I believe it was 2012 – it might have been 2011 – that also received unanimous consent to pass all three readings in a day. So there have been times in this Chamber where folks have shown an ability to be able to leave our party hats and partisan stripes at the door and work in the best interests of Albertans. Now, I completely agree that we need to do that much more, you know, in all parts of the day in this Chamber, and it will require an effort by everyone, a hundred per cent, Mr. Speaker.

The challenge that I have is that when we look at something like standing orders – standing orders in the past in this Chamber, for the majority of, like, decades and decades of us having an Alberta Legislature, were only ever changed when there was unanimous consent of all parties to change them. That has changed in the recent past. Now, I will admit, one hundred per cent, as someone, I'm sure, will point out, that under the NDP we changed the standing orders twice. For one of them, we had consent or agreement from the entire Chamber; for one of them, we did not. So I'm well aware that, with what I'm asking for, we committed that same fault. It is surprising, or was surprising to me, the number of times the standing orders

have been amended in the past three years. It is a record. I believe we're up to 12 times in the three years that we're here.

Now, I'm not opposed to updating or refreshing or reviewing the rules of this place, but some of the rules have a history. I, for one, was opposed to getting rid of desk thumping. No, it doesn't exist in Ottawa. Why? They don't have desks. I mean, I guess they could thump their own thighs, but that probably wouldn't be as effective as clapping. I mean, this is just an example, Mr. Speaker. There are some changes that I know the Official Opposition didn't agree to, and we've seen the government make use of their majority on a number of examples, right? Introducing time allocation or closure: again, I recognize that the NDP government also invoked closure twice in our four-year term.

You know, the spirit of this motion, of getting all parties to come together to discuss standing orders, to look at best practices in other jurisdictions: I support the spirit of that. I just really struggle, as I've mentioned, Mr. Speaker, when there are tangible examples where both sides have decided not to pursue that path. I appreciate that in order to break that cycle, it's going to require all members to move this forward.

You know, there are times where members of the opposition have brought forward amendments, many different amendments, and I appreciate that – I will allocate some as being maybe more partisan in their nature, but there are and were and have been quite a few amendments that have been brought forward that have not been accepted.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know if I ever told you this story. In my first term, in 2012, the NDP had an amendment. We brought forward six or seven on one bill. We had one amendment, the final amendment, that was a completely nonpartisan amendment. In fact, during the division I was speaking with a number of ministers on the front bench, and they acknowledged that it's nonpartisan, and they said, "This is actually a pretty good idea." And I said: "Great. So will you vote in favour?" And I was told to my face: "No. We won't, because it's coming from the NDP. It's coming from you." And let me tell you: that was probably one of the most disheartening moments that I've had in my time in this Chamber.

I think that actions speak louder than words. When we were government, I know that there were multiple amendments on pieces of legislation that I brought forward from the opposition that were accepted. Again, I'm not looking for an attaboy. I'm just trying to demonstrate that there have been times, I believe the current government included – in the past three years have any amendments been accepted? I'm looking to our House leader to confirm or not. [interjections] Okay. Great. We have confirmation. There has been at least one amendment, maybe more. [interjection] Seven. Oh, okay. So there have been a few amendments that have been accepted . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt; however, the time for debate for the item at hand has elapsed. There will be 14 minutes remaining in debate next week on this hotly contested motion other than a government motion.

Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, May 2, 2022

Day 27

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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New Democrat: 23

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Stephan
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Vacant
Vacant
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Getson
Guthrie
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, May 2, 2022

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 19

Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate April 28: Member Irwin]

The Acting Speaker: I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, with about four minutes remaining post adjournment last time.

Member Irwin: Thank you. Thank you. You know, Mr. Speaker, I have to just share a little bit about this very auspicious occasion, and I'm certain that many people are watching, especially given the hockey game tonight. I'm positive that we have at least two or three people watching tonight.

Mr. Speaker informed me that this will be the first time that the person who adjourned debate was actually in the Chamber and able to start – well, not that that was a point of order, but you know what I mean. Yeah. This is a big deal. I wasn't planning to speak first, but I really wanted to maximize those four minutes. I wanted the Speaker to be able to share this tonight perhaps with his family and others.

Anyways. I'm sure I only have three minutes left now, and I didn't draw a point of order on that. Just before – I actually did speak a fair bit on this bill, I know, in previous days, and I may have a chance to speak again. I know in my comments on Bill 19, which is the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, I really wanted to just highlight the fact that, you know, we've seen multiple times already in this session with this government that they've had an opportunity to introduce transformative legislation on areas of concern to Albertans.

I think about continuing care, Bill 11. The Continuing Care Act is the name of the bill. You'd think: wow, what an opportunity to really listen to the dire concerns of stakeholders and patients when it comes to continuing care, but of course this government chose not to. I could name the same with multiple other pieces of legislation this session, including Bill 19.

I talked about the fact that we are not certain who, in fact, was consulted on this proposed piece of legislation. I talked about the fact that, you know, in some of the consultation that we did on this bill, we heard a lot of concerns, and we had stakeholders raise a lot of questions, particularly around the tribunal process and why there's no tribunal included in this bill. Condo insurance: wow. We could talk about and we have talked a lot about the rising costs on Albertans in so many areas: auto insurance, tuition, park fees, school fees. The list goes on.

You know, I know in the last time we debated this bill, like, a few of my colleagues shared some of the concerns that they've heard from condo owners in their ridings about rising condo insurance fees. Again, the point being here that this government had an opportunity to address some of the real concerns that we're hearing from our constituents around condominiums, and they chose not to.

What I ended on in my last speech on this bill was the fact that housing remains a huge concern, and that is an issue. I admitted that I haven't heard a lot about condos from my constituents, but I have

heard a lot about housing, and it's one of the top issues I hear in my riding. Every day I witness unhoused folks, and I interact with unhoused folks. We know that the number of unhoused folks on the streets of Edmonton and across the province, as my colleague from Edmonton-Strathcona raised in question period – in fact, she asked the Premier about the lack of housing and housing supports in Calgary, and the answer was quite shameful. The answer talked about shelters, and the Premier did not talk about the need for investing in housing, particularly permanent supportive housing.

With that, I will end my remarks and hope that we will get some answers from this government on this bill. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen to join debate.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak to Bill 19, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022. Edmonton-City Centre is, of course, home to a lot of condominiums. It is a big portion of the constituency I represent, and it certainly affords some unique challenges. It's much more challenging to do door-knocking in a good part of the constituency outside of election periods, and there are a number of other things that come with it. Certainly, with that also comes a high interest in government legislation around condominiums. Indeed, since we were in government in 2015 and inherited the condominium work that had been done by the previous PC government but not proclaimed, there was a lot of extensive work that had to be done to bring that forward. Some of that indeed went on long enough that it was inherited by this government and brought forward, but it's certainly something in that process that I've heard from a lot of constituents about.

Indeed, I have been a condominium owner. I have been on the condominium board. I have been the president of such boards. Certainly, I have seen that they are a dynamic form of democracy, Mr. Speaker. Folks may comment at times about the temperature in the Legislature and the kinds of disorder that they might see during question period. At times I would say that pales in comparison to some condominium board meetings.

Now, I think we all here do believe in grassroots democracy, but certainly it's a challenging one when it comes to condominium boards because so much of it is left to the boards themselves and the individuals involved to police. There is no Speaker, Mr. Speaker, at your average condominium board meeting. You have the chair, of course, but there is perhaps limited knowledge of *Robert's Rules*.

There are a number of factors involved. Certainly, condominium legislation can be complex. It can be difficult. Indeed, I've been in experiences, and not that long ago, where new ownership was coming in, buying a certain number of units, creating complications, and the board felt that we actually had to have a lawyer at several meetings to try to determine which way things were going to go.

So these things can be very complex, but certainly the objective of government in terms of governing this and trying to set out these processes should be to try to make it as easy and as smooth as possible for these meetings to take place and, secondly, to make it as easy and smooth as possible to try to resolve these disputes because, again, the complexities that can be involved in some of these questions and indeed the level of emotion and personality conflict that can be involved make these situations difficult.

If the only available resolution is to go to court, Mr. Speaker, that creates an even bigger challenge. It certainly does little to try to calm the situations. It certainly does little to make them smoother or easier. Indeed, it increases expense for everyone involved and

can make it far more challenging. It can deeply disadvantage individuals who do not have the kinds of financial resources to be able to hire a lawyer and take these things to court.

We have to recognize that in certain situations a condo board themselves can have a lot of power. They have control over the purse strings. They have control over those resources, and if a condo board chooses to act in a way that perhaps is not quite ethical, it can be very challenging for an individual owner to push back against. Again, I can speak from experience in situations where I've seen presidents or other members of condo boards who worked with property managers who themselves were willing to look somewhat askance at what the actual rules and legislation might say to attempt to intimidate owners with fines that were not actually legal or take other steps that they did not actually have the authority to take.

Now, what we have in this bill are a few different changes. Certainly, I have no objection to the change that the minister is proposing here in terms of allowing certain votes to be done simply by one owner, one vote as opposed to unit factors. Indeed, I have spent my own time, Mr. Speaker, at times when we felt that we needed to take action to make changes on the condo board, going around, figuring out how many owners we need and how many unit factors that person has in order for us to be able to win this vote, et cetera. Certainly, that was one of the early things that first got me interested in a career in politics. But I recognize that when it comes to things like simply approving the agenda for the meeting, why not just have that be able to be just by a simple show of hands from the owners present? That seems reasonable.

7:40

Now, I'll look forward, of course, to the regulations, where we'll get further definition on some of these things, but on this piece I do not have a difficult time trusting the minister that there are going to be some of these sort of small adjustments to try to make for an easier flow.

However, I do have some concerns with the proposal that the minister is putting forward regarding chargebacks. Now, indeed, I have had folks on condo boards at condo buildings here in my constituency reach out to me on the issue of chargebacks. They have indeed said, you know, that they felt that the process that was in place made it too difficult for them to be able to recoup costs in situations where there is damage done to common property. That's reasonable. We want to be able to find a way, I guess, for those things to be achieved. Certainly, I recognize that costs can – when there is damage to common property, then that falls on everybody. Then it's all owners that have to pay that indeed.

As the minister himself said, these costs add up. The only way to pay for these costs is to increase condo fees. That means every condo owner, even if you're a good actor that's never caused any damage, had to bear the cost of those. Certainly, that's a reason to have concern, Mr. Speaker.

I would also note that I've heard from many people who were very concerned about the fact that this government removed the cap on insurance, which, in turn, has also had precisely that effect, driven up the costs for the building and therefore every single owner's condo fees. But that is not the subject of this bill.

It does concern me, Mr. Speaker, again, as I have seen and certainly as I have heard from other constituents, that it is possible for a board to be, shall we say, disingenuous, to choose to target a particular owner. What this change would do is that it would make it more difficult for an individual owner to be able to appeal that.

Again, the only option that they would currently have is to go back to the courts, and that, as I said, can be a very insurmountable obstacle for some. It's a very difficult position to be in when you have put your life savings, you have put a sizable investment into a

condominium, particularly in a market right now, Mr. Speaker, where it is very difficult to resell and recoup your investment.

Now, I understand that the minister said that he is going to set some of these things out in regulation and that in regulations he's going to require that condo boards will need strong and compelling evidence for charging for damages as well as a fair way for owners to appeal decisions. On that, Mr. Speaker, I am a bit more hesitant about simply trusting this to the regulations, particularly because there has been work under way for a number of years that began and was first hinted at in the legislation that was passed by the PC government, was worked on by our government during the four years we put work towards it, and was indeed promised by this government and continued until now to create a condo tribunal.

Now, the existence of a condo tribunal would certainly make this an easier change to accept, that owners would have an option outside of having to go directly to the court system or depend potentially on the goodwill of the board as to having a fair appeals process.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we can keep in mind what this government had attempted to put forward in terms of an appeals process when it came to traffic tickets and some other things in the courts here, where individuals would have indeed had to pay out of pocket and would have been judged more or less as guilty until they proved themselves innocent and had to pay for the privilege of doing so.

I think we have some reason to be a bit hesitant, a bit skeptical about what the government is going to put in place to ensure that owners who are put in this position, where they are judged to have done that damage and they are levelled these charges – that there will be a really, truly fair option of appeal. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that is one of the things I have heard about most. I said that I've heard from a few folks about the chargebacks. I've heard from many, many, many more about the need for the tribunal.

I can tell you that during the time that we were in government, I repeatedly was reaching out to our Minister of Service Alberta and asking about progress on that point. We saw other pieces move forward, other pieces of the regulation, but that was one that, you know, did stall out. It turned out to be perhaps complex. To be honest, I was never quite clear exactly on all the pieces that were involved there, but I do know that we are coming up now on potentially five, six years that this has been in process. This was something that this government said they were going to get done, and now they are effectively saying, "No, we are not," without a lot of clarity on why.

We know that this exists in other provinces. B.C. has a Civil Resolution Tribunal to resolve condo disputes of any amount. It handles other issues in B.C. that are under \$5,000. It issues fees and fines, deals with condominium bylaws that are arbitrary or unfair. So it provides a much-needed check and balance, Mr. Speaker, on what is essentially an honour system, again, unless owners can afford to actually go to court and go through that process.

Mr. Speaker, we also know the state of our court system right now. It is under enormous pressure. We know that there are cases at risk of not being able to proceed for having exceeded the statutes that have been set out. We know that our Crown prosecutors – and I was thankful to hear today that they will not have to go on strike but that indeed they have the opportunity to sit down now and enter into a negotiation with the government to address their issues. Certainly, we are hearing from defence lawyers now, who are also asking questions about: okay; if there's going to be a change for them, is there going to be a change for us?

Overall, what we know is that our court system is already under enormous pressure, and indeed that was part of why the government was originally justifying the somewhat troubling and lopsided approach they were looking at taking with traffic courts and traffic tickets, which they have walked back. But the fact is that we still

have enormous pressure in that system, and to say at this point, then, that we are still going to leave these kinds of disputes to our court system to resolve is just going to add more to that pressure.

So it would be my hope that a government that has said, you know, that they are dedicated to eliminating red tape, making processes flow more smoothly, giving Albertans more access to grassroots democracy would have prioritized a condominium tribunal, would have put real work and effort into achieving that. Unfortunately, we have not seen that, and that is not in this bill.

Ontario also has the Condominium Authority of Ontario, arm's length from government, which has tribunal authority, so a condominium authority tribunal. They have a \$50 levy that goes for all condos and then fees for some of the services. It is administered online, and it offers opportunities for negotiation, mediation, and adjudication. Nova Scotia has a condominium dispute officer condominium arbitration process.

Mr. Speaker, there are clearly models that we could be looking at in other provinces. There are certainly opportunities for us to be bringing this forward. I would be interested to hear from the Minister of Service Alberta a bit more about what the obstacles have been to moving this forward in Alberta and why the decision has been made at this point that they are simply setting that aside, that that is not a priority.

I can say, again, that for folks in my constituency it continues to be a priority, and it continues to be a concern, particularly when we are talking about housing issues and challenges for people to own their homes. I think most municipalities are looking for opportunities to increase their density, certainly for urban living and more opportunities. We have seen a significant growth in the number of people that are living in Edmonton's downtown, and that then has economic benefits and also has good benefits for the city in helping to curb urban sprawl.

But the fact is that when we're increasing that kind of density, a lot of that ownership is going to be in condominiums, so we really need to be thinking very carefully about how we can make this a better system, with more accountability and more protection for individual owners as well as for condominium boards. Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. I know I have spoken about boards that act badly or are disingenuous or may target owners – and those exist – but certainly I have also been in the position to work with a number of people who were very dedicated on their boards and dealing with very difficult situations like building-wide bedbug infestations or indeed folks doing damage to property or other things that can occur. I recognize that that can be very thankless work and that it is done by volunteers, for the large part.

By no means do I want to disrespect the folks that step forward or indeed the folks that have advocated for this particular change from the minister in regard to chargebacks. I think it is very important for us, particularly as legislators, that we are thinking carefully about the impacts this could have on individual owners.

That said, I think I'm nearing the end of my time. This is my first opportunity to debate the bill, and I imagine there will be more. I look forward to perhaps hearing from the minister on some of these questions.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

7:50

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a great deal to say about this particular act, but to begin with, I am rising to move an amendment. I'll just wait for that to reach you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

This, for the purposes of debate, will be referred to as REF1. As is the normal course of the procedure, if you would like a copy of the amendment, please put up your hand, and one will be delivered. There will also be copies at the table. There will also be copies available in the peace lounge should you be looking for one there.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, please continue.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Mr. Speaker, this is an amendment which is commonly referred to as a referral because it refers the substance of the bill to a committee, and I actually think that that is a good thing to do with this particular bill. Now, I'm not suggesting that all of the changes in here are bad, but I think there are a few details left to be worked out.

Obviously, one of the things the bill doesn't do is establish a tribunal to deal with these matters. That's certainly something that I heard about an enormous amount in government. I've heard about it an enormous amount since we've been in opposition. Probably the main ask that I hear from anyone who wants to talk about this act is: when will the tribunal be established? The reason for that is that court processes take a very long time. They're extremely costly. The procedures can seem quite difficult and arcane. It can be difficult for people to understand what the steps are they have to take or how to argue it or how to move something forward or how to get it resolved. The idea would be to bring in this tribunal to help with that.

I think, of course, of the residential tenancies dispute board, which does handle matters, disputes under the Residential Tenancies Act significantly more quickly in a lot of cases. People find that incredibly helpful. Yeah, I would say that the primary ask I get from people representing condo boards, from people representing condo owners, from just people generally is about this sort of resolution mechanism. I think that it would be extremely helpful here because things are often more complicated than they appear.

I mean, the really nice part about alternate dispute resolution is that if you're doing it right, it's not just sort of two parties who go in and fight and one wins and one loses. If you're doing it right, what happens is that everyone comes together, and they sort of explain what their feelings are around the situation, what they think happened, and kind of what they would like to have resolved going forward. It can actually result in better resolutions. Rather than one side or the other side, rather than, like, very sort of clunky orders that can be provided from the court, it can often be the case that people will sort of negotiate to a resolution that isn't something that ever would have come out of a court decision but is something that is better for all of the participants involved. It can happen faster, with a lot less sort of stress and turmoil and cost for everyone involved.

I really think that that is something that should be moved forward to. I know this government had committed to that in the last election. I'm sad to see they didn't move forward with that. They moved forward with a lot of commitments I don't agree with, and it just so happens I guess the one that I did agree with they didn't, so there we go.

The other, I think, concern here – and my hon. colleague who spoke before me raised it as well – is the chargeback system without

an obvious mechanism to create that accountability. I think it's worth sort of starting with a story, because, you know, these situations can be incredibly complicated when you come right down to it, right? A lot of condos, for instance, are rented out, so it can sort of create a complicated scenario. In this scenario you have a tenant, and the tenant has received notice that there's some sort of leak from the washer. It's believed that the pipe is backing up or something like that. They ought not use the washer in the interim. That's fine.

Now, the property manager will only speak to the owner of the unit, because, well, some property managers are very good and others are not very good, and the one in this story is pretty abysmal. So the property manager sends a plumber. The plumber comes. The plumber talks to the tenant, says: "The pipe is backed up. It's full of built-up laundry detergent gunk, just a bunch of gunk. It needs to be snaked. It can't work until it's snaked." Okay. Fine. Then the property manager, because they know that it is a condo which is inhabited by a tenant, just really doesn't bother to getting around to having the plumber come back. They don't have to deal with the tenant, so of course not their problem.

Roughly somewhere between five and six weeks elapse, and the landlord, feeling a sense of obligation because he's a decent fellow, comes and does it himself, snakes the pipe himself, and says to the tenant: "Okay. Great. The problem that the plumber identified has been solved. You may now run the washing machine," which the tenant does. Well, it turns out that that never was the problem. It's not really clear what happened. Perhaps the plumber was mistaken. Who knows? Anyway, that's what happens. The result is that the thing leaks again. It turns out that the actual problem is that there's a hole in the pipe, but the pipe is behind a wall.

Considering this an emergency, the condo manager person, who, of course, will not talk to the tenant who now inhabits the property, sends someone in who drills a giant hole in the wall and leaves a big mess and doesn't check for asbestos, and it's just generally extremely problematic. The tenant, obviously, reaches out to the landlord and says, "I would like some assurances that this, like, giant pile of mess that's been left for me to clean up is not, in fact, full of asbestos," and no one is able to provide that assurance, so it goes round and round and round and round.

This has never been resolved, to the best of my knowledge – I guess I haven't been involved in the situation in a while – but the point is that if the condo corporation, on the word of this manager, chooses to charge back the unit owner, or the tenant in that case, there is very little ability for those people to defend themselves despite the fact that I think that from the story it's fairly clear who is in the wrong, and it is the manager. But the manager isn't going to tell the condo board that they're in the wrong, is he? It just creates a situation where potentially people are being charged with something and now they have to pay an enormous amount to defend themselves in court, which can be a lengthy process, and the money can be in dispute for a long time.

This is, in my view, not an ideal situation, and this could apply to any situation. The way this legislation is drafted – this is amending legislation. It repeals and replaces section 39. Subsection (2) allows the chargeback to be levied for damage. Subsection (3) says that it must be "actual costs." Sub (4) says: costs or the deductible from the insurance. That is a whole different issue. Subsection (5) says: can dispute "in accordance with the regulations." Well, I don't really think that's good enough.

If you're that tenant – you know, this is the other thing. A lot of people who are tenants in condo buildings, who are potentially subject to this, who are potentially being charged with this by these

condo corporations, may be young, right? They may be students. They don't have a lot of money. They don't necessarily know how to seek legal advice. They could be people who are new to the country, with English as a second language. It just puts them at a disadvantage. It puts them in a position where they are essentially guilty by way of charge from the condo owner until they prove themselves innocent. I think that that is a problematic way to go about it.

8:00

Now, I certainly have heard that there are concerns around the process now. It is very hard. If someone is wilfully causing damage or wilfully being problematic, it's incredibly hard to go after that person for a condo board, and that's problematic. It's difficult to get people to serve on condo boards for a number of reasons. It's not compensated, and it's a lot of headache if you have some finicky people who are disagreeable, which, you know, is sometimes the case. It can be an unpaid, sort of headachy problem.

Certainly, this is a problem that needs a solution. I'm just not sure that this solution is the best solution. The reason is that instead of putting a condo board in a position where it has this real big problem, where it has to, like, go after someone and it's procedurally onerous, now you have either the owner or the tenant in that position, where they're charged until such time as they can prove it wasn't them, and now they're having to go through a procedurally onerous situation.

Now, this government says: don't worry; there'll be lots of protections in the regulation. I mean, it's worrisome, right? It's worrisome, obviously, because we've heard this a lot, you know – "Don't worry; public health care guarantee: don't worry" – and it often isn't the case. It's very easy to promise up front and not follow through. This government has a long and demonstrated history, I would say, of promising things up front and not following through.

This amendment gives us the opportunity to take the time to do the due diligence and the due consideration, because I think, you know, "They can dispute it in accordance with the regulations" isn't quite enough. It's not enough protection to make clear what's going to happen. Again, yes, these changes needed to be made because currently the system is unfair to the condo board. I feel that this solution, rather than balancing things, just shifts that unfairness to the other party, and that's not the right way forward either.

What could happen at a committee like this is that, you know, people who have been through these situations could come forward. Lawyers who are familiar with the area, people who are familiar with condo governance could come forward, and everyone could sort of explain what problem we're trying to solve and come up with a better solution, because I think there are better solutions than this. Yes, I guess I would say that this is a problem. It needs a solution. I don't particularly like this solution. I think we ought to go to a committee and sort of discuss what a better solution might be. I think, Mr. Speaker, that a better solution might itself hang on the tribunal that has not been implemented because I think that that is the system that could make everything a lot faster. It could adjudicate rights and interests.

We have this concept in administrative law that the sort of level of procedure to which you are entitled is proportionate to your interest in the matter. I actually think this is a really good principle. I think it should flow throughout the entire court system. You know, the idea that oftentimes, functionally, someone who is fired from their job has basically sort of – I mean, they can go to employment centres, but that only gets you the minimum, which is quite low in many cases. Functionally, there isn't much they can do through the court system, so functionally they can't challenge that. Meanwhile

if you get a \$75 speeding ticket, you get sort of the full-court press for that.

I don't know if that's the best way to do those things. I think a tribunal might solve some of those problems. It might make it the case that we can kind of deal with these issues faster and with the amount of procedure that is necessary to handle what it is that is coming forward, so what the particular dispute is in this particular instance. That is why I think it should be referred to a committee. I think that the committee can do the difficult work of assessing exactly what a better solution to this – you know, genuinely giving the government credit here – problem that needs solving is.

I guess the other thing I would say about this bill is that it really does need that tribunal attached to it. I think that, yeah, that's probably the number one ask. Yeah. I don't think I've ever heard a different number one ask from anyone involved in condos in any sort of position or in any way. That would definitely be a good thing. Potentially the two things are linked, you know? Potentially the one thing goes with the other.

It would be interesting if the minister could tell us a little bit more about the regulation. You know, they're saying: don't worry; it'll be in the regulations. That's fine. I feel like I could use a little more information about what would be in the regulations, a little more information here in this place on the record so that there would be sort of a record and an accountability there, an accountability to ensure that those things were followed through and to reassure the concerns of the opposition.

Yeah. I mean, I think it's pretty normal in this place for people to ask these sorts of questions, to ask for more details, to ask for that sort of thing, and I think it's not unreasonable for a minister to come forward and provide those additional details to make sure that everyone is understanding, I guess, where we are and how we're going to proceed forward. You know, it certainly has been the case, at least in a few instances . . . [Ms Ganley's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on REF1 if there is another. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has risen to debate.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening to speak about REF1, the referral amendment, to the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022. I'm always interested in delving into real estate matters in this House when questions of changes to legislation regarding the sale or regulations around the ownership of real estate are considered, and of course this piece of legislation is no exception.

I do agree wholeheartedly, Mr. Speaker, with my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, who just spoke now about the reasonableness of having this piece of legislation referred to committee so that many unanswered questions can be addressed by committee members and perhaps those who the committee could call before it. I know the Member for Calgary-Mountain View was quite detailed in her approach to the legislation and the need for having a committee consider it.

I hope to add to some of her arguments with a few observations of my own, Mr. Speaker, some of them coming from numerous years selling real estate and also acting as a real estate broker and sales manager, having to face the ire of buyers and sellers who would be phoning me to help resolve disputes that they may be having with their unit after the fact or upon inspection and finding out that there were issues of concern that they were now being stuck with that they didn't feel they should be held responsible for.

Of course, I speak about the concern that many condo owners have had and some continue to have regarding the windows and

doors and the weatherproofness of them. We've gone through a period of time within the last decade and two decades, perhaps, where there was a problem with the so-called leaky condos, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't something that was limited to British Columbia, where indeed they have more rainfall on the coast – and it was a widespread concern and costly issue that arose there – but it was right across the country and, for that matter, throughout North America.

It arose because of faulty workmanship and/or design in the condominium doors and windows in particular; not so much the roof, but sometimes that roof cap was also the culprit as well. I'll refer specifically to the condominium windows and doors for my comments on this topic because what the legislation does, Mr. Speaker, is move the definition of windows and doors from regulations into legislation.

8:10

I understand, I think, the motivation of the minister for doing this. It is an extremely contentious thing to a condominium owner who is faced with the prospect of a major bill to repair damage in their own unit or a unit that happens to be directly below them as a result of water leaking from their unit to the next unit but also between a condo unit owner and perhaps the tenant of that condo unit owner and the condo corporation itself because common property may have been damaged.

Mr. Speaker, one may think that perhaps fire is the worst cause of damage claims to property and the worst threat to property, but realistically water is by far a more insidious and sometimes silent destroyer of property. It can happen slowly and over time and be imperceptible for months, in fact for years, until, for some reason, mould is discovered or a weakness in the structure is discovered. It's an insidious invader of property, particularly where wood is involved but in any case where water can penetrate the surface of the building material, stay for a while in proper temperatures and proper conditions, and grow into a mouldy condition. It can be unbelievably expensive to fix, requiring, in some cases, near total reconstruction. In some cases we've heard about, particularly houses on acreages recently just west of town, around the Spruce Grove-Stony Plain area, the houses were condemned as a result of mould. That can happen if it's not addressed. It's a really difficult issue and a really difficult problem.

I'm concerned that the legislation requires that – the definition of responsibility for windows and doors has been relegated to legislation from regulations. I'd like to hear more in committee, should the referral amendment be successful, about the reasoning why the minister thought that this would be a good methodology to correct any lack of clarity around responsibility for damages caused by leaking windows and doors.

It is a rather rigid tool to have the definition of something as minute as the door trims and casings versus the window trim on a constructed opening embedded in legislation rather than in regulations, which would be, by and large, more flexible should things change or should there be developments in case law, which suggests an alteration in the regulations would be wise to do. Yet here, of course, should that case law arise, it would require opening up the act to start playing around with definitions of, you know, windowsills and window doors and balcony trims versus fascia versus the casing.

I just don't quite understand the need to embed all of that definition, that minutiae, into legislation when, in fact, it probably would have been a bit more nimble to have altered the regulations and made it clear that, you know, notwithstanding what a condominium corporation may have said, if indeed they're undefined, then the regulations would define the openings or the

windows and doors, what responsibility was whose in any particular case. That question, I think, we deserve a satisfactory answer to in committee, should the referral amendment be successful, because the issue is not tiny.

We have had millions and millions and millions of dollars of claims and counterclaims because of leaky windows and doors in condominiums in Alberta and throughout the country. They're very, very difficult situations to be in, where you would have had, in some cases, condominium corporations do a cash call; in other words, a charge to every unitholder to rectify faulty windows and doors that were either a design flaw or perhaps workmanship issues when the building was constructed. Of course, they usually weren't discovered until the responsibility of the builder and the designer and the architect was long since expired, so it became part of the responsibility of the owners to combine their resources and fix them themselves. In many cases the condominium corporation itself was responsible because there would have been common-area doors and common-area windows that would've suffered the same design flaws or shoddy workmanship and had to have been repaired as well.

The idea of embedding the minute definitions of windows and doors into legislation rather than allowing them to stand within regulation is something that I still don't quite see the need for. I'd love to hear more from those individuals who have been directly affected by a situation where they had to face the onerous cost of replacing or repairing windows and doors in their unit or in a common area of a condo. They could come before the committee and explain exactly why they think it would be beneficial to have this definition embedded in the legislation versus maintaining it in regulations.

I know that you'll have quite often, Mr. Speaker, a contiguous line of people suing each other when it comes to a rented property and the tenant is perhaps responsible for damage. Particularly, as I said, water is the number one, but there could be a number of different damages. The insurance industry is replete with circumstances that would be beyond belief unless they actually happened to you. There are any number of circumstances that can happen when an individual is living in a condominium and they have a pet or they have a child's science experiment go wrong, or it can simply be water damage or perhaps a small fire. I know that there are situations where even in some of our public-owned housing the tenants are being evicted for having caused a fire. That is something that concerns me.

In this particular case a tenant responsible for damage quite often in the rental agreement will be required to provide proof of a policy of insurance to a certain amount for certain insurable losses. I'm not sure if the legislation before us contemplates that requirement. Of course, mortgage companies require that a property be insured so that, of course, the mortgage company insists that it be in first place to receive the payout of that insurance, and that's part of the mortgage contract. That's something that we can also discuss in committee, Mr. Speaker, that in the event of losses from an unintentional but insurable loss or consequence the tenant, in fact, could be required by their landlord to have insurance which would protect against as much of a potential liability as possible.

Not only that, of course. You'd look at that being in the condo bylaws, but the owners would, hopefully, also be required by the condominium corporation bylaws to protect themselves with adequate insurance against chargebacks that might happen as a result of their liabilities towards a condominium corporation in the event of water damage or something that the condo claims is damage caused by the condominium owner in that particular complex. In that particular case, of course, that there's a tenant

involved, there may be a suit back through to the tenant from the condominium association.

It can be a true minefield of pain and agony if indeed it gets to a situation where individuals are suing one another and attacking one another in court to recover their perceived damages. That's all the more reason, Mr. Speaker, why it's important to consider having this legislation considered in committee, because of the responsibility, I think, of this Legislature to make sure we avoid the courts, the onerous costs and time liabilities imposed upon condominium owners in this case if they have to go to court to resolve disputes.

8:20

The other big, big issue that we've heard many members comment on from our side of the House, especially – the issue that we have with this legislation is the dispute resolution void, let's say. There's no opportunity for an owner to actually avoid the courts because their tribunal wasn't brought forward. It was contemplated in the regulations that we brought forward when we were government, when we had the act open, and the UCP, current government, did not follow through with it and, unfortunately, in this version of their attempt at changing the legislation for the better has not seen fit to bring forward a tribunal that would allow condo owners, tenants to avoid going to the courts to seek redress.

What it does, in my view, is empower a condo corporation who will have more resources and therefore more power to pursue their interest in court. It gives them an advantage versus the individual owner of a particular condo unit, and, as a result, you will see perhaps unitholders not wanting to engage in court action and just simply suffering a loss or perhaps claiming bankruptcy. That's one option that a person doesn't see as a far-fetched thing to pursue when you're owning a condominium and it may be \$200,000 or \$300,000 or \$400,000 and you're ending up facing a claim from your condo association in the same amount. It may be pretty unreasonable to proceed with anything other than a tribunal.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On the referral motion I do wish to join debate and follow my colleague from Edmonton-McClung and, similarly, agree that I believe that we should not read this bill a second time but refer it to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

You know, standing up and following my colleague from Edmonton-McClung, I think from earlier debates I understood that he's worked in the real estate industry for 30 years now and seen his fair share of both positive experiences – no doubt more positive experiences than negative – but certainly can't have a 30-year tenure in real estate and serving Albertans with their sale and resale and the challenges that some of those have with regard to their purchases or tenure in their properties that they bought through this individual being a real estate agent. With lots of experience on his side in previous debates he's talked about some of the challenges that we have before us as a result of this bill coming forward and the way it has come forward.

My colleague from Calgary-Mountain View is proposing that we refer to a committee for the opportunity to hear more from people who have seen this bill and perhaps judge it in a wanting way. I know the Member for Grande Prairie, I think, in introducing this bill for the second time, perhaps on behalf of the Minister of Service Alberta, talked about how there were regular meetings with groups

of dedicated representatives throughout 2020 and 2021 that Service Alberta held. Just thinking of some of those individuals, whether they be representatives from community groups, representing condo owners or boards or managers of condos, lawyers: all of that would be a really useful group of individuals to hear more from and to kind of understand their views with regard to what came forward in Bill 19 and what is left up to regulation.

Just thinking about the growth of condominium ownership also in Alberta, one of the documents I was looking at from CMHC said that from 2011 to 2016 there was a significant growth in condo ownership in Alberta at that time. I'm just thinking back to what those years were like. It was prior to the world crash and the price of oil in late 2014, 2015. There was a lot of positive growth, positive feelings, positive GDP.

An Hon. Member: Vibes.

Member Irwin: Good vibes.

Member Ceci: Good vibes in the province.

There was a huge percentage of homes built in those days that were condos. If I think back in terms of a story, though I have owned two principal residences in my time, currently in the second one for about 36 years, there was a time when my spouse and I owned a condo just not very far from here as she was working up here at the U of A and wasn't comfortable renting somewhere, wanted to be in a place that we could call our own and lock the door. It was a nice place. Some of the challenges that we had as condo owners were around the common property. Though she felt totally fine being in the place, you know, from time to time the elevator didn't work, and she didn't feel comfortable in some of the hallways that she had to go through to get to the unit.

Mr. Dach: Did you use a realtor?

Member Ceci: Did we use a realtor?

The other thing that I just wanted to say with regard to all of that is that there were challenges with the ownership. Particularly, we weren't there that much. She wasn't there that much, but there were disputes.

I recognize that what we're dealing with and hoping for is that it'll go to committee and there'll be an opportunity to talk more about why the tribunals did not get into this bill, though it was very much the plan back in 2015 to 2019 when we were government and we were working and opened up the condo act twice when we were government. There won't be a million different times to open up this act, and hopefully, you know, together we can get it right and it can service condominium owners for many years in the future, but it means that we need to get this right, and that's another reason to consider going to, hopefully, a referral to this committee that I'm talking about.

I just wanted to talk about a few other things. In terms of the referral to this committee, you know, as I said, it was very much the NDP government's plan to make sure this act worked for the long term, and the tribunal was something we heard about. Unfortunately, when the new government came in, like many things, there was a desire not to move forward with some of the common-sense approaches that we as the NDP were trying to put into legislation.

For example – and it's just a quick example – the two investor tax credits that we brought in as a result of chambers of commerce throughout the province, notably Calgary, making that recommendation and saying that it would attract capital from Alberta investors, and it did. It was a really good thing, and it was unfortunately killed by this UCP government when they became

government, but they saw the wisdom of changing that, about two years after it was killed, to bring in their own. It's very much the same thing that was in place, so delaying for two years the ability of Alberta investors to get credits for their investments and continue to drive forward the economy in this province at a time when we were in the COVID times seems like a bad thing to have happened in Alberta.

8:30

Just another example of what I think needs to happen is that we need to take good ideas from wherever they come and work together to make them happen for Albertans.

I think, Mr. Speaker, I understand that I should be looking towards adjourning in a second, and I'll take my place but hope that members of this House will give good thought to and consideration to the referral that we're talking about here.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate on the referral amendment that's been brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 11 Continuing Care Act

Ms Gray moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not carried out sufficient consultations on the contents of the bill with families whose loved ones lost their lives from COVID-19 while in continuing care.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment April 27: Mr. Williams speaking]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Are there any members looking to join debate on Bill 11, Continuing Care Act? We are on REF1. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to my colleagues for the debate so far this evening. Interesting, respectful, good questions posed, I think, so far, so I'll do my best to continue in that thread. The bill that we are considering at this point is Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. I have to start by saying that I am quite familiar with the legislation that governed continuing care and presently still governs continuing care in this province, and I know that there are a number of different pieces and that this bill appears to be bringing it all under the same umbrella.

What I want to say is that not all care is equal in this province and for good reason. There is a differentiation in terms of the needs of patients. Often we're thinking about seniors, but it's not just seniors. There are certainly many folks with significant illnesses who can no longer stay safely independently living at a certain point. I can't help but think of the number of young people in this province, many who live in congregated sites and in some type of continuing care, and the fact that one of the things when we were in government that I was proud to bring forward was a bill to ensure resident and family councils at all facilities that were providing health care services of some sort.

It really came from feedback from many folks throughout the province that there were some exceptional operators that were doing a very good job of making sure that the residents' voices were heard, that family members had an opportunity to engage and to

give feedback and to be advisory to the operators of the facilities that their loved ones were living in. The operators that were engaging in that space were doing so out of probably a reading of evidence that showed that people have a higher quality of satisfaction in life when they feel like they are involved in making decisions about their home and also out of the goodness of their hearts, really.

There was no legal requirement for them to ensure that – sometimes these people were incredibly young, young adults, and sometimes they were quite elderly, but everyone deserves an opportunity to give feedback on their home, to make sure that their home is a place where they can feel a sense of pride and comfort and belonging. So I was proud that that bill came forward, and I believe that it ended up with support from – at that time there were multiple parties in this place, I think four, and I believe all parties did indeed support that bill. Of course, this is one of the questions that we continue to have: with the alignment of all these pieces that presently govern continuing care, are we actually going to see an erosion of some of those additional pieces that were put in place to ensure that the voices of folks who live in congregated care have an opportunity to give timely, ongoing feedback to the operators of their facility?

Some examples I'll share from my lived experience as a granddaughter of somebody who was in long-term care not far from here, the Edmonton General hospital. When my grandma moved into the General, it was a very, very difficult time for her and in turn for our family, because she was one of the toughest women you could ever meet. She was widowed in her 50s and continued to live on the farm independently. When my gido, my grandfather, went into hospital and was clearly palliative, that's when she said: "Well, I better get a driver's licence because I'm going to need to get in and out of Westlock to go visit him. I'm going to need to be able to continue to live on the farm." She wasn't going to let the fact of her life circumstances and that his life was coming to an end hamper her independence. You know, that, at that time, was not common for a lot of women, to have their driver's licence and be able to have that level of independence.

Then he did pass, and she continued to live on the farm and run the business of farming for many, many years. In fact, I believe she lived there for more years as a widow than she did as a wife, and to move from the farm into the city was a big adjustment for her. Thank goodness she had some time to adjust to condo living – I'm thinking about the last bill – but still was living independently. Then, of course, at a point she wasn't able to cook for herself in the way that she once did, and we needed to rely on the community supports of things like Meals on Wheels to ensure that she could have regular, timely meals, because not all of us were able to check in on her as frequently as she should have.

But there hit a point where both her body – it was really her body. She had Parkinson's, and she wasn't able to live independently in her own condo, so she moved into a lodge, right? This is sort of a natural step that – for those of us who are lucky enough to live well into our 90s, which my baba did, this is often the progression of care. But there hit a point even in the lodge – there was cleaning; there was cooking; home care came in to make sure she was taking her medication and to help her with morning and evening routines – where she couldn't get up on her own. She couldn't actually transition from bed to the walker to the dining room. I think there was one week where the ambulance was there every day and multiple times one day. It was very clear that it wasn't something that could be sustained because, of course, in lodges there aren't people who can provide that medical assessment and make sure that you haven't injured yourself.

She spent months in the hospital, and this, again, was when I was quite a bit younger. Well, I was an adult, but I was not the Health minister at the time. She spent time in hospital and eventually transitioned to transitional housing through Norwood and then eventually to the General, a difficult journey for a woman who spent most of her life living alone, continuing to farm, and caring for others, a very humbling experience.

When she did move to the General – and I want to say that the staff there, I think, worked very hard to, number one, care for the people and make sure that they're safe and that they're not being put at risk and also to make sure that they have an opportunity to continue to live there. I remember my grandmother saying to one of the care workers: I'm not here to die; I'm here to live. That was a really difficult day, I think, for all of us because so often when people end up in that highest level of care, highest level of continuing care, their time in those facilities isn't very long. But my baba persevered, and she continued to fight and lived quite many years. I think she was there five years at the end.

One of the things that I think helped her keep going is the fact that she knew that my mom and I were going to the resident and family council meetings, and this, again, was one of those facilities that was an exception, that didn't follow a rule but had set this up because they have hundreds of residents, and it was a way to help streamline feedback and shared processes.

8:40

There were simple things that she wanted us to communicate, like she didn't want them to bleach her blouses – right? – like simple things about laundry, something that she'd done for her whole life and taken pride in. She wanted to make sure that less harsh chemicals were used on her nicer pieces of clothing. She didn't want to have to downgrade her wardrobe because of the laundry provisions there. These are the kinds of things that – right now under the Resident and Family Councils Act we have an obligation for people to receive that feedback. In turn, we came up with a system where we'd have two different laundry hampers, and there was one that my mom and I would take home and the other one that the facility would deal with. We could problem solve some of these situations.

Also, there were many residents who lived there on the fifth floor who were Chinese and had Chinese news, Chinese television, and they wanted quality Chinese food in their long-term care, in the residence for the long term. They wanted to have good-quality Chinese food that was prepared locally. So giving feedback on the congee, giving feedback on the other dietary options that were available or not available was incredibly important to them.

Not everyone was a family member who would go. There were some people who were quite young, who had conditions like MS and weren't able to live independently anymore, who would go and talk about the types of quality social activities they wanted to have. Bingo wasn't high on their list of desirable activities, but there were other fun, more youth-focused socializing activities that they wanted to have available. So they were able to communicate that collectively through these spaces.

Some of my nervousness around this provision, one act to govern all care facilities, exists because of the severe needs that we see in long-term care and in dementia care specifically as well, that we are going to be governing under this blanket legislation that will probably bring things to one standard as opposed to differentiated care.

One of the things that – right now long-term care is essentially a hospital. It's governed by the Hospitals Act in a large way, and there are provisions for hospital care that the residents of long-term care are entitled to. For example, you do not pay for your medication.

It's part of the Canada Health Act umbrella of services that's available to you when you're in a hospital. So those who are living in long-term care have their medications fully covered while they are living there. That's not the case in other levels of care. Even if you're a senior and you're on the seniors drug plan, you pay \$25 per prescription to receive the medication that you need to stay alive and to stay well.

Another big difference is that in long-term care there's a requirement for a registered nurse, essentially a charge nurse who must be a registered nurse, to be in charge of the provision of care. In large centres like the General there might only be one for hundreds of patients, but there is at least one because of how they are governed and how they are legally required to provide that level of professionalism and care, but it is not the requirement in other lower levels of care necessarily, Mr. Speaker.

Making sure that – I get that we want to have one bill to govern them all, but the challenge is that not everyone's needs are the same. Somebody who is in a level 3 facility technically needs to have a lower level of care and lower level of supervision and guidance. Making sure that we have legislation that differentiates for patient needs and those who are living in a higher level of care being entitled to the provision of medication and the provision of a registered nurse, I think, is important.

I fear, because most of this detail, the minister and others might say, will be ironed out, the fine details will be created through regulation, which means the government is saying: just trust us; trust us that we will make decisions on all the details that relate to this bill behind closed doors. I have to say that there is an incredibly low level of trust right now between Albertans and their Premier, between Albertans and the governing party, and this request to trust just isn't there. As members of Her Majesty's Loyal Official Opposition we have a responsibility to push for verification, because we do want to be able to trust, but it has been so significantly damaged by many decisions that the current government has made over the last three years.

Of course, health care has highlighted the lack of respect the current government has shown to health care workers as well as to those patients who rely so significantly on daily care, especially towards the end of life. I think about the number of people who have died in Alberta directly because of COVID-19, not even to think about all the indirect fatalities but directly because they had COVID-19, knowing that about half of those lived in buildings that will be governed by this legislation. About 1,600 continuing care residents, tragically, passed away from COVID-19.

At the very beginning you saw a significant call to action, and the government even did make some slight changes. For example, it took months, but eventually they said: yes, you should only be working in one facility; you shouldn't be working in multiple facilities. Of course, anyone who understands disease infection and how airborne diseases that are highly contagious spread – of course staff should only be working with one group of patients. They shouldn't be moving from facility to facility to facility. But because of the way so much privatization has taken place under Conservative governments, we saw that there were many staff, the vast majority of staff, working in multiple facilities.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I am looking for anybody to join debate on RA1. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre. Thank you for that.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak to RA1 on Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. I'm going to pull up that reasoned amendment here just

to give myself a bit of a refresher on the specifics to which I am speaking. That the bill

be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not carried out sufficient consultations on the contents of the bill with families whose loved ones lost their lives from COVID-19 while in continuing care.

Now, certainly, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that Bill 11, as has been presented, is largely an administrative piece of legislation focused on consolidating bills and regulations, making a few administrative updates, taking what's been spread across a number of different acts and combining it into one. My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora spoke to that, raised a few concerns potentially with what could impact from that. Certainly, I would agree with her that we need to be careful that in consolidating legislation, we are not making assumptions that all kinds of care that are captured here under this act, this new act that's being created, should it pass this Assembly – indeed, we recognize that there are very significant differences between the different levels of care and certainly the needs of the individuals in between each.

Now, certainly, I recognize the importance, Mr. Speaker, of laying out a framework, making sure you get that framework right, laying your foundation before you begin to build. An excellent quote that I ran across just recently appealed to me very much, from a guy that's very much a systems thinker, author James Clear, from his book *Atomic Habits*: “You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems.” It is really important to get frameworks right, to get your systems right if you want to achieve your end goals. That is one of the things we have continued to hear, I think, from a number of Albertans and, in particular, in referring to RA1 here, where we're talking about the impacts on families who lost loved ones during COVID-19. Certainly, we need to think very carefully about the results we are getting and, based on those results, what the concerns are with the systems that are bringing us there.

8:50

Certainly, that was the focus of the review that went into this and the work that was done by government and the report that has come forward, making a number of recommendations on changes that need to happen within our continuing care system, the facility-based continuing care review report that came forward. Certainly, when we are specifically talking about families who lost loved ones during COVID-19, there are some very specific recommendations that came forward as part of the FBCC review that indeed are not represented in this legislation but that I think have a significant impact on the work we need to do to improve these systems.

Many of those, as my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora was speaking about towards the end of her remarks, have to do with staffing. Amongst the opportunities for improvement that were listed in the FBCC review was increasing the direct hours of care for nurses, health care aides, HCAs, therapy staff. Certainly, something I have heard from many, many people who have come to me with concerns about the care that their loved ones have received or situations that have arisen within the continuing care system are concerns about the number of hours of actual care that are going to individual residents and that in numerous situations, due to short-staffing for various reasons, whether that's due to some facilities that were looking to cut corners or save dollars or just whether that was due to pressures with, unfortunately, staff being ill and not being able to keep a full staffing complement, they found there were situations where indeed proper care was not being provided. There were not enough hours being provided for people to be toileted, for them to be helped with getting their meals, being

helped with eating their meals, and that led to concerning situations for their loved ones.

Some of the other opportunities for improvement that are listed: improving mental health and wellness supports for staffing; increasing the level of full-time employment opportunities for some positions; enhancing the working conditions for staff, wages, benefits, workplace supports, training opportunities, and empowerment. That speaks directly, Mr. Speaker, to the topic of this referral amendment, which is saying that what we have learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and the effect it has had on the loved ones of many families in Alberta is that these have been some of the most significant factors and were exacerbated, highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Increasing the level of full-time employment opportunities for some positions. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, we know that during the COVID-19 pandemic one of the biggest issues was that staff, as we've talked about many times in this House, who work in continuing care facilities often are unable to get enough hours or earn enough at a single job due to low wages, due to an unwillingness of some of the facilities to offer full-time hours. Then you're able to save money because you don't have to pay benefits. But that creates, in a situation like a pandemic, a problem because you do not want people working in multiple facilities when you have a virulent infection spreading in the populace. That's a very quick way for it to hopscotch, jump its way, between one facility and another, and indeed we saw that happen.

So steps had to be taken by the government. Certainly, it was an issue that we raised as an opposition a while before the government took action. It took some time for that to be implemented and put in place, but eventually that was one of the things that was arrived at, and as part of that, there was work that had to be done, then, to try to determine: well, how do we make these workers whole? If they have someone who has been working three part-time jobs and now they're going to be restricted to a single facility, how do we ensure that, in fact, they are going to continue to have the hours they need to be able to earn a living? Certainly, I think that is a very real concern, something that deserves to be considered, something that deserves action but something of which we see no mention in Bill 11. Indeed, at this time we have no indication of what the government intends to do in that regard or what steps they might take.

Now, the minister says that those are things that would take place in the regulations, and indeed the former Minister of Health talked about that being a process that would take place over the summer and would be coming back in the fall. We don't have much information on what the plan is there, Mr. Speaker, which is one of the reasons for the referral, to take the opportunity to better get a sense of what action the government intends to take on that particular point as it impacts very directly the experiences of families who lost loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic and who are very invested now in seeing real improvements to the system so that others do not find themselves in the same position.

Improving mental health and wellness supports for the staff and enhancing their working conditions: two pieces that are very closely related, Mr. Speaker. Now, certainly, we know that these are very real and pressing concerns throughout our health care system, which continues to be under enormous pressure. Health care workers in general in our hospitals, emergency rooms, and ICUs across the system and our nurses, our doctors, our various care providers are exhausted after multiple waves of the pandemic and, unfortunately, many decisions by this government which pushed them to their absolute limits, the continual choice to act last and act least and the very real impact that has had on their mental health, their physical health, indeed leading to the critical staffing

shortages we continue to experience across the system, including at times in continuing care.

Again, we're talking about this referral, saying that we believe that this should be set aside for a time and not proceed through second reading because there is missing here that consideration of these impacts for the families who have lost loved ones due to COVID-19 and indeed their advocacy for improvements in the system so that we can achieve the goals that we say we have set. Certainly, amongst them needs to be looking very closely at increasing the level of full-time employment opportunities, improving the mental health and wellness supports for those staff and indeed their access more broadly to benefits, which is closely related to the level of full-time employment opportunities and indeed wages.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize, of course, that this government has, you know, made great efforts to try to grind down wages for many health care workers. Certainly, we saw that with nurses going into the fourth wave, where the government was demanding 5 per cent wage rollbacks. Certainly, we've seen their position now with HSAA – respiratory therapists, paramedics, a number of others – demanding wage rollbacks of up to 11 per cent, but a failure to understand what is, in fact, here in their own FBCC review. I think it, again, pertains to this referral amendment. The fact is that if we are lowballing the wages of health care workers while at the same time grinding them down with the conditions, that is going to have a direct impact on the quality of care provided.

These are definitely, I think, serious considerations, and I think Albertans deserve an opportunity to have some discussion of that as we have Bill 11 here in the Legislature. Despite the fact that it is largely an administrative piece of legislation, I think Albertans are looking for a little more meat on the bone.

Again, we have promises of what's going to take place during the regulation, but I think that, as I and my colleagues have noted on many occasions, this is a government that has burned an awful lot of trust, particularly when it comes to the health care system. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that when I'm knocking on doors, when I'm making phone calls, both here in my constituency and in many in Calgary and other parts of the province, this is a top concern for folks. When they tell me they do not have trust or faith in this Premier or this government, health care is at the top of the list.

I think we are simply doing our due diligence as an opposition here in putting forward this referral amendment and noting that there is work that needs to be done to earn the trust of Albertans, that the actions this government intends to take on, ostensibly improving the continuing care system, are indeed going to be substantive and are going to address these very real concerns that go to the heart of the issues in the system.

9:00

In general I would say that the treatment of health care workers in this province over the last three years under this government has been absolutely shameful. From doctors, who certainly are able to earn a reasonably good living and are in a position to be able to advocate for themselves – and they certainly have; they've spoken up loud and clear, you know, in terms of their concerns with this government – through nurses and other assistants down to these folks who in many respects, Mr. Speaker, are at the bottom of the system, have the least strength in terms of advocacy, have been the ones who have been least likely to have their voices heard. Indeed, many of them come from marginalized communities, many of them racialized workers, indeed, many of them of the sort who were misunderstood at times and blamed for the spread of COVID-19 amongst their communities when the fact is that they were put in a far more vulnerable position because of these many exact factors

that were listed in the FBCC review report: the fact that they were precariously employed, that they were low waged, they had no benefits, were unable to get full-time hours.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, if we had a collection of race-based data here in the province of Alberta, we would have more evidence on that front about what those impacts were, as they have had from Ontario, for example, where they have passed such legislation. But the fact is that even without that concrete data, we are well aware, from speaking with those individuals, from speaking with the folks who are elected to represent them in labour, about what these impacts have been and what the need is. Indeed, it's right here in this report, but it is not anywhere to be seen in Bill 11.

I think what Albertans are looking for is the government to be very clear, as it pretended to be with the Premier's public health guarantee, as it pretended to be in a number of very bold promises but has utterly failed to follow through on in terms of being truly accountable and truly invested in actual work to support the entirety of our public health care system.

With that said, I think there will be much more opportunity for debate on Bill 11, and I look forward to more opportunities to rise.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join on RA1? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity. Just to remind, I guess, myself and other members of the Legislature, RA1 reads:

Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not carried out sufficient consultations on the contents of the bill with families whose loved ones lost their lives from COVID-19 while in continuing care.

I certainly support this RA1, this referral, for that purpose, because it's important that we learn from those who have lost their loved ones, those who saw early on. We know that there's coming up to about 1,700 Albertans have lost their lives, have passed in continuing care, and the first and second waves of that pandemic in this province, not unlike its effect in other provinces, were devastating to those many individuals in continuing care. Mr. Speaker, that should be reason alone for learning more about what loved ones or residents believe should go into the Continuing Care Act, Bill 11, and to make sure that it has the agency and efficacy to ensure that the lives of people who are in those facilities are as good as possible and protected as much as possible.

In Alberta right now, Mr. Speaker, there are more than 33,000 supportive living spaces, more than 15,000 long-term care spaces, and there are more than 127,000 Albertans receiving home care each year. We know the ripple effects of lives impacted in Alberta and elsewhere by the act that's before us, that it will be bringing together several other acts and putting them in one place. We know that the lives impacted across Alberta of those 127,000 Albertans receiving home care, 33,000 in supportive living spaces and more than 15,000 in long-term care spaces – you know, it spreads out from there. Those individuals, I think we are arguing, would have a great deal to say about this act at this time and why they should be included in a further review of the results of the government pulling together and trying to modernize, to some extent, and trying to streamline and improve what's currently in several very dated acts.

The facility-based review of continuing care final report, we know, came forward on May 31, 2021, so approximately 11 months ago, Mr. Speaker. That review included – it, of course, had consultation as a step in the process to completing its report, but it also had 42 recommendations that would, as I said, transform and

modernize Alberta's facility-based continuing care facilities. It would be useful to not only ask Albertans who have experienced first-hand the devastation of COVID-19 on their loved ones, but it would be useful to ask Albertans, now that the bill is before us: does it have the appropriate transparency, and does it have the appropriate legislation identified in it that will address the needs that Albertans know too well from their experiences with their loved ones?

You know, the impact of COVID on this province and the people of this province: some medical practitioners and others are saying that there's going to be a significant portion of Albertans who now experience long COVID as a result of their contracting COVID and having it in the first place. What will be the impact on our continuing care system? What will be the impact on our supportive living spaces and, of course, receiving home-care needs going forward? My suspicion is that there'll be more Albertans who go to those facilities or are treated at home for long COVID. That's another reason I think, Mr. Speaker, that we should have the opportunity to allow Albertans to come together to look at this bill in greater depth with legislators to make sure that we're getting this right the first time, because Albertans' health is too important to leave continually to updates or amendments or changes to the act.

We can deal with it – one of the challenges, of course, with the current bill before us is that much of it will be addressed in regulations down the road. I think that's a problem, as my colleagues have talked about already, that saying, "We're going to get this right" is not a transparent way of governing, Mr. Speaker. Saying, "Trust us; we'll go into the backroom, essentially work with bureaucrats and others to develop regulations that'll then come to the minister for sign-off or go through cabinet committee to get sign-off" is not an upfront way of dealing with probably the most significant issue that has hit this province on a health perspective ever.

9:10

I can't remember – well, you know I'm not old enough to know about the Spanish flu. That was in the early 1910s . . .

Member Irwin: You're not old enough?

Member Ceci: Yeah. Okay. You don't need to chime in about that one.

I've been in this province for 42 years, and there's not been a pandemic before in this province, so to kind of point out that we can't leave this to the backroom and decisions being made is, you know, just reality, Mr. Speaker. We need the opportunity for Albertans who have suffered greatly to talk about it, to work through it in terms of this bill and what it will do for future pandemics.

I don't know any province that has taken the opportunity to listen to their citizens around the impact of the pandemic on their loved ones and the ones who were lost. I think that's an oversight that needs to be rectified and can be rectified with this RA1 referral before us, Mr. Speaker, because "trust us; we'll get it right and everything will be better going down the road and we'll head off future pandemics by the new regulations that get put in place" is too much an ask for Albertans who, frankly, are concerned with some of the actions of this government. We know that, you know, steps were taken by this government to ensure that moving forward on a privatized agenda could take place.

A really critical person in the health care of Albertans was the CEO of AHS, and that person is no longer here. Right in the middle of a massive health issue that all Albertans and Canadians have dealt with and indeed, go farther, you know, a person who helped guide and address the needs of a significant area of our government, of over \$22 billion, \$23 billion expenditure, is no longer there to

guide that ship. The government saying, “We’ll create the regulations about continuing care” and all those other things while Albertans have seen people like that kind of be shown the door is something that undermines trust, Mr. Speaker.

I think that Albertans are right to say that people need to be held accountable for these things, particularly in the long-term continuing care situation. What we saw was that residents and the families of residents aren’t able to take steps to do that as a result of actions of this government in terms of a previous bill that was brought in. To say the least, I think the government has failed residents of continuing care. We have brought up many reasons why we think this should be looked at in greater detail, but there’s been no interest, I would argue, from the other side of looking more deeply into that.

You know, the home-care situation is a very good one as well. Not only will there likely be greater home-care needs as a result of long COVID going into the future, but this government more than a year ago talked about putting more time and expenditures towards that. I certainly think that that’s the low-hanging fruit, Mr. Speaker, in terms of health care for Albertans. Well, prevention is obviously the lowest hanging fruit, making sure that Albertans know that they should look after their health care, go to see primary care doctors on a regular basis, take care of their dental, their other . . . [interjection] Yeah. Yeah. Just in kind of a holistic way look after their own health – that’s the best thing that can happen – and then follow that up when home care is required, that there be adequate home care to cover the needs of Albertans so they don’t have to go into more acute care. That’s something I think Albertans should have the opportunity to weigh in on as well and why this should go to a committee to have more sufficient consultation.

The number of hours residents receive in continuing care facilities and supportive living facilities is another thing the government talked about which I’m not aware, in this bill, actually takes place. We have to wait till regulations again. My colleague from Edmonton-City Centre talked a great deal about the situation with regard to staff working in continuing care or indeed across the health care spectrum and how the proportion of staff working full-time was, is, has been dismal in terms of continuing care, and it’s not only here; it’s across the system. I think you could probably say it’s systemic, and that needs to change, Mr. Speaker. The federal government provided some support to help that to take place.

I will, I think, get ready to take my seat and listen to other debate on this referral amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join debate on RA1? I see the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. McIver: I’ll be brief, Mr. Speaker. I just was listening to the last speech and am a little bit dumbfounded. The folks across the aisle through the whole time of COVID argued against essentially every single decision that the government made, like everything that was done in the health care system was wrong. Then we just heard one of them stand up and talk about the former chair of AHS, who is a fine person, like they never did anything wrong in their life. I don’t know if that person did ever do anything wrong with their life, but the fact is that the same folks that complained about every single health care action and decision for two straight years now stand up, incredibly hypocritical, and talk about the person leading the effort on the health care side like they were perfect.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Well, Mr. Speaker, no one’s perfect, and the person leading Alberta health care at the time is a fine, good, and decent human

being, and we should all thank her for her service, and we do. I just had to point out the incredible hypocrisy we just heard here after two years of complaining about everything that AHS did and then standing up here and complaining that the person leading that effort isn’t there any more. The hypocrisy is just way too obvious to ignore.

The Speaker: Are there others on amendment RA1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: I’m not certain I can follow the Minister of Municipal Affairs’ eloquent, lengthy comments on that bill, you know, but I do have to say that it is – I believe this is the second or third time that I’ve spoken to Bill 11, and my colleagues have raised some very thoughtful questions in this Chamber.

9:20

I recall, actually, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View: her introductory comments on this were quite thoughtful, and she’d actually done a very thorough analysis of the bill. You know, it’s possible that I missed the responses, but I don’t think we’ve gotten to hear from the members opposite on this bill, and I don’t think we’ve heard much in the way of answers to the many thoughtful questions that have been posed. Always the optimist; hopefully, we will get some more government members rising in this Chamber and sharing their thoughts, because as I said in my previous remarks on Bill 11, continuing care and the health care system more broadly continue to be one of the top issues that I hear about.

You know, I know we’ve said this many times in this Chamber, and we will continue to say it, but we pride ourselves on talking to our constituents and voter contacting and connecting with our constituents at their doors and on the phones and, as my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre pointed out, not just from our own ridings, although we all are spending a whole lot of time in our own ridings, but around the province as well.

I’ve spoken about how I’ve had the chance to knock on doors in Calgary quite a bit, and I’ll be back there on Saturday as well, talking to the fine folks of Calgary-East, I believe, and I’m certain that health care will be a top concern of folks there. It’s quite interesting. While our riding demographics might differ – I think of the time I spent door-knocking in Strathcona-Sherwood Park not that long ago or Morinville-St. Albert as well. You know, quite different demographics than much of my riding in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, yet the common issues transcend our ridings. Health care is certainly one, and I can absolutely say that continuing care has been something that’s come up at the doors, not as much as health care broadly or education, particularly curriculum, as I look at the Member for Edmonton-Glenora – I know we’ve heard that one a lot – but continuing care has come up.

As I talked about in my previous remarks on this bill, I’ve not had the opportunity as much lately, you know, given the pandemic and wanting to be safe with my constituents – I haven’t visited as many seniors homes as I would like, and I do miss that. I really do. I’ve always really loved connecting with seniors, and just some of – yeah. I just can recall, from not long after being elected, some of the great folks that I met in seniors homes, in particular seniors residents that I represent.

I shared, you know, quite recently that there have been continuing care facilities in my own riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, gosh, where the impacts of COVID have been really, really stark, including in the Chinatown care centre in my riding. I was actually just in the area not too long ago. I was at the Chinese Elders Mansion. If you’ve been in the area in Chinatown, the area I’m so proud to represent, there’re a few facilities there. They’re not all run

by the same organization, but they're all in close proximity. I was there not long ago and just chatting – I actually just dropped off an Alberta flag because their old Alberta flag was quite tattered, so I was happy to do that – with them about how things were going there, and they said: yeah, it's been tough, right? It's been hard on residents not being able to see family as much and just the loss in the Chinatown care centre, in particular significant loss of residents. They have a lot of quite older folks, in their 80s and 90s, who we lost to COVID.

I can share similar stories from some of the other folks that I've chatted with throughout my riding. You know, the people that we lost in the area that I represent are just some of the over 1,600 continuing care residents that have passed from COVID-19. I've got those numbers from the end of March, so I would hazard a guess that those numbers are even higher now. This is why – I should mention, before I forget, to make it clear to the Speaker – we're calling on this government to take our advice and accept our amendment on Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, which will ask for Bill 11 not to be read a second time.

Our biggest concern about this bill, as has been well delineated by my colleagues in the Chamber tonight, is the lack of consultation on this bill and particularly the lack of consultation on the contents of the bill with families whose loved ones lost their lives. I would urge this government to go to some of the continuing care facilities in my riding in particular, you know, perhaps the Minister of Seniors and Housing. She was in Chinatown just – oh, gosh, time is confusing. When was that?

Mr. Shepherd: Yesterday.

Member Irwin: That was yesterday. Thanks, Edmonton-City Centre. Thanks for that. That was yesterday. My brain.

It was great to host her in my riding. We were at Dynasty Century Palace, and she was there from the UCP, and myself and my colleagues from Edmonton-City Centre and Edmonton-Whitemud were there from the NDP. You know, there were quite a few elderly Chinese members of our community there. I can imagine that many of them do live in some of the housing that I mentioned earlier, particularly the elders mansion, the Chinatown care centre, as a few examples.

As I said, again, we're always so happy to support Chinatown and to listen to our constituents. I've said this in the House a few times. A lot of the folks who own businesses and whatnot in Chinatown might live in other areas, but some of them do have elderly parents and whatnot who are in some of those facilities. I was mentioning not too long ago that I chatted with someone who'd lost her grandfather in the Chinatown care centre. She'd pointed out that, you know, yeah, he was old – I need to remember how old he was; I believe she said in his 90s – but he was healthy, and he didn't need to die. But COVID really swept through the care centre. I say all that context because I don't think she was consulted, and I don't think a whole lot of family members who lost loved ones to COVID were consulted.

We can see that in a few other pieces of this bill, and that's why we're urging this government to truly heed our advice. I've said this, you know, in my previous comments, that this government had an opportunity. I was talking with someone, actually, earlier who works with health care in this province, Friends of Medicare, in fact. I'm sure he won't mind me mentioning that I was chatting with him about a few health care issues.

Ms Hoffman: Say his name.

Member Irwin: His name is Chris Gallaway. He's the new executive director of Friends of Medicare, and he's doing a great

job in that role. He's got a lot on his plate, I must tell you. He truly does. He came into that job with a whole lot to deal with. We were just chatting – important stakeholder meeting, of course – about some of the legislation in front of us today, and I pointed out that, you know, there are so many things that this government could be doing. They could be taking very much transformative action to improve our health care system, to address the funding gaps in education, to improve the continuing care system. Sadly, instead of doing that with this piece of legislation, it's very much a lot of administrative work that's been done. Oh, I just had the bill with me. But, you know, even just the title of the bill, the Continuing Care Act: someone might think that a lot is being done, but it's certainly not.

9:30

We're disappointed that when presented with the opportunity to bring about substantial change and to really, you know, transform a system that countless Albertans are telling this government needs improvement, they've chosen not to. That's incredibly disheartening. It's disheartening to us as the opposition, who've heard from families who've lost loved ones in continuing care. It's disheartening to health care workers in continuing care facilities.

I really appreciated – I always appreciate his comments because they're always so thoughtful – the Member for Edmonton-City Centre's point that, you know, many of these workers do come from marginalized communities. There's a large percentage of continuing care workers who are racialized women, many of whom would tell you, if they had the opportunity without fear of reprisal, that their working conditions are just dreadful in a lot of these facilities.

You know, this bill doesn't even – it doesn't even – fulfill the UCP's own promises from a year ago, which were quite a few, among which were increasing home care, increasing the amount of hours of care that residents receive, and increasing the proportion of full-time staff. It fails – it fails – to make substantive and meaningful changes when it could have done so.

The other big concern – we've touched on this a lot. As I've said many times in this Chamber, trust and lack thereof is becoming a consistent theme with this government. What this government is doing with Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, is that they're going to leave a whole heck of a lot to regulations, and they're asking Albertans – they're asking us, the opposition, but I'm more worried about Albertans – to just trust them that, you know, the changes that they want to make are going to be happening in the spring of '23 and that they're going to make the right decisions through regulations. We've heard that on countless bills already. I mean, I've only been an MLA since 2019, but the number of times where we've been told that things will be settled, figured out in regulations is quite troubling. So we cannot – we cannot – trust this government to just leave things to regulations.

Now, I know I don't have a lot of time here left, but I just want to quickly, you know, touch on the fact that there was – again, I remember my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View digging into this quite deeply, so for those of you watching at home, again, of which I know there are many, especially with that Oilers game raging on, do look back in *Hansard* and read some of the comments.

One of the big concerns was around the fact that this government has not acted on the recommendations in the facility-based continuing care review. We've asked multiple times – again, we've not heard answers, or at least I've not heard answers when I've been here in the Chamber – why they're not acting on those recommendations such as increasing the amount of home care provided; improving the working conditions, as we talked about, the often quite challenging working conditions, particularly in the

midst of a pandemic, that those working in continuing care are experiencing; and increasing the amount of full-time staff. Hiring more people isn't necessarily going to fix all those working conditions, but it sure would help, especially for those continuing care workers who we are hearing from, who are just beyond exhausted – right? – and working unbelievable hours and, you know, multiple shifts.

We're asking this government. Will they – and this is why we'd suggest that they very much delay this piece of legislation. We're asking them to share the consultation report. What specifically is being supported by stakeholders? We've got a lot of questions, but we're not getting a lot of answers.

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

The Speaker: Oh.

Member Irwin: That's fine.

The Speaker: We'll say the tie goes to the runner in this case.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 16 Insurance Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate April 27: Member Irwin]

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 16, which is the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. I think it is worth specifying because we've had actually quite a lot of insurance-related amendment acts in this last little while.

What is this bill about? It solves a problem, according to the government, that actually does exist, and I think they are correct in this. I am not in any way challenging this proposition. The government says that it's challenging for certain companies in Alberta to obtain reinsurance, and this is due in part, I think, to oil sands companies being unable to obtain this type of insurance because of climate change. Now, this sounds a bit odd, but actually reinsurance – companies will buy insurance for a loss. They'll buy potentially excess insurance for losses over a certain point, and then they will buy reinsurance. The reinsurance is kind of the third level. Something really, really vague, really, really bad, really very expensive has to happen to get to the point where you're dealing with reinsurance. The challenge, as I understand it, is essentially that because potential damages arising from climate change could be so large, depending on sort of which way things fall out, it's difficult for these companies to obtain the insurance that they need. It is a real problem, and I am glad to see the government moving forward to solve it. I think that this is overall a good bill insofar as it goes. I don't think there are any major concerns.

Essentially, what the bill does is three things. It allows Alberta-based companies who have a captive insurance company outside of Canada to bring them home. So if a company that resides here has a subsidiary that does insurance but it's located elsewhere for various reasons, they can bring them home with no interruption in coverage, which I believe is called redomestication. So far riveting. Riveting.

It also allows Alberta to license stand-alone reinsurance companies. I don't think anybody really knows if this is going to work, but it is actually what I would say is sort of a genuine good-faith attempt to do this on the part of the government. I don't give them a lot of credit for good faith, so I guess I'll take the opportunity

where it presents itself and list it here. Essentially, what it would do is allow a stand-alone reinsurance company to be created in Alberta, I think the hope there being that because it is primarily oil and gas companies that are having difficulty obtaining this insurance, that because there's a lot of capital floating around, they might bring that together and create a company. I would need to do a lot more research to say whether or not I would even want to hazard a guess about whether it'll work, but I think it is a genuine attempt to solve a real problem on behalf of the government, so good for them.

The third thing it does: it allows Alberta companies to access unlicensed insurance. The reason certain insurance is not licensed in Alberta is essentially because, depending on where the insurance company is located, if the insured were to have to sue the company because they decided just not to pay out even though they were liable for whatever reason, it would be very, very difficult to obtain such a judgment. Essentially, it's just sort of highlighting that an unlicensed insurer is unlicensed because the body here in Alberta doesn't believe there's sort of a really good way to force the company to pay out. It's not ideal insurance, but when you cannot obtain anything else in the market, it is something at least.

9:40

Previously the tax rate paid on premiums for that sort of insurance was 50 per cent, which is pretty high. This would reduce it to 10 per cent. So the idea behind charging taxes on those premiums is to sort of disincentivize the behaviour, to incentivize companies to use a normal insurance company if they can manage to do that. I think the 10 per cent is probably still sufficient to disincentivize taking unlicensed insurance over licensed insurance, so it's probably a good move again.

Again, most of what's in this bill itself, I would say, is a good move. It solves a genuine problem. I anticipate supporting it, but I would love to see the government approach the struggles of everyday Albertans with the same sense of urgency that they approach the struggles of large, profitable corporations. You know, this isn't the first bill we've had that deals with this sort of insurance. It's not that anything in the bill is bad; it's just that it's a really interesting signal of priorities. We have this coming through after previous bills that were sort of aimed at similar problems.

Meanwhile, you know, we have the government wanting to act on or claiming – claiming – that it wants to act on skyrocketing utility rates for consumers. The government announced a rebate on natural gas. As it turns out, that rebate wasn't coming forward for – well, at the time it was announced, it was months. It doesn't come in until this coming fall, so October. At the time it was announced, it didn't appear that the prices were going to actually reach the level that had been set. As it turns out, world events have intervened, and in fact gas prices have come up. There was some musing on behalf of one – it might have been the Premier; it might have been one of the ministers – about having that come sooner, and then someone else contradicted the musing, so apparently we're not going to see it until fall. It's a very slow approach.

Then we have the electricity rebate. The government announced it was going to do this, and then crickets; for weeks and weeks and weeks crickets. After those weeks and weeks and weeks of crickets we finally had an announcement. A bill was brought before the House, and as the bill was dropped, the minister said that Albertans wouldn't see the money in their pockets until June or July. The Official Opposition acted quickly. We drafted amendments to put a timeline in there to make sure that that money was getting to Albertans in a timely fashion, because it was an urgent situation for them. The government not only rejected our amendments, but the minister now likes to claim the fact that six days' – he said it today in the House, "six business days" – worth of delay is what caused

the months and months and months of delay. I think that's pretty transparently absurd, but it is a little funny side note.

I guess my point here is that I would love to see this government approach the concerns of the voters in this province with the speed with which it addresses the concerns of large and profitable corporations. We also saw the government sort of race out the door right in its first term a tax cut to large, profitable corporations, and then it rushed that. In the first year, which was pre-pandemic, Alberta lost net jobs in that time frame. Not only did the proposed solution fail to solve the problem; things, in fact, got considerably worse. Having demonstrated that their initiative failed entirely, the government rushed to speed it up and did a 3 per cent drop in one year, which also failed to create any jobs.

In the meantime they cut a series of programs under the NDP that had sort of demonstrated histories of helping: the Alberta investor tax credit, some specific tax credits around the tech sector. Now, subsequently they actually brought some of those back while not having actually verbally admitted that it was wrong. I would consider that an admission that the strategy was incorrect.

But the point is that while all of this rush happened, we have them rushing to move tax rates for regular people but not in the same direction, so they will see an additional billion dollars from bracket creep, which is something the current Premier actually used to rail against in opposition in the federal government. I guess – well, that's some comment on what principles are worth to him. I think the general problem here, again, is not with the bill. The bill itself doesn't do anything wrong. I've said this about a number of bills. The problem is that it just sort of signals a set of priorities that I just don't think are the priorities of Albertans. I think that this government has a really big hurry to help those who have a lot of money, and they need to be in a bigger hurry to help those who don't.

With that, I think I will take my seat. I will say that we'll be generally supporting this bill.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has the call.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to my colleagues for the opportunity to engage in debate regarding Bill 16, Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. I want to take a second here. I'm going to directly connect this to debate, celebrate that we're tied up at 3-3 right now, and just say how grateful I am that Darnell Nurse was well enough to be back in the game tonight and, of course, has already got at least one assist.

How it connects to insurance, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: He had injury insurance.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for that.

Yesterday's media coverage says, quote, as insurance the Oilers recalled Broberg from the AHL. But, of course, tonight he doesn't need to play because Darnell Nurse is back in. This is one of the reasons why it's so important to have insurance. It's not that you're planning on needing Broberg, but there are times where you might have to lean on a junior from the AHL to step up and fill that backlog.

I'm going to take a minute just to also share a story about insurance. We were talking about this with – of course, financial literacy is something I've been advocating for greater improvement in the curriculum for many, many years, Mr. Speaker, including the time when I was on the Edmonton public school board, so I try to take opportunities with the young people in my life to talk about components that relate back to financial literacy.

Mr. McIver: This just in.

Ms Hoffman: Pardon me?

Mr. McIver: This just in.

Ms Hoffman: Hmm. I'll look at it later.

I have to say that the conversation I was having with my niece and nephew – this was probably a year ago – around insurance: we talked about how you want to buy insurance for things that you can't afford to replace like your house, usually the biggest investment that most people make, your vehicle. Of course, related to that is injury insurance and the fact that you might be in an accident with another vehicle. Then we talked about life insurance, and immediately my niece said: "What does that mean? If my dad dies, I get another dad?" Of course, if your house burns down, you get another house; if your vehicle gets totalled, you get another vehicle. Then we talked about how, of course, no, she wouldn't get another dad, but we talked about the earning potential that he would have to contribute to his family over his working years and how that was something that they would need to ensure was there for them and their family to provide for their future if something bad happened to one of her parents.

I have to say that I think, as the colleague who spoke just prior to me has mentioned, there aren't a significant number of red flags in this bill, and that, for a change, makes us inclined to probably support it.

The government has taken many opportunities to – I think the only piece of legislation, which I will refer to it as, that's been changed more than insurance: well, for sure the standing orders have been changed far more times than insurance. They've been changed more in this sitting of the Legislature than, I imagine, probably the last five or 10 combined, so it's interesting that we continue to see additional changes to the standing orders and proposals around that.

Now, here tonight we are considering additional changes to insurance. I would say that one of the big things when people talk to me about insurance that they want to see, though, is that their bills become more affordable and more predictable. I can't help but be reminded of a conversation – actually, I think he just spoke earlier today. But prior to that the last time the now Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin – is that the name of the riding now?

The Speaker: Lac La Biche.

9:50

Ms Hoffman: Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The last time prior to this recent iteration of re-election that the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche spoke in this place, I believe his final exchange in question period was related to insurance and the fact that the policies weren't consistent for residents in Fort McMurray, but there were many different types of insurance packages, and sometimes neighbours living side by side who both lost their homes had very different coverage, and they weren't aware of the fact that their policies were that divergent.

What I would love to see in terms of insurance in this place – and I imagine the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche and others would probably agree – is more focus on affordability, more focus on comprehension and having consistent packages of services available for those who might need them as it relates to automobile, home, life insurance, and other major insurance products. Those are some of the things I would love for this Assembly to focus its time on, things that actually directly impact affordability and ways to make life better for everyday Albertans.

I don't think that this bill is problematic, but it definitely doesn't give me the kind of enthusiasm that I would have if we were actually addressing some of those significant root problems that people regularly talk to me about throughout the province of Alberta when it comes to what can be done to address insurance as we move forward.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 16, Insurance Amendment Act, 2022, in second reading, my first opportunity to address this piece of legislation. The bill primarily does three things: making changes to captive insurance companies, building off the changes that the government passed last year; it makes changes to allow Alberta to license stand-alone reinsurance companies; and it makes it easier for Alberta companies to access unlicensed insurance. Based off the debate that we've had so far, based off the support from the energy sector that we've seen for this piece of legislation, and based off the remarks and the research I've had the opportunity to do, it's my intention to support Bill 16 at second reading because of the three things that it is doing and the need for that given that Alberta is in a hard insurance market and that this change will bring Alberta more in line with other provinces and make sure that we can get viable insurance products easier for industry.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, I cannot rise in this place and speak about insurance in Alberta without talking a little bit about what I'm hearing from my constituents in Mill Woods, who are more and more struggling with the rising cost of living and the rising cost of their own personal insurance items. Now, in seeing the Insurance Amendment Act introduced and in considering it at second reading, which is looking at kind of the high level of this piece of legislation, I'm very disappointed that this bill does not do more to address what have been some very serious and expensive to Alberta families changes that have come about since the UCP removed the rate cap. We have talked about the cost of insurance rising and the impact on families in this place a number of times. In fact, it comes up during question period quite frequently, and it's certainly not something that the government is unaware of. When the Insurance Amendment Act for 2022 was introduced, I genuinely hoped that we would see more support for Albertans, and unfortunately it does not exist in this piece of legislation. What is missing – that support for drivers, that support for homeowners on their home insurance policies – is really incredibly important.

Now, we know that the government just recently released the superintendent of insurance 2020 annual report. It found that the car insurance industry was charging Alberta drivers \$385 million more in premiums in 2022 than they did in 2019 during a time period where drivers were actually spending less time on the road. I would have liked to have seen in Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, something to address this – across Canada other jurisdictions were actually providing rebates to drivers – and to Albertans to help offset potential costs and to acknowledge that during a pandemic people in many cases used their vehicles less. Certainly, that wasn't universal to all experiences during the pandemic, but for many, many people it was true.

Here in Alberta, rather than providing rebates, we saw Alberta companies collect \$1.3 billion more in premiums than they paid out in claims, boosting their profit margins and expanding their gross margins. Not surprisingly, this report was delayed, delayed, not released. We were told it was unimportant, that the information was available elsewhere. It was not. Then the report was dropped late

on a Thursday before a four-day long weekend, which is a sure sign that the government is not that interested in Albertans noticing it. Unfortunately for the government, Albertans did notice that report. In fact, I was door-knocking just the week after – that weekend, actually – the report was dropped, and people were bringing it up to me on the doors, that they had seen this was happening.

Certainly, when I'm out talking to constituents and talking to Albertans in other parts of this province, affordability issues are absolutely the number one concern that is impacting their pocketbooks. We have talked about this as well, Mr. Speaker, in this House, but just recently we saw a report that said that Albertans say they're \$200 away from being unable to meet their monthly financial obligations, one of the highest rates in the country. I think we need to think about that incredibly seriously, so the Official Opposition has called for a one-year freeze on car insurance premiums, something that would save Albertans \$360 million on their insurance bills and take action to help fight rising cost of living. The government disagrees as we do not see that type of policy in Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, where it would have certainly been most welcome.

In fact, instead, we see last year's rates skyrocketing, in some cases up by 30 per cent. Even just this month alone, Mr. Speaker, we've seen five rate hikes, with Premier Insurance company going up by 5 per cent, the Dominion of Canada General Insurance Company going up by 5 per cent, Aviva Insurance Company of Canada going up by 5 per cent – that's just this month – on top of the previous increases that we've seen. While Bill 16 does not address rising car insurance costs – I wish it did – costs are going up for Alberta families as we speak in this very Chamber. So I'm disappointed that Bill 16 doesn't do more to address the very real concerns that Albertans are talking about at the doorstep and that the concerns of large companies, to my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View, seem to rate as a higher priority than the concerns of average, everyday Albertans, that the profits of insurance companies are ahead of the budgets of everyday working families.

We've recently seen numbers even in the budget documents, where based on the projections for revenue growth on the Alberta government's tax on car insurance premiums, Budget 2020 projects that Albertans are going to pay \$891 million more over the next three years. That's accounting for inflation and population growth. That's a lot, Mr. Speaker, and that's on top of an Alberta public that – already so many of them say that they're \$200 away from being unable to meet their monthly financial obligations.

These are serious topics, Mr. Speaker, and while I support Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, for the three things that it does do, I am incredibly disappointed for all of the things that it does not do. It does not support Alberta families. It does not address the problem that the UCP themselves introduced when they raised the cap on insurance prices that was put in to protect consumers. They say that insurance companies were leaving, except none had. They were about to leave, except none did.

10:00

Instead, we have Alberta families that are paying more and more and more each and every day, on top of, of course, the affordability crisis that we have with electricity and utility costs going up, food and gas prices with the inflation that we've seen, tuition – oh, my gosh; tuition is going up hugely – school fees, over and over and over, park fees. Each and every one of these things that I've named is a policy that the UCP government has changed that is making life more expensive for Alberta families. I haven't even talked about the insidious bracket creep tax changes that they've put in or Friends of Medicare and the important work that they are doing to advocate for Alberta families, because, of course, our health care

system is being underfunded in so many ways, and our health care workers are stressed and have been carrying so much weight throughout the pandemic.

On this important Bill 16 piece I will be voting in support of the Insurance Amendment Act, but I had to use my brief time at second reading to express my disappointment in all of the things that the Insurance Amendment Act does not do. Again, to be entirely clear, Mr. Speaker, because this is what I'm hearing when I talk to families when I knock on their doors, it's a very real concern each and every day, and while Bill 16 is doing three very good things and it has the support of the energy sector and the voluntary reinsurance task force, it doesn't take action on what's most important to Alberta families. As a member of the Official Opposition I really just needed

to make sure that I represented the voices that I've been hearing and the constituents that I represent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this time to address Bill 16.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a second time]

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Assembly be adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, May 3, at 10 a.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:03 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, May 3, 2022

Day 28

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, May 3, 2022

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning, hon. members.

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 22

Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 22, Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022.

This is part of our ongoing efforts to modernize the electricity grid and keep our system safe and reliable. It is also another piece in the suite of measures we are taking to ensure our system remains stable. If passed, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022, will help address the changing ways that electricity producers and consumers interact with and use Alberta's power grid.

It will encourage new investment in technologies and support the establishment of a planning framework while maintaining our overarching requirement that infrastructure costs borne by Alberta ratepayers be reasonable and fair. This legislation builds on some previous work that the AUC has been doing.

Madam Speaker, the reason that this work is necessary now is because Albertans have come through a period of high pricing on electricity. You know, it's at this point in second reading where I insert a trigger warning because we're going to talk about how we got here. Albertans have gone through four years of having the NDP use the electricity grid as ground zero for their inappropriate meddling in pursuit of their progressive goals, and that's what they did. The first thing that they did was that they got rid of coal. Don't get me wrong; please don't misinterpret. There is a need to decarbonize – we recognize that – but you can't swing the pendulum so hard that you harm Albertans. We need to find that right balance. Unfortunately, they didn't explore clean-coal technology. They didn't explore carbon capture. They just got rid of coal.

Then they ran the victory lap with their extremist environment friends, but they forgot to tell Albertans that they were going to be paying more for electricity. That was the net result of what they did. Before we started to see the effects of getting out of coal, we would see the price go up because we got rid of the cheapest form of electricity. We believe that we have to decarbonize methodically,

responsibly, and that means moving at a balanced approach. We also know that the NDP spent 7 and a half billion dollars on infrastructure when they were in government.

Now, Madam Speaker, as you know, I am the first one that will be fair with the NDP. I will be the first one to admit that the NDP did not start the overbuild on the transmission grid. They are guilty of not stopping it. I am proud to say that our government has been doing the hard work that will bring forward long-term price reductions for Albertans.

One of the first things that we did was that we stopped the overbuild from happening. We put a stop to it, and I'm proud to say that in 2020 we only spent a hundred million dollars on infrastructure in this province. In 2021 we spent zero dollars on transmission infrastructure, Madam Speaker. Compare that to the 7 and a half billion dollars that was spent under the NDP. We brought significant changes.

The Alberta Electric System Operator actually released their long-term forecast. When you read that forecast – and I encourage everyone to read it if you're concerned about the price of electricity – they actually deferred a billion dollars' worth of infrastructure investment, Madam Speaker. I mean, I wish the NDP had deferred some of that infrastructure investment.

Now, in addition to delaying that, they also forecast that we will build between \$150 million to \$200 million a year in new infrastructure investment. Build-outs will have to be made. There must be current investments, but you must invest at the appropriate level that is sustainable for Albertans. You can't overbuild the system. AESO is forecasting \$150 million to \$200 million a year in infrastructure investments compared to the \$7.5 billion that was spent under the NDP.

Yes, Madam Speaker, we are bringing forward long-term changes that will bring relief to Albertans. We'll be winding down the Balancing Pool as well, because, as we know, the Balancing Pool was allowed to be used to pursue the progressive policies of the previous administration, and they hung \$1.3 billion on the ratepayer. Everybody can go to their electricity bill, look at the Balancing Pool rate rider, and we still have \$700 million that has to be paid off by the ratepayer. That will take upwards to 2030.

The problem is that the Balancing Pool used to be a profitable organization. Since its inception the Balancing Pool has refunded \$4 billion back to the ratepayer. For the NDP to lose \$1.3 billion in four years is just incredible, Madam Speaker, so we must do a couple of things. We must NDP-proof the electricity grid, and that means taking organizations like the Balancing Pool and creating environments where they cannot be used to drive ideological, politically driven agendas to the harm and detriment of ratepayers in this province.

Madam Speaker, we are bringing forward meaningful changes that will help us modernize the electricity grid. One of the first things that this bill is going to do is bring forward self-supply with export. See, we know that the path forward for lower prices is through increased choice and more competition, so we need to create environments where we encourage more generation coming online, and that's exactly what self-supply with export will do. It will allow companies to generate electricity for themselves and then sell that electricity into the grid, and that, of course, will increase the supply that is available to all Albertans and then bring down the prices over time.

We are excited. Self-supply with export is not something that is currently allowed under current electricity legislation, Madam Speaker. This will not just help us bring down prices for Albertans, but it will also be an investment attraction tool. It will be one more thing – I apologize to the hon. member. Was that standing for an intervention?

Ms Phillips: No.

Mr. Nally: Okay. I thought it was.

Madam Speaker, this will be an investment attraction tool because companies will look to this as one more reason, not just our reduced red tape and our lowest corporate taxes in Canada, cheaper than in 44 U.S. states. They will also look at the investment attraction tool of being able to provide self-supply with export.

This has a number of benefits to the electricity system, Madam Speaker. We are also going to allow energy storage to come online. See, right now energy storage is not something that exists in our legislation. The AUC has been approving projects. I believe they've approved upwards of 14 projects. They are at various stages of approval or construction right now, but there isn't the legislative framework to support it, so they've been approved on a one-off basis. We need to provide a legislative framework that will not just enable and support those project but bring online new projects.

This is very exciting. As you know, the Canada Energy Regulator said that Alberta is a Canadian destination for renewable energy, and having a legislation framework that supports energy storage supports our leading as a clean energy provider, Madam Speaker.

Energy storage does a couple of things. One, it deals with the intermittency of renewable energy. As you know, there are some efficiency issues because the sun doesn't always shine, the wind doesn't always blow, so renewable is at times not the most efficient form of electricity. Storage will help us deal with that intermittency issue. That, of course, will help us have more generation that is going to be part of the supply mix that is available to Albertans, bringing down prices in the future. So we're very excited to be able to provide that.

Storage also is a nonwires alternative, and this is something that was not explored under the previous administration. We wish it had been. Had they used energy storage, Madam Speaker, as a lower cost alternative to wires, we could have spent less money on infrastructure build-out and not gold-plating it like the NDP did.

We're very excited about having the opportunity to have storage as a nonwires alternative. It may not be a 100 per cent replacement for transmission wires, Madam Speaker – in fact, we know that it won't be – but there will be cases where energy storage will be a cheaper alternative to costly wires. So we're very excited about having an opportunity to make that available to companies in Alberta.

In addition to those advantages, Madam Speaker, energy storage will also provide some arbitrage opportunities, and it will be an opportunity for entrepreneurial individuals to buy electricity during the periods of the day when prices are cheaper and resell it later on in the day, when prices are higher, helping provide more supply at that that peak time, which then, of course, is not just an arbitrage opportunity but will actually help bring down prices for consumers as well. So we're very excited about enabling energy storage in our electricity grid.

10:10

We will also be winding down the Balancing Pool, Madam Speaker. As I mentioned, the Balancing Pool is something that the NDP do not like to talk about. The Balancing Pool is, obviously, a conversation they feel uncomfortable having, and that's because they lost \$1.34 billion on the Balancing Pool driving Alberta towards their progressive, ideological agenda, that just gave us one result, which is reduced reliability and higher costs. We see that through the \$1.34 billion that they hung on the Alberta ratepayer, using the Balancing Pool to do it.

We know that we must NDP-proof the electricity grid, and that means winding down the Balancing Pool. The PPAs have expired,

so there really is an opportunity, now that the PPAs have expired, to reassign many of those responsibilities and to come up with a strategy to wind down the Balancing Pool.

Now, as you're aware, the Balancing Pool still owes \$700 million, and in addition to that, there are other liabilities and other companies that have signalled they may or may not sue because of what transpired under the NDP. Of course, we need to keep a shell of a corporation or a shell of an organization in place to manage those liabilities. You might want to refer to this as the hangover from the NDP. I certainly view it that way, Madam Speaker. If we hadn't lost that \$1.34 billion, if we hadn't created liability opportunities, then we wouldn't have to keep it open through 2030, but we do have to keep a shell of an organization there to deal with those liability opportunities.

I couldn't help but glance over at the NDP, and they're all looking down at their shoes. Of course they are. They should be. They should be embarrassed, Madam Speaker, because they brought two things to Albertans. [interjections]

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j), specifically language to cause disruption. While the hon. Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity said that the NDP should be embarrassed, they responded, in turn, by saying: you are an embarrassment. I believe I heard it from the member from – there are so many constituencies over there. Just ramble off your constituencies. Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview certainly was one of them, and the former Minister of Education and current critic of postsecondary was another. I would ask that both of those members apologize. That is certainly language that is not parliamentary in this Chamber, calling someone else an embarrassment. Certainly, policies of a government or the previous government could be considered embarrassing. That is a matter of debate, but personal attacks are not welcome in this Chamber. They should apologize and withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is not a point of order. For the last little while, while I was listening to the minister, he has not said one thing that was relating to the bill or factually correct. It's not a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I didn't hear the comments that were made in the accusation by the Deputy Government House Leader. However, if those were to be comments that were used in this House, it's certainly most inappropriate. Comments are to be directed through the chair. Speaking directly to a member using words like "you" is not welcome language in this Chamber. So I ask all members, whether they're heckling or speaking, to keep their comments directed through the chair and on topic.

The hon. associate minister.

Debate Continued

Mr. Nally: Thank you for that ruling, Madam Speaker. It's not even 10:30 in the morning, and they're already lighting their hair on fire.

The truth hurts, and facts are inconvenient, and it's unfortunate that this is going to be an awkward conversation. Make no mistake. We will debate this bill, and we will hear about the progressive government that preceded us that used the Balancing Pool to drive their ideological agenda and hung \$1.34 billion – it's unbelievable that we have to have this conversation. It's going to be uncomfortable for them.

You know, there was a member of that caucus that was actually defending that \$1.34 billion in the media. If you can believe it, Madam Speaker, that member was actually justifying it, saying that it was the right thing to do. [interjection] I think I just heard more defence of that.

I mean, talk about doubling down on something, Madam Speaker. To hang \$1.34 billion on Albertans and then double down and saying that it was the right thing to do: I've got to tell you that there are 4.3 million Albertans that think otherwise. Not only that; that's probably why they got tossed aside in April of 2019. I would encourage the members opposite to participate in this conversation and to keep an open mind. But it is going to be difficult for them, to be able to listen to these accusations, because they did not do a single thing on the electricity grid that didn't result in either higher costs or reduced reliability.

Yeah, we're going to be having some awkward conversations. It's not even 10:30 in the morning, and this is only second reading, Madam Speaker. I'm sorry about that, but we were elected on a campaign to stand up and fight for Albertans, and putting in electricity legislation that will modernize the electricity grid: that is what Albertans asked us to do, and that's what we're going to proceed with.

Those are the three areas that I talked about: self-supply with export, energy storage, and the Balancing Pool wind-down strategy. We will also be putting forward a distribution planning framework, Madam Speaker, because planning and co-ordination are critical to ensuring the retirement of existing assets and that the addition of new technologies happens in an orderly, efficient, and cost-effective way. Competitive market forces will continue to be relied upon to develop many of the distributed energy resources, including residential, solar battery storage, and electrical vehicle charging. They are transforming the electricity sector on a global scale.

To ensure that Alberta's distribution system can effectively accommodate these changes, Bill 22 will require distributional system owners to prepare electric distribution system plans in accordance with future regulations. The act would also give the Minister of Energy regulation-making authority, which ensures government can provide further guidance around the planning framework as needed. Proactive planning of grid modernization will provide for better cost management to ensure ratepayer dollars are used as efficiently as possible and provide long-term savings. It is essential to ensure the system continues to meet the evolving needs of consumers in an orderly and efficient manner.

While the amendments are not expected to have an immediate impact on utility costs in the short term, Madam Speaker, they do set the stage for longer term benefits for all ratepayers and a more robust system. I'm happy to say that while we are doing the heavy lifting that's going to require us to bring down the cost of electricity long term, we are providing short-term supports for Albertans, like the electricity rebate, the gas rebate, and, of course, the 13 cents a litre that we paused at the pump. That's \$2 billion worth of short-term supports to provide relief to Albertans.

A number of consequential amendments to existing acts are also required to support implementation, specifically the Hydro and Electric Energy Act, Electric Utilities Act, and Alberta Utilities Commission Act. Our approach to strengthening the electricity grid

is measured, responsible, and pragmatic. It opens doors for new investment and limits the risk of overregulation and unnecessary red tape while ensuring that the regulatory regime remains responsive and appropriate.

Alberta is on the cusp of the greatest economic recovery that our province has ever seen, Madam Speaker, and it will need a modern and innovative electricity system to power that recovery. The Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act represents a step forward in creating that system. It builds on recommendations gained through extensive consultation with consumer groups, industry stakeholders, agencies, and investors, and it makes the long-term changes needed to create a stronger electricity system that keeps energy affordable and reliable for Albertans for years to come.

We've always said that the path to affordability is through increased competition and consumer choice. That is exactly what this legislation will do. I hope that all members support me in moving forward with Bill 22. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise to speak at second reading to Bill 22, the guiding legislation framework for the regulatory treatment of energy storage. I'm going to begin my comments with – in any discussion of electricity anyone who purports to be part of a government that is full of adults in the 21st century begins their conversations about electricity with the statement that is very straightforward, which is that climate change is real. Decarbonization has as its anchor electrification in our current industrial, residential, and building processes and systems. This is the key and the foundation to how we become more resilient and adapt to the reality of the climate change that is already baked in to the atmosphere and how we mitigate our greenhouse gas emissions such that we mitigate further catastrophic climate change.

10:20

Let's start with first principles, Madam Speaker, because I believe that a responsible government starts with the reason why we might undertake a particular piece of legislative action. It is not to stand up and yell or to engage in unnecessary disorderly speech in a Legislature for one's own personal satisfaction. It is not, in fact – you don't even introduce legislation in order to, you know, get up and use inappropriate phrases, such as the minister just did, like "trigger warning," which is entirely inappropriate, and he should refrain from continuing to do it.

Mr. Schow: Explain why.

Ms Phillips: Rather, a government that knows how to govern itself and to regulate its own emotional reactions, which is a course of action that I would recommend to the other side seeing as emotional self-regulation seems to be a little bit difficult on the other side this morning.

Mr. Schow: Explain why it's a trigger warning, why it's bad.

Ms Phillips: We ground our conversations in electricity particularly in storage because this is a reaction to decarbonization, to the incredible amount of private capital that is working around the globe to, in fact, decarbonize our electricity system, being our lowest cost emissions.

Mr. Schow: You can't even explain why it's inappropriate. If you're going to say something, back it up.

Ms Phillips: If the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika would like the floor, he is welcome to it, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to sit down if he would like to provide his extemporaneous thoughts on electricity storage, but right now I have the floor. Thank you.

Climate change is real. This is the way that we ground our conversations in electricity. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released their Sixth Assessment Report, which was quite alarming, to the world in the summer of 2021. It stated – and scientists are not given, especially atmospheric scientists and these sorts of scientific experts, to unequivocal statements. Yet in the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report the first line is:

It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred.

In terms of climate futures:

Global warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in carbon dioxide . . . and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades . . . Continued global warming is projected to further intensify the global water cycle, including its variability, global monsoon precipitation and the severity of wet and dry events . . . the ocean and land carbon sinks are projected to be less effective at slowing the accumulation of CO₂ in the atmosphere . . . ice sheet collapse, abrupt ocean circulation changes, some compound extreme events and warming substantially larger than the assessed very likely range of future warming cannot be ruled out and are part of risk assessment.

The risks are massive to our food supply, to our biodiversity, to our ability to be resilient to extreme weather events, to our infrastructure. We already have around the world millions of climate refugees, and there will be more. This indeed does present an existential risk to our children and our grandchildren.

Decarbonization, though, does have a great deal of promise and hope. There is opportunity as well. I'll read now from Wood Mackenzie, one of the world's largest consulting firms to the private sector on these matters. They say that electrification "enables demand flexibility." It indeed incents new economic activity in terms of "ecosystems of software companies [that] have developed to leverage . . . capabilities, connecting loads to wholesale and retail energy markets." It notes the great economic potential of energy efficiency, both in grid management but also in industrial processes, and it notes that

building and transportation sectors account for 33% of global CO₂ emissions, making the electrification of those sectors key to decarbonisation.

In countries with sufficiently decarbonised power sectors, electrification not only directly reduces emissions through reduced fuel carbon-intensity but offers an array of benefits that contribute to emissions-reduction, [indeed] public health, and equity.

There is no question that fossil fuels will continue to play a role in the global economy. However, what we are seeing is that our lowest cost emissions are often in electrification of industrial processes, in buildings, and in transportation and that over time fossil fuels will become less of a combustion-related activity and more of a durables-related activity and CCUS will be undertaken in order to deal with the emissions associated with extraction.

Now, I have read from the overall scientific assessment and from some of the global economic assessment. I'll refer now to the American Securities and Exchange Commission, who just put out the proposed rules to enhance and standardize climate-related disclosures for investors. This came out of the American SEC a couple of weeks ago on March 21. These rules would provide investors with "consistent, comparable, and decision-useful

information for making their investment decisions and . . . provide consistent and clear reporting obligations for issuers."

The SEC chair says, in a very key phrase, that

our core bargain from the 1930s is that investors get to decide which risks to take, as long as public companies provide full and fair disclosure and are truthful in those disclosures . . . Today, investors representing literally tens of trillions of dollars support climate-related disclosures because they recognize that climate risks . . . pose significant financial risks to companies.

Assets managers representing hundreds of trillions of dollars have asked securities regulators for these rules.

Why is this important to Alberta, and why is it important to this bill? Well, there are trillions of dollars in the capital markets looking for a home and looking for investments that they can justify to their investors according to a climate-related disclosure risk that makes economic sense, and oftentimes those folks are looking for a home in Alberta. This is why Alberta attracted the lowest cost renewables in the price discovery exercise that we undertook through a contract for different procurement framework in 2017 and 2018.

Now, it remains to be seen whether that price discovery is required anymore. What is definitely required is regulatory overhaul at the AUC given the thousands of megawatts that are stuck in the regulatory queue of renewables projects looking to move forward. What is certainly required is the regulatory certainty provided under this bill, and it's too bad that when it was first introduced six months ago, that regulatory clarity could not have been provided to the private sector.

The other piece that power markets need most certainly is regulatory certainty around industrial pricing, and it is not helpful that the Minister of Environment and Parks will not sign the ministerial order and signal to markets on the industrial price of the output-based allocation framework until the last possible moment. But, finally, of course, he did in March, signalling the industrial price moving to \$50 per tonne and the associated movement in the offsets markets. But there's no need for this kind of investment uncertainty, Madam Speaker.

I have made a case for why we are doing this: because climate change is real. Why else are we doing this? Because electrification is a big part of decarbonization. In fact, electrification forms our lowest cost emission reductions. Indeed, the coal phase-out begun under Stephen Harper, 12 of the 16 plants, and then with some community transition funding completed between 2015 and 2019: certainly, those costs per tonne of phase-out were approximately \$10 per tonne whereas nearby, in Saskatchewan, the Boundary Dam CCUS project that has still not moved forward under its original promised parameters has cost taxpayers there in excess of \$100 per tonne in abatement for abating the GST cost per tonne.

10:30

There is no question that electrification remains the nearest term, the quickest, and the measure that we can take often when we are doing things like retiring old coal plants, as Mr. Harper did in 2012 when 12 of our 16 plants were phased out. As the Harper government justified in their associated documents, there were hundreds of millions of dollars in avoided health care costs for people with various forms of pulmonary complications, heart disease, COPD, asthma, and so on. There's no question that there are also public health benefits to some of these electrification efforts as we move away from combustion and towards durables for the role of our fossil fuel resources.

That is how a government comprised of folks who understand what the problem is in front of them and what the lowest cost solutions for best economic growth are to address them – that is how a government capable of emotional self-regulation talks about

a bill on energy storage and frames the challenges for the regulatory environment, for the way that distribution facility owners actually interact with the regulatory system, how, certainly, self-supply with export is handled in the regulatory system and the regulatory treatment for energy storage.

Now, energy storage can take a number of forms and is complementary to a number of different types of power generation. It is not just wind and solar although it is helpful with those particular sources of power generation. It can also very nicely complement natural gas plants, who don't necessarily, too, run all of the time. Certainly, large facilities are not as able to turn on and off as quickly. They are large plants, although they are faster than coal, certainly, and they can respond to peak in demand. But energy storage can also take the form of pump storage in hydro facilities as well. It can also potentially take the form of repurposing some of our oil wells for geothermal. There are all kinds of interesting projects out there, some of whom are attempting to get to scale, and lots of ways that Alberta can innovate and create jobs and use our natural strengths as an energy province to meet the challenges of the future.

There is no question that we have a number of challenges before us as a province. A report by climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe, that was commissioned in 2018 and that the current government attempted to bury upon its publication, indicates that Alberta very likely will experience "a 2°C [rise] in average winter [temperatures] and 1.5°C increase in average summer temperature." That is some time ago now, and climate models certainly out of the University of Lethbridge and elsewhere are actually now modelling higher summer temperature rises as a result of climate change. This is not something that we can just summarily dismiss as, "Oh, it would be nice to have a warmer wintertime," as I have sometimes heard the members, various people say, Facebook uncles, elected and otherwise.

You know, the fact of the matter is that this is very, very serious for precipitation, for food supply, for crop yields, for feed supply, for our livestock industries. You name it, Madam Speaker. It is deadly serious for those of us who will be on the receiving end of more extreme and severe weather events given Alberta's particular vulnerability to those and the vulnerability of our infrastructure.

Also, it's really important to ensure we have the right investment climate. So standing up and saying, "Oh, you know, the phase-out of coal," which was not reversed by this government – it was in fact introduced by the Harper government, which ought to be something that the House should look favourably upon given that the companies that it affected also supported it and have used the slight early retirement of those plants to invest in renewables. I'm thinking here of Capital Power and TransAlta, who have not only retired the remaining plants that were supposed to go beyond 2030 early but also made massive investments and enjoyed significant growth since those 2017 decisions – it's been a while now – in not only renewables here but elsewhere as well but certainly here in Alberta. Both companies have created jobs, they have created more shareholder value, and they have been able to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

In Alberta's deregulated electricity market we should be welcoming new investment in renewables and in storage and in grid upgrades and in better grid management for efficiency and so on. We should have an eye to the sophistication of what the capital markets and investors are looking for, not giving them, essentially, uncertainty when people come into this place, that is supposed to be a place of serious debate, and undermine the case for investor certainty in renewable storage, new natural gas, whatever the case may be, new innovations in hydro. Certainly, it does nothing to

instill confidence in the offsets market, a significant measure of asset value on a company's balance sheet, as the TIER price goes up in accordance with schedule 2 of the federal Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act, which was upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Madam Speaker, I am going to leave it to my colleagues to describe the various elements of this bill for the public and engage with some of the questions that we may have for government to reflect some of the conversations that certainly I have had with folks in the power sector, with industrial interests, with prospective investors in this province. I am going to leave those serious elements of the bill to my colleagues on this side of the House, who, in fact, are very serious about grappling with questions of electrification and decarbonization; so serious, in fact, that we have indicated a goal to move towards a net-zero grid and a goal towards working with people in the power sector, investors from all over the world and those here in Alberta, to get to that goal because we understand that it is urgent. It is necessary. Above all, it's real. We understand that on this side of the House as well.

We also understand that there are tremendous opportunities: economic opportunities, opportunities in the construction sector, engineering sector, software, data, artificial intelligence. All of those areas are captured by attracting new investment in decarbonization, energy efficiency, and the build-out of new renewables.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on the second reading of Bill 22? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. Certainly, you know, on this side of the House we certainly think that this is an important bill, and we do support it. We know that there are four main areas that it covers. The first is about defining energy storage; second is self-supply and export; third is requiring distribution facility owners to prepare long-term distribution system plans; and the fourth is dissolving of the Balancing Pool. We take no concern with these aspects of the bill.

10:40

I guess, Madam Speaker, the key issue for us on this side of the House is just, first of all, that something quite similar was introduced about six months ago by the associate minister, and it was, for some reason, not followed through on, and now this similar bill is being brought forward. There's been a, you know, significant delay, over six months.

We know that this is a key, imminent issue in our society, on our planet, as was well articulated by the Member for Lethbridge-West. Climate change is real. We need to be working hard to make sure that we are caring for our planet and making sure that we are doing everything we can as a provincial government to make sure that we're being responsible regarding the environment.

You know, I just really ask, I think, a pretty straightforward question of the associate minister: what happened previously? What was wrong? How come that bill was never actually voted for and passed? And then: why was there such a long delay? As I said, this is a time-sensitive issue, and the quicker we move on it, the better.

I guess one of the things that we certainly do support is that we think that it's really important to add more energy to the grid, energy storage. We've been consulting about this extensively with people in industry, other stakeholders. Certainly, there are ways that we can achieve a net-zero grid by 2035 while creating 60,000 jobs,

and if Albertans are interested in more details on that, they can go to albertasfuture.ca, because it does have our extensive paper regarding that and gives extensive details about that. You know, certainly, the NDP caucus is completely in support of this aspect of the bill and certainly know the importance of that.

But I guess the questions come with the delay, as I've articulated already, and also, frankly, Madam Speaker, just the competence of this government. Will they be able to fulfill on what they are proposing? Sadly, so many things, it seems, that the UCP does touch sort of end in disarray and confusion and back and forth-ing, so Albertans are left feeling that we don't have a competent government. Certainly, there are many questions about the leadership of the government, and I guess we'll know in a few weeks exactly who will be the leader of the government and by default the Premier of our province.

Certainly, Albertans have been loud and clear. I mean, I hear it, you know, every time I'm at the doors, when I'm talking to people on the phones, which I do extensively: Albertans don't trust this government, and they don't feel like they're stewarding the province in the best interests of Albertans. Certainly, there are some people who are benefiting, sort of a more elite population, but not the average Albertan. As I said, I hear this all the time, and I certainly can give many examples of policy concerns that I have and that my constituents have about a government that doesn't really care about the average Albertan.

This bill: while, you know, it looks good on paper, we just really want to make sure that what it says it will do, the UCP will be able to implement and fulfill on.

You know, we've had a pretty tough last few months through the winter of really skyrocketing utility costs, and that's really created so much chaos for many Albertans. Certainly, as the critic for seniors, many seniors are on fixed incomes, so if they're living in their own home, which most seniors are – the vast, vast majority live in private homes – that means that they've had these extremely high-cost utility prices. Of course, what did the associate minister say about that, the very real concern of Albertans? "The market is working. We don't need to do anything. Everything is fine." Certainly, for the seniors I've talked to, it made it impossible for them to make ends meet, going into debt, and when you're on a fixed income, of course, that can be very difficult.

The affordability issue. It's like the UCP don't really understand or seem to have any compassion for Albertans who are challenged by – you know, this is something beyond the individual control. That's the thing about government. Government is meant to actually support the collective of whatever jurisdiction they're responsible for. Of course, here we are in Alberta. We're a provincial government.

The price of oil is nothing that can be controlled. I mean, certainly when we were government and we had rock bottom – I think it was \$26 a barrel at one point when we were government. The UCP at that time liked to say that it was our fault that the price of oil was that low, but, you know, we know that's not true. Certainly, now that they've been government – and, of course, they have quite a buoyant market right now for oil, but it is definitely nothing that they can control themselves. Certainly, individuals can't control that, so it's really important for government to mitigate, you know, to try to have the best interests of the population in mind so that they can help them manage that. That is a really significant role of government, to make sure that everyone is supported.

Unfortunately, the UCP perhaps – we could say that it's incompetence, unwillingness, disregard. I'm not quite sure how we want to call it. But it seems like for certain people in our province, certain groups, they are vastly supported, and others are forgotten. I mean, I could happily list so many examples of the incompetence of this government. We know, I think, this fiasco with the high cost

of utility bills and them saying, "We're not going to do anything; the market is working; don't worry about it" and then deciding, "Okay; yes, it is so concerning; we will do something," but then it's like a minuscule response, \$50 rebates to a maximum \$150, when people's bills are \$400, \$500, \$600, even more. That's, you know, really a drop in the bucket, Madam Speaker. It's not much help for people.

Then there's always the question of when. When is it going to come into Albertans' pockets? We still don't know that. Albertans need support now. It seems like the UCP is really dragging their feet on this issue. Then that is a question of whether the government is competent, whether they can manage this, and really, you know, support the best interests of Alberta.

I mean, I did bring up seniors just a moment ago because I think that they're a particularly vulnerable population in this regard. Oftentimes being retired, they're on fixed incomes. So this extraordinary increase – and perhaps it's not going to be extraordinary anymore; it might be the way it's going to be going forward – makes it very difficult for them to be able to manage that. We know that the affordability of so many things has gone up, and a lot of it has directly to do with the policies, the decisions of the UCP government. You know, we could identify insurance. Certainly, the removal of the cap means that individual Albertans are paying much, much more, and we know the price of groceries is skyrocketing.

Guess what else is happening, in turn, when that goes on? This is directly the policies of the UCP government. They deindexed the Alberta seniors' benefit. This is for low-income seniors. This is a little bit of income support for them on a monthly basis, especially with the skyrocketing inflation rates. They don't get that bump. That helps them have the same earning power they did the previous year. Things cost more, you know, inflation, so it should be indexed to inflation. But the UCP have wilfully decided that, no, seniors shouldn't have that money, and that means that sometimes they get pushed further behind. They may not be able to pay their bills. They may go into debt. It could really diminish their quality of life. They're able to connect less.

10:50

That was definitely a policy of the UCP government that is beside sort of these extraordinary situations on the global front. There are some real policies the UCP could do things differently on, so they're accountable for that. They're really ignoring this population in Alberta, seniors, for sure. We know that one of the first things they did, too, was cut the Alberta Seniors Advocate office, which was an office that supported seniors to navigate public programs, help them overcome issues that they might be having. You know, let's face it, our government system is complex, and it made a big difference. Certainly, that's one of the major issues that I hear about, that seniors feel abandoned by the UCP, that they're not focusing on their particular interests or supporting them.

Another thing, too, is that they've cut grants to nonprofits which, you know, seniors need in order to be connected. We know that's all really very important for the mental health of people. We need to be connected. Oftentimes we do that through our workplace, but when you're retired, there need to be other mechanisms in society to connect. But those grants have been cut by over \$1 million.

These are just further examples of the UCP not caring about affordability and some concerns about, certainly, the incompetence of this government before us. Bill 22: we certainly hope that it will be implemented in an appropriate manner and that we can count on this to be sustained and that it will support our system here in Alberta and make a big difference for us over many, many years to come. We want to make sure that, you know, we have a stable

system so that we can be confident we'll have the energy when we need it, and if we can store energy, that can mitigate times when we won't have perhaps as much access.

These are good steps forward, but we want to make sure that it's done well, of course. You know, there are just some things that we don't know what's happening behind the scenes on, so that question that I mentioned already about – a similar bill was introduced six months ago. How come that bill didn't go forward, and why was there that delay? I mean, it would be great if the associate minister could explain that to us, and that would make a big difference to sort of understanding where this has come from.

We certainly want to make sure that the UCP is going to be able to, you know, fulfill on what the vision is for this bill. As I've said already, certainly we in the NDP feel that we can achieve a net-zero grid by 2035, and if Albertans chose us in the next election, we would certainly work very hard to make that happen and fulfill that commitment because we know how important it is and we know how essential it is for us in the long term.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will end my comments.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to be here today and talk about Bill 22. Before I get started, I just want to talk about that amazing sports battle that is happening, that I know everyone in the province is paying attention to this week. I'm happy to say that the Spruce Grove Saints are tied with the Brooks Bandits for the AJHL championship. I know they're playing tonight. I just want to recognize them real quick.

As my colleagues know, I'm the parliamentary secretary for Energy, so when this bill came across my desk, I knew I had the opportunity to share just how beneficial it would be for all Albertans. Energy is a topic very close to my heart and something I'm very passionate about, and I wouldn't be standing here speaking on Bill 22 if it wasn't. You know, as I've mentioned many times in the House before, one of my first jobs out of high school was in energy and oil exploration. I spent many years working out at the power plants west of Spruce Grove, both at the K3 expansion in 2007 and the G3 expansion in 2004, so a long history working at power plants and in the energy industry here in Alberta.

The electricity statutes amendment act is going to make long-term changes to help keep electricity safe, reliable, and affordable for Albertans in the years to come. As we all know, many have voiced concerns, starting with the costs of electricity prices over the winter months, and like every Albertan, we know just how high those bills can get when the temperature dips below zero. But electricity is more than heat in our homes. It's a necessity that we use every day, from the moment we wake up to when we go to sleep at night, when we use it to drive our cars or sit at home and watch TV with our families. It's such a key item in the modern world that most of us don't even consider how reliant we are on it. We all need to do everything we can to make sure that this resource is available for use in the long term.

That's why Bill 22 is needed. It'll encourage the adoption of new technologies and create a planning framework to improve distribution while making sure the infrastructure costs for Alberta ratepayers are reasonable and fair. These proposed amendments would enable energy storage, allow more self-supply and export, improve future distribution and system planning, and begin winding down the Balancing Pool by redistributing its remaining responsibilities and laying the groundwork for its dissolution in the coming years.

These changes will help Alberta's electricity system meet the evolving needs of consumers and create a low-carbon future through investment from industry rather than costly subsidies from taxpayers. How are we going to do that, Madam Speaker? I know you're wondering. Well, the electricity statutes act includes four key initiatives to meet those goals. As mentioned, they include energy storage, self-supply with export, distribution policy, and Balancing Pool distribution.

Energy storage gives consumers the ability to retain surplus energy for later use. We've seen a massive rise in these types of projects in the province as more Albertans try to understand the importance of using electricity responsibly and efficiently. Energy storage is an evolving technology, with potential benefits for all aspects of Alberta's electric energy system. Energy storage has many different attributes and, depending on the application, may look like generation, load, transmission, or distribution.

Another aspect of this amendment is self-supply with export. If enabled, any developer who gets approval from the Alberta Utilities Commission could generate electricity for their own use and then export it to the grid. Now, this would help make sure that transmission system costs are balanced, and I know that's what all Albertans are wanting.

Alberta's current policy framework does not require distribution companies to proactively plan for the adoption of distributed energy resources, but proactive planning and co-ordination of grid modernization could provide for better cost management and long-term savings for taxpayers. When it comes to distribution policy, Bill 22 will require owners to prepare plans for the Minister of Energy, where the ministry will be able to provide some guidance on the initiative and its planning process.

Proposed changes to the Balancing Pool dissolution mean the administration of the small-scale generation program would be assigned to the Alberta Electric System Operator. It would also mean that admin for the pilot program and any revenues would be transferred to Treasury Board and Finance, with funding of the Utilities Consumer Advocate facilitated by the AUC. The Balancing Pool would also wind down once it has completed its remaining responsibilities.

Madam Speaker, the proposed legislative amendments will help build investor confidence in Alberta's electric grid and support a modern and innovative system. This legislation was developed with input from a wide range of stakeholders, including consumer groups, and builds off legislation tabled last fall. After the legislation was tabled, this government received questions from some stakeholders on the implementation of the bill. Now, instead of rushing the process, the ministry took the time to speak with stakeholders and come up with a better plan when it comes to Alberta's energy future. This choice was made to balance the needs of job-creating industries and the well-being of the Alberta ratepayers nearby.

Now, this bill does the right balance of protecting Alberta ratepayers and the job-creating industries they rely on, and I thank the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity for bringing it forward. Bill 22 will allow new technologies to modernize our grid and keep electricity affordable in the long run.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

11:00

Bill 21

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

Bill 21 continues to build upon the significant progress this government has made in reducing red tape for Albertans and Alberta businesses. In 2019 we committed to reducing red tape by one-third by 2023. Since that time we've removed thousands of burdensome regulatory requirements and saved Albertans, Alberta businesses, and other organizations millions of dollars. We've also removed or streamlined administration and processes that were outdated or duplicative while improving access to government services through digitization and innovation. Meanwhile we've helped speed up regulatory approvals to help businesses do what they do best: innovate, create jobs, and grow the economy.

This important work has been guided by specific recommendations of everyday, hard-working Albertans and the province's businesses and industries. Through the work of our nine industry panels we've benefited from the knowledge of experts in the province's key economic sectors, including agriculture, forestry, construction, oil and gas, industrial manufacturing, chemical manufacturing, tourism, nonprofit, and small business. We've also heard from hundreds of Albertans who shared their ideas through our cut red tape website on specific areas where improvements can be made. As a result, Bill 21 focuses on key legislative amendments that help enable common-sense change.

This is our government's sixth red tape reduction bill and the most comprehensive to date. Bill 21 proposes amendments to 15 pieces of legislation across nine different government ministries. This includes supporting small business by enabling the creation of intermunicipal business licences, making it easier for, say, a food truck operator in Blackfalds to serve customers in Lacombe or for a photographer in Calgary to shoot pictures in Okotoks, all without the administrative burden of obtaining licences from all of the municipalities in which they want to do business. Of course, I use these place names as examples; municipalities will have the freedom to choose to offer these licences.

We're also helping municipalities move forward with economic development and revitalization. By speeding up the review and approval processes for municipal community revitalization levy bylaws, freeway designations, and new freeway access locations, communities can get on the road to economic growth sooner.

Bill 21 offers even more support to rural Albertans and rural businesses by increasing the sustainability of rural utilities. Proposed changes would allow rural electrification associations, or REAs, to purchase one another and allow rural utilities to add new lines of potential business, all of which helps to support the long-term sustainability of REAs while enabling economic opportunity and diversification in Alberta's rural communities.

We are also modernizing land surveying, saving time and money for surveyors and their clients, and we are encouraging investment by updating legislation around governing co-operatives. Changes would allow co-operatives to choose the most qualified people for boards of directors and support modern approaches to communications and operations.

Other changes in the bill will remove onerous requirements that Albertans, Alberta businesses, or other organizations must follow and replace them with more flexible and common-sense ways of regulating. For instance, is it common sense to require the Fort Edmonton Park heritage railway to operate under the same set of rules as industrial railways that interline with CN? Of course not. That's why we're allowing Alberta's heritage railways to operate under alternative rules that are better tailored to the needs of each operator while still ensuring railway safety.

We are also allowing for more tailored regulations relating to recreational activities on Crown land by enabling the development

of area-specific rules and regulations that reflect local needs and conditions. These changes replace the current one-size-fits-all approach while protecting these important areas for future generations.

These amendments are about looking to the future and making changes to support growth and adapt to a changing world. That's why we're proposing changes that would allow pharmacy operators to be more responsive to evolving needs and circumstances by enabling the Alberta College of Pharmacy to create and enforce standards of practice addressing specific areas of pharmacy operations. These new standards could be readily adapted to meet the changing needs of patients and to respond to major issues and events such as natural disasters, pandemics, and drug shortages.

We continue to recover from the pandemic. We are applying learnings to support Albertans and Alberta businesses. For instance, we know that electronic and virtual options for doing business worked well when we had to work from home and practise physical distancing, so livestock owners and veterinarians will now be able to report animal diseases to government by e-mail while Alberta's landlords will be able to use e-transfers to return security deposits to tenants. These may seem like small changes, but they make a big difference in the lives of everyday Albertans.

Additionally, we are clarifying some areas where we do need to regulate by making our legislation clearer and easier for Albertans to understand and follow. This includes ensuring that municipalities and school boards have a clear set of rules and legislation that ensures the protection of personal information of local election candidates and campaign donors, and we are making it clear that Alberta foster parents can exercise their right to appeal government decisions affecting their foster home licence.

We are also making legislative changes to enable regulations to help our accredited publicly funded private schools and private early childhood services operators by eliminating one specific additional schedule that independent schools submit. Going ahead, parents and government will receive reporting of a school's public and private dollars through audited financial statements, and we are extending the Minister of Education's authority to improve spending of reserve funds by school boards from September 1, 2022, to September 1, 2023.

Madam Speaker, these are significant amendments we are proposing that will reduce red tape in the province even further, continuing to make life better for Albertans and Alberta businesses.

I hereby move second reading of Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on second reading of Bill 21? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise on Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. As we just heard in comments from the associate minister of red tape, we are dealing with a bill touching on many different issues, about 16 sections in this legislation amending 16 different acts. I would begin, I suppose, by stating that while there are certain pieces within this legislation, certain amendments to acts, that I see myself very likely being able to support, unfortunately there are other pieces contained in this legislation that I feel the complete opposite on.

It takes me back to a point, which has been raised time and time again in this Legislature, that when we are seeing such consequential changes or amendments to legislation, it's unfortunate that we see time and time again from this government a willingness where, instead of seeing the appropriate minister responsible for these amendments coming forward to put them forward to the

Legislature, we are seeing omnibus legislation being put forward by the associate minister of red tape. It truly is unfortunate because many of the consequential amendments that we see in this legislation should have an opportunity for fulsome debate in this Legislature one by one, and we should have the opportunity to vote on each of those pieces one by one. Instead, we are being asked by this associate minister and this government to accept them as a whole, which is a deeply flawed system, in my opinion.

You know, when we look at the 16 sections that are being amended in here, just in terms of the differences in ministries and how they might affect our community, a few examples: from the Animal Health Act amendments to the Municipal Government Act to the Education Act to the Public Lands Act to the Rural Utilities Act. I mean, these are issues that are in no way connected, for the most part, Madam Speaker, and again it's truly unfortunate that instead of having the opportunity to debate each of these amendments or each of these acts by themselves, we are being asked to accept them wholesale.

Again, many of these amendments are administrative. In some respects I see myself being able to accept some of the amendments that are being proposed, and in some cases they are good amendments. But, on the other hand, again, when we look at changes to the Education Act that are being put forward in here, which has been a truly interesting debate to follow in itself, with the amendments that are being proposed to the Education Act in this legislation, it seems that the associate minister of red tape and the Education minister are on quite different pages in terms of their messaging, in terms of how they believe it's going to affect the Education Act and the reporting of tuition specifically for private schools in our province. For that point alone it raises red flags, and it raises many concerns because we find ourselves with a government that is unable to even co-ordinate between the associate minister of red tape and the Education minister to be able to explain to Albertans truly what these changes are going to mean.

11:10

Again, specifically when we're looking at the Education Act, I would say that many Albertans are confused because the Minister of Education is claiming again and again that audited statements, including tuition fees, would be required and that they would be reported to the public whereas the opposite was said by the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. I think that we've raised this concern in the Legislature previously or maybe in the public that we need to be able to fully understand the changes that are being proposed and that we need to, I guess, have certainty that these reporting requirements as well as the ability of Albertans to see this information are still available to them. If that's not the case, I'm not sure how this government can try to claim that this is about accountability when it comes to changes to the Education Act because it certainly doesn't seem to be the case from what we can see.

I think that there is a piece regarding amendments to the Rural Utilities Act which I find very interesting as the critic for Service Alberta. Obviously, there have been many conversations about the need for expanding broadband Internet across the province. That has been a very important topic for Albertans over the last many years, so I think it's interesting to see the amendments that are being proposed through Bill 21 regarding, first of all, the ability of rural electrification associations to purchase other REAs. I would be interested to find out what consultation the government has done on that and what they heard, what feedback they gathered that made them believe that this was, first of all, an issue that needed to be

addressed as well as that this was the right path forward for addressing that issue.

There is another point on this specific issue in subsection (5) regarding rural utility associations being able to expand their scope to include other lines of business such as fibre optic. I think that this is a very interesting conversation as we have been consulting on Internet connectivity and bridging that digital divide. This is an opportunity, Madam Speaker, that has come up again and again, that associations, specifically regarding rural utilities, have come forward saying that, you know, these are the associations that helped power this province in the first place and that they feel they have the opportunity or the right people and understandings in place to be able to expand that to support bridging that digital divide.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I think this is a very interesting point, and I would hope, again, to hear the conversations that the government has had on this issue and how they expect that to be moved forward, if they do see a vision for including these associations in the expansion of rural connectivity or Internet connectivity across the province, if they are in discussions to ensure that those associations have an opportunity to be a part of the expansion of those services. I think that is a great idea and a great opportunity, so I would be very hopeful that those consultations are ongoing and would want to find out exactly what that consultation process looked like as well as when we can expect the regulations regarding this specific topic to be released.

Now, when it comes to the issues that we are seeing regarding the opportunities that are being provided to expand ministerial power for the environment minister specifically on amendments to parks, again and again we've heard in this House and from the public that Albertans do not trust this government and, specifically, this minister when it comes to changes to public lands and the management of them. We've seen this minister, first of all, tell Albertans one thing and make decisions that are contrary to what those initial comments were from the minister. We know this specifically on the K pass decision, charging Albertans to access our beautiful province, which has been a completely unfortunate turn of events from what the environment minister originally told Albertans and proposed. Unfortunately, Albertans, again, cannot trust this minister on issues of public lands and protecting our parks across the province, so as we see this legislation proposing to expand the powers of the minister to provide exemptions on these public lands, I am deeply concerned about this.

The associate minister of red tape made it sound like it was a good decision, that it was going to make things easier, but unfortunately it seems that, you know, based on the conversations that the environment minister has put forward regarding the issue at hand, the powers that are being proposed through this legislation are expanding much more than what is necessary. Whenever the government, whether it be this one or any other government, proposes that the minister should have expanded power, I think that Albertans should be deeply concerned. I think that we in the opposition have seen this happen already, and in many cases it is consequential to the accountability of that minister as well as to the transparency to all Albertans, so that will continue to be a concern for us.

On the other hand, we heard the associate minister name a couple pieces of amendments within the legislation that very well could be beneficial. I think we see changes to the Municipal Government Act that are positive in many cases, making it easier to license across municipal boundaries if desired. I think that we in the opposition are likely to support changes like that as well as some of the other

administrative changes that we see regarding the MGA in this legislation.

But again, Mr. Speaker, we have this government come forward to the Legislature with massive omnibus pieces of legislation that in this case affect 16 different pieces of legislation, in many cases moving things that are currently legislated into regulations and being asked by the government to just trust them. But whether it's on provincial parks or public lands, whether it's on consequential amendments to the Education Act, we simply cannot trust this government when they're asking us to give them more power to make decisions to make things like tuition for private schools less transparent, to provide the opportunity to the environment minister to make specific exemptions without coming to this Legislature. There are many reasons to be deeply concerned about this legislation, to believe that it is truly flawed simply on the fact that it is reducing transparency in many cases.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I do not see myself being able to support this legislation. There are too many questions that are left, which is exactly why the ministers themselves should be bringing this forward. We should be able to have debates on each of these changes that are being proposed, especially when some of these changes are so significant. Again, while there are some administrative changes that are within this legislation that I could see myself supporting, unfortunately overall I will not be able to support Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others on Bill 21? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, a very comprehensive bill in that it does amend a significant number of pieces of legislation. I will walk my way through it. I have some questions that I hope the minister or ministers can answer regarding some of these changes that are being made, of course, fair questions as far as who's been asking specifically for certain changes and who's been consulted.

11:20

I appreciate that the minister in her opening comments had talked about speaking with many different business leaders and industry experts. My hope is that the Chamber and Albertans can get a little more detail as far as: who are some of those groups who are asking for the changes, and what are the proposed benefits?

Broadly, when I look at this bill, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of changes being made to pieces of legislation where different laws or rules are being pulled out of the legislation and put into regulation. I don't see a significant red tape reduction in moving it. I guess if you consider democracy red tape, then, of course, cabinet can much more efficiently and quickly make decisions without having to bring it through the Chamber.

My comments will make a little more sense as I go through the individual pieces of this. Again, you know, I would love to see – and I don't know if the minister or her ministry or working with the Ministry of JEI can do some modelling or has the figures on some of the proposed job numbers from some of these changes. How many jobs will be created? I appreciate that for some of this there may be some savings for businesses, but I, again, would love to hear more of the specifics, which, I would imagine, the ministries would have brought forward to the associate minister when they brought it.

Now, you know, critics or skeptics of this government could make the comment that possibly the UCP is moving a number of important

pieces of legislation into regulation to avoid accountability. It's possible. Again, it's possible, and I know that that has been a comment that we've heard from some stakeholders on this legislation.

We'll go through it. You know, at first, the Animal Health Act questions that I have really just go around – I mean, I don't have a problem with this first change per se. I'm not sure why there's no form of accountability or there's no way to ensure that the 24-hour time limit has to remain in regulations and it can't be increased. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I'm talking about the need to report the presence of notifiable disease within 24 hours. That's being moved from legislation to regulation. Again, that 24-hour time period: will that ever be increased? Is that being changed at all? Again, that move out of legislation to regulations: at the outset I don't see – oh, I guess the 24 hours is removed, so there's no length of time whatsoever. I'm not sure, then, what the government will do to ensure accountability. I mean, it's possible that the 24 hours, for some, might have been onerous. I would think that if electronic communication was permitted, 24 hours is not that onerous.

The challenge with this change without any time limits being attached to it is that – my understanding of that 24 hours is to ensure that the proper authorities are notified so that measures can be taken so that we don't have animal diseases spreading and spreading quickly. If there is no time limit on that, how does the government ensure that they're going to be learning about challenges quickly enough that it will not spread through multiple farms? So that's one question that I have. If there isn't a time limit, what is the government and the minister thinking in terms of through regulations? What are farmers asking for?

When it comes to the child and family enhancement act, the challenge that I have with this one is that we know, Mr. Speaker, that it's been an extremely sad year in that more young people have died in care this year than they have in previous years, so there is much more work that needs to be done and quickly. I mean, you know, I appreciate the minister and others saying: well, this is a call to action. Well, quite frankly, the call, in my opinion, was years ago. The fact that these numbers continue to climb isn't a call to action; it should be a call that the system is broken and needs to be fixed.

Now, the change in this piece of legislation: my understanding is that it's going to remove the one-year maximum on all licences, both new and renewals, for residential facilities in the child intervention system, which includes foster homes, group homes, et cetera, and move those limits to the regulations. Now, yes, that may result in a more expedient system, but the danger is that you're taking away what is in legislation, which is discussed and debated in this Chamber and put in the window for all to see and to be aware so that there's a significant amount of transparency and accountability, and moving it into regulations. Again, of course, the challenge with regulations is that regulations are done by cabinet behind closed doors, so Albertans have to trust cabinet, trust the Premier, trust that the decisions that are being made behind closed doors are, in fact, the best decisions.

The challenge that I have is example after example, month after month this government has proven to Albertans that they are untrustworthy. So moving something of this significance and importance from legislation, which is the most transparent way to discuss laws, to regulation, which is probably the least transparent way, is sounding the alarm bells for me. So this piece of Bill 21 I struggle with. I haven't had time to contact many operators. I know in my riding there are quite a number of group homes, and I'd be curious to hear what they have to say about this and if they have concerns that renewals are moving from legislation to regulation.

Now, the one piece of this section that I do think is positive is the amendment to add in that a foster parent is able to appeal the renewal or alteration of an existing licence. At the outset, or my first blush through this, I think that that is a positive change, but, again, you know, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that we're just in second reading so that we have time to engage with stakeholders to ensure that they have in fact asked for some of these changes and are behind them.

I'll try to move – I'm going a little slower than I meant to, to be honest.

Questions that I have. I know the opposition has asked the ministers both of red tape and of Education, but there's been some – we need clarity. There's been quite a bit of confusion because the Education minister said one thing and the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction said another. The issue is around that private schools no longer have to produce financial data, like how much it collects in tuition fees.

11:30

Now, the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction has claimed that they no longer have to report that, that that was red tape, which – I mean, the irony is that we're really expanding the definition of red tape, because I don't believe that accountability is red tape. I think that's just smart business practice, and it's what Albertans deserve to know as the government spends their tax dollars. Again, you know, government programs and services are not nor should ever be considered the government's money. It comes from Albertans, so Albertans deserve to know where their money is going. The fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that 70 per cent of dollars that private schools have to operate are provincial dollars. Now, I'm not trying to argue – and I know that there are arguments. There are some that want that changed, some that feel it's not enough, some that feel that it's too much. For me, that oversight that Albertans have, I think, is important. If an entity is receiving tax dollars, then Albertans have the right to know how it's being spent and where it's going.

What's confusing with this is that the Minister of Education has claimed that the audited statements, including tuition fees, are still going to be required, but the government produced some kind of media release or handout stating that tuition fee data would not be collected. This obviously needs clarity as far as: you know, will this be reported, or will it not be reported? I know that other changes include how private schools can be regulated and, as well, how boards can spend their noncapital reserves, which I also recognize requires ministerial approval and that it's being extended out for another year.

I want to jump briefly to some other changes. The Highways Development and Protection Act: it moves the power from cabinet to the minister to designate new freeways or the approval of freeway access locations. I don't know if that was overly burdensome for cabinet to deal with, but again the challenge: when you move something from cabinet to the minister, you take away the oversight that cabinet has for each other to get input from a variety of cabinet ministers through a decision as opposed to one person doing it unilaterally.

The one piece of the bill that I have to say is my favourite is enabling municipalities to provide a single business licence for a company operating in multiple municipalities. That is good news. I think that's positive for all parts of the province, especially for the Edmonton metro region, knowing businesses operate in – I mean, we have, you know, more than 12 municipalities in our direct surrounding areas, so that's positive.

There are other parts of this bill that I do want to comment on – but I believe I will have to wait for Committee of the Whole – including the public lands. There are some concerns with changes

to the Public Lands Act that I will get into more detail the next time I speak to this bill.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate this morning? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the call.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for setting up the comments that I am about to make on Bill 21, the red tape reduction act, because he said that he had some further comments on some changes to the provincial Public Lands Act as well as the Provincial Parks Act that he had concerns about but, unfortunately, didn't have the time to get to. That's what I'd like to focus my comments on today because we see that within this bill the legislation is being altered to give the minister the power to adopt any policy, position paper, anything as a regulation affecting parks or public lands. This is extremely worrisome because we've already seen the Minister of Environment and Parks break trust with the people of Alberta on a couple of key policy decisions that this government has tried to make.

The first was his stated policy goal, established in February 2020, to close down or sell off hundreds of provincial parks. As soon as he issued that press release, he said that the thing that he was going to do is not the thing that he was going to do, and for the rest of the year he was in a pitched battle with the people of Alberta over his plans to sell off and close parks. Even though the press release was quite clear that the plan was to sell off or close parks, he spent the rest of the year saying that he wasn't doing the thing that he said he was going to do. And then in December 2020, just before other members of his family jetted off to Hawaii in the middle of a pandemic, he said that he was backing away from the thing that he never intended to do. So the people of Alberta, rightfully, from that one instance, have lost trust in the minister, in his ability and intention of protecting parks and public lands in the province of Alberta.

At the same time he and his cabinet colleague the Minister of Energy were moving to expand the mining of coal in the province of Alberta. Of course, again all along, once they released the press release saying that they were rescinding the coal policy to enable further coal development in the eastern slopes, they started backing away from it, saying: "No; the policy was redundant. It doesn't do the thing that it says it does. There's no need to be alarmed." But the people of Alberta kept pushing back against this government's terrible plans, and at least now we have a temporary reprieve in the form of a ministerial order curtailing the activities of coal-mining companies in the eastern slopes for the time being. But just a reminder that a ministerial order can be changed or revoked at any moment without consultation or even without notice. I don't think the people of Alberta should rest easy in the belief that the eastern slopes are protected from the depredations of coal miners. This is a precarious protection that can be rolled back at any time.

When we've seen the behaviour of the Minister of Environment and Parks and the Minister of Energy with respect to allowing the privatization and the further industrialization of our public lands and our parks, they should be rightfully concerned when they see clauses like those that are included in amendments to the Provincial Parks Act and the Public Lands Act.

One of the things that I think is again worrisome, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that the minister is centralizing a lot of this power for himself. Not only is he centralizing power for himself with respect to the management of provincial parks and public lands, but he's also throwing out the normal process by which regulations impacting provincial parks and public lands are drafted. Now, right

now there is a standard process of drafting regulations, ministerial regulations, regulations passed by orders in council, and with these changes to the Provincial Parks Act and the Public Lands Act those processes are being completely thrown out the window, saying that almost any document can be adopted by the minister as a regulation applying to provincial parks and public lands. There's no consultation required. There's no standard drafting required. This is not the way that regulations regarding any matter of public policy should be drafted but certainly not for provincial parks and public lands.

11:40

What I'm concerned about also is the loss of oversight over these documents. Once the minister signs the order that adopts whatever policy document that he's adopted as a regulation in a provincial park or public land, that document can be updated or thrown out at any time, and the minister doesn't even have to be notified. That begs the question, Mr. Speaker, as to who will actually be in charge of setting the regulations that are applying to provincial parks and public lands in these cases. Is it the minister himself, or is it the people who are bringing forward these policy documents that will be adopted as regulations? How will the people of Alberta know that the regulations that are being adopted are in the public interest and not in the interest of a particular user group that the minister seeks to favour over the interests of others? There's no assurance that that will be the case if these changes are adopted.

I think one of the concerns that we've heard from people who are interested in the management of parks and public lands is the fact that there seems to be no formal structure for conducting consultations or for allowing Albertans to provide feedback for the adoption of any of these policy documents as regulations are completed. I think one thing that, if the minister is intent on forcing through these changes, they should at least consider is structuring some formal policy on incorporating feedback from the people of Alberta, broadly speaking, before adopting these regulations, because right now, as the bill is structured, the people of Alberta don't have confidence that the minister will make regulations that reflect the wishes of a broad cross-section of people who are interested in management of parks and public lands. I would urge members of the Executive Council to consider formalizing a consultation process if they want to adopt these changes.

Also, they need to be clear about the process that people will have to go through in order to even write any of these policy documents. That part is not even clear. How will the minister and the ministry working on his behalf evaluate whether a policy document that is going to be considered to be adopted as a regulation is suitable, even meets any sort of criteria or standard for adoption as a regulation? I would like to have seen something in this legislation that would at least set out a framework for a policy document to comply with in order to even be considered to be adopted as a regulation. Right now potentially anything could be considered to be adopted as a regulation under these changes, and I don't think that that's right. The people of Alberta don't trust this government to engage properly with the people of Alberta with respect to these changes or potential changes to regulations regarding parks and public lands, and they have a right to know. They have a right to know how these things will be adopted, how the people of Alberta will be consulted before the adoption of these things. That's really what I think people are looking for in this bill.

I'm going to listen intently to the debate to hear if the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction or any of her colleagues on the Executive Council can provide any more clarity or assurances to the people of Alberta that this process won't be misused to curry favour with particular groups that the minister is interested in favouring

and that this process will be above board and conducted fairly and transparently.

You know, there are a lot of other pieces of this bill, but I think I will leave it to my colleagues to address the other pieces of the bill that are of concern to them. I look forward to listening to the other contributions that will be made on debate in this stage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, second reading of Bill 21. Is there anyone else wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 21. This is the type of bill, of course, that is very concerning for the opposition because it's a bill where the ministers responsible for the various items are not held accountable because they are not introducing the bill and not speaking to the bill. Instead, we have a minister who is not focused on any of these particular amendments or the activities that these amendments will reflect on here in the House. We clearly know that there have been examples already of confusion between the minister properly responsible for the item and the ministers presenting the bill, having seen a document come out of the minister presenting this bill fundamentally contradicting information that the minister responsible for the area says to be true. So we see some confusion right from the very beginning with this bill.

That's, of course, the reason why we're very concerned about these kinds of bills. It means that it's not being presented in a holistic way, in the context in which the information should be presented, and debated with regard to other aspects of the ministry which will be affected. That always leads to confusion and doubt. We certainly have plenty of doubt with regard to this government already, so to provide us a bill that exacerbates that doubt is somewhat problematic.

Of course, I'm also concerned that what happens with these types of bills is that the government puts together a whole variety of different things, some of which, of course, we can simply support: some of the changes to the municipalities act, some of the changes for foster parents. You know, some of those kinds of things we're more than happy to support, but they put that in the same bill with things that we absolutely cannot support, so they create a poison pill effect where when we vote against the things we do not like, they then go out into the public and tell the public we voted against the things that we, in fact, do like, which is a devious thing to be doing.

We've seen it happen repeatedly in this government, where the public is told we voted against something when, in fact, it was not the part we voted against, but because you can only vote for the bill either all or none, when we have these kinds of unfair omnibus bills, then we end up in a situation where the public ends up having to be informed about the nuances, which is not something that is very easy to do, for the most part. You know, clearly, this government is doing these kinds of things not because they care for the public to be fully informed; rather, they wish to push something through that they don't really want the public to pay attention to.

11:50

What I do when I look at these bills is that I look at the variety of different things that are being changed, some of which, as I had mentioned, I already will dismiss quickly because I just simply accept them. On other ones, which I, you know, might have a question about, for example with co-ops, the decision to reduce Canadian ownership from 50 per cent to 25 per cent, why would that be done? Why would that be just slipped into a bill that deals

with wildlife and education and child and youth and family enhancement? Like, why would you slip that in there when it, actually, is probably going to have very significant consequences for public ownership and private ownership in this province and reduces the conditions under which Canadians can actually be owners?

Why would you slip that into the middle of this bill? Is there some relationship with some foreign entities that this government is trying to enhance? Should I be concerned about which foreign entities the government is in a relationship with? Why would you not want to support Alberta owner-operators? Those kinds of questions come up, and I think that we should be making sure that those kinds of things are addressed appropriately and properly, and the government should not be using an omnibus bill to hide activities, as they clearly are here in this particular case.

I simply, you know, can't support a bill that isn't transparent to the citizens of the province, and that is certainly what we have in this particular case. The decisions seem to be minor that are addressed in simple lines like the reduction of Canadian ownership from 50 per cent to 25 per cent in the co-ops. Actually, they have very significant consequences and will really affect things moving forward in this province in terms of Albertans having governance over their own lives.

We know that this government has often made deals with corporations that have caused problems later on. They slip a poison pill into a bill that says that if the government changes its mind on anything, then we will pay you out. What kind of a ridiculous line is that to put into a bill? And here we are. We're back into the situation now where we're taking power and control away from Albertans and handing it off to others.

We've learned already in this province that correcting Conservative mistakes is a very expensive proposition, and here we are. The government is setting up another situation where if another government wants to come along and say, "No; we should be having Canadian ownership," we're going to be on the hook, because there's now been a contract that's allowed foreign ownership to be doubled in this circumstance. These are the kinds of things that I absolutely find unacceptable with a bill of this nature. Something that we should be talking about at great length is not being spoken about at all here.

In the few minutes that I have left, I want to speak about one of the biggest poison pills for me here, and that is a change with regard to the ministerial powers in Environment and Parks to make decisions with regard to, well, essentially everything. The nature of the bill widens the minister's regulation-making powers to actually literally encompass all aspects: to set standards, to set directives, to set practices, to identify codes, to write guidelines or objectives or any other rule. Any other rule. I'm very concerned about this because I see that in that same section there are also changes in the regulation-making power from "controlling domestic or other animals not defined as wildlife under the Wildlife Act" to "respecting domestic or other animals not defined as wildlife under the Wildlife Act." I want to know what that's about. I want to know what's going on here.

The reason why I'm concerned is because I know that the First Nations people are very interested in expanding the presence of bison, buffalo, depending on who you're talking to, even in the Indigenous community. They are very interested in expanding these kinds of wildlife in the parks areas and beyond the parks areas. This doesn't tell me anything about how the changes will affect that kind of decision-making. We have a minister who can just go in and randomly make any kind of decision they want.

I know that right now we have, for example, a Buffalo treaty, that's been signed by many First Nations, that is working toward

the expansion of this wildlife in the parks, yet we have a minister here who can just make a decision to do anything they want with those bison. Should we allow that to happen, or should there be in here a clause that says that the minister cannot make those decisions unless they have consultations with First Nations first?

There's no limit put on the minister here. How can you give ministers the power to make every possible change? What's the point of having regulations and laws at all if the ministers can do whatever they want? What would happen if a minister, looking at the park, said: "Oh, look. We have all these wild horses that are running around the park. Why don't we just eliminate them all?" What would happen if we had a minister that decided to make the decision just to shoot all the wild horses in the parks? That would be completely ridiculous, yet this bill allows that to happen.

The Speaker: It would also be equally as ridiculous for a member to assert that a minister would suggest or do such a thing.

Mr. Feehan: I'm sorry. I have to disagree. The bill is . . .

Speaker's Ruling Accusations against a Member

The Speaker: You can't make an accusation that a minister would go and commit crimes in provincial parks. You can make an assertion about all sorts of things, but making the accusation that someone is going to commit a crime . . .

Mr. Feehan: I didn't say that.

The Speaker: What you said was that it's reasonable or it's possible, inside this legislation, that a minister would go and shoot all the wild horses in a provincial park. I'm not going to debate with you what the *Hansard* says or doesn't say, as neither of us has the benefit of the Blues, but I just think that continuing down this line of conversation is quite likely to create disorder.

Debate Continued

Mr. Feehan: The point is that a minister, under these regulations, can make regulations to do things. I'm not saying that they would break the law, but they would establish a law to allow them to do things. For example, if First Nations people want to expand the buffalo, what happens if the minister decides that they want to eliminate and do some kind of buffalo cull? If they did that kind of buffalo cull, would they have to consult with the First Nations first or not? How does this fit into the Buffalo treaty, signed by so many First Nations in this province?

You know, I can understand the Speaker's sensitivity because I used the example of horses, but they're also very important to the Indigenous people, and many of the horses run wild in the parks in this province. This bill allows the minister to make decisions about those wild horses. That's my point. I cannot tell you that I trust this minister or any minister of the government to make decisions like that without proper and due consultation, yet we have a bill that allows the minister to make all kinds of regulation decisions over standards, directives, practice codes, all of these kinds of things. It's completely unnecessary to write a bill this wide to achieve something as narrow as the environment minister suggests that this is all about.

There have been serious concerns by groups such as CPAWS saying that you have designed a tool that is far too extensive for the actual activities that are being intended here. I think that's just unacceptable. If the minister needs some specific ability to do something within a particular area, then that can be written in for

the minister to have the discretion, but simply just to open the door up and say that the minister has the widest of all possible discretions in all kinds of areas is not acceptable. We just certainly haven't seen, under this minister, any reason to trust them. We saw that when we saw the minister's attempt to sell parks in this province. We saw that when we saw this minister's attempt to mine the Rockies in this province.

You know, we have just seen this minister consistently go after the environment, which is pretty ironic for an environment minister. They have certainly not gotten the support of people who devote

their lives to the environment, and it certainly should give us all pause to not want to give this minister, who has attempted to do these things that have been completely and ultimately resisted by people who are the most knowledgeable in this area, the power to do whatever they wish to do. This is the biggest poison pill in this bill.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt. However, pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the House stands adjourned until this afternoon at 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 3, 2022

Day 28

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 3, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us in the Speaker's gallery today are some very special guests. They are friends of mine and the parents of Char Bergen. Char works in the office of the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction. I hope that you will join me in welcoming Pat and Nick Barnay to the Assembly. During COVID last year they reached several very important milestones, including their 90th and 80th birthdays as well as their 60th wedding anniversary. Earlier today I was speaking with Mr. Barnay, who is a retired barber, and he was telling me that on his very busiest day of being a barber, he actually did 101 haircuts. It looks like some members over here could use the services of the member. Last but not least, it's actually his 91st birthday today. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Also, hon. members, joining us in the gallery today are Heather Prendergast and Blair Nielsen of Leading Influence. They are guests of the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Also, guests of the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville: Babs Ajayi and Jummy Ajayi. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Women's Health Care and Reproductive Rights

Ms Hoffman: Yesterday a draft opinion of the United States Supreme Court to overturn Roe versus Wade, the decision which legalized abortion across the United States, was released. This news has shocked many, and it has brought up deep concerns for women about the threats to their health. Hearing this made me think about advancements in women's health that we made while in government. I am proud to have been Alberta's first NDP Health minister. That legacy includes expanding women's health care. This includes expanding midwifery services, public coverage of Mifegymiso, the abortion pill, and creating a bubble zone around women's health clinics so that the staff who work there and the patients accessing the health care in those buildings could do so without harassment, intimidation, and violent images being forced upon them.

This issue hits close to home for many Alberta women. It's why the NDP wanted to create safe spaces. Four years ago UCP members ran from this Chamber 13 times when our NDP government brought forward that bill to create bubble zones to stop the harassment. What was the UCP scared of? Why did every member of their caucus turn tail and run? Well, members across the aisle have voted against women's health care, against women's choice, and have been endorsed by groups who believe in restricting access to abortions. Abortion is health care, and we need a government that defends health care, all health care.

Today our leader gave Albertans our guarantee that an NDP government will protect reproductive rights here in Alberta and across the country. The Premier must reaffirm Alberta's commitment to a woman's fundamental right to choose, guaranteeing that he will do nothing further to restrict access to reproductive health services, and join us in condemning this attack against women's health.

Women across North America, including women here in Alberta, need to know that their health is protected, that it matters, and that it will get better. Alberta women can't trust this UCP to do that, but they can trust the NDP because we know that women's health is public health. An attack on women's rights is an attack on us all.

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

Stanley Cup Playoffs

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The good old hockey game is the best game you can name. The NHL playoffs have begun, and for the first time in a long time both of Alberta's teams, the Calgary Flames and the Edmonton Oilers, have a very good chance to hoist Lord Stanley's Cup.

This isn't just great news for hockey fans; it's great news for Alberta's economy. Alberta's tourism and hospitality industry was hit hard during the pandemic, but now our hotels, bars, and restaurants are bursting at the seams with hockey fans. Alberta's tourism and hospitality industry is vital, contributing approximately \$8.2 billion per year to our economy. Sixty-nine thousand jobs and 20,000 businesses are impacted by this. Our government is working to reduce red tape for businesses, and we are working with municipalities to establish entertainment districts where people can gather responsibly and enjoy events like the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Tonight I will join thousands of Albertans in rooting for the Calgary Flames, the number one team in the Pacific division, with a whopping 111 points. But Flames fans aren't celebrating yet. We know that there's a lot of hard work to do to recapture the cup and bring it home to Calgary. From the Red Mile to Whyte Avenue, Flames fans will pack the bars and restaurants to cheer on Johnny Hockey, Matthew Tkachuk, Jacob Markstrom, and more.

There's nothing like playoff hockey, Mr. Speaker, and Alberta is hockey country. In fact, many of the players in the Stanley Cup playoffs hail from our province such as Lightning's Brayden Point, a two-time Stanley Cup champion; the Edmonton Oilers' Brett Kulack; and the Bruins' Jake DeBrusk, just to name a few. From the frozen ponds to junior rinks to the NHL arenas, hockey is alive and well in Alberta.

I want to wish the Flames and the Oilers good luck, and I look forward to the battle of Alberta in round 2.

The Speaker: I'm just wondering where the hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia will be this evening, whether he'll be cheering for the Flames or not.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Forest Industries

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was raised in a family that depended on Alberta forests to help us earn a living and put food on the table. In my constituency of Lesser Slave Lake forestry is one of the leading employment areas.

Every year during this first week of May we celebrate Alberta Forest Week. The week is a chance for people across the province to celebrate everything our forests and forest industry do for us. Alberta forests cover about 87 million acres, an area larger than Japan. Alberta forests give us so much, from recreational areas and environmental habitats to building materials and good-paying jobs.

As our province's third-largest resource sector and the fourth-largest of its kind in Canada, forestry directly supports 722 small businesses and 51 medium to large businesses while providing good jobs for more than 18,000 Albertans. There are about 17 municipalities across Alberta that derive between 10 and 27 per cent of their employment income from forestry. Thanks to work like the forest jobs action plan we're

home to the country's most competitive forest sector, and this industry will be an important contributor to Alberta's economic recovery.

This week thousands of grade 1 students across Alberta will be planting seedlings of white spruce and lodgepole pine, Alberta's provincial tree. As their seedlings grow into strong, sturdy trees, I look forward to seeing our forest sector continue to be a strong and sustainable contributor to Alberta's economy and culture.

Albertans can be proud of the many technologically advanced pulp mills, sawmills, oriented strandboard plants, and laminated veneer mills in operation across Alberta today along with advancements in cogen and biofuels. We also have a stringent, global-leading reforestation program, ensuring the viability of our forests for many generations to come.

I would like to give a shout-out to all the forestry businesses and their workers for doing an amazing job in preserving the longevity of this amazing resource.

Thank you.

The Speaker: It would probably be inappropriate of me to point out the fact that the Minister of Health's phone rang during the member's statement, but I'm sure he'll be making a donation to the hon. member's charity of choice.

Government Record

Ms Goehring: Well, Mr. Speaker, it was bound to happen eventually, but this government's inherent elitism and selfishness finally got the best of them. Albertans are struggling, dealing with the cost-of-living crisis created by the UCP, and when asked about it, the Finance minister had the audacity to blame them. "Get a better job," says the Finance minister, who spent his summer sipping whisky on the sky palace with the Premier. "Get a better job," lectured the Finance minister, who is personally hiking Albertans' income tax by a billion dollars using a sneaky trick the Premier once opposed. The Finance minister, whose record is slashing benefits for seniors and disabled Albertans, hiking insurance costs, hiking utility rates, hiking income taxes, making life unaffordable for students, has zero credibility to tell people to get a better job when their lives could be improved simply with a competent Finance minister.

1:40

But this goes to the heart of this UCP government. The UCP since day one of taking office has taken from Albertans to reward themselves. They cut the minimum wage of young Albertans but then used taxpayer dollars for a private jet ride for their friends. When asked about it, the Premier said that he planned to do it again.

They cut the supports that disabled Albertans use to survive but then defended the Premier's friend who spent tens of thousands of dollars travelling to London's fanciest hotels. They refused to fund schools, leaving nearly 2,000 students in Edmonton without support, and then kicked back with Hawaiian vacations that the rest of Albertans were told to cancel.

This government could charitably be described as out of touch, but in reality it's much worse. This government is so entitled that it would make the Redford-era PCs blush. Albertans deserve better than a government that lives large while telling working families to do more with less. After the next election they'll have a chance to vote for a government that values them.

Thank you.

Legislature Building and Government

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, back in my office in Taber I have three pictures proudly displayed on the wall. These pictures show the purposeful and meticulous construction of Alberta's first Legislature

Building. I've been coming to work here for seven years, and I have to admit that I have sometimes lost my appreciation of the beauty and grandeur that surround us.

In August 1907, just two years after becoming a fledgling province, hard-working Albertans put their shoulder to the wheel and got to work. Within just four years, in 1911, lawmakers were able to hold their first session as the paint dried on the newly constructed walls. Pioneers of the past knew full well that the foundation, in fact all parts of the Legislature, needed to be built with the best material and crafted with the greatest of care. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we have this great edifice today because of that purposeful work of our forefathers. Renewal of older buildings is a given as it faces the harsh winters and summer storms of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, building a province, a great province, follows similar principles. Our province continues to be built with great care and great vision. For the past three years our government has purposefully renewed the foundation of our province. That made it the greatest place to raise a family, start a business, or get a well-paying job. That foundation is called the Alberta advantage.

Achieving prosperity is not a fluke. Instead, it is achieved through purposeful, hard work. In the past three years our government has reduced the corporate tax rate by one-third, reduced red tape by one-quarter, and flattened the curve on government spending, which has allowed us to table the first balanced budget in many years. People from all over the world are coming here again to benefit from the Alberta advantage because, Mr. Speaker, Alberta has its swagger back.

AISH and Income Support Shelter Benefit

Ms Renaud: Politics are personal, and decisions made by government impact people's lives. The UCP made cuts to AISH and income support. Cutting by deindexing wasn't enough for the UCP, so they systematically cut income support supplementals through a variety of policy changes.

Let me tell you a couple of true stories. The first one. We'll call him John. John has many issues, both physical and mental. As a result, he is unable to support himself. He receives income support to survive, and that means that as a single person he receives just over \$900 a month. A person can't live on that. He used to receive an additional shelter allowance of \$300, and that small amount was often the difference between being homeless or not.

In January 2022 John was notified that he lost that \$300, so he appealed. At that point he had a three-month reduction in his income. Now, if he's lucky, he can hang on for three months without getting evicted, and if successful, he'll receive over \$900 for those three months. The problem is that in appeal he found out he's only eligible to receive an additional three months of shelter benefits. Once again he's at risk of acute homelessness, and the cycle begins. Here's the kicker: he has to maintain his residence throughout.

Another one. Let's call him Steven. Steven has had a difficult, painful life and now relies on income support to live. He's trying to make changes. He lives at a sober living facility, and he's trying to stay there and heal, but CSS is telling him they don't do additional shelter benefits anymore. The UCP have systematically attacked low-income and disabled Albertans by cutting poverty-level benefits, introducing ableist policies while boasting that AISH and income support are the most generous in Canada. That is not true.

I urge this government again to reindex benefits and stop this speeding train of ableist policies that are inflicting harm all over this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park is next.

Energy Industry Environmental, Social, and Governance Standards

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March of this year the federal government finally did something I agree with. I know. Shocking, right? They banned the import of Russian conflict oil. That was the right thing to do. That being said, I was surprised to see the federal Liberals ban Russian conflict oil. Buying and using foreign conflict oil from corrupt and oppressive countries is straight out of the Liberal playbook.

Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Venezuela provide Canada with billions of dollars' worth of conflict oil while everyday Albertans are shoved into the corner and told that our oil is dirty. What a complete slap in the face, Mr. Speaker. It has been proven that Alberta oil development follows the strictest environmental guidelines. Furthermore, Alberta and its energy sector engage in meaningful dialogue with Indigenous communities to ensure minimal disturbance to their lands, and their communities can prosper from the wealth gained from selling clean Alberta oil.

Do you think that Saudi Arabia, a country that does not respect human rights, follows strict environmental guidelines for their oil development? Do you think that authoritarian Venezuela considers the rights of Indigenous people when extracting oil? The answer is no, Mr. Speaker. The double standard is disrespectful to what this province has done for this nation. I, like so many other Albertans, am angry. Now that Russia is beginning to shut off energy flow to Europe, Alberta must be allowed to step up to the plate to ensure that clean, ethical oil is allowed market access.

Alberta's destiny, Mr. Speaker, is to be the arsenal of energy security globally this century. Unfortunately, I am afraid that the Trudeau Liberal-NDP alliance with their delusional green, left agenda won't see or support this vision. Here's to hoping that I'm wrong.

Agriculture and Agricultural Land Ownership

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, agriculture is an important part of Alberta. It is a key industry that contributes significantly to the economy of our province. But beyond the economy, Alberta's agricultural industry is reflective of a way of life. We speak of industry as a concept, identifying it through measurements, including how much product it yields and how much it contributes to the economy, but often we overlook the people who are at the centre of this production.

For the men and women who choose the agriculture industry, they are choosing a way of life. They are choosing to be farmers and ranchers, caretakers of crops and livestock. They are choosing to get up before sunrise and work late past the sunset. Mr. Speaker, as a farmer I can attest that these individuals do not have a typical 9 to 5 job. They do not have the luxury of saving work for another day or keeping their livestock and crops uncared for as they are responsible and subject to the life cycle of something beyond themselves.

It is farmers that understand first-hand the necessary conditions to ensure food security for our nation. As stewards of over 31 per cent of our nation's total farmland, Alberta farmers and ranchers are entrusted to protect this arable land. Mr. Speaker, it is the shared realities of the demands of caring for crops and livestock as well as the responsibility to the population to ensure food security and preservation of our agricultural land that brings people together and forms rural communities and culture. It is the Alberta rural community and culture Bill 206 seeks to protect.

Ownership of agricultural land by individuals is paramount in keeping our rural communities strong. For farmers and ranchers, ownership of agricultural land is more than an investment opportunity. For over 100 years families have come and settled in Alberta, put down roots, helped to further develop rural Alberta, and

are the foundation and strength of our rural Alberta communities. Mr. Speaker, by defending the ownership of agricultural land by individuals, we will keep our rural communities and culture strong.

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

Federal-provincial Relations

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many are concerned we are sleepwalking towards disaster. Canada is acting like a hostile, \$1 trillion plus fiscal train wreck, attacking Alberta, threatening to drag us down with it. Yet in spite of Ottawa, Alberta still succeeds. But they are a growing danger. There is a gathering storm. We need to protect ourselves.

Mr. Speaker, if Alberta was not part of Canada and was invited to join this rigged partnership under the current terms, would we join? No. Does loyalty compel us to remain host in a parasitic relationship? No. Alberta is not compelled to suffer constant harassment and attack. But what about national unity? For the sake of unity, are we forced to allow ourselves to suffer attacks from politicians seeking power? No. Albertans do not need to unite with political corruption. Unity without integrity is fake.

1:50

Trust is earned as one's actions are consistent with one's words. There is too much overpromising and underdelivering. The concept of a fair deal needs to be more than a political slogan. Mr. Speaker, Alberta has the potential to be the most free and prosperous nation on Earth. What is holding us back? If one is not fair, how does one insist on fairness? If one is not accountable, then how does one insist on accountability? Alberta is a land of freedom and prosperity. We must be vigilant to keep it that way.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Economic Recovery

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, in the last election the UCP made big promises about jobs and economic growth, but even before the pandemic investment dropped, our economy shrank, and 50,000 full-time jobs were lost. Then the pandemic hit, and Alberta had the worst performing economy in Canada. Desperate for some kind of spin, the Premier then promised us that we would lead the country in 2021, only for us to discover yesterday that we actually finished sixth, ninth if you include the territories. Can the Premier explain how it is that he got it so wrong?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's the NDP that got it so wrong. When they raised income taxes on Albertans, when they raised taxes on Alberta employers, when they imposed the job-killing carbon tax, when they attacked our energy industry, when they asked Justin Trudeau to cancel Northern Gateway, when they cheered on the death of Energy East, when they opposed Keystone XL, tens of billions of dollars of investment fled Alberta. We ended up with a jobs crisis, an \$8 billion structural deficit. This government has turned that around, leading this year Canada in economic growth, a balanced budget, and tens of billions of dollars of job-creating investment.

Ms Notley: He promised that we'd be first; we came in sixth.

Now, yesterday the Premier also claimed that Alberta's tech sector was the fastest growing in North America. Let's check that:

venture capital investment in Ontario, \$7.9 billion, up 295 per cent; B.C., \$2.9 billion, up 224 per cent; Quebec, \$2.8 billion, up 180 per cent; but Alberta, \$500 million, up just 23 per cent. The Premier's definition of "fastest" appears to be much slower than *Merriam-Webster's*. Why is that, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, in the last three years the number of tech companies in Alberta has more than doubled. The amount of venture capital has tripled. And according to LinkedIn, in a study that they did, Alberta has the fastest growing employment in the tech sector, not in Canada but in all of North America, thanks to policies like the innovation employment grant, part of Alberta's recovery plan. You know what that is? It's a long-term plan to build, to diversify, and to create new jobs, and it's working.

Ms Notley: Even when we give him the facts, he denies them, you know?

It's important because when it comes to our economy, Albertans actually deserve the facts, Mr. Speaker. You can't make things better if you don't admit how they are right now. We are not leading Canada in recovery; we're sixth. Real GDP is slower than most other provinces, and we are billions shy on tech investment. But the Premier shamelessly throws himself victory parties just to prop up his leadership. Why won't this Premier put his head down, pause the party, tell the truth, and start doing the work?

Mr. Kenney: Well, here's the truth, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday, I want to ask the Leader of the Opposition to please continue to focus on this government's economic performance for the next 13 months because Albertans will render judgment on the economic catastrophe of her job-killing, tax-hiking, overregulating, fiscally irresponsible policies. They drove us into a deep jobs crisis. People were leaving Alberta. They're now coming to Alberta. Investment was fleeing. It's now coming to Alberta. They were raising taxes. This government is cutting taxes. Our economy shrank under the NDP. Finally, we've caught up to where they were when they took office.

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

Women's Reproductive Rights

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans woke up today deeply concerned over the news that the U.S. Supreme Court may overturn *Roe versus Wade*. I'm one of those people, as are all of my colleagues. The landmark decision to legalize abortion was a victory for all women. Now it's under threat. Our bodies, our rights, our choice must be protected. I am hoping that the Premier can stand today and reaffirm to those concerned Albertans our commitment to a woman's right to choose. Will he join me in condemning this attack on reproductive rights in North America?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is asking about a potential decision in a foreign court in another country. That is for the American legal and political system. There has been no change in policy with respect to that procedure in Alberta, and none has been proposed.

Ms Notley: For the many Albertans who are very worried, that answer did not make them feel any better.

Now, as Premier I was proud to introduce legislation to better prevent the harassment of women seeking this health procedure. We created a safer environment for both staff and patients, women making a very difficult choice, often in very difficult circumstances, but we know that we need to do more. Access is still restricted to

the major cities, and we still don't have a complete picture of available resources or other barriers at play. Will the Premier agree today to debate our motion so members can discuss these important issues today and reaffirm their commitment to human rights?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, again, the member wants to debate a potential decision of a court in a foreign country on a matter that is under the jurisdiction of Canada's federal Parliament. If you want to seek a Canadian application of this issue, it's under the federal Parliament. The member is trying to create controversy where there is none in Alberta. There is no precedent in this place for us to get involved in a running commentary on decisions of foreign courts.

Ms Notley: Well, this Premier claimed he was the economic puppet master of the U.S. last week. That was the most hypocritical answer I've ever heard.

You can understand why Albertans are nervous about this government's intentions when you google their record on these matters. Setting that aside, this draft decision could fundamentally undermine the equality rights of millions of women and gender-diverse people. At times like these, leaders must stand up and declare their clear support for the right to choose and for reproductive health rights. That means reassuring Albertans. Can the Premier commit that the UCP will never act to reduce access to abortion in this province? Yes or no?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I don't understand the preamble. Of course, the government of Alberta has a responsibility to engage foreign trading partners on economic issues that affect jobs in Alberta. With respect to the potential decision of a foreign court on a matter that would be under federal jurisdiction, individuals can have individual views about that, but what the leader is trying to do is to invent a political controversy that does not and has not existed in Alberta politics.

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

Women's Reproductive Health Care and Bill 17

Member Irwin: With the threat to reproductive rights across the border, we have an opportunity in this House to say loudly and clearly where we stand as legislators. Bill 17 gives Albertans time off to grieve or process pregnancy loss – very important – but missing from it is an explicit mention of the word "abortion." We can make amendments to be explicit about where we stand, leaving no room for interpretation and better protecting Albertans from discrimination in the workplace. Will the Premier support this amendment to Bill 17, and if so, will the government introduce it?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There will be an amendment to Bill 17.

Member Irwin: It's clear that Albertans cannot trust this UCP government when it comes to matters impacting women and gender-diverse folks and their health care. For instance, the Ernst & Young report, that the minister holds up as the blueprint for the UCP's agenda of cuts to health care, includes delisting both tubal ligations and breast reductions. They call these procedures elective when, in fact, they are critical. To the Premier: why is a vasectomy considered essential, but getting tubes tied is considered elective? Aren't both of them critical health procedures?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

2:00

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In regard to the statement made that we're delisting services, that is simply not the case. We are investing in our health care system. We are spending \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year, \$600 million the year after that, you know, \$1.8 billion over three years. We're investing in capacity across our entire system, EMS, within our acute-care system. Also, we're investing in more spaces in our continuing care. We're focused on delivering health services for Alberta, and that's exactly what we'll do.

Member Irwin: Fascinating that this minister talks about increasing capacity and expanding services for rural communities when there are eight Alberta communities right now where obstetric care has been seriously impacted, including Whitecourt, Rimbey, Lac La Biche, to name a few. That's a serious problem stemming from the UCP's mismanagement of the pandemic and their ongoing fight with doctors. Simple question to the Premier: does he know how much further someone from Rocky Mountain House now has to drive in order to give birth, and if he doesn't, should he maybe go and find out and fix it?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I've spoken in this House many times in regard to the challenges in rural Alberta that we're facing in regard to health care professionals. We've spoken in regard to obstetrics. It's incredibly important. We are addressing those. We are investing in building health care capacity across our entire province, and particularly we're investing \$90 million last year, another \$90 million this year to be able to get more doctors to be able to offer these services. Unfortunately, certain services in obstetrics have been shut down in a few areas for a few days, but we are actually getting more services there. We're hiring more individuals, and we're going to deliver for Albertans.

Collection of Race-based Data

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, yesterday 34 members of the UCP voted to kill Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act, legislation to establish a framework for the collection of race-based data to address inequities in provincial programs and services. Now, Bill 204 was introduced on March 24, but it was only yesterday, six weeks later, that government members stated that they're working on their own bill to get this done. Yet currently there's nothing publicly available about that, not even a footnote on the Anti-Racism Advisory Council web page or any information about consultations. Can the Premier please tell this Assembly where Albertans can find information on these consultations and how racialized communities and the public can participate before decisions are made?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council concluded their report, sent it to government. Out of 48 recommendations about 22 have so far been implemented. That's because the rest of that particular report also includes race-based data collection. That whole process is working through a cabinet committee, and I look forward to coming back to this Assembly at a future date.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 was voted down as similar legislation was introduced in B.C., a bill rooted in a consultation process started over a year ago that requires robust consultation with Indigenous and other racialized communities before establishing data standards, just like Bill 204. Now, to date this government has made no public mention of holding consultations on this issue, not in the Assembly or at a news conference or even on social media, not until

Bill 204 was introduced. If indeed the government has already begun this work, can the Premier please provide some details. How many consultations have taken place? How many more are planned? How can members of racialized communities take part?

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, this is what is so disappointing about the members opposite. They had office for four years. They lifted no finger on any of these issues that they're talking about. This government has done so much to ensure fairness, respect, and equity for minority cultural communities, including our First Nations people. From banning carding to instituting the hate crimes co-ordination unit within the Department of Justice, to including the First Nations police in the Police Act, we are doing much when so much work still needs to be done.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, these are simple questions and they are not partisan, because addressing racism is not a partisan issue. In fact, yesterday multiple members of this government stood, stated that their caucus decision was not motivated by partisanship, and spoke of a need to work together collaboratively to ensure all communities were heard and the legislation made as strong and effective as possible. My colleagues and I agree. Let's come together to address this. Will the Premier today commit to a consultation process on the collection of race-based data that includes all parties of this Assembly in hearing from communities and making decisions, and when can we expect such a process to be announced?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. We would consult, and we are consulting. I am proud of the consultation that the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism continues to do in all of our communities in every region of this province, and I look forward to all that particular work so that we can come together to put forward a bill that actually speaks to the needs of the community, not a partisan tone.

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

Technology Industry Development

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We keep hearing about growth in Alberta's tech sector, and rightfully so. Earlier this year Neo Financial and EY in Calgary and HCL Technologies in Edmonton announced plans to grow in Alberta. Last week Rogers and Shaw announced that their think lab was coming to Calgary. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: how do these recent announcements fit into the larger tech ecosystem in Calgary and Alberta-wide and our work to diversify our economy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two years ago we set out to put Alberta on the map, and the private sector, our tech sector, has delivered. Recently LinkedIn forecasted that Calgary had the highest growth in labour in the tech sector. That is a true testament to the innovators here in our province. Not only is it the local ecosystem; it's the national attention that Alberta is garnering. We have Rogers, that just announced 500 new tech jobs in the city of Calgary, RBC's innovation hub with over 300 jobs. The tech sector in Alberta is truly diversifying our economy, and it's an amazing story.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance of diversifying our economy and the role that tech and innovation are

playing in that diversification and given that Calgary especially is building a strong reputation as a hub for innovators and entrepreneurs, to the same minister: what are we doing to help ensure that investors and job creators know that our province is a strong place for tech companies to grow?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, our government has recognized that one of the only issues that can hold back growth in Alberta is making sure we have the right talent here and the right skill sets here in Alberta. That's why we've invested over \$600 million in our most recent budget, to make sure that we can help Albertans get the right skill sets, attract the right talent into Alberta to make sure that we can grow Alberta's economy. And, yes, for everybody in this House, BMO is still forecasting Alberta to lead the country in growth this year and next year. Alberta has an amazing economic story happening.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and hear, hear to the minister. Given that people looking for tech jobs want to have options when it comes to the companies that they work for and given that we have seen impressive growth in the tech sector through venture capital investment and, of course, increased tech talent, to the same minister: investors, job seekers, and entrepreneurs all want to know whether or not the recent growth in the tech industry has been a fluke, or whether you believe that it will continue.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we've talked about diversification in this province for decades, and arguably over the last three years more has been done to diversify Alberta's economy than at any time in recent memory, and those job opportunities are real. Calgary and Edmonton: high-paying jobs, affordable living, recognized as major cities as the most affordable in all of Canada, top 10 in the world. But those job opportunities aren't just in the major cities; we're also seeing them in our mid-sized centres, rural communities. Alberta's economy is booming. We've got our swagger back in Alberta.

Provincial Park Administration and Bill 21

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, last week this government introduced Bill 21, and in that bill there were some changes to the Provincial Parks Act and Public Lands Act. The changes give the minister broad powers without specific indications on intent, which the minister claims already exist, and the minister also claims that it's simply being changed so that park partners are able to put up signs or allow dogs off leash, but these changes could create a set of legal puzzles that could make park protections worse and a nightmare to detangle and understand. Will the minister promise in this House today that these changes won't inhibit protections and allow industry in our parks?

Mr. Jason Nixon: I see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is still struggling to read legislation. That's not what the legislation does. He should take some time to read it.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that that was a simple question that the minister refused to answer and given that this wouldn't be the first time that this government has tried to sneak changes to our natural areas by Albertans, with the removal of a decades-old coal policy on the Friday of a long weekend, as one example, and given that another example, of course, included their plan to sell off and close down parks and given that this government claims they make these moves in the interest of removing red tape when this bill directly allows the creation of messy regionalized pseudo-regulations, will

the minister explain to Albertans why he is trying to hide the truth from them once again on how he manages our natural spaces?

2:10

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, only the NDP and, in particular, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar would say that legislation to make it easier for park rangers to put up signs to keep people safe inside parks is somehow some great conspiracy. That's an important piece of legislation. It's going to allow individual managers within our 458 parks to be able to adjust signs, keep people safe, and make some local decisions inside their parks. I know the member doesn't leave Edmonton very much, but the fact is that our parks are very, very different across the province, and local decision-makers are the best to make the decisions for parks.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that this bill would give the ability for regulations to be amended without involvement from the minister, which seems odd to me that the minister would want to allow a free-for-all in our park protection systems, and given that this could be due to the minister's affinity for allowing OHVs in more parks, as this government has cleared the way for the use of exemption of popular ATV areas from the absurd \$90 Kananaskis fee, is the minister intending to use the changes in this bill as a runway to allow more destructive ATV use in areas of Alberta where they aren't presently allowed?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, there it is right there. In point of fact, the NDP at the end of the day just can't help moving forward constantly with their desire to shut Alberta's public spaces to Albertans. At the end of the day that is their primary goal. It always comes out, and even with a simple piece of legislation that helps local park managers to be able to put up signs without having to call into Edmonton and have regulatory and cabinet decisions about safety signs and those types of things, they would be against that out of their desperation to ban Albertans from the backyard.

Workplace Fatalities

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Labour and Immigration has reported the occupational disease fatalities, the workplace incident fatalities, and the workplace incident fatalities investigated. These reports, which summarize information provided by the Workers' Compensation Board, are different from the investigation reports, and they're published on the Alberta government website and the open government portal, except that no reports have been published since the UCP took office. A simple question to the minister: where are these reports for the past three years?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. My department, the Department of Labour and Immigration, conducts investigations in respect to workplace incidents and makes those publications public. I am happy to look into the specific concern that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods might have on this particular issue, but as far as I can tell, the department routinely publishes all of those incidents and data across the province.

Ms Gray: Given that last week Albertans paused to remember the lives lost in workplace incidents and illness on National Day of Mourning and given that in 2021 178 Albertans were killed because of their work, including 31 due to COVID-19, and given that this is the highest year for workplace fatalities in Alberta since 2013, to the minister. I appreciate you looking into this. Fatality investigation

reports have been published, but the summary reports have not been published in the past three years. I would certainly like his insight as to why they have not been published.

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, it is always tragic to see the loss or the death of fellow citizens in the workplace, and that is why the focus of this government from day one has been to ensure that our various workplaces are safe for Albertans so that they can go to work and come back to their families in peace and quiet. I am looking forward to continuing the good work that my predecessors have done to ensure that Alberta's workplaces are safe for all Albertans.

Ms Gray: Given that workplace fatalities are preventable and given that this UCP government has made substantial amendments to labour and workplace safety regulations that do not improve worker safety and given that the 2021 report on workplace fatalities and injuries from the University of Regina found that Alberta has one of the highest rates of workplace fatalities in Canada, to the minister: what actions is this government going to take to prevent the deaths of workers in Alberta? Be specific, because this is a matter of life and death.

Mr. Madu: You know, Mr. Speaker, this province has a world-renowned program called the certificate of recognition, by which the government works with employers and occupational health and safety partners to make sure that modern practices around safety are there in the workplace. I am proud of the work that the department has done with health and safety partners, especially when it comes to the certificate of recognition.

Alberta Death Rate and Health Care System Capacity

Mr. Loewen: The data shows that Alberta experienced higher than average mortality in 2021. Sadly, approximately 3,600 people, more than the expected average, passed away. Of that total, approximately 2,100 of those were attributed to COVID. Therefore, we have at least 1,500 that are not yet explained. We saw rates of young and middle-aged people dying that far exceeded normal rates. Albertans are extremely concerned that this Premier has presided over such a rise in mortality. Can the minister explain the cause of these 1,500 non-COVID deaths?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. My heart goes out to anyone who's lost a loved one. It's been a very challenging time over the last two years. As the hon. member mentioned, the number of deaths attributed to COVID: this is something that we're not only dealing with as a province but we're dealing with as an entire country, as an entire world. We continue to focus on providing protections to Albertans through vaccines, through adding capacity into our health care system to be able to provide Albertans with the health care that they need, and also through education.

Mr. Loewen: Given that this Premier has failed on the mental health and addictions file, with substance abuse death rates twice as high as before restrictions, and given that thousands of Albertans, primarily young people and working-age males, have died during the past two years, with the last 20 months having been the deadliest for substance abuse, and given that Albertans are very aware of COVID statistics but most remain wilfully unaware of rising addiction and mental health mortality numbers, how exactly can the Premier be in power for three years, claim that 90 per cent of the

platform commitments have been upheld but every failing is still someone else's fault?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, COVID-19, amongst other variables, has had a huge impact on mental health and addiction throughout Alberta and not just Alberta but throughout Canada and, in fact, North America. That's why we are committed to the 8,000 spaces that we've created to help people with addiction and mental health issues. We're committed to five world-class therapeutic communities. We're committed to the virtual opioid dependency program, an award-winning program that provides same-day treatment to anybody who wants evidence-based medication.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Loewen: Given that AHS measures show that as the Premier was celebrating the best summer ever, the health care system was performing worse than ever and given that even with COVID hospitalizations at a seasonal low last summer, wait times across the board were worse than when this government started for everything from emergency departments to most benchmark surgeries and children's mental health access and given that billions more were spent on health care with no discernible result or increase in capacity, at what point will the Premier stop blaming COVID for his own failures to manage and actually improve the health care system?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As said many times in the Chamber, we are investing record levels into our health care system, and we're actually getting some results. I was pleased a couple of weeks ago to announce the chartered surgical facility contracts in ophthalmology, cataract surgeries. We've made tremendous progress over the last year. By using CSFs during the worst part of COVID, we were able to catch up on surgeries. We dropped median wait times from 18 weeks to 10 weeks. That's still too long, and we still need to get them down, but we're continuing to work on it. We took the number of surgeries from roughly 19,000 to 9,000. That's just the beginning, and we're going to get caught up on surgeries.

Addiction Harm Reduction Strategies

Ms Sigurdson: In March researchers at the University of Calgary published their findings on the economic impact of supervised consumption services in Calgary. Over the two years they studied, they found that Safeworks saved the Alberta health system \$2.3 million by intervening in overdoses without the use of an ambulance or a trip to an emergency room more than 700 times. That's 700 times when an ambulance or an ER bed was available for another Albertan. Did the associate minister read this report, and does he conclude that we must urgently expand supervised consumption services in our province?

Mr. Ellis: You know, I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite is aware that in the east side of Vancouver in a three-block radius there are 15 to 20 supervised consumption sites, and it has not reduced at all any of the deaths that are occurring, any of the issues that they have in the east side of Vancouver. We are committed to helping people. Supervised consumption sites are part of our continuum of care, and we do support them. [interjections]

2:20

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that the UCP commissioned another report last month to set the table for the fake committee to study safe supply and given that 50 leading researchers and scientists from across Canada cosigned a letter denouncing the report for cherry-picking studies and data to support a predetermined conclusion and given that these Canadian experts said that the report is of, quote, critical low quality and cannot be used as a basis for policy-making, will the associate minister finally admit what everyone already knows, that his fake committee is nothing more than a bad-faith political stunt?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for the NDP quitters' club for asking that question. They are, I would say, consistent with the BCCSU, which is also part of the quitters' club, who was not willing to provide evidence to support their position. Let me be crystal clear. Are we going to call into question Dr. Keith Humphreys, the head of the *Stanford-Lancet* Commission on the North American Opioid Crisis? Dr. Humphreys wrote a report consistent with that of the Simon Fraser University report. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Given that six Albertans die every single day of a preventable drug poisoning and given that there are proven medical interventions that would have spared thousands of Alberta families a lifetime of grief and loss but given that this associate minister and the UCP have refused to get past their own personal prejudices and take action, does the associate minister have any compassion at all, any regrets for the families of Albertans who have died on his watch because of his decisions? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I challenge that member and any member over there to go to the east side of Vancouver, where they have 15 to 20 supervised consumption sites, where they have de facto decriminalization, where they have safe supply . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Ellis: . . . and, quite frankly, they have a state of lawlessness in that zone. Those are the policies that the NDP wants to bring to Alberta. Those are the policies that have caused more harm than any good of anything that they are bringing over to this province. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Foster and Kinship Care Provider Funding

Ms Pancholi: Mr. Speaker, when the safety of a child is threatened and child intervention is involved, thousands of Albertans across the province support these children as foster parents, kinship care providers, or group care providers. These Albertans provide the care for children and youth that the government is legally responsible for, and government provides funding to these caregivers to do so. To the Minister of Children's Services: as cost pressures on all Alberta households rise rapidly, how is the UCP supporting these providers in addressing increasing costs to care for the children in your government's care?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is very important work, and I am so grateful for the foster and kinship care providers right across the province that open their homes and their families to support some of the most vulnerable children at times of great need. As the member opposite is aware, we did increase our funding specifically to address caseload growth in this area. We know that this is an important area. We have continued to increase the child intervention budget, unlike the members opposite, and we'll continue to listen to what we hear in pilots like we're doing on kinship care.

Ms Pancholi: Given that, like for all other Albertans, the cost of groceries, heating, electricity, insurance has skyrocketed for foster, kinship, and group care homes and given that the maintenance fees for these providers have not been increased for more than three years, putting more pressure on these Albertans who support children and youth in government care, and given that the UCP has denied a request from providers in December for one-time funding of \$200 per child to help pay for groceries and heating costs, can the Minister of Children's Services please answer why the UCP's balanced budget has no help in it for the children in their care?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is again mistaken. The child intervention budget does continue to increase every single year under this government, unlike the members opposite, who left child intervention underfunded even after an all-party panel on child intervention. We continue to take the feedback that we receive . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. It would be much more helpful for the overall decorum in the Assembly if members kept their conversations across the bow to a minimum.

The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to listen to the feedback that we receive. One good example is, like, kinship families. These are very unique situations. We know that when a child is placed in a family in an emergency situation, they need additional supports, and we're providing those.

Ms Pancholi: That is not what providers have been told. Given that these cost pressures are not going away any time soon and given that these same providers have been told that there will be no increases in maintenance fees now or in the foreseeable future and given that it is appalling that the government, who is legally responsible for these children, refuses to ensure there are adequate funds to pay for the groceries, can the Minister of Children's Services please explain to this Assembly how she expects these foster, kinship, and group homes to feed children in their care? Will they be expected to go to food banks or ask for donations from their neighbours?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sorry. With all of that, I wasn't able to finish my last answer, so I do want to go back and just explain some of the areas where we do make changes based on the feedback that we receive. One example is in kinship care. We know that these are emergency placements, and one of the things that we heard is that families do struggle to access basic supports that they need. We, in fact, moved up the payments that we provide to kinship care providers, \$900 immediately, so families can buy whatever they need to support the child in their care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Financial Innovation Act

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week this Assembly passed Bill 13, the Financial Innovation Act. It's essential for our government to create an investment-friendly environment to position Alberta as a place for growth, delivering jobs, and renewing our economy, and we remain committed to that goal. Given that Bill 13 provides the government the ability to establish a regulatory sandbox for industry to explore innovation and financial products and services here in Alberta, to the Minister of Finance: how will Bill 13 assist in attracting investment to Alberta, and, further, can you explain the types of financial services and products Albertans can expect to see as a result?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. With the passage of Bill 13 Alberta would be the first province in Canada to establish a regulatory sandbox for financial services products. This will attract fintech companies as they will be enabled to offer new, innovative, novel products to Alberta consumers in a time-limited fashion, in a safe fashion. Alberta already employs over 63,000 folks who work in the financial services sector. This will expand that sector.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and, through you, to the minister for his answer. Given that the Financial Innovation Act is set to be the first of its kind in Canada in the fintech space and further given that this act would enable innovators to be exempted for up to two years from select rules and regulations but would still limit them to the guardrails provided by the regulatory sandbox, to the same minister: what safeguards are being put in place to protect consumers while fostering innovation and investment, and how will the privacy and safety of Albertan citizens be ensured throughout the exemption period?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each applicant would have to meet specific criteria to qualify for the regulatory sandbox. Additional terms, conditions, and restrictions will be imposed, depending on the product, to ensure that these companies are testing their products in a safe and sound manner. We're confident that our approach is the right balance between providing additional flexibility for companies to offer new and novel products and services and ensuring the safety and protection of Alberta consumers.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again, through you, to the minister for that answer. Understanding that Bill 13, now passed, will create this regulatory sandbox for fintech industry players as soon as July 1 of this year and given that one of the criteria for applicants to participate in the sandbox is proof of physical presence in Alberta to maintain eligibility, again to the Minister of Finance: are there companies expected to relocate to Alberta this summer as a result of this provision, and if so, how long will they have to establish residency, and how many jobs are expected to be created as these companies relocate here?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. We've already received great interest around Bill 13, enabling a regulatory sandbox for financial services and fintech products. Last year we engaged the industry broadly. Fintech companies that were players already in the province of Alberta were very supportive of this initiative. We know that this will spur on activity within the province. We know that this will also attract other companies from outside the province of Alberta into Alberta. This will expand financial services, further diversify the economy, further offer new job opportunities.

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

2:30 Athabasca University and Postsecondary Education

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the town of Athabasca hired long-term UCP insider Hal Danchilla to help them with their campaign to keep Athabasca University in Athabasca. Danchilla was a co-chair of the Premier's election campaign. This is just another example of pay-to-play politics. If you want help from this government, you need to pay their friends, handsomely sometimes. To the minister: can he tell us why he didn't take any action to help the town of Athabasca until they hired the government's close friend to take up their cause?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. Of course, the issue with Athabasca University is one that stems from a number of years and, of course, requires a very thoughtful response. That's why we've been working very closely with the university and the town and other interested parties to make sure that we develop a solution that is unique to the environment, one that will enable and allow Athabasca University to succeed as Canada's online university while at the same time creating job opportunities and bringing in employment to the town.

Mr. Eggen: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock is a member of this government caucus and theoretically has access to the Minister of Advanced Education and given that Alberta's NDP understands the community desire for a physical campus to stay in Athabasca – we understand that because we were there to listen – and given that the Athabasca county has no faith in their MLA or the minister, otherwise they wouldn't have bothered to hire a lobbyist to do the job, Minister: really, is this how the UCP operates, pay-for-play politics and the only ones benefiting are the rich friends of the members on that side of the House?

Mr. Nicolaides: Mr. Speaker, that's so ridiculous. I don't even know where to start. I mean, the town is free to do what they want and hire who they want. I can't understand. I guess the NDP would put restrictions on what municipalities can do and who they can hire and what businesses they can engage in. As it relates to the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, let me just say that the member is a fierce advocate for the community, a strong proponent for the region, more so than the NDP member was for that region when they were in government.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, given that it's clear this government doesn't even listen to government backbenchers, meaning that their members don't have the ability to actively advocate for their own constituents, and given that clearly this government only listens once money finds its way into the pockets of good friends and allies – it was clearly established that the insurance lobbyists were the ones who successfully removed the annual cap on auto insurance, for example – will someone, anyone, from across the way let us

know how much it will actually take to improve postsecondary education? How much money does someone have to spend?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd happily take the opportunity to talk about the incredible things that we're doing to advance postsecondary education in the province. We're investing \$235 million over the next three years to create 7,000 additional spaces at our postsecondary institutions, expand supports and access for low-income students, expand access and supports for apprenticeship education. On the question of Athabasca I know the members opposite are just annoyed that they didn't have the opportunity to be this courageous and to develop these types of solutions. I know the members opposite agree with my position. That's what they stated in 2016. I'm happy to have their support as well.

Local Government Concerns and Government Caucus

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, for the last seven years I have had the honour of representing the people of Edmonton-West Henday in this Legislature, taking the concerns of my constituents, the organizations and local businesses, and stakeholders here so that I can advocate for them. The county of Lac La Biche has hired a team to lobby the Minister of Health to help them attract and retain physicians. Can the Health minister explain if the MLA for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche raised this issue with him, and if he did, can he explain why his constituents felt the need to hire somebody to do his job for him?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche, as many members of our caucus, has raised issues regarding the delivery of health care services in Alberta. We have listened. We are focused on expanding capacity across our entire province. As I've indicated in this House before, we are investing \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year, \$600 million the year after that; \$1.8 billion. We recognize that there are challenges in terms of retaining and attracting health professionals, but we are hiring more. We have almost 2,000 more nurses than two years ago. We have 230 more paramedics, more doctors . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that Northern Sunrise county has likewise hired a team of lobbyists to lobby this government to raise awareness of safety issues on highway 744 and given that highway 744 and the concerns have not been brought to this Chamber by the representative of Northern Sunrise county and given that that member was sent to this Chamber to raise these very issues on behalf of his constituents and since that member has not raised these issues here, can the Minister of Transportation please confirm on what dates and times the Member for Peace River raised them with her?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that I've had many conversations with many members across the province of Alberta on these transportation topics. Certainly, I have an open-door policy, so if anybody has any specific questions that they would like to bring to me, I'd be happy to hear them out, and I'd be happy to provide more information.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that this government has shown no interest in really investing in or working with municipalities to build affordable housing and given that the town of Gibbons, supposedly represented by the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity, has hired lobbyists to work with the province on the affordable housing projects and given that this clearly means that the concerns of the town of Gibbons are not being heard in the government caucus or at the cabinet table, can the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity explain why his constituency has to pay lobbyists to do his job for him?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I guess that member should explain why he knows so many lobbyists. Quite frankly, it's not clear to me what the member is talking about. I'm the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity. If he has any questions on that, I'm happy to answer them. If he wants to speak to any lobbyists, he should call them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Hydrogen Industry

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is preparing for a lower emission future, and increased hydrogen production will play a big part in our path to economic recovery. To this end, our government released the hydrogen road map in November 2021. This road map outlines a plan for our province to build a provincial hydrogen economy by becoming a major supplier of clean hydrogen to global markets. Can the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity please advise this House on how increased hydrogen production can help Alberta reduce emissions?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hydrogen is the most abundant element in the universe. In fact, three-quarters of all matter is made up of hydrogen, and the best part is that at combustion hydrogen releases zero emissions. So when you capture the carbon and you have clean hydrogen and you incorporate it into things like mobility and heat and power, industrial uses such as we're proposing in the hydrogen road map, it gives you the opportunity to significantly reduce emissions. In fact, we're forecasting that we're going to reduce emissions by 14 million tonnes by 2030.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that hydrogen represents the next great opportunity for Alberta's energy sector and that Alberta is already the largest hydrogen producer in Canada and given that we already have all the resources, expertise, and technology needed to quickly become a global supplier of clean, low-cost hydrogen, can the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity please advise on the potential economic impact of the hydrogen industry on Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. the associate minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hydrogen has the potential to be a 2 and a half to 11 trillion dollar industry; 360,000 jobs by 2050 in Canada. We're going to get as many of those jobs and as much of that investment into Alberta as we possibly can.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Given that Alberta has all the tools to be a global leader in the hydrogen industry, including a skilled workforce, reduced red tape, and low corporate tax rate, and given that Alberta's Industrial Heartland already plays an important role in our energy industry and given that we have many carbon capture and storage facilities in my riding of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, can the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity advise what impact the emerging hydrogen industry will have on the Industrial Heartland?

The Speaker: The hon. the associate minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Industrial Heartland is poised to be a huge player in our hydrogen economy. In fact, we've seen four billion-dollar investment announcements in hydrogen in the Industrial Heartland alone. It's going to mean jobs. It's going to mean investments. We're proud of the work that we're doing in hydrogen, and we're going to keep doing that.

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

2:40

Child Care

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. As many in this House know, child care is essential for the lives of everyday Albertans, including my residents of Spruce Grove and Stony Plain. So many families use these services daily, and thanks to the agreement with the federal government, families will start to see a reduction in costs this year, continuing to \$10 a day by 2026. As we come out of the pandemic and more parents return to work, families will be needing access to affordable daycare solutions. To the Minister of Children's Services: where is this government when it comes to making child care more affordable for families who will need it more than ever?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. The great news is that nearly 83,000 kids and their families have been seeing their fees go down by an average of 50 per cent for child care in this province. Families that make less than \$120,000 a year are in fact paying an average of about \$10 a day. I just received an e-mail from Kaitlyn, a Grande Prairie parent, who said this. "This difference has enabled my family to be able to pay our bills each month." Fees will continue to drop every single year over the next five years.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for her answer. Given that private daycare homes play a big role in helping families receive quality, affordable, and convenient child care and given that these facilities have a long and costly process in order to open and operate their daycare and given that the province is the one who determines if and when new private daycare applications can be accepted, what is the Minister of Children's Services doing to help eliminate some of the hurdles individuals face when trying to create daycare facilities in their communities?

The Speaker: The Minister of Children's Services.

Ms Schulz: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. We did fight to include the entrepreneurs who run private programs and represent around 67 per cent of all Alberta child care spaces. We're investing

an additional \$300 million to help child care operators recruit and retain staff. As we speak, we have round-tables happening with operators and the child care sector to fine-tune our investments in this area. We're supporting operators to create more child care spaces in all settings right across the province.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the government's focus on ensuring every child can access affordable and accessible child care and given that it can be especially difficult for families of children with complex or unique needs to find proper child care and further given that last week the minister announced additional funding to support inclusive child care, can the Minister of Children's Services please tell us more about how the inclusive child care program will support these children and their families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you so much. Last week's announcement of \$7 million to support inclusive child care is great news for parents, especially those who have children with special, unique, or diverse needs, Mr. Speaker. This funding will be provided to five agencies who then provide on-site training and support for both operators and educators. This investment is through our agreement with the government of Canada. It will double the number of programs that can now access that support from about 270 to 600 programs. I sure wish that the opposition was as excited about this child care plan as Alberta parents are.

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

Notices of Motions

Member Irwin: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice that at the appropriate time under Standing Order 42 I intend to move the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly acknowledge that on May 2, 2022, a leaked draft decision of the Supreme Court of the United States indicates that the court intends to overturn its decisions in *Roe versus Wade* and *Planned Parenthood versus Casey* and that the reversal of these landmark judicial decisions would fundamentally erode reproductive rights and access to health services for women in North America. Be it further resolved that the Legislative Assembly condemn any decision of the Supreme Court of the United States that would limit reproductive rights and affirm that access to reproductive health services, including abortion services, is a fundamental right and freedom of all women in Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, in just a couple of seconds here we'll proceed to the Standing Order 42, but I want to allow the pages some time to distribute some copies of the motion to the members in the Assembly prior to asking the member to move it.

Motions under Standing Order 42

The Speaker: Hon. members, there were no points of order today, so we will immediately proceed. At the appropriate time, during Notices of Motions, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood gave notice of her desire to move a Standing Order 42. As such, she has up to five minutes to do that now and speak to the urgency of this matter.

Women's Reproductive Rights

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 42 to request that the ordinary business of the Legislature be adjourned to debate a motion that is quite urgent and pressing and which I read out just earlier under Notices of Motions. I would like to acknowledge that pursuant to SO 42 I have provided the members of this Assembly with the appropriate number of copies, and I provided your office notice of my intention to move this motion as well as notified the government.

Mr. Speaker, it is our duty as representatives in this Assembly to stand up for the rights of women and gender-diverse folks in our society, and that includes the legal right to seek an abortion. As the motion indicates, for one of the world's largest democracies to roll back women's rights by two generations, it would truly have ripple effects throughout the world. It would embolden those who seek to roll back our rights in Canada. Let me be clear: autonomy over our own bodies is being threatened. This is why this debate is so very important and so very pressing.

While access to abortion is currently decriminalized in Canada, there are still barriers to services and barriers to support. While I won't get into a debate on this matter, I must note there is currently a bill before this House allowing bereavement leave for pregnancy loss, but this bill only provides leave when a woman has a miscarriage or stillbirth. It discriminates in terms of the kinds of pregnancy loss that one might experience. Pregnancy loss through either an abortion or termination for medical reasons is a right in Alberta and in this country, but it's a right that we must fight for each and every day. It is these rights that are under threat, as we see in the United States, where they are about to take a massive step backwards and undermine decades of progress.

On this side of the House we stand with women. We stand with gender-diverse folks here in our province and around the world. We will continue to fight for reproductive freedom, and we will defend abortion rights. I know it's a dark day for many. It's a hard day. The landmark decisions in *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* were historic victories for all. We do not want to see these victories rolled back. News of the Supreme Court's impending decision makes it clear that the fight for equality may never be truly over. It is a stark reminder that elections have consequences and that our most basic right, to control our own bodies, is very much under threat.

2:50

We cannot be complacent. We cannot ever take these rights for granted, and the fight for our rights has suddenly just taken on new urgency. That is why I'm bringing forward this motion. This Legislature should speak with one united voice that we respect women's rights and that we won't equivocate on matters as fundamental as reproductive rights. This Legislature must affirm access to reproductive health services, including abortion services, because it truly is a fundamental right and freedom for all Albertans. This Legislature must condemn any decision of the Supreme Court of the United States that would limit reproductive rights. We must be steadfast. We must be unshakable in our commitment to women's rights and to the rights of the 2SLGBTQ-plus community.

This is why I'm standing here in the Chamber today encouraging, urging members of this Assembly to take this matter seriously, to not dismiss it as something happening somewhere else, to accept and to acknowledge that an attack on women's health care, an attack on the health care for trans and queer Albertans is an attack on all of us. That is why I'm urging this Assembly to take this seriously, to put aside the ordinary business of the day in order to debate this critically important motion. Nothing could be more serious.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 42 this is a request for unanimous consent but allows a member of Executive Council to respond for up to five minutes. I see the Associate Minister of Status of Women has risen to do that.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I must say that I reject the premise of most of this motion. I'm going to start with "a leaked draft decision of the Supreme Court of the United States." First of all, it's unverified; number two, it's a foreign country; number three, it doesn't affect Canadian law; and, number four, this area of law actually exists under purely federal jurisdiction.

"The reversal of these landmark judicial decisions would fundamentally erode reproductive rights and access to health services for women in North America." I'd like to remind the members opposite that we live in Canada. The Supreme Court of the United States is the court for the United States, not for North America, not for Mexico, and certainly not for Canada. We are not in America.

The next assertion: "condemn any decision of the Supreme Court of the United States that would limit reproductive rights." Condemning a decision of a foreign court: it's pretty normal for governments to condemn the decisions of other governments; condemning the decisions of other countries' courts is not acceptable. It's not acceptable for the United States to condemn decisions from our courts, and we don't condemn decisions from their courts. If you want to condemn the United States government, you can do that, but not their courts.

Finally: "affirm that access to reproductive health services, including abortion services, is a fundamental right and freedom of all women in Alberta." I'd like to talk about reproductive health for women in Alberta for a moment, and I'm going to remind the folks in this Assembly that we have a number of women MLAs in this Assembly, and certainly women's health issues affect female MLAs, like they do every other woman in Alberta. In addition to reproductive health issues around terminating pregnancies, I'd like to raise a couple more issues such as endometriosis: painful, sometimes debilitating, and – guess what? – often misdiagnosed. In this Chamber there are probably four of us female MLAs who'll be affected by it. Ten per cent of Alberta women will be affected by fertility issues, and the list goes on.

When we talk about women's health issues, the members opposite have raised over and over again access to women's health services in rural versus urban Alberta. Well, I'm going to remind the opposition of something else. While they were in government, they actually diverted capital from rural areas into urban centres. That's what they did while they were in government.

There's lots to talk about on women's health issues, and we're going to talk about them more and more as time goes on, because my department is working very hard on them. In fact, next week I'm going to be participating in a women's reproductive health activity, and I'd sure like the members opposite to participate with me. I'll look forward to that.

In the meantime I don't see this as anywhere near an emergency debate. Again, the premise of it, with respect to dealing with foreign courts, does not at all indicate we should have an emergency debate about it.

On that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

**Bill 15
Education (Reforming Teacher
Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022**

The Chair: This is the bill's first time in Committee of the Whole. Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak and to address Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. Many in this Legislature know that prior to serving as an MLA, I was a public high school teacher for 30 years and therefore a member of the Alberta Teachers' Association. Over my 30 years of teaching I, like many teachers, served as a school rep on my ATA local and at various times attended local meetings and various assemblies of the ATA. While I'm no longer a member of the ATA, I am fairly conversant with many of the issues that surround the ATA and, in particular, Bill 15. They are serious and important issues that will need careful and, I believe, nuanced consideration.

Throughout my tenure as a member of the ATA one of the largest concerns expressed by the ATA executive and many of my fellow ATA members revolved around the issue of whether the functions or the professional duties of the ATA should be separated from the mandate of the ATA to represent teachers at the bargaining table. Both are important functions. Bill 15 impacts both of these functions as it separates the professional disciplinary function from the oversight of the ATA to an independent commissioner. Many, many times I have listened to ATA executives and representatives and members argue that the ATA must remain as the organization in control of both the professional and the union functions of its membership. There was and still is, I believe, a firm belief within the teaching profession that to separate these two functions will impact the collegiality within the school community.

There is some merit in this argument, but it is not the only consideration when looking at Bill 15 and whether or not it should be passed. In my experience, schools are not the same as businesses. It is critical for the administration and the teachers to be working collaboratively together. By overseeing both the professional and union functions within the ATA, teachers and administrators are held to the same professional code of conduct. And to the credit of the teaching profession, rarely do the bargaining conditions, wages, and job descriptions negatively impact professional relationships within the school community. Teaching is, first and foremost, about fostering good relationships, because only then will there be the trust necessary to make a meaningful and positive impact on education and the school community.

3:00

Yet after a great deal of thought I will be supporting Bill 15 for two very specific reasons. One, because there appears to be a significant problem with the discipline process as it now stands, and secondly, because I believe that Bill 15 will bring forward benefits to teachers, students, and our system of education.

I want to start by addressing what Bill 15 actually does and what it actually changes. When addressing the professional side of education, it must be understood that the teaching profession has not been organized like other professions. In fact, every profession organizes itself and its discipline process in unique and different ways. Doctors organize, set professional standards, and discipline their membership differently than do lawyers or engineers or nurses

or teachers. In the case of teachers, there have always been multiple players working co-operatively within the profession, impacting professional credentialing, setting up professional standards and the discipline of teachers.

Presently in Alberta there is a role for the Minister of Education, for the registrar, and for the ATA to play within the profession, and this has made the profession different from many of the other professions in how they set and address credentialing, professional standards, and discipline. Bill 15 is going to significantly change how the discipline process will function in the province of Alberta. Bill 15 will change how the government and the teaching profession address the competence of teachers and the professional conduct of teachers. Bill 15 will create a new office to help address the issues of teacher and teacher leader professional conduct and teacher and teacher leader competence.

Alberta has a long history of independent commissioners, like the Privacy Commissioner or the Ethics Commissioner, and Bill 15 will create a new Alberta teaching profession commissioner to oversee the discipline process, for the most part supplanting the role the ATA played in that discipline process. Bill 15 will allow the Minister of Education to appoint a panel to address professional conduct and competency, and this panel can appoint a hearing committee and an appeal committee within the discipline process. Under Bill 15 any person may make a complaint in writing to the registrar, and the registrar may refer the matter to the commissioner for investigation. A hearing panel can be formed to adjudicate the complaint as long as the issue of professional competence occurred within two years of lodging a complaint. This time limit, however, does not apply to an issue of professional conduct.

Upon receiving the complaint, the commissioner will make preliminary inquiries, upon which the commissioner may decide to take no further action, refer the complaint to a mediator, to dispute resolution, or appoint an investigator for further investigation. If, upon completing preliminary investigations, the commissioner believes further action is necessary, the commissioner will inform the teacher or teacher leader and the registrar and create a hearing panel. Once the panel arrives at a decision, the complainant may appeal the decision through the creation of an appeal panel. All decisions will be forwarded to the commissioner, the registrar, and the Minister of Education, and the Minister of Education will continue to have the responsibility of removing or suspending the teaching certificate or certificates or credentials of a teacher or a teacher leader.

This is a significant change to the present system of addressing teacher and teacher leader competence and professional conduct, and as I have read through Bill 15, I believe that it is a reasonable way to handle these two issues of competence and professional conduct and will address some of the problems that presently exist and will provide some added benefits to the profession.

So what problems need to be fixed? Over my years as a teacher and subsequently as an MLA I've heard the following arguments for why the discipline process needs to change. There's a perception by many outside of the teaching profession that there is a conflict of interest within the discipline process because the ATA oversees both union and professional discipline functions within itself. I find this, to a certain degree, to be a fairly subjective argument.

It is true that the ATA often has to try and accomplish the two purposes of both protecting its members while also disciplining them. The ATA mission statement in 1993 reads:

The Alberta Teachers' Association, as the professional organization of teachers, promotes and advances public education, safeguards standards of professional practice and serves as the advocate for its members.

The Teaching Profession Act states that the objectives of the Alberta Teachers' Association are "to improve the teaching profession . . . by advising, assisting, protecting and disciplining members in the discharge of their professional duties and relationships." Protecting and disciplining: in both cases we see that the ATA, like a good parent, has the responsibility of advocating for its members while at the same time protecting the professional practice of the profession through its disciplinary practice.

While I will not go into case studies, there are times when complaints have come forward to the minister or to the registrar that appear to highlight the problem of a conflict of interest. While anecdotal and, I believe, relatively rare, these cases speak to the times when an investigation into a complaint has done a disservice to the student or to a family, when the teacher is protected rather than moving forward through the discipline process.

Even more rarely do we see problems occur at the hearing level of the discipline process, but they have occurred. I do believe that the Michael Gregory case speaks to a problem within the system. In this case, it was not a breakdown at the investigatory phase of the discipline process but at the hearing phase. Upon being found guilty of unprofessional conduct due to the sexual abuse of many students and rightfully having his teaching certificate suspended, the ATA did not, in turn, pass on to the police this criminal abuse. Now, it must be noted that neither did the registrar, nor did the Minister of Education of the day.

As shocking as this is, I am very disturbed that the present leadership of the ATA, which oversees the present discipline process, believes that they are not required to report to the police a finding by the ATA disciplinary body that a member has been suspended due to what is clearly a criminal offence involving children. This speaks to a breakdown of the process, and it is my opinion that the ATA position to not report is clearly not in the best interests of either students or parents or the teachers within the profession.

Bill 15 will address this with a duty to report findings to the minister and to the registrar. Any suspension of a teaching certificate or certificates will be published in an online registry that the public can access, and there will be a duty to report to the police. This duty to report unprofessional conduct, especially of a criminal nature, is clearly in the best interests of the students, the parents, and the profession in its entirety, and in its entirety it has my complete support.

The disciplinary process also addresses teacher and teacher leader competence, not just unprofessional conduct. There appear to be problems with how the profession addresses this under the present system. Over my 30 years as a teacher the vast majority of the teachers I interacted with were hard working and highly professional. The children I taught were always individuals who brought those strengths and weaknesses and learnings into my classroom. It was my job to assess where those students were at and to try, through a wide range of pedagogical methods, to help each student to engage with the curriculum, assimilate the skills and knowledge, and interact with that knowledge to bring about a higher understanding of the material under study.

The standard for doing this was never perfection. I was not a perfect teacher; neither did I teach perfect students or have perfect parents or perfect administrators to support both myself and the students. At the same time, the profession must be prepared to address those very few teachers who over time do not meet the teacher qualification standards and are therefore not professionally competent.

There are over 40,000 teachers in the province of Alberta, yet under the present system over the past 10 years there has not been a single hearing for teacher incompetence. This should be concerning. Admittedly, our postsecondary system of education

prepares our education graduates, and they do an amazing job. We prepare some of the best educators in the world to teach within our schools in Alberta, but there are also teachers who struggle, and we seem to have a problem identifying them and then addressing the issue of teacher competence when it arises. This seems to point to a problem of a conflict of interest within the discipline process, a process overseen by the ATA, where the professional responsibility for identifying and addressing teacher competence appears to be subservient to job protection.

3:10

So I conclude that Bill 15 addresses a problem in the discipline process in a reasonable fashion by introducing a process that will be headed by a familiar and a successful practice of appointing an independent commissioner to oversee the discipline process. At the end of the day, this is not solely about the ATA and its capacity to oversee both the functions of a union and a professional association; Bill 15 is primarily about ensuring that our students are safe and that the discipline process that addresses teacher competence and professional conduct is transparent and accountable. I believe that Bill 15 moves us in that direction, and I also believe that there are some benefits that will come with the passage of Bill 15.

Bill 15 will create a single, effective, consistent, and efficient discipline process that will oversee every teacher, principal, superintendent across the system regardless of where they're employed or if they are a member of the Alberta Teachers' Association. What many people don't realize is that presently teachers employed in independent schools or charter schools are not members of the ATA, and therefore they actually fall under a separate discipline process in the province of Alberta. Bill 15 will ensure that all teachers and all teacher leaders, regardless of where they are employed, will fall under one discipline process overseen by the commissioner. Placing all teachers under one process ensures that consistency and transparency and accountability will be applied to all teachers and to all teacher leaders, and therefore it raises the bar for every teacher and ensures that all students in the province of Alberta will benefit.

While this should not be necessary, Bill 15 will reinforce requirements for education system stakeholders – stakeholders like the Alberta Education registrar, the commissioner, the ATA, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, and employers – to report to police when there may have been serious harm or a threat to student safety. Why we should have to put that in legislation I am not sure, but it needs to be there, obviously.

It makes sense to me that the registrar at Alberta Education be responsible for the intake of all complaints in the province, and this will help avoid duplication of complaints. The Alberta teaching profession commissioner will have the authority to address and to investigate a complaint and determine the most appropriate course of action to take regarding that complaint. By making the discipline process more transparent, both student safety and the teaching profession are actually enhanced.

By further expanding the online teacher registry established under the students first act, the following will be made publicly available: all hearing, appeal, and minister's decisions where there is a finding of unprofessional conduct or professional incompetence will be publicly available to all Albertans; any consent resolution agreements initiated by the new Alberta teaching profession commissioner where there is a finding of unprofessional incompetence or unprofessional conduct will be publicly available to Albertans; all hearings and appeal dates will be publicly posted and available. This raises the bar, and this is in the best interests of the profession.

My decision to support Bill 15 is not based on a desire to weaken the profession or to weaken the public system of education but the

exact opposite: to enhance it, to strengthen it, to protect. My support for Bill 15 is not so that the government can distract from decisions on the curriculum or funding that the ATA has not agreed with, as some have charged. That is a red herring argument brought forward by those who seem to be unwilling to address the serious issue of professional discipline. Rather, I believe Bill 15 could lead to greater accountability, greater public assurance, and consistency in addressing complaints under one legislated governance structure by the commissioner's office, which in the long run, I believe, will be best for students and for the profession as a whole.

Madam Chair, Bill 15, I believe, is a step forward in the teaching profession. It addresses some of the issues that have obviously come to fruition as we've looked at the discipline process, and finally it does make some positive changes. It will therefore have my support.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others wishing to speak to Bill 15? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Madam Chair, thank you. I would like to stand in support of Bill 15, the Education Amendment Act, 2022. I want to share an experience with the Legislature. Shortly after my election as the MLA for Red Deer-South central Alberta representatives of the Alberta Teachers' Association asked to meet with me. I said yes. In the course of our meeting I asked the ATA union two questions. First, I asked them what the ATA union could do better to serve children, who are the heart of our education system, not the ATA union. Second, I asked the union: how many teachers last year were let go for incompetence? The ATA union said that they would get back to me with answers to those questions. I never heard back from them.

Madam Chair, since that time I have learned the answer to one of those questions. As mentioned, there are over 45,000 teachers under the ATA union, yet over the past 10 years with the ATA union in charge there was not a single hearing for teacher incompetence. Nobody believes that in the past 10 years there was not a single incompetent teacher in Alberta. This is proof positive that the ATA union was not diligent in its trust to protect higher standards for the teaching profession. The ATA union has lost its moral authority to be entrusted with this stewardship.

Madam Chair, by way of contrast, I am a member of the Law Society of Alberta, and if I am incompetent, I get sued. In some cases a grossly incompetent lawyer can also be disciplined and even disbarred. The Law Society posts notifications of these actions. Now, providing legal advice and teaching children have differences, but both are important. There need to be mechanisms to address incompetence.

The ATA union failed to do so. Albertans may conclude that either the ATA union is incompetent in identifying and addressing incompetence or they were influenced by a conflict of interest as the union being a discipline body. Madam Chair, which is it? I do not know. Maybe it was some of both. The ATA union certainly is in a conflict of interest running teacher discipline. As it relates, though, to conflicts of interest, it is not only important to avoid an actual conflict but to avoid the perception of conflict.

Bill 15 takes teacher discipline away from the union. The ATA union does not like Bill 15. It reduces their power. It is interesting to see the ATA union arguing against Bill 15. They did not do a good job. Does that matter? They are in a conflict of interest. Does it matter? The union argues that they should regulate themselves, that they should be immune from government accountability. But, Madam Chair, just as a lawyer is accountable to a client who pays their bills, so should teachers have some accountability to those

who pay their bills, in large part the parents of children, who pay taxes to government, who fund, through them, public education.

3:20

Teachers and the ATA union are not the same thing. The ATA union should not conflate teachers with the union. The ATA is a public-sector union. Sometimes the ATA union will represent themselves not only as teachers but also as students and parents, but, Madam Chair, what happens when the interests of the ATA union are not aligned with children, parents, or Albertans, who fund our education system? When push comes to shove, the ATA union is in a conflict of interest to put interests of teachers, even if it is contrary to the interests of children, parents, or Albertans – they may not wish to admit it, but that is the truth.

Yet using proxies and their own communications, they will sometimes seek to frame a self-serving position as in the interests of parents and children. Often there is alignment, but sometimes there is not. We see this when a union will strike near the end of a school year and claim they are acting in the interests of students. Madam Chair, that is not in the interests of students. This makes Alberta cynical and less trustful, when unions distort the truth.

Now, the majority of teachers are competent, seeking to be excellent, to teach and serve children. I have experienced that myself both as a student, and I have seen it as a parent. To those teachers: thank you. Teaching is a rewarding and wonderful opportunity to serve. But, Madam Chair, it is so important that we ensure that there is an accountability and standard of excellence. While it is the exception rather than the rule, let's confront reality to strengthen the profession for the majority of teachers. Let's nurture an increased culture of excellence. Removing conflicts of interest furthers this overarching objective.

Madam Chair, children are the heart of our education system, not the ATA union. Teaching our children is a privilege and serious responsibility. Done well, it can be rewarding and fulfilling. I want a culture of excellence in our teaching profession. It is too important to do otherwise. Bill 15 seeks to put the best interests of children first in the teacher discipline process. By so doing, Bill 15 not only increases student safety but will strengthen the standard and reputation of the teaching profession. That is something that I hope that we can all agree on. It is in the public interest.

With that, Madam Chair, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 16 Insurance Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: Are there speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to rise this afternoon to speak to the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. I thank the minister for bringing it forward. Just spending some time reviewing exactly what this legislation is doing. Of course, last year the UCP government passed the Captive Insurance Companies Act, which allowed captive insurance companies to set up, get licensed, and operate in Alberta. What we're seeing in this legislation is making one substantive change, that was recently passed through that previous act, regarding redomestication provisions, ensuring that Alberta-based companies who have captive insurance companies operating outside of Canada are able to bring those operations home. I guess this is finalizing or adding onto some of that previous legislation regarding the Captive Insurance Companies Act, which we saw previously.

It's an interesting topic that we have before us, where we see insurance companies across the world less and less likely to insure

oil and gas projects, specifically energy projects within the fossil fuel industry or sector, so we find ourselves in a position where we need to look within our own jurisdiction and our own regulatory opportunities to provide that insurance. I think that it's a reasonable ask, to try and bring some of that insurance back in-house or offered by organizations within the province when it comes to insuring our own liabilities.

But it's also important, I think, to reflect on how or why exactly we have come to this point in the first place. Obviously, there are many external pressures, one being that the returns for these insurance companies are increasingly being affected by things like extreme weather events and climate change concerns, both what the environment is doing to projects and what that is costing these energy companies as well as the insurers of those projects but also, I would say, external pressures around people's perspective on these types of projects as well. That's not just, you know, regular people across North America or across the world but also how investors are looking at these projects. I again appreciate where the minister is coming from regarding this Insurance Amendment Act and the idea of captive insurance across the province, ensuring that we are able to properly insure the energy sector here where in some cases it's becoming increasingly hard to provide or get that insurance elsewhere.

Now, with that being said, Madam Chair, I think it's also important to reflect on the fact that the UCP is as a government moving towards making it easier for large companies to receive insurance or become insured, but on the other hand, when it comes to regular Albertans, we've seen this government do the exact opposite. Take, for example, at the beginning of this government's term, their decision to let the 5 per cent cap on personal auto insurance lapse. Since then we have seen skyrocketing insurance costs for Alberta families, upwards of 30 per cent, if not higher in some instances. Again and again, as we see these inflationary pressures and as we see so many Albertans struggling to have to make decisions between keeping their lights on or putting food on their table, unfortunately, this government has done nothing to support them.

We continue on those calls. I believe just recently we called for a further cap on personal auto insurance, to the point of calling for a zero per cent increase over the next year, recognizing that so many Albertans are still struggling with the ongoing pandemic and the increasing costs that they're seeing across this province because of decisions that the UCP has made. Again, I think it's an important contrast, Madam Chair, to recognize that on one hand we have this government willing to do anything possible to ensure that these companies are able to hold onto insurance, going as far as creating new opportunities to provide this insurance and create new companies, potentially, that may have otherwise not been possible and changing regulations on that matter, but, on the other hand, making decisions to reduce coverage for Albertans who find themselves in potentially life-altering collisions, reducing the amount of payout that Albertans are getting, and still letting those insurance premiums get out of hand and skyrocket upwards of 30 per cent for many Albertans. And we continue down that path with no assurances that that is going to change by any means.

3:30

Again, as we reflect on the Insurance Amendment Act before us, I think that it's reasonable to expect these types of regulatory changes to allow these companies to provide this captive insurance opportunity and to potentially bring home some of the companies who are currently operating outside of Canadian jurisdictions, to ensure that, whether we're talking about potentially insuring

tailings ponds or insuring wells, there are going to be opportunities for those companies to get insurance.

I think that there's also another important discussion that we need to have in terms of the support and the costs that we are incurring as a province based on things like orphaned oil wells. Unfortunately, there are many conversations that still need to take place regarding insurance for these companies and regarding often the liabilities that are being put back on municipalities when we aren't properly assessing the costs and potentially aren't expecting the right type of insurance for such energy projects.

I do look forward to hearing more from the minister. Potentially some questions that I would be interested in finding out: how many companies we believe across the province are going to benefit from this idea of reinsurance or captive insurance; how many companies, insurance companies specifically, working outside of Canadian jurisdictions that are potentially offering insurance even for energy companies outside of North America we expect to come home; what type of capital we expect to be brought back into our provincial jurisdiction with some of these changes. Again, I look forward to seeing how this legislation rolls out and what type of economic opportunities there are here.

Finally, I would say that, again, while we have the Insurance Act open before us, we've had many opportunities in this House not only today but previously to ensure that we are supporting Albertans to the best of our abilities. Why are we seeing decisions like this made but, on the other hand, leaving consumers, specifically around personal auto insurance, behind? We do have a real opportunity here with these changes that we see before us to support, in many cases, medium-sized and large energy companies. I think it's an important move, but I think it's just as important to ensure that the Albertans who are depending on us to get their kids to school in the morning, get themselves to work so that they can put food on the table and keep the lights on in their house – I think we have a responsibility to them as well to do everything we can in this House to support them with their household budgets and, in this instance, the skyrocketing rate of premium increases that we are seeing under this UCP government.

With that, Madam Chair, I will take my seat, but I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this legislation. I think that it's a reasonable request of the minister. I think that there are likely to be more questions as we see this industry start to take place here in the province, and at that point we will continue this conversation.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Chair: Hon. members, just a reminder that while Committee of the Whole is certainly a more casual and lenient time of debate and light conversation, there still needs to be the opportunity for members to be heard despite the activities you have going on. Just a reminder that the lounge is available for all that wish to have louder chats in the Chamber.

At this time I am seeking speakers to Bill 16. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. I'm happy to see that so many members of the Chamber are in jovial moods as we debate this piece of legislation. Well, most members, anyway. No; with that, I jest as I'm looking at members smiling back.

I'm happy to talk to this bill. You know, the long of the short is that I support this bill in how it's amending the Insurance Act and recognize that likely when the Minister of Finance brought forward the Insurance Act in our last session, that brought in captive insurance as a solution to a niche problem. I respect the fact that it's easy sometimes even for government to miss some nuances. In this,

I suspect that members from our energy sector came forward and approached the minister and government with the challenge that they face.

Obviously, the energy sector, critical to Alberta's economy and critical, quite frankly, to the Canadian economy, requires a great deal of insurance. They have very expensive assets. This bill – and I'll talk through it a little bit – will provide an opportunity and a potential solution. I mean, it'll be interesting to see what companies do with the changes in this bill. And then, Madam Chair, in my time I will circle back to the fact that here we have an amendment to a bill that was done last year, and I'm not criticizing the government or anyone for doing that. That happened under our term as well, where bills had to be reopened.

But the disappointment I have in the bill in its current form, Madam Chair, is that we've missed an opportunity, an opportunity to provide relief for drivers. We know that drivers have experienced significant jumps in their premiums, myself included, over the past couple of years. You know, it's an interesting discourse in that under our government we put in a rate cap of 5 per cent, which is nothing to sneeze at. I mean, the fact that companies could increase the fees by 5 per cent per year for most years: that outpaces inflation. Again, we're at a period in our time where we're seeing record-high inflation. Well, record in the past 30 years. Drivers have seen their costs shoot up, yet there has been very little relief for drivers.

Now, I will admit, Madam Chair, that the insurance cap was not meant to be a permanent, long-term solution. It was meant to be an interim solution to work with industry to come up with what would be a reasonable amount for them to charge drivers, recognizing, quite frankly, that costs for insurance companies have gone up significantly. Quite frankly, I recently had a conversation with folks in this space, and although we have – you know, cars are being built with all of these sensors and safety mechanisms that, in theory, should help reduce the number of accidents that people get into. The challenge is that, when you think about how many sensors are in your bumpers, what used to be a small fender-bender, that could be fixed for a few hundred dollars, is now costing thousands and thousands of dollars because of the sensors that are in them.

3:40

I say this, Madam Chair, to acknowledge the reality that insurance companies are facing and why rates and costs are going up, but at the same time we also need to recognize that wages have not gone up concurrently with cost of living, so Albertans have fewer and fewer dollars at the end of the month. We've heard a number of stories where Albertans have to choose between, you know, paying their bills and having enough money for groceries, or that Albertans are also deferring – I won't even call them luxuries but just certain purchases that they have to put off. In this bill there was an opportunity to address the challenges that Albertans are facing, again, providing some kind of relief for drivers.

The other thing that's missing – and then I'll go back to the meat and potatoes of this bill – is that the government is no longer producing a report that they used to. The Minister of Finance used to prepare the superintendent of insurance annual report every year. That was done for many, many years. I don't have the date of when it started in front of me, but I know that this was customary for many years, including when we served in government, our term, to long before. You know, the fact that the report was produced right before a long weekend, on a Thursday beforehand: I can tell you, Madam Chair, that what that does is that it makes Albertans question why it's being made public late in the week ahead of a long weekend. Is it trying to be buried, or what is the reason if not that? It definitely raises questions for folks.

Here are the different opportunities that were missed in this bill. Legislating that report to be produced and shared with the public would be one thing that we would have liked to have seen in this bill, the other being relief for drivers that's missing.

I'll get into some of the changes in this bill. Again, as I mentioned, the one substantive change that is now in this bill: when we talk about the Captive Insurance Companies Act, that was passed last year, it creates redomestication provisions, which in my understanding – and I have a limited understanding in this. It basically allows Alberta companies who have a captive insurance company located outside of the province and internationally, so somewhere in the U.S. or elsewhere – they can bring them back home here to Alberta without any disruption to the services that it's providing.

Again, there are reasons that companies will want to do this. In fact, I have learned, for example, that Suncor has a number of companies that they will now redomesticate back here in Alberta. I think that's great news. We want our companies to be here at home. Obviously, there are additional benefits for the province such as, you know, greater tax revenues from that. I appreciate the conversations that took place between ministry officials and the Official Opposition where they indicated that they were pleasantly surprised at the amount of interest companies have in this part of the bill and how many have indicated that they will be redomesticated. So that's good news, Madam Chair, and I definitely support that.

The second thing that this bill is doing is making changes to allow Alberta to license stand-alone reinsurance companies in Alberta. Again, here, essentially, my understanding of reinsurance is that it's insurance for insurance companies. There are a small number of large global players that do this, that provide this type of insurance, so here we're ensuring that Alberta's oil and gas companies can have that type of insurance. Obviously, it's critical for them, as I mentioned earlier. What this may do is – I mean, it provides the ability or the opportunity for the energy sector to look at potentially creating a reinsurance company or several companies here at home. It doesn't guarantee it, but it provides that provision or is an enabling piece of legislation.

You know, my understanding of this is that it's a good-faith attempt. It's something that the government is hoping companies will take advantage of. It provides that opportunity for them for a solution that is not a risk to the province. What I appreciate about this is that it's not the province backstopping or being the reinsurer; this is about providing the private sector with the ability to do that. When I first read that, Madam Chair, I thought: well, this seems like an innovative solution to a challenge that industry is facing. Hats off to industry for coming up with this potential solution. I would imagine it came from industry. But either way, another reason for me to support this bill.

The third, Madam Chair, is making it easier for Alberta companies to access unlicensed insurance. Now, companies can only access insurance from unlicensed insurance companies – in other words, insurers that are not licensed in Canada – only in circumstances where there are no domestic insurers that will underwrite a policy for a particular risk. I appreciate that this is going way into the weeds, but I recognize that the challenge with how it's currently structured is that if you have an unlicensed insurance company operating in another country and, for example, they decided that they aren't going to pay out a policy – or, say, they go under – there's no recourse. Again, if we're talking about our energy sector companies, these are companies that have assets in the billions, so if there is a major disruption or need for them to call in their policy, they may not be able to, and that is an incredible risk that they shouldn't have to bear.

There are other details in my notes that really go even further down into the weeds, so really the thrust of my comments here today, Madam Chair, are that I support this bill, the three different

parts of it and what it's going to do and what it potentially could do, again, you know, fixing a problem that I'm sure was recently discovered after last year's legislation.

But I'd be remiss if I didn't point out the fact that there was a missed opportunity here to provide some real relief for Alberta drivers. I know that between insurance costs and the high cost of gasoline many folks are taking the bus, are leaving their vehicles parked at home. I appreciate the fact that the government brought in some relief to drivers at the pumps, but, again, when you look at the costs and how they've compounded, it's a real struggle for Albertans. Again, it's not just insurance and gas; it's also the cost of utilities for folks.

3:50

You know, at least when I was watching BNN this morning, it sounds like there's going to be another rate hike on insurance, which may have already happened as I've been in this Chamber. That's going to impact Albertans who have a substantial amount of debt. That's going to impact mortgage rates. That's going to impact lines of credit. Again, I appreciate the fact that the lenders are looking at trying to get a grip on the rising pace of inflation, yet at the same time that's going to have a very real effect on individual Albertans and Alberta families. In this bill I wish the minister would have brought forward some tangible measures and ideas to be able to provide relief for drivers when it comes to rising insurance rates.

Now, my final comment as I wrap up, Madam Chair, is that I appreciate that the minister has said that his advice has been that rates should start coming down – and maybe that's the case; I'll wait with my fingers crossed – but I can tell you, from talking to individual Albertans and constituents, that they have not seen their rates start to drop yet. Again, relief was needed months ago, it's needed now, and it's unfortunate that this bill doesn't address that.

But for all the reasons I laid out, Madam Chair, I will be supporting this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to Bill 16? The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: Very good, Madam Chair. It's great to hear the supportive comments on Bill 16 from the members opposite. I think it's a good bill that everybody can support. The Insurance Amendment Act, 2022, further advances our efforts to modernize and grow Alberta's insurance and financial services sector. The proposed amendments in this bill amend the recently passed Captive Insurance Companies Act. Specifically, they would add reinsurance provisions to the Insurance Act, allowing provincially licensed insurance companies to solely focus on reinsurance and to enter into limited partnerships to do so. Reinsurance is essentially insurance for insurance companies.

Many people are not aware, but the reinsurance industry in Canada is limited, comprised mostly of foreign-based enterprises, many of them operating through subsidiaries and engaging in businesses in Canada through a branch. In fact, most of the reinsurance capacity right now is located in Europe, the United States, and places like Bermuda. As you can appreciate, Madam Chair, this can make it challenging at times for Canadian and Alberta-based insurers to access reinsurance. It's important that we do everything we can to attract additional insurance capacity to Alberta and to diversify insurance offerings. Diversifying Alberta's insurance sector will have both short-term and long-term benefits for the province's economy, our businesses, and Albertans broadly.

This bill also proposes new redomestication provisions for the recently passed Captive Insurance Companies Act to specifically address the relocation of foreign captives to Alberta. The new

provisions will help companies understand how they should bring their foreign captives to Alberta.

Lastly, Bill 16 makes a number of administrative amendments to the Insurance Act, which should help to ensure a clear and efficient regulatory framework for the conduct of insurance businesses in the province.

Again, I'm pleased to hear that the members opposite support this bill. It's a good bill and another step forward, and I encourage all members to vote in support of it. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to this bill, Bill 16, Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. It's my first opportunity to speak to this bill, and it's an important piece of legislation. In fact, insurance is important. It's the way people manage their risks, and these policies are used to hedge against the losses, whether they are personal injury kinds of losses, whether they're financial losses, property losses. These products, this new concept, are critically important to managing the risk in our society.

For the constituency I represent, it's more important for many reasons as well. Part of the area I represent was hit by the fourth-costliest natural disaster in Canadian history – the fourth-costliest natural disaster in Canadian history – and I do live in my riding as well and personally was impacted by that. You know, I also saw the destruction that hailstorm levelled across my constituency, across northeast Calgary. People's homes were destroyed, their sidings were shredded, and their cars were destroyed.

There were many losses that were not covered by insurance policies, and there were many reasons for that. One of the reasons was that it was during the pandemic. For instance, in the case of vehicle insurance, many people parked their vehicles because they were not driving as much, and they only had parked insurance on those. That's why they didn't have the comprehensive: they didn't need it, they were not driving as much, they were trying to get by because of the global pandemic, because of the loss in business revenues, because of job losses, and all those things. People were certainly impacted. Their bottom lines were impacted by that.

I do hear from my constituents directly to this date about that hailstorm and how there was no help from the government. Just to be clear, nobody was asking this government to act as an insurance company for northeast Calgary. All they were asking was that at least the government work with these insurance companies and for the government to make sure that people are treated fairly, that their claims are processed in a timely fashion, and that their roofs, their homes are repaired in a timely fashion. And the government didn't lift a finger.

Every time I've raised this issue, this government, this Premier have even ridiculed it, as if northeast Calgary was looking for a handout and somehow these people in northeast Calgary didn't have insurance at all and whatnot, but that was not the case. People were asking this government to at least advocate on their behalf so that they are treated fairly, their homes are repaired timely, their claims are processed in a reasonable time. Even after two years, when you drive on the streets of northeast Calgary, you can still see homes damaged. You can still see vehicles that are damaged. So these policies and how government approached these policies, insurance, this industry, are important to my constituents.

The second reason it's important to my constituents is that there are many in northeast Calgary and in my constituency who drive cabs, who drive for delivery companies, who drive ride-share vehicles, and they do that to earn a living. Certainly, in order to drive, you need insurance, so, again, any changes that the government makes to this industry, to

these products are important to my constituents, people in northeast Calgary, and, of course, all Albertans.

4:00

Another thing, specifically, I guess, that has been brought up by many people in my riding and across Calgary with respect to insurance is insurance for the trucking industry. They also drive for a living and provide valuable services across this province, across this country, and changes that are made by this government certainly impact them as well. So every time the government opens up the Insurance Act, every time some changes are suggested, I think my hope is that the government will actually also look at issues facing my constituents, facing people in northeast Calgary, facing everyday Albertans across this province.

For instance, this bill makes, broadly, three changes to the Insurance Act. One relates to captive insurance, a kind of niche area. The second helps to license stand-alone reinsurance companies, something that will benefit insurance companies. And, third, it will make it easier for Alberta companies to access unlicensed insurance when there is no licensed product available in Alberta. Nothing in this bill addresses skyrocketing insurance costs for everyday Albertans. While I have no major concerns with the content of this legislation, I'm more concerned about what I hear from my constituents, from people in northeast Calgary, from everyday Albertans across this province.

Yet again the UCP is refusing to take any action whatsoever to reduce auto insurance bills that are punishing Alberta families and businesses since this government took over. We have tried to work with this government to address that issue. We have suggested that a legislative committee be established to look into why insurance premiums are so high, but this government, in the interest of insurance companies, has refused that.

When we were in government, there was a cap, a 5 per cent cap, on insurance premiums. As soon as the UCP became government, they were lobbied by their friends and they removed that cap. We were told and Albertans were told that unless they do so, insurance companies won't be able to survive. We were told that they might leave the province.

Every day we heard that they were removing products from the market, which, by the way, did not happen during our term when there was a 5 per cent cap. We knew that was not true. We knew that whatever the government was telling us on behalf of insurance companies was garbage. In order to hide that, they even tried to not publish a report that was published continuously for a hundred years. They just decided not to publish that so that the people of Alberta would not know what they were telling Albertans to believe, that insurance companies are broke and we all need to chip in to help them out.

Finally, when under pressure, they were made to publish that report, they released it quietly on a Thursday, and Albertans were able to see that whatever the government was telling us about insurance companies and how they are not viable and how they won't be profitable without removing that cap – they charged Albertans \$385 million more in premiums in 2020 than they did in 2019. While Albertans were struggling to make ends meet during the pandemic, these companies were making huge profits with the help of this UCP government. They collected more money from Albertans at a time when they were able to afford it the least. And then they tried to hide that information. That's exactly the reason that Albertans don't trust this UCP government.

Plus, they were saying things that were not true. Then they were hiding the report that Alberta has published for 100-plus years. And when the report came out, it was written in black and white that insurance companies were not broke. They charged Albertans more at a time when they were not able to afford it. They raised auto insurance,

for instance, anywhere from 20 to 30 per cent. If somebody was paying \$100, they're now paying \$300 thanks to this UCP government.

And still, when the UCP opens up the insurance bill, they turn a blind eye to the real issues facing Albertans across this province, that we hear every single day. Madam Chair, we do know that the government hears the same as well because we are sometimes CCed on those e-mails. But what the government does is that it ignores those Albertans. It doesn't listen to those concerns. They're completely – and they're just listening to what their lobbyist friends in the insurance industry tell them.

So one has to ask: while you're opening the Insurance Act, making these changes, that we have no concerns with, why is it that the government is not taking any action on skyrocketing insurance premiums? I don't think that answer is enough that the government tries to give to Albertans, that there are five, six companies that have asked for a rate reduction. Guess what? They increased the rate by 30 per cent; now they're asking for a rate reduction of 1 per cent or 2 per cent, 1.5 per cent. That's not enough. Why is it that the government is not willing to do anything or willing to take any action to address those skyrocketing insurance premiums?

4:10

And since the government works very closely with the insurance industry – they have close friends, the Premier's former staff, who are on insurance lobbyist teams – is there any rough idea how many more millions or billions Albertans have to chip in to make this insurance industry viable? Any rough estimate will help. I urge government members to share that information if they have that available. If not, the government should ask their friends in that industry how much more Albertans need to pay.

Also, with respect to the report that the government earlier tried to hide, while this act is open, why is it that the Minister of Finance is not bringing forward changes to make sure that we have that in legislation, that that report is published every year and that report is tabled in this Legislature? Why is that? Is there anybody who is willing to talk to the Minister of Finance and provide that answer for Albertans? Albertans would like to see how insurance companies are doing.

These are the concerns that we hear every single day in our constituencies. These are the concerns that we hear from Albertans every single day. They are worried about their insurance bills. They are worried about their utility bills. They are worried about costs being piled onto them by this government. Insurance costs are such that if you have to drive to get to school, if you have to go and do groceries, if you have to drive kids to soccer games, you need to have a vehicle. You will have that cost. And government policies are punishing Albertans just to insure their vehicle. It's getting harder and more difficult for Albertans to afford this UCP government anymore.

So while these changes to captive insurance, these changes to get unlicensed insurance for companies, and these changes for stand-alone reinsurance companies are good, the Minister of Finance and this government also need to make changes to make sure that Albertans can also afford insurance products, that they're able to afford to insure their vehicle. It is not enough, these talking points are not enough, that there are companies that are applying now for rate reductions after increasing that 25 to 35 per cent.

The government represents, first and foremost, Albertans, not the insurance industry and not their lobbyists. The government should step up and work for Albertans, and this is something that Albertans need action from this government on. They are hurting. They are unable to afford insurance products. And if anyone from this government wants to hear how these changes made by the UCP have impacted Albertans, they can come to my riding, and I am happy to take them on a tour.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to Bill 16 in Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022. I want to just start by acknowledging the importance of the previous member's speech, when he was talking about the residents of northeast Calgary and the devastation that so many experienced because of the hailstorms and then, unfortunately, the lack of support that this government provided. The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has been a fierce advocate when it comes to advocating on behalf of the residents of northeast Calgary and the impacts of this devastating storm.

You know, I think it sets a tone for how we're discussing what the needs of Albertans are versus the legislation that we see put before us, and today is no exception to that pattern that we continue to see. When we're advised that the Insurance Amendment Act is coming forward, there's always a bit of hope that perhaps now this government will do something that actually has an impact and supports what Albertans are asking for.

Unfortunately, the pattern and the trend that we've seen are that the government will introduce something, and then, unfortunately, it actually does nothing to support what Albertans actually need, which is lower insurance rates. While there's not a lot in this piece of legislation that supports Albertans, it's not necessarily something that I would vote against. What's glaringly obvious in this legislation is the lack of actual tangible pieces that will actually support Albertans.

I know that many across the province have experienced insurance increases, around 20 to 30 per cent on average. I know the members opposite know this because we as opposition are CCed in most of the correspondence because there's not an actual response or action that comes from the government. I just think of the ongoing pleas that I hear as the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs from my constituents about how difficult times are right now. Financially people are struggling. We have seen a government bring forward legislation that has potential to actually make a difference in the lives of Albertans.

However, again, we see in Bill 16 nothing that actually helps drivers in Alberta. We know that driving is something that is quite essential for many across the province. I would say that this government has arguably made that even a higher requirement, because if you live in rural Alberta right now and you need to access a doctor, you have to drive. You can't simply just walk down the street or ask a neighbour for a quick ride to go see your physician, because there aren't any.

In order to access something as essential as health care, unfortunately, many residents of the province are required to drive. You know, as someone who grew up in Whitecourt, Alberta – and my little brother was born in Whitecourt – I just don't understand how the bad decisions around supporting health care or the lack thereof from this government are putting so many people from my hometown in a place where they can't have their children in a hospital in their community. They have to drive who knows how far to be able to access that.

As a mother of three I can tell you that when a baby wants to come, they're coming now. Part of your prep is planning on what that looks like, and not knowing where your baby is going to be delivered, not knowing how far it's going to be is quite a big stress and not needed at that time in this expectant parent's life.

I think that when we're looking at what this government could have done, we've seen a history of what they have done. I would like to just take a walk down memory lane when it comes to insurance and what this government has done. Previously in this sitting we've seen, again, insurance legislation opened, and unfortunately what the UCP

thought was important at that time was to decrease the status of a concussion through an accident. They reduced it from being a serious injury. I don't understand how something as serious as concussions, something where we know there's so much research that has gone into the impacts of concussions and the extreme seriousness of that injury, with potential life-long impacts, was determined by this government to not be serious.

4:20

When we had the legislation open under insurance previously with this government, another thing that they did was reduce the number of physicians that were able to actually talk to an accident claim. You know, having been in conversations with people that have been in accidents, unfortunately, there are potentially several physicians that need to weigh in on insurance and the outcome of this individual that experienced an accident. You could have mental health, you could have surgeons regarding any of your bones, and you could have brain injury. There are so many things that happen. To be able to decide arbitrarily which physician gets the right to deliver the report, because this government reduced it to one physician, is a major, major impact on Albertans that have been in a motor vehicle accident.

That's the history that we've seen so far with some of the things that this government has chosen to do when they open up legislation.

Now, one of the things that we're seeing, definitely, with this government is that if you are a friend of theirs, you will have impact. I would argue that insurance companies have definitely had an impact when it comes to the decisions that this government is making, specifically their lobbyists, their friends, because we've seen in the province an incredible increase to the profits that insurance companies have and not an increase in Albertans' pocketbooks. We've seen decisions that actually are costing a lot more to the average Albertan's household.

We've seen insurance rates go up, like I mentioned previously, a 20 to 30 per cent increase on average. We've seen tuition rates skyrocket for students in the province. We've seen utility bills absolutely astronomical in this province. Those are the things that I'm hearing from Albertans, things that are impacting their income, their ability to make decisions on how to spend their money, whether it's their unfortunate \$400 electricity bill or their skyrocketing insurance to drive their car or food to feed their families.

We know that the food banks are up substantially in the number of individuals that are accessing them, and it's because people are being forced to pay rates that they shouldn't have to pay. They are being forced to pay for things that this government could easily come in and support. However, that's not what we're seeing. When we have bills presented on legislation that make changes but don't actually do what Albertans are asking for, there is a big disconnect between what Albertans are saying that they need and what this government is proposing as legislation.

I know that we had asked for a report – it is something that has been done in the province of Alberta by the Finance minister for over a hundred years – and unfortunately it took pressure from Albertans for them to produce this report. They did, reluctantly, and they put it out on a Thursday before a four-day long weekend, Madam Chair. Now, when you hear that, you know it's not going to be good news. You know that Albertans are not going to be benefiting from the details of that report. I just wonder why the favour is with highly profitable insurance companies as opposed to Albertans that are paying for insurance.

I have two young drivers in my family, and the cost for their insurance is absolutely ridiculous, what they're being asked to pay for insurance. Now, I understand that as young drivers their insurance is naturally higher. One of my children is a male; therefore, I know that

it's higher. But when you put in the cost of a 20 per cent to 30 per cent increase, they can't afford it.

One of my children is currently enrolled at the University of Alberta. She is pursuing a career in education, and a lot of her time is spent on her studies. She doesn't have a lot of extra time to work. She was laid off – she worked in the service industry for most of the pandemic – and she just doesn't have a whole lot of savings that she can access. She needs her car. She has the capacity to pay the insurance, but there are a lot of struggles that are impacting there. When you look at the cost of her tuition, when you look at her lack of access to employment over the pandemic, she's in a position where she's literally living paycheque to paycheque, and I can tell you, Madam Chair, that she's not alone.

There are so many young people in this province that are currently deciding whether or not they can afford postsecondary. Some of them are in their second, third year. Some of them are just deciding whether or not they should enter at all, if they can afford it. Those are conversations that absolutely should not be happening in the province of Alberta. We have a government that's made horrible decisions throughout the pandemic. They put an attack on the health care profession. We've watched decisions being made that did not reduce skyrocketing utility bills, and now we have this piece of legislation before us that really could have made an impact. Bill 16 could have been an opportunity for this government to show that they have actually heard Albertans talking about what their needs are. We don't see it in this. We see a piece of legislation that does nothing for Alberta drivers. It does not decrease their insurance.

I can tell you that there has been a lot of discussion from so many in Edmonton-Castle Downs about just the affordability right now in the province. I'm hearing from people that I'm shocked are considering leaving the province: educators that just feel completely defeated and unheard, unrespected in their profession, based on so many things that this government is doing with legislation, whether it's curriculum – it just doesn't end. When the cost of living comes up, it's not something that this government should be ignoring. People are struggling in the province. People have come to the government expecting that their needs are being met. They should be able to have access to health care providers in their community. They shouldn't have to drive to see a doctor.

These are things that we know they're asking for, yet this government isn't doing anything. They propose a piece of legislation like the Insurance Amendment Act and do nothing to actually support Alberta drivers. It's really concerning when over and over and over we're watching pieces of legislation that have potential to actually make a difference do nothing of the sort. I have had countless conversations with individuals about ideas that are just not being listened to, pleas for help when it comes to the cost of living in the province, some sort of support when it comes to utilities, their insurance, but this government instead chooses to put forward legislation that doesn't actually support them. It's very confusing when there are no changes in this legislation that would actually benefit drivers. We know that the insurance companies have billions in profits – billions – yet we don't see any support to the average Albertan and drivers.

We have many questions that just continue to go unanswered, and unfortunately I can tell you that that isn't unique to this piece of legislation. It's been an ongoing theme from this government to put in pieces of legislation that don't actually have an impact on the day-to-day lives of Albertans. If there is an opportunity to have an impact, we hear: don't worry; it'll be done in regulations.

4:30

We have a clear message that we're hearing from people all across the province. They need support with insurance. They need reductions. This doesn't do that, Madam Chair. I question: why would you take an opportunity to open the legislation, to create an

Insurance Amendment Act, and then not actually do what Albertans are asking for? It's a question that continues to go unanswered. It's something that we've watched over and over, where they favour their friends in decision-making. We watch them make pieces of legislation that keep their friends and insiders happy, yet it doesn't actually support Albertans.

So with that, Madam Chair, I will end my comments, and I look forward to further debate. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon and make a few comments with respect to Bill 16. I appreciate the debate in the House during Committee of the Whole. The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has made a number of assertions around Bill 16 and, more broadly, around insurance in general. There are certainly a number of points that I have to agree with her on. Insurance costs are high, and we certainly recognize that. We are in an inflationary environment right now globally, certainly within the North American context, and I would agree with that. Affordability is a concern for Albertans, and I would agree with that. What I don't agree with is the assertion that this government is taking no action. That I simply can't agree on because we are taking action. Again, we're certainly taking action through Bill 16.

I'll talk about some of those details, but I do want to again just respond to the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs around utilities. We are taking action with utilities. We are providing an electricity rebate, and that's a tangible, measurable affordability piece that will provide relief to every Alberta household. We're also taking action by suspending the fuel tax, saving every Albertan, every Alberta business, every Alberta nonprofit every time they go and fuel up their vehicle at the pumps. So, Madam Chair, we are taking action.

We're taking action on the insurance front as well. We're taking action in Bill 16. We have a hard insurance market in this province, in this nation, really in this continent. What that means is that there have been losses in the insurance industry, large claims over time in recent times, that have caused insurance providers to raise their premiums. They raised their premiums to recapitalize. They raised their premiums to reflect what they may believe are additional risks going forward. We're seeing that not only in Alberta; we're seeing that across the country, and in fact, to some degree, it's a global phenomenon. But we're taking action.

That's, in fact, why we brought forward to this House Bill 41. Bill 41 clarified, amongst other things, the definition of a minor injury with respect to automobile accidents. Certainly, our actuaries as well as industry actuaries all agreed that by providing that additional clarity, a similar definition to that used in Atlantic Canada and elsewhere, we would expect to see approximately \$120 of premium relief for every Albertan in terms of vehicle insurance. At the same time we added additional care in Bill 41 so that Albertans who had the misfortune of being injured in an automobile accident would in fact be able to access more care. So, Madam Chair, we are taking action.

You know, we hear from members on the opposite side, time after time, their reference to massive profitability in the insurance industry, and there's no doubt that insurance companies are profitable. Madam Chair, I've had a real interest in that question myself. I believe fundamentally that it's government's role to create a very, very competitive business environment, an environment that encourages more players to be active in a marketplace. Right now we have approximately 45 insurers in Alberta offering automobile insurance to consumers. We want to see that number go up because I believe that with increased competition we'll see better value for Albertans.

I have inquired with my department, who inquired with the body who is ultimately responsible for gathering statistics... [interjections] Madam Chair, the members opposite are heckling. They should listen because they're going to learn something right now. I have inquired with the statistical agency that gathers statistics with respect to premiums, losses, and profitability for Alberta insurers, in fact for insurers across this country. What I have found is that in 2020 – and this is statistical information that's available, I believe, to the public, certainly to the department, and I'm happy to provide it – on average insurers had a profit in the automobile insurance industry market. They made on average net \$11.59 per vehicle insured, and that's a profit. I was interested, you know: are they making \$300, \$400 a vehicle? Are they in a loss position like they have been in some years? No, they were in a profitable position in 2020, netting \$11.59 per vehicle.

Madam Chair, I'm not suggesting that automobile insurance premiums are low. They're not. But what that tells me is that we need to deal with the systemic issues that are driving up costs in the sector. That's how we'll ultimately provide better value for Alberta automobile insurance consumers, and that's why we brought in Bill 41. The good news is that at this point in time we're seeing automobile insurance premiums flatten out, level out, which is very encouraging because even under the NDP rate cap they were going up, at a minimum, 5 per cent per year. They're levelling out right now, and we're continuing to monitor that. It's our role to ensure that we have a regulatory framework that provides an efficient, effective automobile insurance experience for insurance companies but, more importantly, for Alberta consumers. We continue to monitor our progress.

With respect to Bill 16 we're taking action. Last fall we passed I believe it was Bill 76, the captive insurance corporations act, which effectively enabled captive insurance companies to exist and operate here in the province of Alberta. That was tangible action to deal with an insurance challenge. In Bill 16 we are further enhancing that captive insurance corporations act to provide clarification around redomestication if an Alberta company has a captive insurance subsidiary domiciled outside of the nation.

This additional clarity will make it easier for these Alberta parent companies to redomesticate their captives into the province, with a goal of expanding the insurance industry in Alberta, expanding solutions and options for, ultimately, insurance consumers and for growing our financial services sector right here in Alberta. I have to say that when we enabled captive insurance in the province, it was very well received by Alberta parent companies who have captives domiciled elsewhere, but also it was very well received by other entities within the province who were considering a captive insurance company as an insurance solution.

Bill 16 also enables reinsurance and, maybe more importantly, offers a well-understood corporate structure that has served Alberta businesses, companies, entities very well in other applications, and that's the use of a limited partnership. We've taken advice from an expert committee around insurance. Certainly, this was a recommendation that they believed would be important, would move the meter in terms of attracting attention and investment in the reinsurance space. That's what Bill 16 is all about.

4:40

I have to say, Madam Chair, that we recognize that insurance costs are high, but we're taking action. We're working to ensure we have the most favourable regulatory environment in this province so that businesses can set up shop here in Alberta and offer Albertans the most cost-effective insurance products available, possible.

Madam Chair, I could contrast that to the efforts of the NDP when they were in office. Their ultimate move was simply to put a rate cap

in place. I think we all recognize that if a rate cap is put in place – if we as a government legislate what businesses can charge but don't deal with the systemic issues that are driving up their costs, what happens? Companies that work in that space just start to pull out, start to pull back. We were starting to see that. Had we left that rate cap in place, I am very confident that we would have had massive capacity by this point in time pull out of the insurance industry in Alberta, leaving fewer players, fewer choices for Albertans. Ultimately, if left in place without dealing with the systemic issues driving up costs, it would have led to a collapse in the insurance industry, and that would have been unacceptable to Albertans.

Madam Chair, I appreciate the chance to rise and debate Bill 16 in Committee of the Whole, and I'll cede the rest of my time.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 16 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. deputy government whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 15 and report Bill 16.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 16. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 15.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 11 Continuing Care Act

Ms Gray moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not carried out sufficient consultations on the contents of the bill with families whose loved ones lost their lives from COVID-19 while in continuing care.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment May 2: Member Irwin]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we are on amendment RA1. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Before I begin speaking about Bill 11 – I know it's not customary under current standing orders, but I think in this instance you'll make an exception – I just want to recognize that our previous Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Brian Hodgson, is here visiting. Perhaps he became a little nostalgic and wanted to be back inside the House. I just wanted to say that it's wonderful to see you, sir. I hope that you're doing well, and I'm wishing you and your family the very best.

Of course, we are discussing Bill 11, Continuing Care Act. We have before us a reasoned amendment, and of course this is so that the proposed piece of legislation just not carry forward. I think that on this side of the House we've been able to demonstrate significantly that although this bill is an administrative piece of legislation, there are so many other things that the Minister of Health has failed to address when it actually comes to continuing care here in the province of Alberta.

Now, of course, continuing care legislation and rules are split between many different acts and regulation, including the Nursing Homes Act, the Hospitals Act, the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act, and the co-ordinated home and community care regulation. Bill 11 consolidates various acts so that different parts of continuing care, both home care and facility-based care, have similar processes, governing legislation. Notably, the bill does not make much significant change since most of the substantial aspects of care, which are, of course, the fees, the standards, and the staffing, are all going to be decided through regulation, Madam Speaker. I think that I along with my colleagues have been able to demonstrate significantly that these are the things that most Albertans are truly concerned about when it comes to this particular bill. It's disheartening to see that they're not being addressed in legislation.

Of course, so many Albertans, those particularly who have family in care, are really concerned about staffing and the ratios. It's been proposed before, and I don't know why it's something that the Minister of Health couldn't potentially actually put forward in the legislation here today, but staffing ratios in relation to the amount of people in continuing care are a serious situation that could have been dealt with within this piece of legislation. Of course, staffing and the issues that people who work in this particular line of work experience are a considerable issue that could have been addressed in Bill 11 as well, and unfortunately we just didn't see it.

I mean, it's not just coming from us on this side of the House. The facility-based continuing care review highlighted so many of these issues that we're currently bringing up. I mean, just fees alone: it's quite incredible the amount that people have to pay in order to keep a loved one in continuing care here in the province of Alberta.

You know, we just finished hearing this diatribe from the Minister of Finance saying that in relation to insurance – of course, he was debating another bill. He was saying that you welcome privatization in and costs are supposed to go down. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on this side was, like: well, how many companies have to come in in order to bring that price down, to bring that cost down here in the province of Alberta when it came to insurance? The minister said that there are currently 45, so how many do we need? Do we need 100? Do we need 200? How many? Then again, when it comes to continuing care facilities, is that the type of thing that we want to be bringing into the province of Alberta? How many continuing care companies are we going to need in order to drive down the price for continuing care here in the province of Alberta, which in essence is the service of caring for loved ones with dignity?

Because the staffing ratios aren't there, that's not what Albertans are getting, and you have this paradox because, you know, the company is trying to obtain the greatest amount of profit through this process as possible. What are your two major expenses in any

business? Well, it's going to be your rent or the mortgage you're paying on the business in order to conduct that business and then labour. Of course, in the continuing care industry you have these private operators trying to do their very best to lower their costs, because that's how private business works when they're trying to achieve greater and greater and greater profits.

4:50

That's why this is so important. Yes, we are leaving this industry or opening up this industry to the free market, but at the same time there need to be certain regulations in place because, number one, we're talking about the service of caring for people in continuing care with dignity and respect. You can't just leave that entirely up to the market. You cannot leave that entirely up to the market and for operators to basically just come up with their own rules and hope for the best. So, yes, we do need regulation when it comes to people in care to make sure that they are treated with dignity and respect. The bare minimum that the government could do is actually provide in legislation ratios for staffing to people in care. I think that this would be the bare minimum that the government could provide, yet the Minister of Health has omitted that very suggestion that has come from a number of advocates and stakeholders in this particular industry.

It's saddening, really, because I honestly believe that a lot of seniors especially are not being treated with dignity and care inside of these facilities. We've all heard the horror stories, so why can't we agree on this? Okay. I'll give it to the members on the other side. You know, I'll let them have – certain things, yes, should be just left to the free market, but this is not one of them, especially our seniors in this province, that have dedicated their entire lives contributing to our society. This is definitely not one of them.

As I've explained time and again in this House, when it comes to the free market and the laws of supply and demand, you're going to have people that are going to be able to access – you're just not going to be able to get people that will access the level and quality of care that they deserve in a free-market system. This is what's so disheartening, that we see this government pushing us more and more and more when it comes to not only this industry but almost everything in the province of Alberta, pushing us more and more towards a free market, to free-market principles, right?

We have the Minister of Infrastructure and the fact that, you know, he's completely open to P3s even though we've seen in jurisdiction after jurisdiction the horrible application of P3s. You know, essentially, it's a way that governments can actually hide costs when they're balancing the books, but those costs are still there in the long run, never mind, Madam Speaker, when you're talking about the externalities, as I've mentioned several times in this House. It's almost like you're trying to save a buck today, but you're going to end up having to pay exponentially later. That's why I don't understand why the members on the other side can't see that, right? It's disheartening to see that even though you have statistical studies out there, that we could reference, where it's not always the answer – and this is definitely not one of them.

For that reason, I would really hope – and I know it's a long shot – that all members in this House will actually vote in favour of this amendment. Now, we've had the opportunity to debate, and I'm really happy that the Minister of Health has actually gotten up, especially in Committee of the Whole, and has addressed some of the issues that we've brought up in debate, but of course he hasn't talked about all of them. He hasn't addressed them all when it comes to this particular piece of legislation.

As I already mentioned, the government has not acted on several recommendations from the facility-based continuing care review, and you can't help but ask: well, what are they waiting for? They've

been in government for three years now. For three years they've been in government, and I get it. When you're in government, you have certain priorities, and you want to get certain things done. Sometimes you can get to everything, but on this one, on treating especially our seniors with the dignity and respect that they deserve, you'd think that this would be one that's important, the one that they would move on when it comes to the facility-based continuing care review. Of course, that review stated that there needs to be an increase in the amount of home care provided, just that alone; then, again, improving work conditions for continuing care staff.

I've already highlighted it in debate, but I believe that it bears repetition here once again, and that is the fact that the majority of the people that actually work in this industry are new Canadians, racialized people. Because of the fact that we have private continuing care operators that, again, are seeking the greatest amount of profit by providing this service, these staff are paid the lowest wages and then, on top of that, don't have benefits. Why? It tends to be racialized Canadians. When you're a racialized individual and you look at this scenario and you see that whenever it comes to the private sector – and the only job that you can get is within that private sector – you're treated with no benefits and lower wages, you start asking yourself: well, why is this? Why am I being treated as a second-class citizen?

Ultimately, you know, there are a number of issues of fairness that need to be dealt with here as well, and that's another reason why the Minister of Health could have come forward with a proposed piece of legislation that could actually address these issues, because racialized individuals within this province are feeling discriminated against. You know, I remember my mother, of course, coming to this country, having to learn English, and I remember having many a discussion with her and her feeling the very same way, that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to amendment RA1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to offer some comments on this amendment. Let me just follow up on some of the things that my friend from Edmonton-Ellerslie was talking about during his speech. You know, he was talking about his opinion that the continuing care sector is not one that should be dominated by market forces, if I could summarize it succinctly like that. Let me just build on that and say that I firmly and strongly believe that for-profit continuing care service is immoral. It is not right that people should profit off caring for the sick and the elderly and people who are not able to look after themselves. That's not to say that I don't think people should make a living being able to look after that. I think that people who work in the health care field should absolutely be able to look after themselves while they're looking after others who need it, but I do not believe that investors, shareholders should profit off people's pain and suffering.

5:00

I'm not the only one who believes that, Madam Speaker. In doing a little bit of research around the history of continuing care in the province of Alberta, it was astounding to me that the Social Credit government of this province also agreed that it was immoral to profit off caring for people who needed it in the long term. They made it illegal to profit off caring for people who were in long-term care facilities. I think that that is something that the province of Alberta would have been wise to continue.

I can see that my friend the Minister of Infrastructure is again audibly sighing listening to my speeches. I would encourage the minister that if he takes issue with the things that I have to say, either he can get up and respond to them, or he can remove himself

from the Chamber. But interjecting in this way is not helpful and only serves to lower the tone of the debate in this House.

On this particular amendment, though, the amendment is worded such that this bill – if the amendment is passed, this bill would not be read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the minister didn't adequately consult with the families whose loved ones lost their lives from COVID-19 while in continuing care. As we've said over and over again in this House, hundreds of people lost their lives to COVID while in continuing care. This bill does absolutely nothing to address the circumstances that led to that happening or make any attempt to try to fix it.

In fact, the minister is so closed off to the idea of addressing the problems that led to the deaths of so many people in continuing care due to COVID that he refuses to even open up public consultations on the matter. When I asked the minister the last time that we had a chance to talk about this a few days ago – I asked him directly if he would allow some forum, some public forum, for the families who have lost their loved ones to COVID to at least have their stories heard, to at least be able to tell the minister and the people in the Health department who are responsible for continuing care what happened to their loved ones who died from COVID. What did the minister say? He brushed it off. He said: "No, we don't need any more consultation. We've done enough consultation on this matter." He's not interested in listening to people share their stories about this anymore. That's completely offensive.

There's been no public consultation whatsoever on how government has managed the COVID crisis in continuing care or anywhere else. I know of no forum where the families and friends of people who died of COVID in continuing care can even submit their stories for consideration.

Mr. Carson: No Seniors Advocate.

Mr. Schmidt: There's no Seniors Advocate anymore.

People are left to carry this grief, mourn their loss on their own, with no hope of any improvement for people who are still living in the continuing care system and at risk of dying of COVID. I don't think that that's fair. I don't think that that's responsible government. At the very least, give people an opportunity to share their stories so that their loved ones didn't die completely in vain. I mean, it's too late now to take actions that could have prevented the deaths of the people who we've already lost, but it's not too late to take preventative measures to make sure that it doesn't happen to anyone else.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

COVID certainly hasn't gone anywhere, as much as the government refuses to admit that it's a problem anymore, won't talk about it anymore. COVID hospitalizations are as high as they've ever been, with the exception of a few days in January of 2022. So the risks of residents of long-term care dying from COVID, I would suggest, are as high now as they've ever been at any point during the pandemic, and the minister doesn't want to hear a word about it.

That's why I'm encouraging all of my colleagues here in the House to vote in favour of this amendment. Give the government time to construct a meaningful consultation process with the families and loved ones of those who died of COVID in continuing care. Hear what they have to say. I'm sure they'll offer some suggestions on how continuing care facilities could be safer. We could also make sure that we bring in experts or people from other jurisdictions who've done a better job of managing COVID. Now is not the time to be passing this piece of legislation. We need to give the families of the people who died a voice. We need to validate their experiences and show that we've learned from our mistakes and are doing better.

So for those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues here in the House to vote in favour of this amendment and give the families of those who we've lost to COVID hope for justice of some kind.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate on RA1? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to this reasoned amendment. I offer a few thoughts that I will begin with by recognizing the tremendous number of front-line workers in the long-term care and assisted living sector in Lethbridge. We have a large number of seniors and folks over 65 in varying levels of congregate care and a great deal of home-care workers as well as a result of the demographics of the city.

Indeed, people have worked through tremendously challenging conditions through the pandemic. Certainly, long-term care and assisted living in particular and home care, I would argue, are areas where folks are just managing at the best of times. During the pandemic people were asked to go over and above, oftentimes without, especially in the early days, appropriate PPE, without having any explicit rules around working in one site, often without those full-time hours and that full-time employment, which we know leads to better outcomes both for the staff and folks who continue to see themselves in these personal care professions but also over time in terms of the outcomes and health care outcomes for people even absent a pandemic but certainly during it.

There is no question that we owe these front-line workers a great debt of gratitude. In fact, when I was reading through the Royal Society paper on COVID-19 and its effect on long-term care, the Royal Society of Canada indicates that this is an area where the workforce is prone to a great deal of burnout and leaving this line of work. Even still, people in these areas of work report a great deal of satisfaction with their jobs.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, oftentimes people working in these areas are providing a voice to the voiceless. The frail elderly have shockingly few advocates, and oftentimes in assisted living there is more family interaction because the family is taking up a great deal of the care work with respect to getting their elderly parent often to appointments and so on. But in long-term care the isolation became even more pronounced during the pandemic, and it was oftentimes the workers that filled in those gaps, certainly, during the pandemic.

We had 1,600 Albertans perish of COVID-19 in congregate living facilities, seniors, during the pandemic. By contrast, in Quebec there has been a coroner's inquiry when 4,000 people died, and it's quite a larger province. That coroner's inquiry called 220 witnesses, including a couple of ministers. In Ontario, which also saw a great deal of deaths in long-term care and assisted living, they had a commission that just recently submitted its final report to government.

In Alberta we have an Auditor General who has looked into the issue but was blocked, specifically blocked, from making his findings on his investigation into the COVID-19 response in long-term care and assisted living in Alberta by UCP MLAs who blocked his request, refused it, voted it down a couple of times, for him to make those findings public and answer questions about those findings at the June meeting of the Public Accounts Committee.

I believe that families, front-line workers, and the residents themselves deserve better. I believe that the isolation and the stress of the pandemic and the separation from family and loved ones was quite likely exacerbated by understaffing and had a great deal of

effect on people in their final days. I believe this because I saw it up close. I shared with this House watching someone in the final year of her life move from assisted living into long-term care and back to acute care and back to long-term care during the context of the pandemic. People didn't get what they deserved, certainly, or even what they needed in terms of their health care needs at that time.

We see a workforce, Mr. Speaker, that is disproportionately women, immigrants, and racial minorities. We see a workforce that in Alberta, by the government's own figures, is short approximately 6,000 FTEs. We see a long-term care and assisted living system whereby private, for-profit care settings fared worse through the pandemic, where we see lower ratios, potentially lower investments in building maintenance, in PPE, and lower pay.

We certainly see a situation in Alberta where creativity for quality of life was not at all – not at all – something that we were able to see our way through to providing for people. People were reduced to waving at each other through windows rather than having the appropriate staff ratios and enough personal care aides to get elderly people outside so that they could engage with their family members, sometimes at the end of their lives. We haven't seen any level of accountability, not even allowing the Auditor General to speak to the public about his findings on this.

We have seen the minister get up and be very proud of his legislation because it provides a better administrative and statutory framework. Well, I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. That does not exactly rouse the enthusiasm of families and those living in long-term care and assisted living through the pandemic. That's not what leads to quality of life, a better administrative framework. This sort of bureaucratise is no salve for what people actually need. What people actually need is a commitment from government that "the fractures in our nursing home system," as they are referred to in the Royal Society of Canada report on the matter, resulted in "high levels of physical, mental and emotional suffering for our older adults."

I'll quote directly from this Royal Society report because it actually hit home for me.

Those lives lost unnecessarily . . .

They're referring to the COVID-19 pandemic.

. . . had value. Those older adults deserved a good closing phase of their lives and a good death. We failed them. We have a duty to care and to fix this – not just to fix the current communicable disease crisis, but to fix the sector that enabled that crisis to wreak such avoidable and tragic havoc. We have the capacity, the knowledge and the resources to take immediate steps toward restoring the trust we have broken. This is our choice.

That's directly from the Royal Society of Canada working paper on long-term care, that came out by June 2020. Canadian researchers got straight to work on the extremely important public policy conversations that needed to come out of COVID-19 and the level of accountability and what we needed to learn and how we needed to measure it as a result of this crisis in long-term care and assisted living.

That is what we have been asking for as an Official Opposition as an approach to this issue. There is nothing in this legislation in terms of measurement, metrics, data gathering, any kind of evaluation, any kind of guarantee of better outcomes. One can put those things in legislation. One can give those statutory expression. There's nothing stopping us from doing it except that this government will not. It won't even have the conversation about better quality of life for elderly people, let alone learn anything from what we've just been through over the last two years.

Now, the government's own facility-based review exercise, unimplemented, indicates, as I shared with the House, 6,000 FTEs required. Other organizations have also studied this matter of

learning from the COVID-19 pandemic in long-term care. Again, the Royal Society's executive summary indicates that

provincial and territorial governments must make available full-time employment with benefits to all unregulated staff and regulated nursing staff. They should also evaluate the impact on nursing homes of "one workplace" policies,"

as I discussed. By the way, parenthetically, Mr. Speaker, this is something that was happening all across the country. Alberta was months behind other jurisdictions on the one-workplace policy. I remember the government providing various excuses for this monumentally unsafe approach to our nursing homes, our long-term care and assisted living facilities. They tried to blame the unions or something, but it was completely ridiculous. All they needed to do was make it happen and appropriately fund it, which they did not do, which put people's lives at risk.

We also need better continuing education for the unregulated and regulated direct care workforce and, really important to a conversation we've been having recently in this House, around data collection in all appropriate spheres. One of the recommendations of the Royal Society indicates that

data collected must include resident quality of care . . . quality of life, resident and family experiences, and quality of work life for staff.

It sure would be easier to collect that sort of data if we still had an office of the independent seniors' advocate, Mr. Speaker, which we do not, that this bill could have restored.

I'm back to the Royal Society report now.

Data must be collected using validated, appropriate tools . . . must address disparities and compounding vulnerabilities among both residents and staff, such as race, ethnicity, language, gender identity, guardianship status, socioeconomic status, religion, physical or intellectual disability status, and trauma history screening;

in other words, making sure that our care for our elderly people appropriately fits in ways that we now make sure and understand that we need to deliver all of our provincial services, whether it's health care, education, social services, housing, justice services, and so on. The extent to which we care about this issue is the extent to which I believe we care about our whole human family, from beginning to end.

5:20

I'm going to conclude with a quote from Carole Estabrooks, who is a U of A researcher and professor. She's quoted here in a University of Alberta Folio piece on some of the national standards and other investments and recommendations that the Royal Society made in the wake of the first wave of the pandemic. This quote really stood out to me.

In the end, Estabrooks said she is hopeful that change is coming, but worries about those who suggest the cost will be too high.

"It is going to cost more, and the federal government is going to have to help," she said. "At the end of the day, it's as simple as, "What can you expect when you live in Canada and get old? Will you be cared for in such a way that you not only have good quality care, but you also have a good quality of life, even in advanced dementia?"

"What is that life – that life that raised us, that built the economy, that paid taxes – what is it really worth to us?"

These are Carole Estabrooks' words, but I think this, too.

I think it is worth a lot, that the value we place on a life lived should be no less than that which we place on one about to be lived.

This is health care by yet another name, Mr. Speaker, but it extends into an area of our lives that we have allowed to wither, believing that we can have some people pay for it and other people just be isolated away with very small levels of care delivered by

workers who are not honoured in the appropriate way for their time and their talent.

That is why this bill just is not good enough. It does not reflect the level of urgency, the social and economic need for a real reckoning with how we approach long-term care and assisted living. It is for that reason that I speak in favour of this reasoned amendment, and I exhort the members of this House to recommit ourselves to do better by our most frail, elderly people, who are often, too often, left voiceless.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Are there other members looking to join on RA1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. As I had an opportunity to speak to the body of it before, I just will take a moment to reiterate sort of the central theme, and that is that I certainly am supportive of the ongoing work to improve continuing care, and I certainly agree with the expansion of home care that is intended by this bill.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

I was, you know, quite clear when I first spoke to this that there are a number of parts of the bill that I really support. I mentioned section 20, section 49, section 48, and many others. I took the time at that time to talk about the pieces that I appreciate because I really, certainly, want members of the government to understand that any of my criticisms are about improving the bill and moving it forward and doing good work, good work based on some work done by members of the government side.

I mean, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was involved in the facility-based continuing care review as the chair of the committee and spoke quite well about the amount of work that went in, the number of people that were consulted with, which, you know, became the basis of this act. At the time I commended that member – and I continue to – and, of course, all of the people that participated in that review, putting the time in to ensure that there was deep consideration for the issues that are at hand here.

The thing that I am concerned about and the reason why I'm standing now to agree to this amendment is because I think that work that was done by the facility-based continuing care review is not adequately reflected in this bill. There's no reason for it not to be. Certainly, many of the recommendations from that review could be brought forward, and I would like to see the government actually take the time to do exactly that. You've done the hard work; just finish it off. Don't get two steps before the finish line and then stop and pause. You know, that's the old fable of the rabbit and the tortoise. The tortoise ends up winning only because the rabbit actually stops in mid-motion. It doesn't continue at the pace that it was initially headed out in. What I would like to see, for once, is the rabbit to win. Just continue the work that was started quite well by this facility-based continuing care review. That's the most important piece.

But I want to take my time to talk about something a little different than what has been talked about by others up until this point, and that is my deep desire to see a serious amount of attention being put on home care and the expansion of home-care services so that things are available for citizens in this province that are actually already available in many other jurisdictions around the world.

I happened to have the opportunity, while I was vice-president of family services at Catholic Social Services, to be responsible for a program that was examining the role that Catholic Social Services may take in expanding home care. I had an opportunity to work for a few years on a pretty extensive review of what's possible in home care, where it is conducted. It is now some almost 20 years ago – I'm too old

– that we took the time to actually look at what is possible in home care. Unfortunately, it has not moved forward very well in this province at this time. People are still in the position where unless they have a family member who is able to surrender their employment and provide for them, they're most likely going to end up in some kind of continuing care if their health requires it.

Now, thankfully, medicine has also moved us to a point where many people are able to stay in their own homes throughout the duration of their life, with very little time in any kind of a care facility and many even with no time in care facilities. Thank you to all the great health care practitioners that have made sure that that is now a reality for many people in society. I certainly wish this government would spend as much time celebrating that kind of success as they spend fighting with doctors and nurses and trying to take the money away from respiratory therapists and so on.

The thing I want to talk about most as absent in this bill and the reason why we need the amendment is because there really has been a lack of effort in moving home care along. I understand partly why, because it is indeed a complex issue. The issue isn't simply an issue of health. It's also an issue of social demography and responsibility and employment and pensions and benefits and all those other things that come up, and that is that when someone is in the state of having ill health, we have a medical system that often can deal with the issues of health in terms of pain management or of slowing down at least, if not reversing, actual health conditions and trauma to the body.

But often the reason why people move into continuing care is not their health itself but their ability to respond to daily needs. Those daily needs are often not health needs but, rather, the other kinds of needs that someone has. You can be at home and have your health maintained, but if you can't get out the door to go buy groceries, you've got a problem. If you can't, you know, clean your floors, if you can't clean your bathrooms, if you can't do your laundry, if you can't make your bed, these are all issues that come to the place where you start to say: I can no longer live alone. It's not because the medical system isn't able to help you manage the health problems that you have, but the complexity of managing those in a solitary situation is very problematic.

5:30

I remember my mother used to joke that she wished she had a little drawer with a man inside that she could just open up maybe once a day and have them do one or two tasks and then put them back in the drawer and close the drawer again. The reason why is because she needed help with specific tasks, and although, you know – lots of children in our family – we all came by regularly to see her until COVID made that very difficult, we clearly were not there full time every single day. That meant that while tasks would get done, they would get done at the convenience of people who were not resident in the home. Therefore, whenever we happened to come by, there would be the jars on the counter: "While you're here, could you open these jars and put them in the fridge for me? Can you move these boxes of things? Can you put some more things into my fridge from the storage room?" You know, a variety of small tasks like that.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

It is a very complex area, and we need to take the time to look at: what is it that helps an individual to stay in their own home beyond the issues of health management? If we continue to neglect those kinds of problems, we are never going to be able to ensure that people are able to stay in their own home. At some point they are going to give up because they simply can't do all the tasks.

Now, one of the things I know is that people in society are very kind and generous. They certainly do things like volunteer to shovel walks, and often a neighbour is great at helping to pick up groceries and so on. But the problem with charity is that it is always at the whim of the charity giver. It is not consistent. It is not organized around the needs of the recipient; it's organized around the availability and the desires of the giver of charity, which is why we have systematically moved away from a charity model to a more structural model of care in our society to ensure that people are well taken care of.

In other areas in our lives it would be considered absurd if we said: "Well, let's not teach children how to read. Let's just depend on the charity of others to teach the children in their lives how to read." You would say that's silly. We send them to school and make sure that a hundred per cent of the children have the opportunity, not just the ones who happen to have someone around who happens to have the time and so on.

So we can't depend on charity because it is by its nature unreliable and, by its nature, is not focused on the needs of the individual receiving it. You know, charity as a moral imperative is wonderful because it impels people to actually do some things about it, but very few people say the ultimate: I am going to give up all of my own needs in terms of employment and earning an income and the benefits and pensions that come with that in order to take care of somebody else because they have a greater need than me. I certainly know people that have done that, and I have deep, deep respect for that, but that is so rare that it is ridiculous for us as a society to depend on that kind of thing.

Then there's also the question about who it is that inevitably ends up giving up all of their own personal benefits – their job, their benefits, their pension plans, and so on – and the vast majority of time that falls on women and is not equally distributed with men. So we have a systemic problem here. We have a problem that if we do not provide adequate home care in the way that it should be provided, we are essentially asking women to do what we would never ask men to do, and that is to give up their employment to take care of another.

Now, I know that's not the intention. We say, "Well, anybody can do that," but we know statistically that doesn't happen. Statistically it's women that end up losing their income, losing their choice, and losing their own mechanisms of well-being in order to provide care. It is therefore important that as a society we not allow that to happen, not allow a systemic discrimination to continue to occur, and we should establish a structure that provides for the well-being of all citizens that does not depend on discriminating against one group over another. That's just something that's no longer acceptable in our society. As such, we need to make sure that we have a systemic, well-organized, universally accessible, and publicly paid for service that helps to provide expanded home care services so that we can keep people out of continuing care.

Now, this may sound, you know, like pie-in-the-sky idealism on my part. However, from the work I did when I was at Catholic Social Services, I was able to learn that this already existed 20 years ago and is being used in many countries in the world, typically in northern European countries. Finland, Switzerland, Denmark, Holland, Germany all have models that have what I'm talking about to some significant degree. Finland, for example, has an almost completely comprehensive model in which they have been able to reduce the number of people going into continuing care by a significant amount. The vast majority of people, even with needs that make them dependent, whether it be health care or other kinds of in-home care needs – it's down now to a very, very minimal number of people that are going into care. I think that's good. I think that's positive.

I think it's something that we should aspire to and something that we can achieve simply by learning from other jurisdictions, which is exactly the point of this amendment, that we are seeking to have this no longer move ahead until we've done the work to actually make this section of the bill more robust and to deal with the issues that are in front of us. We know that not only should we do it in order to avoid systemic discrimination against one group in society, but we can do it because it is being done in jurisdictions that are very similar to our own. It's simply a matter of political choice. Are we prepared to do what we can to ensure that people stay in their own homes and live the good life that they possibly could live, or are we prepared to just say, "No, people are just going to have to suffer and go into longer term care situations, which are certainly not as satisfying as living in your own home"?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has stood.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this afternoon, or evening, to speak to the proposed amendment before us, that, again:

Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not carried out sufficient consultations on the contents of the bill with families whose loved ones lost their lives from COVID-19 while in continuing care.

I completely support this amendment. I've appreciated the points that have been made by several speakers before me this afternoon. It's going to be hard for me to do a better job than that. That's just simply the fact.

But I, like many of my colleagues before me, have concerns with Bill 11. First of all, I guess, just reflecting on the decisions that this government has made previously in regard to long-term care sites – you may remember that back in April 2021, I believe, we saw this government put forward legal liability protections for continuing care or long-term care providers. At the time we were seeing – about 61 per cent of deaths, I believe, from COVID-19 at that time were happening in these long-term care sites or facilities or homes. I think, Mr. Speaker, that's a devastating fact and figure and clearly shows that this UCP government and we as a society did not do enough to protect the seniors in those communities.

But at the point of seeing this high amount of life loss in our communities and across the province, instead of increasing protections and increasing quality of care for seniors across the province, this government decided to add legal protections for these long-term care facilities and these long-term care companies. Unfortunately, since then we have not seen much work done to improve the quality of care, to improve reporting, necessarily, or monitoring of these facilities.

5:40

We have heard from many speakers before me this afternoon reflecting on what we saw from this government: the facility-based continuing care review. I would repeat and echo the comments of previous speakers that there was a real opportunity to make impactful change for seniors and for families across this province if only the government followed through on the proposals that were put forward in this review. There were many important pieces within this that would have been attainable from this government, but, again, as we look at Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, the most consequential amendment that we see in here in terms of holding these companies and these long-term care sites accountable is an amendment talking about increasing the amount that an operator can be fined to \$100,000 from \$10,000.

While I can appreciate that, on one hand I think we must also reflect on the fact that through the COVID-19 pandemic and onward we have not seen any movement from the government to strengthen regulations, to strengthen the requirements to provide quality of care, to monitor things like staffing and the idea of staffing burnout, and ensuring that we don't see staff going from one facility to another.

As we heard from previous speakers, often this type of work can be precarious. The people on the front lines are well intentioned and trained, often as best as they can be, but the fact is that in many instances there aren't benefits being provided to these workers and there aren't full-time opportunities. That is something that was spoken to in the facility-based continuing care review recommendations from the final report on April 30, 2021. It discussed the fact that in many instances these workers were not getting full-time employment, that they were potentially going from one site to another and had the potential to create further spread of COVID-19.

It truly doesn't seem like this government has learned anything from this report, as good as it may be, which is truly unfortunate because they had a real opportunity to make choices, and they could have been reflected in this Bill 11. But, unfortunately, we see very little in terms of the recommendations that were put forward in this report. Again, when we look at some of the topics that it talked about and issues and concerns, the need for an increased focus on quality of life and person-centred care for facility-based continuing care residents, have we seen anything to prove that the government has made any changes to this model and ensuring that regulations and rules that are in place are increasing the quality of life for these families?

There's no doubt that it has been incredibly complicated and complex keeping seniors safe but also ensuring that they have a better quality of life and ensuring that they are able to stay integrated into their community, whether they are in their home but, more specifically, in a long-term care site. But the fact is that the government hasn't taken any steps required in terms of ensuring that there's adequate staffing, ensuring that those staff feel that they have mental health supports in place, ensuring that those staff have benefits that are going to ensure that they don't have to go and get a second job, that they don't have to go to several long-term care homes to be able to support their own family, let alone the families that they are trying to support in these sites.

Again, some of the other recommendations in terms of improving co-ordination for monitoring and inspections. This truly goes back to the idea that, again, not only is this government trying to reduce the liability to these long-term care companies and again, through Bill 11, increasing the fines, but increasing fines does nothing. It means nothing if you aren't increasing the regulations and the requirements of these facilities to provide adequate quality of life, to provide adequate monitoring to ensure that the families that are relying on these sites and on these homes are getting adequate support.

We saw this tragic story play out – and very unlikely that it was a unique situation here in Alberta; I'm sure it's happened in other sites, but I'm not sure that we've learned anything from it – in the story of the family who found that their senior or their parent had been mistreated in a facility, that they had died from dehydration, that they weren't being provided adequate supports, and that they weren't being taken care of properly. What we saw from that is staff reporting that they were completely burned out, that they didn't have the proper supports to ensure that they could in turn support the families that they were supposed to be caring for. What have we learned from that? Through Bill 11, what we see before us, it seems this government has learned nothing.

As we reflect on this amendment to Bill 11, that it not now be read a second time because we aren't of the view here in the Assembly that sufficient consultation on the contents has been carried out, I again completely agree with that amendment. I think it's completely

reasonable, that what we see in Bill 11 is not adequate in terms of supporting the families across the province who have not received the proper care and support that they should expect from this government and that they would expect from any government.

I think that there was also an important point, that I believe the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford made and likely several other members, about the need for more long-term home care, and that is reflected in that report, that report recommending that we shift the current distribution here in Alberta of continuing care services from 61 per cent long-term home care and 39 per cent facility-based continuing care to a ratio of 70 per cent and 30 per cent. What movement have we seen from the government with this expert review report coming back to them and having a year to reflect on the important issues that have been raised by this report? What movement have we seen on that?

I know that when we look at the supports that are provided by this government and the decision from this government to deindex important benefits like the Alberta seniors' benefit, that this year alone is costing many seniors \$750 a year – of course, that would only increase year after year when it was previously indexed. The government went back on that decision, so we are seeing systemically dollars being taken out of the pockets of seniors, and it is only going to see more and more needing further service from the government and increased costs on our health care system across the board, which is completely disappointing but not surprising from this government on the many backwards decisions that they made.

Another one, an important thing that needs to be pointed out and has been by members so far, is the lack of an independent seniors advocate here in the province, the government's decision to not find somebody to fill that position. I've spoken with many people out in the community, whether it be nonprofit organizations who deal with seniors, whether it be aging citizens in my community who are deeply concerned that such an important role, the role of an advocate to, well, Mr. Speaker, advocate on behalf of these seniors – that whether it be about long-term care, whether it be about facilities in their community, whether it be about income supports, whatever the issue might be, they have somebody to go and talk to and potentially get answers. Unfortunately, this government, on such an important role, the seniors advocate, has made the decision to not fill that role. Completely devastating.

5:50

You know, looking at the facility-based continuing care report, again, something that – the UCP government commissioned this report, had the opportunity to reflect on it and improve the services provided to seniors through long-term care and, unfortunately, just didn't follow through with these things. I just do not understand, because in many situations, while some of them likely would cost more money when we are talking about providing adequate staffing levels and providing that mental health support – but these things will pay themselves off in the short term. But in some instances, whether we're talking about expanding home care, their own report shows that it's very likely to save money, so I'm not sure, especially in the continued pandemic that we see ourselves in and the need to provide adequate space and a feeling of belonging to seniors, why we aren't moving forward with that model that has been proposed through this report.

You know, the idea of being able to interact with family members and friends and caregivers has become increasingly difficult through the pandemic. I can appreciate that entirely, that as a representative – and I'm sure many people in the House here have had the opportunity, whether it be for Easter, whether it be for Christmas or any other special event, to go spend time with seniors and, of course, above and beyond that, take time as the representative for these citizens in our community to ask them what

is important to them. Unfortunately, through the pandemic that relationship has completely changed. I can appreciate that, but there would be further opportunities for seniors and families to be able to visit with their family members if they were potentially in home care instead of being locked down in these long-term care homes.

There is so much to be said, Mr. Speaker, on how completely wrong the direction of this government has been, specifically on how we are taking care of our aging population, specifically on the lack of action to strengthen regulations to . . . [Mr. Carson's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join on RA1? I see the hon. Member for Peace River has risen.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak on this amendment on Bill 11. The first thing I want to address is the minister. The Minister of Health, bringing this forward, I think, has done a terrific job on a number of fronts and is beyond reproach when it comes to his sincerity in his desire to see a system that works, works for Albertans and works for seniors. I think that if we start with that premise, understanding that the minister, first of all, when it came to consultation, has been doing this for a long time with the help of other members, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and others, in doing the consultation with the FBCC review – we have to remember that the legislation that we're currently working under is as old as 1985. That's a long time ago for legislation that governs a very important part of health care delivery with continuing care, and it does need updating.

This amendment in particular would suggest that we do not continue in second reading, which would mean the bill would die, would prohibit moving forward on important enabling aspects of that review.

Now, I appreciate that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford made, I think, a very thoughtful speech going into details of why there are many good things in this legislation but, he thought, even better things in the review that are not included in the legislation. The reason for that, as the minister has explained previously in the House and I'll help to try and elaborate now, is because this legislation allows us to do the transformative work from a number of different pieces of legislation. I think it's six different pieces of legislation under one house, one legislative house, updated for today. We're looking at something that's over – what is it? – 35 years old or so. The truth is that this legislation is enabling.

I heard some interesting comments and thoughtful comments from Edmonton-West Henday, who was speaking previously, asking for us to do a number of things. His reason for opposing the bill and for this amendment, which effectively kills the bill, is because there's staffing burnout, and he wants to strengthen regulations. Well, Mr. Speaker, the proper place to strengthen regulations is in the regulations. The legislation itself is an inappropriate place. Obviously, this Chamber needs to be making decisions for the enabling framework so that we can do the transformative work we need to in continuing care. To put the kind of regulations that the members opposite are asking for in legislation would be misplaced and ill advised given the importance of that review that the members opposite also appreciate and see as something that we need to be finishing.

I do think it is important we understand as a Chamber the best way for us as legislators to structure the future generation of continuing care. It would be a mistake for us if we did that in a short-sighted way and overloaded our legislation with details that need to be changed and updated. As we can see, there's much legislation and demand on this House, and the very fact that we have not updated this since 1985 is a testament to that. That was back when we had even fewer pieces of legislation as a government,

fewer bills that we needed to manage, continue to update. Technology and best practices are continuing to advance very, very quickly in all fields, particularly when it comes to health care, this important piece.

The Member for Edmonton-West Henday also talked about staffing arrangements, working in multiple facilities. I could not think of a worse place to deal with staffing arrangements than in a piece of legislation. It strikes me as very, very much something that ought to be in regulation or in policy. Many of these very important points that are being brought up are right to be brought up. The truth is, Mr. Speaker, as the minister has promised in this House and in public, that they will be addressed. We take very, very seriously the FBCC review, and the reason we take it so seriously is because we know it's transformative. It's important for future generations and perhaps even some in this Chamber to have the continuing care that we need, but that will not happen if we try and bog down the legislation in ways that cannot be updated in appropriate ways as these changes come about.

Then another part that I would like to bring up particularly is surrounding home care. Now, the work in home care I think the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is very right to bring up as paramount. In my own review that I did when it came to end-of-life and palliative care, it also came across brightly as one of the most important points that we need to invest in, and it's true as well in the FBCC review. I think that is obvious to all members of this House, on all sides.

I'm very happy to report that the 2022 budget that we passed – unfortunately, members opposite voted against it – is increasing home care by \$81 million, totalling that to a \$750 million investment. Now, for that money to be spent in an appropriate way, for it to be able to enable home care in its most effective way so that we get as many folks in continuing care with as many supports as possible in the comfort of their own homes, in the way that we all believe they ought to be cared for, we need to have the legislation and the framework there to do it.

When we heard the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar say that this is not the time to be passing this legislation, I could not disagree more.

The exact opposite is true, Mr. Speaker. We absolutely need to be passing it today. Any more delays are only delays on the care that we ought to be delivering. Any more delays now, any more filibuster, any more proposed amendments, reasoned or hoist or otherwise, are continuing to slow down the work of this House and, effectively, the work of that review that we want to be implementing in the appropriate space, in the space of policy, in the space of regulation, as it ought to be done.

I encourage the members opposite to take up their own challenge and to move forward so that we can vote against this amendment, for the bill, get it out of second reading, look at any thoughtful, genuine amendments when it comes to Committee of the Whole, and get it passed. Our seniors, those who worked so hard to build this province, those who have laboured so much to build the families and the communities and all the civil society we care so much about, deserve it. They deserve very much to see us move forward as serious legislators, as adults in this Chamber, and say: "We agree on the importance of the review. We think the review is right in its recommendations. We think home care should be enabled, that the \$81 million ought to be spent in the best possible way."

We need to be serving these individuals, and the way to do that is by putting aside any differences that you might have over questions of allocation of staffing when it comes to the legislation, because the right place for that is on an operational basis. Legislation should not be dealing with those sorts of intimate operational questions of who is staffed, in what building, when.

I think, Mr. Speaker, the important thing that we need to do is vote down this amendment quickly and move quickly out of second reading into Committee of the Whole and as soon as possible be able to do the transformative work needed for our seniors and for our province.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, and very good timing.

I see that the time is now 6 o'clock, which means that we are adjourned until 7:30 tonight.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, May 3, 2022

Day 28

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 3, 2022

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 19

Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022

Ms Ganley moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment May 2: Member Ceci]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we are on amendment REF1 on Bill 19 in second reading. Are there members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise tonight to speak to the referral amendment proposed by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View to Bill 19, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022. Let me just start by saying that I encourage my colleagues to vote against the amendment as I am confident in the provisions contained within this amendment act and the hundreds of hours of stakeholder consultation that have gone into crafting this bill. I would like to take some time here to talk about what exactly it is that is inside this bill, what it is that we’re trying to do, why it is that that’s important, and why it is that I believe these are very common-sense, nonideological amendments that members of this House can and should support.

In fact, the condo sector has been talking about the two main pieces of this amendment act since the 2014 Condominium Property Amendment Act was passed in this House, and those pieces are adding a simpler method for voting on routine business and recovering the costs of damage caused by an individual owner or a tenant. Madam Speaker, 2014 was a long time ago, and the condominium industry has been waiting for these items since then.

I’m proud of all the work that my team at Service Alberta has done in my short time as minister, that we have done together, to get to this point of being able to deliver on these important topics. Since 2019 my department has worked with Alberta’s key condo stakeholders, representing all corners of the condo industry and all corners of the province. These groups include the north and south chapters of the Canadian Condominium Institute, the Condo Owners Forum Society of Alberta, and the Association of Condominium Managers of Alberta, and I’m happy to share with the House that their representatives are supportive of this bill. I want to thank them in this House for the work that they put into improving condominium governance in Alberta as I know it will help to create an even healthier condominium sector in Alberta. We want condo living to remain a strong option for Albertans, which is something that is very important for this government, and these amendments will help to solve some of the more contentious challenges currently faced by the sector.

I’d like to reinforce again why we’re doing this and who has been asking for these changes, because some members opposite have questioned that, including the Member for St. Albert, who asked: which condominium lobbyists asked for it? Well, Madam Speaker, I’ve just said that it was, in fact, Alberta’s largest condo owner association, the Condo Owners Forum Society of Alberta, and the Canadian Condominium Institute and the Association of Condominium Managers of Alberta, none of which I would consider to be lobbyists, not in the way that the Member for St. Albert was implying. I hope that we can put to rest any assertion behind the motivations of this bill. The fact is that the motivation of this bill is to benefit Albertans and, most specifically, to benefit those Albertans who choose to live in condos.

In fact, as the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview suggested, we’re all wanting to get to the same outcome, which is improving the current condominium legislation. That member should know, as a former minister, that stakeholders are looking for these amendments to the act, that make their lives easier, save time in meetings by enabling simple voting on routine affairs, and save the vast majority of responsible condominium owners money by appropriately assigning the cost of damages to common property to those who caused it. These are common-sense amendments that will save condo owners time and money. It is important to pass these amendments, so I cannot support the referral amendment made by the opposition, which would simply delay the delivery of these important amendments to condo owners and residents.

But let me go into some more detail. On the voting rights, these amendments on voting rights will add flexibility in the voting processes used at condominium meetings while respecting the self-governance model of condo corporations to adapt the voting processes to meet their needs. Currently the act has a narrow process for voting, where condo owners are only entitled to vote by unit factor. A unit factor vote makes sense for conducting votes in situations where those results could be contentious, like in matters where you need to approve a large expense or decisions that may have legal implications. However, for routine business, including approving an agenda or approving the minutes from a previous meeting or simply adjourning the meeting, it is an overly complex calculation that needs to be done on the unit factors, and that can unnecessarily delay the time required for concluding an important meeting.

That is why we’re establishing a new voting option, an owner vote, which is one vote per owner or co-owner, which reduces administrative burdens associated with preparing and verifying voter eligibility for boards and condo corporations. A condo corporation will adopt an alternative voting format in their bylaws and can set out a different, simpler voting format – for example, one vote per unit – if that works better for that corporation.

Madam Speaker, we are amending the condo property act to make voting rules more flexible for condo corporations who may want to use simpler voting methods on routine business. We have heard that this is something that is already widely happening in practice in condominiums across Alberta, so we want to ensure that our condo legislation reflects this practice while establishing specific parameters to protect owners’ rights. As such, owners will be allowed to request a unit factor vote on any vote, which would overrule an owner vote, so long as the request is made before the result of an owner vote is announced. I’m happy to hear that this proposal has been very well received by members in this House so far.

Circling back to the damage chargebacks topic, Madam Speaker, similarly, we are providing condo corporations with tools to protect the financial security of all owners and their corporations by charting how they can recover the costs for damage to common

property. Now, normally it makes sense that an owner of any asset would be responsible to pay for the repair of any damage that they cause to it. However, in condo corporations, where people own common property in addition to their own personal assets like their unit, it is unfortunate that owners might have to pay to repair damage caused to common property when they had nothing to do with that damage in the first place.

Currently condo corporations must seek a court order to recover the costs of repair for damages to common property attributable to owners, including damage done to hallways, elevators, and parkade infrastructure, just to name a few examples. Going to court costs a lot of money for the condo boards and, ultimately, to the condo owners that they represent as they generally have to hire lawyers, and then those fees get passed on to the owners through higher condo fees or special assessments. At the end of the day, Madam Speaker, it's always the condo owner that ends up paying for this, so we want to make sure that responsible condo owners who have never caused damage to the common property in their building or on their property no longer have to pay for the costs associated with an irresponsible owner who caused damage to common property. This is common sense.

We know that the vast majority of condo owners and residents are responsible stewards of their property, and we don't want them to have to deal with unsustainable increases to their condo fees because of the negligence of a small minority of condo owners and residents. We know that that's not what condo owners want. We don't want that either, and I would hope that all members of this House would recognize the financial burden that is being placed on all condo owners by not allowing for the proper allocation of damage costs to those who are responsible for causing it.

What we are doing with this legislation, ultimately, is allowing for condo corporations and condo boards to charge back damages directly to that owner or occupant who is responsible for causing that damage in the first place. The context on exactly how that would happen, Madam Speaker, will be spelled out in regulation.

Let's make sure that people who cause damage are held accountable for their actions. Let's make sure there's a fair process to make sure that that is handled in a way that is acceptable to all of the owners and that it is handled consistently and fairly, with due process. I'm pleased to say that that's exactly what this legislation will deliver.

To put this into a real-life example for everyone – and I believe my colleague the Member for Grande Prairie may have shared some of this story in some earlier remarks – this is a personal example for me as someone who lived in a condo building for six years and served on a condo board for two of those years. In our building we had about 158 units. We had a very large underground parking lot, and without fail every couple of months somebody who lived in our building would hit that door with their car. We had a video camera. We knew exactly who it was. We could prove exactly who it was, but the fact was that they chose not to pay for that damage, and ultimately we had no legal means to recover the costs for that damage. Guess who paid for it. Every single condo owner in that building, not the one owner who caused the damage. That is unacceptable, so that is what this legislation is designed to address.

Another important part of this legislation is that it will allow these chargebacks to be treated as a contribution, which means that if the owner chooses not to pay for it, the condo corporation has the ability to place a caveat on the title of the condo unit and also to charge for reasonable administrative and legal costs associated with filing that caveat. This is critical to ensure that there is fairness for

all residents in a condo property and to ensure that the folks who are responsible owners do not have to bear the costs of irresponsible owners.

7:40

Madam Speaker, I have heard members opposite bring up concerns about whether the introduction of this tool would mean that due process would be eliminated for an owner who wanted to dispute being charged with a chargeback. That is simply not the case. As I've said, the process for a chargeback being issued will be set out in regulation. Those regulations will be developed in consultation and collaboration with the industry, including those condo owner groups that represent the interests of the 500,000 Albertans who live in condos all across this province.

We will take the time to get this right, and we will do that in collaboration with the industry. But, at the end of the day, there will be due process. There will be a format to deal with an appeal. I can assure all members of this Chamber and all Albertans who may be watching that that will be the case. But that is way more appropriate to be spelled out in regulations instead of in the legislation.

If passed, these amendments will come into effect on proclamation, Madam Speaker, which is targeted for the fall of this year. That will give time for the condo corporations to consider the process we put forward through legislation and the accompanying regulations and to decide whether or not they would like to make use of it.

We have also addressed a number of standing issues in the act that frequently cause confusion for those who interpret the act on a regular basis. The section that deals with whether or not windows and doors are part of a unit of common property will be moved into the act. And just to confirm for this House, given that the Member for Edmonton-McClung had raised some concerns, we are not changing who owns windows and doors with these amendments. This does not change the definition of personal property or common property. This change simply means that all of the rules that determine what is personal property and what is common property will now be in the same section of the legislation, which will make it easier for readers of the legislation to interpret, and that may include people who are purchasing a first home in a condo. This is an important step to clarify our legislation and make life better for condo owners.

Finally, to wrap up here, I've heard a lot of talk from members opposite about a dispute resolution tribunal and how they wish to refer this bill to committee in order to further study that issue. Madam Speaker, we see the value in a dispute resolution tribunal. However, it would not make sense to force a dispute resolution tribunal on short notice into a bill that was not designed to handle that, and it certainly would not make sense for us to hold up the implementation of these much-needed reforms that have been asked for by the condo owners all across this province. While we work towards getting the tribunal right, we are moving forward with these important amendments now because they are ready now and because condo owners want them now.

Let me remind the House of the work that we have done since I became minister to address these issues in the condo space. First of all, let me just say that if we were to listen to what condo owners said about the NDP's track record when they were in government, they told us that every single thing that the NDP did on condo regulation was awful, and they begged us to stop it and change it. Guess what. That's what we did in June 2019, Madam Speaker. We paused the regulations that they had screwed up, and we took six months to work with the industry to make it better, and we did. That's exactly what we did. We got those up and running in January 2020.

Since then we have been working with the industry on a series of reforms to other important condo-related matters. The fact is that the NDP did nothing of value on condos for four years, and that meant that we inherited a long to-do list, Madam Speaker. We've been hard at work tackling that, one item at a time. These are two more items that are extremely important to condo owners that we have ready to implement now, and I urge all members to vote against the referral amendment and instead to vote in favour of this bill so that we can deliver on what condo owners need and want and have been asking for.

Madam Speaker, I can assure you that work continues on developing a framework for what a condo tribunal could look like in Alberta. We know it's important, we know that condo owners want it, and we are working towards that. But we will not hold hostage these important reforms that are ready under Bill 19 now simply because they want to make up for the four years that they squandered when they were in government, when they did nothing of value for condo owners.

When the time is right, we are committed to moving forward with a tribunal that would be created through extensive engagement with stakeholders, taking all of their concerns into account. In the meantime we are making these common-sense reforms that will bring immediate benefits to the over 500,000 Albertans who live in condos across this province.

With that being said, Madam Speaker, I would like to encourage all members of this House to vote against the referral amendment and to support Bill 19, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, as proposed. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 19, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, and to speak to the referral that's before us today. I actually want to give credit to the Minister of Service Alberta for going through some of the questions that the members of the opposition had laid out and for answering them in detail. You know, honestly, there have been many pieces of legislation that the minister has brought forward in our time in the House, and I do give him credit for consistently doing that. He regularly does try to engage in a thoughtful debate for the most part. Something went a little awry at the end of that, but really there is a genuine willingness to engage on the questions that are put forward, which is appreciated. I do appreciate that he's addressed some of those concerns.

I do note that the Minister of Service Alberta, you know, seemed to be frustrated that members of the opposition were perhaps questioning the process – or the motives, I suppose, is the way he framed it – of some of the proposed changes, and I can appreciate why he would be frustrated with that. I think part of that, of course, is because Albertans have come to question the motives and intentions of this government due to the broken trust on so many issues. Even on an issue where maybe there are no ulterior motives or friends that are being supported or lobbyists that have a disproportionately loud voice in certain ministers' ears – unfortunately, some of the minister's colleagues in cabinet have shown that they are beholden to certain interests, and that's why we have to be very careful in this Chamber to make sure that there is full transparency around the motivations behind legislation that comes forward to this House. The frustration that I heard in the Minister of Service Alberta's voice in addressing those – he may want to share that frustration with his colleagues who are making it more difficult for him to do his job.

I do want to speak to some of the proposed changes that are within this bill and why I do support the amendment to have this matter referred back to committee for consultation. The Minister of Service Alberta outlined a number of the changes that actually are noncontroversial, from our perspective or at least from my perspective – I can't speak for everybody else – in terms of some of the changes that are coming through that will be beneficial. For example, the Minister of Service Alberta talked about moving to an owner vote on sort of less substantial issues to get through meetings, to allow for where there are multiple owners of one condo unit to be able to each have a vote. It does make it easier, and I think that makes sense, for certain. I think that's something that the condo associations and those representing the owners have indicated they support.

While I've never owned a condo, I have rented a condo from an owner and have been privy to some of those condo board meetings, and I know sometimes they can be very challenging to have the proper representation to get certain matters heard. If there are processes that this bill is putting forward to make that easier, that's certainly something that I think is a good idea. I don't think that we have too much issue with those changes as well as the chargeback issue, which is the ability to sort of have individual condo owners held accountable for costs that they may have incurred as a result of damage to common condo property.

You know, that's very, again, noncontroversial in the sense of we need to be careful, of course, that that's not used to sort of single out – with condo associations and living in condo situations, I know you become very entrenched with your neighbours because your neighbours' conduct does have an impact not only on your living space, which is true of any multi-unit or communal kind of living environment, but also in a condo the conduct of another condo owner could actually have a direct financial impact on you. Certainly, the ability to hold those owners who are causing damage and are incurring costs for all members of the condo association – a chargeback process sounds like it could be reasonable as long as it's not used in any kind of punitive way.

We know that sometimes in those situations tempers flare and there's a lot of emotion involved, and we want to make sure that things are handled fairly. I think, you know, again, that's a process that exists in other jurisdictions and Ontario, and that seems to be something that the condo owners and stakeholders are supportive of.

7:50

When I say condo owners, I should mention, you know, that I think the census data talks about that as of at least 2020 there are roughly half a million Albertans who own condos and live in condos. That's a significant portion of our population, so those kinds of changes that make the process better for those owners are important, and that's a good thing.

The Minister of Service Alberta also spoke to a couple of other small pieces, you know, provisions about who holds responsibility for doors and windows on the exteriors of units, from regulation to the legislation. Again, I don't necessarily think that that's controversial.

The reason why I support the referral amendment to send this back to committee is something that the Minister of Service Alberta seemed to kind of gloss over in his comments there at the end, which was about the dispute resolution process. You know, I'm happy he went into significant detail about the other changes, but I would argue that this issue of a dispute resolution process is a very significant one. In fact, Madam Speaker – don't take my word for it – it's actually something that we know that condo owner groups have spoken out about.

This idea of having a dispute resolution process to hear disputes between owners and between neighbours, essentially, because that's what we're talking about when we're talking about condo owners, having that ability to resolve those disputes through a resolution process, has been something that has been on the table and in active discussion since 2014, when this amendment act was first considered. That goes back now eight years. That is when that concept of setting up some kind of a dispute resolution process was first conceived.

I know that under the current provincial government they have been doing ongoing consultations on this issue. At least that's what the Minister of Service Alberta has said. I can provide some commentary that I know when the NDP was formerly in government, consultation was done on that piece. It's an incredibly important piece because we know that the failure to have a dispute resolution process leads to unnecessary and incredibly costly and then increasingly adversarial court processes. Having neighbours go to court against each other: those costs that are incurred in those situations can be significant.

First of all, to get to the point where somebody is even in a position to go to court means that, you know, there has been some significant conflict between condo owners in the same property. That's, of course, never a great thing, to be living in a situation where you're in deep conflict with your neighbour and sharing common space with them, potentially sharing walls with them. So getting to a point where the matter has to go to court – first of all, that's going to be prohibitive for many people, right? We simply know that the court process in general, especially civil litigation, is incredibly difficult for people to access, and it can be very costly.

Even when it's gone through that process, the resolution is often not very satisfactory. Apart from the fact that both condo owners might have incurred significant costs or groups of condo owners within one property are, you know, suing each other – not only is there that conflict, but the cost is significant, and then the outcome is rarely one that everybody is happy with. Unlike many other litigation disputes, when a condo litigation dispute goes poorly and the outcome is not satisfactory, those individuals often still have to continue living with each other and near each other, and that is not a great outcome for anybody. So this dispute resolution process is incredibly important.

I was quite surprised to hear the Minister of Service Alberta say that, you know, they didn't want to rush something through. Madam Speaker, I don't know how many times it's necessary for the Official Opposition and for Albertans to remind the government members that they are the government and have been for three years.

Member Irwin: You had the same minister for three years.

Ms Pancholi: Yeah. Granted, the same minister, which we can't say the same for some other ministries, but certainly with Service Alberta it's been one minister in place for three years.

It's interesting. I know perhaps, Madam Speaker, that the government members may forget sometimes that they're in government because there are too many other things going on, internal drama and soap operas. They forget that they're actually governing, but they are. The time is well past for this government to be blaming a previous government when they have been in this position for three years.

It's certainly not rushing it through. Again, as I mentioned, the idea of a dispute resolution process: well, consultation was going on under the former government, and the concept of it has been at

least discussed since 2014, so that certainly is not a short period of time. Nobody is rushing anything through. Frankly, the Minister of Service Alberta said that, you know, certainly – I think the phrase he used was that this legislation was not designed for that. Well, he's the minister who designs the legislation. It certainly was within his power to draft legislation, to put forward to this House for consideration legislation that would have been designed to implement a dispute resolution process.

Again, Madam Speaker, as I said, this is not something that you need to take my word for. It is actually condominium owners' groups who are deeply disappointed. In fact, I'll point to Terry Gibson, the president of the Condo Owners Forum Society of Alberta, who indicated that the lack of a dispute resolution process in Bill 19 came as a, quote, big disappointment. He also said, by the way, quote, we've lost years by failing to do this now.

That's really an important point. If it's not being done now, Madam Speaker, when is this going to be done? Now, I know the Minister of Service Alberta tends to like to bring the same piece of legislation forward to this Assembly numerous times for amendment over and over and over again, but we don't know if there's any intention to once again bring condo legislation before this Assembly or when this Assembly may sit again or whether this government will be in power. In any event, we will have lost significant time that has already been lost by this government's failure to act. Again, that's, a quote from Mr. Gibson, a very poor decision. This is only going to make it harder for condo owners to resolve their disputes.

Again, I point to another organization. The Canadian Condominium Institute's north Alberta chapter president, Mr. Anand Sharma, commented that it's been urgent for a long time and that this is, quote, disappointing that they pulled the plug on it because that's not the solution; the solution is to work through these issues. I think that's an excellent point, Madam Speaker, that just because it's hard doesn't mean this government should shy away from doing it. It actually doesn't need to necessarily be that hard. There are other jurisdictions that have a dispute resolution process in place. Certainly, we have the opportunity to maybe learn from the models they have built, maybe make adjustments, of course, to reflect Alberta's circumstances, and do ongoing consultation, which apparently has been done. We've heard the Minister of Service Alberta talk about the lengthy consultation he has done. We know consultation began under the former government. How could those conversations have not resulted in a feasible dispute resolution process for condo owners?

I think what we're really seeing: this is not necessarily about the complexity of the issue, it's not about, as the minister would say, it being rushed through in a piece of legislation that's not designed for it, but this is really about cost. I think that's really why this government is not committed to doing this. It does require the government to put some money up front to help design the process.

Of course, certainly, there are mechanisms by which it would be a shared cost in terms of administering it and processing it. Condo owners could certainly have some kind of – associations could determine on some kind of a levy that goes into that. Certainly, if somebody is participating in that process, a condo owner, they could – as is typical in other resolution processes, there are filing fees. There are certain things that can be done so it doesn't have to be solely a cost that's borne by the government. Will it require some upfront cost? Probably. But as the minister has said, he's here to make, you know, life better for condo owners, and this is a significant issue that they have been asking this government to address for a very long time, for the entire three years to date of this government's term.

While I know that a number of condo association groups are supportive of the other changes in Bill 19, as I think many members of the opposition have expressed, certainly we believe that this is a significant enough issue around the dispute resolution process – and more importantly, condo owners are saying that it’s a significant enough issue – that this should go back to a committee for consultation to see whether or not we can come up with legislation that addresses the needs of condo owners by developing a condo owners’ dispute resolution process. That would truly make a difference, I believe, Madam Speaker, for condo owners, the 500,000 of them in this province who would very much appreciate a process that would keep them out of courts and help them resolve their disputes with their neighbours in a less costly way so that they can continue to live peacefully with their neighbours.

I think that’s worthy, Madam Speaker, of referring this matter to a committee, and I certainly hope that all of my colleagues and all of the members of this Assembly would support our amendment.

With that, I would like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

8:00

Bill 20 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie on behalf of the minister.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise this evening to move second reading of Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

This act proposes a handful of housekeeping amendments intended to keep our province’s justice legislation up to date for Albertans. If passed, the amendments will make updates to the following: the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, and the Youth Justice Act.

Starting with the Corrections Act, Madam Speaker, we are looking at clarifying processes for the Alberta Parole Board. Right now Parole Board members’ remuneration is set in regulation. We are proposing to change it so that this is set by an order in council. This would make the process consistent with what is done for other Alberta government agencies, boards, and commissions. To be clear, we are not changing compensation rates for board members, just the tool the government uses to say what that remuneration is set at at any given time.

With respect to the Justice of the Peace Act for this legislation all we are proposing is to streamline the process to make justices of the peace – that’s a handful to say – part-time or full-time. Madam Speaker, instead of having to go through a time-consuming bureaucratic process of needing to take this request to cabinet and go through that process, we are recommending to simply let the Chief Judge, on their own accord, designate a JP as part-time or full-time. Not only would this simplify judicial administration processes, but it would make this process the same as what’s already being done for judges and masters in chambers. More importantly, it would allow the court to respond more quickly to caseload challenges as they arise.

Moving on to the Missing Persons Act, Madam Speaker, proposed administrative changes to the Missing Persons Act are meant to help the police complete tasks with minimal delay. Obviously, when a person is missing, time can be of the essence. To that end, proposed changes such as clarifying what information police can request and ensuring records can be requested before destruction would help them find missing persons more efficiently

and complement the changes recently made to the regulation such as allowing remote applications for orders.

Next we’ll speak about the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act. The plan for this piece of legislation is to simply clean up some outdated wording and make the language more sensitive to grieving families. For example, the amendment would rename “death benefit” to “funeral expense reimbursement.” This is in response to stakeholder advice about using the term “benefit” when talking about criminal death of a loved one. It just seems insensitive, Madam Speaker. We’re also proposing changes to remove items that are no longer required, specifically references to the old Criminal Injuries Review Board and provisions that were only needed while a specific class-action settlement was completed. The settlement is now complete, so the board is longer needed.

With respect to the Youth Justice Act, the last legislation we are proposing changes to in this omnibus bill, Madam Speaker, for this act all we are suggesting is an update in wording to keep it in line with the changes the federal government made to Canada’s Criminal Code related to detaining and releasing young persons.

Taken together, the proposed changes demonstrate that as times progress and change, it’s important to do the work to keep Alberta’s legislation current and effective and relevant to the times. They show our government’s commitment to making sure Albertans can access justice across our province and that it remains strong, including taking the time to look after the smaller details. I hope all members will support these changes.

With that, I am pleased to move second reading on behalf of the minister, and I thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I’m pleased to rise and speak to Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. As was just noted, this bill does a number of things, but I think what I would like to focus on is related to the victims of crime fund. Obviously, one of the reasons for that is that this is an issue that is near and dear to my heart.

I think, Madam Speaker, that the first thing I want to say is that what this bill is doing with the victims of crime fund in some way just sort of ensconces into legislation some parts of changes that were made previously. I don’t agree with the changes that were made previously. I think I’m on the record fairly extensively not agreeing with the changes that were made previously. Primary among them is the change that limits the ability to apply to 45 days. The reason I think that this is a problem is because many victims and, in particular, victims of sexual assault are never going to apply within 45 days. They’re not there yet. I think that’s sad, and I think it’s incredibly problematic.

I appreciate that the government has taken the money they appropriated from the victims’ fund and used it to fund what are otherwise good programs. Certainly, drug treatment court is a program that has proven extremely effective. I think it has a long track record of being effective. What I do not think, however, is that it ought to be funded at the expense of survivors of sexual assault. I think that these are individuals who have been through enough. I just fundamentally believe that it is wrong for the government to take funds that were earmarked for victims or survivors of various types of violence and funnel it to any other purpose.

I think that that is very problematic, especially in light of the fact – what Albertans may not know is some background on the victims of crime fund. It usually comes in by way of a surcharge on various offences. The vast majority of money flowing into the fund actually comes from traffic tickets. People pay their ticket, and on the ticket

is a victim fine surcharge. I think it's reasonable, if the government is not going to fund in any other way programs to support victims, that this should go forward.

The government made changes previously. Those changes altered the victims' fund and allowed the funds to be used for other reasons. Again, the things that the government is funding out of this are good things. I just think the government should be funding them out of revenue and leaving the victims' fund for victims. My understanding is that some of it goes to ALERT, also an excellent program that does very, very good work.

In fact, I think that probably my first extensive lobbying experience was with respect to ALERT when we were first elected. The PCs had – I don't know if they had cut its funding or were set to cut it. I can't remember exactly what it was they had done, but when I arrived in the minister's office, a number of folks had been, I think, prepared for my arrival, and the lobbying started pretty much immediately on this. And they were right. It is an organization that does very good work. It's a good model. It's actually a model that should be replicated in many different ways.

No one is denying what they're doing with the funds. That is my point. The challenge is that the result of that is that it was only possible to use that money in other ways because they knew that survivors wouldn't be accessing it. This doesn't just go for survivors of sexual assault. It goes for victims of any sort of crime. If they don't apply within 45 days, they don't get it.

There's also been a significant diminishment in the amount of benefits that can be achieved. For instance, the fund will now pay funeral expenses, but it won't necessarily pay to, say, certain family members, like children of a murder victim, which is not a choice I agree with. I think that those children deserve that money. I think that survivors of sexual assault deserve that money. It wasn't a great deal of money.

8:10

What this legislation does is that it finishes the disestablishment of what is called the Criminal Injuries Review Board. Now, the Criminal Injuries Review Board did an interesting thing. Their work was very – essentially, they assessed, based on various factors, what had happened to the victim in the particular instance, how much financial reimbursement they were entitled to. It wasn't lofty compensation. You know, often people who were very badly injured in an assault would get, like, \$10,000, something like that, for a sexual assault. It wasn't a huge amount of money. You rarely saw awards over \$20,000. Basically, what it did was that it allowed people to take a few days off work to recover, to pay for some counselling to deal with the trauma.

I mean, a lot of people don't interact with crime in their daily lives. A lot of people have the good fortune, I guess, to walk around and not worry about getting hurt, about someone beating you up or stealing your purse or sexually assaulting you. After that happens, your ability to interact with society changes. A lot of people are sort of permanently fearful in certain situations. It impacts the way they carry on their lives, what they're able to do, what they're able to enjoy socially, what they're able to do for work. It impacts future relationships. It impacts every aspect of their life. I feel like cutting them off from this very small amount of money, to which they would otherwise have been entitled, is just incredibly wrong.

The Criminal Injuries Review Board is de-established here now. The disestablishment started in the previous legislation. The reason that the Criminal Injuries Review Board had to be continued is that there was an outstanding court case. The government – not this one, not ours, a previous government, and not the government itself but people on behalf of the government – had essentially failed to apply

for benefits through the victims of crime fund for children that were in care, benefits to which those children would otherwise have been entitled. There was a class-action lawsuit arising, and it was found in favour of the plaintiffs.

The order was that the plaintiffs had to apply first to the victims of crime fund, and then there would be a secondary fund that was set up by the government if they were declined. So the Criminal Injuries Review Board essentially had to be continued for the length of time that that case was ongoing, so until such time as those probably now adults but at the time dependent children – the government hadn't applied on their behalf – had an opportunity to apply to the fund, that the fund could make a decision, and then, you know, they could either go to the other compensation or not.

This just finishes that process, but I think it's a sad day to see that process finished, because it means that that is the end. That is the end of the fund. That is the end of people's ability to apply to that fund. I'm actually somewhat surprised to see that, because some of the other changes are just sort of terminology changes, but they kind of put permanently in place the changes the government made, which is confusing to me, Madam Speaker. I know the government did consultations, extensive consultations, consultations which were, in my opinion, quite well done on this matter. I was in some of those consultations – I was fortunate enough to be invited – and I heard what people said. I heard what police said. I heard what agencies who normally support victims had to say. They were not happy with the changes. They thought that there were a number of changes that could be made to reverse the changes that the UCP made when they first came in.

I'm deeply curious about what happened. Those consultations were done. They were well done. I presume – I don't know if a report was prepared. I don't know if a report was laid before the minister. I don't know if it ever came out. I think, probably, a lot of people wonder what ever happened to that piece of work.

I'm just a little surprised to see the government coming back here and sort of finalizing those changes because I was hopeful of a different outcome. I think a lot of people were hopeful of a different outcome, an outcome where victims could apply to the fund, where they would have additional financial benefits, an outcome where that 45-day time limit was removed. I myself had the opportunity to do extensive consultations on this issue in particular because when we were in government, we brought forward a bill to remove the limitation period for survivors of sexual assaults and other forms of sexual abuse, which at the time was two years, so the limitation period was two years from when the person knew or ought to know, with an ultimate limitation period of 10 years.

I consulted specifically on what the journey of many survivors was, and one of the things that I think came up over and over again is that everybody has their own journey. Everybody has their own way that they process an experience like that. It isn't really subject to an arbitrary time frame in that way, so the advice was that we remove the time frame, and that's what we did. And that is the advice I would give to the government in this instance, to remove the time frame, because 45 days – like, two years wasn't enough. Forty-five days is definitely not enough.

I think one of the other things I heard loud and clear from survivors was that in a lot of cases they had choice taken away from them in a very fundamental way, in one of the most fundamental ways that a choice can be taken from you, and we should give them all of the choices about how they deal with that that we possibly can.

I think it's incredibly problematic to see that this bill is coming forward, which is an otherwise procedural bill, that essentially puts permanence, I guess, to the changes that were made. I had hoped

that what we would see was a bill that fixed some of the problems that arose. Yeah. You know, according to the government page up there on this issue, it is still the case that that 45 days is in place. I think that's troubling because even – like, it's clearly and obviously problematic for survivors of sexual assault. I think it's probably problematic for a lot of other victims, too.

I think survivors of a domestic assault are probably – you know, when a woman or a man or any person makes the decision to leave an abusive partnership, there is a lot to deal with. Potentially there are children. Potentially there are pets. There are leases. There are joint bank accounts. There's a lot. I think people, rightly, focus on what is in front of them, on putting one foot in front of the other, on doing the best that they can, so they don't necessarily apply immediately, and 45 days is a pretty short time frame. I think people are still potentially processing what has happened to them.

I mean, it's often the case that survivors of sexual and domestic violence don't report at all. When they do report, which is the minority, it's definitely – I mean, the one thing we know for certain from the statistics is that it is the minority of cases that are reported at all. It's not necessarily immediate, so – I don't know. I feel like at this point I'm shouting into the wind a little. I feel like the government did consultations. They went out and talked to the victim support workers, who are on the ground, who are dealing with this. They went out and talked to front-line police and police governance, who deal with this every single day, and they heard the message loud and clear.

8:20

So I don't suppose that me saying it is going to change that, but I think it's worth putting it on the record, because I think that if even one survivor hears that at least one person in this place thinks that their inability to access this fund after 45 days is extremely problematic, that's at least something.

Let's see. Yeah. That's my primary concern with this bill. I would say that other than that, the changes appear to me to be administrative changes, changes to align the legislation with other federal legislation. That's very common. Governments do that all the time. There is actually a lot of work of government that doesn't really come to the attention of the public. It's important work, but there it is. Those things all seem fine, in my estimation: changes to the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, Missing Persons Act.

It is really just this one set of changes, I think, that troubles me, because it sort of does indicate, or at least it indicates to me, that the government doesn't seem to be looking to implement the changes that arose out of those consultations. I mean, it's important to do consultation. I'm glad that consultation occurred. It feels a little like those consultations were essentially political cover because nothing happened.

I believe that there are at least some members in the government caucus who don't agree with the fact that nothing happened as a result of that. I think that there are at least some members in the government caucus who would like to have seen those changes, because I know that some members of the government caucus care deeply about this issue. I hope – it is my sincere hope that somewhere something is occurring that will alter that and that we will see changes and that we will see greater support for victims and that we will see the victims of crime fund going to victims of crime.

Yes. Was there anything else I wanted to add on this bill? Yeah. I guess that pretty much sums it up. Most of this is administrative. Most of it seems fine. I wish deeply and sincerely that the

government would reconsider their course of action with respect to the victims of crime fund. That is what I have to say about that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to join the debate on Bill 20? The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Member Ceci: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I'll try and follow the former Justice minister. I'll try and be clear and succinct about what I think about this act as well. As the previous speaker was just saying, different aspects of this statutes amendment act before us, like the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, and the Youth Justice Act. I'm going back many years. I think the Young Offenders Act has been changed. The title has been changed.

Those changes – as I was listening to the mover on behalf of the Justice minister talk about housekeeping amendments, I wouldn't disagree with those four in particular, but the one in particular that I would disagree with is the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, I think.

Going back to my years as a social worker, many, many years ago I was involved with the Youth Justice Act, called the Young Offenders Act at that point in time, and involved with counselling many individuals, families, and community and speaking to the victims part of this. I know that it took a long time, and I don't think it was because of my particular, you know, skill level as a social worker. I think many people just took a long time to address their needs because of the weight of the conditions they were living in. Many of those individuals had left violent situations and were setting themselves up in new circumstances with their children, single parents often. They were moving on to an extent, but they weren't totally feeling like they had everything together. They were just, really, surviving at that point in time. I and my colleagues would do what we could to assist, make their lives better, support children in those situations, get them into schools, ensure they had the necessities of life: food, shelter. In time often those living situations would get better, but that was in time.

Just as my colleague before me was talking about, the 45-day cut-off for taking action under the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, it seems totally unreasonable to continue to perpetrate that kind of situation on Albertans. I know, from this side, that when the Minister of Justice is questioned in question period about this sort of thing, our critic brings up the inadequacy of the current program and the fact that it was changed by the current government and the fact that it doesn't meet the needs of Albertans.

The monies that are there for victims of crime now are diverted to other, as my colleague was saying, good programs. But those good programs should be experiencing the funding not through the money out of the ticket revenue for victims or other places, but they should be funded from the government. The fact that they're not and that victims are given short shrift in this regard is a reason why I will oppose this legislation.

I think, also, the points that were made in opposition here need to be briefly underlined again. I know that when changes were made to the victims of crime fund initially, many, many stakeholders – probably a better word is Albertans who were victims of assault – came forward to say how disappointed they were that the changes were being made by the government. Person after person after person, victim after victim after victim came forward, at probably great distress to themselves, to be reliving some of their darkest hours in front of the public, to say how wrong this approach was, and they were not given any satisfaction by the government. The

monies that obviously, we have been saying, should support victims are now being directed in other places, and victims and their children are lesser for it. We put forward amendments at the time to change that, and they were voted down by the government. I want to say as clearly as I can that this is a continuation of the wrong-headed approach of the government, and I won't be supporting it in any fashion.

I would like to adjourn debate on this now. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

8:30 **Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole**

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 15 Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Sorry. I'm just trying to remember. Is it 15 or 20?

The Chair: We're on Bill 15.

Ms Hoffman: Sorry. Debate time.

The Chair: Oh. You have 20 minutes.

Ms Hoffman: Twenty. Perfect.

I think I'll actually start by introducing an amendment and keeping the remainder of my time to explain the amendment. I will pass those through to you, Madam Chair, through the page. When you're ready, I'm happy to read it into the record.

The Chair: Just one minute.

Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1.

Hon. member, please proceed to read it into the record.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Through you I move that the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022, be amended as follows: (a) in the proposed section 225.8 (i) in subsection (2) by striking out "The Minister may appoint" and substituting "Subject to subsection (2.1), the Minister may appoint" and (ii) by adding the following immediately after subsection (2):

(2.1) At least half of the panel members appointed under subsection (2) must be recommended by The Alberta Teacher's Association.

(b) in the proposed section 225.9 (i) in subsection (1)(b) by striking out "in accordance with the regulations" and substituting "in accordance with subsection (2.1) and the regulations"; (ii) in subsection (2)(a) by striking out "in accordance with the regulations" and substituting "in accordance with subsection (2.1) and the regulations"; and (iii) by adding the following immediately after subsection (2):

(2.1) At least half of the committee members appointed under subsections (1)(b) or (2)(a) must be panel members appointed in accordance with section 225.8(2.1).

A little bit of rationale here, through you, Madam Chair. This really does come back to the rationale that the Premier and the

Education minister have been using for quite some time in arguing their significant changes to the way teachers are led and disciplinary issues are handled. There have been a few different social media campaigns, and one did a comparator between other provinces and explained that Alberta was an outlier, and another did a comparator between other professions. You might remember that there was a list of scrolling professions going by on the screen that were governed differently than how teachers were governed within the province of Alberta.

Understandably, many people were looking into those types of professions. Many of them I am very familiar with, having been part of the appointment process for the College of Physicians & Surgeons or College of Registered Nurses of Alberta, for example, and every other health profession that is so governed in the province of Alberta. Knowing that for these types of colleges that govern the profession – and I'm not saying that the minister is creating a college. But colleges were what was used as the justification through all of the public campaigns as to why the model needed to change.

The thing that is very different, though, about what is being proposed by the minister and by the current government is that the model that's being proposed is unlike any other profession in the province of Alberta in that the minister, through the current bill, will appoint through cabinet one individual to be the person that brings these recommendations forward to the minister for final decision. Final decision is currently already with the minister, but it's currently a disciplinary issue led by the ATA that does that. So instead of the ATA doing it, the minister is now selecting one employee, essentially through the department, to bring forward these recommendations.

To go back to the original arguments as presented by the Premier, the minister, and many members of the UCP, they said that teachers should be governed in accordance with the fact that they are a profession and with other professions in mind. I have to say that we did absolutely check on a number of other professions. I'm just going to highlight a couple because I think we're probably erring on the side of the minister having still more influence on who is part of the recommendation process than other comparable professions within the province of Alberta.

If I'm to look at the College of Physicians & Surgeons, for example, there are eight elected doctors who are part of that and seven public representatives as appointed by the Minister of Health through OIC, and then there are four university reps or observers. In this situation the majority still are physicians who are governing disciplinary recommendations as it relates to physicians and surgeons, eight versus seven.

In terms of the Law Society of Alberta there are 24 individuals: 20 are elected lawyers, and four are public representatives, again, appointed by government through order in council, very different than having one person appointed to oversee the process as is outlined currently in the bill.

In terms of APEGA there are a few different disciplinary committees, but the biggest one: the disciplinary committee has 10 members selected by APEGA, selected by engineers, and one public member appointed by the government of Alberta.

Then for social workers: for example, for the hearing tribunals there are two members from the college – social workers – and one public member from the government of Alberta.

So for all of these professions the majority of those who are making the recommendations around disciplinary decisions are actually members of that profession, not government appointees. One sole government appointee is definitely an extreme example and for good reason, through you, Madam Chair. Of course, if the Law Society, which determines which

lawyers are in and which lawyers are out and have the right to continue practising in the profession, was governed by one lawyer, the current Minister of Justice, I think that there would be huge red flags of concern raised by members of the public as there are regularly complaints brought forward to the Law Society about the minister themselves. So having the minister in charge of the determination of who's in and who's out through a one-person appointment certainly would be a breach of most people's sense of common sense and understanding.

I also have to say that regularly we see feedback from the public through public opinion polls and such about who you trust with making decisions around different professions. In health I will say that, you know, of course, the number one and number two trusted professionals are my doctor – my personal doctor is usually number one, and nurses are number two. Doctors in general are a little bit lower down the list, but generally it's the people that they have the relationship with or who they trust the most about the functioning of the health care system and then, of course, nurses.

I'm confident that it is the same when it comes to the education system. We've seen significant concern raised by, generally, members of the public about the lack of partnership and respect when it comes to the role that teachers play in the education system. I think the government could demonstrate that they are actually trying to do what they laid out as their original opening arguments when they launched this significant change to the way the teaching profession is governed by actually accepting this amendment even though there were many – it wasn't a short amendment. There's really one thing it does, and that one thing it does is say that the folks who are making the decisions about who is allowed to teach and who is not allowed to teach: half of those should actually be teachers, folks recommended by teachers to be on that decision body.

8:40

Again, that doesn't mean that the government can't have a significant role. The government absolutely should, much like the case with College of Physicians & Surgeons, where there are eight elected doctors and seven appointed public representatives. A similar model would meet the terms outlined through this amendment, creating that opportunity. You might notice that I haven't proposed any changes to the fact that the minister is the ultimate decision-maker. At the end of the day, it would still be a recommendation, but instead of it being a recommendation by one person – an employee, an appointee, a direct appointee by the Minister of Education – it would be a panel that included majority teachers. That would be far more consistent with other professions within the province of Alberta.

I also want to say that the other piece that I highlighted earlier, that there were comparators done to other provinces – this probably is closely aligned with one other province, but there are many more than one other province in this country, of course. I'll just maybe touch on two others: Saskatchewan, which has an independent regulatory board, which, of course, is self-governed, and then, of course, in Ontario they continue to have a college that both invites and appoints. I believe that is a mix, again, of the profession and government appointees.

Back to the crux of the original argument that the government used for why they were bringing forward such significant changes to the way the profession is governed, it is that they wanted teachers to be governed in a similar fashion to other professionals here in the province of Alberta, and that is definitely not what's being proposed through the bill in its current form. That's why we've addressed this one change that I think could give a greater sense of confidence to

the people of Alberta when it comes to trusting the process around recommendations.

There are many people who feel that the government is showing a lack of concern and respect for teachers and the teaching profession. The number of teachers who approached me to talk about concerns around their safety and well-being, the curriculum, their teaching conditions, the fact that they for the last two years have been teaching in incredibly difficult times, trying to find ways to manage increased educational and mental health needs for students in their schools – I don't think that there is anyone who feels that their school is in a healthier place now than it was, you know, three years ago or four years ago, Madam Chair.

I think that this would at least show a little bit of respect to the profession in saying: "We are going to welcome you to appoint people to help make these decisions about the profession, just like we do for nurses and doctors and social workers and lawyers. We will not assume that the minister knows best on the minister's own." I think that that is something that would be well received by teachers and also, I would say, by most people in general, especially those who are currently governed by some kind of joint governance model around discipline, as we've highlighted through some of the comparators that I just laid out.

So I am hoping that that was enough time for colleagues across the way to consider what is being brought forward here with good intent to try to meet the government at a halfway point, to propose something that I think would bring greater trust and greater confidence to the process that the minister is proposing here. Knowing that we're in committee and that I can possibly respond at a later point, maybe I'll cede the remainder of my time so that the minister and other colleagues can respond to the recommendation and the amendment that we've brought forward here through you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on the amendment? The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the amendment coming forward. I do believe that what the member opposite was really looking for is transparency, accountability within the system, and what we have said all along is that we really want to be transparent. We want to be accountable, and we want to ensure that the bias and any perceived bias are taken out of the system, so under the office of the commissioner, when there is a hearing committee required, when there is a panel that needs to be put together, we have that ability under regulation to make sure that the commissioner is able to appoint that panel. Of course, there will be regulation stipulating that there will be teachers and there will be public members on that panel and that the commissioner, similar to the way it functions right now with the executive secretary of the ATA or the registrar putting together, depending on whether it's a teacher that falls under the ATA – of course, as you know, we have a dual system. That is what we're looking to eliminate, that dual system, that we only have one process for disciplinary matters for all teachers, teacher leaders, and that is certainly what we're looking to do.

I don't find it surprising that the members opposite would bring forward this amendment because it really does, by stipulating the Alberta Teachers' Association, speak to their friends, their union friends, and this is not what we're about. We're not about ensuring that the union has more control and input into this process. We're about making sure that the union stays out of the control and input into the process. It's really about making sure that the process is unbiased, that it's fair, and that it runs smoothly. There will be the

ability for the commissioner and their office to make sure that when they comprise a panel for whatever hearing may need to take place, there are public members and teachers.

I'll just remind the members opposite that not all teachers belong to the Alberta Teachers' Association and definitely not all superintendents, because they will now belong under the CASS legislation. They belong to the College of Alberta School Superintendents. As well, there are teachers that are in charter schools, independent schools, First Nations schools, and ECSs that do not belong to the Alberta Teachers' Association. So to recommend and approve this amendment would in fact negate all those voices being on the panel. Anyone who wants to apply to be on those committees, those panels, that panel roster certainly can go through the process and make sure that their voice is heard there.

For all of those reasons I would recommend to my colleagues that we not vote in favour of this particular amendment. Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: The challenge is that what's different from what the minister is saying and what's being proposed – the reason why I put the Alberta Teachers' Association is because it's an elected body, and with the other professions outlined, they are elected. Their doctors elect who they want to have on the College of Physicians & Surgeons. The Law Society elects who they want to have as benchers, and the list goes on. What the minister just said is that the minister will choose teachers. That is a very different process than how other professions are treated in this province. The reason why we proposed the ATA is because it was an elected body.

I certainly would welcome the minister bringing forward an amendment that ensured that these were elected, not hand-picked solely by one individual. The biggest problem with the argument being laid out as it is currently by the minister is that the minister is choosing who the employee within the department is. The minister is choosing who the representatives will be on the panel, and it doesn't give the same level of trust and confidence that we see with other professions where they are elected representatives. So I sincerely hope that the minister – if the minister doesn't like the way I'm recommending elected individuals be appointed, then I would like the minister to propose a different election process. But simply to say, "Trust us," when trust has been at record lows, I think, does not give greater confidence to the people of Alberta.

That's why I proposed a model that would have elected representatives be a part of this decision-making process rather than solely appointees by the minister. Again, the College of Physicians & Surgeons elects physicians to be part of the disciplinary committees. The Law Society is governed by elected benchers. The vast majority – there are a number of appointed individuals by government, but this is completely different from those models that have been used as an argument that there should be a model more consistent with other professions.

But, clearly, that isn't the way the government is actually responding to teachers in what the government is actually proposing because they are refusing to allow elected representatives of that profession to actually be a part of making recommendations, still to the minister. The minister still controls the ultimate decision-making power and, through my amendment, would still have the ability to have just one fewer than the number of elected teacher representatives making the decision. So I hope that the minister is either willing to bring forward a subamendment to the amendment that I proposed or an alternate amendment because, definitely, the bill in its current form, I think, doesn't pass the nod test around trust and accountability.

This was one idea I had. I certainly welcome others from the minister or any other member of the government who would like to

bring forward a greater level of transparency and accountability through a model that actually reflects the same level of respect for teachers as we have for other professionals in the province of Alberta. The current bill does not do that in its current form.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

8:50

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would beg to differ with the member opposite. In fact, the Alberta Teachers' Association, should they want their members to be part of those panels, can certainly recommend that they put their names forward, similar to – we have that happening in so many other areas. Nothing prevents them from ensuring that their membership is made aware of these committees, similar to the way it happens right now, and they can put their names forward in that way. We do not need to enshrine it in legislation. I believe the legislation, the way it is written, is accurate and fair and accomplishes what we look to accomplish.

I have the utmost respect for teachers, and I can tell you that I've heard from many teachers who have come to me personally and said, "This is so needed," so many administrators as well who have said, "This legislation will in fact help because I haven't been able to report something that I felt needed to be reported because I felt there would be conflict within my profession and just the way the code of conduct, et cetera, is put forward." So, again, I do not feel that the amendment that has been brought forward is necessary.

I believe the – you know, I give kudos to my department. They have done tremendous work in ensuring that this piece of legislation meets what we're wanting to do, fulfills the role that we want it to fill in ensuring that we have an accountable, transparent, and timely process to deal with all teacher discipline issues, whether they are teachers that are under the Alberta Teachers' Association or teachers that fall outside of the Alberta Teachers' Association. We have both. We will have one streamlined process for all.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question. [interjection] Oh, my apologies. I've got a blind spot there. The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I want to say that I've really enjoyed listening to both sides of the House as we've talked through this amendment. There's no doubt that this is worthy of consideration but I'm not sure worthy of support. At the end of the day, one of things I think I liked about this bill was that there are currently teachers that are not a part of that discipline – we've got different discipline processes depending on where you are, whether you're a charter school or an independent school or part of the public system.

So I think that the minister probably makes a good point. I think we probably should leave this in the hands of the commissioner to be looking at the panel and how it should be organized. Each of the situations is going to be unique, whether we're talking about professional conduct or whether we're talking about teacher capacity, you know, whether they've met the qualifications for the TQS. So I think there's a wisdom in letting the commissioner have the capacity to decide what is a body of their peers and who should be a part of that panel. Putting a number – half have to come from the ATA – may not do justice to that particular situation. So I think I would – like I say, I believe this was worthy of consideration. I'm just not sure it's worthy of support.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:54 p.m.]

[Fifteen minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------|---------|----------|
| Ceci | Gray | Irwin |
| Ganley | Hoffman | Pancholi |

9:10

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Allard | McIver | Rutherford |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Milliken | Sawhney |
| Copping | Neudorf | Schow |
| Ellis | Nicolaides | Schweitzer |
| Glubish | Nixon, Jeremy | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Gotfried | Panda | Singh |
| Issik | Rehn | Smith |
| LaGrange | Reid | Wilson |
| Madu | Rowswell | |

| | | |
|---------|---------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 6 | Against – 26 |
|---------|---------|--------------|

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We are back – well, we never left Committee of the Whole.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my honour to rise and speak to Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. Unlike members of the opposition, who spent a significant amount of their time during second reading not focusing on the specifics of this bill and instead making excuses for their union friends, I will spend my time further unpacking it for the members of this House.

Madam Chair, Albertans have raised concerns about the ATA playing both a union and a disciplinary role for its members and the potential for conflicts of interest that can arise due to the dual role. Bill 15 will restructure who is responsible for teacher discipline in Alberta, create a single, streamlined process, and separate discipline processes from advocacy functions. This will secure the best interests of students, the public, and the profession itself. Bill 15 would see a teacher profession commissioner appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council to operate at arm's length from Alberta's government.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

To be absolutely clear, Bill 15 would not give the Minister of Education the ability to influence or control the commissioner in the course of their duties or those of the commissioner's office. Under the new proposed discipline model in Bill 15 all complaints would be received by the registrar at Alberta Education and referred to the commissioner, not the minister, for further action. The office of the teaching profession commissioner would review the complaint and determine the appropriate next steps. The complaint would be investigated, referred to mediation or dispute resolution, or dismissed. If an investigation takes place, the commissioner would be required to render a further independent decision to: one, dismiss the complaint if warranted; or, two, consider entering into

a consent resolution agreement or refer the matter to a hearing or choose the dispute resolution option.

In cases where the expedited process to cancel a certificate must be considered for prescribed indictable offences under the Criminal Code that threaten student safety, the commissioner must also decide if a recommendation to the minister should consider cancellation of a certificate or a referral to the hearing committee to recommend a penalty to the minister instead. This is about improving accountability, transparency, and timeliness in the teacher discipline process, full stop.

Mr. Chair, a commissioner model would balance the need for an impartial and fair process with the government's desire to increase oversight to protect students and the public interest. This legislation demonstrates that Alberta's government is putting students first. Albertans deserve greater accountability, transparency, and timeliness in the teacher discipline process and so do teachers. Bill 15 would bring Alberta's teacher discipline process in line with other provinces.

Alberta is the only Canadian province where the teachers' union has the sole responsibility for overseeing complaints of alleged unprofessional conduct and professional incompetence filed against their own union members. That's why the teacher discipline process must be improved with Bill 15. We have one goal with this bill, Mr. Chair: to have an effective and efficient teacher discipline process by using a single legislative structure to govern matters of discipline under one organization, regardless of where teachers are employed or their membership status in a professional association.

Simply put, Mr. Chair, this new discipline model would ensure that all teachers and teacher leaders, including superintendents, are subject to the same disciplinary system. By eliminating the conflict of interest where a union could advocate for its members while also overseeing disciplinary matters, Bill 15 would also bring Alberta in line with other regulated professions such as nurses. Alberta's government is extremely proud of the more than 50,000 hard-working and dedicated teachers and teacher leaders across our great province. Bill 15 is about further protecting students, not punishing the vast majority of Alberta's incredible teachers.

Mr. Chair, Alberta Education will ensure an effective and smooth transition to the new model while ensuring procedural fairness in dealing with current complaints. My department is committed to supporting the education system to make this transition as smooth as possible. This work was not done in a vacuum. We engaged with key stakeholders and education partners in February to hear their perspectives, including meeting with the ATA as well as other education partners and victim advocacy groups. The discussions we had were rich and nuanced, and I cannot thank all of the participants enough for their time and their attention. They were remarkable.

Since we tabled Bill 15, we've received very positive responses from the victim advocacy groups. For instance, Debra Tomlinson, CEO of the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services, said that they support

efforts to streamline professional regulation, transparency and accountability utilizing an external review process for all professionals who are in positions of power and authority across all of our institutions and systems.

Sheldon Kennedy, the cofounder of Respect Group, said:

I applaud the government's efforts to reform the discipline process used in Alberta schools. Professions and organizations all across North America are modernizing and refining their policies and processes to ensure they are unbiased, support victims and ensure transparency for the public. I'm pleased to see Alberta's education system doing the same.

Our education partners, including the College of Alberta School Superintendents, the Association of Independent Schools and

Colleges in Alberta, and the Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools, have all said that they support this legislation. Mr. Chair, this is significant. Even the Alberta Teachers' Association can acknowledge some changes may be beneficial. It seems that the opposition is the only group unwilling to put students first.

Bill 15 was informed by the best practices in Canada. We looked to Ontario and Saskatchewan, who both have self-governed professional regulatory organizations that issue teaching certificates and oversee matters of professional discipline for their teacher members. But they also have no union functions. We also looked at British Columbia, who dismantled their teachers college in 2011, which resulted in the creation of a commissioner's office, that has been successful for them. In all other provinces and territories the provincial or territorial government is responsible for issuing teaching certificates and also plays a varying role in overseeing teacher discipline processes.

Mr. Chair, we found that there are additional checks and balances in place for many of these jurisdictions such as adjudicative committees comprised of teachers and public members or commissioners who operate at arm's length but have accountabilities to the Minister of Education in carrying out disciplinary functions. This new model would not impact the current professional development role of the Alberta Teachers' Association or the College of Alberta School Superintendents. Bill 15 would give them more opportunity to focus on these important functions.

Mr. Chair, this model would also not impact the ATA's role as it pertains to collective bargaining. Bill 15 would also see the Alberta Teachers' Association and the College of Alberta School Superintendents continue to focus on other member-focused services and advocacy. This bill would ensure that members from the teaching profession continue to play an important role in the disciplinary process by serving on hearing and appeal committees, conducting dispute resolutions and mediation processes where appropriate, as the members opposite were just asking for. All committee members would serve on the professional conduct and competency general panel, that would have a chair and a vice-chair, who would then select both teachers and public members from the panel roster to serve on hearing and appeal committees as needed.

Again, to reiterate for the House and particularly for the members opposite, the chair and the vice-chair would make decisions on the composition of hearing and appeal committees, not the Minister of Education. Where a teacher or teacher leader does not agree with a hearing or appeal committee's decision or the minister's decision, the ability to file for a judicial review is still available. These are all elements that ensure procedural fairness in the process.

9:20

Mr. Chair, Bill 15 is about the Legislature doing everything we can to ensure that the public and parents know that we have accountability and transparency when it comes to teacher discipline.

That being said, Mr. Chair, I have an amendment that I want to introduce. I want to make the House aware that since tabling Bill 15, it has come to my attention that minor amendments will be required to address editorial errors and adjustments that are necessary to ensure effective proclamation dates for Bill 15. These are technical amendments that adjust the timing of the coming into force of the legislation; they are not a shift in policy or in the intent of this bill.

Mr. Chair, I look forward to the questions that will come my way, and now I would like to table an amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Just for clarity, if you want to hand off the copies of the amendment there and just wait a moment until we get a copy here at the table, and then I'll give more instructions.

For the purposes of debate, this will be referred to as amendment A2.

The hon. minister can continue, with about 10 minutes still remaining should you choose to take it.

Member LaGrange: Thank you. With amendment A2 to Bill 15, Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022, as indicated, the bill is amended as follows: (a) section 11(b) is amended by striking out subclause (ii) and substituting the following:

(ii) by repealing clause (a);

(ii.1) by repealing clauses (d), (e) and (f);

(b) section 12 is amended in the proposed section 225.99994(2)(g) by striking out "the The" and substituting "The"; (c) section 15(2) is amended by striking out ", (aa)"; (d) section 18 is struck out and the following is substituted:

(18) Sections 2(a) and (b), 3, 4, 7(c) to (e), 9, 11(b)(ii.1), (iii) and

(iv), 12 to 14 and 17 come into force on Proclamation.

Again, these are very technical errors – obviously, a double "the" in one line – just in the formatting, nothing substantive here to change. I encourage all of my colleagues to vote in favour of this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Are there any members looking to join debate on amendment A2? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the minister and the team for ensuring that we could have a chance to look at this and confirm what the minister has said, which is that, clearly, there were just some numbering errors and a couple of instances where a word was duplicated. We have a chance, while this bill is open right now, to fix those, and therefore I'll be supporting the amendment and encouraging my colleagues to do so as well.

What I wish had been done, though, is that there were some actual amendments to address the primary causes that parents, educators, teachers, educational assistants, school leaders, teacher leaders, bus drivers, custodians, everyone who's working in education as well as, of course, students and their families have been raising as some of their key issues as it relates to education. It's not every day we have an opportunity to debate an education bill, and it would be great if in this bill we were doing something to address the significant concerns that Albertans have raised across the board with regard to curriculum, the significant concerns that have been raised about class size, and the fact that there are fewer teachers now according to the government's own budget documents. When you compare the last NDP budget to the most recent budget under the UCP, about a thousand fewer teachers now than there were under previous NDP governments, and of course we know that educational needs are going up, particularly as many families have faced significant hardships over the last few years and the yo-yo effect between schools being open and closed and open and closed.

I know that everyone wants schools to be able to stay open consistently as we continue to move forward, and I'm continuing to hear pressures around staffing as it relates to illness caused by COVID-19 in schools. I wish that the government was doing something in an education bill to address some of the design changes that could be made, including increased filtration in schools and creating safer opportunities for kids to learn consistently in school. Really, what we in this province have experienced over the last two

and a half years has been incredibly unfair to ordinary Alberta families.

I wish that the government was addressing curriculum, class sizes, COVID, the supports that students with disabilities need. Disabled students have suffered significantly under this current government's leadership, particularly when I look at some of the youngest Albertans and some of the oldest Albertans who are in school, losing funding for years 4 and 5 of high school for those who need it, primarily students who are dealing with a number of pressures in their home lives and often disabilities, and children, of course, in the earliest years who relied on PUF funding. Of course, the funding for kindergarten has been eliminated under PUF.

It is these types of things that I wish the government was addressing tonight through education legislation, but the numbering errors and the odd replacement of a duplication of a word: I'm fine to support this amendment as proposed by the minister. I really wish we were discussing some of the other significant issues that families, students, staff, and families have been raising with us, and I'm sure it's not just with me. I'm sure they're raising them with the minister as well.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much.

Are there any members?

Member LaGrange: I thank the hon. member for supporting the amendment and acknowledging that it is really just minor errors in drafting that were needing to be corrected. I heard the hon. member wishing for many things, nothing that had to do with the bill, but I do want to assure the hon. member that wishes do come true, because, in fact, we have been dealing with all of the concerns that she has brought forward in terms of curriculum, ensuring that we had the most robust engagement process across this province, and we have a curriculum that is going to be implemented in September that is research and science based and that really is reinforced by all of the terrific engagement that we have received.

We also have close to – no, over \$1 billion that we will be adding to the Education budget over the course of the next three years and looking at making sure that we have \$700 million added to the base funding and operational funding for school authorities as well as \$191 million over three years for curriculum implementation, an additional \$110 million over three years, again, for mental health and wellness and supports for students that have fallen behind because of COVID.

When we look at special needs, last year I was happy to have announced an additional \$40 million in that funding envelope, which sits at well over half a billion dollars to support our schools and our most vulnerable, and that's not even mentioning the \$45 million that we did add on top of the funding that we provided last year – I should say in this current school year – for the learning disruption loss. I'm hearing great things on how those dollars have been used to ensure that students are catching up.

I do thank the member opposite for supporting this amendment, and I guess the fact that the lack of concern in terms of the actual substantive issues around the bill indicates that we probably got it right, so I am thankful for that and really appreciate all the support. I look forward to everyone voting in favour of this amendment and then moving forward with the rest of this bill process.

Thank you.

9:30

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much, hon. minister.

Are there any other members looking to join on A2?

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 15, Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022. Are there any members wishing to join debate on the main bill?

Seeing none, I am prepared to ask the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 15 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

I see the hon. deputy government whip has risen.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 15.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Mr. Neudorf: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 15. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

I see the hon. deputy government whip has risen.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 9 a.m. Wednesday, May 4, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:33 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, May 4, 2022

Day 29

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, May 4, 2022

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 20

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate May 3: Member Ceci]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members wishing to join debate on second reading? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. This bill seems to be making a few changes to justice acts. Some of them seem pretty straightforward, as the government claims. They are mostly housekeeping, and I will speak to those changes as well. But we have obviously more challenges in the justice system that this government has done nothing to address.

One thing that we do take issue with is that this bill is legislating the changes that government made to the victims of crime fund by taking supports away from the victims of crime, and these changes will certainly have a negative impact on the victims of crime. Instead of supporting victims of crime, the UCP is doing exactly the opposite. This was the opportunity for this government to realize how horrible their changes were and to fix some of those. But, no, they did not get this one right.

As I said, the bill amends five different pieces of legislation: the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Youth Justice Act, and the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act. I want to say that we do not take issue with the changes to the Corrections Act, the Youth Justice Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, or the Missing Persons Act, but we have serious concerns with respect to the victims of crime fund and public safety act changes.

The Corrections Act is making changes so that the compensation rate for Alberta Parole Board members can now be set by an order in council instead of regulation. In the tech briefing government shared that this brings this board in line with other Alberta boards, agencies, and commissions.

With respect to the Justice of the Peace Act, it gives the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta the discretion to designate a justice of the peace as either part-time or full-time if there are certain conditions that are met. That's the same process for judges, and we take no issue with that.

With respect to the Missing Persons Act, it adds a definition of medical information and now allows for TV footage and other

video recordings to be used in missing person cases. Again, we do not take issue with the changes that are proposed in this legislation.

Lastly, the Youth Justice Act changes align the act with changes from the federal Criminal Code, and according to the government it's not a change in the policy.

But the changes that they make to the victims of crime fund and public safety act are significant ones, and these changes have implications for victims of crimes.

Earlier, a couple of years ago, the UCP brought forward Bill 16, and they made changes to the victims of crime fund so that the victims of crime fund can be used to backfill for the reckless cuts that this government has made to the justice system. Since then we have been hearing constantly in our constituencies – in Edmonton, in Calgary, across the province – that victims of crime have been denied benefits. They are only given 45 days to apply for the benefits. I think that's unfair. That doesn't give enough room, enough time for the victims to apply for these benefits. Victims should not be forced to apply for these benefits within a certain time. They should be allowed to heal on their own timeline.

The changes that are contained in this piece of legislation are making some of those changes, some of those horrible changes, permanent. One change that is contained in this piece of legislation is that it de-establishes the Criminal Injuries Review Board. That was, I guess, in part done by legislation previously, but this one formally de-establishes that. This board was an important, arm's-length board that was responsible for reviewing the benefits, hearing the complaints about those benefits. What this government is doing is that they are completely getting rid of this board so that victims will only have to apply through this government, and whatever government wants to do with that program, they will be able to do that on their own.

So far the changes that government has made to this program were not helpful. They were, rather, harmful to the victims of crime. Not one organization across this province – not one organization – supported the changes that government made. I do challenge the members of the government, members of the UCP caucus, this morning if they are aware of just one organization across this province that supported these changes. Not one, but the government won't listen.

That's the reason Albertans don't trust this UCP government. They think they know the best. They ignore Albertans. They just don't respond to their e-mails. I was personally copied on many e-mails relating to this fund. Our leader has received numerous e-mails about this, and we know that they are getting the same e-mails, but unless these e-mails are coming from lobbyists, they just don't respond. The result is that victims of crimes are paying the price.

These changes are fairly significant, and they will codify the changes government made to the victims of crime fund. No one, no victim supports these changes, no organizations supporting victims are in favour of these changes, and we will not be supporting these changes.

9:10

Government needs to go back to the drawing board. Government needs to consult with the victims of crime. Government needs to consult with organizations providing supports to victims of crimes and reverse their damaging policy of using the victims of crime fund to backfill their reckless cuts. Since the UCP took over, they have cut the Justice department budget by \$200 million in the last three budgets, and that impacts services throughout the Justice department. They have downloaded policing costs onto the municipalities. They are making Albertans pay for their recklessness.

When we talk to stakeholders, when we talk to the legal community, there are many issues that they will bring up, but that's not the focus for this government. For instance, since they became government, they've been telling Albertans that they will be hiring 50 prosecutors. And year after year, every time when we ask about the progress on that hiring, they will say that they are in the process of hiring those prosecutors.

We do know that because of the Jordan decision there are so many cases that are at risk of being thrown out because courts won't be able to prosecute them within Jordan timelines. There are so many cases, and Albertans who are victims of those crimes won't be able to have a day in court. They won't be able to get the justice they deserve. That situation has been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic as well. There are tens of thousands of cases that are at a serious risk of being thrown out. Government should be focusing on those cases, on addressing those delays. That's something that Albertans expect this government to focus on.

Lastly, in Calgary in particular we have seen a wave of violence, drug related, gang related. So far there have been 11 murders already this year in Calgary – 11 murders – and one of them a couple of weeks ago was from my neighbourhood. The government needs to focus on addressing that wave of violence because that's, first and foremost, the government's responsibility, to make sure that people are safe in their homes, in their communities. That needs to be the focus of this government. Everyone is fearful for their safety. Those are the real issues that are facing Albertans. Instead, the government is solidifying their raid on the victims of crime fund so that they can backfill for their reckless cuts to the justice system. These changes are hurtful. These changes are damaging.

One, the government is not doing anything to address the rise in crimes. Two, the government is not doing anything to address the delays within the justice system. On top, the government is taking away the supports from those victims of crime. That is shameful, and that's something we will not support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen.

Ms Goehring: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this morning to speak to Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. While I am so appreciative of the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall for highlighting some of the major concerns that this piece of legislation has, this legislation makes some changes to the justice act. Some seem positive. Some are housekeeping, as per what the government is saying.

We, however, think that more needs to be done. We see that they're legislating the victims of crime fund but not actually doing anything to fix the mess that they made. In previous pieces of legislation – I believe it was Bill 16 – this government created some considerable changes to the victims of crime fund, none of which actually support victims of crime.

I have a background where I was a volunteer with the Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton and then did my first-year practicum as a social work student with the Lurana Shelter. I can tell you that had they talked to just simply those two agencies, they would have known that the changes that they were making were not only not helpful, but they were going to be so restrictive that victims couldn't actually access the fund. They put in an implementation of a 45-day time period where the victim must apply for the services for emergency assistance.

I can tell you that the majority of my calls and my interactions dealt with victims well past the 45-day limit. Most in that period –

in the initial weeks or months following a crime specifically related to domestic violence or sexual assault, there is no capacity to expect someone to go and fill out all this paperwork and do all of this work, especially because the majority of those individuals haven't even reported it yet. So many are still in that contemplation phase.

You know, unfortunately, there's a lot of stigmatization that happens around sexual assault and domestic violence. There's a lot of blaming of themselves. Unfortunately, there can be space where other people blame them as well. We've seen judges throughout the province make comments that are completely inappropriate, blame the victim, and those things make the news. So when someone is a victim of a serious crime, those are all of the images and messages that they have. To expect someone to apply within 45 days for funding is absolutely ridiculous.

I think about what the intention of this Bill 20 is. I mean, most of it is what we can support. There are, I believe, five different pieces of legislation, different acts, that are being impacted, but the one that sticks out the most is definitely the victims of crime fund and the horrible changes that this government did.

I know that since the implementation we've heard from many that work in the area of being supports to those that have been victims. You know, there were some significant concerns. The money wasn't rolled out on time. They highlighted the 45-day time period as being way too restrictive. It used to be two years, and even within that two-year time period there were still organizations advocating on behalf of victims, saying that it just wasn't enough time. To take it from two years to 45 days: I can't imagine that many victims are actually able to access this funding. So when this government opens up this legislation, I'm just so confused as to why they wouldn't have taken the feedback that they heard from Bill 16, both prior and post, and done some significant changes in here.

9:20

We know that, you know, I believe it's a \$1,000 limit for being able to access money for counselling. Well, Mr. Speaker, the average rate for a qualified therapist is around \$200 an hour, so saying that there's only \$1,000 to access supports – you're dealing with trauma. That simply is not enough. We hear from victims and their families who say they've spent tens of thousands of dollars on counselling. To have a trauma-informed practice isn't something that can just be wrapped up in only a handful of sessions. These are situations where, like I mentioned, we're talking about the stigmatization of what happens when someone has been assaulted, acknowledging that there's that impact, acknowledging the societal messages that this person perhaps could be to blame. You have to undo all of that trauma.

Oftentimes I've experienced where there are multiple incidents of trauma, and the one that they actually come forward and report wasn't the first time that this person has been victimized. So to think that \$1,000 for counselling is the solution: it's simply unacceptable to look at that. We have so much trauma that can happen as a result of a crime, and I think that this could have been a really great opportunity for them to fix the legislation that they broke with Bill 16.

We know the history and the statistics regarding domestic violence, and we know that it's very likely that those that have experienced domestic violence or intimate partner violence don't report within the first incident. When I was at Lurana Shelter, the statistic was that an assault happens, a woman is victimized, an average of 35 times before she tells one person. Thirty-five times. And that's just telling someone. What happens if that person comes forward and she's not believed or she's not supported or she can't access shelters because they're overflowing, there are no beds available, or she can't get in to see a therapist because the wait-lists are astronomical?

Forty-five days is just simply not a reasonable expectation for someone to be able to report the crime and then complete all the paperwork that's required. There are some significant barriers that individuals face when they're trying to access support services. I know that because of this, many individuals choose or are forced to stay in that relationship because there isn't anything available to help them escape safely.

We know statistically that when a person decides to leave the relationship and they have a plan, that's when they're most at risk, and when I say "at risk," Mr. Speaker, the worst case scenario is that they're killed. This isn't something that is a light topic. It is proven over and over that in intimate partner violence, domestic violence the highest risk to that individual is death. So when we're talking about things that could actually support victims, they need access to mental health supports. They need access to nonprofits, where some of those services no longer exist because they've had to close their doors.

I remember working at Lurana, and the amount of calls that we received in a day compared to the amount of beds that we had available was devastating. We were a shelter that was in Edmonton, and we accepted women from all over the province. We had a shelter that had four beds for single females, and then we had family beds as well. Those four single female beds were never open. There were continuously women that required those services, and to have to tell an individual that we don't have a bed – they've created the courage to come forward, they have a plan, they want to escape – is devastating.

So when you think about the decisions that victims that are fleeing domestic violence or intimate partner violence are facing, it is basic safety needs first. Do I have somewhere safe to go? Do my kids have somewhere safe to go? To complicate things more, throw in a family pet. Trying to find a safe shelter or space for a family pet that you know is at risk – because often statistics show that if human beings are being abused in the home, family pets are also being abused. That can be a factor, where someone chooses not to leave because of their family pet.

When we're talking about a 45-day time period, these individuals are simply trying to stay alive. They're not thinking about applying for the victims of crime fund. And I can tell you that's probably not at the top of mind for those that are providing the supports and services to those individuals. We want to make sure that their basic needs are being met. Is there a protection order in place? Do they have the means to be safe? Can they make sure that their kids are safe? These are people that are coming from all across the province. If you're in rural Alberta, I can tell you that it can be a huge culture shock to come into the city and be in a shelter in the city.

On top of an individual being abused an average of 35 times before they tell one person, the statistic from when I was at the shelter was that an individual would leave the situation an average of seven times before leaving the final time. There are so many factors that come into place when you're deciding what to do. What is the best thing to do for myself? For my kids? For my loved ones?

Those are statistics that aren't unknown. They're easily accessible. We have done so much studying when it comes to how best to support victims. I can tell you that Bill 16 and what the UCP introduced is not what is needed.

Bill 20 would have been a wonderful opportunity to be able to take the mistake of Bill 16 and do some real changes. There are other pieces of this legislation, under the other acts, that make sense, and they're clearly things that we can support. However, this should have been a place where the UCP fixed what they broke. We heard pleas when this piece of legislation was introduced, and we continue to hear from those that are providing services and from victims that there's been so much damage done for those that need

to access the victims of crime fund, that something should be done. Bill 20 would have been the perfect opportunity to make those changes.

I have a friend who accompanies police, RCMP specifically, when there is a serious incident, and her job is to help the families. She's a victim support worker, so she's on call, and she could get a call at any time of day within her area of work to respond. That's because the police have been called, so we know that there's been a crime. Even within that time period, where it's been reported, the police know that it's happened, we have a date of the incident, she tells me that this still isn't enough time.

9:30

The priority isn't trying to set up an application to get services. So many of these individuals are in shock. They have no idea of the trauma that can happen.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate on second reading? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I want to thank my two colleagues who have spoken to this bill and shared their insights and experiences, which helps, I think, Albertans to understand the significance of this bill and the significance of the actions of this government.

Now, as pointed out by my colleagues, there are a number of – I would refer to them as housekeeping – amendments that are being made to, I believe, five pieces of legislation, which, as my colleagues have indicated – I mean, I'll go through them, but they're all reasonable changes. The focus of my comments this morning in second reading will be on the changes that the UCP government made to the victims of crime fund and how frustrated Albertans feel that a fund that is so critical to helping people, helping support people who have gone through unbelievably traumatic experiences, is being used to fund other programs that, quite frankly, the government should be funding, whether it's additional police officers, especially at a time right now.

Mr. Speaker, I mean, it should be pointed out that western Canadian select has been sitting around \$90 U.S. a barrel for some time now. You know, as many Albertans know, every dollar that western Canadian select is above what the government budgets is another \$200 million in royalties for the government. The government has the funds and the means to provide services to Albertans, but this government is choosing not to, and I'll relay some of my experiences working with some very vulnerable young people when I taught at Inner City High School for six years.

I guess I'll lead with some of the housekeeping changes for the benefit of Albertans who are paying attention to the debate this morning. We'll start with the Corrections Act. There's a change where compensation rates for Alberta Parole Board members can now be set by OIC, an order in council, which brings it in line with most other if not all other ABCs, agencies, boards, and commissions. That seems reasonable and very much a minor, minor change.

There are changes to the Justice of the Peace Act giving the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta the ability to designate a justice of the peace as either part-time or full-time. This is similar to the process for judges, so this brings it in line, you know, with the rest of the justice system. I appreciate that previously governments were doing this in a process through regulations, which, of course, just expedites the process. In fact, this could have

been in the red tape bill. This is actually reducing red tape and speeding up the process. So instead of tying up cabinet to do this, it gives the authority to the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta to make that decision. Quite frankly, they are probably much more qualified to make that decision. My guess is that the Minister of Justice would have been speaking to them regardless ahead of time. This expedites that process, so that change I can get behind, Mr. Speaker.

As well, there are changes to the Missing Persons Act. It adds a definition of medical information. Now, the act already had provisions which allowed access to health information, but now things like TV footage, other video recordings can be used in missing person cases, which is wonderful. My understanding of this is that that would also apply to any kind of video even done by cellphone. You know, my understanding is that this is really modernizing this act, but again it wouldn't hurt to have some clarification from the Minister of Justice that it's bringing the act up to speed for today's technology and the access to technology that most Albertans have.

It also adds a section that the justice of the peace can seal court records related to a missing person if that case interferes with an investigation or if it endangers people and changes the timeline for a review by a special committee of the Legislative Assembly. As well, Mr. Speaker, it adds regulation-making powers that give the government the ability to define any term not defined in the act. Again, I suppose that if there is a realization that there's a term that needs to be defined, instead of having to bring the whole act back through the Legislature, which, of course, is a much more lengthy process than doing it through regulations, this gives the cabinet the ability to define a term.

For the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act – actually, I'll come back to that one. Let's jump to the Youth Justice Act. Changes here are changes that are going to align with changes from the federal Criminal Code, so that includes updates on forfeiture, changes that notification of parents can be given by any peace officer as opposed to solely the officer in charge. I mean, that again seems that it makes quite a bit of sense, Mr. Speaker, especially when you think about people and their shifts when they work, holidays, et cetera. It now gives peace officers much more flexibility. I also believe that this will expedite those conversations, again, that they can happen now much easier and much quicker.

I'll now spend the duration of my time talking about changes that this government made to the victims of crime fund and how this was an opportunity for the government to reverse changes that they've made. Again, you know, for the benefit of Albertans, there were a few changes made to the victims of crime fund, first and foremost being that all of the funds that were collected would be used to support victims of crime. Now, I have in my notes, if I can find it, the fact that there would have been a surplus in the fund. Here we go, Mr. Speaker. Before changes to this act were made, there was a \$74 million surplus in this fund, the victims of crime fund, that could have been used toward helping more victims. Instead, the money is now also going to be used to pay for more prosecutors and police officers.

9:40

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am supportive of the fact that we need more prosecutors and we need more peace officers and police officers, absolutely, but they should be paid out of government's revenues and not out of the victims of crime fund.

You know, as a number of people have spoken out and said – I was reading that one person had described this as robbing Peter to pay Paul. We've heard stories of the trauma that people have experienced and what's required, the supports that are needed to help victims.

You know, another change to this was that the two-year reporting period shrunk down to 45 days. I remember speaking in this Chamber against this idea, which is absolutely ridiculous, that the timeline requiring someone to report a crime has shrunk so significantly, especially when we're talking about assaults, sexual assaults, domestic violence. The number of victims that will be ineligible to access this fund is staggering. It's shameful, Mr. Speaker, that people who have gone through what I can only imagine as some of the most traumatic experiences that a person could ever have to go through now don't have access to supports if they do not report within 45 days.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when I worked at Inner City High School, I worked with a number of young people who had faced incredible challenges and had students disclose being victims, but I can tell you that it was not within a 45-day window. Some of them were well over a year if not even longer. To deny supports because a person is not ready to disclose or has to work through the trauma that they've lived through – like, I don't understand the rationale for it, but it looks a lot like the government is trying to prohibit or inhibit victims of crime from accessing supports. I'd love to hear the logic behind it. It's creating barriers, barriers that are completely unnecessary.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when I first looked at this, it made me think back to why I first ran to be an MLA. I was teaching at Inner City High School and saw the incredible barriers that the government then was putting forward for these young people who faced a myriad of challenges but were trying to go to school in order to change their circumstances. They wanted to improve their lives. They didn't want to live in poverty. They didn't want to be homeless.

The hoops that the government brought forward with additional barriers in accessing funding for them to be able to pay their rent, to go to school – many of the students were older, Mr. Speaker. They were unsuccessful in the traditional system. Some of them were born on the streets, born into poverty. Some faced addictions. For some, their parents or parent were in and out of incarceration their whole life. That's their number one role model.

So here they are trying to improve their lives. Mr. Speaker, if a student or someone who wants to go to school can't access funding to do so, then how are they supposed to pay for food and a roof over their head? A number of the students also had young children, so there are issues and barriers as far as child care and daycare. It was really frustrating to see. You know, I give kudos to the school, that provided incredible supports, working with our students, spending hours in front of a computer trying to navigate the system. Here we see again barriers that this government has created.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill because it gives me the opportunity to speak to an overall trend that I see with this government. In fact, I'm beginning to think that we should not refer to this government as the UCP but, rather, as the "Are there no workhouses?" government.

Mr. Bilous: Charles Dickens.

Mr. Feehan: Exactly.

We see a consistent trend in this government to seek out people who are the most vulnerable in society and to take resources away from them and deprive them of the things that they need.

We saw in Bill 16 substantive amounts of money taken away from rape victims to be used for other useful – agreed – things in society, but you don't take money away from rape victims to do them. Why would you take it away from the most vulnerable? We've seen with this government the decision to deindex AISH and to move the payment date for AISH to a date that makes it most likely for people who are disabled to end up having to pay extra fees because of the lateness of their payments. Of course, the deindexing is actually taking money out of their pockets. So we see this government not only going after rape victims; we see them going after disabled people.

We see this government moving to reduce the age at which children in care are supported, and what have we seen in the children in care services? We've seen the most number of children in care or who have had a recent open file with Children's Services die in the history of this province. So if you're a rape victim, if you're disabled, if you're a child in care, if you're vulnerable, this government is not there for you. We see this government oppose race-based data collection, so for people who are oppressed, systematically victims of racism, the government is not there for you. I can tell that after over three years since the report on the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls from the federal government has come out, this government has not even issued a single step forward in moving on that.

Consistently what we see is this government taking people who are vulnerable, pummelling them, beating them down, and then kicking them when they're down, taking their money away when they're in the most vulnerable place that they could possibly be: children in Children's Services, disabled people, racialized people, and now we see people who are rape victims. Specifically, people who've actually witnessed murders are no longer considered eligible for services. You know, this is something I just cannot stand for with this government, this constant decision to go after people who are most vulnerable, to take resources away from them, and to just make the decision that they don't care.

This is the whole attitude of Scrooge writ large here in this province, sending people who should be protected by a society into the worst possible circumstances and making the decision that they just have to survive on their own, and if they don't survive, too bad, even if they're murdered. We have no report from this government after three years on murdered and missing Indigenous women. Three years. How much time do you need when the reports are already written for you?

9:50

This is completely unacceptable. Here we are again finding this government taking money away from people who have been brutalized by watching murders, by being raped, and going through serious traumas that have resulted in the destruction of their lives, their families, and their sense of self. Does this government have no sense about how trauma affects human beings and the consequences of trauma in our society? Can they please go back to school and learn something about how trauma has the consequence of building more trauma in society? If you don't deal with trauma, you will end up with people acting out in ways that cause more trauma for others.

Repeatedly I see this government finding the vulnerable, beating them up, doing the worst possible thing they can to them, and now taking their resources away.

Mr. Nally: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: A point of order has been called.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, 23(h), (i), and (j), language that is going to cause disorder. I have been very patient listening to the ridiculous comments from the individual across, but to say that a government beats up on vulnerable – and, actually, not beats up on. Beats up, so it wasn't even figurative. It was literal. Quite offensive. Hopefully, the gentleman can class it up.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that that member somehow didn't like hearing about trauma, victims of rape, victims of crime who are stripped of support through this piece of legislation. We are at the second reading of this bill, where a member can talk about the principles of the bill, changes contained in it, how they impact the society, how they impact Albertans. It's not at all a point of order. I think the minister needs to read up in this House procedure book.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much.

At this stage I don't think that we have brought ourselves to a point where there's an actual point of order. The individual, though very passionately, was discussing about the government broadly speaking, not individuals. What I would say, though, is that it can get to a point where language chosen by an individual in here can ultimately begin to cause disorder. So what I would do is that I would just ask the hon. member to perhaps use some different phrases that may accomplish the same goals. If he could, please, continue.

Thank you.

Debate Continued

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, when I'm using an expression, I'm speaking metaphorically, not literally, although it doesn't surprise me that the government has trouble with the difference between the two.

I do think it's interesting that they are not objecting to the facts that I've put forward, that this government indeed has attacked the disabled and has taken money out of their pockets, that they have reduced supports for children who have lived their lives in care, and that we have seen an increase in the number of children that have died subsequently, often from suicide, if you read the Ombudsman's report on this. They do not argue the fact that they denied race-based data collection, which was asked for by people who are oppressed. They do not deny that they have done nothing about murdered and missing Indigenous women in terms of putting out a report. They've had three years to do something. They had a committee work on it for over a year within that period of time and still have done nothing.

You notice they do not argue the facts, because the facts speak for themselves. The truth is that this government does not understand the nature of vulnerability and are more than happy to take resources away from people who are vulnerable. In this case they're specifically targeting people who have experienced trauma. They are specifically going after people who have been raped, people who have seen murders and taking resources away from them, just as they did with Bill 16. If they just did nothing, we would be better off. If they had just left AISH alone, we would be better off. If they had just left the children-in-care bill the way it was, we would be better off. In most of these cases doing nothing

would be a better moral choice than the choices that this government has made.

Now we see there are specific actions being taken here where they're putting in limits of 45 days from the time of the actual commission of the crime to apply for victims' services. This is so ridiculous, that they do not understand the nature of trauma and how people respond to trauma. If you look at jurisprudence across this country, you will see that governments and courts have said that you cannot put limits on victims because there is a process of dealing with trauma which often extends into the period of years.

There was a time that you couldn't report a rape if it was over a year old. Governments and courts have said: "That's ridiculous. People can't do that. You should be able to report a rape 30 years later." But in this government, in this province, if you do that, you get no resources because: oh, you didn't report it in 45 days. Can you imagine what it's like to go through a sexual assault? Can you imagine what it's like to witness somebody in your family get murdered? And you're supposed to go: I know I'm feeling all these bad feelings, but perhaps I should be reasonable and think about the paperwork I have to do. It is absolutely unconscionable that this government is acting in this way yet again, consistently. Their value system is to go after people who are most vulnerable and take the resources away from them.

The other thing that this government could do, besides take off this ridiculous limit of 45 days, which is just absolutely in the face of all science with regard to the treatment of trauma: they could actually provide resources, put the money back in that they took out in Bill 16, and say to people: "You know what? We're not going to limit your counselling to \$1,000 after you've been raped," which, as has been mentioned in this House, is maybe five sessions, "and why don't we actually provide counselling for you for a period of a year or two regardless of the costs?" That's what most trauma victims actually need.

Trauma is not readily resolved. I worked in this area for many, many years, as you know. I wish we had a better resolution. I wish people could come with me and work with me and within five sessions it's all gone, they're happy, and they're at least in a functional place where they can move on in society. But that is not what happens. What happens is that people go into a trauma state, and they struggle for months, sometimes years even to get into the place to begin to do the work, let alone actually work through the horribleness of these things and then actually resolve them and move on and find a place to thrive and be vibrant in society. Anybody who works in the area knows that's true.

I wish there was a better answer. I certainly would go take the training if something else was offered to be able to provide quick and effective services to resolve trauma, but we know that nobody in the world has designed that kind of treatment. What we do have is effective, solid, relationship-based treatment that takes time to build a relationship and to use that relationship effectively to move a person from a place of trauma to a place of health. And this government has just made the decision that they do not want to be part of that healing process, that they are going to put limits on families.

First of all, some won't even get it at all because: "Oh, they only witnessed their mother being murdered. They didn't actually get murdered themselves." And others who have been sexually assaulted or by other kinds of assault will be told: "Get over it. Get on with it quickly." This is absolutely not acceptable, and I'm insisting that this government remove this bill, that they do the work to get this right. They haven't even released the report that was done by the working group to examine the benefits of the fund for victims. They won't even give us the information, hiding reports,

as they typically do, and, when they are absolutely forced to, releasing them on Easter weekend. This is the consistent pattern with this government. There is an inherent dishonesty in that kind of behaviour.

If you want people to actually receive the information, you don't release it on Holy Thursday. You release it on Monday morning so that people can read it and respond to it. But I can see that they are just trying to hide yet again the facts that people would use to judge this government as they should be judged, as governments who are not there if you're disabled, not there for you if you're a child in care, not there for you if you're part of a racialized community, not there for you if you are a murdered or missing Indigenous woman, and now not there for you if you are a victim of trauma.

10:00

This government needs to remove that 45-day limit now before this bill moves forward. This government needs to increase the actual resources available to families and not limit it to \$1,000. This government must reinstate the financial benefits for all survivors of any kind of victimization, because you are not the judge of how people respond to a traumatic incident. For one person a traumatic incident may not be overwhelming, but for somebody who has had a previous traumatic incident, even a small crime can be triggering of the initial traumatic incident.

I worked with one person who was a bank teller, and someone came in to rob the bank. She wasn't even the one who had the gun pointed at her, but she came into therapy. She was deeply traumatized because she had experienced previous traumas of being victimized as a child, being sexually assaulted, and therefore came back to me, because I helped treat her when she was young, to say that she was struggling again. She's the kind of person that would not get any resources from this government because the gun wasn't pointed at her; she just happened to be in the bank at the time the robbery occurred. But for her it was real trauma because it was an echo of the trauma that she experienced as a child and made her feel vulnerable again, and she needed to come back into therapy in order to go back to that place where she found health and healing. And this government has made the decision that she is not worthy of services, she is not worthy of support.

This government needs to open up the money that is available in the victims of crime fund into new, exploratory ways of treating people and building community around people who have been victimized. There was supposed to be a surplus in this fund until the government raided it, and now the government is denying, put a moratorium on grant applications for new programs to come forward, and there's no reason to do that. You have the money.

As previously stated by one of my peers, oil is at the highest it's been for very many years. You have an abundance of dollars. Now, I know it can't be spent on everything, but you would think that people who are victimized and traumatized would be at least somewhere near the top of priorities. But no. You know what's at the near top of priorities? A war room, which doesn't report on anything and hasn't accomplished anything in many years and spends more money on a daily basis than this program gives to people who have been victimized. This is completely... [interjections] Yes.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for that. I appreciate – you know, just further to that, let's not forget that the victims of crime fund is funded from resources that are seized from other criminal activities, too, right? So it's not as though it's, like, money that is from oil revenues. Rather, it is money that's accumulated from, let's say, the seizure of assets in a criminal situation.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, would you like to respond? You have only about 12 seconds at this stage.

Mr. Feehan: I think I've made my point. I think that the government needs to sit down and look at its decisions from a value-based perspective and to start treating people who are vulnerable with respect.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer a few comments as well on Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Let me first start off by thanking my friend from Edmonton-Rutherford for bringing so much passion to the debate. He has been a fierce advocate for victims of crime and for better treatment of the victims of crime from this government from the very day that he was elected, and I really appreciate the fact that he brings his significant experience as a social worker and a person who was engaged in therapy for people for many, many years. I appreciate that he brings that perspective to the House. It's one that I think is very much needed, and certainly the government would benefit from taking his advice into consideration.

I would also like to say that I appreciated the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford's references to Dickens. I, too, am a fan of Dickens but not Charles Dickens; I'm a fan of Little Jimmy Dickens, whose hit in the 1960s, *May the Bird of Paradise Fly Up Your Nose*, is certainly one of the most outstanding country music songs of all time.

I want to build on the point that my friend from Edmonton-Rutherford was making with respect to the government and how they're treating victims of crime. He did mention that the government has been sitting on the report on missing and murdered Indigenous women for at least three years, and I just want to update the House on the status of the government's response to that report. We had a meeting with the Indigenous Relations ministry at the Public Accounts Committee on Tuesday morning. We questioned officials from the Indigenous Relations ministry on the status of the government's response to that, and they said that they will be responding to that report in the very near future. So I certainly hope that that provides everybody with assurance that the government is taking this issue very seriously, because after three years of waiting for a response, to hear that the response is coming sometime in the near future is not exactly the assurance that people were looking for.

To turn to the issue around how the government has changed the use of the victims of crime fund with this legislation and previous legislation, you know, let me just first state that I think the government has done a good thing in announcing yesterday or maybe the day before – I can't remember exactly when it was announced – the fact that Crown prosecutors are going to get a pay bump so that they are competitive with other lawyers, people working in the field. I think that it's important that we pay Crown prosecutors the salary that they deserve and pay them enough to keep them working for the Crown instead of losing them to other areas of law.

We know that this government has had a serious problem with workforce morale in the Crown prosecutors' office, and I sincerely hope that by increasing the pay, the government will be able to better retain Crown prosecutors, better attract Crown prosecutors. This is a problem that has long existed, that the government has failed to address even though they committed to addressing it in their platform. You know, they promised to hire a whole host of

new Crown prosecutors, yet they have failed for three years to hire the number of Crown prosecutors that the Justice department says that it needs. I hope that by increasing the pay of the Crown prosecutors, this will advance the government's work to attract and retain more Crown prosecutors in the Justice department.

Mr. Speaker, the money that is to be paid to Crown prosecutors, to new Crown prosecutors, to raises for existing Crown prosecutors, should not come from the victims of crime fund, as this government has given itself the power to do. That money should come from general revenue. Victims of crime should be supported by money from the victims of crime fund. I think that it's unfair to take away important supports for victims of crime to pay Crown prosecutors.

The government has an obligation to carry out justice by having an adequate staff of Crown prosecutors and to look after the victims of crime by providing them benefits through the victims of crime fund, and they certainly have the financial wherewithal to achieve both of those objectives simultaneously. There is certainly no cost pressure that the government is facing right now that would prevent them from doing both of those things at the same time. They can keep the money in the victims of crime fund for use by victims of crime and also give a pay increase and hire more Crown prosecutors at the same time. It won't affect their bottom line. They'll still probably run a surplus this year if they did both of those things.

10:10

It's outrageous to me that they would try to achieve their objectives in one area of the Justice department by sacrificing the needs of victims of crime. That's incredibly unfair, especially at the same time as granting profitable corporations a \$4.7 billion tax cut. Why does somebody who has been a witness to murder or a victim of sexual assault have to go without important supports to deal with the trauma that they've suffered while shareholders of insurance companies get to increase their dividends? That's not fair. But this is the way the government continues to prioritize the people of Alberta. If you are an investor, you get every benefit, every support from the government. If you're a victim of crime, you have to fight tooth and nail to get the bare minimum of supports from the government. That's incredibly unfair.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we had a high-profile violent crime occur not too long ago in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. A young man by the name of Karanveer Sahota was murdered by allegedly seven children while waiting for a bus on his way home from school.

An Hon. Member: It's horrible.

Mr. Schmidt: It is horrible. My heart goes out to his family, who are suffering the pain of that loss.

But what's made it worse, Mr. Speaker, is that if they wanted to apply for support and benefits through the victims of crime fund, they only have 45 days to do it. I can tell you that just from observing how all of this has played out, 45 days is precious little time for a family to access victims of crime funding if they've been in this situation. The logistics of dealing with his hospitalization, the funeral, bringing the family together to mourn his loss: that all takes time and energy. They don't have additional time or the mental energy to worry about whether or not they should apply to the victims of crime fund within 45 days.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, this crime has victimized hundreds of other students. This kid was murdered in full view of a school of about 900 students. How many of those other students need the support to deal with being a witness to that trauma? Hundreds of them, and there are no supports for them now through the victims of crime fund because they're not eligible. If you're a witness to a

homicide, you no longer qualify for benefits through the victims of crime fund.

Now, maybe people would say: “Well, surely the school must have support for them. Can’t they just talk to the counsellors at school?” The answer is no. On the very day that McNally high school brought in grief counsellors to help these hundreds of students deal with the trauma of witnessing one of their fellow classmates get murdered at a bus stop, that same grief counsellor was given his notice that he was no longer to be employed by the Edmonton public school board. They couldn’t afford to keep him on. How is that fair?

This government has failed that family twice over, failed that family and the students at McNally high school twice over. They’ve told everyone who has been victimized by that crime that they are no longer eligible for benefits, and they’ve taken away the important supports that should be there in the school for these kinds of cases.

And to add insult to injury, Mr. Speaker, when we bring this up in the Legislature, the lack of critical supports for students in Edmonton public schools, the minister denies it, tells us that we’re fearmongering, that what is actually happening and is plain for everybody to see with their own eyes is not happening. I would certainly like the minister to take the time to visit with the students of McNally high school – I’m sure they’d be happy to have her – explain to them the effect that this crime has had on their school community, and tell them the kinds of supports that they need to be able to heal from this, create safer schools, put measures in place to make sure that this doesn’t happen to another McNally high school student ever again. My hope is that by doing that, the minister’s heart would be opened, that she would let go of this story that she continues to tell, that the supports that Edmonton public school students are getting are sufficient, because they’re not, and that she’d reverse the decisions that she’s made to claw back funding from those students.

You know, it’s easy when you sit here in this House, and all you have are the budget documents in front of you, to think that what you’re doing is sufficient to meet the needs of the students, but if the minister were to actually visit McNally school right now, I’m sure that she would come back to this Legislature telling a different story because you can’t not be moved by listening to what the students and the staff have experienced as a result of this, and they need much more support than what they’re getting to get through this, and it’s not coming from anywhere. It’s not coming from the victims of crime fund. It’s not coming from the budget of the Ministry of Education. It’s not coming from anywhere else. Those family members and those students are left completely on their own to deal with this.

My fear, Mr. Speaker, is that if the family of that student and his classmates at McNally high school aren’t able to sufficiently deal with this trauma, that will have a negative outcome, that will lead to further violence and crime. I think we have an opportunity here to stop the cycle of violence, and I hope the government takes it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. First, I want to thank the Minister of Justice for bringing this bill forward. Part of the responsibilities of this Legislature is to continuously update current legislation to align with current societal realities and changes in our province and country. This

responsibility is even more important for justice-related legislation, which is required to stay current and effective. This bill is a demonstration of the UCP government’s commitment to ensure that Albertans have access to justice.

10:20

Mr. Speaker, we have read from the bill. One major highlight of Bill 20 is the housekeeping amendments to the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, and the Youth Justice Act. I fully support the changes proposed in this bill, which will streamline the appointment process for justices of the peace and clarify the processes for police working cases on missing persons.

There are also changes that will bring provincial legislation in line with changes to Canada’s Criminal Code. Some of these changes include renaming “death benefit” in the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act to “funeral expense reimbursement.”

We all know the trauma the families and friends of missing persons go through in finding their loved ones. This bill will make it possible for our officers to resolve missing persons cases in a timely manner. Some of this information includes inbound and outbound phone and text records of missing persons as well as a record of their browsing history to help police determine possible places to start looking. The bill also proposes access to signal records from wireless devices which will indicate the possible location of a missing person. This will go a long way to improve the efficiency, effectiveness of police searches for missing persons because they will have more tools at their disposal to work on the missing person’s case.

Administrative changes are also proposed in the Corrections Act amendments, which will ensure that compensation rates of Alberta Parole Board members are set by order in council rather than regulations. These changes will greatly improve the functions of the board and bring them into consistency with other government agencies, boards, and commissions in Alberta.

The bill also proposes to remove administrative bottlenecks in the Justice of the Peace Act to give powers to the Chief Judge to make full- or part-time appointments of justices of the peace. With these changes, the Chief Judge, in accordance with established laws and the approval of the Judicial Council, will have the flexibility in judges and masters in chambers for new assignments for the remainder of their appointments either on a full-time or a part-time basis.

With the passage of this bill there will be efficient and effective court administration. Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to examine our laws and justice system and look for ways to improve them by removing what slows down the justice system. This proposed legislation puts forward a number of changes that will modernize Alberta’s justice system by removing redundant clauses and correctly adjusting dated references in existing legislation. The new legislation will modernize the wording of this legislation and bring it up to speed with the current realities in Alberta’s justice system. The bill proposes changes to Alberta’s justice system, and it is pleasing to note the proposed bill will significantly align Alberta’s justice system with other jurisdictions in Canada. In my view, the administrative and housekeeping reforms included in this bill will help Alberta to update legislation that govern this justice system and bring relief to Albertans.

The job of government is fundamentally to respond to calls from the public for changes in different areas of society and to advance the well-being of its people. This UCP government is doing precisely that by introducing transformative adjustments to Alberta’s justice system that will make responsible stakeholders perform better. The administrative changes that are introduced,

although minor, are very important in order for justice-related legislation to continue to run smoothly for Albertans both now and into the future.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will adjourn the debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there – I see the hon. member for . . .

Some Hon. Members: He moved to adjourn debate.

The Acting Speaker: Oh, he moved to adjourn debate. Sorry.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 22

Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate May 3: Mr. Turton]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members looking to join debate on this one? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to offer a few comments on Bill 22, the justice – Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022: that was the last bill that we were talking about. This is something else entirely. I'm sure that the name is incredibly clever, reflecting – the Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, of course.

I think that the government is making some positive moves here in modernizing the electricity grid. Certainly, the legislative changes that are being allowed here to allow for energy storage to be incorporated into the grid and function on our energy market are positive and much-needed moves to modernizing the energy grid. As my friend from Lethbridge-West said in her comments on this bill a few days ago, any forward-looking government would recognize the need to decarbonize its electricity system, and by enhancing the capacity for energy storage on that electricity system, I think that we are moving in the right direction with regard to that.

We have a long way to go, though, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to decarbonizing our electricity grid. Even though our government accelerated the phase-out of coal-fired electricity, the bulk of that electricity generation was picked up by natural gas generation, which, to its credit, is certainly a cleaner fuel than coal, but it is still quite greenhouse gas intensive. Eventually we need to get to a net-zero electricity grid, and in fact our party has committed to achieving that objective by 2035 should we be elected to government.

10:30

You know, it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that on the topic of coal-fired electricity phase-out, the associate minister of natural gas and a number of his colleagues on Executive Council have blamed the accelerated coal phase-out for the current electricity price spike, which makes absolutely no sense, especially when it's followed up by the minister's claim that had we only looked at the issue of so-called clean coal, we wouldn't be in the mess we are in today when it comes to electricity prices.

Well, Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The fact of the matter is that had any government pursued so-called clean coal technology, the price of electricity generation would have skyrocketed because the costs of capturing carbon emissions and storing them underground at a coal-fired electricity power plant are astronomical. There is no way that there would be any feasible way to capture those emissions and store them underground and provide electricity at a price that's lower than it is today had any government allowed coal-fired generation to pursue that option.

Moreover, there are a couple of examples where so-called clean coal technology has failed spectacularly. I think it was not too long ago that Mississippi closed down a so-called clean coal electricity generation plant because the technology that they tried to employ there did not work. So now the ratepayers in that state, in that jurisdiction, are on the hook for a massive technological failure of a huge bet that went bad.

So when the associate minister of electricity says that he wishes that the government would've pursued clean coal technology, what he's saying is that he wanted electricity prices to go up even more than they have already. It's completely outlandish. What I suspect that the government wishes they could've done is to allow coal-fired generation to continue apace without any significant greenhouse gas emissions mitigation measures in place. That's not even something that the Harper government in Ottawa supported, nor is it something that the planet could've survived.

I'm exceptionally proud of our government's record of phasing out coal-fired power. In fact, even though, when we embarked down that road, we were told by power generators that it was impossible, it could never be done, a couple of years later TransAlta and Capital Power . . .

Mr. Jean: We're paying for it.

Mr. Schmidt: We're not paying for it. We're not paying for it.

Mr. Jean: Yes, we are. You haven't checked your heating bill.

Mr. Schmidt: The Member for Fort . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, through the chair. The only person with the call right now is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: It's interesting to me, Mr. Speaker, that an actual member of the Harper government is taking issue with a decision that his own government made, and what the member fails to recognize is what additional costs the people of Alberta would have paid if we hadn't made that decision. He's laughing because I think he suspects that climate change isn't real and it doesn't have actual costs to the people of Alberta, but it does. It will, and it will be borne by his constituents if we – those greenhouse gas emission reductions had to come from somewhere, and they came from the coal-fired power plant. The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo – sorry. Not the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. That guy can't tell his left foot from his right foot most of the time.

Speaker's Ruling Insulting Language

The Acting Speaker: Hon. member, I think that that was a direct insulting attack on an individual member. I'd ask that you withdraw the comment.

Debate Continued

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche needs to recognize that if those greenhouse gas emissions didn't come from the coal sector, they would've come directly from the oil sands sector, which is something that he's absolutely opposed to.

We need to recognize that climate change is a serious and imminent threat and that we need to do something. We need to take meaningful action, and our government did that. We shut down

coal-fired power in an attempt to do our part to reduce Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. I'm looking forward to hearing the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche's greenhouse gas mitigation plan. If he thinks that he could do it cheaper, without making the kinds of impacts that our government made, then he's welcome to present his plan. I eagerly await that.

The minister has also claimed that skyrocketing power prices have been the result of what he says are our government's overbuild of the transmission sector. I have two things to say about that. First of all, if the associate minister is so concerned about the overbuild of the electricity transmission sector, then he should maybe take that up with the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Ask him why that decision was made, because that's exactly who made it, Redford-era PCs. In fact, I – the rest of them are gone. You know, former member of this House Joe Anglin made an entire political career on the issue of the overbuild of the transmission sector, and the PCs laughed him off at the time. So they're the ones who hold responsibility for that.

Let me also say that having lived through the hottest summer on record and then one of the longest cold snaps on record, just in the last eight, 10 months here in Alberta, I am thankful that we had the capacity in the electricity sector to generate and transmit that much power. If we hadn't, there would've been people freezing to death in their homes this winter, and there would've been people who suffered, who died from the heat because they didn't have access to air conditioning. We know that people did die from heat. Hundreds of people in Calgary died from heat exposure because they didn't have access to appropriate air conditioning.

Mr. Schow: Are we going to buy them air conditioners like we're going to buy them roofs?

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, the only member with the call right now is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I would remind all members of the House, though, that if they do have comments that they would like to make, it would be through the chair, or perhaps I think that there's always the opportunity to do an intervention as well – right? – but if you also want to have conversations, perhaps you can take them to the lounge.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar with three minutes and 49 seconds remaining.

10:40

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Cardston-Siksika asked me if I think the government should buy people air conditioning. I certainly do, at least in long-term care facilities. There are hundreds of people in long-term care facilities who had to withstand . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I think the next time I stand up, I'm going to call members out and say: perhaps you would like to go have a conversation in the lounge.

We have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. If you could please stick to the bill at hand, Bill 22, that would be very appreciated; three and 34 remaining.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, all of the comments that I've made have been directly applicable to the electricity system. We need air conditioning in our long-term care facilities because senior citizens will die if they continue to be exposed to the kinds of heat that we saw at the end of June and the beginning of July last year. That is a fact, and the government has a responsibility to look after those people, to make sure that they lead lives that are as good as can be. If the Member for Cardston-Siksika would like to visit some of the long-term care facilities in

Edmonton-Gold Bar and see the kind of conditions that people are living in currently, I am more than happy to give him a tour.

We have some serious issues to deal with in the electricity system. I think the government is making the right move in requiring distribution owners to provide long-term plans because upgrading our distribution system will be critical to electrifying the future. Speaking to people with experience in this area, the city of Edmonton is not equipped right now to handle the massive electrification of the transportation sector, for example. We just can't under the current plan, so I'm glad that the government is bringing forward a requirement for distribution owners to plan for that future because just in the transportation sector alone we are undergoing massive change.

The sale of electric vehicles is skyrocketing right now and would actually be even higher if we had a supply chain that didn't limit the production of those vehicles. But if people in Edmonton were to all suddenly shift to electric vehicles, the distribution system would not be able to handle it as it's currently constructed, so I'm glad that the government is requiring distribution owners to address those kinds of problems, and I look forward to everybody in Edmonton-Gold Bar being able to choose to purchase an electric vehicle and use that for transportation if they want.

An Hon. Member: What do you drive?

Mr. Schmidt: Right now – what do I drive? I drive a minivan. It's the sexiest vehicle on the road, thank you very much. I'm happy to take the member on a cruise through Edmonton-Gold Bar if he wants to enhance his cred there. I can tell you that you get a lot of attention driving down the streets of Edmonton-Gold Bar in a minivan.

Mr. Schow: Playing some polka music?

Mr. Schmidt: Yes, absolutely. The Member for Cardston-Siksika can choose the polka record of his choice to listen to as we make that cruise through the . . .

Mr. Bilous: It's an eight-track.

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. I had to have my minivan modified to include an eight-track player so that I could listen to my old polka eight-tracks.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, that I think the government is moving ever so slowly in the right direction to decarbonize our electricity system and to upgrade, but I don't think they're going far enough, and they're not being honest about some of the cost pressures.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Calgary-East has risen to debate.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to express my support for this significant legislation that will modernize our electricity laws, Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. I would like to thank the Minister of Energy and the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity for taking this important initiative to ensure our system is able to meet the fast-emerging technological innovations and promote investor confidence through sustained focus on regulatory clarity and efficiency.

Alberta's energy-only market continues to attract new investment and competition. It is a good thing that we maintained this type of market through Bill 18 in 2019 after consulting with a cross-section of stakeholders. During that consultation process stakeholders

voiced strong support for the energy-only market, saying that it offers structural and administrative simplicity and has a proven track record for providing both affordable electricity and a reliable supply of electricity.

Investors expressed confidence and willingness to invest in an energy-only market, saying that it is established and understood, which offers greater certainty regarding its future performance. Technological and industrial developments continue to evolve rapidly, producing new challenges and opportunities as well.

We are seeing a transition from centralized to decentralized generation systems and a baseload to intermittent electricity generation. Alberta's electricity system, like many globally, is seeing the way that electricity producers and consumers interact with and use the electricity grid evolve as innovative technologies and changing consumer behaviours are increasingly asking a one-way-flow power system to operate in a bidirectional, or two-way, manner. This can also be seen from the significant rise in distributed energy resources, including distributed generation, generation like solar panels, small natural gas fuelled generators, energy storage, electric vehicles, and controllable loads.

With these emerging advancements occurring, Bill 22 will reinforce our energy-only market and maintain market competitiveness. It will ensure consumers have safe, reliable, and affordable electricity while promoting investor confidence through regulatory efficiency, policy clarity, and removal of needless barriers.

More and more consumers have expressed interest in a self-supply with export system. The Alberta Utilities Commission expressed that there are limited circumstances where the owner of a generating unit is allowed to consume electricity produced from that generating unit on their own property while also exporting the electricity produced by the generating unit for exchange through the Power Pool. Where no exemptions apply, the owner of a generating unit is prohibited from using that unit to supply on-site load and export electricity generated for exchange through the Power Pool.

The AUC recognizes that current legislation was enacted prior to the recent increase in distributed generation and the affordability of economic, small-scale generating units. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, in late 2019 consultation on the issue of power plant self-supply and export was made, and the majority of the 33 submissions received were in favour of the option of having unlimited self-supply and export, which requires a change to the statutory scheme and may require changes to existing transmission and distribution tariff structures.

10:50

A second round of consultation was made in 2020, which was focused on the market and tariff implications of unlimited self-supply and export. The AUC published a discussion paper which included a summary of the summations received from the said consultations. With thoughtful consideration of all the relevant matters, including the result of the consultations, and to ensure ongoing fairness relative to the transmission cost of uneconomic bypass, this bill will enable unlimited self-supply with export, which can assist industrial and commercial operators in managing electricity costs, promote the reliability of the integrated electricity system, and reduce emissions. It will clarify tariff treatment of self-supply with export projects in the spirit of fairness and ensure that these projects will align with an efficient, fair, competitive electricity market.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's system is based on companies that generate electricity as their core business plus limited exceptions such as industrial system designations and small-scale generation. Commercial and industrial businesses who would like to generate electricity and export it to the grid are currently not

permitted to do so. By enabling self-supply with export, everyone who wants to generate their own electricity will be able to do so and export the excess electricity to the grid and will pay their fair share of the overall system costs from which they benefit, including transmission.

Increased self-supply with export is not expected to increase electricity costs for Albertans. Rather, the additional generation would help stabilize energy prices and encourage electricity market competition. With greater competition consumers will expect more options and different offers. Also, the system is designed to ensure that those participating pay their fair share of system costs, which, in turn, would keep the system costs stable for consumers.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, it will explicitly provide the definition for an energy storage resource, which is lacking in the current legislative framework, inadvertently limiting its application. It is aimed to provide clarity to regulators and ensure certainty to investors. It will also identify parameters of users, ownership, and cost recovery. Over the past several years there has been an increased interest in energy storage projects in Alberta, particularly in the last couple of years. The significant development of new large-scale renewable projects has resulted in substantial interest in new energy storage projects.

Canada's largest solar energy project is under way in Vulcan county, which attracts big investors like Amazon, apart from their announced investment in a solar energy project in Newell county, east of Calgary, which will produce over 195,000 megawatt hours, MWh, of renewable energy. That is enough to power more than 18,000 Alberta homes for a year. So as we promote diversification of our economy, we have to modernize our legislation and systems for us to address growing development.

Energy storage is an evolving technology with potential benefits for all aspects of Alberta's electric energy system. Energy storage has many different attributes and, depending on the application, may look like generation, load, transmission, or distribution. Energy storage technology is also scalable, resulting in deployment to the smaller residential scale or all the way to the larger commercial projects.

Bill 22 will also begin winding down the Balancing Pool by redistributing its remaining responsibilities and laying the groundwork for dissolution in the coming years. Established to support Alberta's fair, efficient, and openly competitive electricity market, the Balancing Pool's primary role of managing fixed-price deals with electricity producers ended in 2020. Actions taken by the previous government resulted in the Balancing Pool losing 1.34 billion of taxpayer dollars.

Another positive impact that the bill introduces, Mr. Speaker, is the establishment of a long-term planning framework to modernize Alberta's distribution system. Grid modernization is needed to support the evolving system, and should there be no context of long-term planning now, unexpected costs may result in the future. Proper consideration must be made respecting the needs of rural electrification associations or disconnected municipalities. Suitable development of road maps and consideration of storage, electric vehicle charging, energy efficiency, and distributed generation must also be made with minimal technical standards.

To ensure accomplishment of these needed modernizations of distribution policies, this bill will authorize the minister to guide planning frameworks through regulations. Alberta's current policy framework does not require distribution companies to proactively plan for adoption of distributed energy resources and does not require distribution facility owners to consider the system benefits which these resources could provide.

However, proactive planning of grid modernization could provide for better cost management and improve customer outcomes.

Legislative amendments are required to ensure the distribution system can enable the development of distributed energy resources in an orderly and efficient manner. It is expected that a transparent and co-ordinated long-term planning framework will support an orderly and cost-efficient transition to a modernized grid that will integrate more distributed energy resources.

With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, the government seeks to improve the lives of all Albertans. Alberta's recovery plan is set on an unprecedented path towards a new, innovative, and diversified energy future, recognizing that the development of sustainable forms of energy will become more of a driver of investment moving forward. It is the provincial government's ongoing, aggressive response to the impact of the pandemic and distribution in global energy markets.

As we strive to lead the country in economic growth, we are seeing new businesses and more investors coming to our province as we promote diversification. That is why the changes that this bill carries . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. I have a number of comments on the bill but also want to talk a little bit about Alberta's electricity system as a whole, going back to the mid-2000s. Really, that is where we need to go back to to truly understand why today Albertans are paying such a high price for electricity.

11:00

But I'll begin with some comments about the bill. I have a couple of questions, actually, for the minister. I know that the minister brought forward a bill similar to this. I believe it was last fall. I'm curious why it got pulled then to be reintroduced now. I appreciate that there are some changes between the two bills. I believe the first iteration of this bill didn't deal at all with the Balancing Pool and that this iteration does, but I'm just curious why that was, if the minister, through Committee of the Whole, could walk us through that process.

What this bill does I'm largely in support of, Mr. Speaker, as far as providing the ability for . . . [interjection] Oh, I don't even have to wait for Committee of the Whole. I'll give way to the minister.

Mr. Nally: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for making way. That's a good question. We had this in another iteration. While it was in Committee of the Whole, we had some stakeholders that had some concerns that they had already made some investments based on the current climate of regulation in the industry. So if you go back to the bill, we put some amendments in there that allow and address those companies that had made investments so that they won't be unfairly punished with new regulation. It essentially gives them a path to industrial system designation. I don't know the exact number, because it's always fluid, but it's around 18 companies in that position. Then, as you know, we prorogued, so we had to start again, and Bill 86 has now become Bill 22.

There was a second question, and it escapes me. But it'll come to me, and I'll stand up on another intervention later on. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to the minister, I do thank him for his comments and response. It's quite

nice to actually have an exchange where we're talking about policy, so that was quite enjoyable. I appreciate that and recognize that that's a very good reason to pull the bill back, recognizing that companies had made investments.

I know for a fact – I'm curious, and if the minister has an answer to this, I welcome him to stand up, and I'll take his interjection. I know Amazon's AWS has made an announcement to invest significant dollars in Alberta. It'll take a period of about 14 years to get the full investment, but I know they've already begun. In fact, I found it fascinating to learn that their three facilities are powered by solar, so they've invested significantly in a number of different solar farms. I'm curious if – I would imagine and hope that this bill in its current iteration has obviously recognized that investment to ensure that that will be accounted for.

I found it fascinating that Amazon – and I sat down with AWS. I found it fascinating that their plan to go – you know, using renewables to power all of their facilities by the mid-20s is incredibly ambitious, but kudos to them, Mr. Speaker, for doing that. Their three facilities that they are building are all going to be powered by renewables. I think that that's very good news, and I think that as much as we can as legislators encourage folks to generate is good to see. [interjection] I see the minister has risen. I will give way again.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for giving way. To answer the question – and I won't speak to specific company specifics – I'll say that the legislation was written so that if a company was doing self-supply with export on January 1, 2022, they are the ones that will have that path to ISD status, industrial system designation. If there were companies that started doing it after that, then they will not have that same path to ISD, but they certainly would be welcome to apply for it.

The good news with respect to the company that you mentioned – and again, well, I'll go back to not using company names. Any company, whether they're in business before or after January 1, 2022, will be able to produce electricity in theory for themselves cheaper than they could buy it on the open market. That's a competitive advantage for the province, why it's an investment attraction tool. They could sell the excess to the grid. They will in fact be able to do that. It's a great business model.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I'll just remind the member that you have an extra two minutes because of the interventions, so you have 13 minutes left.

Mr. Bilous: Great. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and through you to the minister: thank you for that response. That is great news.

I do agree with the minister that this is an additional competitive advantage for Alberta as far as companies being able to generate their own supply and then sell excess to the system. I don't know how many jurisdictions have enabled that, but I would imagine that Alberta is one of the few that provides that ability to companies. So that's wonderful news.

As I said at the outset, I don't have really any opposition to this bill. Again, providing the ability for producers is fantastic. Now, I know that energy storage – one of the issues is that it was previously undefined. It's because up until recently energy storage was – well, it just wasn't possible, you know, to store significant amounts of energy to be used later on. Again, of course, with evolving technology

that's changed significantly. So it's good to see that our electricity statutes legislation is being amended.

I do want to talk a little bit about – I know, you know, Madam Speaker, that when we go back and forth, there are comments that are made as far as the current reasons for why the current price of electricity is so high. I just want to comment on that because it goes back to actually before my time in this Chamber. But also when I first was elected in this Chamber, there were a number of debates that occurred about the transmission lines being built. I'm even going to reference a couple of articles that were written a long time ago.

You know, Madam Speaker, back in – well, let's start in 2009 with Bill 50 under the PCs. That legislation was completely contentious. In fact, my colleague referenced Joe Anglin. Joe did make a political career out of fighting against the government's incredible overbuild in the electricity system. It started back in 2009, when the PC government brought in legislation that removed the obligation the government had for public hearings around new power lines.

Of course, when we're building power lines throughout Alberta, where are they being built? They're being built through rural Alberta, through people's yards and acreages and farms and ranches. So there were a lot of very angry Albertans. In fact, I remember the Member for Edmonton-North West telling me stories about going to town halls where Albertans were irate with the government about this bill, Bill 50. I encourage members to comb the media if they're interested to see just how upset Albertans were with the fact that the government removed this obligation to consult.

That was one of the first steps that the government did in the overbuild of the transmission lines. I'm going to give a shout-out to our former leader and my former colleague Brian Mason, who in 2011 was sounding the alarm bells that the transmission lines that the government claimed were necessary to prevent rolling brownouts, which was hogwash, Madam Speaker – it was not true. That was not the reason for the massive overbuild. The massive overbuild was, in fact, because the government was planning to sell electricity down in the States but didn't want to admit that.

11:10

You know, back in 2011 – and I believe my colleague the Member for Lethbridge-West has already tabled these articles, because I know she's referenced them – Brian Mason was warning Albertans that their power bills were going to double because of this massive overbuild in the electricity system, and it wasn't just Mr. Mason that was calling it. He looked to a study that was done by the Alberta Direct Connect Consumer Association, and the study indicated that power bills were set to jump 65 per cent. That was in I believe it was an April article. Then, again, in May another news article talked about how much power bills were going to jump. I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that I encourage government members to look back at *Hansard* because I'm also on the record in this Chamber talking about how that massive overbuild was not only costing Alberta taxpayers at the time but that it was going to cost them on their monthly bills.

Again, this started, you know, before my term in 2012, but this continued through 2012. As these commitments were already made, funding contracts were already signed – I know one of the members earlier had asked: why, when we formed government in 2015, didn't we cancel it? Well, the answer is quite simple. The contracts were already signed. The money was already out the door. To cancel them at that point would have cost Alberta taxpayers even more without the lines being completed. So it was a lose-lose situation that we were in. That's a bit of history that Albertans need to be reminded of, Madam Speaker.

The other part. When we talk about the coal phase-out and the transition off coal: that file I was heavily involved with when we were government. In fact, I toured the province and spoke to Albertans in town halls throughout the province. What I reminded Albertans about: yes, we were accelerating the phase-out of coal. Companies had a 12-year runway, from 2018 to 2030, to phase out coal, to transition to natural gas. Now, interestingly, companies have accelerated their phase-out, and in fact I believe Capital Power will have their final facility converted by next year. Now, I may have misspoke by a year, but they're going to be completed very soon. TransAlta is not far behind.

I had conversations with these companies about when people talk about clean coal and technology to bolt onto existing power facilities. The example, of course, that everyone likes to use is in Saskatchewan. The cost of that is prohibitive to the point that companies told me: it's less expensive, it makes more sense for us to transition to gas right now rather than invest in an expensive technology to try to clean the emissions as they're coming out.

The other thing that's interesting, Madam Speaker, is that Alberta had 18 – I'm trying to think of the term. But our regulations affected six out of the 18 because regulations under the Harper government in 2012 phased out 12 of the 18 facilities. The difference is that that government provided zero supports for workers, for communities, and for the companies to transition. Zero supports. Now, I'd love to hear from the members of this House who were part of the Harper government that brought forward those regulations. In fact, it was the Premier in his former role who was a member of cabinet, a part of the decision to phase out 12 of 18 coal-fired facilities. So when the government jumps up and screams at the NDP for phasing out six, their own leader, the Premier, and the newly elected member, who were part of the Harper caucus, phased out 12 of 18 coal-fired facilities with zero supports.

So when the members opposite yell at the opposition for phasing out the six, the runway we gave them was longer, and we had supports. We had millions of dollars set aside for retraining, for those that were close to retirement to be able to top up their pension so they wouldn't lose out on pension dollars, because the facilities, when they transitioned to gas, required fewer workers, about a third fewer, and supports for the companies to be able to transition. Now, the government shouldn't decry at all about supports for industry when they, too, have . . .

Ms Lovely: What about the people of Forestburg? What about all those people in Forestburg who lost their jobs?

Mr. Bilous: . . . when the supports that we provided . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I hate to interrupt the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, but if we're going to have conversations, I would prefer that we take them to the lounge.

Member, you can continue.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The member that was asking about the facility in Forestburg: that facility was phased out under the Harper regulations, not under the Alberta NDP, so it's a great example of how the government uses misinformation to try to blame our government when the reality is that she should be asking that question to the Premier because it was his regulations.

Now, again, Madam Speaker, I'm encouraging Albertans and members of this Chamber to go visit *Hansard* for not just the Alberta Legislature. Go look at the federal *Hansard*, and members will see that it was the Harper government that phased out 12 of the 18 coal-fired facilities. That is a fact. That is not disputable. That's not an opinion of mine; that happened, factually. Yes, we brought

forward regulations to phase out the remaining six of 18 coal-fired facilities. That is also a fact. They had a long runway with supports to help them convert. So the difference between the Harper government and the two sitting MLAs that were part of that government and the NDP government is that we had supports for those communities. I sat down with the mayor of Forestburg, I sat down with councillors and reeves of all of the coal-affected communities, and we asked them: what supports do they need so that their communities can remain vibrant? Then we provided those supports.

So I won't be lectured by government members about how decisions that we made impacted their communities. I recognize that it impacted their communities, but that's why we were there to support them through their transition.

The Acting Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 22. I relish any opportunity to see the government correcting themselves, having initially entered into this process last term and now coming back to fix things up. I actually appreciated the comments from the associate minister of natural gas as to the reason why. It's always nice to be able to offer some support to the government when they make a decision that I think is good.

11:20

I was hoping that given the interim time, given the reason, that they had suggested, that they wanted to make a change, they might have done a little bit more, but I certainly like the direction that we're going here. I'm always wishing that the government would dig in a bit more and kind of get the work done, but I certainly want to commend them for kind of catching up with the rest of the world in terms of moving toward a better electricity grid, making sure that we are providing the infrastructure necessary for the future. We know that the future is certainly going to be a lot more about electricity and a lot less about coal.

[The Speaker in the chair]

As the previous speaker suggested, you know, the movement away from coal is something that is not actually a partisan idea. As was mentioned, it was actually initiated in Canada under the Harper Conservative government and continued with us. The major difference, of course, is that we actually did something to facilitate the movement forward in a positive way both for people who worked in the industry and for institutions that are involved in the transition whereas the Harper government simply didn't do that with the first 12 coal plants that they shut down.

Now, we know it's very difficult, and we know that it's easy for local MLAs to kind of blame the government when people go through difficult times, but I just want to, you know, reflect on the fact that the Conservatives often suggest that people just need to learn how to retrain themselves and catch a new job. In fact, I think we had an announcement out of the Finance minister's office recently that if you don't like the job you have now, you should just get a better one. We certainly know that the stance from the Conservative side of the House is that things change, economies change, and people just need to fend for themselves, yet here they are in the House often complaining, as we just heard from the Member for Camrose sort of chattering in the background with the last speaker, that individuals were hurt. It's funny that the government suddenly is concerned about that when they haven't been concerned about it with any of the other major transitions that have happened in society over the last number of years.

Moving beyond that, let's talk about the positives that I see moving forward here. I certainly like the move toward electrification being done in a way which is responsible and inclusive and forward thinking, future oriented. I know that it certainly was the direction that we had taken on this side of the House, both when we were in government and currently, in that we had had since we first came into government a very extensive climate leadership plan, that was ably brought forward by the then environment minister, which actually made some huge steps forward in our electrical grid and our joining the rest of the world in doing two very important things; that is, creating work and industry here in the province of Alberta and taking care of the environment simultaneously, which I think was quite effectively done under the climate leadership plan under the previous environment minister.

There were some real specific benefits that came from that kind of a plan. I was very happy to see the renewable energy program auction for provision of energy into the electrical grid, for renewable energies, and I can tell you that as someone who was watching that bid happening for the very first time and wondering what kind of a price we would get out of it, we were ecstatic to see the price that was being offered by international corporations to provide electricity in the province of Alberta at a rate that was actually better than many other facilities such as coal or even natural gas and all being done by wind, which had multiple benefits.

One, of course, is the intended benefit, and that is to make the shift toward renewable energies, because we certainly care for our children and our children's future and we love to see anything that's done to ensure that we can decarbonize the environment and provide for our children to have a good life, as we ourselves have been able to have. Unfortunately, we've kind of set them up a little bit with the climate, and we need to do something significant about that.

Not only was I thrilled with the movement forward because of the environmental benefits of it, but I also was thrilled because we really gave a boost to Alberta's renewable energy sector. The massive amount of investment that suddenly came into the province of Alberta because we were moving on these renewables and were providing long-term stable contracts in a competitive bid process is quite significant. The benefits for Albertans are that many jobs were created in the construction of these wind farms in southern Alberta, a place where jobs were quite needed. Of course, many people were able to begin businesses associated with the construction process and were able to enter into the economy in a really positive way that is both environmental and economically successful. We were thrilled to see that kind of movement forward.

Of course, what we've subsequently seen is continued investment, because we knew from our experience with the oil sands that if the government makes an initial investment, gets things going, it often stimulates the investment from the market. And exactly as Peter Lougheed did with the oil sands, we did with wind turbines in southern Alberta, and we were successful in very much the same way. I'm glad to see this is growing. I'm glad to see it's very successful.

Again, not only was I happy about the environment, not only was I happy about the jobs and the investment, but I was happy because in the second round of the renewable energy program bid process we made a requirement that you must involve First Nations communities in the bid process. We went through, you know, a very detailed conversation with the First Nations communities, saying: how much? If we made it too high, nobody would be able to bid in because they just simply wouldn't have the money or only those already wealthy nations would be able to bid in. If we made it too low, of course, you begin to wonder how much influence they'll

actually have. We certainly wanted them to be at the table properly as full partners in the process.

So we came to an agreement as to what that level would be, and we then sat back and wondered: now, will this change the bids that are coming in? Will it change the prices that we were able to obtain? Lo and behold, it did not. We had virtually the same price come in in the bids that required First Nations partnership. That was an excellent outcome, not only excellent because we were continuing the good work that was done from the original round of the REP program, but it expanded the work by making sure that First Nations were beneficiaries of the movement into the future in this province, were not left behind. They have all too often been left behind in the history of Alberta.

As a result, we actually kind of coincidentally, to be honest, had nations from all three of our treaty areas benefit from this program: the Blood Tribe in Treaty 7, the Paul band in Treaty 6, and the Sawridge band First Nation in Treaty 8. We saw the benefits spread throughout the province, not just in the southern part of the province, and we saw an opportunity for First Nations to build their equity, to build their role in the economy in this province, and to do good things for citizens in this province, as we should always be making sure that they have the opportunity to do.

It was really a successful process and one that I think, you know, would have been nice to have continued and moved forward on because we know that the world is moving in that direction. It's not a left-right issue. Some of the most well-known right-wing financial groups in the world, like BlackRock, for example, are very clear that they want to move in this direction. They see it as the future of the world, and they are actually making massive investment decisions based on exactly those principles of ensuring that as we move forward, we move forward into the new economy and not the economy of the 1970s, and that will benefit all of society not only here in Alberta but around the world.

11:30

Our people are already experiencing the horrible effects of climate change. I was extremely concerned about people living in India over the last few weeks, where temperatures were hitting well over 60 degrees Celsius at one point in some areas, and people literally were dying of heat because they were too exposed to it without having any ability to respond.

We're going to see more of that. All of the research indicates that that is the direction that we're heading, that we're going to see more climate disasters and that that's going to not only be horrendous for the people who experience it but is also going to be very, very concerning for economies around the world, who are going to have to adapt to it, so it is responsible for governments to make the choice to adapt to it now so that the big financial hit doesn't come at the last second, when too much work is required to move forward and we just simply do not have the resources to do the things we have to do. Doing it now is the right thing, so I certainly think that there are some great movements forward here.

I was also very proud of working with the Indigenous climate leadership program in my ministry, where we were able to see a massive investment in solar and connection to the grid. I have been down to Montana band to see their over one megawatt system. I've been down to Samson band to see their over one megawatt system. I haven't, unfortunately, been able to return to the Mikisew up in Fort Chip, but I know that their solar system is there and it's actually replacing some diesel, which is one of the worst forms of energy generation. Of course, I've been to many, many other bands, like Little Red and Tallcree, where other aspects like solar panels on the roofs of buildings and the building in Tallcree of their new school on environmental principles were all made possible through the

decisions of having a comprehensive climate leadership plan. I certainly wish this government would actually develop a comprehensive climate leadership plan, would actually plan for the future both economically and environmentally. They have not, so quite disappointing.

The one piece of this bill that I was kind of hopeful for seeing a little bit about was storage, because, of course, that is going to be a major part of the movement forward. I just wish that more had been done to actually provide resources or to establish mechanisms for the development of storage techniques and so on. There are very many varieties that are to be discussed.

I know the government has complained about the overbuild in the electrical system, but that has been well responded to by the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I also want to remind the government that an overbuilt system actually is in itself a storage facility, and they themselves have put forward legislation to ensure that that is recognized, so it seems ironic that they complain yet actually have legislation that supports it.

Overall, I just want to say that I look forward to a future in which we build the economy of Alberta by recognizing where we are going. You know, the famous Gretzky statement "Go to where the puck is going and not to where it has been" is always a good message for governments. Too often this government is going back to an economy that was quite positive and significant in the 1970s but is not going to be the economy of the 2070s. We want to get ourselves in line. We want to move forward, and I certainly want to support this government in any of their legislation that does help move us forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this morning to speak to Bill 22, Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. I have to say that, you know, as a child I grew up in a home where we frequently spoke about electricity. My dad started to work with what was then Calgary Power in the '70s, then transitioned to TransAlta, and then after TransAlta transitioned to Fortis. So when I was a kid, electricity was something that my dad was very passionate about and something that we talked about quite frequently. I grew up in Whitecourt, and that's where he worked with TransAlta. Because we were a small community, many of my science teachers throughout the years asked my dad to come in to provide some sort of electricity education for me and my peers, and it was quite exciting for me as a kid because I got to really understand how electricity is distributed. My dad was a lineman, so we often got to go out and watch him climb poles and work on lines. So talking about electricity now as an adult is something that I feel kind of nostalgic about, I guess.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

When we're talking about being able to modernize the electricity grid, I have a general understanding of what the province looks like in terms of electricity and the distribution and the DFOs that are part of this province and, really, all of those Albertans that rely on those DFOs when they're looking at their energy. When I see that we're moving forward with, you know, modernizing our electricity, I think it's a huge step.

I know that this was previously introduced by this government, I believe, and it didn't go forward. It was abandoned in the last session, and now, you know, we're seeing it again today. I think that there's so much in this legislation that I can support. Anything

that looks at ways that we can modernize Alberta's electricity grid is a positive thing, and if implemented correctly, this could really have a positive impact on Albertans and the way that they are able to access electricity.

I know I'm really proud of the work that we did as government when it came to supporting a renewable energy sector. I saw many of my neighbours install the solar panels on their roofs. You know, it's something that we talk about in this province when it comes to alternative renewable energy, and I think that there's quite an appetite to look at ways to do that. Some of it is for perhaps cost benefit. Some of it is environmental impact. I think that there are lots of mitigating factors when it comes to ways to boost our renewable energy sector, and I think that Albertans are excited about that and they look forward to some of the alternatives that are out there.

I know a few of my friends have transitioned from different careers. They're now in the solar panel installation phase of energy, and it's something that they're excited about. Sitting down and talking with them can be a little confusing because I don't understand all the ins and outs of how their installation of it works and how they assess how many panels each roof should have and which way you're facing and all of those intricacies, but hearing the excitement and passion in what they do and being able to relay that to consumers in the province is really a good thing.

When I look at this Bill 22, I think that there are so many things that could have positive impacts long term. Unfortunately, what we have seen is this government that really has delayed the process and failed Albertans. When we look at the outrageous, skyrocketing costs for utilities, you know, we were pleading with this government to extend the ability for residents to not have to pay in the middle of winter, and that was rejected. There were some real things that could have happened to really help Albertans at the time. Even the fact that this legislation was introduced and then taken away and now, six months later, is reintroduced – six months ago this perhaps could have had a significant impact on so many Albertans that are struggling with high utility costs.

11:40

When I think about the trust that Albertans have in this government and their ability to modernize the electricity system, I know that there are some questions about what's going to happen. I know that many Albertans have told me that they simply just don't trust this government with their pocketbooks. They've watched utility costs skyrocket, insurance rates skyrocket, and we have a government that just talks about "Trust us," and it continues to be shown over and over that this government has failed.

So while I read the legislation – and I can see many points throughout this that are great areas. You know, being able to define the energy storage, talking about self-supply and export, requiring the DFOs, or the distribution facility owners, to prepare long-term distribution system plans: these are all really important things that we absolutely do need to look at and we need to take action on. I just think that there's a general mistrust for how that will roll out.

You know, this government talked about providing supports to Albertans when it comes to their skyrocketing utility rates. I get e-mails from constituents whose bills went from \$88 to \$475. That is something that is just simply a deal breaker for someone of fixed income.

When we look at the resources that have been cut back, they have cut those living on AISH, which is tough to make ends meet, and when you are experiencing these unexpected costs, it literally means food, utilities. So there's a general distrust when it comes to the capacity for this government to really have Albertans' best interests in mind.

I know, when it comes to working with stakeholders, that there are also some questions about their ability to consult. Because there are some major distribution facility owners, I hope that those organizations have been consulted, that they have talked with those in rural Alberta, because the way that they have grids and the way that they distribute power all across the province is different. The needs are different.

We look at, you know, some of the calls that I know my dad would go on in rural Alberta, and it's quite a bit different than the structure and the infrastructure that's provided in a city like Edmonton. So what is the capacity for this to roll out equally all across the province? Has that been considered? Have we looked at the different needs? Have we talked to the municipalities and the leadership within those communities to talk about what it looks like to roll out a plan?

I think that this is something that really should be taken into consideration, knowing how many decisions have been made without the key players being at the table. You know, we talk about the importance of being elected officials, and then we see the disregard for that when it comes to municipalities. I think municipalities have significant insight into what the needs of their communities are.

I would suggest that a community like Fort Saskatchewan, where I also lived when my dad worked for TransAlta, versus Whitecourt versus Boyle – all have very different needs and capacities. What does it mean for those that are doing the work? Have they been talked to? When they're talking about doing this rollout, is it with those that are doing the work? Has it been in consultation with the municipal leaders and how it will look in their communities? I think that something that we can all agree on is that adding more energy storage to the grid is a wonderful thing – we support that – but what does that look like for different areas in the province?

I think that, you know, something happened between the introduction of Bill 22 last fall, that ended up dying on the Order Paper, and then today with Bill 22. What happened in that time period? Was there information that, you know, was absolutely needed that came to be and now we're going to see it in here? Were there things that government thought, "Okay; no, we were completely on the wrong track"? We don't know what happens because of the secrecy that's going on, and it's just not clear, Madam Speaker, what this government is doing to get direct support out the door, what's happening with the decisions around this piece of legislation.

I know that it's concerning that there's this potential here for some great work to be done about modernizing our electricity grid, but based on the record of what we've seen over and over with this government, they simply can't be trusted. I hope to hear throughout this debate, you know, some of those questions addressed. What happened with the previous bill? Why was it allowed to just die on the Order Paper? What's the difference that they heard in that time? Was there something significantly wrong with that piece of legislation? Did industry come forward and express some glaring issues? What caused it to die on the Order Paper, and what's now happening that's different in this legislation?

I can say that Albertans are struggling, and when we look at utility costs and the outrageous costs that so many households are facing, something that is going to have an impact on that is welcome. One hundred per cent I would support anything that's going to have positive long-term impacts, but we just need more information about what that plan is in this. It's easy to support in the way that it's laid out, but I just have this hesitancy when I look at the track record and how many times this government continues to let down Alberta families, especially in a time where affordability is top of mind for so many.

We have other pieces of legislation before the House where we're talking about the high cost of insurance, where we're talking about just general affordability and the concerns that Albertans are facing. We're talking about them on this side of the House, yet we're not seeing legislation that's actually having any long-term effect. I just really hope that we're seeing a modernization of our grid to add energy storage and really reduce costs in the long term. That would be the ideal outcome of this legislation, and I look forward to getting some more information throughout the debate. I think that it's a wonderful opportunity to hear from all members about some of those details that are outstanding.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

When we talk about, you know, being transparent and being able to really have a good understanding, the electricity grid in the province perhaps might not be an area that most Albertans truly understand. It's quite complex. When we're hearing that this legislation is going to help, that's something where we truly want to be able to say, "It helps because" and being able to identify clearly what those actions are going to be, whether it's supporting infrastructure across the province, being able to look at transmission lines and what that potentially could be across the province. I know that there's some understanding about there being alternatives to nonwire. I think that as a kid I had a really clear understanding of what lines were across the province, because no matter where we went, my dad was able to identify: I worked on that line. I think that there are some great conversations happening. I just really hope that we're able to kind of break through that and get a good understanding.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next up to speak I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a couple of comments in regard to Bill 22. There are sort of three areas that I am particularly interested in categorically, and those are, of course, transmission lines and generation and storage.

11:50

I guess I'll start with the last one. I find it intriguing how this bill is sort of setting some frameworks for energy storage here in the province of Alberta, defining what energy storage could entail. I would be curious for the minister to give more information about initiatives that this government and different energy companies might be pursuing to move forward on energy storage. You know, it's just a very interesting way to make an electric grid more efficient and take advantage of generation of electricity during nonpeak hours, right?

Of course, electricity is transported around the province or to any given area, and the further that you transport that power, the more you lose through line loss and so forth. You know, to be able to build generation capacity in proximity to where most electricity is being used is one thing and then to build storage capacity in the same way – right? – so that you have some storage capacity that's in reasonable proximity to where the electricity is being generated.

You know, I've seen some very interesting different techniques in different parts of the world for how you can effectively store energy for off-peak hours and then bring it back when, let's say, you have rush hour or during the dinner hour or when people are using air conditioners more and stuff like that, right? Now that we have a defining framework for storage of electricity, I would like to

see how we might pursue that in a reasonably environmentally sustainable way.

I can remember seeing one particular facility set up where they were pumping water during the evening and the nighttime, when the electricity demand was down, up into an elevated storage facility, like a lake that was built at a high level, and then running that same water back down through turbines during the day so that you could have a cycle of power that was already generated and then recycle it as hydro power and put that back into the grid. There are lots of ways you can pursue this. Batteries as well are another one.

In regard to generation – right? – again, as we move away from coal, which is a logical and, I think, economic and moral imperative for us to continue to do, I think we saw power companies, in fact, accelerate their conversion of generation from coal to even exceed the expectations that were set by our provincial government and the federal government and to actually retool the generators, power plants even faster than what the timelines were originally. You could see that there was incentive and motivation to do so. There was good economic motivation and incentive to do so, and of course the expectation to decarbonize is paramount.

I find it a bit disturbing to see the associate minister and the Premier talking about coal again, talking about clean coal. I mean, this is obviously the opposite of the direction of the world right now and obviously the opposite direction of what is actually happening here in the province of Alberta. You know, I don't know what the logic is behind that, if they're just trying to plumb some depths of polling to try to secure votes based on false pretenses or something, because it certainly is a false pretense. You're not going to bring back coal generation. I mean, that would be insane, right? Any suggestion of that is dishonest, quite frankly, and I really think it should not be included in the debate around electricity, in any legitimate debate around electricity.

The other parts that I had mentioned were in regard to generation and diversifying our generation capacity. One thing that's always intrigued me for years – right? – is for people to be able to generate their own electricity, not burning coal, of course, but through solar panels or wind power and so forth, and being able to sell that power back onto the grid. The degree to which you can enhance or somehow get people to do this, have incentives to do so, I think really can help to diversify our electricity grid.

You know, it's not just in order to decarbonize and to localize electricity generation, but it's a good safety net. Quite frankly, if you have all of your generation eggs in one basket, so to speak, and then those systems fail – right? – you get brownouts and blackouts, rolling brownouts and blackouts. It really can cripple an economy and really send a bad message to investors if you can't keep your grid up and running and diversified.

Anyway, my point is, Mr. Speaker, if you can incentivize people to put, let's say, solar panels onto their home, not just by making it cheaper to buy panels and so forth, which is getting cheaper all the time, but also to give a differential price for that electricity that you're producing on the roof of your house not just to use for yourself, which is yours because you generated it – the sun gave it to you, and away you go – but also to be able to sell that onto the grid, right? If you can sell that electricity that is monitored to be coming from solar panels and sell it at a better price, an incentivized price, back onto the grid, then lots and lots of people will put on panels. I mean, lots of people are putting on panels anyway.

I mean, it's certainly my intention to do so. I kind of missed the city of Edmonton's special deal. I think it was all taken up in about a couple of hours, right? They had a subsidy for panels and so forth. I mean, it's just, really, a great thing to do. I think it's a responsible thing to do, and by having a differential price, in other words a

better price, for the electricity you're generating off the roof of your garage, you will make it look more attractive for people to consider doing that, you know. I think that there's a lot of future in that as well.

Another thing that we can do to help to maintain the safety and the integrity of our electricity generation system is to have more electricity generation capacity with smaller units closer to where it's being used, right? You see in Calgary, for example, the power company there really doing that, quite aggressively building smaller generating units around the city so that you're reducing line loss. You're not producing electricity somehow all the way over in Hanna or just south of Hanna and bringing it all the way to Calgary. If you have a smaller generating unit that's close to the city, then it's more efficient, and quite frankly it helps for the safety and the integrity of the system as well.

We have a lot of work to do for electricity generation and transmission and storage here in the province of Alberta. We know that at the much larger, higher level view this is the future of how we build a more sustainable energy future for our province and as you see electrification taking hold, right? I know that other members were talking about people building political careers based on opposing the massive transmission capacity that the PCs were embarked on back 10 or 15 years ago. I mean, I certainly was part

of that as well, but also now here we are in 2022, and we're looking to really upgrade our electricity transmission with people using electric cars and so forth and different other forms of electric transport, electric-driven industrial development. You know, the long game for it is really not bad, right? Mr. Speaker, you have increased generation capacity and transmission capacity. We need to bring that down to a neighbourhood level, more or less. I think that's the next step, right?

I was listening to the radio the other day, you know, talking about: well, you have one person on the block, say, who is plugging in their car in their garage – right? – but what happens when suddenly you have 30 people plugging in their car in the garage on one block? Then suddenly that level of electricity transmission needs to be upgraded. I think I'm the first person on my block plugging in my car in the garage, and I expect there will be a whole lot more people doing it in the next number of years, especially with the price of gasoline and other incentives as well. Plus, it's quite fun to drive. I have an electric hybrid . . .

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member. Under, I believe, Standing Order 4(2.1) we are adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 4, 2022

Day 29

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 4, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, it is with our greatest admiration and respect: there is a gratitude to the members of the families who share the burden of public office and public service. Today I'd like to welcome the family of the former member Jack Cookson who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. Mr. Cookson was the former Member for Lacombe who served three terms in this Assembly from 1971 to 1982. He passed away on July 8, 2021, at the age of 92.

I would ask each of the family members to rise as I call your name and remain standing until you've all been introduced. Jack's son Bruce Cookson, his granddaughter Kasia, both joining us from North Vancouver; Jack's daughter Sally Weenink and her husband, Ken Weenink, from Lacombe; and Jack's granddaughter Amanda Cookson and her friend Darcy Meyer from Calgary.

Hon. members, I ask you to rise and spend a brief moment reflecting upon Mr. Cookson's service each as we may have known him.

Hon. members, please welcome this family to the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: It brings me a special joy to introduce to all members of the Assembly this afternoon a special guest and the partner of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Ms Jo Cusack. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members, we have several guests joining us in the gallery today, including parent council representatives and students from the Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord francophone schools of l'école Gabrielle-Roy and l'école Michaëlle-Jean. They are guests of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Also sitting in the gallery today are 15 guests from Lakeland school in Dewberry. They are guests of the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright. I invite you to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

SCAN Unit Property Shutdown in Calgary

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Lethbridge-East I'm very happy to report to this Chamber that today Lethbridge is a little safer place to live, work, and raise a family. Today the Alberta sheriffs have shut down drug activity at a problem property in our city. The safer communities and neighbourhoods, or SCAN, unit of the Alberta sheriffs obtained a court order against the owner of a known drug house that gives investigators the authority to shut down the property for 90 days. The community safety order obtained in the Court of Queen's Bench took effect today, May 4, and bars people from the property until the closure period ends on August 2.

Mr. Speaker, crews installed a fence around the property, boarded up the house, and changed the locks to prevent unauthorized access before then, a strong intervention and step by the Alberta sheriffs to continue to address the issue of drug dealing and property crime. The

property in this case is also the subject of a court-ordered sale. The SCAN unit will continue to monitor the premises until the community safety order expires on April 26, 2023, or until the property is sold.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Alberta sheriffs who work alongside other law enforcement agencies in shutting down properties that are being used for illegal activities. They along with the Lethbridge Police Service and our local drug courts have made a considerable and noticeable difference in reducing crime over the past year or two.

Since its inception in 2008 Alberta's safer communities and neighbourhoods unit has investigated nearly 7,000 problem properties and issued nearly 100 community safety orders across the province. The majority of complaints are resolved by working with the property owners to keep criminal activity out of the community.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act gives law enforcement another tool for fighting crime by targeting properties associated with illegal activity. Community safety orders help break the cycle of crime and allow law-abiding Albertans to take back their neighbourhoods and rest a little easier at night.

Thank you again to the officers at SCAN for the important work that they do.

Jobs, Economy and Innovation Minister

Ms Phillips: In 2017 the now Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation was campaigning for leadership against the now Premier. At that time he said he disagreed with the Premier's socially regressive views on LGBTQ and abortion rights. In contrast with this Premier, he claimed to be socially progressive.

The MLA for Calgary-Elbow said the UCP would never out gay kids, but one of the first bills of the UCP government, that he supported, did just that, and yesterday when asked about his government's position on the right to choose, the minister ducked the question. When asked about his own personal opinion on abortion, the minister still refused to answer. His refusal to even act like he has an opinion on this issue might come as a surprise to some people, but his loyalty isn't to the folks in Alberta; it's to the Premier's office.

This is the same minister whose chief of staff was fired after coming forward with serious allegations of sexual harassment. The minister claims she was an excellent staffer, but he didn't know why his chief of staff was fired, and he had no part of it. Does he really expect Albertans to believe that he just allowed his excellent chief of staff to be fired and didn't ask a single question why?

His views on gender equality were made clear when he ignored the child care and other challenges faced by working women during the pandemic, when he claimed they were, quote, choosing to stay home and out of the workforce. A minister that ran for leadership on a socially progressive policy has quickly shown that to be false. After three years in cabinet he's shown he would rather cater to the Premier's social views about women than represent his women constituents in Calgary-Elbow.

But, surprise, women have the right to vote, and in the next election the women of Calgary-Elbow have a chance to choose an MLA who values gender equality. We need an NDP government.

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

Seniors' Issues

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to pay homage to Alberta seniors. Seniors are responsible for developing this province into the amazing place it is today. They created the

bedrock and the infrastructure that allowed us to grow to be one of the most prosperous provinces in the Confederation. Their hard work and their dedication must not go unseen or unrecognized.

Yet I've received word from seniors in my constituency of Calgary-Cross and, frankly, across the province that they feel ignored, forgotten, and disrespected. This cannot stand, Mr. Speaker. We must ensure that Alberta seniors have every bit of access to services that allow them to live a full life like every other Albertan. We must do better.

While this government has created new plans to tackle elder abuse, improve seniors' housing, and created transformational shifts to continuing care, there is still a need to engage meaningfully with seniors in Alberta's communities to ensure that their needs are met. I strongly encourage the Minister of Seniors and Housing to continue to find new ways to ensure that seniors can participate fully in society. To accompany this, I also implore the minister to continue to find new ways to engage meaningfully with seniors to ensure that they feel heard and that their needs are met.

As a member of the government caucus I want to assure seniors from Calgary-Cross and across Alberta that you have and will continue to be heard. As your representative I will continue to do my best to engage with seniors and relay this information to both the government and to the minister to ensure that we set ourselves on the right path.

Intergenerational respect is paramount within our society. Alberta seniors have never forgotten about us. We must never forget about them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40 NDP Provincial Election Candidates

Member Ceci: Mr. Speaker, Calgarians are looking for a government they can trust. They're looking for a government that will help create good-paying jobs and drive investment in new and emerging industries. They're looking for a government that will help keep the lights on and put food on the table. They don't want to live paycheque to paycheque, in fear of something happening that could teeter them into financial ruin. They want a government that will protect and improve public health care, ensuring Albertans get the care they need when and where they need it. They want good teachers, good schools, and a curriculum that prepares their kids for the future. They want a government that protects their parks, not demolishes them to make way for coal mines. There's more, too, but the bottom line is that Calgarians are getting none of this from the current government.

But there's a team that's being built, Mr. Speaker, that will deliver for them, a team of New Democrat candidates with credentials, work ethic, and devotion to the people of Calgary. That team includes, of course, the members for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall and Calgary-Mountain View, but it also includes world-renowned medical researcher and neurologist Luanne Metz. It includes energy analyst Samir Kayande. It includes antipoverty advocate Janet Eremenko, teacher and community organizer Rosman Valencia, realtor and community builder Parmeet Singh, military veteran and Indigenous advocate Marilyn North Peigan, educational assistant Julia Hayter, and business owner and college instructor Gurinder Brar.

The team is growing, too, Mr. Speaker. Next week members will choose between two fantastic candidates in Calgary-Glenmore, and my friend and seven-term city councillor Druh Farrell will be acclaimed as the candidate in Calgary-Bow. This is Team Calgary. It's one heck of a team, and it stands ready to deliver on what matters for Calgarians and Albertans. Those looking for hope, those looking for help, those wanting to take part in building a bright

future, head to albertandp.ca and get involved. We'd love to have you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge.

Teacher Certification and Bill 15

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, teachers hold an incredibly important role in Alberta. We're lucky to have some of the best teachers and a world-class education system to ensure that every student has the opportunity for success. Approximately 46,000 teachers are part of the Alberta Teachers' Association, which has been known to strongly oppose anything related to the UCP government.

Albertans sent a clear message that they wanted change in education. Parents told us that they want choice in what their child is taught. They told us that they did not want the NDP's ideological curriculum in the classrooms. Parents want to know that those who teach their children are being held to a high standard, a standard that is clearly too high for the ATA.

In 2020 only eight teachers in Alberta faced suspension or cancellation of their teaching certificate. Given the number of complaints, it's hard to believe that this is accurate. The Alberta Teachers' Association plays a large role in the certification of teachers. In my constituency I represent many newcomers to Canada who have not been able to receive certification to teach in Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, shame on the ATA and shame on the NDP for not supporting our government's solution to these issues. Parents in Alberta need to know that competent teachers are being certified in a fair and timely manner. The members opposite have chosen to side with the ATA in calling Bill 15 unnecessary. Protecting students is extremely necessary as well as certifying competent teachers. My constituents are happy to see that the UCP has consulted with Albertans on the new curriculum. Albertans are not buying into the fearmongering of the NDP, and they're certainly not buying into the lies offered by the ATA.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Calgary Storm Damage Recovery Funding

Mr. Sabir: I've never in my life seen a government so opposed to helping people in need, Mr. Speaker. On June 13, 2020, Calgary was hit by the fourth-largest natural disaster in Canadian history, a huge hailstorm that cost over a billion dollars in damage. People's homes, vehicles, and businesses were destroyed. For two years these residents looked for help, faced unacceptable delays in getting support from insurance, and lived with holes in their roofs during winter.

The government did nothing to support them. They exempted hail damage from the disaster recovery plan and did nothing to help plans get processed. The four UCP MLAs in northeast Calgary defended this government's refusal to help these Calgarians. Another UCP MLA, who got a \$12,000 raise, gave a statement in this House cheering on the decision to not help people recover from the fourth-largest natural disaster.

This tells you everything you need to know about this government's priorities. This Premier will defend his private jets, his disaster of a war room, the billion dollars he spent on Donald Trump. He will also stand up and tell you that investing in the people of northeast Calgary is vote-buying. But that same Premier will then shamelessly go to northeast Calgary to beg for votes so he can keep his job.

Well, Mr. Speaker, hail season is coming fast, and the silence from this government is deafening. There are still over a thousand Calgarians with damaged roofs who are scared about what will happen should another storm hit, but the UCP simply doesn't care about them and won't lift a finger to help. I want to promise them and all Albertans that no matter where you live, the Alberta NDP will be there to help you recover should the worst happen.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Committee to Examine Safe Supply Consultation

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had the honour of sitting on the Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply, where we have heard from leading experts on opioid addiction from across North America as we study the issue of so-called safe supply. This was supposed to be a bipartisan committee, but unfortunately the NDP wasn't willing to engage in the work to hear the evidence and listen to the experts.

For the benefit of the NDP and all Albertans, Mr. Speaker, I would like to share some expert testimony that we heard. Dr. Keith Humphreys is a former White House drug policy adviser to Presidents Obama and Bush. He was also the chair of the *Stanford-Lancet* Commission on the North American Opioid Crisis. When asked about the potential harms of public supply of addictive drugs on the community, he said:

We know for a fact – it is not hypothetical – that when we flood communities with drugs, they spread beyond the person who gets the actual prescription. There's no way to assess, and that is a weakness in safe supply studies. Because they don't admit the possibility that someone else could be harmed, they don't measure the possibility, but the fact that they chose not to . . . doesn't mean that it isn't there.

Next Dr. Nathaniel Day, a leading addiction medicine physician in Canada, had this to say:

My greatest concern with the concept of safe supply is the unintended impact that these policies have on the general public . . . increasing the supply of opioids will increase use, it will increase addiction, and it cannot help but result in increased death.

Then there was Dr. Kevin Sabet, former White House drug adviser to Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama.

There are not many truisms in drug policy because this issue is one that is complex, context dependent, and really intertwined with so many issues, but one truism that most scholars agree on, most experts agree on is that greater availability leads to greater problems because of greater use.

Mr. Speaker, these are the concerns being shared by leading experts in the field. Since the NDP couldn't be bothered to show up and do their job and hear from them, I guess we'll just have to give them an education in this House.

Women's U17 National Soccer Team

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, Canada's women have long been a powerhouse in the world of international soccer, and this week has been no different as Canada's women's U17 team competes in the CONCACAF championship happening right now in the Dominican Republic. Canada has never finished lower than third in the tournament's history and went into this year's competition seeded second and considered strong contenders to win. One reason they're such a strong team is because four of the athletes on the roster this year are from Alberta: defenders Ireoluwa Omotayo, Nyema Ingleton and midfielders Anna Hauer along with my partner's niece Isabel Monck.

The team has had a great tournament so far. They dominated their group, defeating the Dominican Republic 10-nil and Bermuda 5-nil and battling Jamaica to a 1-1 draw. Winning their group meant they advanced to the knockout stage, where they faced Honduras on May 1. Although the game got off to a tense start, with Honduras scoring the first goal early on, the team turned things around and knocked Honduras out of the tournament with a score of 4-1. It's worthy to note that to date the leading goal scorer in the tournament is Canada's own Rosa Maalouf, who has scored nine goals in four matches so far.

The top three teams in the tournament qualify for a berth in the FIFA U17 women's World Cup taking place this October in India. Canada has a lot of work to do to win one of those spots. First, they have to beat Costa Rica in their match this afternoon. Then they have to advance to the semifinals and face the winner of the USA-Jamaica match. It's not an easy path to victory by any means, but I know that I speak on behalf of the entire Legislature when I say: we are behind you one hundred per cent; go Canada.

The Speaker: Hon. members, let me assist you in saving some money today. At approximately 1:55 there will be an alert that will check the Canada-wide emergency alert system. At 1:55 if your phone is not off – and there's some debate about airplane mode – and if you're still connected to Wi-Fi, you may be alerted. If you are alerted, the fines are double today as a result of the very generous warning that I have now provided. If you want to save yourself additional trouble, I'm certain that the pages would be more than happy to remove your device from the Assembly altogether.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Cost of Living and Wage Growth

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, inflation is at a 30-year high, 6.7 per cent, and Albertans are paying more. Now, instead of reindexing the tax code to protect Albertans' income from skyrocketing inflation, this UCP government is trying to argue that the answer to inflation is a better job with higher wages, but according to their own economic dashboard average weekly earnings rose only 1 per cent in the last 12 months in Alberta, less than half the rate enjoyed by the rest of Canadians. When will this government stop the excuses and stop the tax on inflation?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Affordability is an issue, and that's why this government is taking action. That's why we are moving forward with an electricity rebate. That's why we suspended the fuel tax. That's why we're bringing in a price-protection mechanism for natural gas consumers. But it's more than that. We're positioning this economy for disproportionate investment attraction and growth, creating more opportunities for Albertans. Our plan is working.

Ms Notley: The Premier's record on private-sector wages is to drive them down, cutting overtime, cutting holiday pay, cutting youth wages. We used to lead the country in our rate of wage growth, and now Alberta is behind. Earnings are up 3 per cent in Saskatchewan and Manitoba; 4 per cent in B.C. and Quebec; 5 per cent in the Maritimes; Alberta, 1 per cent. To the Premier: if the

UCP's answer to sky-high inflation is higher wages, why is Alberta's wage growth tied for the lowest in Canada?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, that's right. The Leader of the Opposition is correct. We used to lead the nation in wage growth until the NDP took office in 2015. Their policies drove out billions of dollars of investment. Tens of thousands of Albertans lost their jobs. That had a profound impact on the economy in this province, had a profound impact on opportunities for Albertans. This government is turning that around.

Ms Notley: A lot of passion; not a lot of facts, Mr. Speaker.

Wages in the private sector are stagnating, and that's especially true for industries that employ mostly women: arts and culture down 10 per cent; health care and social services down 3 per cent; educational services down 2 per cent; same with accommodation and food services. These Albertans are earning less even as inflation climbs higher, all under this Premier. Mr. Speaker, when the Premier claims the swagger is back, is he just mostly talking about men?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, we're taking real action on the affordability issues. We're also positioning this province to create more opportunities for Albertans. As I've travelled the province corner to corner, as I visit with employers, there's one common denominator across regions, across sectors: employers are looking for staff. There's never been a better time for Albertans to step out and get their first job, for Albertans to step out and get a better job, for Albertans to step out and find a career that didn't even exist when members opposite were in government.

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

Women's Reproductive Rights

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to ambivalence about issues facing women, yesterday Albertans saw a shameful display from a UCP government that is so afraid of discussing women's reproductive rights, they cannot even say the word "abortion." The Premier was simply asked to stand up for the millions of women in this province who are deeply worried about their right to choose. Instead of answering, he offered a series of excuses ranging from the untrue to the utterly laughable. Yesterday politicians across Canada stood up and spoke out on behalf of the women in their provinces and in their country. Why won't this Premier?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, women's rights in Alberta are unchanged today. They were there yesterday, they were there three weeks ago, and I have to tell you that a U.S. court decision is about the U.S. of A, not Canada. Women's rights have not changed in this province. I'll tell you what: we support our publicly funded health care system, and access to abortion is part of that system.

Ms Notley: You know, this government claims that politicians don't comment on judicial decisions of other jurisdictions, except that's utter nonsense. This Premier does it all the time, and moreover this issue matters to Albertans. Americans could be coming north to exercise their rights, and the toxic extremism that is targeting these fundamental rights has already started leaking into Canada. Alberta women and gender-diverse folks need their leaders to stand up and passionately declare that their reproductive health

rights will be protected. Why won't this Premier or someone in this government do that?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, it is clear. Women's rights, access to abortion are protected in this country under Canadian law. Nothing has changed. Not yesterday, not the day before, not today.

Ms Notley: That's inspiring, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier tries to argue that this is a federal issue. It's not. Access is controlled entirely by the provinces, which is why B.C.'s Premier had no issue coming out yesterday and stating his clear position to protect a woman's right to access abortion services. This is also an issue of health care, which falls squarely on this Legislature. What is the problem here? Why can't someone in this government stand up, condemn the attack on reproductive services that we are seeing south of the border, impacting all of North America, and commit to forever protecting them here?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, women's access to abortion services in Alberta has not changed one ought, not yesterday, not the day before, not today. Women continue to have access to health care services clear across this province, but I'll tell you what. There is a disparity between rural and urban, and you know why? Because when the opposition was in government, they actually directed capital from rural areas into urban areas. So if they have a problem with access to services . . .

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

Women's Reproductive Rights and Bill 17

Member Irwin: Mr. Speaker, words matter. Albertans are looking for leadership here given what we've seen in the United States over the past two days. We have an opportunity to make a real difference right here, right now. Bill 17 provides job-protected bereavement leave for miscarriages and stillbirths but does not explicitly state abortion as a form of pregnancy loss. It should. The minister indicated yesterday that he would be open to amendments. I want the Premier to be explicit. Will he stand and tell this House that Bill 17 will be amended to provide job-protected leave for abortion? Say the words. They matter.

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 17 honours all Albertans who have suffered the loss of a pregnancy. This side of the government is committed to that. Yesterday I indicated before the floor of this Assembly that there will be an amendment, and that amendment is coming.

Member Irwin: Mr. Speaker, will any man on that side of the House utter the words "abortion," "reproductive rights," "women"?

We have so much more we can do to support access to health care regardless of where they live. Currently getting an abortion in rural Alberta is nearly impossible. That needs to change. We need to expand access. Does the Premier agree that we should expand critical abortion services in rural Alberta? What specific steps is he going to take to make that happen as soon as possible?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, women's health services are available across this province, and it is true that abortion services are largely available in urban centres. I've got to tell you: part of the reason for that, the disparity, is because those members across, when they were in government, diverted health

care capital from rural Alberta into the urban centres. Like it or not, that's the truth.

2:00

Member Irwin: Wow.

We have an opportunity to make such a difference. This Legislature could have yesterday provided reassurance to so many Albertans who are frightened, who are devastated by an anticipated ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court that could overturn Roe versus Wade. We could have had a debate in this House. We could have had people from all sides, men and women, stand and speak in support of reproductive rights and access to health care. The Premier? He wouldn't even say the word "abortion." Will he stand in this House and categorically state that abortion is a medically essential health care procedure and that he supports reproductive rights for all Albertans?

Ms Issik: As I've said many times, Mr. Speaker, reproductive rights in this province have not changed at all, period.

Speaking of periods, let's talk about women's health care. I hope that the opposition across will participate with me next week on very important women's health issues, including menstruation, menopause, and other critical issues that affect women's health. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

School-based Mental Health Supports

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, there is a mental health crisis in our schools. The UCP's gross mishandling of the pandemic and failure to support students, staff, and families have made a difficult time even worse. The pandemic is still affecting our schools, and staff and students are still getting sick. In a letter to Calgary families a principal said that a spike in student and staff absenteeism meant day-to-day decisions were being made on whether a class would go ahead or not. This pressure and uncertainty causes stress for students, staff, and families. Will the Premier explain to these families, who are begging for more support, why his government is failing them?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do acknowledge that COVID has been very, very difficult on all students and families, teachers, the whole system, and the whole community, all Albertans in general. We as a province have spent more than any other province, \$53 million, towards those programs. Additionally, we've had supports in our schools, and we continue to have those supports. It is why we've allocated another \$110 million over and above the \$700 million that we've added to Education for mental health and wellness supports for our students.

Ms Hoffman: Nonstop stress and anxiety faced by students and staff in schools is negatively impacting their ability to learn and work. Some Calgary parents report that very often in their child's elementary school they'll be notified late one afternoon that it's moving online the next day. Kids have already been through so much in the past two years, and they deserve stability and support from their government. Will the minister explain why the UCP has failed to provide students and staff the support they need to end the stress and anxiety of these uncertain times?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, we continue to hear fear from the opposition. They continue to put misinformation out. In fact, we have zero schools that have gone online. I have had zero

schools from Calgary school division in the last . . . [An electronic device sounded] It wasn't me.

We've had zero schools in the last number of months from Calgary going online, but we continue to monitor the situation. Again, we prioritize the safety of our students and staff.

Ms Hoffman: In March 2020 the UCP laid off more than 20,000 educational assistants and support staff at a time when they were needed more than ever. Supporting students in their learning can be a demanding job at any time, let alone during the past two years under this UCP government. May 2 through 8 is Mental Health Awareness Week, and this year's theme is empathy, which, of course, is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Why won't the Education minister demonstrate some empathy for the students and staff who are really struggling right now? Will the UCP take the mental health of students seriously and put a counsellor in every Alberta school?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, we take the mental health and wellness of our students and our staff members very, very seriously. It's why we've added additional dollars. It's why we had a billion dollars' worth of supports and dollars added to our education system through COVID. It's why we continue to add more resources. We are doing everything we possibly can. We have to work as a community. When the members opposite talk about hiring these individuals, they're talking about 2,200 individuals. That's, like, 13,000 nonexistent teachers they wanted to hire. They weren't there. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

I would like to thank the hon. member who fessed up to their significant crime and will be making a \$100 donation, as I understand it, to humane animal rescue and the Calm society. Thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Artificial Intelligence Lab

Mr. Turton: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation recently released the Alberta technology and innovation strategy, which will position the province as a technology and innovation hub. Just yesterday, in support of this strategy, the Minister of Service Alberta announced that we are investing in the province's first public-sector artificial intelligence lab. Alberta continues to be at the forefront of technology and innovation in Canada, and this new AI lab is positioned to diversify our economy and accelerate economic growth. To the Minister of Service Alberta: how will this investment make life better for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've said it before; I'll say it again. Technology is not just an industry; it is the future of every industry, and it must be the future of government. The most exciting innovations that are transforming every industry today are data-driven innovations. In other words, these are innovations built with artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies. That's why I'm so excited about yesterday's announcement to launch GovLab.ai, an AI lab partnership between the government of Alberta, AltaML, and Mitacs. This is an exciting investment to apply more technology and innovation in everything we do to deliver better services, better outcomes, and better value for all Albertans.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for his answer. Given that technology and innovation are essential for growth and success in all industries and given that Alberta's tech sector is already seeing record-breaking success, to the same minister: how will the AI lab encourage the attraction and retention of talent that will support this phenomenal growth?

Mr. Glubish: One of the most in-demand skill sets in Alberta and around the world today is for programmers, analysts, engineers, and executives with experience in artificial intelligence and machine learning. Alberta is already a global leader in training the best and the brightest in this space, but our investment, that we announced yesterday, in this new AI lab and our partnership with AltaML and Mitacs will create new opportunities for students and recent graduates to apply their skills and expertise to solve real-world problems with applied artificial intelligence. This will help us to retain and develop talent in Alberta, contributing to this growing momentum in this exciting space. It has never been a more exciting time to be in the tech sector.

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this new artificial intelligence lab is set to be fully operational by summer of 2022, which is good news for the Edmonton capital region, including my residents of Spruce Grove and Stony Plain, and given that the lab will also build a sustainable innovation practice in the province, can the same Minister of Service Alberta please explain to this House how the AI lab will work in practice?

The Speaker: The Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the exciting part about this lab is that the government will be bringing the public service forward to bring real-world problems and challenges, and then the private-sector expertise from AltaML will be bringing seasoned leadership and expertise to help us tackle those problems, and Mitacs will be bringing new students and recent graduates forward to have real jobs, working with both AltaML and the government, to tackle those problems. This is a collaboration from academia, from government, and from the private sector to bring the best and brightest together to apply more technology and artificial intelligence to solve problems in creative new ways.

Invest Alberta

Mr. Bilous: The UCP's failed war room has been plagued by scandal from day one. They hired failed candidates, plagiarized logos, impersonated and attacked journalists, and gave out hefty sole-source contracts to their friends. But these are just the scandals we know about, because the UCP has hidden the war room from FOIP. Now they're at it again. It turns out they've hidden Invest Alberta from FOIP as well, an organization that has a \$25 million budget and is responsible for representing Albertans on the world stage, but we have no insight into their activities. Why isn't Invest Alberta subject to freedom of information laws?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, our department just recently sent me the paperwork to make sure that Invest Alberta is subject to FOIP. It is.

Mr. Bilous: Given that Invest Alberta spent \$750,000 to sponsor Alpine Canada but is yet to produce any concrete, tangible outcomes and given that Invest Alberta is hosting lavish dinners in Lake Louise and given that the government refuses to shed light on

any of the activities or tactics of Invest Alberta – see *Hansard* from estimates – why is this government so afraid of transparency, and what are they hiding?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, I love the opportunity to talk about the success of Invest Alberta. With our investment and growth fund they've attracted over a billion dollars of capital investment to diversify Alberta's economy. Unlike the no-development party on the other side, we believe in attracting investment. They were involved in bringing Mphasis and Infosys into Alberta, diversifying our province. It's an immense success.

2:10

Mr. Bilous: Given that this power to correct the situation lies directly in the minister's hands and that if the minister saw fit, he could open it up to public transparency whenever he likes and given that there's a very easy fix to all of this – all the minister has to do is sign a ministerial order designating Invest Alberta as a public body under FOIP; he's claiming that he's done it – when, Minister, did you sign that order to open them up to FOIP, and will you table it?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, this is a marked day. Put this one on the calendar. The reason why: a member of the opposition actually deviated from their script. That is a big day and a big step for the members of the NDP.

Mr. Speaker, if people want to FOIP Invest Alberta, they can go right ahead. We've signed off on that, normal, core stuff with a Crown corporation. Again, we want to highlight one more thing. This side of the aisle believes in attracting investment, diversifying Alberta's economy. The other side: they chase away investment. That's what they did when they were in office. We're not going to let them do that again.

The Speaker: I understand the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley may also be writing a confession note.

Francophone School Capital Funding

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, Edmonton has one of the fastest growing francophone populations in the entire country, and the Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord has one of the fastest growing student populations in the entire province. These students desperately need a modern high school. The current Michaëlle-Jean school is located in an old junior high building, and it's not adequate for providing the quality education that these students deserve. The Minister of Education denied the conseil scolaire the new high school that's so desperately needed. Can the Minister of Education explain why she believes francophone students don't deserve the high-quality school facilities that everyone should enjoy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we do take section 23 rights for francophone education very, very seriously. I just want to inform the member opposite that the north central francophone school authority actually has five current projects under way plus a modular starter school in Stony Plain. This means over \$91 million in building and new modernizations for francophone schools in Edmonton, Beaumont, Sherwood Park, and Legal. This is 3,900 students over 20 schools, an average of 195 students per school.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that that's cold comfort to the parents who are here today to talk about their own needed high school and given that the Supreme Court of Canada recently affirmed the responsibility of

provinces to provide francophone education when it found that British Columbia's inadequate spending on its francophone school system violated section 23 of the Charter and given that despite the minister's apparent beliefs Alberta is bound by the same rules when it comes to francophone education, will the minister live up to her constitutional obligations to provide francophone schools with equivalent funding and better schools, or do these parents have to take her to court?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll have the hon. member know that we have built more schools and are building more schools for francophone communities than they ever did in the four years that they were in office. A few weeks ago – I'll also add to that – Alberta Education committed to funding a feasibility study for a capital project at l'école Boréal. Also, in case you didn't hear it earlier, we currently have fewer than 3,900 school students in this school authority attending 20 schools in their authority, with an average of 195 students per school. We do take section 23 very seriously, and we're continuing to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the minister hasn't addressed the need to build a new school for Michaëlle-Jean students and given that I'm joined by parents of the conseil scolaire students today and given that they've tried for months to get a meeting with this minister but have been ignored and that when I wrote to the minister to request a meeting on their behalf, she replied that she wasn't interested – Mr. Speaker, these parents have a right to have their voices heard; they're here in the gallery to meet with the minister today – will she agree to meet with these parents today after question period? Yes or no?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the member opposite is talking about. I actually met with the executive of the board of the francophone Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord a week ago. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: I also met with the association for francophone parents just yesterday. As well, I continue to meet with them. In fact, we're so committed to the francophone community that we are reintroducing the francophone language branch in my department. The directorate for the francophone community was actually terminated under the NDP. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Order. [interjections] Order.
The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Renewable Energy Projects on Arable Land

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government ran on a platform to strengthen and grow Alberta's agriculture industry and fight for Alberta's farmers and ranchers, including their property rights. I've heard from many constituents who are concerned about agricultural land use for wind and solar farms. Land is often passed through generations with the intent of enjoying it and farming it for generations. Not only is land value a concern when new solar developments arise, but the amount of tillable land that appears to be going to waste is a growing issue. To the Minister of Energy: what can be done to encourage developers and operators of solar farms to use nonarable land for their projects?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are robust guidelines and regulations in place to conserve native grasslands and protect special areas, and renewable energy projects are only allowed on private lands. Most importantly, private landowners have full control in negotiations related to renewable energy development on their property. They will ultimately have the final say. We have and will continue to support a free-market approach.

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

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that energy prices are high and going up and given that solar and wind companies stand to benefit greatly from building their supply of solar and wind energy and further given that our UCP government promised Albertans that we would end the NDP's green subsidies from Alberta taxpayers, to the same minister: what is the status of taxpayer-funded subsidies for controversial green energy products in rural Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The only controversial energy project is a subsidized energy project. Our power market is market based, and industry is free to make their own business decisions without government picking winners or losers. We ended the NDP's renewable electricity program because it was clear that subsidies weren't needed. The market was going that way regardless. Alberta has seen over \$2 billion in renewable investments since we came into government, evidence our market-based approach is working.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that solar farms require vast amounts of land and given that arable land right now is being used for these projects and further given that solar companies and the operator can decide to abandon this project at any given moment, to the same minister: can you please explain to Alberta's farmers and ranchers in my riding who will be liable when or if these projects are abandoned?

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The AUC requires companies to ensure that sufficient funds are available at the end of a project's life to cover the cost of cleanup, but these are ultimately business decisions between the landowner and the investor, assuming, of course, there's approval from the regulator. We are supportive of the free market, and that includes market-based renewables.

Thank you.

Utility Rebates

Ms Ganley: In the lead-up to the last budget the UCP made big promises about a rebate for natural gas, but Albertans found out it was a fake. It doesn't take effect until next fall, and it doesn't even have its own funding. Then the Premier indicated that a rebate would take effect much sooner: another fake out. As the government struggles to get that support out the door, Albertans are struggling to pay their bills. Can the associate minister tell us: if the prices exceed the cap, will Albertans actually see a rebate in October?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is asking the wrong question. You see, this was the same member that was complaining about the price of electricity when she didn't know the price of electricity. Albertans deserve an Energy critic that actually knows the price of energy, so I'm going to give the hon. member a chance to redeem herself. To the hon. member, through you to her: what is the price of natural gas today? Does the critic know? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Ganley: Given that, Mr. Speaker, I think Albertans understand how question period works even if the minister doesn't understand how it works and given that the UCP has also promised an electricity rebate and given that it was announced almost two months ago but Albertans still haven't seen a dime and given that we still haven't seen regulations despite the associate minister's bluster about them being ready when the legislation was introduced, when will the electricity rebate be delivered to Albertans? Please provide a specific month. "In due course" isn't an answer, Minister.
2:20

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, since the NDP Energy critic clearly doesn't understand the price of natural gas, I'm going to let the hon. member know: \$8.32 is what it was trading at this morning. So the trigger price for the rebate . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The associate minister.

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, \$8.32 is the price of natural gas trading this morning on AECO. If the member knew that, perhaps she would know that that's almost 2 full dollars above the trigger price for the rebate and that it's absolutely within the realm of possibilities for this to be triggered in the fall.

Ms Ganley: Given, Mr. Speaker, that the questions were about when Albertans will see the rebate and given that the UCP's natural gas rebate was a fake and given that their electricity rebate was promised months ago but hasn't been delivered and given that Albertans are still trying to pay off the bills that rose by hundreds of dollars under the UCP, is the associate minister so confident he can deliver these rebates to Albertans that he will stake his job on it? Will he resign if he can't deliver them on the timeline promised?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member complains about the price of electricity but doesn't know the price of electricity. Then the hon. member says that it's a fake rebate for gas, but the member does not know the price of gas in this province. This is absolutely an outrage, and here's the unbelievable part: that's the same member that voted against getting rebates to Albertans earlier. That's right. That member voted against early rebates. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Government Policies and Young Adults

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this government is trying to paint a picture of Alberta's economy; the facts are just not adding up. The government brags about migration into Alberta, but their own data does not even bear that out. Despite claims, Stats Canada is reporting that last year, for the first time in 35 years, there was a net out-migration of 20- to 24-year-olds. Can the Minister of Finance tell the House how he can stand there and claim this economic strategy is working when young people are fleeing this province at rates that we have not seen since the 1980s?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, what I can say: in Q4 of 2021 Alberta led the country in terms of net interprovincial in-migration. That hasn't happened since 2015, since the NDP were in government. The reason is because there are more opportunities in Alberta. The reason is because we have a more affordable province in Alberta. The reason is because investment is pouring in by the billions, more jobs are created. There's more opportunity for all Albertans.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that facts don't lie – I wonder about other things going on here in this moment – and given that rather than addressing the problems that they created with the cost of living, making postsecondary unaffordable, and more, and given that it's reported that younger generations are leaving because they don't see a future in this province as long as the UCP is in charge, does the minister have any regrets about the brain drain that he's creating, or is he proud about driving out young people from Alberta?

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

Mr. Nicolaidis: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to rise to address the comment that postsecondary education in Alberta is unaffordable because that statement is simply not true. Tuition in Alberta is below the national average. I think all members of the Assembly can say it with me at this point. Tuition in Alberta remains very competitive. As well, to ensure that all students have access to affordable education, we are increasing supports to student assistance. We're providing \$12 million more over three years to scholarships and \$15 million over three years to new bursaries for low-income . . .

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that it's clear this government just doesn't get it or they just don't care and given that Canada West Foundation saw that the young people looking to leave Alberta are looking for a quality of life that suits them, does the Finance minister think policies of higher utility costs, higher insurance rates, higher income tax, higher tuition, higher interest payments on student loans are signalling to young people that the UCP is actually interested in the quality of their life? Will they stop trying to make life harder for young people? Let's do something to keep them here so that we can build a strong economy together. The New Democrats are here to do that.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, when the NDP were in power, they increased regulatory burden. They raised taxes on businesses, on individuals, on everything that moved. They sent tens of billions of dollars of investment out of this province. This government has positioned Alberta to be most competitive. It's resulting in investment attraction, job creation, and right now we have more employers looking for employees than the other way around. That's why we've invested \$600 million to reskill Albertans.

School Construction in Camrose

Ms Lovely: During constituency week the Premier visited Camrose, and we met with the Elk Island Catholic school board to celebrate in a sod-turning event to recognize the spot where their future high school will be built, starting this summer. Currently there's a wait-list for students to enter the Catholic school system in Camrose, and Our Lady of Mount Pleasant school has reached capacity. To the Minister of Infrastructure: when is this future high school scheduled to start construction, and what are the details regarding the school?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I couldn't join the Premier recently, but last year, actually, the member knows that I was there with the Premier for Chester Ronning school. Talking about this particular Catholic high school, the opening capacity of that would be 410 student spaces, and at the peak it will be 610. As regards the start of construction, we're still evaluating which type of procurement, whether it is traditional or design/bid/build or alternate financing like a P3, which gives a better bang for taxpayers' dollars. We have yet to decide.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you so much to the minister. Given that there are some concerns regarding decisions around the idea of capacity and design of the school on whether they were government ideas or they came from community consultation and given that oftentimes schools have portables added to them after a new building is constructed, community members are left wondering why a school is not built to capacity at the beginning. To the Minister of Infrastructure: are there any indications that would lead to the installation of these portables after the school's completion?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, we all know that modular classrooms provide much-needed flexibility as a community's school-aged populations ebb and flow over the decades that a school is in operation. In fact, last summer, together with the Minister of Education, I visited the second-best constituency, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. A manufacturer in your riding, Mr. Speaker, who fabricates and supplies modulars – they're really great. The latest ones are the best. But that said, school boards should decide when they need new modulars. In this case we leave it . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that constructing a school is a complicated process – it involves a lot of manpower and work hours across many trades – and given that during the construction of our new Chester Ronning school in Camrose RAP students participated in the construction of the building, to the Minister of Education: will it be possible for RAP students to get experience in their desired trade with this new build in Camrose?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Yes. Indeed, it's up to the school authorities to work with the contractors to enable that. I was happy to hear that Chester Ronning school did have students involved in the construction process. In fact, my old school division was one of the pioneering schools in having individual students involved in construction. This is done very safely, and it works really, really well, gives students that practical experience that they need to go on into the trades. We want to encourage the trades because we know we're going to be short in the years to come. So thank you for that great . . .

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

Avian Influenza

Mr. Dach: Alberta has more confirmed cases of the bird flu than any other province according to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. There are 23 flocks where influenza has been detected, and it's estimated that up to 600,000 birds and counting are impacted.

Across the country 58 farms or businesses have been impacted. That number is growing. This is creating great concerns for Alberta farmers and producers, who are looking to this government to show leadership, but it's been nearly a month without real public comment from the minister on this growing crisis. Can the minister of agriculture and forestry explain his silence on this issue, that is hitting Alberta harder than the rest of Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to provide comment. It's not that we've been silent; it's that CFIA has taken the lead on this issue. I was in Ottawa at the start of the week, was able to speak to CFIA officials directly through the federal minister of agriculture. They're well aware of the current state of affairs in Alberta. Like you said, that 600,000 depopulated birds is moving quickly to probably 800,000. Across the country it's 1.7 million, so Alberta is seeing a large number of that. The federal monies are being triggered for depopulation and cleanup. Everything is working well.

2:30

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, producers are looking to keep their flocks alive, not help with killing them.

Given that April 12 is the last public statement this minister put out regarding the avian influenza in Alberta and given that since then we've seen 23 flocks impacted and more than 600,000 birds affected and likely more to come and given that the flu is breaching current protection protocols, what new, innovative, world-class best practices providing an extra layer of protection to actually prevent this flu is the minister contemplating?

Mr. Horner: Just so everyone is clear, this is moving through the wild populations. It started in Europe and Asia over two years ago, moved to the eastern seaboard of the United States, and then has moved into the Mississippi flyway, the central flyway, and it's getting into our migratory system. What we are doing is that we're expanding our zones where we do have confirmed contamination in barns. We're doing more dead bird testing at the surrounding farms. But you have to understand that, from starlings to hawks to owls, this is moving through all the species, and it's quite difficult to prevent.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our producers fully understand the complexity of this, and we hope that the minister will as well and will look towards new solutions that are innovative to actually prevent this flu from spreading given the serious nature of it.

Now, given that this is a very real concern for farmers and producers even though it's not a food safety concern and given that we know this government has a track record of being slow to deliver necessary supports to those who need them and given that there are concerns being faced about the cost and impact this crisis will have, can the minister list in this House all supports available to farmers and producers and when exactly they can expect to receive them?

Mr. Horner: Like I said, the supports flow through CFIA. This is their jurisdiction. The producers are compensated for any birds that need to be depopulated. They're compensated for cleanup and disposal. I can tell you that in our conversations on Monday through CFIA and the federal minister, AgriRecovery is being looked at. Those conversations are being had. That's an ad hoc program that can look to provide more benefits, but it's in ongoing conversations.

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

Budget 2022 and Lethbridge

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three questions about investments in Lethbridge today. Budget 2022 doesn't have any new schools for the third-largest city in Alberta even though two elementary schools and 11 modernizations are needed just to keep up with the growth of our population, some of the fastest growth in the province over the last eight years, especially on the west side. There are 13 projects ready to go that are urgently needed, and we got zero. Can the minister provide an explanation as to why the people of Lethbridge don't deserve new schools?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will continue to reiterate the fact that we have a very robust gated process that all school authorities have to go through. We typically get about 400 requests a year. They go through that 10-step process. They rise to the list, and then they are funded as we move forward with them.

Mr. Speaker, we continue – in fact, last year, I do believe, not in this upcoming budget but the previous budget, there was a new Lethbridge school announced. I don't know why they continue to put fear into the public.

Ms Phillips: Given that we ask because we are sent here to represent our constituents, I will ask another minister.

Given that this government has not committed to a badly needed cardiac catheterization lab at Chinook regional hospital and given that a report from AHS found that it was warranted and that Lethbridge should have its own cardiac lab, a call echoed by Lethbridge city council and committed to by our government in 2019, will the Minister of Health provide us an update? Will he commit to this necessary hospital upgrade and provide us a timeline for the project?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Lethbridge-West for the question and also thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for speaking to me on this exact same matter over a couple of weeks ago. We are doing an assessment at this point in time in terms of the needs of the facility in Lethbridge. I spoke with AHS on this. That work is ongoing, and I look forward to reporting back when it's done and it's completed. I look forward to reporting back to the House on this.

Ms Phillips: Given that the government has levelled deep cuts to the University of Lethbridge, to the tune of \$20 million over four years, and given that the university recently came through the longest faculty strike in Alberta history because of the government's cuts and given that these millions in cuts undermine our research and teaching talent attraction and the U of L's reputation as an institution, will the minister commit to reversing the cuts at the University of Lethbridge over the next few years and allow our city to attract and retain teaching and research faculty to rebuild our institution's once sterling reputation?

Mr. Nicolaides: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm disappointed to hear that the member has so little faith in the University of Lethbridge. Just recently the University of Lethbridge received international awards and accolades for its performance. I stand with them in celebrating their excellence.

Mr. Speaker, we are investing, as well, \$171 million over three years to create 7,000 additional spaces at all of our postsecondary institutions, including, I would imagine, many in the city of

Lethbridge as well. Stay tuned for more details and information on that. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Road and Bridge Capital Projects in Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Transportation has released a three-year highway plan as part of the provincial construction program. Within my constituency there are several repaving projects planned that are currently in the design phase: highways 44 and 18 through the town of Westlock, highways 18 and 661 from Barrhead to north of Fort Assiniboine, highway 28 from highway 63 to Waskatenau, and highway 55 east of Athabasca. To the Minister of Transportation: when can we expect the completion of the design phase on each of these projects?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Transportation.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, Alberta has an extensive highway network that requires significant ongoing investment with a focus on safety for all Albertans. The member asked about highway 44. The design of passing lanes is anticipated to be completed by the end of this year. Design work to improve access on highway 18 is expected to get under way in about six months, and an engineering consultant was recently brought onboard for designing a paving project on highway 661, which will take about 15 months. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that two Transportation projects, the replacement of the Athabasca bridge and the repaving of highway 831 between highway 661 and the village of Boyle, are defined in the construction phase, to the same minister: have contracts been awarded for these projects, and if so, when can we expect construction to begin?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has asked an excellent question. I'm pleased to announce that the construction of a new bridge in Athabasca will begin this summer. Alberta-based Alberco Construction is the contractor. Again, I'm very pleased to announce that. The project to replace the old wooden plank bridge, built in 1950, will create more than 400 jobs. It is expected to be open to traffic in 2025.

As for highway 831, repaving started this week, with an expected completion of mid-October.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, given that highway 769 is not currently included in the provincial construction program and given that in its current state highway 769 is in need of repair due to dangerous sections of pavement and cracking throughout and given that highway 769 does not adequately accommodate the current level of traffic, including the daily commuters and the large agricultural traffic, to the same minister: has this government considered the rehabilitation and widening of highway 769?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you once again to the hon. member for that question. Mr. Speaker, I want to assure everybody who might be listening that I have received the petition from stakeholders about this particular highway. The member is correct; highway 769 is not currently on the provincial construction program list. Alberta Transportation will be, however, hiring an engineering consultant

within 12 months to complete the design activities. In the meantime pothole paving will be ongoing as part of routine highway maintenance.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government continually works to maintain our road network to ensure that our motoring public remains safe. It is a top priority.

The Speaker: The hon. the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

2:40 **Support for Victims of Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence**

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Intimate partner and domestic violence is far too prevalent in society. In 2019 Statistics Canada conveyed that police-reported family violence against children and youth and intimate partners has increased for three consecutive years. Our government has introduced Bill 14, Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022. To the Minister of Justice. There needs to be required training on intimate partner and domestic violence and on coercive control for the provincial courts. When will this training be considered?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member for her question and all of her hard work on supporting victims of domestic violence. Violence of any kind must be condemned, and intimate partner and domestic violence are no exceptions. As the member referenced, the government introduced legislation to reduce the risk of victims of sexual violence being revictimized during the trial process. This bill will foster stronger confidence in the administration of justice and encourage greater engagement in the justice system by victims. It will also embolden victims of sexual assault to report that crime, and that would be undoubtedly a positive thing.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that 60 per cent of cases of child domestic homicide are perpetrated by the father and that there is frequently a history of domestic violence against their partner and retaliation against their partner, to the same minister: will the government make efforts to have law enforcement agencies and courts take victims' accounts of domestic violence more seriously and prioritize proactive safety measures for children and victims?

Ms Issik: Our government is committed, Mr. Speaker, to providing comprehensive and integrated supports to victims of intimate partner violence and making sure they are safe and protected. We're working on expanding specialized domestic violence programs which give victims focused support throughout their involvement in the criminal justice process. Supports include updates to their cases, safety planning, and making sure their perspectives are heard. We've also developed tools designed to assist investigators involved in intimate partner violence cases to help them ensure victims are safe as well as supplementary family violence training for police services.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Minister. Given that many judges who decide the cases involving intimate partner and domestic violence need to have a background in family law and given that most judges need knowledge on violence and coercive control and how to recognize that these are occurring, to the same minister: when will

our justice system proactively place routine protection based on assertions of abuse and coercive control?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's critical that we have a justice system that ensures that all people who come into the courtroom are treated respectfully and fairly. While not every judge has a background in family law, they are actually expected to practise ongoing education and would have access to education on subjects such as intimate partner and domestic violence. This is why Bill 14 will require Provincial Court judge applicants, in order to be eligible for appointments, to complete sexual assault law and social context issues education. This legislation will also require candidates already on the appointment eligibility list to complete or promise to complete training if appointed.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie-East has a statement to make.

Alcohol and Energy Drink Regulation

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A situation has arisen in Alberta where bars and restaurants may serve energy drinks alongside alcohol while patrons do the mixing, but liquor stores cannot sell energy drinks at all. This is the doing of the Alberta gaming and liquor commission, the AGLC. It's the provincial regulatory body that oversees and enforces alcohol laws. The AGLC already allows caffeinated alcoholic beverages to be sold on liquor store shelves, some with even more caffeine than energy drinks, so why can't energy drinks also be sold at liquor stores? Caffeine is caffeine, natural or added.

Mr. Speaker, the situation is further complicated as in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, where small private liquor stores exist, energy drinks are sold but not in Alberta, the land of free enterprise and Canada's leader in private retail liquor stores. Recently Alberta made changes to allow bars and restaurants to do takeout alcohol, and this resulted in convenience stores that have food service adding cafes that serve alcohol for in-store consumption. At select 7-Elevens in Alberta you can have beer or wine with your taquitos and hot dogs, and while you're at it, you can have an energy drink, too.

We know there are risks with alcohol, and there are added risks with combining alcohol and caffeine, and I encourage Albertans to consume both responsibly. Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, if you can buy beer and wine at a 7-Eleven store, where food and energy drinks are already available, why can't you buy food and energy drinks at a liquor store, too? This places Alberta liquor stores at a competitive disadvantage, and I call on the AGLC to go out and look globally as a way to modernize their regulation of alcohol and energy drinks and start allowing them to be sold in liquor stores, too.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie: I missed you there, but you do have a tabling.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a two-and-a-half-page letter from a constituent dated April 24, 2022. Her name is Anna Portocarrero, and she's very disappointed with how education is being underfunded. She has a child who is neurodiverse and is very concerned about the fact that there are zero occupational therapists and zero speech-language therapists in her particular school, where her child needs the support. There are the requisite number of copies that I table here this afternoon.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there are no points of order today, and as such we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 15

Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and move third reading of Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the members of this Chamber for their valuable feedback and support for Bill 15. I would also like to once again recognize the dedicated and world-class teachers we have here in Alberta, who work so hard to ensure the success of students each and every day across Alberta. Mr. Speaker, we couldn't ask for better.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I want to take a moment to sincerely thank all stakeholders for their contributions related to this bill. We engaged with the Alberta Teachers' Association, other education system partners, and victim advocacy groups on this important legislation.

Madam Speaker, Bill 15 would reform the discipline process for all teachers and teacher leaders so that our education system is safer for our students, their families, and teachers. As this House knows, I raised seven children of my own, so I deeply understand how essential it is for parents in Alberta to have confidence that their children are safe when they go to school. Parents should expect nothing less.

Madam Speaker, we know that the vast majority of teachers do their utmost to secure the safety of the students in their care. We thank these amazing individuals who uphold the high standards of themselves and their profession. However, we know that there is a conflict of interest within the existing system. We know that the same organization that advocates for its members should not also oversee the disciplinary process. We intend to fix that. Bill 15 would improve the teaching profession's discipline process by creating the Alberta teaching profession commission. This work builds on the students first act, that transformative act which we passed last fall. This commission would oversee teacher and teacher leader conduct and competency complaints for the teaching profession. Bill 15 is about transparency, it's about accountability, and it's about ensuring that we have a teacher discipline process that is streamlined.

2:50

Madam Speaker, we would ensure, by creating this commissioner role, that there would be an appointed commissioner, appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, who would operate at arm's length from the ministry. This would bring Alberta in line with

comparable provinces and other regulated professions such as nurses, where an arm's-length organization oversees disciplinary matters. Simply put, Bill 15 would modernize the teacher and teacher leader profession oversight process while further elevating the status of the teaching profession.

With that, Madam Speaker, I look forward to my colleagues supporting this important legislation that puts student safety first. It is an absolute privilege to be here and to hereby move third reading of Bill 15, the Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022, an act that is long overdue.

Madam Speaker, thank you so much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members wishing to join the debate on Bill 15? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak to Bill 15, but before I get into the substance of my remarks, I would like to begin by saying that I have given significant thought and consideration to the content of this bill and the consequences it will have both for the teaching profession in Alberta and for the students that they educate.

When it comes to the safety of students, I will always put kids first. For that reason, I dedicate this speech to my daughter Olive. May her path through Alberta's education enrich her knowledge and fulfill her curiosity, and furthermore it is my prayer, Madam Speaker, that her experience will be made that much safer as a result of the debate we are having today and the content of this bill.

Each day we put blind faith in others, so much so that we rarely give it a first thought, let alone a second. When I board an airplane, I do so in the assumption that all the preparation work for the flight has been done in accordance with national and international standards. When I go to my dentist, I assume that all of his equipment has been sterilized and that he has completed the required education to perform the task. Even as I stand in this building, I do so assuming that the arch directly above my head was designed to withstand the forces of nature and time, and in my nonprofessional opinion I would say that it's done pretty well thus far. But should any of these aforementioned groups not maintain the standards expected of their profession, they have independent bodies that they are accountable to – and they are accountable to the public as well – and they investigate each instance of malpractice. Unfortunately, one of Alberta's largest public sectors does not, that is teachers.

When we send our kids to school, we assume they are going to a safe place free from harm and predation. That was the case for parents of students at John Ware junior high school in Calgary from 1986 to 2006. Each day they sent their daughters to school, where they would attend grade 9 science class and outdoor education with Michael Gregory. Madam Speaker, I should mention that some of the information I'm about to use and share was gathered from multiple news outlets, including the podcast *Crime Beat*, Mr. Gregory's *Dark Secret*, hosted by Nancy Hixt.

Michael Gregory was the cool teacher, the one that everybody liked. According to his victims his class was unlike any other because it was just so laid back. However, mixed with the fun, Mr. Gregory put the students in compromising situations as if to test them to see how much he could get them to do as he watched. Not surprisingly, Mr. Gregory was really beginning the grooming process that he used to initiate an inappropriate relationship with his students. This usually began by trying to relate to the students on a friendly level, giving the impression that he understood them like no one else could or would. He would make them feel safe when, really, he was the one from whom they needed protection.

Mr. Gregory then would move past relating to students in the classroom to making inappropriate comments like, "You're

beautiful,” “You’re perfect the way you are,” and “You don’t need to lose weight.” And then came outdoor education. According to one individual the outdoor education excursions were trips organized through the school where students would embark on overnight canoe trips with Michael Gregory.

However, it became apparent that these trips were not your typical camping adventure. One female victim described the trip as follows, and I quote: we are somewhere in Kananaskis; we are pulling off in our canoes, starting the trip; I am in a canoe with Mr. Gregory, and he is seated opposite me, and we are facing each other in the canoe; I look up, and three other female students, who are a lot smarter than me, were topless, and they were canoeing as if it was completely normal but without clothes on; I remember being really confused and thinking, “Well, you know, they’re really smart; they’re the absolute smartest girls in my school, and if it’s okay with them, then it must be okay with me”; then Mr. Gregory took his canoe oar and put it in my life jacket; he unzipped my life jacket, and I don’t remember how, but I wasn’t wearing a shirt underneath; so he pulls my life jacket off; for a few minutes I was topless; he was the first person to ever see my breasts topless, and I just got really uncomfortable, so I decided to put my life jacket back on.

The female victim went on to say that later that evening Mr. Gregory chose one of the girls on the trip to sleep in his tent with him. This young lady also later found out that the group had gone on other trips without her knowing, and she was devastated. It was likely because she refused the initial advance from Michael Gregory in the canoe and could be a liability to his sexual predation in the future.

The case of Michael Gregory made national headlines when he was charged by police in February 2001 with 17 counts of sexual offences against former students. These offences ranged in severity from inappropriate touching to penetrative sex. Madam Speaker, these were 14-year-old girls. Five days later Michael Gregory took his own life.

As severe and shocking as this case may be, it actually came to light 15 years prior, when students and parents at John Ware junior high school came forward with complaints about Mr. Gregory to the school administration. In May 2006 Mr. Gregory was the subject of a professional conduct hearing for alleged misconduct that took place from 1992 to 2005. He was charged with unprofessional conduct under the teaching act, one count for failing to treat students with dignity and respect and one count of unprofessional conduct for failing to maintain the honour and dignity of the profession. Gregory pleaded guilty to both charges.

A report later outlined the nature of misconduct for which Michael Gregory was being held accountable, which included abusing, demeaning, and endangering students. The committee also found that Gregory had an inappropriate relationship with two female high school students. He admitted to this unprofessional conduct. The committee found that Michael Gregory

1. . . . showed disregard for the safety, well-being and dignity of the students in his care.
2. . . . mentally and physically abused his students.
3. . . . coerced and manipulated students for his own benefit.
4. . . . attempted to conceal his wrongdoing through misuse of his authority as a teacher and program leader.

In response, Michael Gregory was suspended by the ATA Professional Conduct Committee for two years, but the suspension was to be served concurrently, which means it only lasted one year, Madam Speaker. One year.

As a parent hearing this story absolutely breaks my heart. As the father of a young girl who is already faced with an ever-evolving and complicated world, from which I hope to protect her, I am furious. Like everyone else in this Chamber, I spend a significant portion of my life removed from my family, but if I spend my time

here without making an effort to keep her safe and my other children safe and the children of this province safe despite not being close to them, then I would consider my time wasted. But, Madam Speaker, speaking to this bill is some of the best use of my time that I could ever imagine.

Now, the ATA has gone on record opposing this bill for a number of reasons. First, the ATA opposes it; they said that it’s not necessary, that the current system works fine and that changing it would require too much work on the part of the government. In response, I would say that that is incorrect, and I would echo the words of the hon. Minister of Education that the ATA’s role as a bargaining agent for teachers conflicts with its other role as a disciplinary body for its members. I have spoken to members of the ATA in my constituency, and there is an argument to be made that the system there works, and to a degree it may. But I have also heard from parents asking me a very simple and fair question, Madam Speaker: at what point does the advocate become the disciplinarian?

3:00

What is the threshold that must be met before the ATA stops defending a bad teacher and becomes the prosecution? Is it simply based on how much public backlash the ATA will receive if they don’t act or if the incident becomes public? Out of principle I cannot support a system where the advocate is also the disciplinary. That would be as if my re-election as the Member for Cardston-Siksika was solely based on the votes of members of my own caucus, not the residents of my constituency, for whom I work.

Second, I have heard that the ATA thinks that this is just a distraction from our curriculum launch. The president of the ATA, Jason Schilling, said: if we can’t trust the government to get the curriculum right, how can we trust them to get this right? In response to that gutless comment, I’ll read a few quotes from some of my constituents in response to the curriculum.

The first is from trustee Jessica Payne, and I quote: I feel like it’s a great move to have the separation between the ATA and the discipline of the teachers and increased accountability.

Assistant superintendent Rob Doig: I appreciate the listening voice of the government has been throughout the piloting of the K to 6 curriculum in our division; I appreciate that they listened to some of our views in terms of a reasonable rollout plan; it may not have been exactly what we had planned or would have picked, but at least I can say that I feel like we have been heard, that the minister and the government are making an effort to listen; our teachers are looking forward to rolling out the new curriculum, especially in language arts; I can see where the minister and curriculum implementation panel have listened to our concerns.

Trustee Ross Blackmer: I’ve never seen so much feedback ever in all my years of teaching as this curriculum has received; they are listening to everyone; whether they are taking it in is a different story, but it’s different from the “Here’s the curriculum; now teach it” mentality; there is a tremendous amount of feedback now compared to what has been done in the past.

Finally, from trustee Doug Smith: this is the most a government has ever involved teachers and everyone else in implementing a new curriculum in all my years of teaching.

Madam Speaker, the next time the ATA or the members opposite choose to diminish the importance of this curriculum and how it’s been rolled out and say that everyone is opposed to it, I’d like to refer them back to these quotes from trustees and a superintendent who would say the complete opposite, who are grateful for the way that this has been rolled out. In that same breath I will, again, give credit where it is due, to the hon. Minister of Education for all her work in piloting this program and having the courage to move forward with this bill.

What does this bill propose to change and why? First, about accountability: it would create an effective, consistent, and efficient discipline process that will oversee every teacher, principal, and superintendent across the system regardless of where they're employed or if they are a member of the ATA or not. This will be done through a new Alberta teaching profession commission, and an appointed arm's-length commissioner will oversee teacher and teacher leader conduct and competency complaints within the profession. This commissioner will be someone with understanding of both legal and education.

It's also timely to reinforce requirements for education system stakeholders like the Alberta Education registrar, the commissioner, the ATA, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, and employers to report to police if there has been any serious harm or threat to the safety of a student. Under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act the ATA is already legally required to report to the police when there may have been serious harm or a threat to a student's safety. Unfortunately, as evidenced by recent cases, the teachers' union does not understand this duty to report.

Now, I should back up and say, Madam Speaker, that this does not reflect all members of the ATA. The ones that I have worked with personally have shown a tremendous amount of interest in making this bill as good as it can be, recognizing the challenges that we as a government face, and I want to specifically thank them for their time and communicating with me their concerns.

Lastly, it further expands the online teacher registry established under the students first act by making the following publicly available: all hearing, appeal, and minister decisions where there is a finding of unprofessional conduct or professional incompetence and any consent resolution agreements initiated by the new Alberta teaching profession commissioner as well as hearing appeal dates.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I again would like to applaud the Minister of Education for her courage in moving forward with this bill. It is my hope and prayer that, moving forward, this bill will make Alberta schools that much safer and more transparent in the process of teacher discipline.

To the teachers, the very, very few teachers who would take advantage of their position of power and authority over students, this bill is for you. To the teachers, the vast majority of them who do such a wonderful job educating our children, this bill is also for you, to protect you. I stand in this Chamber in support of this bill wholeheartedly, and I encourage all members of this Chamber to vote in favour of Bill 15 as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 15 in third reading?

Seeing none, would the hon. minister like to close debate?

Member LaGrange: Thank you to everyone who took part in this debate. This is a momentous and monumental bill. I'm very grateful to everyone. I close debate.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 17 Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Debate adjourned April 28: Member Ceci speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak this afternoon to Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Now, it's interesting where we're at with this bill. There's been some back and forth in the Chamber in question period, where my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has asked about a few different pieces for this bill to be included and strengthened, and until we see that – there are some elements of this bill that I do support. But there are – I'll spend much of my time speaking about bereavement, the current legislation as it's written, and then I'll also talk about, again, what we would like to see and how we'd like to see it strengthened. Quite frankly, it's been rare that we've seen this in this term in the House, where ministers have accepted amendments by the opposition, but it's my hope that this bill and amendments brought forward by my colleagues will be accepted.

To start off, Madam Speaker, I do support and we support our reservists and the incredible work that they do for our country. I recognize that removing the 20-day limit on job-protected leave will bring Alberta in line with other Canadian jurisdictions and is a good change. I'm sure that later on this afternoon you'll hear from my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, who, of course, was our military liaison for the full four years that we were government and continues to liaise with the military and has an incredible relationship with the men and women who bravely serve. She'll also, I'm sure, comment on this.

Now, it's very important, Madam Speaker, that the grief that surrounds pregnancy loss is recognized. I do want to acknowledge that the bill does provide some dialogue around that, so I want to thank the minister, through you, Madam Speaker. We know that pregnancy loss can include instances of miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, termination, and we want to work to ensure that the bill is inclusive and reflective of the experiences of birthing persons, women, and parents.

Again, we're also – at the outset, Madam Speaker, we're in the process of engaging with stakeholders ourselves, recognizing that the bill is in second reading. We're reaching out to stakeholders to get a better sense of their position on the bill. So we'll get back to the minister with that, and, again, hopefully, by the time the bill gets to Committee of the Whole, we'll be able to have some amendments written but also be in a position to speak with a little more detail about the bill.

3:10

Madam Speaker, again, it's extremely important that grief and other responses that may surround pregnancy loss are recognized. I cannot speak from personal experience, but I do have friends who have experienced this loss and recognize that there's a huge range of mental, emotional, and physical health experiences that people can feel and go through. So giving Albertans time away from the workplace to process pregnancy loss is a positive step. However, the challenge, and what we're hoping that we can strengthen or provide a little more clarity on, is that the legislation as it's currently written does not include – it's not inclusive of all types of pregnancy loss.

The bill as it's currently written specifies leave when someone "has a miscarriage or stillbirth," but it does not include abortion or termination for medical reasons. Because of that, it essentially discriminates in terms of the kinds of pregnancy loss that a person may experience. So our hope is that we can work with the minister to ensure that the legislation is written in a way that is broader and more inclusive and that it can include abortion and termination for medical reasons. The reason for that, Madam Speaker – and I'm sure the minister understands this quite well – is that we don't want to leave room for interpretation. I mean, I get that's why we have

lawyers, but we really want to be clear, crystal clear, in the legislation so that there aren't cases that are interpreted differently and where women and families can be denied bereavement leave if they've experienced either a termination for medical reasons or abortion.

Again, my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood spoke about the difficult experience that a person and their partner and family could go through. And it's unfathomable to expect that person to have to explain in detail the situation to their boss if they've experienced pregnancy loss. It should be covered because of what they've already gone through. So we're hoping we can work with the government to amend this bill in its current state to ensure that job-protected leave will be included for an abortion or termination for medical reasons. This will, of course, protect individuals, Madam Speaker, from discrimination in the workplace. It will also show compassion and inclusion to all of those who are facing a pregnancy loss.

I know that, again, my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has spoken about this and had a person who has been an advocate that the bill must include the loss of pregnancy. We want grieving individuals to feel empowered to be able to define their experience as their own. Madam Speaker, all of the experiences deserve to be included, from miscarriage and stillbirth to abortion to TFMR, or termination for medical reasons, infertility, and failed adoption, so we will work with the government to achieve this.

A similar example, if I may, Madam Speaker, is that if an employee tells their employer the devastating news that they have cancer, they're not asked: well, what kind of cancer? Their leave is not dependent on which type of cancer they have. This is a similar example, where we need to ensure that the definition of pregnancy loss is inclusive, completely inclusive, and encompasses all of the different reasons for that loss.

Again, Madam Speaker, what we're hoping to accomplish here is to empower employees so that they can receive the support and have the choice, whenever they feel safe or comfortable, to share specifics but that it's their decision. They decide when and how and if they disclose any details about the experience and the loss that they're going through.

I think, quite frankly, that's the least thing that we can do because, unfortunately, not all employers and not all people may view all losses equally. You know, again, I recognize that many employers in Alberta are incredible employers and they care about their employees and they want to do everything they can to support their employees. Absolutely, Madam Speaker. The challenge is that not all employers will view loss the same way, so, again, to make it crystal clear, defining pregnancy loss to include all those terms will ensure that it's included and that no one has to attempt to justify the cause of their pregnancy loss.

The other thing is that it'll remove an additional stress of an employee, that of: "What if my employer says no? How can I frame this so that I can have this bereavement time?" Again, I don't think it's fair to put that additional burden onto a person and their family as they're experiencing this. Madam Speaker, you know, by making the language more inclusive, it's our hope that everyone who needs this leave will be empowered and will be able to go to their employer and say, "I'm going through a pregnancy loss, and I need support," and not have to define it further than that.

I'll mention a few other questions that I have on this bill. Again, as you've probably noted, Madam Speaker, that's a very, very important piece that I'm pretty confident members of the Chamber will hear from a number of my colleagues who have similar concerns and similar comments. You know, I appreciate that the minister, during question period, indicated that he's open to this

type of amendment, so we'll see how that moves forward as we move into Committee of the Whole.

3:20

Other questions that I have for the minister. There is a section on the Labour Relations Code, Madam Speaker, that removes the July 1, 2022, end date to the legislative protections for faculty associations as exclusive bargaining agents for faculty staff and allows division 4 to apply to the boards of postsecondary employers, which often refer as organizations. I'm just curious who the minister consulted with on these changes that impact postsecondary faculty associations and if the minister is able to provide some detail. I'm not sure, quite frankly, how the leaders of faculty associations are determined, so if the minister is able to provide some insight on that as well, that would be welcome. Where I'm going with that question as far as how the leaders are determined is that if members of the association are unhappy with leadership, are there opportunities to change leadership and how is that conducted? Lastly on this subject, how will this change protect members' rights to have a say in their own contract negotiations, which is, I think, important, a very important topic?

I'm looking to you, Madam Speaker, if you can just advise me on how much time I have left.

The Deputy Speaker: Ten seconds. Go quick.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Wonderful. I will leave my comments there and look forward to responses from the government.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I will focus my comments today on unpaid bereavement leave. I realize that this bill does deal with and address reservist leave and postsecondary institutions, but I want to focus my remarks today on bereavement leave.

In this bill there is a section that talks about:

An employee who has been employed by the same employer for at least 90 days is entitled to unpaid bereavement leave on the occurrence of any of the following:

- (a) the death of a family member;
- (b) the employee has a miscarriage or stillbirth;
- (c) the employee's spouse or common-law partner has a miscarriage or stillbirth;
- (d) a person has a miscarriage or stillbirth and the employee would have been a parent of a child born as a result of the pregnancy.

and that they would be allowed to have bereavement leave for three days in a calendar year. I think we can all understand and we all would agree in this House that this is an important piece of legislation.

I guess I would start my comments by saying that it's been my experience in life that grief is not limited. It's a very wide and encompassing thing. Grief is not limited to knowing or necessarily having a relationship with simply a family member. Grief knows and goes beyond the bounds of having a family member. Grief can and often is just as intense for the loss of the life of a person in the womb or for a person outside of the womb. Every life has value regardless of age or race or nationality or religious belief or any other defining category that we choose to use.

We do not as humans, as people have value because of where we live or where we abide. We do not have value because of our IQ or athletic ability or physical ability. Our value as people transcends our looks. In my case that's a good thing. It transcends our income.

It transcends the job that we do. It transcends our perceived value to the society. The value that we place on a person, on human life is not determined by our age or whether we are firm or infirm or whether we are wanted or not wanted. As I was growing up, I was glad that that was the case, or I'm sure that my mother would have done away with me many times. I'm not sure if she really wanted me after some of the things that I did.

We have value because we're simply human. We have value because all life, every life – every life – has intrinsic value because, I believe, we are made in the image of God. We do not have value because some court or some government or some business or some budget line has granted us value. And I believe that we all understand this. In our most intimate parts of who we are, in our innermost being, in our very souls, we know that the people in our lives, all of the people have value. And that's why grief is so powerful.

I've often said to people, as I've wrapped them in my arms and consoled them in their grief over the loss of a loved one, that I would much rather suffer the grief and the pain that comes from a loss of someone that I have loved than to have never loved them and not to have had that grief. Grief over the loss of a loved one is the result of recognizing that we are social creatures and that we value and that we recognize the loss of a life and that that loss leaves a hole in our lives.

Bill 17 recognizes the loss and the pain of the people who have died and passed on in our lives through this bereavement clause. Grief is real, and it can be paralyzing. Grief does not recognize whether that life was a part of our lives for a long time, that we knew intimately and that we had had a relationship with or whether that life was inside the womb. I support this bill as it is written. Madam Speaker, I support Bill 17 as it's written because it recognizes the grief of so many Albertans who have lost preborn children due to miscarriage or stillbirth.

Madam Speaker, my wife and I have been blessed with four children. Three of those children have grown up to be fine young men and women. I support Bill 17 and I speak to it at second reading because I know that it would have helped myself and my wife as we worked through our grief after having the loss of our little boy in the womb. This bill recognizes the grief and the pain that transcends the location of the life that was lost. Our grief was no less painful to us and the life of our son was no less valuable because he was stillborn, because he had died in the womb. His life was no less valuable or loved because the only time that we ever got to hold him was when he no longer had a beating heart or could take a breath.

3:30

Bill 17 recognizes this reality. We all know in our very souls that life, every life, is sacred. Every life has value, and every person who grieves the loss of a family member should be given the time to grieve by an employer. It seems eminently reasonable to this MLA that employers would enable grieving employees three days to start to address this grief. Trust me on this one; it's going to take longer than three days. In fact, I would argue that it's probably going to take me a lifetime.

What makes me a little sad is that sometimes when I stand up or I sit in this Legislature and I hear some of the rhetoric that goes back and forth across these desks, it would appear that this bill is destined to be made a wedge issue. It frustrates me that a bill that's supposed to be structured around addressing grief and loss of life and a recognition that all life has value could potentially be used as a wedge issue. Could we not instead set aside the realpolitik of social politics and support a bill that helps Albertans to grieve with dignity over the loss of a loved one?

I guess I'll have to wait and see. The Committee of the Whole is coming. We've been told that amendments will be there, and I guess I'll have to wait and see what those amendments are and how they're brought forward at the Committee of the Whole. I'll be listening carefully – I'll be listening carefully – to see what comments are brought forward in support of or against those amendments.

But at this stage, second reading, Bill 17 has my support. I'm grateful – I'm grateful – for the recognition that this bill brings forward for those that are grieving, have lost somebody that they love, that it recognizes that all life – all life – has value and that the grief of a life should be recognized with bereavement leave.

Bill 17 has my support. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 17? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. I will soon reflect on some of the comments made by the previous speaker from Drayton Valley-Devon. I'd like to thank him for his speech. But maybe I'll start first with some of the more trivial issues within this bill just to make sure I get to them and move on before we talk to the seriously difficult pieces of the bill.

The first piece I just want to comment on is the changes in circumstances for reservists. I just want to – you know, as only one of two people in this House who has served in the reserves, I thought I would take a second to acknowledge that this is happening and that there is a change. In reality this is going to affect very few people. My time in the reserves was fairly short, and there was never a circumstance where I found myself, because I was a student at the same time, requiring leave from work in order to be able to fulfill my duties in the reserves. Usually duties were related to training rather than service in combat or anything of that nature. But if I were in that position, I would have been happy to have been able to know that I could leave and do my duty on behalf of the country and then come back and be able to continue my work. So I'm just glad to see that we've made this slight change in terms of the ability of reservists to take time away and not be limited by the act in how much they can do that.

I guess I do wonder a little bit about what might need to happen to support employers in that. Certainly, I would hate to be in a position where employers express concern about hiring people who are in the reserves, knowing that they may be called away and that they may have to hold a job for somebody temporarily, and now that it's longer, even a longer period of time, that they might be hesitant to hire someone in the reserves. I would just hope that the government will think about that when they're doing regulations, that there may be some way that the government can assist or help employers to ensure that this does not become problematic.

I recognize, again, that this is not going to happen very often in an average year, where this is even a concern at all, but since, you know, it has come up in the legislation, I would like to just make sure that the government gives some consideration to making sure that the wheels are greased and things run smoothly, not only from the position of the Canadian Armed Forces but also from the position of the employee of both the civilian work and the government work and, of course, the employer themselves. I think that fits in well, and I think this piece of change is a good addition to Bill 207, which was the Reservists' Recognition Day Act, as it was called. I think it's a nice little piece in addition to that.

Just getting that out of the way for a few minutes, I'd like to go on and also talk about the academic associations. Again, in my career as a member of a faculty at the University of Calgary I had the

opportunity to belong to an academic association at the University of Calgary at a time when the faculties did not have a right to be recognized as a union in bargaining. Thankfully, under the previous government that did change, and now people who are employed by universities have the rights that people outside the universities have, including that academics now have the right, not just nonacademic staff, to have someone represent them in bargaining situations. I appreciate that at the time the changes were made, there was a five-year window put in holding the academic associations as the interim representative bodies for negotiations because this was all new, and we needed to know whether or not that was the right place to start and whether to add some other changes.

Now, of course, we're in a place where it's been in fact established that those organizations are the bargaining unit in this bill. I think that's completely appropriate because nothing that I have heard from my university colleagues indicates it should be otherwise although they did express some concern that when this was introduced into this legislation, they were not consulted. So they're taking time also to make sure that their interests are fully protected by this legislation. It would have been good for the government to spend a little bit of time with the various associations to walk them through this, make sure that they fully understand this. I imagine there's not going to be a complex disagreement on this, so it would have been great just to have that kind of relational conversation where you're walking through what is happening and ensuring that if there is any glitch there, the people who are going to be affected by it are well informed.

3:40

Again, you know, this is not the biggest part of this legislation for me, but having involvement with both the reserves and academia, I felt it was appropriate for me to review these sections and to ensure that I didn't have any major concerns, and I guess I say now that I don't.

What I would like to talk about, of course, and what you will hear mostly from members of this House are conversations about the leave at the time of loss of a pregnancy. I think this is a very important thing for us to consider in this House because, of course, it is a very traumatic situation in the lives of everyone who has experienced it. I think we just heard quite eloquently from the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon about the importance of going through grief at a time of loss and how difficult that is and how much we really need as a community to support people, and above all we should not be in any place where we consider it right for us to judge other people's grief.

As the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon indicated, grief is very wide ranging. It's experienced differently by different people, and we have no right to create a circumstance where some people's grief is acceptable and other people's grief is not or that the way they grieve or what they're grieving over is acceptable or not. I think it's very important that in this circumstance we make it very clear to all people appropriate – all the family members, all the people that are affected by this type of grief – that what we are concerned about as a society is that they get support at this very significant time, that they do not get judgment, that they don't get questions, that there's not some kind of assessment about whether or not their grief is valid or not or the reason why they have grief is valid or not. I think that that would just be a horrendous intrusion of the state in the private lives of people.

You know, in many other situations we recognize this principle that the government just does not have a role in making decisions about people's lives because it does not affect others. Of course, government always has to make rules when something you choose to do affects another person, but in the case where you are having an experience that is about yourself and who you are as a person,

then I think it is quite appropriate that we not enter into a discussion about your grief and about whether or not it is acceptable or not.

We need to make this legislation as wide as possible to avoid any potential for government interference or for employer interference. You know, as has been mentioned before, when we have other situations, if somebody comes and says, "I'm having heart surgery," we don't start to question them about what the nature of the heart surgery is or why they need heart surgery or if they engaged in activities like overeating or drinking that caused them to need heart surgery. We certainly just stay out of it. It's a conversation between a patient and their doctor, and the only thing that the employer needs to know is that, in fact, the surgery is going on and that the individual needs some time to go through that procedure and to recover from that procedure.

Sometimes it's easier for us as outsiders when it's a physical procedure that we recognize, like surgery. "Oh, I can see that, you know, you've got this cut, and you have to recover physically from it." But actually the most wounding kind of loss often isn't physical but is emotional. I know that this is an area that is so often vastly overlooked yet is so defining in people's lives.

My wife for a number of years was a social worker at the neonatal intensive care unit at the Royal Alexandra hospital and often would go back in in the evenings or overnight to be with families as they went through the process of grief around traumatic illness, children that were stillborn, or children that had died shortly after birth.

You know, in many ways there's nothing much you can do. Obviously, the medical profession did everything they possibly could to resolve the situation, but the grief itself still needs to be attended to. The sadness of the families as they lose a family member is deep, and it is really important that all of us recognize what that is like. It isn't just one or two things. It's not just a miscarriage or a stillbirth, but it's also these other things that go on all the time that people actually have significant grief reactions to. That would include abortions or TFMR or even infertility. I mean, trying to get pregnant is often very traumatic for people. They end up in the NICU because they've gone through these very difficult processes, and they lose a child yet again and they have to try all over again.

Really, just acknowledging that that is a problem, I think, is very important for us as a society. We're only asking for a few days. I mean, in reality we know that the vast majority of people will continue to grieve – well, as the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon says, for the rest of his life over loss of this. I know that in my own family there have been miscarriages and stillbirths, and that continues to be a grief for family members. But to have three days where you don't have to face other people on tasks that are irrelevant is very important, and I think we should be recognizing that for people.

One other piece that is not often talked about that is included in our recommendations for change is the situation of failed adoption. When I was at Catholic Social Services, I had the opportunity to be the supervisor of the adoptions program. You know, most of the time that was quite a joyous kind of occasion because in our particular program we were dealing primarily with newborn children who were being adopted, so people were very happy to receive a child when they thought they wouldn't after having gone through much infertility grief, finally to receive a child that they could love for the rest of their lives.

However, there were occasions where a situation happened that a child was placed for adoption, but within the 10-day period the biological mother of the child changed their mind. So they had a child come into their home, that child lived with them for up to 10 days – and I know in one situation it literally happened within an hour of the cut-off time – and they came to love this child and

expected this child would be with them forever, and then this child was taken away. Now, I don't blame the biological mother. That's a very difficult decision, and, you know, if that's the right decision for her, I think she has to do that. But I can tell you that the consequence for those parents, after waiting sometimes years for an adopted child, was very high.

I think the chance that we have here is to recognize that any loss of a child, any loss of a pregnancy, including adoption, which is a form of pregnancy in a way, that I think we need to recognize – the only way to capture all of these things is to define the legislation widely and not to specify. If we start to specify, then we decide who are the deserving and who are the undeserving, and that is not a place for us in the question of grief. We should not be putting ourselves in the place of deciding whether someone's grief is legitimate or deserving of support and response from a compassionate community.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wanted to rise today to speak and express my support for Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. First, I would like to thank the Minister of Labour and Immigration for bringing this important bill forward that provides more job protection to Albertans when they need it most. This bill is proposing to make necessary changes to bereavement and reservist leave. This bill will introduce long overdue changes that will make bereavement leave more inclusive, and it will expand reservist leave, providing reservists the flexibility they need in order to complete their training. This bill also goes on to maintain the status quo for postsecondary bargaining agents.

3:50

Under the current Employment Standards Code bereavement leave is provided for employees who have worked at least 90 days for the same employer, with up to three days of unpaid leave per year when a family member dies. This bill does the much-needed next step of including those who have experienced a miscarriage or stillbirth to now have access to that leave as well. It allows for three days per calendar year of job-protected leave.

This part of the bill, Madam Speaker, is similar to a private member's bill introduced in last year's session by the Member for Sherwood Park, and I believe that member had consultations with the stakeholders regarding the changes he sought to achieve. Though the private member's bill passed first reading, it did not proceed further as the session ended. I will applaud the member for his hard work and dedication on this matter, and I am delighted to see that these initiatives started by the member are being carried by Bill 17.

There is arguably no greater loss than that of a child. This bill allows for the process of inevitable grief to start to take place without any concern of job loss, and that is why this bill is so important, Madam Speaker. Unfortunately, about a quarter of pregnancies end in loss. This can result in a wide range of mental and physical issues. A study published by an American journal found that a month after an early pregnancy loss 29 per cent of women experienced posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD; 24 per cent experienced anxiety; and 11 per cent experienced depression. These statistics illustrate the need to include pregnancy loss in bereavement leave. No matter the circumstances of pregnancy loss, the impact is evident and the trauma caused is not to be overlooked.

There may be leaves such as this already available for some businesses, but it is the commitment of this government to provide

this leave to all Albertans. Healing after such a loss is a process, and it will take time, but this bill makes leave available so no Albertan will need to even think about returning to work the next day after experiencing such a tragic loss. Employees are not required to provide any proof of entitlement for the leave but must give their employer as much notice as possible to take the leave. Employees may have access to more than three days of bereavement leave or may have paid bereavement leave if that is specified in their employment contract or collective agreement.

Prince Edward Island is the only province in Canada that provides bereavement leave specifically for the loss of pregnancy. However, other jurisdictions may have other leaves that allow employees to take off in situations of pregnancy loss.

This bill, Madam Speaker, also goes on to expand the leave taken by the reservists. This portion of Bill 17 was made possible with the support of stakeholders through consultations conducted by the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, the military liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces. I appreciate the member for his great work and contributions on this matter, including the initiatives in the reservist recognition act.

The stakeholders have indicated that reservists would have had to complete their training by using other leave options. Reservists are a vital part of our military, and they should be given a sufficient amount of leave required to complete their mandatory training. This bill would remove the 20-day cap on the use of reservists' leave for annual training, and it would allow reservists the allotted time they need to complete their training. It should not be on the reservist to figure out how they will complete their training in order to serve their country. They're courageous in their commitment to serve Canadians when disaster strikes at home or when they are called overseas for assignment. At the very least we should be able to provide them with enough leave that they are able to complete their training. Reservists should never be in a position where they're sacrificing hard-earned leave in order to meet their training requirements.

The Alberta government is proud to support our military reservists in all they do for us. It is in this bill that we acknowledge all their hard work and allow for it to continue with ease and remove a burden to them on how to cope with training days. Removing this limit on annual training days will align Alberta with most Canadian jurisdictions should this bill pass. Only British Columbia, Quebec, Yukon, New Brunswick continue to have limits on annual training for reservists.

Bill 17, Madam Speaker, also introduces changes to the Labour Relations Code. It replaces the effective date of the rights of academic staff associations to represent their members in the collective bargaining negotiations. This has been an exclusive right granted since 1981. This bill will allow for the right to continue indefinitely. The right was set to expire on July 1 of this year. These associations are the best option there is when it comes to representing their members. There is no other option that would be able to provide the same level of experience and expertise that these associations can.

The previous Minister of Labour and Immigration and the Minister of Advanced Education have met with different faculty associations and have heard from them that it is important to continue to give academic staff, graduate students, postdoctoral fellow associations the exclusive right to represent their members in collective bargaining negotiations. This provision in the bill to maintain the status quo shows the commitment of our government to listen to feedback and respond effectively. It will then allow for the right to continue indefinitely, and it is what many faculty associations have been asking for since 2019. This government has listened and is now introducing these needed initiatives that will

give associations peace of mind that their exclusive right to represent their members will not be taken away.

4:00

Bill 17 is a win for all Albertans. It does what needs to be done in terms of increasing facility regarding bereavement, reservists' leave, and in maintaining the status quo for postsecondary bargaining agents. Albertans have had a tough two years. Bill 17 is a compassionate bill that acknowledges the need for time to heal in times of despair and the need to have sufficient time to train as reservists to protect our fellow citizens. It also continues to give postsecondary faculty associations the ability to represent themselves during collective bargaining, which allows for the continued strong representation they currently have.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, let me again thank the Minister of Labour and Immigration for introducing this bill to this Assembly. I also express my appreciation to the Member for Sherwood Park and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for their efforts and contributions that led to the creation of this bill, and I encourage all the members in this Chamber to support this bill, that provides more job protection to Albertans in times of need.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I think that, first off, in light of the potential decisions that we are seeing in the Supreme Court of the United States, I want to start off by saying that I fully and unequivocally support the right of women to make the very personal choice in their own life to have an abortion, full stop, period.

I'm excited to have the opportunity to speak to this legislation or at least debate some of the topics that have come up so far through this debate. I think it's a very, of course, sensitive topic but an important one that we should be debating in this Legislature today and many times into the future. I think that this is a reasonable first step, but by no means do I think it's necessarily where we would hope to end up in the grand scheme of things.

I would also address, off the top, that we've heard in this discussion from, as far as I can tell, every speaker that they are in support of the changes regarding job-protected leave for our reservists and removing the 20-day limit on those to bring that in line with other Canadian jurisdictions. I think that's a good change, a reasonable change, and we should be doing everything we can to support reservists, whether they are going to training or anything else.

I would agree that it's a very important piece of legislation when it comes to ensuring that we are providing some opportunity for families, parents, expecting mothers, or otherwise to process the trauma and grief that often comes from the situations that we are discussing, whether we are talking about, as the legislation describes, miscarriages or stillbirths, whether it is the person themselves or a common-law partner as well. I fully support the decision to enshrine this in legislation, Madam Speaker.

With that being said, I also fully support the idea of strengthening what has been put forward by this government by including the idea of termination for medical reasons and abortions specifically in the legislation. As far as I can tell, it seems to be the case that there is some understanding that this would strengthen this piece of legislation, so hopefully when the time comes for us to have the opportunity to put forward amendments, the government will be receptive to the discussions that we've had already and to those amendments as they

come forward. Again, with the legislation as it currently stands, it only specifies leave when someone has a miscarriage or stillbirth and does not include abortion or a termination for medical reasons.

As the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and, I'm sure, many other members as well have raised concerns, we must do everything we can in these sensitive and traumatic and overwhelming experiences to provide for those families who are dealing with this loss, showing them compassion and being as inclusive as possible when it comes to the relationship between the employee and the employer and the expectation that, I guess, we as Albertans expect for somebody who is dealing with such a sensitive situation and a traumatic situation.

I think that the member made some good points in regard to concerns around discrimination and concerns around judgment on whether that person's grief is valid based on the circumstances of their own situation. Again, we are talking about several different issues here, whether we are talking about termination for medical reasons, stillbirths, miscarriages, abortions, and so on. But we should as legislators do everything we can to ensure that when an employee is going to an employer with such traumatic news and a request for leave in this circumstance, unpaid leave for three days – I don't think that they should be asked to clarify their traumatic experiences, by any means.

You know, I think back to when I first found out that my wife was pregnant. We were so excited, elated, and went through the process, as you normally do, of waiting and watching as things progress. We found ourselves in a situation where, a few weeks into already knowing that this has happened, with a positive pregnancy test and everything, there started to be some concerning signs, cramping and spotting among other things. You start being very worried, and you look for medical support. Sometimes it's better than other times, but in this circumstance it was kind of pushed to the side until it got to a point where the pain was just completely unbearable for my wife, and it was quite clear that something was going wrong.

At this point we were finally able to get a referral for an emergency X-ray when a physician said: obviously, something is wrong here. That same day we were referred to have these ultrasounds done. At that point, after those results came back, our physician said: you need to go to the emergency room right now because you are putting yourself in a lot of harm, and it's quite clear that this isn't going to work out. At that point we found out that it was an ectopic pregnancy.

From there, obviously, things don't, by any means, get any better. First of all, talking about looking for leave when you are needing to go to the emergency department immediately: there's no time to necessarily ask for time off for that. At the same time, you didn't necessarily expect to find yourself in this situation so quickly. Among other things, after you get to see the physician, who is going through your options – and there are a number of options, one being a pill, which is not necessarily likely to work and is going to require follow-up and potentially having to go through that process again, or alternatively a medically invasive procedure, which is also more likely to be, you know, for lack of a better term, successful. But there's still a chance that you are going to have to come back – no doubt you will have to come back – and ensure that the procedure was, again, for lack of a better term, successful.

Already we're talking about the span, from that process, of many days, Madam Speaker – I would have to say above and beyond three days just for that process itself – and then, of course, the recovery from the trauma that is caused, not only emotionally, going from such a high of, you know, having all the expectations in the world of how things are going to turn out to completely grounded and devastated.

4:10

You know, again, I identify that while this legislation in itself is a good start, I hope that one day we are able to come back and have discussions about how long of a process this truly can be. But at this time I would again support the call, as members on this side of the House have, for including definitions or ensuring that things like termination for medical reasons are included in this legislation.

The idea of an ectopic pregnancy is the exact definition of what we're asking for, termination for medical reasons. I think that ectopic pregnancies are somewhat common when families are trying to have a child. I know, Madam Speaker, that in the grand scheme of things, while there was so much trauma and pain that we went through in this process – and I tell you it went above and beyond three days; it went above and beyond three weeks; it went on for some time – we were very lucky because eventually we were able to welcome our first child into the world last year. But I also recognize that many families aren't so lucky and that many families go through several miscarriages before they're, if ever, able to have a child.

With that, again, I would ask this House, I would beg of this House to include what we are asking for, as those amendments come forward, to ensure that we are strengthening this legislation to include abortions, to include termination for medical reasons.

I appreciate the indulgence of the House. You know, this was a very sensitive time for us. No doubt, the feelings that I went through were different than the feelings and trauma that my own wife went through. At this point I guess I would just say that I'm so proud and honoured to be married to such a courageous and inspiring and intelligent woman. It was a tough path. We were very lucky and privileged in our situations, here in the Legislature and in her own work, that her employers were willing to go above and beyond to support her. But not every family is so lucky. That is why we as legislators need to ensure that we are providing the strongest framework to ensure that people aren't discriminated against through this process based on the procedure or decisions that they make and that we do everything we can to support families through this very traumatic experience.

With that, I look forward to further discussions on this very important piece of legislation. I again appreciate the government bringing it forward and being willing to take some steps to strengthen what was previously in place. But, again, as a private member, Madam Speaker, I hope that we can do even better sometime in the near future.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to add my voice to the debate on Bill 17. I just want to acknowledge my friend who's the MLA for Edmonton-West Henday for sharing his very personal story. We're so glad that it worked out for him and his wife. I think that he speaks for many Albertans, you know, about the deep emotional pain, of course, with the loss or potential loss of a baby coming into your life. It really does speak to the importance of making sure that Bill 17 accurately reflects what we really want to do to support all families and be inclusive.

There are really three aspects to Bill 17, and I'm just going to go through them. Like, there are three parts that sort of focus on reservists, and on just the labour code, protections for faculty associations regarding exclusive bargaining, and then, of course, what the Member for Edmonton-West Henday shared about bereavement leave.

I'll start with the reservists, Madam Speaker. This legislation removes the limit of 20 days of leave per calendar year for the

training of reservists, and my understanding is that this is, you know, getting Alberta sort of up to speed in terms of the national sort of, I guess, the way it is done in most provinces. I just want to commend the government for doing that because I'm sure that not every type of training, not every type of activity that the reservist needs to do fits into that 20-day frame, so it's important that there be some flexibility with that. The removal of this I think is a good thing.

Let me just also thank all the reservists here in Alberta, who do work every day to support us, you know, as Albertans, as Canadians. Some of the international work that they're doing even supporting citizens of Ukraine right now: we're just very grateful for them putting themselves in harm's way, really, to support us here in our province and in our country.

I mean, I think that all members of the House think this makes sense, to remove this 20 days. You know, the minister: I know he has shown a lot of interest and oftentimes wants to be involved in debates, but if he could talk to us a little bit about how this specifically would help reservists, we'd be happy to hear some of his comments about that. Let me just say that certainly the removal of the limit of 20 days of leave per calendar year for training, so that they can keep their regular jobs, is very important. I just want the minister and the government to know that we certainly support that.

The other aspect of the bill that I'd like to talk about is about, you know, the labour relations amendment that they're doing. It removes the legislated protections for faculty associations as exclusive bargaining agents for faculty staff associations, graduate student associations, and postdoctoral fellow associations.

Somewhat similar but not exactly similar to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, I taught at the University of Calgary also, but I never had a full-time gig. I always just was a sessional. I know that he was, of course, a full-time faculty member there. I taught at the University of Calgary and also at MacEwan University, Faculty of Social Work, for many years before being elected here to this Chamber. I even did one course for the University of Alberta, which is kind of extraordinary for a social worker.

There's no faculty of social work at the University of Alberta, which I think is a great tragedy for our province because, unfortunately, that excludes social workers oftentimes from – for example, the U of A hospital is a teaching hospital, so they have all the faculties come together and they often have collaborative professional development. When the students are in school, they're easily brought together because it's all part of the U of A. Of course, the U of A does not have a faculty of social work, and that apparently was a decision made back in the early '60s, 1960 or something, when it was decided that Calgary was going to be responsible for the entire province for the education of social workers.

4:20

Certainly, as a long-time social worker myself I've always wanted the U of A to have a faculty, and I think we have enough need and demand in our province to have students educated not only at the University of Calgary but here at U of A. But, yeah, U of C did have a satellite campus here in Edmonton, and of course that's where I taught.

Anyway, I have some, obviously, concerns and, you know, connection with faculty staff associations because of my previous work. Again, these are just some questions for the minister. How come this decision is being made to shift this? Like, what is the purpose of that? Who benefits? You know, that's always an important social policy question to any policy that comes forward. You have to ask: who benefits? It's really important. Like, is it just one specific group, or this group? It determines a lot of what people can understand from legislation. I'm just wondering if the

minister would be willing to express some of his understanding about that.

One of the things that we have heard in our consultation, ongoing regarding this part of the legislation, is that there hadn't been consultation on this. That again is sort of confusing. Why is this being brought forward? If it's being brought forward, we always want – whoever is impacted by the legislation should have a voice in it. Certainly, the disabled community talks about “nothing about us without us,” but I think all of us feel that way. If there's legislation that's going to impact us, we want to hear about that. Faculty associations, graduate student associations, postdoctoral fellow associations are telling us that the government, the UCP, has not consulted with them about this, so that's concerning.

I mean, certainly, when the UCP was in opposition and we were in government, that was one of the things that they took great umbrage in, that they felt like a rigorous consultation process was so important, but it seems kind of strange now that they are government that they themselves don't see that as valuable and think that they can just go right ahead without actually including the voices of the people impacted by policy. I think that that's a deep concern, and I would really encourage the UCP – it's not too late. This legislation hasn't gone through. Maybe there are some amendments that need to be put forward, that they are listening to these leadership bodies of the groups that this legislation has impacted. I really encourage them to make sure that their door is open to all of these associations.

But I guess I have a deeper concern about some of the changes here, not only the consultation – of course, that's significant – but also just the UCP's continued attack on civil society organizations and certainly professional organizations specifically. You know, we just moved Bill 15 to third reading, and that's of course changing the self-governing process of the disciplinary hearings for teachers in our province. It's taking away their ability to be self-regulating, which is sort of a fundamental aspect of being a profession. That's actually part of the definition, so it's almost deprofessionalizing – well, it is deprofessionalizing the profession of teaching. Because it's important to be assessed by people who understand the work that you do, and if you're being assessed by people who are not understanding that, don't have that professional background, sometimes, certainly, poor outcomes can come from that because they don't understand the work you do. That is another attack on some of these professional associations and certainly my own professional college, the Alberta College of Social Workers.

Last spring a bill was passed in this House where the association had to split from the college. Because it's just such a small association, college, only 8,000 members, you know, it's the death knell – it could be the death of the association.

In the changes to this labour relations in Bill 17 I'm just concerned that they are continuing the attack on, sort of, professions, the civil society organizations. As I was just saying, my own professional college has just 8,000 members. The mandatory registration would continue, so social workers would need to pay fees, agree with a code of ethics, standards of practice on an annual basis, submit continuing competence, those kinds of things. But then the association, which has to do more with, you know, what the state of affairs is in our province regarding social services, what kind of supports, what kind of things our clients that we serve need, what some of the issues are in the workplace, all of those broader issues that we had come collectively together for – really, this splitting of the Alberta College of Social Workers is going to create a much weaker association, and I really am concerned that it may not continue. So then that's not a really strong advocacy voice for the profession in our province. I see that as a real attack by the UCP on professions.

Then just in terms of this issue regarding not consulting on this aspect of the bill, certainly I just want to remind members of Bill 78 in the fall, the Alberta Housing Amendment Act, 2021. I heard directly from many affordable housing stakeholders that they were never consulted on that bill. They were consulted on the strategy but not the bill, and they were surprised by the legislation that came forward. Of course, there are some deep concerns about that legislation because it really looks to privatize affordable housing and certainly not look at any kind of social housing, which, of course, is the deeper subsidy housing, which the private industries are not interested in. Maybe they'll do 10 per cent below market because there may be some profit motive for them, but nobody in the private sector is going to do rent geared to income. They're not going to do that deep subsidy. What does that mean? Is the UCP abandoning that whole aspect of housing? It's really important that we have that social housing for people. You know, at times it is seniors who are on fixed incomes and need that kind of subsidized housing and support.

It's also very tragic because at this time we know that the federal government is investing significantly, but unfortunately Alberta is kind of missing in action in that regard as they leave \$187 million on the table. We could be benefiting from that in our province.

These are some reasons we need to consult and we need to really listen to those stakeholders, so I guess I'm encouraging the minister to be in contact with faculties, staff associations, graduate students' associations, and postdoctoral fellow associations so that they think that he's listening to them and understands their concerns. If legislation is being created, it needs to actually be assessed and be put before people who are impacted by that. I think that that's really important.

Then, sort of the third piece, which many of my colleagues have spoken about very eloquently, in this legislation is about the bereavement leave for pregnancy loss, which, I suppose, could potentially . . . [Ms Sigurdson's speaking time expired] Oh. I didn't get to it.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to get up and speak to the current bill, Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Of course, as was spoken at length by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, one of the concerning aspects of this proposed piece of legislation that we have in front of us right now is changes to the Labour Relations Code. It removes the July 1, 2022, end to the legislative protections for faculty associations as exclusive bargaining agents for faculty staff.

4:30

Now, as I've stated in the House before, I had the pleasure before being elected to this House to be the president of the Non-Academic Staff Association at the University of Alberta. One of the roles that I actually implemented was a meeting between all the associations at the university so that we could all talk about the immediate concerns, short-, medium-, and long-term goals that our associations had in relation to our representation at the University of Alberta. It was a good opportunity for us to see what the issues and concerns were that we had in common.

It was my own particular opinion at that time that especially the Postdoctoral Fellows Association would be better off being represented by the Non-Academic Staff Association. That was my opinion at the time. But, of course, things change. Things could be different now. I'm not suggesting that that should be the case. However, at that time and with the issues and concerns that

representatives of the Postdoctoral Fellows Association had and how they felt completely underrepresented – actually, many of them felt completely disrespected by the board of the University of Alberta, the administration at the University of Alberta. They felt that not only were they being underpaid and receiving next to nothing in benefits, but also the amount of work that they had to do being postdoctoral fellows was immense compared to some of the academic staff that were there at the University of Alberta.

I was president of the Non-Academic Staff Association for, I believe, a period of two and a half years. Of course, that would be too short of a time to develop a real, considerable, deep relationship between nonacademic staff and postdoctoral fellows. But that was my intention, at least to sit at the table and to continue discussing the issues. Like I mentioned at the very beginning, it was my hope that many of these postdoctoral fellows would then become members of the Non-Academic Staff Association. Of course, you know, with the name being the Non-Academic Staff Association, the postdoctoral fellows were a little bit concerned about that. The thing is that organizations grow. Associations grow in their mandate. That's one of the beautiful things about associations like the Non-Academic Staff Association, that they're truly democratic organizations, and the directors of the association are doing the will of the actual members of the association.

I mean, that's just to give you a little bit of a history on the role that I played there at the University of Alberta and how it actually applies to this piece of legislation in the fact that things can change over time. People can feel better represented by another association, or there is greater strength or bargaining power in actually joining with another association so that when going through the bargaining process, they can have more strength at the bargaining table, right? These are some of the things that would have to be considered.

But, of course, that's not up to this body in terms of legislating it. I would say that it is the direct concern of the members that are being represented. So I feel like this piece of legislation actually closes the door to a potential possibility if it was deemed desired by the actual members of these different associations and, in this particular case, the Postdoctoral Fellows Association, but the same could go for the Graduate Students' Association or even the academic staff association at the University of Alberta or at any postsecondary institution for that matter. I think that, well – that's just to give it context and framing.

Now, the part that's even more concerning about this is the fact that this government didn't even choose to actually go out and ask and consult these associations about what it is that they would want, so it almost seems as if the minister is just assuming that, you know, this is what these associations want, didn't bother to actually consult with them. Since this proposed piece of legislation has been introduced in this House, we've actually reached out to a number of stakeholders on this particular bill, and they're the ones that are telling us that they haven't been consulted, right?

Here I'm giving a concrete example of how things can change over time or how members can be better represented, and of course that's completely up to them, how they are being represented. But it would've been good for this government to actually sit down with the stakeholders whom this proposed piece of legislation would be impacting and actually ask the questions – right? – give the time to sit down with the academic staff association and the Graduate Students' Association and the Postdoctoral Fellows and ask them, well, "What are the immediate concerns that you have?" especially since – and I can't tell you how many times I've heard this, Madam Speaker, from members themselves at the University of Alberta – they feel that because of the budget cuts they're drastically being impacted.

For example, since this government has taken power, I've heard from a number of members of the Non-Academic Staff Association

that not only I used to represent but that also actually live in my constituency. You know, they reminisce about the times I used to do the work as the president of the Non-Academic Staff Association. Bless these members. They say, "You know what? We need you back at the university," and I say, "Well, you know, I'm trying to do the job from inside the House now" instead of doing it as the president of the Non-Academic Staff Association. Of course, I represent many people and constituents. For me it's an honour for a member of the Non-Academic Staff Association in my constituency to call me or write me an e-mail and tell me about what it is that they're experiencing now and the fact that they feel incredibly short-changed by this government because of the pressures that they are putting on postsecondary institutions all over this province.

It's tough because I remember when I was the president, and it was very common at that time that – of course, it was under, you know, previous Conservatives. Like, we have the new and renewed version now, but it's not so good for members of the Non-Academic Staff Association, as for many Albertans, because it's still the Conservative perspective, the Conservative ideology that they're trying to shove down people's throats, I'll say – and that's a nice way of saying it, Madam Speaker – because they refuse to listen to anybody else, right? I've said it time and again. That's what members of my constituency and members of the Non-Academic Staff Association have been telling me. Again, we're back to these antiquated policies in terms of underfunding postsecondary education and not everybody having equal access to it.

4:40

What ends up happening, Madam Speaker, is that the board of governors, the administration, the president of the University of Alberta see the economic, the financial pressures being set on them, and the first people that always get the short end of the stick are the nonacademic staff at the University of Alberta. They're the first ones to lose their jobs or get their hours cut. When it comes to bargaining, the administration wants to give them less and less benefits as time goes on.

Like that, I think that the Graduate Students' Association, the Postdoctoral Fellows Association, and especially the academic staff association go through the same, similar types of pressures being set on them. I would argue that they have a lot more in common than they have different. But, of course, this proposed piece of legislation just completely shuts the door to the possibility of one of them or even another association or group being the bargaining agent for them at the table when it comes to bargaining exactly for how they're remunerated for the work that is being done in the postsecondary system and the benefits that they receive.

A lot of the times, you know, they won't get – because of the economic conditions that we're currently under, the crisis that we're under, that was made even exponentially worse by COVID, these workers tend to have not received any pay raises for years now, and of course inflation is going up. I remember, under the previous Progressive Conservatives, being at meetings and sharing with members of the Non-Academic Staff Association that because of inflation that same box of cereal that you're buying for your child so that they can have some breakfast, the same box of cereal that you're buying yesterday, in, like, a year from now is going to get more expensive. That's exactly what's happening now.

It's a shame that this government, without consulting any of the stakeholders that this portion of the legislation is going to be impacting, didn't even bother to consult with this group to ask them why that is the case. Of course, this is going to change and effectively stop the work that they've been doing to determine who represents them and their best interests at that bargaining table, Madam Speaker. So I think that this is something that's serious

enough that this government should take a second look at it, especially since they haven't consulted with these particular stakeholders.

I'm seriously thinking about voting against this bill at this time as it stands right now. I'm hoping that members on the other side will hear the message that I'm sharing with them right now and that they will bring an amendment once this proposed piece of legislation makes it to Committee of the Whole. Of course, as we know, Madam Speaker, this government has a majority so they tend to just – again, with all due respect, this is the way that a lot of people are feeling, that they're just ramming their ideology down people's throats and not listening, not taking the time to really listen to people and what their concerns are and how they can best be represented through pieces of legislation like the one that we have in front of us.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. When I look through the legislation, there are clearly some things that can be supported. I think, right off the top, talking about removing the 20 days for reservists to have leave from their employer is incredible. I know that there are so many reservists in the province, many of whom are employed by the government of Alberta. Health is probably, I believe, the number one employer of reservists in the province, and to know that this leave is being made available is great. Being able to support reservists to do the things that they need to do to train and not go into their own personal days is a wonderful step towards showing support for the incredible work that they do within Canada domestically on missions and then internationally.

I know that when we have wildfires, when we have floods, if the community that's being impacted doesn't have capacity, the reserves are the first line of action that we call in when we're dealing with those domestic disturbances all across Canada. Recently we saw reservists deployed into several provinces during COVID to assist with the continuing care facilities. We heard reservists here in the province getting ready for potential deployment. In order to do that, they need to take time off, and the simple act of being a reservist means that you are a civilian and also part of the Canadian Armed Forces. While you have your civilian job, you want to be able to fulfill your service to the Canadian Armed Forces, and knowing that this piece of legislation is going to remove that is a wonderful, wonderful thing, and I can wholeheartedly support that piece of Bill 17.

When it comes to the rest of this legislation, specifically around section 53.983, unpaid bereavement leave, I think the sections where it defines common-law partner and parent under (a) and (b) are good. When we get to section 2(a), (b), (c), and (d), it's not clear enough. We talk about

- (a) the death of a family member;
- (b) the employee has a miscarriage or stillbirth;
- (c) the employee's spouse or common-law partner has a miscarriage or stillbirth;
- (d) a person has a miscarriage or stillbirth and the employee would have been a parent of a child born as a result of the pregnancy.

Well, when we talk about pregnancy loss, there are two clear definitions that have been left out. Madam Speaker, I don't know if that was intended, but it is a glaring omission in this legislation, and it absolutely needs to be included.

We need to talk about abortion and termination for medical reasons being included because this legislation needs to be clear. It

needs to identify pregnancy loss in all its capacity. I think that when we see that there's an acknowledgement of adoptive parents, when it talks about the miscarriage or stillbirth and they would have been a parent as a result of that pregnancy, that very clearly is thinking outside of the box and not looking at biology but looking at what pregnancy means. To not define clearly abortion and termination for medical reasons is confusing, why it's omitted. I think that in order to honour all of those that experience any form of pregnancy loss, this legislation needs to be clear. We should be able to say the term "pregnancy loss" and look to the legislation and have clear definitions included under this section that identify exactly what that means so there is no room for interpretation. It needs to be very, very clear.

4:50

I think that when we're talking about pregnancy loss, it's not the why and it's not the how. A loss of pregnancy occurred, and that employee deserves the ability to access bereavement leave, period. It's our job as legislators to make sure that there is no question when it comes to the approval from that employer to be able to give it. Right now the way it reads is that if someone – like the hon. member my colleague from Edmonton-West Henday described, his heartbreaking experience with his wife and an ectopic pregnancy, that wouldn't qualify as a loss of pregnancy the way it's written in this legislation.

There's no reason to not be clear. When we look at legislation about the kinds of pregnancy loss that a person may experience, the way it's written is discriminatory. It clearly excludes abortion and termination for medical reasons, and I think that it's essential. Those legislators were able to be very clear in what pregnancy loss means. The last time I checked, Madam Speaker, those two words, "abortion" and "termination for medical reasons," are pregnancy loss.

When we hear in question period the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood ask specifically, "Will this language be included?" and we get a response that an amendment will be coming, even that message isn't clear. What will the amendment say? This is a piece of legislation that has a huge impact on those that are seeking that time off, those three days unpaid, because of the loss of a pregnancy. We don't need to be putting employees in a situation where they have to explain the type of loss. They should be able to look to the legislation and see all of the types of pregnancy loss and know that they unequivocally qualify. It's the importance of having clarity when we're talking as legislators and creating legislation that is inclusive and truly includes all the types of pregnancy loss.

I also think of the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talking about the loss of a child through a failed adoption. The loss is significant. We have families that prepare, whether they're a foster to adopt family or they're approved for an adoption, and there are so many different barriers – they're not barriers but factors, perhaps – that could come into place that could cause adoption breakdown. One of them under the legislation allows the birth parent 10 days to appeal and revoke their consent. I can tell you, having worked with families who have gone through adoption, that those 10 days are excruciating. I've had parents tell me they're afraid to bond; they're afraid to love this baby in case it's not theirs.

I can tell you as a mom to three kids that when you find out that you're pregnant, you're flooded with a ton of emotion, whether it was planned or unplanned. Then to deal with the loss of a pregnancy is a significant loss to so many, whether you're the biological parent, whether you're the adoptive parent, the caregiver, the loved one. And however that pregnancy came to end, you shouldn't be required to explain to your employer. We should have it very articulate through the legislation to include those two extra definitions.

It's a positive step, for sure, that we're giving Albertans time away from the workplace. We've heard countless personal stories

of the impacts of pregnancy loss. It's something that I can tell you as a support person, as a friend, as a social worker: the grief can be absolutely unbearable. To have to explain to your employer the type of pregnancy loss shouldn't be a requirement, or to try to justify or advocate for yourself that your grief affiliated with loss of pregnancy deserves three days of bereavement leave. If it was clear in the legislation, it would be a simple conversation that there was a loss of pregnancy, period.

I think that there is a real opportunity for this government. Like, the minister had said that there would be an amendment. I truly hope that that amendment clearly articulates abortion and termination for medical reasons. It goes in line with the rest of section 53.9. It adds extra clarity to this piece of legislation, which I would hope all can agree in a time of grief and loss shouldn't be left up to the employee to explain to their employer.

Now, I know as an employer that there are conversations that you just trust are happening and that they're being honest and truthful. I can't imagine what the experience would be like for an employee to have to explain the type of pregnancy loss, knowing the stigma that comes with so much of that.

One of my very best friends suffered numerous miscarriages. She got to the point where she was even embarrassed to tell us that she was trying. Telling her employer that she had a miscarriage caused so much stress for her.

I think that when it comes to pregnancy, we need to be able to acknowledge all the types of loss that occur, be able to have it clearly articulated. Miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, TFMR, infertility, failed adoption: those are all examples of loss of pregnancy. Whether the language makes you uncomfortable or not, if we're truly trying to support Albertans in accessing unpaid bereavement leave for pregnancy loss, it simply makes sense to ensure that that's included.

I think that when we have conversations with employees and the different regulations under the labour statutes, there are conversations that just simply don't exist. When an employee comes and says, you know, "I have cancer," typically that word alone is enough for the employer to know that they need support, that they need time off. My hope is that it's the same when an employee comes to their employer and says that they've experienced a loss of pregnancy and they need time off. There shouldn't be follow-up questions. There shouldn't be: "How come? Why? What happened?"

I know that we still live in a society where there are some expectations around pregnancy. A very dear friend of mine in a public position, common law, not legally married, got pregnant and was terrified to tell her employer.

Thank you.

5:00

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, at the second reading stage. I was pleased to hear that the government does intend to amend this legislation around the issue of amendments to employment standards around job-protected leave in the context of a pregnancy loss. Of course, it's not defined as such in the legislation. It's a very curious crafting of the legislation in which miscarriage and stillbirth are not defined in the act, yet they are enumerated in the act. This should have been caught at the legislative review stage of cabinet. I am shocked that it was not. It is – and this is charitable – a very sloppy way to draft legislation given the number of events that may be interpreted within miscarriage or stillbirth or not and would have to be defined as a result of some forms of litigation.

I think we heard that through the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday describing in heartbreaking detail – and I thank him for sharing that story with the people of Alberta. He did not have to, but he did. I think it was in the public interest to do so, not only because I believe it to be in the public interest that people who come to this House accurately reflect the lived experience of the people who elected us. Certainly, pregnancy loss is a lived experience for far too many people. It can be very hard on people's attachment to workforce, on relationships, on overall health and well-being for prospective parents.

But an ectopic pregnancy, because miscarriage and stillbirth are not defined in the act, wouldn't necessarily be captured. It is a loss of pregnancy, but it is not specifically a miscarriage. It is not a pregnancy that can be carried anywhere near to term. It is, in fact, dangerous for women, and it has to be dealt with via medical intervention, that can sometimes also be very painful and, depending on how it is dealt with, can take some time. This has got to be fixed in the legislation if only because it causes, just on the face of it, even on the face of what constitutes either a miscarriage or a stillbirth, a great deal of confusion.

It also seems that it imports this language because there's sort of an attempt potentially by some to only keep those grounds very, very narrow. You can see coded in this – or one can see, if one is looking quite carefully at it and the various arguments of antichoice organizations and antichoice advocates, an importation of the concept of muddying women's personhood in front of the law and the bodily autonomy of there only being one person under the law even if that person is pregnant, which is, in fact, what underlines a lot of British common-law history and then was upheld in the 1988 Morgentaler decision, when it found that the Criminal Code provisions outlining access to abortion and the provisions requiring some sort of panel that women had to appear before endangered what was called security of the person in our section 7, security of the person rights. Those infringements on those rights were not saved by section 1 of the Charter because they muddied the concept of one person being able to make decisions and have autonomy over their own health care choices.

So it appears to me that, on the face of it, the refusal to have anything more than miscarriage or stillbirth is imprecise legal language. The terms are not defined, but also there appears to be an ideological impetus here as something of a way to mollify perhaps more extreme antichoice elements within the conservative movement, who do not reflect the broad consensus of Canadian or Alberta public opinion but nevertheless hold considerable sway in certain corners of the conservative moment in this province and across the country.

It is imperative that this be amended if only to satisfy just some basic concepts of fundamental justice, and I remain quite astonished, quite frankly, Madam Speaker, that this made its way through cabinet and none of the lawyers in cabinet looked at this and said: this is, on the face of it, a very problematic way to enumerate the terms for a job-protected leave and will just simply cause confusion at the level of employment standards interpretation and ultimately land us all in the courts. The courts have better things to do than to fix the Legislative Review Committee of cabinet's mistakes and deliberate oversights, quite frankly.

It's important that we put that on the record, I think, because we have not seen the amendment yet, and if and when there is an interpretation phase of this legislation, if it doesn't get fixed in the right way, then the courts will look back at the transcript of this and they will see that the province had the opportunity to insert a better definition and a better approach that conforms with women's Charter rights, or section 7 rights to security of the person, and the full gamut of our health care or what happens to us in our interactions with the health care system, whether it's medical

reasons, pregnancy loss, or other forms of pregnancy loss, and they will see that the government chose not to take that route. I mean, somebody is going to end up having to pay a whole lot of money to fix this problem, including GOA lawyers and some brave woman, I'm sure, if it doesn't get fixed within the confines of this Chamber forthwith.

Now, I want to turn my attention and the remainder of my time and comments on this bill at second reading to a completely different matter, Madam Speaker, which is the matter of postsecondary associations and the individuals that are affected by the removal of the expiration of the exclusive right of academic status associations, graduate students' associations, or postdoctoral fellows to be bargaining agents for those groups. We have heard from those affected that they were not consulted on this change, and those changes will effectively stop the work, the constitutionally protected work, that those associations have begun doing to determine who represents them in their bargaining relationship.

I will remind this House that the reason why academic staff associations, graduate students, and postdocs have the right to representation and the right to bargaining in the first place is because the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour decision in 2014 by the Supreme Court of Canada underlined that the prohibition on the right to strike for faculty and other provincially represented unions, if you will, was, in fact, unconstitutional, that freedom of association is the fundamental freedom, the Charter right that underlines the right to choose a bargaining agent and then ultimately the right to withdraw labour, and that that is, in fact, a constitutional right in this country.

5:10

At the time of drafting the legislation that the New Democrats brought in, it was communicated to us through consultation, a novel concept, that those associations wanted more time to understand the impact of the legislation, what would be expected of them as bargaining agents, and they didn't quite, I think, have the capacity at that time – I think “capacity” is the right term – to fully grapple with what it might mean to choose their own bargaining agent. That was then; this is now.

Those organizations – we're talking about relatively small groups of people affected by this change. Postdoctoral fellows are, you know, maybe a few dozen at the University of Lethbridge. Certainly, the academic staff association is larger, and the graduate student association is of reasonable size. The University of Lethbridge is still relatively small compared to U of A and U of C, obviously. But there is no question that they have had a front-row seat for what it means to be represented in a bargaining relationship and to be included in a normalized labour relations environment as a result of that Supreme Court decision in 2014.

[The Speaker in the chair]

That is because the University of Lethbridge faculty found themselves on strike after a protracted back-and-forth period of negotiations over some time, and 300-plus faculty walked a picket line for some weeks, I think just shy of two months. I could stand to be corrected on that, but I think it was around that time. Maybe it was a little bit more. I certainly felt like it was a long time as I visited the picket lines very often. One was walking distance from my house, and the other was over on the west side, up at the actual campus, where the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West also joined me to chat with faculty walking the picket line.

Nobody wanted to be there. Everybody wanted to be teaching and doing research and, you know, undertaking scientific work in the neuroscience building, in the new science building, in biological

sciences, in chemistry, in mathematics, in music education – I'm just trying to go through all of the different conversations that I had with liberal arts professors, with professors of economics and business management and all of the disciplines that the University of Lethbridge excels at. Of course, they came to find themselves walking that picket line as a result of the \$20 million of cuts over four years that have trickled down from this House into my community.

It was just such a shame to watch all of that happen given the fact that the cuts have been severe. When you pull \$20 million over four years out of a community of 100,000, that is a tremendous economic multiplier effect, and it has had an effect on businesses, small, medium, and large. It has had an effect on real estate, on families having to make decisions about whether to stay or whether to go. Certainly, meeting people on the doorstep who say: there's no way I would ever support the UCP because I just lost my job because of them. You know, canvassing in Lethbridge-East and Lethbridge-West, that is something I hear.

Again, concentrating those cuts so narrowly in that city certainly has tremendous effects, but all of this came about because there was a normalized bargaining relationship, which the academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows all deserve, and that's why this legislation is problematic.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 17 is before the Assembly. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. It's an important piece of legislation and, for the most part, I guess, does three main things.

With respect to changes to reservists' leave we support our reservists and the important work they do for our country. Removing the 20-day limit on job-protected leave is the right thing to do, and it will certainly bring Alberta in line with other Canadian jurisdictions.

The second thing: with respect to bereavement leave I think it's critically important that grief and other responses that may surround a pregnancy loss are recognized or duly recognized. Since there are a range of emotional, mental, physical health experiences that can follow these events, those who experience that are in the best position to describe that, to share what they need. I think that giving those Albertans time away from the workplace to process that loss is certainly a positive step.

However, one concern is that it only specifies leaves when someone has a miscarriage or stillbirth, and it does not include abortion or termination for medical reasons. This bill needs to be amended to include all types of pregnancy loss so that abortion and termination for medical reasons can be included as well. We should not leave room for interpretation.

Earlier the Premier was asked about this, and the minister of labour just said that there will be amendments. He was very hesitant – in fact, all members of the UCP caucus were hesitant – to even utter the word “abortion.” As it stands now, I think this bill does not go far enough. It is not clear enough. It needs to be amended to include abortion. It needs to be amended to include termination for medical reasons. It needs to cover a range of experiences.

Many of my colleagues shared their experiences, and I thank them for that. This bill needs to do exactly that and provide for a range of experiences that come with this loss. They need to specify what loss will be covered and what loss will not be covered.

With respect to the other changes contained in this piece of legislation, the postsecondary changes, it will identify members of the staff associations and put them in legislation, recognize them in legislation as a bargaining unit.

The problem with those changes is the same as with many other steps that the government has taken. This government has an attitude that they know best, and they do not consult with relevant stakeholders when making these changes. We have heard from those impacted by these changes that they were not consulted. It's deeply concerning because this government has made a number of changes to postsecondary institutions without consulting them.

5:20

Postsecondary institutions have been on the chopping block from day one, when the UCP began government. Their funds were cut by \$700 million without any consultation with universities and postsecondary institutions. Their staff was fired. Their grants were cut. Tuition fees were raised. Interest on student loans was raised. All these things were done without consultation with the postsecondary institutions, not just without consultation but despite strong opposition from postsecondary institutions, despite evidence that we need a strong postsecondary sector to grow our economy, to diversify our economy, to be a part of the modern economy. But this government did not listen to anyone, and now they're making further changes that will impact postsecondary institutions without consulting them.

These are the reasons why, whenever this government comes close to educational institutions, postsecondary institutions, or does anything, nobody trusts them. Their goal is to keep postsecondary education out of reach of everyday Albertans and to do much damage to these institutions. As it stands now, I think there need to be substantial amendments in order for us to support this piece of legislation.

With that, I will take my seat.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a second time]

Bill 11 Continuing Care Act

Ms Gray moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not carried out sufficient consultations on the contents of the bill with families whose loved ones lost their lives from COVID-19 while in continuing care.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment May 3]

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment RA1 to Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview would like to add to the debate.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on referral of Bill 11 to committee and that this not be read further. I mean, I've spoken already regarding the Continuing Care Act. You know, this is described as framework legislation, so it's legislation that, really, sets a framework. It doesn't have a lot of detail in it, and therein lies the concern.

This is such a key area. Since we've just experienced some very difficult years because of COVID-19, this area in our province has had so much difficulty. We know that more than 1,600 people have died in continuing care facilities, residents of continuing care facilities, throughout our province. According to the National Institute on Ageing we've had the highest number of outbreaks in facilities in Canada here in our province. These are sad statistics.

This means that so many families have grieved lost loved ones and, I'm sure, are continuing to grieve as each sort of milestone – another birthday, another holiday like Christmas – comes up, you know, memories of that individual.

Sadly, so many of these deaths were preventable, but for a multitude of reasons I think the services that these families needed, that these residents needed were not provided. Sadly, they were put in harm's way. That's why it's so important that this bill not be read again.

One of the major things that's a huge concern, I would say, was just, you know, how the UCP really dragged their feet on that one-site work order of the chief medical officer. When they did finally bring it forward, after we had for months – I think it was two months we were calling for it, and other jurisdictions had been doing this. They finally did bring it in. But guess what? Unfortunately, there were so many exemptions to this one-site work order that, really, it still meant that it didn't have much power to mandate that workers would only work at one site. The reason that that was so important, of course, as we remember, is because oftentimes COVID was transmitted by these health care workers because they worked at multiple facilities. Sometimes they worked in other kinds of jobs. They were spreading COVID-19 amongst the residents, and that, obviously, had deadly consequences, as I've just noted, with over 1,600 residents dying here in Alberta.

Things could have been handled very much differently. The urgency and the importance of Bill 11 is key. The tragic thing is – I mean, we were hoping for some transformational legislation, quite frankly, but what we got here is, really, an administrative bill. As I said, it's framework legislation that gives very few details about what exactly is going to be transformed. The question is: will it transform our continuing care system in Alberta? Really, we know – and COVID has shone the light very brightly – that it does need to be transformed. We knew this before COVID, but of course the pandemic did really show us very clearly how much that system needs revamping.

You know, we're grindingly slowly moving forward. But I guess what I would say to the government is: where's the urgency? Where's the urgency? What does it take to see the importance of this? A pretty serious consequence has already happened, but we're told now that it's going to be still spring 2023 when any of the detail, which is going to be in regulations, will come about. I just want to express my concern about that, really, again just seeing how this UCP government has not supported seniors. Not all residents of continuing care facilities are seniors, but I would say that the large majority are. Certainly, families of those residents really feel that they can't depend on the UCP to competently manage the continuing care system, to have the best interests of their loved ones in mind.

5:30

This isn't the only area where the UCP has really, you know, abandoned seniors, I'm sad to say, because they've done other things, and I guess I just want to identify that one of the other things that they've done is that they closed the Seniors Advocate office. That was one of the first things they did when they became government. Of course, that office did tremendous work to advocate for seniors, to help them navigate provincial programs. I mean, it's a complex system. The work that the social workers, that the advocate herself did at the time made a big difference.

It was a new office that, of course, we created when we were government. I had the honour of being the Minister of Seniors and Housing at that time, and we took great pains to make sure that we had a really high-calibre, qualified individual to lead that office and, you know, just set it up, obviously, and have staff and really develop

that whole Seniors Advocate office. We chose Dr. Sheree Kwong See, who was a professor at the University of Alberta, continues to be a professor there, of course, as a specialist in seniors' services. Certainly, she was a strong advocate. I met with her on a quarterly basis, and she certainly told me many times all the ways we were failing as a government. She pushed the envelope, and that was her job. I feel like she made me a better minister because she challenged what we were doing.

Certainly, one of the things that she taught me was just about, you know, sort of being much more respectful in terms of our language. Sometimes when we talk about seniors, people will say, "Our seniors," as if they're little children or something. No, no, no. That's not very respectful. She was often critiquing how information came out from the ministry and made sure that we had respectful language.

But, sadly, as I said, when the UCP was elected, one of the first acts was to close that office. At the time the minister said it was because: oh, well, the Health Advocate can do that. Shortly after the UCP was elected, that Health Advocate position was open, and the Minister of Health at the time actually stopped the sort of recruitment process, the interviewing process, and put in a hand-picked UCP supporter, Janice Harrington, who really has no background in, certainly, health or seniors and sort of really, I think, created a question of credibility for that office.

Despite the Minister of Seniors and Housing's commitment to me, certainly, in multiple estimates that I've asked her about or even in this House, asking questions that seniors' concerns were being addressed by the Health Advocate, she has not met with the Health Advocate. I asked her that specifically in estimates, you know, again this year. Refused to answer that. I can only assume from that that she's not meeting with them. I asked the Health minister the same question because that's what the Minister of Seniors and Housing advised me to do, because she says: that's Health. That makes me question whether she actually is listening to the Health Advocate or the Health Advocate actually is doing anything to support seniors. And he told me that he didn't know if they'd been meeting. He had met with the Health Advocate regarding concerns for his Health ministry but nothing about, specifically, the seniors ministry.

Anyway, despite the Minister of Seniors and Housing saying that, yes, absolutely, seniors' concerns will be met and supported and advanced through that office, the Health Advocate, because they're just amalgamating it, so seniors will still – it's not happening. There wasn't even a report this year. You know, every year an annual report is submitted by the advocate, and there was nothing even this year, so we have no public record even of what's going on. Again, this is just an example of the UCP not advancing the concerns of seniors, not providing supports for them. In Bill 11 again we're being told, "Yes, yes, yes; it's all going to be taken care of," but again it's a delay. We won't hear anything until the spring of 2023. Again, I just feel this is a lack of urgency on the part of government, because we've been through a very difficult time, and there are things that could be done right now to make a huge difference for residents of continuing care facilities.

I guess another area where it shows we just can't trust this government, can't trust the UCP, is Bill 70, the COVID-19 Related Measures Act. I think it was last spring that that bill was passed, and it took away the right of families to seek justice. So if loved ones were neglected or indeed passed away in continuing care facilities due to negligence on the part of the facility, no longer could families seek justice. Again, this is just another way the UCP is abandoning seniors and is deeply disturbing to me.

Another – well, this is sort of an overall issue with some of the continuing care system, that there are many private facilities, there's

a for-profit model. That can create difficulties, I would say, in the system because we know from research – and it's been extensive – that the best outcomes for residents of continuing care facilities, the best outcomes for the residents themselves, come from public facilities; second, nonprofit facilities; third, we know that the privates do the worst in terms of how they support seniors. We know that the private operators – when they got, you know, I think it was the federal money for COVID support, we know that a lot of that money went to shareholders. Herein lies the issue with some of the private continuing care facilities, because they're operating to make profit. It's not so much about service delivery; it's more about making profit for their shareholders.

Also, the staff are being squeezed because they're not getting the supports they need to be able to serve seniors well. We know that that is one of the most important aspects of continuing care, that staff are well supported, well trained, yet we know that most of the staff in continuing care are low-paid, precarious workers – most of them are women – and that they are often newcomers to our country. That makes it pretty volatile for everyone involved in that system because if you have workers that aren't well supported, it's hard for them to do the job that they need to.

Serving vulnerable seniors: you know, that's not easy work. That work requires training. Certainly, you have to develop a relationship with people, so if the staff are always changing, which happens oftentimes with precarious workers, then of course the health outcomes for the seniors themselves will be much diminished. You get to know seniors, and you know, perhaps, what they like or how they like things to be done, those kinds of things. If workers are always changing, they can't be supported.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on the amendment the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, under RA1. This is not the first amendment that we have put forward. Previously in the debate we put forward an amendment to refer this piece of legislation to committee based on what we've been hearing from Albertans, and what we see in this legislation is that there's absolutely no action in this bill. We advocated, when we were requesting for it to go to committee – and I will continue to advocate like my colleagues have on this referral amendment – that this bill not proceed in the way that it's been written.

5:40

We have seen devastating outcomes for Albertans. I would say that having over 1,600 loved ones die in continuing care in Alberta is a tragedy, and it absolutely has to be a call for action. Bill 11 was a wonderful opportunity for the government to do that, but unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, when we look through this, it doesn't have the action that's required. I would suggest that members really consider not allowing this piece of legislation to be read a second time and that the UCP really take the time to talk to Albertans about what this act should do.

I know that throughout COVID I've had many important people in my life either working in continuing care or have loved ones in the continuing care facilities in the province, and their stories are heartbreaking. We saw the stories emerge throughout COVID when the military was called in to assist. That made the national stage, talking about the care that seniors are having in these facilities, and I think that we need to have that same kind of transparency and real action about what needs to be done. The best way to come up with solutions is to ask those that are living it, ask those that work in

those environments, ask the loved ones who have their people in those continuing care residences.

And like the Member for . . .

Mr. Bilous: West Henday.

Ms Goehring: No.

Mr. Feehan: Riverview.

Ms Goehring: . . . Edmonton-Riverview was talking about, this is their home. So when we're talking about job and safety standards and those types of things, there's a certain amount of intimacy that happens when the work that you're doing is providing care to someone in their home. I know my experience working in group care with young people: I had an incredible privilege to work in their home. First and foremost, it was an expectation of myself and my staff that we treat it as their home. Yes, this is our place of employment, but first and foremost this is where the people that we work with live.

Having that intimate relationship with people is so important, and that care can't be completed in a way that is expected if there are so many barriers that are being forced on them. When we talk about hours, when we talk about ratios, this isn't how many people can fit in a capacity, in a space, if you work at, let's say, a stadium and you're looking at how many people meet fire code. These are person-to-person ratios. These are expectations of the people providing the care and the utmost respect and quality of care that we're expecting to be provided to seniors that are living in these facilities.

We made an attempt to have this referred to committee, and that was defeated, and now we're making an attempt that it not be read a second time, that the government take the opportunity to really talk to those loved ones and have the conversation about what it was like when COVID was at its peak. What is it like now? Have there been any sort of changes or implementations that need to happen that are being missed? That information isn't relayed in this bill. We know that if we gave opportunity to speak to grieving families, there is a lot that they would say. They're coming from a place of first-hand experience of the tragedies that happened to their loved ones, and with legislation this government took away the rights of grieving families. It provides an opportunity, if we were to agree on this amendment, for the government to really get it right, to listen to those that have been impacted.

One of my dearest friends provided care for her great-aunt living in a facility. My friend worked full-time. Her husband worked full-time. Both of her kids were university students. The staff were so overwhelmed at the facility. They weren't able to actually provide the care that was required to feed her. My girlfriend said that it would take anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour. She was not capable of feeding herself. She needed to be assisted quite significantly, and the staff just couldn't do it, so my girlfriend and her loved ones took turns. They were there two, three times a day just making sure that her basic need of eating was taken care of.

Now, when we look at what it's been like for those that are working in these types of facilities, the stress has been absolutely unbearable for many. I know that I've had calls from physicians, from health care workers, from nurses, from aides that told me that their workplace has been filled with professionals that hide in closets crying because they're so overwhelmed with the work conditions and the workloads and the care that they're providing. So many have told me that they want to do more, they want things to change, and they need the support from government to be able to do that. I know that if I'm hearing it, members of government are hearing it, Mr. Speaker.

I think that by not moving forward with this legislation and approving and voting in support of this RA1, it really gives an opportunity to just pause it, reach out, talk to those Albertans that have so many stories to share. It's an opportunity to really get this right. We know that there are so many that have been impacted by these 1,600 Albertans that tragically passed away from COVID, that 1,600 individuals and countless others that loved them, that knew them, that are grieving. They could have some significant insight on the impacts that should be in this Continuing Care Act, the action that needs to be taken at this time. I don't understand why there's this need to get this through legislation right now when we're hearing loud and clear that it does nothing. Let's listen to those that work in the care facilities. Let's talk about some of the substantive changes that could occur.

We know that there's a mistrust from those working in health care for this government based on how they've been treated. We know that there's continuous action that has created chaos. And we've seen that this government is just simply incapable of managing a complex health care system. Let's turn to those that are the front lines, the family, the residents, and get this right. It's an opportunity to be leading in how we respond to our continuing care facilities. We want to be able to shine the light on what's going wrong. We don't want it to be hidden in some report; we want it to be talked about and fixed. The UCP claim that that's something they want to do, yet this legislation doesn't do that. I think that when we hear the UCP time and time and time again say, "It's coming in regulation; just trust us" – the record of trust that has been broken continuously from this government leads so many to believe that they can't trust the UCP. Having clear, comprehensive legislation provides an opportunity to get it right, to talk about it.

5:50

I know that one of the things that this government did early on was that they closed the Seniors Advocate office. I think of all of that missed information that really could have been shared to really make this piece of legislation a piece of action, listening to the concerns of seniors. They would have been able to report directly to the Legislature and make recommendations. But we don't have that. That's not something that this government thought was a priority. So in lieu of having that, why not talk to those living in continuing care? Why not talk to those residents that are impacted?

I know the trauma that exists around the health care workers, the residents being trapped in their private rooms without knowing what was going on with their neighbours. Hearing of tragic loss and death and sickness has an impact. When you're working in people's homes and you're establishing incredible relationships with people, the grief and loss that you're feeling through this needs to be heard. It needs to be listened to. We need to be able to show Albertans that their loss and tragedy meant something, that a government that truly cares takes action. We take information, we take experience, we listen to those that have lived this, and then we do better. I would argue that through this referral amendment that gives government that perfect opportunity to just pause what they're proposing to do, actually implement something that has real, tangible action. I would really encourage all members of this House to really think about the stories that they've been hearing and what the change could look like.

I know all of us in this Chamber know someone who's aging. If they're not currently in a facility, there are those conversations about whether or not they should be. Knowing the state that it is right now and the fear that's surrounding it, I would argue that that's a discussion that has a lot of consequence.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I would really encourage all members of this House to vote in support of RA1 and just pause this legislation. Get

it right. Let's do something that has real action, not just words, something that has a true impact on those that are continuing to work in these environments, those that are continuing to live in those environments, and those that are going to be entering those environments. Seniors deserve the best possible care, and we owe it to them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment RA1 are there others? The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the members for Edmonton-Riverview and St. Albert for their comments on this bill. I'd like to speak to the amendment, and I'd like to speak against the amendment. While I appreciate the comments made by the members across the way about their passion for supporting seniors and the need for us to move forward, supporting this motion, which actually stalls us in our tracks and prohibits us from taking action, is actually not the way to do that.

Mr. Speaker, if we read the motion, you know, the single largest reason why they suggest that the bill not be read a second time is because there have been insufficient consultations. I'd like to speak to that in a second. The other reason that the members opposite give are the concerns of what's not in the bill in terms of transformation. We agree that we need to transform the system, and I'll speak to that. Finally, the suggestion that the legislation does nothing, that it doesn't take action: I'd like to speak to that because, again, simply, that is not the case.

Now, on the first item in regard to consultation, Mr. Speaker, there has been significant consultation. Over the years many continuing care stakeholders have asked the Ministry of Health to review Alberta's legislation to address challenges that exist in the system. This legislation review is part of our broader commitment to transform our continuing care system, to do everything we can to ensure that Albertans have access to high-quality continuing care. Now, we engaged numerous continuing care stakeholder organizations, and we received 33 written submissions that identified issues and recommendations for improvement. Additionally, input was received through home-care and nursing care regulation review. The legislative review was also informed by advice and recommendations from the facility-based continuing care review process.

I'd like to point out that that process occurred after we had already had some experience with COVID. We were into that for a year, and we heard through part of that review feedback from over 7,000 Albertans, including residents, family members, caregivers, operators, and community organizations. We heard stories of people that were impacted by COVID living in the seniors' facilities. We heard stories of families who were impacted, and we heard suggestions and recommendations through the FBCC to be able to make changes. I'll speak in a minute on the changes that we're making. All of this we took into account when we put this

legislation into place. So, Mr. Speaker, there was sufficient consultation.

The second point I'd like to make is on the concern about what's not in the bill. Mr. Speaker, concerns were raised by the other side that, you know: we can't trust the government to take action, to put it into regulation. Well, this bill is a framework, and I'll talk a little bit about what it does. They're quite right that it sets the frame for us to be able to do the transformation, that the policies and the changes are appropriately in regulation, as they are now. What we're doing is that we're taking disparate acts, six acts, pulling them together into one to have one consistent framework so we can ensure that we can have better outcomes and better governance of the entire sector and then work with the sector over the course of the coming months to build regulations to be able to deliver on the policies.

But I can say, Mr. Speaker, that we are taking action. We are putting our money where our mouths are. In Budget 2022 we increased the funding for continuing care, community care, and home care by over \$200 million, expanding access to home care. We also as part of our budget will be building over 1,500 more spaces in continuing care this year. Plus, we've added an additional \$200 million for additional spaces over the next three years. That is commitment. That is action that we are taking.

Part of that has been informed by the facility-based continuing care review, which suggested that one of the challenges associated with COVID – some of the worst outcomes in certain continuing care facilities were not associated with whether it was private or public; it was actually more associated with whether it was old or new, the age, and whether or not there were shared accommodations or shared washrooms. We're already taking action in terms of making renovations and changes to move away from the shared accommodations in recognition of that, and we will be doing more.

Mr. Speaker, we have put our money where our mouth is. This is a first step in terms of the funding, but that's the appropriate place where this will be. As the hon. members know, when they were in government, you don't put the budget, you don't put the policy, you don't put the details in regard to the staffing in the legislation. That goes in the regulations. That goes in the policy.

I'd like to talk a little bit about what this act does do, because it does enable us to be able to build a better system. It's the foundation. It will provide for greater system accountability, Mr. Speaker. It will align continuing care accommodation services, transparency, compliance, and monitoring, and it'll help us protect the quality of care and services and residents and clients. It puts all of that in place, better administration, so I urge . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt; however, the hon. Minister of Health will have nine minutes remaining should he choose to use it the next time this item is called for debate.

Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 3(1) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, May 4, 2022

Day 29

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 4, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 22

Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022

[Debate adjourned May 4: Mr. Eggen speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, for second reading, Bill 22. Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this point in the evening I don't have an opportunity to make a direct connection between the game, because it doesn't start for another 30 minutes, but I imagine there might be opportunities in other bills or stages of debate tonight.

The Speaker: The atmosphere is electric.

Ms Hoffman: The atmosphere is electric: way to light it up, Mr. Speaker. I feel pretty charged as we enter into consideration of Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. Maybe not a hockey pun quite yet, but it seems like we will have quite a few electricity-related opportunities to be connected and charged up.

We haven't had this bill for long. We've had it for a couple of days now, but it seems like there are many positives at this point in reading some of the efforts that are in this bill. I think that they could have positive long-term impacts if implemented properly and through thoughtful regulations, but we definitely have seen a lack of interest in supporting ordinary Alberta families, regular ratepayers and consumers, when it comes to the government's initiatives and actually standing by those who – I think everyone in Alberta should be able to have a good quality of life, should be able to work one full-time job to be able to support a family, if they so choose, have a home, and be able to have electricity, of course, to support functioning in that home.

As I think about the importance of an affordable electricity system, I think about the many, many families who relied on technology even more over the last two years than they did before. Of course, we've seen such a significant change in how society has been interconnected and modernized over the last two generations, in particular, as it relates to connectivity and the Internet, and of course none of us would be able to stay connected if we didn't have power and electricity to support that as well.

I can't help but reflect on a set of questions from earlier today that really focused on what the person asking the questions, the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat, deemed to be problematic, dangerous solar power. When I talk to my neighbours and constituents throughout Edmonton-Glenora, many people are very excited in trying to grow their opportunities for renewable electricity for a number of reasons. Number one, I think that many people want to reduce the amount of individual fossil fuel consumption in their own home, and if they can do that in a way that doesn't negatively impact their quality of life and the power

that they consume personally, I think that that could be of benefit, of course, to us all.

One of the ways that we have seen the municipal and the federal governments step up is through programs to support people in putting their own modules on their own homes to produce as much electricity as possible locally and tie it back into the grid, of course, and create opportunities for their neighbours and others to use that electricity as well.

We could see the current government find ways to increase affordability and really get more opportunities into the hands of everyday residents throughout the province who want to access those opportunities, but unfortunately we haven't seen that. What we have seen are skyrocketing bills over the last several months, and regularly we'll hear the associate minister sort of shrug it off and say how confident he is in the free market and that everything's just fine. Then occasionally we'll hear – well, we heard it several weeks ago now; almost two months, actually – that the government made a decision to move forward on bringing forward a rebate, and thank goodness.

Because I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the number of households that told me their bills went from \$300 to \$500 in just a matter of one or two months – I can't even keep track of how many families told me that. An almost 100 per cent increase to their bills, probably about an 80 per cent increase to many households throughout the province. The government, you know, instead of helping out with these massive increases, \$200 increases, said that they would do \$50 a month for the first three months of the fiscal year. They actually brought forward a request to this House for supplementary supply. Of course, those first three months of the year were in the last fiscal year, not the current fiscal year, so they needed us to approve them spending money out of last year's budget to be able to pass these savings on to ordinary families.

We, of course, want to see families have any kind of relief. They would like the relief to be more substantial. I know even members of the UCP caucus have referred to the rebate as paltry. But, you know, even a paltry \$50-a-month rebate for three months is better than nothing, I guess, Mr. Speaker. Of course, Albertans expect much more from a government that brags about being flush with cash right now, but they'll take what they can get.

Except that it was the end of March when we were asked to support the supplementary supply, and now here we are into May, and Albertans still haven't seen the impacts of that rebate and can't even seem to get a concrete date or a commitment that the associate minister is willing to stake his reputation and ultimately his job on the effective distribution of that rebate. I will tell you that whether he wants to stake his job on it or not, his job rests on that. That is a big portion of what people will remember and hold him to account for when it comes to all of us asking for an opportunity to come back to this place and continue the work that we've done on behalf of Albertans. So I would encourage the associate minister and all members of the government to actually get on with it. They asked for support in supplementary supply, and it has been granted. It's been quite some weeks now.

I will say that in terms of the trust component it is not very high right now in terms of ordinary Albertans being able to count on their government to follow through on promises that they've made and actually do anything to directly support them and their families when it comes to the skyrocketing bills that they're facing for electricity. Of course, the current government has delayed making changes to the grid that could provide long-term relief for Albertans in their utility costs and continues to try to lay any blame on the brief period of time when Conservatives weren't solely responsible for the decisions being made as it relates to electricity. I hate to

remind the associate minister that, you know, he's been in his role now for three years. Families are really feeling significant pressure under his leadership. What most voters would like to see in terms of electricity is, obviously, constant supply and for it to be made more affordable. There are a number of ways that we could do that, that we hope the government will continue to explore as we move forward.

We do have a couple of questions that I hope that we can get some responses to as we continue to debate this bill, Bill 22, here tonight. One of the questions was around – there was a bill last session that has been now brought back quite similarly. I guess one of the questions would be: why did the minister allow the former iteration of this bill to die on the Order Paper, and what has changed between then and now in terms of the content of the bill and the political appetite from the current government?

Then another question would be, of course: why did it take as long as it did for this bill to come back? Here we are, Bill 22. A very similar bill was debated in previous sessions. Why wasn't this a higher priority and dealt with earlier in the session than where we are at now in terms of the timeline?

To summarize a little bit of what I understand from the bill – and I certainly look forward to opportunities to hear from government members on their perceptions of some of these pieces as well – it appears that there are sort of four main areas in the bill. The first is about defining energy storage. Good. The second is about self-supply and export. Good. The third is about requiring distribution facility owners, DFOs, to prepare long-term distribution system plans, which have to be given regulatory approval, so they have to receive regulatory approval before they can move forward, and then the last piece appears to be sections dealing with dissolving of the Balancing Pool.

7:40

Again, Mr. Speaker, generally I'd say that the content for those four areas isn't of significant concern for us at this point, so at this point I would say I'm leaning more towards supporting the bill than cautioning against it. Of course, it all comes down, in the end, to – the devil is in the details, right? We don't have a lot of details in many of the bills that come forward to this place under the current government. We have a lot of enabling provisions and a lot of opportunities through regulation to define in greater detail, but of course regulations aren't debated in public.

The regulations aren't even debated by all members of the Assembly or even all members of the governing party. Regulations go through cabinet committees and to cabinet, and that's the legal requirement as it relates to that. I think Albertans are right to want greater transparency from this government when it comes to decision-making and as many details as possible to be considered through the legislation rather than so many things being funnelled through regulation.

In terms of the sections that we sort of have highlighted, being part of this legislation, the first one relates to energy storage, as we said, and it's previously undefined largely because the energy storage has traditionally not been a factor in electricity grids. I think a big part of that is because the types of electricity that we've had here in Alberta primarily were on demand, right? We would see a lot of coal-fired electricity. You don't need to store coal – you don't need to burn it ahead of time and store it. But when we have the additional forms of energy, including wind and solar, which, of course, are dependent on the conditions of the day, and some days we will produce a significant amount, and some days that amount will be produced when most people aren't drawing from the grid, so of course we will need to feed it into the grid and have ways to actually store it so that it can be used when most necessary; for

example, at 8 o'clock when everyone turns on their TVs to watch the hockey game. Making sure that we have the power that's been produced during the day available for families to be able to consume in 15-ish minutes I think is something that we are wise to define, and I'm glad that the bill does define storage.

It seems to enable energy storage projects, which, of course, would be larger scale than what most people anticipate with local battery storage close to the source, but we will need storage projects and some significant ones to meet our needs in a diversified energy economy. The lack of definition previously prevented effective regulations and made energy storage projects more difficult to move forward, so I do hope that the government puts some significant focus on getting more storage projects available throughout the province. We are so fortunate to have all of the nonrenewable energy that we have, but we also are very fortunate to have so much opportunity in renewables as well, so why wouldn't we ensure that we have greater opportunities for storage and to access and harness the wind and the sun?

This will also allow storage to be integrated into the distribution and transmission, which we hope will help to lower transmission costs for consumers throughout the province. I regularly hear and feel the impacts of those transmission costs on our bills, transmission costs that were committed to by former Conservative governments, and we all have unfortunately been living through the excessive costs that are continuing to grow in that area.

Energy storage will also be important to guarantee reliable and lower cost power moving forward, so I think that the increased discussion through this bill around energy storage is a move in the right direction. The bill defines storage to recategorize the unique role energy storage can play in our electricity system and support more energy storage projects as they go forward, and that absolutely is a good thing.

This relates to the Electric Utilities Act because it defines energy storage resources as the energy that's stored for the purposes of energy storage as separate from the generation unit. "The component of an energy storage facility that uses a technology or process that is capable of using . . ." [Ms Hoffman's speaking time expired] Oh, shoot.

The Speaker: My apologies for not reminding the member that we were ending her opportunity to speak. I'm sure she'll have others.

Are there others who wish to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was going to pause to see if any government members wanted to speak to this bill, but I am pleased to rise and speak to it now, Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. My colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood said that probably nobody is going to be listening to our comments because of the hockey game. Actually, my comments, for those who are watching, are going to come in the 15 minutes before the game starts. So if people are really looking to be pumped up and electrified before the game starts, I am happy to provide them the enthusiasm and electrification they need.

In any event, I am pleased to speak to this bill as it comes before this House today. You know, I think the Member for Edmonton-Glenora made some important comments. I will get into the content of the bill in a moment. Certainly, electricity is something that's very much on the minds of a lot of Albertans right now. We are seeing, of course, Albertans shocked at the rise of their electricity bills, and to see many of their bills, not just electricity but all utility bills and insurance, groceries – everything is going up, and that's really a challenge for many Albertans. We also have an Alberta

government that is very slow to respond. A lot of talk but not a lot of action.

In fact, you know, even earlier today we still had not heard any clear answer. We heard a lot of juvenile heckling, but we did not actually get a clear answer from the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity about when Albertans can expect to see rebates, that the Official Opposition has been calling for for several months. Couldn't answer the question, and I think that's a deep concern. In fact, it's a question that not just the Official Opposition but Albertans are asking and have repeatedly asked and have yet to get an answer to as to when they can actually expect any relief on their electricity bills.

Of course, this is affecting not just residential owners and households; it's actually affecting business. It's affecting industries who obviously rely heavily on electricity. This is an impact on our economy as a whole, and we certainly need to get these costs under control and to see some relief for Albertans as soon as possible. I certainly hope that sometime this year the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity decides to make this a priority, to actually take action.

In any event, we are seeing a delayed reaction in terms of this bill that's before us today. As we are aware, this is actually legislation that was tabled before this House some months ago yet, for some reason, was not brought forward for debate. We saw several other pet projects come forward by the government, yet for some reason this bill, which actually does, I think, chart a path to start making some credible progress on our electricity grid, was delayed. I guess better late than never could be the motto for some things for this government. I think there are probably less charitable mottos that many Albertans have, but let's give it a better late than never on this one. As the Member for Edmonton-Glenora said, going through the bill, there are a number of provisions that, you know, actually sound like a good step forward in charting the path for our electricity grid.

As I understand it, Bill 22 essentially has four main areas. The first is that it addresses defining energy storage. This is important because it was undefined. The concept or term of energy storage was undefined in legislation governing our electricity grid. That's largely because energy storage wasn't actually a huge factor in our electricity grid for many years. But, of course, things are shifting and changing. This will actually enable energy storage products.

7:50

I know that in consultations we have done through the Alberta's future initiative – Mr. Speaker and all those listening, I invite you to go to albertasfuture.ca because we've done a number of consultations, hundreds actually, on a number of economic policies, including on issues related to renewable energy and, you know, energy storage. We know that Albertans have certainly been providing us with their feedback, their advice, what pitfalls to avoid, but also what things to consider, and we've developed a number of economic policies. I know I've sat in on energy consultations that we've done where energy storage has certainly come up as something that we're not only going to need but that presents a great opportunity for our economy and our energy grid going forward.

Without having the concept of energy storage defined in legislation, it has actually prevented these projects from being able to move forward in a meaningful way because they weren't covered by existing regulations. As I understand it, under Bill 22 this will allow energy storage to be, you know, integrated into distribution and transmission, which over time will hopefully lower transmission costs. This will be important to guarantee what many Albertans need, which is reliable and lower cost power going forward. This is certainly something that I think is important.

With respect to, you know, this idea of energy storage it sets out – of course, this bill amends a number of different pieces of legislation and a number of statutes, including the Electric Utilities Act, the Hydro and Electric Energy Act, and the Alberta Utilities Commission Act, and it defines energy storage within the context of each of those individual pieces of legislation to sort of recognize the unique role that energy storage can play in our electricity system and support more energy projects going forward.

I think the Member for Edmonton-Glenora was starting to get into the definitions, but I want to just talk about how this actually also relates to – I believe that the bill also requires distribution facility owners to prepare long-term distribution system plans, which will have to receive regulatory approval. Why I wanted to bring that piece up, which is another element of the act, is that this can help plan for the transition to the increased electrification in electric vehicles.

I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but I can tell you that I've heard a lot of Albertans talking about moving to more electrified vehicles. I can tell you that my nine-year-old son is a little bit obsessed right now with electric vehicles and is constantly reporting back to me on the progress that's being made on new electric vehicles, what's coming forward. He's informed me of one vehicle, which he has said he really wants us to get, which is not even available on the market yet. But, of course, my son is obsessively doing the research. Gosh, he's going to be really upset with me if I get the name of the car wrong, but it is, like, an Ioniq Seven, I believe, and he informed me that it's actually driven by a joystick. That, I have to say, was my big hesitation, apart from, I imagine, the significant cost, but you know he's very excited about the idea of electric vehicles. We talk about it quite a bit.

I know that the market right now to get electric vehicles is really tough, actually. You have to go on waiting lists for – you know, I think it's up to 18 months for electric vehicles right now. I know because we were looking at it ourselves in our house, and we were able to replace a vehicle that was no longer functional with a plug-in hybrid vehicle. Of course, yes, it's now on our minds a little bit more about: where do we get more electricity to run more of these vehicles? Because that is the way I think the market is going. We see that large pickup trucks are going to be now electrified. This is going to be happening in every model of vehicle imaginable. I think that more and more Albertans and Canadians are going to be moving in that direction, would like to move in that direction, and we, of course, need to make sure that we have the electric capacity to handle that.

I think that there are some very good questions being raised right now about whether or not we do have that capacity and how do we raise that. Of course, you know, electricity doesn't always come with – I mean, it also has some environmental impacts as well, Mr. Speaker. It's not necessarily a panacea. Moving away from fossil fuel driven vehicles to electrification does not automatically mean that there's no environmental impact. We know there is. We've learned a lot, I think, from the vehicles that we've all been driving for decades.

You know, we need to be preparing for not only an electrical grid that can manage and store the needed power to serve the greater car market for electric vehicles but also do so in an environmentally responsible way. There are going to be some challenges there. We know that, Mr. Speaker, but I think efforts being made to allow for that innovation as well as conversations around increasing energy storage are critical to that discussion. This bill, I think, supports moving in that direction, and I think that's a good thing.

I did have some questions about – you know, I think one of the other provisions around the bill was to allow unlimited self-supply with export. But I understand, because one of the questions I had –

essentially, Mr. Speaker, under the Electric Utilities Act what this means or what it's defined as meaning is "the production of electric energy on a property of which a person is the owner or a tenant where any of the electric energy is consumed on that property by that owner or tenant." Basically, it's self-supplying.

Also, of course, there's always going to be – especially when we're talking about moving to things like solar panels, there'll be more electricity that will be put back into the grid, right? That's a conversation, again, that I know a lot of Albertans are having. They're looking at getting that assessment done about solar energy and how to, you know, generate enough for their own use in their own home but also what that means in terms of putting energy back into the grid. These are conversations that Albertans are already having.

I think that if I were to express, you know, one of my frustrations – and I have many – with this current government, it's that they are dragging their heels and are slow to respond to the conversations that are already happening in this province. Rather than leading in those discussions and rather than showing leadership in where energy is going, we've seen incredible resistance, which is not just, I guess, a bit outdated; it's also damaging to our economy. It's damaging in terms of our reputation of being what we have been for decades in this province, which are energy leaders.

We've already shown innovation and creativity and leadership in this space, so I'm kind of exhausted by this government's continued efforts to tarnish that reputation by refusing to harness the energy that's already coming from both Albertans and the energy sector around where they want to go moving forward. We see great interest in renewables not just from, you know, environmentalists, but that interest is coming from global investors. That interest is coming from the energy sector itself, who's looking for those opportunities.

I think, you know, when we talk about energy storage, as this bill does, we also have to be talking about attracting the talent to do some of this creative work, to do some of this innovative work. I know, for example, many of my colleagues – and I'm seeing the Member for Edmonton-City Centre, who has been such an advocate on the tech industry, as well as my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. But that's because we can lead in that. Tech isn't some sort of sector that is separate from what we're talking about here in Bill 22. Tech is integral to actually the innovation that we need.

Member Irwin: Diversification, right?

Ms Pancholi: Yeah. It is a diversification of our economy, and it is doing what we do best, which is being leaders in innovation and in the energy sector.

You know, I'm excited about opportunities to do that. Albertans are excited about opportunities to do that. We see the rhetoric from this government not reflect that, not reflect the conversations. I know my colleagues and I have spent a fair bit of time recently, in particular, in Calgary. When I talk to folks in the energy sector, they are excited. There are things that they want to do. They have to at some point, they're telling me, just ignore what this government's rhetoric is because it's damaging their reputation and it's making it less likely that people would want to invest in Alberta for these innovative projects.

I guess, you know, regardless of where this government is going in dragging their heels on this, taking six months to do this, Alberta will move ahead without this government. They are doing that. The private sector is. And I have a feeling, Mr. Speaker, that there are many Albertans who are excited by the conversations that we've been having with them for the last three years and even the years

before that about renewable energy and moving our electricity grid into that new and innovative space.

Mr. Speaker, I think I can say, you know, that I have frustrations overall with the approach that this government has taken to our renewable energy space, to our electricity grid. I mean, Albertans are feeling that right now in their pocketbooks, in their household budgets, the dragging of the feet by this government. But what I am confident in is that Albertans will continue to do what we do best, which is lead, and I'm also excited about the opportunity to lead with them.

8:00

I think that the question Albertans will ask is: do they want a government that is not willing to look into the future and is more likely to look in the past, or do they want a government that will do the opposite? I'm proud that I think we will be that government.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate this evening? The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. When I saw this bill come in and I started to take a look at what it was about and seeing it talking about enabling more energy storage, working on that part of the industry in the province of Alberta, it put me in mind of an entrepreneur I had met a few years back. As my colleague for Edmonton-Whitemud noted, here in Edmonton-City Centre the tech and innovation industry is an important part of growing the economy in our downtown. Certainly, our government did make, I think, some smart investments and introduced some programs to help grow that industry and set it on a good trajectory, for which now this current government likes to take credit. I think a lot of the efforts we made helped begin that momentum and start it moving forward.

At one of the events here in downtown Edmonton, over at the Edmonton Convention Centre, where we had a number of folks getting together to talk about growing companies, I had the chance to meet Connie Stacey, who is the founder and president of Growing Greener Innovations. Connie grew up in Newfoundland and in Alberta, so she was quite aware of energy production, usage, sort of saw it in the field. She herself was working, actually, in sports administration and then in software development, starting into the tech field, but she had an experience. She was out driving one day with her wife and their children, and their children had fallen asleep in the vehicle. They passed a construction site. As they passed that construction site, a generator kicked in, and it was very loud. She was a bit concerned. It sort of startled her, and she was concerned it was going to wake the kids.

She started thinking about that, being a woman who is a thinker, an innovator, sort of thinking about problems. She started to think about: "Well, this traditional diesel generator is noisy. It's smelly. It's not good for the environment. There must be a better way to approach this." So she put her mind to work. She started talking with people who work with generators, and she started to realize that one of the biggest problems with trying to replace that generator technology was developing a battery that was relatively easy to recharge on the fly.

In 2014 she founded Growing Greener Innovations. Her intent was, first of all, to create a better generator, one that would be silent, one that wouldn't create fumes, and one that wouldn't contribute to global warming. In 2015 she saw that the market for efficient, portable batteries was starting to expand. It was becoming an

opportunity, and she saw in that a way to create a sustainable business that could also be of real benefit as we were all looking for new options in energy that are lower carbon.

She talks about that. She says: you know, one of the things people don't recognize is that studies show that access to energy is perfectly correlated to economic growth. Certainly, that is something that we have heard many members of this House talk about, the importance of access to energy as part of an economy, absolutely. She was looking for a way that she could develop that specifically because she also recognizes it as part of tackling energy poverty. Noting that more than a billion people world-wide have zero access to electricity, she wanted to find a way that it could be made portable and easily brought to them.

Through her company, Growing Greener Innovations, they have worked to develop portable battery technology, batteries that can be stacked on top of each other, can be mixed and matched to easily create power sources. Now, they've had some challenges, but they've done, actually, quite well with the company. At first they had trouble getting interest, but what happened eventually is that they won a contest with the U.S. Department of Defence, that was looking for folks to put forward innovative, sustainable new technologies, and they indeed won a U.S. defence innovation award. That began to open some doors for them, and they have developed what they call now their patented Grengine. It's a rechargeable and stackable battery generator.

That's expanded now into energy storage and a smart battery management system. They have a number of things now. Generally what they are offering right now are solutions for home based that work with solar panels, that allow people to create that energy through the solar panel and then store it for reuse. But they continue to expand. Indeed, they are part right now of a program with the Department of National Defence here in Canada, one of three Canadian innovators that are working with them to develop solutions to provide integrated energy, water, and waste management systems for relocatable, temporary camps used by the Canadian Armed Forces.

It's wonderful to see, I think, these kinds of entrepreneurs, you know, growing here in the province of Alberta, developing innovative technology in the realm of energy storage and production. I recognize that the intent of this bill is to grow that on an industrial scale. Now, again, GGI are working on a smaller scale, certainly working towards perhaps larger opportunities, potentially scalable technology. But we are talking here about working with larger industrial providers who are looking to do much the same thing.

We have the bill here, which is defining what energy storage is; that being, on a grid level any technology that allows energy to be captured when it's generated and to be utilized at a later point in time. The bill is laying out terms in terms of self-supply and export, requires the folks that are running the distribution facilities to prepare some long-term distribution system plans that would have to seek regulatory approval, and then we have the sections that are dealing with the dissolving of the Balancing Pool.

Certainly, I think, as my colleagues have noted, we are generally in support of the direction that this bill is looking to go. As has been shown by GGI and other folks who are working to innovate, the ability to store and then later distribute electricity is a major step towards being able to incorporate other forms of energy creation into our system, things like wind energy, solar energy, the ability to store those things for, as members of this House have been often wont to talk about when they are talking about renewable energy, the times when the sun does not shine and the wind does not blow.

It's an important part of that being a sustainable part of our grid. From what we're seeing here, certainly it appears that the framework that this legislation is looking to set up, the groundwork, laying the foundation it's putting down, is an appropriate one to incent more of this kind of work and to allow for sustainable growth of the levels of electricity that we need to have and potentially, then, reducing the greenhouse gases that are created along the way.

As my colleagues have also noted, this does seem to be largely the revisiting of a piece of legislation which had been brought forward in the last session, Bill 86, I believe. It does seem to be very, very similar here. One of the only real differences here, of course, is the addition of the sections on the dissolving of the Balancing Pool. You know, I suppose, as my colleagues also noted, better late than never, Mr. Speaker.

There have been a lot of concerns from Albertans, as my colleagues have noted, regarding the cost of electricity. Certainly, the government was a bit late to the game in recognizing the importance of that. There was nothing about it in the budget initially, and it did not seem that that had been a calculation or consideration that that was a concern of Albertans. But they did come around eventually to sort of try to come up with a plan, and we are seeing them move forward with their electricity rebate, which Albertans may see as late as, it appears, October, November, December, certainly not the most speedy and expeditious rebate, again sort of perhaps belying the johnny-come-lately nature of the government's response on this. That said, they are moving forward on that.

I do have to wonder if, to some extent, perhaps that was part of what spurred this legislation to be resurrected, as it were, that the government felt it needed to display that it was taking some sort of action to try to reduce electricity rates. It's entirely possible, Mr. Speaker, that indeed this legislation may in fact aid in that. I don't think it's going to provide much in the way of immediate relief. Some would say the same, perhaps, of the government's electricity rebate, which may not arrive till the end of the year. That will at least likely arrive before, necessarily, some of the benefits we'll see from this legislation, but, that said, certainly it is still beneficial to take these steps and to make these plans. It does strike me as prudent planning for the future. Certainly, as much as I may criticize the government, I will give them credit when I do see them doing something that seems to be the right thing to do, and it does appear that many pieces in this bill indeed are that.

8:10

We do recognize that previously there was not a definition for energy storage, because traditionally, really, energy storage has not really been a factor in electricity grids until today, but of course we know that that is shifting. As I noted, of course, Connie and the folks at GGI have been working on that aspect, and I think that indeed that is an area of some innovation and a lot of exploration in the tech field as we look for those sources where we can have more effective, long-lasting storage of electricity. Certainly, when we are able to arrive at that point – we're seeing, I think, some rapid evolution of that technology – that will be a significant game changer as we continue to look for greener sources of energy and be able to make that worth while, make that sustainable, make that affordable and accessible for more individuals.

[Mr. Amery in the chair]

It's my understanding that the lack of a definition previously prevented some of the effect of regulations, made it more difficult to move forward with energy storage projects. Indeed, again, I think that we're quite clear on why that's a valuable thing. I certainly recognize that that could help us move towards addressing some of

the cost issues and other long-standing challenges in the electricity industry, so it seems reasonable to move forward with that here. The bill defines energy storage to recognize, I think, the unique role that energy storage can play in an electricity system. It supports more of those sorts of projects to go forward.

Now, the bill also allows for unlimited self-supply with export. That's defined under the Electric Utilities Act as "the production of electric energy on a property of which a person is the owner or a tenant where . . . the electric energy is consumed on that property by that . . . tenant." Basically, before what we had was a situation where self-suppliers had to get an exemption if they wanted to export. An example of that would be cogeneration facilities, certainly something that we have seen used often in the oil sands. This is making it easier for more folks to be able to partake in that, to be able to work to provide export when they have that self-supply without some of the regulation and other encumbrances. Again, it seems reasonable, Mr. Speaker, to allow for more opportunities for folks to be able to generate that, put it back in, export, sell it back into the grid.

Again, of course, we know that homeowners with solar panels have been doing this for a while. That was enabled in the system, and that's certainly been beneficial. Again, the kinds of technology that we see from GGI and others are certainly working toward that end, but this is giving more opportunities within the larger industrial setting, to my understanding, for a similar sort of situation to be able to work, so then facilities that were operating before January 1, 2022, can apply to continue to be classified as industrial systems, to continue under the rules that they currently have.

There are some bits here about requiring the distribution facility owners to prepare a long-term distribution plan, which will then have to seek regulatory approval. That's a model that's already in place, my understanding is, for transmission. It can help us in planning for some of the transition that will be involved to increase electrification. Certainly, there has been a lot of conversation about that recently, Mr. Speaker. I've been seeing a few articles recently where they're talking about the rise of electric vehicles, and certainly that presents for us a grand opportunity, I think, for the reduction of greenhouse gases from transportation. But that then does require a much more robust electricity system. We certainly know that we are going to be drawing much more on that. This helps towards the planning for that transition, increased electrification, in helping us figure out how we are going to manage those systems provide that energy that's needed.

In general, Mr. Speaker, again, while we certainly have had our concerns with some of the government's approaches on electricity and, in particular, how it's impacted consumers over the last few months – certainly, we'll continue to raise those concerns and, I think, speak about those issues as a large number of our constituents are reaching out to us on that. That aside, I think that in general what we are seeing with Bill 22 is prudent legislation and, I think, laying some good groundwork for some important steps that we need to take in the evolution of our electricity system here in the province of Alberta. I do appreciate that the minister has brought this forward and has taken these steps, and I look forward to the opportunity for further debate.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Yeah. I mean, I was just being respectful and trying to leave time for some government members to join debate,

thought perhaps the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity might want to weigh in. But I know he'll be listening with rapt attention to my remarks, just like many are right now as we – has the hockey game begun?

Ms Hoffman: Yeah.

Member Irwin: It has. Okay. The game has begun, so we've got to have at least two people watching right now.

You know, I listened intently to some of my colleague's remarks and, as always, was quite intrigued. Just as I shared earlier in a press conference, I am certainly no lawyer. I will preface my remarks by saying that I'm certainly no energy expert, to be clear. Yeah. Just because we've all, at least on this side of the House, been speaking to a lot of bills lately, it feels again like déjà vu as I stand and speak to Bill 22. Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022, is another piece of legislation where again there's – as my colleagues have said, I mean, we're mostly supportive of a lot of aspects of this bill, with some questions, of course.

But I ask – again, this government had such an opportunity to really bring forward legislation that could in the here and now have a tangible positive impact on the lives of Albertans. There's no clearer an example of Albertans struggling than when it comes to electricity costs and it comes to their skyrocketing bills. I've talked ad nauseam in this House, in fact, about the fact that we are hearing that. We're hearing that at the doors. We're seeing it in our e-mail inboxes and in our messages from constituents. They're struggling. It's not just folks in my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood who are telling me this; it's others as well. You know, we've seen this government just continuing to ignore the problem of skyrocketing bills.

I can actually just think – I was just having a conversation with a few folks just a couple of hours ago, in fact, and chatting with someone from Public Interest Alberta. They do great work. Brad LaFortune is the executive director there. Just chatting about the fact that – and if you don't know what Public Interest Alberta does . . .

Ms Hoffman: It's kind of like Friends of Medicare.

Member Irwin: It is a bit like Friends of Medicare – that's right – which is another great organization, led by Chris Gallaway.

Friends of Medicare is a great organization, but Public Interest Alberta really focuses a lot on connecting with Albertans and hearing their concerns in the public interest. No surprise there. One of the things that we talked about is just the fact that this government – you know, what a time to take the opportunity to tangibly improve the lives of Albertans, and this government is choosing not to.

Brad LaFortune from Public Interest Alberta actually pointed out in one of his recent releases:

Despite Premier Kenney's audacious trumpeting that 2022 is a turnaround year for Alberta, many Albertans are struggling with the escalating affordability crisis.

"Cost of living and interest rates are exploding" . . . "Working people are having [such] a tough time . . . Wages are . . . not going as far as they used to. It's a struggle to afford necessities like food, gas, utilities, rent or mortgage, never mind being able to save for the future. It seems callous for Kenney to herald now as a great time for Alberta, when in reality, so many are [struggling]."

This is why – and I wanted to raise this because this is what we heard again in the Chamber earlier today, in question period, trumpeting how great Alberta is doing and how great Albertans

are doing without an understanding of what's really going on on the ground. A lot of Albertans are struggling with affordability.

[The Speaker in the chair]

This is an opportunity for this government to take action, and instead they've dithered, right? You know, this associate minister has promised relief and promised support, and what do we see? We see inaction, right? According to that same minister Albertans will now have to wait for months to get any sort of action. They failed to get direct support out the door that could help Alberta families with skyrocketing utility bills. [interjection] Okay. In the interest of being amicable, I will let the associate minister speak.

8:20

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the comments. It looked like she was wanting to embrace some interventions, so I thought I would participate. It's true. We recognize that there's a higher cost of energy, so we are providing short-term relief while we do the longer term work to bring prices down. The relief that we've provided, of course, is \$2 billion worth of relief between the gas, the electricity, and the tax at the pump.

But the pieces that I wanted to focus on, because we need to do the long-term work – and the storage is the piece that I would encourage the member to look at because not only does energy storage help with the intermittency of renewable energy; it makes it more efficient, which helps bring down cost. It's also a nonwire solution, a less costly alternative to transmission, and that is a big advantage of storage. Lastly, the self-supply with export will help bring more supply online because we know the path forward for lower prices is through more choice, increased competition. Self-supply with export will allow companies to export to the grid.

Member Irwin: Thank you to the associate minister for that. Happy to have him intervene. I am getting there. I'm getting to some of the specific aspects of the bill.

But I have to ask. I have to ask the minister. This UCP government introduced similar legislation last fall but abandoned it and only reintroduced it six months later, so I would love to hear an apology if I just missed the explanation for that. Sometimes I do tune out. I know I shouldn't admit that on *Hansard*, but sometimes I miss things. Why the delay? If this is something that is so critical and so important – my colleagues have said it far more succinctly than I have, but, you know, why? If this is so critical, why the delay? Why delay making changes to the grid that would provide long-term relief for Albertans? It's an example again of not being able to trust this UCP government, because if this were so critical and if this were so necessary, why not make the changes then? That's one of the key questions we have. Again, I look forward to hearing more from the associate minister and perhaps other MLAs as well. Yeah. Why did he abandon the bill last session?

And I want to touch on a couple of points. Actually, my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre talked a little bit about Connie Stacey just as an example of someone really doing innovative work in the field. I've had the opportunity, too, to meet Connie Stacey from Growing Greener Innovations. You know, she has been a forerunner – is that the correct word? [interjection] Thank you – when it comes to clean energy technologies, and what an example, just one example of many folks around our province who are innovators and who are doing this leading work when it comes to green, clean technology.

You know, obviously, this bill, when we're talking about the grid, ties into solar as well, and I've been very fortunate to learn more about solar energy and, really, the relief that it can provide.

For those folks who don't know, anybody in this Chamber, anybody watching at home, I would love for you to come by my Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood constituency office, where we have solar panels on . . .

Ms Hoffman: Modules.

Member Irwin: That's right. Modules. Thank you. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora is far more versed on solar than I am, because I believe she has solar on her home.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah.

Member Irwin: Yeah. So I should say solar modules and not panels. That's right. I do know that distinction. But I'm so proud to have those. They were actually supplied by a local solar provider in my riding, Warren, who's part of green and gold solar. He's a great human with excellent dogs. Yeah. You know, I've had the opportunity to meet with him and some of his team members, and it's such an area for potential.

I hope that by discussing bills like this, we open the conversation for more investment in solar and in greener forms of energy. I don't think I've heard it much today, maybe a little bit from my colleagues, but we are facing a climate crisis, and we are facing temperatures at the poles higher than we've ever seen. It truly is a dire crisis, and we must – we must – be leaders. Folks in this Chamber should be pushing for economic diversification and for a move towards greener, cleaner energy sources.

My colleague – I believe it was from Edmonton-City Centre again; actually, it might have been Edmonton-Glenora – talked about coal-fired power as well. I know I've shared this. I believe I've shared this story in the past, maybe in 2019, just having lived in Forestburg, Alberta, gosh, 10 years ago now, 11 years ago now. Forestburg, if you don't know, does have a coal-fired power plant. You know, I can tell you that I actually talked directly to workers at that plant who – obviously, they know how critical that plant is to the vitality of their community, for sure, but were really asking for different opportunities and different ways to support that fantastic community that is Forestburg.

In fact, there was a fellow – I'm sure he won't mind me mentioning, because he's a great person. There was a fellow I dated, actually, back when I was, you know, dating men. His name was Robert, and he worked at the power plant. He actually would come home and he'd have, like, black in his ears. Like, he'd have just – and he would talk about just how, like: I'm worried about this. Like, he would express his concerns about the impact of working at the power plant. So I think of Robert many years later and those workers who were really asking for support, not wanting the power plant just to be shut down – absolutely not – but for a transition and for plans.

I was really proud of what members in this Chamber on our side of the House did to support a climate leadership plan when they were in office. It was incredible work. It was a bold plan, but there's more to do. There's a lot more to do, and sadly we're not seeing that same interest. You know, we've got climate change deniers in this Chamber, in fact, people who've gone on the record to question the science of climate change. Sorry. The science of climate change. That's a fact. The member for Vermilion-Lloydminster – I'm probably going to get his riding wrong. We've got him quoted in this Chamber a couple of times questioning the science of climate change.

You know, with all of that, like I said, I mean, we are supportive of a number of elements of Bill 22, but I would ask, I would urge

this government to do more and to be bolder when it comes to looking at energy transformation in this province, because they really can. If this Premier and if this government and many of the government ministers are going to brag about swagger and Alberta booming – and we’ve talked about this in the Chamber before – it’s very difficult to accept such logic when you’re not looking at the bigger picture, right? People want to come to a province that has a healthy environment, where there’s a plan for the future. They want to come to a province where the Rocky Mountains aren’t under threat from coal mining, where our water sources aren’t under threat, and the list goes on.

I’m hopeful. You know, I’m hopeful that we’ll get a few more answers on some of the questions that we’ve asked. I could go into some of the specifics around the requirements in this bill, like requiring distribution facility owners to prepare a long-term distribution system which will receive regulatory approval, which I gather is the model that is in place for transmission currently. I know there’s a lot in here about the dissolution of the Balancing Pool, which is something I had to read a fair bit about just to understand. I don’t mind admitting when I’m not an expert on things.

Again, I know there are some differences as well between Bill 22 and the previous iteration, which was, I believe, Bill 86. Again, I’d like to perhaps just hear a bit more from the minister on what those differences are. Again, why the delay in moving forward with Bill 22 if it was such a priority of this government?

I would urge folks to, yeah, read more about energy storage, like I did, and with . . . [interjection] Oh, never mind. I will let the associate minister intervene, and then I can talk again.

8:30

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the questions. Happy to share the – the big two differences are that on the self-supply with export there were a number of stakeholders that were doing self-supply with export at the time, and they’d made investments based on a current economic climate. They’d indicated to us that to change that climate could potentially disadvantage them and their investors. So we agreed with that, and we made some concessions to allow them to have a path towards ISD, which is industrial system designation. It doesn’t preclude anyone else from applying for ISD. It just gave them a clearer path to have that done. The second piece is that we added the Balancing Pool. That was the wind-down strategy. We’ve been working on the wind-down strategy for a while. The bottleneck, of course, on that was that there are some liabilities and some lawsuits that we had to take care of. But, essentially, those are the two differences.

Member Irwin: Thanks to the associate minister for that clarity.

You know, I will end my remarks shortly, but I just want to again reiterate the point that they’ve introduced this bill six months later, and as a result we’ve lost almost six months in taking steps to modernize our grid and to add energy storage that could of course reduce costs in the long term.

We do of course support adding more energy storage to the grid – that’s indisputable – on this side of the House, and we’ve been consulting. I’m proud of the work that my colleagues have been doing, including our critic for Energy, on adding more storage and ways that we can achieve a net-zero grid by 2035 while creating 60,000 more jobs through Alberta’s future project. Check it out at albertasfuture.ca.

With that, I would like to adjourn debate, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 21

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Debate adjourned May 3: Mr. Feehan speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, on second reading of Bill 21, are there other members wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks. I think you’ve always called me that, Mr. Speaker, even with the new change. Really appreciate it. Thank you so much. I have to say, as we kick off Bill 21, which is titled Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, that I am going to take us on a little trip down memory lane to a week ago – a week ago; maybe it was a week and a half, not long, anyway – when the sponsoring minister, the associate minister responsible for red tape and Member for Calgary-Peigan, at a media briefing very definitively stated that part of the bill’s intention was to ensure that the money that parents and others might be paying towards private schools need not be publicly reported because it wasn’t public money. And it wasn’t just stated. It was also addressed in subsequent follow-up questions from the media, from reporters, from community members.

Of course, many of the questions were around the fact that in Alberta private schools are entitled to 70 per cent of the funding for operational costs that public schools are. They are receiving a significant amount of private funding from the government of Alberta, from the people of Alberta, who are contributing, and therefore the people of Alberta should have every right to know what additional funds these private schools are charging and how much is in their balance sheet: how much are we continuing to contribute to private schools?

Now, I want to clarify, because there often will be accusations from members within the government caucus that we think that private schools are the bane of all evil, they will assert, and that we are out to get them. I want to be very clear, Mr. Speaker, that I stand by the decisions we made while we were in government for four years, the first time in my adult memory we had four years of education stability in this province, four years of consistent funding in this province.

Prior to that, I’d served on the Edmonton public school board for five years. We never once had a year where we could anticipate what next year’s budget would be with any certainty. Prior to that, I did my master’s in education and my undergrad, and before that, my parents also taught. So for most of my life I spent the spring sort of bracing ourselves for what might be coming with the upcoming budget. The spring presentation of the budget regularly would see significant reductions to education funding, and then there would be protests, often just a few metres from here, 100 metres or so from here, on the steps of the Legislature.

Eventually the government would typically rescind the cuts and restore some of the funding that they had cut. At the very beginning it would happen very quickly. Like, within two weeks there’d be an amendment to the budget. We’d get on with it. Everyone would realize: “Oh, yeah. Parents do actually really care about education. We’d better not mess with it. We should restore educational funding.” Then it would happen a little bit later. Maybe it wouldn’t happen in March or April, when the budget was presented, but it would happen before the end of the school year. And then later on, under the time of Premier Stelmach, I believe, it would happen later and later but still before kids would go back to school. This was the game that Conservatives were playing with Alberta families around continually attacking education funding and making people protest

to be able to defend their child's right to a quality education in the province of Alberta.

Then we had the reprieve of the four years under the NDP government, where we committed to stable and adequate funding that funded for enrolment growth and that would provide that continuity for Alberta educators and Alberta families so that they wouldn't have to spend all of their time fighting the government for the educational rights that their child should so be inclined to receive without question.

But that doesn't stop the current government, the government that has actually cut educational funding. They have cut funding for students with disabilities. They have cut funding for years 4 and 5 of high school, again, often disabled students who access those additional final two years of high school. The current government has cut that, and then also, at a time when educational needs and often educational enrolment have gone up, the government has refused to actually fund for any of that increase. The minister will take credit for the fact that the federal government did discharge some funds during COVID to address additional pandemic pressures, but the thing that the minister fails to highlight is the fact that that essentially replaced some of the money, most of the money that was cut under the provincial budget that year.

The minister responsible for red tape presents this bill in April. The bill comes forward, and at the tech briefing, at all the media events it was made very clear that one of the intended pieces in this bill as it relates to education was to reduce the amount of burdensome public reporting with regard to tuition and balance sheets for private schools, because that should be private information. Only the parents need to know, and they would report to the parents. Of course, they would. They would invoice the parents. They would invoice the employer of the parents, whoever it is that happens to be paying the tuition.

I want to say that there is a broad range in what private schools charge in tuition. There are some private schools that charge nothing, that cater to students who are incredibly vulnerable, whether that's physical or developmental disabilities or youth who are houseless. There are private schools that definitely focus on addressing vulnerable students. Then there are other types of private schools that charge upwards, some even in excess of \$20,000 a year to send your child to said independent private school. There's a big range, Mr. Speaker. For the government to set one formula and say "70 per cent" and to no longer, through the intent of the mover of the bill, require public, transparent reporting on how much is being charged in tuition and how much is on the balance sheet set a lot of Albertans off. They were deeply concerned, especially when they are seeing the impacts of educational funding cuts in their own children's schools. For example – we're in Edmonton – Edmonton public: 1,700 kids going to school next year without a dime to fund them.

8:40

And we will hear the government say: well, but we're providing stability; give us a pat on the back. Stability when your demand is growing, when your needs are growing is less for everyone else. You are taking away from everyone to give the scraps that are left for the new kids who are showing up at school. No matter how much time you want to spend focused on one line item and trying to justify decisions that result in less for more, Alberta families know and will live through the reality; that is, seeing the impacts of more students in the classroom without adequate support to fund them.

At the same time, the sponsoring minister for this bill says: Albertans don't have a right to know how much private schools are charging in tuition or how much they have in their balance sheets.

Of course, Albertans appropriately pushed back, just like they did on the steps of the Legislature through most of my life during the budget cycle as it related to education. What happened here is that we saw not the sponsor of the bill, a different minister, the Minister of Education, go to the Internet many hours later, after the technical briefing where this information was shared, after the stories had been filed where this information was published, after Albertans rightfully were incredibly upset with the double standard that was being set and the lack of transparency that was being pushed through the intention of this bill – they rightfully pushed back.

The minister or the minister's team took to the Internet to do damage control the same night, many hours later, probably six or eight hours after the briefing and all of the stories had been filed, to do damage control and to say: no, no, no; that isn't what's happening, and that wasn't going to be allowed. Well, the mover of the bill, the bill's sponsor – the name is on the title of the bill – clearly said that that was the intent. Many of us scoured Bill 21. We read through that section forwards, backwards, sideways, upside down, talked to every lawyer we knew, and the truth is that the bill is really fuzzy. The bill is as opaque as one could imagine a bill could be in those sections. So we have to ask questions of the intent, and the intent has been very clearly stated as having less transparency, less overt filings, less oversight. And then a different minister says: no, no, no; that's not going to happen. Well, bills shouldn't be that wishy-washy, fuzzy, confusing.

I have stated already publicly, and I will call on the government again. I think that the opportunity – it would be wise to seize the opportunity to actually amend these sections as they relate to education and the transparency of private school tuition and balance sheets in this legislation. I think Albertans deserve that at a minimum because, clearly, two people sitting at the same cabinet table have different understandings of what this bill does, or maybe they had the same understanding, saw what the public push-back was, realized that the bill was written in a way that was vague enough that they could maybe just brush that aside. I would say: no, no, no; do not attempt to brush this aside. I think Albertans have rightfully said – and even the minister of a different ministry, the Minister of Education, has said: no, we're not going to do that.

I sincerely hope and I'm confident – we make jokes about not a ton of people potentially watching this debate. I am confident that there are people in the department of red tape reduction and in the Department of Education right now watching this debate. I'm confident that there are political staff listening to this debate, trying to work through what some of the key points are. So my question to you, public servants and political staff and the ministers responsible, is: don't you want to make sure that the bill is most clear and most transparent and most consistent so Albertans know and can interpret the law fairly and consistently? I do sincerely hope that the mover of the bill was wrong in presentation of what the actual intent of this section was, but the best way to actually have that trust is to verify it through an amendment to this section. So I sincerely hope that the drafters, that the political staff, that the ministers are all doing their best work to put forward clarifying language to actually deliver the intent of the Minister of Education.

Well, I'm missing out on a good joke right here. I can feel it. Perhaps I'll hear it from the next speaker.

I look forward to an opportunity to have greater clarity through an amendment. Certainly, we can do our best to draft amendments that relate to this section to try to meet what the Education minister says the actual intent of this section is, but it certainly, I think, would be beneficial to all members if we had the expertise of the people who drafted the original bill to put forward an amendment in this section. But, you know, if the government fails to do that, to fix the errors and the drafting that resulted in such significant push-

back from the public, certainly we are ready and willing and will work with Parliamentary Counsel to do our best to ensure that the door that was opened by the sponsoring minister gets closed.

We already have seen this government recognized by media outlets across the country as being the most secretive government in Canada. We have heard about significant concerns with entities, agencies, boards, and commissions that the government has set up intentionally being outside of information and privacy sharing legislation, and that only raises the ire of concern among the general public.

I will say to all of the parents who are out there thinking: “Why is my child losing out on educational opportunities? Why is my child losing an educational assistant? Why are my bus fees going up? Why are my educational property taxes going up?” Not just to parents; that’s all of us. Educational property taxes under the UCP: going up. Why are we all being asked to pay more? Where is that money going? We absolutely, at a minimum, deserve to know where it’s going, deserve to know places we are putting our money, how much money they are charging in other areas, and how much they currently have on their balance sheet. That is just prudent, open, transparent governance.

We certainly see this in other areas of government, too. This is as it relates to Education, but there are other areas where private and nonprofit service delivery are done and government is also funding operators. I’m thinking right now, of course, about long-term care and assisted living in this province. I know that the people of Alberta would like to see greater accountability and transparency when it comes to the services that are provided, that are publicly paid for but aren’t delivered publicly. Making sure that we have as much transparency as possible is crucial.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought perhaps we might hear from some government members, particularly members of cabinet who could shed some light on the important questions that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Glenora raised about the misunderstanding, the miscommunication. Perhaps cabinet members haven’t all read their own bill, but there is a lot of confusion right now around the changes that Bill 21, this Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, makes to the Education Act around the transparency of private school funding and tuition payments. It doesn’t seem like it should be that difficult to get a straightforward answer about what’s happening, but for some reason Albertans are not getting that from this government.

I will come back to those changes to the Education Act that are made through this bill if I get the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, but I’d like to focus on what appears to be just a small administrative change but raises some bigger questions for myself that are within Bill 21, and those are specifically the changes that are made to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. According to Bill 21 this change that’s proposed in the bill would remove the one-year maximum on all licences, new and renewals, for residential facilities in the child intervention system – so that includes group homes and foster homes – and it would move those limits to the regulation. Specifically, what it does is that it amends section 105.3 of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, which deals with both initial licences and renewals of licences for these residential facilities.

Specifically, it changes subsection (3) of 105.3. The current wording in the act says:

- (3) Unless otherwise specified in the licence, the term of a residential facility licence is one year from the date of its issue.

And the changes being made under Bill 21 will now say:

- (3) Unless otherwise specified in the licence, the term of a residential facility licence is the term specified in the regulations.

That sounds minor, but I just want to point out that again there is a miscommunication between what is in this bill and what was being communicated by the government about the change that’s being made.

8:50

Specifically, according to the news release related to Bill 21, this change to this residential facility licensing term only applies to renewals. But, Mr. Speaker, if you look back at what I just read out, that subsection of 105.3 is not limited to renewals. It actually specifically addresses initial terms of licences for residential facilities, a minor thing perhaps, but once again what’s being communicated about what’s in this bill to Albertans through their communication networks is different than what’s in the bill. So I’d like some clarification from the associate minister for red tape as to: which is it? Is this change limited to simply renewals, or does it also apply to the initial term?

Now, that’s perhaps a minor quibble, Mr. Speaker. You know, it should be able to be cleared up. But I want to just outline what this change does, right? What it does is that it basically says that a residential facility no longer is subject to a one-year licence, which would have to be renewed every year. And, of course, part of renewing a residential facility licence means going through all the health and safety requirements, making sure that all the standards are met in terms of accreditation of the program so that it actually meets the standards that are necessary. All of those pieces, that are important, wouldn’t have to happen every year. It could happen – who knows how long the term is? We put it in regulation, and the government will get to decide, through regulation, how often to renew those terms.

Now, a residential facility – when we’re talking about children in care and child intervention, I think we need to really understand what we’re talking about here. I’ve had the opportunity recently to tour a number of residential facilities, particularly in Calgary, to get an idea – because I think all Albertans should get a picture of what residential facilities look like for children in care. When they’re in a residential facility – and it’s not just group care homes, but let’s specifically talk about group care homes – we’re talking about children who the government has not successfully placed in either a foster home or a kinship home because of either a lack of a suitable home or the particular challenges that a child in the intervention system has: behavioural challenges, you know, mental health challenges, addictions challenges. These are kids who are quite possibly the most vulnerable.

Residential facilities: the staff there do incredibly important work, and they are caring for children who are the responsibility of the government but cannot be placed in a home setting, a home-based setting, for all of the reasons I discussed, Mr. Speaker. I don’t know that licensing them, those facilities, those group homes, should be referred to as red tape. I have a problem with that, just as I have a problem with looking at health and safety standards and quality standards in early learning and child care programs as red tape. But I know that that’s how the government views those things that are in place to keep children safe, to keep children healthy, and that’s the bare minimum. There are also things about the quality of the programming and the care and the treatment that they’re receiving. I have a real concern about dismissing that as simply red tape.

So I would like to see the rationale as to why we should be moving to longer terms for licences. I would like to hear about that. I appreciate that residential facilities are doing important work, and

perhaps constantly renewing their licence might be administrative work that's not, you know, the best use of their time. If that's the case, I want to know what assurances Albertans have, these care providers have, these children in care have that they are still going to receive the utmost level of support and safety and care and that Albertans can hold this government accountable for that. I don't think that's too much to ask when we're talking about children in the child intervention system, but we have a hard time in this province trusting this government on a number of issues but particularly on the care for children that are their responsibility, children in the child intervention system.

I have a larger concern, Mr. Speaker, around this provision in Bill 21. It is that we have a crisis going on in this child intervention system in Alberta. I have spoken at length in this House about the numbers of children and youth, either in care or transitioning out of care, who have died in this province in the last year. Record numbers, Mr. Speaker – record numbers – numbers that nobody could have predicted in the years coming before that. Record numbers of young people aging out of care. To put forward at that time – the only change, the only proposed amendment and reconsideration of the primary legislation that governs our child intervention system, which is the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the only change this government has put forward has been as red tape reduction. In fact, I think this is the second time that the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act is being amended through either red tape reduction bills or miscellaneous statutes amendment acts.

I'll say that again, Mr. Speaker. We have a crisis going on in child intervention, and the governing legislation that deals with that has only been dealt with by this government as red tape. Let me tell you. In the conversations that I've had as to what should be done with the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act – well, first of all, I'll go back and say that the Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention, that was convened by our government in 2018, conducted extensive consultations with stakeholders, with experts, with Indigenous communities, with care providers, with former children in care. That work produced a number of recommendations. One of those recommendations – actually, two of them – dealt with amendments. Sorry. Three of them, actually, dealt with amendments to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.

One was immediate changes related to the role of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. Those changes were brought in by the NDP government, the former government.

The second was to actually review the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act to make changes related to the role of the band designate. The band designate, Mr. Speaker, is the person who is designated by a band to represent the band on decisions related to children that are First Nations children, to make decisions about their apprehension, about their care, about their placement, about their development. They are a key person, and consultation with that band designate is critical to make sure that we don't repeat the tragedies of the '60s scoop and through residential schools of making decisions about Indigenous children without the involvement and the say-so and the decision-making of Indigenous communities. We committed under that Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention that the role of the band designate needed to be reviewed and updated. That was supposed to be a short-term action that was supposed to be completed, which this government has not done.

And, more importantly, one of the other recommendations from that panel that came forward, one action was to actually do a complete review of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act,

to put it before a committee of the Legislature for a complete review, to look at all of the pieces and to consult with stakeholders and to talk about making the changes that were needed. That was four years ago, Mr. Speaker. I've sat on committees for the last three years and not once has that been brought forward to a committee, to review the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. And this is at a time when the child intervention system in Alberta is in a crisis like never before.

It is insulting, Mr. Speaker, I have to say, that the only time that I get to speak to legislative amendments to the governing framework for our child intervention system is as red tape reduction. It, frankly, frustrates me beyond belief. Let me tell you about some of the things that should be considered – and this is not an exhaustive list, because we should be doing a full committee review of this legislation to hear from stakeholders, to actually come up with a new legislative framework that will actually address some of the issues that will keep Indigenous children connected to their communities and their traditions. But some of the things, off the top, that we should be considering, Mr. Speaker: the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act should be reviewed to align with Bill C-92, which is the federal legislation around ensuring that First Nations and Indigenous communities have the authority to make decisions and govern their own child and family services.

One of the pieces that sticks out at me very much – and I've spoken to experts and legal experts in this field who have talked to me about this – is that one of the things that Bill C-92 has that our legislation clearly needs in Alberta is that section 15 of Bill C-92 says that a child, especially as it relates to an Indigenous child, cannot be “apprehended solely on the basis of his or her socio-economic conditions, including poverty, lack of adequate housing or infrastructure or the state of health of his or her parent or the care provider.” Why is that important, Mr. Speaker? Because too many children are apprehended because their families are poor, because the government has failed to support them by – it's all levels of government that have failed to provide them with adequate housing, food security, addictions and mental health supports, and they should not have their children taken away from them solely because of poverty.

9:00

We should be amending our provincial legislation to contain just that kind of a provision, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you what, when I talk to experts in this field, what they say is: if we were to not apprehend families on the basis of poverty, if we were actually to provide families with the things they need to get out of poverty, we would not see the level of child apprehension that we see now. That is really – it's neglect. When you look at the number of reasons, the reasons why most children in care are actually apprehended and why reports of a requirement for intervention are made, it's because of the neglect. And neglect is often because of lack of housing. It's because of lack of food security.

I would like to see the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act revised given that we've now had three years of seeing how the revised role of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate has been working, and we should amend it to address the recommendations that have come from the advocate repeatedly, particularly over the last year, that there is not enough accountability from government ministries for how they respond to recommendations made from the advocate. This would be a good time to review this legislation and to consider whether or not that needs to be enshrined in this act, that there is accountability from all ministries who deal with recommendations from the office of the Child and Youth Advocate to report publicly on their work. That's something that I think should be included in a review of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.

We should also be looking at the process for appeals and transparency when a report is made and a decision is made by Children's Services about whether or not to conduct an intake or move that intake on to assessment. Intake is the initial report of a child being in need of intervention, and somebody makes a decision about whether or not the circumstances described are sufficient enough to warrant an assessment about whether or not perhaps that child is in need of intervention. Those decisions are made with very little transparency and accountability.

I hear all the time about families and young people saying, "I don't know why they didn't follow up on this intake; I don't know why I didn't go to assessment" or "I don't know why they did, and I can't get any information." That's something that the act should be reviewed in light of, Mr. Speaker.

I only have a few seconds left. If my frustration isn't clear, I'll state it again. There's really important work to be done in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. What we see today, what we see repeatedly from this government is treating those amendments, minor amendments, as red tape reduction. It's an insult. It's because they're afraid to do the work, and they're afraid to do their job, which is to protect the children in their care.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak to the bill? The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to be in this Chamber this evening to speak about a significant piece of legislation. Of course, it's another major omnibus bill that the government has brought in under the guise of red tape reduction. Of course, they attempt to do a lot of other things that may not be readily apparent, and it's up to us, of course, as the opposition to bring those to light and ensure that the public is aware of the minutiae that may be hidden within the bill and some of the changes that might not be readily apparent.

As we continue with debate on Bill 21, I'm sure that there will be issues that arise that right now even may not be jumping right out at members of the opposition, but as we dig into it, we see things that at least beg questions. My intention here this evening is to raise some of the questions that have occurred to me upon initial investigation and reading of the bill, and I'd like to start that off by considering some of the changes that are being prompted by the bill to the Railway (Alberta) Act, section 13.

I'd really like to hear a little bit more background from the minister on how these changes came to be and if there really was an urgency around them. Now, when I've spoken to short-line railway operators recently, it wasn't what they were asking about. These weren't changes that I heard come up in conversation. Perhaps the minister could explain a little bit more. There may be a difference between what the act is calling heritage railways versus the short-line operators, which are actually carrying freight, in particular grain, Mr. Speaker, on a regular basis from rural areas and avoiding having to truck a lot of grain. The changes in this section of the act would allow heritage railways to operate under the same set of rules as industrial railways.

In the conversations I've had, Mr. Speaker, with the operators of short-line railways, which are used to collect grain and minimize truckload after truckload of grain going from farmers' fields to long distances, there are useful conveyance mechanisms now that are surviving kind of on a shoestring. I think that they're worthy of maintenance and consideration. One of the things that the operator that I spoke to was talking about requiring was perhaps some consideration not to be forced or allowed to operate under the, quote, same set of rules as the industrial railways but to perhaps be allowed to vary somewhat from those rules. In question in particular

were level crossings which were uncontrolled. In some cases the short-line operators were being forced to follow the industrial carriers' rules and put in a regulated crossing, which would mean lights and automated crossing arms at some very remote locations, which really didn't seem to warrant it because of the traffic or the sightlines. This is the type of thing that the short-line railway operators were looking for, perhaps for some variance or relaxation of the industrial carriers' rules, not to be operating under the same set of rules but to actually be allowed to have variances granted to them from those rules.

I know that the definitions and so forth of heritage and short-line commercial railways may differ somewhat. I know that those short-line grain carrying railways: the people that I've talked to are looking for ways to stay afloat, to survive, and to ensure that they can serve the agricultural community with their short-line railways, which take a lot of transport trucks off of our highways when hauling grain off the farm directly into the railway system and export markets to the west coast primarily.

I'm wondering if the minister would be able to clarify exactly who has been calling for measures that would allow them to operate under the same set of rules as industrial railways when some of them that I've been talking to are saying that they want to be granted variances from those rules. I'm not certain why a heritage railway would have to submit a request for approval to the railway administrator to be able to operate under these new rules. In fact, they're seeming to want to avoid that. Obviously, I've got questions, and I seek clarification. I don't know who was actually advocating for this on behalf of the railway operators, the heritage railway operators. Practically speaking, what would the implications of these changes be if indeed the heritage operators were, quote, unquote, allowed to operate under the rules of the industrial railway? So a number of questions regarding the important operation of short-line railways, which haul freight, namely grain.

There is perhaps opportunity in the future, Mr. Speaker, to expand the number of the short-line railways that do exist, because there are other pieces of track in the province which are sitting fallow and perhaps could be operationalized if indeed the economic feasibility of the short-line railways was more positive and had a better outlook. Yet the people that I've spoken to are looking at gaining access to relaxation of some of the rules, keeping in mind provisions of safety at all times but also realizing that there are significant costs to a short-line railway to install such things as flashing lights and crossing arms that they simply don't have the capacity to absorb whereas a mainline railway operator, of course, has the revenue streams and so forth. It's kind of unrealistic to think that on a very remote level crossing a short-line rail operator might have to suffer that type of regulatory expense when it may not be justifiable from a safety standpoint. So that's one of the things that I wanted to bring up when I was initially reviewing the legislation because it directly affects my critic role as the critic for Transportation.

9:10

I think we'd all be disappointed to think that any regulatory changes we made in the name of red tape would mean the death knell for one of these. I think there are only three of the actual short-line railway operators hauling grain in the province right now, so it's a struggling industry that we should be nurturing and not impeding, and that's something that I'm concerned about for rural Alberta and future rail developments in the province. Rail is a big a topic of discussion in Alberta right now on many fronts, and this one is, I think, maybe of lesser known public significance but nonetheless worthy of making sure that we don't do damage when we're looking at doing red tape reduction, doing damage to

something that would otherwise perhaps be economically viable except for the changes that are contemplated under the bill to the heritage railways.

Another thing, Mr. Speaker, changing gears a little bit in the act: the Animal Health Act in section 1. It continually shows that the UCP are moving important pieces of legislation away into regulation to avoid accountability. This is a theme that we've seen repeatedly under the Red Tape Reduction Act versions that have come before the House, where the government is using the smokescreen of red tape reduction to accomplish things they otherwise might do in such an upfront way. I don't know if the UCP government is taking the required steps and shouldering the correct level of responsibility, as I mentioned in question period today in questions I directed towards the minister of agriculture and forestry regarding the avian flu and the spread of avian flu throughout our poultry producers' flocks.

Granted, I agree that is a very difficult flu to maintain. It's a disease that's being spread by wild species of birds, from small songbirds to larger migratory birds as well, notwithstanding the high level of the antibacterial and antiviral protections that one finds on poultry farms. I've visited them. I've had to dress in the PPE and the full mask and booties and suits to make sure we don't bring in outside infections into the poultry-raising areas. So I agree that there already are significantly high measures in place to prevent infections in our poultry flocks, but obviously, as I mentioned in question period today, Mr. Speaker, those protections have been breached. In fact, I believe the number is 58 farms are now infected with the avian flu, and over 600,000 – I think the number that the minister quoted today was 800,000 and counting – birds have been euthanized as a result.

I don't know if indeed the minister has done well enough to tell farmers what support precisely and what stability the farmers and producers can be expected to receive as a result of the spread of the avian flu. More to the point, as I said, notwithstanding the difficulty there doesn't seem to be any effort or intent on the part of the minister of agriculture and forestry to focus on prevention. You know, the minister has talked at length about how many efforts were being made to provide supports to farmers to help them euthanize their flocks when, in fact, I'm sure I'm correct in saying that every poultry producer in the province would much rather be securing efforts to keep their flocks alive; in other words, to find ways to prevent this flu even though it is an insidious avian flu, something that returns on a routine basis over time.

There are new technological advances all the time. There are ways indeed in which we need to address this avian flu.

It's a huge cost and undertaking for producers to have to exterminate their whole flock and then repopulate once again and then perhaps go through the same cost again and completely sanitize all of their barns. It's a monstrous and very, very difficult, stressful operation to have to go through for any producer of livestock, and poultry is no exception, Mr. Speaker.

I would really like to hear from the minister in terms of taking measures in the act to support notification of disease within 24 hours. He's looking, in this act, to have that designation or notification requirement moved from legislation just to regulation. Indeed, it's weakening the very type of rules and regulations at a time when we need them to be stiff and strict. You will not go onto a poultry farm, Mr. Speaker, without being held directly responsible by the owner, the producer, to suit up properly and be extremely careful. It's not only his or her livelihood that they're protecting when they ensure that any visitors to that farm or any workers or any suppliers who visit or get even close to the barns will have to suit up. It's not only them that they're protecting, their livelihood,

but it's the livelihood of every other poultry producer in the province.

That responsibility lies with the minister ultimately, and I'm not convinced, indeed, that the minister has the concept of prevention at heart. I think he's just conceded that the avian flu is something that's here and is not a preventable type of infection and that the only thing you can do is support the culling of flocks that are infected. I disagree with that wholeheartedly, Mr. Speaker. If I was a poultry producer, I'd be wanting the minister to tell me what, indeed, measures the government of Alberta is taking to provide extra layers of protection given new technology that might be involved and available. Is there a way of ensuring that there's a vaccine, perhaps, that could be used? Are there other methods of protecting against the farmyard or the building actually having birds come to it? Is there a netting capacity to make sure we have that physical layer of protection from migratory birds and other birds that might infect a flock?

So lots of questions, and those are only two points, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 21, another in the continuing series of the government's red tape reduction statutes acts. There are a number, as has been the case before in such omnibus legislation, of changes that are being made, but I'd like to speak in particular about some changes being made in sections 11 and 12 regarding the Provincial Parks Act and the Public Lands Act.

We have seen, Mr. Speaker, a repeated pattern with this government. They are very fond of awarding their ministers new powers. Now, when you're appointed to cabinet, I mean, that is an incredible privilege, and that comes with a considerable amount of power: the ability to make changes, decisions, bring forward legislation that has profound impacts on the people of Alberta. But this government in many respects has not been satisfied with the power that's been available to them. They have repeatedly chosen to make changes to give themselves more.

I think back to Bill 21, when it was brought forward in the fall of 2019, where this government decided that their Minister of Health needed to have the power to unilaterally tear up the province's agreement with doctors. Now, of course, the government's argument at that time was that they were just clarifying a power that was already there. However, a lot of other folks really disagreed with that. But that was a power they felt the minister needed to have, and indeed he exercised that at the end of February 2020. Well, we all know the saga that has rolled out since. It was later that year, in 2020, I think around May, that we had the government come forward with Bill 10. Actually, it was probably a little earlier given that it was Bill 10, probably April, May 2020.

9:20

Bill 10 hit the floor of the Legislature, in which the government decided that in the midst of a public health emergency they, all cabinet ministers, should have the ability not to simply amend current legislation or expand on current legislation but create entirely new legislation without ever setting foot in the Alberta Legislature during a public health emergency. It was an amendment to the Public Health Act. Now, that, Mr. Speaker, is a sweeping addition of power.

Now, of course, at the time we brought forward a number of amendments. We noted some concerns. Those were all brushed aside by the government. We were patted on the head and told that everything was just fine. But we very quickly saw some very strong

push-back from the public, to the point where this government eventually had to strike an entire committee to provide cover for them to walk back their egregious mistake, so a massive use of taxpayer resources, hours of time, to do a full review of the Public Health Act and make many of the changes that had been brought forward as amendments during the initial debate in 2020.

However, it seems this government has not learned from its previous experiences, because here again, in this red tape reduction bill, Bill 21, we have them awarding new, sweeping powers to the Minister of Environment and Parks. Now, in this case, Mr. Speaker, it is particularly egregious because this is a minister and these are some particular areas where this government has completely lost trust with Albertans.

When it comes to the subject of public parks, Mr. Speaker, you can still go to many neighbourhoods in Edmonton and Calgary and find signs that say: protect our parks. That is the legacy of this government and that particular minister, of having attempted to sell off parks in the province of Alberta, as much as he denied it, but that legacy remains.

Of course, he is also the minister of environment, and we have seen what this government has done in terms of the environment on its coal policy. He was the one who, through a change in regulation on a long weekend in May 2020, changed regulations to override the 1976 coal policy, and we all know what the legacy of that has been, Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that this government attempted to at first deny that that was what they had done. Secondly, they created an entire website to try to help their MLAs convince their constituents that they were, in fact, wrong on this issue and that it was a wonderful idea to allow coal mining in the eastern slopes of the Rockies.

After much public push-back – again, we had to mount an entire panel. We had to do an entire consultation process. The government dragged its feet on finally putting it out before finally, to some extent, walking things back but still leaving a fair amount of latitude in the hands of their ministers on an issue on which Albertans have been one hundred per cent, abundantly clear: they do not want coal mining in the eastern Rockies.

What we have here now in this bill: where previously the government had the ability to set out standards, directives, practices, guidelines, objectives, or other rules in existing regulations, the minister may now set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines, or rules relating to any matter in respect of a regulation that could be made under the act. So no longer is the minister only able to tweak; he is able to just create entirely new possibilities. Again, this government is giving a sweeping, almost unfettered power to a minister who has already demonstrated that he has no trust with Albertans. This, Mr. Speaker, is considered to be, by this government, red tape. Democracy is apparently an inconvenience for this government.

Now, when this was raised with the minister, he told the folks at CBC that the reason for making this change in the bill was simply to make it easier for regional park and land managers to make seasonal trail closures or change signage without having to go through a senior ministry official. The minister said:

I would not want to see our officials have to go all the way to Edmonton to get permission to put up a sign to be able to protect that habitat . . . this speeds up their process to do simple decisions like that in the field. It does not change the Parks Act at all.

That, Mr. Speaker, I think, is what is known as an understatement.

Indeed, if the minister's intent was simply to make it easier for a parks and wildlife manager, a parkland manager to simply make small adjustments to a seasonal trail closure, change a sign, this is attempting to kill a fly with a sledgehammer. It would have been easy, I imagine, to make a much smaller, much more targeted, much more focused amendment that would accomplish that purpose, but

that is not what this government is attempting to do in this legislation. They want to give this minister broad, sweeping powers to set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines, objectives, or rules regarding any matter in the act. Carte blanche, a blank cheque, Mr. Speaker. We have heard no justification from these members, from this government other than the rather specious reasoning put forward by the minister.

It's not just us that's raising this concern, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, some of the good folks that have been on the front lines standing against this minister's attempts to undermine our parks systems, to endanger our environment and our water in the province of Alberta have also stepped up to speak on this. Chris Smith, a conservation analyst with CPAWS, Northern Alberta, says:

If the government's main goal with this was to, say, provide local park management with the authority to change signs for trail usage, then this is a very broad way to achieve that goal. It raises some questions to us as to why it needs to be so broad to accomplish that goal.

Ms Hoffman: Keep talking, David. We're up 2-nothing. Keep going.

Mr. Shepherd: Apparently, the Oilers are now up 2-nothing, so there we go. It appears that my lambasting of the government is good luck. Mr. Speaker, I guess I get about another five minutes to continue. We'll see if we can do any favours for the Oilers in that time remaining.

There are concerns that were brought forward by CPAWS, Mr. Speaker, that this indeed now could lead to, in fact, a patchwork of inconsistent rules across parks, that the minister could use this new, sweeping power, which this government apparently wants to award him, to create confusion for people who want to use public lands. Indeed, we have already seen that this minister seems to have some favourites in terms of who he favours in terms of the use of public lands. We recall that this is the minister, of course, that imposed park fees on the Kananaskis but failed to do so for the folks at a spot a little further away where they use off-road vehicles. He said that he would, but to date, to the best of my knowledge, he has not actually imposed those fees on off-highway vehicles.

This minister now could have the sweeping power to apply similarly unbalanced policies across parks, across public lands. He would never have to set foot in the Legislature to do it. He could do it with the stroke of a pen. I don't think that's going to help win back the trust that this government has so badly lost with Albertans when it comes to issues of parks and the environment, the use of public lands. There are very real questions why this government wants to secret this new power for the minister away in the backrooms of a bill on red tape reduction.

There are reasons why we have checks and balances in the system, Mr. Speaker: to help ensure that the public remains informed, to help ensure that ministers do not simply have unchecked power, to ensure that ministers actually consult with Albertans before making these kinds of decisions. But this is a government that time and again seems to feel it should have the right to override, sidestep, or otherwise escape those responsibilities. I disagree, and I think a wide swath of Albertans disagree as well. That seems to be the case when one looks at this government's polling numbers, certainly those of the Premier.

Certainly, I'll be looking for the Minister of Environment and Parks to rise in this place and perhaps provide some actual justification for these changes made, beyond the rather embarrassing attempt he made in conversation with the CBC.

I look forward to that perhaps at a future opportunity of debate.

At this time I will look to adjourn debate on Bill 21.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**9:30 Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

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

**Bill 14
Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training)
Amendment Act, 2022**

The Acting Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The member from . . .

Member Irwin: Come on. Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

The Acting Chair: Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock, come on.

Ms Hoffman: You can say the member from Barrhead.

Member Irwin: The member from Barrhead originally. That's right. I trust that the chair will never forget Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood again, and I'm going to mention Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood multiple times just so he does not.

We are going to be speaking to a quite serious bill here and one that I'm very happy to speak to, but I am told, again, that the Oilers are still up 2-nothing, so I'm cheering them on and hoping for the best for Edmonton's hockey team.

What I'd like to do is just talk a little bit about Bill 14. I've been on the record in second reading. You know, as I shared on that day, I talked about the fact that on this side of the House we are really happy to see a number of aspects of this bill. I have been happy. I don't mind putting on the record that I did have a chance to speak with the associate minister a little bit about it as well. I know she actually reached out to a stakeholder who'd had some questions about the bill as well, so I do appreciate that.

These are conversations that we need to be having. You know, we've said in this Chamber many times that all of us as legislators must do all we can to not just elevate conversations around sexual assaults and sexual violence but to take action, right? Words are important, but actions are what matter.

I'm going to recap a few of my comments. Spoiler alert: I do have an amendment coming. I'm going to just recap a few of the comments that I shared in second and hopefully have an opportunity for some dialogue with the associate minister and perhaps anybody else on the government side as well.

We are glad to see the requirement for sexual assault and social context training for anybody who's hoping to be appointed as a provincial judge. You know, we are saying, of course, that training should be extended to all sitting judges. We've heard already, again a common theme from this government, that they're sort of asking us to trust them that sitting judges will have an opportunity to get this training through existing education plans. The reason why it's hard to trust this government on an issue as important and as sensitive as this one is that I witnessed this government ram through the just simply horrific cuts to the victims of crime fund.

I've said in this House – and I don't mind sharing it more – that on two occasions I had three different folks, three different what we call validators, who were willing to share their stories about how either the victims of crime fund helped them or how it would have helped them. You know, to hear the stories, the absolutely traumatic stories of assault that all three of these women experienced, one sexual assault and one physical assault and the other one sexual

violence as well – I still remember the one validator. She had never shared her story publicly before, so to be willing to do so in the hopes, genuinely in the hopes, that this government would be willing to listen and would be willing to reverse their changes, changes that included a 45-day limit on accessing those funds – we all know in this Chamber or should know that survivors of a horrific event like sexual assault or sexual violence: some will never share their stories, and some, many, take a very long time to come forward. To ask people, survivors, at one of the toughest times in their lives to rush through and to expedite their application for funds doesn't make sense.

It was hard. It was, of course, you know, a different person in the role of minister of status of women at the time, but it was certainly hard to see her and her government justify those changes and those cuts with very little justification other than to say that they were looking at it and there would be a review and there would be further changes coming. We said: "You know what? That's great that you're looking at it, that you're examining the process, but in the meantime don't make it harder for survivors to access supports." I need to share that, and I need to just share the fact that, you know, it's hard, it's tough to take this government seriously when they say that they're taking action to support survivors when they justify cruel decisions such as that one.

I also want to talk a little bit about – oh, gosh, there are a few other things that I wanted to talk about. I mean, we laid out – and I know we've mentioned her in this Chamber before – in second reading of this bill, like, that we must address, you know, the myths and stereotypes that exist when it comes to sexual assault and sexual violence. Jennifer Koshan, who is, of course, a professor, who's fantastic at analyzing legislation and, more than that, at offering solutions as well, laid out the case for the need for governments to implement mandatory judicial education about intimate partner violence, social context, the myths, and the stereotypes.

You know, one of the things that we talked about – and I think the associate minister will weigh in on this a little bit. I know she's chatted with some key stakeholders, including – I'll name her because I know she won't mind – Jan Reimer from the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, who does great work looking at domestic violence and ways to support women and all folks, gender-diverse folks as well, men too, fleeing domestic violence. I know she had an opportunity to talk with the associate minister, so it would be nice just to hear a little bit more while we are in committee about why the associate minister chose not to include intimate partner violence.

We do know one of the pieces that is – there are very few metrics in the business plan for Status of Women, as I called out both in the last budget estimates and the one in the prior year as well. You know, how are you able to track anything when you have no performance metrics – right? – when you have no metrics to support the outcomes that you have laid out? To give them credit, that is one that the Associate Ministry of Status of Women has in there, police-reported intimate partner violence. I recall just the other day in the Chamber that the Associate Minister of Status of Women, when asked by me about the need for data for trans and nonbinary folks coming out of the latest census data, committed to that. I'm hopeful that that will continue to be a priority for those populations.

9:40

But I can't help but think about my colleague here for Edmonton-City Centre, who has asked many questions about race-based data and, of course, through his private member's bill, Bill 204, outlined the dire need for race-based data and the support for racialized folks. Yet, of course, that bill was shamefully shot down by this government. You know, I talk a lot and this associate minister has heard me talk a lot about intersectionality. Let's think about those

intersections of racialized women – right? – and the need for there to be data.

I mean, let's talk about racialized trans folks. Racialized trans folks: we don't have a lot of data here in Canada yet, but we know that racialized trans folks in the United States experience far higher levels of violence and discrimination than their cisgender, nonracialized counterparts, as an example. That is one piece of data that we do have from the States. Hopefully, we will have more coming out of Canada with the new census data and in Alberta as well.

We've got a few questions. I know my colleagues have a few other pieces that they want to outline, but I do want to make sure – because, gosh knows, if I don't, I will likely forget, and then I'll run out of time – that I would like to introduce an amendment on Bill 14.

The Acting Chair: The amendment will be known as A1.

The member may proceed.

Member Irwin: Okay. Just remind me. It's been a while since I got to introduce an amendment. I read the whole thing into the record?

The Acting Chair: Yeah.

Member Irwin: Wonderful. Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: But not your name.

Member Irwin: Thank you. But not my name, which I would have absolutely done.

The Member for, and say it with me, Chair, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood moves that Bill 14 – he's not even listening – the Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022, be amended as follows: in section 2 by striking out “clause (a.01)” wherever it appears and substituting “clause (a.02)” and by adding the following immediately after the proposed section 1(a):

(a.01) “approved sexual assault law education program” means a program established or approved under section 9(2.11);

In section 3, in the proposed section 9.1, as follows: in subsection (2) by striking out “education in sexual assault law and social context issues” and substituting “an approved sexual assault law education program”; in subsection (2.1) by striking out “undertakes to complete education in sexual assault law and social context issues after being appointed” and substituting “undertakes to complete, within 1 year of being appointed as a judge, an approved sexual assault law education program”; by adding the following immediately after subsection (2.1):

(2.11) The Judicial Council may establish a program or approve an existing program that

(a) is developed in consultation with the following, as the Judicial Council considers appropriate:

- (i) individuals who are sexual assault survivors;
- (ii) individuals or organizations that represent or support sexual assault survivors, including Indigenous leaders and representatives of Indigenous communities, and

(b) includes educational content or training in respect of each of the following:

- (i) evidentiary prohibitions;
- (ii) principles of consent;
- (iii) the conduct of sexual assault proceedings;
- (iv) education regarding myths and stereotypes associated with sexual assault survivors and complainants;
- (v) social context issues relating to sexual assault including systemic racism and discrimination.

All right. I've now read that into the record.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

We have a number of questions. Like I said, I know I've got some colleagues who will probably go into more detail on this as well. As written, Bill 14 in its current form does leave us with a lot of questions. Who is responsible for ensuring that the content of the education in sexual assault law and social context issues is adequate? What's the check on that? What's the control on that? What needs to be in the curriculum of that training to meet the intent of that legislation? Gosh, well, don't worry; I won't get into a whole diatribe about curriculum here although that was my world for many years.

We know that curriculum documents need to be developed meaningfully and in consultation with key stakeholders. So who will be consulted in the development of that curriculum? Whose voices will be at the table? Whose voices won't be at the table? How do we address the training of those on the approval list when this bill comes into force, to ensure that they don't sit on the bench for years before getting that training? I think that's something where we can, obviously, with some support, ask that question, because, you know, we've seen examples of judges who've been on the bench for a period of time or, obviously, of those perhaps who are very much in need. How will we make sure that that delay is not an issue?

The goal of this legislation is to ensure that Provincial Court judges will be receiving the same training that is required for federal and federally appointed judges. This amendment, as we've written it, will ensure that the legislation better meets that goal, better addresses that goal, and it does that in a number of ways.

First of all, it adds a definition of an approved sexual assault law education program. Second, it requires that appointees on the list when this legislation comes into force will have to take that training within one year. Based on what we've heard from our briefing with officials, that won't be prohibitive at all, you know, as the bill won't come into force until those training programs are established. Third, it requires that the Judicial Council, which is established under the Judicature Act, approve or establish a program, and that can be done without amending that act as that act allows for another enactment to legislative duty on that council.

Fourth, and this is one that's, you know – well, they're all important, but this one is really important to me. It requires consultation in the development of an educational program, consultation that will include, as I noted, those who've experienced sexual assault; sexual assault survivors. We need to hear from those who've experienced it first-hand. Their voices are critical. Individuals or organizations that represent or support sexual assault survivors, including Indigenous leaders and representatives of Indigenous communities: that's a really important one as well, making sure that those voices, the community voices, are diverse and are varied. I really hope that the Indigenous piece is included. These individuals, these organizations are best equipped. I mean, again, they're the ones on the front lines. They're the ones who get these issues inside out.

In my role as critic for Status of Women I've had the opportunity to meet with a number of individuals and organizations who are working, both those who are working on the front lines and individuals who are in leadership positions, and, you know, they get it. They're the experts, and that's – I think about my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud here. We've had a lot of meetings with various organizations who work in the areas of sexual assault, sexual violence, domestic violence. We go into those meetings and we say: “We want to listen. We want to hear how things are going for you, and we want to hear the real situation. You don't need to sugar-coat things for us. You might be fearful of speaking out publicly because perhaps your funding comes, much of it, from this

provincial government. You might be fearful about being truthful about your situation, but what you share with us is – if we've agreed that it will stay within this conversation, then it does, right?" I want those folks to know that their voices are valuable and that they're doing the good work and that they would have an important role in consulting on this bill.

The federal bill, as I understand, did go through considerable consultation prior to getting to its final form, which includes additional consultation on the training development, so, you know, again, let's heed that advice. Let's look at what the feds have done on this and try to head off any of those possible issues that could come in the future.

Finally, it inserts minimum content in the training: evidentiary prohibitions; principles of consult; the conduct of sexual assault proceedings; education regarding myths and stereotypes, as I talked about prior; social context issues relating to sexual assault, including systemic racism and discrimination, which, again, is a crucial piece here that I know my colleagues have talked about. We talked about the implications on the justice system. We've talked about the fact that we still very much have an issue in front of us where we see Indigenous folks and racialized folks overrepresented in the justice system, and we need to talk about the systemic barriers, the racism, the discrimination and talk about and unpack and try to act on some of the factors that lead to that. Again, we can look to the federal legislation for some guidance on this area.

9:50

Yeah. I will mention, you know, and I would love for the Associate Minister of Status of Women to talk a little bit more about this because we did, as I alluded to earlier, consider bringing forth an amendment that would address domestic violence or intimate partner violence. There is currently legislation in Parliament addressing just this issue, but from what I gather, that could potentially change the intent of this bill. That may have also – and I can defer to my lawyer caucus on this one – required amendments to family law, which, I gather, would be a big undertaking.

We would encourage this government – and I'll end with this. I would encourage this government to think about how they might address issues around intimate partner violence in the future, domestic violence as well, if the minister or associate minister confirms with me, in fact, that this would have been out of scope and would have changed the intent. I would encourage them to think about a focus on that piece moving forward and perhaps bringing forward legislation that could enhance the training that Provincial Court judges receive to ensure that survivors of intimate partner violence don't face additional barriers when navigating an already complex court system and already very challenging-to-navigate judicial system.

So, with that, you know, I do hope and encourage the members opposite to support this amendment. I think we can all agree in this Chamber that we want to get this right and that we want to, again, amplify the voices of those on the front lines and of survivors. We want to do the best job that we can, and I think this amendment will certainly help with that.

With that, I will conclude my remarks.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join debate on amendment A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise in Committee of the Whole and speak to the amendment tabled by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood on Bill 14. I believe it's amendment A1, if I'm correct.

I appreciate the opportunity not only to speak to this amendment, but I appreciate this amendment because I actually believe that throughout debate on this bill and certainly in conversations that I know many of our members have had with government members as well as with stakeholders as well as in statements made by government members, I think we're actually all quite unified on this bill and the objective that it seeks to meet, which is, of course, to ensure that those who are in a position of judging and making determinations in cases before them in Provincial Court, judges making those decisions that are critical to respecting and adjudicating sexual assault trials, are not making those decisions under the influence of rape myths and stereotypes, that we know, unfortunately, have been far too pervasive in our judicial system in the past and even not so past, Mr. Chair.

I think we're united in that. There seems to be a real consensus around the idea that we want to make sure that those in those positions do have appropriate sexual assault awareness training, that those who are making determinations that deeply affect the lives of sexual assault victims and even those who are accused are making so free from this prejudice. That is a huge shadow that's been hanging over sexual assault for so long, which has been one of the key factors that has deterred women in particular but all victims of sexual assault from coming forward to report cases.

It's all of those myths around, you know, perhaps what the person was wearing or if they had consumed alcohol or their sexual history or even: can consent be revoked? All of those stereotypes have made it so difficult for women to seek justice, to tell their stories, and to be heard. A key part of this bill is, I think, meant to address that by making sure that they do not fear that when they go into a court system, they will be subject to those stereotypes and prejudices.

It's not an easy task, Mr. Chair. I'm not by any means suggesting – and I don't think anybody is – that this bill will solve that issue, but it is a key part of it. It is a key step that needs to be taken to make sure that we are creating a safe space for victims of sexual assault to be able to come forward, to report to police, to be heard in court in a fair and impartial way based on the evidence, not based on prejudice.

So with that united goal, that I believe we all have, we also sort of have the objective of wanting to make this bill as effective as possible and to make sure that it is very clear that it serves the purposes it seeks to serve. I want to note that I think what's been put forward in an amendment here by my colleague really seeks to align what is going to be taking place for training for provincial judges with what's already happening in federal legislation.

Key to that – and these are points that I know that I raised when I had the opportunity to speak to this bill in second reading – were two pieces, to me, that stand out immediately. One is that we need some understanding about what that education program that judges will be receiving will look like, and, importantly: who is contributing to developing that education program?

I note that Bill C-3, which is the federal legislation that is similar, you know, requires that that education program, that sexual assault education program for judges, be developed in consultation with survivors of sexual assault as well as in consultation with Indigenous communities and organizations. That's critical because – I know I'm echoing some of the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood – we understand and recognize the intersectionality that is at play, particularly in sexual assault.

We know the disproportionately high number of racialized Indigenous women who are victimized by sexual assault, women with disabilities – and, again, I shouldn't limit my comments to only women. It's gender-diverse folks. We know that trans folks are absolutely at high risk of sexual assault. So when we talk about

intersectionality, it is absolutely a critical issue to recognize and acknowledge in sexual assault awareness training.

So developing that education program in consultation not only with those groups who can reflect that intersectionality but, of course, with survivors themselves is absolutely critical because they can speak to, you know, I guess, perhaps some of the concerns and barriers that they may have felt in actually coming forward, speaking to their unfortunate real-life experiences in interacting with the judicial system and breaking down those stereotypes. It can really only be done by hearing their voices and making sure that they are participating in an active way in the development of the sexual assault awareness education program that judges will receive. You know, I see in this amendment that it's key to establishing that the Judicial Council, which would describe the education program and would establish it, would do that development in consultation. That part is key.

I also note that through this amendment it's addressing, I believe, sort of what the ambiguities of the bill are as it's tabled right now, which are around: what does social context mean? You know, currently in Bill 14 it indicates that, you know, no person may be appointed as a judge unless they have completed education in sexual assault law and social context issues, but social context issues are not defined in Bill 14.

We do know that in Bill C-3, which is the federal legislation, social context is defined, and it is described as, you know: social context issues relating to sexual assault, including systemic racism and discrimination. Through this amendment it is providing that further clarification as to what the term "social context" means. It means understanding systemic racism and discrimination. I think, again, that's really important when we talk about the intersectionality.

Again, we understand that rape myths and sexual assault myths and stereotypes have arisen in a context of systemic racism and discrimination. It is systemic, and again this bill will not solve all of those problems. By the very nature of it being systemic, we need multipronged approaches on all levels and in various institutions: police, to judges, to councillors, to teachers, to all of the systems that support survivors of sexual assault. They need to be addressed, certainly, understanding that judges should have training in social context, and by social context we mean training with respect to systemic racism and discrimination.

I'm very pleased to see this amendment that actually kind of provides that clarification in Bill 14, and again it's intended to meet the same goal that I believe the government brought this forward with.

10:00

I do also appreciate that this amendment clarifies that this training for newly appointed judges must take place within a year of that judge being appointed. We understand that that is not an onerous undertaking and that it should be done. It does place some urgency because certainly in that period of time, unless there is a prohibition on the judge actually hearing cases of sexual assault until they've had the training, which is not included in the bill – you know, I think it's important to kind of put some timelines around that. I think that's a very useful piece.

I do think that the amendment here does not address this, but it is something that I raised in the context of second reading on this bill. You know, this bill is very much targeted towards new judges and newly appointed judges and judges going forward. Of course, we have a number on the judicial bench who have been appointed for many years, many of whom are incredibly – I certainly do not want to be seen to be critiquing the skills of those sitting judges.

However, we do know that sexual assault myths and stereotypes training has not been made available to all judges. They would not

have received it. I told the story in second reading about how even in law school, when I attended law school, which is now 20 years ago, there wasn't this kind of specific training around sexual assault myths and stereotypes at the law school level, so it's very likely that there are many sitting judges who have never received any of this specific kind of training. I do think it would be, you know, really meaningful to make sure that as part of their continuing education all sitting judges, no matter when they were appointed, are required to take any kind of education program as is determined by the Judicial Council. I think that that's really important.

The truth of the matter is that one of the reasons why we're all talking about this is because of the situation that arose with Justice Robin Camp, who, not that long ago, Mr. Chair, at the Alberta Provincial Court level, you know, made some comments during a sexual assault trial that horrified most people but clearly didn't horrify Justice Camp – well, Mr. Camp, I'll say, because of his title now – at the time that he said it.

You know, he made some statements in that sexual assault trial which were the deepest and most insidious of stereotypes around sexual assault. Likely, there are many with years of experience at the bench and in law school who may not have ever received this kind of training. I think it would be incumbent upon – it would be great to see existing and sitting judges also do this kind of training. I think that would be really useful.

I really do sincerely hope that this amendment is received and supported in the spirit in which it was tabled, which is really to align the legislation that is proposed with federal legislation but also, really, to ensure that we are providing the best framework for new judges who are appointed the Provincial Court to receive the best and most thorough education program in sexual assault awareness that we can.

Really, this is about treating those individual survivors who do come to the courts fairly. That goes without saying. It absolutely is about treating them fairly. I know we've already talked about in this House that, you know, only 6 per cent of those who experience sexual assault actually report that to police. Then from that point, of those who report to police, even fewer make it to court, so there are already significant barriers. We want to make sure that those who actually get to court have a fair hearing, have a true hearing based on the evidence, not based on predetermined or prejudicial or discriminatory views about sexual assault.

The bigger purpose is also to break down that systemic discrimination, those systemic barriers that discourage survivors of sexual assault from coming forward. Really, what we're trying to do is create more of a safe space for that to happen, and we want to really ensure that this is one piece of that. They should not have to be subjected – and let's be clear. The court process is already incredibly stressful. It's traumatic for survivors of violence: reliving experiences, being challenged by attorneys, having intimate, intimate details brought up in a public space. It is incredibly traumatizing, and we need to do whatever we can while also making sure we have a fair judicial process for the accused, who do have rights. The accused definitely have rights, but we want to make that process as fair as possible to encourage more women and survivors of sexual assault to feel like it is safe to come forward and to report their assault so that we can all work to break down those systemic barriers.

With that, Mr. Chair, I certainly hope that all members present will vote in favour of this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much.

I see the hon. government whip has risen to respond.

Ms Issik: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to say that I, you know, appreciate the spirit behind this amendment. I think it shows

that there's been some thought into the reasoning behind putting Bill 14 up in the first place. I have some concerns with the amendment, and I'm just going to go through a couple of them now, and then I just want to speak more broadly about some of the issues that this amendment gives rise to.

First of all, in this amendment it speaks to striking out "education in sexual assault law and social context issues" and substituting "an approved sexual assault law education program." What I don't see in this amendment is any mention of who approves that. I'm going to come back to who approves what for whom in a moment, but I will note that it just says "approved," and it doesn't note who would possibly approve that. I have a concern about that, and I'll bring that up in a moment.

Next it says, "undertakes to complete, within 1 year of being appointed as a judge, an approved sexual assault law education program." Well, Mr. Chair, the bill as it exists now refers to: those who are on the approved appointment list would make an undertaking to take this education piece. It was made very clear, when this bill was moved and when we did the press conference about it, that there's no way functionally for government or this legislative body to tell the judiciary what they can do or cannot do within a prescribed time frame, particularly when it comes to something such as education. I'm going to come back to that in a moment as well.

I will say that in the section of this amendment that speaks to some of the particulars that they would like to see in the education piece – I mean, these are good pieces; these are good points. I can't imagine that in today's world, where somebody was designing an education piece on sexual assault training and context issues, these would not be included. I think they're very good. They're very good. I think the intent behind this amendment is great on this point. However, it is quite specific, so the concern that I have and the reason that I wouldn't support this amendment, although I understand that there's good intention behind it, is because of judicial independence and the need for our judiciary to be independent.

You know, judicial independence is a building block of a free and democratic society, and it exists for the benefit of everyone. As we know, as we've seen, judges make life-altering decisions, and they must be able to do that free from any sort of influence. To be blunt and to be, actually, pretty specific, that includes influence from government and influence from the legislative branch as well. The executive branch and the legislative branch are meant to be completely separate, and the judicial branch is meant to be completely independent.

10:10

Now, the Supreme Court of Canada has enunciated three major components or three main components for judicial independence. They are, first, security of tenure; second, financial security; and third, administrative independence. Administrative independence can be seen to be an extension of the judicial function. Administrative independence means that decisions about how courts operate must, first and foremost, be in the hands of judges. That's important.

The members across had talked about education of judges and who in particular educates. They mentioned, you know: who creates these education programs? Who develops the curriculum? Who delivers these education components? Those are important questions.

At the federal level the CJC issues the professional development requirements for federally appointed judges. The CJC has noted – this is the Canadian Judicial Council – that "training sessions provided to judges must . . . serve the interests of justice alone and not that of external forces, governmental or otherwise."

The National Judicial Institute is the primary training and education provider for federally appointed judges and is an

independent organization led by judges. The NJI, which is an organization that I mentioned in the press conference when we first brought this bill forward, works with judges, courts, and other judicial education organizations to provide education to judges in person and online. The NJI has been an effective forum in which continuing education of judges is accomplished. That's at the federal level.

On the issue of content, you know, there's an emerging consensus about education on the subjects that we're talking about specifically, that are actually in the federal bill. According to the Advocates' Society, "While there is an emerging consensus that education on this subject would serve the interests of justice, judicial independence may be threatened when the executive or legislature attempts to determine the content of judicial education." So there's a concern out there that's been expressed, I would say, by a pretty competent stakeholder, and that speaks directly to what I'm concerned about.

Now in Alberta, you know, we've had good conversations with the Chief Judge. The Chief Judge has been very generous, I must say, with his time. He came to the MMIWG joint working group for a very lengthy consultation, and it was a very useful conversation.

I just want to talk a little bit about how the Alberta courts education process works. In Alberta the education is provided by the Alberta Provincial Judges' Association, so judges, the Canadian Association of Provincial Court Judges – this is the Provincial Court judges from all of the provinces and territories – the National Judicial Institute, which I mentioned earlier, and the Provincial Court itself also does some education. In 2014 the Provincial Court established an education committee, and the mandate of it is to "support, improve and enhance professional competence of the Court's Judges and Justices of the Peace."

The Provincial Court's 2021 new judges education plan is actually available on the Internet. I went through their website the other day. It includes shadowing and mentoring programs as well as a requirement to attend two new judges programs which address substantive law, judicial skills, social context, and judicial development, with particular emphasis on topics including sexual offences law, Indigenous justice, and programs to understand the cultural dimensions of judging. New judges are further expected to develop education plans for their first five years on the bench, which must include sexual offences law education if relevant.

The Provincial Court also has a more general education plan to establish measurable goals for 2021 to 2024 and provide judges and justices of the peace with a broad range of educational opportunities. Certainly, Chief Judge Redman was kind enough to share that information with us, those of us sitting on the MMIWG joint working group. In that group some of these issues were raised with respect to, you know, what kind of content this education should have. Chief Judge Redman was very amenable, very agreeable to consideration of many of the issues that are actually listed in this amendment. So it's hard for me to contemplate that these issues would be left out of curriculum.

But it's clear that judicial independence requires us to not interfere with judges developing education for judges. I would note that this bill is primarily intended to ensure that lawyers who wish to become judges undertake this education piece as mandatory in order to apply to be a judge, and in that way we're actually filling the pipeline for not only the Provincial Court but also for, eventually, the Court of Queen's Bench because many provincial judges become federal judges. Judicial independence is very, very important, and I think it's something that we all need to respect.

Like I said, while I appreciate the intent of this amendment, I do think that we risk crossing the line that no legislative or executive branch of government should do. With that, I would ask members

to not support the amendment. I'm happy to say that I look forward to further discussions with the opposition as we work towards resolving other issues that are of importance, including intimate partner violence and all the issues surrounding that.

With that, I'll take my seat, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has risen.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the comments from the Associate Minister of Status of Women. I just wanted to clarify a few pieces just to fully understand what the amendment was put before. I heard the associate minister express concerns about not understanding who would approve the sexual assault education program as proposed under this amendment. I just want to indicate that it does state in the amendment that in the new section, a.01, it would mean an "approved sexual assault law education program" means a program established or approved under section 9(2.11)." So it's approved under that section, and then that's the new section that we have added in the amendment. Section 9(2.11) indicates that it's the Judicial Council that would establish the program or approve an existing program. So in response to that question, it is the Judicial Council that would make that approval. Again, that is very similar to the process that the associate minister described in terms of what happens at the federal level, which is that there is a Judicial Council that sets out the content.

Key here is, again, that "the Judicial Council may establish a program or approve," so it's not the executive directing the Judicial Council to do so. It is empowering the Judicial Council to do so but simply saying that that existing program would be developed in consultation with sexual assault survivors and, you know, representatives from Indigenous leaders and Indigenous communities. Again, that's mirroring what is in Bill C-3. As well, the description of what social context is: this is again mirroring what's happening in Bill C-3, which was not passed that long ago.

10:20

I'm certain there will be some stakeholders who, you know, have concerns about what the Legislature or Parliament is directing. This is very discretionary, but it's clear that it is still the Judicial Council who is the one who approves it and develops that education program. It's not intended to be overreach by the Legislature into this role; it's simply to make sure that that education program does include those important voices when being developed and to provide that clarification around what social context would mean.

I would invite, given that I feel like the associate minister did overall seem to express, she said a couple of times that the intent of this amendment – and I hear her concern about whether or not the education program could be completed within one year of being appointed as a judge. Certainly, if the associate minister would be willing to entertain or to put forward a subamendment to remove that piece, you know, that it must be undertaken to be completed within one year of being appointed as a judge, I certainly think that the Official Opposition – and I don't want to speak for the mover of the amendment – would consider that to be something we'd accept and support.

Ultimately, we believe that the rest of the content of the amendment is really important and seems to align with, you know, the federal legislation, trying to make this as effective as possible without overreaching into direction from the Legislature and Executive Council into how lawyers govern themselves but still

providing guidance as to expectations, which is precisely, honestly, what the entirety of this bill is about. It's saying that there are expectations that the elected bodies have for how judicial appointments are made and approved and the requirements that they have to meet in terms of education. I think that's the purpose of this bill.

Again, our objectives are aligned. I would hope that perhaps the associate minister would consider putting forward a subamendment to remove that one section that she believes is inappropriate, because I believe that there's really good stuff in the rest of the amendment. I would hope that the associate minister would consider that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much, hon. member.

Are there any other members on amendment A1 looking to debate?

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 14, Provincial Court (Sexual Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022. Are there any hon. members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Associate Minister of Status of Women has risen.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Chair. At this time I would like to offer up an amendment. It is a change to the title of the bill.

The Deputy Chair: Just hand it on to the pages, including the original, and once I've got a copy, I'll give you some more quick instructions once I see it.

Ms Issik: Will you read it then?

The Deputy Chair: Once I see it, yeah.

Ms Issik: Can I take a copy?

The Deputy Chair: Keep a copy.

Thank you, hon. minister. If you'd be so kind to read it into the record.

Obviously, copies will be provided to everyone. This will be referred to as amendment A2 for debate. Thank you.

Please continue.

Ms Issik: I move that the bill be amended as follows: the title of the bill is amended by adding "Assault" after "Sexual."

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members wishing to join debate on amendment A2?

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Deputy Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 14. Are there any members wishing to join debate? Seeing none, I am – oh. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has risen.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and just briefly address Bill 14, the Provincial Court (Sexual Assault Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022, that has been up for debate this evening. I appreciate those who ventured into debate, particularly around amendments. And thank you to the minister for engaging in debate and talking about the thoughts on this particular piece.

I really just wanted to rise in support of removing barriers to victims coming forward, victims who have experienced sexual assault. We know that few victims will report sexual assault and

even fewer will go through the process to enter into the court system and get that far. Certainly, as has been outlined during the debate on Bill 14, there have been several very high-profile examples of archaic stereotypes and misconceptions leading to Provincial Court judges obviously using completely outdated and false narratives and perceptions when dealing with victims of sexual assault in our court system. Of course, those stories impede the confidence that victims have in our justice system and being able to bring forward their concerns and their complaints.

Knowing that all appointees, as a requirement for being appointed, will need to take training and ensure that victims are protected from those biases and stereotypes I think is incredibly positive. I would note that Manitoba is debating very similar legislation, and we've seen federal legislation implemented as well to make sure that judges are educated in sexual assault awareness training.

I do think that the amendment that my colleagues brought forward, my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood and also referred to by my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud, would have been an improvement to this bill, but even so that amendment was not accepted. Based off the debate that I've seen at second reading and based off the good that the Provincial Court (Sexual Assault Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022, can have in building confidence in our justice system for victims of sexual assault, I will be voting in support of Bill 14 as we conclude debate in Committee of the Whole.

I do just want to thank everyone who's entered into this debate in a respectful way. This is an issue of incredible importance, incredible sensitivity, and I believe it's a positive step that these changes are being implemented here in the province of Alberta. I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate and to just briefly reflect my thoughts on Bill 14.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Issik: Mr. Chair, I move that the committee rise and report Bill 14.

The Deputy Chair: I appreciate the goal there. What I would say is that we should take the opportunity to ensure that there are no other individuals looking to join debate on the bill.

I see the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley has risen.

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to take a few minutes to talk about Bill 14, the Provincial Court (Sexual Assault Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022. I support this training, and I guess one of the reasons why I support it is that I know it's hard to put yourself in the place of a victim to know exactly what they're going through. I know that's impossible for me, and anybody that hasn't been through it: I think it's impossible for them, too. I have, however, been in that situation where I've had to accompany someone through this process personally, and I have to say that it's incredibly hard. It's heart-wrenching. Yeah.

10:30

The process itself, even before they get to the courtroom, is an incredibly hard process, and it takes a lot of guts and a lot of nerve and a lot of strength to be able to get through that process. I think we need to alleviate absolutely every possible negative interaction that victims would have to go through. Of course, we can't

circumvent the fair justice process, but this doesn't take away anything from the fairness of the justice process.

I think this is important enough that we should just do it. I don't know that we needed to have legislation to do this. I don't know how much influence the Legislature has had on the training of judges in the province of Alberta, but I think this is important, that we should be just doing it. You know, this legislative process: it's always good to be able to talk about these things in the Legislature, but it would be great if this was already happening.

Hopefully, this will encourage more reporting of sexual assaults and potentially preventing more in the future. It is, you know, a little disappointing that this doesn't have any implications for current sitting judges. That would be nice, too. I guess if there was any way we could encourage the current judges to go through this training, too, I think that would be great.

We need to make sure that victims come forward. I think the statistics are alarming, the number of sexual assault victims that don't come forward. That's incredibly alarming. I think we need to have greater reporting, and of course we need to be able to have the people, the victims, that come forward feel that they're going to be treated well all the way through the whole process. Of course, we're talking about sexual assault, one of the most personal and intimate things that could happen to anybody in such a horrible way, so the survivors of sexual assault need confidence in our justice system. We've seen in the past where this hasn't happened, that they didn't have the confidence, and they were mistreated in our justice system, and we need to make sure we do everything we can to prevent that from happening in the future.

Of course, one of the best ways that we can combat this kind of misinformation and stereotypes is through education and training. We need to make sure that judges understand the nature of sexual assault and the humiliation experienced by victims and how so many of them don't report it or once they start the process, actually quit partway through the process because the process, again, is already hard, and, again, we don't need, in the end, to be mistreated by a judge in the courtroom.

I just wanted to say that I support this bill and look forward to it passing in this Legislature. Again, hopefully, we can make a difference for so many people that have been victims of sexual assault in this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate on Bill 14?

Seeing none, I am prepared.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 14 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to as amended]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? Carried and so ordered.

Oh, I see the hon. Associate Minister of Status of Women has risen.

Ms Issik: I didn't want to jump the gun this time. Mr. Chair, I move that the committee rise and report Bill 14.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain has risen.

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill: Bill 14.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 9 a.m. Thursday, May 5, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:36 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, May 5, 2022

Day 30

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
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Copping, Hon. Jason C., Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Devin, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, David, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
 Official Opposition Whip
Ellis, Hon. Mike, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Kathleen T., Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
 Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Grant R., Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
 Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
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Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UC)
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
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LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)

Nally, Hon. Dale, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
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Nixon, Hon. Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (UC),
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Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
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Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
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Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
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Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, May 5, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 14

Provincial Court (Sexual Assault Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning. I rise today to move third reading of Bill 14, Provincial Court (Sexual Assault Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022.

As we all know, a well-functioning justice system is key to keeping our neighbourhoods, communities, and province running properly and safely. The courts are an integral part of this, as are judges, who are in charge of their courtrooms, including overall conduct of and the experience in the courtroom. The life experiences, circumstances, and perspectives of those who come to their courts, either by choice or requirement, can be varied and complicated. It can be a very nerve-wracking process and experience, particularly for victims who are testifying, vulnerable Albertans, and those who are not familiar with the court process, including families of victims. Sadly, we know that victims: some of them never appear in court because they have sadly lost their lives.

This bill is intended to help with this by making sure that those who apply to be a judge have to complete sexual assault law and social context issues education before they're eligible to be appointed. This will help set up the next generation of judges with the tools to understand the circumstances and life contexts of those appearing in their courts, including victims. This is intended to build trust, trust that all those who enter the courtroom will be treated fairly and respectfully. By building this confidence, we will ultimately create greater confidence for victims to come forward and report. Greater reporting, in turn, will ultimately help us eliminate sexual violence. Mr. Speaker, I am sure that is a goal that we can all agree upon.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Associate Minister of Status of Women has moved third reading of Bill 14. Are there others wishing to join in the debate this morning? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has the call.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate in third reading on Bill 14. I did speak on it earlier in the debate, but first I'd just like to acknowledge that

today is Red Dress Day. I know that many of my female colleagues are wearing dresses just to honour missing and murdered women. Speaking of this bill today, of course, it's extremely appropriate that we are highlighting this deep concern in our society, where Indigenous women and girls have suffered so much more, and there is profound discrimination to this day. So I certainly stand in solidarity with my Indigenous sisters and certainly want to shift our society into respect for women, whatever background, and certainly, of course, Indigenous women.

I grew up in the north. I grew up in a small town in the Peace Country, Valleyview. We had a very large Indian reserve right next to us. It still is up in Valleyview, Sturgeon Lake Indian band. I saw, really, on a daily basis just discrimination. I grew up, you know – I guess I was going into school in the late '60s, in the '70s, so many, many years ago. But I know I was profoundly impacted by what I saw all the time and how Indigenous people and, specifically, women and girls were treated. It always disturbed me profoundly, and I think it's one of the reasons I made the decision to go in to the social work profession. I felt like things can be different. We don't have to have so much dissension and discrimination in our society. Actually, we can be inclusive and supportive. So I did make that decision more than 30 years ago.

Here as an elected official and certainly as part of the NDP caucus I'm so proud of the work my colleagues have done to really make sure that all Albertans are counted and, specifically on this day, today, that Indigenous women and girls are honoured and respected. I wear this red dress in honour of that.

We are talking about Bill 14, Provincial Court (Sexual Assault Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022, in third reading, as the associate minister just shared. Of course, this bill largely is a mandate for sexual awareness training for judges, which, of course, we on this side of the House think is an important move, and we want to make sure that judges in Alberta are absolutely fulfilling on this training and make sure that they understand and have an awareness, as it says, the sexual assault awareness training.

This training follows the federal process, where the training is overseen and implemented by independent professional bodies – or we would like it to be this way. I think that that is – I'm not sure if that's explicitly identified in the legislation, but I think it's really important that it be implemented and overseen by independent, professional bodies and, of course, developed in consultation with sexual assault survivors.

You know, I talked about this yesterday. We want to make sure always that there's Nothing about Us without Us, right? Who knows best about any particular issue is someone with that lived experience, so it's really important for survivors of sexual assault to have input into what the contents of this training will be. Perhaps there needs to be an opportunity for sexual assault survivors to share their stories with the judges in the training so they really see what these survivors have been through and just to bring the import of that to them. Certainly, we see that as very important and want the government to fulfill on that.

Certainly, you know, on this side of the House we've been somewhat concerned by some of the decisions that the UCP have made, in particular issues with the victims of crime fund. We know that survivors have been denied access to the fund, shortened time limits for reporting. We know that when you've been through this type of experience of a sexual assault or some attack, oftentimes it takes even years for people to feel they have the fortitude, the willingness to step forward and talk about it. It can be very traumatic for them and very difficult for them to go forward. I guess this is another area, speaking about the same population that this bill is addressing to support, that the UCP would be encouraged to

understand, the lived experience of survivors and why they need that extended period of time.

Certainly, we know that, you know, judges are just like the rest of us, really. They grow up in this culture. It's sort of the fishbowl, that sometimes we don't know the water that we're swimming in. That's why this sexual awareness training is so important. We grow up with attitudes perpetuated from previous thoughts that are antiquated now. We certainly as a society have moved forward in a most fundamental way, I guess. Like, women are no longer chattels; at one time they were. We're independent people who have our own human rights.

9:10

Sadly, sometimes some of that, you know, antiquated thinking is still very much part of our society. Of course, the rape mythology, where prejudiced, stereotyped, and false beliefs about sexual assault are perpetrated, is something that people need their awareness raised about, and judges specifically, of course. With the sexual awareness training I hope that that will dispel those mythologies because, you know, it happens still, to this day, that sexual aggression is excused. Also, sometimes this creates hostility towards the victims themselves and biases criminal prosecution. These rape myths can significantly influence the perspectives of jurors, the investigative process, judges, perpetrators of sexual violence, and victims themselves. Victims themselves, we know, blame themselves. They often say: well, I should have done this; I should have done this; I should have done this. But, again, this is all part of not understanding the issue.

Certainly, when I was younger, I mean, I would hear, "Well, don't wear those clothes" or "You have to look a certain way" or "Make sure you're not walking at a certain time of day, and you shouldn't walk here or there." There were so many rules for me as a young girl, woman growing up in a northern Alberta town that – let's face it – was kind of a rough town. You know, we had a couple of bars in town. One of them was called The Zoo because it literally was the zoo. It was very important that we did not go near The Zoo because – who knows? – there'd be some guy there, and he might grab you or something.

I certainly was told this all the time when I was a kid, and I remember thinking: "How come it's all about me? Why is it me that has to change? I'm not doing anything wrong. You know, I'm just existing on the planet. Why is it me that has to be so careful about what I do, like I'm provoking somehow these negative sexual interactions or whatever?" I always felt that was outrageous. It made absolutely no sense to me. But that absolutely was the culture that I grew up in, and I had a lot – perhaps I still do – of anger as a young woman because of that, because I felt like: hey, this isn't fair. Of course, that has spurred me to stand up in many different ways throughout my life to, you know, say: hey, this isn't fair, and why are women, why are girls being unduly blamed or told to be responsible about their deportment but guys can do whatever they want?

You know, as a woman in her early 60s now I still feel that rage, and I still feel how important it is for all of society to take responsibility. I must say that things have shifted, certainly, in my lifetime. It's not perfect. We certainly don't have equality in our province, in our country, in our world. But this, of course, initiative, this Bill 14, to have judges take sexual awareness training is a good step in the right direction, so I do commend the government for moving on this because, as I've just articulated, so many judgments against women or girls still continue to this day, and sadly still cases before the court are prejudiced against the survivors. I certainly do hope that this training goes a long way to alleviating those kinds of prejudices and stereotypes about women and girls and that fair

decisions are going to be made in our society. Of course, you know, I know the associate minister. I think we've talked extensively about: how can we, besides with this legislation – and this legislation, as I've said, Bill 14, is a positive step in the right direction, but there are so many other issues in terms of equality for women in our society.

I always like to reference the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, because on an annual basis they rank, you know, the best and worst places in Canada, in terms of major cities, for women to live. Of the about 25 major centres – it's the largest centres – Edmonton turns out to be 24th down the list. It's not the worst, but it's only one up from the worst, and Calgary is the 23rd. Again, Alberta's major centres are not great places for women to live, and there are a multitude of reasons for that. Some of the metrics that this organization uses talk about economic security for women. The income gap between men and women is most profound here in Alberta. Also, women in leadership, in municipal government, in industry: women aren't in those senior positions. It doesn't look at the provincial government. It just looks at the municipal government, so women in leadership is low.

Reports of health and well-being, you know, self-reports by women: stress is extremely high, and that's another huge issue and can really negatively impact women's lives. Another one is just personal security – that's another metric – like intimate partner violence, police-reported sexual assault, police-reported criminal harassment. Of course, that fits very well with Bill 14 as we move to make sure that judges have training so that they don't have prejudices against the survivors themselves. On personal security, we have high rates of all those things that I just said: intimate partner violence, police-reported sexual assault, and police-reported criminal harassment.

That's, you know, absolutely nothing to be proud of here in Alberta. I mean, what's more fundamental than that, the security of your person, that you can feel that you can go out and walk on the streets or go out in the evening or even be in your own home? We know that intimate partner violence is extremely high in our province. What's it like to live with the threat of that, to know that you may be hurt at any time? Of course, that is a negative indicator of a good place for women to live, and sadly Edmonton and Calgary are some of the worst places for women to live in Canada of the major centres.

Then the fifth indicator is education, actually. Again, Alberta lags behind other provinces.

Anyway, these are just some of the metrics that this study has used, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. I'd just commend the associate minister to look at this study and, you know, bring forward policies that really impact those indicators. I think that that could make a huge difference for women in our province, and I'd just encourage her to really look at some of these issues and also move legislation to support that.

Certainly, we know, as I said about personal security, that 1 in 3 women have experienced sexual assault, but only 1 in 10 report it. Again, I think it is a lot because of women feeling exactly that, that prejudice against them: no one is going to believe me. There could be self-blame, so they're not going to put themselves out there. They'll think: okay; well, I did this, and I did this. It is like blaming the victim. The survivors themselves are maybe thinking in their own head that they are responsible for it.

9:20

You know, it's so important that women feel that if they do step forward, then indeed they will be supported and that they won't be put before a judge who does have those prejudices and questions their integrity and creates further trauma for them.

You know, some years ago, when we were government, the Sexual Assault Centre had a campaign called I Believe You. That one sentence is so important when you're working with survivors because so many people don't believe them. Sadly, in my own extended family, well, one of my cousins – this happened to her. I guess that her mother didn't not believe her, but she didn't do anything about it. It was just, like: oh, well, you're fine. She minimized it. I mean, there are so many issues in our society about women coming forward and not being heard about this. This I Believe You campaign was, I thought, extremely powerful and really very respectful of the survivors themselves.

Certainly, in my experience as a social worker so many people that I worked with minimized whatever kind of abuse had happened to come their way and really didn't see themselves as worthy of – I don't know – being treated fairly. One of my jobs as a social worker was to honour them, to believe them, to support them, to help them kind of take that apart and understand why what happened to them wasn't okay and that they don't have to be in relationships like that. They're adults now. They have their own autonomy. They don't have to make that okay. I mean, that's the thing. A lot of times people who are survivors of abuse sort of make it okay what their abuser did. That, of course, is not okay.

Only 1 in 10 women report this. You know, making sure that judges have that training, have that understanding will make a significant difference for survivors coming forward to share their stories and then having justice done, very frankly, Mr. Speaker, so that this can't happen to someone else. I mean, I know that many survivors say: I came forward because I didn't want this to happen to anybody else. Good for them. They put themselves in harm's way, but good for them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second reading of Bill 14.

Ms Issik: Third reading.

The Speaker: Oh. Correction. Third reading.

Are there others? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to this bill. I am speaking to this bill in the month of May, which is sexual assault awareness week. To that end I'm going to begin my comments about this legislation and the necessity for it with a story from one of my constituents. I'm just scrolling through to pull it up here. It's a social media post. The post itself was made to support a fundraising effort for the child and youth advocacy centre, a place where children who have experienced sexual assault or sexual abuse trauma can go for better counselling services and an appropriate approach to supporting children through many of these traumatic events.

My friend Melanie works with her husband, Courtney Atkinson, at one of Lethbridge's largest real estate firms. In fact, the Atkinson Team at EXP Realty Lethbridge and the Atkinson Team at EXP Realty Medicine Hat have committed \$100,000 to the child and youth advocacy centre to assist with their building costs.

Melanie's post notes:

Kristine Cassie and Cheryl Pollmuller, among others, have raised enough awareness and money that the CYAC is currently functional with counseling services.

That is a good thing, that certainly began some years ago.

But the Centre is seeking monetary donations which will be used towards completing the physical space. A space that will make kids feel safe, comfortable and heard.

I'm going to just read really quickly from what happened to Melanie and what she was brave enough to share with the community

in service of making sure that we have these sorts of support services available to people of any age but, in particular, children. She writes:

As a very young girl I was sexually abused . . .

While I won't share the details of the abuse, I am going to share my experience regarding the process after the abuse was identified.

In the early 80s there wasn't much for education surrounding sexual abuse, in particular, what to look for, what to say, or how to support victims, particularly children.

At least as Melanie writes from her experience.

When [the person in question] was found to be a molester, I was taken to meet a social worker in a very clinical, dark and unfamiliar space. It was scary, uncomfortable and being there for 1 hour, I asked to never go there again. I was introduced to the social worker, taken from my mom and placed in a mahogany office alone with someone I had never met. From there I was given 2 dolls and asked to replicate the abuse. I . . . left without any understanding as to what or why that was happening. The [counsellor] meant well and the environment created was a product of knowledge at that time.

She writes:

My quietness, discomfort and stubbornness to go back for further sessions no doubt resulted in [the man's] 1 week jail time. I'm not sure if he was convicted, but I do know he [did continue] to abuse.

Things have changed drastically since then,

Melanie points out,

but the change needs [our] help.

This post then goes on to ask our community in Lethbridge and in southern Alberta to support the Chinook Sexual Assault Centre's efforts to fully fund the child and youth advocacy centre.

Melanie writes at the end:

I can tell you first hand that had there of been a CYAC things would of been [very] different. How I was approached would of been different. The safety I felt in sharing my story would of been different. The outcome would of been different. [The man in question] would likely of received a harsher conviction (if he received one at all) and less chance of abusing more kids.

I share that, Mr. Speaker, number one, because it is my job, first and foremost, to come to this place and share the stories of my community, and that is one. It came across my radar relatively recently because I have the honour and the privilege of being a friend of Melanie's. There are very few community endeavours where you don't see her and her partner, Courtney Atkinson, and Atkinson realty in some way, shape, or form trying to do what they can to build community, whether it's in the arts, in social services, as we saw, or in downtown revitalization efforts. I want to make sure that during this sexual assault month of May we honour and lift up those voices, not only the stories of what has happened but what people are trying to do make it better and how people are channelling their impatience with what has gone before, with the injustice of what has gone before, into doing something good.

So here we see where the system failed this particular child in the '80s. I think it does not defy imagination that the system, quote, unquote, in many ways likely continues to fail children and their families and certainly other survivors of sexual assault and sexual abuse. This is why we need an appropriate counselling and support system in order to make sure that justice is both done and seen to be done and felt to be done by the community, the family, and the survivors themselves.

I will table later on the recommendations to the government from the Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Services. They provided recommendations some months ago to the government around the uses of the victims of crime fund and appropriate counselling and

support services for victims. Why is this important and germane to this bill?

9:30

When I read through the language of the act, Mr. Speaker, it struck me that we are spending this time making sure that judges have the support that they need, but we still struggle with how to ensure that victims of crime have the support they need. You know, judges get all this professional development training, and that is good and right and nobody is saying there's a problem with it. This bill is good and right and I think is a step in the right direction, coming as it does out of certainly anecdotal stories that I have heard of survivors coming forward and how they go through the criminal justice system but also even stories that have hit the headlines coming out of our own province over the years: Justice McClung and the other fellow that saw fit to write some fairly egregious things in his decision. Certainly, action had to be taken by the federal Justice minister, because he was completely unfit to be hearing such cases and had no comprehension of the concept of trauma, victimization, and so on. So this is good.

In my view, there are a number of ways that both the federal government and the provincial government need to act to make sure that justices at all levels, whether it's Provincial Court, QB, or elsewhere, have the appropriate training in place. I'm glad that the government has taken action in this way.

The victims' rights movement in the United States came out of a development through the 1970s of two things. One was sexual assault and domestic violence survivors, primarily women, and the women's movement in the 1970s finding that they were not appropriately heard when they got into court, if they ever did. We note, in the background provided by the Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Services, that it remains the case that in only 5 per cent of instances of sexual assault survivors in Canada report to police, and the rate of attrition in sexual assault cases through the criminal justice system is very high. This obviously was also the case, and the women's movement grappled with this issue in both Canada and the United States.

But then there was in the United States one event that precipitated even more action around the concept of victims' rights, and that was the assassination of Harvey Milk, who was the first openly gay elected person, as far as we know, certainly in the United States and quite possibly in Canada as well – this was in the 1970s – and, really, in North America. He was assassinated by one of his fellow Board of Supervisors members in San Francisco – the city is run by a board of supervisors, not by a city council; anyway – and Mr. Milk's murderer got off very lightly through the criminal justice system. There was an incredible just roar of action across the continent about what happened and how the justice system dealt with that murder. As a result, that confluence of LGBT activists and the women's movement through the 1970s then became a societal push.

Now, what ended up happening, of course, through the 1980s was that this narrative of victims' rights was then sort of appropriated for a long time, you know, became an excuse for excessive criminalization and incarceration such that the United States now finds itself with the highest levels of incarceration, really, in the industrialized world, certainly among democracies. But the kernel of it remains that victims of serious and egregious crimes both need to have an appropriate support through the criminal justice system, and justice needs to be done by a criminal justice system that understands the trauma and the harm that has been caused to people and the life-altering effects of those crimes upon people.

You know, fast-forward to 2021, and here we are in the fall of 2021 with the Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Services

proposing six recommendations for a new Alberta victim assistance program that are specific to victims of sexual assault and sexual abuse in Alberta.

One of them is the approval of applications and adjudications of any appeals taking into consideration the unique characteristics of sexual assault trauma and the barriers and challenges that victims face as a result of the societal context of sexual violence in our province.

There are a number of other recommendations in terms of victims of sexual offences being eligible to apply for benefits with no timeline restrictions based on when the crime occurred and being excluded from application timelines that may apply to other offence categories.

Recommendation 3 is that the new program be a hybrid system that allows victims to access funds and community-based programs and services directly and also provide lump-sum payments to victims of sexual assault and sexual abuse; that the fund categories be expanded to include financial support during and after court proceedings.

Again, these recommendations have not been taken up by this government, and it has been almost two years since the victims of crime fund was raided to pay for other, no doubt virtuous, undertakings by government and public expenditure, that being, of course, the expansion of Crown prosecutors. That is fine, Mr. Speaker, but we have left victims behind. I wish that the government would take up their support of victims with as much enthusiasm as they bring forward this bill.

There is no question that victims of crime, particularly egregious crimes of sexual assault and sexual abuse, continue to require that support, and it is owed to them. We owe it to them as a society. We owe all kinds of other things, too, such as better education, better overall antipoverty strategies, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview pointed out, in terms of what we owe in terms a society to take care of one another and prevent these things from happening in the first place. Once they are in that criminal justice system, we need to make sure absolutely that judges are disabused of their preconceived notions, stereotypes, and so on but also that we as a society have done everything we can to repair the damage that has been done to victims.

The victims' rights movement in the first instance was about ensuring that people who are victims of intersectional violence and abuse, coming as it does out of the LGBT and women's movements of the 1970s – we owe it to ourselves to remind ourselves of that history and to move forward knowing what we know and doing better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others at third reading? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is an absolute pleasure to speak to this bill, Bill 14, Provincial Court (Sexual Assault Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022. When I did get up to speak to this bill previously during second reading, it was near the end of the morning and I didn't have a lot of time to put some ideas on the record, so I'm very eager to get some on the record now.

Last time I spoke to this, I had ended by saying that, you know, I was raised by a wonderful mother. She was a strong Latina feminist. I was mentioning that she was the kind of woman that didn't take any – how could we put it? I'm thinking of a specific word.

An Hon. Member: Crap.

An Hon. Member: Guff.

Member Loyola: Yeah. Okay. I'll go with that. It was said for me. That's the one. I was thinking another word.

She was super serious and super straight. You know, at a very early age my mother would tell me: I'm not your maid. She would make me wash my own clothes, iron my clothes, do things around the house.

9:40

I remember having discussions with my mother about how, you know, things are changing. She expressed to me one time that there have always been individuals, regardless of if they're women or men, who just believe in a fair society. To my mother, the problem, amongst the many others, when it came to the relationship between people of different genders was, of course, patriarchy when it came to her own personal experience. I think that's the real problem, the underlying cultural, political, economic, social problem that we really need to address as a Legislature. Now, we have so much work to do.

Of course, this bill addresses one particular aspect of our judicial system. I will argue that it does not go far enough, but before I do that, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to get a definition of patriarchy on the record so that we can think about this. It's defined as "a system of social structures and practices, in which men govern, oppress and exploit women." I go back to the comments of my mother and think that, well, you know, there have always been individuals who have been against the oppression and exploitation of women, but those people just haven't been in positions of power to actually change the law, to actually make a difference in changing the way that women are viewed in our society. I'm grateful that we've come a long way, but I would argue that even back then there were people who knew that it was wrong, but they just weren't the majority in order to make the change happen.

Now, the fact that women used to be considered property of a man: there were people who were against this. There were people who were against it, but they just weren't in positions of power to make it into law to recognize the sovereignty of a woman and the rights that a woman has. Now, luckily, we've made significant advances, and I think it has been because of the juxtaposition of patriarchal power and those who are consistently challenging it, those who see that it is wrong to have a patriarchal mentality – by that, I go back to the definition – that think that somehow it is appropriate to govern in terms of oppressing and exploiting women, that somehow that is right.

I want to be firm on the record and say that, you know, this is an all right piece of legislation for me. It's all right. It's definitely a step in the right direction. However, one of the things that I haven't heard in debate up until now and defended by the government or anyone in cabinet is why the existing judges don't have to go through this training. Like, that's what I find just highly questionable. If you agree that sexual assault awareness training is indeed necessary, why is it, then, only applicable to new hires into the judicial system? I just can't understand that, that somehow, you know, those that have already been in the system are somehow grandfathered in and they aren't going to have to go through the training. Those are the people that indeed need to be changed, need to understand that this is something very important in order to address it. As has been described by several of my colleagues on this side of the House, we're dealing with the actual impact on survivors of sexual assault.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

The other aspect that I find questionable is that – I believe it was last night in committee – there was an actual amendment that talked about involving individuals who are sexual assault survivors. This

was actually turned down by the members on the other side of the House, and I can't understand why. Why wouldn't you want to include individuals who are survivors of sexual assault and make sure that they're involved in any kind of educational program, especially for judges? Of course, this is an education program that – perhaps everybody who is in the public service should have to go through an educational program like this. I think that we really need to question ourselves as a Legislature on all the work that needs to be done in order to really rid our society of patriarchy and the oppression and exploitation of women. We have a long way to go. A long way to go.

You know, I don't want to get too partisan on this, but there are a lot of questions that I have when it comes to the actions of this government. It's important that we address these, but of course I haven't heard in the debate responses to these particular queries. I think that the Alberta public is due these answers, and it's really important.

We know, for example, that at the federal level there's a private member's bill before the House of Commons that seeks to update the federal legislation that mandates sexual assault law education and social context training. It was introduced on February 7 of this year.

Why did the associate minister choose to leave intimate partner violence out of the scope of this legislation, particularly since tracking the rates of police-reported intimate partner violence is one of the performance indicators of the Associate Ministry of Status of Women? You know, this is an important one. I think that it's really important to address that, well, all kinds of sexual abuse, sexual assault. All of that is enabled, I would say – that's the word that I'm really looking for – by a patriarchal system that somehow sees women as less in a society, so therefore it's okay to abuse them. That's the cultural context in which we are, Mr. Speaker, and that's the cultural context that a lot of individuals and specifically men in our society actually use to justify their actions when it comes to intimate partner violence.

I've heard from a number of constituents who, you know, are going through sexual assault experiences with their intimate partner. Police will show up at the residence, and rather than believe what the woman is saying and how she's been attacked or assaulted, somehow it's like the men are just allowed to carry on.

9:50

Even within our police system we need to, like, make sure that we are doing more to address and educate people when it comes to sexual assault awareness, especially when it comes to intimate partner violence. As was indicated by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, Edmonton and Calgary are two of the worst cities to live in for women, and this is one of the factors. This intimate partner violence is one of the factors, so it's surprising that the associate minister would leave this out of the legislation.

The Court of Queen's Bench undertakes training for federally appointed judges and new judges. So then it begs the question: what body is responsible for the training of judges and justices of the peace in the Provincial Court? Who's actually going to take this on? That's why the proposed amendment last night was dealing with this. How is this going to be done? Who is going to participate? Are individuals who are the survivors of sexual assault going to be permitted to at least provide insight into the education program? I think that that's something that would've been really good for the associate minister to actually include in this piece of legislation.

Of course, as with other bills, I can only imagine that perhaps the associate minister will be like: well, this will be set in regulation. We on this side of the House are left to just having to trust, and the Alberta public is having to trust that the government is actually

going to include this in regulation, but we have no indication as to whether it will be or not.

This bill legislates a requirement that in the future anyone seeking appointment as a provincial judge will be required to undertake sexual assault law and social context training. Who will be responsible for this training given that they are not yet judges? How much is this expected to cost, and how will those funds be delivered to the delivering bodies? How will it be guaranteed that the pretraining and posttraining will line up and ensure cohesiveness in the justice system, particularly for sexual assault and intimate partner violence cases? Of course, these are some of the questions that we still have, I would say, unanswered when it comes to this piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members looking to add to debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to see you in the chair this morning. I rise today to speak to Bill 14, the Provincial Court (Sexual Assault Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022. Like my hon. colleague, I also want to acknowledge that today, May 5, is Red Dress Day. Today is a day that brings awareness and calls to all Canadians to speak about violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people. I think that that's important to note specifically regarding this debate.

This is a call to action, and I think that when we look at our judges and our justice system, there's so much that needs to be done, and I think that seeing a requirement for sexual assault and social context training in order to be appointed as a provincial judge is a wonderful first step. However, you know, I've been on the record before that I believe that this is something that should be extended to all sitting judges.

I believe that we in Canada have made progress when it comes to awareness and rights. However, it's fairly new still, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't until 2016 that we celebrated the 100-year anniversary of women's right to vote. I proudly wear my Mace pin that has the 100 years. As a woman in politics it's something that I absolutely do not take for granted. That's new in Canada.

I think that we need to ensure that the education is happening to those that have such an impact on individuals that have suffered often traumatic crimes. When we look at Canada and our justice system, it wasn't until, actually, January 4, 1983, that it became a criminal offence for a man's sexual assault against his wife. Nineteen eighty-three.

Unfortunately, there is still a marital myth that exists within our justice system. We saw in 2017 a justice use the marital rape myth in his decision between a husband and wife and whether or not a sexual assault occurred. His ruling quoted incredible, disgusting remarks about this marital myth. That's 2017. It was put on the record that it was clear to him that her allegations were an attempt to influence the family law proceeding that was before the courts at the time, that a woman couldn't claim sexual assault from her partner, and that the intention was to have an outcome and an impact on their family law court matter that was before the courts. I can tell you that this is something that occurs today. This was 2017.

There are many, many myths that exist around sexual violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment. There is so much language when it comes to definitions of consent and an understanding of rape culture. We're still at a place where it's upon the victim to defend themselves and to provide enough context and understanding about what's happening in this situation.

[The Speaker in the chair]

That's by the time it gets to court. We've heard in this Chamber significant statistics around sexual assault and sexual violence and sexual harassment. We know that for it to actually get to the court process is a very, very unlikely outcome.

There are so many barriers when it comes to individuals reporting sexual violence. When we look at sexual violence on men, the stigma exists to even tell someone that it occurred. We have a society that has so much judgment around sexual violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment. To be brave enough and courageous enough to tell someone and then, hopefully, that individual is believed: hearing the words "I believe you" can have such an impact on what happens next.

I know that as a social worker I participated in group training. It was a program that was between Children's Services and the Edmonton police, and it was specific around children and sexual abuse. I can tell you of the experience of listening to the police officers and the anxiety that they indicated they got when they received a call and it was child sexual abuse. Many indicated that they did not feel equipped to respond to that call. It's because there wasn't an education, there wasn't an understanding of how we support individuals that are reporting sexual assault. This training was for those that expressed an interest in wanting to come forward and have more understanding and be able to better respond to those calls.

10:00

When we look at Bill 14, it shouldn't be a choice. We look at the existing judges that are out there, and I think that having this training would be so beneficial to Albertans in better outcomes, and it would have a ripple effect on those that come forward, those that report. I think that this is a good first step, but it could be so much better, Mr. Speaker.

With that, I'd like to end my remarks. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the hon. associate minister to close debate.

Ms Issik: Waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 22

Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate May 4: Member Irwin]

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise to speak to Bill 22, Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. It's a long name, but I think that within it we see some changes that are quite reasonable and positive. You know, in this bill we see some proposals that are likely to modernize Alberta's electricity grid and, if implemented, will likely have positive long-term impacts on our electricity system and impacts for Albertans across the board, whether we're talking about opportunities for investment or opportunities to have more affordable electricity. I've appreciated the debate that we've heard so far, and it's nice to be able to stand in this House every once in

a while, not too often but every once in a while, and be able to agree with the decisions that this government is making.

Obviously, the idea of modernizing the system specifically in one key area we are talking about in terms of battery storage: it's an important step forward and something that is increasingly becoming prominent in terms of our ability to provide sustainable and reliable energy to Albertans and to all of the world, really. Again, when we look at battery storage resources, it seems like there is a lot of potential here, quite clearly, and also a lot of concern, I suppose, about the ability of it to disrupt the status quo, especially in a system like our own, where for so long we have been dependent on coal. We continue down a path of transitioning away from that, which is positive, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker. While we in the opposition and the current UCP government might disagree about how we get there, I think that through this legislation, specifically, again, around the opportunity for – providing a regulatory framework for, in this instance, battery storage is an important move and something that we need to move forward as quickly as we can as long as we get it right.

Now, I would highlight, as many other members, many other colleagues of mine have brought forward, that we had seen similar legislation introduced last fall. The government made a decision to essentially abandon that, and now we see it reintroduced six months later. I'd be interested to find out exactly what happened through that process, if maybe they got some pieces wrong, if some new, supplemental information came forward that they felt was important and was potentially missing from the legislation previously. I'd be interested to find out what has changed over that six months. Maybe the minister can answer that.

Again, while this legislation is incredibly important as we look to transition to more renewables, which is an important endeavour, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we currently are faced with skyrocketing bills. While this legislation is important for the long-term sustainability, reliability of our system and ensuring that we are able to manage costs to consumers, the unfortunate piece that is missing from this government in terms of their own policies and direction is real support now, today, and in the near future to ensure that Albertans are able to afford their electricity right now, because so many Albertans have come forward sharing their concerns with the cost of electricity, the cost of utilities across the board. Unfortunately, we have seen a real lack of commitment on that issue from this UCP government.

Of course, they've removed caps that would have protected Albertans on their utilities, among many other issues that we've talked about in this House, also including tuition and automobile insurance. You know, these are all impacts or costs that are having consequences for Alberta families because this government is so unwilling to take action on those. I really hope that this government has been able to implement or pass legislation regarding rebates for utilities, that in the near future – it should have happened weeks if not months ago, Mr. Speaker. We've been talking about it for several months now, and the government has made that commitment several months ago, that Albertans would see rebates and support on their utilities, but unfortunately that hasn't been the case so far. Now that they have that opportunity, hopefully we will see that very shortly. Better late than never, I suppose. The fact is that thousands of Albertans are currently being cut off from their utilities. That is simply not acceptable, and this government must take action.

I will digress from that point for now, Mr. Speaker. I do want to get back to Bill 22 and look at some of the main areas that are being considered through this legislation. Defining energy storage is a big one and something that is incredibly important as we consider moving forward with the regulations and ensuring that we are able to set up a system that provides opportunities for companies to join

in on this important work and to, I guess, have the certainty that Alberta has the framework in place to ensure that when they are coming to the government with proposals for whether it be renewable projects or energy storage projects, the framework is in place to support that work and to ensure that their investment is well placed.

Another main area in here is the self-supply and export piece, which is another very important piece of this legislation; beyond that, requiring distribution facility owners to prepare long-term distribution system plans, which will have to receive regulatory approval; and finally, sections dealing with the dissolving of the Balancing Pool. You know, when we look at preparing for the long-term distribution system's plans, again, this is an important piece along with energy storage to ensure that the market is going to work effectively and that it's sustainable and that we aren't creating any, I guess, undue issues as we transition to a grid that is more based on renewables and less on the traditional burning of fossil fuels or, specifically, coal generation.

Again, these are issues that we in the opposition take very seriously. It's important that we do make that transition, so ensuring that there is legislation and a framework in place is very important. Again, when we look at the move to define energy storage, the lack of definition previously prevented effective regulations and made these storage projects more difficult to move forward, so this will provide certainty to Alberta investors or investors that are looking to Alberta for opportunities.

10:10

Now, the International Energy Agency states that "Global installed storage capacity is forecast to expand by 56% in the next five years to reach over 270 [gigawatts] by 2026." This is an incredible figure, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, and something that we can't take lightly. I think that as Albertans we want to take part in this energy transformation, and we need to ensure, again, that the regulatory framework is in place to be a part of that. We see investors and institutions increasingly looking to opportunities to invest in renewable and less so in the more traditional generation, specifically again looking at coal. While we look to make that transition, it has always been a concern in terms of reliability, so the move to provide opportunities and a framework for energy storage is so important as we move forward.

Again, the main driver for this is an increasing need for system flexibility and storage around the world to fully utilize and integrate larger shares of variable renewable energy into power systems. There's no doubt that there are concerns about reliability with our renewable energy options. While Alberta is, I would say, one of the best places in the world to consider building a renewable energy project, whether we're talking about solar, whether we're talking about wind, there are issues in terms of ensuring that that system is reliable and available to all Albertans at any time of the day, no matter when they need it. So this move to define energy storage, again, is an important move that I completely support. But I do wonder as well why it took quite this long and why we saw the legislation come forward in previous sessions, about six months ago, I believe, and didn't see that move forward at that time.

I think that there are many opportunities for investors that will be enabled by this framework, specifically around the idea of value stacking and opportunities to potentially make more money based on when we are releasing that energy back onto the market. I can appreciate that as well, more opportunities for investors. Again, while we may disagree quite often about specifically how we transition away from coal-fired generation and how we support those workers in that transition and potentially even what projects we might believe to be the way of the future in terms of whether it's

renewable and how we support those investors to bring their dollars and those jobs to our province, I think that, at the end of the day, with this legislation it is ensuring that there is a framework in place to support a sustainable energy market into the future, to in the long term provide relief to Albertans.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that while this is good news for our economy and our electricity system in the long term, Albertans are expecting more from this government when it comes to support in the short term for so many who have been affected by the pandemic. The job loss and the loss of economic opportunities have left a lot of Albertans feeling the pinch, and they need support today. Unfortunately, this government made the decision, again, to not extend the cap on utilities that we had previously put in place, and many Albertans are feeling that pain now. While I support this legislation, so much more needs to be done by this government because they have failed to support the Albertans who need it most. Unfortunately, right now many of them are facing power cut-offs. If that hasn't happened already, that might be happening in the very near future.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat, but I do appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. I do see myself supporting that, and with that I'll take my seat.

Thank you.

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

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, like many of my colleagues, I see the positive aspects of this bill and just wanted to summarize some of the things that are within my understanding. In this bill we have four main areas. There's defining energy storage, the self-supply and export, then we have the requiring distribution facility owners to prepare long-term distribution system plans which will have to receive regulatory approval, and sections dealing with the dissolving of the Balancing Pool.

Of course, energy storage was previously undefined, and this is largely because energy storage has traditionally not been a factor in electricity grids. The definition seems to enable energy storage projects, and the lack of definition previously prevented effective regulations and made energy storage projects more difficult to move forward. This will allow energy storage to be integrated into distribution and transmission, which could help lower transmission costs over time. Energy storage will also be important to guarantee reliability and lower power costs going forward.

On that note, I just want to say that for constituents of mine who have been focused on being as environmentally friendly as possible, who have even put solar panels up on their houses, on their roofs, some of them on the roof of their house and their garage, one of the things that they would constantly talk to me about is, "Okay; well, being able to be off-grid but then also being able to sell some of that energy back into the system," so this is an important step. I think that for those constituents that have been ahead of the game for a while now – I'm talking about constituents that have had solar panels on the top of their house for a decade if not two already, who made the initial investment a long time ago because they knew it was the right way to go – they'll be happy to know that this government is catching us up in legislation by actually defining energy storage, bringing that into the bill. I think that those constituents will be highly supportive of something like this.

Then, of course, that will truly help the industry as a whole or the economy as a whole, as it involves several industry players, to help move in that particular direction, which will bring us to more

environmentally friendly practices here in the province of Alberta. That I highly encourage, what this government is doing.

The bill defines energy storage to recognize the unique role energy storage can play in our electricity system and support more energy storage projects to go forward, and then the Electric Utilities Act defines energy storage resource as the energy that is stored for the purpose of energy storage as separate from a generation unit. It says:

the component of an energy storage facility that uses a technology or process that is capable of using electric energy as an input, storing the energy for a period of time and then discharging electric energy as an output, and includes a share of the following associated facilities that are necessary for the safe, reliable and economic operation of the energy storage resource, which may be used in common with other energy storage resources.

In the Hydro and Electric Energy Act it defines an energy storage facility as "a facility that uses any technology or process that is capable of using electric energy as an input, storing the energy for a period of time and then discharging electric energy as an output."

10:20

The Alberta Utilities Commission Act brings energy storage under the Alberta Utilities Commission's process and clarifies how storage has to follow the rules and mandates of the electricity market. It enables storage as part of the distribution and transmission systems, but these storage facilities, owned by distribution facility owners and transmission facility owners, are prohibited from participating in the competitive energy-only market. They recover their costs through the guaranteed rate of return that they receive from other transmission and distribution infrastructure. So to go that route, DFOs have to prove that a competitive option is not in the public interest or possible. This does not currently apply to the transmission facility owners, of course.

The bill speaks of allowing unlimited supply with export. Of course, it defines, under the Electric Utilities Act, "production of electric energy on a property of which a person is the owner or a tenant where any of the electric energy is consumed on that property by that owner or tenant." Given the minimum scale of five megawatts this will likely only affect industrial consumers. Previously a self-supplier had to get an exemption to export. Cogeneration facilities that feed it back to the grid are an example of that. Homeowners with solar panels that sell back to the grid are not affected by this as the Alberta Utilities Commission has its own process for that.

Under Bill 22 companies that are self-supplying and exporting can be required to pay a tariff by the Alberta Utilities Commission. Previously self-supply and export facilities did not pay a tariff, which allowed them to lower their transmission costs, which then ultimately had to be paid by other consumers. If done correctly, this could lower transmission costs in the long term. So facilities that were operational before January 1, 2022, can apply to continue to be classified as industrial systems and continue under the rules that they currently operate. And certain facilities that technically fall under self-supply and export, but it might be desirable for them to produce electricity, can be regulated separately. Flare gas is one example that this may apply to. Nigel Bankes estimated that in 2020 around 5,004 megawatts of approved capacity in Alberta was classified as industrial systems. Alberta had a total capacity close to 16,000 megawatts.

The bill also speaks about, as I mentioned at the beginning, requiring distribution facility owners, or DFOs, to prepare long-term distribution system plans, which will have to receive regulatory approval. The model is in place for transmission. This can help with planning for the transition to increased electrification such as more use in electric vehicles, for example. Currently it can

be the case that the person that causes a need for a distribution system update has to bear the cost, which could be a user of an electric vehicle. It does require distribution facility owners to consider nonwire alternatives where they are economic. The act does not define nonwires. The Hydro and Electric Energy Act definition of transmission line includes wires, which “means a system or arrangement of lines of wire or other conductors and transformation equipment, wholly in Alberta, whereby electric energy, however produced, is transmitted in bulk, and includes” the transmission circuits composed of conductors that form the minimum set required to so transmit electric energy and insulating and supportive structures, substations, and operational and control devices.

The bill also talks about sections dealing with the dissolution of the Balancing Pool. It allows an administrative fee to be charged to finance the Alberta utility advocate – the advocate was previously funded through the Balancing Pool – so the fee would go on Albertans’ bills, but it would likely be rather low or not impact Albertans substantially.

It moves the administration of small-scale generation from the Balancing Pool to the independent system operator. According to the government it is intended to work the same, and owners will likely not notice the difference. The Balancing Pool used to contract the bidding to an independent contractor. Now the independent operator will do the same and bid into the market the same way. It allows the government to designate an entity to make regulation with regard to municipality-owned utilities such as payments under the payment of tax under the Income Tax Act at the federal level or the Alberta Corporate Tax Act or other payments that would have gone to the Balancing Pool. Previously the power was with the Balancing Pool.

Of course, this is the, I would say, second reiteration of this particular bill. The minister took a while in having to bring back this particular piece of legislation. Essentially, the previous one was just kind of, like, abandoned. Now he’s brought back this similar bill, so I think it’s important to highlight the differences between the last bill and this one. Of course, the previous bill had no provisions dealing with the dissolution of the Balancing Pool. You know, rather than the highly charged rhetoric that we are getting from the associate minister, it would be ideal if he could actually bring insight into the debate on why this is being included now so that we could hear it from his own perspective. Under the previous bill there was no provision for current industrial systems to apply to continue under their current arrangements. So these are some of the questions that I have of the minister.

On that note, I would just say that the debate on this particular bill has been highly charged. I understand, Mr. Speaker, that on both sides of the House, you know, there’s rhetoric shared, I would say. But with this particular bill I have to say how disappointed I am because even right off the bat this minister has just attempted to create discord in the House. How can I say it? It’s just – well, what I will say is that the minister, including in question period, makes personal attacks on the critic for that position. I would really appreciate it if this minister could really stick to the legislation, as I have tried in debate on this particular Bill 22, to discuss the issues, understand why in this reiteration of the bill specifically he is going to be cancelling out the Balancing Pool, and the insights that he has gained from stakeholders, perhaps, on why that is the most appropriate move to make.

As I’ve mentioned before in debate, one of the ideological perspectives of the members on the other side is that by introducing competition, it will bring the price down. Honestly, since 1996 this has not been the case for a lot of Albertans. When we moved from

the traditional system to the market-only system, it was promised that the price of electricity would go down, and of course that’s not what we’re seeing. Like, they’ve had since 1996 to actually demonstrate this would fail.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

10:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this Bill 22, which actually makes a number of positive changes to modernize our electricity grid. I’m sure that, if done correctly, these changes will have positive long-term impacts. However, we have also seen that Albertans are struggling with the rising utility costs, and they’re looking for something in terms of relief that they can avail right now. The government so far has been dithering on that file, and they have used the debate on this bill to make accusations that somehow the rising utility costs are because of overbuilds in the transmission system that we are responsible for somehow, that coal-fired plants that were retired earlier than their actual retirement date, which was done under our government, are the reason for the soaring energy prices.

I will briefly touch on that, too, but let me say that the concept of energy storage is critical to a reliable and efficient electricity grid. It is critical to reducing GHG emissions. We have technology now. There are enough technological developments that we can produce energy, when conditions are favourable, through solar, through wind, and through renewable resources, and we can store it for later use. That certainly is a step in the right direction, and that will help us make our grid more efficient, more reliable, and more environmentally friendly. So that is a good step.

Similarly, I think the bill requires the distribution facility owners to produce long-term distribution system plans. Usually government doesn’t like planning because they believe in free market, but now they’re requiring those distribution facility owners to have those long-term plans through the regulatory process, of course. That will, again, certainly help us make our electricity system a bit more reliable, a bit more predictable. That’s about this.

They’re also dissolving the Balancing Pool. Again, that was the PC’s doing back in the day when they deregulated the market and gave sweetheart deals to their insiders through PPAs and all that. They’re now dissolving that. But six months ago they had similar legislation that they abandoned, and they never said anything about it.

Let’s look at who was building transmission lines. They often blame that they were built under our government. I was elected seven years ago today, and I don’t remember in those seven years that there was any major transmission project undertaken. So that must be before we were elected.

Back in 2009-2010 the PCs even granted themselves powers to approve transmission lines without any public consultations whatsoever, and that’s when they started building transmission lines. I was the critic for a little bit of this file, and the major lines – that is, the western Alberta transmission line and the eastern Alberta transmission line – were both approved in 2012, Mr. Speaker. For the record we got elected on May 5, 2015, so that was certainly before we were elected to this Legislature, before we were the government. That was their predecessors who went on to build these transmission lines. My colleagues who were then part of this Legislature – the Member for Edmonton-North West, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and the leader back then, Brian Mason – were all opposed to this. They all cautioned the government of the day that that will result in spikes in utility costs. But, no, they did not listen.

Somehow when the minister or anyone from the UCP gets up and says, “Oh, it’s because of the NDP; they built transmission lines,” two things come to mind. Either they’re completely unaware of this file, what happened, incompetent, or they’re not up front with Albertans about this. I find it dishonest that the government will try to kind of jam every blame between 2015 and ’19 and forget about the rest of Alberta’s history. Those transmission lines that the government mentions every day, that the minister mentions every day, were built by their predecessors, by the PCs, and we were opposed to those lines then.

The second thing. The minister even suggested: oh, well, they didn’t build it, but they didn’t cancel it. There is a thing called a contract, and when it’s signed – especially when they were signed by the PCs, they were so onerous and restrictive to get out of that it would have cost Albertans more to get out of those contracts. That’s what they have done with PPAs. The profit goes to private companies; losses come to the Balancing Pool, to be shared by all Albertans. That’s what they did with the Redwater Sturgeon refinery contracts. That’s what they did with those contracts for seniors’ homes. That’s how they used to write contracts. The profits will be privatized – they will go to corporate owners – and losses will be socialized. These contracts were no different. That was the reason that no government would be able to get out of those contracts.

Another thing that we get to hear is that we retired the coal power plants, and somehow that is the reason for energy spikes. Before that, again in 2012, there were 18 coal plants in Alberta, and 12 of those plants were shut down by Stephen Harper’s Conservative government, that the Premier was a part of. Twelve out of 18 plants: they were shut down under a regulation called reduction of carbon dioxide emissions from coal-fired generation of electricity regulations statutory orders and regulations 2012-167.

10:40

Before, I guess, talking about coal plants, I would urge the minister to learn his file, to read the developments, quite recent developments, that have occurred under federal and provincial Conservatives. There were only six of the 18 plants remaining. TransAlta, ATCO, and Capital Power: they own them. Not only did we work with these companies; we also worked and consulted with those who were working at these sites. We provided \$40 million to make sure that those who work at these plants have an opportunity to get retrained, have an opportunity to adapt and be able to maintain their jobs with upgrading in other sectors; \$40 million was spent on that.

Then government talks about \$1.36 billion. Sure. That was the money that was pledged over 14 years to convert these six plants to gas so that Albertans have a reliable supply of electricity going forward. That was investment in our grid. It was not an investment like KXL, a pipeline to absolutely nowhere, just a blind bet on Donald Trump getting re-elected, \$1.3 billion. That’s the background when the government gets up and says that we shut down coal plants or we built electricity grids and that’s why we are seeing spikes in the prices.

There is another thing. They never mention why we are seeing rising utility costs, and they’re so scared of saying that, and that’s that the corporate profits are through the roof in the last six to 12 months. Every time the minister gets up, he talks about everything but will never mention that there is that corporate profit thing that is reason one for rising utility costs. Then for the last three or four months the minister has been promising rebates, and he has not been able to get that right, get that \$50 cheque. He has not yet figured out how to send that to Albertans.

So the changes, as they stand in this legislation, are good, but I don’t trust this minister or this government that they will be able to get it right. It’s important that we get these changes right and we make sure that our grid has storage capacity and, whenever we can, we utilize more wind, more solar, more renewables and save them so that we can use them at a future date. That will help us reduce our greenhouse gas emissions as well. That is good for our grid, and that is good for our environment as well.

How much time, Mr. Speaker, do I have?

The Speaker: Eight seconds.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a second time]

Bill 21

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate May 4: Mr. Shepherd]

The Speaker: Hon. members, second reading of Bill 21. It seems to me the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West is rising.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you. You saw my clue there. I had my mask hooked onto my glasses. I don’t know if any of you have ever done that, projected your glasses across the room with the elastic from your mask. I’ve done it several times over the last couple of years.

Thanks for the opportunity to speak to Bill 21. In reviewing this bill, one thing that strikes me is that, you know, with these red tape reduction bills – right? – it’s kind of like throwing a new coat of paint on a very old idea, an idea that I just generally as a legislator don’t accept, which is omnibus legislation from a whole wide range of different areas and departments and ministries, with no particular connection to one or the other.

Mr. Speaker, you know as well as I do that in using omnibus legislation, or in this case, as I say, putting a new coat of paint on it and calling it a red tape reduction bill, by having perhaps some ideas that have merit combined together in the same bill with something that’s obscure and probably slightly devious or even malicious, they cancel each other out. Quite frankly, if you have ideas that are all just kind of jammed together in what I would say is sort of omnibus legislation, then you’ve created something that is usually pretty hard to vote for unless you are just a well-whipped government member. Then, you know, good luck, right? So this is kind of that, I think, Bill 21.

It has 16 different sections to it, amending different acts in a whole number of different departments. There’s an Animal Health Act change. There’s a Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act change. There’s a change to the Cooperatives Act, the Education Act, health statutes, highways, the Local Authorities Election Act, the Motor Vehicles Accident Claims Act, the Municipal Government Act, pharmacy, provincial parks, lands, railways, residential tenancies, rural utilities, and surveys. The challenge: if you can find a thread through any of those things, I mean, good luck, right? Of course, the government will say: “Well, it’s all red tape – right? – and away we go. That’s what we’re here for, to reduce red tape.” But, you know, you have to look at each thing. You just can’t have a checklist and say, “We can measure how many regulations we’ve removed by weight,” somehow just putting them all in a box and weighing the box and saying, “We took out 15 kilograms of red tape, so that’s a good thing.”

10:50

You have to actually analyze these things and just make sure that there is no compromise to the public good and public safety and all of those things, why people have made regulations and laws in the first place. Sometimes laws are outdated, right? You might have a law around, you know, which wagon should give way on Jasper Avenue: oxen or horses? Maybe there are not so many oxen and horse carts on Jasper Avenue anymore, so you can change that law, right? But some laws work pretty well in perpetuity, too, around stealing and public safety, public health, and so forth. Let's just take a look at some of these and see what actually this UCP government is trying to do with Bill 21.

The first one is around the Animal Health Act, removing regulation and removing the need to report notifiable diseases within 24 hours from legislation down to regulation, so sort of downgrading this protection for animals and so forth. You know, we just don't have to look any further than the front page of the news to be concerned about this downgrading of protection to our agriculture industry, because, of course, we're right in the midst of an avian flu outbreak – right? – which is spreading across the province and the country and North America at quite a rapid rate, so any compromise to the obligation to report notifiable diseases and to do it in a timely manner is a cause for concern.

I remember – probably many of us do – the mad cow disease issue, right? It was really causing a lot of concern around our beef industry, and when the Premier of the day intimated that you shoot, shovel, and shut up, that didn't go over really well. Of course, not only was it compromising one of our essential agriculture industries, the beef industry, but it had an element of dishonesty and a lack of accountability built into it. Really, when we make laws here and regulations and so forth, that is what they are all founded on, which is reliability and security and trust.

You know, making this change to the Animal Health Act, degrading the reporting of the presence of notifiable disease within 24 hours from legislation to regulation, you've got to wonder what and why that is taking place here. Perhaps the minister can explain that to us.

The second one, the second section that I see, is in regard to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. You know, again, you don't have to look any further than the front page of the news to see that we've just witnessed the most deadly year on record for children in care, and then this red tape section is removing statutory time limits on residential facilities in the child intervention system, again just pulling up an electric third rail of concern that we have around the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. This change says that it only will apply to renewals, but really, if this government was serious about only wanting this change to apply to renewals, they could have amended the act to state that explicitly. Instead, they've failed to do so, and again that whole foundation of trust is compromised, I would suggest. So concern number two. Just rolling through here.

The third section that is being changed in this Bill 21 is around the Cooperatives Act. I just want to know on these changes: have they been consulted on? Is it something that co-operatives have in fact asked for, right? There are so many different versions of co-operatives, Mr. Speaker, as you probably know, and they're engaged in so many different industries and not necessarily having a lot in common. Is there some particular part of the co-operative community in Alberta that was looking for changes? There are, in fact, 90 subsections that are making changes here to the Cooperatives Act, so it's not insubstantial.

One of the ones that's most significant is that the bill now would only require 25 per cent of members of a co-operative to have

Canadian citizenship as opposed to 50 per cent. I mean, I think that that is probably not unreasonable. I'm just curious to know what precipitated that, though. The government also is stating changes to make more use of electronic records and processes for a lot of the paperwork that's concerned around co-operatives. I mean, that seems pretty straightforward. Then there are lots of clauses that seem to update sections with new language, talking about directorships, commissions, and so forth.

Again, my question, Mr. Speaker, is just that this seems to be looking at specific types of co-operatives, and I'm curious to know how this was consulted on. Were these changes brought forward by co-operatives, or was it the government just presuming that this was some version of modernization? Are they just looking for ways to check that box to throw more regulations into the bin so that they can hit their quota of red tape reduction?

The next section that is in this Bill 21 is around the Education Act, and this is talking about private schools and the collection of tuition fees. We saw some quite public confusion when this was announced, some discrepancy between the red tape minister's version of events and the Minister of Education's. You know, again, I think that all that did was help to add to the confusion around the financing of different types of schools here in the province. It didn't help to clarify anything at all, really. Making this kind of a change – right? – in the Education Act as part of an omnibus bill, again, immediately raises suspicion amongst people as to what is being changed and why and why there would be confusion. Confusion, Mr. Speaker, of course, breeds suspicion always.

I'm just curious to know how the government managed to get so far off message. Were they trying one thing and thought quickly that it's not going to work, so they scrambled to do another? I'm not the only one who would like to know. I mean, it seems fairly obvious that they were trying to play some kind of politics, to curry favour with some groups, and all it really did was add to the confusion and uncertainty around education in this province.

The next section that this Bill 21 seems to be dealing with is in regard to the Health Statutes Amendment Act. I have never heard the minister – probably the Health minister would be better to explain it and not add that confusion of two ministers, like we saw with the Education Act changes. Why is this necessary? You know, this was an amendment act that just came through here last year, right? I seem to remember debating it, so it's not a very old one. I'm just curious to know what the changes are.

I mean, again, this could be something that could be part of a miscellaneous statutes act, right? That's another common tool that's used in parliamentary systems. What you do, in case you don't know, folks out there, is that you talk to all parties in the Legislature, in this case the Official Opposition, and you make an agreement beforehand so that the miscellaneous statutes don't get in the way of more substantial debate that needs to be taken here in the Legislature, right?

Instead, we seem to be blurring those lines by building this new thing, which is really an old thing, as I said, a new coat of paint on this red tape reduction scheme that the government has come up with. Really, something like this could belong in a miscellaneous statutes act, which, I suspect, will still come forward here, Mr. Speaker, before the end of this legislative session. I fully expect we will see one of those. Maybe this section 5 could have been part of that. It's entirely possible. Some free advice from me, through you, to the government.

The next section, the Highways Development and Protection Act, seems to be something that we have no concern about. But, again, using that suggestion that I just put forward, when you're making such a minor change like this, just throw it into a miscellaneous

statutes act, have a prior agreement with the Official Opposition, and Bob's your uncle, right? That's the way you do it.

11:00

The next section is the Local Authorities Election Act, section 7: again, you know, fairly straightforward, talking about making the campaign disclosures for municipal and school board elections. It's interesting that the Edmonton municipal political contribution lists were just kind of coming out here today in the news. Again, this is absolutely essential information for people to see how much people are spending on their municipal campaigns and who is contributing, right? It is worth while to know, and it is certainly an important part of our democracy. Any time you have a campaign on any level, even if it's a leadership campaign, and you are not properly disclosing who is financing that leadership campaign, then it compromises the integrity of that election, and it compromises people's trust again. You know, we don't have to go any further than to look at the outstanding campaign contribution files that should have been disclosed by the UCP during their leadership campaign. As these things hang on for years, so grows the lack of trust and the greater suspicion, like, of what was really going on.

Again, moving forward on the red tape reduction, section 9 . . . [Mr. Eggen's speaking time expired] Oh, dear. Time flies when you're having fun, eh?

The Speaker: Hon. members, the bill before the Assembly is the red tape reduction act. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 21 – the book, really – Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Yeah. It's a little over 100 pages, so it really had to be bound. This is an omnibus bill, of course. It seems like the ministry of red tape reduction is responsible for – I haven't kept count, actually, but there have been several of these bills. You know, it's always interesting to me to see what difference it makes when the UCP was in opposition and when the UCP is in government. When they were in opposition, if we dared to bring any kind of omnibus legislation, even a couple of acts together to present a bill, they would cry foul and say: "This is way too much legislation to have together. This is way too much for us to have to analyze. It's unfair of the government. You're ramming this through, and this isn't okay." But, as I said, we've had several of these omnibus bills from specifically the red tape ministry.

You know, it's just very cavalierly done; as the member before me spoke, saying that it's like 15 different pieces of legislation that are sort of all put together in this bill without necessarily any congruence, any relatedness. Some of it is administrative, certainly, but other parts of it make a significant difference, and other parts of it are just plain confusing. So for us to understand the legislation, I think it's important for the government to, you know, parse that out, make sense of it for Albertans because if we as legislators need to tackle this, I mean, the average Albertan is certainly going to be confused by the magnitude and, yeah, the confusing things.

Even ministers of the government have said that are not – you know, one minister said one thing, and one minister says the other, and they're not the same. Let me just say that, you know, it really questions the competence of this government. Certainly, I know that the UCP wants us to trust them, but unfortunately so many times they are not trustworthy, and that is a great tragedy. We want our governments to be trustworthy, and we want them to fulfill on what they say they will and have integrity, but sadly it seems like that's not the playbook of this government.

I'm going to start with the public lands piece of this legislation because I think this is perhaps one of the key issues with this legislation. The changes proposed will, you know, sort of create a patchwork of rules and weaken environmental protections. This isn't our Official Opposition saying this, necessarily. It's the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. They certainly expressed a deep concern, and they want certainly to be heard by the government. They want consultation before adopting this legislation into law.

What they identify: some of the issues are just the breadth of the changes. It's so tremendously broad. You know, to hear the minister speak, it's just like: oh, it's just about changing a few signs in a particular park. Mr. Speaker, that's ridiculous. It's not about that, and you can see that right in the legislation. I'm just looking on page 95, and it just says:

Minister's directives and codes

1.2 The Minister may set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines, objectives or other rules relating to any matter in respect of which a regulation may be made under this Act.

Well, that's not just changing signs, Mr. Speaker. That's just government rhetoric. This is a profound shift and gives the minister extraordinary powers that, you know, he doesn't have any oversight regarding.

Of course, this is an organization, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, that cares very much about Alberta parks and is dedicated to making sure – and they are certainly one of the stakeholders that should be consulted with. They're asking the government: please let's meet to discuss this because this seems to be much broader than certainly indicated by the talking notes of the minister. Of course, the issues are the breadth of the changes, so broad, going well beyond the changing of the signage, which is what the minister wants us all to believe.

I'll just say once again that we know we can't trust what the minister is saying. Certainly, the society is concerned that inappropriate recreational usage may create conflict for Albertans using public lands. There could be quite distinct and different expectations, rules, guidelines – what are all the things? – objectives at individual parks. You know, they went to one provincial park last weekend, and now we're going to another one this weekend, but actually you can't do those same kinds of activities, so who's going to enforce all of that? Is that just going to be left to regular Albertans to try to say, "Well, I'm just here to ride my bike"? Someone else has a motorized vehicle of some sort, and they think that they can both coexist, and sometimes the coexistence is difficult. Having no continuity will create some havoc, I would say.

I do want to, you know, I guess, commend the government to listen, to listen to the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, whose, I think, concerns are quite valid. Certainly, our critic for Environment and Parks has concurred with the concerns that have been presented and has spoken about that. I do recommend that the government listen and make sure that they're not creating more problems. Hopefully, legislation changes are improving our province, not creating more havoc in our province. That is a significant part of the bill that I think is questionable and certainly is of concern.

I guess one of the concerns of this government for me is just that they have continued to give ministers extraordinary powers in areas that show no oversight. I know that Bill 78 gives the Minister of Seniors and Housing – she can designate affordable housing. What's affordable housing? She gets to just decide that, and that can have huge implications for funding, for support, for people having access to affordable housing. You know, this is something that we've seen previously from this government, and I just caution

them that again they are doing that with little oversight. Will they be creating more confusion and concerns rather than helping the situation? Despite the minister's comments it is much more than just changing a sign. It is very, very broad, what they're indicating they will have the power to change or the minister will have the authority to do.

11:10

We also know – again, this is another area of the bill, the Animal Health Act. It moves important pieces of legislation into regulation. Why is that? Why is information that was in legislation being moved to regulation? I mean, obviously, something that is in legislation: it's statutory. There's an accountability piece that's very strong compared to something that's in regulation. Like, a minister can just change whatever is in a regulation. They don't have to present that regulation here in the House. We don't have to – you know, it doesn't have to be seen by all members of elected office here in this Legislature, whether you're in opposition, whether you're independent, whether you're part of the government. It can be done behind closed doors. That's the key piece with legislation: it makes it transparent, we all get to see what it is, and Albertans, of course, can tune in and see what's going on. Reporters cover issues so that we understand what is going on.

But when you move information from statutory legislation into regulations, then people may not know about it, and it can be kind of sequestered away, secretly done, and then where is the accountability? When this is being done in the Animal Health Act, section 1, we ask about accountability. Why is the government doing that? We want to make sure – I mean, I know that the UCP has certainly said that they want accountability. They want things to be transparent. You know, they talk a lot about wanting democracy – the more involvement the better – yet this flies in the face of that. It's sort of the opposite kind of a policy. I guess I ask all those questions, make all those comments to the minister regarding this because it seems like the opposite is true, that actually the UCP does not want to be accountable, and they're keeping things behind closed doors and giving extraordinary powers to ministers. Yeah, that's an absolute concern for me.

Let's move on now because we have so many bills to cover here. Let's go to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. This is a very important piece of legislation. Really, you know, my involvement even in being in elected office sort of comes from the work I did in child welfare. I used to be a caseworker and also a supervisor in Children's Services. It's now over 20 years ago, but I certainly was deeply concerned about how the ministry supported children in care. That experience really awoke my political concerns, and I wondered what the government was doing. I was concerned that they weren't very focused on caring for vulnerable children, supporting families to stay intact, to be able to overcome so many barriers to their healthy functioning. I always felt, when I worked for child welfare, Children's Services, that it was all about budget. It wasn't about actually caring about people or individuals; it was very much about budget. Consequently, I think it really awoke my political interest, and here I am today as an elected official because I had deep concerns about the choices of government at that time and continue to.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

In this Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act they are removing some statutory limits on residential facilities used in the child intervention system. We know that renewals will be only up to three years, but previously it was a maximum of one year, so

moving from more scrutiny to less. Again, this is something that sort of surprises me a bit. Certainly, the UCP do like to express that they care very much about accountability, but, you know, having every three years as opposed to every one year a review of facilities that serve children in care shows less scrutiny, I guess. I wonder if that's a wise decision. I think that it was brought in back in 2003 because of multiple allegations of a lack of care, issues in the system, and that, of course, at the time was a Conservative government. There was a class-action suit, which the Conservative government lost, so they did bring in this level of scrutiny. It seems like, I guess, all these years later the UCP think that is not needed, but it may still very well be needed. I mean, tragically, we've heard certainly . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to Bill 21? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise at this second reading stage of debate to provide some comments on Bill 21, a very large piece of legislation proposed before this House that makes amendments to a number of different acts. As has been observed by my hon. colleagues on the Official Opposition side, this is a sort of omnibus set of changes to various different acts, some of which do not rise much above the level of miscellaneous statutes. In review of this bill the majority of the changes, I would say, are less omnibus than they are omniboring, and I wonder about the job satisfaction of the red tape reduction minister, satisfying a deputy ministers' committee and some sort of bureaucratic metrics exercises, little relation to well-being and improving people's lives in measurable ways, which I suppose is why, you know, if a lot of the business of this bill could have been placed in miscellaneous statutes or close to it – some of it is still relatively substantive and, frankly, unproblematic but is very, very straightforward. One would think, then, that on the pieces of legislation that might arouse more public comment, public question, scrutiny in the media, and so on, the minister would have a much better understanding of what the legislation actually accomplishes in those areas where there's going to be significant public scrutiny.

I'm thinking here of the education portion of this legislation. Now, there is no question that education is vote determining for Albertans. Certainly, when I have been out on the doorsteps in Calgary and in Lethbridge-East and in Lethbridge-West, I have heard concerns about education on the doorstep from previous UCP voters who have assured me that they will not do any such thing once again. When I get that sort of feedback on the doorstep, it does remind me of late 2014 and into the first quarter of 2015 being out on the doorstep, when there were a number of cuts to the education system at that time, and sort of these, you know, middle-of-the-road kind of PC voters saying to me: no; this is vote determining for me, and I am deeply disappointed in the approach to the K to 12 education system.

11:20

You know, oftentimes what shows up in our public opinion polling – when you read the ranking of people's issues of most concern, when you read the public domain publications of issue ranking in Alberta politics and, frankly, across the country, usually one sees the economy and health care, often both federally and provincially, and health care is always a matter of concern for people, but the extent to which it's vote determining often depends on the social conditions such as a pandemic, for example, but also any changes that the government has made, or the public expects them to make, and they have not done so.

But education flies under the radar a little bit, and I think that because the other two issues are a bit more universal, sometimes we lose sight of the extent to which people really do care about the K to 12 education system. It's not just people with kids, like me. It's not just teachers or retired teachers or people who are working in schools as educational assistants or even on the custodial maintenance side or in school divisions. It's not just those folks at all.

The other day I had a guy I was talking to on his doorstep. He was a heavy-duty mechanic, and I said, "So what's on your mind these days?" He said, "Well, education, the curriculum, no question." I saw his kids running around, and I said, "Oh, do you work in education?" He said, "No, and my kids will be out of elementary school by the time they introduce this curriculum, and I'm a heavy-duty mechanic, but I really care about this issue and this one thing alone cements it for me." I said, "All right." He'll put up a sign, and that'll be great.

But that's kind of a long way to get around to saying, Madam Speaker, that I was, frankly, agape at watching the red tape reduction minister state one thing in no uncertain terms to the media and to the public, creating a great deal of confusion, and the Education minister or her staff or whoever tweeting out at, like, 10 o'clock at night a complete repudiation and a one-eighty on what was said a few hours previous at the news conference.

No one seemed to know what was going on in this bill for a good 24 hours until it was sort of clarified, and that was the minister of red tape reduction claiming that private schools – that is to say, schools where people have to pay a certain amount of tuition – will no longer have to produce financial data, like what it collects in tuition fees, and the Minister of Education bouncing up and down and saying: "No, that isn't true. Audited statements, including tuition fees, would still be required." Then, all the more confusing for Albertans, the government did produce a media handout stating that tuition fee data would not be collected, but then the amendments through this legislation make it quite clear that financial data will be reported. Well, what a tangled web we weave when we practise to not know what we are doing. It would be hilarious if it wasn't so sad, Madam Speaker.

You know, the minister of red tape reduction: all she has to do once a session is read through her legislation, figure out what it means, communicate it, and she's done. That's all she's got to do. Take the recommendations from the various deputy minister committees or whatever with their little metrics and their little beans and say: "Okay; throw this all into an act, most of which is miscellaneous statutes. I'm the minister of stuff that sails through the Legislature because it concerns itself mostly with commas." Congratulations. I guess you get a fleet car. Wonderful for you.

You know, but this piece, that is so deeply important to people in the manners which I have described, she couldn't get her head around and communicate appropriately. I can well appreciate that sometimes it's tough to three-legged race a file in government with other ministries, and that's fair. But this is just: read the talking points off the page and get it straight. Like, they couldn't even do that, right?

You know, for that reason alone, leaving aside the parks issues, that are fundamental and ultimately indicate that they don't want to bring forward a free-standing piece of legislation, if they want to actually change parks, we have some significant concerns with this bill, Madam Speaker.

With that, I will conclude my comments and move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 19 Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022

Ms Ganley moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment May 3: Ms Pancholi]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, we are on Bill 19 in second reading, on referral amendment REF1. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday rising to speak.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 19, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, of course, as you mentioned, specifically on the referral amendment. I completely agree with my colleagues that this should be referred to a standing committee because the fact is that it's simply not ready, as I will get into. There are advocates within the industry who believe that to be the case in terms of it not being ready because, you know, we see some changes here, some more substantial than others.

First of all, I guess, I'll discuss the changes around voting to streamline and simplify the voting process, which are presented in Bill 19, and just start off by saying that I completely support what the minister has put forward and what people in the industry have asked for in terms of simplifying this voting process specifically for procedural things like accepting an agenda or, you know, moving minutes or things that shouldn't be burdensome for condo boards or associations. No doubt these are reasonable changes that are quite easy, in my opinion, to support. With that being said, if an owner feels that they want to have the more thorough voting process, at any point they are able to ask for that and it will be granted to them, as far as I can tell, through the legislation. So that is something that's easy to support.

Now, where we begin to have concerns are the changes that are being proposed by the minister specific to the idea of chargeback in this legislation. Of course, owning a condo is – well, buying a condo in the first place is one of the most costly investments that you might consider. It is life changing, obviously, and very expensive and in most cases a very positive experience, and living in a condo, just the same, is often a very positive experience. But we have seen and will continue to see forevermore, whether we support this legislation or don't or make other changes regarding tribunal systems, which I will get into – the fact is that it's a complex relationship that you have with not only your own neighbours, in the instance of living in a condo, where you have neighbours on potentially both sides, potentially under and on top of you. That is a lot of interaction to have, not only, of course, when you're living inside your unit and hearing the noise and whatever else is going on but also when you are sharing things like common areas, which are more specific to the idea of chargebacks in this legislation.

Now, I completely understand that condo corporations and condo boards and the industry as a whole are concerned about increasing costs based on having to take on losses that are potentially happening because of negligence from a condo owner or damages that are caused. I completely understand that. We've heard – it comes up quite often in the media and just in conversations – the idea of special assessments on condominium properties and how burdensome that can be to find out. Obviously, you're planning your budget and have an expectation of X being the cost of your

rent or the cost of your mortgage, and all of a sudden because of something, potentially damage that happened to a common area within a condominium property, you are having a special assessment because of somebody else that's at fault. I completely understand how frustrating that might be. That has affected so many Albertans across this province, so we need to take action, no doubt, Madam Speaker.

11:30

Now, my concern comes from the fact that what we are seeing in this legislation in regard to chargeback is essentially a complete reversal of the responsibility, going from a process where a condo owner who is being potentially fined or charged by a condominium corporation or by a board is right now essentially innocent until proven guilty, and what this legislation is going to do is reverse that role and make them guilty until proven innocent. So if a condo corporation comes to them and says, "It seems that you created this damage," and they may or may not have clear evidence – and that is something that this minister has clarified has to be done through regulations, which I understand.

But, again, based on many decisions that this government has made and this minister, it is quite hard to accept things at face value and accept that the hard work of ensuring that the framework is in place is going to be dealt with through regulations and not come through the Legislature. That is always a concern.

We have this changing dynamic between the relationship and the ability of an owner to have due process, in my opinion, Madam Speaker. I understand, again, the frustrations that are here. When any other owner who was not responsible for the damage to a common area has to pay for somebody else's negligence, that, I know, can be extremely frustrating.

I would accept, I think, the idea of chargebacks – we see it in many other jurisdictions – if there was a framework for a dispute resolution mechanism put in place. Unfortunately, even though this government and this minister have been having these conversations about dispute resolutions or civil resolution tribunals – they have been having these conversations since 2020 but have not been able to bring forward, well, anything, let alone something substantial, to support condo owners as well as condo corporations and condo boards.

Now, again, my concern becomes that without the tribunal system in place, condo owners are not going to be able to defend themselves from these costs without going to court, which is truly unacceptable, in my opinion, Madam Speaker. First of all, the point of this legislation was supposed to be to reduce the amount of time spent in court. I mean, it's very possible now that unit owners are going to have to go to court to prove their own innocence, which very likely will cost more than the damage that is being charged against them in the first place. That's a concern. And the amount of time that we are going to potentially see spent in court for these things: while it might be reduced, I don't necessarily think it's for the right reasons.

With all the time that the minister has had and all of the resources and information that are at the minister's disposal and that have been brought forward and the education provided by so many people within the condominium industry and condo owners and advocates and managers – they have all been very clear, even with the introduction of this legislation, that what they wanted more than anything was to have a tribunal system put in place. Unfortunately, we don't see that. The minister says, you know, that it's not necessarily – let's see here. An *Edmonton Journal* article says it "is not at the top of the government's list of immediate priorities." Well, why, Madam Speaker? The top priority should be keeping

these cases out of court, yet we are going to continue down this path.

We, again, had advocates representing condo owners coming forward. Specifically in this case, Terry Gibson, the president of the Condo Owners Forum Society of Alberta, told Postmedia that the delay came as a "big disappointment," and I completely agree. He goes on to say that "we've lost years" and it's not uncommon during disputes for collective court costs to hit \$100,000. I don't think anyone wants to pay that kind of money for potentially a relatively simple or minor dispute. Whether it be the condo corporation or a condo owner, I don't think either side wants to continue down this path of going to court.

Unfortunately, this minister says that it's a matter of a lack of resources, so here we have a minister admitting that because they're not willing to put forward however much it might cost, the court system is going to continue bearing that cost, and the nature and relationship between condo owners, potentially neighbours, potentially the relationship between a condo owner and the condo corporation are going to continue down a negative path, in my opinion, in many of these circumstances. This goes on, I would say, to show the lack of vision within this ministry, lack of vision from this government.

We saw back in, I believe, January of 2020 that Service Alberta laid off 26 of their managers. When we talk about having the infrastructure in place to put forward civil resolution tribunals like the one that we see in British Columbia, something that, as far as I can tell, is working relatively well and keeping many of these cases out of the court and actually expanding the opportunities for both sides to hold each other accountable – it's truly disappointing, but it's not surprising because of the actions of this government, of this minister to reduce very helpful staff in their own departments, managers who understand these issues, specifically on the IT side of things. When we talk about comparing to British Columbia's online tribunal, I can only imagine that dealing with things like this, implementing systems like this becomes quite a bit harder if you don't have the staff in your own ministry.

I want to take a moment to look at British Columbia's resolution tribunal if I have time here, Madam Speaker, because the fact is that I don't necessarily think that there's that much work that has to go into this. Obviously, we need to consider differences between Alberta and British Columbia, which I'm sure is the case, but I don't think it should take several years to implement this because the fact is that there are systems across Canada that at least have a framework for us to consider. At least we could bring these tribunal ideas to the table and decide what we like about them and what we don't like about them.

What we can see from the Civil Resolution Tribunal in British Columbia is that not only does it deal with things of chargeback when damage happens to common areas, but it also deals with things like bylaw infractions. If a condo board tries to fine somebody potentially for leaving something in a common area, not necessarily damaging it but creating an insurance concern potentially or maybe a parking ticket fine or maybe, you know, you took a left turn into oncoming traffic in the parking lot of the condominium complex – I mean, there are many reasons that a condominium board or corporation brings forward fines when somebody is potentially in contravention of the bylaws, but again, there should be mechanisms and appeal processes in place for owners or renters of these condominiums to have their voices heard and ensure that there is a due process.

Again, not only have we not taken the first steps to ensure there's a tribunal process in place for chargebacks where there's potential damage to common areas, but we aren't even considering right now the idea of offering these tribunals for bylaw infractions as well.

Again, I don't think we have to reinvent the wheel here. I'm sure that there are amendments and changes that we can make to the tribunal systems that we see across Canada, but for the government to not have any plan in place, prepared to share with us and instead just come forward with this very one-sided proposal that takes away, in my opinion, due process or the ability for a condo owner as part of this dispute to have an appeal process is relatively one-sided, Madam Speaker.

I don't think that this legislation is nearly finished enough. I think it's deeply unfortunate that instead of finishing what needs to get done in respect to supporting condo corporations and condo owners and the complex relationship between the two, instead of finishing the work that has to be done there, the minister instead brought something that was half finished to this Legislature, which is incredibly disappointing.

11:40

I hope that in the very near future, even though the minister claims that it's not a top priority of this government, we see a civil resolution process come forward, because it will strengthen the relationship between owners and boards and corporations. It is something that is desperately missing from legislation and regulations in this province, and we owe it to these homeowners, which make up about 12 per cent of the population, as far as I can tell. Upwards of 500,000 people are in these condominium complexes, and they deserve legislation that supports them and ensures that they are able to have a positive relationship with every party involved.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to the referral amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment. I believe this is a referral amendment to committee, which I support. I have spoken to this bill once and want to thank my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday for his comments. You know, he's been our Service Alberta critic for some time and is quite engaged on this file and has spoken with a number of industry experts and leaders within the condominium space who have been weighing in on this bill and, quite frankly, previous pieces of legislation that were brought forward under our government as well as under the UCP government. I think it's very important for us to get this right. I know that there are a lot of different interests that need to be represented and balanced.

Here we have certain elements of this bill that, like my colleagues, I can support. You know, again, changes to the voting process to make it easier and more efficient I think are a great step to bring existing condominium rules and legislation into today's reality of being able to do so in an easier way as opposed to continuing on the same path of the past. That's a positive step forward. I appreciate, well, the changes to the voting: all of it, the changes under the unit factor vote as well as how unit owners can vote in meetings.

Now, the damage chargebacks that allow the condo board to charge condo owners for damage: I appreciate that the government has communicated that these will be small fees, but we don't know. Those are going to be left up to regulation. The challenge with that, Madam Speaker – you know, I'll go through the argument that government often gives, which is that if we put those fees into legislation and we didn't get them right, then it's onerous to bring legislation, through the process, back into the Chamber as opposed to regulations, where if we don't get those fine figures correct, then

it's very easy to change. I don't disagree with that. The challenge is that those fees and those figures are decided behind closed doors by cabinet. Again, when we hear comments from government such as "Trust us" and "Take our word for it" and "We will engage," there's a whole host of examples where the current government has done the opposite and actually has broken the trust of Albertans and said one thing and done another.

You know, an example that is in the face of Albertans right now as we face record-high inflation: you have a government that campaigned on not increasing taxes, yet in the past three years user fees and costs under this government have shot up dramatically. I hope that members of the UCP shake their heads or at least feel a tad ashamed of the fact that their leader 20 years ago was screaming at the federal government for bracket creep, for deindexing personal income tax, calling it a sneaky tax grab and pernicious – I mean, there are many clips, and I encourage Albertans to take a look at that online, that show that he was vehemently opposed to it – yet 20 years later: "No. It's not a tax increase. No, no, no. It's perfectly fine. It's good."

Now, I'm not saying that people can't change their positions over time, but, I mean, give me a break. These are increased costs on Albertans, and with the accelerated increase in inflation that figure is close to a billion dollars that the Alberta government is taking out of the pockets of Albertans at a time when costs have shot through the roof, whether it's at the pump, whether it's on your groceries, on your utilities. By the way, I do want to just mention, Madam Speaker, that yesterday the government did talk about the gas tax rebate, but if the rebate is still going on – as of today gas is about \$1.60 and going up – either the retailers have said, "Thank you very much; we'll pocket that difference and still charge \$1.60," or that rebate has ended and the government hasn't yet told Albertans that it ended. I'm sure we'll get some clarification on that in the coming days.

Regardless, the supports that the government has provided to Albertans have been minimal. I mean, \$50 a month on your electricity bill when bills have doubled for many Albertans is actually a joke, and if Albertans weren't in such a difficult position of having to afford groceries and keep their lights and heat on, it would actually be laughable; \$50 a month, \$150 over three months, doesn't even provide relief for the majority of Albertans for one month, but that was this government's solution.

Now, the tax rebate. You know, you could argue that it did have an impact for a short period of time for Albertans and help them, but as I've pointed out, conversations that were taking place on the radio yesterday were on the fact that gas prices have shot back up. Many people were asking whether that break on gas taxes was still in effect, because you can't tell. If it is still in effect, it's lost its benefit unless the government is going to jump up and say: "No. Actually, gas should be \$1.73, and we're saving that 13 cents."

The point of this, Madam Speaker, is that times are very tough for Albertans, right? I mean, the other challenge that Canadians are going to be facing is that interest rates are going to continue to go up. I mean, everyone has forecast that those are going to go up. I know that yesterday the Federal Reserve bumped it by .5 per cent. I'm not weighing in on whether or not they should or shouldn't – I'll leave that to the experts – and I appreciate that these are efforts to combat the high and continually rising inflation rates. But the implication of that, what it means for the average Albertan, is that their borrowing costs have just gone up, so that also will impact their pocketbook.

All of this is built on the theme of the government saying: trust us. Where this comes back to this bill, Bill 19, and why I'm supporting the referral is because the amount that a condo owner

can be charged will be decided in the regulations. That's the first challenge that I have.

11:50

The second is that there is no recourse or there is no process set out in this bill for condominium owners to have due process. There's no tribunal process indicated in this. Again, we have a government that has said: well, that'll come later on in the regs. Well, no. That should be in the legislation. It should be a law and not in regulations as far as what that process looks like. That was something, Madam Speaker, that the UCP government promised Albertans. They said that the tribunal process would be included in this piece of legislation, and it's not. That's the main reason that I'm supporting this referral motion and why I cannot support that this bill continue forward, because it's only half done, and a major piece that will impact condominium owners is, again, their right to due process.

I know that when we look to our neighbours, there is a tribunal process in British Columbia that has supported condominium owners and given them that right to a fair dispute mechanism. That's something that I can tell you, Madam Speaker. I was Service Alberta minister for about six months when we were first elected – I held the twin portfolios of Municipal Affairs and Service Alberta – and I engaged in a number of condominium consultations with folks. I know that there is a varied opinion on it, and I know that there are some challenges that exist within the condominium act.

You know, one of the things that we were working on as government was just that, that process, that formation of a dispute resolution tribunal, which is critical. Quite frankly, I believe that had we formed government in 2019, we would have already had that implemented. But here we have an opportunity for the government to tap the brakes on this bill in its current state. Let's bring in a few stakeholders by sending this to committee, and let's add that to the bill and get that dispute resolution mechanism into this bill. I'm confident that the opposition could support this bill with that piece added to it, because it is so critical.

Madam Speaker, with that, I will take my seat and allow my colleagues to continue the discussion on this, but I strongly urge members to consider voting in favour of this referral. Let's get it right, let's get it right now, and we can all celebrate together.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for his thoughtful comments. I will also be speaking strongly in support of this. You know that in 2020 on June 13 a huge hailstorm hit northeast Calgary, and people's homes, people's vehicles, their businesses – everything was destroyed. While I do not have many condominiums

in my riding, there are a few. Mostly, the people who live in those condominiums are senior citizens, and they are people on fixed incomes.

After that hailstorm I was reached out to by condominium owners who thought that their corporation didn't deal with them fairly. They were slapped with those special assessments, and at the same time they felt like their corporation also didn't share what the negotiations were between them and the insurance company. There was clearly a dispute, and I wasn't able to help them much other than that the corporation was taking them to court, and they had to follow the lawsuit and go through the pain of hiring a lawyer – not that lawyers are not good, but legal fees and all that – and pursue the lawsuit. Clearly, there was an issue between the owners and corporations, and there was absolutely no mechanism whatsoever to resolve that. On one hand, now the corporation was incurring expenses on legal fees, and now the residents, who are mostly seniors who are on fixed incomes, are also forced to hire a lawyer and proceed with the lawsuit.

The reason this referral is important, that we do know – we hear that in our ridings – is that we do need a dispute resolution mechanism that is more accessible, that is more efficient, and that is less costly as well. And as my colleague mentioned, the UCP government promised that there will be a tribunal, and we do not see that tribunal in this legislation. I think that the single most important thing that condominium owners need is a tribunal where they can go and adjudicate these issues without going through the court. That will help us address these issues facing condominium owners and corporations. While this condominium ownership is not known to common law, it's a very unique kind of ownership. It comes with certain legal rights, responsibilities, and financial obligations as well, and having that tribunal will certainly help corporations and owners to efficiently adjudicate any disputes that may arise from those rights, obligations, and responsibilities.

The second thing, the reason I support that this bill be sent to the committee, is that the government is now giving corporations certain rights that they can take the owners to court. That will also impact court resources. That will strain our court resources, which are already stretched because of this UCP government's cutting the Justice department budget, because of the pandemic putting pressures on courts, and because of the Supreme Court decisions in the Jordan case. There are already so many cases that are pending in court. They are already stretched, and I do not believe that sending further matters, that could easily be dealt with in a different setting, to courts is wise.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt, hon. member, but the clock strikes 12. The House stands adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, May 5, 2022

Day 30

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, ECA, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
 Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
 Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
 Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
 Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
 Alberta Hansard

Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Jason Kenney | Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations |
| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Singh
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gotfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 5, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will be led in the singing of *God Save the Queen* by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. I invite you to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble Queen,
God save the Queen!
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the Queen!

Statement by the Speaker

Red Dress Day

The Speaker: Hon. members, today we pause to recognize the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and two-spirited people, also known as Red Dress Day. We wear red and display red clothing to remember and honour the lives of the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited people in Canada. I know that there are several members who have joined in recognizing this important day through their dress.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us today are a number of very special guests in the members' gallery. They are the family of the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche. Please welcome his wife, Kim Jean, his daughter Annabella Jean, and their friend Kristin Morrison. I ask you each to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, also joining us in the galleries today are three early childhood educators, who are guests of the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. Please join me in welcoming them: Thula Sibanda, Ashak Bara-Morad, and Kathy Rickett. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Finally, members, there is a large group of students joining us from the constituency of Chestermere-Strathmore. Please welcome students and teachers from Westmount school. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Mr. Dach: Mr. Speaker, Albertans judge a government by actions, not words, and with the UCP Albertans get lots of words but virtually no action to back it up. There's no more clear example of this than the debacle this government has made when it comes to supporting Alberta families coping with the cost-of-living crisis this government created.

The UCP lifted caps that our government put in place to protect consumers and did nothing as prices began to climb. The Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity showed the true colours of his government when he told Albertans that his plan to support them was to do nothing. The UCP then announced their rebates, but after months not a single Albertan has seen one cent, and according to

the UCP's own plan Albertans might be waiting until December 31 to see the electricity rebates that the Premier promised in March. As for the natural gas rebate that Albertans were promised in February: not until October.

This is more than just incompetence. This is what you get when you have a government that is reluctant to do anything at all to support Albertans in their time of need. They put their friends in the insurance industry before their constituents and let premiums climb by 30 per cent. They used a tactic that the Premier used to oppose in Ottawa, to use inflation to take a billion dollars from Alberta families. They decided to slash supports for disabled Albertans and seniors, taking thousands from them. They decided to make it harder and harder for people to get an education by slashing tuition, hiking interest rates on student loans, and levelling deep cuts on Alberta's postsecondary institutions.

This is a government that fundamentally does not care about Albertans, and their decision to delay these rebates for months just shows how true that is. Albertans know that while the UCP doesn't care about them, the Alberta NDP has their backs, has a leader and a team that will always put them first.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hope that you will indulge me just for a brief moment. I did notice that the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche's family snuck in just moments following the introductions, so I hope that you'll please welcome them. Kim, Annabella, and Kristin, please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Red Dress Day

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Red Dress Day is held every year on May 5 in honour of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Hanging red dresses or wearing red on this day helps raise awareness of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA-plus people. These are people who are loved and are mourned. We stand with the survivors and the loved ones of those impacted by this crisis.

Like Sisters in Spirit Day, Red Dress Day has been a grassroots movement to raise awareness about Indigenous strength and resilience despite the high rates of violence they face. People will hang red dresses in private and public spaces to remember those they've lost. Others will gather in places around the province to remember their lost loved ones, including in Edmonton today.

Higher rates of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA-plus people stem from root causes that need to be addressed. Mr. Speaker, during my time as a member of the Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, along with the other members, I had the chance to hear from Indigenous communities, survivors, loved ones, and families about how to address these urgent issues.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government is choosing action. We set up the Alberta joint working group to review the calls for justice that the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls identified. The Alberta joint working group's research and engagement with families and communities helped clarify actions the government of Alberta can take to change outcomes.

We'll have more to say on this in the coming weeks, but I want to assure survivors and their loved ones that this is something that we take very seriously, and we are committed to getting it right to make real and meaningful change. Alberta's government has also established the Public Security Indigenous Advisory Group to help improve the safety of Indigenous communities, with Indigenous

people playing a central role in developing solutions and strategies to improve public safety across Alberta.

We all have a part to play in ending racism and violence, so if you see it, call it out. On Red Dress Day I want families, loved ones, and survivors to know that we will honour those lost by working together to address this crisis.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Physician Supply

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 26 it was my honour to host the Premier, ministers, and many other local leaders to mark the official opening of the Grande Prairie regional hospital. The new hospital began accepting patients on December 4, 2021, and I was there at 5:30 in the morning cheering on the arrival of the first patients and the first ambulance dispatched to the new facility.

This hospital is a key investment in health service to northern residents, boasting 62 additional private in-patient rooms, five additional operating rooms, one dedicated to obstetrics and two dedicated to driving down surgical wait times for Albertans, and also a new state-of-the-art cancer centre with two radiation vaults.

Mr. Speaker, finally getting to this point to offer better acute and surgical care is a huge win for Grande Prairie and the surrounding region. However, I still hear from my constituents that it's hard to find a family doctor. Staffing challenges in rural areas have been a long-standing issue, and without accessible primary care, many Albertans cannot be referred to the health care services they need.

That's why I'm proud to see our government working for rural Alberta when it comes to recruiting and retaining doctors in rural communities. In the past two months alone two more pediatricians have been hired in Grande Prairie, and that's just the start, Mr. Speaker. The ministers of Advanced Education and Health are continuing to work with postsecondary institutions to train more health workers, dedicating spots for rural students. In particular, I want to highlight \$6 million in funding dedicated to rural medical education, providing rural rotations for nearly 1,000 medical students and a two-year rural-based family medicine residency training program.

Health has been funded at the highest level in Alberta's history, Mr. Speaker, by this government, but we know that throwing money alone at the problem won't fix it, and that's why we're dedicated to system transformation to provide real results for Albertans. We know there are challenges, and we are dedicated to hearing them and addressing them with real action.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Red Dress Day

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, May 5, is Red Dress Day, a day that honours the spirits of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited people. The red dress acts as a visual reminder and is a powerful symbol of the Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited people who have been murdered or gone missing across this country.

1:40

Métis artist Jaime Black helped to inspire the red dress movement. Throughout the province you will see red dresses hung from windows and trees, a representation of the pain and loss felt by loved ones. The colour red was chosen by the artist after conversations with a friend who told her that red is the only colour that spirits can see. In the words of Jaime Black: it is a calling back of the spirits of these women

and allowing them a chance to be among us and have their voices heard through their family members and community.

Today in Edmonton many of us gathered to march from Churchill Square to beaver hills park, many wearing red dresses to remember the loved ones that are so very dearly missed. For everyone who visits the Federal Building, one of the first things you will see upon entering is a red dress that was presented to the Minister of Indigenous Relations by the Awo Taan Healing Lodge in Calgary and created by artist Emily Taylor.

This is important because in order to truly honour the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited people, we need to take action every day. This means working with our Indigenous and Métis brothers and sisters to action the calls to justice from the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. That also means ensuring we learn about Indigenous-Canadian history from the Indigenous perspective, listening to the truths shared through the inquiry, and being an ally.

Today I encourage all members of this Assembly to visit the red dress and listen to the voices of the spirits and pledge to ensure their voices are heard and the genocide of Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited people ends.

Thank you.

North American Energy Security

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, in the wake of everything going on around us, we need to talk about the importance of North American energy security. Alberta is home to the third-largest oil reserves in the world. We produce 4.6 million barrels of crude per day, and we do it with the highest human rights, labour, and environmental standards. Now, there are those on the left who would have you believe we can just shut the taps off overnight and cease production, but at a time when much of the world has been unable to impose the sanctions that could truly cripple the Russian petrostate's war on Ukraine because of their dependence on Russian oil and gas, phasing out the energy sector right now is nothing more than a pipe dream.

Alberta recently had a visit by United States Senator Joe Manchin. Not only is he chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, but he is an important vote in an evenly divided Senate, a vocal supporter of oil and gas, and, Mr. Speaker, he's a Democrat. Senator Manchin is evidence that heating our homes, commuting to work, and manufacturing household goods should not be partisan issues. During his visit to Alberta's oil sands he was clear: North America could be the energy leaders of the world, but it can only be possible with Canada's help and alliance.

Mr. Speaker, at a time when the U.S., under Democrat leadership, is scrambling to fill oil and gas shortages, Senator Manchin is powerful, because honest recognition of the need for a true North American energy alliance is what the world needs. It's not a partisan issue. Our oil reserves could lift millions of people out of poverty and siphon away the funding stream of the Russia-Ukraine conflict if we allow them to, but we need international collaboration and a concerted, unified strategy. Canada has been blessed with an endowment of natural riches beneath our surface, and the world needs our energy now more than ever. With bipartisan international collaboration, one day we'll get it to them.

Early Childhood Educators

Ms Pancholi: May 20 is Early Childhood Educator Day in Alberta. It's a day to recognize and celebrate the incredible early childhood educators who are not just caregivers for our youngest children but are professionals in early learning and child development. I want to

highlight one very special early childhood educator, Mr. Speaker, who is here in the gallery today. Thula Sibanda is one of 11 Alberta early childhood educators who was recently recognized with a Prime Minister's award of excellence in early childhood education. Like many educators, Thula has superpowers, and her superpower is always meeting each child where they are. Her teaching and care is tailored specifically to the interests of the child, empowering them to learn from play and to embrace their own path of development.

When I heard that Thula had received this extraordinary national recognition, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I wasn't surprised, because my daughter was one of the children who, as a toddler, was lucky to have been taught and loved by Thula. With her today in the gallery is another former Prime Minister's award recipient, Ashak Bara-Morad, who was a big part of both of my children's early learning and a big part of our hearts. They're joined by Kathy Rickett, the incredible director at Edmonton northwest child care centre.

Mr. Speaker, early childhood educators are the foundation and most critical part of quality early learning, but it's a sector that is struggling profoundly. The low pay, lack of benefits, professional recognition, and career opportunities mean programs can't find qualified staff for existing child care spaces, let alone the 10,000 new spaces that are supposed to be created this year. Because the UCP has never believed in a publicly supported system of universal, affordable, quality child care, they've wasted over three years without addressing any of the challenges that would support educators and grow the workforce now, when we need it the most.

But the Alberta NDP has always understood that early childhood educators are professionals who deserve not just thanks but to be valued, supported, and compensated properly. We know that educators are the most important part of quality early learning, and we can't wait to build that strong system with them.

Congratulations, Thula. You truly deserve it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose is next.

Sexual Violence Awareness Month

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and take this time to recognize Sexual Violence Awareness Month. Each year in May we focus our attention on serious issues related to sexual violence in workplaces, schools, homes, and communities in Alberta. We celebrate the work of front-line responders, who help survivors heal, get justice, and move forward with their lives.

Two in three women and 1 in 3 men in Alberta experience sexual violence in their lifetime. These numbers are horrifying. Given the prevalence of sexual violence I'm sure that many if not all in this Assembly have experienced it or know someone who has. Whether it's being catcalled in the street, hearing inappropriate comments from a co-worker, or being forced into a sexual situation by a partner, sexual violence must not be tolerated. Sexual violence strips you of your confidence, your sense of safety, your freedom. It's an attack on a person's most intimate parts of themselves. It leaves deep emotional scars that never truly heal.

Far too long society has ignored the warning signs and actions that lead to violence. It's time to fight back, and we always are responsible for taking action. These actions can be simple and ones that everyone can take. Learn to recognize the signs of sexual violence. Be an active bystander. Look to intervene or notify authorities when someone is being harassed or assaulted. Listen when someone confides in you and support them in finding the help they need to heal.

Alberta's government has introduced Bill 14 to help those seeking justice to be more confident in the system and ensure they are treated with respect. Throughout May Alberta's government will be sharing resources regarding sexual violence and what supports are available.

Many community partners such as the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services are hosting events. I encourage every Albertan to take part in this month and help build a safer province for everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Federal Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Targets

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I stand in this House in disbelief as I reflect on comments made by our federal leaders. Last week a federal Liberal MP said, quote: this country will be unable to meet its climate change targets by 2030 if certain provinces don't do their part. She called the inaction of Ontario's government irresponsible and, quote, a crime against humanity. Greenhouse gas emissions are a serious issue for Canada and the world, but it's no crime against humanity if provinces aren't able to help meet unachievable federal targets in eight short years.

Alberta has done an exceptional job when it comes to reducing emissions and continues to do so not only by reducing its carbon footprint but also by spending the time, the money, and the resources on renewable energy. To hear this Liberal MP knock on provincial efforts to reduce emissions and compare them to such horrible events is absurd. Earlier this year we saw their trust-fund leader Justin Trudeau call Canadians terrorists and bigots when they stood up for their rights under the Constitution. To see a member of his Parliament compare underwhelming climate change initiatives to the Holocaust is outrageous.

Alberta leads when it comes to environmental stewardship and conservation, but we're always under pressure by this federal government to do even more. Just last week I read an article showcasing how this federal government is unfairly expecting Alberta to carry the weight of reaching those emission goals. In that article, Mr. Speaker, policy-makers at Ag Canada said that they are concerned about greenhouse gas emissions from wheat, barley, and other cereal crops, crops that alongside our oil sands are a pillar to both the Canadian and international economies. Ag producers work extremely hard to feed us in a carbon footprint limited manner.

Alberta should not be the province this federal government continues to focus on when it comes to environmental stewardship. Alberta has made leaps and bounds in trying to reduce emissions. The federal government and their NDP opposition supporters need to reconsider how they plan to reach climate change goals if they continue to put down provinces like Alberta.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton Glenora has question 1.

Utility Rebate Timeline

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, Albertans need help with their utility bills today, but the UCP is way behind. It's been 93 days since the Premier promised natural gas rebates and 59 days since he promised to deliver electricity rebates. Today neither rebate is out the door, and Albertans have been waiting months, but the government now says that the electricity rebate won't be delivered until December, 200 days from now. Can the Premier explain why help for bills from January, February, and March won't come until Christmas?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What an absolute despicable display from a caucus that has proven themselves to be as desperate as they are irrelevant. To frighten Albertans with categorically false information is disappointing. We had royal assent of this legislation on Friday; we handed the regulations to the retailers yesterday. In fact, we've moved at speed, and we've asked the retailers to do the same as well. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Hoffman: I can see that the UCP is angry, but you know who's really angry, Mr. Speaker? It's Albertans who are waiting for help.

The Premier also promised that they would fix the fake natural gas rebate, but the government's own fact sheet says that it won't be in effect until October, 150 days from now. Can anyone in the current government explain to Albertans struggling to pay their bills why they should trust the UCP when the current Premier is telling everyone to wait five months before he might maybe possibly try to help do something?

Mr. Nally: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry there's nobody in that caucus that knows how to read a regulation. If there was, they would know that that date was put in there as nothing more than a safety net, because we're going to be giving this rebate to 1.9 million Albertans and we know that there are going to be, out of 1.9 million, some that have moved, and for whatever reason they may have an issue. We put the date as far out as possible to capture every Albertan to make sure they get the rebate. We know the vast majority of the 1.9 million will get these rebates sooner as opposed to later despite what they may have to say.

Ms Hoffman: The UCP is trying to take a victory lap on this while telling families that their March electricity rebates might not arrive until Christmas. They are celebrating natural gas rebates that won't be in effect until October at the earliest. We are tired of this government that refuses to act. We asked them to put in a deadline by the end of this month, and they said no. Albertans are being forced to choose between paying their bills or buying their groceries. Instead of telling Albertans to get a better job or to wait until Christmas, why doesn't anyone in the UCP just pick up a pen and get these cheques out this month? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The Minister of Finance has the call.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are taking action on affordability. We are moving forward with electricity rebates, price protection for natural gas users, and we suspended the fuel tax. What I find hypocritical is that the members opposite introduced and brought in a carbon tax designed to increase the cost of electricity, designed to increase the cost of utilities, and then they sit there across the way complaining about the cost. This government is taking action. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Gasoline Prices

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, nobody trusts this Premier or his Finance minister to understand the struggles of regular working families. If he tried to put gas in his own truck, he would see today that prices have shot up. They're over a buck 60 across the province. Albertans are looking for long-term relief and actual help with the cost of living, but prices keep shooting up under the UCP. Why

won't the government launch a third-party audit of gas prices to ensure that Albertans aren't getting ripped off at the pump?

Mr. Toews: Again, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that there are affordability challenges in this province, and that's why we're taking action. That's why we're moving forward with the electricity rebate, price protection for natural gas users, suspending the fuel tax. Again I'll make the same point: the members opposite, when they were in government, brought in the largest tax increase in Alberta's history, unannounced, the carbon tax, the carbon tax designed to increase fuel prices, increase utility prices, increase electricity prices. We're taking action.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, life under the UCP keeps getting more expensive. We're paying more for electricity, more for car insurance, more for tuition, and the UCP clearly doesn't care. The Premier cares more about photo ops where he pretends to pump his own gas than he does about how much it costs ordinary families to do the same. Why won't the government promise an independent, third-party audit of gas prices? Albertans can't trust the UCP to stand up for them.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a well-known fact that 60 per cent of the cost of gasoline is related to the cost of crude oil. The cost of crude oil is going astronomically high – it was a buck eight this morning – in part because of the European Union ban on Russian oil that takes effect at the end of the year. It's also a result of OPEC not increasing supply. The cost of oil is going astronomically high. That funnels down into the cost of gasoline.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the current Premier jet-sets around the world complaining about having to take a yellow cab because back home he has a personal chauffeur. He drinks fancy whisky on the roof of the sky palace with his liquor cabinet while more than half of Alberta households are reporting that they are \$200 away from not being able to make ends meet. Why doesn't the Premier come down from the sky palace, drive himself over to a gas station, look at the price of gas, and then actually do something about it?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, this government has taken more action on affordability than any provincial government across the nation. We've suspended the fuel tax – that's 13 cents a litre – creating additional savings for every Albertan . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: . . . offering savings to every Albertan every time they fill up their vehicle to go to work, to take their kids to dance, providing affordability relief for every senior and every business every time they fill up their tank. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Depending on the order in which you would like, the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Children's Health Care

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Overwhelmed: that is one Calgary parent describing how they felt waiting in line with their children at the Alberta Children's hospital this week, a line so long it extended through the doors to the ER and outside onto the sidewalk. We're seeing the impacts of the UCP's mismanagement of the health care system, and it's not good for Alberta families: wait times of up to nine hours. Albertans expect to see lineups of

children at amusement parks, not hospitals. To the Premier: is he concerned by this event, and what action is he taking to address it today?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the hon. member for the question. During our media avail with Dr. Hinshaw last week we recognized that the system right now is under strain, and this is for a number of reasons. It's because we are actually getting through now on the other side of BA.2. We're coming down, but we're still going to see increased pressures on our hospitals. We're also dealing with the flu, which is actually adding to pressures. Plus, there's increased acuity because individuals who didn't go to their family physician are showing up at hospitals. We're adding capacity, and I'll talk more to that in a moment.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, the minister is right. There are a number of factors, and they are all factors his government made worse. Indeed, we're seeing rising COVID numbers coupled with the late influenza season, and that is impacting children. Indeed, Dr. Stephen Freedman, a professor of pediatrics, emergency medicine, called it a perfect storm. He said that the rising number of children presenting with respiratory illness in recent weeks is clearly linked to the lifting of restrictions. To the Premier: was this scenario ever flagged as a concern by health officials, and if so, why did they not take action to prepare for this?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, the system is under strain, and the system is under strain not unlike we're seeing across the entire country, not unlike we've actually seen in earlier periods where there are high instances of flu. But we are taking action. We know that we need to invest in capacity to be able to ensure that we can respond not only to other waves of COVID in the future but whatever is thrown at our health care system, and we're doing that: \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year, and \$600 million after that. I want to thank all of our health care workers for the tremendous work they're doing. Relief is coming.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this crisis is happening now. Indeed, Dr. Freedman also noted that a lot of Alberta children under five are undervaccinated against COVID-19. According to provincial data only 49 per cent of children five to 11 have received one dose; only 34 per cent have received two. This UCP government refused to offer vaccines in schools. They said that they didn't need to do more to ensure that that population was vaccinated. The minister promised that he was going to do more to get people vaccinated, but we have not seen much action. Will the Premier rise today, admit it was a serious mistake not to invest in this and one that is contributing to rising illness amongst children in our province?

2:00

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, we have made vaccines widely available, and in regard to the provision of vaccines at school, when we did this for the older age groups, it was not very successful. We continue to urge all parents to get their kids vaccinated. We continue to urge all Albertans to get all the doses that they're eligible for, and I want to thank all Albertans who have gotten their doses so far. As indicated in the House earlier, we'll be running another campaign to increase the rates of vaccination, but we need to invest in capacity. That's the way we solve this. We are taking action, we are doing it, we are investing far more than any government in the past has done, and we will continue to invest in our health care system for . . .

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

Women's Reproductive Health Care in Rural Alberta

Member Irwin: Once again the UCP is letting down folks in rural Alberta, particularly those seeking reproductive health care. Getting ready for the birth of a child can be an exciting moment, but it can also be uncertain and anxious at the best of times. No one knows when a baby is ready to be delivered, and having a lack of local options for obstetrics can be deeply challenging. Why is this government putting the well-being of so many Albertans in harm's way by refusing to support obstetric services across this province?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, we are working to ensure that all expecting mothers have access to the services they need, including a plan and a place where they can safely deliver their babies. Now, as I've already indicated in the House, we do have certain challenges in certain areas due to a shortage of doctors. We are assuring expectant mothers that there's a plan in place and that they can go nearby to be able to deliver their babies while we are working on ensuring we can attract and retain doctors. We are putting our money where our mouth is. We are providing \$90 million this year to be able to recruit and retain doctors, and I'll be able to speak to that.

Member Irwin: Nearby isn't good enough because expecting parents in Whitecourt already have to leave their community to give birth, and now the service has been cut into June, so they have to drive hundreds of kilometres, figure out costs of accommodation, travel, alongside trying to anticipate when birth might happen. As it turns out, babies don't take into account your calendar and planning when it comes time to be born. Whitecourt joins – let's see – Sundre, Rimbey, Three Hills, Provost, St. Paul, Lac La Biche, my hometown of Barrhead as places where UCP failures mean expectant parents cannot access the services they need. Will the Premier provide clear and accurate details today on how critical obstetric services will reopen across the province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We fully appreciate that we want to provide these services across the entire province, and there are some challenges in doing so right now, but I just want to put this in context. The hon. member talked about Whitecourt. Well, nearly half of all deliveries for Whitecourt moms are done in centres normally outside of Whitecourt. That's because for the level of service and the expertise required, they'll go to Edson, which is about 97 kilometres away. Now, unfortunately, we've had to temporarily suspend these services in Whitecourt. That has impacted two families at this point in time, but we're working very hard to get the services stated back there, and we understand that . . .

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

Member Irwin: Unbelievable.

Obstetrics isn't the only way rural Albertans are struggling to access reproductive health care. Abortion, as we know, is medically essential, but currently there are no abortion services offered in rural Alberta, none whatsoever. Yesterday the Minister of Health said that he has no intention of further allowing access to reproductive rights in rural Alberta. It turns out the UCP just don't support anyone being pregnant or wanting an abortion in rural Alberta. Can anyone over there explain why pregnant Albertans or

those seeking abortions don't deserve access to those services simply because of where they live?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned yesterday and the day before, part of the issue with access to services in this province for rural Albertans is due to the fact that the opposition, when they were in government, actually diverted health care capital away from rural Alberta to urban centres. I will also point out that in this province the actual drive time to access abortion services is actually shorter for most of the geography of Alberta as compared to other provinces, and that's the . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. Member for Highwood.

Hydrogen Industry

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have seen significant movement in the hydrogen sector recently, including key investments announced as a result of the first Canadian Hydrogen Convention. This includes the Alberta government's own clean hydrogen centre of excellence, a \$50 million centralizing organization that will help expand hydrogen technology across our provincial economy while supporting Alberta-led innovation. To the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity: can you advise this House on what hydrogen means for Alberta's economy and the transportation sector?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that question. Hydrogen-fuelled transportation can drive both decarbonization and demand for clean hydrogen from local producers, something our hydrogen road map recognizes as essential for scaling up hydrogen production for export readiness. At the Canadian hydrogen conference last week we learned about Nikola motors' hydrogen-fuelled heavy transport trucks . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the Canadian hydrogen conference last week we learned about Nikola motors' hydrogen-fuelled heavy transport trucks, Mitsubishi's passenger vehicle, and just yesterday ATCO announced it will build hydrogen production facilities and refuelling stations to support CP Rail's new hydrogen-powered locomotives.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the associate minister for that answer. Given that hydrogen is an emerging technology and that there are many myths about the safety and availability of the fuel and given that much of this stems from information and incidents from decades ago, again to the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity: can you tell the House about the advancements in liquefied hydrogen as a sustainable fuel source?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that this hydrogen may make people uncomfortable because it's a new technology, but I

can assure you that hydrogen fuel cells have been around for generations. In fact, I can assure you that I personally reviewed the safety features of these vehicles. Industry has done a great job in making these vehicles safe. In fact, I took a drive in a hydrogen fuel cell vehicle last week. A phenomenal experience. I'm proud to tell you: hydrogen is not the future; it's the present.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given the extremely competitive Alberta petrochemical incentive program, low corporate tax rates, reduced red tape in the province, a skilled workforce, and enormous reserves of natural resources to produce clean hydrogen and given that there is a tremendous interest in developing made-in-Alberta advancements in the space, can the minister inform this House on the industry's current response to Alberta's approach to hydrogen technologies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to say that our Alberta petrochemical incentive program, which applies to hydrogen as well, has received \$24 billion worth of applications, and the vast majority of those are for hydrogen. Authorities like the Edmonton International Airport are also seeing tremendous international interest in advancing hydrogen technologies in Alberta thanks to our many intentional and natural advantages. Last week I was honoured to witness EIA sign over a dozen partnerships with local and international organizations.

Hate-motivated and Violent Crime Prevention

Mr. Sabir: The number of hate-motivated crimes in Edmonton is increasing at an alarming rate, with nearly double the number of attacks in the first quarter of 2022 compared to last year. Racialized Albertans are living in fear. This province belongs to all of us regardless of race, religion, colour, or ethnicity. We should all be able to feel safe in our communities, but that clearly isn't the case. Yet this government does nothing. Why is this government failing to ensure that racialized Albertans can feel safe in their communities?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am actually very proud to respond to this question. As a government we have done so much to make sure that racialized communities feel safe, welcome, and able to achieve their . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Unparliamentary remarks, on or off the record, are still unparliamentary.

The Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite are heckling because they know that they have nothing to stand on. For four solid years, when they were in office, they lifted no finger to help racialized communities in our province. We were the government that banned carding, we were the government that included First Nation police services in our Police Act, and we have so much more to do.

2:10

Mr. Sabir: Given that people have been physically assaulted, threatened with firearms, spat on, had racial slurs shouted at them, and are being discriminated against systematically and given that this government still refuses to even debate a bill to collect race-based data and given that we are increasingly seeing the rise of racist rhetoric on the right, apparent in the recent trucker convoy that shut down our border and occupied our nation's capital as many

waved Confederate and Nazi flags, yet members of this government actually supported this group, why?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Albertans can be confident that their government shares their anger and disgust with hate crimes. We continue to work in making our province a safer and more welcoming place, and that's why the Minister of Labour and Immigration, when he was in my role, had established the hate crimes community liaison, establishing that to engage with communities that are most affected by hate crimes. Province-wide collaboration among law enforcement agencies has been enhanced and will further be strengthened by the new hate crime co-ordination unit when it launches later this year.

Mr. Sabir: Given that we aren't just seeing crime on the rise in Edmonton, that we are also seeing increased violence in Calgary, drug overdoses, and even murders, and given that many of these crimes are increasingly taking place with weapons, including guns, and given that this government actually wants to put more guns in people's hands while increasing barriers to accessing mental health and addictions, the question I have is: what is the government doing to stop these killings in Calgary and across this province and address the rise in crime?

Mr. Shandro: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the premise of the question is totally incorrect and totally false. I will say, though, that it is a multifaceted approach, and we are leaving no stone unturned in either of our major urbans or in rural crime. I know that the member failed to mention even the rising rural crime rates that we continue to see. But we are taking action on rural crime as well as the increasing crime in our major urbans. We're going to continue to work in a multifaceted approach with our law enforcement agencies when it comes to addressing these issues and continue to work in building a recovery-oriented system of care.

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

Affordable Housing and Health Care Costs

Ms Sigurdson: Poverty is a health care issue. Albertans who do not have the stability of a home face worse health outcomes because they are more likely to have precarious living situations, less access to healthy food, and have experienced trauma. Therefore, increased poverty adds pressure and strain on the system. Unfortunately, under the UCP both poverty and chaos in the health care system are increasing. To the Minister of Seniors and Housing. Communities across the province are losing access to health care by also not having provincial support to build affordable housing. Why isn't the UCP building affordable housing to ease the strain on the health care system?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently this government is building approximately 1,500 units over the past two years. As well, we have our stronger foundations, Alberta's 10-year affordable housing strategy, which is increasing, changing dramatically how our government builds in support of affordable housing. With this housing, we will create an additional 25,000 households and increase it by 40 per cent by the end of 10 years.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that a night in a hospital is more expensive than one in a shelter and that a night in a subsidized home is cheaper than both and given that since the UCP are not maintaining homeless support

at levels they have for the last two years – Edmonton is set to lose 800 shelter spots in June, and homelessness is also rising in Calgary and across the province – and given that the UCP has also refused to work with municipalities to build permanent supportive housing and has left hundreds of millions in federal money on the table, to the Minister of Health: how much more is the UCP spending on health care because of their bad decisions?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is so shameful that the NDP repeat and repeat again the same question, that we leave the federal dollars. We left nothing on the table. We spent every single penny, and currently we have a commitment to work with the federal government. We committed \$561 million for affordable housing. Again, the former NDP government's Minister of Seniors and Housing is aware of this agreement, but she still keeps questioning about it.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that a recent study published in the *Harm Reduction Journal* proved that preventing overdoses saves over a thousand dollars per visit to an emergency room and nearly \$400 per ambulance visit and given that housing provides stability to people with mental health concerns and provides dignity while also saving money in the health system – I know that the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions doesn't support the science and the evidence, but will he stand in this Chamber and explain how much his government's decision to not invest in permanent supportive housing and harm reduction measures is costing the Alberta health system?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite would probably be aware of this if she had attended the select special committee on safe supply, that more opioids in the community actually causes more harm to the community. That's actually what the experts say. We are committed to a recovery-oriented system of care. We want to help people with the illness of addiction. It is a health care issue, and we are going to continue to help people with their addictions. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-East is next.

AGLC Charitable Gaming Model and Rural Alberta

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ability and opportunity to fund raise within a community is extremely important. Fundraising can help to subsidize the costs of certain activities or events that are popular and important to communities, making them more affordable for individuals and families. Given that I've recently heard complaints and concerns from my constituents in Airdrie-East about the disadvantage that they have when it comes to fundraising opportunities with the AGLC, especially compared to our neighbours in Calgary, can the Minister of Finance please tell us how smaller towns or cities such as Airdrie can receive fair fundraising opportunities?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. AGLC initiated a review of the province's charitable gaming model in 2019 to examine how the model is meeting the needs of Albertans and to look for

opportunities to improve it. The review has involved a comprehensive engagement with our many varied stakeholders involved in charitable gaming in the province, including more than 90 charitable organizations throughout Alberta, both urban and rural. I assure you that the government and AGLC remain committed to maintaining and maximizing charitable gaming proceeds to support eligible programs and services.

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

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Airdrie Skating Club has high ice costs, comparable to the prices in Calgary, and that Airdrie is trying to reduce costs for families in order to encourage kids to be active and participate in sports and given that our opportunities to fund raise are less frequent, bringing in significantly less funding than the clubs in Calgary, putting us at a disadvantage to the point where we often lose families to Calgary that can subsidize their ice costs, Minister: can you please tell us what the AGLC's plan is to make fundraising fair for rural areas like Airdrie when they're competing with the larger cities? [interjection]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know the importance of civil society organizations and addressing issues and creating opportunities in our communities. I'm proud to report that AGLC has received a milestone of 38 per cent reduction in red tape, which is part of the solution to efficiency. In two years AGLC has reduced over 9,100 pieces of red tape, including a number of policy changes that reduce financial reporting and admin requirements for charities, allowing these organizations greater flexibility to put resources back into their communities.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the minister. Given that my constituency of Airdrie-East is trying our best to fund raise and make things affordable, such as the skating club, for families in our community and given that the AGLC will assign fundraising opportunities to groups that are registered with them and apply to participate but given that rural areas are at a significant disadvantage when it comes to these opportunities and that casinos are allocated less frequently and that the casinos assigned to rural groups are much quieter and therefore don't have the same earning capacity, Minister, could you please tell us how rural areas can receive more fundraising opportunities from the AGLC?

Mr. Toews: Well, I want to thank the hon. member for her questions and the commitment she has demonstrated to the charities in her community. I know full well the importance of charities and that there are indeed unique qualities to our province's rural areas that rural charitable organizations deliver on. We've made tangible changes, including greater flexibility on how charitable organizations can use their proceeds. AGLC announced these important changes relating to charities earlier this week. For those who are interested, more details can be found on their website.

2:20

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

Diabetes Treatment Coverage

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's clear when I hear from my constituents that this government is not doing enough about the cost of living. Indeed, it seems the UCP is more focused on their internal

squabbles than the needs of Albertans, and now they've decided that more than 4,000 Albertans living with type 1 diabetes should fend for themselves by discontinuing the insulin pump therapy program without any warning. Apparently, the UCP would rather fight for insurance profits than for Albertans with life-saving medication. Can the minister today attest that the changes he's making to the program will not increase the cost of living for a single Albertan?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We are supporting Albertans with diabetes. We are making changes to improve access to supplies and new technology while at the same time enabling us to manage costs. Phase 1 of this was expanding coverage of supplies. Phase 2 was access to continuous glucose monitors for our youth, and then phase 3, which is access to new insulin pumps. Now, as part of the way to manage costs, we are transferring individuals as part of that program on to the Blue Cross program. Many are already on those programs, and I'll speak to more about that in a second.

Mr. Dang: Given that the minister admits that the cost of managing type 1 diabetes is rising and given that the insulin pump can cost someone between \$6,000 to \$8,000 and given that a lot of the employer-backed insurance programs don't cover the pumps because previously the government's insulin pump therapy program covered them, can the minister explain how this change benefits those who have to switch back to multiple insulin injections a day because they are unable to afford the care that they need since he refuses to provide actual clarity about these changes?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as previously indicated, many individuals already are on government plans in terms of Blue Cross plans, and the coverage for the pumps move over there. In addition, there are also a number of individuals who are covered under their private plans in terms of pumps. I'd like to point out that our Blue Cross plan, for those who don't already have plans or are not already on them, is a subsidized plan through the Alberta government. Everyone on this program will have access to this. They will not need to be spending the \$6,000. For those who are low income, there will be no cost associated with them in terms of moving over to the program.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister has just acknowledged, of course, that there may even be insurance premiums required for these changes and given that that means many Albertans will see higher costs than they saw under the insulin pump therapy program and given that this government is responsible for many Albertans struggling with the exponentially increasing cost of living, can the minister explain to these families how he sleeps at night while they're up worrying about these new costs?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I already indicated, low-income families will be fully covered and there will be no additional cost. In addition, many of these families are already on these Blue Cross or insurance policies, whether private or the government-subsidized programs, so there will be no additional costs to them. Our focus is to be able to provide new technologies for those with diabetes. The cost of insulin pumps to the government has basically doubled over the last five years. We are spending \$50 million, and we need to put our program on a sustainable path so we can be able to cover those who are suffering from diabetes now and into the future.

Confined Feeding Operation Proposal

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, this government is considering approval for a feedlot near Pigeon Lake, a very popular spot for Albertans to visit, especially over the summer, without enough notice to residents and neighbours. Most users of this area found out about the project through a small weekly flyer and understandably were upset that they did not have adequate time to provide feedback or to ask questions about the impacts on the lake. Pigeon Lake already experiences runoff with cow manure and, given its slow water turnover, is very vulnerable to algal blooms, which residents in this area have already spent millions of dollars fighting to fix. Why did the Member for Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin do nothing to defend Pigeon Lake?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The natural resources board, the NRCB, is the regulator that regulates confined feeding operations in Alberta. The public notice period for this project closed on April 7, and the NRCB is now reviewing all of those statements of concern submitted by the public. It's the responsibility of the NRCB to ensure that the proponent offered reasonable accommodation to all those concerns, and they will be reviewing those statements of concern.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that the government refuses to accept any responsibility for this matter and given that residents and users of this area were only given a short window to provide comments and that the board's narrow window only judges concerns for those who are directly affected, excluding many residents who own recreational properties at the lake, and given that, despite this government's attempt to restrict deadlines for feedback and ignore the concerns of Albertans, more than 300 people filed statements of concern with the board anyway and given that the county of Wetaskiwin has asked for an environmental impact assessment as well, will the Minister of Environment and Parks actually listen to Albertans, pause this project, and do his job for once?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of agriculture and forestry.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NRCB published official notice of the application in the local newspaper, which covers the area in which the proposed confined operation is located. The NRCB also posted the notice on its website and sent courtesy letters to neighbours residing on or owning land within the notification radius. NRCB granted Wetaskiwin county's requests for extension of the response deadline to April 21 from April 7 to provide additional information on its initial response.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that Pigeon Lake consistently sees health warnings due to levels of toxins in the water from existing cattle manure runoff, which can cause gastrointestinal illness, skin, ear, and eye infections, and given that over 100,000 Albertans use this lake annually for fishing, camping, boating, hiking, and beaches, which become rendered unusable by the consistent algal blooms, and given that the blue-green algae escalates with warm weather and we're on track for more record-breaking temperatures this summer, only making the problem worse, will the minister not make the problem worse and conduct a proper environmental impact assessment on this problem?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister of agriculture and forestry.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The role of Environment and Parks regarding confined feeding operations is to regulate the use of water under the Water Act, and the department will respond to the NRCB regarding these requirements in due course. Albertans place very a high value on this province's water resources, and

there's been significant effort in protecting and improving water quality at Pigeon Lake, including development of the Pigeon Lake watershed management plan.

Federal-provincial Relations

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, in 2017 I introduced the idea of Albertans forcing constitutional changes via an equalization referendum. The Premier picked up on the idea. Last October a clear majority of Albertans endorsed the referendum; a few weeks later this Legislature passed a constitutional resolution giving force to that referendum. Can the Premier tell us when he wrote to the Prime Minister and the other Premiers informing them of the constitutional resolution passed in this Legislature? Can he tell us, please, when the constitutional negotiations are set to begin?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. Welcome to him for coming back to the House. As well, thank you to the Premier for being the only politician in Alberta with a vision to bring two political families together to defeat the NDP to form a Conservative government that got more votes than any other party in the history of this province. It's because of that vision that we were able to introduce Dr. Morton's idea of a referendum on equalization.

Mr. Jean: Given that constitutional discussions are never easy and given that the Premier has admitted that Canada is broken – equalization is unfair to Alberta. Alberta is underrepresented in both houses of Parliament and the Senate. The Trudeau government has also passed laws that are designed to hurt only Alberta. All of these things can be fixed with constitutional changes. Will this government commit to standing up for Albertans and demanding that the rest of the country come to the constitutional table to work at fixing Canada?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the leadership of this Premier our government has challenged the federal incursions into, for example, the federal carbon tax. We've challenged the constitutionality of the no-more-pipelines bill, Bill C-69; the Alberta tanker ban bill, C-48; and we intervened in Quebec's challenge to Bill C-92. We are fighting the federal firearm ban, and we're intervening in challenges to federal use of the Emergencies Act to be heard in federal court this July. This government makes no apologies for standing up for the people of Alberta.

Mr. Jean: Given that while constitutional change is never easy, it isn't impossible – in the last few weeks the House of Commons, the Senate, and the Saskatchewan Legislature have changed the Constitution section that applies to Saskatchewan and CP Rail. By the way, that same section exists in the Constitution about CP Rail in Alberta. So since constitutional change is actually possible in Canada, what will it take to make the government of Alberta stand up for the needs and worries of Albertans and start the process of fixing Canada? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

2:30

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. This government has stood up for, is standing up for, and will continue to stand up for Albertans. Under this Premier's guidance all of Canada's provinces

unanimously supported Alberta's request to fix the broken fiscal stabilization program, which sees Alberta support Canada through tough times only to have Ottawa turn its back on Alberta when we need support the most. Alberta's government has publicly called on the federal government to respect the wishes of Albertans regarding equalization and continues to demand a fair deal for Alberta in the federation.

Alberta Joint Working Group on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Mr. Feehan: Today we remember, reflect, and fight for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. We do not know the true number of Indigenous women and girls missing or murdered in Alberta. That alone is a tragedy. Here are some numbers that we do know: 1,068, the number of days since the national inquiry report was released; 792, the number of days since the Alberta joint working group was formed. The Alberta website states that the final report will be published January 5, 2022; 121 days later and still no public report. Why has the minister failed to release the report, and when will he release it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, we are committed to building a safer province for Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited people. I and the hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations were pleased to formally receive the report and recommendations from the joint working group to inform our response to the national inquiry's final report. Thank you to each member, by the way, for all their incredible work on the joint working group. My colleague will be providing an update on Alberta's response this spring.

Mr. Feehan: It's been your whole term in office, and you've not done it.

Given that the families and the communities of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls deserve justice, peace, and reconciliation and given that the minister has had the final report from the Alberta working group for four months and given that each day without a strategy could mean more women and girls are lost to these horrific crimes, why has the UCP government failed to present a plan and recommendations from the report?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It is an important issue. Alberta's government is now reviewing the recommendations from the joint working group and their final report. This is a crossgovernmental effort, and we all have to work to create safety for Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirited people. My colleague the Minister of Indigenous Relations will be providing an update later this spring on Alberta's response to the national inquiry's final report.

Mr. Feehan: Given that the final report from the national inquiry includes 231 calls for justice and given that the UCP government stated that it is, quote, committed to true, meaningful, reconciliation, unquote, but has failed to provide the necessary resources across all ministries to achieve this and given that zero action means zero steps toward reconciliation and given that each and every one of us has a duty to address reconciliation, something this government has yet to fully commit to, can any member of the front bench tell me today why they have chosen to fail these women?

Mr. Shandro: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and I are going to agree on something, that this is an important issue. Because it's an important issue, we want to do it right. I think we also will agree on how many recommendations there were. There were quite a lot, and because of that, it takes time necessary to study the recommendations in the final report. As I said, my colleague the hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations will be providing an update on Alberta's response this spring.

Invest Alberta

Mr. Bilous: Invest Alberta has now been in operation for almost two years, and we still have very little insight into their operations beyond their press releases and what the minister tells Albertans. For almost two years they were not subject to access-to-information laws. Requests have been filed and denied, shrouding the Crown corporation in secrecy, much like the UCP's war room. When I asked about this yesterday, the minister informed me that he signed the paperwork to open Invest Alberta up to FOIP. My question is: why the delay? Why did it take the government almost two years to do this?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Investment Attraction Act established the Invest Alberta Corporation in 2020 with a mandate to promote, identify, and pursue investment for Alberta. As per the act Invest Alberta is a corporation with one share owned by the Crown. It is the government of Alberta's intent to designate Invest Alberta as a public body under the FOIP Act, and on May 2 of this year Service Alberta received a request from the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation to designate the Invest Alberta Corporation as a public body under the FOIP Act. We're following up on that request, and our intent is to follow through with that, to designate it as a public body.

Mr. Bilous: Given that Invest Alberta was created almost two years ago but wasn't open to FOIP because of either incompetent oversight or intentional secrecy by this government and given that we have partial records pertaining to a lavish dinner hosted by Invest Alberta in Lake Louise, where several ministers and their staff attended, and given that Invest Alberta is now open to FOIP but access to information requests take several months under this government, will the minister release all of the expenses related to their party in Lake Louise, and if not . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, as the member noted, it is true that it is taking longer than normal to process FOIP requests. This is very understandable given the fact that we have just come through two years of a pandemic, and all aspects of government have been a little bit slower to tackle the challenges that they have had over the last two years, and our FOIP department is no different. But we have been making investments to ensure that our FOIP divisions in government are operating more efficiently. We have added new tools to help them to process requests more quickly. That work will continue, and we will take our obligations on disclosures through FOIP very, very seriously.

Mr. Bilous: Given that Invest Alberta has signed a hefty sponsorship deal with Alpine Canada and the event at Lake Louise was an FIS World Cup race put on by Alpine Canada and given that questions have been raised about the relationship between an Invest Alberta board member and an Alpine Canada board member and given that the UCP claims to suddenly be all about transparency, will they release the

details of this sponsorship deal, including board meeting minutes and any communication related to the deal?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Additional information will be forthcoming, but Invest Alberta has been a key piece of positioning this province for investment attraction and economic growth, and I want to point out a few metrics. These are 2022 metrics versus 2019, when the members opposite were in government: business and corporations, up 42 per cent; wholesale trade, up 29 per cent; manufacturing sales, up 34 per cent; merchandise exports, up 81 per cent. Our economic plan is working. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Strategies

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would appear that the Liberal-NDP elites are once again at odds with everyday Albertans. The clean fuel standard will be placing a carbon tax on trucks. Trucks that are critical to wealth production in Alberta could face a tax from \$1,000 to \$4,000 each. It was recently reported that one-third of pickups are bought by Albertans, who make up about 11 per cent of Canada's population, while one-third of cars sold in Canada go to Quebecers, who make up 24 per cent of the population. Does the Minister of Energy believe that the Trudeau Liberal-NDP alliance would have brought in this tax if it had targeted the eastern urban elites?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do know that any tax that targets pickup trucks would be disproportionately aimed at Albertans. While we haven't heard any specifics on this tax, we do know that Steven Guilbeault and the Trudeau-NDP alliance are continuously moving the goalposts when it comes to emission reduction policies, targets, and taxes. They continually say one thing and then move the goalposts. That's why we continue to stand up to Ottawa-made policies that discriminate against Alberta, and we always will.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Trudeau government intends to use the clean fuel standard tax to subsidize the purchase of EVs and given that the EV subsidy could rise to \$8,000 or more per vehicle and given that the average income of an EV purchaser is in excess of \$100,000 while the income of the average truck buyer is just over \$60,000 and given that this plan is a transfer of wealth from the Alberta middle class to the eastern upper classes, to the Minister of Energy: is the government of Alberta supportive of the Trudeau Liberal-NDP alliance's desire to support the subsidization of electric vehicles, predominantly found in Quebec?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. No, we are not considering a rebate for electric vehicles here in his province. We believe a defensible approach is the market-based approach. In fact, we're convinced that if we depart from the market-based approach, there will be unintended consequences such as extra pressure on our electricity grid before

it meets its time. We are not in favour of subsidizing one vehicle type over another. Pickup trucks have a great future in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that EVs are mostly bought by affluent eastern urban dwellers to commute to work and given that an EV simply isn't practical for a rural Albertan because of the distances we have to travel, their limited battery range, and too few recharging stations and given that you cannot trust the Trudeau Liberal-NDP alliance, whose support for EVs is an attack on hard-working Albertans under the guise of carbon reduction, to the Minister of Energy: how will the Alberta government balance the need to reduce carbon while still maintaining their support for Albertans' jobs and our economy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been really clear. Alberta will not accept or develop any emissions plan that will drive up inflation, drive up costs, hit Canadians' pocketbooks, and do little, if anything, to reduce emissions. We can and we must balance the need for responsible resource development and protecting the environment, and we can do that. This isn't an either/or proposition. This government is making great progress on lowering emissions using real-world, practical solutions, and at the same time our oil and gas sector is thriving and having its best year ever.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

Child and Youth Mental Health

Ms Sigurdson: This Saturday marks National Child and Youth Mental Health Day, part of Mental Health Awareness Week. The theme this year is empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. All people are being called upon to listen to the concerns, anxieties, and issues that our neighbours, friends, families, and colleagues are facing and to support them however we can. Mental health awareness is crucial against stigma to ensure that everyone is able to grow and prosper. We mark this day to acknowledge that we must act to end the discrimination on mental health issues and support youth in all of their needs.

This year it is even more critical as we see the impact of the past two years of the pandemic on Alberta's youth. Youth have dealt with so much over the past two years, and we as a Legislature, a province, and a people must be there for them in any way that we can.

Our caucus will never stop advocating for the mental health of Albertans. We have called for every school in Alberta to have a counsellor to be there for the support of their students. We are committed to ensuring that every Albertan has access to at least five mental health sessions.

Many things have changed over the years, Mr. Speaker. While we are still far from perfect when it comes to helping people dealing with mental health issues, I can attest that certain things have improved, but as we are called upon to do this week and on Saturday, we must first listen, be compassionate, and be empathetic.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell children and everyone who is suffering from mental health issues that they can call the mental health helpline at 1.877.303.2642. They are not alone.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of the disability advocate's 2020-2021 annual report.

I'll be also tabling five copies of Family Violence Death Review Committee 2020-2021 annual report.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members there are no points of order today; a gold star for everyone.

Just prior to calling Orders of the Day, I beg the indulgence of the Assembly just for one brief moment because I see that the chief of staff for the Hon. Ted Arnott, the Speaker of the province of Ontario, has joined the Assembly this afternoon. Ms Rachel Nauta, I invite you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 16

Insurance Amendment Act, 2022

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2022.

This legislation proposes improvements to Alberta's insurance regulatory framework with a goal to diversify Alberta's insurance industry and modernize our financial services sector. The amendments propose to make Alberta the first Canadian jurisdiction to allow provincial companies to focus on reinsurance and raise capital through limited partnerships. Increasing the availability of insurance in the province, Mr. Speaker, is good for our entire insurance market. By allowing insurers to attract more capacity to Alberta, we're enabling the entire industry to be better positioned in serving its customers.

The amendments also propose improvements to our new legislation for captive insurance companies. Alberta is getting ready to welcome captives, and this amendment is intended to facilitate smooth relocation of foreign captives into the province. It would give Alberta and Canadian companies contemplating moving their foreign captives here – it would provide them certainty around the relocation process.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 16 is about moving our economy forward by supporting diversification, attracting investment, and creating jobs. I encourage all members to support this bill.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

With that, I move third reading. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer some comments on Bill 16 in third reading. Let me first of all extend my gratitude to the Minister of Finance for his best speech ever in this House. I think it had a total running time of about three minutes and contained nothing but facts. Well done, to the minister, for a real stellar job. I wish that every speech and every answer that

he gave in this House were as factually accurate and as succinct as that speech. Thank you very much for that.

I want to spend some time with my comments this afternoon on this issue of reinsurance because the Minister of Finance is on record as saying that the reason that the province of Alberta is allowing the establishment of reinsurance companies here is to allow for oil and gas companies, which are awash in cash right now, to use some of that cash to fund their own reinsurance programs or fund reinsurance companies to provide reinsurance to themselves. We here in the NDP Official Opposition have no issue with that. We think that reinsurance may very well serve the public interest when it comes to providing those services to the oil and gas sector.

I think it's interesting to talk about one example where reinsurance was a help to the public interest, and that's with the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, in 2010. The costs of that disaster were so astronomically high that British Petroleum had to access reinsurance in order to cover some of the costs related to controlling, ending the release of the oil from the well and cleaning up some of the mess in the Gulf of Mexico and compensating the people who lived along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico for some of the hardship that they endured as a result of that disaster.

2:50

I'm pleased to see that this kind of financial safeguard for potential environmental disasters is being allowed here in the province of Alberta because everybody knows that the oil and gas companies here in the province of Alberta have significant unaddressed environmental liabilities. It's my hope that by allowing reinsurance companies here in the province of Alberta, oil and gas companies will have the reinsurance that they need to cover some of the costs of those environmental liabilities should those costs spiral out of control.

But I think that on this issue of getting environmental liabilities in the oil and gas sector under control, much more needs to be done. Reinsurance will not be a sufficient measure to get environmental liabilities related to the oil and gas sector under control. We know that right now the mine financial security program is woefully underfunded. There are hundreds of billions of dollars of potential environmental liabilities attributed to oil sands companies alone that do not have sufficient funds in place under the mine financial security program to cover those costs if those companies are unable to deal with the costs on their own. We have yet to see anybody from Executive Council present a coherent plan to the people of Alberta for dealing with those costs, and my fear is that it will be the average Albertan who will be left on the hook to pay for those expenses.

It would be bad enough, Madam Speaker, if the government had just left the mine financial security program alone and did nothing to address the issue, but they actually scaled back the financial requirements for oil sands companies last year. Oil sands companies paid less in 2021 than they did in the previous year because – the minister gave the excuse of low resource prices. Well, you know, covering the costs of these environmental liabilities should take precedence over a whole host of other costs that oil and gas companies need to meet, so I don't buy this argument that because oil and gas companies had reduced profits, they couldn't afford to contribute the same amount as they did before to the mine financial security program.

Moreover, we currently see oil trading at well over \$100 a barrel, yet the minister has been completely silent about what the future of the mine financial security program holds for oil sands companies. As far as we know, the rates of contributions that will be expected from those oil sands companies aren't actually going to increase from last year. How is it that when oil sands companies are suffering from low oil prices, they get a premium reduction on their mine financial security

obligations, but when prices go up, nothing is done about it? That's not fair, Madam Speaker, and I think that the taxpayers of Alberta are being left at significant risk of having to pay for these environmental liabilities once the oil sands companies are no longer viable, whenever that happens, at some point in the future. We hope that they will continue to make money and have enough money set aside for dealing with those liabilities, but this government has done nothing to ensure that that happens.

We also see the same issue in the traditional oil and gas sector. It's been a privilege of mine to participate on the Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights, and I've had the chance to travel to a couple of different locations around Alberta to hear from landowners who are having extreme difficulties dealing with traditional oil and gas companies and trying to get them to deal with their oil and gas liabilities. There are thousands and thousands of landowners who are going without lease payments right now. They've got inactive wells that need to be abandoned and sites that need to be reclaimed – and there's nothing being done – hundreds of thousands of sites all across the province where the traditional oil and gas, conventional oil and gas companies are not addressing their liabilities either.

It is my hope that by allowing these conventional oil and gas companies to set up their own reinsurance companies, they will provide some means of dealing with these liabilities, but I don't think that it will be sufficient. More needs to be done to protect the interests of landowners who will be left to suffer the consequences, because these oil and gas companies are very quickly reaching the end of their lives, so to speak.

Municipalities as well are going without tax payments from oil and gas companies. This government has done nothing to address any of those outstanding liabilities of the conventional oil and gas companies either. People in Alberta are incredibly upset. They see that the price of oil is as high as it's ever been, oil and gas companies are making more money than they've ever had before, yet the debts that they are owed are not being paid, and that is not fair.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to offer my support for this bill along with all of my Official Opposition colleagues. It is my sincere hope that this reinsurance scheme that the Minister of Finance is proposing will help to address some of these environmental liabilities, but I hope that members of Executive Council understand that much more needs to be done to make sure that oil and gas companies clean up the messes that they have made and that they don't leave the average Albertan on the hook for covering these costs.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will conclude my remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join in on Bill 16? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Of course, it gives me great pleasure to stand and speak to third reading of this bill and discuss not so much the fact that – you know, I'm in agreement with the fact that it's very important that this bill create opportunity for reinsurance here in the province of Alberta, but the bigger issue, of course, is the fact that this government has had an opportunity to actually address issues regarding insurance coverage for Albertans, specifically car insurance and even home insurance. Unfortunately, over the past year and a half people's car insurance has actually gone up, in some cases by 30 per cent.

You know, to your average family out there – I find it interesting that a member across the way was talking about urban elites. I've never thought of myself as an urban elite. I come from a very working-class background, a very humble background. Both my parents worked every day. They did not run their own business or anything, but they brought home a paycheque, and they made sure food was on the table and that we were fed. We didn't have

everything we wanted, but we didn't go without. We had everything we needed. Of course, I come from a family where I was raised with three other brothers. There were four of us. I remember that at the time in the '80s when my parents decided to purchase a house or put a mortgage on a house, interest rates were, like, 17, 18, 19 per cent. It was a real difficult time.

For any average Albertan, you know, they obviously have their household budget that they need to deal with, and when the cost of insurance goes up by 30 per cent, I can tell you that that puts a tremendous amount of anxiety on those average Albertans. Maybe they're saving a little bit every paycheque. Maybe. I'm sure that, like other members on the other side of the House know, every paycheque that comes in: you save a little bit and you put it aside, but there always seems to be some kind of issue that will come up that will take down that amount that you're saving every month.

3:00

Currently, in the economy that we have right now, those average Albertans are finding it harder and harder and harder to put, you know, \$100 aside every paycheque. We're hearing from Albertans that they're \$200 away from not being able to make ends meet here in this province. So for me it's a shame that the minister wouldn't actually address this issue more concretely when it comes to insurance here in the province of Alberta. For the first time in a hundred years the minister decided to, I can only assume, hide the report on insurance profits. It's a report that comes out every year, but for some reason this year it didn't come out. Is that a coincidence? I don't know.

I can tell you that when that report came out, I heard from several Albertans that were just awestruck at the fact that insurance companies have gotten away with such huge profits while they have had to endure very difficult times during this economic crisis, that, of course, were made even worse with COVID-19. So many of them – and I remember in debate getting up in this House and telling members of this House that there were teachers, for example, that at the beginning of COVID were told to stay home, so, you know, they didn't have to drive anywhere. Maybe they went to the local grocery store. There could have been something worked out with the insurance companies to actually lower the monthly payments or the amounts paid to insurance companies, but this government decided to do nothing about that.

I get it because their ideology, Madam Speaker, is to let the free market do its thing; don't get involved. That's why, for example, when in the House I asked the associate minister of natural gas what he was going to do about utility bills, he got up very proudly and said: I'm going to do nothing. That's the ideology of these Conservatives. Their ideology is to let the free market do its will, and it doesn't matter how that's going to impact your average Albertan. But average Albertans want a government that's actually going to defend them, to stand up for them, to help them.

You know, it's very plausible that the minister – although he may not agree with a cap, well, then I invite him to come up with some other alternatives but to actually stand up for Albertans, because that's his job inside of this House. If he doesn't like the idea of a cap, then come up with something else. Work with the private sector, work with the insurance companies to actually come up with an alternative that makes the lives of Albertans easier when it comes to this issue, this problem, this deep concern that they have.

Unfortunately, we don't see things getting any better. The minister gets up in this House time and time again, and he says that insurance companies are actually coming down, but that's only 10 companies that have applied for their premiums to come down. We know, last I heard, that seven companies are actually requesting to increase their

premiums. So what is it? Is it coming down? Are they going up? What's the case?

Again I go back to the issue at hand. You know, Conservatives and champions of laissez-faire economics continue to tell us that more competition is actually going to drive the price down, but that's not what Albertans are seeing. That is absolutely not what Albertans are seeing.

I asked the minister the other day in debate – was it 46 insurance companies or 76?

Mr. Toews: Forty-five.

Member Loyola: Forty-five. Thank you, Minister.

There are actually 45 insurance companies here in the province of Alberta. Now, you'd think, you know, according to Conservative ideology and free-market principles, that 45 companies would be enough to bring down the price of insurance for Albertans . . .

An Hon. Member: Do you want to nationalize one?

Member Loyola: . . . yet we're not seeing the decrease of prices.

The members on the other side are like: okay; well, do you want to nationalize it? We're talking about the fact – how many companies are going to be needed? Is it going to be 50? Is it going to be 70? Is it going to be 100? How many do we actually need? [interjection] Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, Madam Speaker, I'd like to thank the member, through you, for giving way. I just want to provide some metrics that are helpful here. According to the statistics from the National Insurance Agency in 2020, the most recent year we have data for, automobile insurance companies in Alberta had a profit, but they netted \$11.59 per vehicle insured in this province. That is an independent statistical agency. I think that's helpful for members in the House. That's why we brought in Bill 41. That's why we looked to deal with the systemic issues that were driving up costs. We do have a competitive market in this province, and this data point would demonstrate that. We need to maintain the competitive market and drive down costs.

Member Loyola: Well, I appreciate that, Minister, but it's not working. What Albertans are actually seeing are their premiums going higher and higher and higher under this UCP government. I mean, I can appreciate that you have data and that you're presenting that in the House, but it's . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. Just direct your comments through the chair, please.

Member Loyola: Of course, Madam Speaker.

Through you to the minister, the outcome is what's important. That has been the primary focus of my intervention here today, that Albertans are spending way too much on insurance, not to mention all the other costs that they have related to the family budget. That is the main concern, and that is what we should be addressing as a Legislature, making sure that we're making life for Albertans easier and not harder.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity just to address this bill for a few moments at the end of this day. In general, of course, this bill will get the support of myself and, I believe, my colleagues as we move forward. We certainly appreciate the need to keep refining the insurance industry

in this province for the benefit of Albertans. I'm happy to see the government redo their bills when they've made mistakes in the past, as this one does and as we've seen a number of times in this particular session of the Legislature, having to go over bills that failed to do what they were supposed to do in the first place. But, you know, credit where credit is due: good second try.

I want to take a few moments just to speak about some of the concerns I have about what we have just heard from the Minister of Finance in response to the member who was just previously speaking, Edmonton-Ellerslie. That is that we have had deep concerns on this side of the House with average Albertans' experiences over the last number of years, particularly in response to the direct action of this government to remove a limit on increasing insurance rates that were clearly going up in this province and clearly putting people in dire straits.

3:10

Businesses were telling us that they were seriously going to think about closing their doors because of dramatically increased business insurance rates. People were parking their cars in spite of often needing them for work purposes because of increasing insurance rates, and people were concerned about being able to maintain their own homes. So a very serious hit on people and their lives. Of course, people do their best to try to adapt. They cut back where they can. Unfortunately, some people ended up suffering serious consequences because they simply couldn't make it all work, just living too close to the line, which is unfortunate. But, of course, we know a significant number of people at any time are in the position of actually doing that.

I'm concerned because, you know, the Minister of Finance has stood up in this House a number of times and listed companies who have reduced their rates this year, but he does not give you the full facts when he does that. That's what I'm very concerned about. What we saw were some increases in insurance rates that were upwards of 30 per cent for people in the province of Alberta and basically across the board. It almost didn't matter which insurance company you were with, with some minor exceptions, I'm going to admit, we saw this dramatic increase.

Then we see only a small portion of the 45 insurance companies in this province – I think there were seven listed by the Finance minister – who had applied in the second year to actually reduce their rates, but reducing their rates by approximately 5 per cent. So what they're not telling you is that your rates went up 30 per cent and down by 5, and they're equating it to as if they're the same, and they're not. They're not the same when 100 per cent, or close to 100 per cent, of the businesses go up, but only a small proportion, some, you know, approximately 15 to 20 per cent, go down. There are not equivalencies. My concern here is that what we have is the government really not admitting to the set of facts that Albertans are experiencing and not addressing the consequences.

Now, what we have heard the Finance minister say is that we need to leave this to the market, and the market will, you know, deal with this. There will be competition in the market, more companies will join, and we'll see the rates go down. But this is not a normal open market, and I think we have to be really clear about that. There are only approximately 45 companies in the province of Alberta, and I know the minister is hoping more will join, but what is he hoping? That two, three, four, five more will join? He hasn't actually stood up and said to this House that when we reach a thousand insurance companies then we will have true market competition, because he knows that will never happen.

He also knows that in a market the size of 45 you actually don't have fulsome competition. You don't have fulsome competition because the companies are quite able to work together. I'm not talking about collusion. I'm not talking about a dishonest, you know, sort of under-the-table kind of working together. I mean that they just

understand each other and understand how things work. So they all raise the rates knowing that it will be supported across the board because there is no real competition. There is no one standout company, for example, in the last year who said: "Has your insurance gone up 30 per cent? Well, we're going to give you not only an insurance rate that doesn't go up 30 per cent, but we're going to drop it by 5 or 10 per cent." Not one company made that advertisement, so that tells you that they all rose with the market.

What happens in these situations, that the Conservatives do not speak to, is the fact that the lives of individual Albertans are driven into chaos. Even if they are right and eventually somewhere down in this magical future competition will result in some reduction of the bills, in the meantime the people of the province of Alberta have experienced extreme distress. Some, as I say, have had to make really critical decisions in terms of their personal finances or their small-business finances. Unfortunately, the Conservatives' answer is always, "Don't worry; this will resolve itself in due time," this being the in-due-time government. I think what that says is: "Well, you know what? Those of us who have wealth will ride through this because it really won't make a huge difference in our lives, and those of you who don't have wealth can just suffer the consequences because in due time it'll be okay again." Two years of trauma in terms of being unable to pay your bills is really unacceptable, yet it doesn't matter to this Conservative government.

I certainly would like to see this Conservative government make a decision that is about everyday Albertans in their everyday lived experience and not just sort of cast them to the winds, hoping that somehow they will land in good conditions. You know, we simply cannot be the farmer who casts the grain across the fields, allowing some of it to fall on rugged land and some of it to fall on fertile land, because those that fall on rugged land will not thrive and survive. We have a responsibility to make sure that they do not fall on that land and that they only end up in fertile land.

This government is refusing to do that because they believe that in due course things will resolve, which is an easy thing to say when you have the money. It's an easy thing to say when you're sitting in this House and you're earning \$120,000 a year or more in cabinet, almost \$200,000 a year in cabinet, and those increases of 30 per cent are, at worst, inconveniences, but when you are a small-business owner and your insurance goes up to the point that you have to consider whether or not you're closing your shop, when you're a family that has to look at maybe taking the kids out of hockey this year because you just simply can't afford it, that's a very different kind of question. I really would like, for once, this government to stand up on the side of those average Albertans and not always on the side of corporations, who are ultimately the beneficiaries.

We can see that they are the beneficiaries because we've seen the report that was hidden by this government for months, a report that

had been issued in this province for over 107 years. When did they release that report? On Holy Thursday, just while everybody is distracted, while people are not in the House. They hid that report and then released it at a time when nobody would be paying attention. Fortunately, on this side of the House we are always paying attention, and we saw that report, and we found that insurance companies were not in a desperate strait. They did not need to increase the fees for their services by 30 per cent. In fact, they were making record profits.

What we have is a government making a decision: whose side am I going to be on, the insurance companies who are making record profits or the average, everyday Albertans who are going to have to say to the kids, "No hockey this year"? I can tell you that on this side of the House we're on the side of hockey.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate?

Seeing none, would the minister like to close us out?

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to close this out, just make a couple of comments around Bill 16, the Insurance Amendment Act. This bill is about taking action. This bill is, in fact, about creating more capacity for Alberta consumers. This bill is about creating innovative solutions for not only industry, key industry elements within the province, but much more broadly for consumers throughout the province.

I just want to close with this. You know, we hear from the members opposite that we're not taking action on issues of affordability. Madam Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We have taken action time and time again, and we will continue to take action to ensure that Alberta consumers have the maximum number of product offerings available. Madam Speaker, that's what Bill 16 is about.

I appreciate the debate, and I appreciate that the members opposite have indicated they're going to support the bill. I very much appreciate that. I encourage all members to support Bill 16.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

3:20

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think a lot of great work has been done this week, but at this moment I think it's time that – I'd like to move that we adjourn the Assembly . . . [interjections] Do you want me to adjourn or not? I would like to move that we adjourn the Assembly until Monday, May 9 at 1:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder: we don't bang on desks anymore as per the standing orders.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:21 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 3rd Session (2022)

Activity to Thursday, May 5, 2022

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act (\$) (Kenney)

First Reading — 4 (*Feb. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 94-97 (*Mar. 7, 2022 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 140-44 (*Mar. 10, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 230-34 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cQ-0.7]

Bill 2 — Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 312-19 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft.*), 391-95 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve.*), 484-90 (*Mar. 29, 2022 aft.*), 565-71 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve.*), 599-604 (*Apr. 19, 2022 morn.*), 661 (*Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 699-707 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 715-24 (*Apr. 20, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2022 c4]

Bill 3 — Special Days Act (Orr)

First Reading — 124 (*Mar. 9, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 327 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 343-45 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 346 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 375-78 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 379 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 389-91 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; SA 2022 cS-16.3]

Bill 4 — Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022 (McIver)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 163-77 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft.*), 360-66 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 396 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 519-23 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 571-79 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force April 21, 2022; SA 2022 c5]

Bill 5 — Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022 (Sawhney)

First Reading — 202 (*Mar. 16, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 319-26 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft.*), 469-71 (*Mar. 28, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 523-24 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 537-43 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 c6]

Bill 6 — Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022 (Orr)

First Reading — 228 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 502-505 (*Mar. 29, 2022 aft.*), 513-14 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 562-65 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve., passed*)
Third Reading — 594-98 (*Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed*)
Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force April 21, 2022; SA 2022 c3]

Bill 7 — Appropriation Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 272-73 (*Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed*)
Second Reading — 310-11 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., adjourned*), 327-36 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 345 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division*)
Committee of the Whole — 366-75 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve.*), 395 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division*)
Third Reading — 411-14 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft.*), 419 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division*)
Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; c1]

Bill 8 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 297 (*Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed*)
Second Reading — 311-12 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., adjourned*), 336-43 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 345-46 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division*)
Committee of the Whole — 379-89 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve.*), 395 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division*)
Third Reading — 414-19 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft.*), 419 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division*)
Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; c2]

Bill 9 — Public's Right to Know Act (Shandro)

First Reading — 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 447-54 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft.*), 455-63 (*Mar. 28, 2022 eve.*), 643-51 (*Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 707-13 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 745-49 (*Apr. 21, 2022 morn., passed*)
Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cP-47]

Bill 10 — Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022 (Aheer)

First Reading — 408 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 463-69 (*Mar. 28, 2022 eve.*), 543-50 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft.*), 604-10 (*Apr. 19, 2022 morn.*), 661 (*Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed*)

Bill 11 — Continuing Care Act (Copping)

First Reading — 432 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 550-56 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft.*), 634-42 (*Apr. 19, 2022 aft.*), 663-72 (*Apr. 20, 2022 morn.*), 865-71 (*Apr. 26, 2022 aft.*), 873-79 (*Apr. 26, 2022 eve.*), 891-97 (*Apr. 27, 2022 morn.*), 936-42 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft.*), 1027-34 (*May 2, 2022 eve.*), 1074-82 (*May 3, 2022 aft.*), 1140-43 (*May 4, 2022 aft., adjourned on amendment*)

Bill 12 — Trustee Act (Shandro)

First Reading — 483 (*Mar. 29, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 651-61 (*Apr. 19, 2022 eve.*), 749-54 (*Apr. 21, 2022 morn., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 858-65 (*Apr. 26, 2022 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 903-09 (*Apr. 27, 2022 morn.*), 988-90 (*Apr. 28, 2022 aft., passed*)
Royal Assent — (*Apr. 29, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cT-8.1]

Bill 13 — Financial Innovation Act (Toews)

First Reading — 535 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 624-33 (*Apr. 19, 2022 aft.*), 724-27 (*Apr. 20, 2022 eve.*), 807 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve.*), 850-58 (*Apr. 26, 2022 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 925-36 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 943-48 (*Apr. 27, 2022 eve., passed*)
Royal Assent — (*Apr. 29, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cF-13.2]

Bill 14* — Provincial Court (Sexual Assault Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022 (Issik)

First Reading — 535-36 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 672-81 (*Apr. 20, 2022 morn.*), 727-33 (*Apr. 20, 2022 eve., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1159-66 (*May 4, 2022 eve., passed with amendments*)
Third Reading — 1167-72 (*May 5, 2022 Morn., passed*)

Bill 15* — Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022 (LaGrange)

First Reading — 592 (*Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 767-76 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*), 825-32 (*Apr. 26, 2022 morn.*), 884-89 (*Apr. 26, 2022 eve.*), 923-25 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1065-67 (*May 3, 2022 aft.*), 1090-95 (*May 3, 2022 eve., passed with amendments*)
Third Reading — 1125-28 (*May 4, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 16 — Insurance Amendment Act, 2022 (Toews)

First Reading — 622 (*Apr. 19, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 807-808 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve.*), 832-37 (*Apr. 26, 2022 morn.*), 879-84 (*Apr. 26, 2022 eve.*), 897-903 (*Apr. 27, 2022 morn.*), 1034-37 (*May 2, 2022 eve., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1067-74 (*May 3, 2022 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 1196-99 (*May 5, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 17 — Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Madu)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 968-75 (*Apr. 28, 2022 morn.*), 1128-40 (*May 4, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 18 — Utility Commodity Rebate Act (Nally)

First Reading — 693-94 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 735-45 (*Apr. 21, 2022 morn.*), 807 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve., passed on division*)
Committee of the Whole — 808-22 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve., passed*)
Third Reading — 822-23 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve., passed*)
Royal Assent — (*Apr. 29, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force April 29, 2022; SA 2022 cU-3.5]

Bill 19 — Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022 (Glubish)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 948-58 (*Apr. 27, 2022 eve.*), 959-68 (*Apr. 28, 2022 morn.*), 1021-27 (*May 2, 2022 eve.*), 1083-87 (*May 3, 2022 eve.*), 1180-83 (*May 5, 2022 morn., adjourned on amendment*)
Third Reading — (*May 5, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 20 — Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Shandro)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1087-90 (*May 3, 2022 eve.*), 1097-1105 (*May 4, 2022 morn., adjourned*)

Bill 21 — Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Fir)

First Reading — 788 (*Apr. 25, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1045-52 (*May 3, 2022 morn.*), 1152-58 (*May 4, 2022 eve.*), 1176-80 (*May 5, 2022 morn., adjourned*)

Bill 22 — Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022 (Nally)

First Reading — 922 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1039-45 (*May 3, 2022 morn.*), 1105-14 (*May 4, 2022 morn.*), 1145-52 (*May 4, 2022 eve.*), 1172-76 (*May 5, 2022 morn., passed*)

Bill 23 — Professional Governance Act (Madu)

First Reading — 1002 (*May 2, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 201 — Eastern Slopes Protection Act (Notley)

First Reading — 156 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 432 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly*), 789-95 (*Apr. 25, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; not proceeded with*)

Bill 202 — Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022 (Loewen)

First Reading — 110 (Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills), 309 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly), 433-40 (Mar. 28, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; proceeded with)

Bill 203 — Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act (Bilous)

First Reading — 228 (Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills), 693 (Apr. 20, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly), 796-801 (Apr. 25, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; not proceeded with)

Bill 204 — Anti-Racism Act (Shepherd)

First Reading — 408 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills), 788 (Apr. 25, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly), 1002-1008 (May 2, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; not proceeded with on division)

Bill 205 — Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022 (Sigurdson, RJ)

First Reading — 592 (Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills), 922 (Apr. 27, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly), 1008-14 (May 2, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; proceeded with on division)

Bill 206 — Prohibiting Ownership of Agricultural Lands (Pension Plans and Trust Corporations) Act (van Dijken)

First Reading — 988 (Apr. 28, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills)

Bill 207 — Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, 2022 (Rutherford)

First Reading — 988 (Apr. 28, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022 (Jones)

First Reading — 309 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills), 1001 (May 2, 2022 aft., reported to Assembly; proceeded with)

Bill Pr2 — Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022 (Nixon, JP)

First Reading — 309 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills), 1001 (May 2, 2022 aft., reported to Assembly; proceeded with with amendments)

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, May 9, 2022

Day 31

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Allard, Hon. Tracy L., ECA, Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,
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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
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Horner, Hon. Nate S., ECA, Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
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McIver, Hon. Ric, ECA, Calgary-Hays (UC)

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 Leader of the Official Opposition
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Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
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Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, ECA, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
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Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

| | |
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| Jason Kenney | Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations |
| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

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| | |
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| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Singh
Sweet

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Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gotfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
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Turton
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Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

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Frey
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Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
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Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, May 9, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Akesh Aheer. I would invite you to all participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

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

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to welcome our anthem singer today, sitting in the Speaker's gallery, Mr. Akesh Aheer, a student of music. His recent accomplishments include singing at provincials after having won scholarships at the local festival. Along with being an award-winning singer, Mr. Aheer is also the son of the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore. Hon. members, please join me in thanking him.

Hon. members, also joining us in the Speaker's gallery today are some very, very special guests of the hon. the Member for Morinville-St. Albert, the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity. Please join me in welcoming Kevin and Gail Nally, the parents of the hon. member. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

We also have this afternoon a school at the Legislature, a group joining us from the constituency of Strathcona-Sherwood Park, Uncas school.

Last but not least, joining us in the galleries today is Sierra Garner, a constituent of the Member for Lethbridge-West.

I invite you to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Gasoline Prices

Mr. Rowswell: Mr. Speaker, 2022 has been a year of records or at least for record gas prices, which hit a new record it seems every few weeks. Our rising gasoline prices increase the cost of living by 1.4 per cent alone. While the increase in gas prices has been driven by an increase in commodity prices, they do not have to be as high as they are. That is a choice of various governments. For example, the federal government levies an excise tax, a carbon tax, and a GST

on gasoline, which together add up to more than 28 cents per litre. This is passed directly on to consumers and indirectly through increased transportation costs, which increase food prices.

The federal government decided in April to increase gasoline and food prices more by increasing their carbon tax. This was a deliberate move by the federal government to increase the cost of living for Albertans and all Canadians. The federal government could have helped. After all, here in Alberta the provincial gasoline tax has been removed for as long as oil prices remain high. This tax relief, according to University of Calgary economist Trevor Tombe, was passed directly through to Albertans and continues to be passed through weeks after it began.

A simple look at national gas prices will tell you that something is very different and cheaper in Alberta. The price in Halifax is \$1.91; the price in Toronto, \$1.94; the price in Victoria, \$2.10; and leading the country in the most cost imposed is Vancouver at \$2.14. Meanwhile gasoline in Alberta is \$1.54 in Edmonton and \$1.59 in Calgary.

Clearly, there's a difference between Alberta and the rest of Canada, and that difference is that while other governments brought in taxes, resulting in increasing costs of living and punishing their constituents who need the fuel to drive vehicles to work, Alberta removed taxes and costs from all constituents.

Children's Health Care

Ms Pancholi: Sick children being forced to line up outside the children's hospitals in Calgary and Edmonton because there's no room for them to even sit and rest in the emergency room, a six-year-old being cut off from access to an insulin pump he needs to live, the lowest vaccination rate for children over five in the country, emergency room closures throughout rural Alberta, 43,000 residents and climbing in Lethbridge without a doctor: this is what health care chaos caused by the UCP looks like, and I barely cracked the surface.

Emergency room physicians, heroes during the pandemic, say that things are as bad now as they've ever been. They don't recall a time when it took 90 minutes just to triage a sick child. Ninety minutes. As a parent this is a nightmare. This is heartbreaking. It's cruel, and it's a crisis. Yet Albertans get nothing but talking points from the government, a Premier too embroiled in trying to save his own job to care, a Health minister that won't even take the phone calls of parents fearing for their child's life.

Albertans deserve so much better. Alberta's children deserve so much better. They deserve a government that will put public health care first, that will properly fund emergency rooms, that will ensure ambulances don't have to wait in line with their critical patients onboard, that will recruit new doctors and end the fighting with front-line heroes. They deserve a government that knows that, yes, public health care matters. It's part of being Canadian. It's how we take care of each other and, most importantly, how we as a community take care of our children.

I promise Alberta's children and their parents this: Alberta's NDP hears each and every one of you. We hear the pain and the fear in your voice. We're listening, we're acting, and if we have the privilege of forming the next government, we will be there for you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Economic Recovery and Women

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is booming. In 2021 Alberta beat the national average in real gross domestic product

growth, coming in at 5.1 per cent. Alberta quickly recovered postpandemic to its original position in Canada as the economic workhorse of this country, and people around the country and the world are noticing.

Within the last quarter of 2021 Alberta led large provinces in international and interprovincial immigration. The spike in GDP and immigration to this province is due to new investments from Amazon, Northern Petrochemical, Dow Chemical, Telus, and Pace Canada, just to name a few. These investments have shown that Alberta is the place to do business, and I am excited to see what this new outlook has in store.

Let's not forget, Mr. Speaker, that while this government has achieved all of this, they have still managed to balance the budget and increase funding for programs that Albertans value most. This is the Alberta advantage.

While this is great news, our government also recognizes the systemic barriers that women face in the workforce, and that is why our government has created an extra \$1 million bursary to assist women in their pursuit of careers in STEM and the trades. This government has also begun negotiations and has been working very hard to reduce licensed daycare fees to help working parents enter and stay in the workforce and participate in this economy.

Mr. Speaker, this government's efforts to reduce barriers for women are working. In March of 2022 the unemployment rate for women was 6.7 per cent, with an employment rate of 60.7 per cent. ATB reported that female workers in Alberta experienced a more pronounced labour market recovery postpandemic than male workers. Employment rates for women in Alberta have led the nation for five consecutive months. Under this government all Albertans, no matter their gender, will have an opportunity to participate fully in this economy.

Thank you.

1:40

Health Care System

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, just over three years ago columnist Don Braid wrote some prophetic words. He said that the UCP's plans for cuts to health care would guarantee "a return to the chaos of the Progressive Conservative years, and maybe worse." That prediction has sadly, tragically come true. Last week Braid spoke with Dr. Paul Parks, head of AMA's section of emergency medicine, on the dire state of our health care system under the UCP. "Albertans are dying," he says, because they can't access care.

We know some of these people have very serious outcomes and even deaths . . . The idea of a patient seeing the right person in the right place at the right time has completely fallen apart . . . We are desperate, just desperate for Albertans to understand how bad this is . . . There's a strong feeling among medical professionals that the troubles will only get worse because they have spread into so many corners of health care.

This, Mr. Speaker, is not just seasonal pressure like the Health minister likes to blandly claim. It didn't have to be this way. This government isn't a victim of circumstance. It repeatedly ignored warnings and made choices that led us directly here. As Dr. Parks says, "There is only one government making decisions and its policies are devastating."

You know what else Don Braid wrote back in 2019? "The NDP calmed down the system, made significant improvements and provided stability for health planners, professionals and workers." Keith Gerein wrote: "Alberta's health system has enjoyed one of its most uninterrupted periods of stability under the NDP's reign." But, as Braid wrote: "A new bunch of UCP politicians arrived in 2019, claiming to know exactly what was needed for health care. This is what we got." Chaos, Mr. Speaker, three years of mismanagement,

bullying, and utter incompetence, and Albertans left to pay the price.

It's clear, Mr. Speaker, that if we want to save our health care system, Alberta needs a new government, and the Alberta NDP is ready.

Camrose County Fire Services Safety Training

Ms Lovely: Thank you to the fire chief of the Camrose county volunteer fire service for inviting me to participate as a casualty in a safety training scenario which took place with the firefighting team, Wildrose safety training, and EMS. We gathered in a field at Silver Creek Paintball, close to New Norway, with a school bus turned on its side and a car placed in a collision position head-on with the bus.

There was a team of us gathered inside the bus, posing with various injuries. The Wildrose safety team outlined characters for each one of us to play, reviewing injuries and behaviour that they wanted us to exhibit so as to best provide learning experience for the volunteer firefighters. My character had two fingers severed, a head injury, confusion, memory loss, and a tendency to wander. One casualty was lodged in between the bus seats. Another had her arms stuck under the bus with the hands severed off. An additional casualty suffered the loss of an ear. With lifelike props and theatre makeup the team provided a very real scenario.

The volunteer firefighters were provided a call and sent to the scene, not knowing what they would find. The next two hours resulted in this dedicated team helping each casualty one by one. We were brought to a safe spot beside the bus, and the driver of the car was extracted, with the roof being removed and the driver carefully extracted on a body board.

Co-ordination and planning went into creating this scenario so as to provide valuable training for each of these volunteers. It was an honour for me to be asked to participate, and I came away from the exercise with tremendous respect for the time and commitment each one of these volunteers provides to their community. This participation means time away from family and work. It also puts them in places of danger to themselves in order to protect the safety and well-being of others.

This same team recently celebrated the grand opening of their new Camrose county regional fire services hall #2 with a barbecue and fundraiser. At the end of the event the alarm went off. They jumped into action.

Thank you for all you do. You are valued and appreciated.

Government Record

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have been subjected to this government's boasting about their economic wizardry for months. It's embarrassing, and it's unbecoming and part of why no one trusts the UCP. The price of oil went up – that's it – otherwise, they'd still be running the highest deficit in Alberta history given how they've been happy to waste billions of the public's money. But while the Premier, his Finance minister, and the rest of the UCP liquor cabinet are popping champagne corks on the sky palace, Albertans don't buy it because they aren't feeling it, and that's why it's so disrespectful.

People are struggling because of the cost-of-living crisis that the UCP created, a full billion taken out of Albertans' pockets because of the hikes to personal income tax. They lifted the caps on utility rates. They've done nothing at all when rates skyrocketed and families were forced to choose between gas and groceries and keeping the lights on. The minister even declared in this House that the preferred UCP plan to help those Albertans was to do "nothing."

Electricity bills, natural gas, insurance premiums, income tax, student fees: Albertans are paying more and getting less. We have lineups outside of emergency rooms. Forty thousand of my fellow southern Albertans don't have a family doctor. And did they create jobs? No. Calgary's unemployment is still the highest of any Canadian major city, but still the government forks out money for private flights for the Premier and his friends, the fanciest hotels, millions for his secret war room, and time and again, over and over again, justifying a billion for a nonexistent pipeline. That's why this is the least trusted Premier in Canada, only able to hold on to his job by putting his thumb on the scale of an internal UCP process.

This is a party and a government that does not have respect for our tax dollars, our health care, or trimming waste in government. Albertans are asking for a government they can trust and that has respect for our province and the hard-working folks who build it every day. Whether it's in 12 weeks or 12 months, Alberta's NDP is ready to restore respect for Albertans yet again.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Exercise Maple Resolve 2022 at CFB Wainwright

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many here know of Wainwright as the location of the 3rd Canadian Division support base detachment for the Canadian military. This is one of the busiest army bases in Canada. Over 600 military personnel drawn from all over Canada, many with their families, are stationed here for training. The role of the detachment is to provide extensive training to military individuals to prepare for active duty. Throughout the year military personnel are trained in a variety of military activities, primarily in-field exercises, live firing, and unit tactical operations.

Every spring, in May, the exercise Maple Resolve begins. This is a multinational exercise, involving 3,500 U.S. and Canadian troops as well as personnel from Great Britain, Australia, and France. This annual exercise identifies interoperability issues between the forces, allowing the partner nations to overcome them during training. This is not only sensible but acts as a force multiplier. It teaches individuals in the military across the world how to interact with army forces and to allow forces and units to operate together.

I'm reminded of this quote attributed to Thomas Jefferson: "The price of freedom is eternal vigilance." The important activity of CFB Wainwright and the Maple Resolve exercise is part of that vigilance. I ask everyone here to join with me in paying tribute to our Canadian Armed Forces and to remain mindful of the important training that takes place year in and year out in humble Wainwright.

Government Record

Mr. Loewen: Democracy. It's a word we all know. It's a word we all use, maybe too casually, but let's dig into it. Democracy in Greek means "rule by the people." It must be stressed that this means all people. Of course, we have many elements of majority rule in our political system; for instance, we govern ourselves in this Legislature by majority vote. We allow the party that wins the most seats to govern. We have conducted referendums on various topics that respect the will of the majority.

However, democracy is the rule by the people, all people, and that's why we also have mechanisms to include the minority. For example, we possess rights and civil liberties like free assembly, religious freedom, and even free speech for unpopular opinions. We believe in the rule of law, with the understanding that the system must always be fair and just to all people. We believe in the role of

opposition and the rights of elected representatives to challenge government power, holding them to account.

However, I am troubled that this Premier does not seem to understand that he is a servant of the people. We have seen civil liberties trampled. We have seen corrupt practices that undermine our faith in fairness and the rule of law. We have seen critical and dissenting voices treated with contempt and mockery. The government seems to have little use for the people or the public's right to oversee their own government's increasing power. The Premier's so-called big tent seems just about big enough to fit his own ego and nothing else.

A government that forgets its place under the people is one that rapidly grows out of touch. Ralph Klein spoke about the dangers of dome disease and the temptation of government officials to become more obsessed with their own tight groups of insiders, ignoring the regular people outside these walls. Not everyone will agree with every decision, but the people have stopped trusting that the decisions of this government are being made for the right reason. They ultimately question whether we have true rule by the people or rule by a small group of elites and well-connected insiders.

The will of the people may be temporarily ignored, but it cannot be suppressed forever. Their demands for good governance, honesty from their MLAs, and the end of corruption will be met one way or another, either by this group or their replacements.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Children's Health Care

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans expect to see lineups of children at amusement parks, not outside their hospitals. Today the crisis in health care has reached ERs at both the Stollery and Alberta Children's hospital: packed waiting rooms, families waiting up to 16 hours, lineups of children going out the door. This UCP's mismanagement of the pandemic pushed our hospitals to the brink, and now it's our children who are paying the price. To the Premier: does he accept any responsibility for this crisis, and what is he doing to fix it? Be specific.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's regrettable but not unprecedented that we see acute pressures in our health care system. That's the case right now, and it's in part because we do have 1,000 people in hospital with COVID; thankfully, only about 45 in ICUs with COVID at this point, in addition to two years of stress on our health care workforce. That's why Alberta's government has added roughly \$2 billion to the baseline budget for Alberta Health Services. We have 100 more doctors working in the system now than a year ago, 1,800 more nurses, and 1,300 more EMS personnel. We fully expect AHS to use those resources to address these pressure points.

Ms Notley: Well, it's not working, Mr. Speaker. Quote: ER doctors are the canary down the coal mine of health care; well, the canary has keeled over and died. That's Dr. Paul Parks in Medicine Hat. Quote: every funded bed is occupied. That's Dr. Eddy Lang in Calgary. Quote: the biggest worry is that a child dies. That's Dr. Shazma Mithani, who works at the Stollery children's hospital in Edmonton. Why doesn't the Premier take out his earplugs and listen to these doctors and realize he needs to do more because doing the same is not working?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member that there is inadequate capacity in our health care system, which is why we are funding and implementing a plan to increase that capacity. My

question for her is: why did she leave government after four years with the second-highest per capita health expenditures in Canada but the lowest per capita number of ICU beds with longer wait times both for surgeries and diagnostics? Why did she for four years oversee one of the most expensive systems with inadequate results?

Ms Notley: I left government with zero children standing in lineups outside of emergency rooms, Mr. Speaker.

Now, part of the problem is that children are experiencing high levels of COVID-19. Doctors provide several explanations for that, including the fact that Alberta has the lowest vaccination rate among children aged five to 11 in the country. Now, this UCP government claimed that in-school vaccinations don't work, but provinces that put vaccines in schools have vaccinated up to 20 per cent more children in their province. Just how long do the lineups at the ER have to get before this Premier reverses his . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, we encourage all eligible Albertans over the age of 12 to get the protection of vaccines. They're safe and effective, and the opposition is right. They are kids. Their parents are responsible for their health care decisions, so I find it regrettable that the NDP leader is attacking parents who have chosen not to get the vaccination for their kids. We support the choices that parents make for their minor children, but perhaps, like the Ontario NDP, she wants to throw unvaccinated kids out of our schools. We think that would be irresponsible.

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

Ms Notley: An irresponsible misstatement of the facts by that Premier.

Utility Rebate Timeline

Ms Notley: Now, meanwhile Albertans struggling to pay their utility bills are waiting and waiting and waiting. That's because when it comes to Albertans getting their electricity rebates, the UCP is speaking out of both sides of their mouth. The minister claimed June or July, but last week this government quietly passed regulations giving power producers until December 31. They rejected our deadline for the end of May, and now Albertans are discovering it will be sometime in the next seven months. To the Premier: is it any wonder Albertans don't trust him or his government?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we recognize the very significant cost pressures on people with inflation, with carbon taxes, with energy inflation, that the NDP has been calling for. They imposed the largest tax increase in the history of Alberta, their job-killing carbon tax. They cheered on Mr. Trudeau's plan to raise it by 25 per cent on April 1. They want to quadruple it. Meanwhile this Conservative government suspended the collection of Alberta's fuel tax, a \$1.3 billion annualized savings, together with the gas rebate and electricity rebate, about \$2 billion of support on an annual basis.

Ms Notley: They promised June; now it's December.

Meanwhile, Mr. Speaker, the same goes for the Premier's fake natural gas rebate. He announced it in February at a price his own budget said would never be triggered. Lo and behold, prices in April shot through the roof. Yesterday it was \$8.29. The minister recently claimed they were talking about expanding the eligibility period to cover these spikes, but information online now says it's still October. So, Premier, clear this up. Will your natural gas rebates

cover the spikes Albertans are experiencing this spring, or are you making them wait again?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, when she said that the consumer protection on the natural gas price was above what was projected in the budget, that's the whole point. We were preparing Albertans for a potential increase in that price. It triggers at \$6.50. We've been averaging gas prices in the last month of about \$7.50, so that relief will be forthcoming together with the 13-cent-a-litre savings on the fuel tax and the electricity rebate, by far the largest consumer support of any government, provincial or federal, in the Dominion.

Ms Notley: Clearly, Albertans are still waiting for an answer on whether they are eligible now or not.

You know, meanwhile this Premier didn't hesitate to tax inflation. One call from the insurance lobby and, poof, the cap on premiums was gone. Tuition hikes every year, like clockwork. When the Premier sped up his billion-dollar handout to big, profitable corporations, it took him just two days, but when it's hundreds of thousands of struggling families, he makes them wait months, and he won't give them a clear black-and-white answer. Can the Premier explain why there is such a big difference about who it is he shows up to work on behalf of?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, the NDP is phony about a lot of things, but they're not phonier than – the phoniest issue for them is the cost of living, because they brought in a tax whose entire purpose is to increase the cost of living on Albertans. Their carbon tax . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, their carbon tax is costing average Alberta families \$600 a year now, but that's not enough. They want to quadruple it. They want it to cost Alberta families over \$2,000 a year. They want to dig into people's pockets. We won't let them.

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

Diabetes Treatment Coverage

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, just this morning I stood with over 20 Albertans, some with diabetes, others family of people with diabetes, who were infuriated with this government's plan to cancel the insulin pump therapy program. The minister has created uncertainty and chaos in the lives of Albertans who depend on these pumps and their families. People do not know how they will pay for their pump once these changes are put into place. To the Premier. Simple question: will the UCP stop this chaos, restore peace of mind for those who rely on an insulin pump by committing now to not make any further changes without comprehensive consultation with Albertans who depend on the pumps, including those in the gallery . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we all know that diabetes is a serious health issue for many Albertans, and that's why we've taken measures to actually increase access to support, particularly for lower income people and children with diabetes. We're making changes to provide Albertans with the newest technologies to better manage diabetes to maintain and improve their health and well-being. In phase 1 of the plan we provided expanded coverage for diabetes test strips and other diabetes supplies. In phase 2 we expanded coverage for continuous glucose monitors for kids under the age of 18 under supplementary health benefits.

Mr. Shepherd: Empty talking points, Mr. Speaker, while Albertans with diabetes watch this Premier. Six-year-old Conor is sitting up in the gallery today. His dad, Jason, shared with us that, quote, the fact that Conor has an insulin pump means he can safely go to school with minimal support and still be safe. Their family's care plan is built on Conor having the pump going into grade 1. If he doesn't, Jason or his wife may have to leave their job, find one with more flexibility to give Conor the care he needs during the day while he's at school. What does the Premier have to say to these families or those in similar situations who planned on having a pump but now fear losing it? Where are the details?

2:00

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, we estimate that more than 1,500 children will benefit from this expanded coverage that I've mentioned, saving parents about \$4,200 annually. Phase 3 of the plan will allow us to cover a new generation of insulin pumps to better support diabetic Albertans, and this involves transferring insulin pump benefits from the insulin pump therapy program to government-sponsored health benefit programs like Blue Cross nongroup coverage as of August 1. We expect that the vast majority of 4,000 Albertans receiving pumps and supplies at no cost in this program will continue to receive coverage.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, if that's what they expect, then they've done the work. Show it to the families. Let's see the plan. The people in the gallery today are just the tip of the iceberg. Both Lisa Hart and her daughter live with type 1 diabetes. After the UCP's announcement to cancel the program, they're worried that they may have to pay thousands out of pocket to keep their pumps. That'll be on top of other costs that they pay, including potential premiums, copays associated with private insurance, costs that are not associated with the current program. Can this Premier simply admit that he's made a mistake, apologize, commit to halting this cancellation and not moving one step further until he actually consults with these Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, we're having consultations, and I should note that about 30 per cent, or 1,300 people, are already enrolled in government plans, and about 500 low-income Albertans will continue to receive coverage at no cost after the transition. About 60 per cent of those involved in the insulin pump therapy program do have private coverage already. Nongroup coverage costs about \$63 per month for a single Albertan, plus a copayment, but seniors will only have to pay a fee of 30 per cent for a claim of up to \$25. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Alberta School Councils' Association

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta schools council has seen almost all of its funding cut over the past year. ASCA provides critical advocacy support for 1,500 school councils and more than 50,000 parent volunteers. Under the UCP this vital organization funding has gone from \$650,000 in 2020 to nearly zero this spring. What is the Premier afraid of? Why is he undermining this organization that acts as representatives for thousands of diverse parent voices?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education is rising.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Great question. I've been a long supporter of the Alberta School Councils' Association and school councils in general. That's why I've allocated... [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: That's why, Mr. Speaker, I've allocated a million dollars to go to school councils. That's \$500 for every school council to engage with their parents. Additionally, on top of that, I started up the parent advisory council. Also, I've provided a grant to the Alberta school council to do their much-needed work.

Ms Hoffman: The Alberta School Councils' Association offers critical training and education to help school councils do their work in a meaningful way and ensure that their school community has diverse representation. Yet this is another attack on public education. Many parents involved in ASCA feel that this cruel cut is happening because the UCP is vengeful. Parents throughout Alberta have been voicing their frustration with the UCP's COVID mismanagement and this government's discredited Dumpster-fire curriculum. Will the Premier tell students, staff, and families why the UCP wants to bankrupt parent advocacy and why they won't work with democratically elected parents?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, I've worked with the Alberta school council. In fact, the member opposite probably doesn't know that when I was a trustee, I actually received the friend of the Alberta School Councils' award because of my advocacy work on behalf of parents, because I believe in the... [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe in the advocacy of parents. I fully support it, and that's why we continue to work with the Alberta school councils. We provided them a grant for this year to work on learning disruptions. We will continue to provide grants to them when they put them forward.

Ms Hoffman: The Alberta School Councils' Association celebrated their 90th anniversary the year the current Education minister was appointed, but under the UCP they seem dead set on shutting down ASCA and silencing elected parents who advocate for Alberta students. This is clearly a move to undermine the role of democratically elected parent volunteers. Mr. Speaker, since the current Education minister refuses to answer the actual question, I have a declaration. I've put it in writing to the President of ASCA: under an NDP government we will absolutely restore the \$650,000 a year that they get to do their important work, because we stand with parents while the minister sits beside the Premier.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More and more empty promises from the other side, empty promises that they never follow through on. That's what we heard. That's what I heard when I was a trustee. Therefore, I can assure you that we continue... [interjections]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order.

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, we do not fund any other association for operating costs. In the past that's what we were doing with the Alberta School Councils' Association. We are now treating them like every other association, like the Alberta School Boards Association, the College of Alberta School

Superintendents, et cetera. We provide them grant funding to do specific project work.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein is next.

Springbank Reservoir Flood Mitigation Project

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The floods of 2013 caused billions of dollars in damage, forced dozens of communities to declare states of emergency, and took the lives of five people. It even forced the quick evacuation of the youth shelter I managed, destroying much of the youths' belongings and displacing these youth. In the years since this natural disaster Alberta's government has worked tirelessly with all levels of government, stakeholders, and landowners to develop plans for SR 1, the Springbank off-stream reservoir. To the Minister of Transportation: can you tell us about this historic announcement that was made last week on the banks of the Elbow and the Bow rivers?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for the question. Mr. Speaker, we must never forget the destruction and chaos, and we must never forget those who perished. Last Thursday the Premier, fellow cabinet members, and I announced the start of construction on this once-in-a-generation project. Vinci Construction won the contract to build a dry reservoir that will divert flood waters from the Elbow River during extreme flood events. It has taken many years of collaboration, and I'm truly grateful to all of our stakeholders for their input to get us to this milestone.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her efforts. Given that a project of this scale and magnitude is not cheap and given that costs have increased dramatically since 2017's forecast of \$432 million and given that during last week's announcement the Premier said that this new total would be \$744 million, to the minister: can she tell us why this project, with its escalating cost, is an important use of taxpayer dollars?

Mrs. Sawhney: Mr. Speaker, the new total is reflected in Budget 2022. Since the original approved budget in 2017 costs have skyrocketed for construction, materials, utility and pipeline relocation, and land purchases. It's important to note that the federal government is contributing 168 and a half million dollars to this project. Without flood mitigation Alberta risks losing billions of dollars when the next major flood hits. When SR 1 is operational in a few years, it will protect lives, property, businesses, and the economy.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister for her efforts. Given that, as the minister mentioned, Vinci Construction won the contract to construct SR 1 and given that with the reservoir mapped out, crews are currently moving dirt to build the dry dam and given that part of the agreement includes work that will be done by First Nations and Métis nations in the region, to the minister: can you talk about how government engaged with Indigenous communities throughout this process?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, for many years Alberta's government engaged in discussion and conducted site visits with Treaty 6 First Nations, Treaty 7 First Nations, and the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3. Alberta Transportation signed 31 agreements for various work for Indigenous contractors,

from excavation and site preparation to road and bridge construction. A community liaison was also established to work with Indigenous groups and other stakeholders to address any concerns they may have had with the project.

Political Party Membership Sale and Purchase

Mr. Sabir: Bill 81 is bad for Alberta. Those aren't just my opinions; those are the opinions of at least four UCP caucus members, three of whom voted against this bill and one who filed a complaint with Elections Alberta citing concerns about membership purchases in the UCP leadership race. These are very serious concerns that require the full action of Alberta's government to ensure that the democratic traditions in Alberta are upheld and maintained. Will the minister agree to work with the opposition to immediately reverse the section of Bill 81 that allows the bulk purchasing of memberships without . . .

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

2:10

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me say right away that that particular member is mistaken and is misinforming the general public. There is absolutely nothing in Bill 81 that allows for bulk membership. What we have in Bill 81 right now is still similar to the provision that we had prior in section 25. I'm happy to report that the Chief Electoral Officer has confirmed in a revised bulletin that there is nothing in Bill 81 that allows for bulk members without the consent of Albertans.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the UCP Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul was prevented by this government from being able to introduce his amendment to prevent someone from buying party memberships without individual consent and given that 4,000 memberships bought on six credit cards show that this type of accountability, blocked by the UCP, needs to be looked into, will the Minister of Justice agree to take the amendment from his colleague, turn it into a government bill, pass it by tomorrow, and end this unethical practice?

Mr. Madu: You know, I mean, let me say that one more time: there is nothing in Bill 81 that allows for bulk membership without the consent of party members. The process that we have right now is the process that we had prior to Bill 81. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, they are heckling because they are not interested in facts or the truth. They just want to misinform the general public. We will ensure that we don't allow the NDP to misinform Albertans on Bill 81. I am happy to have brought in . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Given that it appears the minister has not read the bill and given that Elections Alberta has confirmed that they are investigating the alleged bulk membership purchases and given that the last time they were investigated by Elections Alberta, they rushed to fire the Election Commissioner, showing the true colours of the Premier and the former Justice minister, will the four Justice ministers stand and promise that the election officer job is safe while this investigation is ongoing, or is accountability still a four-letter word for this government?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what that particular member is talking about. There is no . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The minister.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You can see that they are heckling because they are not interested in facts and the substance of the issue. They are only interested in misinformation and disinformation. There is no threat whatsoever to the job of the Chief Electoral Officer. Let me repeat that once again: our party's, the United Conservative Party's, regulation requires consent before you can pick up a party membership, unlike the NDP. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Gasoline Prices

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, in April the UCP government declared victory on gasoline prices after they cut the provincial fuel tax, but now we see gasoline prices back on the rise and close to the same levels they were before the UCP cut the fuel tax. In the end Albertans are no further ahead than they were a month ago, and experts are saying that gas could go even higher as the war on Ukraine continues and summer driving season approaches. What is this government going to do to provide relief at the pumps for Albertans? Or is the Premier not aware of these increases since he can't even fill up his own gas tank?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find that question ridiculous. Has that member read the newspaper? Has he looked at other provinces' fuel rates? Alberta is by far and away the lowest cost jurisdiction for gasoline, for diesel fuel. Why? Because we have an efficient system but, more importantly, because we suspended the fuel tax in this province. We're providing real relief for Albertans, more protection than any other province.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that the UCP said that the savings from the fuel tax would be passed on to Albertans and given that we have asked for an independent review to ensure this is the case but the UCP continues to refuse to provide any kind of transparency or accountability and given that fuel prices are back on the rise as Albertans already struggle to make ends meet, will this government finally agree to an independent review to ensure that all of the rebate is being passed on to Albertans? If not, why are they so scared of transparency?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I find that question ridiculous. We monitored gasoline prices when we suspended the fuel tax, and they dropped almost across the board by 13 cents a litre. There are a lot of factors that go into the price of retail gasoline and diesel, including WTI prices, refining margins – many factors – but one thing I can say for sure today: Alberta has the lowest gasoline costs of any province in this country.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that Albertans are falling further behind under this UCP government – in fact, wages are failing to keep up with inflation, and Alberta has the slowest wage growth across the country – and given that the UCP is making a bad situation worse by piling on additional costs – income taxes, property taxes, tuition, utilities, and auto insurance have all increased drastically due to this government – and given that fuel prices are back on the rise but the UCP is doing nothing to provide transparency, why is this government okay with these rising costs as Albertans struggle to pay for basic necessities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that affordability is an issue, and that's why we're providing real relief, almost \$2 billion of annualized relief. I find it really odd, the members opposite raising the issue of affordability, being the members, when they were in government, that brought in the largest tax increase in this province's history. They brought in the carbon tax. It increased costs for everything from fuel to groceries to utilities. It affected every family, every business, every senior.

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

Lobbyists Act

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has an all-too-cozy relationship between senior officials and its favoured lobbyists. When the Conservative Party of Canada was first elected in 2006, its top priority was the Federal Accountability Act, which included measures to close a revolving door between the PMO and lobbying. Sixteen years later Alberta still has some of the most lax lobbying rules in Confederation. Provincially the cooling-off periods are just one year and can be waived upon request instead of Harper's five years. To the Premier: why are cooling-off periods important federally but not for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations has risen.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the member for his hard work on this file. The Alberta Lobbyists Act regulates lobbying activities in Alberta, and it balances free and open access to government with public transparency and accountability with respect to who is going to access it and to seek influence in government.

Mr. Barnes: Given that it shocked Albertans to see UCP members on a UCP-dominated committee block any substantive changes to the Lobbyists Act, voting down at least a dozen recommendations, including some straight from our Ethics Commissioner, and given that a proper ban on family members lobbying immediate family members is long overdue as there is currently nothing in the Lobbyists Act to prevent a lobbyist from orchestrating a deal with a staffer family member and given the perception that at least one contract has been awarded in such a scenario, Mr. Premier, are you keeping this obvious loophole open?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Indigenous Relations has risen.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you for the question. Unfortunately, many of the recommendations that were presented were unclear and, if adopted, would have created mountains of burdensome red tape. Others already exist, like recommending a cooling-off period for former government staff.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that the entire purpose of lobbying rules and regulations is to prevent special interests from exerting undue influence denied to regular Albertans and given that there is currently nothing within the Lobbyists Act to prevent UCP provincial board members from lobbying the government and given that there is currently a registered lobbyist sitting on the UCP's provincial board and given that the leadership review's returning officer is also a registered lobbyist, can the Premier tell us: if all the lobbyists he meets with work for the UCP, who is working for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the Alberta lobbyist registry is a free online registration system which lobbyists must use to register their lobbying activities in Alberta to be in compliance with the Alberta Lobbyists Act. All registrations are searchable and viewable by the public free of charge at any time. Also, ultimately, Alberta's Lobbyists Act is one of the most stringent in the country, and I believe the committee felt that these recommendations were not going to be helpful to improve it.

2:20 Live Events Industry Support

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, the events industry, artists, theatres, and venues were hit hard by the pandemic. They were the first industry to close their doors and limit their audiences and performances, because of public health orders, and the last to open. Many took on debt and had to lay off staff just to survive the pandemic. Many are struggling to get back on their feet, and they are looking to this government for support to be able to recover. The stabilize program was meant to help, but I've heard concerns that many are still waiting for support. Can the minister confirm that every cent of the stabilize program has gone out the door?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. We fully recognize that the live events industry, everything from rodeos to music to theatre, was definitely hard hit, first to close and last to open. The stabilize program has come to an end. The money, to my knowledge, has gone out. I'd also like to add that we've actually increased the budget this year for arts and culture. There will actually be more money available this year than there was last year.

Thank you.

Ms Goehring: Given that for many this funding came late, which meant additional pressures for them as they waited for the government to catch up to the commitment that they made to them, and given that artists and the events industry pivoted their projects, platforms, and services in response to the pandemic without initial help from the government for far too long and given that the stabilize program didn't help artists or spaces with these retroactive costs, which they asked for, can the minister explain why so many were forced to wait for this essential funding? Has he apologized to those who were forced to stress because this government was unable to live up to their commitments?

Mr. Orr: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't accept the implication of that question. While I realize that everybody in this province struggled and was under stress, the reality is that we worked very hard with the entire industry to try and help them out, and we received a lot of input of them. As I said earlier, this coming year there will be even more money available than there was last year.

Ms Goehring: Given that I have heard from venues in the live experience industry about the pressures that they are experiencing as a result of inflation and the cost-of-living crisis the UCP created and given that skyrocketing utility bills, higher costs are compounding with debt many of these organizations had to take out to survive the pandemic, raising concern for many that they might not be sustainable, and given that the rebates that this government promised but won't deliver for months aren't enough for many, what supports will the minister roll out to help the industry survive this latest crisis? Will it be to tell them that they're on their own again?

Mr. Orr: Well, Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the NDP would have done – they would have had every live event completely shut down, completely locked down, and everybody told to stay home – we made a point of making sure that they could be open, that they could continue to have business. I'd like to tell you that Alberta is open for business. When I talk to the live events industry now, they are booked solid. When Alberta thrives, culture thrives. Things are looking up in Alberta, and they're going to continue to look up.

South Edmonton Hospital Construction Funding

Member Loyola: The Minister of Infrastructure is making an egregious mistake of pursuing the P3 model for the \$2 billion Edmonton south hospital. Other provinces, like Saskatchewan, Ontario, Manitoba, have had bad experiences with P3 projects. Even the previous Alberta Conservative government knew P3s were a mistake. The only apparent reason that this minister is pursuing the P3 is to consider this government's mission to funnel public funding into the hands of private corporations. To the minister: will he now give Albertans a clear and unequivocal answer that he will not waste \$2 billion of public taxpayer funding on pursuing a P3 model?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I cannot go against the will of Albertans, who have voted for our campaign commitment to aggressively pursue public-private partnerships where it makes sense, where our taxpayers get the best benefit. In this particular case we haven't decided what the procurement method is yet.

Member Loyola: Given that the minister seems to ignore the past failure of P3 projects in Alberta and given that the Bessie Nichols school was a P3 program that was a disaster and cost the taxpayers millions more than the traditional model and given that private contractors weren't allowing school administrators to even control the thermostat on the coldest days and that there were incidents of student injury, is this minister really okay with sick patients forced to bundle up on cold days or willing to make doctors, nurses, and health care aides work around failed and potentially dangerous infrastructure just so your government can get more public funds into the pockets of profitable corporations?

Mr. Panda: To that particular member "profit" is a word that I don't know if he understands what it is. He hates that word, "profit," but that's a different subject, Mr. Speaker.

Let me correct him. The experience of P3s in the previous government was validated by the Auditor General when they determined the value for Albertans. There were some things to be fixed in delivering schools, for example, which we are working on. But the hospital project, if we go through P3s, will still be safe.

Member Loyola: Given that the city of Edmonton tried this risky P3 experiment for the valley line LRT and given that this risky experiment has resulted in years of delays and cost millions more than anticipated and given that the previous mayor has called for the province to stop forcing more P3 projects down their throats, to the minister: will you finally listen to the city of Edmonton and commit to not forcing municipalities to accept projects built on your ideological P3 agenda and just finally get the Edmonton south hospital built?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, we'll work with the city of Edmonton. If they have any concerns about P3s, we'll address them. And we'll definitely continue the work on this Edmonton hospital. But when the member opposite is talking about ideology, theirs was the risky

ideology, which Albertans are still trying to recover from after four years of their risky ideological policies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-East is next.

Oil and Gas Export

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is making rapid progress in its economic recovery plan. The unemployment rate is the lowest since the government took office. Alberta now tops the rest of the country in overall employment rate. The energy sector provides more economic opportunities. Oil and gas production from Alberta's oil sands extraction continues to increase, higher than it was in 2019. To the minister: what plans are in place to ensure that Alberta's energy supply continues to reach both Canadian and international markets?

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you for that question. As the world moves to weed out Russian oil and gas, it also has highlighted the shortage of supply and it's exposed the weaknesses in energy security. It's also shown that the world will continue to use oil and gas for decades, even in a world that's transitioning towards net zero. The question is: where will that supply come from? Every single barrel of oil that we leave in the ground here will come out of the ground somewhere else, and we believe that energy should come from Alberta. Mr. Speaker, that's why we are accelerating our efforts in North American energy security.

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

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Alberta still has more capacity to increase its energy export to other countries and within Canada and that that is likely to increase the revenue flow in the province's economic recovery plan and given that Alberta's ethically produced oil is the solution and substitute for Russia's conflict oil, what is the minister doing in terms of investment in energy infrastructure to increase Alberta's oil and gas exportation nationally and globally?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We sit on top of the third-largest reserves of oil in the world, and on this side of the House we treat our oil and gas industry like a strategic asset, something to be proud of and support, not something to demonize. That's why our government supports all forms of egress. North, south, east, west: we've supported every single pipeline proposed, and our export market always has been and continues to be North America and the United States. That's why we have been working with Senator Joe Manchin, the proud Democrat from West Virginia, on energy security.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that Alberta still requires more investment in the energy sector to increase the supply and, further, given that there are higher prospects for Alberta's energy in the global markets in the short and long term, to the minister: what are the efforts that have been taken and timelines put in place to remove antienergy legislation that deprives Alberta's energy supply from reaching global and regional markets?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know the history, the very sad history, of cancelled and vetoed pipelines at the hands of the Trudeau government, supported by the NDP governments. The history of vetoes and pipeline cancellations will go down as one of the biggest mistakes that this country has made in its history, but we have an opportunity to reset as the world grapples with energy security. We have an opportunity to reset energy policy, one that includes challenging bills C-69 and C-48, creating efficient and predictable regulatory processes, eliminating red tape, and working on North American energy security.

2:30 Antiracism Initiatives in Education

Mr. Deol: Recently the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights led workshops across the province where parents, teachers, school board trustees, and community members shared ideas on how to curb racism in academic settings. Those workshops resulted in a final report and calls to action. It is clear that across school districts and areas of the province it is up to each individual school board to look to address racism. Can the Minister of Education explain why there is no guidance from the ministry on developing antiracism policies? Racism isn't reasonable.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and a great question. It's something we're all very concerned about. School authorities do develop their policies. It is incumbent on school authorities to make sure that they have strong, safe, welcoming, caring school policies. Many of them go to extra lengths, particularly to combat racism right across the whole school authority, divisions right across this province. Again, we're working with school authorities because they are the ones that are putting in place policies and implementing them.

Mr. Deol: Given that school boards are trying to address this issue in the face of ever-decreasing funding from the province and given that there are no clear guidelines, goals, timelines, or targeted funding in the Ministry of Education to combat racism and given that the Action Alberta report recommends stable funding for antiracism initiatives in education and given that under the UCP there are currently no grants open or available to support antiracism, will the minister commit today to ensuring that all school districts have access to consistent funding to address racism within the education system?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated earlier, school authorities are looking to make sure that they have strong policies in this area, but beyond that, we're addressing it in the curriculum for the first time ever. We are ensuring that our curriculum is focused on: every student is welcomed regardless of where they come from, regardless of . . . [interjections] It's very hard to actually give you great answers, because the opposition continues to heckle on something that is such an important issue. Antiracism is everybody's responsibility, including our schools.

Mr. Deol: Given that many Indigenous and racialized Albertans have repeatedly said that they do not see themselves reflected in the education system and given that in order to address racism, we need to increase the diversity of educators and given that we need to focus not only on hiring more Indigenous and racialized Albertans but that we also need to focus on recruiting and training more diverse educators, can the Minister of Education explain what work has been undertaken with the Minister of Advanced Education to

address this issue in the education system and what benchmarks the government is targeting to increase the diversity of educators?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. You know, this is actually an issue that all of us agree on. I think my one request to the members opposite is to support the curriculum, because – guess what? – for the first time in our history the K to 6 draft curriculum actually addressed racism and included minority, cultural, religious groups in that same curriculum that the members opposite are opposed to.

Legal Aid Alberta Contract

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, this government talks a big game about supporting the rule of law, but as Albertans have come to see, it's all just empty words. Legal aid ensures that all Albertans can get fair access to the justice system. However, under the UCP it is under attack. Only days ago it was reported that dozens of lawyers were removed from the legal aid roster for refusing to sign a new contract that was described by a 25-year veteran of legal aid as, quote, terrible. Why has the Justice minister failed to protect the justice system by allowing this crisis to develop on his watch?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. We continue to fund and work with Legal Aid Alberta so that Albertans can access legal aid. Legal aid is key to ensuring access to justice, and the legal aid program is integral to the administration of justice by supporting some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Mr. Sabir: Given that Deborah Hatch, a lawyer who has worked with legal aid for over 25 years, when asked about the prospect of losing so many senior lawyers from legal aid, has stated, quote, I would be very, very, deeply concerned for what that means for the state of justice in Alberta, end quote, and given that the Justice minister has already done untold damage to our health system with his war on doctors, can the minister explain why it seems that wherever he goes, things get worse for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations is rising.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, Alberta's government's pandemic response has led our justice system and legal aid to innovate. They now offer a balance of remote, digital, and in-person legal aid services to ensure Albertans have safe access to justice. Continued partnerships, including the one between this government and legal aid in Alberta, help ensure fairness in the justice system, which benefits all Albertans. We will continue to support Albertans by keeping legal aid part of an accessible justice system. Since 2014 the Alberta government has increased legal aid funding by \$29 million.

Mr. Sabir: Given that in a shocking revelation Deborah then stated that she was told by someone she described as being in a position of power that she might be supported to become a Queen's Counsel if she toned down her public concern about the legal aid contract and given that previously a former NDP staff member was denied a QC while all of the eligible people who support the current government got theirs and given that these instances raise serious ethical concerns – and I hope the Justice minister takes them

seriously and will work to address them – can the minister tell this House what he is going to do to address this situation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration is rising.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I am actually shocked by that question. The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall is a lawyer by training, and the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall knows that there is a process for the designation of QCs. There is an independent committee, that's made up of judges both from the Provincial Court and the Court of Queen's Bench and members of the Law Society, that vets applications before making recommendations to the Minister of Justice. That member should be ashamed of himself.

Utility Costs and Rebates

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the pandemic getting further into the rear-view mirror, we now have an inflationary mess caused by the Trudeau government's spending and tax-raising antics. This cost rising has been hard on families throughout Lesser Slave Lake between the struggle of powering and heating their homes and the rising cost of fuel to get around. To the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity: what steps have been taken to ease these costs, that continue to rise for my constituents and all Albertans?

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

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We recognize the burden that the increase in utilities and other costs is having on Albertans, and that's why we're bringing in short-term supports to help Albertans while we do the longer term work to lower prices. We are bringing in the natural gas rebate, the electricity rebate, and, of course, the 13 cents a litre that we paused at the pump. That's \$2 billion worth of supports, by far the most generous in the country. We have demonstrated that we will always have Albertans' backs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, and thank you to the minister. Given that the rebates are greatly needed right away as many people continue to struggle with these costs and given that I have also received concern from my constituents in Lesser Slave Lake about how soon they will see this relief because of the continual fact-twisting antics of the NDP to spread false information, to the same minister: how will these rebates be applied to the bills of those living throughout Lesser Slave Lake? This may be hard for the NDP to listen to, but how soon will we see them applied? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. the associate minister is the only one with the call.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Despite the NDP's best efforts to slow down the passage of this bill – and that's right; you can't make this stuff up. The NDP actually voted to slow down passage of this bill, an absolute outrage at a time when Albertans need these supports. We moved at speed to get the legislation through the Legislature. We moved at speed to write the regulations . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. associate minister.

2:40

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We got royal assent on April 29, we wrote the regulations in under three days, and then we got the rules to the retailers, and they're moving at speed as well.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the minister. Given that these rebates will help in the short term and provide much-needed relief to those throughout Alberta and given that these increased costs will still be part of their future bills, which some worry about when the rebates end, to the same minister: what else is the government doing to improve the electricity costs for all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I don't have a conversation with either the Premier or cabinet about electricity that doesn't start or end with: how do we lower prices for all Albertans? We know that the path forward for cheaper prices is through increased choice and more competition. That's why we've introduced Bill 22, which is about modernizing the electricity grid and increasing generation options for Albertans. They broke the electricity grid, and we're going to fix it.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Premier's Leadership

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2015 conservatives split the vote between two conservative parties, that led to 28 constituencies going to the NDP and giving them 54 seats in the Legislature, allowing them to form a majority government that, thankfully, only lasted one term.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans will never forget the way they were treated by the NDP government. They couldn't trust them then, and they can't trust them in the future. Parents will never forget the way choice for their children's education was robbed. Albertans will never forget the NDP's carbon tax, driving billions of dollars out of our province and putting thousands of people out of work.

It is for these reasons that Albertans will never elect an NDP government again. As we approach a monumental moment for conservatives in Alberta, we must ask ourselves: how important is unity? Mr. Speaker, under the current Premier Alberta has faced a triple black swan event: negative oil prices, a recession, and a global pandemic. I don't think a single member in this House ran for office expecting to face such extreme circumstances, but in a way that only Albertans can, we rose to the challenge and overcame.

As made clear in the last election, Albertans want a conservative government, which is why they must stay united, ensuring that the NDP, who are untrustworthy, never sit on this side of the House again. It is true that you can't make everyone happy in government. If you want proof, just ask the NDP Twitter mob. But I am proud of the government's fiscal management, the countless investments

brought back to Alberta, the jobs created, infrastructure built, industry diversification and growth – it goes on, Mr. Speaker – and a balanced budget, something the NDP could never figure out. Now, with over 90 per cent of our campaign promises having already been fulfilled by this government despite the exceptional challenges we've faced, we continue to move forward.

The province is better off with the UCP, and Albertans know it. That is why the United Conservatives will win the election in 2023, and I'm excited to see that happen under the current Premier.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has a tabling.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my questions earlier today I referred to a letter that I sent to the president of the Alberta School Councils' Association, Brandi Rai, notifying the ASCA that if the NDP is re-elected, we will restore funding for Alberta school councils.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Copping, Minister of Health, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Social Workers annual report 2021, the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta annual report 2020-21.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a gold star for everyone. This is two days in a row with no points of order, and as such we are at Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

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

Bill 202

Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me start by stating that it is an honour to be here in the Legislature to speak to second reading of my private member's bill.

The right and the opportunity for private members to independently bring forward legislation is vital to the proper functioning of our Assembly. Unfortunately, Bill 202, which was the second private member's bill for this session, is finally seeing second reading after nine weeks in session.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

I have often stated in the Chamber that each and every MLA's first duty is to represent the families and communities of our constituencies, and bringing forward private members' bills is essential. However, I want to add that Bill 202 isn't solely supported by the good people of the central Peace. In fact, this bill is a direct result of a province-wide consultation process. In addition to gathering input online and through social media, I have personally visited dozens of communities over the past six months. In each and every community

people have expressed deep concerns about Alberta's pandemic management during the repeatedly declared, rescinded, then redeclared public health emergencies.

This shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone here today. I know that each and every one of us has received hundreds of phone calls and e-mails about pandemic management over the past two years. More than any other issue over the past decade this one has impacted the lives of every single Albertan from every corner of our province. As the pandemic unfolded on a week-to-week and even day-to-day basis, this government took contradictory positions on a variety of measures, swinging from the open for good to directly infringing on constitutionally protected rights.

In addition, the scattershot directives resulted in a confusing and contradictory mix of restrictions that failed common-sense tests for many Albertans. Here's one example with which many of us are familiar. At one point some smaller church services' attendance was allowed to proceed while funerals were not allowed with the same numbers. There clearly is no scientific argument for such nonsense, and none was ever offered.

By seeking to enforce such contradictory directives, the government did more harm than good when it came to overall compliance with pandemic measures. When MLAs, myself included, attempted to speak up and explain the situation to government, more often than not we were dismissed out of hand and even vilified for daring to speak out on behalf of our constituents. This wasn't helpful or necessary, and it just dumped gas on the fire as greater numbers of Albertans started to question the lack of checks and balances in place to prevent authoritarian government overreach.

I should note that this government was warned about this issue beforehand. These concerns were raised as part of a legislative review of Alberta's Public Health Act. The report issued following the review specifically noted that the Public Health Act should be amended to enhance transparency and democratic accountability. Speaking to the Select Special Public Health Act Review Committee on August 27, 2020, the chief medical officer of health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, stated:

[Recognizing that] there need to be checks and balances, there need to be assurances that there's not going to be use of this act in an inappropriate way, I would advocate that tools not be taken out but, rather, if additional checks and balances are needed, that those be put in.

As I've stated previously, the committee's report called for three key measures: first, that an order declaring a state of public health emergency under section 52.1 cannot lapse and subsequently be reinstalled without the approval of the Legislative Assembly; secondly, that ministerial orders issued under section 52.1 cannot be renewed without the approval of the Legislative Assembly; thirdly, that sunset clauses be included under section 52.1 to ensure that health orders are reviewed in a timely manner to ensure that they are removed when no longer necessary. All three of these are reasonable recommendations widely supported in communities across our province, and all three have been ignored.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that democracy matters more during an emergency situation, not less. A government that is unwilling to debate, defend, or alter its public health restrictions cannot complain when compliance drops or misinformation spreads. The moral authority needed to navigate a crisis, any crisis, is not granted by law but by public will. This is exactly why, for example, the federal government requires a vote of the House of Commons and the Senate to ratify use of its Emergencies Act. You may remember that earlier this year, when the Prime Minister chose to invoke the Emergencies Act, it was widely seen as authoritarian overreach. In

fact, the members of the Assembly here in Alberta adopted Motion 10, which condemned the invocation of the Emergencies Act and declared, in part, that it "infringes upon the constitutionally guaranteed rights of Albertans and all Canadians." In the run-up to the Senate vote on ratifying the Emergencies Act, it became clear that the federal government could not clearly demonstrate its case for maintaining the Emergencies Act, and the state of emergency was lifted.

2:50

In my consultations with Albertans I can tell you that people here find it clearly hypocritical that the Alberta government chose to repeatedly declare public health emergencies without a single ratification vote, yet criticized the federal government on its use of the federal Emergencies Act. The bottom line is this: Albertans want checks and balances added to the Public Health Act to ensure that there is greater accountability and transparency during declared public health emergencies.

Furthermore, Albertans want to make it clear, to this government in particular, that democratic oversight of pandemic management and other emergencies is not something to be avoided or disregarded. It is something to be embraced, and with good reason. The moral authority necessary to govern during difficult times is derived directly from free and fair votes. The very word "democracy" itself comes from two root words, "dēmos," meaning people, and "kratos," meaning rule. I believe we can do a much better job respecting our democratic traditions while protecting public health. To make this happen, changes are necessary, but here's the good news: we can fix this.

Bill 202 provides MLAs with additional oversight powers during a public health state of emergency. Under Bill 202 the Assembly's essential role in debating and voting on extensions of public health states of emergency will be strengthened. Future ministers of Health will be prevented from circumventing the Assembly by allowing a state of emergency to lapse only to declare a new state of emergency without seeking the Assembly's approval. In addition, Bill 202 proposes that a new section be added to the Public Health Act. This new section provides a framework by which the Assembly may opt to review, revoke, or amend some public health measures during a public health state of emergency. Under Bill 202 any two members of the Assembly may file a written request with the minister to initiate the Assembly's oversight process. This process must be carried out "within 2 sitting days." It must include a debate of "at least 2 hours," and a vote must follow the debate.

Now, I've heard from some who oppose this bill, who fear that it would weaken the powers of the medical officers of health at the wrong time. This is demonstrably false. Bill 202 doesn't include a single word that alters the powers of the medical officers of health in any way, nor does it impede officers of health from issuing such orders as they see fit, when they see fit. Rather, Bill 202 simply provides the Assembly with the ability to ratify and adjust such orders following debate. Why anybody would seek to minimize or avoid such debate is beyond me. Debate is the beating heart of our parliamentary tradition. Frankly, if the government can't provide the scientific data to convince the majority of 87 MLAs to ratify health orders, how can it convince the public of the necessity to comply with these same orders? In short, it can't. Furthermore, it is self-evident that the democratic oversight won't weaken pandemic management. If anything it will improve public compliance with health orders, making severe restrictions that infringe on constitutionally protected rights unnecessary.

Finally, Bill 202 includes some simple and straightforward transparency measures. First, under Bill 202 medical officers of

health will continue to be able to issue isolation and quarantine orders as well as exemptions to these orders. Bill 202 requires that such orders be tabled in the Legislature in a timely fashion to ensure that legislators and the public understand the nature of the orders, including which specific section of the Public Health Act is being invoked. Bill 202 applies to general orders only and not to orders that may allow private citizens to be identified.

Secondly, under Bill 202 cabinet will continue to be able to issue orders that may be necessary to protect public health, including the emergency closure of specific facilities. In addition, for example, the government may request that the Lieutenant Governor delay an election. Bill 202 requires that such orders be tabled in the Legislature on a timely basis to ensure that legislators and the public understand the nature of the orders.

Finally, under Bill 202 the Minister of Health may declare a public health state of emergency in consultation with the chief medical officer of health. Bill 202 requires that such declarations be tabled in the Legislature on a timely basis to ensure that legislators and the public understand the nature of such declarations, including which specific section of the Public Health Act is being invoked.

Why are these changes needed? The fact is that during the recent COVID-19 pandemic elected officials and the public grew frustrated and concerned regarding the emergency powers being exercised by the government and public health officials. These three measures are necessary to provide clarity to legislators and the public alike. In addition, these changes are needed to combat misinformation.

There are those, like the federal government, who believe the answer is to veer towards authoritarianism and restrict free expression; however, I am not one of those people. The fact is that restricting speech will only make things worse. The answer, rather, is to provide clear and accurate information in a timely manner. The more we can proactively do to promptly address Albertans' concerns and reduce unnecessary public frustrations, the better.

I also believe the government has a role to play in minimizing panic.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

For clarity, I just want to ensure for the record that it's your intention to be moving second reading. Correct?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah.

The Acting Speaker: Yes. All right.

Are there any other members looking to join debate?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, today the Minister of Health was actually in Calgary to announce a new \$2 million program which aims to improve the identification of potential donors, support families considering consent at a really difficult time, and save more lives. The specialists in end-of-life care, neuroprognostication, and donation, otherwise known as SEND program, will see 22 specialist physicians co-ordinating organ donation and transplantation opportunities. This program goes hand in hand with a private member's bill we have on the docket, Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022, introduced to this Chamber by the Member for Highwood. I think that given the timing of this announcement, it would be prudent to move to debate on second reading of this bill; therefore, I move to adjourn debate on Bill 202, Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 205 Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022

The Acting Speaker: I see that the hon. Member for Highwood has risen.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading on my private member's bill, Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022, and to take time to tell today a couple of stories that have really ignited my passion for building a much stronger organ and tissue donation system here in the province of Alberta.

The story of Dan and Jennifer Woolfsmith's daughter is both heartbreaking and inspiring and important to share. Mackenzy, their daughter, was just 22 months old when she suffered a devastating injury and was declared brain-dead.

As a parent this is the worst possible news you could ever receive. But due to the circumstances of Mackenzy's death there was a chance of organ donation. Organ donation was something that the Woolfsmiths found clarity in. They knew that their daughter would have wanted to help others, and organ donation was one way to do that. However, there was a moment in the process when Mackenzy was almost disqualified as a donor.

As I have mentioned in earlier speeches, only 1 to 2 per cent of individuals who signed up to be donors can qualify to donate. To donate one's organs, there normally must be neurological determination of death, also referred to as brain death, which means that the brain has permanently lost all function and a diagnosis of death using neurological criteria has been determined. But in order to donate once brain death has occurred, an individual has to stay on life support, meaning that in the case of Mackenzy, her organs had to continue to work until the surgeries were complete. That is why identification of donors early on in the process is so critically important, to ensure there are no missed donor opportunities and that the viability of organs for donation is preserved.

Mackenzy was ultimately able to save the lives of four other children and give the gift of life. There are many people who are awaiting organ donation right now whose opportunities for transplant have been missed because of delay, causing a loss of viability, something that was thankfully missed in the case of Mackenzy and those four other children that she saved.

As many of my colleagues know, these individuals' lives are significantly worse of organ failure, those who continue to wait for organ and tissue transplantation. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, there are 4,500 Canadians currently waiting for a transplant, and in Alberta alone that number is almost 700.

Mr. Speaker, there is currently a seven-year wait time for a liver transplant. We know that for those who are living with liver failure, life is extremely hard. This life is filled with blood tests, imaging tests, surgical examinations, medications, and constant trips to the hospital for liver dialysis, which is time away from their families. This is completely time consuming and physically and emotionally draining for these individuals. The seven-year wait time to receive a liver is a direct result of there being so few donors and donor opportunities right now.

3:00

The sad reality, Mr. Speaker, is that we know that organ transplants save lives. For most organs patient survival is greater than 80 per cent after five years. Take Helen Determan's story. She was the third patient to ever receive a liver transplant in Edmonton back in 1989. She was told that she had five years to live afterwards, but luckily she received the gift of life, which completely changed

her life. Helen went on to travel globally as she represented Canada in the World Transplant Games. Helen recently passed away, just recently, but she is a symbol of resiliency, strength, and determination, and she will always be remembered. It is my goal to be able to hear more stories like this and like Helen's as the years go on.

That is exactly the intent of why I've brought to this Assembly Bill 205, which I move second reading of today, to improve this system by spreading awareness and education on organ and tissue donations, by having specialized professionals speaking with families like the Woolfsmiths to encourage organ and tissue donation, and by improving agency guidelines so that we can have annual reviews and reports.

All of these steps are crucial to build a stronger system of organ and tissue donation in the province of Alberta. We need to work hard to pass this legislation so that the wait-lists can start to decline and so that more Albertans can live their best lives possible free from constant assessments, medications, and worries, more time that they can spend with their families.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 205.

The Acting Speaker: Okay. Are there any members wishing to join the debate? I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am compelled to rise once again in support of Bill 205. Organ donation is more important than many of us realize. It saves lives and significantly improves the quality of life for many people. In fact, as the hon. member shared, there are currently somewhere around 700 Albertans on transplant wait-lists. Bill 205 will put in place three vital recommendations to build a strong foundation for a significantly better human tissue and organ donation system here in Alberta. First, it will implement a mandatory referral process; second, it will improve agency guidelines; and third, it will improve education and awareness.

To go back to the first and maybe the most important, the change to mandatory referral, a change from our current law of only mandatory consideration, mandatory referral is the legal requirement for health care professionals to report all patients who may become potential donors to their organ donation organization. This requirement is an essential building block of a highly functioning organ and tissue donation and transplantation system because it supports the timely identification, referral, and assessment of potential donors. Notifying the ODD reduces the effect of clinical bias or lack of knowledge regarding donations, which has been identified as a leading cause of nonreferral cases.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to mention that mandatory referral is independent of the consent model and does not affect how families are approached to discuss consent to donate. Registering as an organ donor or sharing your wishes with your family does not necessarily mean you will automatically become an organ donor. The pathway to become an organ donor is complex since individuals must die in circumstances where donation is possible. Contrary to common assumptions, those circumstances are rare. As a proportion of total deaths in Canada approximately 1.2 per cent have the potential to become donors. Each patient who is a potential donor is rare, and identification and referral of those patients is the only way they can become actual donors. However, failure to identify those possible donors is the single largest factor explaining the differences in deceased donation rates here nationally versus internationally.

Missed donor opportunities occur when potential donors are not identified, ODDs are not notified, or referrals are received too late. Missed donor opportunities also arise when potential donors are identified by the treating medical team but they choose not to notify

the ODD. In cases of late or nonreferral life-sustaining therapy is withdrawn in a way that excludes the possibility for donation, preventing the wishes of the patient and their family towards donation from even being considered.

Mandatory referral ensures that every family and individual is given the opportunity to include donation in their end-of-life care if they so desire. The patient's medical suitability for donation is assessed earlier by clinicians who are experts in donation and transplantation. This may reduce delays for the hospital and ensure that availability of supporting infrastructure, for example, an operating room, is made available. Assessment of donation suitability can occur in all instances with the timely identification of potential organ donors, helping avoid missed donation opportunities. It ensures that a potential donor is maintained on life support, which is essential for the usability of those organs.

Family discussions can be planned for when suitability for donation has been determined, which gives families the right information at the right time. This reduces uncertainty and disappointment on occasions when families are approached too soon or are later told that their loved one is not actually eligible to be a donor.

In the second part amendments to the Organ and Tissue Donation Agency will pave the way for annual reviews, reports, and suggestions submitted directly to the minister. Since mandatory referral is only effective if there is a way to review those referrals, this is a critical part of the bill to verify that a stronger system of donation is continued in the future.

Third, or last, the education component of Bill 205 expands the information provided to Albertans to ensure that they have access to the most current and up-to-date information, education, and awareness.

This bill is an excellent piece of legislation brought to modernize and strengthen Alberta's tissue and organ donation system. It is brought forward to help the system be better and save lives. I commend the Member for Highwood for bringing this bill forward. I hope that all in this Chamber will continue to support this bill so that we can see it made law and help those throughout Alberta and possibly even across Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Next, hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. My colleague did a beautiful job in describing the bill, and I don't have a lot more to add to that other than some personal anecdotes. I don't know – for those of you who remember my maiden speech when I was first elected in the opposition, I spoke about Jaydon Sommerfeld, who was actually killed in a car accident traversing across the highway from Chestermere high school. That's a very dangerous piece of highway out in my riding. Jaydon was one of the best friends to my son Sehran, and Sehran was at school the day we lost Jaydon.

As a result of that entire tragedy, his parents were able to save eight lives with Jaydon. Jaydon, at the tender age of 16, had actually signed to donate his organs and tissues and was such a blessing to so many. To this day – I just saw his mom the other day – it's still hard to not embrace each other and cry. For any of us who love a child in any capacity, whether they're yours or you're an auntie, uncle, or whatever, some mentor to these children, the impact that these kiddos have on our lives is humongous, especially when we lose them so young.

Also, Morgahan Krieger was a student of mine and of my girlfriend. She was a voice student, a beautiful young woman, had type 1 diabetes, and passed away while she was at school out east. Her parents had to fly out. They're watching this debate, actually, very closely because it's very important to them, as you can

imagine. She would have celebrated her 24th birthday on May 6. My son, who you saw singing in the Legislature today, was very good friends with Morghan. They sang together on a regular basis.

Morghan's mom actually got to go to Halifax, the Stanfield airport, to meet with Monique, who was the recipient of Morghan's heart. She felt her daughter's heart beating very, very strong in the chest of Monique. It is a story that, when you think about what that would feel like or even the strength of her mom and dad and their son to be able to meet with Monique and to feel that heart beat strong and what it meant to that family – and many of Morghan's organs and tissues were also donated. The lives not only of the people that they've saved but the contributions even to the family to be able to participate in such a meaningful way – and I want to thank our wonderful MLA for Highwood for bringing this forward and continuing to have the discussion.

3:10

I will end with something that is related. I think it's really important. These private members' bills are an absolute blessing in this Legislature. We might not always completely agree on how that legislation should come to be, but private members' legislation has been a staple in this space since, really, like, 1993. Ralph Klein fought very, very hard along with the opposition to make sure that private members' legislation was able to be discussed and to be able to participate fully. Quite often private members' legislation is based on the needs of constituents, is based on being able to elevate legislation, and whether or not we agree with that legislation, the ability to debate that legislation is purely about democracy in this House. That democracy cannot be suppressed, should not be suppressed, and should be considered a privilege by each one of us who holds space in this place.

I have been very, very blessed to have three of my bills come to the floor as a private member, and in fact one of them was incorporated by the government, which is the FGM bill, which hopefully will still come back to the floor.

I just want to say how grateful I am that legislation from the private members is here, and I would ask that as we debate this very important piece of legislation, as we come forward on this legislation, we understand the privilege of that and that we continue to elevate discussions of private members' bills, that we debate them fulsomely in this house, that they make it to the floor, that we honour our responsibility and, in particular, Ralph Klein, who made the decision along with the leaders of the opposition at that time to be able to bring forward legislation that comes from private members. There's been a huge history in this Legislature of drafting that legislation, the importance of drafting that legislation, and the very robust debate that comes out of that legislation.

We can debate, we can amend, we can even vote against it should we choose to at the end of the day, but this is a bill that shows the importance and the work that the MLA for Highwood has done to bring this bill to the floor. I have two people in my own personal life that are watching this bill. They're watching how it's coming forward, and it will impact their lives in ways that we can't even imagine. So with my privilege and standing here, I ask that we always consider that the MLA for Highwood is having the privilege of debating his bill on this floor and that we always take that privilege very seriously and that we do not suppress democracy and that we continue to allow these bills to hold space in this place.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation

(Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. Before I begin, I want to thank the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for her comments regarding the importance of the private members' legislation process.

Indeed, I would like to congratulate the Member for Highwood for being given the opportunity to bring his bill to the floor, an opportunity that has been systematically and, I do believe, intentionally denied by members of this government to almost every single bill brought forward by an opposition member. That is a disgraceful record for this government. As the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore noted, it is highly outside the normal practice of this House. It is an affront to democracy. That's it. The poor behaviour and lack of ethics of his colleagues or, I suppose, that member, if he supports this system, do not impinge on the quality of his bill. Certainly, unlike members of government, I'm quite happy to consider a bill that is brought forward by the other party in this House.

Now, Bill 205 focuses on the question of organ donation. Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker, that all of us in the Alberta NDP caucus strongly support organ donation and steps that can be taken to help improve donor participation rates in Alberta. That is always a good thing to do. Certainly, in my role as the critic for Health I've had the opportunity to speak with many Albertans about their experiences going through the transplant system, sometimes about challenges they've faced or delays, because certainly we recognize that there can be a limited number of organs available. There are a number of things that have to be considered in determining whether someone is eligible for a transplant, so it is a complex system. Certainly, I could understand how fraught that is for the individuals that are caught in that when they know the difference in their life that receiving that transplant organ could make.

Certainly, I support efforts to try to find ways that we can streamline and improve this system and indeed allow for more individuals to be inspired to step up and participate as a donor when possible. We know that organ donation saves lives, and, frankly, Mr. Speaker, it is inspiring. I think we are all inspired by and grateful to those who make that choice to be an organ donor.

Indeed, we've had the opportunity to hear from many stakeholders about the importance of considering mandatory referrals, and we support that proposal in this legislation. Now, as has been laid out, the bill lays out the system for mandatory referrals. Currently a medical practitioner has to consider if someone's organs are suitable for donation after they die. If we pass Bill 205, it would make it mandatory for a medical practitioner to then share that information if someone is judged to be imminent for death. This will provide more opportunities to ensure that every potential organ that could go to potentially save a life will have the opportunity to be used, and that, Mr. Speaker, is absolutely a good thing.

The bill makes a number of administrative changes, creates a board of directors for the Alberta Organ and Tissue Donation Agency, gives it more responsibilities and capabilities. Again, Mr. Speaker, that seems to me to be reasonable. It makes sense that we would review the systems we have, find more efficient ways to optimize them, find ways that we can make sure they are working for the benefit of Albertans, and I appreciate that the member has done, to my understanding, some considerable consultation on how to achieve that and talked with a number of advocates in this area to bring forward the ideas in this bill.

The bill makes it clear that people can express refusal to have their organs donated, and people who have registered to donate their organs can also change their position after the fact. That, too, Mr. Speaker, is appropriate. We want to make sure that individuals have a clear choice. Certainly, it should be up to an individual to determine what is done with their body. The bill allows donors to determine if they want to donate their entire body or just specific organs or tissues

and what purposes those can be used for. I appreciate the thought that has been put into this bill.

Now, certainly, we will be interested to see how this might interact with the announcement from the government today regarding the new specialist in end-of-life care, neuroprognostication, and donation, or SEND, program, by which we will now have 22 specialist physicians across the province of Alberta who will help to co-ordinate organ donation and transplantation opportunities, specialists who should be available 24/7 to improve the identification of potential donors and support families who are considering consent at a difficult time, hopefully save more lives. Again, that's practical and reasonable, Mr. Speaker.

I applaud the government for looking for a real and tangible way that we can improve this system and that in this particular case they appear to have actually worked collaboratively with physicians and experts in the health care field to achieve this, because tragically that has not been the general record of this government. Even as we speak, our emergency rooms across the province are in crisis because this government chose to go to war with some of these very physicians, because of repeated decisions to push our health care system to the absolute limits in the midst of a global pandemic and to continue to try to find ways to grind down particular physicians or health care workers and again now push those very workers to the absolute limits with extreme, mandated overtime to try to keep up with the implications of the chaos this government has sown in the health care system.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, certainly, it is important work for this government to look at how we can improve our systems. These are important steps to improve the organ donation and transplantation system, but let's remember that that system lives within a larger ecosystem in the midst of health care, an ecosystem which this government chose to tromp into, sow disorder, attempt to bully and overturn in an attempt to force through their particular ideology and change. That affects the ability for these physicians, for these individuals to continue to provide this important and life-saving care. Because of decisions of this government we saw tens of thousands of surgeries that were cancelled and delayed in the midst of the pandemic. We are still dealing with that backlog now, and indeed in many jurisdictions we are seeing serious implications. Indeed, in the Red Deer regional hospital last night I confirmed that there was no doctor of internal medicine available or no doctor to perform cardiology. None. That is because of repeated decisions by this government.

Now, of course, that isn't the individual direct decision of the Member for Highwood, and certainly it's his decision whether he supports government policies, but in this particular case the bill that he has brought forward is a thoughtful one. Indeed, despite the incredible damage – I'd say the most damage that's ever been done to a public health care system by a sitting government in the history of this province – that does not negate the value of this bill and does not negate the potential good it could do should we have a government in the province of Alberta that finally brings some stability back to our health care system.

As I was saying, we look forward to learning a bit more about how the SEND program is going to work, how that will interact with a new mandatory referral system in the province of Alberta, and it is my hope that the government will follow the lead of the Member for Highwood in terms of the thoughtful consideration he has put into this bill, in terms of how this legislation is potentially integrated should it pass this House.

I thank the Member for Highwood for bringing this forward, and I look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has risen.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise in this House to speak on Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. On behalf of my constituents I would like to extend gratitude and my thank yous to the Member for Highwood for putting together such a thoughtful piece of legislation and something that I hope that the entire House can get behind.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, with over 700 Albertans currently on transplant lists I think that we can all agree that this is a very important issue. Many of us in this Assembly will know of somebody who is waiting for some type of transplant, or maybe we have a loved one who's waiting for a transplant. That could be a close family member or a friend, or perhaps it might be a constituent who's waiting for the good news that one day they'll be receiving a new heart or a kidney or something like that.

Regardless of the circumstances, though, this bill is good news for Alberta, I think, and it will ensure that this government is doing more to help improve the process of donating organs or tissue. Just a month ago, Mr. Speaker, on April 7 we recognized Green Shirt Day. Of course, this is a day that honoured one of the young Humboldt Broncos hockey players that passed away as a result of the traumatic accident that happened in April 2018. I actually had the pleasure of reading the book by one of the surviving members of the crash, Kaleb Dahlgren. It's called *Crossroads*. It's an excellent book, very well written. A smart young man put together a book of his life and how he got there and also detailed some of the ways in which he recovered from the crash and spoke very highly of organ donation.

Of course, Logan Boulet was a defenceman for the Humboldt Broncos, and it's with great respect to his life and to his family that we celebrate and honour him for his choice to donate his organs after tragically passing away due to his injuries. But because of the choice that Logan had made, six other people were able to live because of life-saving organ transplants, and although he was only 21 years old when he passed away tragically, he recognized and understood how this selfless act of donating is one of the most heroic things that a person could do.

Because of this, I think everyone can say that the awareness was definitely raised, and more and more people have now registered to become organ and tissue donors. In fact, Mr. Speaker, of course, when everyone heard of the Humboldt Broncos crash, it really rocked us all, I think, to our core, and to see that tragic loss of life, especially these young men who had so much potential and were going to do such great things, I'm sure, with all their families – I know that I was inspired by the selflessness of Logan Boulet.

Actually, I went to the registry that week and registered as an organ donor myself. Now there's a little heart on my driver's licence that says that I am a donor. I'm very proud of that because I think it's just a way that the Logan Boulet effect, as they call it, really touched everyone, even people in this Chamber, and it continues to inspire thousands of Canadians every day to register as organ and tissue donors. It's estimated that almost 150,000 Canadians registered as organ and tissue donors just weeks after this tragic crash, which is truly impressive, of course.

As I've said before, Alberta has a long list of individuals who are waiting for a new organ or new tissue, and, if passed, this bill will shorten that list as it will help to create more opportunities for eligible donors. With this legislation physicians will be required to refer patients to respective organ donation organizations, if they might be eligible, as soon as they're recognized, and by referring patients, Mr. Speaker, we'll be optimizing opportunities for those

who are on the wait-list and informing potential donors who might not be fully aware or understand the organ donation system as it is.

It's understandable that a physician would sometimes be hesitant to bring up organ donation to the family of a dying loved one, but it's important that we do not miss potential opportunities to save lives. I note some surveys taken from physicians who do not regularly refer patients: 59 per cent indicated their reasoning is due to their own predetermination that the patient would not be eligible. You know, of course, I respect and trust that these doctors were making the decisions as best they could, but one intention of this legislation is that it would not be up to the doctor to make that choice, and their only responsibility would then be to offer a referral.

Forty-five per cent of physicians brought up that they don't offer referrals because of the family being too upset. Of course, I mean, this is a very tragic and hard time for families. I mean, you see a loved one pass away – it could be tragically, unexpectedly, who knows what – and I'm sure that that question would be overwhelming for many. I know I haven't been in that position, and I don't really ever want to be. As we know, because of that very painful end of life and mourning, I hope that if this legislation passes, physicians will take the opportunity to simply educate families of dying loved ones about the lives that could be saved. I know that because of Logan Boulet's hard work and his dedication to helping others through organ donation, his effect will live on. The incredible thing today is that there are six people living because of just one person's choice, and that was Logan's choice.

For 39 per cent of surveyed physicians, they are concerned that the family may have a religious belief that would prevent them from donating organs or tissue. Of course, that's a very fair concern. We want to respect those people's decisions, but it's important to continue to raise the awareness of organ and tissue donors, to be able to speak up and have a discussion like we're having today, Mr. Speaker.

I will note that I didn't – you know, before the Humboldt crash and before the tragic loss of life that we saw from those young men and support staff and coaches and trainers and so on in that event, I don't really know if we really talked about organ donation nearly as much as we do now, especially not in such a public setting. It was more of a quiet conversation, so maybe this will destigmatize some of it as well and bring up opportunities for us to talk about the benefits of organ donation and kind of normalize talking about it in public places to allow more people to make that choice.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that these things that I've shared today will help more Albertans consider registering as an organ and tissue donor. As of now, over 4,500 Canadians are awaiting a transplant of some kind, and over 700 of them reside in Alberta. With the number of donors lower than neighbouring provinces, I think we can all realize how important it is to have this discussion right here at home, and it truly is giving the gift of life to register as an organ donor.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Member for Highwood. I note that he has been very passionate about this, especially in his former careers, and I know that he really cares about this and has done extensive consultation, so I think that, you know, I'm glad to hear, politics aside in this Chamber, that we're all supporting the Member for Highwood and his desire to do this for his constituents and for all Albertans. I think that many Albertans are grateful to see members of all sides of the House focus on bettering the system that we have for organ and tissue donation. I think this is a bill that's really going to save lives and impact people in a positive way.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say again that I completely support Bill 205, and I hope that other members will do the same.

3:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to join debate and follow my colleague from Brooks-Medicine Hat and likewise say that I will be supporting Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. I must say also that I'm learning a deal just from my colleagues, both my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre, the Member for Highwood, who talked about this, the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, who also talked about this earlier, and just reading through the bill and kind of seeing the care and sensitivity with which it talks about the different aspects of human tissue donation. As we know, towards the end of life can be a situation quite fraught with emotion and confusion. Anything that improves upon that situation both for the medical practitioners, doctors, who are dealing with the patient, potential donor, as well as family members is a good thing. I, too, welcome the opportunity to see improvements to this act.

I just want to also, I guess, mirror or echo the views of my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre, who expressed concern with the government in its lack of genuineness around dealing with the private member's bill brought forward by opposition members, most notably Bill 204, Anti-Racism Act, something that was – we know that the city of Edmonton, both the police services and the administration, was embroiled in a situation where many members of the community were coming forward and wanting greater accountability from the authorities around tragic occurrences in the community of Edmonton that seemed to point to differential treatment of people of colour by the authorities when compared to nonracialized individuals in Edmonton. It would have been great to have that improvement, that act on the books as well. That didn't occur.

I think members of the opposition know that whenever there is an ability, an opportunity to improve acts, we should take that opportunity and bring our best recommendations forward. We do that often with amendments, and we do that often with motions arising or, indeed, referrals to try and improve things. In this case, with Bill 205, I don't think any of that's necessary.

As I was saying earlier, I strongly support organ donation, any steps that will help improve donor participation rates in Alberta. Hearing that, regrettably, only 1 to 2 per cent of potential donors and organ donations actually take place is, obviously, something that needs to and can be improved upon. I, like the previous speakers, believe that if there's any opportunity to improve the lives of those 700 Albertans who are waiting for organs, we should take that opportunity, and this House is doing that today around improvements to the mandatory referral process, around improvements to accountabilities and the Organ and Tissue Donation Agency.

I was reflecting on members of that agency's board of directors, and I see that one of the expertise points, that a director will be appointed who has expertise in the area of clinical ethics, is a good thing, Mr. Speaker, because this area, as many people before me have talked about, is fraught with potential challenges. An individual with expertise in clinical ethics is a good requirement to make sure that some of the challenges, some of the ethical concerns that are related to donations and people donating are sorted through with a skill set that perhaps not everybody has.

I note also that other directors have to have expertise in the area of organ and tissue donation. That's pretty understandable. Another one has to have expertise in nonprofit organizations who are dealing

in this organ and tissue donation area. Then the fourth person has to have a connection to the regional health authority. It seems like a comprehensive board of directors. That looks like it's new in this act because it's not amending anything. I give kudos to the thoughtfulness of bringing that forward.

I think the last thing that I want to focus on and say, of course, is to focus once again on these end-of-life conversations about organ donation, making sure that they happen sooner and establish a quicker process. Clarifying this is in everyone's best interest, recognizing that it doesn't override a person's consent. They can still decide for themselves not to consent to organ donation. But once they have made that decision, then that is an area that needs to be clearly understood in terms of who does what when.

With those things said, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and listen to other parts of the debate. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in second reading and speak to Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. I want to also give my thanks to the Member for Highwood for bringing forward this bill. Many of the members of this Assembly will recall a private member's bill that was brought forward on organ donation a couple of sessions ago. I've lost track of time a little bit now. At that time, you know, there were some questions about some of the provisions of that bill although in spirit I think all members were very much united on the idea of promoting organ donation and increasing the likelihood of organ donation by making it more available. More information would be out there.

Now, as I recall, the previous – and I think it was also Bill 205, brought forward by the Member for Calgary-South East – had a sort of opt-out provision for organ donation so that it was presumed that all individuals were organ donors unless they specifically opted out. I understand that there were some concerns around that, and some consultation was done. I think other members of the Assembly have spoken to the consultation that the Member for Highwood did, and that's the result, that we see a new private member's bill which basically requires a physician to do a mandatory referral for organ donation even before somebody has passed away, so having that opportunity for education and engagement with a family or an individual who is close to passing about the benefits of organ donation.

3:40

I understand, of course, that there are a number of other administrative measures in here that are very important. Again, I seem to sense, obviously, a consensus amongst members of supporting the importance of this bill, of increasing organ donation. I do want to make a couple of small comments during my time here.

Again, I think this is a good example of how important a private member's bill, legislation, is. We've heard members of the government speak of that and how important it is that individual members have the opportunity to bring forward concerns from their constituents in a private member's bill. I do feel that it's important to note that the privilege of a private member's bill coming forward, which has been a long-standing tradition of this House and of many Houses across the country, has been undermined significantly under this current government. Not one single private member's bill brought forward by an opposition member has made it to this floor for debate. We should highlight that, Mr. Speaker, that some of our

basic democratic principles have been undermined significantly and continue to be.

But I, just like many of my colleagues, will stand in support of private members' bills that we believe are serving the public good and would seek to serve our constituents' needs. Therefore, I am happy to support Bill 205 as well as many other private members' bills that have come before this House.

In particular, on organ donation, this is something that I think we've all kind of shared some stories perhaps of – well, there are the statistics of how many people could benefit from organ donation, how many Albertans are waiting on lists, but I think that many of us in this House actually have very personal stories of individuals that we know, and I'd like to highlight that now.

First, I'd like to mention that my father was an organ donor when he passed away in 1994. He was an organ donor, and I'm very happy that while that was a loss for us, other families and other individuals got to benefit as a result of my father's passing. When you're trying to look for silver linings in losing a loved one, that is one that I know my family felt some solace from. Certainly, I know the importance of individuals agreeing to be an organ donor. My dad was a proud organ donor, actually. He had signed his card, and he had talked to us about it, and that was back when the licences were those old paper ones, and nobody asked you when you got your licence whether or not that was something that you wanted to do, but he had signed it well before he ever knew that he would be a donor himself.

Certainly, that's something that in our household we did talk about, the benefits of organ donation and the opportunity not only to contribute to another family's or individual's well-being but as an act of giving. I am so glad that we have made some changes even since that time to encourage individuals to become organ donors, lots of public education campaigns, but also, yes, when I most recently renewed my driver's licence, I was informed by the registry agent about the importance of organ donation, and I'm proud to have signed that on my driver's licence as well.

I also feel compelled to speak about some of my constituents, Mr. Speaker. One constituent who is very close to my heart is a young man – he's not quite six yet; I'm not sure if he's turned six yet – George Kemp and his parents, Lindsey and Randy Kemp. George has been the recipient of two heart donations in his very short, young life. I know that I myself and, of course, his family are incredibly grateful that he did receive those heart donations because that is why he is here with us today. You know, with the first donation, sadly, his body was rejecting it, and it wasn't working out well. I know that his family lived in anguish for many months, thinking that the chances of getting a heart donation once seemed unlikely, so to get a second donation seemed incredibly unlikely. George lived at the Stollery hospital for, I believe, almost nine months. I'm sure Lindsey will correct me if she's watching this. I'll let her know to correct me. But it was well over six months, I know for sure.

He lived at the Stollery waiting for that second donation of a heart. Of course, when a child receives a heart as a donation, it's only because another child has passed, and what a big, generous gift by that family, to go through such incredible loss and then to have donated. That's why George is here. Of course, during this pandemic I know his family was deeply concerned, given his immunocompromised state, about safety. You know, Lindsey and I spoke many times and she wrote to me many times about her concerns about George, who had gone through so much to be able to go to school, to be able to be a normal kindergartner going to school, then feeling unsafe at school. There were some anguishing decisions for Lindsey and for Randy about what to do. They wanted

George, who had grown up, essentially, in a children's hospital, to spend more time socializing, but then the pandemic hit, and they didn't feel that school was safe. I know that that put an enormous amount of stress on them.

I am grateful to the families who agreed to donate their child's organs and a chance, through grief, to really continue another life. I hope, actually – I don't know, but I hope – that that brings them some comfort as well.

I also want to talk about a very special constituent of mine, Anne Halpin, who is an incredibly brilliant woman. She's the one who first talked to me, when I was thinking of running for office, about the importance of that lab that we were going to build as the NDP. I'm going to get all of her credentials wrong, but she is an incredibly brilliant laboratory scientist who cares very deeply about that. She's also a woman who walks the talk, because she's long been an advocate of organ donation and she recently signed up to be a living donor of a kidney. I understand that due to some challenges that transplant did not take place, but she is still indicating that she is willing to donate a kidney as a living donor, and I think that speaks to exactly who she is.

There are so many Albertans who inspire, and I want to speak about one more, who is a young man named Mason. He's actually a year younger than my son, so he's eight years old, and I know that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora knows this family very well. Their mom, Tamara, is a close friend as well as their dad, Clifton. Mason went to daycare with my son. He has kidney challenges, kidney troubles, and he was diagnosed young with that. He has been told that before the age of 18 he will likely require a kidney transplant. I know his mom had hoped to be that donor at some point, but due to her own health conditions she may not be in a situation to be able to do that, which is probably the part that has been most devastating for her.

This is all to say that these are very real lives that are impacted by the need for organ donation. There are some very real lives impacted by being an organ donor. It's incredibly important. Let me take this opportunity to once again encourage Albertans to sign up and to be organ donors, to speak to their family members about their wishes, and to have those conversations openly. I think that so much of the reason why we don't have more donors is because, you know, the conversation isn't had until the family is going through a very difficult time, the imminent death or the death of a loved one. That can be an incredibly traumatic time. There are high emotions, and at that time it might be too difficult to have those conversations.

I think that sometimes it may be difficult to make decisions around organ donation at such a difficult time, so part of the reason why I think we're having this discussion, that the Member for Highwood brought this bill forward, and why we've been supportive in this House is that we're encouraging individuals and Albertans to really speak openly about organ donation, because not only does it save a life, but you could really give a life.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie has risen.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to second reading of Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. I'd like to start, as many have this afternoon, by thanking my colleague the hon. Member for Highwood for his tremendous work and the time he's dedicated in consulting with Albertans and bringing this bill forward.

It's my opinion, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 205 will dramatically impact life for many Albertans, most notably the 700 Albertans who are waiting for a life-saving transplant and their families. While

almost 90 per cent of Canadians say that they support organ donation, approximately 32 per cent have actually registered their intent to donate. Unfortunately, of that number, a very small number, approximately 1.2 per cent, of people that pass away are considered viable for organ donation in Alberta for various reasons. Therefore, the more people that understand and choose to register and the better the notification system to the organ donation organization, the more lives will be saved, and that really is the intent and the heart of this bill.

At this point in time there are over 4,500 Canadians waiting for a transplant that could save, extend, or improve their lives. As I mentioned already, of those 4,500, 700 of them are Albertans, Mr. Speaker. These numbers directly represent the urgency and the need for donors and a clear process or a clearer process here in Alberta.

3:50

It's troublesome that Alberta has fallen behind other jurisdictions in terms of our rate of successful donation, which is costing Albertans on the transplant wait-list their lives. I was inspired by the member opposite, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, and her story of that little boy. Think about being the mom of that child waiting for not one but two hearts. As she mentioned so eloquently, one organ donation can save up to eight lives, and a tissue donation can improve the quality of life for up to 75 other people.

As I mentioned already, the intent of this bill is to establish a mandatory referral process and increase donor opportunities throughout the province. Bill 205 will improve the information provided to individuals within Alberta registries to better educate Albertans on the process and on the importance of organ and tissue donation. Unfortunately, consent to donate is of little value if potential donors are not properly identified and referred to donor specialists in a timely fashion, and as the member opposite also mentioned, I think that quite often what happens is that you're in a crisis. You're having to make some very tragic decisions in the middle of a tragic situation in your immediate family, and for most people, that's not the time to be considering what you want to do. I appreciate the thoughtfulness in this bill to educate Albertans and give them that information up front, long before it's a crisis situation, to make an informed decision outside of that window of crisis.

Mr. Speaker, an opt-in program with the clarifications made in this bill will serve to benefit Albertans, the hundreds that are currently in need of organ and tissue donation as well as those who will need one in the future. Accidents and tragic diagnoses are unpredictable, and Bill 205 addresses the time sensitivity of these urgent needs as they arise. We need to think of those that are waiting for transplants, transplants that, as I've said already, will either improve, extend, or save their lives.

This morning the Member for Highwood was present with the Minister of Health to announce the specialist in end-of-life care, neuroprognostication, and donation, or SEND, initiative, that is being given \$2 million. This program will allow 22 specialist physicians to co-ordinate organ donation and transplantation opportunities across the province, and I think that's incredible. The services under SEND will be available 24/7 in order to improve identification of potential donors, support families considering consent at an unimaginably difficult time, and ultimately save more lives of Albertans.

Prior to this program there were no dedicated donation physician positions for individual hospitals and intensive care units, but with this now in place it would provide for six SEND physicians and one program lead in Calgary; six SEND physicians and one program lead here in Edmonton; one SEND physician in Red Deer, the third-largest city in Alberta; two SEND physicians, a shared position, in

Lethbridge; two SEND physicians, again a shared position, in my home constituency of Grande Prairie, and I'm very thankful for that; one pediatric SEND physician at Alberta Children's hospital, which, I'm sure, would have been very important to the family of that little boy; two pediatric SEND physicians, again one shared position, here at the Stollery children's hospital. It's expected that the program will expand to Medicine Hat and Fort McMurray in 2023, and I just think that's remarkable. The timing of this private member's bill, coupled with that announcement, I really hope will transform our transplant and organ donation system.

The allotment of \$2 million to this initiative demonstrates its importance. It allows for intensive care units and emergency departments across the province to work together to co-ordinate a province-wide response for organ donation and transplantation opportunities. Mr. Speaker, since 2011 Alberta's donation rate has increased by 28 per cent, and that's remarkable. While this is fantastic news, hundreds are still waiting for life-saving transplants, and Alberta has lagged behind other provinces for many years with respect to organ and tissue donation. This is a reality we cannot continue, and I believe all members of this Assembly – I believe that's what I'm hearing this afternoon – are in support of changing that reality and assisting in shifting this troubling trend in service to our constituents right across the province.

Mr. Speaker, I've seen first-hand how being a donor can help others, and it's only served to inspire me, and I, too, would like to share a couple of personal stories. I had the opportunity to already speak to this bill at concurrence, and I'm going to share this story again because I think it's worthy of sharing as many times as I get the opportunity.

I have a friend. Her name is Dianna Havin. She lives right here in the city of Edmonton. She's originally – at least when I met her, she was from Peace River. We first met as business owners, and we bonded over that challenge and that time in our life. But we bonded even more over the fact that we were young moms and working business owners. Dianna is a retired nurse, and she also happens to be a living donor, which is, I think, a fairly unique choice that few make. As a retired nurse Dianna has a rare blood type, and she understood, with that rare blood type, how critical it is, how challenging it would be for somebody who required a transplant who also shared that blood type to find a donor, like finding a needle in a haystack.

She understood that, Mr. Speaker. She saw a need, and she stepped up. I don't know if it was the pandemic or what in particular, but she did it during the pandemic. I think the pandemic gave all of us an opportunity to take stock of our priorities and our purpose in life. For Dianna, this was, really, a part of her process as she processed the pandemic. She saw an opportunity that she couldn't deny, and she really felt compelled, so she chose last year to donate one of her kidneys. I just wanted to thank her and her family, her husband, Mark, and their kids for their support of this choice. It's a risky choice and a scary choice, but ultimately she saved a life. That person will never know who it was who saved their life, but we know here in this Chamber that Dianna Havin is a hero and that there are many others like her. This bill, while it talks about organ donation and transplant typically upon the loss of a loved one, is another facet to transplantation and donation.

I also, again, tie back to my time as a young mom. When I first moved to Grande Prairie, I was expecting my first child, who I can't believe is going to be 25 this fall. I don't know where the years have gone, Mr. Speaker. I'm starting to sound like my grandma when I say things like that, so I will not continue on in that vein. Almost 25 years ago I moved to Grande Prairie expecting my first son, Nicolas, and I met the most wonderful group of neighbours in Grande Prairie. I will tell you that when we moved to Grande

Prairie, we were so amazed by how hospitable the community was. It was overwhelming, and this neighbourhood that we lived in for just eight short weeks – while we were waiting for the final construction on our home, we rented this place for just eight short weeks. In those eight weeks we made lifelong friendships in this little neighbourhood in Grande Prairie.

Sort of the key person: her name was Claire Newnham. She was a lovely, lovely lady, and she introduced us to all the neighbourhood. She got everybody working where they were going to make cookies for this new little pregnant lady that moved into the neighbourhood. It was quite inspiring, Mr. Speaker. We were in the middle of setting up business, and I was expecting, and we had this house under construction, a lot of things going on. We came in from a different province. But I'll get back to the point of the bill. One of the people in this neighbourhood was in desperate need of a lung transplant, a double lung transplant. She had been on the wait-list for more than a year, and she was dying. In these eight short weeks in the neighbourhood I was amazed – I have 10 seconds? Oh, wow. Okay. I was amazed that she got this lung transplant, and her life was saved.

I have so much more to say, and I'll be happy to share it in Committee of the Whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I believe I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows has risen.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to speak to Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022, on behalf of my constituents. I'm happy to say that we support the position of this bill. It was not long ago, just last week, that I visited the family of a community leader who passed away last week. I just wanted to share the feelings. The family was feeling grateful to see that their family member did not only work hard and contribute to the community for a living but also for how concerned he was with education and how aware he was in that he also donated his whole body after his death, that he can still contribute to save the lives of his fellow Albertans.

4:00

I also have a story going back a few years, four or five years, where the family of the person who died anxiously wanted to donate the body of the family member since the family member had not registered herself into the registry in advance and the hassle they went through and the struggle they had. Eventually they were not able to get it onto the registry and donate the body of their loved one. I assume the changes in this bill will definitely help not only education around donations of the organs and the bodies but also will fix some of the challenges and the process that people many times feel are challenging when it comes to donating specifically not themselves, when it comes to donating the body or the organs of their family members or their loved ones.

We strongly support organ donations and steps that will help improve the donor process and the participation rates in Alberta. Organ donation saves lives, and we are so grateful for people, Albertans – I personally know a few of them – that have donated. They made their decision on this life-saving process.

We have also heard from the stakeholders the importance that, specifically proposed in this Bill 205, Albertans see the importance of mandatory referrals, and we support this proposal in the legislation.

I also wanted to thank the Member for Highwood for bringing this bill forward that will not only help people bring education and

awareness about donating their organs and bodies, but also it will help Albertans save lives.

What is happening right now: the medical practitioner must consider if someone's organs are suitable for donation after they die. We assume that if this bill passes, it would make it mandatory for medical practitioners to share this information if someone is imminent for death. The process following the information of the organs being donated remains, I think, unchanged to current practice when medical consent has not been provided, that the donation organization must seek it from the family member, spouse, adult child, parents, or their relatives.

This effectively causes the conversation about organ donation to happen sooner or establishes a quicker process. This has been advocated by Toby Boulet, who is the father of Logan Boulet, the Humboldt Bronco hockey player who died weeks after he registered to be an organ donor.

Bill 205 also makes many administrative changes, including to the Alberta Organ and Tissue Donation Agency by creating a board of directors and giving it more responsibility and capability.

The bill will also make explicitly clear that people can express refusal to have their organs donated. People who have registered to donate their organs can also change their positions after changing their minds after the fact. The bill would allow a donor to determine if they want to donate their entire body or specific organs and tissue and for what purposes those parts are allowed to be used, so they can specifically mark the purposes they are donating for, either for scientific research, transplantation, or medical education.

The changes brought by the bill make addition to the powers of the agency to release and report the statistics on refused consent percentage, donor identifications, and referrals.

The bill amends section 7 of the Human Tissue and Organ Donation Act to oblige medical practitioners to provide donation organizations with information to allow them to determine the suitability of organ or tissue for donation, so they will be obliged to provide the information around

- (a) the age of the person;
- (b) the cause, or expected cause, of the person's death;
- (c) if death has occurred, the time of death of the person; [or]
- (d) any available past and current personal information of the person that is relevant to their medical suitability for tissue or organ transplantation.

Currently this information is shared after a donor dies. If passed, this bill requires the information to be shared if death is imminent.

Section of 9 of this bill will add section 12.5 into the act, which obliges the chair of the board of the agency to provide an annual report. That's very important. That's a very good proposal. In this legislation: a summary of the activity carried out in the preceding year; statistics on the number of donors' identifications, referrals, and consent rates; its recommendations.

Now, donors in Alberta and Canada: the information shows that in Canada in 2017 415 people withdrew from the wait-list, and 245 people died while on the wait-list; 67 of those who withdrew and 35 of those who died were Albertans. According to Alberta Health there are over 700 Albertans on the wait-list to get an organ transplant. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information the deceased donor rate in Canada increased by 42 per cent between 2009 and 2018, from 14.5 to 20.6 donors per million population, which translates to 487 deceased donors in 2009 and 700 ... [Mr. Deol's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland has risen.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member here. For those who are following along at home, the Member for Highwood brought forward Bill 205 – again, this is a private member's bill – Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022.

The biggest thing that is changing in this – I mean, we've had a donation program for a number of years. I believe the existing legislation is over 30 years old, so firstly it was in need of a revamp, and then, secondly, I'd like to thank the member and other members here for coming forward on this business. This is one of the most impactful things that we can have, I believe, on Albertans' lives.

Some of the concerns out there, some quick stats. There are over 700 Albertans out there right now waiting for transplants. Through the process the way it is sitting currently, it puts a ton of pressure on the system and organizations to react within a given time limit. Unfortunately, what's happening there is that the organs and the folks that are donating may not be receiving recipients in time, Mr. Speaker, which is obviously a real problem given the circumstances that that comes about on.

4:10

There are a few major items that are covered off here. The first one – well, there are about three major components, from what I can see reading through the bill, and we'll let the member correct me later on through debate, but the first one is to implement a mandatory referral process. In essence, what that does: instead of waiting until the fact of the individual passing and then starting the process, it compels them to start to talk to the organizations, talk to the donors themselves and to the family to start the process. Change of notification will streamline it so that it's making it more efficient. It gives an adequate timeline. Again, everything is compressed around those timelines, and it's such a stressful circumstance. That'll decrease the missed opportunities, as mentioned.

Now, it's interesting to note – you know, I've already said that there are 700 Albertans. There are over 4,500 Canadians waiting for these transplants currently. When the physicians were polled on this to see where some of the impediments were, some of the feedback that we received on this, of some of the referrals not taking place currently without this mandatory process, was: 59 per cent said that they didn't do this because they deemed the patient to be an ineligible donor, may or may not be the case; 45 per cent said due to the family being too upset, so they didn't want to intrude on these types of circumstances, obviously, and that's a consideration for the personal needs; 39 per cent believed that the family had a religious bias; 34 per cent said due to their desire to leave the hospital unit, so they didn't want to remove them there. Mandatory referral increases the probability of these very difficult conversations taking place and helps provide a mechanism, quite frankly, whether falling back on it can become a procedure that they can have those discussions.

The other one was to improve the agency guidelines. The changes to the Organ and Tissue Donation Agency will pave the way for a renewal of reviews, reports, suggestions directly to the minister to help minimize misused donor opportunities and build a stronger system of donation in the future. Again, there are several organizations out there that are kind of in this wheelhouse. This is their backyard of how they deal with it. This is, again, going to help improve that that process has some consistency as well.

Improve the education and awareness: those are big deals, to understand how the process takes place and what the benefits are to that, so improve the information provided to individuals through Alberta registries to better educate Albertans on the process and on the importance of organ donation and tissues.

Now, again, being a father of four, hearing some of the stories in here – I mean, it is just absolutely heartbreaking that you would

think of circumstances where you have to put yourself in that consideration not only for, you know, being a parent in your prime, trying to protect your child; you've raised him since little and doing all those things. Firstly, to have something tragic happen to them: I don't think that there's anybody in here that wouldn't tear up if you put yourself in that circumstance. Secondly, being on the other end, where you have a child that is in need and you're doing all that you can and you're looking down the end of a loaded gun, so to speak, and knowing what the probable circumstances are – so to hear some of the stories that are so heartwarming, and the Member for Highwood had mentioned that part of the inspiration was from a young girl by the name of Morghan. Because her parents had the wherewithal, because they dealt with these things head-on, the impact from that was that there were seven or eight other people that have a better future, a brighter hope, and that can carry on. I mean, that's something amazing.

If all it takes is a little bit of a legislative change here in this House, is a private member to work through this, to help facilitate those types of outcomes without people being put in that circumstance at the very end of having to deal with all the other consequences, let alone that, I think that's one of the most meaningful things that we could ever do here in this House. You know, my father-in-law – God rest his soul – was a doc for 30 years, ran the hospital up in Lac La Biche for 30 years as chief of staff, and I'd asked him for some of the highlights of his career. He said: honestly, Shane, there were only two times in my life in over those 30 years of managing that I really felt that I saved somebody's life. Being a doc, most things kind of cure themselves and take care of it. Considering that we as legislators here have the potential to save hundreds of lives by tweaking some laws: that's profound.

I was, you know, reflective in the last little bit of some health concerns I had personally and wondering what impacts and what I've really done here in this House. You know, in prior life in projects there's something tangible that you can look back and see. I was searching for a couple of things, because you're looking at where you can put your stick in. This one, honestly, to the Member for Highwood: you made it real again. You've resonated with what it means and why we're elected and why we're here and some substantial changes that we can make. This, honestly, will be one of the things that I can put in – win, lose, or draw next election or otherwise – that I did something meaningful, impactful, to jump on your coattails of something that you managed to get through here as a private member, to be able to make some substantial differences in Albertans' lives and to help, as it would appear, the over 700 people that are currently waiting in this circumstance.

Now, I do know a person, an individual that was a mentor to me, ironically, who was a recipient of a liver transplant, Wayne Huddleston. I first met him up on a project at BHP, a diamond mine project, in the middle of nowhere in the territories, and Wayne, at that time, was the lead for the millwrights, so all the big, heavy equipment that was being put together. He and Lloyd Jackson were like Mutt and Jeff up there kind of organizing this, and we had a 24/7 operation that was nonstop for just about three years. Wayne was managing all that heavy equipment going together, all the conveyor lifts and all the machines.

Well, it turns out that at that time Wayne was actually having liver failure. Here's a man that's up on a project in the middle of nowhere, still doing these projects and suffering these major circumstances. Now, in Wayne's condition he couldn't find a donor. There wasn't a donor out there. I lost touch with him for a couple of years. He ended up getting a second lease on life because his brother-in-law actually bellied up and said – well, you know, he must have liked his brother-in-law because he donated half his liver to him.

With that gift, it gave Wayne at least another 15 years' lease on life, and the next time I talked to Wayne – you know, being one of my mentors, we kept in touch. I called him up, and it was on a project down in Estevan, Saskatchewan. It was going right sideways, and I needed somebody who could understand that side of the business, who could work with the crews out there, who could get the inspection guys back together and do those things. I'm just thinking of what a massive gap there would have been out there without having Wayne around. He ended up following me around in that whole pipeline industry for another 10 years after that.

He recently passed, this last fall, unfortunately, and it was due to complications with that transplant. But I know that his family was immensely grateful, and I know that there are so many other countless people out there that he touched over the time that he was, you know, extended with us. Credit to his brother-in-law again for doing that, for being a donor, for stepping up and doing that, for putting himself through that circumstance. That gift is insurmountable.

Again, with the member here bringing together some very common-sense legislation to have that meaningful impact – and I hope that with, you know, my little bit of a speech here talking about this, folks will consider filling out those donor cards, that they'll consider that gift that's out there. We never want to talk about our own expiry dates, but, believe it or not, we are on a termination schedule, and we can only do so much with the time we have. Whether it's a gift or whether it's a consequence, we don't know when that time is up.

Again, if we can do something as impactful and meaningful here by putting legislation through, I'd challenge everybody as well to make sure that you do that next step kind of like Wayne's brother-in-law did and fill out those cards to make sure that those donations can take place, that those tissues can be there, that the medical experts that we have, that we're very fortunate to have in this province, can do their best to extend and give that longevity to someone else's life.

Without rambling on too far, I'm very much in support of this, very appreciative of the member for bringing it forward, and very happy for the good, fulsome debate that we've had and for the interests of Albertans in doing this. Again, quite frankly, seeing this legislation, if, God willing, the creek don't rise and we can all get along in here to get it passed, this will be one of those items I can talk about in the future, to say that it was worth it and I did something meaningful.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join? The individual who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Mr. Amery: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by taking the opportunity to thank the hon. Member for Highwood for introducing this very important bill in this House, and I also want to take an opportunity to thank some of the members in this Chamber who spoke on this bill – the Member for Grande Prairie, the Member for Edmonton-Meadows, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud – for presenting their own personal accounts and their own experiences about this topic and this debate here this afternoon, and certainly my good friend from Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland, who gave a wonderful presentation about this particular bill. I appreciate the personal accounts that they all gave here this afternoon, and I certainly rise to also speak in favour of this bill. I'm honoured today to rise and speak about this Bill 205, namely the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, legislative reform is essential for modernizing Alberta's organ and tissue donation and transplantation system, and

I believe that that is exactly and precisely what this bill is doing. I had the pleasure of hearing the hon. Member for Highwood at the committee – that is, the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills – who gave his initial presentation on this particular bill, and he certainly provided those committee members with some of that preliminary information. I certainly appreciate the debate that is happening here, and I believe that we are making significant progress with respect to discussing this bill and, hopefully, seeing it pass through here.

Mr. Speaker, implementing a mandatory referral process means that physicians will refer patients to the appropriate organ donation organization when death is near or approaching. As my friend mentioned earlier, nobody likes to talk about these particular issues, but we need to talk about these issues, and ultimately we are all headed that way. Certainly, preparation and discussion, despite how difficult it may be at times, is something that I think is incredibly important.

Now, based on the surveys, that we assume are completed by physicians on this particular topic, those physicians have listed things like family grief, their perception of a family's religious bias, and their desire to leave the hospital unit as reasons for their decision not to address this particular topic. Certainly, I cannot speak for physicians – I'm not a physician – but I cannot even imagine how difficult it is to ask patients or their families questions about tissue and organ donation.

Prior to coming into this Chamber, I worked as a lawyer for almost a decade, Mr. Speaker, and a lot of those discussions focused on wills and estate planning. One of the most difficult discussions for young, healthy Albertans was talking about how to structure their estates, what to put in their wills, who to name as an executor, who to name as beneficiaries. These are discussions that take place, most times, with young, healthy Albertans. So certainly talking about these types of issues with people who may be facing impending death is a difficult topic, far more than the ones that I'm experienced with.

What we do know, Mr. Speaker, is that this bill has accounted for this particular factor. As a result, discussions about donations with families who are experiencing a tragedy are conducted by specialists explicitly educated and trained in this area. Professionally trained organ donation organizations can best deal with the families and are not biased against organ donation one way or the other. This should decrease, in my view, the likelihood of overpromising and underdelivering or missing having conversations with families who wish to donate. This referral process will play a considerable role in optimization efforts and streamlining the notification process to ensure reasonable timelines for accessing potential donor viability and decreasing missed donation opportunities.

Again, I refer to some of the statements that my friends here made earlier today, and certainly I want to reiterate what my friend from Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland mentioned just earlier today. This process will not compel anyone, but it will increase the probabilities of open and frank discussion, and that is specifically what I think the member who presented this bill intended to do. Mr. Speaker, let's pave the way for open discussion. Let's pave the way to discuss, to engage, to raise awareness. I'm all for that. I think my colleagues and, I hope, all members of this House agree with that as well.

Now, the content of this bill is really nothing new, nor is this the first time that legislation of this sort has been presented in Alberta. What's more, several jurisdictions world-wide have already implemented similar mandatory referral processes when it comes to organ and tissue donation. For example, in 2021 Nova Scotia became the first jurisdiction in North America to enact a presumed consent law for organ and tissue donation. Since then the province has seen a significant increase in tissue donations and large

increases in the availability of both tissues and organs for transplants.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to note for all the people watching here today that what was implemented in Nova Scotia is not necessarily being presented here in Alberta. Under Nova Scotia law people are presumed to agree to donate their organs when they pass away unless they choose to opt out, but we recognize that not everyone may be comfortable with donation, not everyone may be comfortable with that presumption that Nova Scotia law has implemented. We will ensure that each individual's wishes are honoured regardless of whether they wish to donate or not.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that it is critical to also remember that registering as an organ donor does not mean you will become an organ donor. The path to becoming a deceased organ donor is extremely complex because individuals need to die in certain circumstances where donation is even possible. Unfortunately, and contrary to some of the common misconceptions, those circumstances are relatively rare. Of the proportion of total deaths in Canada approximately 1.2 per cent have the potential to become organ donors. That's far lower than what I expected, and certainly the facts speak for themselves.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, there have been questions about why we chose the mandatory referral process instead of taking another approach such as one similar to the law in Nova Scotia, so I want to share the findings of the 2021 International Donation and Transplantation Legislative and Policy Forum with you on the evidence-based practice of mandatory referral as explained by the experts in the fields of donation and transplant.

Mr. Speaker, when comparing the two most common models of donation, mandatory and presumed consent, what stands out most to me is that under mandatory referral, clinicians or administrators notify the organ donation organization about the potential donor for evaluation, and if deemed medically eligible, the families of eligible potential donors are then approached for their consent. On the other hand, the presumed consent model makes the assumption that all individuals have consented to donation unless they have opted out before death. I should also mention that although Nova Scotia has legislated the presumed consent model, their legislation also includes mandatory referral as well, so all donor identification practices and ethical consent models are involved in deciding to donate. Mr. Speaker, all things considered, this brings us to why mandatory referral is more beneficial to its counterpart.

This is an important bill. I hope that all members of this Chamber vote in favour.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I believe the hon. member who caught my eye is the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise on this piece of legislation brought forward by the Member for Highwood, an important issue to all Albertans, Bill 205, the private member's bill titled Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. This afternoon, while deliberating this piece of legislation, this private member's bill, we've heard from many legislators here speaking to the bill, bringing forward personal anecdotes and stories that were very, very touching and very intimate stories of tragic circumstances and, in some cases, very happy circumstances. Those are the two sides of the coin when it comes to organ transplant. Unless it's a tissue donation or a live organ or a partial organ donation, somebody's death must occur before, in fact, the saving of a life can happen.

We heard a number of stories from families of members of this Legislature, and because of the numbers it's easy to surmise, Mr.

Speaker, that there is no family in this province that is untouched by this issue of human tissue and organ donation. It's a widespread phenomenon that there are concerns about the lack of availability of organs, and of course this piece of legislation attempts to address that. It is a private member's bill which I think is timely. It's always important to do what we can to improve the number of people whose lives can be saved or bettered by a tissue or organ donation, and I think this legislation addresses it. I strongly support the measures in Bill 205, brought forward by the Member for Highwood.

4:30

Some things that people may not be aware of are the actual sort of circumstances around which a tissue or organ may be donated. For example, Mr. Speaker, about organ donation, as I mentioned earlier, it may be that you can have a living donor. It means that the donating organ has to be free of disease and not harm the individual, but certainly there are a number of different organs that can be donated by way of live donation, and that's something that is a huge gift. I know of individuals personally who have done such a thing, and it's an amazing gift to give somebody else.

The organs themselves that may be transplanted include – of course, this would be after-death transplantation, after the death of the donor in most cases. Heart, lungs, liver, kidney, pancreas, which many people will not be aware of, pancreas islet cells, small bowel, and the stomach are organs that can be donated. Of course, tissues that may be donated include the cornea, the sclera, which is the white of the eye, heart valves, skin, bone, tendons, and amniotic tissue.

We heard earlier today, Mr. Speaker, that there are over 4,500 Canadians waiting for a transplant that will save their lives. All of us have heard the tragic stories of people on dialysis, whether liver or kidney, struggling to stay alive until a donor is found. Sadly, many people die waiting on that list for a transplant. That is something, of course, this bill seeks to address and ensure that we increase the number of donors who provide that life-giving gift of a transplant of a tissue or an organ.

As I mentioned earlier, the Member for Highwood has brought this bill forward, and I give him kudos for that. Every family in this House has been affected in some way, either directly or indirectly, and every Albertan family is, and my family is no different. As I mentioned before in this House, I had a younger brother named Kevin Dach who was killed in a car accident, tragically, just after graduating from high school. He was attending Lakeland College up in Vermilion, and the wish of the family, of course, was to have his organs donated. Unfortunately, his injuries were too severe for that, and we weren't able to move forward with that. We faced as a family that traumatic decision at a very point in time where the crisis of death was imminent, and I feel for every family who has to go through that.

The measures in this legislation, Bill 205, I think, help to make the process one of – it gives it pathways, gives it some roadways for families to follow, and it normalizes and makes it very clear. Back in 1977 things weren't quite as clear. You could express your wishes, but there certainly could have been a debate among family members about donation or not, and then if there were dissenting family members, probabilitywise the physician would have felt unable to move forward. Certainly, as I said, every family is touched by this in Alberta, and we welcome measures that are going to help more Alberta families keep their loved ones alive and extend their lives and allow the wishes of many family members to proceed and make sure that an organ donation can occur when, in fact, the deceased has made those wishes known on their driver's licence or through the Alberta care system or followed online to make the wishes of themselves known.

Now, we did mention in this House a few times, with other speakers previous to me, how important, how precious the whole concept of private members' bills is to members in this House. The public may not be aware, but a member can go through three or four or more terms, a whole career, without ever having the privilege of having their name drawn to bring forward a private member's bill. That is something that many members have expressed regret over, that they never got the opportunity. This opportunity is something that I think the Member for Highwood has taken full advantage of. As we all know, from our side of the House or the government side of the House, anyone who brings forward a private member's bill and gets it to the point of the floor of the Legislature debate has put an awful lot of work into the whole process, and regardless of the subject matter of the bill the effort that it takes to get a private member's bill to this spot in this House and actually debate it here is something that the public should recognize.

What's happened recently, Mr. Speaker, in this Legislature is that no opposition private members' bills have received the ability to be debated on the floor of the House. They were blocked by government members in committee, the public bills committee, who decide whether or not to allow a bill to proceed to the floor of the Legislature for debate. They were blocked not because they were in some way deficient in their content, in my humble opinion, but they were blocked because they were opposition bills and the government did not want to see any opposition bill getting debated in the Legislature simply because they came from the opposition. This is, I believe, a black stain on our democratic process here in the House. It's something I don't want to see permitted to happen over the long haul.

Right now the government of the day sees fit to completely stifle the debate that members of this House wish to bring forward as private members' bills, and I think it's something that should receive the condemnation of all legislators in this House and also the public, because when government members simply block a private member's bill because it comes from the opposition regardless of the inherent value of that piece of legislation, what they're doing is expressing that they really don't believe in giving the opposition a fair hearing just because they might have opposing views. There have been 10 – 10 – of these private members' bills, I think nine or 10, that have been actually . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The individual who did catch my eye was the hon. Member for Camrose.

Ms Lovely: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. I first want to thank the Member for Highwood for his hard work in bringing this bill forward to this House. It's important to promote organ and tissue donation because organ and tissue donation can save lives.

Currently organ and tissue donation rates in Alberta are lower than many of our neighbouring Canadian provinces and other top-performing countries. In Canada right now there are over 4,500 Canadians waiting for a transplant that will save their lives and even more people that are waiting for tissue transplant that will increase their quality of life. Of these Canadians on transplant wait-lists, over 700 of them are from right here in Alberta. Organ failure and organ donation impacts the lives of not just the recipients but their families as well.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 will include measures that will improve the effectiveness of organ donation and the transplant system as a whole. Organ donation is the ultimate gift of life, but there is need for improvements to the organ and tissue donation system. Bill 205

contains three major components that will improve the organ and tissue donation system. This will in turn help address the shortage of organ and tissue donors and increase the number of lives that can be saved.

4:40

The first major component contained in this bill is the implementation of a mandatory referral process. Mr. Speaker, last year the International Donation and Transplantation Legislative and Policy Forum assembled a panel of international experts in the fields of donation and transplantation to provide expert guidance on the structure of an ideal organ and tissue donation and transplantation system. The forum concluded that the mandatory referral is a key, evidence-based, best practice among global deceased organ and tissue donation and transplantation leaders.

Contrary to popular belief, registering as an organ donor or sharing your wishes with your family does not mean that you'll become an organ donor. The pathway to becoming a deceased organ donor is a complex one because individuals need to die in circumstances where donation is even possible, and these circumstances are rare. As a proportion of total deaths in Canada only approximately 1.2 per cent have the potential to become donors. Each patient who is a potential donor is rare, and identification and referral of these patients is the only way they will become an actual donor. Failure to identify possible donors is the biggest factor in explaining differences in deceased donation rates nationally and internationally.

Missed donor opportunities occur when potential donors are not identified and the appropriate organ donation organization is not notified or referrals are received too late. Missed donor opportunities also occur when potential donors are identified by the treating medical team but they choose not to notify the organ donation organization. In cases of late or nonreferral, life-sustaining therapy is withdrawn in a way that excludes the possibility of donation, preventing the wishes of the patient and their families to even be considered. A study found that reasons for physicians not referring patients to organ donation organizations are as follows: they deem the patient to be not an eligible donor; they did not due to the family being too upset; they did not due to their belief that the family had a religious bias; they did not due to their desire to leave the hospital unit.

Mandatory referral will help address these issues by increasing the chances to make sure discussions with the patient's family about donation are conducted by specialists who are educated specifically in this area. Under a mandatory referral process a physician would be required to refer a patient to the appropriate organ donation organization when death is deemed to be imminent. This is expected to play a huge part in optimization efforts. This change in notification will create a streamlined notification system that will ensure a more adequate timeline for assessing the viability of potential donors and will decrease missed opportunities. This should decrease the likelihood of overpromising and underdelivering or missing the opportunity to have the conversation with families who wish to donate. Both situations can add to the stress a family is experiencing at one of the most worst times of their life.

Mr. Speaker, we know that legal and ethical practices like mandatory referral are essential to establishing a strong donation culture. The decision on whether to donate a loved one's organs can be an extremely difficult one, especially under the umbrella of a family tragedy. This is why we need trained professionals engaging this process to provide the best support possible for Albertans. Professionally trained organ donation organizations are better able to help families and are not biased against organ donation. Consent

to donate is of little value if potential donors are not properly identified and referred to donor specialists at the right time.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The second major component of this bill is that it will improve agency guidelines. The changes to the Organ and Tissue Donation Agency will also pave the way for annual reviews, reports, and suggestions directly to the minister to help minimize missed donor opportunities. These measures will help, to conclude, to build a stronger system of donation in the future.

The third component of this bill is improved education and awareness around the donor process. This bill will improve the quality of information provided to individuals within our Alberta registries in order to better educate Albertans on the process of organ and tissue donation and its importance.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is a major and necessary step forward to modernize Alberta's tissue and organ donation systems. I'm pleased to support this bill and would encourage all members of this House to do the same.

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

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take an opportunity to speak to this bill also. I've supported organ donation my whole life, and I remember signing an organ donation card decades ago. In fact, I think it was maybe even before I was 18. I actually think my parents had to cosign or sign on my behalf to make sure that could happen. This morning, knowing this bill was coming up, too, I thought I would actually check my donor status, so I went online, checked the status, and, sure enough, I was registered as a donor, which I was happy to see.

I know this process in the past has been complicated, but the new online process that I think has been in place for maybe two years now I thought was relatively simple. I know it could be simpler. I know we could have processes that are far more simple to make sure that we have everybody that wants to have their organs donated if something happened to them, make sure that they are taken care of and that that process happens, so I think this is a good discussion to have.

However, the process of private members' bills: let's face it; it's been manipulated by the UCP here. After nine weeks in session we are looking at bills 202 and 205 right now, which are the second and fifth drawings in this session, and they're finally hitting the process where they could actually see second reading, which is the first opportunity in this Legislature to actually debate a private member's bill. It's taken us nine weeks to get to this process.

Now, if the government really wants private members' bills to proceed, as there seems to be anxiety for this, an anxiousness for this bill to proceed as fast as possible – if they really wanted this bill to proceed as fast as possible, they would have done away with the private members' bill committee and concurrence, that delays private members' bills and motions by weeks. Now, again, everybody is talking about urgency, but nobody is doing anything to truly move this process along faster.

Now, when I look at this bill here, Bill 205, the member who brought this bill forward asked for concurrence in this Legislature, which actually delayed this bill an extra week, asking for and having to discuss concurrence. I believe it was the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain who asked for concurrence on my Bill 202, which delayed my bill, and by pushing my bill back, that pushes Bill 205 back because it's further along on the Order Paper.

Now, this government, if they're really serious about this, could make this a government bill, and that would ensure that it's debated and passed in the fastest process possible. They could actually ask

for unanimous consent to allow these bills to pass multiple stages in the same day. They could actually collapse debate and force the vote on it today so that we could move on to the next stage of the process even faster, but I'm not convinced that the government actually wants this bill to really pass, because they're doing nothing to show that to us.

With only a couple of Mondays left, which is the only time we have member time, there's a chance that this bill, even pushed along, won't be able to pass because on the next Monday we have – there are two bills up for concurrence. We could have concurrence discussed, which would take up that Monday, too.

I just want to say that I think the most important thing to remember here is that the process has been manipulated, and it's left us in a situation where we don't get the work done that we should be getting done in this Legislature. Again, nine weeks and we're barely discussing the first two private members' bills.

With that, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate lost]

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. Before I add my comments about this piece of legislation, I would also like to just echo what some of the other members in this place have said about private member bills. I sat through some of the comments earlier from the member for – was it Rocky View? Strathmore?

Member Irwin: Which one? Oh, Chestermere-Strathmore.

Ms Renaud: Chestermere-Strathmore. The Member for Chestermere-Strathmore made it very clear how important she believed private members' bills were, that we needed to clear the way for this important legislation. You know, all of us know that we really just only have a chance to bring something forward if we essentially win a lottery. She talked about how important the different topics were and how hard different members worked to be able to do that, which I found really odd given her and other members' actions over the last nine weeks of this session. That has been to, at every turn, shut down opportunities for the opposition bills to make it to this place so that we can debate them in the fashion that we were sent here to do.

4:50

You know, another example of just the blatant hypocrisy in this place is a little bit – it should be shocking, Mr. Speaker, but sadly it isn't because we're getting used to it. In any event, it is unfortunate that the UCP MLAs are really sort of intent on eroding the democracy that we should be upholding and protecting, but they erode it almost every day that we are in this place, sadly.

To Bill 205, human tissue and organ donation, I listened with interest as some of my colleagues talked about people, whether they were constituents or people in their lives, that had been successful recipients of organs, and it was actually really quite inspiring to hear just the incredible, life-giving nature of human tissue and organ donation. I'd like to tell you about someone in my life that I knew, and this was my first introduction to somebody that did require . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt; however, the 115 minutes allotted for debate at second reading have elapsed, and that allows the Member for Highwood five minutes to close debate.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I first want to start by thanking all my colleagues in the House today for sharing their input and their stories around such an important issue, an issue that I'm extremely passionate about, which is organ and tissue donation here in the province of Alberta. I've heard a lot about how important this is. I think we've identified how critical it is to move forward as quickly as possible with 700 Albertans awaiting either organ or tissue donation here in the province of Alberta. I think it's critical that as legislators we do everything possible to ensure that we are creating the best system possible to make sure that there are the most opportunities for that chance. We've spoken to how limited those chances are; roughly 1.2 per cent of all instances present an opportunity. We have to make sure that we maximize on those and minimize donor opportunities.

It's great to hear overall that there seems to be a general consensus in this House and support for this bill because, as I mentioned, it is important for all those people whose lives really are on the line, awaiting either organ or tissue donation. I also want to note and recognize the number of foundations, organizations, and individuals that have really supplied the input here. This is a bill by Albertans for Albertans to save Albertans. I have spent over a year working with AOG, Heart and Stroke, and Kidney Foundation. I know this morning we had the SEND presentation, and I had a chance to speak to Joyce Van Deurzen, who is an executive director with the Kidney Foundation, and was able to have really important conversations with her. Flavia Robles, as well, is an executive director with the Kidney Foundation and has been critical in the input that she's provided to me and the support for this bill, and I'm very appreciative of that.

You know, these stories, the stories that I've heard, stories around Cindy Krieger and her daughter Morghan, Dan and Jennifer Woolfsmith and their daughter Mackenzy: I think they're incredibly powerful, and they highlight how critical it is for us to move forward as quickly as possible on finally getting this legislation passed. Before I close debate, I just want to read something that was provided to me by Jennifer Woolfsmith, and I think it says a lot. She sent me an e-mail that says:

We talk about Mackenzy [her daughter] and the gift she gave openly and often in our house. Having our children, both Owen and Declan, understand all the hard work that went into this by so many as well as witness the important step forward first-hand on what would be meaningful to our whole family.

She states that

Declan asked me just the other day how Mackenzy's organs got to other kids. I was beginning to explain that the doctors did it very carefully and lovingly when he asked me if she had surgery, because one of his classmates recently had surgery and she got a lollipop for being brave. When I answered that it was indeed surgery, he replied, "I hope that Mackenzy got a thousand lollipops." Although he often cries that he misses his sister that he never had the chance to know, he also knows how incredibly meaningful the gift was that she gave.

I think all of us here today need to be brave, brave like Mackenzy and Declan and Owen, and recognize how important it is for us to move forward with this legislation. Thank you to everyone who spoke today.

With that, I close debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:57 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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|--------------------|------------|-----------------|
| Allard | Irwin | Sabir |
| Amery | Issik | Sawhney |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Jean | Schow |
| Bilous | Jones | Schulz |
| Ceci | LaGrange | Shepherd |
| Dach | Lovely | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Deol | McIver | Singh |
| Ellis | Nally | Stephan |
| Fir | Neudorf | Toor |
| Frey | Nicolaides | Turton |
| Getson | Orr | Walker |
| Horner | Pon | Wilson |
| Hunter | Renaud | Yaseen |
| Totals: | For – 39 | Against – 0 |

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 205 read a second time]

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 9(1) in order to proceed to debate on Motion Other than Government Motion 507.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Public Service

507. Mr. Neudorf moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review the rate of growth of the number of public servants employed by departments, public agencies, and municipalities and establish benchmarks for hiring new employees that are linked to population and population growth to ensure that the size of the public service is appropriate.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As municipal governments increase services, they add staff. Then their labour costs grow, and inevitably municipal tax rates increase. It's important to remember that, at the end of the day, there is only one taxpayer. People have to pay their share of property taxes along with business taxes and school taxes. There are also federal and provincial personal income taxes, payroll and business taxes, fuel taxes, not to mention Justin Trudeau's carbon tax. You can also add fees as well as licences and membership costs to people and businesses, and it all adds up.

Mr. Speaker, did you know that May 24 is Tax Freedom Day in Canada? Through the research I did for Motion 507, I learned that families of two or more pay 39.1 per cent of their income to taxes. Think about it: that's almost 40 per cent of a family's budget paying various levels of government taxes.

Let me explain how this has worked in our province. Here are some facts reported by Franco Terrazzano with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation on June 30, 2020, in an article titled *Alberta Municipal Gov't Labour Costs Out of Touch with Reality*. Calgary's and Edmonton's municipal budgets have labour costs of over 50 per cent of their total spend, both increasing by more than \$200 million between the years 2014 and 2018. That's each. I can confirm to the Assembly that neither of their populations increased proportionately by that much over those four years.

A statistic on pensions for the city of Calgary blew me away, Mr. Speaker. Did you know that Calgary spends more on pensions for

its employees and elected officials than every other major Canadian city? Calgary provides some of its employees not just one, not only two, but in some cases three pensions to a single employee. If that wasn't enough to make you shake your head, the council pension plan costs Calgaryans more than council pensions in Vancouver, Edmonton, and Ottawa combined. Let that sink in.

Mr. Speaker, not to single out our largest metropolitan cities too much, small municipal governments are not exempt from this trend. Of those with populations between 5,000 and 30,000 people such as the municipal districts of Taber, Greenview, and Blackfalds, some of them have the fastest growing labour costs. Small towns which saw their labour costs double are the villages of Edberg, Gadsby, and Lougheed. Between 2014 and 2018 Edberg's population declined from 163 people to 146. Gadsby saw an increase of 36 to 61 citizens but not quite double. Lougheed's population increased from 256 to 267, by 11 people.

It begs the question: does it make sense to see their labour costs double in those jurisdictions during that same period of time? Overall, in Alberta municipal government labour costs increased by nearly \$837 million, or 17 per cent, which outpaces the population growth of only 5.3 per cent and is still higher even when inflation is added in at its 7 per cent rate. Setting benchmarks tied to population growth would be one simple tool to protect every single Albertan taxpayer on an annual basis year over year for as long as they are adhered to. Aside from that, it is simply good governance, exemplifying transparency, accountability, and predictability.

Mr. Speaker, I bring forward this motion today in the spirit of Daniel Webster, who said, "The Constitution was made to guard the people against the dangers of good intention." I say that to recognize the typical cycle of human society. For example, the pioneers who first settled the land, started farms, worked mines, gathered at forts, and established towns quickly focused on building schools, town halls, libraries, and hospitals, requiring staff to be hired, first to do the work and then to administer the respective institutions.

It wasn't long before there was a need to see governance and planning for towns, industrial growth, regulations and bylaws for order, policing and jails, courthouses, offices to guide fair trade and security of goods, post offices, water treatment plants and waste depots, and the growth continues. People continue to come to developed areas. Hamlets become villages, villages become towns, towns become cities, and cities become metropolises. The public service continues to grow, providing social services; help for those with disabilities, mental health, and addictions; supportive housing; the provision and connection of utilities, water, waste water, garbage, and recycling; public transit; colleges and universities; and more. These are all very good things that are needed and, in fact, often demanded by the citizenry, but all services come at a cost to the ratepayer and the taxpayer. Not only do services cost more over time due to inflation, but that cost is further augmented due to the volume as the population increases.

5:20

But the most invisible of all is the growth of scope, things that used to be done privately that are now done publicly and paid for by the public purse. To more clearly define this, Mr. Speaker, I will remind you and my colleagues in the Chamber here today of the following. Schools of all kinds – from K to 12, colleges and universities, trade schools and vocational schools – were originally established and operated privately. Just watch *Anne of Green Gables* for a trip down memory lane in this respect. Nearly all hospitals were established and operated by churches and funded by donations, and wealthy philanthropists often built wings and units that bear their names. Libraries, banks, railroads, and even resource development are other examples of industries that began privately

that now, in whole or in part, have seen government or public agencies take a hand in administration.

Again, Mr. Speaker, all these things are very important, needed, and often demanded by the people. The arguments for consistency, access, affordability, transparency, and fairness are all valid. Due to time, relative comfort, and wealth, we see more and more of society expecting these things. My goal today is not to wage war on those ideals or have that debate but merely to warn of the dangers therein and, more specifically, to provide a comprehensive way of keeping that invisible exponential growth in check, to shine a light on the pitfalls of trying to, quote, unquote, keep up with the Joneses, or, more appropriately, to warn of the cost of small towns wanting to be mid-sized cities and mid-sized cities trying to be metro cities.

I take some wisdom from history, particularly from many of the founding fathers of the United States and the writers of their Constitution. Thomas Jefferson said:

A wise & frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, & shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government; & this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities.

In essence, good government must be restrained, held in check, and not allowed to grow without deep and careful consideration.

James Madison said it this way:

The powers of the federal government are enumerated; it can only operate in certain cases; it has legislative powers on defined and [united] objects, beyond which it cannot extend its jurisdiction.

The key words: “enumerated” and “defined,” which mean to establish the number of or to mention one by one, making these powers clear, defined, limited, beyond which it cannot extend its jurisdiction. It requires an incredible amount of self-discipline to exact that self-control and not extend the jurisdiction of government, the highest authority of the land. Depending on your beliefs, that may be debatable, but government is definitely the largest and most powerful. Therefore, it begs the question: who or what controls that apex predator unless it controls itself?

This principle is so important, so powerful, so invisible that those founding fathers and legendary leaders almost all spoke to it in one way or another. As Thomas Paine said: government is best which governs least.

I humbly ask all members in this Chamber to please support this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Motion other than Government Motion 507 are there others? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the wonderful Member for Lethbridge-East, who brought forward this motion. I’m going to read it into the record again just because my folks may not be watching his feed.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review the rate of growth of the number of public servants employed by departments, public agencies, and municipalities and establish benchmarks for hiring new employees that are linked to population and population growth to ensure that the size of the public service is appropriate.

In layman’s terms on that, typically on project sites or in private industry we kind of look at that ratio, so management to services ratio. One of the other things that helps us drive that in the process of how many people you need to do things is looking at the physical processes themselves.

In a former life I used to go in as a consultant to a lot of organizations and look for efficiencies. One of the things that freaked a lot of people

out: when you go in as an outside person and you start lifting up the hood, so to speak, and looking at what their processes do and what the efficiencies are, typically they’re concerned that there are going to be layoffs. What I’ve found most times in that consideration is that it actually increases throughput. So when you start looking at efficiencies within the system or you have some type of metrics or something to guide by, typically those departments become more productive, and hence the throughput and the services increase.

Now, in the government context, some are rock stars; some aren’t. Like, it depends on which department. When I was a first-time candidate, I was actually down in Yuma, of all places, because we’ve got lots of snowbirds down there. I went down for an air show and ended up talking to a bunch of folks from my own constituency, ironically. One of the individuals there, Wendy, took me over – she grabbed another person that she knew that was from Edmonton. He was retired out of the Transportation department. He was around right during that time when Ralph Klein and everybody were looking at cutbacks. You know, regardless of history lessons or otherwise, essentially everything became so darned bloated at the time. The government couldn’t borrow cash; they had to have some drastic measures to look at cutbacks.

Now, this gentleman was recruited from an engineering company to come over to Transportation at the time. He gets there just as these cutbacks are taking place. He was divulging to me some of the context, that the department was very much upset. They were very concerned about how this was going to work. He said: quite frankly, after the first year of going through those changes, the attitudes increased; the workplace satisfaction went up. He said that the throughputs went just through the roof. They were doing more than less and very happy with it.

It’s counterintuitive. It may seem to some that when you don’t have so many people around, the morale actually goes up. Again, it’s job satisfaction, getting those throughputs, concentrating on which items. In governments at all levels I think it behooves us to not have some type of metric to tie the number of people we have with throughputs.

Now, the other thing is that I really like the concept of tying it to the population as kind of a starting point. But, again, depending on the services and the systems that each one of these departments is offering, it may be because it’s cumbersome till you get more people. Also, another thing: it’s counterintuitive. Because we have computers, sometimes it takes more people to do work where we were all sold on how it was supposed to be less labour intensive. So there has to be some tongue in cheek there.

What I am going to do is talk about some of the items that the member pointed out: 39 per cent of our tax dollars go to some level, way, shape, or form of government in this country. Thirty-nine per cent. So we’re pushing almost 40 per cent of our tax dollars going to pay for services that we may or may not tap into, that we may or may not have an input into, that we may or may not see in the first place, which is just wild.

The fact that the pension plans – and this one jumped right off the page. The pensions from Calgary – and I’ve got to find it here; it just blew me away. Edmonton, Vancouver, and Ottawa combined pale in comparison to the pensions paid out by Calgary for the public service. Like, folks in Calgary, if you’re listening to this, the pucker factor, for me, is pretty high in hearing about it. The fact that you guys are living the dream is another one. So you can see, when some of these things don’t have checks and balances in place, how that compounding tax effect just keeps taking place.

I do have some rock stars out in my area. I’m going to give some plugs out to the county of Parkland, the county of Lac Ste. Anne, the county of Sturgeon, the counties of Yellowhead and Westlock. I’m very fortunate to work with those folks. When I first started

talking about this, coming in as newly elected, Mr. Speaker, all fired up about our platform commitments, looking for efficiencies, red tape reductions, and all those things, they were already doing it. So before we even got here, those counties were already looking at efficiencies internally. The collaboration that they were looking at between them: when it comes to firefighting services, when they're looking at the Villeneuve landing network, as an example, they were utilizing their own business development groups between those organizations.

When they were looking at landing a manufacturing company, XCMG, that produces industrial equipment – they were competing between here and Texas and us – those groups came together utilizing their existing resources in an efficient manner to try to land these projects, to try to land these companies and organizations.

So those are the types of things that can happen when those departments are lean and mean and working on doing that.

The other thing that really pushed Parkland to be very efficient, I would hazard to say, was the premature phase-out of the coal mines. Again, you've heard me speak about that a few times, that they lost 25 per cent of their revenues on the front end because of that. So they needed to find innovative ways to make sure that they were turning over tax revenue, and they had to develop what assets they have. That meant building permits. That meant building out the Acheson industrial park to do that, and the way they had to do that was to get very lean and mean within their approval process. Unfortunately, when you look at processes, some of the impediments become personnel themselves. If they can't get on with the new program, then they have to go.

5:30

Now, the Alberta government itself: I would like to give credit to the Minister of Finance. He's in behind the scenes and through all the other ministries as well over the last few budgets. I heard the Member for Lethbridge-West – sorry. I'm trying not to laugh, but it does strike me as odd. The only reason, she felt, that we balanced the budget was that the price of oil went up. Well, I'm here to tell you that that isn't quite the case. Budgets don't balance themselves, and just because the price of oil, the old Texas tea, goes up doesn't make it all happen. In behind the scenes there were lots of efficiencies looked at through an attrition process, through all the hires that have taken place and not backfilling those positions, looking for efficiencies in your own backyard before you put more burden on the taxpayers to ask for more.

The other one that comes with that is that once you have some of these metrics tied into place, you can have incentive plans or incentive packages or performance metrics that people can now achieve, being these departments and organizations. If they can do more with less, they're happy about it. They actually start to achieve these goals. Once they understand what the rule of the game is, rather than building fiefdoms or having these convoluted processes, once they're efficient, everything starts to fall into place because now you're benefiting from an improved process. You're getting people to work together. You're also looking at the right culture to come into place. Sometimes it's very awkward to have someone from the outside come in and take a look at what you're doing but also to have those bookends and put it in place.

It's a sobering thought when we think that some of this has just happened and grown over the years. Again coming back to that engineer that was with – now he's retired at this point and packaged out down in Yuma. When he was talking about that department, he said: we did all these cuts, and everything took place. He says that, quite frankly, when he left, it had ballooned and popped right back up to that again. Again, there wasn't that need or that necessity, and it's not until sometimes we have a crisis, whether it's a cash crunch or anything else, that we have to look at these.

From the Member for Lethbridge-West for being one of the grown-ups in the room looking at – Lethbridge-East; I apologize. East, west: west is the best; east is the least, or the other way around in that case. From the Member for Lethbridge-East being the grown-up in the room and understanding that it's not the price of oil: it comes down to little steps that you can take along the place, and if you don't have performance metrics in place, then you're only rising to the lowest level of performance in the first place, and the easy thing is just to hire somebody else. Where you have that intestinal fortitude, have to look inwards at what you're doing with what you have and making sure that you're spending every taxpayer dollar as if it's your last to make sure that we don't have to rely on commodity prices – there isn't a Hail Mary – and doing prudent business practices in hiring and making sure that we're held to account: that's what we've got to do to get things forward.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I'd like to close my remarks, and thank you very much to the Member for Lethbridge-East for bringing this motion forward.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Sure. I'd like to stand briefly and lend my support to the private member's motion. I'll read it for the record as well.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review the rate of growth of the number of public servants employed by departments, public agencies, and municipalities and establish benchmarks for hiring new employees that are linked to population and population growth to ensure that the size of the public service is appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, before I became a Member of the Legislative Assembly, I had the opportunity to serve as a tax lawyer in the city of Red Deer, and over the last couple of years – you know, I love the city that I live in. It's where I grew up and came back to raise my family and to start a business, and I wanted Red Deer to be the best community that it could possibly be. One of those things is that when I met with individuals and families in my community, they were concerned about the increase in their property tax rates. I started to do some investigations as a public service, and I formed with some other members in the community an organization called the Red Deer Taxpayers' Association. Actually, you can go online and look it up. It's in the public domain there.

One of the things that we measured is that over a period of a number of years we looked at and compared the combined rate of population and inflation growth and compared that to the operation expenses of the municipality. Just looking at the website, it's really interesting. I think it was mentioned that we talk about compounding impact and a municipality that spends above population and inflation growth every single year: it's quite extraordinary, actually, what that compounding impact can result in.

As it related to the city of Red Deer, just looking, there was a measurement done over a 15-year period where you had a combined population and inflation growth of about 72 per cent, and during that time operating expenses went up over 215 per cent. When you look at kind of the compounding impact, if you kind of compare, if they had just kept their spending in line with inflation and population growth versus what their actual spending is, you see this large area, this large growing difference from the compounding impact. In the city's case, over a 15-year period to 2018 that difference had compounded to over \$125 million in a year. It was almost double of what their budget had been had they just kept their spending in line with population growth. So over a 15-year period the compounding impact almost doubled, in fact, their operating

expenses versus if they had just kept it in line with population and inflation growth.

But one of the things that I think is really good about this as well is that it's not only important that we do the analysis to have that accountability, but it's just as important that we report it and let the public know the truth. In our communities we want to encourage all of the communities that we live in to be the best that we can be. Certainly, when we report and when we're accountable to the public in the communities that we live in on how we're doing, then that strengthens democracy. It changes culture. The more that the truth is known, the stronger culture you have in government.

With that, I really appreciate this wonderful motion, and I look forward to supporting it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has the call.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for an opportunity to briefly address this motion before us. You know, I come at it from both being a public servant in Calgary for eight years and then getting elected to city council for 15 years. In those times there certainly was – long-service employees would get a contribution at the end of their service to the city of Calgary, but that's changed. That has been eliminated, and I don't think the mover of the motion reflected that in what he was saying. He was talking about things that were in the past and done in the past in Calgary, and the way the new council is going forward is very much having set a time limit on that kind of contribution to long-service employees, people who had spent 25 years plus with the city of Calgary, and they were retiring and they did get a contribution. That is not what employees signing up today will be achieving, will be getting. So there is some old news in what the mover was talking about, and the new news is the city's actions going forward.

You know, I was just wondering about this establishing benchmarks for new hiring based on population and population growth. Mr. Speaker, that's how I understand municipalities, for the most part, look at hiring. They look at hiring as a lagging effect of their population growth. They look at hiring. They look at business processes first to see if they can address the service, perhaps, that citizens are asking for, and they, in a lagging way, will then go to build their staff complement up once their population or population percentage goes up.

5:40

It used to be said around the council table: constituents never ask for less service; they always ask for more service. That's the dilemma that many municipalities find themselves in. Constituents aren't happy with less garbage collection, less roadway work done; they want more. In many councils that I was a part of, the times didn't afford us to increase property taxes, so we had to do a lot more with less, or the workers had to do a lot more with less.

The other point I wanted to make, Mr. Speaker, just listening to the information that came from the mover, is that while being a city employee, I went through two or three organizational reviews where the management was tasked by the city government of the day to look at: is the city in the right business? I was in the community and social services area: is the city in the business properly of addressing the needs of citizens, and can we change it? We very much got changed a couple of times from doing direct counselling work with constituents who would be either referred or come to our doors to doing community development work, not individual work but group work. Then the city moved out of daycare, child care services to just kind of monitoring or regulating child care services.

So the entire time of my entire profession of being both a city employee as well as on the governance of city council, I knew the municipality to be involved with and active in always deciding the kind of work it should be doing on behalf of the citizens. I knew it to hire in a lagging way, where if the population grew, then down the road the number of employees for the city would grow.

The other thing I guess I wonder is: where will the benchmarks, how will the benchmarks be established? Will they be truly benchmarks amongst peers – I'm talking about other governments, other municipalities, other departments, and other public agencies – or will they be benchmarks between apples and oranges? Like, that wasn't really made clear by the mover.

The last thing I guess I'll just say is that, you know, this government has done, in my estimation and the estimation of probably many people in Alberta, many things to increase the size of government in ways that didn't benefit the population in Alberta. For instance, the whole war room grew – I don't know – maybe 15 to 20 people that are either government or they're an agency of government, and I don't see the value for money there, Mr. Speaker. So this government has done many things to increase the size of the public service in ways that have provided no value, in my estimation and the estimation of many Albertans who are critical of the work of the war room and other places.

I will sit down and listen to the rest of the debate, Mr. Speaker, but just wanted to get on the record that municipalities, for one, have done a lot of this work already. I'm not aware that the mover has spoken to any of the municipal agencies, whether it's RMA or Alberta Municipalities, to share what their views are, in fact, of the motion he's bringing forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this motion.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review the rate of growth of the number of public servants employed by departments, public agencies, and municipalities and establish benchmarks for hiring new employees that are linked to population and population growth to ensure that the size of the public service is appropriate.

Of course, our caucus supports this motion, but the remarks we heard earlier completely skipped over the departments and public agencies and went straight to attacking municipalities, which are also independent bodies duly elected by their constituents and should have every right to manage their affairs as they see fit, and the data that was used also was not up to date with respect to municipalities.

When we talk about the government departments and public agencies – like, for instance, we can look at an example from Education. We can look at Alberta Health Services. One thing for sure that we do firmly believe is that we do need a strong public service. There is a strong role for public service, and we think that services that government provides, government departments provide, government agencies provide should keep up with population growth and inflation, those kind of parameters. Instead of, I guess, poking at and talking about what municipalities do, government should look at their departments first. They should mind their business first.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

For instance, Alberta's student population has grown every year. There are more kids in the classroom than there were in 2019, than there were in 2020. Instead of adding more teachers, instead of taking into account population growth, that this motion says that government should, what we see in the government budget, in their own documents,

is that there are 954 fewer teachers in our classrooms now. There are more students in our classroom, and instead of keeping pace with the student population growth, government is slashing teachers. It's slashing public service from that school system, exactly the opposite of what this motion is asking government to do. Those are facts coming from their own budget documents, that they have fewer teachers now.

That only happened because the government was pushing through its ideological agenda of cutting public services, slashing services, so that they can give corporate handouts to the wealthiest in this country. On one hand corporations got \$4.7 billion dollars from this government, but education is seeing a cut. We're seeing a cut even to, like, supports for individuals with disabilities. They deindexed AISH. They also changed the schedule for supplemental benefits. They're denying those benefits as well. They didn't do anything to make sure that our education system keeps pace with the growing number of students. So, certainly, this is a good motion, and government should look into what they did to education.

5:50

The second thing with respect to education: early on in the pandemic the government fired 20,000 staff from the Education department via a tweet. Those were education assistants. Those were people who were making sure that students who are coming through our education system have the supports that they need. Twenty thousand staff from the education system, and over the same period we saw an increase in the growth of our student population.

Similarly, when we take the example of health care, the government may say whatever they choose to about spending more on health care, but every day what we are hearing is that because of this government's mismanagement our health system is not keeping pace with the population growth. We are seeing ER rooms getting shut down every day. We are seeing services cut every day. Government certainly didn't care when they were slashing the health budget, when they went to war with doctors. They didn't make sure that services that government is providing keep pace with the growing population needs. The record that we have so far is that this government did not make sure that our services keep pace with the population growth.

[The Speaker in the chair]

On top, the motion talks about some kind of transparent benchmark. This is the government that has not shared a thing about a \$120 million entity known as the war room and exempted that entity from FOIP. What kind of benchmark is the Member for Lethbridge-East talking about? I would be interested in knowing: why doesn't he support some kind of benchmark for the war room that's spending \$30 million every day? We don't know how many employees they have. We don't know what kind of budget they have. We don't know where they are spending money. We don't know who they are contracting out their advertisement to. We don't know where they steal their logos and how much they pay for that. I hope that member will agree with me that we need some kind of benchmark there as well.

We have Invest Alberta. Up until last week that was not FOIPable. That's a government agency. No wonder that this government got an award from the Association of Journalists, a code of silence award in secrecy. That's the record of this government.

So they can bring forward this feel-good motion, but their actions are completely opposite of what this motion is saying. We will certainly support it, and should we become government, we will make sure that the public service keeps pace with the population growth and inflation. We will make sure that there is a benchmark and that entities like the war room are not exempt from FOIP and other laws that make such entities transparent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise with just a few short minutes left in our debate this afternoon. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Motion 507, brought forward by the Member for Lethbridge-East, and I just wanted to thank the member for his diligence and his work in general as an MLA and certainly on this motion. I also wanted to take this opportunity to thank the members of the public service that I have had the pleasure of working with in my time in office. I've had many, including members of the Legislative Assembly offices, that you would be well aware of, Mr. Speaker, and also municipal leaders across the province. We seem to have sort of focused the discussion today on municipalities, but I don't think that was the intent of the motion. It was broader in focus than that.

However, since we've talked about it – and I've heard members opposite thank the member and suggest that they would support the motion, which is great to hear, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to thank the municipal leaders across Alberta that I've had the pleasure of knowing and working with and particularly – and I don't want to play favourites here, because I am a rural MLA – the rural municipal leaders that I've had the pleasure of meeting, because many of them have the practice of doing more with less for the duration of their careers because of where they live. It's just a fact of their geography. I just wanted to thank them for their creativity, for their ideas, for their ability to do more with less, for their commitment to do so, and for their commitment to rightsizing government on behalf of Alberta taxpayers, which I think goes to the heart of this motion.

I wanted to talk a little bit about this. I realize that my time is very brief, but I thought I would start with a quote from our friend Benjamin Franklin, his famous words in a letter that he penned to – and I'm going to probably say this name wrong – Jean-Baptiste Le Roy. I'm assuming it's a French name, but anyway we'll see how that goes. It was penned in 1789, which was shocking for me to read. And the famous words are: in this world nothing can be said to be certain except for death and taxes. Sadly, those words remain true to this very day. I think the heart of this motion is really about limiting the tax burden to the people, and I would fully support the intent of that in any opportunity that I would have to do so.

There are so many things that I could talk about. One of the things I believe the Member for Calgary-Buffalo had mentioned, you know: are we going to compare apples to apples? Well, with respect to municipal governments, which is what he was talking about, this government did put together a tool that municipal leaders can use. I apologize, Mr. Speaker; I can't remember the proper title. It became coined as the municipal report card and that stuck in my brain, so I can't think of what it actually is called, but it provides municipal leaders right across Alberta the opportunity to go onto the site, that's populated every year by Alberta's public service, and provide them with the ability to compare and benchmark themselves against municipalities of similar size.

It's really important, the apples-to-apples conversation, because built into that software, built into that system are flags. For example, if I was a municipal leader in Grande Prairie, the amazing, wonderful constituency and city of Grande Prairie, and I wanted to compare my budgets and my staffing levels to that of Calgary, the system would flag me that this is not a great comparator because of the differential in size. I think that there are already tools in place that have been put in place by this government to allow municipal leaders to benchmark themselves. This is just another way to look at this.

I believe that any time you want to create great public policy, there should be guardrails in place. I can say as a former member

of Executive Council that one of the things that's challenging are the silos that exist in government. So to have an overarching motion that says that we're going to look at the public service as a whole instead of just the pieces, I think, is really valuable and important.

I can also say that there are times when things bloat because technology shifts but the organizations don't shift in response, and some positions do become unnecessary or redundant. That's just a reality in any organization. When that happens, if there's no way to benchmark ourselves, if there's no guardrail in place, if there's no anchor to look at that, that will remain unchecked. We owe it to ourselves, we owe it to the taxpayers to ensure that we're doing the very best with the dollars that we take from them and also to ensure that we take the fewest dollars possible from them to provide the best service.

That goes back to my time in rural Alberta with those municipal leaders there, who I believe really understand that concept and

really work diligently to make sure that that happens. I think we could learn a lot of lessons from rural Alberta. I probably sound a little bit biased.

I think I have about one or two minutes left. I just wanted to talk a little bit about the situation when there is a bloated labour pool. There are a number of inefficiencies that are inherent culturally in a bloated labour pool. Other members of this Assembly have spoken about that this afternoon. I know that the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland spoke about that from his industrial experience, and I can speak about that from my time in restaurant.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt; however, the time for debate has now passed, and pursuant to Standing Order 3(1) the House stands adjourned until this evening at 7:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, May 9, 2022

Day 31

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, May 9, 2022

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 19

Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022

Ms Ganley moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment May 5: Mr. Sabir speaking]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen to debate.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, this evening. Of course, we’re on a referral amendment. The reason why, I think, that on this side of the House we are so adamant that this be referred to committee, of course, is because the number one reason for the bill: I think that many individuals and stakeholders have been wanting from the government and not only from this government but even governments going back into the Progressive Conservative years, actually, a tribunal. What we realize is that a lot of these issues end up clogging our courts, and it’s not the most effective way of addressing a lot of the issues that need to be worked out.

We’ve heard from a number of property owners, condominium owners, of course, but also people who live in these condominiums who could be renting from the owners that there are a number of issues that end up coming up because of the relationship that exists between the board and then also the condominium. Like, there’s a whole series of concerns regarding chargebacks and whether some upgrades that have been done to the condominium weren’t actually agreed upon by all the members of the condominium who own units there in the condominium, yet the owner of the building actually decides that this actually needs to move forward.

Of course, people are left kind of hanging because they’re saying: well, I didn’t agree to this, I didn’t agree to this issue, and why do I have to pay for it? Sometimes these upgrades that condominium owners want to make end up costing people in the thousands and thousands of dollars. Especially now, in the time that we’re living right now, where people are stretched pretty thin, having to come up with, you know, \$5,000, \$10,000, sometimes even \$15,000 for an upgrade that you don’t even remember taking a vote on could actually be a considerable issue that could then eventually end up in our courts because of how things go.

It’s important to note that tribunals have been something that stakeholders on all sides have been asking for for a very, very long time. That’s why it’s important for us to – well, it’s one of the major reasons, I would say, why this bill actually needs to be referred to committee, to actually see how this actually can be resolved, right? I mean, some of the more not-as-immediate, I would say, concerns

of people have been dealt with in this piece of legislation – and I applaud the minister for that – in terms of votes being done although there are some concerns with that particular aspect.

It’s very possible for individuals to be scapegoated. For example, it’s very easy for a group to decide: okay; well, we’re all going to vote that whatever particular reason we need to bring in some kind of service, it’s all going to have to be paid by one individual. I’m sure that many of my colleagues on this side of the House have described situations like that. I’ve only heard of them third-hand, Mr. Speaker. I’ll be honest. I’ve never lived in a condominium and don’t ever plan on living in a condominium as far as I know – who knows? – but things change. I can’t say that I’ve experienced any of this first-hand; I’m just hearing it second-hand by others. The stories that you end up hearing, though, are that individuals could be scapegoated. For example, I’ve heard stories of there being, like, one particular individual that, you know, perhaps is not as well liked by other individuals that happen to live in a condo, and it’s something that definitely needs to be looked at. Like, how can we make sure that individuals aren’t going to be scapegoated by the rest of the people who actually live in the condo?

That being said, I think it’s really important that we continue to pressure the government on the issue of these tribunals. For example, in B.C., Ontario, and Nova Scotia they all have versions of condo tribunals, you know, so it would have been very easy for the minister and the minister’s staff to do a crossjurisdictional and look at where in Canada there are other versions of condo tribunals and perhaps even picked the best elements out of each one of those cases and proposed something here in legislation for all of us to consider. It’s not as if this is a new idea or it’s a new ask; it’s something that’s been asked for for quite a while, as I stated.

For example, in B.C. they have what is called a Civil Resolution Tribunal, which resolves condominium disputes of any amount and handles other issues in B.C. under \$5,000. B.C.’s residential tenancies branch was not involved in developing it, but the tribunal resolves issues of fees and fines, condominium bylaws that are arbitrary or unfair, financial responsibilities, irregularities of board interpretation of condo legislation, and common property. Like, just irregularity of a board interpretation of condo legislation: I’m sure that there are a number of issues there that people get into. It’s quite unfortunate that we don’t have a tribunal here, and something as simple as the interpretation of condo legislation could end up clogging our courts when the judicial system, I would say, has – I mean, I understand that it’s important for these individuals who are actually living the problem. It’s important for them but all the more reason that there should be a tribunal to actually look into this so that our courts can be freed up to actually deal with, I would say, more pressing matters.

On that note, though, in B.C. the Civil Resolution Tribunal does not deal with the sale of condos, court orders on property, dealings with developers, and significant issues with the board such as conflicts of interest or human rights concerns. In B.C. through the Civil Resolution Tribunal resolutions can take anywhere from four to six months. I think that Albertans would really benefit from something like that. You know, between four to six months for something to get resolved seems pretty reasonable to me, and it would be great if we had something like that here.

In Ontario, for example, they have the Condominium Authority of Ontario, which is at arm’s length from the government. It has tribunal authority. It has programs that are administered by a \$50 levy from all condos and then fees for service. It’s administered online, and the system goes through stages of negotiation, mediation, and adjudication. Currently the only disputes dealt with are related to condo corporations keeping records.

7:40

Nova Scotia has a condominium dispute officer and has a condominium arbitration process. The officers deal with issues regarding a corporation's failing to provide necessary records and issues related to the common areas.

As I stated, you know, there are examples of versions of tribunals across Canada that the minister could have very well looked into and developed something here. I have to wonder if during this process – I mean, from past examples of proposed pieces of legislation in this House I know that the minister does a pretty good job of consulting with individuals, so I wouldn't mind knowing who the minister consulted with on this particular piece of legislation and if the issue of tribunals was brought up or not. I mean, on this side of the House, we're hearing that it continues to be a pressing matter for a lot of people. Of course, it's something that could easily be constructed through the ministry and brought into the House in proposed legislation. Albertans would take real good advantage of that.

The most important thing, though, as I alluded to, Mr. Speaker, is that it wouldn't be clogging up our courts. It wouldn't be clogging up our courts for very important matters that need to be dealt with there. Of course, I think that it's very important that that be provided because, I mean, government resources, as we know, are limited. I mean, there's talk about strikes happening because there haven't been raises. They don't feel that there's the adequate amount of resources being given, and I think it's something that – I mean, there's a whole lot of issues, I understand, that this government needs to deal with when it comes to our judicial system, but this small decision through this bill could alleviate a lot of the pressures being experienced by the judicial system. For me, it sounds like it's a no-brainer, why members on that side of the House wouldn't be supportive of moving towards Alberta having a tribunal here for this particular process.

You know, all this is in – as I stated, for a lot of these people who live in the condominiums with these issues, they're feeling pressed economically at this time. But even beyond that, Mr. Speaker, I think that housing continues to become more and more unaffordable for many people – right? – whereas condominiums were seen as an option for people to kind of get into because the cost of housing was going so high. It reminds me that even when I was first elected – and it continues to this day. I'll meet constituents at some kind of event – like, for example, the community league is hosting an event – and individuals that I will meet there will actually bring up to me, like, the cost of housing: why is it so incredibly high? Like, to pay \$600,000, \$650,000, \$700,000 for a house that just three years ago, you know, was costing \$300,000: they just can't understand that. Of course, they often say to me, "Well, is there any way to control house prices?" And I tell them, "Look, if I were to walk into this Legislature and say that we have to have price controls on the housing market, the members on the other side would call me a communist." Right?

Some Hon. Members: Yup.

Member Loyola: Of course, no debate there. See?

The issue being that Albertans are so pressed because of the cost of housing. It's becoming more and more unaffordable, more like first-time homebuyers are having more and more of an issue actually getting into a home. Yet from this government – you know, they can laugh about calling me a communist, but I actually care about Albertans that are trying to get into a home. I actually care about that. I want them to get a home.

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

Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen to debate.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak to Bill 19, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022. I believe we're on a referral. I know that I've spoken to this bill and have expressed some significant concerns about not having a tribunal. I know that when we look at the court system that's in the province right now, it's overwhelmed. Simple things that shouldn't be taking a significant amount of time – I can tell you that I had a constituent reach out to me regarding a speeding ticket, and it has been adjourned. It's now going on three years from the time the speeding ticket occurred to when they're going to see their day in court to fight that speeding ticket.

I can't imagine taking something as significant as where you live, your place of residence, your condo. To wait significant amounts of time, to invest money in a court system that's already backlogged: that is increasing stress for Albertans. When we look at the proposal to have this bill referred to committee, I think it makes sense. I think that we would hear very loudly and clearly in that committee what the opposition is already hearing, that life is not affordable, that there are some really easy steps that could have made this piece of legislation something that actually has a positive impact on those living in condos. They would be able to share their experience and their story, and I think the committee is the ideal place to do that.

When we were government, we started a review regarding condominiums, and the UCP stopped that. I know that there would have been some significant feedback that would have been heard there. I know that when I first started my career in mediation, Mr. Speaker, the very first mediation that I did was with the city of Edmonton, with a condominium board and a resident. To give you some context, a typical mediation is one hour. From the time that we meet – everybody puts their issues on the table; we talk about some sort of dispute resolution, some sort of ideas that both parties could agree with – to the very end of wrapping up with an agreement that both parties are in support of: one hour.

The mediation that we had done with individuals of the condo and the condo board was five hours the first day and three hours the second day. This is something that people are incredibly invested in, as I'm sure you can well imagine. It's your home. This is where you want to be able to come home to after a stressful day, find peace. If there's some sort of issue that's happening, it shouldn't be taken to the extreme, where the automatic is to go to court. That is the worst case scenario.

I know that in many other fields of law, when it comes to the court system, there's mediation that's offered, there's justice dispute resolution that's offered, all in attempts to avoid a matter going to court. When we look at this piece of legislation and we don't see that there's a tribunal established, it's confusing why the government believes that referring it to an already burdened system is the solution.

7:50

We see a crisis in the province with housing and affordability. When people are making a home purchase, it's a big decision. I would argue that it's probably the biggest financial investment that Albertans will make. When they're entering into this, they should have some sort of ability to dispute in a reasonable, time-efficient way. When we look at other jurisdictions, it's working. I don't understand why, at this point in the legislation and when this government is saying that there's consultation that's occurred, the glaringly obvious tribunal process is excluded.

I think that perhaps if we had this in committee and we invited condo owners, if we invited perhaps the people in the courts system that would be disputing these, if they were to give feedback on what that experience would be like in and out of court, what the cost perhaps could be if it was through a tribunal versus through the court process, what the impact on condominium owners would be, I think that that's all valid information where a committee could very easily put a call out, listen to those that respond, take that feedback, and provide a really thorough report to give back to the minister to talk about some of those suggestions. We're hearing it on this side of the House.

You have this piece of legislation here. We're amending the act. Why not get it right? Why not do what Albertans are asking for? They're not asking to take things to court. That's just a process that has so many negative impacts: time, finances. I can tell you that it's not good for a relationship when parties are sent to court. There's a very strong message that that gives when the alternative could be to have some sort of dispute resolution that could be done outside of the court process.

You have to live here, Mr. Speaker. This is your home. These are your neighbours. To have such a disruptive process as the solution is not conducive to healthy relationships within your community. When you live in a condo, you don't have the luxury, that you have in a single-family dwelling, to drive into your garage and never talk to your neighbours. You're going to have people that you are in conflict with, going to court with, that you interact with potentially every single day when it could be resolved in a more time-efficient manner, a less costly way, and a way less combative approach than going through our already overburdened court system.

I think that having a condo dispute resolution would not only reduce the stress of the individuals involved, but it would help with the burden that's already on our court system. I think that having a committee do that work makes sense. I know that when I was a chair, we had several pieces of legislation brought forward, and it was a wonderful process to be able to engage with Albertans. Some incredible suggestions came out of that process. As the committee you're able to provide the space to allow Albertans to talk to you, to provide written reports, submissions, to provide an opportunity to come and present to the committee. We have individuals in this very Chamber that represent the committee, and any member that's interested can attend. It's a wonderful opportunity for Albertans to engage on a more transparent platform, to be able to go in and talk to the committee, to talk to their legislators about what their concerns are.

I'm sure they would come through and say that some of this legislation would be helpful, but why not make it actually beneficial to Albertans, especially when we're looking at an affordability crisis, when we're looking at a housing crisis? I think that in having that opportunity to send it to committee, to have Albertans be able to respond, to talk about what the real-life implications are if this bill was to go ahead without a tribunal, it could have an impact.

I think that the committee has the capacity and the ability to do that work. It doesn't need to be incredibly time consuming. I know that the committees can work quite efficiently. We have incredible supports through the LAO that support the committee work. They're able to do cross-jurisdictional scans. They're able to do all of the work that helps the committee run along smoothly. Having those presentations come in, to get actual feedback in a transparent way, that's on the record, with some ideas that would have some significant change, reduce stress for condo owners, reduce conflict between neighbours: to me, that's a success. To be able to, then, at the end of the committee have the report, to be able to prepare and submit it to the Legislature and to the minister, who could take this piece of legislation and make it actually beneficial to Albertans

living in condos: to me, that is just a simple way to do this. It's something that makes sense.

It's something that we know individuals that are living in condos would like to see. They don't want to go to court, Mr. Speaker. That in itself is such a conflictual experience. By being able to hear from Albertans directly in the committee, it's a process that works. It's so complete and down to the minute of how exactly to roll out a committee meeting once a referral from the Legislature has been done, and it provides opportunity for some real expression and to hear those stories of those individuals. It seems that when we're saying it in opposition, it's just disregarded despite having the information come directly from individuals that are being impacted. Perhaps in hearing it first-hand in the committee from those individuals that are asking for a noncombative system, asking for a dispute resolution system that would take pressure off our courts and reduce costs, maybe then this government would listen and implement that.

I think that when we're talking about something as significant as someone's home, we should be giving every opportunity to make sure that it's a successful experience. When there are issues that come up, it's ideal to have them resolved quickly, with the minimal amount of conflict possible. To have a tribunal makes sense. You know, I haven't heard any information about why the court system is the solution. There's been nothing in the debate that supports why going straight to court is to the benefit of Albertans. I haven't heard from condo owners that have asked for that. Nobody wants to go to court if they don't have to. If there's a process that's set up where it can be resolved, I'm sure that that would be what the committee would hear. Perhaps not, but I think that having it referred to committee, where there's an opportunity for Albertans to reach out and share their voice: that, to me, is what makes sense.

I would really encourage all members in this Chamber to vote yes in support of this referral, to vote yes in support of having Albertans' voices heard, to vote yes in support of having perhaps an extra piece to this legislation that could actually make a difference and could actually do something that Albertans are asking for.

I think that we have so many costs right now that are being piled on Albertans and so many stressors. People are struggling, Mr. Speaker, and adding the stressor of having to go to court over an issue that comes up in your condo doesn't need to be one of them. People should have the ability to have their dispute resolved in a time-efficient manner without having to go to court.

We've seen this government come up with legislation that speaks to our court system and our justice system, and none of the changes would lead me to believe that it's going to take any sort of pressure off the court system. Adding yet another level of dispute that needs to be resolved in the court process just doesn't make sense.

I would really encourage members, when they're looking at this legislation and they're considering it, to support it and vote yes. Thank you.

8:00

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate an opportunity to speak briefly on the matter of referring Bill 19 to committee. Certainly, I am also supportive of that idea. I think that there are a lot of changes that do need to be made in regard to the Condominium Property Act, but there seem to be some issues here that are just not being resolved in this current iteration of an amendment. It's a shame, too, really, because I've seen, you know,

in my own constituency quite a number of issues, especially in larger condos that have been built probably in the last 15 years or so, where there've been categorical structural problems that needed to be dealt with. I think that any number of MLAs in this Chamber here tonight would be dealing with a similar problem in the so-called leaky condo situation.

You can see the telltale signs of a leaky condo structure when the exterior cladding of a building is coming off, right? Usually that kind of stucco choice for exterior cladding, which is not entirely appropriate, I think, for this climate, at least here in Edmonton, is prone to separating and it's prone to getting water in between the exterior cladding and then the interior insulation. That is often made worse, Mr. Speaker, by having balconies on the exterior of the condo that are not necessarily draining away from the structure. So over time the water is being pushed in from the balconies into the interior walls, and of course that can create terrible damage to the structure of a building.

In the absence of proper regulation and building code standards, you know, this has been going on for quite a long time, not just in Alberta but, of course, in British Columbia, where the leaky condo namesake came from. But, you know, the reason that I bring it up is, of course, that as part of your agreement for being part of a condominium complex people are left on the hook for those damages. For example, I have one large structure that's just north of what used to be the Safeway on 137th Avenue and 127th Street, where the collective bill for paying for the leaky condo structure just literally forced at least 10 per cent of the condo owners to just walk away – right? – because they could not afford this bill. They just left their mortgage and had to walk away from their home, right? So these condominium laws certainly have direct cause and effect for protecting condominium owners, and we have to make sure we're really careful about how we structure them, quite frankly.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

Part of the issue that I have with Bill 19 is that it doesn't make it necessarily a fair process for individuals that could be perceived as being blamed for specific damages, right? Like, let's say that someone leaves their sink on in the bathroom and it leaks down a couple of floors, or let's say that they have an outbreak of bedbugs in a unit. Under this amendment act it doesn't seem as though there's a fair due process that can be accessed for people to have justice. For people just to make a judgment on any one individual causing damage, collective damage, for a whole condominium complex, you have to make sure that that's fair, right? You don't just have a process by which someone gets blamed arbitrarily and then is left with the bill, so to speak.

You know, that judgment process has to be accessible. I'm not sure that deferring things to the courts straightaway is the best way to handle that, Mr. Speaker. We hear, of course, the interrelationship between different bills that we debate in the House here in this session, that while we're talking about putting more burden on the courts to resolve disputes, we also know that the courts are in a terrible backup position right now, with a shortage of staff and resources and whatnot.

For us in full knowledge over in the Department of Justice, knowing that there's a backlog in capacity in our court system, for us to be then passing another bill which would add more burden on that backlog in our court system, I mean, that alone I think is not necessarily good, sound judgment.

As well, of course, suggesting that we do put more of the disputes that happen around condominiums to the courts, you know, I think that that really leaves a gap and an unfair circumstance for a lot of

people, right? Just accessing courts and being part of a court case – right? – in the legal system is not something that many people are comfortable with.

You know, having a condo board and having a dispute resolution system that perhaps uses a tribunal – right? – is a much less onerous way by which you can resolve disputes, and I think it's a bit of a softer, more easily accessible way by which you can find a resolution, Mr. Speaker, instead of having to go to a formal court system, which can be a bit intimidating. Having a tribunal resolution system based on less antagonism but more looking for resolution, amicable resolution for people with damages to a building, and so forth, I think is a way better way to go.

I mean, we do have more of our population than ever living in condos, and indeed many of our urban centres are looking for more dense urban settings, and I think that that's a good thing, right? It helps to build a more resilient urban structure. It helps to provide more services in close proximity to where people need them. It allows people to live closer to where they work. All of those things – right? – point to the population of Albertans that are living in condos to be increasing over the next 10 or 20 or 30 years. So it's important and incumbent upon our Legislature here today to build sound legislation around condominiums and dispute resolution in particular because we just know that a whole lot more Albertans will be living in condos not just now but in the foreseeable future.

Yeah, I mean, honestly, you've heard from my colleagues. I totally concur with them that the lack of a tribunal in this bill really seems to be a gaping exclusion. You know, I'm curious to know, like: by doing that, how much more of a cost is going to be associated with taking disputes to the court? Of course, does that cost exceed, in many circumstances, the damages that are trying to be brought forward or to be resolved? Someone drives over their parking spot plug-in, and they have to go to court. Those court costs far exceed replacing that plug that someone maybe accidentally drove over: a small example. I think that we can create something that's more in keeping with and proportional to the little things that happen in a condo, right? Somebody scratches the wall when they are moving in their couch, and you can find an amicable way by which to deal with that and not have to resort to the court system.

8:10

You know, I know that there are some parts of this bill that I certainly do not disagree with. I know from condo owners themselves in my constituency and then in talking to condo associations – right? – about the changes in Bill 19 in regard to the voting process at condo meetings to allow for easier notes and establishing the process for that: I think it's okay. Changing voting in more simple manners – right? – and making those meetings less onerous and more accessible: I think that's not unreasonable.

Again I go back to my first example, Mr. Speaker, which is, like, around more significant damages. When you have things around, like, elevator systems or garages or, you know, water leakage into those systems or having to take off the exterior cladding on an entire building – right? – we need to make sure that people are having a fair and affordable way by which to deal with those things.

I would strongly suggest that the condo amendment should include strong action on building codes and penalties for condo developers that are not following the highest standard of building codes. Part of the problem with dealing with the leaky condo situation, Mr. Speaker, is that we've had a terrible, you know, situation where a builder might put up a series of structures and then get sued for leaky condos, fold that company, and then re-emerge as a completely different company. This was happening all over the city of Edmonton, probably in Calgary and other places, too, sort of analogous, I would say, to some unscrupulous drilling companies –

right? – where they have built into their drilling business plan the idea that you drill and you extract and then you leave and then you go out of business and you re-emerge somewhere else under a different name.

This is the same kind of thing that we do see with condo developments. So I would strongly suggest again that, you know, in concert with condominium property management revisions, we look at more strict building code standards and more strict ways by which contractors should not be able to walk away from inadequate building that they had been responsible for so that we can chase down some of the perpetrators of these buildings that really are not habitable after a number of years.

I think, again, not in Edmonton but the terrible situation with the condo structures in Fort McMurray on the upstream side close to Keyano College, where suddenly an entire condominium complex – the people had, like, an hour to get out of there, Mr. Speaker. People were having their dinners or whatever, and then they said, “You must evacuate.” And they said, “Okay; well, what’s happening?” They said, “Well, no, you need to evacuate now; these buildings have been assessed to imminent collapse.” So dozens of families had to leave on the hour, leave everything behind, and then still be stuck with mortgages for a building that you could never possibly sell again because, of course, it was dangerous. They quite literally had structural, foundational problems and, as they said, could fall down at any time, right? Lots of people are still stuck with those mortgages now for the condos that don’t even exist anymore. They just had to tear them down, and, you know, the whole problem just snowballed, right?

There are lots of things that we can do to build a more equitable and fair and protected condominium environment for people. You know, we need to make sure that we build a lot of affordable houses and homes here in this province right now, right? We don’t have to look any further than other cities in Canada. Don’t think that we’re not immune from the same problems that places like Vancouver and Toronto have, where there’s just a dire shortage of affordable housing. We can start to see the – it’s on the horizon here in Edmonton and Calgary right now, and now is the time to build those places. If you don’t, you quite literally are shutting out a whole class of people that can’t afford to live in those places.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, anyone else looking to speak to REF1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this referral amendment. Having had the opportunity to speak previously to this in the main, I just will take a few moments to reiterate some of the concerns that have been addressed. I think that listening to my peers speak about this, we can see that there are a number of issues, kind of fairly wide ranging for a small bill, in fact, and I think perhaps it’s time that we actually give some second thought to this bill and some reconsideration of it.

I think that the first thing that I really want to cover in sort of some depth is the lack of tribunals. I know it’s been quite well articulated by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie that there have indeed been – in many provinces there are tribunals that handle these issues. They’ve been designed in slightly different ways, you know, to handle only the smaller issues, like under \$5,000 in B.C., for example, or at least some of the provinces such as Nova Scotia have a dispute resolution officer, that kind of thing. So we see that there’s nothing unusual about having one.

But I also want to add to the fact that there’s nothing unusual about having tribunals even in the government of Alberta. There are a number of situations in which we have tribunals. For example,

when I was the Minister of Indigenous Relations, I worked very closely with the Métis settlements tribunal. It would be very much like that, that we would see in this act a tribunal that was established by appointing an individual by the government who would be responsible for establishing the tribunal so that the actual putting of people on the committee of the tribunal, as it is with the Metis Settlements Act, is independent from government interference. Indeed, in that particular case, for example, it is people who have some relationship to the Métis settlements, some knowledge or perhaps have lived there or are Métis themselves, that are put on that tribunal. You know, it means that decisions are made by people who are close to the ground, who understand the process and procedure, and it seems to work extremely well.

I mean, even this government, who has dismantled so many other things since they got into power, has not dismantled the Métis settlements tribunal, so they obviously must recognize that the tribunal works as intended. I guess my point is that we know how to make tribunals work well. We certainly have the benefit of bringing the decisions closer to the front lines of people who are experiencing the issues, and I think that it’s a huge absence in this particular case.

Now, I know that part of the reason for even bringing this bill forward is that the government was approached by some of the condo associations and corporations. They made a decision to listen to people at that level, which always concerns me because the reason that was presented as to why they needed to move forward is one, actually, I accept, and that is that being able to only resolve problems when somebody is causing damage in the communal areas by going to court really is not a good use of our court time, especially at a time when our court time is highly stressed, and makes it financially difficult for the corporations that need to move ahead to try to get somebody to be responsible for damage in the common areas. You know, actually, I support the argument, but that’s not a good way to resolve what essentially, for the most part, is a minor claim.

8:20

So I would have been happy if the government had pursued that, but they didn’t. All they did is shift who goes to court. They didn’t actually reduce the going to court. They just took the burden off the corporations and put the burden on the individuals, yet again this government siding itself with a business interest over the interests of individual Albertans. I don’t know why they continually do that, but they do. It’s been pretty consistent. I’ve brought this up before, and I don’t understand why they do it. They certainly aren’t interested in saving money for the government because, of course, they’ve not removed the section on going to court. They just changed who has to go to court and who has to bear that burden.

Of course, they put the burden on the people who are least likely to be able to afford it and therefore essentially have effectively made a decision based on your social class as to whether or not you get justice. You know, it used to be that people with money were able to pursue justice because they had the money to do so. Now people without money cannot get justice because they don’t have the money to do so. It’s just a huge mistake. There’s no reason for it. We can actually improve this bill by putting in some kind of a process that keeps it out of court and is satisfactory to both sides.

This government has experience with tribunals. They know that. I mentioned the Métis settlements tribunal, but I also know that tribunals are also used, for example, in appeals for social services, for public assistance, and other places in government. There’s certainly some appropriate experience. Certainly, the intent of the government to keep it out of the courts would be better served if we actually took this bill away and made some changes to it and had

some further consultations. They have yet to have presented any reasons why we shouldn't have a tribunal. I've been listening very closely and have not heard any significant arguments as to why a tribunal is not a useful thing to have, so I certainly wish the government would take a step back.

I also think it's really important that we not put any more barriers into the possibility of home ownership, which essentially this becomes for many people, because if they have a dispute with their board, they suddenly may find themselves in a place where they cannot afford to pay the costs that they're confronted with. It undermines their ability to have home ownership, and I think that's a significant problem. I don't know why this government would not be trying to encourage people in the area of home ownership. We know that the existence of private home ownership and the ability to build equity is actually extremely good for the Alberta economy. It should be encouraged as widely as possible because people who have a home and are able to build equity in that home are then able often to use that equity to further other interests like starting a small business, for example, or going back to school or doing something else that actually contributes to the local economy.

If the only people that can afford to buy a home now, because of the costs that are on them, are people who are already homeowners or corporations who own multiple homes, then what we have is a pooling of money that does not actually help the local economy. The average individual, when they use their equity from their own home, uses it in the local economy, uses it in their neighbourhood on the other small businesses in the other communities in the neighbourhood, and that's good. But if we have a major corporation that's buying all the condos and all the homes, because they're the only ones that are able to do so because of the cost burdens, then what we have is a pooling of money, and that money does not get spent locally. Only a portion of it gets spent locally. Instead, it goes offshore. It goes to other places, where they buy interests in major corporations in other parts of the world or holiday places in resort locations. It's really a negative to shift our emphasis away from individual Albertans being able to build equity to corporations having ultimate control over a circumstance.

Again, I don't know why the government would want to undermine that process, which actually has worked very effectively for many people. I can tell you, you know, that the example of First Nations communities, where people cannot own a home on-reserve and, as a result, cannot build equity, has proven to me, again, in my experience, that it's not a good idea to stop people from being able to build up equity, because what you find, of course, on First Nations is that people can't then use their home to get on and do some of the other things like going back to school or even improving the home for ultimate resale value or starting a small business or many of the other things. It means that we see people in First Nations communities really struggling to get together equity in order to be able to do some of the things we really would encourage them to do.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

You would think a government that represents itself as being pro business would understand these lines of argument, but consistently they're not pro business. They're certainly pro corporation but not pro business. I can tell you that I continuously hear from small businesses in my community that the government is not on their side, not making decisions, and is constantly funnelling money away from local Albertans into large entities who frequently take that money offshore and therefore reduce the circulation of the money in the province of Alberta. It's just bad economic decision-

making here. I wish the government would take the time with this referral motion to get this one piece right. It would be a model for them getting a bunch of other pieces right that they have gotten wrong consistently over the last number of years. It's just something I can't understand, why they would choose to do it.

I certainly, you know, support some of the changes here. As I said when I first spoke to it, I would have liked to have been able to support the bill in terms of making voting procedures better although I did have some concerns about some of the things that were said by the Member for Grande Prairie at the time. But I think I can get past that, and I think I can see some desire to support making things function better in condominium associations since house prices have gone up so much, so ridiculously high over the last little while and apparently in Alberta are about to take another big jump up.

Then I'm very worried about the next generation being able to afford a home, so anything we can do to get them into a home – and if that's a condominium because they can't afford the extremely high prices for houses, I certainly would like to see the government do that. It always discourages me when the government does not take into consideration the next generation and the difficulties they have. They just sort of say, "Well, let the market decide," but we can see what the market has decided, and the market has decided that young people are not going to be able to afford homes on average, or if they do, they're essentially going to be house poor for most of their lives because the price of a home nowadays – I know my own home is now worth more than three times what it was when I originally bought it.

I know that one of my children moved to Vancouver some years ago, and they watched house prices go up by four times in Vancouver. We know that's about to happen in Alberta as well. All the real estate agents are in the process of having conversations with people selling in large markets like Toronto and Vancouver, coming back to Alberta, and buying up, for the purposes of creating rental properties, homes and therefore elevating the market here in the province of Alberta. Again, very good for the corporations that can afford to do that; terrible for average Albertans who are just trying to put together a living and just trying to, you know, establish a future for themselves and their children.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to recommend adjournment of debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

8:30

Bill 21

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate May 5: Ms Phillips]

The Acting Speaker: Are there any members looking to join on Bill 21? We are on the main bill. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has risen.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Let me preface by saying that whenever this government tables an omnibus piece of legislation, based on my experience, it is usually to hide controversial changes. Also, I think I would remind the government that whenever we had a piece of legislation, even very related pieces of legislation put together in a piece of legislation – for instance, labour relations and changes to the labour code – this government, the opposition back then, would cry foul, that this is an omnibus piece of legislation and that it's not possible for them to analyze and debate this bill effectively.

But this government has consistently put forward red tape reduction bills containing changes that are way more substantial than just red tape, than just streamlining process, than just making things easier for Albertans. Most of these changes are substantial and should be discussed as stand-alone pieces of legislation. For instance, this bill gives enormous and widespread powers to the minister of environment over provincial parks. This alone is enough not to support this bill.

I will quote directly from this bill. Under the heading Minister's Directives and Codes the bill says, "The Minister may set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines . . . or other rules relating to any matter in respect of which a regulation may be made under this Act." That's a huge and wide power that this bill is giving to a minister who nobody trusts. Let me interpret it for them. What this provision is saying is that the minister can do anything he wants, basically anything. That's what this provision is saying. And when we look at this government's record on parks, I don't think that this Legislature should be giving this minister these kinds of powers. That's a disservice to Albertans. That's a disservice to our constituents.

Initially they tried to close down and sell off our parks. Then the public found out, and then they were pushed to back off from those changes. Then they leased out the Rocky Mountains for coal mining. Then they got push-back, and it's still not clear whether they have reversed everything yet or not. And now this government is asking this Legislature to give the same minister carte blanche, that he could set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines, and other rules relating to the matters within this act. I don't think that such broad power is needed for any minister and especially this government and this Minister of Environment and Parks.

Again, these changes are buried in this red tape reduction bill in the name of red tape. I think the government is giving itself power to essentially partially privatize our parks. They have already put fees on Kananaskis Country, that was free for five decades for all Albertans to go to, but during the pandemic they found out that Albertans are visiting it quite often: let's slap them with a charge. Now Albertans have to pay \$90 per year. I can see that the Member for Banff-Kananaskis is cheering that on.

Ms Rosin: I sure am.

Mr. Sabir: I think that because this legislation gives the minister fairly universal powers, I urge each and every member of this House to oppose this piece of legislation, oppose these kinds of powers. They are not good for our environment, they are not good for our parks, and they are not good for this government, that cannot be trusted with parks or anything, for that matter.

The second thing: we are also concerned about the government agenda with respect to the Education Act. Even the government is confused about: what are the changes contained in this act? The minister who put forward this piece of legislation is claiming one thing, and the Minister of Education is claiming things which are exactly the opposite. To add to that confusion, the government released a background on what this legislation does to the Education Act from the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction that appears totally inaccurate and which the Minister of Education even thinks is inaccurate.

It's clear that there are changes in this piece of legislation that have nothing to do with red tape – it's just furthering the government agenda to destroy our parks, our pristine nature – and there are changes contained in this piece of legislation that further erode accountability, so we cannot support this piece of legislation. These changes are not worth supporting. I think, with that in mind, that these changes are way more than red tape reduction, that these

changes are substantial, Mr. Speaker, I would like to move an amendment, a referral amendment to this legislation. I have the requisite copies ready to be distributed.

The Acting Speaker: Once I have a copy of it, I'll just give you a few further instructions.

Thank you, hon. member. If you could please read the amendment into the record for the benefit of all those watching. As well, for the purposes of debate this will be referred to as REF1. All members will of course receive a copy.

If the hon. member could please continue, with about six minutes remaining.

8:40

Mr. Sabir: I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 21, Red Tape Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

As I said, this bill amends 16 pieces of legislation. I do want to acknowledge that there are amendments which are administrative in nature and part of this piece of legislation, this miscellaneous statutes amendment act, but there are changes that give wide power to the minister of environment to do all kinds of things without oversight from anyone, for that matter. The second thing is that this bill also removes accountability by making changes to the Education Act. At least these two changes are not acceptable under any circumstances and since, I think, changes made to the Alberta parks act are fairly substantial.

This bill and the subject matter should be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, where we can look at the changes and how they will impact our parks, what Albertans have to say about these changes. And trust me that at this point if this government asked the public that they be given powers over their parks, powers over their natural beauty, I don't think Albertans would be giving them that power, because Albertans don't trust them. They cannot trust them. Their track record on this file is that at first they tried to sell off parks, then they tried to close down parks, then they put fees on the parks, then they tried to strip-mine the Rocky Mountains, and the list goes on and on. They've been trying to hide all those things until they are caught by the public, and then they will backtrack. So I don't think that the minister has earned the trust of Albertans to ask for these kinds of sweeping powers. These powers should not be given to this government or this minister, and Albertans should not trust and we don't trust this government on that.

The second thing. The changes contained with respect to the Education Act are confusing, and even the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction and the Minister of Education can't be on the same page with respect to these changes. One was telling the public that they will not have to report. The other one is saying that, no, they will still have to report. It's still very confusing. I would suggest that people are paying for these schools, whether they're private, whether they're charter, and Albertans have every right to know how much in funds Albertans are paying and how those funds are spent, how those funds are helping with education. But now this government is removing those reporting measures, that will now be under the discretion of the school and under the discretion of the minister.

This government has a problem with accountability. Like, they have done things from day one where they will try to hide

information. For instance, Mr. Speaker, you will know about the war room, a \$120 million entity. Three years in and nobody knows how many people they're employing, what work they are doing, where they are stealing their logos from and how much they are paying for them, all those kinds of things. They have exempted that from FOIP. I think a similar kind of thing is going on, that public funds are spent on private education, but they are refusing now to share that information so that the public can hold this government to account.

So that's why it's important that we not read this bill for the second time – it's not worth reading – and send the subject matter of this bill to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, where we can discuss this bill in detail. It's important that we send at least one bill to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship because when the Premier was sitting in opposition, he would ask that every bill be sent through the committee process because that was happening in Ottawa, and he thought that was a very good process, an excellent process. That was an excellent opportunity for people to engage, Canadians to engage, and he wanted to bring that back here. Now, I guess, for this government that's an opportunity. Send this piece to that committee so that Albertans can weigh in, stakeholders can weigh in, and they can make this legislation a bit better.

With that, I urge all members of this House to support in favour of this referral and refuse to give the minister of environment any more powers on Alberta parks or the Rocky Mountains and demand accountability from this government and not curtail that accountability any further.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join on REF1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise this evening to speak to Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, and, more specifically, on the referral amendment put forward by the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. Again, just reviewing it, that this piece of legislation, Bill 21,

be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

I completely support this amendment for many reasons, that I will get into, the first one being that, I think with any government but maybe this one in particular, there is a lack of accountability, as the previous member was speaking to, on many issues and also a failure to communicate, Mr. Speaker, on, again, this issue but many others that came before it. Unfortunately, from this government we have seen a pattern of rolling out legislation or proposing changes to regulations, legislation, and there are a few instances of that within this, not only on the sweeping powers that the government is proposing be given to the minister of environment but also on the changes that are being proposed from the Ministry of Education around transparency and reporting in terms of the funding that's provided and tuition costs.

In both of these instances we see a government that is failing to communicate clearly to the public. As we see so often from this government, instead of clearly ensuring that the communication is understandable and that Albertans can see why these things are being proposed, like so many times before it, we have a government that instead would blame Albertans, blame the opposition, blame everyone but themselves for not understanding this.

We saw this from essentially day one, Mr. Speaker, when the opposition back in early days of 2019 were putting forward reasonable comments towards legislation, just like we always do, and instead of engaging in the debate, as a government should on their own legislation, they actually came into the Legislature and put earplugs in their ears, the majority of the members from the government, and it was actually the Premier who handed them out. It really goes back to the attitude of this cabinet and this government, that instead of listening to the debate that is taking place, listening to the concerns of Albertans, understanding and empathizing with them for their concerns and potentially the confusion from a lack of clarity that they have communicated, instead they would rather ignore those concerns and just continue on, steamroll through.

Again, that goes back to why I am supporting this referral amendment, because, like so many other pieces of legislation before it, there's an opportunity for us to take the time to hear from stakeholders, from experts who are, rightfully so, concerned about the sweeping changes that the minister of environment is proposing we accept in this legislation. It should come as no surprise to you, Mr. Speaker, that we in the opposition, above and beyond all the many expert stakeholders in this field, are concerned about this legislation because of the track record of this environment minister and when we look at what is being proposed in here, the opportunity for the minister, if this legislation is passed, to set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines, or other rules relating to any matter in respect of which a regulation be made under this act.

8:50

What we heard from the minister is that there are concerns around being able to change signage in specific parks or other areas, so we have to accept that these sweeping changes are the only way for that minister to carry that out, which, first of all, is unbelievable to me, Mr. Speaker, but, second of all, is quite a massive change in the legislation to allow this minister to do much more than allowing signs to be changed with less red tape. I think that, again, there are already opportunities to do this quite clearly, but if it is the case that there are issues there, we could be considering something much less expansive, I suppose, than what is being proposed by the minister in here.

Again, when we look at the track record of the environment minister, the move to sell or privatize our parks, only from the massive amount of push-back – and you have to understand, Mr. Speaker, that it was a lot of push-back, because for this government to actually listen to the people of Alberta requires a whole heck of a lot of push-back, I would add.

As the previous member also talked about, the rescinding of the Lougheed coal policy is another thing that caused great concern for experts and regular Albertans because, above all else, when it comes to our nature, they believe that we need to do our best to respect it and protect it and ensure that it is there for generations to come.

Again, beyond that, when we look at the changes that the environment minister has carried out and even with the large outcry from the public around the \$90 Kananaskis pass – and I know that even this evening the Member for Banff-Kananaskis heckled the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall when he brought up that point. But it again goes back to the great amount of disconnect from this government when so many Albertans are concerned about this government moving to charge more for being able to access things like Kananaskis and, instead of listening to them and understanding what their concerns are, just barreling ahead, which goes back to why this should be referred to the committee, the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship.

Again and again this government has proven that they aren't willing to listen, but I think that it is our job as an opposition to offer them another opportunity to sit down with the stakeholders and truly understand why they are so concerned about the sweeping changes that are being proposed in here regarding the ability and the power of the minister to change standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines, and beyond.

This isn't the first time that we've seen UCP ministers try to propose such sweeping changes and, well, really trying – you know, in this instance we're calling it the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, but it is much more than that, Mr. Speaker. Previously we saw the Health minister proposing changes in Bill 10 that would have allowed that minister to pass laws without actually coming to the Legislature, and it wasn't until great outcries, specifically from members that they would identify as their traditional supporters, came out and attacked them for those changes. So this isn't the first time that we've seen this government propose sweeping changes to legislation that would give their ministers so much power above and beyond what they are communicating to the public.

Whether it is on the issue of Environment and Parks and the powers that this minister is trying to give to themselves or the changes to the transparency of reporting of tuition for schools in our province, which was also very ineffectively communicated to the public – it has left so many questions even between the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction and the Minister of Education. We can't even get a straight answer between the two of them. They both have very different thoughts on what the changes are actually making. One says, you know, that transparency is going to be increased and that more reporting is going to be required, and the other minister says the exact opposite in terms of the amount of reporting that is required. We can't even get the ministers to agree on what these changes are, yet the government expects Albertans to accept those changes at face value.

I think that it is important for us as legislators and as members to take the time to evaluate what is truly being proposed in here, what the full range and scope of powers are being proposed by the minister of environment to give to himself and his ministry, because it doesn't seem clear that the government, maybe even the minister based on the way that he is communicating these changes, actually understands what is being proposed in this legislation. And we might find ourselves in a situation just like we did with Bill 10, where the government has to come back to the Legislature and actually revoke some of the powers that are being given to themselves, which is very unlikely, Mr. Speaker. I think that there were specific reasons for what transpired with Bill 10. Very unlikely that the environment minister would admit a mistake in the first place but actually come back and fix it. Very doubtful.

But that is why it's so important for us to take the time to review Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, because I believe on the topic of reporting and accountability and transparency, there are other concerns around reporting for things like avian flu, which is so topical right now in our province because of the devastation that that is causing. There is an opportunity here for us to get this right, for us to reduce red tape, as this government is proposing to do through this legislation, and ensure that the proper stakeholders are at the table and that all Albertans truly understand what is being proposed here, because I don't think that we have come to a place where we can accept at face value what the minister of environment and the Minister of Education are proposing through this legislation.

With that, I think I'll take my seat. Again, I appreciate the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall putting forward this referral amendment. I also appreciate the member's comments because they

were very relevant and very clear and showed the track record of this government and why in so many instances, including this one, the government, the UCP, and its ministers can simply not be trusted.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Next on REF1 I see the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going to talk here for a couple of minutes and correct a few things. The other folks seem to be confused. They've been in this House. They ask questions. They don't understand, amongst other things, what a great job the environment minister is doing. Particularly, I love it when they're talking about Kananaskis. For four years they did nothing. I guess I would just point out to them that it's a little more work to do what our government is doing, trying to keep the backcountry of Alberta available to Albertans to go and enjoy it and to plan to do improvements there and to let people use it.

Now, I appreciate the other side. Their whole effort was to lock Albertans out of the backcountry and not let them ever go there. I suppose that would preserve the backcountry, but they forgot that we haven't forgotten, on this side, that we work for Albertans. On the other side I'm not sure who they were working for, but it sure wasn't the people that live in this great province.

It takes a little more effort. In fact, you want your environment minister to have some authority to make changes, because in the more complicated world that we want for Albertans, where they can go and enjoy their province – not the NDP's province; Albertans' province – sometimes when you've got people out there in the backcountry doing things, it comes around to a place where something needs to be changed, and that's the point where you want your environment minister to have some authority.

On the other side they want to lock everybody out and basically put a fence around the outdoors of Alberta. I suppose that's less complicated and a little easier to govern. In fact, I guess we saw an extension of that even during COVID, when they wanted Albertans all locked in their homes for months on end, essentially two years, for the most part. I guess they prefer simplicity in government by locking Albertans in their homes, not letting them go out into the backcountry, not letting them enjoy their lives.

On this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we work for Albertans, and we know that Albertans want to leave their homes. They want to gather. They want to get together. They want to go and get a meal at a restaurant. They want to go hiking in the backcountry. They want to take their ATV out in the backcountry. They want to go fishing. Some of them want to go hunting. This is a little more complicated because under the UCP government we want Albertans to go out and enjoy their whole province, which means there are moving parts; 4.3 million moving parts called people. And, you know, when we all want to allow those people to go out and enjoy this great province that we all live in, because it's their province, that's why you need your environment minister to have some authority to make changes along the way when it becomes apparent that some rules and regulations need to be adjusted.

9:00

So I can see, when they want everybody locked in their homes and out of the backcountry, why they don't think the minister needs any authority. They seem to envision a stagnant Alberta where people stay in their homes, they're not allowed to go out for a walk or a hike in the woods, not allowed to go on an ATV or go fishing or go hunting. I suppose that if that's the case, then the minister

doesn't really need much authority, because in the almost police state that the folks across would prefer – yeah. Okay. In that scenario, I suppose, ministers don't need that much authority, but on this side when we want 4.3 million people using, enjoying, and looking after the whole province, you need your minister to have some authority, some flexibility.

The minister has done a great job. The award-winning Kananaskis pass is giving this government some resources and some ability to improve things in the park, to improve how often the garbage is picked up, to improve the number of peace officers out there making sure that when those good 4.3 million Albertans forget to follow the rules, someone's there to responsibly remind them to follow the rules.

I understand why the folks across don't understand this, but if they did, they wouldn't put forward an amendment that would stop all this ability for our government to look after the backcountry and give our government the ability to make changes when people are out. We don't want people locked in their homes. We want people to use the backcountry. We don't want Albertans locked out of, essentially, the entire outback or the whole great group of nature, the millions of square kilometres of nature in this province. The folks across don't want Albertans to use that, to see that, and enjoy that. On this side we do. That's why the minister needs some authority, which is why this amendment shows, basically, a lack of understanding of what Albertans want.

I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but I certainly won't be supporting this amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs has risen.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, on REF1. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2."

I have to say that I agree wholeheartedly that this should be referred to committee. I think that when we're talking about a piece of legislation that has ministries of red tape, Education, Municipal Affairs, agriculture, Children's Services, environment, Health, Service Alberta, Transportation, Treasury Board and Finance – and then, on top of that, there are 16 sections with amendments to 16 acts. Those acts, Mr. Speaker, are the Animal Health Act, the child and family enhancement act, the Cooperatives Act, the Education Act, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, the Highways Development and Protection Act, the Local Authorities Election Act, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Act, the Municipal Government Act, the Pharmacy and Drug Act, the Provincial Parks Act, the Public Lands Act, the Railway (Alberta) Act, the Residential Tenancies Act, the Rural Utilities Act, and the Surveys Act.

Now, there have been ongoing questions from this government about what it is that Albertans want, and all of the legislation that we have seen is not actually addressing the concerns. We have a minister who's responsible for red tape who I question why even has a ministry when each minister under those previous acts should be able to go through their own ministry and articulate what is being impacted and what needs to change.

We have a situation that happened between the red tape ministry and the Education ministry. On one hand, the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction was claiming loudly and vocally that private schools will no longer have to produce financial data, and then we had the Minister of Education claiming loudly and vocally that that isn't true. We have a ministry created to go through all of the other ministries, and then the ministers responsible for those ministries are contradicting what's happening. So we can't even trust this government to talk to each other. How can we trust that they've actually spoken to Albertans?

I think that when we talk about referring a piece of legislation to a committee, this would be a prime example. I think there would be many people from Children's Services, environment, Health, Service Alberta, Transportation, Treasury Board and Finance, Municipal Affairs, agriculture that would love to come to the table to talk about the changes that are impacting them and perhaps a minister that hasn't consulted not only with the ministries but, I would suggest, with Albertans.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I think that when we have the opportunity to send a piece of legislation to a committee, they're able to do a robust job in outreach, in talking to those Albertans that are being impacted by this legislation. There's an incredible opportunity to have that information presented either by written submission, or there's an opportunity to hear directly from stakeholders. I would argue that this piece of legislation, this omnibus, is one of those times when there are probably a lot of individuals and stakeholders that have a lot to say about the ministries that are being impacted when it seems the own minister isn't in agreement with what the red tape ministry is doing.

So when we see that kind of thing happening within the Legislature, it begs the question: who is this minister talking to? If she's not talking to the ministers responsible for the actual acts, who is providing this information and this feedback that these red tape reductions are required? I would argue that it should be the people that are actually being impacted by the legislative proposals that are in the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act.

One of the best ways to do that is to utilize the committees that we have set up through this Legislature, to use the incredible services of the LAO when it comes to research and a cross-jurisdictional scan. They're able to do outreach requests. They're able to reach out to Albertans in ways to have them provide feedback. I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that it doesn't seem that this minister has actually done what's required, so when we're looking at this much legislation and 16 acts that are being asked to be changed, I would think that being able to have the committee review the information with stakeholders and hear directly from Albertans would simply make sense.

I think that when we have something as serious as CYFEA before this Legislature under the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, I just question why the minister of red tape is overseeing this piece of legislation when we've witnessed the most deadly year on record for children in care. I would think that this should be something that should be handled directly under the Children's Services ministry. We've been asking for this government to do something, and what we have instead is this UCP government saying: just trust us.

We have this really essential piece of legislation under CYFEA being opened up by the red tape reduction minister. I don't understand how something that is this significant and this important and serious, that's happening right now – why is the red tape minister addressing it? Why isn't it coming directly from the Minister of Children's Services? We have so many heartbreaking

stories of children dying in care. For it to come through and be opened through red tape, it just doesn't speak to the importance that this government sees for the children in care.

9:10

I know that there are restrictions in place and minimums in place because of concerns that had previously been brought forward by other reviews. I know that in 2003 there was a review that happened, and it changed some of those regulations in those time periods. There were significant concerns at the time about I believe it was the Child Welfare Act that were brought forward. There were significant allegations of lack of care and protection in that system. The consequence of that was that a class-action suit was brought against the government, and the government lost. So instead of really looking at what's happening in the current child and family enhancement act and the Children's Services system, instead of opening it and doing a really thorough evaluation, they're sending it off to the red tape reduction statutes, which, to me, is very concerning, and it speaks volumes to the level of concern that this government sees for children in care.

I know that children in care is a very complex system. I know the CYFEA act is very complicated, and I know that workers working under that piece of legislation work under several pieces of legislation. They have CYFEA, they have the Family Law Act, they have PSECA, they have the Drug-endangered Children Act. There are so many different pieces of just that work environment that impact CYFEA.

Then to hand it off to the red tape minister: it doesn't make sense. I think that it's a huge detriment to children in care and families when it's being passed off like this. I think that when we're seeing the reports that are coming out of the Child and Youth Advocate's office, when we're hearing the cries from Children's Services workers, from foster parents, from kinship providers, from physicians, from people that provide mental health services to children and youth, there is a crisis happening with children in care.

When this government decided to stop providing services to youth over 22, when they rolled it back from 24, that was such a damaging decision, and the impact has been that children are dying. Instead of opening up that legislation and really getting to the heart of the concern and listening to the recommendations that are coming, what they're doing is that they're handing a piece of it off to the red tape reduction statutes minister under piles and piles of legislation. What are they trying to hide?

I think this government has shown an incredible lack of transparency, lack of consultation. I hear over and over from constituents that have had decisions made that they can't believe it's happening. When we have what is the deadliest year on record for deaths of children in care, I just can't understand how a piece of the legislation under CYFEA is being handed off to red tape reduction. There was an opportunity to open up that legislation, look at the minister responsible, and make some impactful, meaningful changes. Instead, we have this omnibus legislation that's being pushed through.

I'm curious how many other pieces in this legislation are going to be handed off to a minister that didn't really consult with other ministries. We saw that with Education, where there were two complete opposite messages happening. That's concerning. I think that by referring it to committee, it provides a real opportunity to get to the heart of what this government is trying to do. At least provide some transparency. At least identify if the stakeholders that are being impacted by these changes believe that the changes are actually red tape reduction. We've seen, over and over, pieces of legislation brought forward by this ministry in what seems to be an attempt to create work when every one of these ministries has

capacity to look through their own ministry and identify concerns, areas that need to be changed, make good decisions to really reduce red tape, but when we're giving it to a minister that doesn't have the depth and understanding of each one of these decisions in these ministries, there are some significant concerns.

I think that when it comes to referral to committee, I would argue that committee would be able to give the time that's deserved to go through this incredible legislation. There's so much: 16 acts, Mr. Speaker. I think that this would give opportunity for some real robust consultation to occur. This would give some opportunities for those engaged in many different industries to have voice, because that's a theme that we've heard the entire time that the UCP has been in government, that there isn't consultation, that stakeholders aren't feeling heard. By providing the opportunity for this legislation to go to committee, it does exactly that. It invites those that are impacted by this omnibus legislation to come forward and present their ideas and their information. If it really is about reducing red tape, I would say: get it right the first time; make sure that you're doing things that the people are actually asking for.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that everybody support the amendment to refer to committee.

The Speaker: On amendment REF1 are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has the call.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to this referral, which shouldn't come as a surprise to members of the Assembly, that I support. You know, I'll take my time to speak about elements of this bill that I do support, again, that I wish weren't bundled with amendments to various pieces of legislation that I can't support or at least not in its current state. Recognizing that we're in second reading, there are opportunities to amend this bill, and I hope that the government will be amenable to the amendments that the opposition will put forward.

You know what's interesting about this bill, Mr. Speaker? I appreciate the spirit of what the government is attempting to do, and I don't disagree. I mean, the difference between this government and the previous government was that each cabinet minister took it upon themselves to look at regulations that were under their purview in each ministry and, every time they were up for renewal, which is what governments for decades and decades had done, put a time allocation on when regulations would have to be renewed by cabinet. Honestly, that's what preoccupies the majority of time of cabinet, reviewing regulations that have a review date on them. Now, one could argue that that's red tape and time consuming. Yes, but you could equally argue the opposite, that the fact that cabinet has to review previous regulations that are attached to a bill means that they're putting that day's lens five years later, a current lens, on previous regulations to ensure that there's a conversation around: are these regulations necessary, and can they be amended? Can they be ameliorated? Can they be cut out altogether?

9:20

You know what? I can't help but think about examples when the current government came into power and talked about all of the regulations that Alberta had – but Alberta still had, I think, a third or a fourth of the regulations that the province of British Columbia had – and how much further we were ahead. Part of that is because – I remember, Mr. Speaker, getting briefed by my department, when I had economic development and trade, that there was a regulation in the province of British Columbia for bar owners about the height that a television could be. Now, I don't know the backstory and the history as to why there was a regulation prescribing how high a television could be off the ground, but there was.

British Columbia got rid of that regulation and many others, and the government of the day looked at how many they got rid of and used that as a comparator for Alberta. But the problem with that and the reason that it's apples to oranges is that Alberta has never had regulations prescribing where bars and pubs can have their televisions. Like, for us today it's ridiculous, or at least that was my reaction thinking about that regulation that existed in British Columbia. They eliminated that, but that was part of the total tally of the regulations that British Columbia had, so when you compare it to Alberta, it's apples to oranges.

I'll give you another example, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to be the minister that signed onto the new Canadian free trade agreement and negotiated a number of reductions in regulations. In fact – and this is where I have fun with the current Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction – how many golden scissors does she have? As government we negotiated with other ministries across Canada to reduce red tape, to enable further trade with other provinces, so to reduce those barriers. I'll be the first to admit that there are ridiculous barriers and barriers that I pushed back against.

I mean, the fact – here, I'll give you a great example, Mr. Speaker. There are differing regulations on the containers for dairy creamers between provinces, so if you are a company that puts dairy products like coffee cream into different containers, you cannot do it once uniformly across the country. Every province has different stipulations for the size of the dairy creamer you can use. Now, if you're shaking your head, Mr. Speaker, so was I. That seems absolutely ridiculous. There is a black-and-white example of red tape that is costing our producers dollars for no reason today. Now, I'm not about to argue whether there was a valid reason in the past for why that existed – I'll leave that be – but why that exists today makes absolutely no sense. So as much as we can harmonize, those examples I'm behind a hundred per cent.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of areas that we need to work together on, but the challenge that I presented the Premier with years ago, in fact, the first year that we were in estimates, was the fact that, you know, when I was at the bargaining table negotiating the Canadian free trade agreement and other provinces complained about the fact that Alberta had – and this is how you skew statistics – more exemptions than other provinces, other provinces used that as a way to attack Alberta.

But when I turned around and said, "Our exemptions, for example, for our energy sector are very specific to elements of our energy sector and not just elements within oil or gas or electricity but within those spaces very, very limited," other provinces argued, "Well, you have more exemptions than we do." Yeah. Do you want to know why that is? Because in Ontario they exempt the whole of their energy sector. The whole of their energy sector is not reciprocal for the rest of the country. How is that more of a free trade economy than Alberta, that had a higher number but the exemptions were pinpoints? They weren't exempting the whole energy space. That was the argument that I put forward every time to my former colleagues who were trade ministers.

The point of this, Mr. Speaker, is that, you know, you can use any stats you want and skew the heck out of them in your favour, but the reality is that at that time . . .

Mr. Rehn: You do it regularly.

Mr. Bilous: If members are accusing us of doing that regularly, just listen to your front bench. Give me a break.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, that if we're fighting for the outcome, then that's what we should be looking at and, you know, not all the rest. There are numerous examples where the opposition presses the government on outcomes and on showing and demonstrating those outcomes where it's frustrating when the government doesn't subscribe to that same logic. I mean, I can give you countless examples where throughout estimates I've talked to and challenged the minister to demonstrate or articulate – not even demonstrate; articulate – the outcomes of different entities, and I couldn't get a straight answer. This is where government can talk about how much they want government to be like the private sector. Well, if you're like the private sector, then you have to have targets and outcomes, and if you can't demonstrate that you're reaching those outcomes, there are consequences. This government: not at all. Not at all. Articulate a single outcome or target of Invest Alberta, and then show the metrics: can you? You can't. Trust me, in a couple of weeks I'll highlight that.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, that what we want to see – and on this side of the House we're also in favour of whatever measures the government can implement to expediate business and to make Alberta more business friendly, but what we see in a number of these red tape reduction bills are either examples that could be done within the ministry that don't need legislation – but the government needs to prove that they're actually doing something in this space – or we see examples where the government is confused. There have been a number of examples or instances where my colleagues have pointed out the fact that there's been a discrepancy between the words of the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction and the Minister of Education. To my knowledge, there still has not been a clarification on this, so when it comes to private schools having to disclose their spending, there's still a confusion as to what needs to be disclosed.

9:30

But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I'm – you know what? If private schools were funded privately, 100 per cent privately, they don't have to disclose. They're like a private corporation. They don't need to put out their financials. But if a private school receives a dollar of public funding, so similar to the TSX, for all my investor friends – if it's a publicly traded company, they have to disclose their financials. What is the difference between that and this bill? There isn't. If a private school is receiving funding from taxpayer dollars, then they should disclose. That is the issue that I have with this bill.

Now, I could go on for a long time, as every member in this Chamber knows, and I will.

Mr. McIver: Please do.

Mr. Bilous: Oh, I make that commitment, not in this instance, but I will. I will, especially for the Minister of Municipal Affairs, because he's asked me to and I respect him in that.

However, Mr. Speaker, I've said my piece. For that, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The deputy government whip.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 10 a.m. Tuesday, May 10, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:32 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, May 10, 2022

Day 32

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,

Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)

Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, ECA, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., ECA, Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
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Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
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| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
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| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

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| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
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Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

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Frey
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Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Singh
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Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, May 10, 2022

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning, hon. members.

Prayers

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

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 23 Professional Governance Act

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to rise and move second reading of Bill 23, the Professional Governance Act.

The proposed act will govern the 22 nonhealth professional regulatory organizations for which Labour and Immigration is responsible. The Alberta government delegates self-governing responsibilities for certain professions and occupations to professional regulatory organizations. These organizations are responsible for the governance, registration, conduct, and discipline of their registrants. They are also responsible for ensuring their registrants deliver services in a way that protects life, health, property, the environment, economy, and public interest of Albertans. A few examples are the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta, the Alberta Institute of Agrologists, Chartered Professional Accountants of Alberta, the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, and the Alberta Association of Architects.

Currently, Madam Speaker, these 22 organizations are governed by an inconsistent and confusing patchwork of legislation, one that includes nine separate acts and 28 supporting regulations. This current patchwork has created inconsistencies and inefficiencies in how professional regulatory organizations are governed and operate. Some of the legislation is also outdated. The proposed Professional Governance Act will consolidate and streamline this patchwork into a single umbrella act with a minimal number of supporting regulations. This will make it easier for professional regulatory organizations to do their important work of protecting the public interest of Albertans. This act will provide a consistent and standard way for professional regulatory organizations to carry out their common core functions such as governance, registration, and addressing professional conduct and discipline.

We realize that some organizations and their professions may have unique needs and requirements. This will be addressed through adding profession-specific schedules into the regulations. We will develop those schedules in consultation with the professional regulatory organizations in the coming months.

Madam Speaker, the new act will provide a consistent process for professional regulatory organizations in similar fields who wish to amalgamate. Some organizations may find it more efficient to have a single source of governance for that profession. Some professions have successfully done this already such as accounting and forestry. The new legislation will set out a transparent process for deregistration and the registration of new professional organizations. Currently there is no consistent way for approving amalgamations, deregistration, or creating new professional regulatory organizations. The new act will provide that consistency.

Madam Speaker, professional regulatory organizations do a good job and contribute to the economic success of our province. I am confident that that will continue.

The new act provides for the appointment of a public administrator when a professional organization is no longer able to fulfill its obligations, act in good faith, or serve the public interest and public safety. This will be used only in exceptional circumstances when there is a clear threat to the public interest or the interest of public safety. For example, a professional regulatory organization may become insolvent and cease to operate, so they can no longer regulate their profession. Madam Speaker, I want to emphasize that this provision will be used only in rare and extreme circumstances. We strongly support professional self-governance. Bill 23 is designed to minimize government involvement with regulating professions as much as is possible or feasible. This option to appoint a public administrator would only be used as a last resort.

Madam Speaker, speaking of protecting the public interest, public members are essential to help professional regulatory organizations carry out their duties. The government appoints public members to the organizations' governing bodies to ensure the public interest is represented. Public members serve on professional regulatory organizations governed by this along with tribunals for complaints, discipline, or appeals. This will continue under the proposed Professional Governance Act, and it will continue in a more consistent and efficient manner. This includes creating a roster of public members which PROs can utilize for discipline tribunals and appeals.

Madam Speaker, Bill 23 will also bring professional legislation into the modern era. Some of the current legislation is more than 40 years old and didn't take technological advances or other changes into account. For example, the new act provides for electronic means of communication and the ability to hold meetings virtually.

The new act will also provide greater flexibility to professional regulatory organizations to manage the regulation of their respective professions. It does this by allowing PROs a greater ability to make bylaws to regulate their professions while still maintaining government oversight. This will ensure that professional regulatory organizations can be more responsive to changing needs and will also remove unnecessary government oversight. There will be less red tape, and it will be easier for organizations to make or change their own bylaws. It provides greater flexibility for self-regulating professions while retaining an appropriate amount of government oversight.

Madam Speaker, speaking of updates, the new act will align with a couple of other recent acts, the Labour Mobility Act and the Fair Registration Practices Act. The alignment is critical for reducing barriers for regulated professionals from other provinces and other countries. Their credentials can be recognized in Alberta more quickly and efficiently, and they can be recognized on a temporary basis to allow out-of-province professionals to work in Alberta on short-term projects or during emergencies. This helps our province attract the professionals we need to fill labour shortages and support Alberta's economy.

Madam Speaker, stakeholder input has been critical as we move forward with streamlining Alberta's professional legislation. Labour and Immigration met regularly with stakeholders throughout the development of the proposed Professional Governance Act. These included existing professional regulatory organizations and associations who may wish to become professional regulatory organizations in the future. Thanks to their valuable input, Bill 23 will serve the needs of self-regulating professions now and into the future and ultimately serve the needs of Albertans through protecting the public interest and public safety.

Madam Speaker, I am confident that Bill 23 will pass. After the bill passes, we will continue to engage with professional regulatory organizations as we develop the regulation and organization-specific schedules in the coming months. I am confident that their input will continue to help us make Alberta's professional legislation the best in the country. If passed, the Professional Governance Act will take effect upon proclamation, which is expected to happen in early 2023. I ask my colleagues in this Assembly to support Bill 23. By passing this bill, we can begin a new era for professional governance legislation in Alberta.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 23.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join the debate on Bill 23 in second reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to the minister for going through a high overview of what he believes Bill 23 will achieve for this province. You know, my own background with regard to some of this area – and maybe I'll just share – is not in the professional regulatory organizations, not here, because these are the 22 nonhealth PROs. It was the Alberta College of Social Workers, and I don't believe that's in this bill. I just scanned the 22, and I didn't pick it up. Perhaps I missed it.

10:10

I was a member of that organization for several years, had to provide information – to continue to be accredited, you had to provide information on an annual basis, and it was spot-checked or monitored or reviewed. I have some experience with a PRO, and they did great work and continue to do great work in regulating and making sure social workers throughout the province who use that designation have the appropriate skills to be able to assist Albertans in their needs.

The other aspect of my connection to this kind of work is the agencies, boards, and commissions. Of course, when I was Finance minister, we reviewed all – I think there were around 150 or more agencies, boards, and commissions that were connected to the province of Alberta. They had staff. They had significant roles. Like, AGLC – AGL Ceci – is one of those agencies, boards, and commissions. My role, our role was to harmonize, essentially, what the level of remuneration across those boards would be. There were kind of like A, B, C levels of remuneration based on the level of import, the level of responsibility, work that those agencies, boards, and commissions did. I kind of have some understanding of the challenges this area faces, potentially the minister.

You know, I support the desire to be consistent and efficient, of course. Those are kind of – “efficiency” was a word that came up regularly in the minister's speech. I think that's important. I think it's important to be transparent, of course, and to hold these PROs accountable for what they do and for them to hold their members accountable. It seems like a great deal of the impetus behind this work is around the whole idea of including professionals from other provinces and countries across the many responsibilities that we see: assessors, architects, landscape architects, agrologists.

Perhaps one of the better known ones in that list is APEGA and maybe the Veterinary Medical Association, not to say that the others aren't important.

Ms Hoffman: APEGA advertises more and represents a lot of people.

Member Ceci: Yeah. I was going to say the same thing. There are huge billboards across the province. It's something like: if you want to know how this building works, ask a member of APEGA because they helped design it.

That group, in my mind, has a stellar ability to regulate their own members, to include new members from other places, to make sure that the buildings that we are in are designed and built to the highest standards possible. It's curious that the kind of views that I heard the minister talk about in terms of making them better, making sure they do a good job, making sure they're stronger with this new act, that they'll be better as a result of this new act: I think they're already pretty good, APEGA being a good example of that.

I think also that the bill goes too far in many ways because the bill – not only is it difficult to get through and very convoluted and very confusing, but it leaves too much scope, in my view and the view of many people and perhaps stakeholders who have looked at this bill from a legal perspective. It provides too much scope to the minister in being able to address the bylaws and even the existence of some of these PROs that are out there. I think, just on a quick read of some of the areas and reflection on some of the feedback that I'm aware of, the legislation is confusing and leaves too much to regulations and schedules which are to come in the future.

The minister said that, you know, assent of this will be sometime early in the new year. That's to give opportunity and time for the regulations, I presume, to be written, so there's a lot that we're not seeing here, that's not transparent, that's not before us, that we're going to have to take the minister's word on that it will address the needs of PROs, many of whom are functioning well and have been doing that for many years.

Some of the feedback I'm aware of as well is that this legislation is based in part on B.C.'s Professional Governance Act, which was passed in 2018, but that act does not contain some of the things that are in this act. It does not contain the same sweeping powers that this legislation gives the minister, so why does the Minister of Labour and Immigration need that kind of sweeping power to give him oversight onto all aspects of Bill 23 when we know that groups like APEGA are functioning adequately at this point in time?

I think that we know that there are many changes that are going to be coming down the pipe for these PROs, and the minister talked a little bit about stakeholder engagement, but really there's not a lot in this, not a lot in the speech, and not a lot that I've been able to review. As well, I've been able to hear from some stakeholders, through other parties, where their engagement, their participation was minimal. The minister talked about meeting regularly, but when I was listening, it sounded like he met with some groups who wanted to become PROs and who wanted to benefit from the creation or be able to benefit from what's in this bill in terms of becoming a PRO in the future. I didn't hear a lot about the existing PROs that are identified, the 22 here, and what their view of this act is.

I think, Madam Speaker, that the number of nonprofessional PROs that are identified here and their functioning and what they think of this act should be reported on by the minister. We should hear what their feedback is, and we're starting to engage with those. The opposition hears from them, and I can tell you that they're still working through this legislation. As I said, it's very substantive in bulk, and it changes the way they work. There's a concern, of

course, that the ability of the minister to regulate the advocacy role of these organizations is changing as a result of this act, and I know from my own example that the College of Social Workers sees its role very strongly as advocates for improving the quality of life of Albertans and is not shy to take on bad legislation or bad policy that affects Albertans. I think that's what professionals should do. That's a concern that's been reported, that the advocacy role of these associations is being limited or changed or neutered as a result of this act.

10:20

Another bit of feedback – and I think I shared this already – is that consultation was very limited in structure, lacked reasonable timelines, and indicated a predetermined outcome, which always is a concern if you're going into a meeting with stakeholders with the answer you want to achieve as opposed to a true negotiation. Madam Speaker, the lack of transparency in going into those kinds of discussions is evident, you know, if you only look for one answer.

Those are some of the concerns. I think the primary ones are that this legislation leaves too much to regulations and schedules, which haven't been put before us. The timelines to achieve that are, like, less than seven months in the future, eight months in the future. If you've got 22 organizations, a convoluted bill, and you're expecting royal assent and everyone to line up, then you should be doing a lot more work to make that happen. What I heard from the minister is that some engagement went on with stakeholders, and I think there needs to be a lot more.

I don't think this bill should pass, Madam Speaker. The government should immediately take it back and work with each and every stakeholder who's going to be impacted before considering passing this in the Assembly. I think there's more work to do. As I said, just on a quick review and some of the stakeholder feedback there is too much prescription in this. The minister has too much power over each of these PROs and can change things without reasonable engagement with them. I don't think that's the kind of stakeholder outreach that we want, that I want. I want to see the minister talk about how he would behave going forward, how the act would enable the government to work together with these PROs.

PROs, as in APEGA's case – that one has been around for a long time, doing incredible work, and has a sophisticated way of engaging its members, its new members, people who want to become members. Certainly, there has been some feedback from those wishing to be engineers in this province that it hasn't happened fast enough for them. I think the way to improve that is to incentivize the PRO to find better ways to ensure that the skill sets of those applying to become registered members so that they can work in this province are assessed, given transitional support to make the grade if they're not there, and to have additional resources put into a place, like APEGA, where members are tasked with streamlining their process and the bar is held high for them. I'm not sure Bill 23 does that in ways that can find a co-operative relationship, a we-found-this-way-together approach.

The number of things that I've pointed out – and I think some of my colleagues will continue to talk on this bill. The bill itself seems really prescriptive. PROs can't even begin to do the necessary work to meet the regulations, which, you know, we're being told will take months to come together before they can begin looking at them to make sure that they're addressing those regulations. That's a problem, Madam Speaker.

I think that with those kinds of comments to start things off, I'll sit down and listen to the rest of the debate around the Professional Governance Act. I just know that from what I've heard, what I've

seen in the act so far, I think I'm supportive of improving professional regulatory organizations, but I'm not sure that this bill does it in ways that will be beneficial for PROs. I think it goes beyond what's necessary, and I think that the minister's power to determine the scope and the bylaws and even the existence of PROs is a step too far.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have to rise this morning to provide some initial comments here to Bill 23, Professional Governance Act. You know, I guess I can appreciate the minister getting up and kicking off debate about how he feels about what the bill is going to do and how great it is, but quite frankly this seems like a problem that is just looking for a place to happen.

This bill causes me great concern, especially around the scope that the minister is providing for himself around this bill. As I've said before, you know, members of the government bench, members of the government caucus that served in the 29th Legislature: whenever they saw any kind of extra abilities that were being given to a minister, let's just say that the comments were very serious, very pointed, and came in a flurry. When you see the ability for the minister to determine the scope, the bylaws, and, quite frankly, even their existence, I can just imagine what those members would have said back then. My guess is that the debate would have been very robust, very heated, yet I suspect that we'll probably see those same members simply sit here and say nothing with regard to Bill 23.

When you're looking at that and what the minister is basically going to be able to prescribe – I think it was my friend from Calgary-Buffalo who had said, you know, that you have professional organizations, and I think again my friend from Calgary-Buffalo mentioned one there with APEGA. This is an organization of individuals, very highly skilled, very highly educated, who carry an immense responsibility in terms of what they do, as he said, designing the very buildings that we work in each and every day. I'm curious what the minister feels that he can come in and do better. I can sit here and challenge him in this House about three simple words – “may,” “will,” and “shall” – and our disagreement on those, yet he's going to try to prescribe to these individuals how they should govern themselves.

Now, I would never, of course, ever say that we don't want to be transparent, providing accountability, being consistent in your actions. You know, if that is indeed the case, well, maybe I would suggest to the minister that he suggests to the rest of the government that they try that a little bit more in terms of consistency, transparency, and accountability. It feels like Bill 23 has been rushed for some reason, needing to get something out the door to be able to talk about in this House. I've seen several bills now that are coming out and trying to change things.

10:30

You know, maybe there's been some – and I'm using the term “consultation” loosely here. Instead of, rather, consul-tate, it's probably consul-told, and then, “Well, we're going to do it in regulations,” again, something members of the government bench and members of the government caucus that served previously would have significant problems with in that case. That's what we have here.

I mean, we've just recently seen a change with regard, for instance, to insulin pumps. You know, making the changes, but

nobody seems to understand what's going on. That is of great concern to people, myself personally as my daughter is a type 1 diabetic. She is furious about this change. This is the pattern that we're seeing with the government in terms of legislation. Same with Bill 23: "Well, we'll figure out all the details later," and then give virtually no time to adapt. My friend from Calgary-Buffalo was talking about: what kind of timelines are we going to allow these organizations to adjust? Are they going to be reasonable, or is it just going to simply be an after fact and "Well, you're on your own to figure it out"? For a government that really doesn't want to be involved in things, you're getting involved in a lot of things, a significant number of things.

You know, the changes here around the timelines and approving applications for registration are now going to propose three different timelines that they're going to have to try to adhere to. That, by definition, is red tape. You just increased the difficulty to be able to do these things. So I'd be curious as to maybe some comments from the red tape minister on that particular part of the bill. Or did the Minister of Labour and Immigration even consult with the red tape ministry? I would certainly hope so because the red tape ministry is costing taxpayers anywhere between \$10 million and \$15 million over the course of this term. I would hope that they're a resource to all of the ministries when they're creating red tape. This would be a significant one just by itself.

I guess you could almost say, you know, that there's the chance for some very unpleasant, unintended consequences. I remember that word a lot. We used to hear it a lot, the unintended consequences. With the list of these professional organizations that are available to us that are being affected, I'm curious: did any of them say, "Yes; please create more barriers in terms of the timelines for these application approvals"? I'd be curious to know if any organization actually said: "Yes. We want more hurdles. We want more red tape there." But, like I said, I suspect it was more consult-told rather than consult-tate around this.

As my friend from Calgary-Buffalo had said, this bill significantly needs some work to it. It seems very haphazard in some of the things. You know, perhaps maybe even pressing the pause button to give a chance for any of these organizations to weigh in on some of these proposed changes like, for instance, what I just mentioned around red tape and the application process. I think that the minister should be forthcoming with those discussions. There seems to be a habit of the government wanting to form all kinds of panels and create reports and whatnot. Well, why don't we get a quick report on this from these organizations about how they feel this legislation looks?

This is a significant piece of legislation. You know, I can remember members opposite – whenever a bill got bigger than 50 pages, there was concern about being able to go out and find out from stakeholders about how they felt around things. As you can imagine, Bill 23 is significantly larger than that. Maybe we should find out. Maybe we should take that time to be able to get the input from these organizations.

I guess the next aspect I'm looking at – when I look at the scopes of some of these different professional organizations, having them essentially under one umbrella feels like you're just simply trying to mash a whole bunch of organizations together. I mean, we have everything from architects to agrologists, engineers, veterinary, chartered accountants, electrical contractors, yet you're going to come in and start prescribing to all these organizations potentially what their bylaws might be. I mean, they didn't reach becoming professional organizations in terms of self-governing just by accident. They had to work towards that. They had to prove that they could indeed govern themselves with accountability, integrity,

transparency, and now, all of a sudden, we feel we have to smash all of these organizations together.

Again, I seem to remember that those same members serving before had a problem with things like one size fits all, yet here we are in Bill 23 doing that exact thing. It's always interesting. Again, as I've always said, Madam Speaker, when you start analyzing the language, what it says, what it doesn't say, what are you saying about it, what have you done in the past, persistently and consistently these things are always butting up against each other, much to the dismay of Albertans, because they are the ones caught in the middle and affected by these changes.

Again, it's a whole lot of: well, just trust us to get it right. I'm telling you right now that trust is in very, very thin supply with this government – very thin supply – and you just lost a whole bunch more trust with diabetics. I do believe I'm actually going to take a little bit of a personal insult to that because my daughter is type 1. There are maybe individuals that have private insurance that might be able to get to that; she's not one of them.

I guess – and, of course, I do realize that this is second reading, Madam Speaker. Hopefully, we'll get a chance to get more questions answered as we move along in debate and to Committee of the Whole. I'm hoping we'll see some answers around Bill 23. Why has the government chosen this direction? You know, why did we choose to increase red tape around these timelines for applications? How does the bill allow for the minister to prescribe how each organization can register? What got to that point?

You know, let's hear what was heard around the consultations – again using that term a little bit loosely here. I guess the big one: if you are indeed just going to pass this through – and I'd never presuppose the decision of the House, but that's likely what's going to happen – what kind of supports are you planning to put in place to help these organizations make this transition? Again, are you just going to leave them out in the wind, or are you actually going to back them up with these changes?

10:40

Now, past habits would show me that that's probably the case; they'll be left to their own devices, as we've seen with so many different changes brought in over the course of this government's term. Then maybe when there's a significant enough blowback, they start to make some changes. I mean, you've been promising help to Albertans for months around rebates. Still waiting. Is that the same kind of thing we're going to get out of Bill 23 should the minister decide to create a whole bunch of upheaval? Are we going to be able to go to these organizations like, for instance, the Society of Professional Biologists and say, "There's help available for you"? You know, are you going to give reasonable timelines if you're going to ask them to rewrite their bylaws because of the changes from Bill 23? Are you going to give them the proper amount of time that they require to effectively change these things?

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 23 in second reading? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise this morning to speak to Bill 23, Professional Governance Act. I believe I could think of a number of different titles to the act and perhaps submit them for tentative amendments. One that comes to mind, after reading the act in a cursory way, is that it's the Minister-Knows-Best Control Act. It certainly smacks of a heavy-handed piece of legislation that seeks to exercise a significant amount of control and shows in a very dramatic way why not only individual Albertans can't trust this government to govern in their interest, but now the crosshairs are focused

completely and very resolutely on the business community with this piece of legislation.

Business, looking at this legislation, can't trust this UCP government to look after their interests, because they are certainly not doing so with this piece of legislation. This is a three-alarm fire as far as I'm concerned, and the business community will be rallying, I think, against it, because I don't remember, Madam Speaker, reading any headlines saying: professional regulated organizations demand the minister take control of their organizations with an umbrella act such as this. There was no such headline and no such demand. There were organizations that acted independently under rules and guidelines that already exist in legislation, and I don't recall hearing any groundswell demanding that the government undertake a sweeping change to basically overtake the governance of many of these organizations which have been around for decades and decades in this province, which represent thousands and thousands of independent businesses who are now being told by the government that they don't have legitimacy to operate their own organization.

Some of my comments are based on the Field Law assessment of Bill 23 that really shows it to be a massive change in governance of some incredible organizations in this province that have been instrumental in building this province, yet the government seems to believe that they need to intervene on their own in order to have complete control over these organizations.

Now, it's stunning, Madam Speaker, to see the control that the government wants to exercise over these organizations, and I'm not speaking about fly-by-night organizations. The 22 professional regulated organizations that they seek to limit are well-known organizations that most Albertans would recognize: the professional engineers, professional accountants of Alberta, Consulting Engineers of Alberta, Alberta Institute of Agrolgists, Land Surveyors' Association, Professional Planners Institute; you know, these individuals who are continuously in trouble and flaunting the law. Well, no, they're not, actually. You don't see those headlines because, indeed, they have been operating with integrity for decades in this province, yet somehow the government sees the need to add them to the targeted list of people that they want to control in this province. Now, you know, businesses are squarely in the crosshairs of this government, and businesses looking at this are going to say: we can't trust these guys; look what they're doing. [interjection] I'll accept the intervention.

Member Irwin: Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-McClung for accepting my intervention. I know he was just getting started there, and he's got a lot more to say on this bill. What piqued my interest were his comments that he was starting to say about trust. I'm seeing – and I think he is as well – a clear pattern of a lack of trust with this government. We've said that honestly, I think. What are we on? Bill 23, and it's been a theme with at least, I would say, 21 of the bills that we've seen in front of us.

You know, I would ask that member to just talk a little bit more about some of the concerns that he sees around trusting this government. We've seen multiple times the justification from this government. They say, "Oh, you know, just trust us that the kinks in this bill will be worked out in regulations" or "Just trust us that we've gotten the consultation right; just trust us that this is what stakeholders want."

Thank you.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood for bringing up the question of trust as a matter of grave concern with this piece of legislation. Basically, what the government is doing, in a way that

wasn't solicited by the business community – that's for sure – is telling them: "We don't trust you. We don't trust you to operate yourselves with integrity, and therefore we're going to create a piece of legislation, Bill 23, which is going to provide us with the ability to have the minister, never mind the cabinet but to have the minister, dictate to you how you operate your businesses and your professional organizations, and if we don't like you, we're going to put the screws to you. We've got the tools in this legislation to actually discontinue your existence." That's how draconian this is.

I can only imagine, Madam Speaker, what the groundswell will be from businesses who feel they can no longer trust this government themselves, like Albertans across the province who don't trust this government as far as managing the pandemic and treating health care professionals, tearing up contracts with doctors, looking after the vagaries of inflation. The list goes on and on, and now the government aims directly at professional organizations, telling them that they are now the target and that they will be ruled by the minister, basically. That's the ulterior motive here, and it seems to be the ultimate goal.

The recourse in the event of a dispute with the professional regulatory organizations is simply to go to the Court of Queen's Bench. Well, that's a pretty difficult process to undertake if indeed you feel you have a minister trying to dictate how you're operating, and now the only recourse you've got is the Court of Queen's Bench.

The government, the minister can direct the professional regulatory organization under Bill 23 to adopt specific rules or specified rules of professional conduct, codes of ethics, or standards of practices or amend any of these, as if the organizations didn't have those elements to their governance right now. It can make, amend, or repeal any bylaws. It can carry out any power, duty, or function in the act or the regulations to be done in a specific manner. If they don't comply, the minister may actually override them and require that they be implemented.

Now, what business operator in any of the fields, whether you're an engineer, you're an accountant, you're an electrical contractor, whether you're a certified management consultant, whether you're a local government manager of Alberta, whether you're involved in the Supply Chain Management Association of Alberta or any of the businesses that operate under those professional categories – and there are thousands of them. What indeed are you thinking as a business operator or business owner when you read this legislation, seeing the government basically reaching its arms into the doors of your business and telling you how indeed you're going to operate? This is shocking. [interjection] I'll accept the intervention.

10:50

Member Irwin: Thank you again to the Member for Edmonton-McClung for being so accepting of my interventions this morning. I just feel very much like I need to stick my nose into this piece of legislation. You know, it's interesting. What I hear from his remarks, too, is that it's just – for a government that speaks a big game about reducing red tape and reducing barriers for business and organizations, they seem to be adding a whole lot of additional burdens, and that's concerning to me.

I think, you know, an example that my colleague from Edmonton-Decore shared earlier was around the issue of insulin pumps, and I know, clearly, that's not directly related to this bill, but what a clear, relevant example of this government adding barriers to folks at a time when they should be reducing them, when they should be supporting Albertans. That's an issue that I need to raise because we are hearing from thousands of Albertans on that one.

Mr. Dach: Thank you for that intervention, Member. I certainly see a number of barriers that are being added to the operation of professional organizations that the minister will now control. The barriers include allowing the minister to actually limit the advocacy role of the PRO, the professional regulatory organization.

Now, does this sound familiar to anybody in this province, Madam Speaker? I'm sure it should because it follows a theme of the government not liking any opposition in any form whatsoever to anything that it decides it wants to do. A good example of it was seen recently with the number of private members' bills that the government refused to even let out of committee and be debated in this House simply because they were opposition members' bills.

That's the type of control that this government wishes to exercise over private businesses by passing Bill 23 in this House and giving itself the ability through the minister – through the minister only – without recourse except to the Court of Queens' Bench, to actually dictate how a business will operate through the governance regulations that this minister will now have total authority over. It's a quick process that should be shocking to every professional organization that will be governed under this act and others who might seek it. If you are a self-regulated organization looking perhaps to become a PRO in your future, you might have second thoughts, Madam Speaker, about doing that because of the amount of draconian control over your business that this piece of legislation is blatantly looking to exercise.

Now, some of these things used to happen behind closed doors, Madam Speaker, in the past under Conservative governments in this province. I've been here all my life, and certainly the stories were pretty much open and public knowledge. Governments would have their way or step on whatever organization they wished to have change its practices by simply having conversations with them over coffee, breakfast, or – who knows? – maybe Jameson on the steps of some local establishment. Now what the UCP government is doing in this legislation is legitimizing that backroom process and enshrining it in legislation. It's indeed a brazen – not an attempt; it's a brazen, blatant means of establishing the past practices in legislation so that they have total control over the regulatory models that the professional regulated organizations have.

If I was a business operator in this province and if I was a member of these regulated professional institutions or organizations, I would be shocked to know that this bill will empower the minister to establish a regulatory model for each PRO through regulations. It also creates a professional governance officer to advise the minister on the choice of regulatory models. Now, the professional governance officers are not necessarily going to be operating in the interests of the organizations that are about to be regulated. There are existing PROs that are continued under the act until the regulations are made, quote, unquote, but the minister is going to be authorized to make regulations respecting regulatory models. As the Field Law review of this Bill 23 suggests, it gives the minister immense power over the regulation of the professions through regulations. They are also permitted to apply for a change of regulatory model, but it's subject to the discretion of the minister.

One of the most shocking things that I find in this piece of legislation – and it may be slipping past the public's sight, but I want to bring it to the public's attention – is the limitations that the government intends through the minister to be able to put on the advocacy roles of these professional organizations. If you are perhaps an engineer or you're involved in land surveying and you have something that you think is in the public interest to bring forward regarding amending the legislation or the practices of your particular business and how it operates for the safety or betterment of the public and you bring that forward and the government doesn't like it, this legislation, through the governance act changes that it

contemplates, will allow the minister to limit the amount of advocacy that you can bring forward on a particular issue.

Now, this is shocking because it indeed touches upon the fact that you can't trust this government in terms of your ability to exercise your free speech in this country, in terms of how it wants to perhaps maintain bubble zones around abortion clinics so that that will impede access to abortion in this province. Other things that one could contemplate are pretty scary, Madam Speaker, given this exemplary power of limiting advocacy. [interjection] I'll accept the intervention.

Member Irwin: Oh, very kind of the Member for Edmonton-McClung to accept my third and final intervention on this. I wasn't planning necessarily to jump up, but then he brought in the comments around abortion and bubble zones. Don't worry; I won't get on a long tangent about that, but it is . . .

Ms Hoffman: You only have 50 seconds.

Member Irwin: That's right. I only have 50 seconds. Gosh.

You know, it is interesting because what he was getting at is that in the case of Bill 23 really a lot of power is given to the minister, potentially what this same government would label as government overreach. They talk a big game about free speech and about the free market and so forth. The number of times we hear concerns about the federal government – if we drank every time we heard Justin Trudeau's name from that side, we'd be in trouble over here. It's intriguing that this same government continues to be quite hypocritical in their legislation.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Member, for that intervention. I'll be brief. I think I only have a few moments left. I wanted to build on those remarks by saying that, yes, indeed, in Alberta this government prides itself on being the bastion and protector of free enterprise, but what they are doing with this piece of legislation, Madam Speaker, is actually stifling the ability of business.

I was in business for 30 years before being elected to this House, as were many members of this opposition assembly. Therefore, I wanted to know why this government decided to stifle the adaptation ability of business, the innovation, the evolution and adaptability of legislation, throwing all that out the window because the UCP government knows best. Through their minister they're looking to stifle the creativity of businesses by creating a wall around their professional organizations, a wall of control that should be shocking every business owner, under the guise of this legislation and those that might even contemplate joining professional organizations.

In fact, the whole business community, particularly small businesses but large businesses also, is impacted by this legislation in a very large way. It is shocking to see the amount of control that this minister and government wants to have over businesses. I think that the business community should be standing up and saying: "What in the world is going on? What do you think you're trying to pull? We're not standing for it."

With that, Madam Speaker, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

11:00 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 22
Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's
Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: This is its first time being debated in Committee of the Whole. Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I was hoping that the minister might answer the questions that we'd asked at previous stages, but perhaps a little bit later in committee since we will have multiple times to pop up and ask them.

I would start by sort of reiterating one of the main questions I asked in second and would sincerely like to get a response on, and that's the fact that this bill, a very similar version of this bill, was brought forward in a previous sitting of this Legislature and died on the Order Paper. We've waited about six months, and now the government has brought it back. They added one more piece to it that I'm aware of. It seems like the Balancing Pool provisions were added to this bill, but other than that, the bill largely was already before this Chamber and being considered. While I think that generally I'm quite supportive of this bill, I would love to have some clarity from the government about why it is they didn't pass this bill when it was in this Chamber previously. What kind of feedback did they receive that caused them to let the bill die on the Order Paper and then wait six months before bringing it back?

To me, it would seem that defining energy storage is a significant step in the right direction, and I would have liked to have seen the government move quickly in doing that. Energy storage is something that I think many of us are much more aware of now than when I was a kid. We certainly didn't talk much about energy storage because everything was based on short-term, surge energy needs, primarily coal, and then a lot of people still had oil furnaces burning in their houses, too – right? – so they heated their homes with short-term, immediate energy sources. But now, when we look at our electricity grid, more and more of it is coming from other forms, including natural gas as well as renewables, and the opportunities that have surfaced for increased energy storage are significant.

We've seen many, many researchers dedicate their careers to creating better storage mechanisms for energy users here in North America but also around the world. When you look at some of the work that's being done internationally around poverty reduction, access to information, access to the Internet, and access to energy storage so that locally produced renewable energies can be accessed in the long term are two of the big things that poverty reduction is really focusing on in terms of foreign aid and work that's happening around the world.

Making sure that we actually define energy storage, especially when the need is growing so significantly around the world, that we define it and what it means here in the province of Alberta, I would think would be a priority for any sitting government. So why did the government fail to pass the legislation that did that in the previous sitting of this Legislature, six months ago? I definitely think that it is something that I support us moving forward on at some point. What was the reason for the delay? Sometimes governments get feedback after a bill has been introduced and take that into consideration, so if there was a reason for the delay, I think it would be really important for us to know so that we could assess if the reason for the delay has been addressed by the time the bill has been brought back to this place, now, for further consideration.

Another area, of course, is self-supply and export. We are proudly one of the biggest energy producers in the world, and making sure that we can address our own energy needs as well as

export needs is something that I think most Albertans would be supportive of. Again, what was the feedback gathered when this bill was originally introduced, about half a year ago, that required it to be delayed to this point, and has that feedback been addressed through this later version of the bill, which we are now considering as Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022?

And then a third area is requiring distribution facility owners, DFOs, to prepare long-term distribution system plans, which will have to receive regulatory approval. So, again, as I recall, this is something that was in the previous iteration of this bill. What has changed between that bill – why did the government fail to pass it six months ago, and why is it coming forward now? What are the changes? I don't think that these are onerous questions to ask of the government that has brought this bill forward now twice in two different versions but failed to actually get it through the legislative process.

I would like to enthusiastically support this bill, and giving this information, this basic information, not just to members of this Assembly but to the public – because this is about to become a law, should this receive full support from the Assembly or even majority support from the Assembly. And when we are asked to pass a law that was already proposed six months ago, that the government didn't care enough to pass at that point in time, I think we should know why. I think we should know why they didn't bother to move this forward six months ago, when it was already on the Order Paper, when it was already up for consideration, when it had already received some level of engagement, and why is it in a better position to become the law today? Pretty simple questions.

Then, of course, the fourth main area in the bill is about dissolving the Balancing Pool. I won't get into lengthy debate on the merits for and against the Balancing Pool. The government certainly has the opportunity to make that decision and drive in that direction if they so choose. I wish that we were debating where we were at a number of years ago, more than 20 – I'm sure now probably more than 30 – when we moved to such a deregulated, market-based model, really, the most extreme model in North America. The only other one that sort of compares is Texas, and I think many of us remember what happened to energy needs last year, when so many people in Texas were without power for such a long period of time. That caused significant hardships on families and on economies. So I wish we had an opportunity to consider many of the decisions that were driven by other Conservative governments in the past, that have resulted in us being in the situation where we are today.

And I wish this government was really, actually doing something to focus on the main energy issue that comes forward to me every time I talk to people about what's on their mind, what are their biggest issues, and one of the number one issues that comes up here in Edmonton-Glenora, in Canmore, in Calgary, in Spruce Grove-Stony Plain: like, regularly people bring up affordability and affordability specifically as it relates to energy costs. We know that this government has sat by while energy prices, specifically electricity prices, power prices for ordinary families have gone up significantly. Many people have talked about hundreds of dollars each and every month being added to their power bills, and we know that this government has been hearing that feedback because they have at least in language talked about rebates, right? They've said that they're going to bring forward some energy rebates that were for January, February, and March. They said this to us in March.

They had us pass supplementary supply, a spending bill, to be able to pay for that money out of the last fiscal year, in March, because they were going to give people \$50 a month – not

significant but \$50 a month – for each of those three months that people were seeing hundreds of dollars in terms of increased costs on their power bills. So the government finally said, “Okay; we will bring forward some kind of a rebate,” asked us all to move this forward quickly in March. Here we are, the middle of May, and Alberta families are still waiting for that, what the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland referred to as a paltry rebate – not significant but something – and the government can’t even get it out the door.

When we’ve actually asked for clarification that it will be out the door by the end of May, still a full two and a half months after they originally brought up this idea for Albertans, they refused to pass that amendment and have moved this, kicked the can further down the road, making Alberta families wait months more before giving them any guarantee that they will actually get that paltry rebate into their household budgets. In the meantime Alberta families are paying hundreds of dollars more each and every month, and that time keeps adding up, and the pressure keeps growing.

11:10

I really wish that this bill we’re considering today, Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta’s Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022 – I think it has many, many worthwhile pieces in it. I think that the government is really missing the big picture, though, which is how desperate Albertans are to see their government do anything to address affordability for them and their families. For a government that campaigned hard on one particular aspect of affordability in the last campaign, I think that a lot of Albertans expected to see significant savings for them and their families; instead, what we’ve seen over the last three years is that costs have gone up for pretty much everything, including the cost for electricity, significantly, under the present government’s leadership.

So when it comes to a government that will actually stand up for you and your family, for your individual bank accounts, for the energy needs that you have, I think we’ve seen time and time again that you can’t count on the UCP to stand up for you and your family. You can’t trust them to actually follow through on the things that they espouse during an election. They’ve ignored the problem of skyrocketing bills for months, and they keep failing Albertans in that regard, and we deserve to have the direct support for individual Albertans. Again, why did the minister take so long to bring this bill back, and why did this bill fail to be implemented in the last session?

I also want to take a few moments to talk about energy needs and what so many Albertans are doing in spite of their government. One of those pieces is that many are moving forward with harnessing wind and harnessing the sun to do whatever they can to both reduce their own personal emissions in terms of their household consumption but also to reduce their monthly bills, because most of the research shows that in somewhere between five and 10 years you can amortize the cost of solar module installation for a personal household. It definitely makes a big difference to the monthly bill, especially once you’ve hit that mark where you’ve paid off the upfront capital investment. That’s one of the reasons why, when the money for the price on carbon was actually staying in Alberta instead of all being sent to Ottawa, energy efficiency as well as initiatives around reducing the actual draw on the grid were priorities. They aren’t for the current government. I’m very well aware of that.

But we still have a federal rebate, and many municipalities are bringing forward their own rebates as well to try to off-set some of that upfront original capital pressure that’s put on so many families, when they’re already paying hundreds of dollars more on their power bills and they’re trying to find a way to get out from under

that pressure, and the province is failing to give them any sort of incentive to further reduce their household consumption.

Part of why people want to reduce their household consumption is because there are many ways that you can reduce your emissions for a financial benefit without having a negative impact on your quality of life, and this is certainly one of them. When you’re running your dishwasher and watching your TV, whether it’s being powered by natural gas or formerly by coal or by renewables, most people at the time they’re turning on their device just want to make sure that they can wash their dishes and watch TV. That’s what their driver is. And it doesn’t impact them in a negative quality-of-life way to know that that energy is coming from a variety of sources at the time of consumption. The biggest impact, of course, is when you look at your bill and you see how much your usage was that month.

One of the reasons why many governments, including – right now we’re in the city of Edmonton – the government of Canada, and many other provinces have moved forward on rebates is to help with that upfront cost at the very beginning of the capital install to create more opportunities for energy to be produced locally through renewables. What it also means is that there are more other forms of energy that can be saved for other markets or for other types of use outside of individual household consumption.

So why the government here still fails to see the benefits and actually do anything to address affordability for Alberta families – because obviously there are two ways that I’ve highlighted so far in my remarks as they relate to Bill 22 that the government could quite easily do to address affordability for consumers, for people who need energy, and we all need energy. One is, of course, to have an actual rebate plan that’s meaningful and that’s timely, and another would be to find more ways for people to address their own energy needs and reduce their bills over the short and long term. The government here has failed to do either of those things to actually address affordability for everyday families.

I do want to again say that I think the piece around defining storage is very good news, and I think it does relate primarily to forms of energy that are produced through renewables. Sometimes you’ll hear people who don’t like renewables saying: well, it’s not windy every day. That’s true, but we have some of the best wind of anywhere in the world, and many other countries have found ways to harness the wind on windy days and store that energy for use in future times when they need it.

Us actually defining storage for energy storage, I think, is an important step forward for us to be able to actually have full utilization of the natural resources that we are so fortunate to have, both renewable and nonrenewable. We have many exceptional forms of energy here in the province of Alberta, and making sure that we can harness it all, I think, is the wise thing to do, and I think that we all know how much people across the planet need energy to be able to function.

I know that I’ve read about people having – oh, shoot, I forget it. The term escapes me. But when their power bills are at risk of being shut off, there are sort of energy consumption limits put on somebody’s bill and put on their address so that you can only use a certain amount of energy per monthly billing cycle. We’ve heard from people who needed their energy for things like running their oxygen machines, and they couldn’t draw on the grid and have to run their oxygen machine and run their microwave or run, you know, their washing machine at the same time. That definitely doesn’t speak to the kind of dignity that I think we all aspire for every Albertan to have, the ability to have reliable, cost-effective energy that’s there when you need it.

I think that those are a couple of things I wish this bill would do to take it from where we are now to a better place, where we could

all even more enthusiastically support it. I think that it is important that we move this bill forward. Again, though, given that the minister is the same – it's not like we've seen a change around the cabinet table as it relates to this area of responsibility in the bill. So understanding the backstory about what happened between when this bill, in its previous form, was introduced and what happened when it was brought back I think would help us have a better understanding of what exactly is going on behind the curtain, so to speak, because there is a lot of concern from everyday Albertans that this government is so stuck in their own political drama that they are keeping the actual needs of ordinary Albertans as an afterthought.

And that's one of the ways it feels in this bill: it's an afterthought in terms of affordability. Nothing is really being done in this bill to address the biggest issue facing most Alberta families. The number of Alberta families who report being \$200 away from financial ruin is an embarrassment, and it is shameful that in a province as rich as ours we have so many families on the brink of bankruptcy. The fact that this bill does nothing to address affordability and has done nothing to answer the questions about why it was delayed for so long between prior readings, between prior sessions and now – certainly, a lot has gone on politically over the last six months.

We know that there are many people in the UCP, many sitting MLAs in the UCP, who are more focused on infighting and on who's in the position of power – and I'm sure for good reasons. I'm sure that they have been frustrated by the way the current Premier has been treating them and party members, specifically when I think about the kinds of messages that have leaked out over the last several months, where there is name-calling directed towards people within their own party, probably, it appears, people within the caucus. And when those types of messages make their way out, it's clear that the Premier and probably his cabinet and probably his MLAs are spending more energy focused on infighting and on how they're going to arrange the deck chairs on the *Titanic* than they are on the issues that matter most to Alberta families.

11:20

I would say that clearly this bill has missed the mark when it comes to addressing energy affordability, but the other pieces in it, again, I'm fine with and I think are probably going to move our system forward and therefore should probably be passed. In fact, they probably should have been passed six months ago, when the government first brought these ideas forward to this Assembly and then sat on the bill and waited for it to die on the Order Paper. So by failing to say why this bill is better than the previous bill, by failing to say why the government chose not to move forward on those first three really big pieces – again, defining energy storage, self-supply and export, and requiring distribution facility owners to prepare a long-term distribution system plan which will have to receive government approval... [Ms Hoffman's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 22? The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am excited to talk about Bill 22 and electric power for Albertans. As Bill 22 seeks to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of electric power production for Alberta businesses and families, it is something that I hope that all of us in the Legislature can support.

Madam Chair, I need to express the truth that the NDP were a disaster for power in Alberta. The NDP accelerated – I am excited to let all Albertans know the truth. The NDP accelerated the

shutdown of coal power production prior – prior – to the end of the economic life of this infrastructure and . . .

Mr. Dach: It saved lives.

Mr. Stephan: Madam Chair, that dysfunctional thinking saddled Alberta taxpayers with having to pay over a billion dollars of compensation to producers. At the end of the day, whether they want to admit it or not, the NDP made things worse. They made power cost more, yet they attack our government. They say that we should do more.

We need to understand, whatever rebate is provided, who is going to actually pay for it. Who is paying for a rebate to Alberta power users? Madam Chair, Alberta taxpayers are paying for it. I want to ask the question: should Alberta taxpayers subsidize the utility cost for themselves? Is there another way? Let's pull back the curtain. How about this? How about getting Quebec taxpayers to pay for the power of Alberta residents? How would we feel about that? It sounds kind of crazy – doesn't it? – but that is exactly what they are doing to us.

I want to share the truth with all Albertans, and here it is. Quebec enjoys the lowest residential power rates in all of North America. How do they do that? Quebec Hydro is using their Crown corporation, Quebec Hydro, to get money from Alberta businesses and families. You see, Quebec Hydro sells their power to Quebec residents at under market, the lowest in all of North America. You know what? When the NDP were in power, they absolutely did nothing. They did absolutely nothing. They made things worse.

The Quebec government: by selling their power at under market to Quebec residents, what they do is that they actually decrease their fiscal capacity. Equalization is determined by looking at each individual province's fiscal capacity. So by selling their power at under market to Quebec residents, lowest in North America, they actually decrease their fiscal capacity. By decreasing their fiscal capacity, they get more equalization. Their principal source of equalization is Alberta businesses and families. We pay over \$10 billion every single year to Quebec indirectly. While we are saddled with high power rates, we are indirectly subsidizing Quebec residents with the lowest power rates in all of North America. Madam Chair, why aren't we confronting that? Why is it that Alberta taxpayers are having to not only pay for the power of Alberta residents but Quebec residents also?

Now, Madam Chair, how would we replicate that result? You know what we would have to do? We would have to provide power to Albertans through a Crown corporation at below market prices just like Quebec does with Quebec Hydro, and we would have to manufacture losses in this Crown corporation in a way that decreases Alberta's fiscal capacity in the billions, reducing our capacity to pay billions more in equalization to Quebec.

Now, a challenge with this strategy is that it could be undermined with amendments to an equalization formula to punish Alberta or frustrate attempts to stop having to subsidize Quebec. Madam Chair, with the Supreme Court of Canada saying that carbon taxes are okay, which the NDP love, by the way, the Trudeau-NDP axis government can simply adjust or come up with new, creative carbon taxes that are even more prejudicial to Alberta to attack Alberta businesses and families.

We need to remember, Madam Chair, that the Premier of Quebec says that one of his favourite things about Canada is equalization. Now, I want to ask the question to Albertans, to Canadians. If Quebec did not get to take from Canada, from Alberta, would they still be here? We know the truth; the answer is no. They would have left a long time ago. The only change to equalization that Quebec and Ottawa will support is a change that allows them to take even

more from Alberta businesses and families. They are ignoring the equalization result, and nothing is happening.

Madam Chair, do we think for a minute that as Quebec and Ottawa accelerate towards becoming fiscal basket cases, they will look at the economic success of Alberta and leave us alone? No. They will absolutely not. Why do I say this? Because we can look back and see what they have been doing for decades in varying degrees.

Now, this is a very serious matter, but I'm not saying this in anger. But there is no point in sticking one's head in the sand and pretending to ignore the reality of our circumstances, both the great blessings we have but also the threats from this NDP-Liberal axis. They are a clear and present danger to Albertans. How are we going to protect ourselves? How do we move towards having more self-reliance? Madam Chair, this is a very difficult situation, but one thing that we can do is – there is great safety in the truth. I love the truth. In the end, the truth always prevails notwithstanding lies and distortions, and numbers don't alter the truth. If a majority believes in a lie, truth is unaffected, and in the end it does prevail.

Madam Chair, as it relates to electric power, we need to let every Alberta ratepayer know the truth, that every year Albertans are paying billions of dollars to Quebec to subsidize the lowest power rates in North America as they are suffering under high power rates. The more Albertans know the truth, even if it challenges the status quo, the more Albertans will push Alberta government to do what is right. The more Albertans know the truth, the more accountable government will be. The more accountable government will be, the better they will be. We want government to have the best culture of government possible. The NDP were a failure. I'd love, as we strive to be better in every single way, to have a culture of excellence in government, and Bill 22 is moving in the right direction, but there's more to do.

Thank you.

11:30

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's nice to hear a mention of Bill 22 towards the end of the member's speech. That's how I kind of realized that the speech was about Bill 22. Although it's a good bill, many things that the government talks about with respect to the bill and the government member talked about with respect to the bill have nothing to do with facts, truth, or anything resembling that. [interjections] When I hear these talking points, two things come to mind.

Mr. Getson: To accelerate phasing out coal to save the environment, apparently, was ridiculous.

Mr. Sabir: Are you done with that?

The Chair: Hon. members, I think it's a good time to remind members to direct their comments through the chair. Also, only one member has the floor to speak.

The hon. member.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through you, I was trying to make sure that the member was done with whatever he was trying to say.

When I hear government speaking notes and government talking points on this file and this bill, two things come to mind. One, either they are completely incompetent, or they are not truthful about this file. I think I will go back a little bit. When we talk about the rising cost of utilities, that Albertans are hurting, that they're looking for

relief, the government promised many times that Albertans will get a \$50 paltry rebate, but still they are waiting for it, and their utility bills are through the roof. Government members will get up and they will try to tell Albertans, tell this House that somehow from '15 to '19 there were transmission lines built which are the reason for these rising utility prices.

Back in 2008-2009 the then PC government gave cabinet powers to approve energy infrastructure without any public hearing. That's a matter of public record. That's what the previous government did. The two major lines that were built – like, they started building those lines back in 2009. The western Alberta transmission line, eastern Alberta transmission line: they were both approved in 2012, and 2012 is well before when we became government. That's when the PCs were building energy infrastructure, and yes, it was overbuilt. Back then NDP leader Brian Mason was opposed to it. He warned government then that this will result in higher energy prices and Albertans ultimately will pay for that. The government, so conveniently, ignores all of that and wants Albertans to believe that somehow transmission lines were built in '15 to '19.

One day even the minister suggested that our fault is that we didn't cancel those. Madam Chair, let me tell you that the contracts that we see government used to sign were always cheaper to honour than to cancel because they often had put clauses there that would socialize all kinds of losses onto Albertans, and profits would be taken by their insiders, by their close friends, and by big corporations. That's exactly how they have signed on to these contracts and overbuilding this energy transmission.

There is no truth to any of those assertions that the NDP were responsible for building transmission lines. It was all PCs, and government members should look into *Hansard*, government members should look into Alberta's legislative records instead of blindly standing up for this government. They should stand up for their constituents, and they should tell them that the number one reason for rising cost prices is the profits that companies are making. That's the number one reason. That's the people from, you know, the University of Calgary School of Public Policy, that came out last month and with facts and figures showed how over the last year or so companies are making the profit in excessive amounts, and that's the number one factor for the rising gas prices.

The second thing. Government will get up and tell us that our government shut down coal plants and that's the reason for the rising electricity prices. For everyone's information, Madam Chair, there was a regulation passed by the federal government – and the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche will know that; back then he was a member of the federal Parliament – and the name of the regulation was reduction of carbon dioxide emissions from coal-fired generation of electricity regulation. That's a federal regulation, and the statutory order and regulation number is 2012-167. I strongly urge the members of government caucus to look up this regulation and look up what this regulation did to Alberta's electricity market or Alberta's coal-fired plants. At that time there were 18 plants in Alberta that were coal powered, and out of that 12 of them were scheduled to shut down through this regulation by December 31, 2029 . . .

Mr. Getson: You didn't accelerate any of the other ones?

Mr. Sabir: . . . twelve out of 18.

Mr. Getson: And you didn't have to pay out \$1.3 billion in contracts?

Mr. Sabir: Madam Chair, through you, if the member wants to talk, if he's allowed to talk, I am willing to cede the floor to him, but I'm sure he's not allowed to talk.

Anyway, 12 out of 18 plants were shut down under the Harper government, and that was in 2012. The workers who were in these plants didn't get any support whatsoever. These business owners didn't get any support whatsoever from the federal Conservative government. These are 12 out of 18 plants.

The remaining six plants were TransAlta, ATCO, and Capital Power. When we accelerated their transition, we negotiated with them, and their plants were converted to gas so that Albertans would have a reliable supply of electricity from a relatively cleaner source using Alberta's natural gas. With that, we also provided \$40 million to Albertans whose livelihoods were impacted so that they can get the training, so that they can get the skills upgrade and transition into new jobs while the federal government just shut down 12 of the 18 with the dint of law without giving a penny to Albertans, without any regard for the jobs of those who were in those plants.

11:40

Then, yes, we also worked with them. Oftentimes the government talks about \$1.36 billion. That was money committed over 14 years so that those plants can transition to gas plants and Albertans can have a reliable source of energy. I think I would argue, and Albertans will agree, that that investment was better than spending \$1.3 billion on a pipeline to nowhere; \$1.3 billion on Keystone XL that didn't go anywhere. It was literally a bet on Donald Trump winning the U.S. election.

Mr. Stephan: They fired you.

Mr. Getson: And they honoured foreign policy, national security.

Mr. Sabir: They wasted that \$1.3 billion, Madam Chair.

Mr. Getson: Look at what's happening with Ukraine.

Mr. Sabir: If they want to speak to that waste or any other waste, they certainly could, Madam Chair, through you. But they don't want to listen to facts. They don't want to listen to truth.

These are the facts, what the PC government did from 2009 to 2014. That's part of *Hansard*. That's part of Alberta's legislative history, what the Stephen Harper government did. I think that if they are on talking terms, they could ask the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche that that was done when federal Conservatives were in government; 12 out of 18 plants were shut down back then.

So against this backdrop, when I hear government assertions that somehow from '15 to '19 we built transmission lines, we did everything wrong, and that's how prices are up, electricity prices: that's not true. If this government believes that to be true, then this government cannot be trusted and they are incompetent. If this government knows this history and is still not telling Albertans the whole story, then they are not up front with Albertans about the facts.

At any rate, they will blame anyone and everyone for their failures, for their mistakes, for their lack of leadership because that's what we have heard from this government from day one. Anything that happens here – if they are caught drinking liquor in the sky palace, it's somebody's fault because somebody took a picture, not their fault. They were not supposed to get caught. It's not their fault. Somebody should not have taken the picture without their consent, without letting them know. That's their fault.

Mr. Nally: Let's talk about Bill 22.

Mr. Sabir: Anyway, Bill 22 still is a good piece of legislation. It defines energy storage. It will help us capture energy at one point

and let us store it for use at another. This is important for a couple of reasons. One, it will make sure that Albertans have a reliable source and supply of energy. So that's a really good thing about it.

The second thing is that it will also help us address the environment, that this government doesn't care much – sometimes even they don't believe in climate change, but the fact is that this energy storage can help us address climate change as well. We do know that most people do believe in climate change. They think that as humans, as legislators we need to take climate change seriously. We need to take action on addressing climate change. I think that by creating room for energy storage, by creating a legal framework for energy storage, that will help us create efficiencies for the grid. It will help us reduce GHG emissions by introducing more flexibility and by integrating energy to a storage system from more environment-friendly sources such as solar, such as renewables, such as wind. I think that's a good step, and it will help Albertans in the long run, and I recognize that it's a good thing that government did.

Another thing. While the Member for Red Deer-South was speaking – when he was speaking, he was talking about Quebec Hydro and some other provincially owned corporations. Before I became elected, I was working on a file that had something to do with another Crown corporation, Manitoba Hydro, and I was doing some due diligence for some First Nation on a file. I started looking at Manitoba Hydro's record. They were not only providing the cheapest electricity at that point in Canada; they were also providing technical assistance to 55 countries across the world. Not only were they providing electricity, the cheapest electricity, to the people of Manitoba; they were exporting that electricity, and they were also providing technical assistance to 55 countries: how to generate electricity, how to, I guess, export electricity, and how to deal with electricity markets. [interjections] That's the capacity of one Crown corporation that I know of. I think that they pick and choose whatever suits their arguments. They will bring that forward and ignore everything else; it doesn't matter how relevant, how factual.

Anyway, in closing, I think that energy storage is a good step. It will help us reduce our GHG emissions. It's good for the environment. It's good for Albertans. Also, requiring distribution facility owners to do long-term planning will, again, go against the ideological belief of this government that they don't want to intervene in markets or don't want to require anyone to plan ahead because the market does everything on its own. But this provision in this act will require market actors, distribution facility owners to prepare long-term distribution system plans. Madam Chair, there is a chance that they might prepare plans which are not good, so an additional safeguard is that they will need regulatory approval from the government so that the government will make sure that the plans they prepared are good and they are in the best interests of Albertans, the best interests of our grid. The government is now intervening in the market to make sure that distribution system owners have the plans in place with respect to their business.

Lastly, I would say that the government also had one piece of legislation, a similar piece of legislation, six months ago. The government didn't pass that piece of legislation. I think it will be important to know: from that time on, what has changed? Had government received any feedback? Had government consulted with anyone in the industry? Their record on consultation is really, really poor as well. They think they know the best, and they don't bother themselves with any kind of consultation, so it will be important to know what has changed since they dropped the last piece of legislation. What's new in this one in terms of consultations with the stakeholders?

I think that with that, I will take a seat, and I would also urge the government that whenever they are talking about Bill 22, they should talk about Bill 22.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

11:50

The Chair: Are there are others? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. This has been a very, very nice conversation in here this morning. I just wanted to thank the minister for this bill and for looking at this, in particular the Balancing Pool. We all know some of the concerns that we've had in the past, and I think that, you know, when you have the privilege of being in government and you're working with such a diverse group of people, especially folks from all ends of the spectrum of – and electricity is confusing even when you understand it. It's very, very complex. It's difficult. There are a lot of different organizations and, actually, a lot of personalities at the table, too.

Again, I want to thank the minister for being able to co-ordinate and collaborate with so many of these organizations, because I think all of us have struggled from time to time in this place in trying to understand what's in the best interest not only of this sector, but in particular I think every one of us right now in this place is receiving bazillions of e-mails of the difficulties that people are having, how hard it is. You know, there is so much going on. We are looking at inflation. We're looking at increased rates for electricity. We're looking at how it is that we can support people who are vulnerable.

So many things that are on the personal side, but then also when we look at the grid, the important thing for me in this legislation is really exposing and having some transparency around the Balancing Pool. As we bring that together – and again thank you so much to the minister for the opportunity. I'm not quite – you know, there'll be always things in electricity that have to be tweaked and fixed. When you take a look at your own legislation and you realize that it's not working exactly right and you're willing to come back to the drawing board and look at that and fix it, that takes a lot of guts, and it takes a real, good consultation with the folks that you're dealing with. Thank you so much, Minister, for doing that.

It's so hard to predict what's going to happen. There is so much that goes into the discussions around this, but one of the things I wanted to say – and I just want to touch on this for a bit – is that the ability to debate it here is one of the most important things that we can do. Every single one of us is coming from a very different position, whether we're rural MLAs, we're city MLAs, about the impacts that this is having on our constituents. When you have more generators that are able to apply and supply into the grid and are contributing, the hope is, and particularly in being able to put it with AESO versus the Balancing Pool, to have a more stable structure. I think that, at the end of the day, if that's what we're able to accomplish through this legislation and other pieces of legislation going forward, it's a really, really good step in the right direction.

Again, I think that, you know, we're looking at – if I'm understanding it correctly, like, we have a lot of large producers that

are already enabled to be able to participate, and this is very enabling legislation, the process being that the more the market is able to be a market and bring people into the market, the more stable the prices will be for the people of Alberta. I really look forward to seeing how this bill will engage not only with the stakeholders but with the people of Alberta, and I just want to take a minute to thank the minister for bringing the bill forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 22, Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. Just before I address a couple of things that were said, let me just say that I agree. This is my first time speaking to this bill, so just to put on the record that I do believe that there are a lot of positives in this bill that have the potential to help modernize Alberta's electricity grid, which is a good thing, and if implemented well, these certainly will have a positive long-term impact.

Now, the associate minister is – you know, hopefully, he'll answer the question. I know that two of my colleagues have, before me, asked the same question, and I think it would be great to hear an answer from him. Those were: why did it take the minister so long to bring back the legislation – I'm sure there's a good reason; perhaps it was around consultation – and why did the minister abandon the bill last session and now bring back a similar bill? Just to shed some light on that would be super helpful. If he would jump up and explain that or answer that question, that would be great. I'm guessing that's going to be a big no.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. Pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) we will now rise and report progress.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Rosin: Madam Speaker, Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 22.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried. Looking for the hon. Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity to perhaps move an adjournment.

Mr. Nally: You want to break for lunch?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Nally: I didn't realize. Yeah, thank you, Madam Speaker. Should really wake me up earlier next time.

I make a motion that we break for lunch – no; adjourn.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:56 a.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 10, 2022

Day 32

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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| Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk | Nancy Robert, Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Committees | Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms |
| Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk | Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary Programs | Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms |
| Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary Counsel | Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i> | Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms |
| Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and Director of House Services | | Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms |

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| Jason Kenney | Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations |
| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

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| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gottfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
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Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Singh
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gottfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
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Turton
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Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

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Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

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Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 10, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I do have a number of very special guests joining us today, and I beg your indulgence for a little bit of extra time this afternoon as well. Members, this morning I had the privilege of meeting with a very special guest who is joining us in the Speaker's gallery. Please welcome the ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium, His Excellency Patrick Van Gheel, accompanied by Mr. Arnaud Gaspart, deputy head of mission at the Belgian embassy, and Ms Lori Schmidt, honorary consul designate for Belgium in Alberta. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also joining us in the Speaker's gallery is a delegation from the Central Alberta Economic Partnership. It is Economic Development Week. I ask that you please welcome Chief Leonard Standing on the road of the Montana First Nation at Maskwacis and vice-chair of CAEP; James Carpenter, chair of CAEP; and Kimberley Worthington, executive director of CAEP. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Last, hon. members, certainly not least, it's my great honour and pleasure to introduce to you a former member, Mr. Neville Roper, who sits in the Speaker's gallery today. Neville joined the air force in 1941 just shy of his 19th birthday and served until his discharge in the fall of 1945, when he returned home to Rimbey, Alberta. He has been a member of the Royal Canadian Legion Branch branch 36 for over 76 years. Always an active member of his community, Neville was a member of the Rimbey firefighting brigade, a town councillor, and was also the mayor for 11 years. From 1967 to 1971 Neville Roper served as the Member of the Legislative Assembly representing the constituency of Ponoka.

He and his wife, Edith, travelled extensively until her passing in 1999. Neville continued to explore the world, celebrating his 78th birthday building houses in Fiji with Habitat for Humanity and his 82nd birthday while on a bus tour in the Dominican Republic. Members, Neville Sydney Roper celebrated his 100th birthday on March 5 and is here to participate in a project we're working on in association with former Members of the Legislative Assembly to capture the stories behind the service of former MLAs. He is joined by his daughter Lisa Madsen and his 92-year-old sister Doris Moonie. I would invite you all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Mr. Roper reported many, many stories to me today, including that of stealing former member Tom Copithorne's boots and having the pages scurry them out. I'm glad that the members are equally as well behaved today as they were when you were a member.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, joining us in the gallery are two guests of the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod. Please welcome Liz Charyna and Deborah Storlien-Cundy.

Also joining us is Karen Gosbee, a guest of the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Also in the gallery are Burton Bailey and Emma Kunaka, Red Deer-North constituency office, and Vesna Sertic, constituency manager for Calgary-Peigan. I invite you to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

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

Federal Impact Assessment Act

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for an opportunity to rise on a ministerial statement today on a very important issue. In August 2019 the Trudeau government brought into force a new set of regulations for federal environmental impact assessments, also known as Bill C-69 or better known here in Alberta as the no-more-pipelines bill.

Mr. Speaker, this law weaponized environmental law to attack industries and provinces that do not agree with the environmental zealots in Ottawa. Alberta's government very quickly responded and launched a constitutional challenge to the act on the grounds that the no-more-pipelines bill was a federal intrusion on provincial jurisdiction.

In February 2021 the Alberta Court of Appeal heard the case. Now, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note that Alberta was supported by many key partners who intervened in support of our province in this case, including the Attorney General of Ontario, the Attorney General of Saskatchewan, the Woodland Cree First Nation, the Indian Resource Council, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, the Explorers and Producers Association of Canada, the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association, the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association, and Alberta Enterprise Group. We would like to take a moment and thank all of those intervenors for their critical support in defending against the Trudeau Liberals' intrusion on provincial rights.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report to the House that today in the Alberta Court of Appeal there was a decision made on this case. In a historical ruling, ruling in favour, the court clearly ruled in favour of our province's argument. This ruling represents one of the most significant rulings on environmental law in the history of our country. This is very good news. As of today Bill C-69, the no-more-pipelines law, can no longer handcuff Alberta and our job creators coming to invest in this great province.

Now, I'd like to take this opportunity to read some of the key points from this historical decision. I would draw your attention to paragraph 421 of the decision, where it says, "the [Impact Assessment Act] constitutes a profound invasion into provincial legislative jurisdiction and provincial proprietary rights." Strong words, Mr. Speaker.

From paragraph 423 it says:

The unavoidable effect of the [Impact Assessment Act] would be the centralization of the governance of Canada to the point this country would no longer be recognized as a real federation. This is not what the framers of our Constitution intended. And it is certainly not what provincial governments agreed to either on patriation of the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize this. The Court of Appeal today clearly stated that this type of legislation and constitutional infringement would make our country unrecognizable. I will point out that the job of the federal government is to keep our nation united, but sadly Trudeau and his Liberal government are insisting on using laws to break our very country apart.

I will go further into this ruling, Mr. Speaker, and draw your attention to paragraph 424 in its entirety. It says:

Where natural resources are involved, it is each province that is concerned with the sustainable development of its natural resources, not the federal government. It is the province that owns these natural resources, not the federal government. And it is the province and its people who lose if those natural resources cannot be developed, not the federal government. The federal government does not have the constitutional right to veto an intra-

provincial designated project based on its view of the public interest. Nor does the federal government have the constitutional right to appropriate the birthright and economic future of the citizens of a province.

Mr. Speaker, for those reasons the Alberta Court of Appeal found the Federal Impact Assessment, Bill C-69, or the no-more-pipelines bill, ultra vires Parliament. That means that with the no-more-pipelines bill the federal government has completely – and I want to stress this; completely – overstepped their powers and disrespected the concept of the Canadian Confederation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take a moment to recognize the critical role of Indigenous communities and what they played in this case. Alberta's government has heard loud and clear from Indigenous communities that they can and that they want to participate in and benefit from responsible natural resource development in Alberta, which is why the Minister of Indigenous Relations created the Indigenous litigation fund to make sure the voices of Indigenous people could be heard in legal actions that were attempting to hinder responsible resource development in our country and make sure that Indigenous peoples could be heard in those moments and make their desires for increased market access for natural resources or pipeline development be known and ultimately make sure that they can share in the economic benefit of these projects.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, this fund helped the Woodland Cree First Nation to intervene in Alberta's constitutional challenge of the federal Impact Assessment Act in late February 2021. I'd also like to note that the litigation fund is also currently being used to support Fort McKay Métis Nation and Willow Lake Métis Nation's challenge to the federal Oil Tanker Moratorium Act. I know that the Minister of Energy looks forward to updating this Chamber on this important litigation in the future.

Mr. Speaker, our government is proud to back Indigenous communities to take legal actions that support their decisions to own, manage, and participate in natural resource development projects. We are working with Indigenous peoples to build a prosperous future that benefits all the people of Alberta. The court found in paragraph 315 that this legislative scheme . . .

referring to Bill C-69,

. . . permits the federal executive to stop intra-provincial designated projects authorized by a province or provincial authority even where agreements have been made by an Indigenous entity with either or both the provincial government and project proponent and with provincial approval again constitutes federal overreach. It also underscores that the true purpose of this legislative scheme is to empower the federal executive to veto intra-provincial designated projects based on its view of the public interest, not what is in the interests of the Indigenous entity involved, never mind the interests of the province in question and its citizens.

Additionally, the court also noted that

all three appellate courts that heard the Greenhouse Gas References concluded that the federal government did not have the constitutional jurisdiction to regulate GHG emissions in a province.

The court found that the federal government

does not have the right under the national concern doctrine to regulate GHG emissions generally within a province including from intra-provincial designated projects approved by that province, much less stop such projects from proceeding.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government followed through on our commitment to stand up for Albertans against the unjustified intrusion into provincial jurisdiction by the Trudeau government, better known as the Liberal-NDP alliance, which, it is important to

make clear, is supported by the provincial NDP, who continue to support Ottawa's efforts to attack our largest industry. Alberta agrees with the Court of Appeal that the impact assessment goes against what the framers of our Constitution intended and is certainly not what provincial governments agreed to when they agreed to the patriation of our Constitution. This decision means that the impact assessment cannot be used by Canada in Alberta. The act is unconstitutional, and, in the opinion of the court, the federal government has overstepped its powers.

The Court of Appeal agreed, Mr. Speaker, that the federal government is needlessly overhauling a regulatory and environmental review process that is already one of the world's best, putting jobs and investment at risk. Alberta wants to see investment grow, not driven away by unbalanced, unpredictable new rules for large-scale infrastructure projects. Alberta stands by the principle that provinces are best situated to make policy decisions for our own unique economies and for our own citizens. The Ottawa-knows-best attitude of the federal government disrupts the constitutional balance of our federation, and it undermines our rights to manage our own affairs, and the Alberta Court of Appeal's decision is a major step in correcting this trend.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, the decision of the court is clear.

Where natural resources are involved, it is each province that is concerned with the . . . development of its natural resources, not the federal government. It is the province that owns those natural resources, not the federal government. And it is the province and its people who lose if those natural resources cannot be developed, not the federal government. The federal government does not have the constitutional right to veto and intra-provincial designated project based on its view of the public interest. Nor does the federal government have the constitutional right to appropriate the birthright and economic future of the citizens of a province.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that this country cannot be a federation at all if this type of legislation is allowed to stand. The Liberal-NDP alliance must stand down now its weaponization of environmental law against our largest industries and respect the rights of provinces all across this country. Alberta will continue to vigorously defend our constitutional rights and the people of the great province of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a member of the opposition has up to three minutes to respond to the ministerial statement. I see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to reply. Now, as is customary in the Chamber, the Official Opposition did not receive any notice that there was going to be a ministerial statement, so my reply will be necessarily brief and necessarily unscripted.

However, I thank the government for bringing forward their analysis of the just-released decision. I thank them for providing the House with some of their commentary and some of their analysis. Of course, as intervenors they would have been provided some heads-up that the decision was coming. However, we as the Official Opposition did not benefit from that, so we are still reviewing the ABCA decision and how that decision lines up with the concerns that we brought through to the Senate of Canada through various means through our intergovernmental relations work through 2018 and '19, and we can provide further comment about that to this House at the appropriate time, Mr. Speaker.

There is no question that there were serious concerns both with the legislation and with the regulations that were ultimately gazetted in the summer of 2019, Mr. Speaker. That analysis was done, and we found many points of agreement with the current government in that

analysis through the development of this legislation. There is no question that as we review the ABCA decision, we will do so through the lens of finding full value for our resources, getting our oil and gas products to market, and building an economy with good-paying jobs for Alberta's future, and that remains our focus.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to provide this reply to the ministerial statement.

Members' Statements

Unemployment, Wages, and Cost of Living

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, the UCP likes to talk a lot about booms and swagger, but the reality is that Albertans are feeling the pinch. Despite the April job numbers showing an uptick, there are several concerning facts the UCP continues to ignore.

Alberta's unemployment rate is still higher than the national average, Calgary has the highest unemployment rate of any city in the country, and Alberta has the highest long-term unemployment rate in the country. Roughly 1 in 3 unemployed workers have been unemployed for six months or longer. At the same time, wages are failing to keep pace with inflation. In fact, Alberta has had the slowest wage growth in the country since the start of the pandemic, and investment and GDP are still below prepandemic levels.

Meanwhile the UCP piles on additional costs as half of Albertans are just \$200 away from not meeting their financial obligations at the end of the month. Income taxes, property taxes, tuition, utilities, and auto insurance have all gone up because of this government. They are literally pushing Albertans to the brink. Rather than recognize these challenges, the UCP tells Albertans that everything is fine or that someone else is to blame, and rather than focusing on the needs of Albertans, the UCP is focused on themselves.

It is time for a government that puts Albertans first, one that puts more money in Albertans' pockets, creates good jobs, and helps hard-working Albertans get ahead. It is time for an NDP government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Calgary Office Revitalization and Expansion Working Group Report

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, last month our party released a fully costed plan for revitalizing Calgary's downtown, a serious, quantified investment in tower conversion, small-business grants, and support for cultural events along with a world-class innovation district. So I was flabbergasted to read the government's report today, the one that's eight months late, to discover that the UCP is so far behind. No commitments. No funding. To the Premier: why is this report more about identifying an already-known problem than funding the solution, or, put another way, where's the money?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, can you feel that, what's in the air right now? Can you feel it? NDP hypocrisy. Not only did they chase away investment by the billions; right now in this province the unemployment rate: 5.9 per cent. The last time it was that low in Alberta, we had another Conservative government. We're cleaning up the mess that they left behind. We have a plan for the downtown of Calgary endorsed by the chamber of commerce. We have eminent people from across Alberta on that panel. We're reviewing it. Thank god the NDP are not in office anymore.

Ms Notley: There's a lot of hot air there, Mr. Speaker. What's not there is money.

In fact, the biggest number in this report is the number of task forces it recommends. This report was due in September, and after spinning in circles for a year, Albertans now have to wait for five more task forces. Mr. Speaker, this is a master class in dithering. They've kicked the can so far down the road, it's landed somewhere in Saskatchewan. Why is the UCP plan so short on action? Why do they care so little about the future of downtown Calgary?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, it is amazing that the NDP have such little regard for all the people that dedicated their time to put together that report as well as the Calgary Chamber of commerce, who resoundingly endorsed the report that came out, but let's talk about some more of these economic highlights. Albertans can look forward to the fact that they do not have an NDP government that is simply chasing away investment. Under that government, when it comes to diversification, they thought a good year for venture capital was \$37 million. We had over \$200 million in just the first quarter alone.

Ms Notley: Our downtown plan, \$160 million; theirs, \$5 million.

Now, another part of this report talks about a very important issue, the need to reinvest in social supports for the most vulnerable. At least they talk about it. News flash: if this UCP government, that's frozen benefits, slashed affordable housing, cut income support, and reduced rental supplements – to date the UCP have actively increased poverty, full stop. Rather than sending this report off to gather dust, as the minister promised today, will the Premier stand in the House today and reverse his cuts and increase funding to vulnerable Albertans?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're proud of the work that our Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions as well as our Minister of Justice are doing to ensure safety across this province. The committee report that came through emphasized the fact that community safety in our downtown core is important long term.

This is the one thing I have to tell Albertans across this province. There's one thing as well. I mentioned earlier on. There's this thing in the air, Mr. Speaker – you can feel it – economic momentum in Alberta. We're forecasted to lead the country in growth. You can rest assured we will not let the NDP come back to destroy Alberta's economy.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of the Opposition. Second set of questions.

Ms Notley: Let's turn down the panic meter just a little bit there, Mr. Speaker.

Child Care Affordability

Ms Notley: More and more Alberta families are struggling, and they need a government to act. A good start would be to aggressively cut child care fees in half using the new federal dollars. Now, the UCP claimed that the 50 per cent reduction would have happened already. However, according to a report today by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Alberta families won't see a full 50 per cent cut any time in 2022 or perhaps ever. Can the Premier explain how his UCP government found a way to miss the mark again when it comes to child care?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we're doing in terms of child care is exactly the opposite of what the members opposite did. We are not picking winners and losers. We are not telling parents where they can and cannot access support to accessible, high-quality early learning and child care. We have in fact met the parameters of our first year in this agreement with the federal government. We have seen child care fees reduced by, on average, 50 per cent in every single licensed space across this province in the centre of parents' choice.

Ms Notley: Well, in fact, according to the report this minister has not met her targets. She has, however, picked losers. This report indicates that the lowest income families are paying around \$400 more. That's compared to the zero dollars they paid under our government. To the Premier: how on earth could you get \$3.8 billion from Ottawa and still find a way to make the most vulnerable Alberta families pay more?

Ms Schulz: Mr. Speaker, I will take the facts any day over the stories and spin being shared by a union-funded, left-wing think tank. Let me tell you what Alberta parents already know. Child care fees, on average, have been reduced by half, and right across this province, in the setting of parents' choice, parents are paying between \$10 and \$25 a day. And you know what? The most supports are being targeted to the parents who need it the most.

Ms Notley: Well, even if she was right, on average does not include Calgary. According to the report Calgary continues to have among the highest fees in Canada across all age groups under this Premier and this minister. Nearly every province and territory signing on to this plan has found a way to make the plan work. Instead of leading the pack in lowering costs, this minister ensures that Albertans continue to pay more, and this will hurt our economy. Why doesn't the Premier understand that his indifference to the child care issue has a real economic cost to the future of this province?

Ms Schulz: You know who's not listening to the NDP spin, Mr. Speaker? More than 90,000 parents right across this province who are benefiting from reduced child care fees in the centre and space of their choice. More than 90,000. This is a good plan. Why is it a good plan? Because it is not based on NDP ideology or spin. It is based on the feedback and the concerns that we heard from Alberta parents, child care operators, and educators right across this province; 90,000-plus parents think that this is a great deal for Alberta families. I wish the NDP thought it was as great as Alberta parents do.

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

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, over the weekend, if the Premier had picked up a copy of the *Herald*, he would have seen a column from economist Trevor Tombe. He wrote that we need a sensible solution to inflation. A very reasonable position, I think. In fact, he acknowledged the value of the gas tax deferral, but he also listed some other things the Premier could do right now to help take the pressure off struggling families, starting with reindexing the tax code to give back almost half a billion dollars to Albertans this year. Will the Premier take his advice – yes or no? – and why not if not yes?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to answer that question, but first I would like to ask the members of this House and the Leader of the Opposition: why is the opposition not celebrating and asking questions around our victory around Bill C-69? This is a great day for Alberta. This is a great day for Canada. This is a great day for wealth creation and prosperity for future generations.

Ms Notley: Wow. Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, some Albertans are under an exceptional amount of stress and don't have time to read the Court of Appeal because they can't pay for their groceries, and that's what they're focused on.

Now, Tombe recommends boosting the child and family benefit to get another \$1,000 into the hands of families. He also notes that the government could reverse decisions to freeze benefits, which has seriously hurt the ability to buy food for vulnerable Albertans across this province. Why doesn't the Premier take some good, nonpartisan advice and help most vulnerable Albertans?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are taking action on affordability. We have come forward with the suspension of the fuel tax. We have an electricity rebate in process, in motion . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. We heard the question. Let's hear the answer.

Mr. Toews: . . . and we have a consumer protection mechanism for natural gas. But it's more than that. We inherited a fiscal train wreck from the members opposite. We inherited a fiscal situation that would have meant our programs would have been unsustainable. Future generations would not have benefited. We've taken action to make these programs more sustainable.

Ms Notley: For the moment, Mr. Speaker, these guys are still in power, so they have responsibility for their decisions. Now, Tombe notes two current government policies that have more to do with inflation than the carbon tax ever would: one, their decision to drive up tuition at colleges and universities; and two, the rising vehicle insurance premiums that this government is allowing big, profitable insurance companies to charge Alberta families. Those are this government's policies. Not mine, not Ottawa's; this government's. Why won't they stand up for Albertans and act to reduce their inflation?

2:00

Mr. Toews: We are taking action, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the members opposite brought in a carbon tax, pushing up costs on every Albertan, on every Alberta family. We're taking action. Bill 41, the bill we implemented about a year and a half ago to deal with the systemic issues driving up insurance costs, has flattened insurance . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The Leader of the Opposition had the opportunity to ask the question. If she'd like another one, I invite her to do so when it's her turn.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, in the last year and a half, after implementing Bill 41, insurance premiums have declined by almost 1 per cent. When the NDP were in office, automobile insurance premiums didn't go down; they went up by 14 per cent.

Health Care System

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, one of the most telling examples of this government's skewed priorities on health care was their decision to fire Dr. Verna Yiu. This was a body blow to front-line workers who trusted and respected her leadership. The plan of the UCP was apparently to downplay what that would mean for the system, with the Minister of Health trying to claim that it was expected that Dr. Yiu would be leaving early when all the front-line health care workers I've spoken with were shocked by the decision. Did the Premier really believe that Albertans would buy their spin that firing Dr. Yiu with a year left in her contract was no big deal and that it wouldn't lead to further chaos in our public health care system?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education is rising.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To respond to the hon. member's question, of course, Dr. Yiu was a valued member of our health care system. But what I really believe is happening here is that they're trying to distract from their very, very poor record on health care. When we look back over the four years that they were in government, the wait times for a hip replacement under the NDP went from 204 days to 265 days. The wait for a knee replacement went from 238 days to 298 days.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, our record? This government's record is that in everything in health care they simply break the system and leave it to others to deal with the consequences. This week alone we're seeing lines of sick children waiting over an hour to be triaged at the emergency room, longer wait times for surgical procedures, ER doctors warning that people might lose their lives as a result of this situation that the government has allowed to develop on their watch. The Premier calls this par for the course; Albertans call it a crisis. When will this Premier actually take responsibility for the devastation his government has created in our health care system instead of attacking front-line workers, trying to discredit claims from Albertans who need critical health care? Why doesn't . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Health is trying to deal with all the situations that were left from the members opposite. As I was saying, the wait time for cataract surgery went up from 202 days to 320 days. The wait time for open-heart surgery went from 60 days to 98 days. They left us a mess that we're dealing with, and we are going to fix it.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, these excuses are pathetic, just like the Minister of Health and the Premier, who knew that their decision to fire Dr. Yiu after six years of exemplary service would cause further chaos in our system. They were given specific lines on how to respond to the question of the chaos it would create. Their solution: pretend that firing her with a year left in her contract was expected and make the laughable claim that hiring her created more chaos than firing her did. Can the Premier or this minister list the number of times that sick kids were forced to wait hours in the cold outside to get in an emergency room in '15, '16, 2017, '18? That's when we were in government; this is their record.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I want to reiterate that we valued Dr. Yiu for the work that she did, particularly through the pandemic. That being said, we have committed to

Albertans that we are going to fix the health care system. We know that we have some of the lowest capacity in all of the country, and that needs to be dealt with. The NDP had four years. They didn't deal with it; we will. As I said earlier, the NDP record speaks for itself; 204 days for a hip replacement under the NDP went to 265. I could go on and on.

Alberta at Work Initiative and Veterinarian Supply

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta at work initiative is directly investing in programs to help get more Albertans back to work while also addressing the province's structural unemployment problem. Some of these labour shortages greatly affect rural Alberta and our agricultural sector. One of these critical labour shortages is the shortage of large-animal veterinarians in rural Alberta, which could threaten the sustainability of our agricultural sector. To the Minister of Labour and Immigration: what is Alberta's government doing to address the current shortages of large-animal veterinarians for future projected shortages?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for that very important question. Alberta's government is investing \$8.4 million to support the enrolment expansion of the University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. We are making a capital investment of \$59 million to support the construction of new infrastructure to expand the veterinarian medicine program at the University of Calgary. This funding is part of the Alberta at work initiative, and it will double the amount of vets trained right here in Alberta, in return providing more opportunities for young Albertans who enter veterinary professions to support the workforce needs of businesses and communities.

The Speaker: The Member for Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that in 2017 Alberta decided not to renew its funding agreement with the Western College of Veterinary Medicine in Saskatchewan and given that these investments are aimed to ensure Albertans can learn the skills and knowledge they need to meet the labour demands of tomorrow while addressing critical labour shortages, can the minister elaborate on the value of having access to training close to home with the help of these targeted investments?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta at work initiative is here to get Albertans back to work while also addressing Alberta's structural unemployment problem. To retain our skilled workers, we need to be able to provide them the skills, the training, and knowledge right here in our province. The expansion of the vet med school at the U of C does just that. Through this program we will be able to double the amount of veterinarians trained here in Alberta. By providing this training close to home, these graduates can find fulfilling careers right here in our province as we address this critical labour shortage.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that we now know how the Alberta at work initiative will help address specific labour shortages such as the shortage of large-animal veterinarians and given that Alberta's government invested \$600 million towards the Alberta at work initiative, can the minister expand on the other sectors Alberta's government is investing in and how this funding will help get Albertans back to work?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, again I thank the hon. member for that very important question. We are investing a record \$255 million through Advanced Education towards various supports for students. Through my own ministry Alberta's government is proud to invest \$64 million over the next three years to support Alberta's workers to develop new skills and talents in our province. We believe every Albertan deserves the opportunity to participate in their communities and in the workplace, which is why we are investing \$20 million to provide support for these Albertans.

Child and Youth Deaths during COVID-19 Pandemic

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, Alberta saw a spike in excess deaths during the pandemic, and the rates for youth were high. A study recently published said that youth make up a large portion of non COVID-19 related deaths, including from the drug poisoning crisis. This data is important to shape public policy on how people are cared for. Following this sobering information, what will the UCP announce today so that we do not see tragic deaths of youth in this quantity again?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Any death of a young person is tragic, and our hearts go out to them, their families, all of the people that knew them. Reported COVID and overdose deaths account for the vast majority of the increases in deaths in the pandemic in Alberta, but there have likely been other deaths beyond the normal for a range of reasons. The AHS's paper gives rough estimates based on our assumptions about what would be normal in that period compared to other prior years. There is a wide range of methodologies to calculate excess deaths in the pandemic based on different assumptions and giving different results.

2:10

Mr. Deol: Given that the children's hospitals in Calgary and Edmonton are full and that young Albertans are struggling to get the care they need and given that there have been tragically high numbers of children dying in care and given that the drug poisoning crisis has taken the lives of young people at rates higher than ever, when will enough be enough for this UCP government? When will they stop the chaos in health care and guarantee that children will be able to access the care they need?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, the death of any child but especially a child who has been in the child intervention system is not only a tragedy, but it is, in fact, a call to action. My ministry: I did ask them to look into what we are seeing in this past year. Unfortunately, we have seen an increase of opioid- and addictions-related deaths. That is why we are working so closely with the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to direct additional supports to help young people who need it. That work will continue. It's also going to take community partners working alongside us. That work is under way.

Mr. Deol: Given that more must be done to decrease the number of excess deaths in Alberta, especially young people, and given that the study does not have race-based information and that we know that racialized communities have more difficulties accessing government services in the health system, making this data essential, why is this government failing Albertans by refusing to collect race-based data?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. First of all, the assumption in the question is totally baseless. We plan to address and we have addressed already a number of issues, and we plan to address the challenges of racism, including the collection of race-based data, through more efficient and collaborative methods and in a way that is considered in harmony with Albertans' privacy.

Utility Load Limiters

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe I have to stand in this Legislature and ask about people having their heat and electricity turned off at a time when utility bills have skyrocketed and the UCP has failed to deliver the meagre relief in the form of rebates that they promised. Now we're reading about Calgary families whose electricity and heat are being rationed, and families are going without. Can the minister explain why he believes people should go without heat and electricity because he can't do his job and people are waiting until next year for a meagre rebate?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We recognize that the higher cost of utilities is having a burden on Albertans. That's why we put forward the electricity rebate that we did. Unfortunately, the caucus opposite actually voted against speeding up the legislative process. I mean, you can't make this stuff up. In addition to that, that's the same caucus that complains about the price of electricity. They don't even know the price of electricity. We have Albertans' backs. We've demonstrated that, and we'll continue to support them.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, given that families in Calgary are being put on what's called load limiters, which means they're being rationed, power is being withheld from families, and given that the nonprofit Harvest Hills Cares Calgary told the media that they have heard from hundreds of families who have had their utilities rationed and given that the media reported one family whose kids couldn't do school work on their laptops because it kept tripping this so-called load limiter, does the minister really think we should be denying kids an education because their parents can't cover utility bills in excess of 700 bucks a month? What is the explanation for this?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate that there are some Albertans that are struggling from utility insecurity. The good news is that in that same article that member is referring to there are actually fewer people year over year experiencing utility insecurity. I can tell you this: since the member is aware of the utility insecurity, why didn't they speed up the passage of Bill 18, that would get electricity rebates into the pockets of Albertans that need them the most? Why don't they look at those cameras and tell Albertans why they're making them wait?

Ms Phillips: Now, Mr. Speaker, given that Harvest Hills Cares Calgary also heard from a senior dealing with a load limiter – that's rationing – who was unable to use their breathing machine and their microwave at the same time, seriously, and given that this senior

was unable to use the machine they need to breathe and heat up food simultaneously, does the minister seriously believe that seniors facing UCP inflation and cost-of-living crises should have to choose whether they suffocate or starve? How is this allowed? Whose side is the minister on?

The Speaker: The hon. the associate minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I came into this House, and I asked everyone in this Chamber to give us unanimous consent so that we could speed up the passage of the rebate legislation, and on this side of the House . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Nally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this side of the House you know how we voted. We voted to speed up the passage of that legislation. But that's not how they voted on that side of the House. They voted to slow down the legislative process and make Albertans wait, so I think they owe Albertans an answer. Why did they make them wait longer for the rebates? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hunter: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:16. The hon. Member for Taber-Warner raised it.

Executive Council Political Staff Communications

Mr. Loewen: Thanks to the hard work of investigative journalists, the public learned of serious allegations of a centrally co-ordinated effort by this Premier to circumvent the FOIP Act. In response to these allegations I have personally written to the Information and Privacy Commissioner to request an investigation. The allegations include direct instructions to delete e-mails, encouraging staff to use their personal cellphones for government business, and encouraging staff to use unsecured Internet messaging apps. All this begs the question: what exactly is this scandal-plagued Premier and his administration hiding from Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yet again what you see from the hon. member is similar to things that you see from his colleagues in the NDP opposition, who continued to put forward false allegations. In fact, I've lost count of how many false allegations . . .

Mr. Loewen: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: . . . that you get from the opposition, none of which, Mr. Speaker, after three years have ever been found to be true by the Chief Electoral Officer, by the Ethics Commissioner, on and on. This government takes FOIP very, very seriously. Our staff are trained to follow FOIP, and they are expected to follow FOIP.

Mr. Loewen: Given that our Legislative Assembly allocates significant taxpayer-funded resources to providing safe and secure communications and given that the reason we do so is to protect against the threat of information being intercepted, which prevents cabinet confidences from being breached by nefarious domestic or foreign interests, and given that we don't want the detailed itineraries of senior officials to be leaked as markets rise and fall on leaked and stolen information, can the Premier tell us why he would encourage his staff, just like Hillary Clinton did, to use private communications equipment?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Again, Mr. Speaker, the government and the Premier have made clear to all staff from day one of the government that they must comply with FOIP. That's the top priority of the government. All staff have received training on how to comply with FOIP, and the government takes it very, very seriously. [interjection] I hear the deputy leader of the NDP, who once in this Chamber famously said that she told all her staff to go to voice mode, so I don't think that she should be heckling inside this Chamber. Again, staff are expected to follow the FOIP law. They're trained to do so, and we expect them to do so.

Mr. Loewen: Given that that's not what the report said and given that FOIP is an essential part of ensuring transparency yet only 1 in 10 general requests were satisfied while 23 per cent of general requests can't be fulfilled due to a lack of records – go figure – and given that these latest allegations further betray the paranoid bunker mentality within this Premier's government and given damaging allegations that offices were given 24 hours' notice, providing an opportunity to delete e-mails, showing a complete disregard for transparency and ethics, please tell us why Albertans should trust a Premier that is once again setting the bar at a new low.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Again, Mr. Speaker, that was categorically false. Departments and ministerial offices are not given 24-hour notice about a FOIP. Staff are trained to do FOIPs underneath the law. They're expected to follow the law. That's been made clear by the government, and again anonymous Twitter trolls are not real allegations. This is the approach that you see from the NDP. That member and his NDP colleagues, who continue just . . .

Mr. Loewen: Point of order.

Mr. Jason Nixon: . . . to make things up, Mr. Speaker: it's very, very disappointing.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at both 2:19 as well as 2:17.

2:20

Diabetes Management Coverage

Member Irwin: Conor is six years old. He has type 1 diabetes; he relies on an insulin pump. Walker just turned eight. He has type 1 diabetes; he relies on an insulin pump. For both of these little boys and thousands of Albertans, access to an insulin pump is absolutely life saving, but in an unconscionable, indefensible decision this UCP government has cancelled the insulin pump therapy program. To the Premier: how, in any universe, can you stand up and brag about the economy when you're cutting critical life-saving supports for kids like Conor and Walker?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. You're absolutely right. We need to be concerned about our young people, and that's why we want to provide them with the newest technology. In phase 2 of this new program, the insulin pump therapy program, we have expanded coverage to provide continuous glucose monitors to children under 18 under supplementary health benefits. We estimate that more than 1,500 children will benefit from this expanded coverage, saving parents about \$4,200 annually. Of course we care about our young people.

Member Irwin: Unbelievable.

Given that yesterday 25 Albertans came to speak out against the UCP's cruel cuts to the insulin pump program, just a small handful of the thousands of Albertans across our province who are going to

be impacted by this despicable decision – they’re angry. They’re scared because they don’t know if they can continue with this life-saving treatment, yet those Albertans waiting in the gallery wanted an answer from the Premier. Nope. The environment minister laughed. To that minister: what exactly is so funny about Albertans losing their coverage for life-saving insulin pumps?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, this is ridiculous behaviour from the Official Opposition to refer to any member, saying . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. members of the opposition asked a question. The least they can do is to listen to the answer.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Correct, Mr. Speaker. I certainly did not laugh at people that were in that situation. Assuming what conversations may or may not be taking place between me and colleagues on this side of the House is ridiculous, but that’s what you see from the Official Opposition.

The Premier was very, very clear yesterday, Mr. Speaker, about a significant process that is being undertaken to be able to help people that have found themselves in this situation. I want to thank the Premier and the hon. Minister of Health for taking that action and, through you, condemn the Official Opposition for continuing to play politics.

Member Irwin: Wow.

Given that it’s been a week since this government cruelly cancelled the insulin pump therapy program – and we’re all still waiting for any details. They have not released any information. This government is saying: just trust us. Albertans do not trust this government with health care. Children’s hospitals are at the brink of collapse. There are long lines of ambulances outside hospitals. Doctors are fleeing the province. Health care is in a crisis. Do the right thing for once. Please commit right now to restoring the insulin pump therapy program.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite need to know that these changes came after years of consultation and communication with diabetic Albertans and will deliver equitable coverage that includes non pump users. Numerous Albertans have written over the past years about the need for more options on insulin pumps and supplies, including newer technologies and advanced moderating devices like continuous glucose monitors. We’ve also heard from those who want equity in benefits coverage, including non pump users. Alberta Health engaged extensively with the insulin pump program’s clinical advisory committee before making decisions.

Calgary Office Revitalization and Expansion Working Group Report

Member Ceci: The UCP has finally released a report on revitalizing downtown Calgary. This comes after the Finance minister said that it wasn’t his job to help downtown Calgary and eight months after the report was supposed to be released. Upon reading it, many of the recommendations look a lot like the ones we put forward in our plan. However, the UCP has ridiculed many of these proposals, including the ones found in their own report. They’re opposed to supporting office conversion, they’ve cut affordable housing, and they’ve put barriers up to accessing mental health and addiction support. Does this mean that the UCP disagrees with their own plan?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, it must be difficult for the members opposite to stand up and ask questions on this topic, and you want to know why? Because when that member was Finance minister, the unemployment rate in Alberta skyrocketed. Right now in our province it is lower than at any point when that member was Finance minister. We have a report from the committee. It was well received by the chamber. We’re studying the report across government, with lots of opportunities for us to collaborate with all levels of government to make sure we have a vibrant, thriving downtown in Calgary. Albertans can rest assured that we’re not going to let the NDP chase away business again.

Member Ceci: Given that that member forgets there was a recession in Alberta and Canada and given that the UCP’s report on downtown Calgary is eight months late and still doesn’t have any funding attached to it except \$5 million, that the CEO of the Calgary Chamber called a drop in the bucket and absolutely inadequate, and given that several of the recommendations appear to be directly lifted from our plan and given that our plan is costed, if the government is going to copy our work, can’t they at least properly cite Alberta’s NDP?

Mr. Schweitzer: When it comes to the economy, we’re not going to take advice from the no development party, the NDP. When you look at what’s happening across this province, Alberta has economic momentum. Those are words that were never – never – spoken ever in Alberta when the NDP were in office. That’s right, Mr. Speaker. Alberta has economic momentum. Alberta can rest assured that the NDP will not get back into office. We have their back. Jobs are being created right now in Alberta.

Member Ceci: Given that Alberta led GDP for two years under our watch and given that several of the recommendations from the UCP’s working group are to create more task forces to study parts of this issue even further – in other words, it’s a plan to make several plans – and given that this just means more delays and given that Calgary desperately needs support as the city continues to face the highest unemployment rate in the country and the office vacancy rate still sits around 30 per cent, why the constant delays? Or is the minister too busy getting his leadership campaign ready to help the city of Calgary, that he’s a member of?

Mr. Schweitzer: Oh, Mr. Speaker, it’s that time again. It’s time to resurrect the NDP legacy tour bus for Alberta. It is that time. When they were government, their Energy minister told Albertans: if you want a good job, you know what you should do? This is NDP advice: leave the province. Right now we’re seeing waves and waves of Canadians come to Alberta for opportunities. That is a fresh opportunity, stuff that we never heard ever when the NDP were in office. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul.

Diabetes Management Coverage (continued)

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans are affected by diabetes, and this disease takes a ton of time and effort to manage, which is why, back in 2013, the Alberta government implemented the insulin pump benefits program to specifically support those with type 1 diabetes. The insulin pump automatically gives a small amount of insulin throughout the day and night to help control your blood sugar, without needing to give yourself several shots of insulin multiple times a day. To the

Minister of Health: why was this program created in the first place, and has it been successful?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education is rising.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I cannot agree more than with the hon. member, because insulin pumps have been a game changer for so many Albertans with blood sugar control as they are easy and efficient. I want to assure the member, his constituents, and all Albertans that we are continuing to support diabetic Albertans. That's not only for right now but to ensure our programs are sustainable and can continue to provide devices for Albertans into the future, with the new technologies like the continuous glucose monitors and advanced insulin pumps, which so many have asked for. We're delivering.

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I've heard many stories of individuals whose lives have been drastically changed for the better once the insulin pump became available – the insulin pump provides flexibility for type 1 diabetics; before, they had to plan their entire schedule and meals around insulin, and now the insulin is delivered at the exact right moments without much thought – and given that some of my constituents are worried about the recent announcement that on August 1 the insulin pump program will be taken away, to the minister: why are we changing the benefit program, and who have we consulted on these changes? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. minister is the only one with the call.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These changes come after years of consultation and communication with Albertans. We engaged extensively with the insulin pump program . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: No.

The hon. minister is the only one with the call.

Member LaGrange: We exchanged extensively with the insulin pump program's clinical advisory committee, all of whose members worked to make sure Alberta's diabetics get the care they need. Transferring from the insulin pump therapy program to government-sponsored health benefit plans like Blue Cross nongroup coverage means that we can now cover a new generation of insulin pumps in the third part of our three-phase plan, building on our expansion of coverage for diabetes test strips . . .

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

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The insulin pump works fantastic because with this pump people can plan insulin around their lives rather than planning their lives around insulin. Given that just last week the Alberta government announced that this program will be discontinued come August 1 and given that the replacement for this program will be the government-sponsored health benefit plan but many of my constituents are worried about the lack of details about what this plan will cover, to the Minister of Health: can you provide details on what will be covered, what the cost to diabetic Albertans will be on a monthly and yearly basis?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. We expect that the vast majority of the 4,000 Albertans in the program will continue to receive coverage through existing government and private plans. About 60 per cent already have private coverage, and about 30 per cent are already enrolled in Blue Cross. About 500 low-income Albertans will continue to receive coverage under Alberta adult health benefits at no cost to themselves. No cost. None of this happens before August 1. Premiums for Blue Cross nongroup coverage are \$63.50 per month for a single Albertan.

Edmonton Remand Centre Emergency Services

Mr. Sabir: Paramedics at Edmonton Remand Centre, Canada's largest prison, will no longer be on-site as of June 1. Paramedics are qualified to handle crisis situations, trauma response, and overdose from drug poisoning, which is tragically becoming more common. Other medical staff at the Remand Centre believe this is a dangerous decision because paramedics are better equipped to respond and are a key part of the medical team. Why is the UCP removing paramedics from the Remand Centre, where they serve a critical, life-saving role?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Ellis: Oh, sorry.

Member LaGrange: No. Go ahead.

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I apologize if I did not quite understand the member's question here, but the pandemic and related public health restrictions, of course, have caused increased harms from the illness of addiction in jurisdictions throughout North America, including Alberta, and it's no exception. You know, we're focused on addressing the cause of fatalities in opioids related to EMS calls, the illness of addiction, and we want to make sure that – and that's why we created the 8,000 new spaces for people with addiction and mental health concerns. We've removed all user fees, and we've expanded the virtual opioid dependency program.

Mr. Sabir: Given that EMS is over capacity as is and Albertans from every corner of the province wonder if they can receive an ambulance when they need one and given that emergency room wait times are increasing as well and Red Deer had 14 ambulances lined up outside the ER two weeks ago, the need for preventative and immediate measures to avoid more ambulance trips is clear. Why is the Minister of Health putting more demand on ambulances by removing on-site paramedics from the Remand Centre? I hope the question is clear this time.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to inform the members opposite that they are incorrect in their assumptions because there will be no reduction in services or staff at the Edmonton Remand Centre. Alberta Health Services is aligning its correctional health services at the Edmonton Remand Centre with the rest of the province to ensure patients have access to the most appropriate care. In fact, they will have registered nurses instead of paramedics in those roles. They will have enhanced care because those registered nurses actually have a broader range of spectrum of care that they are able to provide for those individuals.

Mr. Sabir: Given that many nurses do not understand why paramedics are being removed from the prison and given that the United Nurses of Alberta are in the process of filing concerns over this decision, it is clear that the UCP did not consult with them. Removing paramedics from the Remand Centre is opposed by the paramedics and nurses and could put more strain on the health care system and result in the deaths of people at the Remand Centre, so who did the UCP work with to create this plan? Why are you ignoring paramedics and nurses?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, registered nurses have a broader scope of practice than paramedics and will help enhance patient education, support for patients following release, and the ability to connect patients to additional treatment such as opioid dependency treatment and other recovery-based treatments and services for patients at the Edmonton Remand Centre. Impacted paramedic employees are going to be offered other positions with AHS emergency medical services under their collective agreement. Again, there is no impact to the level of care.

Disability Worker Wages AISH and Income Support Payments

Ms Renaud: This pandemic showed us many everyday heroes who went above and beyond to do their jobs and serve Albertans during difficult times. One group that doesn't get enough credit for their work is disability workers, whose work with disabled Albertans deserves the gratitude of us all. Instead, what they're getting is a crisis. The Alberta Disability Workers Association has warned that they're facing a staffing crisis because too many are unable to make ends meet with their salaries, forcing them to take on other jobs or even leave the sector. To the minister: how long is the minister prepared to let this crisis develop before acting?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I do want to thank disability workers right across this province. We know the last two years throughout the pandemic were extremely challenging, and we're grateful for the important work that they do. You know, our government is committed to providing a work environment where all employees are safe and treated with respect and dignity, and that includes our disability workers. I know that that's something that this government is committed to with the Minister of Community and Social Services as well.

Ms Renaud: Given that it's not just the workers who are struggling but the individuals that they work with – they're also feeling the real consequences of this government's inaction and lack of support – and given that we've heard reports from families who are concerned about the absence of supports, long wait times, and changing contracts that are leaving families behind and given that the Alberta Disability Workers Association is calling on this government to increase wages so that they can retain and attract staff that disabled Albertans rely on to live, can the minister explain why he or she has failed to listen to the concerns of disability workers?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Community and Social Services is working with the disability services sector and partner ministries to improve recruitment and retention strategies for the disability services sector. We did provide

a grant to the Alberta Council of Disability Services to collect and analyze data. In addition, we continue to provide funding to service providers to enable them to put together solid compensation packages for their front-line and very important staff.

Ms Renaud: Given that there has been no wage adjustment – disability workers are leaving the sector; they can't afford to feed their families with what they're being paid – and what we're getting is a plan to consult to consult and given that all the minister can do is compare Alberta supports to other provinces, which does nothing to resolve the disability worker crisis, and given that the minister of social services failed to stand up for disabled Albertans in the budget by not reindexing basics, that would have been the basic thing to do, will he commit to ending the cuts to AISH and income supports and delivering a wage increase to disability workers before the session is out? People are hurting right now.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite know full well that the AISH budget increased by \$12 million. They know that the Community and Social Services budget increased by \$36 million this year. They know that the disability services budget is \$1.4 billion, which is an increase of \$61 million. We're providing an additional \$34 million to enhance career and employment services to support Albertans looking for jobs, to help people get back on their feet, and our partnerships with FCSS programs help people adopt healthy lifestyles right across this province. We will continue to support those most in need.

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

Kinship Care

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that it is important to keep children connected to their families, communities, and culture wherever possible. For Indigenous children in particular it is important that children are with people familiar with the child's own cultural practices and traditions. I know a number of families that give of their lives to serve in this way. To the Minister of Children's Services: what is kinship care, and why is it a focus of your ministry?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When a child comes into the child intervention system, our first priority is keeping families together whenever safely possible. Kinship care is a good alternative for kids that cannot safely remain with their immediate family, which, of course, would be our first option. However, these children are placed with caregivers that have a family relationship or connection to the child. For Indigenous children kinship care protects the child's connection to their family, their community, their culture. By investing in kinship care, more Indigenous children in our care will be taken care of according to traditional practices.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that we know the importance of keeping families together, especially in the case of young siblings, and given the need for children to develop pride in their personal identity alongside familial and community belonging and further given this key role that kinship caregivers can play in Indigenous families and communities, to the same minister: how are you improving care and supporting kinship care providers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:40

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, this move to kinship care was one of the recommendations from the all-party panel on child intervention. As part of our investment to providing care that keeps children connected with their families, cultures, and communities, we know we're going to continually need to review and improve these supports. For example, we're providing \$900 to kinship caregivers for initial and ongoing costs, welcoming a child into their home, recognizing that these are often stressful and emergency situations. We want to make sure that those families are ready, willing, and able to support children in need. We're improving how staff are trained so they understand how to successfully work with kinship caregivers, and we're adopting a timelier and more culturally appropriate home assessment practice.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the minister. Given that children do better when connected to their extended families, communities, and culture and that having these important aspects provides foundational relationships for their best futures and given that when a child comes into care, the ministry's primary focus is to find the best placement to meet the child's needs, to the Minister of Children's Services: how many children are receiving kinship care compared to other forms of placement?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Children do better when they are connected to their culture, their extended family, and their communities. Our continued commitment to kinship care has resulted in a greater number of children placed in kinship homes compared to foster homes. As of December in 2021 the number of kinship care homes has gone up to 2,422. This has surpassed the number of foster homes, at 1,674. This number continues to increase, which is important because we know, again, the importance of keeping kids connected to their families, their culture, and their community.

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

The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise the Assembly that pursuant to Standing Order 7(8) the daily Routine may continue beyond 3 p.m.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Federal Impact Assessment Act

Mr. Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to speak about Alberta's historic victory today over the federal government's no-more-pipelines law, Bill C-69. This morning the Alberta Court of Appeal released their decision on Alberta's constitutional challenge of C-69, blasting the federal government in a 4-1 decision for their overreach into provincial jurisdiction and their attack on Alberta resource industries.

Mr. Speaker, I want to put on record a few of the court's statements. They said that C-69 "constitutes a profound invasion into provincial legislative jurisdiction and provincial proprietary

rights," a clear statement that this Legislature, not Ottawa, has the right to regulate our resources. The court went on to say that for Ottawa to have implemented C-69, it would have represented "the centralization of the governance of Canada to the point this country would no longer be recognized as a real federation." It cannot be overstated how significant this is. In addition, the highest court in Alberta has sent a message to Ottawa that the federal government does not have the "right to appropriate the birthright and economic future of the citizens of a province."

Mr. Speaker, when Canada repatriated our Constitution, in 1982, Premier Lougheed made sure that he included the promise of Alberta's right to control our own resources. This government has defended that promise. Ottawa will surely try to appeal, and Alberta will again defend our rights with the support of Alberta's highest court. I am confident that we will win again.

Mr. Speaker, when the NDP were in office, Alberta's constitutional rights were bulldozed by Justin Trudeau, and the NDP stood by and did nothing. Under this United Conservative government that will never happen again. The attack on Alberta's resource industries from the NDP-Liberal coalition stops here. It stops today. That message is what we send to Ottawa.

Housing Prices and Affordability

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, we have come to know and embrace the Alberta advantage as fundamental to Alberta's success. Recognized in different ways by each of us, for most it is about the advantages we possess in attracting people and investment while creating a sense of the spirit of inclusive opportunity we offer to Canadians and new immigrants alike. We have so much to be proud of in our province, from the beauty of our lakes, mountains, forests, foothills, and prairies to the blessings we enjoy from a bounty of natural resources and the drive, work ethic, entrepreneurial and community spirit of long-time residents and newcomers alike.

But, Mr. Speaker, we all need a roof over our heads and appropriate, affordable, and well-located housing in which to live, thrive, and grow. We are currently witnessing the challenges faced by individuals and families in other parts of our great country, and the pressure is right here in our own backyard. Housing affordability has and must continue to be seen by us as government and legislators and indeed all Albertans as a vital pillar of the Alberta advantage, now and into the future. We all have a part to play in ensuring housing affordability wherever Albertans may be on the housing continuum.

As our government remains focused on building upon our encouraging economic recovery, we must continue our commitment to health and social programs, diversification, innovation, and competitiveness, all well supported by housing choice and affordability. To attract businesses and investment, we must attract talented and ambitious people and their families by offering an enviable lifestyle and the opportunity to make a good living while building a good life. Mr. Speaker, let's keep our collective eye on the pressures we may face as we move back to a robust economy and strong net migration and ensure we work together on land and housing supply and tax and levy burdens as we recognize that, at the end of the day, it is owners and renters that not only drive our economy but prove that we can do so while ensuring the Alberta advantage is more about people than GDP.

Thank you.

Calgary Downtown Revitalization

Member Ceci: In January of last year our leader spoke to the Calgary Chamber of commerce and promised to come back with a plan to

revitalize the city's downtown, and we delivered. Last month we released our plan to revitalize the downtown core, that has reached office vacancy rates not seen since the Great Depression. Our strategy, titled *Bringing New Energy to Downtown Calgary*, focuses on economic diversification, the creation of an innovation district, the direct funding to support the city of Calgary's greater downtown plan. Our strategy also proposes support for small businesses, events and festivals, public realm improvements, transit, more child care spaces and affordable housing units downtown, and support for mental health and addictions.

The UCP has repeatedly ridiculed our plan while offering no solutions of their own except for providing a paltry \$5 million in their latest budget. Instead, all they've done is delay. After the Finance minister said that there'd be no help for downtown Calgary, the government reversed course and promised to release a plan by September of last year. Month after month went by and nothing. It took them another eight months to finally release their report, only to find out that many of the recommendations are eerily similar to ours. But the government still has to review and decide which ones to implement, if any, and there still isn't any funding attached to these proposals.

Meanwhile the office vacancy rate continues to hover around 30 per cent, and Calgary has the highest unemployment rate out of any city in the country. Calgarians can't afford any more delays. In fact, they can't afford this government. Too much is at stake. If they are looking for a plan to revitalize downtown Calgary, we have one ready and waiting to be implemented. Go to our website.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Domestic Violence Survivors

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can we please talk about coercive control and abuse and needed support for women to leave and to hold perpetrators accountable when they abuse? My dear friend Karen Gosbee, who is in the gallery today, is a survivor of 23 years of coercive control and domestic violence and courageously shared her story and advocacy for victims when she wrote *A Perfect Nightmare: My Glittering Marriage and How It Almost Cost Me My Life*. Quote: "There was a nonfatal strangulation attempt with guns in the house. Karen called 911 to protect herself and the children. That resulted in George freaking out even more and raving about how he would never be given the Order of Canada now despite the countless awards he had received over the years, including the Queen Elizabeth II silver jubilee medal from Premier Redford and many others. But the Order of Canada: that's the one that he coveted. And being found out as a domestic abuser would have ruined his chances. That's what was most important and what he was concerned about."

Strangulation is a predictor for future lethal violence. Victims are 750 per cent more likely to die at the hands of their abusers, and 80 per cent of women never even come forward. Mr. Speaker, it is individuals like Karen Gosbee that have the biggest impact on change, and she has contributed her advocacy to fellow survivors of coercive control and abuse. Quote: "Before I came forward, I," Karen, "was told by influential male leaders not to reveal I was a domestic abuse survivor because my advocacy would be discredited." End quote.

2:50

We are the elected leaders with the power to make decisions to make change. Maintaining one's power and control, whether that's physical or coercive control, is abuse when one's rights are sacrificed to uphold their own. When we come forward, Mr. Speaker, why do we lose power? When we speak the truth, they will

try to shut us up through intimidation and bullying. We need to listen and provide opportunity and resources for women to have the courage to come forward and make real change.

Thank you.

Justice System Funding and Access

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, we are all elected to this Chamber to serve Albertans, and the most fundamental way that we do this is by creating and supporting a justice system that is accessible, fair, and, most importantly, just. Albertans deserve a justice system that treats all Albertans equally and with respect and dignity, but over the last three years the UCP has shown that this is not the priority for them.

The UCP, since taking office, has slashed the Justice budget by over \$200 million, and it doesn't stop there. During their time in office the UCP has made it harder to access the justice system. They have imposed deep cuts to wraparound supports needed for a functional and effective justice system. They have cut victims of crime supports. They are making changes to Alberta's legal aid system that are opposed by the legal community and will further make it difficult to access justice for many Albertans. They ignore the calls of municipalities to drop their costly provincial police force idea. They are silent on the rising gun crimes and gun violence in Calgary.

Albertans are losing trust in this government, but this is what we can expect from a Premier and government that thinks they are above the law. They fired the Election Commissioner who was investigating them. Their Justice minister attempted to interfere in the administration of justice, and rather than sanction this behaviour, the Premier chose to reward it with a new cabinet post. They work overtime to try and silence the voices of the opposition and Albertans who oppose their agenda.

This is a government that claims to be tough on crime, but that's a talking point only since they are doing absolutely nothing to address crime and its root causes. Albertans deserve a government that addresses crime and its root causes and understands the rule of law and lives every day to uphold it, and the Alberta NDP is prepared to be that government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Hemochromatosis Awareness Month

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to rise in this House today to acknowledge and welcome Liz and Deborah from the Canadian Hemochromatosis Society. The month of May is Hemochromatosis Awareness Month, and this year marks the 40th anniversary of this society. At the beginning of the month Liz launched her cross-Canada awareness tour, starting in Victoria, with Elsie the Bus. Liz is travelling across Canada, with Alberta stops here in Edmonton and in Calgary.

Hemochromatosis, or iron overload, is Canada's most common genetic disorder. As a result, so many people may not know that they could have it, and that's why awareness is so important. Early detection of this disorder could prevent so many Canadians from having serious life complications.

That's why people like Liz Charyna and Deborah Storlien-Cundy, both in attendance here today from the society, will be spending time over the next four months stopping in many towns and cities to help raise awareness of this disorder. They are here today in our beautiful Legislature, and I encourage all members to take time to say hello and thank them for their hard work. Their dedication, time, and effort to raise awareness for this disorder is amazing. The tour started earlier this month in Victoria and will be heading to St. John's, Newfoundland, and back.

Liz told me that they are celebrating a wide variety of things as they stop to speak to Canadians: celebrating early diagnosis, celebrating the people learning to live with hemochromatosis and knowing that they are not alone, celebrating the physicians and other health care providers who recognize the symptoms of hemochromatosis in their patients and provide treatment, and celebrating all the friends, members, and volunteers of chapters of the Canadian Hemochromatosis Society across Canada.

With the month of May being important for so many other disorders and diseases, it's important that some like hemochromatosis aren't lost in the shuffle. Thank you again to Liz and Deborah for taking the time to stop in and visit our Legislature today. The work you do is so amazing, and without you so many Canadians might not know they have a disorder like this one.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Economic Recovery and Job Creation

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I had mentioned in this House before, unemployment is a scary thought for anyone and, sadly, a reality for some. Our government cares about Albertans, and we are doing what we can to ensure that Albertans have a chance and opportunity to work and provide for themselves and their families. Despite a world-wide pandemic unemployment in Alberta is lower today than it was under the NDP.

While job creation throughout the rest of the country has come to a halt, this has not been the case for Alberta; in fact, it's been quite the opposite. Our province had created 16,000 jobs just in April alone. This marks six consecutive months of job gains in Alberta. Since the UCP took government, we have seen Alberta's unemployment rate drop, and just last week it dropped once again to 5.9 per cent. This is the lowest unemployment rate our province has had since 2015. Alberta's recovery plan is continuing to prove its success.

Our province is building momentum, diversifying, and gaining strength, all while leading the country in overall employment rate. The only thing that's holding us back is our labour shortage, which we are addressing through the Alberta at work program. Mr. Speaker, this program is taking action to help Albertans not only find jobs but to build skills and advance their careers as well. This program strengthens our province's K to 12 education system, supports access to training and career development opportunities, helps out-of-work Albertans get back into the workforce, with many other steps to benefit Alberta's workforce and point our province towards economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, we know how important economic growth is in our province, but does the opposition understand its importance? While the NDP mock red tape reduction, campaign on higher taxes for Albertans, and support long, full lockdowns in this province, our government's approach has been quite different and points Alberta towards a brighter and more secure future. Our government aims to cut red tape, has lowered the corporate tax rate, is creating jobs, and is making Alberta the most competitive economy to invest in. This plan puts Alberta in line for both short- and long-term economic growth. Our recovery plan is working. Alberta is back.

Thank you.

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

Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland Constituency Priorities

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I still consider myself an interloper and a newbie when it comes to politics. I don't feel that this is a detriment, however, to my constituents because, in fact,

because of that, I ask more questions. One of the simple questions I ask the most often is: what matters to you? That typically gets the ball rolling.

I host interactive town halls in person and online. School board chairs, town mayors, county reeves, councillors, chambers of commerce are in attendance, and these folks get to sit up front with me in the hot seat so people in the audience can see that we work, we ask, and we interact in the province. There's no script. It's wide open, open mic when you come to a "what matters to you?" town hall. Folks get to hear about some of the great things that the government has done and that we're working on. They also get to hear about what their MLA has been up to on keeping our commitments and getting some status updates on the projects.

Corporate media doesn't cover the good news very well. Fear and conflict seems to sell more clicks. I faithfully write articles in a local newspaper to discuss the issues at our town halls, and the response has been extremely positive. Here's what I'm hearing from a lot of Albertans.

The economy. They like the economic corridors. They like the corridor authority concept. They like the balanced budget, low taxes, economic diversification. They need lower costs of input. Inflation is killing us.

Mental health supports for our youth. There's a bright future ahead for the youth, and we don't hear that very often. They need us to help deliver that message of the good things that are happening out there.

COVID response. The REP program tore the communities apart, and it's up to us to ensure that that never happens again.

Real health care reforms. Not window dressing, not more of the same, not the rhetoric of American-style health care scare tactics. Don't throw more money at it; actually get to the root of the problem and make it cost-effective, delivering quality service.

And they don't want any more socialist governments, quite frankly. They had enough of that.

They sure as heck have seen what the bromance down in Ottawa is doing, and they're done with it. They want more autonomy for the province, and Bill C-69 being turned down today by our courts is showing that.

We've got a year left, so let's make it happen.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you. I have the requisite number of copies of an article I quoted in my private member's motion yesterday, Alberta Municipal Gov't Labour Costs Out of Touch with Reality, by Franco Terrazzano.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley is rising for a tabling.

Mr. Loewen: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise and table the story Inside the Kenney Government's System of Secrecy, that I referred to in my questions today, about the attempt to obstruct the FOIP Act.

The Speaker: Of course, the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley would never use the proper name even if he was quoting a newspaper article.

Does he have other tablings, or is that all?

Mr. Loewen: Yes. One more. I'll table the letter I sent the Information and Privacy Commissioner in regard to that information.

3:00

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've shared with the public here recently my own personal story, my health history of the vaccine injury. With that, it seemed to have popped a bit of a bubble. I have tablings here with the requisite copies of a number of individuals. Ken Hiller is one of them who had more issues with that. He's lost mobility in his arm. He had a bunch of other health issues. I have that for Mr. Ken Hiller.

I have another one here for Ms Char Barnier. Again, similar type items: having health care issues, has lost control of her arm, has had issues with heart complications, has lost time at work as well and also with a daughter who's lost employment as a nurse.

I have another tabling here of Michelle Merrett. Again, similar type of items. She works in a stressful organization, her normal work. She is now suffering from brain fog, suffering from tons of pains, aches, uncontrolled items that are still yet to be fully recognized and speaks to the process of having the federal government recognition of vaccine injuries.

I have another tabling from Lorna Kennedy. This one is talking about lymphatic issues that were brought on by it, talking about some of the other pains and aches in the legs and hands. Again, similar items with the brain fog. Her husband then had heart conditions and heart issues since that.

I'll have some more tablings for tomorrow, sir.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:16 the Member for Taber-Warner rose on a point of order, and the Deputy Government House Leader will be arguing on his behalf.

Point of Order Remarks off the Record

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were doing so well leading up to this day with no points of order this week. However, at 2:15 the Member for Taber-Warner called a point of order. At the time the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity was answering a question from the opposition. It was quite a raucous moment in the Chamber. The comment was overheard: you're a clown. The point of order was called on the Member for Edmonton-Decore, but the reality is that I cannot confirm whether that was, in fact, the case. I did hear the comment.

I do believe this is a point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). If whoever said that comment did in fact say it, which I believe they did, hopefully, they'd recognize how inappropriate it is and apologize, but I'll leave the rest in your hands, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Deputy Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly didn't hear it and the Deputy Government House Leader didn't hear it, but I can agree that if any member has called the minister of natural gas a clown, at least in this Legislature, that would be offside the House rules, but I didn't hear it.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as you know, remarks that do not appear on the public record do not invite an intervention by the Speaker, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 624. However, I do concur with both the Deputy Opposition House Leader and the Deputy Government House Leader that if anyone did call the minister a clown, the honourable thing would be to apologize and withdraw. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At approximately 2:17 the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley rose on a point of order and then again at 2:19. I'm not sure if they are two separate incidents or if they can be combined, but I'll call upon him now.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I called a point of order on 23(h), (i), and (j), "makes allegations against another Member; imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member; [and] uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." Now, I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but the nearest I can figure what the Government House Leader said was: "continued to put forward false allegations . . . I've lost count of how many false allegations" we get from opposition, "none of which, Mr. Speaker, after three years have ever been found to be true."

The Government House Leader knows full well that the allegations regarding the unethical FOIP actions of the Premier have been made by staff in the government, some current staff and some previous staff. Now, I'm hoping that he's not calling these staff liars in this case, but he also did say that this was coming from "anonymous Twitter trolls." Now, I'm going to suggest that he's not calling government staff anonymous Twitter trolls or calling Charles Rusnell or Jennie Russell, those investigative journalists that come up with this information, Twitter trolls also.

As far as "none . . . have ever been found true" in his comments, I wanted to mention just a couple of instances. There was the sky palace party, where the Premier clearly denied anything went wrong there for multiple days and then finally admitted guilt. In fact, I think what he said at the time was that he actually had staff go back and measure the distance between the chairs, and they were actually less than two metres, which obviously made it that it was actually a fact that it was an issue and he was guilty there.

I also want to point to the kamikaze campaign, where the Premier said he knew nothing about the financing. Of course, then there are stories come out where the Premier did know about the financing. Of course, there was a couple hundred thousand dollars . . .

The Speaker: I am certain that the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley is aware that points of order are not to be used to prolong debate. I assume the point of order is with respect to the language around false allegations. I don't think we have time this afternoon to defend, argue, debate all sorts of things that may or may not have happened in the past. If the member has any other specific allegations or concerns around the point of order with respect to that language, I'm happy to hear them. If not, we'll be moving on to the government.

Mr. Loewen: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, the accusation that they were false allegations is not true. The suggestion that there has never been in three years any allegations to be found true is also incorrect. I ask that the member apologize and withdraw.

Mr. Schow: Mr. Speaker, this is, of course, a matter of debate. There's a lot to unpack from the statements made from the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley, none of which rise to the threshold of a point of order. He said himself in his remarks that none of this has been substantiated. These are all allegations made by members of the public, none of which have been proven true. While the Member for Central Peace-Notley may not like the comments from the Government House Leader, I certainly don't believe they rise to the level of a point of order.

The Speaker: I would agree. This is a matter of debate and not a point of order. I consider the matter dealt with and concluded.

At 2:19 the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley rose on an additional point of order. I'm happy to hear that now should he choose to do so.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order, 23(h), (i), and (j) again. On the quote from the House leader – again I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but as near as I can recall it was, "That member and his NDP colleagues, who continue just . . . to make things up." Now, of course, this isn't true. There's no relationship with myself and the NDP. In fact, I brought this up before when I was tabling documents on March 31, to which the Government House Leader became very agitated. I guess he doesn't like to be called out when he lacks truth in his statements and comments, but he did have to apologize and withdraw twice over that incident on March 31. I was just going to suggest the best way for the Government House Leader to avoid situations where facts are laid out that prove he is incorrect is to start telling the truth. It's easy.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Schow: Well, Mr. Speaker, before I begin arguing this point of order – rather, against it – I would say that points of order should not be used as an opportunity to call the House leader a liar in however creative a way that may be. Suggesting that he "lacks truth in his statements" would indirectly be saying that, but we'll move on from that.

Mr. Speaker, in this Chamber we are all colleagues. Whether we're on the same party, same benches, or opposite sides, we are, in fact, colleagues working on behalf of the people of Alberta. To suggest that there is a problem, that saying "the Member for Central Peace-Notley and his NDP colleagues" is offensive – I can't speak for the hon. Government House Leader, but to say "the Member for Central Peace-Notley and his colleagues" is not a point of order. However, if that member is concerned about the perception of siding with the NDP, then I would suggest that he would stop playing petty politics and stop siding with them on important issues regarding this province. Siding with members who are closely seated to him would not be in his best interest if he doesn't want to be associated with such a caucus.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I do believe that this is a matter of debate and is certainly not something that should be a point of order.

3:10

The Speaker: I thank you for both of your interjections.

I do have the benefit of the Blues.

That's been made clear by the government, and . . . anonymous Twitter trolls are not real allegations. This is the approach that you see from the NDP. That member and his NDP colleagues, who continue just . . . to make things up, Mr. Speaker: it's very, very disappointing.

I will say that the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley ought to know that trying to find the most creative way possible, whether it's in point of order debate or regular debate, to call another member of the Assembly a liar is unparliamentary, just as it is and I have made many comments about making allegations that certain members, specific members, are making things up.

I would encourage both members to consider the caution appropriately. This is not a point of order. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 17 Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: This is the bill's first time in Committee of the Whole. I see the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration standing to speak.

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I am very pleased to rise and speak to Bill 17 in Committee of the Whole. As I have shared with members previously, Bill 17 introduces changes that would improve Albertans' access to bereavement and reservist leaves and maintain the status quo at postsecondary institutions. Job-protected leaves like bereavement leave and reservist leave allow employees to take time away from work to attend to personal matters without fear of losing their job. To show compassion to parents grieving the loss of an unborn child, bereavement leave will be expanded to include employees who experience a miscarriage or stillbirth as the bill is currently drafted.

Madam Chair, there has been a lot of discussion with stakeholders and in this House on bereavement leave and the proposed changes to it. I thank the various stakeholders and members of this House for their thoughtful contributions to this debate so far.

Madam Chair, I do want to thank my colleague the hon. Member for Sherwood Park for his private member's bill that inspired Bill 17. The hon. Member for Sherwood Park consulted with stakeholders and partners who have invested a lifetime in pregnancy loss supports across our province. I would also like to thank them for sharing their experiences with us.

Madam Chair, I also want to offer my sincere thanks and recognize Ms Aditi Loveridge, founder and chief executive officer of the Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support Centre, for the work she and her organization do on a daily basis and her critical advocacy on this issue to see that this is a really good bill.

In response to debate in this Assembly as well as feedback from these stakeholders and as I committed in this Assembly, I would like to introduce an amendment to the sections of the bill that address bereavement leave, and I do have the requisite copies here, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I'll just wait for a copy, and then I'll have you read it into the record.

Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1.

Hon. minister, please proceed to debate.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended as follows: section 1(5) is amended in the proposed section 53.983(2) by striking out clauses (b) to (d) and substituting the following:

- (b) the pregnancy of the employee ends other than as a result of a live birth;
- (c) the pregnancy of the employee's spouse or common-law partner ends other than as a result of a live birth;
- (d) the pregnancy of another person ends other than as a result of a live birth and the employee would have been a parent of a child born as a result of the pregnancy.

With this amendment the legislation would provide the broadest approach possible to address any situation where pregnancy ends other than in a live birth regardless of the reason or timing for the end of the pregnancy.

To be clear, Madam Chair, miscarriage and stillbirth are still covered, and employees experiencing miscarriage or stillbirth will be eligible for bereavement leave. Instead of naming miscarriage or stillbirth specifically, if this amendment is accepted, the legislation would use more general terminology to make it clear that any employee experiencing pregnancy loss is eligible for bereavement leave.

Madam Chair, pregnancy loss is a very difficult and highly personal circumstance. Employees experiencing any kind of pregnancy loss should be able to access bereavement leave without having to share the details of their circumstance with their employers. Once again, I would like to also thank members in this Assembly and others who have spoken out on the importance of making bereavement leave available to any employee who experiences any kind of pregnancy loss.

With that, Madam Chair, I hope that all members of this Assembly present would vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1 on Bill 17? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Chair, for calling on me. I have many, many, many comments to make, but it is committee, so I may just make a few right now and then return once I've had a bit more time to digest.

Now, I want to start my remarks, actually, quite similarly to the minister. Gosh, I have to just talk about and highlight the incredible advocates who, as the minister said, have worked with this government. In fact, prior, when the Member for Sherwood Park worked on this in its previous iteration as a private member's bill, it was during that debate that, you know, we had the opportunity, all of us, to very much ask questions about the specificity of that proposed legislation. It was in that discussion, too, that we shared our shared support of folks like Aditi Loveridge, who is the head of the pregnancy and infant loss centre in Calgary. In fact, they work all over the province, and they're expanding to other areas as well.

3:20

It's never been more on my radar and on the radar of so many Albertans and Canadians, the issue of a person's right to choose and the issues around abortion. We need to look no further than the United States and the proposed overturning of Roe versus Wade, which, as everybody in this Chamber knows, has sent serious chills down the spines of many. You know, this government, when asked to debate abortion access and to talk about the real threats facing women and gender-diverse folks in this province, refused to. The associate minister responsible for Status of Women dismissed our concerns and minimized them as something that happens south of the border.

You know, it was incredibly frustrating for us and for so many who were watching at home to hear that dismissive attitude because we've seen, yeah, countless examples where threats to human rights, threats to reproductive rights are ever present. By dismissing them and by minimizing them, it puts all the freedoms that so many of us – many, many folks – have fought for. I think just prior in the Assembly to the veteran who's celebrating his 100th birthday – apologies that I forgot his name; I will find that and correct the record because that's my error for talking off the cuff – as an example of somebody who fought for our freedoms. We were so honoured to celebrate him today.

All that to say, you know, that I see this amendment in front of me from the minister, which seeks to strike out some of the clauses that we in the Official Opposition as well as stakeholders, those on the front lines, had concerns with. We really wanted to make sure that – I expressed this, and so did my colleagues in the Chamber. We don't always have a great number of opportunities to work together on pieces of legislation and really get them right, so I appreciate that we've had an opportunity to go back and forth. I appreciate that the minister was willing to listen as well to folks with lived experience, folks on the front lines.

I guess, because it is committee, again, I like – and I think I say this probably at least once a week in the Chamber. I am not a lawyer, and my key legal adviser . . . [interjection] I know; I know, to the Member for West Yellowhead, that you're shocked by this. My key – oh. I was going to say something that might be a point of order. I'm unable to consult with my key legal adviser at the moment, but I do want to get some clarity from the minister because, again, I sometimes need a little bit of guidance on language in amendments.

I see in the amendment – again, for those watching at home, we've just gotten this:

- (b) the pregnancy of the employee ends other than as a result of a live birth;
- (c) the pregnancy of the employee's spouse or common-law partner ends other than as a result of a live birth;
- (d) the pregnancy of another person ends other than as a result of a live birth and the employee would have been a parent of a child born as a result of the pregnancy.

Particularly in clauses (b) and (c) I want to get some confirmation from the minister if this amendment specifically includes termination for medical reasons and abortion. I want to get that clarity because one of the big concerns that stakeholders raised is that – listen, somebody who is experiencing pregnancy loss – and many of my colleagues have shared their own experiences, were quite vulnerable in doing so, and I respect that so much.

One of the things that they've shared and others with lived experience have shared is just, you know, that it's one of the toughest times that somebody will have to go through, and we're concerned that if there's a lack of clarity and a lack of inclusivity in the language, that's going to put a lot on the person to try to navigate understanding what exactly is written in the legislation. We can't have any room for interpretation on this bill. We can't force an employee at one of the toughest, most traumatic times of their life to have to justify why they need that leave and have to explain to their employer. You know, like I said, it's committee. I appreciate that we'll have lots of back and forth, and I know I've got colleagues who want to ask a few more questions as well, but I would like to, hopefully, get that clarity on the record from the minister.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to be able to rise today and to speak to this amendment on Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. The changes that have been made by this amendment, in my mind, broaden it and change some of the language. It talks about pregnancy of the employee ending other than as a result of a live birth.

I believe that when I rose the other day to speak in second reading to Bill 17 I focused my remarks on the fact that this bill was dealing, amongst other things, with unpaid bereavement leave. This amendment focuses in on that part of this bill. The leave recognizes that a pregnancy lost to miscarriage or to stillbirth – in second reading we talked about the fact that a miscarriage or a stillbirth

should be recognized, that the grief over the loss of a young child in the womb due to miscarriage and to a stillbirth has value and that we should recognize that with three days' leave for the employee or for a spouse or for any of the other situations that are mentioned within the bill.

In second reading I rose to speak in support of Bill 17 because it recognizes that all Albertans – what I believe all Albertans intuitively know, that they instinctively know, that the grief that they have is not bounded by whether that life is inside or whether it's outside of the womb. As I listened to the debate in this House, in this Legislature, the debate to that point had been gratifying to hear, that MLAs on both sides of the House understood this, that the life that we grieve has value.

Every life, Madam Chair, I believe, has value, regardless of its age or its colour or its religion or its nationality or any other precondition that you would want to put on it. Value is not placed on life as a result of its status or its income or its mental acuity or any perceived value that a society or an individual could place on it. Life has value from conception until death, not for any other reason than because it is a human life. It is a person and, in my eyes, a life that is made in the image of God. All life is worthy of life. And any loss of a valuable life is worthy of our grief and of a period of mourning.

Madam Chair, the amendment before us today I believe broadens Bill 17 in that it now refers to a pregnancy ending other than the result of a live birth. I will be supporting this amendment for two reasons. Firstly, I believe that it recognizes that in many, many cases, even in the case of an abortion, there can be and often is great and at times even debilitating grief. I believe that this amendment also recognizes that there are many circumstances under which life in utero may be lost, and in all of those circumstances it is a life that has value and has the capacity and should have the capacity to be mourned.

3:30

Madam Chair, I know there will be some people that perhaps are pro life that will question how the amendment can be supported when an unborn life in the womb that is taken not as a result of an unfortunate life circumstance but has occurred as a result of a deliberate choice could be supported by someone like me, that is pro life. While this is true, I would bring to everyone's attention the need in all of our lives for mercy, for compassion, for grace, and for love. I've met and I have listened to women of all ages who have grieved and had immense emotional pain over their abortions. They have regretted that decision, and they have mourned over the loss of the life of their child, in many cases for years and years. This amendment recognizes what many women, what many fathers, what many grandparents, what many siblings have recognized, that the life lost in the womb had value, that their grief is real, and that the time to mourn is necessary, even and maybe especially when the loss of the pregnancy is the result of an abortion.

Secondly, Madam Chair, I support this amendment because there are many circumstances in life under which life in the uterus, in utero, may be lost. Therefore, the grief will be as unique as the circumstances and the individuals involved and so must be recognized by this bill. This amendment, by broadening the language, recognizes this and is therefore, I believe, worthy of support.

Madam Chair, we've heard from both sides of this Legislature that we understand that all life, including life in the womb, has value and is worthy of the grief that we have at its loss. It is therefore reasonable to this MLA that the amendment should receive the support of this House, and I would encourage all MLAs to do so.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm going to start by saying that hearing from two government members who have never had to make a decision for themselves about whether or not they'll need an abortion, who come here and talk to us about abortion and use phrases like "life in utero" repeatedly in this place when they know how loaded those terms are, I think is disrespectful to all women who are engaged in this consideration this afternoon. I appreciate that they have an opinion and that they have every right to share it. I think that women's voices need to be heard loud and clear. Women's voices, obviously, from our caucus have been amplified, but I think women within all political parties owe it to be engaged in this debate and to be very clear about where they stand on women's rights to choose or any Albertan's right to choose.

I've definitely heard from many Albertans who don't identify as women who didn't think they'd ever be in the horrific decision of having to decide whether or not to proceed with a pregnancy because they didn't plan on having a man make them get pregnant. That was not part of what they anticipated was going to be a part of their life plan.

To any Albertan who has been in a position where they need to make a choice about their own body and their own health when it comes to reproduction, I want to say that the members of this caucus support Albertans in making those choices for themselves. To apply lots of cloaked language about whether or not somebody has a right to have time off when they've undergone a medical procedure that often causes a variety of physical responses, I think – I've heard what you've had to say, and I want to acknowledge that.

I know that many people really wanted clear language from the government in their amendment to actually spell out abortion and termination of pregnancy for medical reasons. That was a very clear ask from people who are going to be required to interpret this down the road, and I'm sure that the minister who brought forward the amendment thinks that this goes far enough in the language that he's choosing. I'm sure that he very deliberately – he very deliberately – chose language like "other than as a result of a live birth," thinking that that was probably inclusive enough. I know that people who are going to be tasked with interpreting this have asked us specifically to have the law spell out abortion and termination for medical reasons.

I want to talk for a moment about why people who are in that position deserve the opportunity to have the same protection in law, to have protected time away from work to be able to heal and to be sick, very frankly. I think that most people who – and it's interesting, too. You'll often hear men say: it's a decision that should only be between a woman and her doctor. I actually don't think it should be up to the doctor. I think it should be up to the person who's pregnant to make the determination whether or not they proceed with their pregnancy, and I really wish that the government would acknowledge that through clear language in this amendment.

If they won't put it in this amendment – and for anyone who doesn't know the details around legislative process, once a section has been amended, you can't reamend that same section. So by the government putting this language in and the government having a majority, if they so choose to pass it, it means that other people in this House can't bring forward amendments to the same section that would actually give that clarity. The government stood up – maybe they stood up – and the government was recognized immediately for standing first in the Assembly and having the attention of the person facilitating the debate. Fair enough. And the government has chosen to use this language other than the language that was very explicitly asked for from many folks for whom this issue is a very deep, personal issue.

Is this language better than where we were at before the amendment was brought forward for consideration? Probably. Is this our best work? I don't think so. I think that we could do a very good service to the people of Alberta by actually spelling out the types of pregnancy loss, including abortion and termination for medical reasons.

I also want to take a moment to say very explicitly that I know women who have had to make this difficult decision. They knew full well that if they went full term and if it resulted in a live birth, the fetus that they were carrying would not survive past the point of birth for more than a few minutes or hours based on all of the medical analysis on the status of the fetus. To say to that expectant mother, that pregnant person, "If you go full term, then you can have the guaranteed protection; if you don't, you may not have the protection of a job-protected sick leave while you're dealing with the impacts of your pregnancy termination or pregnancy loss," I think that that, again, puts this chilling effect over women and their bodies.

Member Irwin: And gender-diverse folks.

Ms Hoffman: And gender-diverse folks. Yeah. Thank you for that.

I didn't think that we'd be in a position where this would be such an area of focus for our consideration in this Legislature a few months ago. Actually, as soon as the Premier was elected, I thought that there will be things that are done covertly to roll back women's protection. Certainly, he doesn't have a track record of wanting to talk about women's reproductive health in this place.

In fact, he got up and ordered every member of his caucus – or maybe he didn't order it. But somebody directed every member of their caucus to get up and walk out of this Chamber 13 times – 13 times – almost four years ago to the day when we brought in protection to stop people from being harassed as they entered or were in the vicinity of a health facility that provided these types of services, so bubble-zone protection.

3:40

An Hon. Member: Thirteen times?

Ms Hoffman: Thirteen times, not once or twice. The first couple of times it was definitely something we'd never seen before in this place: an entire caucus get up and walk out of the Chamber, neglecting to engage in debate, engage in their jobs, actually, their jobs as it relates to making decisions in this place for Albertans, get up and walk out of this Chamber 13 times. I believe one person did speak at one stage, but nobody voted. How disrespectful that is to, obviously, the people directly impacted by the legislation but also to the people who sent them here to come and do their jobs, so frustrating and so disrespectful.

I have to say that I really wish the government had been more definitive in the actual language in the amendment. Since they haven't and since I know that there are times where laws need to be interpreted and that one of the main things that those who are interpreting do is that they go back to see what the debate was around those sections as they were being considered to become law, it would be really great if the government could just definitively state that this includes abortion and termination for medical reasons, at least on *Hansard* if they're not going to put it in the amendment. It would be much better in the amendment, but if they can at least put it on the record so that if we do get to the point where people are arguing over their rights as it relates to the law and the labour statutes amendment that we are considering today, I think that that would be far more appropriate than continuing to throw around coded language. I think that Albertans deserve that clarity, and anyone who needs to access this type of job-protected sick leave needs to have that clarity on the record.

It isn't just because of the 13 times every member of the UCP got up and walked out of the Chamber. It's because there are many members within the government caucus that have a long, documented history of actually fighting against women's rights to choose and all people's rights to choose, the right to choice and to bodily autonomy as it relates to pregnancy status. There is such a well-documented history, and we've all seen the images where underneath the now Premier it says, "Anti-Abortion Activist." Like, Albertans deserve to have this clarity in law. It should have been in the amendment. It needs to be in *Hansard*. Continuing to try to skirt around the edges of what is such a fundamental question about our rights is more than disrespectful. I think it is a dereliction of responsibility to all people of this province, who expect government to make decisions.

I'm sure my colleagues of various political persuasions have opportunities to speak to children about the role of government. One of the questions kids often ask is: "What's the toughest part?" And I say, "Sometimes you've got to make really tough decisions, and at the end of the day you have a choice to vote yes or no." I have to say that today is yet another one of those days where the government is trying to muddy up the question, not make it as clear as it should be, and that, I think, is disrespectful to everyone who is waiting for the government to definitively stand up for choice and access to abortions throughout this province.

It really came to a head, of course, last Monday, just over a week ago. On Monday night, when that draft decision of the Supreme Court in the United States became publicly available, so many of us, I think, sat on our phones or whatever devices watching the news, seeing what was happening, and felt angry, frustrated, disrespected. And I don't live south of the border; I live here. But because an attack on *Roe versus Wade*, which has been held up as a beacon of human rights for many of us around the world, is about to be considered for a significant retraction on those rights, because that is happening in what was once seen as such a great democracy, it sends a chilling effect over other democracies around the world and women and other folks who might need to access abortions around the world.

So when I look at what's happening with some women and other folks who are fleeing Ukraine right now and ending up in Poland, some who are pregnant and, if they were still in Ukraine, would be able to access abortion services, and reporting that they're not able to access them now that they're in Poland – and some of them have said that they got pregnant because of sexual assault by people who were invading their country on them. I don't think that anyone wants to say: well, that's another country's legal authority, and they have a right to make a decision about, you know, how they're going to determine that.

I think we should all stand in unity and say: "You know, what's happening right now, an attack against *Roe versus Wade*, has ripple effects around the world. It's wrong, and we stand with women and other people who might need to access abortion services. We stand with them, and we oppose what's happening and this attack on human rights." I wish the current government had the moral conviction to stand up and say that. For those who are looking to the current government for an assurance that they absolutely will not waver, I wish we saw the clarity in language in this place that Albertans and all people deserve to hear from other democratic governments around the world. It seems clear that the current Premier and members of his cabinet and, potentially, caucus continue to evade the question and continue to try to create any opportunity to distract, and I think that that is incredibly disrespectful to all of the people who are calling on their government to show some leadership.

Is this amendment better than the bill was before the amendment? Maybe. Is this amendment our best work? I don't think so. I don't think this is our best work. I don't think it's answering the question that many have asked us to engage in. It is better in that it doesn't

say “miscarriage” or “stillbirth” explicitly now. The bill is amended by striking clauses (b) through (d). That’s where it specifically said “miscarriage” and “stillbirth.” Thank you to my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo for pointing that out. Replacing “miscarriage” and “stillbirth” with this language that says, “Ends other than as a result of a live birth” I guess is a possible positive step forward, but it certainly isn’t definitive clarity that so many have been asking for.

They want the government to say the words. They want the government to put the words in law, and this government fails to do that time and time again, which is one of the reasons why, when people like the Associate Minister of Status of Women say, “We haven’t made any changes; the law is the same today as it was yesterday” – well, when you refuse to actually put in law words like “abortion,” it implies that that might not actually be a choice down the road because it could result in something other than a live birth, right? It doesn’t speak to the issue of the day, the issue that’s been raised, which is that people want the words “abortion” and “termination for medical reasons” to be incorporated in this.

By skirting around it and failing to actually address the question that has been asked, the question that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood asked in this Chamber – and the minister responsible for this amendment was directed by the Premier. I sat here. I saw it play out. The Premier said: just say yes to the amendment. Well, the amendment was to include abortion and termination for medical reasons. That’s what we were asking about. That’s what the Premier directed the minister to respond with, and that is absolutely not what is being put here definitively in black and white for us to consider.

So I have to say that it probably is better than just saying “stillbirth” or “miscarriage,” but it doesn’t answer the question that was asked, that the Premier directed the minister to bring forward an amendment to address, and I think that that is disrespectful to this place. It’s disrespectful to the member’s question when it was asked, and it’s disrespectful to women and anybody who is worried about their own bodily autonomy when it comes to reproductive health and a choice that they may have to make at some point in their lives.

3:50

While I appreciate that many men in this place have opinions on this issue and I especially appreciate the solidarity that’s felt in our caucus, I think the fact that people who haven’t had to make these decisions and will never have to make these decisions for themselves have been the only voices on the record from the government when it comes to the amendment that has been asked for from women’s rights organizations and others representing gender-diverse folks is incredibly disrespectful.

I think I will leave my remarks there for the time being and see where the conversation continues to, but this is absolutely a call to action for every single one of us in this place and particularly for women in this place because this bill is so close to the rights that we should all have protected.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. It’s my pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment to Bill 17, amendment A1. First, let me say that I think Bill 17 is an important piece of legislation. I was also in the Chamber when I saw the Premier sort of communicate with the minister and just say yes about an amendment. I was encouraged that that would happen, and I think we’ve all been waiting to see what this amendment from the government would look like. I’m

hoping that it’s just an oversight – and, hopefully, the minister will come back and clarify or perhaps amend the amendment and make some changes – but I don’t think it goes far enough.

Of course, I was happy to see the leave supported. I think it’s important to understand why these leaves, not just stillbirth and not just miscarriage – but there are other things where leaves are very important, and those things include abortion and termination for medical reasons. I don’t understand, Madam Chair – well, I guess I do understand why people are afraid to actually say those words. It’s almost like we work with code. You know, we’re not going to say it. We’ll say certain things that are careful – it’s a decision between someone and their doctor – but we won’t come out and say it.

But I think that we all need to step up and reaffirm that abortion is a human right. It’s a human right, and I think that it’s a critical piece of advancing the story of women’s advancement. I think it’s really important for us to recognize that for a woman or any person to have complete control over their body is important. It’s essential to advance human rights.

And it shouldn’t matter why. All too often I think that we’re qualifying things. You know, like my colleagues, actually, probably over the last year or so I watched with horror what is happening to the south, in the United States. We saw a lot of disturbing things happening in Texas. We saw the Governor of Texas I think it was in 2021, where they made abortion after six weeks’ gestation illegal. We saw some lawsuits or a threat of lawsuits to any practitioners that would offer these services to people. We saw them opening up the ability for lawsuits against them. Again, people were measuring their ability to do that, and all of this is methodically designed to reduce access to abortion.

When we saw the leaked decision for *Roe v. Wade*, I think – I’m not going to speak for my colleagues. You know, I was horrified by it, not entirely surprised but horrified by it. It was my hope – it became even more important that we in this place be crystal clear about what it is that we want to do, and what we want to do or what at least I hope the government wants to do is to amend their legislation to ensure that any person who has an abortion or a termination for medical reasons is covered for leave and that it shouldn’t matter what that reason is. It shouldn’t matter because they have been sexually assaulted. It shouldn’t matter that there is incest involved. It shouldn’t matter that it was contraception that didn’t work. It shouldn’t matter that it was a financial hardship or a dysfunctional, abusive relationship. It shouldn’t matter if it was a health issue like an ectopic pregnancy. None of that should matter because it is a person’s right to access an abortion.

Now, I could spend a lot of time talking about what this particular government has done wrong in terms of supporting and increasing and, at the very least, maintaining access to these services because that is dismal in this province. It was my hope that at least this amendment would clarify that any person that had a procedure like this, like the ones I described, would be eligible for a leave, but again we get this coded language that isn’t quite – you know, it’s not crystal clear. Maybe that wasn’t the intent of the government, and that’s okay, but I would love for the minister to come back and to maybe explain why the language is the way it is in this amendment.

You know, not all employers are the same. Not all employers are the same, so to have a person that wants to access this leave – let’s say that they don’t have access to anything else or any other time and they’re required to request this leave. Not all employers are informed and inclusive and accessible, and they will probe, if the language is not crystal clear, about what is covered and what is not. Then all too often people that are looking to access this leave are going to have to divulge information that they should never have to divulge. It’s personal. It’s nobody’s business other than the person

who chose what they did. But without clarity in this amendment, that is not going to happen.

I think back to in my own life, my own experience – you know, I have a uterus, so, yeah, I have some experience to add to this conversation. But I'm not going to really talk about that. I'm going to talk about my friend. I was really quite fortunate. I got to be a birth coach twice in my life, which has been awesome, once for my sister and then once for my friend, and it was really interesting. My friend, at around 40, decided that being in a relationship wasn't going to happen for her at that age. She really wanted to be a mother, so she did a lot of research, and what she decided to do was to do IVF with donor sperm. That's what she did, a lot of research.

You probably didn't know that there are sperm donor catalogues. You can actually go through and select the donor based on a number of factors, a lot of which are health related, but you can actually make those decisions, and that's what she did. It was a huge financial investment for her, but this is something where she couldn't wait any longer. She knew that she wanted to be a mom and have her own child, so that's what she decided to do. It was a lot of work, but that was her right, to do it. It was her body, and it was her choice.

The first time that she had IVF, actually, we were super hopeful that things were going along quite well, and then she miscarried. For her to request a leave for her – I mean, her employer did know what was happening, so she didn't have to explain that, but imagine, if she worked in a place where the employer was not as informed, how she would have to explain all of this, knowing that she's perhaps not in a relationship. She would have to divulge a lot of personal information. Anyway, that would be covered under a miscarriage. But that was one experience. Now, her healing journey was quite a bit different than, say, someone who chose to get an abortion for whatever reason, because it actually doesn't matter why they did get an abortion. But that healing process is quite different. I'll just fast-forward and tell you that her son is actually awesome. He's playing hockey right now, and he's about eight years old, and he's fabulous.

But on the other flip side is that when I was in my early 30s, I had two children already and actually ended up getting pregnant again. I don't have to say why, but there were some complicated reasons, and I decided to have an abortion. I did that, and I can tell you that it's a really difficult decision to make, but I'm not alone. I think there are so many women. Once I came out and said what I did, so many women said to me, "Yeah, so did I; actually, I did twice," or they would tell me their own experience.

4:00

The worst part of it is that people are terrified to say it. They're terrified of the judgment. They're terrified of people just thinking things about them that are not necessarily true. They're afraid and terrified of having to explain why. And they don't have to explain why. They absolutely don't. But people are fearful because they have just not had that right to be able to control everything about their own bodies.

So I think that if we're going to do this legislation properly and if we're going to say, "You know what? This is a good thing that we want to ensure that women for whatever reason, whether it is a miscarriage or a stillbirth or a termination for a medical reason or an abortion, whatever it is – it doesn't matter why; whatever it is – have access to this leave because they are important and they are valued and they deserve the time to be well and they deserve the time to heal," then let's be crystal, crystal clear about the language that we use. Let's not mess around. Let's not be afraid to say what it is.

I can tell you we're all, you know, really into it right now, and we're focused on this legislation, but years from now, when an employer looks at, "Do I have to support this or not?" they're going to look back and they're going to see ambiguity. They might find a loophole, and they might say: "Well, I don't have to do that. It doesn't really say. I mean, it's not really crystal clear, and then I looked at *Hansard* and I looked at the debate, and that wasn't crystal clear." I'm hoping that my comments are crystal clear. Let's use the language. Let's not be afraid to use the words. Let's normalize it.

As I said, abortion is a human right. To control your own body and to make decisions for your life and your future is a human right. It's frustrating to me. It's incredibly frustrating to me that in 2022 we're still dancing around words because we're afraid to use them. I hope that's not the case. I truly, genuinely hope that's not the case and that this is just an oversight in this amendment. I truly hope that is the case and that the minister will stand up and reassure this House: "You know what? Let's be clear. Let's define exactly what this is so that any person that requests a leave in the future will get it because we've been crystal clear, we've done due diligence, and we've identified exactly what needs to happen."

It's called inclusive language. It's so important that we use inclusive language. My colleague is so right to point out that it's not just women. It's gender-diverse folks that really need to be included in this conversation. I make mistakes all the time with the language that I use, whether it's about referring to someone with a disability or as a disabled person. You know, I'm sometimes not sure what language to use. Or gender diverse: I'm sometimes not sure what language to use. I welcome it when my colleagues correct me and tell me what the correct language is because we're learning and we're changing. So it is my sincere hope that the minister will take these comments as: this language isn't clear enough. Let's do our best to be crystal clear about what this leave is for and who it is for and what it's meant to do. We shouldn't be afraid of language.

I think, you know, given the state of politics in our country, in North America, given the state of – we see things going backwards in so many ways that I know that I'm fearful. I know that I have fought for women's rights, for equal rights, for years, for decades. I can remember going to a march when my son was, like, seven years old. There was actually a picture of him in the *Journal* holding a sign. It was my expectation that by this time my daughter wouldn't have to be worried about language or using the word "abortion" or having equal access to a leave. It was my hope that we would be well past that, but I see what's happening all around us, and I see that that is not the case.

You know, I saw a really funny sign, well, a funny-sad sign, at one of the rallies that said, "*The Handmaid's Tale* should not be a manual," something like that. It's sad. It's sad that we're at this place that we're talking about words, and we have a government that is – I don't know. I hope they're willing to correct this. I really want to give this government the benefit of the doubt here. I truly do.

Anyway, with that, I'm going to take my seat.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, it is committee, and I appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak multiple times to this bill or to this amendment, I should say. I just have to again thank my colleagues for sharing their perspectives and particularly my colleague from St. Albert, who shared her own personal story. She's exactly right. It's a lot. I don't have my own personal story. I do have a uterus, though, like my colleagues from Edmonton-Glenora and St. Albert pointed out. I guess I was hopeful that I would hear from more

government members, particularly those who would be most impacted. It's troubling to me that we've not heard back and we've not heard clarity from the minister.

We were going back and forth there, and in the spirit of collegiality I was hopeful that we would get some clarity, so I'll ask again for that clarity in the amendment. We see language around "result of a live birth." I need the minister responsible for Labour and Immigration to be unequivocal in the clarity needed around this bill, so I'll say it directly: will this bill include abortion and termination for medical reasons?

I'm incredibly frustrated when I hear – you know, we've only heard from one member opposite, and that is a member who just stated that he was pro life, or perhaps more aptly described as antichoice, and that's his prerogative, absolutely. But it's certainly concerning that I'm not hearing from members opposite that I believe would say that they may not hold the same views as that member. When that member shares stories about women regretting their abortions, I want that member to perhaps think about some of the stories that myself and my colleagues have heard.

In fact, I was communicating with somebody. She's given me her permission to talk about the work that she does, and her name is Autumn Reinhardt-Simpson. She is an abortion doula. You know, that might seem – and I'm quoting an article which I will table. It says:

That phrase might seem like an oxymoron – although she does sometimes support those who end up choosing to go through with a pregnancy,

as doulas often do. Our conception of a doula might seem a little bit contradictory, but her job is all about protecting clients' well-being. She says:

I'm here to support the choice that's best for you and your family, not the choice that's going to support my ideological preference or some sort of religious goal. I try not to impose . . . my own views, I just ask a lot of questions.

I'm there to support them, she says.

But unfortunately the stigma in regards to abortion care is such that people have to turn to a complete stranger like me and trust that they can help them and get them through this.

She offered me – she said, you know: I've got countless stories of folks in Alberta struggling to access abortion.

4:10

When that government's minister responsible for Status of Women dismisses the lived experiences of folks trying to access abortion, when I hear from members opposite that there are no issues in abortion access, when I hear the very Premier of this province, who's not even willing to utter the words "abortion," "reproductive rights," "women," for that matter – in fact, I can consult *Hansard*, but I believe his direct words were: "that procedure." Unwilling to even talk about the issue – and as has been stated already today, this is a person well known for his antiabortion sentiment. We've not had him clear the air in this Chamber as to where he stands today on that very issue, so until he does, we'll have to assume that he's unwilling to act on the very challenges that folks face across this province in accessing abortions.

Back to Autumn, the abortion doula that I mentioned earlier. She's doing incredible work. I know, at least the last time I chatted with her, about her studies. She was doing a PhD. She's got a lot going on, so she's really doing this on the side, and she's paying a lot out of pocket just to support folks. She gave me the example today of, you know, a woman last month, who she connected with, who had to go to 10 pharmacies before she could fill her prescription for Mifegymiso because none of the pharmacists would do it despite the law. That's one story of many she can offer us, and I will ask her to share more stories

like that. It's not fiction; this is the lived reality of many women and gender-diverse folks right now in the province of Alberta.

As my colleague from St. Albert talked about, in addition to the real barriers in access, you know, being turned down by doctors, obviously, trying to get a procedure, we know that there are very few sites in this province where folks can access an abortion. But people are being turned down for even getting the drug . . .

I look at my Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Mifegymiso.

Member Irwin: . . . which, you know, I was so proud to see that our government funded and supported.

They focused on expanding abortion access and focused on things like bubble zones around abortion clinics. It wasn't that long ago – gosh, when was it when I joined some counterprotesters who were there to support women and folks accessing the clinic? They were just trying to show their love and support because protesting is still happening outside the clinic in that same Member for Edmonton-Glenora's riding. It's still happening. It's the shame and, gosh, the verbal abuse that these folks have to experience, photography – right? – being outed to their families and their loved ones. It's unbelievable.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

So you can imagine that when I hear stories from Autumn and when I hear stories from, you know, folks who are on the front lines – I talked about folks working with the pregnancy and infant loss centre. I mean, there's still so much stigma that exists out there, and this is why we're incredibly alarmed when we see what's happening with the potential overturning of Roe versus Wade, which is why it should be incumbent on all of us in this Legislature, no matter your religious or ideological views, to ensure that women and gender-diverse folks are healthy and safe in our province.

No doubt – no doubt – we're skeptical of this government's support for reproductive health, when this is the same government that continues to attack health care in this province. What's most top of mind for me at this exact minute? Oh, I think about the cutting of the insulin pump program. Wow. You know what somebody said so aptly on Twitter this morning, yesterday? I'm not sure when. "You know, the UCP really did just wake up and say, 'You know who has it too good in this province right now? Type 1 diabetics. You know what? They're doing too well with their insulin pumps. So you know what? Let's cut that program.'" Let's give them additional barriers and red tape that they'll now have to try to manage, leaving many families across this province uncertain about the future of their insulin pump and getting no answers. Gosh, I almost feel sorry for the Education minister having to defend these decisions today, right?

Ms Hoffman: Almost.

Member Irwin: Almost. The same Education minister who talks about kids and putting children first and cuts insulin pumps for those very same kids like Conor, who is six, or Walker, who just turned eight. Unbelievable. Unbelievable.

Mr. Getson: What bill is this?

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

Member Irwin: I hope – you know, he's been doing this a lot today, the Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland. I mean, not that I really want to get his perspective on abortion, but he's welcome to join debate. He's welcome to stand up and join debate instead of heckling consistently, as he does. It seems like he must be silenced because he hasn't spoken much today, but he sure has heckled a lot.

I don't think he's spoken at all, in fact. Anyways, I await his remarks. [interjection] Absolutely. I'd like to hear his views. That's right. The Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall is correct.

Again, I can point to significant barriers that women and gender-diverse folks are experiencing right now in the province of Alberta in 2022. The fact that I'm not hearing from government MLAs, other than the one so far, about their position on this speaks volumes. This is not just an urban issue, right? This is not something that just, you know, members like me and Edmonton-Glenora and Edmonton-City Centre in core areas of the city are hearing about. Members in rural Alberta are hearing about this as well, and some of the biggest barriers to access are in rural Alberta. I see a whole heck of a lot of MLAs in this Chamber who represent rural Alberta not speaking up about this or about the ongoing cuts to health care in their communities. I'm hopeful that I'll hear from them.

Again, I've certainly got more to say, but I once again want to ask for the clarity on this legislation because we haven't heard it yet. I want to again reiterate that none of us in this Chamber would want to put someone who has just experienced pregnancy loss through having to navigate understanding of this legislation, having to go back through *Hansard* and figure out: okay; does this bill apply to me? At a time when we should be supporting, we should make it as easy as possible for those who've experienced pregnancy loss to access leave like this, we're adding additional barriers, and we're lacking that clarity. With that, I will conclude my remarks for the moment.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1? Seeing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah. In committee I'm excited to rise and speak again and again and again until we actually get some answers from the government about what they actually mean about this amendment, because I think that this amendment is an attempt to be vague and cloaked about what the actual language means. In committee you can rise and speak as many times as you want. Certainly, would love to get some answers from the government. Maybe they haven't had a chance to hear the question again, so let me be very clear. The language in this amendment doesn't state abortion or termination for medical reasons. It might imply it, but it does not state it.

So will any member of the government stand in this House and definitively state that this includes termination for abortion or termination for medical reasons? Anyone in the government. That is the main question that we're asking here, and we will keep asking it over and over and over again, as is our right in committee, until we get some kind of an answer from the government, because it is embarrassing that we have to ask this many times and that the government keeps trying to play games. They may be in the room, but I can tell you it sure feels like they all got up and walked out emotionally, metaphorically, and in terms of their response to this fundamental question that has been raised by a number of people in Alberta, primarily by women and other folks who think that they might need to one day access an abortion or terminate a pregnancy for medical reasons. They want the government to give clarity, so we will keep asking the question. I know the government doesn't want to answer it, but Albertans deserve answers.

4:20

You might hear from me a lot more this afternoon if the government continues to refuse to actually address the root cause, the root question, the question that was asked by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, the critic for LGBTQ2S-plus issues as well as Status of Women, the question that was asked in this House last

week in question period, following the draft decision that has been made public about overturning *Roe versus Wade* in the United States, the question that was asked specifically in this House that we have a chance to say that we are not attacking women's rights, that we are going to respect them and their bodily autonomy.

We have a chance in this bill that we are considering today, Bill 17, which is titled *Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022*, but it speaks specifically in its current iteration to miscarriage or stillbirth. We have a chance to actually clarify that we want that to include other forms of pregnancy loss, including termination for an abortion or termination for medical reasons.

The people of Alberta deserve clarity from the government instead of more vague amendments and a refusal to actually even engage on their own debate. This is a government bill, a government amendment. We're asking very clear, simple questions that have been asked of us. I would like to be able to support this amendment. I really would. I do think the language is probably a little bit better than the language that's in the current iteration of the bill.

We actually had amendments prepared and ready to go that would give that clarity, but the government decided to jump up and be recognized first and then bring in this veiled language. If this passes, members of this Assembly well know that once a section of an act is amended and that amendment passes, you can't amend that same section again.

The government has decided to bring in this veiled language because they don't want us to actually put very clear, plain language that everyone can understand into this bill and to have to actually make a vote on something that has the word "abortion" in it, clearly.

The behaviour of four years ago, four years ago probably to this day because the debate lasted for a few weeks – the then Official Opposition, the United Conservative Party caucus, got up and walked out of this Chamber 13 times, and they may be sitting here today, but it sure feels like they got up and walked out of the building.

It sure feels, Madam Chair, like they are refusing to actually engage in the debate that they brought into this place. They brought forward this bill. They brought forward this amendment. We are asking very clear questions about what the amendment means, and we want it to be on the record. We do not want lawyers to be tied up for many, many billable hours trying to interpret the government's vague language through this bill, their veiled language.

People deserve clarity. They deserve to know if the government is indeed including abortion and termination to do with medical reasons in this bill, full stop. We will keep asking the question over and over again in committee, but we deserve answers. The people of Alberta deserve answers. [interjection] Excellent. I look forward to hearing a response from a member. I did wait for a quite a while before I stood up to ask the question yet again. I see a signal from a colleague in the UCP caucus that they are going to answer this question, and I certainly look forward to hearing the answer. Hopefully, it will bring me to a position where I can feel more inclined to support this amendment.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

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

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wouldn't of course want to rush my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora, but I do think it's worth pointing this out for the record. I've been listening to much of this debate albeit I did recently – I guess I can't say that. I haven't been in the Chamber for all that long, but I did hear lots of the debate. I know that intention is usually sussed out from the debate that we have in this place, so for the record, to make it perfectly clear to all Albertans, this amendment does include for abortion or medical termination as well.

This is, in my opinion, Madam Chair, an inclusive amendment. It is an amendment that's needed. I do actually want to thank the members opposite for bringing this forward as well. I know that we had heard this as well. Yes. This amendment does include termination for medical reasons and also abortion. I'll say that again for the record, now twice.

Madam Chair, I've been not quietly known as a pro-life individual. I am a woman. I am a rural Albertan. And I am very committed to my own personal beliefs. I also supported conscience rights legislation. I have supported pregnancy care centres in my riding. I have supported women in all difficult decisions, and I will continue to do that by recognizing that there is need to grieve the loss of a human life. I think that this amendment does that. I also think that the amendment that was to be brought forward by the opposition did that. Honestly, I could have probably voted for either amendment if we're being totally honest. But this language, I think, does that, and the intention certainly is to cover abortion and termination for medical reasons.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1 on Bill 17? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the comments from the member opposite. I appreciate that you were able to say the word a couple of times. That's great. That's a good thing.

Member Irwin: That would be a first, actually. We didn't hear that from the Premier.

Ms Renaud: No, we did not hear that from the Premier at all.

But I guess my question again is: if, actually, the point of this amendment is to be crystal, crystal, crystal clear that this leave is covered for people who experience stillbirth, miscarriage, abortion, and termination for medical reasons, then why not say it? The member is comfortable enough using the word "abortion" twice in her short speech; why not put it in the amendment? As I said in my earlier comments, I was super hopeful that the minister would come back and work with us and say: "You know what? Maybe we didn't get it quite right. We're not afraid of saying the words. We want clarity from now until whenever this bill is changed again. We want someone to have access to the discussion. We don't want it to be open for interpretation. A year, two years, five years from now we want to be crystal clear that if you choose to have an abortion or terminate for a medical reason, you have access to this leave, period. End of story."

I'm concerned that there seems to be a silence from the government about why they're unwilling to change the language and be clear in this language. Now, we've seen a pattern, and I was hopeful, as were my colleagues, that maybe we're wrong. Maybe we're assigning some things that don't need to be assigned to the government members because we've seen them leave this Chamber 13 different times when we were debating a bubble-zone bill. I'll tell you, that piece of legislation was so important.

If any of you have ever driven by an abortion clinic, it is gross, the people that are standing there with their gross, misleading signs and pictures, harassing people looking to get basic health care, health care that is a human right. They're assaulted with these disgusting images, that are misleading and false, and are subjected to this taunting when, really, they're just trying to access health care, as is their human right. We saw members opposite leave 13 different times. I don't really know why, but they did, Madam Chair. I'm sure you'll recall that incident. Actually, I think there was only one member of the opposition at the time who spoke to that piece of legislation; everybody else ran away.

I think we've seen time and again different members that are supported by groups that finance candidates that are meant to work

against increasing equity and equality around abortion. They're called pro-life groups, which – don't even get me started about why that's a ridiculous term – finance and fund these candidates, and we know that there are lots of them in the government benches. We know that. We know that the Premier – I think we all saw his picture on CNN as an antiabortion activist. That was the little thing at the bottom. That's what it read, that he went to university in San Francisco and decided that was going to be his calling. Doesn't have a uterus but wanted to stop people with uteruses from talking about it on campus. So you can imagine that there's alarm.

We see what's happening in the United States. We see what's happening in some of the southern states, where they may not have a full on ban, but they're making it increasingly difficult for women to access reproductive health care. They're making it increasingly difficult for practitioners to offer those services. It's frightening.

4:30

You know, I think back to the time when I had that procedure that I talked about a little bit earlier. I had to go to a hospital, actually, for it, and there was no signage. It was the weirdest thing that they had to give me directions: "Okay. Go down this hall. Then you'll see this picture. Then turn left here. Then knock on the door and wait." There was a bulletproof partition, glass.

I was so hopeful. When I was all done with that, I was certainly hopeful that things were going to change and women – not just women; gender-diverse folks and women would have access to health care where they didn't have to be afraid that some person with some kind of weird agenda, holding a sign, spending the day yelling at people trying to access health care. I would really hope that that would be different.

That is not the case, and that's why as legislators we have to do everything that we can to support changes that will ensure equity and ensure equality. What we're asking for is just clarity. If you're not afraid to use the word "abortion" – we heard the member opposite use it twice. Big steps. Baby steps. I'm not sure. It's good. Used the word twice. Why not be crystal clear in this amendment that if you want to access this leave that is in Bill 17, that I'm ready to support – then let's be clear. If you get an abortion for whatever reason – it does not matter; that is irrelevant – you have access to this leave. If you choose to terminate for a medical reason – does not matter why – you get access to this leave, in addition to stillbirth and miscarriage.

These are all things that require time to heal and not just physically. I'll tell you that it does require time to heal physically because it is really difficult, and it is difficult emotionally and mentally for whatever reason. That reason is irrelevant. Let's be clear that every single person going forward has access to this leave and there's no question that any person will have to go to their employer and explain why they should have access to this leave. Nobody should have to go through that. Nobody.

We can make that so here as legislators. We can be crystal clear about what this leave is meant to cover. It just takes a few words. It takes a little bit of courage. If indeed you want to promote equality and equity for all people in reproductive health and in leaves as described in Bill 17, let's fix this amendment so that it's crystal clear – crystal clear – about what it is meant to do.

Now, I think we'd probably be this passionate even if things weren't the way they are in our neighbouring country in the United States, even if we didn't see almost daily on the news the different assaults that are happening in terms of women's rights, if we didn't see women's rights being just dragged backwards. It feels like we're going back to the '50s sometimes.

I think we're reminded just how precious and fragile our rights are. It is incredibly important that we take our role as legislators

very seriously, and when we're saying – you know, I think the three people that have stood up, again and again, here with uteruses are saying: let's be crystal clear. Let's use the word so that abortion is covered, so that termination for medical reasons is covered in addition to stillbirth and miscarriage. Let's leave nothing to be questioned. Let's not make any person have to go to their employer and divulge information that no person should ever have to divulge to someone that they choose not to. That's awful. We can fix that. Maybe the government just made a mistake.

Now, they don't tend to admit when they make mistakes, and it usually takes a whole lot of public pressure for them to admit that there's a mistake. Usually they throw a few people under the bus, then say, "Well, yeah, it was a mistake." But maybe it was a mistake. They can fix it. Just change the words and make it crystal clear. That's all we're asking for. Make it clear so that this bill, which can be a good bill, and this leave, which can be a great thing – let's do it properly so that in the future there is no question what it covers.

With that, I'm going to take my seat and let someone else speak to this.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I really appreciate the insight and the debate. A lot of the members opposite kept goading me to get up and speak. Quite frankly, I am not a woman. I believe that some of the matters being discussed here are best left to our fairer sex and our colleagues along those lines. Where I do have some challenges and issues is with some of the diatribe that was coming from the member for McCall, so I will respond to some of those items here, quite frankly.

The bill that we're talking about – and I really appreciate the minister bringing this forward, and I also really appreciate, originally, the Member for Sherwood Park bringing this forward. It was done with the absolute best intent to understand that folks out there that have losses – whether it's through clinical measures, whether it's through stillbirths, whether it's through miscarriages – need to be respected and acknowledged and given a time of bereavement. That was Bill 17.

The amendment that was brought forward – here is something that I'll throw back to my colleague that actually is a lawyer and should understand full well the complexities of law in contracts, as an example. Sometimes the best thing is to keep it simple, the old KISS principle, when it comes to law. When you get too prescriptive, you can also tip the scale and the balance the other way and cause issues or concerns or court challenges later.

What I want to read into the record here again is the actual amendment that we're talking about. It is on the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. It's that section 1(5) is amended in the proposed section 53.983(2) by striking out clauses (b) to (d) and substituting the following:

- (b) the pregnancy of the employee ends other than as a result of a live birth.

Anything other than a live birth: that's pretty wide breadth. So anything that could be underneath there other than live. Unless we want to get into a debate on what's alive and what's dead, it's pretty straightforward. Again, to the barrister there who should understand that full well but seems to be reminded from a contracts guy on this side of the table.

- (c) The pregnancy of the employee's spouse or common-law partner ends other than as a result of a live birth.

Again talking about live birth, everything under the sun other than that pretext. So, again, you're asking for specific items to be added? Be careful of what you're asking for because you might inadvertently cause different consequences as well. [interjection] They're heckling

again because it's all fair game. They like to do this. They like to pander and talk about something that really strikes near and dear to people's hearts without knowing their circumstances and discounting anybody else's beliefs and discounting anyone else's backgrounds . . .

An Hon. Member: Unbelievable. This is why we need clarity.

Mr. Getson: . . . experiences because they want to use this, again . . .

An Hon. Member: I was respectful.

Mr. Getson: . . . as a political football rather than understanding . . .

An Hon. Member: No. Because we want rights. We want our rights.

Mr. Getson: . . . the intent that it's being brought forward with and the absolute humanity of why this is being forwarded: to help people going through these circumstances. They'll diminish that, and they'll keep heckling me because, again, I don't fit their narrative. It's very sad, and, to me, it's actually morally reprehensible that you won't give me a chance to speak on this because you don't even know my circumstance.

An Hon. Member: You heckled us.

Mr. Getson: They're heckling again because it doesn't work for their political narrative.

The third part of this is:

- (d) the pregnancy of another person ends other than as a result of a live birth and the employee would have been a parent of a child born as a result of the pregnancy.

Now, they want to ask my positions on certain matters. It's none of their concern. They want to know about circumstances and that potentially, being a father of four, maybe I could have been a father of more, or that my wife and I had some other circumstances, or that I had friends that have lost other ones, too. We've had family circumstances. How many people I've worked with over the years on different projects where you have those awkward conversations when the lady comes in and has had something like that happen to them: they want to discount all that. The intent that was brought forward, if they look at it and just get off their political high horse for a moment and see how genuine and honest and pure this is: if anything, what we should be doing in here is agreeing to it.

Now, I didn't really want to speak too much to the amendment because I wanted to vote on it. I wanted to get this going forward, Madam Chair, through you to the heckle squad over there. To the heckle squad: let's get back to business. Let's make sure that we pass this, and let's make sure that we give those bereavements to the folks that are well deserving of it regardless of their beliefs, circumstances, or otherwise. Let's do something good as legislators in here and knock off the school ground antics.

Mr. Shepherd: If I may, Madam Chair, I think I will leave the majority of this debate to the women of our caucus, who I think have handled it quite ably. I just want to note that members of this government have no moral high ground to talk about political footballs and division. This is a government that's more than happy to grandstand on any issue that they feel they might get political gain, issues of populism. This is an issue of incredible importance to many women in the province of Alberta.

4:40

If this government wants to grandstand on things like firearms, a nonexistent truck tax, they're certainly welcome to do so, but I respect my colleagues who are reflecting the very real voices of Alberta

women, who I believe have legitimate concerns seeing what has happened in the U.S. and based on the actions and words we have seen of many here in Canada and here in Alberta. I respect and appreciate the debate they've brought forward, and I certainly look forward to that continuing.

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Chair. Oh, goodness. Yeah. There was certainly a lot there. You know, I think this is my third time speaking in the last little bit. I'm very, very appreciative of my colleagues from Edmonton-Glenora and St. Albert. I'm posting a little bit about this on social media as we go along, and it's shocking to hear this government, government MLAs continue to say that we are making a political football out of this when we're talking about the rights of people like me and St. Albert and Edmonton-Glenora, people who have uteruses. I'm seeing a whole lot of people on social media chiming in and saying: no uterus, no opinion.

The Chair: Hon. member, I think this is a great time to remind all members that while there isn't a specific standing order against the use of social media while you are in the Chamber, it's significantly discouraged to be distracted from the debate in the Chamber. I would recommend that perhaps the tweeting or the social media use can be done by someone other than you or outside of this Chamber but not during the debate.

I will ask that you proceed with your remarks when you are ready.

Member Irwin: Well, regardless, anybody who's been following the debate, following what's happened with the looming overturning of Roe versus Wade knows that this is very much a real and emotional issue for many of us. You know, abortion is health care, full stop.

When I hear members opposite, as I was starting to say prior to being interrupted – I was starting to say, you know, that we are not making this a political football; we are amplifying and sharing the voices of people who've reached out to us. I can point these members to countless stories of women and folks across this province who are experiencing delayed care when it comes to reproductive rights.

I talked already, but I'll say it again. We've got a few more folks in the Chamber now who need to hear it as well. Access in rural Alberta is just incredibly challenging right now. It's not just access to a physical abortion procedure; it's access to Mifegymiso, the drug. Reports, as I shared not long ago, from people on the front lines like Autumn Reinhardt-Simpson, who is an abortion doula, saying that people are being turned down getting that prescription in rural Alberta. Ten times, she heard from a woman who went around to physicians to try to get access to that pill, a potentially life-saving pill, right?

It's completely fair for us as members of the Official Opposition, particularly us members who have uteruses and rightly have an opinion on this amendment, to ask those questions. So I again want the – we did get some clarity from the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat, and I appreciate her standing up. I truly do. I appreciate her uttering the word "abortion," I believe twice, which is more than we've ever heard this Premier say it. I appreciate that. I'm not being dismissive. I truly do. She shared her own perspective, that she is – I don't have the benefit of the Blues, but I believe I wrote down that she noted that she is, in fact, pro life, and she's helped out with pregnancy care centres and so forth. She stated her views unequivocally on the record that she wants abortion to be included in this amendment. My apologies if I didn't get her words correct.

Mr. Dach: She said that that's the intention.

Member Irwin: The intention. Thank you to the Member for Edmonton-McClung.

If I didn't get her words correct, I'm happy for her to clarify, because there's obviously a lot going on, not that I was distracted by social media, just trying to capture the debate.

But I would like to hear from the drafter of the amendment and the mover of the bill, and that's the Minister of Labour and Immigration. I just want that clarity on the record here in committee. This is what we do in committee. We go back and forth, and we ask questions, and we seek clarity. We're not seeking clarity just so that I and my colleagues can feel good; we're seeking clarity for the folks who are on the front lines, the folks with lived experiences out there, the countless folks who've reached out to us to explain how important it is that the language is clear and inclusive, right?

You know, I think back to just the other day – oh, time is confusing; I forget which day it was – when we stood on the steps of the Alberta Legislature, and myself along with our leader, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, called on this government to be absolutely clear. We were asked about inclusivity and language. One of the members of the media asked about that and said: "You know, you talk about women. Are you also going to be talking about gender-diverse folks?" and I said, "Absolutely." I make the mistake all the time of talking about a woman's right to choose and women's rights, and I'm the critic for 2SLGBTQ-plus issues, so I admit that I still have things to learn. I hope that folks in this Chamber are willing to learn as well and to be more inclusive in our language and to be more inclusive in this bill.

The folks like Aditi from the pregnancy and infancy loss centre – I believe I got the name wrong there; I'll correct it in a second – have said that – you know what? – they make it a priority to be incredibly inclusive in their language, even things like using the word "parent," right? Not all who may experience pregnancy loss were planning to be a parent, as an example. There are a lot of ways that we can be a lot more clear and we can be open to learning. As it stands right now, without that clarity in the bill, this could potentially put a lot of folks who could benefit from this leave in a position where they're having to navigate the legislation and where they're having to seek clarity at a time when they should be supported. We don't want those folks, yeah, to have to explain and elaborate after having experienced something so traumatic.

Aditi Loveridge said it well when she spoke to this just the other day as well. She said: we want grieving individuals to feel empowered, to be able to define their experience as their own. She talked about miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, termination for medical reasons, infertility, failed adoptions. All of those experiences deserve to be included, and they each can be defined under the loss of pregnancy.

She gave a really good, a really pertinent example. She said: when an employee tells their employer that they have cancer, they will not, or at least they certainly should not, be asked: "Well, what kind? You got lung cancer? Were you a smoker?" Like, absolutely not. And if that's happening, I mean, that's incredibly troubling to hear. But generally most employers know to be sensitive, and employees, folks who've experienced loss of pregnancy should be empowered, should have the choice if they choose to share details. We know that some folks are much more willing and open to share about their experiences than others, and that's completely fair, but no one should be put in that position where they're having to explain.

4:50

We're concerned that as it's written, discrimination could potentially still occur. Again, no one – no one, full stop – should have to justify the cause of their pregnancy loss. Again, we want to work together. I've been clear from the very moment I stood up on this bill. We've been

clear that we want to work together. We shared that feeling of collegiality back when this was a private member's bill. I was on that committee. I commended the Member for Sherwood Park for the work that he'd done, for the stakeholder engagement that he'd done, for the consultation, for listening. Absolutely. But we want to get it right. We have an opportunity to get the language right.

Okay. With that, I will end my remarks for the moment.

The Chair: I see the hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. I once again want to speak to the amendment that I put forward and the debate that has ensued as a consequence. I wanted to be in this Assembly, but I had an important meeting that I needed to attend.

The Chair: Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but the absence or presence of a member, including your own, is . . .

Mr. Madu: Yes. Withdrawn, Madam Chair.

I really was hoping that the members opposite would not delve into some of the stuff that they would like to talk about. The bill that we have before us is very specific, Madam Chair. We have worked hard with the stakeholders that want to make sure that this bill is as broad as it can be, but I see once again that the members opposite want to embark on their usual politics, just like they have done with every issue on matters that should not be a partisan issue.

It is disappointing that on an amendment that is the broadest possible of any bill on this particular issue, the bill that they – and I have had the benefit to see some of the amendments that they would like to introduce. That amendment is far more restrictive than the amendment that we have before the floor of this Assembly. Madam Chair, it speaks to “other than as a result of a live birth.” That phrase is the most inclusive language – the most inclusive language – that we can use to make sure that anyone out there who needs this bereavement leave, something that all of us agreed on, will not have to be denied or face any difficulty or have to explain anything to any employer. That is the goal here.

I had the chance to speak with Ms Aditi Loveridge on the day that the original bill was announced. I spoke with her. Since then my office has had to reach out to her and the stakeholders to make sure that there isn't going to be any argument on this particular issue, because this is not one of those issues that should be a subject of confusion or unnecessary debate. But here we are again with the NDP, Madam Chair. “Other than as a result of a live birth” is the most inclusive of all situations resulting in the loss of pregnancy, including miscarriage, stillbirth, and, yes, abortion, to the members opposite. I think that's what they are looking for. Yes: abortion, termination for medical reasons, and a number of other reasons. There are much more circumstances under which women can need these procedures, so we want to make sure that they are not limited whatsoever.

Madam Chair, I speak to you as someone – I think I've often told my story, the seventh of 11 children. I have four older sisters who are way ahead of me. In 2002 I watched my sister pass away in the hospital – in the hospital – from pregnancy. Luckily, we have the benefit of my twin nephews. This is a matter that is personal, and I don't think anyone here wants to play politics with this particular issue. What we are looking for is an assurance that the amendment before us is the broadest that we can have without having to name abortion, stillbirth, miscarriage, and all of those things, because there will be no end. There are circumstances that are much more than all of these things that you want us to name. That is the reason behind the amendment in the first place.

Here you have the NDP on an amendment that is the broadest that there can be ever, but they are hung up on the word “abortion.”

Are we surprised? No, we're not surprised. This is what they do best: politics, identity politics, politics of division, and stuff like that. Please. This is the broadest approach which addresses any situation with a pregnancy regardless of the reason or timing for the end of that pregnancy. For those at home watching and listening, let me say that again. The amendment before us is the broadest approach which addresses any situation where a pregnancy ends regardless of the reason or the timing for the end of the pregnancy. Yes, members opposite, that also includes abortion.

Madam Chair, I am a lawyer. I have also had the opportunity to consult with . . . [interjection] I see the Member for Calgary-Buffalo heckling. I am here now to address your concerns. We've also had the opportunity to discuss this matter with the legal services within my department and at Justice, and we are all in agreement that this is the broadest language ever. This also aligns with language used in the Employment Standards Code, precisely section 46(1.1) – you can check it out – with respect to maternity leave: “A pregnant employee whose pregnancy ends other than as a result of a live birth within 16 weeks of the estimated due date is entitled to maternity leave under this Division.”

Madam Chair, as I said before, after hearing from various stakeholders, this amendment is the broadest way that we can capture a number of experiences and circumstances without any limitations. Contrary, once again, to what the members opposite wanted to believe, this is a good amendment that will ensure people are able to access this type of bereavement leave for a variety of reasons. I should also note and would like to remind the members opposite that employees are not required to provide any proof of entitlement or reason for this leave.

Madam Chair, it is disappointing for me, listening to the totality of the submissions and arguments by the members opposite, hung up on one word and one word alone, abortion. This bill . . .

Ms Hoffman: And termination for medical reasons.

Mr. Madu: Yeah. And termination for other reasons. Yes. To the Member for Edmonton-Glenora: yes.

5:00

But if you sit here listening to them, if you read – and to members at home watching, I want to read into the record once again the amendment that we have put forward so that you know. I leave it to your judgment as to what it is that the members opposite are trying to achieve with their argument on this particular issue. The bill is amended as follows. In part A section 1(5) is amended in the proposed section 53.983(2) by striking out clauses (b) to (d) and substituting the following:

(b) the pregnancy of the employee ends other than as a result of a live birth;

Abortion is a pregnancy that ends other than as a result of a live birth. Are we clear on that?

(c) the pregnancy of the employee's spouse or common-law partner ends other than as a result of a live birth;

A pregnancy that ends as a result of any medical reason is a pregnancy that ends other than as a result of a live birth. Are we clear on that?

(d) the pregnancy of another person ends other than as a result of a live birth and the employee would have been a parent of a child born as a result of the pregnancy.

Any loss of pregnancy for whatever reason there is is absolutely covered and protected in the amendment that we've put forward. Are we clear on that?

Again, like every other issue, rather than focus on the substance of the bill before them – sometimes I wonder whether or not they actually take the time to read the bill. I don't think the Member for Edmonton-Glenora read the bill. I don't think so. I don't think so.

Even when you read it, you are not interested in the actual sections in the bill and what they say. You are much more interested in the things that you just want to pursue.

The Chair: Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt. Please direct your comments through the chair.

Mr. Madu: Very well, Madam Chair. It can be disappointing that I was hoping that all of us, members opposite – and I was carefully listening to their arguments and contributions since Bill 17 was originally tabled. We have taken into consideration the real concerns that they raised as well as those of other stakeholders in making sure that no woman, no person out there, no woman out there, gets to be denied the opportunity of this bereavement leave because of the lack of clarity in Bill 17 with respect to bereavement leave. That inspired this amendment today.

It is one of those instances in which I would hope that the members opposite would, for once, focus on the problem. You know, Madam Chair, when there is a problem, to solve that problem, we've got to focus on the problem rather than introduce a string of circumstances because of their ideological, philosophical pursuit. For the folks out there, Albertans who are looking to benefit from this bill, that's what they care about. That's what they want. [interjection] No. I am not interested in taking an intervention from the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Well, you can't. It's committee.

Mr. Madu: I still have the floor.

Madam Chair, it is disappointing, extremely disappointing, that we have listened to stakeholders, listened to the members opposite, and taken into consideration all of their concerns and put forward an amendment that addresses all of those concerns, yet – yet – they are not interested in the substance of the amendment. They would rather want to, you know, make this bill, that should not be a subject of partisan conversation, a partisan issue. It doesn't help anyone on the floor of this Assembly. It doesn't help the very people out there in our communities, the ones who benefit from this particular bill.

Therefore, I would encourage and urge all members of this Assembly to vote in support of this amendment.

With that, Madam Chair, I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 22

Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: There are no amendments currently on the floor. We are on the main bill.

Mr. Sabir: Madam Chair, you just mentioned that there are no amendments on the floor, but I have one ready to go.

The Chair: I would expect nothing less.

Mr. Sabir: I will distribute this, and we will speak about this amendment.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1. Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Sabir: I move that Bill 22, Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022, be amended in section 1 (a) in subsection (6) as follows: (i) in the proposed section 70.1(4) by striking out “or any other person over whom the Commission has jurisdiction or any person to whom the Commission

provides services”; (ii) in the proposed section 70.1(5) (A) by striking out “or person” wherever it occurs, and (B) by striking out “subsection (2)(b)” and substituting “subsection (2)”; (iii) by striking out the proposed section 70.1(6); (iv) in the proposed section 70.1(7) by striking out “or person” wherever it occurs; and (b) in subsection (8) in the proposed section 72(1.1), by striking out “A person or owner” and substituting “An owner”.

Madam Chair, the legal interpretation of this amendment is that this amendment will stop the UCP government from piling more fees onto Albertans. It's that simple. It will disallow the administrative fee to finance the Alberta utility advocate to be charged to anyone but utilities; that is, the regular consumers, Albertans, cannot be charged the fee.

The new administrative fee results from the dissolution of the Balancing Pool. I don't think that it is fair for Albertans to be charged with additional fees. Albertans are already being hammered by the UCP increasing the cost of living on them. Madam Chair, there are utility costs, insurance costs, tuition costs, postsecondary costs, the Banff-Kananaskis park pass cost. This government has piled onto Albertans in every way possible. There is bracket creep. There are so many things. Albertans are struggling to make ends meet and cover these increased costs of living piled onto them by this UCP government and its policies.

5:10

While I do understand that fees to finance the utility advocate might not be as high, I don't think Albertans can afford any more because this government already has piled enough onto them. Since the UCP removed the cap from electricity prices, we have seen the utility bills doubled, in some cases tripled. It's been three or four months if not more that this government has been promising Albertans a rebate, a fake rebate, and Albertans are still waiting for that. Now somehow, in an otherwise good piece of legislation, they still manage to find something that they can slap onto Albertans to increase the cost of living for them. We all have constituents who are struggling with these rising costs of utilities, and I think we should all make sure that they're not slapped with extra costs.

I urge the members of this Legislature, all members of this Legislature, to think about your constituents and their rising bills and vote in favour of this amendment. Again, simply put, this amendment will disallow any fees to be piled onto everyday Albertans. It's that simple an amendment, and I hope that all members of this House support this amendment and vote in favour of this amendment to make sure that the government doesn't slap Albertans with any more costs.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others wishing to speak to amendment A1 on Bill 22? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Sorry. I had to lean a little bit there just to catch your eye, because I know I'm kind of off to the side here a little bit. But I appreciate the chance to rise and add some comments here to Bill 22 and, of course, amendment A1, that my colleague from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall brought forward.

You know, one of the things that he mentioned, of course, was about the rising costs that Albertans are facing. We've gone over this time and time again in the House about rising insurance costs. We hear this comment around how they've been dropping. The funny thing is that none of my constituents seem to see that reflected in those bills. On top of rising property taxes, because the government is shortchanging municipalities in terms of what they need to be able to provide services – of course, those things are going up. I seem to remember past members talking about how the NDP government was waging a war on fun. I could almost say that

the UCP government is doing that with their little fee just to go camping.

All of these things are starting to add up, so when you look at Bill 22 and we talk about the language – it's funny because in the previous debate we got really stuck on language, but as I've always said, it always comes down to that. When I hear comments about, "Well, we're taking a broad approach" or "We don't want it to be too prescriptive": the amount of arguments and grievances that I know I filed because language wasn't prescriptive enough and somebody was coming up with some kind of a wild interpretation of it. Hopefully, with amendment A1 we don't see that perhaps maybe we're proposing language that's too prescriptive, because right now Albertans are having a hard time, for instance, finding money to pay for their prescriptions. Maybe we should try to help that by not creating any extra costs, like my friend from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall had said.

Amendment A1 will take away that ability to just dump yet more expenses onto Albertans. They just simply can't afford it. There are already too many things going on. Their personal income taxes have been deindexed, as was mentioned. You know, their energy costs are going up. Somebody had mentioned to me in a messenger how: well, it didn't take long for us to lose ground at the gas pump; prices are almost right back up to where they were. So let's give Albertans some kind of help. They're still waiting for these rebates. They're still waiting for that help.

Of course, we heard earlier about how the NDP was supposedly blocking all of that and slowing things down. Well, it's done. It's settled. You should have had that money ready to go and out the door. Why is the minister having such a hard time getting 150 bucks out the door? Because that's really all it comes down to, 150 bucks against – you know, some of my constituents have shown me bills that are \$500 for electricity costs for one month, let alone over the past three months. If that stayed consistent, it would be \$1,500, yet we've offered them 150 bucks. We've offered them because they're still waiting for it to show up. We're no longer in the way. What's in the way of the government? What's holding them up? Why can't they get this money out the door, let alone, of course, any gas rebates? We still don't know what's going to be happening with that. We know at the very least that nothing is happening until at least darn near next winter, so that's not much help.

With Bill 22 and with amendment A1 we can at least offer them some hope that nothing else will get piled on. The amendment proposed by my friend from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall does just that. It's saying: you don't have to worry; there won't be any extra costs being levied against you because of this. You know, maybe we can finally stand up and say to people: look – okay? – we're not actually going to try to make your lives any more difficult. But the problem is that currently the language in Bill 22 will allow for that. So to say that maybe it's going to be too prescriptive or something like that? Come on. Be clear with Albertans what you're going to say to them.

If you're just going to outright charge them, then say it. Just say it: we're going to charge you because of this. Yeah, I can't guarantee they'll like it, but at least they'll know. Rather than dancing around like we've seen with the rebates, "Yeah, we've got help coming; any day now, it's coming; well, hopefully, maybe next week," and then after a month it's like, "Well, we're still working on it," we have an opportunity here. Let's do a little bit better with regard to Bill 22 in terms of this discussion versus the last one, when we couldn't seem to get some simple clarifying language added in.

5:20

It's funny because, you know, as my friend from Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood always says, I'm not a lawyer either, but it would seem to me that lawyers, above all, should appreciate how

clear, concise language is the better approach rather than soft, watered-down language that's left open to interpretation. That's always what happens. I've seen it way too many times where somebody will read that and go, "Well, it doesn't actually say that, so that means I don't have to do it," or "Well, I'm not actually being told I have to do that, so perhaps I can just skirt around it."

I think we can do better with this amendment. I'm certainly looking forward to some of the other comments around amendment A1 and how this can be of benefit to their constituents. I'm pretty certain that it's not just the constituents of Edmonton-Decore that are seeing ridiculously rising prices and expenses like their insurance, like their utility bills, like their property taxes, like their grocery bills, like their school fees, like their camping fees, and I can go on and on and on about this.

Hopefully, my colleagues might have something extra to say about that that I haven't covered, but it's certainly a good opportunity for us to go back and forth and talk about how we actually can make a bit of a difference for Albertans and not lump anything else onto it.

With that, I'll take my seat for the moment.

The Chair: Are there members to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to speak to the amendment brought forward by the MLA for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall that seeks to actually make it a little easier for Albertans to get through each week from paycheck to paycheck as they try to squeak by. Whether they're working at a low-wage job or even a middle-income job, things are pretty tough out there. It doesn't take more than a couple of trips down one or two grocery aisles to know how difficult it would be for families of even median incomes to be buying groceries the way they used to because their choices are limited. Their incomes are being stretched in many, many ways.

This amendment seeks to limit one extra cost that is being added to Albertans' increasing difficulty in paying their bills. By implementing a charge, a fee, on their utility bill to pay for the cost of the utilities advocate, it's kind of a callous disregard for the Albertan consumer to see fit at a time when inflation and costs are going up everywhere because of geopolitical events, because of climatic events. This decision by the government to have the utilities advocate paid for by a fee that's additional to what's being charged already in terms of rate riders and additional fees on utility bills was a fairly contemptuous oversight, totally unnecessary, and really pretty thoughtless. This amendment, Madam Chair, seeks to rectify that oversight.

Certainly, wherever it occurs, we're going to do our very best to make sure that Alberta consumers and, in fact, all Albertans, including the youngest amongst us, our children, and those who are least able to afford it, those on government-funded livelihoods like AISH, who already have been hit with a reduction of their income on an annual basis by the deindexing of their income by this government – we will do our best to try to protect Albertans from additional costs whenever we see the opportunity, and this is one opportunity that we weren't going to let go by, Madam Chair; that is, to make sure that already high utility bills don't get made higher by the addition of an administrative fee to fund the utilities advocate added onto the utility bill. It's already large enough as it is.

You'll see the different rate riders, some of them which are actually going to pay for the Progressive Conservative government's overconstruction, overbuild of the electricity grid in this province, something that the UCP government has been trying to pin on the NDP. In fact, that overbuild took place before we were ever in power, so a rather disingenuous attempt at off-loading responsibility, but

indeed that's what they're trying to do in other cases, too, Madam Chair.

They're off-loading costs or downloading costs onto municipalities at an extensive rate to the point that municipalities now are looking at, including in the city of Edmonton, huge tax increases possibly being contemplated to meet the service requirements that they now have been forced to endure. It's going to be a trade-off. Because of the off-loading or downloading of responsibilities to municipalities, cities are going to be looking at having to increase their taxes or lower their services. Because of the high cost that Albertans are already facing, this is going to be an extra burden. Wherever possible I think it's incumbent, Madam Chair, upon government to not add to that burden by doing such things as they've done in Bill 22, adding an extra fee onto the utility bill to cover the cost of an individual who is going to be the utilities advocate.

I know that in any circumstance where you're looking at either a limited income or a smaller income – the major thing that we hear on the doorsteps when we go to talk to our constituents, which I do twice a week pretty religiously, Madam Chair, is the cost of everything. People are really struggling, and that comes forward very voluntarily on the doors: the cost of utilities, the cost of gasoline, the cost of groceries, and the increased use of food banks. There are at least three or four sort of pseudo-food banks, smaller operations operating out of churches and synagogues and mosques, in my constituency which are seeing increased traffic as a result of the difficulty families are facing.

I know that at the Our Saviour Lutheran church in my community there's a Sunday food bank that's being offered – I know they don't like to call it a food bank, but it's a means of distributing food – that I've actually helped to collect using my own truck, and on a Sunday afternoon it's distributed. They had – and this would be a little bit of old data – a couple of years ago at least 64 families show up to the one location, Madam Chair. The volume, I would dare say, has increased a lot. I know that in speaking with members of the executive at Edmonton's Food Bank at the chamber of commerce banquet lately, they've received awards for their stellar performance in trying to increase the volume of food and support they provide to the huge load of people that are now seeking assistance from the food bank.

That indeed is a testament to why the government should not be placing additional burdens on individual Albertans and families by very callously putting in an extra cost on top of their utility bill to cover the cost of an individual who will be acting as the utilities advocate. A fairly thoughtless thing, and this amendment, Madam Chair, catches that out and rectifies it. It's one of the things that we can do as an opposition party and one of the things that we will do should we be re-elected as government once again. We will always look at cushioning the pocketbook of Alberta consumers and making sure that particularly those most vulnerable amongst us are not harmed. I mean, we did attempt to do many things like that, in fact, did many things like that: reduced child poverty, cut it in half, and, of course, looked to raise the AISH payments. We indexed them to inflation, and of course – guess what – when the UCP took power, they rolled those things back.

5:30

They were given to sending billions of dollars to profitable corporations: \$4.7 billion in a tax break which, of course, never ended up in reinvestment and creating jobs – those dollars were shown to be clearly invested offshore or went to pay dividends to shareholders – and \$1.3 billion or so invested in a bet to get the Keystone XL pipeline built. That never happened. So this is big money. That's \$6 billion right there, Madam Chair, when the government is betting on sort of trickle-down economics and wing-and-a-prayer policies wherein they

forget that the effect of measures that they take on a daily basis in bringing forward legislation such as we see in Bill 22 is harmful to everyday Albertans, in particular those of lower or median income, who are really, really struggling.

I've watched folks particularly at the meat counter. If you watch people looking at the meat counter, they're almost timid to get the grocery cart close to it. They peek at the prices, and most people are kind of embarrassed that they can't even go near the steak section. They're hardly able to afford the hamburger these days, Madam Chair, and it's a telling story when you see that the prime cuts are going untouched and that it's the cheaper cuts that are the ones that most people can afford these days.

I urge everybody to support this amendment. It's a small gesture among many things that we as the opposition hope the government would adopt to make life more affordable for Albertans. I know that the government is not trusted well by the population right now because they really don't see them as being in their corner, and this is an example of that, Madam Chair, a small example where, if indeed the government was concerned about diligently watching out for Albertans who are least able to afford any additional cost right now, this little measure inside Bill 22 would never have passed muster. Somebody should have caught it and said: look, this is going to be an extra cost added onto everybody's bill. The public is absolutely beside themselves about the cost of utilities and gas and looking after their family budget, and it never should have seen the light of day, and that tells me that this government is preoccupied with things other than looking after the best interests of Alberta.

What it's preoccupied with is something, I think, that most Albertans are aware of, and in the back of their mind they are wondering what the options might be after May 18. When the Premier's election leadership review results are revealed, maybe we'll see a shift or a turn by this government. There are so many different balls in the air. It could end up being just another RCMP investigation. Who knows? But indeed what we end up having is a government that is very much distracted by its internal dislocations, let's say, and a leadership review which has caused the party to be in disarray. In fact, the seating arrangement has changed to reflect that in the Legislature by showing those who are least loyal along certain rows and those who are more favoured taking other positions.

There are all kinds of theatrics going on in this Legislature and with this government and – dare I say? – in caucus and in cabinet right now, Madam Chair, that are distracting the government from actually making and taking proper scrutiny of legislation they bring forward, which would have certainly caught something like this, which is going to add an additional cost on the Albertan utility bill by having the utilities advocate paid for by a special fee on the utility bill.

I'm not sure if other examples can be found where an advocate or – you know, the seniors advocate that we wanted to bring forward is certainly not going to be an extra charge brought forward on your tax bill to pay for that. I don't know if there's a special line, a health care charge, that you'd have to pay. No. It's kind of an unheard-of thing.

It's something that maybe we shouldn't be surprised by, but unfortunately it is maybe a trial balloon by the UCP government to put another cost onto something that isn't called a tax. The government, of course, likes to say: we haven't raised taxes. Well, in fact, that's an argument that is pretty easy to destroy because, in fact, bracket creep, brought in by the current Premier, is something that will cost Albertans a billion dollars. Though the Premier attempts valiantly to tell us and all Albertans that it's not a tax increase – guess what – it's going to generate a billion dollars more in taxes. And guess what. Whose pocket is it coming out of? The same Albertans who are being hurt by this Bill 22, which will add

an extra cost onto their utility bill by forcing Albertans to pay a special fee for the benefit of having a utilities advocate on their behalf.

I don't know. If we have somebody who does represent consumers and other areas of utility provision, will the government contemplate putting another rate rider onto that? Maybe we should be prepared for that battle, Madam Chair, and wonder how many particular riders this government can think of so that they can pay for oversight in consumer legislation and positions that would otherwise be public servant payroll and come out of the tax base. Maybe they see this as a way of off-loading that is a convenient way of hiding the cost of providing, in this case, a utilities advocate.

The thinking behind it is something that really should have been carefully considered by the government, especially when we are at a point in time when the affordability issue is uppermost in Albertans' minds. On the doorsteps, in our media, in the newspapers – it doesn't matter where you go – it is absolutely what people are talking about because people are having great difficulty in absolutely just surviving, in buying groceries and paying the rent and mortgage payments.

Interest rates are creeping up as well, Madam Chair. It is a very difficult storm out there, and Albertans and Canadians and globally as well are being caught in the pinch. The responsibility of government is to be very careful to scrutinize their legislation that they bring through to not add to that burden. This is what they've neglected to do or forgotten to do or maybe just callously decided to go ahead with anyways even though there was an extra cost to Albertans for adding this rate rider onto the utility bills so that the utilities advocate could be paid for.

I know that there are lots of major issues going on that maybe seem more important, but this one, Madam Chair, is important to every Albertan who has a utility bill to pay and is looking at how they're going to stretch their dollar to actually get the grocery bill paid for. If the government sees fit and gets away with adding this extra little cost onto the utility bill, what's next? I mean, is it going to be another charge on your natural gas bill? Will it be some other excise tax or some other element to pay for some oversight on your home-heating bill or your natural gas or your car? Hard to say.

5:40

You know, there's one issue that has to do with the electrical grid that really hasn't received a lot of attention either in this bill or in legislative discussions or that I've heard the government talk about, and that is one of grid security and cybersecurity. Now, it's a huge issue that is not even contemplated, as far as I can tell, in Bill 22 and that will need a lot of oversight. Maybe the government is going to consider having us pay for a watchdog to look at grid security, maybe a whole panel of people to look at grid security to protect us from cyberattacks, and that will be a separate charge on the electricity bill on top of the utilities advocate.

That's something that is fair for Albertans to ask. It's a question that comes to mind. When you have something that is sort of a leading pilot project and nobody hollers about it – it's a small charge here – but, say, there's a larger issue that the government wishes to have oversight on such as cybersecurity on our electrical grid, which is a huge issue, Madam Chair, globally, I think it begs the question: would they go ahead and decide, "Well, let's pay for it by adding another fee onto the utility bill"?

I'm not sure if indeed others wish to speak, but I think that some may. I will take my seat and let some others add their comments to the debate, and I'll be happy to hear them.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1 on Bill 22? I'm seeing the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022, and particularly the amendment we have in front of us. We're going to strike out the section that says, "or any other person over whom the Commission has jurisdiction or any person to whom the Commission provides services" as well as some other changes in here.

Again, Madam Chair, this is about protecting consumers, this is about protecting Albertans, and we know that there have been a number of challenges for Albertans over the last year, in particular when it comes to utilities in the province of Alberta, indeed particularly in terms of electricity. I think we've spoken about that at some length, and I guess we're going to speak about it some more because this is a real issue that has been raised with us by many Albertans, the concerns about the rising costs they are seeing under this government.

I think we've all heard from our constituents about the soaring price of electricity. Indeed, we have heard the stories, and we have seen, each of us, I think, the e-mails from individuals who are seeing power bills of hundreds of dollars at a time when they are facing many other rising costs: certainly, the rising cost of natural gas, the rising cost of groceries and other things under inflation, soaring insurance rates. This is indeed a difficult time for many Albertans.

Again, the reason that we are bringing forward this amendment and, in particular, when it comes to electricity, Madam Chair, I know the government has a low opinion of the rate cap which we had had put in place on electricity in the province of Alberta. Certainly, it would have been protecting Albertans right now in a way that this government absolutely is not. Indeed, what we have seen from this government was a promise some weeks ago, months ago, really, that they were going to take action to provide a rebate to Albertans on electricity. That was around about the time of the budget, and then nothing. Weeks went by, and then we had the announcement that, oh, they are going to provide a rebate of \$50 per month for three months but no information about when that might actually come forward. Meanwhile Albertans continued to pay soaring electricity rates, soaring natural gas rates. Of course, we found out that the natural gas rebate that the government has promised was not actually going to do anything for Albertans until potentially, maybe next fall. I think Albertans had some real questions then about: well, what was going to happen with this electricity rebate?

We eventually, finally, saw the legislation brought into this House, and the legislation made absolutely no commitments whatsoever. It was a hollow shell of a bill. We attempted, Madam Chair, to bring forward some actual guarantees for Albertans because we were concerned, the government bringing this forward, that it could be months before Albertans would actually see this rebate that they had been promised and which this government had patted itself so firmly on the back for for suddenly deciding it was going to bring it forward well after they had already written the budget, which clearly showed that they had had no original intent of actually trying to take action to help Albertans on this.

The government rejected those amendments and said: "No, no. We're good. We'll get this in the regulations." Indeed, what do we find when those regulations come out, Madam Chair? That according to those regulations the rebates of \$150, \$50 a month for three months, could be paid out as late as October, November, December of this year. That's what this government thinks helping

Albertans looks like. That's what this government apparently thinks providing relief to Albertan consumers looks like.

Frankly, Madam Chair, I don't think that's what it should look like. That's why we had brought forward amendments to help this government get it out by the end of May. This is a government which talks about its ability to move at the speed of business, yet it could not find a way to give Albertans any more assurance than: yeah, we'll make sure that's there by the end of the year. It's shameful. It truly is. Again, that is why we're continuing to act in our role as the Official Opposition to step up and offer amendments to try to make this legislation better, to try to provide real protection for Albertans at a time when they are struggling in so many ways, unfortunately, due to the decisions of this government.

Certainly, we've had some discussion today about some of the other concerns that are coming up in the electricity market, and it really again raises that question of trust with this government, which is again why we are bringing this particular amendment forward that we are talking about and debating here now. As we begin here, you know, we've heard this government sort of say: "No. It's fine. You know, nobody is actually getting cut off from electricity. It's all good." But then we find out that, well, they may not be getting cut off, but they're being put on limiters. As we heard during question period today, some families, then, have kids that cannot use their laptop to do their homework for school because that is too much on that limiter. The government can dismiss and say: well, no; our lack of action isn't actually stopping anyone from having electricity. Well, it is still having very real and serious impacts for families in the province of Alberta, Madam Chair.

Unfortunately, what we have seen with this government is that their priorities so often are not the everyday people of Alberta. Certainly, they have a strong interest in their corporate friends. They have a strong interest in their own political ends, but the interests of Albertans? Often just left by the wayside, ignored. Again that question of trust, Madam Chair: whether this government can truly be trusted to have the interests of Albertans first, whether this government can truly be trusted to speak honestly about the impacts of its decisions on Albertans, whether this government can be trusted to take actual, tangible action to help those Albertans, to do so in a timely way, in a way that prioritizes the needs of those Albertans, getting that help to them when they need it, not when it's convenient for them, which, again, is why we're choosing to bring this amendment forward to Bill 22 at this time.

5:50

Now, certainly, as I've spoken to before, there are aspects of Bill 22 which I would absolutely support. In general I think there is – the majority of this bill are things we can support. Increasing the opportunity for energy storage: we talked about that at length. Certainly, there are a number of Alberta companies which are doing great work in this field, developing technology and innovation which could contribute quite a bit in terms of building energy independence and in terms of building the opportunity for us to generate electricity and make use of electricity with far lower generation of greenhouse gases. Certainly, there are elements of this bill that will support that through providing definitions of energy storage, by clarifying and opening some of the rules around self-supply and export. There are certainly a number of things we can agree with here, but there are indeed things that I think we can also make better. There are things that can be improved. Indeed, that is why we're bringing this particular amendment forward, to see if we can help make better perhaps just one section of this bill.

But at this time, I think that's about as much as I have to offer on this particular amendment, Madam Chair. I'll perhaps give the opportunity for one of my colleagues to offer their thoughts.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. My pleasure to briefly speak to some of the things that are problematic with this bill, and I agree with my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre. There are parts of this bill that I absolutely can support – the part that has been brought forward under the notice of amendment by my colleague from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall deals with the whole area under the Alberta utility advocate, and I am totally in agreement that where we can find opportunities to reduce the costs levied on Albertans, ratepayers who are hooked up to the grid, it's a positive thing.

Now, Albertans are already being hammered by this UCP and the increasing costs of living. We know that things like insurance have gone up exponentially under this government. Tuition in postsecondary has gone up significantly, making it unaffordable for many students to go for their higher education. We know there's been a reduction in student grants and the increase to student loan interest. There's no help on the horizon, it would seem, for natural gas cost increases, no help on the horizon for electricity power increases. Though there is lots of talk, there's no real meat coming forward for Albertans.

The income tax bracket creep is real and alive under this government, and the lack of indexation of important income support programs makes it really difficult for vulnerable Albertans to keep pace with the cost of living. There's also failed help with child care costs across Alberta and not being able to deliver what was agreed to with the federal government. We have seen delays to these programs that were supposed to help Albertans out and have not helped Albertans out.

We know that this amendment will deal with a small piece of that, Madam Chair, and should be supported so that the companies like TransAlta, ATCO, and Capital Power can pay for the costs of the Alberta utility advocate instead of socializing that to all Albertans. We believe that that's in the best interests of Albertans at this time because of the significant increase to costs that is hammering Albertans. You know, the fee, while it may not be significant, still will be on the bill. Probably all of us have heard many, many times from Albertans who say that they're seeing all these costs on their bill, and they would like them to be addressed.

I'll just sit down now and let you move to adjourn.

Ms Hoffman: You move to adjourn.

Member Ceci: I move to adjourn for you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 17 and progress on Bill 22.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills and would like to report progress on the following bills: Bill 17 and Bill 22.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:57 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, May 10, 2022

Day 32

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 10, 2022

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 20 Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate May 4: Mr. Singh]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Are there any members looking to join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-North West has risen.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words in regard to the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. You know, once again it's one of those bills where we see on first blush that it's a housekeeping bill – and indeed the Justice minister was asserting that so emphatically – but when we started looking at it, we realized that, of course, the main issue is not being dealt with, right? That's the circumstances around the victims of crime fund. Again, this really speaks to a fundamental, foundational problem with so many of the bills that we see here in this session, which is that the government asserts that it's just some housekeeping thing but underneath – like an iceberg, you only see the little tip on the top, but there's this big honking piece of ice underneath that really needs to be dealt with and is not being dealt with, and that is this whole issue around the victims of crime fund and moving that money into a different place.

You know, when you build something like the victims of crime fund, Mr. Speaker, first of all, it is designed to be a self-sustaining mechanism that uses assets that maybe have been seized from other criminal activity. Let's say that someone is busted, and they're seizing the assets of drug dealers or a drug house, and they sell the house, and they sell the vehicles and all that stuff. Then that money goes to the victims of crime fund. From the beginning it was built as a purpose-built, specialized way by which we could have that money from criminal activity moving over to help people who have been victimized by crime in some other location, or it could be the same location but probably not.

To mess with that very fine sort of logical balance – right? – is a serious problem, Mr. Speaker, and any of the changes to how people can access services for victims of crime: again, it's not just going against common sense, but it's going after a sense of balance and compassion, that is what we are meant to provide in justice, Alberta Justice, and the safety and the security that goes with that as well. For people that have been traumatized by being part of a crime, somehow witnessing a crime or being assaulted or so forth, to restrict the benefits that we can give, like psychological services or other benefits for individuals like that, is unconscionable, quite frankly.

We know very well that quite often people will be traumatized by criminal activity, and that trauma will manifest itself sometimes months or even years later. I was listening to, again, the fountain of all my anecdotal stories, the CBC Radio, just last night, I guess. It was a repeat of an investigative report where there was a teacher that was sexually molesting high school students, like, a band teacher, and some of the people who finally came out to bust this guy had the trauma associated with that manifesting itself many

years later, when they were adults. The one woman went from high school and had a very successful career in the public service – I think she was an assistant deputy minister in the federal government – and then suddenly, you know, after all of those years she melted down and needed significant support, lost everything with the traumatic effects of this sustained sort of sexual assault that she had endured when she was a high school student, right?

I guess my point is that, number one, that's a terrible story, but I think it's instructive that people who have been victims of crime in the broadest possible way can have those traumatic effects manifest in their lives months or years later, so for us to put any limitation on that is irresponsible. We must always in this Legislature defer to professionals, right? We can't just be amateur psychologists and say: okay; well, you've got 30 days to apply for the psychological services, and after that, that's it. I mean, who are we to set those kinds of limits as legislators, generalists that we are? The whole premise of this bill is the – by omission the things it doesn't do: that's the problem that I have with it. You know, I think we could really do better, and it's just an obvious place to improve on with Bill 20.

As far as I can see, this bill does amend five different acts, right? It goes for the Corrections Act, Justice of the Peace Act, Missing Persons Act, Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, and then the Youth Justice Act as well. In many of those other acts, you know, Mr. Speaker, again we definitely need to focus our attention always on a constant, vigilant basis but also as these things come forward.

For example, we just saw in the last few days talk about the corrections circumstances and the health services that were being provided in corrections facilities, specifically the remand centre, somehow changing or putting into question the integrity of access to health care in that facility. Again, always it's a solemn responsibility to ensure the safety and security of all people and even people who are incarcerated, too, right? We know that if we learned anything with so many things we could learn from this pandemic, it's that, of course, the health and the collective security of all of us are intertwined, quite frankly. If you have a big outbreak in a place like the remand centre, then that could be the locus of a very large and destructive outbreak that can spread into the general population, not to mention the people that are incarcerated. They're not being incarcerated and remanded because part of their punishment is to be in a confined place where they can catch communicable diseases, right? I mean, that's not part of the system. Again, seeing any change or compromise, as we did in the last – I don't know – 48 hours or 72 hours, in regard to the level of health services that are available to persons at the remand centre: I think that's a Corrections Act issue that we need to deal with as well.

But, again, the heart, Mr. Speaker, of our concern around the changes to the victims of crime fund – we saw in 2020 the UCP introducing Bill 16, which changed the victims of crime fund to the victims of crime prevention fund, again, in direct defiance of what the whole thing was set up for in the first place, right? It was a way to deal with reacting to people that had experienced criminal trauma due to criminal activity.

You know, the whole idea that you can move one piece of money over to another reminded me, Mr. Speaker, of someone. They instructed the Premier's office, each department to go through their budgets and somehow move money around in different ledgers so that you could look like you could be reducing the deficits somehow. Taking something that was a dedicated fund, that generated its own money from criminal activities and so forth, and then somehow moving that ledger over into general revenues: I mean, that's what it appeared to be, really. Again, just, like, really bad, bad choices, right? To presume that (a) you could even touch

that victims of crime fund and try to put it into a different ledger box somehow: again, I just found that to be very poor choices.

7:40

Mr. Speaker, we know that the balance of the fund for victims of crime – you know, the money is collected as part of section 737 of the Criminal Code, directed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council to be paid into the fund, right? Money collected from surcharges under this act, money received by the Crown for the purpose of assisting victims, money received pursuant to the victims restitution acts: none of these things are to do with prevention, right? I mean, we should of course have prevention. Prevention is the key to building a safer, more secure society, but taking it from the victims of crime fund to pursue that defies logic and gravity, quite frankly. I think that explaining it to anyone in a common-sense sort of way, you'd get a head nod from that as well.

Again, you know, building legislation and sort of having a grab bag of so-called housekeeping pieces is fraught with peril, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, because if you're trying to clean up some bits of five different acts but then you're obviously missing the elephant in the room in regard to not reforming the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act for the obvious omission of not allowing those things to move forward to do the job that they need to do, then, I mean, that's quite simply wrong, right? As I said before, people will manifest the effects of being a victim of crime in various ways and sometimes over a long period of time. It's not just like cutting a cheque to say: hey, sorry you witnessed a murder; here's some money. I mean, it's all about building support and a support system so that people can somehow rebuild their lives and receive the psychological and maybe medical attention that they require. Really, I mean, I think we could do a lot better in regard to Bill 20. I implore both the minister and this government caucus to reconsider their approach to this bill.

With that, I will take my chair. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words in regard to Bill 20.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much.

I'm so surprised. I actually see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie now has risen to join debate. Please, sir.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to get up and speak to Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. As was being elaborated on by the Member for Edmonton-North...

Mr. Eggen: North West.

Member Loyola: North West. I knew there was a north in there somewhere. I knew it was in Edmonton. Yeah.

I think that this bill is characteristic of what we see before us in a number of pieces of proposed legislation that have been brought in by the government during this particular session, Mr. Speaker, and that is that they totally miss the mark on the important issues that are before us and that Albertans seem to care about so deeply.

Of course, nothing can be further from the truth on that aspect when it comes to the victims of crime fund. I have a very good friend that, actually, I used to work with in this particular department. She no longer works there, unfortunately. She's moved on to other works, but I remember that when the government actually decided to come in with the previous bill, Bill 16, we had an extensive discussion on the fact that this was really alarming, the fact that victims of crime weren't going to be able to have access to important monies that actually would help them deal with the situation. You know, the victims of crime fund wasn't just for meeting the immediate material needs that the individual may have

encountered because of the crime that they experienced, but it also helped with therapy.

A lot of the times when someone goes through something as traumatic as going through a crime, depending to what degree – every individual is different. That's something that she explained to me. You know, she had seen examples of people that had seen horrendous acts happen. According to the individuals they didn't need any therapy or support because of it whereas others may have gone through something that some individuals might consider minor, yet that individual did need to go to therapy. It's not about how horrendous the crime is; it's about how the individual has been impacted.

I think that this is something that a lot of Albertans are concerned about when it comes to the issue. They would like to see it rectified, or they would like to see, you know, the alternatives that are going to be put in place. How are individuals who experience crime going to be able to access money for things like therapy when it comes to these particular issues?

Now, of course, what we do have before us is a bill that actually amends five different acts, which are the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, and the Youth Justice Act. And as was being shared by the Member for Edmonton-North West, it's really kind of like an administrative bill. You know, I can see the reasons for these things. However, as I was saying before, it doesn't address the most important aspect that most Albertans are concerned with.

For example, under the Corrections Act it deals with compensation rates for the Alberta Parole Board members, which can now be set by order in council instead of a regulation, and this brings it in line with other agencies, boards, and commissions.

Under the Justice of the Peace Act it gives the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta the discretion to designate a justice of the peace as either part-time or full-time. This also means that the Chief Judge can change a designation between full- and part-time if the term is not expired and other conditions are met, similar to the process for judges. Before that, the government had a process through regulations.

As you can see, a lot of these are quite administrative. I would even delve into the ground that, you know, it doesn't even have to be done in a regulation. It's now being pushed into orders in council, which, of course, puts more power in the hands of the minister and cabinet.

Under the Missing Persons Act it adds a definition of medical information. Now, the act already had provisions that allowed access to health information, but of course that will change. It allows now TV footage or other video recordings to be used in a missing person's case, and it adds a section that a justice of the peace can seal court records relating to a missing-person case if it interferes with an investigation or endangers people. It also changes the timeline for a review by a special committee of the Legislative Assembly. It will go from five years after the act coming into force to no later than 2027 and every five years after.

Of course, some of these changes are a result of a previous review. It added regulation-making powers that give the government the ability to define any term not defined in the act. I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that, of course, you wouldn't need to do this if you had proper legislation, right? It's important that we call that out.

7:50

Under the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act the changes, largely, that the UCP have made permanent are that it replaces all references to the death benefit with "funeral expense reimbursement." According to the government this does not change

any benefit Albertans may be eligible for, but it is a change to reflect that the advocate felt that the term “death benefit” was inadequate as there isn’t a benefit from a death. The definition in the act stays the same, but the name of the benefit reimbursement has changed. It disestablishes the Criminal Injuries Review Board. The board was already disestablished in transitional section 22 of the act, and it strikes out the transitional sections of 19 to 23. This makes a number of the controversial changes that the UCP made permanent. Most of the transitional sections were in place to deal with a class-action lawsuit, in fact.

Under the Youth Justice Act the changes are to align the act with changes from the federal Criminal Code, changes that a notification to parents can be given by any peace officer rather than solely the officer in charge. It updates sections on forfeiture, and according to the government the changes won’t be a change in policy. As you see, these are quite slight administrative changes that the government is making.

As I was saying before, it doesn’t actually go into the victims of crime fund. Now, in 2020 the UCP introduced their Bill 16, which did change the victims of crime fund to the victims of crime and crime prevention fund. Now, I just wanted to highlight some of the changes that were made there. The fund has always been 100 per cent supported by a surcharge on fines issued by the police or the courts. Previous to the change the fund supported a wide range of community- and police-based services, and the funding was available to individual victims of violent crimes to help deal with injuries, assist them with funerals, and with supplemental benefits for people with severe injuries. Bill 16 added in emergency accommodation or protective measures, access to counselling for sexual assault victims and families of homicide victims, and court support to victims and witnesses.

According to the help for victims of crime page in order to qualify for emergency assistance or counselling through the victims of crime and public safety fund, the victim must apply within 45 days of the crime occurring. This is resulting in victims being unable to access these services, and many victims, particularly those experiencing domestic violence or sexual crimes, do not even report the crime within that window. This is leaving victims with fewer resources, and for victims of domestic violence it could result in them staying in a dangerous situation. That right there is probably one of the most important factors in this particular bill, I would say.

As we all know, it’s very difficult for those who experience domestic violence to come forward as it is. In fact, I believe that sometimes it takes a victim of domestic violence up to, like, four times to actually make the decision to finally leave the situation in which they are perpetually being the victim of. We’d think that we would want legislation to actually help people in order to make that decision rather than to make it harder for them to actually come forward. I think that that’s something that the members opposite need to take into serious consideration when it comes to providing legislation or bringing new legislation into the House.

I think that there are a lot of issues that could be dealt with, Mr. Speaker, and domestic abuse, domestic crime, domestic violence is one of those things that we need to do better at as a Legislature. Of course, you know, I often say that there’s a difference between making something law and changing the culture, but what we find is that once you establish it in law, then the culture slowly starts to change after that. I mean, in this particular instance I would think that we would want it to move as quickly as possible, and therefore we desperately need legislation that gives – and, of course, I completely understand that there are some men, but the majority of those who experience domestic violence in the home are women. We need to create the circumstances whereby it’s easier for them to actually come forward and report what’s going on. That’s why we

desperately need pieces of legislation that actually will help women do that so that we can truly change the culture.

I know this is not an issue of just Alberta. It happens all over Canada. It happens all over the world. But it’s something that, you know, if we were leaders on that, Mr. Speaker, would definitely make all members on both sides of this House proud that we actually moved forward on something like that. So for me, it’s imperative that we deal with this as an important issue, that we keep moving forward on the issue of domestic violence, and this is something that this government could bring forward as a result of the changes that they actually made to the victims of crime fund, because this is where the impact is actually on Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to be able to provide my thoughts.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to join debate on Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Like has happened several times before, the UCP has put forward a bill that is an omnibus bill with several acts being impacted. Of course, when many acts are opened in one bill, you know, sometimes it’s seen as not really a fair way to put forward legislation, that the acts should be dealt with individually, and there is concern. Certainly, I remember hearing much concern expressed by the UCP when we were in government if we did that on the rare occasion, but it seems to be absolutely something that is done quite regularly by this government.

Most of the changes, frankly, are more administrative, so there are not huge differences that are of concern. But there is one aspect that we, the NDP caucus, have already talked extensively about that continues to be a concern. Actually, Bill 20 was an opportunity for the UCP government. If they indeed had the political will, they could have fixed it, and that, of course, is the victims of crime fund. We know that earlier they brought in Bill 16, which really made it much more difficult for victims of crime to access the fund. You know, we spoke extensively at that time about our concerns. Bill 20, which is another justice statutes amendment act, opens up the Justice of the Peace Act and the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, so there would have been a great opportunity.

8:00

I’m so sorry that the members of the UCP government are not taking advantage of it, because all across this province survivors of sexual assault have been impacted in a negative way by Bill 16 and continue to be by Bill 20. Of course, this is a hill to die on. This is why, certainly, I will oppose this bill, and I know that my colleagues join me in opposition to this bill. We know that Bill 16 allowed the UCP to use the victims of crime fund not only to support survivors but actually to channel or move money to police initiatives, so that meant that there’s less funding for victims of crime. That certainly is not the direction that we want to go with, and we’re concerned that the UCP is doing that. Certainly, the association of sexual assault services’ CEO Deb Tomlinson, who’s someone I know from previous to being elected, is a social worker who has been a strong advocate in this area for many, many years, has spoken certainly very clearly in opposition to both Bill 16 and also this bill.

Previously, before Bill 16, there was sort of a time limit on when survivors could report sexual assault, but it was changed to only 45 days in Bill 16, which is, frankly, ridiculous. When people have experienced an assault, they’ve experienced a tremendous trauma.

For them to have the wherewithal, to have the courage to actually speak up and actually go to police regarding this is asking far too much. There should not be any moratorium. Two years was too short; 45 days is absolutely, you know, ridiculous. It's obviously not meant to support survivors at all and certainly doesn't have any understanding of their lived experience, because when you experience some assaults such as this, it has significant impacts on your life, and in order to be able to face that trauma, sometimes it can take, indeed, years.

Women in our society know that even if they did report, oftentimes justice is not done. They're retraumatized by that whole experience, so they often are very hesitant to even report. Like, it's really significantly so minimal, the number of survivors that actually report crimes to the police, because what's the point? They feel like there is not justice being done. This, again, is just another way that justice will not be done going forward because it expects people to be able to do something after a very difficult situation, and people are not ready.

We know, very sadly, that sexual assault is, you know, a crime of power, largely against women although, as my colleague previous to me said, men also experience it, but it is about power. It's a power differential in our society. We know that here in Alberta we have some of the highest rates in the country of sexual assault, so this should be top of mind for this government because they should be doing everything they can to make sure that survivors feel supported and safe, yet the UCP is doing absolutely the opposite. It just shows once again that Albertans cannot trust the UCP government.

Indeed, it seems like the more vulnerable you are, the more likely you are to have programs taken away by the UCP. We can see that in so many areas, you know, certainly the critic area that I'm responsible for, Seniors and Housing, oftentimes dealing with people on fixed incomes who have very limited resources – it's difficult oftentimes to get work at an elderly age, so they don't have a lot of options in that, and guess what this government did. These are extremely low-income seniors. They deindexed their benefits. We're experiencing tremendous inflation. There's an affordability crisis. I mean, why is it that the UCP thinks they should be picking on the most vulnerable in our society? This is just another example of that, and that is quite disturbing to me, of course, and should be to the UCP.

Bill 20 is an opportunity to actually right some wrongs that they did through Bill 16, and the fund, the victims of crime fund, shouldn't be used, you know, for whatever police initiatives they feel they should undertake. We want to make sure that the fund stays focused so survivors can access that. Certainly, we have been extremely concerned because of Bill 16 and now, again, Bill 20, that continues this sort of continued assault, almost like a systemic assault on survivors of sexual assault. Certainly, we would like the UCP to release the report completed by the working group to examine the benefits of the funds for victims. We'd like to hear more about that. We still haven't seen that.

We want the 45-day limit for the application deadline to be removed. You know, as I said previously, the two years was too short, and 45 days is certainly much too short. As I said, because of the trauma survivors have experienced, it's asking an extraordinary amount of courage and wherewithal to report, and that should be absolutely lifted.

Remove financial barriers to survivors and agencies supporting survivors. Increase the cap on counselling services from \$1,000 to \$3,000. Certainly, we know that even one session, like, a one-hour session seeing a registered psychologist or social worker, MSW, could be \$250, so it's not very many sessions and that \$1,000 is gone. We want to make sure that the survivors have the support they

need, so certainly we're recommending that it be increased significantly, up to \$3,000. We want to reinstate financial benefits for survivors and remove the moratorium on new grant applications from agencies serving survivors, including new programs.

I mean, those are some concrete examples of things that I think the UCP should be moving forward on, and if they are interested in increasing their level of support from Albertans and feeling like they actually are doing something for, certainly, this very vulnerable population, those are important things that the UCP should move on.

You know, there are so many levels of sort of discrimination against survivors. Certainly, many, many years ago, when I was a social worker in child welfare, I would go to court, and oftentimes I had cases where there was some kind of situation where there were issues with sexual assault. In one particular case there was a father who wanted unsupervised visits, but we knew from reports from the police that he was a pimp on the street. He was grooming his own young children for the sex trade, so of course we didn't want him to have the right to unsupervised visits with his children because we felt they were in danger.

8:10

But there were so many levels that we had to fight to make sure that the case was heard and understood. I have my master's in social work. I'm a regulated professional. I have experience. I have understanding. I wasn't anyone who experienced any kind of trauma or sexual assault or anything, yet for me that whole system was overwhelming, and the barriers were tremendous. If you can just imagine what someone who doesn't have that kind of educational background, you know, already experiencing tremendous trauma, who knows other characteristics of that particular individual – the court system isn't welcoming, frankly, Mr. Speaker, so we need to make sure that people are supported.

I mean, in this particular case that I'm talking about – I was the supervisor in the case – my staff member who was the caseworker was intimidated by the system, so I went with her to the court case, and even our legal aid lawyer wasn't very co-operative with us. They didn't even want to, you know, present some of the issues that we had, so I confronted this lawyer, and she just kind of ignored me and walked away. What happened – and I'm grateful this all happened, but I can see it also not going this way – is that we sat in the front row, right behind the lawyer. We were concerned about the safety of these children having unsupervised visits with their father, and the lawyer on our side, the legal aid lawyer, was supposed to be defending our concerns and standing up, and she sat there. She didn't do anything.

When the judge said, "Okay; well, there doesn't seem to be any problem with unsupervised visits," I started to shake my head just sort of involuntarily. Of course, we know that in court you're not supposed to even move. You know, you sit there very stoically. But I started shaking my head because I was so appalled at what happened, and the judge looked at me and pointed at me, and she said, "Who are you, and why are you shaking your head?" I told her, "I'm the supervisor in this case, and these children are at risk, and we're concerned about their safety." And she said, "Okay; let's hear some evidence." Then the lawyer stepped up, and we won that case.

So I'm very grateful that I went and supported my staff, and we were able to make sure that those kids didn't have unsupervised visits with their father, who we knew to be a danger to them, quite frankly. We did what we did, but as I said, how many people would be able to do that? I think it's expecting a lot of some folks.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I do see the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen to join debate.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide some comments at this stage of debate, the second reading stage, for Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. This bill is making a few changes to a few different acts: the Corrections Act, justice of the peace, missing persons, victims of crime and public safety, and Youth Justice Act. Now, a number of these changes rise just ever so barely over the level of miscellaneous statutes, so I shall leave them aside, because the Official Opposition, having examined them, have no real quarrel with what is being done here.

The exception, of course, Mr. Speaker, is the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act changes, because essentially what happens through this bill is that the changes the government made previously, in the summer of 2020, I believe – it makes them permanent. It replaces some of the language around death benefits with funeral expense reimbursement. The definition in the act stays the same, but the name of the benefit reimbursement has changed. And there are a number of other changes. Essentially, it solidifies the changes that we saw in the summer of 2020.

Now, at the time those changes – the bill was numbered 16 in 2020. It changed the victims of crime fund to the victims of crime and crime prevention fund. Now, that fund had always been 100 per cent supported by a surcharge on fines issued by the police and the courts. Previous to the change the fund supported a wide range of community and police-based services, and funding was available to individual victims of violent crimes to deal with injuries, assistance with funerals, and supplemental benefits for people with severe injuries. There is no question that, however small, there were definitely a number of different counselling opportunities and lump-sum payments for victims of crime.

In particular, I'm going to focus my comments on sexual assault survivors because I have heard the most from various organizations on this matter. Now, the rationale at the time was that there was \$74 million sitting in the victims of crime fund. The government wanted to take that money, and rather than ensuring an appropriate balance within the government's operating funds, it would take that money and use it to pay for Crown prosecutors, this, of course, after a massive multibillion-dollar corporate income tax cut that did nothing to create jobs, diversify the economy, attract investment. You know, there was a massive hole blown in the budget, so raid the victims of crime fund, I guess, to fund the prosecutors. They brought in legislation in order to do that, and this solidifies that.

What's particularly ghoulish about it at this point, Mr. Speaker, is that we have a multibillion-dollar surplus. The price of WTI today was \$99. The '21-22 fiscal year is going to be a surplus numbering in a couple of billions owing to the spike in the price of oil – certainly, we will see some of that at the fiscal year-end, on June 30 – and then, of course, there's what's happening with the '22-23 budget. Again, due to a number of different geopolitical and other instabilities we are looking at a period of at least a few months of prolonged higher prices of WTI but also a pretty narrow differential – I noticed today that it was about \$13 – and that improves the overall fiscal position even if the government just sits back and collects the money.

What is so galling here is that we are now cementing these changes to raid this money. The province indicated that they were going to review victims of crime and blah, blah, blah and tra-la-la. Well, what they did was that they suspended a number of the counselling sessions, they suspended a number of the lump-sum payments, and they have narrowed the reporting time to 45 days from two years. Now, two years was even not long enough in terms

of reporting of a sexual assault – there's no question – but 45 days: well, I mean, it's designed to fail. It's designed not to provide victims of serious crime with what they are entitled to after there have been surcharges on fines by people who were found guilty of various things. Those fines were paid. That money was supposed to go to victims of crime. Now it's going heaven knows where, but it is certainly not going to victims of crime.

There's been all of this noise that the government made about: oh, we're going to have this, you know, travelling panel or these people to admire the problem. But nothing has actually been done, and meanwhile victims' services groups are left with fewer counselling resources, fewer resources for before court and after, and victims themselves are left with far fewer options for rebuilding their lives.

Now, the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services has been pretty clear with the government about what needs to happen here for victims of sexual assault, and the government has not listened. Recommendation 1, that the approval of applications and adjudication of appeals must take into consideration the unique characteristics of sexual assault trauma and the barriers and challenges victims face: not done. They haven't done anything. They have not lifted a finger on recommendation 1.

Recommendation 2, that all victims of sexual offences be eligible to apply for benefits with no timeline restrictions based on when the crime occurred and be excluded from application timelines that may apply to other offence categories: that is the recommendation from the Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services. The government has not done it.

8:20

Number 3, that the new program be a hybrid system that allows victims to access funded and community-based programs and services directly and also provides lump-sum monetary payments to victims of sexual assault and sexual abuse: have they done it? No, they have not. They actually have made changes – and this bill solidifies them – to take that away from victims of sexual assault and sexual abuse.

Recommendation 4, that the fund categories be expanded to include financial support during and after court proceedings: are they doing this? They are not. Sexual assault victims do not have access to those funds for those services. This is a moral outrage.

Recommendation 5, that the fund categories include support that specifically addresses the long-term impacts of sexual assault and sexual abuse: totally not done.

Recommendation 6, that the fund categories include a formula or a multiplier to ensure equitable access to services for those victims of sexual assault and abuse living in rural and remote communities: nothing has been done on that for their own constituents. The UCP MLAs that are voting in favour of this should have some very serious questions for their Justice minister, how they can justify taking this money away from their own constituents, Mr. Speaker.

No. I think the position of the Official Opposition is that we will not be supporting this piece of legislation. You know, the fact of the matter is that, absent the changes to the victims of crime fund, this is a perfectly fine, serviceable piece of legislation, but those pieces certainly make it such that we cannot support it in its current form.

Now, if the government was to do the following things, we might consider it. For example, we should ensure that 75 per cent of the victims of crime fund would be reserved for victims and victim-serving agencies. How difficult is this? Three-quarters of the fine revenue that comes in from people who have committed offences – three-quarters of it – goes out to the victims of serious crime. Why is that a problem? Who would vote against that? Money is not the

problem these days, but apparently the principle of supporting victims is the problem, and that's why it's not in this bill.

Now, we also proposed an amendment to Bill 16 in 2020 to ensure that accessibility to justice and financial aid is not limited to victims of crime due to reporting time frames and that minors who have witnessed acts of violence are also eligible to receive financial supports. If that was in this bill, we would vote for it, but it is not because minors who have witnessed acts of violence are not supported by these UCP MLAs and their approach to victims of crime. They're just not. They're just not. There's nothing for them here.

Now, if this bill included a restoration of financial benefits for victims who may have lasting impacts, including physical or psychological trauma, we may be able to support it, but it does not because this government is not supporting people who have lasting impacts, including physical or psychological trauma. If this bill opened up allowing for benefits beyond a severe neurological injury, we may be inclined to support it. It does not.

Now, as I described, Mr. Speaker, this is no longer about money for this government. This is about principles and values and a moral compass, and that is why the Official Opposition will not be supporting this bill. To my mind, it should be very simple at this point, when you are awash in oil revenues, you know, something that is absolutely not of the government's own making. It is true that they are certainly at the whims of fortune. The surplus as it is right now . . .

Mr. Schow: You couldn't balance the budget in these terms.

Ms Phillips: I'm being heckled, Mr. Speaker, by the Member for Cardston-Siksika, but I really actually think that he should spend his time explaining to the victims' services organizations in his riding and throughout southern Alberta why they don't have the money to do their jobs anymore. Maybe he can write a letter back to the Alberta association of sexual assault centres in response to all of those recommendations that remain unacted upon by this government. I would suggest that opening up his laptop and spending his time that way is a better use of his time than heckling me while I'm trying to speak to a bill.

Anyway, moving on, the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that we have a multibillion-dollar surplus, so it should be reinvested in three ways, not the least of which is to start to repair some of the damage of health care, education, and other services. We should be looking at the role of savings and certainly lowering our debt-servicing costs through improving our overall fiscal position and investing in the heritage fund. We should be having a look at how we restore respect for disability services workers, for victims of crime. Clearly, certain members of the government bench would rather spend their time heckling than actually advocating on behalf of them. Certainly, we should be restoring respect for disability service workers. We should be restoring respect for teachers and, of course, restoring respect for health care, both the patients and the people who work in it.

Those should be our priorities in addition to making life more affordable, but I'll tell you what doesn't make life more affordable: having to pay out of pocket for extremely expensive counselling sessions after being a rape victim, which is what this government's changes to victims of crime have left people with, extremely expensive counselling sessions, extremely tight timelines to report that crime and to get any kind of help or assistance. I think it's five counselling sessions now. Wow. That should be the priority right now, restoring respect for our public services and the supports that we have out there in the community, the organizations that are working hard to support people, and building a province that we can

be proud of, where victims of crime are given the supports they need to rebuild their lives.

It's with that concluding thought, Mr. Speaker, that I will conclude my comments on Bill 20. I look forward to the comments from the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika and him tabling letters to Alberta association of sexual assault centres in his response to their recommendations.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join debate on Bill 20?

Otherwise, I am prepared to ask the question and offer the opportunity to the hon. Member for Grande Prairie, I believe, to close debate should she so choose to take it. That is waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a second time]

Bill 21

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Sabir moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment May 9: Mr. Bilous]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. We are on REF1. I believe the hon. member still has some time should he so choose to take it, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. However, you only have less than a minute to talk, just so you know.

Mr. Bilous: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a problem, as every member in this Chamber knows. If I could trade some time with other members, I'd greatly appreciate that.

Mr. Eggen: No.

Mr. Bilous: I know. That's not permitted. I was just being witty.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I've spoken at length to this bill, and I have a sinking feeling that I will speak to it again. But part of the challenge that we've outlined in this bill, less so about the fact that this is an omnibus bill – I recognize that there are some good pieces to this bill, which I highlighted when I spoke earlier. As well, there are, you know, things, well, like making it easier for businesses to license across multiple municipalities. I think that's a great move, and I support that because I know that many companies operate amongst many different municipalities, and that's a challenge. That piece I like.

There are a lot of pieces that I have a challenge with, which I will highlight at the next opportunity.

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

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

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for having spoken for only a minute. That was probably my favourite speech of his that he's ever given. Honestly, if the Government House Leader or any of his team is listening, I think we should give serious consideration to amending the standing orders to limit speaking time to a minute for each member.

You know, we are talking about reducing red tape and promoting efficiency in government. Just imagine how much more efficient this Legislature would be if we could only speak for a minute at every stage for every bill. We could pass hundreds and hundreds of pieces of legislation every session. I think the people of Alberta would at least have a much more interesting government if that were to be allowed.

8:30

You know, the subject of red tape is one that this government has spent a lot of time on over the last three years. First of all, I want to offer some comments to one particular member, my friend from Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, who has done such an excellent job on the Public Accounts Committee, questioning every ministry that has come before that committee for the last three years, asking it to talk about the actions that it's taken to cut red tape. Now, I will admit that I was a little bit disappointed, Mr. Speaker, because, for those who aren't familiar with how Public Accounts works, there are blocks of time where you can go back and forth with ministry officials; you ask some questions; they provide answers at the table. And then at the end of the meeting there is a three-minute block where we can submit written questions, that the ministry officials follow up on 30 days after they're answered, unless you're the Ministry of Education, in which case you take as much sweet time as you want, apparently, and disregard the authority of the Legislature. But that's an aside.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

The Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain generally asks questions about red tape in those question-and-answer blocks, which I look forward to. That's probably my favourite part of Public Accounts. But today he left us hanging, Madam Speaker. He refused to get to the questions on red tape for the culture and tourism ministry, no less, until the three-minute read-in section of Public Accounts. So the poor members of Public Accounts will have to wait at least 30 days until we get answers to the vital question of what the culture and tourism ministry has done in the last fiscal year to cut red tape. That is not fair.

Mr. Schow: How about that one minute?

Mr. Schmidt: Madam Speaker, I hear the Member for Cardston-Siksika asking if it's only been – it seems like it's only been a minute since I started speaking, not even. [interjections] I don't know. Maybe time is moving differently depending on the location in the Legislature, but it feels like I'm just getting started.

Anyway, I hope my friend from Spruce Grove-Stony Plain takes my helpful comments into consideration and moves those red tape reduction questions up in the questioning order at the next Public Accounts Committee.

But, you know, one of the things that I've noticed in the entire time that we've been talking about red tape is that this entire exercise has been completely meaningless. In fact, I would challenge the Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain to even stand up and tell us one particular thing that this government has done as part of its red tape reduction initiative that has made a significant impact on the lives of the people of Spruce Grove-Stony Plain or anybody else in Alberta. I bet that even though he has asked that question at every single Public Accounts meeting for the last three years, he would be hard pressed, without going back to the *Hansard* and reading the transcripts, to stand up and tell us any meaningful change that has been made to benefit his constituents or anybody else here in the province of Alberta.

There have been a number of changes that have caused significant concern through previous red tape reduction initiatives, those things that have impacted landowners' rights, particularly with respect to natural resource development issues. And I sincerely hope that we will have a full discussion about the impact that those changes have made in the real property rights committee, Madam Speaker, because I know that that committee is conducting its work and will be deliberating on its recommendations in the very near future. We have certainly heard from a number of landowners across the province about concerning changes that this government has made under the guise of red tape reduction that have significantly negatively impacted landowners' rights. Fortunately, there isn't a whole lot in here that seems to fall under that category, but I do think that it would be wise to . . . [interjections]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members – sorry, Member; I hesitate to interrupt – I rarely have trouble hearing the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I'm having trouble hearing him right now, so if we could please take our conversations to the lounge, that would be very helpful.

Go ahead. Sorry.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, Madam Speaker, I know you didn't say it, but it was the subtext that you wanted to hear the things that I said, so I'm really grateful for that. Thank you very much.

Yes, as I was saying, I think it would be wise for the members of the Legislature to vote for this amendment referring this bill to committee for further examination, because there is enough here in this bill to cause concern that I think we would be wise to spend the time in committee to dig into the issues that this bill presents and seeks to address.

First and foremost, of course, for me as the environment critic are the changes to the Provincial Parks Act and the Public Lands Act, which, if I quote from the bill, allows the minister to "set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines . . . or other rules relating to any matter in respect of which a regulation may be made under this Act." In layman's terms, this means that the minister can do anything he wants with respect to regulating provincial parks and public lands, and that's a problem because nobody trusts this government with provincial parks. We've seen already its attempt to close down and sell off hundreds of parks in 2020, and the government was stopped in its tracks in that attempt.

My fear is that this is an attempt at getting at that through other means, Madam Speaker, because we don't have any clarity on what this power that the minister is giving himself will mean. Will it mean that he'll be able to partially privatize parks? Will it mean that he'll have the power to prohibit access to parks? We don't know because it's unclear from the text of the legislation, and the minister certainly hasn't given us any clarity in any of his remarks around this bill either in the media or in debate in this Chamber. So I think that we would be wise to vote to send this bill to committee just for this section alone, just to really dig into what it means and whether or not it is actually a good idea to pass this amendment once we understand the full implications of those changes.

Now, of course, this bill doesn't just amend the Provincial Parks Act and the Public Lands Act. We have 16 acts in total, so 14 other acts that are being amended, the first, of course, being the Animal Health Act. It's particularly concerning to me, Madam Speaker, that the amendment to the Animal Health Act moves the need to report the presence of notifiable diseases in animals within 24 hours from legislation to the regulation and that now there is no specified length of time for reporting these diseases in the legislation.

I mean, I wasn't here when the original act was passed or whichever bill legislated these timelines in the first place, but I assume that there was some reason for doing it, and I assume that at the time those timelines were supported by agricultural producers. Once it's moved to regulation, Madam Speaker, of course, as you know, then cabinet can make the changes that it sees fit to the regulations behind closed doors. So my fear is that these reporting timelines may be changed without notice or any kind of consultation, and of course we can't have access to the cabinet discussions. We won't even know the reasonings behind cabinet making the changes to those reporting timelines. I think the timing of this change is particularly unfortunate given the significant impact that avian flu is having on the chicken population for our agricultural producers.

8:40

You know, again, Madam Speaker, it's really concerning to me that at a time when our agricultural producers are being hit hard by the avian flu, the minister is fiddling around with disease reporting timelines but not actually taking meaningful action to prevent the spread of avian flu. I recall an exchange in question period between my friend from Edmonton-Manning and the minister of agriculture on this very topic. I was astounded to hear the minister of agriculture say that we had heard that avian flu was going to be a problem two years ago when it started hitting flocks of chickens in other parts of the world and that they monitored the situation until it became a problem here.

Now, we are all familiar with the government's fondness of monitoring the spread of infectious diseases without doing anything about it, but it boggles the mind, Madam Speaker, to listen to the minister say that they had a two-year window in which they knew that this was going to be a problem, yet they failed to do anything to address it. Now that it's a problem that's growing, you would think that we would have some kind of policy solution coming from the ministry of agriculture, yet all we have, at least in the form of legislation here in this session, is a bill that amends the Animal Health Act so that disease reporting timelines are moved from the legislation to the regulations.

Member Loyola: The feds are taking care of it. Don't worry about it.

Mr. Schmidt: And the federal government is taking care of it. That's one of the things, that my friend from Edmonton-Ellerslie raises, that is a common theme with this government. We get bailed out time and time again by the federal government and then turn around and complain about them intruding into matters of provincial jurisdiction. You would think that a government that is, in words, anyway, so opposed to the actions of the federal government would at least follow up those words with action, stand on principle, refuse to allow the feds to intervene in our responsibilities, and do the work of looking after our agricultural producers ourselves. So it's really concerning to me, Madam Speaker, that here we are again in a dire situation where a problem is spreading out of control and we rely on the federal government to step in and save us from ourselves when we have the capacity to do this work and look after our agricultural producers on our own.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

There are a whole host of other amendments here that are causing some concern. The next piece in the legislation that's being amended is the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. Now, these changes remove the one-year maximum on all licences for residential facilities in the child intervention system, including

group homes and foster homes, and move those time limits to the regulations as well.

You know, like the Animal Health Act, the province of Alberta is in the grips of a crisis when it comes to children in care dying. We've had record numbers of children in care die in the year 2021, and I want to thank my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud for being such an effective advocate for children in care and holding the government's feet to the fire on its failure to protect those children in care. We have yet to hear any adequate explanation from members of the government as to why this time limit on licences is being moved from the legislation to the regulation. So I think that for this piece alone it's worth voting in favour of this referral amendment and getting into the details about this change and what that would mean.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know, in the brief amount of time that I've had, I've only been able to touch on a few acts, but already I think I've laid out the case for voting yes to this referral. Thank you.

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

Are there any other members wishing to join debate? I do see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has risen to join on REF1.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, for those who are actually following along at home, I just wanted to give them a sense of, like, how many bills this particular proposed piece of legislation would be impacting. There are 16 acts that are going to be modified according to this bill, and they are the Animal Health Act, the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the Cooperatives Act, the Education Act, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, the Highways Development and Protection Act, the Local Authorities Election Act, the Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Act, the Municipal Government Act, the Pharmacy and Drug Act, the Provincial Parks Act, the Public Lands Act, the Railway (Alberta) Act, the Residential Tenancies Act, the Rural Utilities Act, and the Surveys Act.

Just to give people that are listening in a sense of what is happening here, with the vast majority of the changes that are actually taking place, things are being moved out of legislation and into regulation. Of course, for those who don't know, when you place the majority of decision-making or changes on the regulation, well, the government can just choose to change those at any time that it wishes. Any time that it wants, it can just change a regulation. It doesn't actually have to come into the Legislature. It doesn't need to be debated at all, and the government can essentially just make a change whenever it likes. Of course, this is a concerning issue because then the government cannot be held to account on a lot of these things when they take place.

You know, for a government that claims that it's doing all it can to be as transparent as it possibly can, you'd think that, well, this is something that it would be trying to curb rather than instigate and bring forward. For this particular reason – and I believe that this government has given us enough examples and enough concerns to demonstrate that they just can't be trusted. Bill after bill after bill that actually comes into this House tends to be quite administrative, especially this session. What I've seen in the last three years in this Legislature from this government is that they move a lot of it to regulation, and then not only that; in the proposed pieces of legislation that they do bring into the House, Mr. Speaker, they actually put more and more power in the hands of ministers.

Now, I've gone on at length prior to today on the issue that, you know, the agencies, boards, and commissions of Alberta actually help in the democratic decision-making and in the governance here in the province of Alberta, and we count on Albertans to participate on these agencies, boards, and commissions. Actually, they do an

incredible job of bringing in perspectives from stakeholders and different interested parties. It's important that we continue to carry on with that approach. However, what we've seen from this government is that not only are they taking power away from agencies or decision-making from agencies, boards, and commissions, but then they're actually taking that and giving it to the minister. That is what's concerning, because when you start adding up all of these factors, you start seeing that the government can't be held to account and that it can make sweeping changes whenever it likes. This is exactly what goes against the idea of strengthening our democracy.

8:50

You know, the members on the other side like to get up and talk about how they're strengthening democracy, but their actions are actually demonstrating that they're making it worse. This is what I find so perplexing, because we have members on the other side of the House that prior to 2019 were members of the Wildrose caucus. And I admit that the Wildrose – we may not see eye to eye on particular aspects, but accountability was part of their narrative, and keeping the government accountable was part of their narrative.

Now those same members that used to be on this side prior to 2019, who would get up and talk about strengthening democracy and that there needs to be government accountability, are the same members that are on that side of the House. You know, they're private members of the government caucus, not involved in the actual decision-making, and now they're actually supporting legislation which takes power away from agencies, boards, and commissions and gives it to the minister and then not only that; putting more and more of the decision-making process into regulation, which therefore goes against accountability, what they used to be firmly for when they were on this side of the House. That's what I find incredibly perplexing by members on that side. You know, although I don't agree with them ideologically, on strengthening our democracy and accountability I do.

So it just demonstrates for me why this government can't be trusted. It can't be trusted by these particular actions that it's taking. What's it trying to hide? Why does it need to go in – why do certain decisions have to go into regulation when before they were in legislation? I think that that's what this whole body was set up to do, bring in legislation and review the legislation. Let's debate the legislation so that then we can make the legislation better and more practical for the people of Alberta so that they can do the business that they need to do, whatever that may be. But here's a perfect example of how this government is making moves to be less accountable to the public, less accountable to this Legislature, less accountable overall, and that's why they cannot be trusted.

Now, I don't disagree. There are some parts of this proposed legislation that I see are very practical and that are indeed needed and I agree with, but there are some that I don't. That's what's concerning about this, because if they would have been brought separately, then we could have potentially voted those certain things in, and the ones that we don't we would have left out.

I think that one of the most concerning parts of the bill is actually when it comes to the decision-making of the Minister of Environment and Parks, or the minister of environment, over our provincial parks. Just to be clear, I'm going to quote from the bill. It says under minister's directives and codes that "the Minister may set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines . . . or other rules relating to any matter." I'll stress that: "any matter in respect of which a regulation may be made under this Act." It leaves one to interpret that the minister can basically just do anything that the minister wants.

Like, let me read that again to you, especially to those members who used to be on this side of the House and used to talk so much about accountability. "The Minister may set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines . . . or other rules relating to any matter in respect of which a regulation may be made under this Act." That is widespread, sweeping power that – and for any private member of the government caucus, regardless of which caucus they used to be part of prior to 2019, I think that would be concerning.

It has been made evident that Albertans do not trust this government with our cherished provincial parks. Many of my colleagues on this side of the House have actually gone into the reasons why. When it comes to coal mining in the eastern slopes, we saw how Albertans were actually enraged by what was being proposed by this government. Now, we actually vote this piece of legislation through, and the minister of environment will just run roughshod over all of that, because it clearly states here that, basically, the minister can do anything that the minister wants to do. Absolutely no accountability to this Legislature, never mind to the people of Alberta, and that is quite concerning. Why members from the other side of the House, private members of the government caucus, would actually agree to something like this I have no idea. I have no idea.

It could give the minister the power to partially privatize a park, perhaps powers to restrict access to a park. Of course, these are just guesses. These are just assumptions I'm making, of course, because we don't know – we don't know – because now it's no longer in legislation, and the minister will be able to bring anything that he wants into regulation through this proposed piece of legislation. You have to wonder.

You know, it seems that in any omnibus piece of legislation most of what's being proposed is, essentially, good. I mean, of course, it's debatable. But this government always tries to slide one huge piece in with its omnibus bill that is, I would say, quite controversial. None is more controversial than the one that we have before us right now with this particular proposed piece of legislation that, of course, gives such widespread and sweeping powers to the minister of the environment.

The other aspect of this is, of course, the confusion that was made between the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction and the Minister of Education. One was saying that the bill would do one thing while the other was saying that, no, it wouldn't do that. There wasn't even agreement among the front bench on what this piece of legislation would actually be doing.

So there are a number of reasons why we would need to refer this to committee, Mr. Speaker. I think that it would be wise for us to do so, considering what I've brought up in debate just now. I would highly encourage all members of this House to vote in favour of this referral amendment.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

We are on REF1. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has risen to join debate.

9:00

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this legislation. Time in this House is coming to a close, and I don't want to miss an opportunity to say a few things before that inevitability occurs. I think that in this particular case I certainly hope the government takes seriously the concerns that we have been expressing although it is quite evident that the government is not generally willing to heed any kind of comment or consideration that has been presented to them by anyone in this House, and in fact I think that on average that's been true of anyone in the province of

Alberta, once they've made a decision. I guess my comments will be really directed toward people who are listening in and paying attention to the political process here in the province of Alberta.

The first thing I want to comment on is that we have here in front of us yet again an omnibus bill. I think that that's problematic in its own right. I know when the many members of the government were on the opposition side, if we ever put two pieces of legislation together, they complained about it being omnibus when it really wasn't.

But now we indeed have omnibus bills that come in that have involved a very wide range of unrelated legislation that should not be in the same bill because they have no purpose in being there. You know, this is another example of this government adopting the tactics of the Republican Party in the United States and copying their very antidemocratic process, something we saw when the Premier was, of course, a member of the Harper government in Ottawa, who did very similar kinds of things, purposely piling things together in order to bury certain aspects of the bill amongst the other pieces.

I can go through the bill and certainly I can find things that I think are quite reasonable and things I would like to support; for example, the change to the Municipal Government Act where it's easier to do licensing across boundaries so that people can have one business licence across many boundaries. Something like that is fine and quite appropriate, but there have been many other municipal-oriented bills that have been in this House where that piece could have been introduced into. The question is always, you know: why is it suddenly appearing here now? Why wasn't it done at the time it could have been done?

[The Speaker in the chair]

We have heard this evening a number of the speakers commenting on various aspects of the bill and presenting some very salient reasons why this bill should not proceed. Of course, I would like to add to that given that this is a referral amendment, and I can go through many different parts. Some of them, of course, are going to be supportive of comments already given by other members of the opposition.

I want to start with one piece that I have not heard a lot of conversation about so far but one that is close to my heart, and that is the change to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, section 2. This seems to be sort of a small, you know, just sort of record-keeping kind of change, one that would be consistent with red tape reduction in the sense that it is a change just in terms of licensing procedures.

But I'm very concerned about the choice that is being made here. We are at a time when the crisis in children's services is the highest it has been in the history of the province of Alberta, essentially. We've had more deaths of children that have been in care or just recently left care this year than any other previous year, and we have to ask ourselves why that's happening. We should be spending some time doing a very deep examination of the causes of that and a real repair of the child welfare system in this province. Yet here we see in this bill not an attempt to improve situations but actually to reduce the supervision of care in the child welfare system by taking a rule which was that people needed to renew a licence on a yearly basis and extending it to three years.

Now, for many people they would say, "Well, that's not much difference," because, of course, they'd be coming from a position of perhaps, you know, a business licence for doing something like perhaps pouring sidewalks or something of that nature. You say: "Really, I mean, how much changes from one year to the next? Once somebody has got their business licence, why can't we just

allow them to continue to practise for a reasonable period of time?" And in a situation of pouring sidewalks, I might support that, but in this situation I don't think that this is something that should be considered lightly, because we are not talking about pouring sidewalks. We're talking about human lives, and we know that in this day and age we are not doing a very good job of protecting those human lives. We have lost so many of them in the last year, in fact, record numbers of them in the last year.

So you have to ask: well, why would you want to extend licences from one year to three years, and why would you not want to go back and ensure every single year that the care being provided to children in the custody of the department is actually at the highest possible level of care? Why would you want to let that drift? Three years is a long time. Can you imagine being a 12-year-old child and something goes wrong in the first year that you were there, and it's not until you're 15 until somebody comes to investigate whether or not the house that you're residing in continues to meet the standards that are necessary? That's an incredible period of time between the ages of 12 and 15. I would hope this government would not allow a negative situation to continue for that period of time, and if they are extending licensing, they are essentially saying that they are going to decrease the amount of transparency and responsibility to the system from the care providers.

I'm very concerned about this, and I know that the government has said, "Oh, don't worry; this will only be used for renewables," but it doesn't actually say that in the legislation. They don't articulate that in a very clear and direct way, so I can't imagine that, in fact, is a valid argument. And even if it were, I wouldn't be supporting it. I just don't think that we should be doing anything to lessen our attempts to bring the highest level of care to children who come under the supervision of the Department of Children's Services in this province, and I wish the government would reconsider on that basis alone in this particular bill.

But moving on, I guess I have other concerns, so I will address them as well. For example, the section on co-ops and the decision to reduce the percentage of Canadian ownership for the co-ops from 50 per cent to 25 per cent. Again I'm very concerned about: why would they want to do this? Why would they want to lessen Canadian involvement in co-operatives for any particular reason? I'm just, you know, concerned that this is again something that the government is doing that appears on the surface to be a minimal administrative change but may actually have very significant consequences for people who are involved.

You know, if we continually make the decisions that we do not need to have significant local representation – and we are only asking for 50 per cent. We were only asking for half of the ownership to be Canadian before, so there's plenty of room for foreign investment. Now we are making a decision that we're going to shift it to less than 50 per cent, which means, ultimately, that foreign ownership becomes the majority on any decision that is made.

9:10

So we are ultimately taking the power for decisions to be made in the local constituency and moving it to an international constituency. Why would we do that? Why would we take the power to make decisions on very important mechanisms here in the province of Alberta and shift it to a foreign power?

Again, this is another time when the government is given a choice, and the choice is between average Albertans, who are trying to make a good living and trying to make Alberta a better place to be, and international corporations, who really don't have any interest in Alberta per se but are interested in their own growth and will be making decisions not based on what's good for Albertans

but making decisions based on their own desire to expand their international well-being. So it means, ultimately, that someone who has an interest in another country will make decisions here that are not good for Albertans but are good for their services and the products that they own and they sell and the businesses they own and manufacturing and so on in other countries.

Why we would want to give that power away is beyond me except for, again, it speaks to the influence on the UCP from, you know, foreign interests that we've seen repeatedly in terms of energy and manufacturing and so on in this province. It's very concerning to me that they would make that kind of decision. Any time you give away your democratic power, you are making a mistake, and you shouldn't find yourself in a place to do that.

But then, of course, we have seen this government make many, many decisions that are essentially reducing democratic power. We've seen them, for example, create a whole new process for bills brought forward by opposition – well, brought forward by noncabinet members – into this House, that go to a committee. And, lo and behold, somehow a hundred per cent of the bills brought forward by the opposition had been killed before they arrived in the House, but that hasn't been true of any of the bills on the government side. So we can look at this and sort of say: is this a fair process? I can tell you, as an instructor of statistics at the university before I came here, that the chances of that happening are almost zero without prejudice.

Therefore, we would say that indeed there is, in fact, reason to believe statistically that this government is intentionally preventing democratic processes in this House. It introduced a process that has never existed in this Legislature up to this time. Why would they be reducing democracy? Why would they be reducing the voice of people who voted anything other than UCP in the last election? That's essentially what they've done.

This is the move of a government that is taking power and centralizing power and ensuring that there is a minimal chance that opposition will be able to speak to legislation or be able to introduce ideas into the House. We've also seen this government deny witnesses to committees and prevent them from attending these committees. We've seen this government invoke closure more than any government has done in the history of the province of Alberta to prevent opposition from speaking in this House.

In this bill we see the government handing extreme amounts of power to ministers and moving decision-making away from public transparency into the cabinet room, where we will never know what decisions have been made. That's been well articulated by the members from Edmonton-Gold Bar and Edmonton-Ellerslie.

So, you know, I think the concern that we have here is that this government is acting in a very undemocratic way, is subverting the Westminster process whenever they get a chance, and it is really unacceptable in this time. It's time for this government to stop this bill and bring it back into committee.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has risen.

Ms Phillips: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide some comments on Bill 21. As I understand it, we are on a referral at the moment, meaning that what we are looking for is a broader public conversation on this bill. There is no question that, given its omninature, it requires more study, I think, and a little bit more light and transparency. Certainly, Albertans are watching the government very closely. They're watching, of course, the outcome

of the internal party process as of whenever it is, May 18. As a result, they're really interested in the leadership of the province and where the province is going.

When you have a bill that affects Education, Municipal Affairs, agriculture, Children's Services, environment, Health, Service Alberta, Transportation, and Treasury Board and Finance, that's going to raise a lot of questions for Albertans. Just exactly what are we trying to spirit through the Legislature under the cover of an omnibus bill, particularly – particularly – when this bill affects some really, really important things that people have raised a lot of concerns about? I'm thinking here of the tremendous public conversations that have been precipitated by the government's mishandling of parks issues and education, in particular. There's no question that there should be a bit more public comment solicited and certainly some provision of the opportunity for Albertans to have a closer look at this bill.

For example, the bill gives enormous and widespread powers to the minister of environment over provincial parks. No one trusts this minister with parks. There are still, since, you know, the summer and fall of 2020, constituencies like mine littered on the front lawns with defend our parks signs in one of the most impressive upswells of support for our natural spaces and our wild areas and, really, I think, the canary in the coal mine for the government on the issue of trust. There was very clearly a surreptitious plan to disestablish a number of parks.

Very clearly, this was not supported by the vast majority of Albertans, and people said so using what ability they had to speak out and to engage the government in their active citizenship. Given that we were not in a position to be, you know, attending town halls as citizens or doing the other things that we might do given the pandemic, people used the tool that they had, which was to put up signs, in particular throughout the city of Calgary, where a number of cabinet represent seats, where people were not at all amused with the experimentation with the parks. Not at all. So there is no question that on those grounds alone the Official Opposition believes that there needs to be more public comment on this bill.

I would certainly like to hear from people who actually have experience, perhaps retired people and others, in the appropriate management of our parks. There's no question that parks staff have been cut tremendously, so park rangers, COs, and others' ability to actually make the changes that the minister has made representations to this House are so very benign and "nothing to see here" – first of all, this business of being able to, you know, change signage and so on was already something that folks could do. But there's no question that parks have been left with fewer people to do that job.

9:20

Certainly, I think for many people, when you go out and chat with folks who are working as parks volunteers or with various societies, they don't necessarily feel supported in their work by this government, and I don't think that this bill provides them any comfort in this regard; in fact, quite the opposite, Mr. Speaker. So it is certainly of concern, and I think Albertans deserve to know and have more conversation about the fact that the minister is now receiving legislative authority to do whatever he wants with our parks. The trust has been absolutely shredded.

Mr. Schow: You closed Alberta's backyard.

Ms Phillips: Again, you know, the Member for Cardston-Siksika has a lot of opinions that he would like to share with the House. I would invite him to – he could table a letter in this Legislature outlining how the Castle parks should be disestablished, then. His minister has so

far failed to do that, so if that's the position that he holds, he should be really clear about it, and maybe we can have an internal party division like we've already had on other issues on this issue.

You know, there's no question that the Member for Cardston-Siksika is also really worried about things like – well, he's not worried about his grazing lease associations, but he is worried about other activity on public land, and there's no question that he's got a lot of opinions about a lot of things. [interjection] He's chirping over there, and every time I get up to speak, he's got a lot of heckling to do. I feel like maybe he should focus less on me, because it's becoming a bit much, and focus on his constituents. I mean, he already dealt with his nomination race, but anyway.

The fact of the matter is that we have a trust gap on parks, and, you know, there's trust gap on a lot of things: public health care, for example, and certainly education and the curriculum and the management of overall finances, with billions of dollars in waste and giveaways and a government that ran the highest deficits in Alberta history. There's no question, too, that there's a trust gap that was created by a number of the southern Alberta MLAs, UCP MLAs, who couldn't give a straight answer about protection of the eastern slopes.

You know, there's absolutely no question that we need to protect our public lands. People want more oversight over the activities of the Minister of Environment and Parks, not less, and there's no question that allowing the minister to use tools for anything the minister wants is likely inappropriate. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. If hon. members want to have conversations, there are lots of places to do that. Across the aisle is certainly not one of them, particularly at this hour.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, there's no question that there are a number of consultation opportunities within the parks act even around changing parks management plans, which are public documents, and they go out for a public comment period. You know, if the minister wants these powers to do these things, he is absolutely already, without this bill, able to do it. He just has to talk to the public for a period of time before he changes a management intent or the various uses.

Now, within the Provincial Parks Act in particular, I mean, there are a number of different uses that are allowed within that parks designation, including the development of various infrastructure like roads and even interpretive lodges and all of that kind of thing. Again, all the minister would have to do is just put that within the parks management plan and then put it out for public comment and satisfy the Indigenous consultation periods, and it would be done. So, really, this is not necessary, and there's no question that that's what has bred the distrust, Mr. Speaker, for this section of the act.

Now, there are a number of other pieces in this act that, you know, I think maybe we want a little bit more conversation around. Certainly, the piece around Alberta land titles looks good on the face of it. I just have some concerns about the overall management of land titles, and I would prefer some clarification from the government that they're not going to proceed with that very ill-advised plan to privatize land titles, for example.

I've just picked out a couple of the pieces that I will speak to in my comments on Bill 21 today, Mr. Speaker, and with that, I would like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 11 Continuing Care Act

Ms Gray moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, be not now read a second time because the Assembly is of the view that the government has not carried out sufficient consultations on the contents of the bill with families whose loved ones lost their lives from COVID-19 while in continuing care.

[Debate adjourned on the amendment May 4: Mr. Copping speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make a few comments in regard to the amendment on Bill 11. Clearly, the issues that we have in continuing care are not being met by this bill. I think we've seen one of the most, you know, traumatic and difficult things in our health care system in a generation in regard to the pandemic response and how it manifested itself in continuing care systems. We literally lost more than 1,600 lives to COVID in continuing care facilities here in the province of Alberta.

You know, it's a reflection of what we have seen in other jurisdictions in Canada and around the world, but if there ever was a time to learn a lesson that we can move forward to protect our seniors in a more fundamental way, it was the loss of more than 1,600 lives in continuing care here in the province of Alberta during this ongoing COVID pandemic. Anything that moves forward to protect those lives and those people in continuing care facilities: that's what we need to focus on right now.

We as a caucus are certainly willing to stay and to build legislation and to build supports and financial supports to build a continuing care system that can withstand something like we just saw over these last couple of years. I think it's imperative that we do that right now. You know, to expedite that very important work that we should be doing, we need to move past what Bill 11 is offering us and build something that is more substantial, considerably more substantial, Mr. Speaker, because while we do have a young population, we just have a larger population in this province. What we have a shortage of is affordable, high-quality continuing care facilities for that significant group of people that will be seniors in these coming years.

It can't be just something for a privileged few that can afford thousands of dollars a month for care, but it has to be something that is universal, an extension of our universal public health system. We need that at this moment, at this juncture. Bill 11 just simply doesn't meet that standard, and for the sake of looking after those who are most vulnerable and people who are moving into that position, it's an imperative that all of us must take as a grave responsibility. There are just so many loose ends with continuing care right now. The facility-based continuing care review, for example, you know, still hangs in the air.

9:30

This whole issue around staffing and staff moving to multiple locations: we know it has been a documented medical fact that that was what was spreading COVID between facilities. We had lockdown in the facilities, yet COVID continued to spread apace, killing, as we see, more than 1,600 people, because people were working in multiple facilities and carrying it from one place to another. That whole scenario just could have been dealt with so

much better. It's all about capacity, Mr. Speaker. Of course, people are working in multiple facilities because they're trying to make ends meet. They can only get part-time jobs, so they have to work at two or three different places in order to have a living wage. You know, all of these things add up together.

So even if we remain dispassionate and not look at it as a moral imperative to look after our seniors now and in the future, we can look at it scientifically to say that you literally are endangering a larger population by not doing anything about the continuing care situation. You know, we are still in a state of high COVID transmission, so it's not like we're out of that situation at all. What might come next? I mean, that's the thing, right? We can see that now, that there's a huge vulnerability around virus spread and the potential for that to occur again, and we just logically need to deal with that. If we have people in continuing care facilities that are vulnerable, then a version of that will just simply happen again, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't take rocket science to figure that out.

Bill 11, you know, I think could do much better. I certainly think that it needs to be not just amended but scrapped, and I think that my position is reflected not just in our caucus but amongst the general public as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also want to speak briefly to this motion regarding Bill 11. I think we do know that the UCP has failed the residents of continuing care throughout this pandemic. Albertans cannot trust the UCP with their health care, and we have evidence that over 1,600 continuing care residents in Alberta tragically passed away from COVID-19. Those outcomes could have been different, and we don't see anything in this piece of legislation that will help us fix that.

More importantly, this bill doesn't even fulfill the UCP's own promise from a year ago: one, they will increase home care; two, the amount of hours of care that residents will receive will increase; and three, increase the proportion of full-time staff. They didn't even do that in this piece of legislation, and I think our residents in continuing care, seniors in this province, deserve far, far better than this from this government. That's why this bill should not get the support of this Legislature.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat, but prior to taking my seat, can I move a motion to seek unanimous consent that we move to one-minute bells for the remainder of this evening?

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member. Can you repeat that? I just want to make sure what you're asking for. It matters as we may go in or out of committee, so there's some difference in what you're asking for. Can you clarify what you're hoping for here?

Mr. Sabir: I am seeking unanimous consent that we move to one-minute bells for everything tonight.

The Speaker: For the remainder of the evening.

Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall has requested unanimous consent for the remainder of the evening to go to one-minute bells, which would include the first bell in Committee of the Whole.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Bill 11, are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment RA1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Bill 11, are there others wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question or ask for the Minister of Health to close debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:36 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|----------|---------------|---------|
| Allard | Long | Schulz |
| Amery | Lovely | Singh |
| Fir | Nally | Smith |
| Frey | Nicolaides | Stephan |
| Gotfried | Nixon, Jeremy | Toor |
| Hunter | Panda | Turton |
| Issik | Rosin | Walker |
| Jean | Savage | Yao |
| Jones | Schow | Yaseen |

9:40

Against the motion:

| | | |
|---------|----------|---------------|
| Bilous | Feehan | Sabir |
| Carson | Loyola | Schmidt |
| Eggen | Phillips | Sigurdson, L. |
| Totals: | For – 27 | Against – 9 |

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Amery in the chair]

Bill 22 Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022

The Acting Chair: Are there any members who wish to speak to amendment A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's an honour to rise to speak to amendment A1. I have had the opportunity to speak to the main bill, Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022, and I continue to have the same concerns as previously provided. Obviously, I support the idea of expanding opportunities for energy storage and opportunities for investment in our province on that specific issue, but I think there are definitely more conversations that have to be had to ensure that we are strengthening this legislation to the best of our ability.

To go further, I think that there are important conversations that we need to have regarding the lack of support for Albertans on important issues like the rising cost of living mainly because of decisions from this UCP government. When it comes to increasing utility costs at the same time as we're seeing that process take place in the province, unfortunately this government has been unwilling to provide any reassurances, based on the conversations we've heard in this House so far. While the government has committed to providing relief for utility costs specifically on electricity...

[interjections] Excuse me. Sorry. It's just a little bit loud in here, Mr. Chair.

But specifically on electricity and natural gas, even when the minister is getting questions from his own bench – obviously, they've had time to prepare this exchange, and even when their own private members are asking when Albertans can expect to see relief, the minister doesn't have answers for them as well. So while I do see myself supporting the general direction and in principle what we're seeing in this legislation, I think there are opportunities to strengthen the legislation itself, much like we are seeing in the proposed amendment from the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. So I again rise this evening to support the changes that that member is proposing in the legislation.

With that, Mr. Chair, I think I'll take my seat. I think that there are more important conversations that we can have around this amendment, but I appreciate the opportunity.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other members who wish to speak to amendment A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak again to Bill 22 and this amendment. I certainly like the fact that we are moving forward in terms of a new electrical grid system in the province of Alberta. Of course, that requires a variety of statute changes and so on. I find it quite interesting that repeatedly on the government side of the House they have complained that we overbuilt the electrical grid system in the province and have blamed us for it in spite of the fact that it was actually a build that was designated and paid for by a Conservative government prior to our coming in. But we've been told that we should have stopped it. Of course, as all reasonable people think, the NDP should stop just about anything that the Conservatives do, and sometimes they even agree with us themselves.

What is also interesting is that recently in question period the Minister of Finance stood up and said that there was hesitancy about moving forward on electrical cars because they weren't sure the grid could handle all that electricity, which is quite ironic given the fact that he said that we overbuilt it one day, and the next day he says that we might need a bigger grid; we might need to build more. So we can see that this government is quite confused about electricity, as they are about a number of other topics, and simply, you know, are in the habit of using talking points instead of actually answering the questions from the people of Alberta or taking responsibility for their behaviour.

But I welcome this bill because this bill is actually the government trying to correct one of their previous errors. I always want to support that. When they come into the House and realize that they've made mistakes, they should fix themselves, and I'm happy to see them doing that in this particular case. There are a number of aspects of this bill which I think are important and things that I think will move forward, but I also think that we need to take some time to pay attention to what they're doing and see if there might be some things that could be improved with the bill. As such, we're here to speak to the amendment.

I think it's important that we actually put this in the context of what's happening. Around the world governments, investors, and, you know, the vast majority of leading thinkers are suggesting that we should be moving in the direction of a significant electrical supply and the replacement of nonrenewable resources for energy production. Now, that's going to have significant consequences in the province of Alberta, and I know that the government is very concerned about that because they keep wanting to go back to the

1970s, when these kinds of questions were not so complicated. Life was simpler. So I can understand that they have some confusion over where we need to be going, but I can tell you that what we really want to have in this province is for Alberta to remain a major player in the energy world. The government, unfortunately, thinks that that's going to be by going backwards in time whereas we believe that there is a future, and that future will include, of course, oil and gas in a variety of ways.

We certainly presented many ideas for how we can help oil and gas move forward into the future and not go back to the past. You only have to go to albertasfuture.ca to see policies on things such as hydrogen or lithium or the conversion of well sites to geothermal or, you know, a variety of other things like that. But we also believe that we need to make sure that we get in front of the changes that are necessary for us to have an electrical system that is less reliant on oil and gas sources and more reliant on renewable sources.

9:50

Of course, when we were in government, we did some amazing things to make that happen. We had a renewable energy bid program that brought in some of the best prices for energy, guaranteeing the price of energy for many, many years to come and doing so not only by encouraging Alberta producers to produce more renewable energy for our electrical grid through, in this case, almost all, I think all, wind turbine energy development. But we also, in our second round of the REP bid, insisted that First Nations participation be in the actual ownership of the program, and we again got incredibly good results in terms of the price bid. We know that the NDP government was looking toward the future, was moving the province ahead, and was very successful in doing so, so we appreciate anything that this government does to attempt to try to catch up with that great modelling that we provided to them.

There are a number of things that I think are interesting in this bill and some things that we probably should spend a little bit of time examining here. I think that I want to start by saying that, as I've mentioned already, there are things I like about this bill. I do appreciate that there's a tariff that will be used to reduce transmission costs for the consumers. I think that's a good idea.

I am wondering about one particular piece that's kind of attached to that, and that is the ability for people who are doing self-supply to then sell or export any excess. There aren't any definitions around limitations or expectations around that. What we might have is somebody who is doing self-supply and then selling excess, but that excess apparently could be as high as 99 per cent of the energy produced.

Is that the intention of this government, that, in fact, people could actually become exporters of electrical energy in this province, which would require, of course, a very large, well-built grid running down the centre of the province toward the places that we might export to, even though the government has constantly complained about the existence of that? In this case, because they haven't put any definitions on it, what we are not sure about is whether or not people could ostensibly appear to be self-suppliers when really, because they're selling 99 per cent of it, they're actually exporters.

Is that the intention of this government? Is this an attempt to move into exporting by simply having people set up a small shop in the site, use a small piece of the electricity for perhaps running the lights in the building that they're using to export the energy from? Is that the intention? Is that where they're going? Is this really all about the continuation of the Klein-years desires to sell Alberta's

electricity into the States? This bill doesn't make it clear if that's where they're going or not.

I probably have said as much as I want to say this evening and have nothing more that I could possibly add to this and will just simply close my last three pages of comments at this time.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak to amendment A1? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Thank you.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to speak to amendment A1, brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall. It has to do with the Alberta utility advocate. Of course, this legislation, Bill 22, does say that the fee can be charged to Albertans for the Alberta utility advocate. Previously this was paid through the Balancing Pool. I guess this is just yet again another example of the UCP, you know, putting a burden on individual Albertans having to be responsible.

They've done so many things to increase costs out of pocket, you know, the affordability. We really are in an affordability crisis, and here yet again is something else where the UCP is reaching into the pockets of Albertans and asking them now that they must pay for this Alberta utility advocate office through a fee. That's why we brought forward this amendment. We are saying that, no, this should not be something that you're taking out of the pockets of Albertans. It's not fair. So we're helping the government out. I know that they want to make sure that Albertans aren't, you know, being asked to pay so much more.

I would commend all members of the House to please vote in favour of this amendment A1. Thank you.

The Acting Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Is there any other member who wishes to speak to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:56 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Amery in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------|----------|---------------|
| Bilous | Feehan | Sabir |
| Carson | Loyola | Schmidt |
| Eggen | Phillips | Sigurdson, L. |

10:00

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------|------------|---------|
| Allard | Lovely | Singh |
| Fir | Nally | Smith |
| Frey | Nicolaides | Stephan |

| | | |
|----------|---------------|--------|
| Gotfried | Nixon, Jeremy | Toor |
| Hunter | Panda | Turton |
| Issik | Rosin | Walker |
| Jean | Savage | Yao |
| Jones | Schow | Yaseen |
| Long | Schulz | |

| | | |
|---------|---------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 9 | Against – 26 |
|---------|---------|--------------|

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Acting Chair: We are back on the main bill. Are there any other comments or questions or amendments to be offered?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 22 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Acting Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Acting Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

I recognize the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that we rise and report Bill 22.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Amery in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

Mr. Turton: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills and would like to report Bill 22.

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

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we have to concur in the committee's report.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Any opposed? The motion is carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tonight has been filled with great debate, but the time has now come for us to head home, so I move that the Assembly adjourn until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:03 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, May 11, 2022

Day 33

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Hon. Leela Sharon, ECA, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Hon. Tracy L., ECA, Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,

Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)

Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
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Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
Official Opposition Whip

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Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
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Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, ECA, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, ECA, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, ECA, Calgary-Hays (UC)

Nally, Hon. Dale, ECA, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
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Nixon, Hon. Jason, ECA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre
(UC), Government House Leader

Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
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Leader of the Official Opposition
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Panda, Hon. Prasad, ECA, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
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Savage, Hon. Sonya, ECA, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, ECA, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, ECA, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, ECA, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, ECA, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, ECA, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, ECA, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Shannon Dean, QC, Clerk
Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

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| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

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Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
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Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Singh
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Ganley
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Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
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Ganley
Hanson
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Sweet
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, May 11, 2022

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Prayers

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

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Bill 20

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to add my comments to Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, on behalf of my constituents in Edmonton-Meadows and the concerned Albertans that have reached out to me in different periods of time regarding the issues in the justice system. This bill I'm looking at seems to be making some justice changes, and the biggest concern that I have about this bill is that I don't see much of it that I'm hearing from my constituents that they wanted to see in order to see the improvements, the help they are looking for in the justice system. I don't really see any of those concerns being addressed in this Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

Affordability has exponential stress and effects on Albertans, particularly for the past few years, and the majority of Albertans are struggling to make their ends meet due to the rising cost of commodities, the rising cost of services. When it comes to the justice system, many constituents who approach me regarding their concerns feel that the access to the justice system is questionable, is not in their range, is not in their reach, and in many ways they find many barriers. This is not something they deal with on a daily basis, and this is not the area where we would expect ordinary individuals in this society to be highly educated and aware and knowledgeable about the whole process.

I've been dealing with one of the community members from Calgary. She is in trouble due to the incident that they were in. They were defrauded by someone by cheating, and they're seeking – they're in a position like they feel that they have lost the savings of their whole life. They worked. They're in their 70s. I think they worked hard to build this life and save for their retirement. At this age, when they were depending on that very savings to live their life worry-free – or you can call it relatively comfortably – I think these savings would help them live relatively reasonable lives without being worried about being able to put food on the table or

afford the daily necessities. Their savings were actually raided by cheating.

They wanted to access the justice system. They found, like, many barriers. That's why they reached out to me, because the barrier was that there were no services available in other languages. The provision in the justice system is to provide the services and translations in many other languages, but the shortage of staff and availability of the services is really impacting those individuals. I tried to help them. I tried to arrange someone from this city who could help them translate with the legal department so they could at least reach the legal aid department, see if they can qualify for the help from legal aid. Without that help that I worked on in this city, it was impossible for them to, first of all, find that the help is there, and second, if they knew that, there were additional barriers that the service was not available in any language other than English.

So what we wanted to see, the reason why I discussed this case and experience – I'm hearing from the very Albertans and racialized peoples; their first language is not English – is to have this on the record, what is happening right now in Alberta and what kind of experience the minorities, the ethnic communities, the racialized communities are having when it comes to the justice system access.

Generally speaking, we all understand – the UCP government has acknowledged this many times – that the justice system is struggling with the staffing issues, correctional officers, Crown prosecutors in a number of ways. We acknowledge that, and the UCP government did acknowledge this in many of their statements and in their announcements. Bill 20 does not address any of these issues.

So it is not possible – it is very hard for the families. They're already struggling to afford the necessities of life, not because just it is their fault, but it has also been contributed to by this UCP government's last three years of their approach of removing caps from a number of other things. I think that was their simplest approach, that they wanted to leave the very Albertans on the free market. The government does not see the responsibility or duty they have when it comes to serving their citizens, making sure that the things they need in their daily life is in their approach. They removed the cap from the insurance, they removed the cap from the tuition fees, and they removed the cap from the utility prices. It's not only that; they also increased the interest rate on student loans.

9:10

This is the approach this UC government had for the past three years, that has made the life of Albertans very hard, and when average Albertans are living this kind of life, it's very hard for Albertans to come up with an additional sum of money when it comes to seeking the access to the justice system. If we do not have enough staffing, if we do not have enough support that is required in the justice system in order to serve the very Albertans, definitely they will need to look into other avenues where they will need to come up with an additional sum of money, and that will just, you know, add another barrier for those people that need the help. In many cases that is the only resort they have to reach the justice system.

This bill does not address those issues that I'm hearing from my constituents, particularly from a racialized group of people, and also from the Albertans from the racialized communities that I talked to across the province. We need to do more. We need to hire more prosecutors, more staff. Not only to hire more staff, prosecutors, or appoint more judges; we also need to increase diversity. We need to have services available in other languages. This Bill 20 does not talk about any of those issues that the very Albertans are feeling very challenged with when it comes to seeking justice for the problems they are struggling with.

We have seen what this government's precedence is for the last three years. We have seen what they have done to a number of other things. I remember standing in this House when the government announced the Police Act review. We proposed that the government should create an antiracism panel that could go out and consult with racialized communities, particularly with Indigenous communities, that are disproportionately represented in our correctional system or justice system, so they could talk to those people and hear their stories and pain and suffering and conduct a report and bring it back to the Assembly with their recommendations. That proposal was defeated by the government House members.

We do not only need resources in the justice system to provide the full support that the justice system is lacking right now; we also need to put our focus on how disproportionately this is impacting the racialized communities, ethnic communities, and Indigenous communities.

Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, does not talk about any of these issues. I'm surprised that this bill does not even care about what Albertans talked about in the government's previous legislation, when the government brought the bill into the House to make changes to the victims of crime fund. The people – professionals, semiprofessionals, agencies, organizations – who are working in our province for decades successfully helping people during their difficult and challenging times spoke against the legislation this government was proposing and eventually passed. The government ignored them all. The people are still concerned that the changes they made to the victims of crime fund eroded the capability of those very agencies. They were there when those very victims needed help.

This was done because the government did not consult with any of the stakeholders. They did not consult with the victims. They did not consult with the agencies. These agencies and the people who are directly impacted by that legislation spoke out loudly against the government efforts and changes eventually passed in this House.

If the government was serious or the Justice minister was serious about making changes in the justice system, this was the time to address those very issues. Not only the people and stakeholders and agencies were concerned with the changes made to the victims of crime fund, but also some of those programs have already acknowledged and recognized what exists in our justice system: lack of support, lack of funding, lack of staff. This bill does not tackle anything.

It's very hard for us to support this bill. The government spent three years, from 2019 to 2022 – I would call it a wasted opportunity. If they recognized the problem and still could not come up with a plan and funding and resources in three years, when will they do that? It means the government is not serious about it.

This is not what I hear from my constituents. This is not what I hear from racialized communities. Their concerns are very different. There was a big incident in my community a few weeks back. There was a young gentleman at the age of 16 who was killed in a very, very bad and violent crime, the family's only child, a 16-year-old boy.

9:20

The people are concerned about their safety. Those are the questions that they're asking. I attended the vigil at the school, and thousands of people came out in support. They were looking for answers from the politicians. Unfortunately, the family had to speak out at that place. None of the government representatives reached out to the family, and they did not even show up for any of the public events either. Those are the concerns. I think politicians need to have answers for those questions.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join? We are on Bill 20. I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has risen.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak in committee to this Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I appreciate the information sharing from my colleague, who works significantly with members of his community and was able to bring a piece or a perspective, I guess, to Bill 20 with regard to how individuals from racialized communities might see the Justice Statutes Amendment Act before us.

I had the opportunity in second to talk about this and to listen to my colleagues, particularly the critic for Justice from Calgary-Bhullar-McCall and the former Justice minister from Calgary-Mountain View. I can say that they centred in on several points, but the main takeaway for me and what I'd like to spend my time talking about is the victims of crime fund and the mess that's been made there by the UCP government.

You know, as a former Finance minister I certainly understand the desire to go looking for funds when you're in pretty dire straits in terms of revenues. We went through a significant negative WTI situation. These are challenges that both the bureaucracy and the cabinet council and the Finance minister and the Finance department struggle with because you've got to kind of understand where the revenues have cratered and what's going to backfill them.

It seems to me that the victims of crime fund was seen as an available pot of monies that happen as a result primarily of driving fine offences and the monies surcharged onto tickets, driving penalties. That probably seemed like a worthy and welcome amount of money to seize on to defer the costs of other police, protective, and justice system programs.

But today the situation is much different. Today the situation is a surplus in this province as a result of the significant rise in the price of oil. Regrettably, the world is in a different place than it was two, two and a half years ago, when these funds were seized on. The unfortunate crisis that is in Ukraine and the unconscionable actions of Russia have driven up the price of oil and energy resources in this world to, well, lengths that, frankly, you have to go back a lot of years, probably to – when was it? In 2004, '05, '06, somewhere in there, it spiked, but we haven't seen a spike in decades in this province.

Now we do. There is an overabundance of money in the treasury, and we don't have to take money away from – the government does not have to take money away from victims of crime anymore. They can go back to the way it was funded, Mr. Chair. They can go back and properly fund these programs out of treasury, not out of funds that are collected for people who have suffered horrendous personal circumstances as a result of crime in the community, crime in their homes, from their nearest and dearest sometimes.

The government is doing the wrong thing, and the government needs to change that. We as opposition members talked about this in 2020. We spent so much time. We had stakeholders come forward who had shared their most difficult personal circumstances with members of the media, with members of the public, with Albertans to try and get across how this is wrong. They're being denied what is theirs. There's less money for victims in the victims of crime fund now because of the government's actions, and this statutes amendment act further solidifies that wrongdoing. So, no, I won't stand up and support this. This act, this bill is doing wrong to victims, doing wrong to Albertans, and it doesn't have to be done.

We're in a different financial circumstance in this province now. The actions that were taken out of desperation before, to fund programs for justice, for prosecutors, salaries, don't have to be

done. But instead of correcting that, private members of this government are standing behind a wrongdoing to Albertans. It's unconscionable. We have raised it over and over and over again, and it has no effect at all, but it does have an effect on victims. It does have an effect on people who have been harmed by crime in this province, and they are not getting their due from this government.

A 45-day limit is put on the ability to access this fund now. Forty-five days. When someone has been traumatized, 45 days is not enough time. You are nowhere – and I'm not talking about, you know, having the experience. I'm talking about listening to victims, survivors, trying to understand what their reality is. The reality is they need more time. So why is a 45-day limit being put on? Why? Why is the victims of crime fund not funded properly? Why are prosecutors and other justice system programs being funded out of this? I don't think it passes any smell test anymore.

The other changes include the removal of the current injury benefit and the witness to homicide benefit. The removal of the witness to homicide benefit may have a negative outcome as therapy is expensive, and someone who has witnessed the homicide of a loved one will likely need it. Like, that's an understatement, obviously. Someone who has witnessed the homicide of a loved one will likely need therapy, but that benefit is taken away. I don't know who on the other side can defend this. I don't know why you would want to defend that.

9:30

The financial benefits are being narrowed, Mr. Chair, to the people who have experienced severe crimes. If witnessing a homicide of a loved one is not a severe crime, to be able to access benefits, I don't know where that's going in terms of what is a severe crime, then.

We talked long and exhaustively when the government introduced Bill 16 in 2020. We said that that's going to be a problem. We are here today saying the same thing. It is a problem. We know it's a problem. Survivors have come forward and indicated that the victims of crime fund does not meet their needs. Instead of addressing that, we have got a government who is plowing ahead, saving funds from treasury when there are surplus funds, when programs should be able to be funded. The government is nickel and diming victims so that they have to do GoFundMe pages. They have to raise funds themselves. They have to take every sort of action to try to address their needs where previously – I'm not saying that the victims of crime fund was perfect, but it was there, and it was doing the job.

There were significant monies in it, Mr. Chair. There were, as I understand, about 70-plus million dollars. That can get eaten up pretty quickly if you're talking about salaries. That can kind of whittle down quickly when you're talking about ongoing operational expenses, which is what salaries are, which is what program support is, ongoing operation. Why is ongoing operation part of a victims' fund? You have to ask yourself. Ongoing operations are part of administration, are part of doing business, are what governments do.

We're just seeing this mess that's been made of the victims of crime fund further, as I said, legislated and put into place, and I and my colleagues oppose that. We need to get back to thinking about the original intent of this fund. While there are many other parts of this bill – the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Youth Justice Act – the most egregious part is the one that I have spent the time on and the one that Albertans, I think, recognize as something that should be addressed.

We think that the wide range of community- and police-based services that are getting assistance as well as prosecutors need to be

shifted, shifted to a place where the government acknowledges that they want to keep those programs going and properly fund them through available monies from treasury under the Ministry of Justice. That's what should be done, but instead we have to stand up and argue that victims should be treated properly. Any victim who is unable to access services because there are not the monies or there is a narrowing of parameters needs to hear this, needs to be aware that they are not getting the support that previously would have been offered to them.

I will at this point give way to a colleague who could probably argue better about the victims of crime fund and other things, but my opposition stays solid. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has risen.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Happy to rise this morning and follow up on my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo's comments. I don't know if I'll be much clearer than you. I think you've, you know, made the point fairly succinct here.

As he was mentioning, we are seeing various changes within Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, changes across the corrections, justice of the peace, missing persons, victims of crime and public safety, and the youth justice acts. Now, as some of the opening statements said, some of this is housekeeping, which, of course, I don't necessarily have a problem with. There are always times where you have to look at language, update it because terms may have changed, procedures may have changed and you have to have the language that reflects that, which, of course, does actually, you know, get me to thinking: why didn't we necessarily maybe hand that down to the red tape ministry? We've seen that quite a few times with legislation, where it seems to be handed down to the red tape ministry to try to justify the \$10 million to \$15 million that the government is spending on this endeavour in order to, I guess, at least look like you're doing something.

We certainly saw some of the housekeeping pieces of legislation that came through there that were questionable at times, whether they're actually red tape or not. You know, my favourite one to think of was when the former associate minister crowed very loudly about cutting red tape for Albertans so that they wouldn't have to pay \$10 when cutting their Christmas trees. They still had to fill out all the paperwork that's required for that, but they didn't have to pay the \$10. That was humorous at best. So I'm wondering why perhaps some of these changes weren't handed down to the red tape ministry like we've seen in the past.

But in correlation with Bill 20 I'm seeing some similarities in terms of how some of the changes are being grouped together. We've seen red tape bills that have come forward where you've got, you know, pretty much nothing controversial being brought forward in terms of changes but mashed in an omnibus style with some very concerning changes, to say the least. We currently have Bill 21 that's before us that has this kind of combination although Bill 20 is not what I would consider omnibus because all of these changes are under, at least, one ministry. Although they are multiple acts, they do revolve around Justice, so I'm a little bit more forgiving in that part.

But, again, whereas we have pieces that are changing that I don't necessarily have a problem with, we see a very distinct failure, as my friend from Calgary-Buffalo had mentioned earlier, around changes to the victims of crime fund. I guess you could almost say that it's a bit of a pattern, Mr. Chair, where decisions that are being made by this government are penny-wise but very pound-foolish. You know, we have a need to make lives more difficult for diabetics by taking away insulin pumps, yet we seem to have the money to

go and chase Bigfoot. We seem to have to make the lives of AISH recipients more difficult and more uncertain, yet we seem to have plenty of money to hand out to very, very profitable major corporations. It's this type of thinking that really baffles me.

9:40

With the changes to the victims of crime fund, as my friend had stated earlier, you know, to deny these people access to services in times of great trauma and upheaval, potentially, in their lives begs the question of, you know: what's the government thinking here? Why is it they feel they need to do this? I mean, for instance, a change around having to report and access these funds within 45 days: Mr. Chair, I think everybody knows that for anybody experiencing, for instance, domestic violence or sexual crimes, the thought of even coming forward within 45 days – people can't get there. They're still trying to work through what even potentially just happened to them. What is this rush that the government has? Are they thinking, "Well, it's red tape, and we're trying to be more efficient"? You can't force these types of things to move forward. You have to work with the people experiencing these things.

So why they would come out with a victim or a survivor needs to access these funds within 45 days – come on. You have to come up with something at least a little bit better than that. Like, where did these 45 days come from? You know, what kind of consultations have you heard from victims, from survivors that said, "Oh, yeah; 45 days is plenty; not a problem"? I certainly haven't seen anybody come forward to me about that, and I've had the opportunity to interact over the years, not just over the course of the 30th Legislature but over the course of the 29th Legislature, when I got the honour to serve the constituents of Edmonton-Decore as well.

There's an organization that I sort of feel calls Edmonton-Decore home. The founder is a constituent, which is why I kind of, you know, try to lovingly make that connection with the riding. It's a support group for the victims of homicide in the Edmonton chapter here now. Some of the stories that these individuals tell, frankly, are absolutely heartbreaking. Mr. Chair. I cannot even begin to fathom trying to wrap my head around dealing with that, but these individuals are.

You know, with some of the changes, as my friend from Calgary-Buffalo had mentioned, around the funding of this program: there is so much more that could have been done with these funds. All I'd have to do is connect you with victims of homicide. I remember working diligently with them, trying to find some mental health supports for some of their members, because there was nothing out there for them. The victims of crime fund could have easily funded those kinds of supports for them. Quite frankly, I mean, I got lucky, Mr. Chair, and there was a little bit of help available through the PCN network. But, again, it's a little bit. There's so much more that could be done to help these folks.

Some people think that victims of homicide – I remember clearly this one story, Mr. Chair. Unfortunately, the individual's partner was involved in things that led to a very high-risk lifestyle, but that individual had no idea that that's what their partner was doing. That doesn't make the loss any less for them. It doesn't make the challenges that they end up facing any less. How can we help these individuals?

Again, these stories that I heard from the support group from victims of homicide and how they're trying to find ways, trying to find funding to be able to help their members cope with these losses: we could have easily made changes to help these folks. We have the money here, yet we've decided, "Well, we're going to siphon this off because we've got something else that we're more interested in doing." I mean, I'm sure there are members that can say that, well, these are changes that we can do to deal with other justice matters. Okay; fine. But, as I said, why then are you

spending money chasing around Bigfoot? I keep joking with people now: "What's next? Ogoogo?" Are you going to start chasing that around?

It's this thinking that the only way we can dig ourselves out, as they see it, is to go after the ones that can least afford to be – I don't know – targeted, used to try to achieve those goals. Yet there are other opportunities that we can take. We didn't have to give a great big corporate handout of \$4.7 billion. You know, I've talked to plenty of people, and they're saying that, well, they're not seeing the jobs being created for this money. We know for a fact that, I mean, there was one that just simply took the money and literally ran right for the border and crossed it.

I'm really hoping, perhaps, that members of the government will reconsider some of the changes. Again, I don't have problems with all of the changes in Bill 20. I get the housekeeping part, and that's fine. But why, going into an area, supposedly under, like I said, the guise of red tape reduction being more efficient, with all those great buzzwords – we're going to push a thumb down on those that can least defend themselves. At the very least, reconsider this 45 days. Come on. You're talking a month and a half. A month and a half.

We can do better, Mr. Chair. We have to do better, and we have an opportunity. We're here in Committee of the Whole. There are amendments that could be made. There are things that we could do differently. I would still like to hear some more discussion and debate about this. We can always talk about what changes could be best, but I definitely want to hear from the government side on how they arrived at this 45 days. That is just – that's unacceptable. You can't tell me that you found anybody that said that that was a good idea, that has experienced domestic violence, sexual crimes against them, that 45 days is plenty.

With that, like my friend from Calgary-Buffalo, I'll give way to some of my other colleagues to hear some of their other comments. Hopefully, we'll see some members of the government get up, provide some comments, answers, maybe, to some of the questions. I know that I've stated here, probably, some of the questions that my colleagues will also have around this. Again, when you have a bill where some changes are okay and other changes are very egregious and you expect me to be able to support that bill just because these other changes are okay – you know, I hate to say it, Mr. Chair. At this moment in time the way that these changes being proposed around victims of crime in Bill 20 – on that alone, I can't support it. I cannot in good conscience go back to people saying: yeah; I'm all in favour of giving you only 45 days to come forward. There's no way I can do that, and I won't.

Hopefully, we'll get a chance, maybe, to discuss this further, to propose some changes around that, and make services for people in times of great need, great crisis, great upheaval, and great loss so that they will get a little bit more of a fair shake than certainly what this section of Bill 20 is doing right now.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

9:50

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Now, as my colleagues have noted, we have some real concerns with a particular portion of this bill, that being that it essentially is looking to enshrine and make permanent some troubling changes that this government has made to the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, changes which, essentially, have taken significant dollars away from their original intent, changes

that have in fact made it more difficult for victims of crime to receive support.

Now, this is part of a troubling pattern with this government, Mr. Chair. They have a habit of robbing Peter to pay Paul. They made a number of promises, they have made a number of commitments, they have a number of ideological objectives, but rather than being direct with these with Albertans, rather than finding ways to fund those directly, they instead try to find ways using subterfuge and take a little from here, a little from there, take things away from other people to pursue their own ends. In so doing, they do a lot of damage. They hurt and disenfranchise a lot of Albertans. It's fundamentally dishonest and certainly not what I would expect from government.

In this particular case what we have are changes that this government first made when they introduced Bill 16 back in 2020, which changed the victims of crime fund to the victims of crime and crime prevention fund. Now, the fund had always been 100 per cent supported by a surcharge on fines issued by the police or the courts. Prior to that change the funds supported a wide range of community- and police-based services, and funding was available to individual victims of violent crimes to help with injuries and assistance with funerals, supplemental benefits for people with severe injuries, et cetera.

But this government, having run on a platform where they said that they wanted to show that they were going to reduce crime and put more dollars for that, saw the funds that were here for victims of crime and decided that they wanted to crack open that piggy bank. Bill 16 laid the groundwork for that, and indeed that is exactly what they proceeded to do. Now they are taking funds that were originally collected specifically to support victims of crime, and they are diverting them to other areas that have nothing to do with the victims of crime.

Now, they may claim, Mr. Chair, that, well, there were excess dollars there, there was a surplus in the account, you know, the need wasn't really there, so it was okay to redirect those dollars. But that is not what we are hearing from the actual organizations who provide those services or indeed from individuals who have been the victims of crime. Indeed, now they face further barriers under this government, where now they say that the victim must apply within 45 days of the crime occurring. Forty-five days. That's six weeks.

Now, imagine that you have been the victim of a serious crime, one that may have involved physical injury, one that may have involved serious emotional and psychological trauma. Imagine that you are also perhaps a marginalized individual, perhaps under the poverty line, perhaps have other challenges. Six weeks can go by pretty fast. If you don't know all of the systems that are in place, if you don't have all the supports, and even if you do, Mr. Chair, six weeks go by quickly.

But this government has decided, because they want to raid the victims of crime fund for their own political ends, to try to make themselves look better in their tough-on-crime approach, that they are going to put that cap on victims, force them to have only six weeks, and if you miss that deadline, tough luck; too bad. That is what they are saying to victims of crime in the province of Alberta, and they want to enshrine that now in law permanently through Bill 20. I think that's shameful, Mr. Chair. It is callous. It shows an utter disregard for the realities that individuals face, for the challenges that marginalized people, who are more often the victims of crime, face in these systems and are usually the ones, actually, who are in the greatest need.

But this government is choosing to increase bureaucracy and red tape for those individuals because they want to raid those dollars to make themselves look better rather than find those dollars – as my

colleague from Calgary-Buffalo noted, this government is not short on funds at the moment. They have record oil revenues. They've given billions away to profitable corporations. Why are they trying to save pennies in the context of a provincial budget on the backs of the victims of crime?

Again, Mr. Chair, shameful behaviour, but this government, again, is very fond of doing this. They like to find little pockets where they can steal back – well, pardon me; that's likely unparliamentary language; I will correct that and withdraw that particular term – where they can yank dollars out. To quote the Simpsons, perhaps yonk dollars back. But, seriously, what we are talking about is that they try to look for ways that they can take dollars under the table from folks who they figure are not going to be able to push back, who are not part of their political voting base.

Member Ceci: Over the table. They're taking them over the table.

Mr. Shepherd: Fair enough. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo notes that they're taking over the table. That's true. They're not being shy about this in some respects.

But, of course, the fact is they are taking away from marginalized groups, people in need. As I noted, this is a pattern with this government. You know, they actually raised the victim fine surcharge, Mr. Chair, raised it from 15 per cent to 20 per cent, expect it to provide an increase from \$40 million to \$60 million so that they can shuffle more of those dollars over to another portion. They didn't raise that to help more victims of crime. They raised that so they can shuffle those dollars over to their own priorities and other initiatives.

It's stunning to me, Mr. Chair. This government continues to do this in so many other areas. You know, they've taken a larger share of municipal fine revenues. Again, this government could be honest and could find its own way to raise more revenues. If it wants to take more dollars away from Albertans, they could do so directly and honestly. Of course, they don't do that. They do sneaky things like bracket creep.

In this particular case, if they want to talk about how they are funding more in terms of police services or other things in terms of law enforcement to make a safer province for Albertans, they're taking a larger share of municipal fine revenues, Mr. Chair. So they are taking dollars away from municipalities that were being used to protect and support the public. The ironic thing here is that as this government crusades against photoradar, for example, they're taking a larger share of those photoradar dollars from municipalities at the same time as they are making it more difficult for municipalities to proceed with photoradar.

Now, Mr. Chair, of course, our party has been quite clear about our position on photoradar as well. We had taken some actions, and certainly the government has taken some actions, but it is hypocritical that this government on one hand says that it wants to stop this tax on the backs of Albertans while it pockets more of the revenue. Indeed, the province takes now about half of the revenue that is raised through photoradar. This government has cut municipal funding for policing. So they're not content to simply take more dollars away from the victims of crime; they've taken more dollars away to actually pay for the folks that are trying to prevent the crime or prosecute the crime. Then they want to pat themselves on the back and talk about how great they are for protecting Albertans.

10:00

This is a government, Mr. Chair, that continues to pursue the idea of an Alberta provincial police force despite the fact that a majority

of Albertans reject that proposal. Pretty much every municipality in the province rejects that proposal because that proposal would cost Alberta approximately \$200 million more annually than what they currently spend. It would come with a \$366 million price tag for the transition, a transition which would take up to six years.

Again, this government is not interested in actually providing better protection for Albertans or in cost efficiency; it's interested in its own political grandstanding at the cost to Albertans, just as with these changes now they are taking dollars away from the victims of crime, making it harder for them to access services, making it harder for them to access supports, making it harder for the organizations which support these individuals. It is shameful, Mr. Chair, and it is unconscionable. It is the reason why I will not be voting in favour of Bill 20. Again, this government wants to brag about having balanced the budget, but you really have to ask: whose backs are they choosing to balance it on?

Now, as one of the members on the government side observed, yes, they have had a windfall of resource revenues, which is a really good reason why they don't have to pick on victims of crime or Albertans who use insulin pumps for that matter, Mr. Chair, another situation now where we have Albertans who are struggling, who are living with a chronic illness, requiring a simple piece of medical technology to allow them to live a normal life that saves millions in our health care system – those are the folks that this government feels that they should be taking dollars back from, not profitable corporations but individuals who need an insulin pump. These are the folks who they feel should live in fear and anxiety because of this government's choices. [interjections] Now, the members across are commenting and heckling. I can understand that. I'd feel uncomfortable if I was making these kinds of unconscionable decisions, too. I'd feel pretty conflicted.

What we have here is a government which, again, is not honest with Albertans, is not willing to be direct, looks for sneaky ways of subterfuge to try to shuffle dollars around and then hide the actual impacts of those decisions. That is what we have happening here with Bill 20.

Indeed, concerns continue to grow, and we've raised this previously, Mr. Chair. My colleagues have spoken out on this. We've proposed changes to protect the dollars that need to be available to support victims of crime. Indeed, Red Deer county council voted unanimously to call for the UCP to preserve a fund for victims of crime. The government did not listen.

Calgary resident Tarin Arndt, survivor of a serious physical assault – hit multiple times, pushed down a flight of stairs, and then her attacker went on to strangle her – said that if her assailant didn't kill her, she thought her posttraumatic stress disorder would. She had to take six months off work to access an intensive outpatient program to support her psychological and physical injuries. She applied to the victims of crime fund because it gave her hope. She said that it gave her a safety net, assurance that she wouldn't have to pay for services for something that she had never asked for. Her thoughts on this government's changes, Mr. Chair? "This . . . almost feels like another criminal act – it is stealing from the victims who need it the most." The government did not listen to Tarin.

Nikki Tighe, sexual assault survivor, didn't qualify for the victims of crime fund because she reported the crime over two years after her assault. Now, Ms Tighe said, "This money was meant to directly support those affected by crime. People like me need direct funds, and have not received it." She said that she did not feel that "taking money away from victims, and using it to fund policing initiatives in the province will help victims" like herself. She said, "Rather than creating incentives to take money away from the fund I want barriers reduced and more funds going

directly to victims." This government did not listen to Ms Tighe, and indeed with Bill 20 they show that they do not intend to listen to these victims of crime.

You know, in June of last year we proposed an amendment to the legislation that would've ensured 75 per cent of the victims of crime fund would be reserved for victims and victim services agencies. A compromise, Mr. Chair. Seventy-five per cent: that would leave 25 per cent for this government to spirit away to whatever initiatives they feel they want to put it into rather than actually finding constructive ways to provide funding for policing initiatives. The government rejected that; 25 per cent taken away from victims of crime was not enough for the UCP government.

As I've said, Mr. Chair, I consider it shameful. I consider it a betrayal of the intent of the victims of crime fund, taking away from those who need it most. There are many other ways that the government could fund these policing initiatives. There are many other approaches it could take. They have their record oil revenues now. They want to argue that this was necessary two years ago; fine. But it is not now. For them to choose to enshrine that in law in Bill 20 is not acceptable for myself or my colleagues on this side of the House, so we will be voting against Bill 20.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members looking to join debate on Bill 20? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has risen.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and to the colleagues who spoke before me for laying out some of our caucus' concerns with the bill as proposed. I will do my best to add to the constructive feedback, and hopefully, if enough of us make enough creative presentations of the facts for the government caucus, we can see some movement either through amendments or through opposition.

When I think about the title, Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, I think about some of the promises that were made in the lead-up to the last election and some of the framing that was done on where the current government, the government that was given a mandate in the last election, stood in relation to victims, survivors, and Albertans who have experienced harm from others, who are seeking justice. Definitely, when I think about some of the lived experience of colleagues across the aisle, I know that there are folks there who probably would have, just knowing the statistics for Alberta, been the victims of crime in some way and that there are people there who have been part of law enforcement. I know that there are people who are retired Calgary city police as well as RCMP and others. I imagine that they have seen the impacts of injustice first-hand and have had to work with those who are victims or survivors in trying to seek justice.

I would say that when we saw a bill come forward that touched on five different pieces of legislation – those include the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, as well as the Youth Justice Act – I think a lot of people thought: let's see legislation that's going to bring about more justice and fairer compensation for the victims of crime. Certainly, that is on brand with some of the things that members across the aisle have in the past committed their life's work to and argued for in the lead-up to the last election. However, the results have not reflected the language that many have used in the past around respecting the order of law, respecting justice, and wanting to stand up for victims, or as we often say, survivors.

10:10

Let's touch just on that one piece of the five bills, the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act changes. The changes largely make changes that the UCP already made permanent. They replaced references to death benefits with funeral expense reimbursement. I don't why. You know, families have different ways of grieving and of processing their grief. I know that when my dad died, he made it very explicit that he didn't want us to have a funeral for him. That was not where he wanted our energy to be spent. In the days leading up to and the days following his death, he wanted us to be together as a nuclear family, and for people who wanted to visit him in the lead-up to that, he certainly welcomed it. But a funeral was not part of what he wanted for his death.

To replace death benefit with funeral expense reimbursement – you know, he wasn't a victim of crime. He died of natural causes, but that wouldn't have honoured his wishes. I don't know why we are dictating for those who have experienced a death as a result of being a victim of crime that their compensation only can be focused on funeral expense reimbursement. There might be other ways that the family and community most closely connected to the victim want to process that and honour that.

According to the government that does not change any benefit that Albertans may be eligible for, but the change is to reflect that they felt that the term "death benefit" wasn't adequate and that there isn't a benefit from the death. Well, you know, why would they put this into law and why would they limit it specifically to funeral expense reimbursement? It seems like nickel and diming families who are already experiencing a significant amount of grief, so why is this the government's priority when it comes to talking to victims and survivors? The name of the benefit/reimbursement has been changed in the act.

There's also been a disestablishment of the Criminal Injuries Review Board. The board was already disestablished in the transition section in section 22 of the act. It strikes out the transition sections 19 through 23. This makes a number of controversial changes that the UCP has already made – it actually brings them into law. Most of the transition sections were in place to deal with a class-action lawsuit.

Again, why is the government making these kinds of sweeping, permanent changes that have been seen as quite controversial when they could be focusing on the things that survivors and those who identify as victims have been telling the government would make their lives better? It seems like this isn't an actual change to benefit survivors; this is a change to try to put the government in a better legal situation. Probably not where most Albertans would expect the government – people who have in the past certainly expressed very overt empathy for victims of crime: probably not what they expected from this government when it comes to making changes to address victims of crime.

As we see again, you can't trust the UCP to actually follow through on things that they claim to virtue signal when it comes to actually bringing forward laws to help ordinary families. The trust again and again is broken between this government in the words that they profess and the actions that they actually bring forward when it comes to making changes in law.

There are also some changes to the Youth Justice Act. Just a little backstory. I was in university for a while. When I was in university, there was a summer that I applied on a – oh, I was going to say "internship." Maybe one of my colleagues here can help me out, maybe the former minister of labour. The summer . . .

Member Ceci: STEP.

Ms Hoffman: STEP, summer temporary employment program, a program that was dissolved by the Jim Prentice Conservatives, brought back under the NDP. What's happened with that today? It's gone again?

Member Ceci: Yeah.

Ms Gray: It's gone.

Ms Hoffman: It's gone again. Okay. Well, again, another cut to important programs that help Albertans.

It was the summer, probably around 2001 or 2002, and the Youth Criminal Justice Act . . .

Member Ceci: You're young.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks. My colleague from Calgary-Buffalo just talked about how he thinks I'm so young. I really appreciate that. Sometimes it's nice to hear that from a learned colleague. He's also pretty young.

It was around that time that the Youth Criminal Justice Act came into force here in Alberta. This, of course, is a further iteration of that act. I was hired as a STEP student with Alberta Community Crime Prevention originally. These are the kinds of programs that are in place when you have a government that works in partnership to support university students in acquiring additional life experience and training and also wants them to be able to afford to pay their own tuition. At that time tuition was not cheap, but with a 40-hour-a-week job and a part-time job throughout the year I could afford to go to school and buy books and have a little bit of an extra, you know, quality of life in my budget.

Working on the Youth Criminal Justice Act, that had just come into place – and through John Howard I was later able to do some work with them on developing some resources for presenters to be able to use in schools to communicate with youth about what the changes were in law and what their rights but also what their responsibilities were, because I know that there were a lot of people trying to pretend that everyone just got a free ride in this country until the day they turned the age of majority, but that certainly wasn't the case. It was important to tell children, youth what their rights were under the law but also what their responsibilities were.

So I wish that there were more STEP grants available for university students who – many are already experiencing right now the summertime, where they're working their hardest trying to find ways to make enough money to cover even a fraction of the tuition that's gone up over the last three years under the UCP in the province of Alberta. Instead of being able to find more opportunities to enrich their own learning and work experience or resumé building by having opportunities to work for nonprofits like the Alberta Community Crime Prevention Association, we see that the current government has decided to cancel that program and also has decided to make more changes to things like this.

These are exactly the types of changes that we could have young Albertans engaged in supporting the development of and the education of. I'm sure there are so many Alberta youth right now who are sitting attentively listening to this debate. What are some of the changes to the Youth Justice Act? They probably won't hear about it through organizations like John Howard who've also seen their funding cut. If they are able to provide this additional ongoing education, I certainly appreciate that they do everything they can with the donations that they have and the limited resources that they do have, but certainly they're in a tougher financial situation than they once were.

Some of the changes are to align the provincial act here, the Youth Justice Act, with changes that were made to the federal Criminal Code. Some of the changes are that a notification to parents can be given by a peace officer rather than solely by the officer in charge, so downloading more responsibilities to more individuals. It updates a section on forfeiture. According to the government the changes won't be – there won't be changes in policy, but we certainly wish that there was more opportunity for people to give further feedback on some of these areas of concern.

There are also some changes to the Criminal Injuries Review Board. Injury has been winding down since Bill 16, the victims of crime bill, which was subtitled (Strengthening Public Safety) Amendment Act, and that cut injury and witness-to-homicide benefits, which the board was responsible for.

10:20

Cutting witness-to-homicide benefits. For most of us, when we escape from the realities of the everyday and we turn on something outrageous on Netflix and we see, you know, a re-enactment or a portrayal of something that could be horrific – and anyone who's watched a scary movie with me will know that even that makes me scream, and I'm watching it on TV, right? I'm watching it on TV from a distance. It's not my lived experience, but it creates an emotional response for the person watching it. Being an actual witness to a homicide in real life, often people have connections to those who are experiencing that kind of horrific death. Cutting the benefits for people who are witnesses to homicides seems cruel, and it seems hurtful and incredibly disrespectful to people who have gone through such often traumatizing experiences.

The government is making all these changes at a time where they are boasting about falling backwards into a surplus of revenue, revenue that they did not expect. They certainly weren't accounting for the price of oil to be as high or sustained for as long as it is currently. I hope that none of us saw the horrific war that's unfolding in Ukraine when we were expecting to run and thinking about what kind of things we wanted to implement in a platform, but to know that this current government, at the same time that they are bragging about having record revenues and all this additional surplus, is doing things like cutting the supports for those who've been witnesses to homicide, I think, is terrible. I think it is wrong-headed, and I think it doesn't reflect the kinds of changes that most people, when they heard that a Conservative government was bringing forward a justice bill, would expect to see in black and white as it relates to the way Albertans who are dealing with this kind of trauma are being impacted.

Previously the UCP has also reduced victims of crime benefits for things like injury benefits, suffering an injury as a result of a crime, and now thanks to the current government, the current Premier and the UCP, there are fewer benefits for those who've experienced injury as a result of a crime. I think that again speaks to the lack of compassion and empathy and solidarity that the current government feels with ordinary Albertans who have faced the hardships of being a victim of crime.

To do a little bit more backstory on some of the changes – actually, Mr. Chair, would it be possible to have a time check?

The Deputy Chair: Four thirty-five.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you.

In 2020 the UCP introduced Bill 16, which I've touched on a little bit in previous comments, which changed the victims of crime fund to the victims of crime and crime prevention fund, as also mentioned by my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-City Centre. The fund has always been 100 per cent supported by the surcharge

on fines issued by the police or by the courts. Previous to this change the fund supported a wide range of community and police-based services, and the funding was available to individual victims of violent crimes to help them deal with their injuries, assistance with funerals, and supplemental benefits for people with severe injuries.

When I think about this, I continue to reflect on the fact that these people have often gone through extremely difficult situations, horrific situations. When we think about that to the extreme, we think about those who are putting on a funeral for somebody who died as a direct result of being a victim of a crime. Bill 16 added an emergency accommodation or protective measures, access to counselling for sexual assault victims and families of homicide victims, and court support to victims and witnesses. That piece certainly would be a positive, making sure that those who are experiencing grief as a result of a crime have access to some supports for funeral expenses and counselling in particular.

When I think of one of the most recent very public murders that took place here in Edmonton, I can't help but think about the young man who was killed outside of a school. We've seen many youth charged with that crime here in Edmonton. I'm grateful that the family reached out and invited myself and some of my colleagues to attend the funeral, and I will say that it was an incredibly powerful memorial and a very difficult time for so many families who were in that room. It actually ended up being at least two rooms, maybe three rooms, because there were so many people who wanted to be there and show solidarity, including my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods and my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

When I think about the boys, the young men who were sitting at the front next to the open casket, and how much hurt you could very clearly see on their faces and the faces of so many others in the room and when I was thinking about the moment when the family began to move the body of the young man who had died as a result of this horrific murder out of the room, I still am overcome with the sound of so many women expressing their grief and sorrow vocally. It was really an incredibly powerful moment.

I couldn't help but think about the mom who was bearing her son and how, just 16 years earlier, his birth was a marker of so much hope and optimism for a family that had already sacrificed so much. One of the uncles who spoke at the funeral talked about everything the family gave up, including close relationships with family in proximity; their language, having to learn new languages; immigrating to a new culture; food; economic opportunities that existed there in their professions, that they had been trained in. Of course, like many families that come to Canada, their credentials, I imagine, didn't transfer directly. When I think about the nuclear family as well as the very broad extended family and the horrific . . . [Ms Hoffman's speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Of course, we know that this particular piece of legislation amends five different acts: the Corrections Act, Justice of the Peace Act, Missing Persons Act, Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, and the Youth Justice Act.

Number one is the Corrections Act. It changes compensation rates for Alberta Parole Board members. They now can be set by

order in council as opposed to regulation, bringing that in line with other agencies, boards, and commissions, which is fine.

Number two is the Justice of the Peace Act. It gives the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta discretion to designate a justice of the peace as either part-time or full-time, meaning that the Chief Judge can change a designation between full-time and part-time if the term has not expired or other conditions are met. I didn't actually understand the scope of this. How many people are we talking about? I actually didn't realize. The most recent stats that I could find are that there are 136 full-time equivalent judges – I think that not all work full-time – but there are only 40 justices of the peace. I wasn't quite sure of the scope of this, but it makes sense to give some flexibility.

The third piece of legislation that I wanted to touch on is the Missing Persons Act. This legislation will add a definition of medical information. Now, the act already had provisions that allowed access to health information. It now allows new TV footage or other video recording to be used in a missing persons case. I think that makes a lot of sense, to update legislation. I think we all understand the need for speed or the need to use any information at hand to retrieve or find a missing person as quickly as possible. It also adds a section that a justice of the peace can seal court records relating to a missing person if that interferes with an investigation or endangers people. Then there's a piece that changes the timeline for review by a special committee of the Legislature and then adds some regulatory-making power that gives the government the ability to define any term not defined in the act. Again, I think it makes sense for anything that speeds up or adds teeth to the actions that are required when there is a missing person.

10:30

I didn't realize until I did a little bit of research that, you know, in Canada in any given year there are between 60,000 and 70,000 people that go missing for a variety of different reasons. Thankfully, the vast majority are found within seven days.

There's a National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains. The earliest stats that I could find were 2019, when they noted that in Alberta just over 3,500 people were reported missing and for a variety of different reasons: parental abduction, relative abduction, stranger abduction, runaways. You know, happily, they noted that in 2019 there was only one person that was a victim of human trafficking and went missing for that reason.

Now, a couple of questions, as I looked at this legislation, were that it would be really great to hear from the government side what kind of consultation was done. And if we're opening up this piece of legislation for amendment, why were some things left out? I think that we're really in a state of constant improvement. I think that any time we open up legislation, it's incumbent on us to ask: how can we make this better? How can we make these processes stronger, anything that we can do? What was the consultation that happened? Was there a review of tools like Amber Alert? Was there any review about required education? And then was there anything around changes to regulation?

I know that in the sector that deals with very vulnerable people, whether that's seniors that reside within continuing care that have disabilities of some kind or impairments – people with disabilities, sadly, regularly go missing for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it is because of inadequate staffing levels, actually, or inadequate housing. They're just in places that they shouldn't be. They're living on their own when they shouldn't be. Maybe they only have a couple of hours of home care as opposed to wraparound supports. Dementia has become a very serious problem, and people go missing. Was there a review of this sector? I would love to hear that from the government.

Unfortunately, more often than not we see legislation that comes before us that is questionable in terms of the consultation that was done. It's often very narrow. It's often just sort of friendly groups that have been consulted. When we ask more broadly to stakeholders, "Have you heard about this? Were you consulted by government? Do you have anything to add? Do you have any concerns?" we hear that they've not been included in that consultation process. It would be great to hear from government what the consultation process was like on this particular piece of legislation.

The next piece of legislation that will be impacted with Bill 20 is the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act. Now, largely, the changes made with this act are to make the changes that the UCP brought in earlier permanent. As my colleagues have noted, it replaces all references to "death benefit" with "funeral expense reimbursement." According to government this doesn't change any benefit that an Albertan may be eligible for, but the change is to reflect that the term "death benefit" was inadequate as there isn't a benefit for death. Fair. There isn't really a benefit for death. The definition in the act stays the same, but the name of the benefit reimbursement is changed. That seems sort of largely an administrative change.

Now, I did want to stop and talk a little bit about the victims of crime. We know that there have been a lot of changes made to the victims of crime fund. There has been some serious spin coming from the other side about why they did what they did. There is a lot of money that has accumulated there, and instead of focusing on victims and individual Albertans, whether they be victims, whether they be witnesses, whether they be families of victims, a lot of the funds here have been used to increase policing and address rural crime.

Now, I am not saying that rural crime or urban crime is not a problem. It absolutely is, and we absolutely have to pay attention and do what we can to address some of the root problems. Now, we can have a whole other discussion on what that looks like, to address root problems, because this government has been horrible at doing that. They have increased poverty. We know this. They have slashed programs that address poverty. We know this.

One very simple example that nobody can turn away from is the fact that right away after being elected, this government used an omnibus bill to deindex benefits that were already well below any line of poverty, so income support. We know there are very vulnerable people that are on income support. Often these are disabled people that haven't yet applied for AISH, haven't qualified for AISH for whatever reason, are chronically unemployed, are mentally ill, are struggling with addiction, and they're trying to live on a base rate of income support that is actually under \$900 per month for a single person. That is awful. You can't live on that. We know people have systematically been removed from this program. Supplemental benefits to this program that actually made it sort of passable have been systematically eliminated. We know this government has made poverty worse, which is a root cause of crime.

Once again, there's an example of this government's very short-term thinking, thinking in terms of election cycles, thinking in terms of budget cycles or talking points. They are not addressing the root cause of crime, one of the root causes, which is poverty. They cut affordable housing. They cut income supports. They do all kinds of things, and then they say: oh, but we're going to, you know, give policing more dollars. Well, that's fine, but you can't do one thing and not the other, and you can't do one thing and then claim that you're making the problem better. You are not. This government is not. Albertans know it. We know it. Everybody knows it.

There's also another problem. I wanted to address one of the changes that is made to witnesses of crime. Now, I can remember in January – it was around mid-January. It was a really cold morning in 2015. My office at the time was at LoSeCa Foundation in St. Albert. That is right across the street from the Apex Casino. It's no longer called Apex, but – actually, is it called Apex? Apex Casino was right across the street. We actually had a board retreat early in the morning, so I was headed to the office to meet with our board and saw all of these police cars, which is very unusual in St. Albert, surrounding this casino.

Now, there was a horrific incident that occurred there. I'm sure many in this House will recall, sadly, that that was where Constable David Matthew Wynn, who was 42 years old at the time, who was married and a father, who was an RCMP officer, was shot in the head and died. He was shot in that casino. He wasn't the only victim that early morning. I think it was about 3 o'clock in the morning that he was shot, but also Constable Derek Walter Bond, who was 49 years old, was an auxiliary officer with the RCMP, who was unarmed, was also shot. He did not die.

But this horrible, horrible crime happened early in the morning, 3 o'clock in the morning. The RCMP were there investigating I believe it was a stolen vehicle. It was a pickup truck in the parking lot of the Apex Casino. They went inside, and whatever happened happened. There was, obviously, a fatality inquiry after the incident, and it was noted that Constable Wynn was shot in the head, and it was at such close range that there was gunpowder residue on his forehead.

Now, I'm not telling you this to exploit this crime. I'm telling you this because I met some of the witnesses to that crime. There was a couple that I met not that long after the crime. Actually, weirdly enough, I met them in MP Cooper's office in St. Albert as they were trying to get some benefits as they were completely unable to return to normal life after witnessing the shootings that they saw at 3 o'clock in the morning in that casino in St. Albert. They were just unable – unable – to get the benefits that they needed.

I do believe that at the time they ended up on income support, which – as I noted earlier, income support is literally under \$900 a month for a single person. You can't live on that. So as a couple – let's be generous – maybe they both got \$900. Doubtful. A couple cannot live on under \$2,000 a month safely. It's not possible. Anyway, I met them there, and just hearing about their struggles and hearing about their complaints, about the limited access to even counselling at the time – because they were witnesses, they could not get access to the other supports that victims of crime got. They couldn't get access to the amount of counselling that they needed. I've not been witness to a crime like that in my lifetime. I'm blessed that way. I cannot imagine what this couple went through, to see that right in front of them at 3 o'clock in the morning at a casino in St. Albert.

10:40

Anyway, fast-forward to a couple of weeks ago. I was at the St. Albert chamber Lifestyle Expo, which is a trade fair in St. Albert, at Servus Place. I was there for the weekend, you know, meeting constituents and meeting people that were stopping by. This couple came by. I looked at them, and they seemed vaguely familiar, but it had been years. They introduced themselves as this couple that I had met many years ago. I think it had been in 2017, so a couple of years after the shooting. They let me know who they were. It was: oh, my goodness; nice to see you. We had a little chat, and then they said: can we take you aside and tell you how it's been? Sure.

So we walked to the side, and we were chatting. This couple told me what life had been like from the time I met them in 2017 to

2022. Because they had not received the support that they needed, things had gotten progressively worse. They didn't have access to mental health supports. They ended up with some very severe addictions. One of the couple ended up with a pretty severe cancer diagnosis and was continuing to have treatment. I'm not entirely sure what that treatment plan looked like. He seemed quite positive that he would survive, but he had successfully transitioned from income support to AISH, thank goodness.

Now, let me just say that AISH benefits were also deindexed and are also well below the poverty line, but it's better than income support. So he had successfully transitioned to AISH. I'm guessing he was successful with his AISH application because there was an end-of-life diagnosis, because that's in the regulations. But, whatever, he had transitioned to AISH. But they had told me what the impact was in those years of not having the mental health supports they needed after witnessing a crime like that. Substance abuse was still an issue. Chronic unemployment, obviously, was still an issue. And then there was a physical disability or physical chronic illness.

These are real people. These are residents of St. Albert. They just happened to be at a casino at 3 o'clock in the morning in January of 2015, and they were witnesses to a crime, to a horrific shooting that ended the life of one RCMP officer and forever changed the life of an auxiliary RCMP officer. They'll never be the same. Actually, I think the city of St. Albert will never be the same.

The day of the funeral, that was held, actually, at Servus Place, I can remember lining up along the streets. The fire trucks were all there with the flags, and there were thousands of people lining the streets to pay their respects. I can remember meeting Shelly Wynn, you know, years after. It was a tragedy, but I'm not telling you about this crime because of the nature of the tragedy. I'm telling you about this because real people are impacted by this. For this government to make supports even more difficult for Albertans is a tragedy.

We come to this place to represent our constituents and to do right by them, and when we hear about where there's a hole or what we need to fix, it's incumbent on us to do better. Time and time again we stand up in this place and we tell the UCP government members and ministers and Premier that this is a problem. I'm more than willing to give you the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps this was an oversight. Perhaps this was a failure to consult. But you have time to fix it. Please fix it. It's a problem.

There are some positive things in this legislation. I think, you know, there are usually positive things in the legislation. Some of them are housekeeping to make things better, to make things faster, to reduce time, to update, and that is fine. But I think along with my colleagues we have gone through a few of the pieces of legislation that should probably be fixed, that should be altered.

I would love to hear from government members or from a minister to talk about their consultation. What did that look like? Who was consulted? How do you know that you did the best job that you could to make this legislation the best piece of legislation that you could?

I know that I would feel quite comforted to know that that work was done because I don't trust this government in terms of consultation. I have seen time and again that changes made impact people's lives in a very negative way, and I think that a lot of the time there are unintended consequences.

I know this government changed payment dates for AISH. Do I think they did it to harm people? No, I don't think that there was a malicious intent. I don't. I think that there was a failure to consult. I think that there was a failure to ask people who will be impacted by the legislation what that would do for them, and that caused harm. That caused people to be evicted, to be threatened to be evicted, to be unable to buy bus passes. It caused a lot of stress and

confusion to people that – let’s be honest about this – are challenged sometimes to understand changes. Change is sometimes difficult. So I don’t think that there is always malicious intent, but I think that when you know better, I hope that you do better.

Mr. Chair, can I get a time check?

The Deputy Chair: One and a half.

Ms Renaud: Okay.

With that, I am going to end my comments and take my seat. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General has risen.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. As has been noted before, this piece of legislation, Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, is amending various different pieces of legislation under JSG: the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Youth Justice Act, and the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act.

It seems that most of the comments from our friends opposite have been related to amendments related to the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act. I point out that these are really housekeeping changes that are proposed for the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act. The plan for this piece of legislation is to simply clean up some of the outdated wording and make the language more sensitive to grieving families.

I’ll give an example. One would be that the amendment would be to rename the “death benefit” to “funeral expense reimbursement.” This is in further response to advice that we’ve received from various interest groups about how using the word “benefit” when talking about the criminal death of a loved one is a concern. We wanted to be respectful to those families who are grieving, to be able to make that type of housekeeping change.

We’re also proposing changes to remove items that are no longer required; for example, the references to the old Criminal Injuries Review Board, of which in the past I had actually been a member, Mr. Chair. These references to the CIRB and provisions were only needed while a class-action settlement was completed. That settlement is now complete, so the board is no longer needed.

What we have heard, though, from members opposite is discussion about things related to victims of crime, which is actually not in Bill 20. I’ve heard a lot of concerns alleged about 45 days. Look, Mr. Chair, what I’d point out is that not only is this not in the legislation, but what our friends opposite are talking about is related to a review that two MLAs had done regarding victims’ services units and how victims’ services are provided throughout the province.

We are now reviewing the report that came out of the work that those two MLAs had done, and we intend to implement those changes. In the meantime, on a temporary basis two years ago, there were changes that were made to provide a temporary victims of crime assistance program. That was introduced, as I said, two years ago. It was designed only to provide victims of crime immediate access to emergency-based services and supports while other options were not accessible for an interim period while a future program was then being developed, coming out of, as I said, the report that came from those two MLAs.

10:50

Now, because the program was created specifically to address the immediate needs of victims in the aftermath of a crime, applications were to be made within 45 days of when the crime occurred. However, we did hear feedback from various folks, and the

feedback was that the 45-day limit not always could be met. But I would point out that in policy – it’s not in legislation – that 45-day limit could be extended based on a review, and I understand that that had occurred in this temporary victims of crime assistance program. Now, we are currently reviewing the policy and are planning to extend the limit to two years in the near future. The new two-year limit could be extended further upon further review to account for historical crimes. So that is work that we are doing.

Again, Mr. Chair, this is not related to the legislation at hand. I’m happy to clarify the misconceptions that our friends opposite have about this legislation. With that, I will . . . [interjection] Okay.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Are there any members looking to – I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood has risen.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am pleased to rise on Bill 20. I believe I’ve not spoken to it yet although I’ve read a lot about it, so it’s always a little bit confusing. I really appreciate the minister joining debate, and I appreciate very much his comments although I would – darn. I would have liked to get a little bit more clarity on victims of crime in particular. Admittedly, I was chatting with my colleague about pressing matters, but I do believe I heard that this bill is not – you know, my colleagues and I were chatting a lot about victims of crime and the egregious cuts to the victims of crime fund.

I believe that the minister was alluding to the fact that the victims of crime fund is not in fact directly implicated in this legislation. I definitely beg to differ from my understanding of Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, so if there is somebody else who can provide some clarity because it is quite clear that this bill amends multiple acts, including the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, and the Youth Justice Act.

In the short amount of time that I have, I want to talk about victims of crime. Again, I’m happy to get some clarity as to what the minister was referring to. Essentially, what I see in Bill 20 is that the changes under the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act basically make the changes that the UCP talked about earlier – gosh, that would have been in 2020, I think, when they started having conversations around victims of crime – permanent.

You know, I was sort of on the front lines when initially the conversations around changes to victims of crime came up. Immediately I had multiple women – they were actually all women – who reached out to me and either talked about how the victims of crime fund was life saving or talked about how they were now experiencing barriers in accessing funds through the victims of crime fund. I think about the stories that were shared with me around how without those funds some women would have never – again, it’s not just women; those are just the stories that are top of mind for me – been able to access critical counselling and therapy supports.

As I’m sure most folks in this Chamber are aware, counselling is expensive. It’s out of reach for many Albertans, particularly Albertans who don’t have access to benefits, right? You know, we’re talking upwards of \$200, sometimes more, for a one-hour session. If you’ve been a victim of a horrific crime, you’re going to need more than five sessions, which is \$1,000, which is the cap.

You know, oh, gosh, I have to say it again, because it’s very fresh in people’s minds right now, that it seems like this government continually just hopes that vulnerable folks can access supports on their own, that they have benefits and that they’ll be able to pick themselves up by their own bootstraps sort of thing, and we saw that very recently with the cuts to the insulin pump therapy

program, right? Essentially, again, we're still seeking clarity on exactly what the next steps are.

I was inundated, after sharing my questions to the minister yesterday, with responses from people saying, like, you know: there's no way that I can afford this on my own, and this program was very much life-saving. So it's similar. I'll get back to Bill 20, but again it's a similar attack by this government on vulnerable folks. Folks with type 1 diabetes may no longer have access to life-saving diabetes supports. Folks who need access to critical therapy and counselling may not have access.

And the other big challenge we saw with victims of crime was the introducing of a 45-day window for applications for the fund. As has been said countless times in this Chamber, including this morning, somebody who's been a victim, a survivor of a violent crime – first of all, we know the statistics show that many survivors of sexual violence may not even report, and if they do report, it takes time. It takes a whole lot more time than a 45-day window.

Mr. Schow: The minister just clarified this.

Member Irwin: If the Member for Cardston-Siksika would like to stand up and provide more clarity . . .

Mr. Schow: I don't need to. The minister just did.

Member Irwin: . . . because I'm seeing in the act victims of crime – and perhaps the chair can remind folks to speak through him. Certainly, I've said it twice now. I would love just a bit more clarity around victims of crime. Again, the heckling of me is not too helpful. If I can get a little bit more clarity because, again, I'm reading the bill, I've got it in front of me, and that's what I'm seeing.

Again, you know, it's got to be tough to be a UCP MLA right now – right? – with countless examples of cruel, indefensible cuts. I'm hearing from folks in many of these ridings who are just so upset. The diabetes example is just one. I won't name them, but a number of rural supporters reached out to me and thanked us and our whole team, including my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre and our leader and others, for speaking out on this. They said that they're getting nothing – they're getting no response from their rural MLAs – and how happy they were that we continue to raise this issue.

So continue to take your constituents for granted. There are a lot of people who have diabetes in this province. There are a lot of people in this province who've been victims of sexual assault, sexual violence. In fact, the stats show that it's roughly 1 in 4 Albertans. If you continue to take every group of Albertans for granted, it's going to come back and bite you.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would like to conclude my remarks.

The Deputy Chair: Are there any other members wishing to join debate?

Seeing none, are you ready for the question on Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The clauses of Bill 20 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

11:00

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 20.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 20.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 23 Professional Governance Act

[Adjourned debate May 10: Mr. Dach]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has risen.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in second reading to speak to Bill 23, the Professional Governance Act. This is a big bill. This bill is going to replace nine current pieces of legislation; namely, the Agrology Profession Act; the Architects Act; the Chartered Professional Accountants Act; the Consulting Engineers of Alberta Act; the Engineering and Geoscience Professions Act; the Land Surveyors Act; the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act, POARA, which regulates 13 occupations; the Regulated Forest Management Profession Act; and the Veterinary Profession Act. That explains why this is a large piece of legislation.

Bill 23 was introduced to bring in more transparency and consistency when it comes to professional regulatory organizations, when it comes to making sure that these 22 PROs are operating in a way that protects the public interest, that there are clear and consistent guidelines, and that it is fair and transparent for Albertans to understand how they work.

Now, this bill that I hold in my hand, Mr. Speaker, is certainly not the complete story, and in second reading I hope to touch on a few of my concerns when it comes to Bill 23, starting with the amount of detail that will be in regulation and schedules. I'd like to talk about the impact that this bill will have on PROs of different sizes. I'd like to talk about how this bill is going to impact timelines for those PROs, the feedback we've gotten on the consultation that went into this bill, the new powers that this bill is going to give to the minister, the impact this bill will have on advocacy, and the modernization elements of it. We'll see if I can touch on all of those pieces within 15 minutes.

When I say this bill is not the complete story, what I mean is that this bill is deferring a huge, fundamental amount to regulations, and they anticipate there will be profession-specific schedules that need to be created in consultation with these professions, with a timeline

that's already been set out with the announcement that they hope to have this all complete by January.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Let me tie this into some of my comments on consultation with stakeholders. A number of these 22 organizations have said that the consultation up to this point has been incredibly high level, very information out. They were not given drafts of the legislation in advance of its introduction. That sometimes is not possible, but certainly for something as fundamental as the legislation that governs their existence, I know the stakeholders were hoping to have more insight prior to this part. Now they're in a position of having to negotiate with the government to create their profession-specific schedules as well as all of the accompanying regulations that will bring this piece of legislation into action. Now, on top of that, they're also going to need to create their bylaws, and that's set out in the act, how that will happen. This is a huge amount of decision-making and work that is not available for us to discuss here in the act.

One of my major concerns with Bill 23 is how much has been deferred to the regulations and the specific schedules and how much uncertainty there is for the impacted stakeholders and for the organizations that are going to be impacted by Bill 23. I will suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that we have reached out to all of these 22 organizations, and it is not just my concern about the timelines and the lack of consultation. They shared those concerns as well. Certainly, they are very concerned about how limited the consultation has been so far and concerned that there was a predetermined outcome with the consultation as it took place so far.

The stakeholders, the 22 professional regulatory organizations, who collectively represent hundreds of thousands of working professionals in our province, who contribute to the economy, who contribute to our great province here in Alberta, are concerned. There's no way for the Official Opposition to really understand the ultimate direction that the government will go with the regulations and the schedules, because they do not exist, and I imagine the Official Opposition will not be invited to participate in those conversations. So here we are trying to advocate on behalf of these organizations with very, very little insight as to what that is going to look like and what the final form will be. That's an area of significant concern.

Now, the current nine acts also have 28 regulations, and one of the reasons for Bill 23 to exist is the idea that it's going to streamline, it's going to reduce the number of pieces, and it's going to modernize, which is absolutely correct because some of those pieces of legislation are 20, 30 years out. One of, I think, the positive things of Bill 23 is some of the modernization around allowing PROs to acknowledge the existence of electronic communication. Legislation written 30 years ago really didn't address e-mail, didn't address things like virtual meetings, which, of course, have become far more the norm through the pandemic. I think some of that updating, that modernization is positive, but there's so much more in this act.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the new powers that have been granted to the minister as well as the creation of a new role, the PGOs, the professional governance officers, because the changes and the new powers given to the minister have been described to me as incredibly heavy handed. They've been described to me as an overreach. While the government is pointing to professional regulatory legislation in B.C. as where this was modelled from, some of those new ministerial powers that are being described as incredibly heavy handed don't exist in the B.C. legislation.

In the news release and the announcements around Bill 23 I did not see any good explanation for why there are all these new powers for the minister, specifically powers that I know stakeholders are interested in learning more about because it addresses their fundamental existence, including the minister being able to revoke a PRO's designation entirely, the minister being able to appoint an administrator for the PRO. So if the minister feels that a PRO is not operating in the public's best interest or is not serving the Alberta public, if there are concerns of safety, appointing this administrator who can then be empowered to essentially run the PRO on behalf of the minister.

My question to this government is: have there been situations where this type of intervention, this very extreme taking over of an organization by the minister through his agent, has been necessary? In my time working with these 22 organizations, each one has, to my mind, approached the work they do in the public interest with professionalism and with a deep sense of responsibility. I'm very curious about the new ministerial powers of appointing an administrator as well as the empowering of the professional governance officers and all of the powers they are doing to oversee, to make sure that the public confidence is maintained, and to require PROs to comply with any directions of the PGO. What limits are there to this power? Again, just fundamentally, why did the government see this need? Are there examples in history of these PROs going off the rails and causing serious harm? In my time as a member of this Legislature, these past seven years, that's not something that I have been aware of. Now, the stakeholders impacted are quite concerned about what this may mean.

11:10

The minister is also going to be empowered to propose the amalgamation of two or more PROs. This is something that has happened and, in fact, happened during my time as minister of labour. But prior to this legislation I believe it was voluntary, negotiated. Two organizations coming together and choosing to combine for a variety of positive benefits, coming to that negotiated solution rather than the minister coming in and saying: okay; you two, you need to combine and play better together; I think that'll be more efficient. I'm very curious, given that we have seen successful amalgamations in forestry and accounting because of the groups involved choosing to take those steps, why Bill 23 includes the minister's power to propose amalgamation and to recommend amalgamation.

Of course, I'm certain that the stakeholders are quite concerned around the revoking of a PRO's designation, when and how that may be used and finding out more. Now, those concerns potentially could be allayed with some great communication between this government and the stakeholders. But I'll remind you, Mr. Speaker, that I've already spoken to the concern that there was not robust consultation on this and not a lot of information offered.

We've spoken a little bit about the modernization, some of the new powers, and the need, I think, for some examples. For those who are following along at home, section 20 was one of the sections that I'm concerned about, the revocation of designation and understanding more about what that would look like and in what cases that might be used and whether or not these types of sections are mirrored in other jurisdictions.

We've talked about consultation. I'll probably talk about that a few more times throughout my remarks.

I would also like to really just flag at this point that when we talk about 22 professional regulatory organizations, we are not talking about a homogeneous group. We are talking about some very, very different groups. I have not had the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to check every single PRO of these 22, but, as an example, the

Association of School Business Officials of Alberta is now covered by Bill 23 rather than POARA, which I spoke about earlier.

Now, I mention them because this is a group that has 180 members. I believe they're organized with a voluntary board and maybe a small staff. Similarly, the Alberta Shorthand Reporters Association is a group that represents 350 members, and they have eight working members who form their volunteer council. So we've got two groups here that are very small, represent a few hundred – 180 in one case, 350 in another – members, and they will be falling under Bill 23, whose regulations are also going to apply to APEGA. APEGA is 70,000 members, Mr. Speaker. APEGA has a council. It has major staff with three different departments. It's operated by boards and committees. It has offices in Edmonton and Calgary. The work that APEGA needs to do in the public interest to manage its memberships, to manage its registrations is going to be significantly different than what the Alberta Shorthand Reporters Association and the Association of School Business Officials need to do. I'm concerned about so many of the sections of this legislation applying to all 22 organizations equally.

Now, I do want to recognize that there will be regulations and there will be profession-specific schedules, but this could be a lot of work for the implementation of eight volunteer members.

Oh, good heavens, I'm out of time already. I haven't even talked about several of my concerns. I thought this might happen. I look forward to the ability to talk more on Bill 23 as we continue, but certainly consultation with stakeholders is going to be incredibly important, finding out more about the details and the regulations and the schedules – time check, Mr. Speaker? – and making sure that we have a better understanding of how this January time frame is going to be met. These are some of the concerns that I have with Bill 23.

In my last, I think, 40 seconds or so I do want to flag that in section 67 this bill also implements some new timelines that I think could be incredibly difficult. Now, it's supposed to be aligning with the Labour Mobility Act and the fair registrations act, but the fair registration practices office and the fair registrations act put into legislation that PROs needed to make an interim decision within six months. This act says final decision within four months, and I'm very curious about how that was decided because the 2020 baseline questionnaire survey that was sent out to all these PROs never even asked them how long it takes to get to these decisions. So how does the government know that four months is going to be sufficient, especially for an organization as large as APEGA?

The Speaker: Hon. members, Bill 23 for second reading. The hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 23, the Professional Governance Act. My colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods, I think, has very ably laid out a number of real concerns that we have with this bill. With this bill, of course, we are here at second reading, so hopefully there is going to be opportunity for us to hear from the minister, from some of the members on the other side on a number of these questions, because as my colleague noted, this is a big bill.

This is an incredibly ambitious bill on behalf of this government, and there are many questions amongst the broad swath of regulators that are going to be affected by this legislation. Indeed, a lot of folks have started to take a look at it, you know, and Field Law did a review. Their comments on this bill were that for regulators this bill represents a massive change, leaves many critical details to regulations and schedules, and regulators will need to carefully

review the transitional provisions, plan and engage with the ministry to ensure that these critical details are considered carefully.

Mr. Speaker, that immediately suggests to me, if they are saying that regulators will need to look at this very closely, plan how they're going to engage with the minister on this bill, that the minister perhaps has not done his work. If the fact is that it's going to be incumbent on regulators to sort through the mass of this bill, the many details, all of the potential regulations in order to be able to advocate to the minister that this does not affect them in a drastically negative way, that says to me that the minister should not be here with this bill yet. There is clearly a lot more consultation that needed to be done. There is clearly a lot more detail that needs to be on the table to understand the kinds of impacts this is going to have.

Again, this is a habit of this government, to bring substantive, massive bills into this House and then defer all of the actual meat of it to regulations, asking members in this House to debate and then approve considerable new powers for government with no details on how they actually intend to use them. Indeed, one of the substantial problems here is that again we have a bill before this House which proposes to substantially expand ministerial powers. Now, I've spoken at great length in this House, Mr. Speaker, about the number of times this government has brought this forward, attempted to drastically expand powers of ministers, and it has ended very badly.

We have seen how this government's ministers like to use these kinds of powers. It is often in ways that have utterly broken the trust of Albertans, have caused serious push-back, and forced this government then to have to retract on its actions, Bill 10, of course, being the one example where they awarded new and sweeping powers to the Minister of Health and certainly every minister in the government in the midst of a public emergency to create full, entirely new legislation without ever setting foot in the Legislature. They had to walk that one back, Mr. Speaker, at the cost of great time and expense.

11:20

Now, the other concern I have here, Mr. Speaker, is what they intend to do with this power they intend to award themselves. The minister is being given the power to determine the scope, the bylaws, even the existence of every regulatory body in the province of Alberta. My concern is that in many respects we have seen that this is an incredibly vindictive government, condescending, patronizing in its approach to those which fall under its governance.

I want to take a walk back, Mr. Speaker. If we want to take a look at how this government has interacted with regulatory bodies in the province of Alberta, let's dial the clock back to the summer of 2020. The then Minister of Health, having made disastrous attempts, after tearing up the provincial agreement with the Alberta Medical Association, with physicians in the province of Alberta, again through legislation that this government had passed, adding those new powers to the minister, then attempted to force through disastrous changes that had multiple MLAs in his own caucus rebelling against him because of the drastic impacts this was having in rural communities, where we saw entire teams of physicians either threatening to withdraw services or, in many cases, actually withdrawing services because the changes this minister wanted to force through would have made their ability to practise impossible.

So this government's own members had to push back against that minister to get some changes. How did the minister respond to that? Was that a moment of humility for that minister? Was that a moment where the minister sat back and reconsidered whether taking that kind of bullying and condescending approach towards

physicians would be harmful to the goals that he actually had set out, not to mention the actual access to health for Albertans? No.

What we saw instead is that that minister then wrote a letter to the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta. He wrote to them and said: I want you to change your standards to stop doctors from being able to withdraw their services. He wrote to them and said: you have until July 20 to change your standards to stop Alberta doctors from leaving their practices en masse. Now, the college registrar at that time replied that, well, there was no evidence that the current practice standards were in fact putting the safety of any patients at risk. Now, certainly, the situation was embarrassing the minister, it was certainly showing how poor the approach of the government was, but it was not in fact putting the safety of patients at risk. But the minister decided that rather than actually try to change his behaviour or reconsider the poor policy of the government, he should instead go to the CPSA and dictate that they change their standards so that he could continue with his aggressive approach.

That is what concerns me here, Mr. Speaker. We have seen with this government that the powers they already have, they use badly. They use them not in the best interests of Albertans. They don't use them in the best interests of supporting the professions. In this case doctors were very clear that to make the kinds of changes that the government was pushing for in the way they were pushing for them would essentially be shackling physicians to their clinics, to their practice, making it impossible for them potentially to be able to take a job elsewhere, to retire if they so choose. These are members that talk often about freedom and freedom from government regulation and government interference, but they are more than happy to weaponize it when they feel it suits their political ends.

I am concerned that with what we have here in Bill 23, awarding once again sweeping new powers to a minister with very little detail on how all of that's going to actually operate, all of that being deferred to regulation at some point down the road, which, again, will be done behind closed doors by the minister himself – I think there's good reason to question that. Albertans have been given examples time and again that this government cannot be trusted with that kind of power.

Now, of course, we have the opportunity – we're here in second reading. There's going to be plenty of room for debate, and perhaps we can get some clarity from the minister on how they intend for this to operate, on what consultations actually took place, on how they intend to mobilize this vast and sweeping change, as my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods noted, by next January. Mr. Speaker, this government has been barely able to hold it together over the last few weeks, months as they are caught up in their own political drama, and they are somehow going to push through this massive, sweeping reform and rewriting of how regulatory bodies in this province operate in the next nine months?

I have serious doubts about their ability to meet that timeline effectively, to do the consultation that's required for the vast number of bodies that are included. As my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods noted, vastly different groups of wildly varying sizes with very different mandates, very different focuses, very different levels of, for lack of a better term, risk to the public. This is not something to be done on the back of a napkin.

Again, with the track record of this government in how it exercises the kinds of powers it has – just thinking back just recently to March here, when this government went out of its way to introduce a piece of legislation solely to stop pretty much a single municipal jurisdiction in the province of Alberta from continuing with a mask mandate. That's the kind of petty vindictiveness we see from this government, using the vast powers that are put in their hands – for the benefit of the people of Alberta is the reason they

wield that power, but that is certainly not how we have seen it used in multiple, multiple instances during the term of their government.

There are some very confusing aspects in this bill. PROs will now have three different sets of timelines to adhere to; 120 days, four months, to make a decision and notify an applicant of a decision in this act, but in the Labour Mobility Act, that deals with Canadian jurisdictions, it says that they must provide written acknowledgement of the application within 10 days and make a decision within 20 business days of receipt of a completed application and provide written notification of the decision within 10 business days. In the Fair Registration Practices Act it says that they must make an interim decision within six months of a completed application and a final decision within a reasonable amount of time. We need some clarity here, Mr. Speaker. What is this government trying to accomplish? What are the actual expectations? What is actually going to be required here?

Now, by the department's own admission, Mr. Speaker, the consultation that they held ahead of this was not broad across all organizations prior to the legislation being drafted. A bill this dense, having this wide of an implication for PROs, and they did not bother speaking to all of them before they put this bill out. The consultation was not broad, was not doing some heavy lifting there. If it was not broad, then by necessity it was narrow, and that is not what we should be seeing when we are bringing forward this kind of legislation providing such profound new powers to a minister, affecting so many organizations and thousands of organizations in the province of Alberta. [interjection] Certainly. Go ahead, Member.

11:30

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for giving way for a short intervention. The member talked about consultation. I'm hoping that maybe that member would want to elaborate on his concerns about the government's consultation because the way I see it, the government did a lot of consultation on this bill, particularly from a number of very important stakeholders, not the least of which is the registrar and chief executive officer for the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta. In addition, we have the registrar, the chief executive officer of Alberta Institute of Agrologists and, furthermore, the Chartered Professional Accountants of Alberta, just to name a few. I know that this is a general talking point coming from the members opposite about the lack of consultation, but I can assure Albertans that while the Member for Edmonton-City Centre gives his remarks, he is doing so in error, not referencing the many people that have been consulted on this to ensure that we're streamlining processes and cutting red tape for Albertans.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's lovely that the member is able to mention three organizations, suggests that there are many others. By all means, he could let us know precisely how many. I would welcome that number if you want to share exactly how many organizations were consulted.

All I can say is that the department themselves in our conversation with them when we had the opportunity, my understanding is likely during the bill briefing, said that the consultation was not broad across all organizations prior to the legislation. No one was provided with opportunities to provide input on the drafts of the legislation. No one was shown the actual drafts of the legislation, Mr. Speaker. Now, this is a government that recently killed my own private member's bill, said that it was not even worthy of debate because it required consultation, consultation that they said only government had the resources to undertake.

In this case, as they drafted this very legislation, they did not consult with a single one of these PROs. Not one. That's another habit this government has. They like to talk about how much they consulted by talking to people before they draft legislation and then not a word to anyone afterwards.

We'll have much more to say on this as we continue debate, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again it's my pleasure to rise in the House to speak to the bill, Bill 23, Professional Governance Act. This bill makes changes to nine acts and affects a number of organizations under, as the government stated – the announcement made that it will bring more consistency, transparency, and accountability for the professional regulatory organizations. These organizations do very important work. I've been a member and part of very similar organizations for the past 14 years, and I have witnessed, lived experience, the amount of work these organizations undertake in order to provide education to their members to advance their knowledge so they can advance their careers, they can advance their professional expertise to put them in a position where they can serve in the better way the best interests of, I would say, Albertans or their clients.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

At the same time these organizations do undertake the work of advocacy on behalf of their members, where they try to make sure that their members also get fair treatment for the work they are doing for the public and the work they are doing while serving the industry. If this were all about to, you know, promote the consistency, transparency, and accountability, we would have been more than happy to support this piece of legislation, but what the government says about this bill and what they propose in this are two different things. Even the government announcement: they tried to say that they are trying to make something in line with what already exists in the neighbouring province of British Columbia. That information is also not true.

As my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Meadows – Edmonton-Mill Woods. Pardon me.

Mr. Nielsen: It's pretty close.

Mr. Deol: That was my own riding. Mill Woods is also my neighbouring riding.

The bill affects these 22 PROs in three different ways. It imposes timelines and what they do for advocacy, and suddenly there's a slightly good thing that could be supported, that an organization – the process where it acknowledges that the technology exists in these days and technology is useful. Specifically, something coming from this government – I understand probably maybe one thing, as the member of government caucus said, named some of the organizations. Maybe this very recommendation coming from one of those organizations that were able to outreach and consult with is modernization.

But other than that, my caucus has worked and has been in touch with the majority – not majority; all of these organizations – did a number of those communications. All of the organizations said that the consultations will not happen or that if anyone replied, the consultation that they had was not broad enough, it didn't provide the proper feedback. A number of those changes that are being proposed in this bill were not asked for by them.

These are unprecedented changes that we are discussing under this bill. That bill that was passed gives sweeping powers to the minister that can change the whole process in this case. The minister will have the authority, and the PROs are concerned that the minister can, in section 20 of this bill, which would allow the minister to either dissolve or cease the existence of those PROs – these organizations, 22 organizations, which replied back to our request that we wanted their feedback, what they're thinking about this bill and where they stand on this: specifically, what they see is good faith in what they have advocated for and that they see this bill address that issue for the betterment of those organizations. So far there is none.

11:40

Tens of thousands of people are represented by these 22 organizations providing wonderful, wonderful services and contributions to our province. They'll be affected, and the minister did not consult properly with all those organizations before bringing this piece of legislation for debate in this House. The sweeping power changing the balance in the hands of the ministry is very concerning.

I do not understand how the minister actually decided to propose these changes even after we know the incident around that particular minister just leaving from one portfolio to another, specifically related to the personal behaviour of interpreting specific powers that do not exist in the system. There is no such precedent that any elected officials or elected member or the member of council would ever try to use those powers. [interjection] Sure.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Member for Edmonton-Meadows was commenting a little bit on the consultation or, shall I say, the lack of consultation. I sometimes refer to it as the government more consul-tolding people what's going to be happening. But I know that with some of your experiences in your past – for example, the Member for Cardston-Siksika was talking about this bill reducing red tape, yet part of this now has these organizations having to adhere to three different timelines around the approving for applications of registrations. I'm just wondering if maybe the Member for Edmonton-Meadows might share his thoughts around: does he think bringing in additional timelines sounds like red tape, or does that sound like more burdening red tape, thereby slowing down the process? Maybe he might share some of his thoughts on it.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, hon. member, for your intervention and allowing me to speak specifically on this red tape perspective the government always has. Something that really always concerned me and confused me: the government's understanding, particularly this UCP government's understanding, of red tape, the definition of red tape for them. When it has come to reducing red tape and barriers, we don't see, like – we just discussed the other bills, like, not a while ago. There was no simple piece of legislation that we could discuss that would help, probably, or make it easy for ordinary Albertans to seek justice in the justice system. So that is what it means to me for red tape, when you're talking about red tape: how you're contributing to your very citizens, Albertans, and make it easy for them to see the services they need. All the bills and the legislation we have discussed under the name of red tape: I have never heard anything from the government caucus members on how those changes are going to impact those very citizens, Albertans, and would make their life better by removing some of those legislations or making the legislation changes.

That is why a number of those particular organizations, specifically the organizations impacted by this piece of legislation, Bill 23 – none

of them actually acknowledge that that is going to help them in a way to do their job, what they're doing right now. None of the organizations came out in the media publicly to support this Bill 23. That is very concerning after the episodes we have seen in the past months and particularly concerning the minister's behaviour, and now the minister is coming to a different portfolio and wants to propose sweeping changes into his hands so he could single-handedly be able to make changes, decide on behalf of 22 different organizations that are professionally serving their members.

Not only that; he will be able to dissolve and cease their status of working. It's totally unacceptable, particularly when it comes to the very ministry that has been – I will just try to stay within the range of parliamentary language and parliamentary behaviour, I would call it. But it is very serious. It's hard to express my concern and the concern of all those that are being affected by these changes and our constituents.

Where I am coming from, I said that, like, my organization was not probably under the definition of PRO but more of a self-regulatory organization. It has been so much concerned by what is happening for the past some years in this province. So when it comes to the brokers association that I was part of – and I'm still holding the designation – they're concerned with all the changes coming into the laws, and they're feeling helpless to advocate on behalf of their members.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members looking to join debate? I do see the hon. Member for St. Albert has risen.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 23, Professional Governance Act. This is a hefty piece of legislation. You know, I just wanted to first comment on – there was an interjection earlier. I don't recall, actually, who was speaking, but one of the members opposite rose and sort of seemed a little defensive about the UCP's – the fact that they had consulted.

I think, you know, there's a lot more to consultation than just talking to friends or talking to one or two stakeholders, and I think it's really important for us to recognize that and talk about it. Honestly, I don't think that any government gets it a hundred per cent right, but I do think that there are some that don't get it right at all. I think that this UCP government has demonstrated time and again that their failure to consult has resulted in legislation that has a lot of unintended consequences, as I said earlier, and makes a lot of changes that are not in the best interest of Albertans.

11:50

One of the things that we have seen time and again with this government is a lack of transparency around their consultation. By transparency I mean: what is the purpose of the change? What problem is the government trying to address or fix, and what is the plan? The plan should be commensurate with the expected impact and scope of the proposed legislation. We don't see that. I mean, you know, all the way from – we don't actually get invited to many briefings anymore to even know what the legislation is about, let alone do we hear about the consultation plan, what tools are being used. Very often we see the very minimum being used by this UCP government. Often it's just an online survey, particularly during COVID. I understand that it was a difficult and trying time to try to consult with stakeholders, but I think that it's incumbent on governments to do far more than that.

I think if this government, if there are members that have more details about what the consultation included other than picking up the phone and talking to a couple of stakeholders or having an

online satisfaction survey or an open survey – like, truly, what was the goal of the consultation? What was the problem that the legislation or the changes intended to solve? I think that that has been a problem with this government over and over again. We don't understand, number one, what the problem is, what problem they're trying to prevent, the problem they're trying to fix and, really, what the range of stakeholders is, not just friendlies, not just lobbyists but the whole range of stakeholders. Friends, maybe not friends, NGOs, community: who are the stakeholders? We don't get that.

Anyway, going back to the legislation, we do – as my colleagues have said, while we support the consistency and the transparency and accountability for the professional regulatory organizations and all areas of governance, the overreach of this bill is a little bit astounding, and it goes far beyond just the basic. Based on the proposed amendments, the professional regulatory organizations can be reduced to self-regulatory organizations in name only. Once again we see legislation that is opening the door for a ministerial overreach that is concerning.

I think it's important, again, as my colleagues have said and we continue to say over and over, that this government has probably stepped into their governing role with not a lot of trust, based on things that went on in their leadership race, in the election, but they have consistently eroded the public trust over the just over three years of their term so far. We have seen example after example of this government demonstrating they are not to be trusted. The leadership race: as I mentioned, I'm quite sure that there is still an open RCMP investigation going on. We have heard again and again of different people being interviewed. We still don't know what the results are, and now we're hearing rumblings of some allegations of problems in another race. Not surprising. We have seen questionable decisions made. We know, via lobbyist registries, who the lobbyists have contacted, who they are, and then, surprisingly, we see legislation or regulatory changes come in soon after that that don't benefit Albertans but actually benefit the lobbyists.

Again and again we see examples of this government that are not to be trusted. We have seen – coal mining, eastern slopes, curriculum, health care – example after example of this government eroding trust. That is why when we see a piece of legislation like Bill 23, which is massive – and my colleagues have talked about the extensive work that needs to go on after this is passed – it does give more power to the minister, and that is definitely concerning.

I would like to know. As I asked in an earlier debate on a separate piece of legislation – that was Bill 20, and I was happy to see the minister stand up and attempt to answer some of those questions. Maybe a minister will come back and answer some of these questions. Who precisely was consulted? I think the member not too long ago mentioned a couple of organizations that were consulted, but what was the consultation plan? What was the problem that was going to be addressed, and who specifically was consulted? Then what is the work plan after that?

Bear with me. Now, one of the concerning things is that this piece of legislation, Bill 23, will repeal governing statutes for 22 different professions and replace them with one umbrella statute. If that makes sense and if all of the professional organizations are okay with that and this is something that they and their memberships support and they've been consulted about and they see a path forward that is positive for them, that is one thing. If they do not, that is quite another. But I think I'm going to list them because I think it's important for people to understand who these organizations are.

We've got the Alberta Assessors' Association, Alberta Association of Architects: were they consulted? Alberta Association of Landscape Architects: were they consulted? Alberta Human Ecology and Home Economics Association: were they consulted by the UCP? Alberta Institute of Agrobiologists: were they consulted?

Alberta Land Surveyors' Association: did the UCP consult them? The Alberta Professional Planners Institute: were they consulted by the UCP? Alberta Shorthand Reporters Association: were they consulted by the UCP? Alberta Society of Professional Biologists: were they consulted by the UCP? I know the UCP sometimes has issue with science. I'd like to know that they were consulted. Alberta Veterinary Medical Association: I hope they were consulted, but we'd like clarity. Were they consulted? Association of Alberta Forest Management Professionals, a vitally important group: were they consulted? I'd also like to know if they were consulted when the rappel firefighters were cut.

Anyway, were the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists, APEGA – yes, they were consulted. I think the member did note that. The Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta: were they consulted? How about the Association of School Business Officials, the chemical profession, the Information Processing Society of Alberta, chartered professionals – yes, I do believe they were consulted – the Consulting Engineers of Alberta, Electrical Contractors Association, Institute of Certified Management Consultants, the Society of Local Government Managers of Alberta, and Supply Chain Management Association of Alberta?

The reason I'm listing these is that there are so many different associations and we only heard from one government member noting a couple of associations. So given the sweeping nature of this piece of legislation I think it's incumbent on this government to actually stand up and tell us the consultation that was done. Were

these organizations consulted, what was the result, and how is that included in this piece of legislation?

The bill proposes to substantially expand ministerial powers to include determining the regulatory model for each organization. Again, I would hope that each and every organization impacted by this legislation was included in the consultation and it wasn't just an exercise of checking the box and saying: all done; we called a couple of organizations, and they're good.

The sweeping powers of a minister that this bill proposes, the appointment of professional governance officers in the department to inspect the PROs or undertake a designation review of the PRO: what does this mean in terms of the number of staff within government? I hear from this government all the time: we want smaller government; we want to spend less on bureaucracy, on bureaucrats. Okay. Fair enough. What does that mean? When you look at this legislation, is this legislation doing that, or does that mantra from the government members only come into play sometimes?

The bill also proposes to expand ministerial powers to include the ability to appoint an administrator to assist or take over the PRO, which is a professional regulatory organization.

The Acting Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member; however, under Standing Order 4(2.1) we are adjourned until 1.30 p.m. today.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 11, 2022

Day 33

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Singh
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gotfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
Singh
Toor
Turton
Walker

Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

Chair: Mr. Sigurdson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 11, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, there are a number of guests joining us today. When I call your name, please feel free to rise. Joining us in the galleries is Katie Cook, a volunteer from the constituency of Calgary-Shaw and a guest of the Minister of Children's Services. [some applause] We'll go till the end if we can. I appreciate your enthusiasm, and so does Ms Cook.

Also seated in the gallery are Ruth Eeles and Zachary Eeles, guests of the Member for Banff-Kananaskis. From conversation with Zach I am certain he will have your job in just a few short years.

Also joining us are five guests of the Associate Minister of Status of Women. They are here for the Women's Health Coalition, in recognition of Women's Health Week.

Finally, we have a group joining us in the gallery from Friends of Medicare. They are guests of the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

I invite you to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

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

Security Infrastructure Program

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to racism and hatred in Alberta, our UCP government has been very clear. We have absolutely zero tolerance for intolerance. Not just words; we have acted quickly to address rising instances of hate-motivated violence and vandalism in our communities. As part of our effort, last November we introduced the Alberta security infrastructure program, aimed at helping to protect faith-based facilities, groups, and organizations from hate-motivated attacks and racism. These grants were used to purchase security infrastructure and equipment and to provide valuable training and education. More than \$1.2 million was provided to more than a hundred faith-based organizations.

Given the strong demand we are more than doubling funding, from \$2 million to \$5 million, for this, and we can say that we stand beside all those affected by these monstrous crimes. Despite the success and popularity of this program, we knew more needed to be done. Today we are also expanding this program so that faith-based groups and organizations can be reimbursed for security upgrades made since June 1, 2021, several months before this important program was first announced. We are also removing application period deadlines to make it easier for organizations to apply for support. As a result, the \$5 million grant program for 2022-23 is now open for the entire year.

Mr. Speaker, this program is making a real impact for faith-based groups and communities who, unfortunately, may find themselves the target of violence and vandalism. We have seen Catholic churches burned down, mosques and gurdwaras vandalized with spray paint, and now we're taking a stand, side by side with our

faith leaders and communities, against this. There is no home for hatred or violence in Alberta today, and we are making that clear.

Thank you.

Bereavement Leave for Pregnancy Loss

Member Irwin: Alberta's NDP will always be a force for compassion, inclusivity, and protection of workers' rights. We have continued this fight in so many ways, including the recognition of grief, anxiety, and other responses that may surround pregnancy loss and the need for bereavement leave to be inclusive. All forms of pregnancy loss must be supported, including abortion and termination for medical reasons.

At first the UCP chose to discriminate in terms of the kinds of pregnancy loss a person may experience. This did a serious injustice to folks who need compassion. We must leave no room for interpretation, and now, due to the pressure placed on this government by the NDP, stakeholders, community activists, and folks all across this province, any pregnancy that does not result in a live birth will be covered. This includes abortion and termination for medical reasons. This is a win for all Albertans.

We will always defend reproductive rights, and we've ensured that this government cannot get away with discriminating against anyone who has had an abortion and is seeking protected leave. We have guaranteed that people making the choice to terminate a pregnancy will be supported. I'm so proud of my caucus colleagues and of all those who support reproductive rights in successfully forcing the UCP to acknowledge abortion.

Alberta's NDP: we will defend reproductive rights. We will always fight this government to be inclusive and compassionate even as they've shown their unwillingness. We know that without much public pressure we cannot trust the UCP to uphold Albertans' right to health care and to safe work environments. An NDP government will move forward with the important work of making reproductive rights a priority, strengthening public health care, all while supporting workers and building a better province for all.

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

Alberta Junior Hockey League 2022 Championship

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with news, great news, in fact. In a stunning victory over my Spruce Grove Saints, the Brooks Bandits became Alberta Junior Hockey League champions for the sixth time, capturing the Inter Pipeline Cup. After a first-round bye and sweeping the Canmore Eagles, this win was well deserved. With 2,200 fans packed into the Centennial Regional Arena, Brooks Bandits forward Ryan McAllister was awarded the Alberta Junior Hockey League most valuable player and top scorer award.

But, Mr. Speaker, the good news just doesn't stop there. Bandits coach and general manager Ryan Papaioannou also has been nominated for the Canadian Junior Hockey League coaching award. In the end, my beloved Spruce Grove Saints tried their hardest but struggled to come out on top, and I applaud their efforts and congratulate them on a hard-fought season. The Bandits are a tough team, the best, in fact, so this loss was not in vain but represented a valiant effort.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it's time to address the elephant in the Chamber. You might be wondering why I stand before you today wearing this stunningly beautiful Brooks Bandits jersey. I do so reluctantly; however, I must make good on a bet to my wonderful, intelligent colleague from Brooks-Medicine Hat, who's the bestest, super-duper MLA in the history of Alberta, and let me just say that

Brooks-Medicine Hat is truly the greatest constituency in the province. From its vast agricultural landscapes to its abundance of natural resources and the hard-working people, any Albertan would be lucky to live, work, and raise a family there. Did I not say also that they have the best MLA?

Throughout this experience, Mr. Speaker, I have learned my lesson the hard way. Never again will I bet against the Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat or the Brooks Bandits, at least for a year. The Brooks Bandits are truly the greatest hockey team in the AJHL this season, and I hope all Albertans will join me as we cheer them on as they fight for the Centennial Cup in Estevan, Saskatchewan. Go, Bandits, go!

Thank you.

Premier's Leadership

Ms Hoffman: Alberta's current Premier is the least trusted Premier in Canada, and in case there was any question as to why Alberta's 18th Premier holds this unique distinction, let me share a couple of examples. The grassroots guarantee, the health care guarantee: both were clearly not worth the paper they were written on. The grassroots were told by the Premier that, despite what they think, he holds the pen. Public health care in Alberta is under attack because the UCP started a war with doctors and other health professionals during a pandemic.

Need some more examples? The Premier called for Albertans to take personal responsibility to follow the rules that he set, but then he had a boozy party with his favourite ministers on the roof of the sky palace, breaking those rules. The Premier says that he believes in the rule of law, but then he fires the commissioner investigating his leadership race. The Premier used to rail and rage in Ottawa about using inflation to hike personal income tax, but then he comes to Edmonton, and he changed the law so that he could tax inflation, taking a billion dollars away from Alberta families. The Premier talks about affordability, but then he lifts the cap on utilities. He promised rebates in March, but Albertans are still waiting. The Premier promised to be a servant leader, but he never told Albertans that that meant he'd be a servant to insurance lobbyists, who wanted him to lift the insurance cap and make driving a car unaffordable for many Alberta families.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

Ever since the Premier climbed down from his blue truck, he's been making promises to Albertans, promises that he repeatedly breaks. Albertans need a leader and a Premier that they can trust, someone that they can rely on to stand up for their best interests and to put them first. Good news, Mr. Speaker. She's running to be your Premier in the next election. The leader of Alberta's NDP cares about you, and you can trust her to stand up for your family, for public health care and public education, to make your life more affordable, to create a diversified economy, and to keep your family as her top priority.

1:40 Lemonade Day in Northern Alberta

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment and talk about something most people like and some people have likely sold, lemonade. Specifically, I'd like to talk about the northern Alberta Lemonade Day, happening on June 18. Lemonade Day is a free and fun experiential learning program that teaches youth how to start, own, and operate their own business. Children from prekindergarten to high school learn to set goals, develop a business plan, establish a budget, seek investors, provide customer service, save for the future, and give back to the community. The main

objective of Lemonade Day is to empower youth to take ownership of their lives and become productive members of society. Along the way kids acquire skills in goal setting and problem solving, and they gain self-esteem while having fun and being creative.

Community Futures, a nonprofit organization dedicated to building an economically diverse future in our region, plans the entire process and co-ordinates multiple tasting events across northern Alberta leading up to the big day. Although the program contributes to growing kids' entrepreneurial spirit, it also focuses on giving back to the community. The program encourages the kids to spend some, save some, and share some of their profits. In 2019 the kids donated over \$9,000 to local charities of their choosing; in 2021 they donated over \$7,000. Mr. Speaker, education goes beyond the classroom, and programs like these teach our kids soft and transferable skills they will need and undoubtedly use later on.

Last year I drove across my constituency to support as many Lemonade Day entrepreneurs as I could. The day was hard on the bladder but good for the soul. Aside from being a great community activity, Lemonade Day helps youth become the business leaders, social advocates, community volunteers, and forward-thinking citizens of tomorrow, so on June 18 across northern Alberta I encourage all MLAs, all community members to get out and support the future leaders in our communities through this great initiative.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Norma Vidal

Member Loyola: Last week the Chilean community in Alberta lost a truly dedicated community member, I would say a remarkable icon for peace and human rights. Known affectionately by many in my generation as Tia Norma, Norma Vidal was a phenomenal community organizer that participated in a number of groups, but her most notable accomplishment was that she was a truly amazing artist.

Norma came to Edmonton in 1975 as a result of the September 11, 1973, military coup in Chile. Soon after her arrival she helped to settle other refugees that were arriving for the same reason as her. In the first few years she dedicated herself to putting together an acting group for children so that they could have an outlet for expressing themselves and learn important skills of reading and reciting as well as acting. Norma also participated in folkloric music groups like the very well-known Tupac Amaru, that would share the cultural sounds and music that accompanied the human rights movement, also known as the new Chilean song.

In her later years Norma was also a pillar of the Latin-American women's association known as Amigas, through which she brought several cultural artists to Edmonton and to Alberta. Norma not only loved to act and sing, but she also enjoyed painting, drawing, and making sculptures out of stone. She illustrated a number of books and later in life also began to write her own, the latest one called *A Cocktail Party*.

Tia Norma, you will be missed, your strong and determined voice, that I remember inspired me to possess a plurality of thought and to never give up on our ideals as a community. Her voice and what she taught me will always accompany me. The whole community has lost an icon. Tia Norma, we love you, and may you always rest in power.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Integrated Emergency Medical and Fire Services

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently Alberta fire chiefs have been promoting an integrated emergency response model. They are educating elected officials as to the benefits of returning emergency medical services to urban municipalities as they recognize the challenges that EMS is facing today. Prior to 2008 municipalities employed an integrated model of EMS and fire services where the rescuers were trained as both paramedics skilled in advanced life support as well as firefighters skilled in hazard suppression and rescue. This gave municipalities an agile system that ensured the people responding could manage virtually any emergency.

Integrated ambulance crews inherently work with the fire crews supporting them. Not only was there a large team focused on patient treatment, but they're available to supplement EMS response. Whether they jumped on the backup ambulance or responded on a medically equipped fire truck, there was always someone available to respond to the call. This diversity within the job contributed to increased job satisfaction as it kept members mentally engaged and reduced the monotony of the job. The cost savings aren't just because you're paying one person to do two jobs, but the integrated model eliminates the need to have separate stations. There is no need to have EMS stations when you have established fire halls everywhere. The end result is over 30 per cent in savings for the taxpayer.

Ultimately, municipalities gave up EMS in 2008 because AHS offered to take over this budget item, collectively saving municipalities over \$300 million. In 2009 the EMS budget was \$329 million. Today the budget is over half a billion dollars.

Despite this infusion of money over the last decade-plus, our wait times for ambulances have increased. Code reds continue secretly as AHS stopped publicly reporting them, and rural ambulances are commonly pulled from their communities to serve in our largest urban centres. Sick time, low morale, and burnout of paramedics is inherent in this current system.

The integrated model appears to be a more cost-effective system with better employee working conditions, ultimately providing more holistic service to Albertans. This government needs to reconsider re-evaluating this integrated model of emergency response for the health and safety of Albertans.

Provincial Support for Edmonton

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, Edmonton needs a partner. That was the thrust of the mayor's state-of-the-city address this week calling out the UCP for their failure to invest in and support Alberta's capital city. His Worship told those in attendance that this UCP government has made Edmonton feel as if they don't matter and called on them to work with them and, most importantly, stop holding Edmonton's economy back.

Rather than addressing these real concerns, the UCP's Minister of Municipal Affairs instead complained that Edmonton doesn't praise his government enough. It's unfortunate, but it's clear as day that the words of the mayor were lost on the UCP, and sadly it seems this government does not value or respect the contributions or the residents of Alberta's second-largest city.

That's certainly what I'm hearing from many of my constituents, neighbours, and friends. Here in the heart of our city one of the biggest challenges remains how many of our neighbours are living houseless. Over the last two years their numbers have doubled and are expected to keep growing, about 2,800 people with no permanent home.

Yet for three consecutive budgets the UCP government has repeatedly refused to partner with the city of Edmonton and the government of Canada to invest in supportive housing. With federal support consecutive councils have invested millions to build 210 new units of supportive housing and over 300 more in converted hotels. Not one dollar from this government.

This despite the fact that, as Mayor Sohi noted, tackling houselessness, mental health, addictions, and trauma is a provincial responsibility and that providing these Albertans in need with the dignity of a home, with wraparound supports will save millions in costs in health care, social services, and the justice system. That benefits us all. Instead, this government broke their promise to ensure that benefits for those with the least would rise with inflation. They attack and undermine supports for harm reduction, increasing pressure on police, hospitals, and paramedics.

Edmonton deserves better, Mr. Speaker. My constituents, housed and unhoused, deserve better. They need a partner. Edmonton is looking for a government that will work with them, and the Alberta NDP is ready to step up and be that partner.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Hemp Industry Development

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government's low-tax, pro-business policies have positioned our province to be a global magnet for investment and innovation. Through our government's policies we are supporting economic diversification in our agriculture sector by investing in projects that will create new value-added hemp products.

In partnership with the federal government, through the emerging opportunities program, Alberta has awarded two grants totalling \$900,000 to help grow the province's hemp industry. Inca Renewtech, a globally recognized hemp manufacturing company, will receive a grant of up to \$400,000 to help fund the building of its new \$72 million hemp processing facility in Vegreville. And Blue Sky Hemp Ventures, a global leader in hemp whole plant utilization, will receive a grant of \$500,000 to advance a proposed \$75 million hemp food processing plant in Alberta.

This investment will increase demand for Alberta-grown hemp while supporting new manufacturing and processing jobs for Albertans. Mr. Speaker, the Inca Renewtech investment is great news for my riding of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville. The state-of-the-art, 200,000 square foot fibre processing and composites manufacturing facility is expected to be operational in early 2024 and create 70 jobs, scaling up to about a hundred jobs by 2026. This facility will also create demand for 45,000 tonnes of hemp biomass per year, adding \$270 million in additional farm income over 25 years. This is a project that I was pleased to advocate for, and I'm thrilled that they have chosen my riding to build in.

I want to thank the minister and all my colleagues who played a role in bringing this important investment to fruition. These investments will no doubt bring new jobs to our communities and help continue to grow Alberta's economic prosperity. Our government's economic recovery plan is second to none, and this is just another example of its success. The project is a win for Alberta's clean tech sector, rural job creation, economic diversification, and my riding of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Emergency Medical Services

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, when Albertans call 911 in an emergency, they expect the ambulance is on the way, but across the province we're seeing ambulances lined up outside of hospitals and a high volume of deep red alerts, when there are no ambulances available to respond. According to new data from AHS response times to life-threatening calls are climbing. The worst ones are now over 17 minutes, well over target, the longest wait on record, in fact, since AHS first started collecting this data. This is life and death. What is the Premier doing right now to reverse this trend he started?

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

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. Every province is seeing this kind of pressure. It's normal after two years of a pandemic. In fact, AHS has 230 more paramedics working today than they did two years ago. Budget 2022 has increased an additional \$64 million to help ease the system pressures and make sure that EMS are more responsive to their communities. Again, this is something we're seeing not just in Alberta but right across Canada.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, those new positions are casual, not full-time. A big difference, and the acting Minister of Health should know it.

Now, part of the problem is that crews are getting stuck in Calgary and Edmonton for longer. In Calgary 10 per cent of ambulances are at the ER for as long as two hours and 45 minutes, over an hour longer than AHS's own target, and the worst measure, again, since they started collecting this data. This risks Albertans' health and increases pressure on already stressed EMS crews. To the Premier: is almost three hours stuck in the ER an acceptable time to him? And if not, what's he going to do to fix it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education is rising.

Member LaGrange: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. We understand that there are pressures, but again I am reiterating the fact that we are taking steps to increase capacity. There's \$28 million for additional ground crew, ambulances, and crews in addition to sustaining funding for helicopter air ambulance service such as STARS, HALO, and HERO; \$22 million for increasing capacity in priority projects, including extension of ground ambulance contracts, supporting integrated operation centres, and interfacility transport; and an additional \$14 million for the hours of work initiative and addressing crew fatigue. All of these are helping.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, if they are happening, they're not working, because these are the worst numbers ever, and they are going up.

I hear from EMS professionals every day, and they tell me they're burned out and frustrated with the incompetence of this UCP government. Today HSAA president Mike Parker called for paramedics to have three things done: one, do more to get paramedics off shift on time; two, go back to supporting safe-consumption sites and lowering overdoses; and, three, stop with casual contracts, all the casual contracts. Will the Premier commit today to acting on these reasonable, immediate, short-term, practical recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. AHS has also developed a 10-point tactical plan to address the pressures. Actions

currently under way are making real progress, starting with more ambulances on the streets in the coming months; five each in Calgary and Edmonton each year for the next two years, for a total of 20 new ambulances. Also, we have stood up the Alberta EMS Provincial Advisory Committee, co-chaired by MLAs within this House, to work with stakeholders from across the EMS system and bring forward recommendations. We are expecting an interim report shortly.

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

Health Care System Capacity

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, every day this Premier, this government stands up, tries to take a victory lap on health care, but here's what Albertans are seeing: in Red Deer 14 ambulances backed up in the hospital parking lot waiting to get to the ER, in Whitecourt the cancellation of obstetrics for expecting parents going on two years running, in Edmonton dangerously long wait times for children at the Stollery, and in Calgary parents lined up outside to even get their kids a seat in the waiting room at the Alberta Children's hospital. To the Premier: is this what you mean when you say Alberta is back? Back to paying for the chaos of Conservative mismanagement in health care?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Red Deer-North I'm extremely happy that our government is finally dealing with the issue of capacity within Red Deer. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the members opposite made a lot of empty promises. Zero – zero – work on any of those empty promises. We're adding \$1.8 billion to expand the Red Deer hospital so we have capacity to deal with not only EMS problems but also with surgical problems in Red Deer.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, what they're adding are ambulances lined up outside the hospital, parents lined up outside the hospital, because this government has crashed the health care system. The pressure on this system, on emergency rooms is called access block. It's a sign of this government's failure. Most obviously, the lack of family doctors: in Lethbridge, 30,000 with no family doctor; Bow Valley, not a single doctor accepting new patients. Registration shows 140 fewer doctors in Alberta last year that left here. Why doesn't this Premier understand that their actions are blocking more Albertans from getting health care in their communities, and that is crashing our system?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I'll remind the members opposite: four years they did nothing for Red Deer. Zero. Zero. That's one of the reasons I ran, so that we would actually address the problems in Red Deer, and we're going to; \$1.8 billion is going to go a long way to address those issues. As far as Lethbridge is concerned, there are 14 active family medicine positions being advertised as we speak; 11 applicants have committed to the community and are awaiting their CPSA assessment. That means that there will be 11 new people coming to Lethbridge.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, did that minister run on driving doctors away from the Red Deer regional hospital? Because that's

what her government has done. Indeed, this government talks a big game, but in reality they've pushed doctors, paramedics, health care workers to the brink, crisis getting worse every day, and Albertans are tired of their excuses. Packed ERs, kids waiting outside, ambulances lined up around the block, random closures at rural hospitals, fewer doctors, longer wait times, and this government's priority on health care is to take insulin pumps away from kids. What's the excuse?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that question from the members opposite, but here's the reality. COVID-19 revealed a wholly inadequate capacity in our health care system, capacity we inherited from the members opposite. We're dealing with it; \$1.8 billion in hospital refurbishing, a new hospital in Red Deer, \$1.8 billion added to Health's budget over the next three years to expand capacity to better serve Albertans.

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

Provincial Support for Edmonton

Member Ceci: "Edmonton deserves a fair deal. [Please] work with us. We are your capital city. We make outsized contributions. Please stop holding Edmonton's economy back." Those are the words of Edmonton mayor Amarjeet Sohi yesterday as he implored this UCP government to stop punishing the capital region, to stop stifling innovation, to stop behaving like the Edmonton region doesn't matter. Truer words have never been said. To the Premier: why does this government have such disrespect for Edmonton? Why is this government holding Edmonton's economy back? The mayor wants to know.

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, this government from day one has made sure that we focus on attracting jobs, attracting innovation, as well as attracting investment to this province. I want to know as well. Edmonton for the first time in its history – first time in its history – is in the top 50 in North America for innovation and technology. That happened under this government, not the NDP, otherwise known as the no-development party.

Member Ceci: The UCP ripped up the big-city charters. Let me quote Mayor Sohi again as he spoke to over 1,000 business leaders and community leaders yesterday at an event hosted at the Calgary Chamber. "Too often we are made to feel [like] Edmonton does not matter to the province. Please stop holding Edmonton's economy back." To the Premier. The Minister of Municipal Affairs attacked the mayor. Business leaders in the capital region disagree. They applauded the mayor. They have Edmonton's back. Why does this government treat Edmonton and the entire capital region economy with such disrespect?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's ridiculous. The reality is that we inherited a fiscal train wreck from the members opposite. We inherited a government that was spending increases of over 4 per cent per year. Instead of a \$500 million budgeted surplus, we would be projecting a \$6 billion deficit . . .

2:00

The Speaker: Order. The hon. minister has the opportunity to answer the question. I should be able to hear him.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, bottom line: we're bringing fiscal responsibility and sustainability to this province. On top of that, we're continuing to invest in Edmonton. Key investments: \$588 million in LRT projects, \$371 million assigned for the new Edmonton hospital, \$142 million . . .

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

Member Ceci: Thank you. You know, if there's one truism of this government, it's just that they don't listen. Over 1,000 business and community leaders applauded the message delivered by the mayor yesterday. All we hear are the same deflections, the same denials. Is it this Premier's message to Edmonton's business leaders that they don't understand what's going on in their backyard? Or can this Premier explain why the UCP is holding the economy back? A thousand people stood and applauded the mayor and the message. What do you have to say?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, what we have to say to people across Alberta is that we have their backs. The unemployment rate in the province of Alberta today: 5.9 per cent, something Alberta never – let me say that again: never – experienced under the NDP, not once. This government is focused on job creation, creating the best possible business environment. The business community in Edmonton can rest assured that Alberta is back. We've got the best business community, the best environment in the entire country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-*Ellerslie* has a question.

Dene Tha' First Nation Flooding

Mr. Feehan: It is estimated that 1,100 people have been forced to evacuate from their homes in the Dene Tha' First Nation because of rising flood waters caused by heavy rain and melting snow. As of yesterday morning over 600 evacuees had been registered in High Level. Robby Didzena is a 19-year-old who stayed behind with volunteers to work to protect homes from flood damage. He told the media, quote: we are losing our homes to water, to Mother Nature; she's beating us. End quote. Can the Premier provide an update on the flooding situation and what supports are available right now to those who are forced to evacuate?

The Speaker: Correction: the hon. Member for Edmonton-*Rutherford*. Thank you.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services has risen.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I do want to thank the member opposite for a very important question. Rainfall and snowmelt are creating flooding conditions in northwestern Alberta. I can tell you that Alberta's emergency management is in constant contact with the community. Transportation is also on the scene. The member is correct that an evacuation order has been issued for the residents of the Dene Tha' First Nation. Around 940 people have been affected by the flooding, and approximately 676 evacuees have been registered in High Level. Flood protection barriers are being set up around housing in the community, and Beaver First Nation is providing additional aid.

Mr. Feehan: Evacuees have been registered in High Level and other communities like La Crête and Rainbow Lake. For those who were forced to evacuate from the community, I can only imagine the pain, stress, and anxiety they are feeling as they wait to see when they will return home and what might need to be rebuilt after this devastating flood. Alberta needs to be there for them now and into

the future to ensure that they are supported in every way they can be. Can the Premier please tell me what he is doing to ensure that everyone forced to evacuate their homes has access to mental health or medical support needed now and in the future? Please be specific. The people need this.

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We do know that this is a difficult time for residents of the area. Our thoughts are, of course, with them as the flooding situation in the north is causing a tremendous impact on local highways. The water level is fluctuating, of course, due to snowmelt, but I can tell you that we are watching the situation closely, and we are there to support these residents in this community. In addition, there is also a First Nations field officer on-site assisting the emergency management team. As the member opposite likely knows, a state of local emergency has been issued due to localized flooding.

Mr. Feehan: It would be really nice if you built a berm or changed the road into the town. I spoke with the chief of the Dene Tha' First Nations this week to offer him the support of this caucus in the midst of this devastating crisis. While this community has faced flooding in the past, what is seen today is far and away worse than anything previously experienced. This likely means that the work and resources needed to rebuild and recover will be far and away larger than historically needed. Can the Premier please advise the House what specific actions his government will take to help the community prevent future natural disasters such as these?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned in my first response, flood protection barriers, tiger dams are being set up around housing in the community, and Beaver First Nation is providing additional aid. We are doing everything possible to ensure people can evacuate or use the roads in a safe and timely manner. Alberta Transportation has crews on the ground working around the clock to make sure the roads are passable. Repairs are under way, and as waters levels recede, more detailed repairs such as culvert replacements will begin. Motorists in the local area should expect delays, can check 511 for the latest traffic information as well, but we are there to support them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod has a question to ask.

Federal Impact Assessment Act Court Ruling

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Trudeau Liberals were taught a lesson by Alberta's Court of Appeal in our fight to stand up to Justin Trudeau's quest for absolute control over Albertans and Alberta's resources. And the NDP, who called Alberta the embarrassing cousin within Canada while they were in office, all the while handing Trudeau more and more control over Albertans and their resources while in office, in typical fashion remain silent on this issue. To the minister of environment: how has Alberta's UCP government been fighting back the relentless assaults by the Trudeau-NDP alliance on Albertans and this province?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to Bill C-69, the no-more-pipelines law, this government took the Trudeau Liberals to court and won yesterday an important case that made it clear that the Trojan Horse that the Trudeau Liberals have tried to

use to block our constitutional right to be able to develop our resources could not stand. Unfortunately, the Official Opposition, the NDP, both when they were government and in opposition, has chosen to stand with Trudeau as they try to block the birthright of Albertans. But, rest assured, this government will never let that happen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that yesterday's court ruling was unequivocal – the highest court in Alberta called it “a classic example of legislative creep” and an “existential threat . . . to the division of powers guaranteed by [the] Constitution” – and given that this Trojan Horse legislation was an attack on Alberta's jurisdiction and our right to self-govern, can the Minister of Energy tell this House why the denial of the Trudeau government's no-more-pipelines bill is such excellent news for all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right; this is excellent news. Alberta has a long and proud history of fighting for our right to develop our resources. In the 1970s Pierre Elliott Trudeau tried to take control of our natural resources. At that time it was to take our wealth. Well, Peter Lougheed fought him and won. Forty years later Justin Trudeau tried to take control of our natural resources through Bill C-69. His intent was to shut down our natural resources. Well, our government won the court case yesterday, and the court decision was a smackdown of Justin Trudeau's attempt to obliterate our constitutional rights, obliterate our natural resources . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta knows that provinces are the ones best situated to make decisions for their own economies and given that Alberta deserves a fair deal from Ottawa, one that allows Albertans to harness the natural resources that belong to them, can the Minister of Energy tell this House what this means for the future of Alberta's energy sector?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Energy.

Mrs. Savage: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This means that Alberta's energy future is bright. Justin Trudeau will not have a veto over the development of our natural resources. Bill C-69 would have effectively rewritten the Constitution. It would have driven away investment and choked our oil and gas sector. We sit on the third-largest reserve of oil in the world and have an abundance of natural gas. The world is looking for these resources, especially as it weeds out Russian energy. We believe this energy should come from Alberta, so yesterday was a great day for Alberta. After six years of fighting with the Trudeau Liberals as they developed this legislation, we won, and the no more pipelines . . .

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

Agricultural Costs

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, farmers are feeling the brunt of the cost-of-living crisis, which will continue to lead to increasing food prices. Fertilizer costs are out of reach for farmers, the price of diesel is surging, and many farmers are still recovering from a tough season last year. On top of that, Alberta farmers elected the UCP government, that jacks up prices on crop and livestock insurance. This government is too busy fighting with themselves to care about

farmers or rural Alberta. When will Alberta farmers finally get some support from the UCP for all the costs they are facing?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I do love the enthusiasm, and I do agree with her that it is a challenging time for farmers. Fuel prices are through the roof. Fertilizer is through the roof. So are commodity prices. This will be the most expensive planting season in Alberta and many places around the world. It will also have the most upside for our farmers.

2:10

Ms Sweet: If they get a crop.

Mr. Horner: Of course. That's why we have great insurance programs that we're so proud to make better. We have to make them better because the NDP signed on to the last set of programs in 2018, and we continue to . . .

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

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the tax exemption for the farm fuel offered a comparative advantage, however, the UCP refused to honour the intent of that program, and given that the price of diesel has increased by over 50 per cent for some and farmers are reporting that this will add about \$50,000 in costs this year and given that the increased price of fuel also adds costs on everything farmers need to ship – so not only are farmers paying more for fuel; the UCP removed the comparative advantage in the market – when will the agriculture minister finally provide actual help for farmers facing surging fuel prices?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I love this. I would just like to inform that side of the House that diesel and gas come from oil. You know, maybe you shouldn't stand on the steps saying, "No new approvals" and bring in things like the carbon tax. Your federal party joined with Trudeau. We brought in the fuel tax abatement, 13 cents on clear fuel, 4 cents for farmers. I wonder: do they want us to buy fuel for farmers? Is that what I'm hearing right now? Interesting proposal.

Ms Sweet: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the UCP are raking in revenues from those high energy prices the minister just referenced, that farmers will have to figure out how they're going to handle their surging costs, and given that the minister of agriculture is in control of what supports he provides and what costs he can increase and given that the UCP's response to increased costs for farmers has been to do nothing and given that agriculture is facing so much pressure, yet the UCP jacked up crop insurance by 10 per cent to gain \$40 million on the back of farmers when last year they had a decrease, how can the minister justify that?

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, everyone in the agriculture sector is very proud of our ag insurance program. Last year: a historic payout, \$2.7 billion out of a \$3.3 billion fund. There's a 10 per cent formula increase in the formula. The majority of the increase in the premium is from the increase in the commodity price, as it should be and as farmers understand. Like I said, the most upside of any planting season in Alberta's history, and here's what else I know through AFSC: our insurance program participation is up. It's up on the crop side. It's up on the moisture . . .

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

Social Supports and Calgary Transit User Safety

Ms Sigurdson: Homelessness, mental illness, and drug poisonings are worse than ever. The UCP is making all of these crises deeper by taking housing funding away from Albertans on income support, refusing to fund mental health support, and withholding life-saving health care from Albertans who use substances. The UCP is pushing vulnerable Albertans onto the streets, seeking shelter in transit stations. In classic UCP fashion, instead of real solutions the associate minister decided to troll a Calgary city councillor on Twitter. Does this minister accept any responsibility for the explosion of homelessness, mental illness, and fatal drug poisoning happening on his watch?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a newflash to the member opposite, but Calgarians and citizens within municipalities also have rights as well. They have a right to ride the LRT without experiencing violence. They have a right to ride the train without sexual assault or open drug use. They have a right to not inhale second-hand smoke from crystal meth and from crack. As a former police officer, we have to understand that the police are part of the solution to this very, very complex problem. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that expanded supervised consumption services would reduce open drug use in Calgary transit stations and given that these services are proven to save the health care system millions of dollars and free up badly overstretched ambulance and emergency beds in Calgary, given that this minister's failure to act has made Calgary less safe for everyone, can the minister grow up, knock it off with the mean tweets . . .

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

Ms Sigurdson: . . . and actually take action to address the crises he has created in Calgary?

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:15.

The Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, there's been no reduction in services for supervised consumption sites. Let's start with that. My office has spoken with operators. It's actually been the city of Calgary that has slowed the approval process, not the government of Alberta. We certainly welcome the application for the supervised consumption site in the constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona. However, I have not heard from the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona whether she supports a supervised consumption site that we would like to put in that area.

Ms Sigurdson: Given that these crises continue to get worse because of the UCP's failed approach and given that this juvenile behaviour from the associate minister proves that Albertans can't trust the UCP to address these problems and given that asking him questions will only lead to more division – these guys have had their chance to take these crises seriously, and they have failed, so to the people of Calgary: I want you to hear me. An NDP government will protect your community, strengthen public health care, and save lives.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, under the previous government the only people that could get help were the wealthy. That is shameful. We removed user fees so that anyone . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

The associate minister has the call.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, we removed user fees. We have created 8,000 spaces. We have created the virtual opioid dependency program, an award-winning program. These are just a small snippet of the things that we have been doing to help people with the illness of addiction. If the NDP had their way, they would be keeping people in perpetual states of pain and suffering. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has a question.

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Curriculum

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have been diligent in our work to renew the K to 6 curriculum. Our government promised a curriculum that will give our children the foundational skills that they need for success. As a parent of two this is very important to me. I have also spoken to hundreds of parents and teachers in Calgary-Currie and relayed their feedback to the Minister of Education, similar to my colleagues. I know there have been a number of announcements since January of this year on this topic. To the minister: can you please update us on what work has been done since the beginning of this year?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have done a great deal of work since January to make changes to the draft K to 6 curriculum and adjust the implementation timelines. In January we established a Curriculum Implementation Advisory Group to provide advice and recommendations on the implementation strategy and timelines for the new K to 6 curriculum. We also held virtual engagement sessions right across the province for all Albertans to have their feedback listened to. With that advice from the implementation advisory group we scaled back full implementation to three subjects and set aside \$59 million . . .

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The math, language arts, and physical education and wellness curricula K through 6 will be introduced this fall. Fort Vermilion piloted these subjects last year, and the students learning the new math and English curricula had on average two full years of growth in math and three full years of growth in English, which is amazing. As a parent of two and one going into kindergarten, we need to get this right. To the Minister of Education: can you please share with this House more about the data and research that informed the math and English curricula? [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister is the one with the call.

Member LaGrange: I'm happy to, Mr. Speaker. These subjects have been based on science and advice from subject matter experts. For example, Dr. George Georgiou, who helped developed the English language arts curriculum, led world-class research on literacy in young learners. For his work he's been invited to participate in the Canadian Commission for UNESCO working group to examine pandemic impacts on elementary and secondary schools in Canada. In fact, Alberta is on the cutting edge, and

focusing on these subjects will help our younger students strengthen their numeracy and literacy skills.

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

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that most of the feedback I have received on the curriculum has been about the draft social studies curriculum and given that we have committed to listening to feedback from Albertans and making changes to the draft curriculum using that feedback, including individuals from Calgary-Currie's feedback, to the minister: can you please remind this House what steps have been taken to address the feedback specifically and what the next steps are as we move towards a new social studies curriculum for kindergarten to grade 6 students? [interjections]

2:20

The Speaker: Order.

One thing I am certain of is that the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie provided a significant amount of respect and decorum to all other colleagues inside the Assembly when they were asking questions. I would guess that he deserves and expects the same.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have been listening to the feedback of all Albertans and education stakeholders since the draft K to 6 curriculum was released. We heard Albertans' feedback loud and clear on social studies, and we went back to the drawing board. In fact, in December we went back to a new design blueprint on scope and sequence on social studies. Based on that feedback we have received thus far, we are making changes to the social studies design blueprint. Once the content changes are made, we will release the updated draft social studies curriculum in the coming months. I look forward to further engagement.

Electric Power Prices and Utility Rebate Timeline

Mr. Dang: Two-hundred and four days: that's six months and 21 days from now, when Albertans can hope to see their electricity rebates, maybe. That's the timeline for the solution that the UCP government has brought to Albertans who cannot use their stoves, their dryers, or even their computers because of limiters that are being placed by companies on their electricity usage, all because they cannot afford to keep up with the rising cost of utilities caused by this UCP government. This government has never let technical difficulties get in the way of helping wealthy companies make more money, so why are they dragging their feet when it comes to helping Albertans?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to affordability, we're not dragging our feet. We're moving quickly on establishing a program and getting electricity rebates out the door. The associate minister is working expeditiously to that end. On top of that, we've come forward with the suspension of the fuel tax, giving every Albertan a 13-cents-a-litre saving every time they fill up. That has a very positive impact for every Alberta family, every Alberta senior, every Alberta business.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Albertans are, frankly, tired of hearing vague statements like the one we just heard,

that they might get their rebates or the minister is working diligently, and given that they need real relief right now yet this government's plan is apparently to come up on another cold winter before providing this pittance of \$150 relief, why won't the minister just admit that this rebate is not something Albertans can trust, like this government?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's ridiculous. We are moving forward on affordability measures. But what I find so hypocritical is that when the members opposite, the party that the member was part of prior to his misdemeanour – that party, when they were in government, created the conditions for increased costs: the carbon tax; early buyout of the power purchase agreements, costing Albertans \$1.3 billion; excessive build of our transmission system. Those are the reasons why costs are so high.

Mr. Dang: Given that energy experts, including Joel MacDonald, found that this year Albertans are going to face colder days in the winter and hotter days in the heat waves in the summers – the pattern of getting a break on bills this summer might be a thing of the past for them – and given that the minister said that these rebates are nothing but a temporary solution, why won't the government finally do the right thing and cap the cost of electricity? Albertans don't need possible outcomes; they need guarantees, and they need them right now.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, I'm always amazed. The only solution the members opposite have is capping every problem we have. They failed to deal with the systemic issues that drive up costs. That's why they brought in the carbon tax. That's why they paid out the power purchase agreements early. That's why they overbuilt the transmission system, because they simply don't deal with the systemic issues driving up costs. This government is dealing with those issues. On top of that, we're coming out with electricity rebates. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Alberta Parole Board Decisions and Police Services

Mr. Sabir: Two years ago this government promised Alberta that a provincial parole board would provide a faster process than the federal parole board, but new data shows that the UCP's parole board has processed only 96 cases total in 15 months of operation. Over the same time, the federal board has processed 2,657 applications, or 28 times more. Is the latest Justice minister satisfied with the underperformance of this parole board? If not, how does he intend to fix it?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for highlighting the work that the Alberta Parole Board is doing and the fact that we have fulfilled the commitment in having a provincial parole board. Yes, I am satisfied and very happy with the hard work that the chair, Rick Hanson, and his parole board members are doing to make sure that we have greater accountability in having Albertans making decisions not just about conditional release but also on what the conditions are going to be for those who end up being released on parole.

Mr. Sabir: Given that the previous, previous, previous, previous Justice minister also promised Albertans a more transparent process but given that the board the UCP created doesn't release its decision, which is standard practice for the federal board, and given that the UCP has a terrible record of hiding the truth from Albertans at every turn, why did the UCP build a secret board, and will they commit to releasing all decisions publicly, as the federal board already does?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, as a former member of the federal parole board, that is not how our decisions – sorry. When I was on the federal parole board, how their decisions are released: people apply to be able to access those decisions. The key is making sure that victims are involved in the process all throughout, and people apply to have access to those decisions. Now, the chair is looking into ways in which we can more proactively have the decisions of the parole board released to the public, but of course we want to make sure that the very private information of victims continues to be kept private for those victims.

Mr. Sabir: Given that this is another expensive and pointless exercise that has done nothing to reduce crimes and given that the UCP is pursuing another of these projects with an expensive and unnecessary police force, which Alberta municipalities have overwhelmingly rejected, will the minister take the lesson of his underperforming provincial parole board and drop plans to spend hundreds of millions of dollars of additional tax money to form a provincial police force for political reasons?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, that is completely ridiculous. This is important work that the Alberta Parole Board is doing. It is doing excellent work in not even just making the decisions, the applications that come before them and making decisions about granting and denying parole. But the key is also having Albertans making decisions about what's right for the community and what's safe for the community and deciding what the conditions will be for the offenders when they go out into our communities, having Albertans making those decisions.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Taber-Warner.

Police Services in Coaldale

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First I want to give a shout-out to the Women's Health Coalition of Alberta and the good work that they do.

Since 2014 Coaldale has been paying 100 versus 70 per cent, an extra \$500,000 per year, to pay for their policing needs compared to other communities throughout Canada. This means that Coaldale has had to allocate an extra \$4 million over the past eight years to a line item that other communities don't have to. To the Minister of Justice: seeing as every other community only pays 70 per cent of their policing costs, what can be done for Coaldale?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for all the hard work that he does in standing up for his constituents in Coaldale. We support Coaldale's position, that the new entrants guideline should not apply to them. This is a guideline that applies to communities that were never policed by the RCMP, and the town of Coaldale was in fact policed by the RCMP for many decades. With and through the member's advocacy I plan to raise this issue with the Minister of Public Safety Canada to urge the

federal government to reverse this unfair policy and how it's being attributed to the town of Coaldale.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Minister, for your answer.

Given that article 4.1, subarticle 4.3, of the provincial police service agreement states that “the Provincial Minister may, by giving notice in writing to the Federal Minister, include . . . any geographical area” in the police service agreement, would the minister be willing to add Coaldale into the province's police service agreement so that they only have to pay 70 per cent of costs?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Shandro: Yeah. This is an interesting request, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me just start off by saying that we agree with Coaldale's position that it's unfair to apply the new entrants guideline to a town of 8,700 people. We are looking into seriously considering Coaldale's request, that the member has mentioned, regarding article 4. It was wonderful to be able to have the opportunity to meet with the town of Coaldale along with the hon. member, during which they made this request. We'll be looking into that and trying to see if this is an opportunity we might have in further bringing up this with the federal minister.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that Coaldale has been trying to talk or meet with the federal government to work through this issue for eight long years now and given that all they have gotten are crickets and roadblocks from the federal government, how would a made-in-Alberta provincial police strategy be more effective for Coaldale's policing needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this situation does underscore why Alberta's government has been studying the feasibility of establishing a provincial police service here in the province. We have a responsibility to explore how a new policing model could improve public safety and provide more effective policing for everyone in the province no matter where they live. While no decision has been made, we recognize the need to speak to people across Alberta with a significant interest in the issue such as Indigenous communities and municipalities before determining next steps.

Collection of Race-based Data

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, last week B.C. announced their plans to begin collecting race-based data to identify which populations are being underserved by government programs such as health care, the corrections system, education, and social assistance. This is something racialized groups have been calling for. My colleague the MLA for Edmonton-City Centre introduced a bill to answer these calls, and this government voted it down. Why is this government refusing to listen to Albertans and voting against the first step, to collect race-based data?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We welcome the intent of the proposed legislation to better understand the realities of racialized Albertans

and to remove systemic barriers they face. We plan to address the challenges of racism, including the collection of race-based data, through more efficient and collaborative methods and in a way that considers Alberta's privacy law.

Mr. Deol: Given that you voted against the bill, given that other provinces are now starting to introduce legislation to collect race-based data to better meet the needs of racialized communities who face discrimination in both policy and their daily lives, and given that during the months of consultations with Albertans that my colleagues conducted, the first step that was identified was to collect the data, why is this government intent on making sure Albertans fall behind other provinces and voting down change-making policy?

The Speaker: The hon. Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member for the question. The recommendation that we had from the Alberta Anti-Racism Advisory Council had been worked on, and we're trying to find a way to address the issues properly. The antiracism action plan, currently under development, includes commitments for Alberta's government to collect and analyze race-based data in order to identify and address inequalities in our province.

Mr. Deol: Given that the B.C. legislation introduced was developed in partnership with the First Nations Leadership Council and Métis Nation B.C. – and this government has a terrible record of consulting and partnering with groups on policy and legislation – and given that multiple professors and experts agree that the collection of race-based data is the first step in addressing systemic racism, which is often caused by policies, practices, and procedures that appear neutral on paper, why does this government refuse to do their job and listen to Albertans who are calling for change?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. We are doing the work. In fact, we have done so much more work than the NDP did in four years. Between 2015 and 2019, you know, they should have gotten to deal with racism, discrimination, and systemic racism. In particular, the collection of race-based data is a complex one that requires adequate consultation. I am proud of the work that the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism is going to be doing to make sure that we fully consult members of the community. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall wants to ask another question, I encourage him to get back on the list.

Postsecondary Staff Associations and Bill 17

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Labour and Immigration brought forward a bill that contains changes to the labour code that no one saw coming. Bill 17 makes temporary exemptions to the labour code that were set to expire for postsecondary staff associations for July 1 and makes them permanent. This was a surprise to postsecondary students and staff that will be impacted by these changes. Can the Minister of Advanced Education please tell us: why would he sign off on changes that negatively impact thousands of his stakeholders without checking with them first?

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. You know, when you listen to the members opposite ask these questions, I mean, you would think that they should know what they're talking about. This was a change that they actually brought in in 2017, and it was set to expire on July 1, 2022. We consulted with the stakeholders, and they have indicated that we need to make that particular change, that was brought in by the NDP in 2017, permanent. That's exactly what we have done.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that amendments to Bill 17 will remove the ability for impacted workers to decide for themselves, starting July 1, who undertakes the bargaining on their behalf and given that this bill now takes away those choices from those workers while allowing for an increase in power for the employers, can the same minister please explain why he believes that the employers of these workers have the right to decide how they exercise their bargaining rights but the workers do not?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, again, this was a change that was brought in by the NDP in 2017, that they have been working with since 2017. They have come to us to say: we would want this to be permanent because it working; we should maintain the status quo. We do not want to upset something that's already working, and therefore we heeded their request to make it permanent.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that if Bill 17 passes in its current form, thousands of faculty, graduate students, and postdoctoral students will not be able to decide for themselves who represents them in collective bargaining and given that in other Canadian jurisdictions these same workers have robust labour rights and the right to choose, can the same minister please tell the Assembly how he plans to attract the best and brightest to teach and learn in Alberta when he's attacking their wages, silencing their voices, and doing all he can to actually drive them away?

Mr. Madu: Mr. Speaker, given the expertise and understanding of the issues faced by their members, academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellow associations will continue to represent their members because they have built a great deal of expertise between 2017 and now. It is good for them. It is good for their students. I do want to thank those faculty associations and those institutions and the leaders of our universities that reached out to us to say: we want this to be permanent. I'm happy that we were able to deliver that to them.

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

Women in STEM and Skilled Trades Careers

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If this government is to continue to repair the economy after the disastrous NDP, all genders must have an equal opportunity to participate in this economy, yet women participating in STEM still face a landscape filled with systemic barriers. If there's any hope of our economy recovering fully once again, we must break down those barriers. To the Associate Minister of Status of Women: what is this government doing to ensure systemic barriers are removed and to ensure women can fully participate in STEM fields?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we know that the province's economic recovery will require an educated, skilled workforce. Upskilling and reskilling for Alberta women will be an important part of that recovery. We have announced \$1 million in

bursary programs to ensure that more women have the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education in STEM programs: Bow Valley College in Calgary, NorQuest College in Edmonton, and Yellowhead Tribal College in Edmonton. We've also tripled the funding for the women's economic challenge grant, and that's for a total of \$3.6 million to enhance economic opportunities for women . . .

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her answer. Given that trades play a vital role within the Alberta economy and are vital to our day-to-day lives and given that women were historically discriminated against when participating in and learning the trades, to the same associate minister: what does this government plan to do to ensure full participation in the trades for Alberta women free from discrimination?

The Speaker: The hon. the associate minister.

2:40

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we're really proud that we've allocated 2 and a half million dollars to Women Building Futures to achieve three goals: first, to address the growing shortage of skilled tradespeople in Alberta; second, we're empowering women to pursue rewarding careers in industries where women are traditionally underrepresented; and third, this investment recognizes that apprenticeship learning and skilled trades have every bit as much value, merit, and worth as a university degree. We also put a million dollars, as I said, into bursary programs. Bow Valley College and NorQuest College will both receive \$400,000 and Yellowhead Tribal College \$200,000. These bursaries will cover tuition fees and all wraparound services.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Amery: Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. minister. Given that STEM and trades fields have been historically dominated by men and given that there are numerous reports of women being bullied, harassed, and abused when participating in STEM and trades training and given that this government has already stated that they have a strong mandate to stop gender-based discrimination, to the same minister: what is this government planning to do to ensure women are protected from gender-based discrimination when participating in the trades and STEM?

Ms Issik: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, in February Advanced Education and Status of Women co-announced 2 and a half million dollars in one-time grants to assist postsecondary institutions in updating their campus sexual violence policies and to develop a survey. Other than the provincial survey, funds can also be used to support and develop training programs, including sensitivity training programs for individuals involved in the complaint process. Alberta's government is committed to supporting all survivors of sexual assault and shifting to a culture that prevents violence from happening in the first place.

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to present the committee's final report on Bill 206, Prohibiting Ownership of Agricultural Lands (Pension Plans and Trust Corporations) Act, sponsored by the Member for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock. This bill was referred to the committee on April 28, 2022. The report recommends that Bill 206 proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 206.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the motion for concurrence in the report on Bill 206, Prohibiting Ownership of Agricultural Lands (Pension Plans and Trust Corporations) Act, is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members wishing to speak to the motion for concurrence? If so, please rise. I have noted a member who would like to speak to concurrence, which will now take place on the next available Monday.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Are there tablings? It looks like the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre may be rising.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce and table on behalf of the Friends of Medicare, members of which join us in the gallery today, a petition containing nearly 2,000 signatures calling on the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to immediately reverse the privatization of Alberta Precision Laboratories and to instead expand its duties and responsibilities for providing lab services publicly under Alberta Health Services.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have another tabling here for a person who had a vaccine injury. Actually, this one resulted in a death. Karen Burkart and her family are still waiting for autopsy reports for their son Tyler, 35 years old, six months later.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the Assembly that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of hon. Mr. Glubish, Minister of Service Alberta, responses to questions raised by Mr. Loewen, hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley, March 7, 2022, Ministry of Service Alberta 2022-23 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At 2:15 the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order

Insulting Language

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order, citing Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). At the time you noted just a moment ago, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview was asking a question, directing it to the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, and at the time in her question, which was written on the paper, didn't appear to be ad libbed by any stretch of the imagination, the member said very clearly – and I do not need the benefit of the Blues; I have the benefit of pen and paper and memory – “[Will] the minister grow up.” Now, this is wildly inappropriate language, to say something so unparliamentary in this Chamber. These kinds of insults I don't believe have a place in the

people's Chamber, and I would ask that that member apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader to respond.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe this is a matter of debate. The turn of phrase “grow up” has never been ruled unparliamentary. In fact, in searching the Speaker's ruling database, I found that on April 16, 2008, the then Speaker told a member to “grow up,” because it is a common turn of phrase when someone is engaging in childish, mean-spirited behaviour, which the minister who was being introduced did when he trolled on Twitter a Calgary city councillor about issues of homelessness, mental illness, and fatal drug poisonings happening under his watch. Given that the Deputy Government House Leader has argued that it is a matter of debate when his ministers suggest that the opposition cannot read, I also suggest that it's incredibly thin-skinned of him to call a point of order on this. I believe it's a matter of debate, and I look forward to your ruling.

The Speaker: Are there others?

I am prepared to rule, and I do have the benefit of the Blues. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview said the following:

Given that this minister's failure to act has made Calgary less safe for everyone, can the minister grow up, knock it off with the mean tweets . . . [and] take action to address the crises he has created in Calgary?

While I agree that this phrase was directed solely at the minister and while I would agree that this type of language is unlikely to raise the level of decorum or assist in the level of debate here in the Assembly, I'm not sure that such a phrase rises to the level of a point of order. But I might remind members that what isn't unparliamentary today could be unparliamentary tomorrow depending on the way in which it is used. Ensuring that all members do not receive my ruling as a carte blanche opportunity to go around telling people to grow up – I think that if we focus on raising the level of decorum, all members and all Albertans will be well served. I consider this matter dealt with and concluded.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 17

Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: We are on amendment A1. Are there members wishing to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise in Committee of the Whole and speak to the amendment that was put forward by the government to Bill 17. For those who are following right now or maybe didn't catch debate earlier in committee, this bill seeks to amend the provisions around bereavement leave, and specifically it indicates that bereavement leave will be available in the event that the pregnancy of an employee ends other than as a result of a live birth or the pregnancy of the employee's spouse or common-law partner ends other than a result of a live birth. Then

there's another provision as well, but I want to focus my comments on those two subsections, (b) and (c), of the government amendment.

2:50

I want to begin by saying that, you know, I do appreciate that this amendment – we've heard very clearly statements from the minister and from government members that they intend for this amendment to include abortion and terminations for medical reasons. I am pleased to hear that firm commitment from the government, that they do support bereavement leave for women and gender-diverse folks who have had an abortion or a termination for medical reasons as well as, of course, the other circumstances, stillbirth and miscarriage. This is a really important change.

Now, it does feel to me, Madam Chair, that there was an opportunity to be more specific in the language, and it does not surprise me that this government may be very deliberately trying to avoid using the word "abortion" in legislation. We know that that is a very divisive topic among the government members, and it feels like this is perhaps a way to try to avoid specifically using the word "abortion," but we know that it now will apply to abortion. While we think it would have been better to be clearer and more specific in the language, certainly the clarity that has been provided by the government members, that this language will ensure that employees who have experienced stillbirth, miscarriage, an abortion, and termination for medical reasons will be covered by the three days of unpaid job-protected bereavement leave, is very important indeed.

You know, I shared in this House the story of my own pregnancy losses and mentioned, of course, the statistics that many of us are aware of, which is that this is actually incredibly common, as is abortion, Madam Chair. We need to be very clear that this is – actually, 12,000 women in Alberta in 2020 had an abortion. This is a significant number of individuals and Albertans. While pregnancy loss is often not spoken of very clearly, it is important to realize that it does touch the lives of many, many Albertans, so we need to be clear and inclusive in our language. We've been consistent on this side of the House as members of the opposition in pushing this government to use inclusive language and to make sure that we are capturing all circumstances of pregnancy loss. I think that that's very important to note, that not only did the members of the Official Opposition do that, but of course Albertans were speaking out about that and wanted that clarity.

I also want to give credit to many of the stakeholders, including Aditi Loveridge with the pregnancy loss and infant care centre, who has been a very clear advocate and worked very carefully with all members to try to get the best language possible. I understand that the stakeholders believe that this is clear, that it will cover abortion, that it will cover termination for medical reasons, and for that reason we believe that, you know, we can support this amendment.

I also want to take this moment, though, Madam Chair, because we have heard some statements from the members on the government side who did not want to talk about abortion. In fact, we heard those statements from the Premier. We heard it, shockingly, from the Associate Minister of Status of Women, who, I believe, had declared at some point that she was actually pro choice yet was very reluctant and seemed to be contemptuous of discussing abortion in this House and called it a divisive issue and that perhaps it was wedge politics that was being played. I am certain we heard those same comments from the minister of labour. I had the opportunity to review *Hansard* from yesterday. I was not surprised but once again disappointed in the tone from the minister of labour.

But this is a very good example of why we have to continue to be vigilant about reproductive rights. You know, Albertans, Canadians, North Americans, people across the world were shocked by what's going on in the United States, that it appears to be evident that the decision in *Roe versus Wade* will be overturned by the Supreme Court in just a few weeks' time. What that will mean is that thousands, millions, actually, of women in the United States will lose access to abortion, and it will be a shocking reversal of years of progress on women's rights and women's reproductive health rights. To say that this is not an issue that affects Albertans and Canadians simply because we're a different country was so devoid of contact with reality, Madam Chair, that it was shocking. I mean, you could see the outpouring from Canadians and Albertans. Most importantly, the message was to be vigilant – to be vigilant – because we cannot take anything for granted.

In fact, what we have to be really clear about is that we don't actually have – we can't sit here in Canada, we can't sit here in Alberta and say that we have fantastic access to abortion in this country. In fact, we've all now seen the data which shows how far women across this country and in Alberta, particularly in rural Alberta, have to travel to access abortion. Yes, it has been decriminalized in Canada. That does not mean, by the way, Madam Chair, that it's the same thing as it's legal in Canada to seek an abortion, to have an abortion. It's been decriminalized, meaning there's no law on paper making it illegal or criminal. However, provinces hold significant power, through their responsibilities for health care, to limit or to expand access to abortion services. So we cannot be smug here in Alberta or in Canada about access to abortion rights, because it's clear that thousands of Alberta women have abortions and struggle to have access to them.

We know that there were steps that the former NDP government took to make that better, which included, you know, passing bubble legislation to make a protective zone around those spaces so women weren't being harassed to go to an abortion and seek what they're entitled to as their reproductive health rights. I'm proud that the NDP government did that. Of course, we saw the UCP members. Albertans – I was in Alberta; I was not an MLA at that time – watched every single UCP member at that time run out of this House to avoid having to talk about it. That's why we need to be vigilant in this House, because that's the party that's now government.

I'm also incredibly proud of the fact that the former NDP government made available Mifegymiso – I always struggle with the pronunciation, but I got it – which actually significantly expands access to abortion services for women who may not be able to travel. That was really important because it's a medication that could be accessed. That's incredibly important. I know we still have a lot of work to do to make sure that pharmacies make that drug available. Again, I'm going to go back to comments made by Dr. Emma Herrington about the limited understanding of pharmacies to actually make that drug available, but that's an important step. Again, we have members of the government who don't want to talk about abortion, who don't want to talk about the limited access, and who actually want – when they were, you know, in opposition, they actually ran away from discussion around protecting women who are seeking abortion services. So we have to be vigilant.

Not only do we have to be vigilant about protecting the rights that we have right now for abortion, but we actually have to work very hard to make sure that we're expanding access to abortion rights. Yes, when a piece of legislation is before this House – originally, Bill 17 was silent and actually not just silent; it actually limited bereavement leave to only stillbirth and miscarriage. This government was content at that time to say that employees, women and gender-diverse folks, who had experienced an abortion would just have to ask their employer for it.

I'm glad that we were vigilant, that Albertans were vigilant, that the stakeholders were and said: no; that is not good enough. We need to make sure that anybody who has had an abortion can also seek bereavement leave because if you look at the purpose behind bereavement leave, it's actually around recognizing what the women or the gender-diverse folk are experiencing. It is loss, and it is complicated. There are medical complications, but there's grief, there's anxiety, there is relief, Madam Chair. I want to be clear that not all abortions, pregnancy loss are the feelings – I don't think we do a good service to women when we pretend there's only one response to that experience. Women have complicated responses to pregnancy loss. Some may be grateful. Some may be relieved. Some may be heartbroken. Some may be devastated. But the fact is that we're talking about bereavement leave for these women because we recognize that this is about them.

So, too, is abortion. Abortion is women's rights. Abortion is women's health rights. It is reproductive rights. It's a human right. So we have to be vigilant to make sure we are being inclusive of that at all times.

The opportunity to make sure that this legislation better reflects the experiences of women and the very complicated circumstances in which they may experience pregnancy loss: it is important to be specific, and it is important that we continue to push and to challenge to make sure that women's health rights and reproductive health rights are protected and expanded. I know that I sit with a number of my colleagues in saying that we will be vigilant, but we will also work to make it better. We will also work to ensure that more women, more gender-diverse people have access to reproductive health rights wherever they live in this province. By doing that, Madam Chair, we're making sure that we truly are the inclusive society that we all want Alberta to be.

3:00

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this amendment. I appreciate that it is going to ensure that women who have had an abortion, had a termination for medical reasons, experienced a stillbirth or a miscarriage or a pregnancy loss of any kind are covered by bereavement leave. This is about human decency. It's about compassion. It's about human rights. I'm glad that we were vigilant and that we stood up for these women and those who have experienced pregnancy loss.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Chair. It feels like we didn't even leave on this one, and I mean that, actually, in a respectful way because it's been actually a really important opportunity, I think, to be able to talk about, you know, these really important, pressing issues in the Legislature.

I want to start my remarks by just expressing my sincere gratitude. I'll start with my colleagues because they're right near me: my colleague from Edmonton-Whitemud, who just spoke and who multiple times in this Chamber shared her own story of pregnancy loss, and, too, my colleague from St. Albert, who has been an absolute, you know, crusader when it comes to speaking out on reproductive rights. Many years ago, I believe, she first shared her story in the Legislature of accessing abortion, and I was proud that she was willing to share that again just yesterday. And to all my colleagues: the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, of course, for the work that she and our colleagues who were in government did to expand access to Mifegymiso, bubble-zone legislation. I

mean, these are all key pieces that have very much advanced reproductive rights in this province.

More importantly than us – I just wanted to mention all of us because they were very fresh in my mind; I don't want to miss anyone – of course, are the folks who have been advocating. You know, I'll name some of the recent people in my mind, but I just think about people who have been on the front lines of this debate – right? – women and men. I can think of some strong women who have been protesting the right to choose for so long. We have a debt of gratitude to all those who've come before us.

But I must, of course, also point out, you know, as has been said a few times, Aditi Loveridge, who, as we all know, worked with this government and spoke with us as well multiple times. She's the head of the Pregnancy, Infant & Child Loss Support Centre. I promised I would get the name of her organization correct today because I'm certain I got it wrong yesterday.

And, yeah, I mean, I will say it, too: the Member for Sherwood Park, who started this conversation through a private member's bill. We went back and forth quite a bit on that committee, and I appreciate that he was willing to take that on as a private member because, as he knows and we all know, your opportunity to get a private member's bill is a rare one, right? I've not had the chance yet. You know, I know that many of my colleagues haven't either. So I commend that.

I just, you know, will share or I will, I guess, reiterate, actually, some of the comments from the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, who, somewhat hypocritically, went on a fairly long conversation about the importance of private members' bills as well. Again, I appreciated her comments, but it's really disappointing when private members' bills from our side of the House are continually throttled at the committee level, particularly when I think about the most recent one on race-based data. That's really tough for us.

But let me get back to this amendment in front of us because I see the chair giving me a look. I appreciate that. You know what? I will give the labour minister props as well for being willing to work with Aditi and other stakeholders and being willing to put forth an amendment that addresses the significant concerns that we had.

So we'll move beyond that a little bit. I want to just talk a little bit about what we heard in the Chamber yesterday, so I may have to move a little bit away from collegiality here. My apologies, but I've got to get it on the record. We do have the minister saying – because, as I questioned, I queried multiple times in the Chamber yesterday prior to the minister providing clarifying remarks, we wanted it to be absolutely clear that without all forms of pregnancy loss named, you know, including miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, termination for medical reasons – we wanted to ensure that this amendment would be inclusive of that, and the labour minister said: "Yes." I'm quoting *Hansard* directly. "Abortion, termination for medical reasons, and a number of other reasons," and he goes on to say: "There are much more circumstances under which women can need these procedures, so we want to make sure that they are not limited whatsoever."

I appreciate that although I do want to point out something that many stakeholders have said as well. We want to really ensure as well – and I talked about this yesterday. We are all learning. I don't think anybody here would claim to be an expert. I make mistakes in my language all the time. But just being more inclusive, to not just talk about women accessing abortion but also who's impacted – right? – even going back to the MLA for Sherwood Park's private member's bill, it's important that we talk about if there is a partner involved as well and the impact on that person, too.

Now, what’s troubling and what I need to get on the record today is the fact that that same minister then went on to talk about how this is classic NDP politics, identity politics, politics of division, that sort of thing, that we are “hung up on the word ‘abortion.’” You better believe we’re hung up on the word “abortion,” and Roe versus Wade, the looming overturning of Roe versus Wade, has made this conversation even more important and even more critical. Absolutely, we are hung up because we know how slippery the slope can be when it comes to rights being attacked, and we have to look no further than this UCP government to see rights being rolled back.

This was the same UCP government that in 2019 became the first provincial government in Canada to roll back 2SLGBTQ-plus rights with the pushing through of Bill Hate, Bill 8, and that’s a fact. So absolutely, we’re concerned. This is the same government that allowed Bill 207 to proceed. Some of them, of course, will say: well, we voted against it. But we know for a fact that there are members on the record supporting conscience rights legislation that would disproportionately impact women, queer, and trans folks accessing health care, and the number of stories I heard from Albertans during that debate, heartbreaking stories of queer and trans folks being denied health care all across this province, heartbreaking stories of women being denied birth control, at that time, in 2019, being denied from their health care provider a prescription for birth control – and don’t even get me started on the heartbreaking stories we heard about abortion access. We’ve shared a lot of those today.

I shared some stories yesterday from an abortion doula, Autumn Reinhardt-Simpson, who does amazing work all across this province trying to support folks who are trying to access an abortion. The stories are real, and they are happening across this province, and if anybody on that side of the House doesn’t believe that abortion access is an issue, let’s sit down. Let’s talk. Autumn has countless stories that she is willing to share with all of you. You know what? We could even drive to some of these communities and talk to people.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but if you could direct your comments through the chair, that would be great.

Member Irwin: Absolutely, Chair. Sorry; I get a little passionate about this when I’m being told I’m being divisive because it seems to me that being divisive sounds a whole lot like standing up for human rights. All right. So we need to get that on the record.

I very much need to just ensure once more from this amendment and the comments by the minister: this leave will cover abortion; no person will have to disclose to their employer why they need this leave beyond the loss of pregnancy. As was clearly outlined yesterday, we do not want people who are in one of their most difficult times to have to beg and justify why they are accessing bereavement leave. I want all members of this Assembly to support this. This is what this vote is about, to include all forms of pregnancy loss.

3:10

We want to ensure as well that when, you know, the government updates their websites, when the government takes on ensuring that there is education about the changes, those are clear, that it’s clearly specified for Albertans how they will access this bereavement leave and that all forms of pregnancy loss are included. We don’t want anyone to have to be navigating websites and reading through fine print; we want it to be absolutely clear.

My closing comment is that, you know, it’s been clear from this government that they’re not interested in supporting and uplifting

reproductive rights, that they’ve got a Premier who is unwilling to even utter the words “abortion,” let alone “reproductive rights” or even “women,” for that matter. Albertans need a Premier and a government who understand these issues, who stand with women, who stand with gender-diverse folks, and they’ll find that in an NDP government.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others wishing to join the debate on amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:12 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|---------|--------------|-----------------|
| Amery | Issik | Savage |
| Ceci | Jones | Shandro |
| Dach | LaGrange | Shepherd |
| Deol | Lovely | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Ellis | Madu | Singh |
| Fir | Nielsen | Smith |
| Frey | Nixon, Jason | Stephan |
| Getson | Orr | Toor |
| Glubish | Pancholi | Turton |
| Gray | Panda | Walker |
| Hoffman | Pon | Wilson |
| Horner | Renaud | Yao |
| Hunter | Rosin | Yaseen |
| Irwin | | |

Totals: For – 40 Against – 0

[Motion on amendment A1 carried unanimously]

The Chair: We are back on the main bill, Bill 17, Committee of the Whole, obviously, with no amendments before us. Are there any members that wish to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I’m pleased to rise to join in the debate on Bill 17 at Committee of the Whole. I had an opportunity to speak to this bill briefly at second reading. At that time, knowing that Bill 17 does three things: reservists’ leave, a change to employment standards; bereavement leave, a change to employment standards; and then an amendment to the Labour Relations Code that impacts, specifically, academic staff, graduate students’ associations, and postdoctoral fellows’ associations, at second reading I raised some concerns about that third section but also wanted to have the opportunity to talk to stakeholders to find out more about those impacted and their thoughts.

During debate in question period today the minister of labour said that stakeholders had been consulted on changes in the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. What the changes do is that they give exclusive bargaining rights, they lock those in, for the associations that currently manage them. They were set to expire on July 1. These bargaining rights were put in place after a Supreme Court decision in 2015 because, of course, prior to that, many public servants and those in the academic world were denied the right to strike. So the government of the day, the NDP government, needed to

respond to that Supreme Court ruling and return the right to strike, freedom of association, and other worker rights to public-sector staff, which they did in 2016, and then also in the academic setting, which came separately in 2017, taking additional time to consult with those impacted at the time.

3:30

Even during that consultation time, since about 2015, it's been known that the right to associate and to strike was coming in these different work environments. Now, when it was implemented by the NDP in 2017, exclusive bargaining rights were put in place for a period of five years set to expire on July 1, specifically because this was a new strike lockout regime. It was a time of serious change. There were concerns about the associations, faculty associations for example, being surprised by perhaps a lockout or being surprised by changing of bargaining agents at a time when they hadn't had a chance to get their feet under them. For these reasons, a temporary exclusivity on bargaining rights was put in place.

That was set to expire on July 1, and this was something the stakeholders were all very aware of. With this change in Bill 17 the exclusive bargaining rights are going to be left in indefinitely. Now, in second reading I talked about some of the potential challenges with that given the impact on Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, specifically the freedom of association. I also said during second reading that we wanted to go away, talk a little bit more to those impacted, and what we have found is that not one of the major university graduate student associations or postdoctoral associations, including their labour relations committees, was consulted on this change. Quite a few of them are very, very concerned and upset because they had already started thinking about what would happen following July 1. There are also some major faculty associations in the province who do not support the changes in Bill 17.

So while we are in Committee of the Whole and we have the opportunity to ask questions and to pop up and down, I'm hoping to find out more about the consultation that was done. When I realized that CAFA and all of the major university graduate student associations and postdoctoral associations were telling us that they were not consulted, that is a matter of serious concern to me, Madam Chair. Removing the expiration and putting in exclusive bargaining rights indefinitely denies freedom of association and very likely makes this section of changes to the Labour Relations Code against Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms and against the rulings that were originally made that the NDP government was responding to, specifically rulings from the 2015 case that the RCMP brought against the federal government. That RCMP case affirmed the rights that are so important.

Right now what the government is saying with this change is that they know best who should represent these workers. I submit to you, Madam Chair, that I and Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms believe strongly that workers know best and workers should be able to choose who represents them. A point I would like to remake that I made at second reading is that even with the exclusive bargaining rights coming off, there's nothing to force these workers to change who their bargaining agent is. It just gives the workers the choice, the choice for what makes sense for them. To be very clear, academically employed students work in a very different-looking environment than many other workers, but they are workers, and they should have this right. I believe that the section in Bill 17 that removes this right would not be Charter compliant based off of previous Supreme Court rulings and based off of what the Charter says about freedom of association.

Now, a lot of these workers are now tuning in to this debate with a great deal of concern given they were not consulted on the changes, so I would like to read into the record just a small piece of that Supreme Court decision I mentioned, regarding the RCMP, brought against the federal government. In the Supreme Court decision there's a section specifically about "choice and independence are inherent to the nature and purpose of collective bargaining." Section 86. I think it is incredibly important for the debate that's happening here and the impact this will have on graduate student associations and postdoctoral fellow associations as well as faculty associations or academic staff. Within bargaining the Supreme Court ruling reads:

Hallmarks of employee choice in this context include the ability to form and join new associations, to change representatives, to set and change collective workplace goals, and to dissolve existing associations. Employee choice may lead to a diversity of associational structures and to competition between associations, but it is a form of exercise of freedom of association that is essential to the existence of employee organizations and to the maintenance of the confidence of members in them.

I have to emphasize, Madam Chair. The Supreme Court was incredibly clear that being able to form and join new associations, being able to change representatives, dissolve existing associations is a form of exercise of the freedom of association, and it is essential.

Bill 17 is removing that, taking these rights away from the workers and giving more rights to the employers. To be very clear, particularly grad students and postdoctoral students work under extreme power dynamics. Workers and employers have a power imbalance to begin with, but when it comes to grad students and postdoctoral students, it's even more torqued.

I certainly want to ask the minister about his consultation process and why we are hearing that graduate student associations and postdoctoral associations have been surprised by this change and were not consulted, particularly given this being a violation of labour rights of freedom of association and associations being put in a precarious position where decisions that they are being forced to make are being made by the government and not by the workers themselves.

I think that this section of Bill 17 removes the rights of workers to choose who represents them, and major stakeholders do not support it. To continue this discussion and to focus our comments on this particular section of Bill 17, at this point, Madam Chair, I would like to introduce an amendment.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A2.

Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Can I get a time check?

The Chair: You have just under 11 minutes.

Ms Gray: Eleven minutes. Great. Thank you very much.

The amendment I've introduced is that I move that Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended by striking out section 2. To be clear, section 2 is the section that changes the Labour Relations Code. My proposal with this amendment is to very seriously remove this change from this piece of legislation based off of the feedback that the Official Opposition has heard from the thousands of workers who are graduate students, who are postdoctoral students, and some of them faculty, who are concerned about this change and who were not consulted on this change and do want the right to decide who represents them in bargaining.

What we've heard clearly is that these workers want that option to associate with other associations and increase their bargaining power. They do not support this change. There is clear precedent in the Supreme Court of Canada that the government cannot limit the freedoms of workers when it comes to collective bargaining.

Now, the question may be asked: if this is so terrible, then why did the NDP government lock in exclusive bargaining provisions? I would suggest that it was done on good advice and for good reason, but it was also done for a temporary period of time. It expiring was what allowed it to continue. It would not cause a Charter challenge because it was temporary given the new strike lockout regime. By removing this, I think that the government will experience Charter challenges for this section. I think it's incumbent upon the government to pass constitutional pieces of legislation.

3:40

Now, what this amendment does is it just takes this section out and removes the changes. It remains in place that there would be an expiry on July 1 and gives those workers that opportunity to choose on that date, July 1, 2022. Of course, the change was never intended to be permanent.

Within section 2, that is being stricken with this amendment, the government is not just looking to remove the deadline; they're looking to permanently limit the rights of workers while giving freedom to the employers and allowing those employers to band together to form employer organizations. As part of the debate on this – allow me to repeat for the record – I'd love to know more about the consultation and particularly if graduate students and postdoctoral fellow associations were actually consulted with. They tell us clearly that they were not. Secondly, why is there a change allowing employers to form employer organizations without a related or relational change to allow the student associations, the worker associations the same rights? I hope the government might be able to tell us that.

They have in their term in government interfered with bargaining of collective agreements. We certainly heard that that resulted in the strike in Lethbridge. Some associations have been unable to reach collective agreements because of secret bargaining mandates set by the UCP. We want our academically employed students, who are workers – really, our priority is that we want them to be able to focus on the work that they do. It's difficult for them when they are not labour relations experts, when there is high turnover, to have this responsibility. For some of them, they are interested in exploring other options and exercising those bargaining rights and exercising the right to freedom of association.

I have introduced this amendment, which removes section 2. I would ask to find out more about the consultation the minister has done. I would ask the minister to reflect on the Supreme Court decisions that have made clear that employee choice is critical when it comes to collective bargaining, including the choice to change representatives, and for what reason that would be removed from graduate student associations, postdoctoral associations, and faculty given the Supreme Court's very clear rulings. Then, of course, why is there within section 2 the allowance for employers to band together to form employer organizations without the same being offered for workers and worker associations?

These are some of my big questions. But, generally speaking, I think that this amendment is a good one and would improve Bill 17. It would remove the labour statutes piece, allow Bill 17 to implement the reservists' leave and the bereavement leave that have been discussed heavily in this place. Voting for this amendment would allow Bill 17 to move forward as a constitutional piece of

legislation that would not likely be challenged. I think it makes sense to remove the section that violates freedom of association.

With those introductory comments on this amendment, Madam Chair, I will take my seat. I look forward to debate on this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for her debate on Bill 17. I can say for sure that I do not support the amendment that she has put forward for the simple reason that it would defeat the purpose of that aspect of Bill 17 that is before the floor of this Assembly. I think this is one of those amendments that, in my view, are ill-conceived because it presupposes that the amendment that is put forward before the floor of this Assembly should not be. You don't just put forward a brand new piece of legislation without it being thought through or consulted on or making sure that it would meet the intention for which the amendment was put forward in the first place.

Second, it identifies a problem which requires a legislative solution. That's exactly what Bill 17, all of Bill 17, all of the components of Bill 17, is meant to accomplish. The amendment proposed, again, by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods would not permit bargaining agent exclusivity for academic staff, postsecondary students, and postdoctoral fellow associations beyond July 1, 2022. It will permit postsecondary institutions to have employer organizations as of July 1, 2022, as scheduled in the current legislation.

Madam Chair, I've listened to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods talk about the Supreme Court of Canada's decision and the Charter concerns and all of those things. I can assure this Assembly that those concerns are absolutely ill-founded, have no business whatsoever. As currently drafted, Bill 17 grants academic staff, graduate student, and postdoctoral fellow associations the exclusive right to represent their members indefinitely to preserve the status quo at postsecondary institutions. It recognizes associations' expertise and experience in representing their members and that they have existing relationships with the postsecondary institutions. They have that right to be represented by their own – their own – association. That is exactly what is going on here.

In 2017, as I indicated earlier today, the members opposite introduced that change that grants academic staff, grad student, and postdoctoral fellow associations that exclusive right to represent themselves. We are not asking them to be represented by somebody else. It was the same people, the same staff. It is their association that is representing them. If the concerns raised in 2017 that led to that introduction in 2017 were a concern then, they are still a concern now. The only difference is that there was in 2017 a requirement that it would expire. This amendment would effectively allow that to expire and, you know, then bring uncertainty and confusion into our postsecondary institutions. We have heard from them that there is stability right now. At this point in time there is no reason whatsoever to upset the status quo. I have not heard anyone out there who says that we need to upset the current arrangement.

In fact, I have heard from some faculty associations who have been to my office thanking me for bringing forward this amendment. But, obviously, you know, Madam Chair, in matters of this nature, especially when you are dealing with the potential for different unions or bargaining agents to jostle for who represents a particular set of employees, there are bound to be differences in opinion. That is all right. That's why we are a democracy. That's why there are people who may not feel comfortable, who may not like that, but ultimately the role of government is stability, especially where there are no problems that require a dramatic overhaul.

It's an expiry date that has been removed to provide for exclusivity by the same people – the same people – that are part of that association. That was the request that was made by them to us, and we are honouring that request. I would urge all members of this Assembly and indeed my colleagues to vote down this amendment because it would defeat the purpose for which Bill 17 was put forward in the first place.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

3:50

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you. Just to briefly respond to the minister, you said that you had not heard from anyone opposed to this; you had heard from some faculty associations. One of the questions that I asked a few times in my remarks was: did you consult with graduate student associations or any postdoctoral fellow associations? Those associations are impacted by this legislation. They are made up of thousands of academically employed students, who are workers who have rights, and when we talked to them, they said that the government had not consulted them in any way, shape, or form. So we were the first people to talk to them when they are impacted by this. I do acknowledge that some faculty associations are supportive of exclusive bargaining rights indefinitely.

Secondly, I talked about the constitutionality of this change. Indefinite exclusive bargaining rights is a significant change and does make this likely unconstitutional because it locks this in permanently. When the change was put in place in 2017, there was a temporary exclusivity that was set to expire, and that expiry was incredibly important. You also talked about the associations having the experience and the expertise to do this work. That is without question, but workers should have the right to choose, and that is called freedom of association. Bill 17, with this change and should the amendment not be accepted, removes that right from those workers. I think that it's really important that it be flagged.

My follow-up questions to the minister are around consultation with graduate student associations and postdoctoral fellow associations. I have not heard of any such discussions and have specifically heard from those academically employed students that they do not support this, the unconstitutionality of locking in the exclusive bargaining rights given the Supreme Court rulings, some of which I have read into the record.

Finally, the question that I asked around employer associations and this section of Bill 17, which we proposed through the amendment to strike out: why does allowing those employer associations while not at the same time allowing an equivalent for the academically employed students or the workers make sense to the minister? That does not provide any balance and, on face value, does not make sense. I'd appreciate the minister's comments.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Happy to rise this afternoon and follow up on some of the comments that I've been hearing here in the debate. I'll thank my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods for bringing this amendment forward, which I very much agree with. To the minister's comments that it would allow the expiry date to go through: that's the exact point.

See, I've spent some time as a labour activist, you know, at least a couple of decades, and spent the past seven years in this Chamber fighting for hard-working Albertans and their labour rights, so I've seen some things happen, come and go over the years, as they say. I can sum it up with: the right for workers to choose their bargaining agent is right up there with their right to strike. For those that now

seem to be keeping score with regard to Supreme Court decisions as of late, both of those are Supreme Court decisions: the right to strike, the right to choose your bargaining agent.

Of course, I very much appreciate the history lesson that my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods did so that we understand how we've gotten here today. I know from my time serving on the bargaining committee of my own workplace before I was an MLA that one of the biggest advantages I found during that time was one of my work colleagues, who was also the shop steward over the course of about 25 years at that point and had attended probably the last – I can't even remember now – six or seven bargaining sessions at that time. It was very much interesting watching my first set of negotiations. The company would kind of try to say, "Well, this is what happened," and she would say: "No. I was there. I know what was discussed. I have my notes, and that's not correct." The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who just happened to serve during the NDP government as the labour minister, had to deal with the Supreme Court decisions around the right to strike.

Now all of a sudden you have workers who have never had an opportunity to be in a position to withdraw their labour in the event of a dispute. This was something that's never been explored by them because they were simply denied it. They had to figure out how this whole labour relations thing works; hence, the decision to put an expiry date on that legislation that was brought forward. It gave them the opportunity to start working with this process, figuring out how things work, how things don't, what you can do, what you can't. At the end of that term they could then have absolutely every freedom, just like every other worker had had for decades, around being able to choose their bargaining agent.

Now, I've always said that if the bargaining agent is doing their job, members will never want to leave. It's that simple. I'm not saying that I've never heard of members wanting to leave their union, because I certainly have. I've heard of it. I've heard of these people approaching the union that I was a part of, the UFCW. The first step, though, was to work with their union to try to figure out where their members feel they're dropping the ball. But the bottom line is that if that can't be resolved, you have the right to leave and to find another bargaining agent.

Now, if that happens, for any current contract language that you have, all bets are off. I absolutely understand that. I would certainly never recommend willy-nilly that somebody just go and do that, because you then place yourself potentially in a position of losing all of that that you've negotiated over however many years that's happened. That is the risk you take. It's a very significant risk. Members should never ever take that decision lightly, but they have the opportunity to do that.

Now, the language contained here in Bill 17 locks in that bargaining agent, period, for groups, as was mentioned – graduate student associations, postdoctoral associations, and labour relations committees – representing over 5,000 Alberta workers. I shouldn't have to lecture the labour minister on his duty to consult with these people. They're saying that you didn't. I can only come to one conclusion, then, Madam Chair, that someone's info on that subject is not entirely accurate. It's either that the student associations', the postdoctoral associations' info is not correct, or it's the labour minister's info that's not correct. It's one or the other. And seeing as how we've done our homework, we've talked to these associations, and they say that they were not consulted: pretty good chance, it sounds like they weren't. So you're making changes without their input. You're not doing your duty.

4:00

As you can imagine, I very much support this amendment because, in my experience, over these past decades, with regard to

labour relations, fighting for workers' rights to strike, to have good contract language, to choose their bargaining agent, if you pass this bill in this form, it will get challenged, and you'll lose. I'm telling you that right now. It will be challenged. You will lose, Minister.

Mr. Madu: No, we will not lose.

Mr. Nielsen: You will lose. I'm telling you that right now. I'm doing my best here to save you a whole bunch of aggravation, a whole bunch of time, and the province a bunch of money. We've seen too many of these kinds of decisions.

I'm sincerely hoping that the trip down memory lane from the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and former labour minister, who dealt with this whole subject as it unfolded, and my comments, my experience dealing with language – we can get into a whole debate about language with the labour minister another time and my concerns with his. He'll change his mind. He'll reconsider accepting this amendment, and he'll urge his colleagues to do the same, because you cannot deny workers' right to choose their bargaining agent. It was a temporary measure to allow a sector that's never had the ability to do these things before to get their feet underneath them, to understand what's involved, how they need to proceed, the rules, all of that stuff. Now they get to do it just like everybody else does right now. Everybody else gets to choose their bargaining agent. You can't deny these folks the ability to do that because – I'm telling you, Minister – you're going to lose on that one.

I hope you'll reconsider. I really do because, as I said, Bill 17 as a whole: there's some good stuff in there, you know, with reservists. Certainly, we can have that discussion of whether I would've liked to have seen stronger language around women's reproductive rights and have the word "abortion" in there. Again, I don't know why I have to continue to lecture you about language being clear and concise, especially to somebody who's a lawyer. You should understand the importance of that. I would've liked to have seen stronger language. This is a little bit watered down, but let's not make the mistake with this labour relations side, because that's what it is. It's a mistake.

I look forward to hearing some other comments from other people as we go along.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to address my colleague's amendment that's on the floor and to follow my colleague from Edmonton-*Decore*, who has a long association with this work around labour relations and organizing. It's really interesting to hear his views.

I want to focus on a couple of things. I want to focus on the lack of consultation that I think my colleague here spoke to eloquently, and I want to focus on the unconstitutionality of the government's actions.

You know, we've heard – and I'm pretty incredulous that the minister hasn't heard the same things that we have – that the changes proposed in this bill are not supported by the individuals that will be impacted by the removal of the expiration date to the exclusive right of academic staff associations and graduate student and postdoctoral fellow associations to choose their own bargaining representatives, bargaining agents. That is what we've heard, and I can't think of groups like graduate students and postgraduate students, people who are in many ways in a precarious situation in any event – they're working in an institution where they fully hope to graduate from someday, and it would seem already that there's a power imbalance. Their employer and the faculty in that situation have the power, the deans have the power to grant higher degrees to these people, the

people who are working towards them. So I think that we need to respect and listen to and understand what their challenge is with not having the ability to find their own bargaining agent.

I can't understand why it's not understood that this was a temporary measure put in, not a permanent measure. It had a sunset date. It was very much our plan to remove it so that it aligned with the Supreme Court views. That's what it was put there for, to give, as my colleague said, some opportunity for a relatively new group of people who are bargaining, organizing, to give them time to put their feet under them before any kind of competitions for the right to bargain for that group were launched.

Certainly, it makes a lot of sense to me that we would bring this amendment forward. We've heard from those impacted by this change, as we have said repeatedly, that they were not consulted. It will put them in a lesser situation than they currently are in, and the fact that their employer organizations are allowed to form a collective to bargain is also something that causes tremendous pressure, potential harm to those bargaining groups of graduate students, postgraduate students, and faculty throughout the province.

I went to the picket lines of Lethbridge faculty – I didn't have to go far; it was in Calgary – and I've never seen faculty of a university picketing their university, their employer. I've never seen that in this province. But under this government we are seeing that now. We are seeing people – and it was 15 to 20 below. It was in January, February, and there were people freezing out on the picket line in Calgary against the University of Lethbridge because of the actions that that employer was taking against them. That's on this government.

Madam Chair, the changes proposed by the government are not fair. They will not be upheld, my colleague who has spent a lot more time in that situation than I have tells me. My other colleague here who has worked as a labour critic, worked as a labour minister says that what the current minister is doing will not stand up.

4:10

What we've heard is that we're talking about 5,000 student workers. That's just the graduate student associations or postdoctoral associations. We believe this to be a violation of their labour rights and freedom of association. We believe what we did was transitional, not absolute in terms of always existing, and what the government is doing is doing that. This bill and the way it's written suggest that the government knows best what these groups of graduate students, postdoctoral students, and faculty need, and we don't believe that to be true. This government is also taking the side of the institutions and allowing them something that they're not allowing these students, these groups of students, university graduates' associations, other associations.

How is that constitutional? Well, it's not. The RCMP challenged the federal government about their own ability to get their own bargaining agent, and they won with the federal government. Speaking of the RCMP, I met several of those individuals as they were touring across the province on their RCMP tours to inform Albertans about the bad ideas not uncoincidentally brought forward by the now minister of labour, who was then the Minister of Justice.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

The RCMP have succeeded in their ability to reach out to Albertans, towns, municipalities, and the outcome of that is that there is no support across the province for a change in the direction that the now minister of labour, then the Minister of Justice, believed that Albertans wanted to move in. I'm just bringing that up because I think there's a pattern here. The pattern is that the government believes they're acting in the best interests, yet again they are wrong.

The information – and we don't have all the resources. The government does. There are 23 of us on this side. There are 60-some on that side. There's a government bureaucracy. There's a minister and a ministry. We hear from that side that they haven't got any of this information. They think everything is hunky-dory. "Just say yes," is their view. Well, no.

This amendment is the right thing. This amendment should be supported. The minister says that he's not heard anyone upset with this arrangement. Then he goes on to say to his caucus colleagues there: just defeat this; this is a bad amendment. You know, he doesn't provide any justification. He doesn't answer the questions that were posed. "Just vote it down. We have the numbers," essentially, he was saying. "We can vote this down. We can vote the next one down. We can vote the one after that down."

Remember, there are over 5,000 people that'll be affected by this. These workers across the province: they may not be watching now. They may be busy with their studies. They may be trying to get ahead, you know, to provide the capacity that this province needs in employees in the future. They may be wanting to teach at these institutions in the future. But they'll learn about it. They'll find out that yet again this government has sided against workers and is supporting or allowing the academic institutions to get together but not giving the same consideration to the organizations, the associations that don't want this.

I said I would talk briefly about the lack of constitutionality that these actions obviously indicate. I brought up the RCMP as an example of what they did to challenge the representation that the federal government was not allowing. I think more and more that if we support bills like this or parts of bills like this, we will be mowing over the rights of people in the workforce to find their own bargaining agent.

I was represented for eight years by CUPE local 38, inside workers, at the city of Calgary. We had that right to choose CUPE or not. We were very satisfied with the actions of our bargaining agent – and I still am friends with and see some of those people today – but they knew and I knew that if their actions went offside with the majority of the people that they represented, they could be replaced.

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

You are taking away that right from a group of people, and they didn't ask for it. The minister hasn't stood up and said: yes, they want this; they want to never have the right to choose their own agent. It's not constitutional, it's not formed with the input of the people it's impacting, and it shouldn't be allowed in this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate on amendment A2? Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill in Committee of the Whole, Bill 17. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: All right. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's unfortunate that all of the members of the Official Opposition were voting for that amendment but it did not pass. I'm not surprised because I think the government in bringing forward the changes in Bill 17 was doing so deliberately and likely in full awareness of the lack of consultation, the unconstitutionality, and the unfairness in creating employer associations and not providing the same for workers, but it was important to me that we try and remove that section. Given that we were not able to remove that section, we will

have to proceed with talking about this section and potentially ways that we might be able to improve this section of the legislation.

Given that we now know that Bill 17, when finally voted on, will have the labour relations section as well as the employment standards section as well as both the reservists' leave and bereavement leave, Madam Chair, I wanted to make a request of you. Prior to the final vote on Bill 17 in Committee of the Whole I wanted to request that the votes on Bill 17's clauses be separated as follows: with sections 1(1) to 1(3) to be voted on as block A; sections 1(4) to 1(5) to be voted on as block B; section 2 to be voted on as block C. The reason is that the bill does deal with three separate issues: block A being reservists' leave, block B being bereavement leave due to loss of pregnancy, and block C on changes to the Labour Relations Code relating to postsecondary associations as bargaining agents. We did attempt to remove block C, which would have made Bill 17 more logically consistent, but that amendment has been defeated. So I make this request of you, Madam Chair.

4:20

The Chair: That would be agreeable with the chair.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate that.

Now, as we continue to debate Bill 17, I think that to focus my remarks, I would like to introduce another amendment at this point, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the pages for your help, as always.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A3. Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended in section 2 as follows: (a) by renumbering the proposed section 58.2 as 58.2(1) and adding the following after the proposed section 58.2(1):

(2) Despite subsection (1) and unless the Lieutenant Governor in Council prescribes a later date, divisions 4 to 9 apply effective July 1, 2023.

(b) by striking out subsections (3) to (5).

Now, the key to this amendment, Madam Chair and to my colleagues here in the Chamber, is that date. Given that we were not able to remove this section from Bill 17 despite what I would suggest were excellent arguments made by the Official Opposition, I would like to propose, and I hope that the government might seriously consider, that instead of making the change permanent, we extend the deadline by another year, to July 1, 2023. The reason for this extension is that we've heard extremely clearly from a number of faculty associations but also essentially all of the graduate student associations and postdoctoral fellow associations that we reached out to their lack of support for making the exclusive bargaining rights permanent, having those in indefinitely and impacting that freedom of association.

Now, I spoke earlier with the first amendment about the difference it makes when there is that deadline that will expire versus something that is permanent when it comes to something as restrictive as restricting workers' freedoms of association, which is a fundamental piece of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I put forward this amendment in good faith because I believe that if there are concerns, extending that deadline an additional year would allow faculty associations who feel that they are not prepared yet additional time to prepare to communicate to their members. Again, I would like to make the point that these academically employed students as well as academic staff do have the option to remain with their current associations even after exclusive bargaining rights have been removed.

I would suggest that leading to the removal of exclusive bargaining rights is the best labour relations solution. Giving this additional year would allow the minister more time to consult. There are 5,000 student workers whose representatives disagree. They disagree, and they say that you did not even ask them. Now, through the debate at Committee of the Whole I have asked the minister a number of times to speak to the consultation. While he has referenced some faculty associations, there are other faculty associations that I know I've spoken to who disagree with the changes in Bill 17. Again, we have not found a graduate student association or postdoctoral fellows association who says that this government consulted with them. I think that's incredibly concerning, and I think it would be incumbent on the minister to be on the record with who he consulted with and who is impacted by these changes.

Five thousand students who are working in an extreme power dynamic, as I described earlier – to be clear, these students are graduate students. They are postdoctoral fellows who are also workers while doing their studies. They often have a work dynamic that is different than the average worker, but that does not mean that they don't deserve the rights that all workers deserve under Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Everyone that we have spoken to and consulted said that they want their rights, they want their freedoms to be honoured. The changes put in by the then NDP government in response to Supreme Court of Canada rulings were never intended to be permanent, full stop, because a permanent change would be in violation of these rights. I think that this amendment could be an important compromise. The minister spoke about stability. This would provide an additional year and, following that, allow these workers to have the freedom of association that, as I read into the record earlier, the Supreme Court of Canada said is critically important for employee choice and is an important "form of exercise of freedom of association... essential to the existence of employee organizations and to the maintenance of the confidence of members in them."

This amendment I put forward in good faith for debate with all members of this Legislature. I will repeat the request to the minister to disclose more about who he consulted with, with the particular focus on the graduate student associations and the postdoctoral fellow associations. If the answer is that he did not speak to these 5,000 workers impacted by this change, I think that is a shame. I think that's potentially a dereliction of his responsibility as the minister, but I also think that that would be a good reason to seriously consider this amendment and to allow the exclusive bargaining rights to remain in place for only a single year rather than indefinitely.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. Once again, I think the point that I want to express here is somewhat similar to the point I expressed on the previous amendment. Effectively, this would defeat the purpose of Bill 17 with respect to postsecondary faculty associations' bargaining. This proposed amendment, as I look at it, would extend agent exclusivity until July 1, 2023, again providing a level of uncertainty that has existed for the last four years. This provision that we are seeking to amend now was put in place in 2017. These faculty associations have had to deal with this instability since 2017. Between 2017 and now we have not heard from anyone out there that they are concerned about the current arrangement. Have not heard.

As I said before, I have letters from some of the faculty associations thanking the department for putting Bill 17 forward.

The faculty associations: my department has been consulting and speaking and meeting with all of the relevant parties involved. I don't have a single letter or e-mail from anyone other than what the members opposite are saying.

It's important that we understand that this is customary of the NDP. I heard the Member for Calgary-Buffalo trying to compare the consultation with respect to the inquiry into whether or not a provincial police would be ideal at this point in time to this one. That member forgot to mention to this Assembly that their counterparts in B.C., in fact an all-party committee that is made up of the NDP and other political parties in B.C., have made the same recommendation to transition to a B.C. provincial police.

4:30

That really is the level of hyperpartisanship that we face with the NDP. Rather than focusing on the substance of the issue, they are more interested in pursuing their ideological pursuits. That's really what this amendment is all about. It's not about whether or not this Bill 17 will serve the best interests of our universities and postsecondary institutions. Those postdoctoral students, those graduate students are represented by their own associations, by themselves. They are the ones representing themselves. That is their own association. There is not a third-party association. There is not an external association. That is themselves representing their own interests.

This may be news to the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, but I have not heard, if that's what you're looking for, any concern, not one single letter, not one single e-mail. You know, Madam Chair, that amendment, again, is very ill conceived. While I thank the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and I accept that she is passionate about these issues and I am looking forward to working with her on this file, I am more interested in amendments that deal with the substance of the issues before us rather than ideological pursuits.

The current arrangement is working. It's been four years and not one single complaint, not one single concern other than the pursuit to have this opened up to create instability in our postsecondary institutions, something that our universities do not want. Listen, I know a lot of postsecondary, postgraduate, graduate students. A lot of them. I come from a community where many of us have two or three postgraduate degrees, a lot of them, one of the highest ratios in the world. I know so many of them: personal friends, family members, colleagues of mine, people with whom I interact on a daily basis in this city, in this province. I oftentimes would pass off ideas. I check in with them on some of the policy work that the government is doing to tell me how they feel about some of these things. I did not hear a single complaint. Not one.

Madam Chair, if we accept this amendment, it means that it will come to an end July 1, 2023, and after that time bargaining agent exclusivity would end and other unions could then seek the bargaining rights for the academic staff, postgraduate students, and postdoctoral fellows, contrary to the intention behind Bill 17. It would not permit postsecondary institutions to have employer organizations until July 1, 2023. A reminder that what they're seeking to extend right now is also part of the current changes that they brought in in 2017, that we are now seeking to make permanent. On that basis, you can tell that this amendment is only seeking to prevent this bill from proceeding, and therefore I would urge members of this Assembly to vote against it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Madam Chair. My question, through you, to the minister. You have mentioned talking to faculty associations,

and you've mentioned talking to personal family, friends, and connections who happen to be graduate students. Did you talk to any graduate student associations or any postdoctoral fellow associations who are today responsible for managing the labour relations environment and who, when I speak with them, say that they do not support Bill 17? Did you talk to any graduate student associations or postdoctoral fellow associations in bringing forward this change, which impacts them and roughly 5,000 students that they represent?

The Chair: Any other members to join the debate on amendment A3? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The silence is deafening from the minister in response to that question. In all probability the response was what we've heard from grad students' associations and postdoctoral fellows' associations and most of the faculty associations, that the minister, in fact, did not consult with them, and that's the reason that the minister was unable to rise and name the individuals or the faculty associations, GSAs, or postdoctoral fellows' associations that he, in fact, claims to have met with in his consultations for Bill 17.

What we are attempting to do, Madam Chair, with the amendments we're bringing forward this afternoon are a number of things, but one in particular is that we're trying to offer the government an opportunity to save face. They have a horrific record in this province of labour relations; failures and disasters, starting off with the tearing up of a contract, a bona fide, legitimate contract, with the doctors in this province. That, in fact, began the demise of the relationship between this government and labour that didn't have to be that way, yet that was what they chose to do. They chose to go to battle with labour and attack labour.

In fact, this is what Bill 17 is attempting to do here by limiting the rights of the workers, in this case the academic workers, to choose their bargaining agent. That's the fundamental question that we're debating here this afternoon. Does the government believe that a union, a faculty association, or workers have the right to choose their own bargaining agent or not? In other words, do they support what is constitutionally guaranteed to workers in this country, or do they not? Are they seeking ways to oppose it?

It's a very simple question that the debate is revolving around, Madam Chair. The minister claims indeed that he is attempting to salvage the rights of workers when, in fact, what the bill will do is permanently limit their ability to choose their bargaining agent, which we, of course, claim, I think with strong legal opinion behind it, will be ultimately found to be unconstitutional if indeed the bill passes without being amended to strike that element of it.

I think the government would be well served if indeed they accepted this opportunity to really save face and to try to re-establish trust in some small ways, at least with the workers in this province, by showing a level of respect for basic, fundamental workers' rights such as the right to choose who your own bargaining agent might be. That's a very simple and clear element of labour relations and labour law, and our Charter of Rights in this country, Madam Chair, is something that shouldn't be a matter of dancing around by the government on labour legislation that they bring forward, this Labour Statutes Amendment Act.

The amendment we're bringing forward gives the government a chance to reset the clock on its actual consultations and come back in a year from now, perhaps, and say that they've actually done the consultations. Give another year for this status quo to remain, and then perhaps the grad students' associations, the postdoctoral fellows' associations, more of the faculty associations will actually be able to properly be consulted and express their distaste and

displeasure for the minister's desire to permanently lock them into the agents that they have right now bargaining for them, the self-representation, rather than giving them the opportunity to choose their own bargaining agent, as is a right guaranteed under our Charter.

Madam Chair, I think that, fundamentally, the minister knows in his heart that this is the right thing to do, and perhaps he may feel that the opportunity to perhaps move forward with this amendment by moving the date to July 2023 for the expiration of the status quo would be a way to perhaps heal some wounds that the minister is creating, I feel, by claiming that adequate consultation or any consultation at all took place with significant members of the 5,000 student workers who, in most cases, disagree that the government should be moving forward with making this bargaining agent permanent, the self-agency situation permanent.

4:40

The minister is saying that this is what the association has wanted. In fact, they are saying very clearly that, no, this is not what they want. They are saying very clearly: no. The opposition was the first to actually consult with them, save for some of the faculty associations that the minister says that he spoke with. It's a clear case, Madam Chair, of the minister claiming to have made consultations, but we have evidence, names of people willing to come forward and willing to publicly state that they were not consulted.

Be that as it may, I wish the minister would maybe take this opportunity to perhaps reload and talk to folks in a way that one would expect a minister would speak to the representation of over 5,000 students, academic student workers, in the province of Alberta, who are astonished that indeed the government is trying to move forward with legislation that would cement their agency to one choice – that is, the existing status quo, the self-representation – and deny them the right that the Charter actually guarantees them, to choose their own agents.

In fact, I believe that it's a worthwhile opportunity for the minister to relent on his plunging forward with this measure, that is not supported by the academic students who he claims to have met with, and it's something that will offer an opportunity for the government to take at least one small step in bringing forward a renewed relationship between groups of workers in this province and their organized labour representatives.

Hopefully, in an effort to re-establish trust and begin to build some relationships that are healthy in this province between government and organized labour and labour that is looking to seek to be represented, the minister will reset the clock on this element of the legislation so that in 2023, perhaps in the fullness of time, the government of the day will be able to sit down and properly speak with the grad students' associations and with the faculty associations and the postdoctoral fellows' associations and understand completely what their wishes are.

They're certainly expressing to us, Madam Chair, that they do not want to be force-fed what the minister is feeding. They do not want to be limited to the representation that they have right now, and the original intention, of course, when the former NDP government brought this legislation in, was to make it a temporary solution to allow the academic workers to sort out the various options that existed for them, and it took some time to do that. Not only that; many of these students are transitory. They're here for a short time, and the population changes over time very quickly. It's incumbent upon us to recognize that we're asking these academic workers to involve themselves in choosing very complex representation options and to hear out the various different parties that may wish to be competing to represent them.

It's a process that, you know, over the course of the five years prior to the expiration that was initially contemplated in July of this year, one would have hoped could have occurred and that the grad students, these academic workers, would have been in a position in July of this year to actually choose their bargaining agent and allow the government to meet the Charter right compliance that one would expect a labour minister to hope to achieve. Instead, what the government is doing is looking to cement in the one status quo option as if it had been intended to be a permanent solution, where it was not, and deny these workers their Charter right to actually choose the agent who would represent them in ongoing labour negotiations.

The amendment that we brought forward I believe is a reasonable one, and I encourage all members to support it. It allows the government to begin building some bridges with labour in this province, with workers, to show that indeed they respect the fundamental elements of the Charter rights that workers have, of course the right to strike and this right to associate freely with whom they choose. That would be allowing them to choose the bargaining agent of their choice.

The amendment before us gives a bit more time for the government to reset and rethink and perhaps re-establish a relationship with the workers that are involved in this legislation, that being the academic student workers in various institutions right throughout the province. It's a message that the minister of labour should hope to be sending to all Alberta workers and the general population, that Albertans who are engaged in work, which all of us hope to be, are respected by this government. Indeed, it's not reflected in the legislation that's been brought forward by this government with respect to Bill 17.

Certainly, the first move that they made right out of the gate after being elected in 2019 was to tear up a contract with the doctors, a legitimate, bona fide contract with the doctors of this province. One would hope that they have seen the folly of that move and that Alberta's workers and the whole population were shocked with that move. Hopefully, the government has learned from that that there is a respect amongst the population of Alberta workers and in general that workers have rights and that we respect them and that we respect those rights that are enshrined in the Constitution and in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We really will be demanding of our government, no matter what stripe, that they stand up for those rights and protect them and respect them and not bring forward legislation that denies or attempts to chisel away at those rights by creating elements of legislation that will certainly trigger a challenge to the Charter.

The minister does not believe that it may be triggered, but he also claims that he would win such a challenge. I respectfully disagree with the minister on that point. Don't take my opinion for it, but there are certainly legal minds that have advised us that indeed a challenge of this element of the legislation would be one that would not survive in the Supreme Court of Canada.

I hope that indeed the minister takes the opportunity. I think that there have been some opportunities afforded to the minister in the past where he's decided to alter his thinking in certain ways, and this perhaps will be one of them. I believe that he's got an open mind to a good argument, and I think that we're making one on this side of the House. There is an opportunity for the minister to say: yup, indeed, let's reset the clock on this, and let's do all the talking we need to do with the academic grad students who are affected by this and make sure that we're not offending 5,000 people and not diminishing their rights as workers. That's, I think, the bare minimum that we should be able to ask of the minister of labour in setting labour legislation, particularly as it surrounds the

fundamental rights of workers and their ability to associate and choose their own bargaining agent.

4:50

That precedent that's being set by the minister's wish to not allow the academic students to make their own choice once the expiration date happens in July 31 of this year, if indeed this amendment doesn't pass, is really very regrettable, and it's not something that would be taken very lightly by organized and regular workers in the province because it's a threat. It's an open threat to organized labour when the minister decides that he will implement pieces of legislation that were perhaps purposely designed to be subject to a Charter challenge and make an effort to chisel away at rights that are sacrosanct in this country to working people and ones that won't be abridged without a large, large amount of anger in the labour movement. It's so unnecessary, absolutely unnecessary.

The minister can circumvent all of that acrimony and build some bridges by accepting this amendment and moving the date forward to July 1, 2023, and reset the clock with his consultations and make sure that all of the academic students and the associations are satisfied with the discussions they've had with the minister, and I think after that consultation it'll be absolutely clear to the minister that the position that should be taken by the government is to go forward and allow the academic workers who are students to choose their own bargaining agents. We hope the minister takes this opportunity to re-establish trust or attempt to re-establish a small measure of trust with working people in this province, build some bridges and allow them to look at the past at some of the things that they've done such as tearing up doctors' contracts and perhaps realize that that was a huge mistake and maybe move in the other direction.

Having an opportunity to gain the respect of workers in some small measure by adopting this amendment is something that would go a long ways to perhaps turning the corner in the reputation this government has with working people. So, with that, I think I'll conclude my remarks and allow others to add to the debate.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Madu: Madam Chair, I just wanted to quickly respond to the comment made by the Member for Edmonton-McClung. Let me begin, obviously, by thanking him for his contributions to this debate. You know, other than the period that I left the provincial government to establish my law firm, I have spent my entire life working. I have been a worker all of my life, and I had the privilege of working for the very department that I now lead as the Minister of Labour and Immigration years ago, the department that I am acutely aware, profoundly aware of the work that they do. In fact, many of the folks that still work in that department continue to be personal friends of mine.

I spent my entire life in public service advocating for the rights of workers. I began with the provincial government as an employment standards officer. To the members opposite: sometimes you guys think that those of us over here, you know, came from some alien country. We are grounded. We know what it feels like to be employees and workers because many of us here have spent our entire lives either as workers or employers or creating employment opportunities for workers, making sure that we build an environment for everyone. I went on to a senior policy role that oversaw many of the policies in this department that I now lead. So to the Member for Edmonton-McClung: rest assured that I am fully aware of the need to make sure that we have a legislative environment that serves the interests of workers and, yes,

employers because we can't separate those two. Employees need employers. Employers need employees. We have to carry that along at all times. We have to think about them at all times.

But coming back to the amendment before us, as I said before, I know a lot of postgraduate students. I know a lot of postdoctoral fellows. A lot of them. And we have not received – again, I want to put that on the record. This bill was introduced a couple of weeks ago. I have read it. I have searched online content to see the reporting on this particular issue. I am yet to see any reporting that reflects the argument that the members opposite are making on this amendment. I have not received a single – let me confirm that again: a single – e-mail or letter on this particular issue. We are here to solve problems; we are not here to create problems where there are no problems. That is what our constituents expect of us. There is no need to upset something that is working or create more uncertainty in the system. That's why we are here.

So again to the Member for Edmonton-McClung: I thank you for your contributions, but again I urge you, I urge members opposite to focus on the problems, where there is one, so that we can see an amendment – and, yes, I am open to amendment where I see that there are real concerns. I am not interested in an ideological fight. Not interested. I am interested in solving problems . . .

Ms Hoffman: This is a problem.

Mr. Madu: . . . and there is no problem here because the people that – you are making up a problem that doesn't exist, to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, and that's what, you know, is so disappointing about some of this debate on this amendment.

When you guys make complaints that you want to work in a collaborative manner, guess what? It is a two-way relationship. I call it a symbiotic kind of relationship. It has to make sense. It has to be substantive. It can't just be ideological politics on your part all the time. There is no problem. I have not heard from those faculty associations or those postdocs. If you have any letter to that effect, I want to see it, and I bet you don't have any. I bet you don't have any because I have not heard. It has been more than two weeks that it's been out there. Not one letter. Not one e-mail. Not one negative report on this bill. Why oppose it for the sake of opposing it? Did the faculty association – this association represents the same members that you are talking about. The same members that you're talking about. That is what is so disappointing about this.

So, again, Madam Chair, I urge all members to vote against this amendment.

The Chair: Hon. members, I'll take this opportunity to remind all members to speak through the chair. Using words like "you" is probably not helpful in the debate.

Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment to Bill 17. I was certainly hopeful when the minister stood up that he would answer some of the questions, the actual questions, that we asked, as opposed to, you know, the job history. The question was: who was consulted other than – you know, the minister noted that he has a number of friends and colleagues that are postdoctoral students, or postdocs, as we are calling them, but that wasn't the question, "How many people do you know that are postdocs?" The question was: who was consulted? Put it on the record. Table it. If indeed the work was done and the consultation was transparent and it was done in a way that you can guarantee that you have talked to all of the folks that this legislation would impact and you know how they feel about this and you're crystal clear, then table it for this House.

The Chair: Hon. member – sorry – I hesitate to interrupt. I just reminded all members that using words like "you" in this Chamber is not helpful and definitely not directing comments through the chair.

5:00

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In any event, I think that probably there are many of us that do know postdoctoral students, but that doesn't mean that we've consulted. In fact, it is not our job, Madam Chair, to consult on this legislation and to make sure that it is, you know, done correctly or is drafted correctly or it's actually solving the problem it sets out to solve. That is the job of the drafter of the legislation. The problem is, the concern is, that we've said over and over again, that we don't see that, and the people that we have contacted don't agree with the government. So I would suggest that this amendment would allow additional time.

Strangely enough, my son, who – I don't know if he's watching right now; it's past midnight in the U.K. He's a postdoctoral fellow. Hi, honey, if you're watching. Consulting him, my texting with him or chatting with him thanks to technology, doesn't mean that I consulted. It just means that I chatted with him. It does not mean consultation. But, you know, the minister does know how to pick up the phone, apparently. Why not pick up the phone and consult with these associations? They have some concerns.

What I do know about this small group is that this is a group – and it is a small group now. It's 5,000 for all of the associations. But I want to talk specifically about – sorry. I've lost my notes here. I'm getting a little disorganized.

This particular group of postdocs is a very transient group, as the Member for Edmonton-McClung noted. Typically this group – and I'm sure the minister knows this. They don't stick around for more than a couple of years. Weirdly enough, my son has been a postdoctoral fellow twice and a postdoctoral student once. I won't get into that. This is a group that doesn't earn a lot. I'm sure the minister knows this. Universities set some minimum standards, I believe. I think that the University of Alberta is probably somewhere around – like, \$35,000 is the minimum. It's difficult. It's a rough life. You know, there's a lot of confusion. Are they staff? Are they researchers? Are they students? There's a lot of confusion there. It is difficult. They're very often trying to make ends meet, often having to get their parents to help them out, but that is the life of a postdoctoral fellow or student. In any event, this is a group that should be consulted. This is a group that doesn't have a lot of power – let's just agree on that – and should be consulted.

Given that confusion, I want to go back to why we're saying that adding some time via this amendment is a good idea. We know that in July 2022 it will expire, and there is a reason that we want this to continue. I am not a lawyer obviously, so I actually went and looked at the – well, it's actually the summary of the lawsuit that we were talking about. I would have liked to hear from the minister, who is a lawyer – he gave us some of his job history – to tell us that he can pretty much assure this House that there won't be a challenge to this legislation, that it won't be a problem, because the people that we have spoken to have said: yes, it will be a problem.

Anyway, I want to summarize a little bit, and here are some of the facts. The Mounted Police Association of Ontario versus Canada (Attorney General): the Supreme Court of Canada made a major pronouncement on the scope of the section of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 2(d), freedom of association. Now, the RCMP had previously been excluded from unionizing and collective bargaining rights available to other public service employees. And then there was a piece of federal legislation that was referenced, but we don't need to get into that.

Instead, the RCMP members, very much like the association for postdoctoral students or other student associations, have a staff relations representative program for employee representation to voice concerns, things like that. Now, this forum does not provide a forum to raise some issues such as wage issues. It lacked independence, and it was the only employee association recognized by management. Now, they did note that it somewhat resembled a union in form as there were membership dues. They had the ability to lobby government, and of course they had the ability to assist and support members if there were disciplinary issues. However, it ended there. It was not a forum for collective bargaining with the employer. Some of the members opposing it went on to say that they weren't elected.

Now, the problem is that it infringes on the freedom of association and can't be justified under section 1 of the Charter. It seems to me that that's a problem, so if the minister is so confident that not endorsing this amendment or letting the legislation proceed as it is won't be challenged, that it won't be a problem, then perhaps he should reassure this House, maybe table some evidence, table some opinion from other lawyers other than just giving us an opinion or assuring us that he's called some friends and everything's cool, because I don't think that's good enough.

I do think that these changes will effectively stop the work – scratch that. Let me back up a little bit. I'm sorry, Madam Chair. I've lost my place.

I did not do any consultation other than texting with one person, which is absolutely in no way any form of consultation, but some of my colleagues have. What we have heard from the workers is that no one with a major university graduate students' association or postdoctoral association, including their labour relations committees, was consulted. Now, it seems to me that that is a problem given that they represent 5,000 student workers. Part of the reason I talked about some of the things that I'd heard from one postdoctoral fellow is that I think that these are folks with not a lot of power and not a lot of agency and not a big voice, particularly given the number. I mean, 5,000 is a big number, but it's not a big number when you look at the scope of the fields that they represent, so I think this is a group that needs to be consulted.

Associations are being put in a precarious position when the decisions being made on behalf of the workers are not done by the workers, and this bill suggests, as it is, that the government knows best who should represent academically employed workers. As usual, one of the concerns that we have – and we heard this repeatedly. This was a theme this morning, that it's unnecessary oversight by a government that undermines the autonomy of a sector. Obviously, this bill removes the right of workers to choose who represents them. By not allowing this to expire and then giving these groups other choices, this government is dictating what they have to do.

Major faculty associations in the province do not support the changes in Bill 17. Now, if the minister has proof that this is not the case and if he's done more than pick up the phone and call a few friends and if there is documentation that there are faculty associations in Alberta that do support the changes in Bill 17, then he should table those with this House. Demonstrate the consultation. Earlier this morning we talked about: what is consultation? Consultation is not picking up the phone and talking to a friendly. Consultation is not talking to a lobbyist. Consultation is not just talking to someone who you're fairly confident is going to agree with you. Consultation is about being very clear and objective. What are you consulting? What problem are you trying to address? Who are the stakeholders? Did you speak to people that, you know, may disagree with you in addition to people that agree

with you? It's about transparency and about being very clear about the work that you've done.

You know, Madam Chair, why I do support this amendment is that I don't believe, once again, that the UCP government has done that particularly with Bill 17. I think that by supporting this amendment, we would allow more time and perhaps the government to do their job and consult.

With that, I will take my seat.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to quickly rise because I was intrigued by one of the comments from the minister around just solving a problem. Great. Let's solve a problem. Hopefully, through you, Madam Chair, to the minister, maybe I can get some confirmation around some language in Bill 17 – a head nod will suffice, very much so – that the language as currently written in Bill 17 locks in the bargaining agent for all of these individuals and associations. You can't change it. They can't go anywhere else. These are who they get, and that's the end of it. Am I on the right track with that? Hopefully. The bargaining agent that currently exists right now: that's locked in; that's the way it is. Not really getting a response.

5:10

Hopefully, the minister will take that for what it's actually worth, because as we know, everything started around this in January 2015 due to a decision by the Supreme Court to affirm the constitutional rights of all workers in Canada to join a union of their own choosing and engage in meaningful collective bargaining, which is all fine and dandy.

Now, here's the part. Because the bargaining agent is locked in and they can no longer choose to go somewhere else – if that was the case, here's the problem, Minister. In a 6 to 1 decision the court expressly states that the right to freedom of association, section 2(d) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, includes a right to meaningful collective bargaining. The judges write:

We conclude that the [section] 2(d) guarantee of freedom of association protects [the] meaningful process of collective bargaining that provides employees with a degree of choice and independence sufficient to enable them to determine and pursue their collective interests.

If you're locking in the bargaining agent, that is not a degree of choice and independence. You've just violated that, hence why I said that this will get challenged and you'll end up losing.

Again, here I'm trying to say that supporting the amendment buys you some time – confirm all of this; check with the associations, all that jazz – and potentially saves you a whole bunch of headaches. Hopefully, the minister will reconsider after hearing that and save himself a lot of headaches, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others on amendment A3?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A3.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:13 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|------|---------|---------|
| Ceci | Hoffman | Nielsen |
| Dach | Irwin | Renaud |
| Gray | | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|----------|-----------------|--------------|
| Fir | Madu | Singh |
| Frey | Nixon, Jason | Smith |
| Getson | Panda | Stephan |
| Glubish | Pon | Toor |
| Horner | Rosin | Turton |
| Hunter | Savage | Walker |
| Issik | Schow | Wilson |
| Jones | Schweitzer | Yao |
| LaGrange | Shandro | Yaseen |
| Lovely | Sigurdson, R.J. | |
| Totals: | For – 7 | Against – 29 |

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Back on the main bill, Bill 17, in Committee of the Whole, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate that. It's unfortunate that the previous amendment was not successful.

Ms Hoffman: We're getting closer, though.

Ms Gray: I can hear that my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Glenora is quite hopeful. The third time is the charm, perhaps. With that in mind, I will just begin my remarks by saying that I will introduce a third amendment, and then I will continue from there.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A4. Hon. member, please proceed.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended in section 2(2) in the proposed section 58.2 by striking out "Divisions 5 to 9" and substituting "Divisions 4 to 9."

Now, in response to the second amendment that I've introduced so far on the labour statutes amendment portion of Bill 17, the minister suggested that rather than changing what he considers the intent of the bill – I disagree. I think the previous amendments were an attempt to make something that is unconstitutional constitutional, to respect the rights of workers to be able to have choice and that fundamental freedom of association.

This amendment perhaps will be able to secure his support. Although we've heard from labour relations committee members and executives who have opposed Bill 17, what this amendment serves to do is ensure that if the government is insisting on preventing workers from exercising their rights for freedom of choice and assembly, balance is maintained in the system by preventing employers from joining together to bargain collectively against small worker associations that do not have the same rights.

Now, there are some worker associations as small as 40. This becomes very much about balance of power. You may recall from debate on some of the previous amendments that I've spoken at length about the graduate student associations and the postdoctoral fellow associations, who are operating under an extreme power imbalance, the dynamics there.

5:20

Keep in mind that these are academically employed students. They are workers, they have rights, but they are also studying, some for one to two to maybe four years. The membership of the graduate student associations, postdoctoral fellow associations can be small, depending on who their employer is, and it can be frequently changing. What this speaks to, specifically, is one of the questions that I asked earlier in the debate, which I have not heard the minister

respond to, which has to do with this Bill 17 allowing the employers to form employer organizations, yet there is no option for that for the workers.

This particular amendment won't fix everything in section 2 – that's something that we would have to do upon change of government – but it does at least make the section a little less bad. For the record even faculty associations who like the idea of having exclusive bargaining agent status have said to us that this section is something that they do not support, employers being able to form large employer organizations whereas the workers' associations will be only able to bargain for themselves and not to collaborate.

There is a serious disparity, and they wonder why the minister, from their perspective, is seeking to take power away from the workers and give more power to the employers. That is why this amendment has been put forward in consultation with graduate student associations and postdoctoral fellow associations. I think it's been fairly clear from the debate this afternoon that the minister has not consulted with the graduate student associations, the postdoctoral fellow associations. We've asked that question a number of times, trying to tease that out. While he has talked to some academic staff, some faculty associations, it certainly wouldn't have been all of them given the number who've reached out to us with concerns.

I've put forward this amendment, the fourth amendment to Bill 17, the third amendment to the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, seeking to prevent the balance of power from really tilting fully out of whack, and I look forward to debate on this particular amendment and our attempt to improve Bill 17 just a little bit.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Madu: Madam Chair, I think that if you are looking for a good example of a pursuit that is purely based on philosophical underpinnings, this is one of those classical examples. I mean, I fully understand where you are coming from, but you are saying that . . .

The Chair: Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but please speak through the chair. Thank you.

Mr. Madu: Absolutely, Madam Chair.

You know, we are talking about how this amendment would effectively prevent the establishment of employer organizations, and you ask yourself: why would the members opposite be interested in preventing employers from establishing an organization? There is an association that is representing the interests of employees. What is it about that? Obviously, I would not support this because the members opposite have not advanced any substantive reasons, under the context of bargaining and the relationship between employers and employees and in the context of Bill 17 and in the context of the labour environment, why it is a bad thing to have employer organizations.

To be clear, division 4, which is really what this amendment is all about, deals with capacity of employers' organizations. Section 30 of the Labour Relations Code reads as follows:

- 30(1) For the purposes of this Act, an employers' organization is capable of
- (a) prosecuting and being prosecuted, and
 - (b) suing and being sued.
- (2) An employers' organization and its acts are not unlawful by reason only that one or more of its objects are in restraint of trade to the extent that those objects are necessary for carrying out its duties under this Act.

Then you have section 31. You have section 30 and section 31, that make up division 4, that is the subject of this amendment.

Section 31 deals with suspension or expulsion from employers' organizations.

Again, the essence of this amendment: it would allow, obviously, academic staff, postgraduate student, and postdoctoral fellow associations to maintain the bargaining agent exclusivity. That's not an issue. This amendment preserves that. But then it would not permit postsecondary institutions to have employer organizations. That is the crux of this amendment, and I don't think that it is appropriate under the circumstances. I would urge members to vote against the amendment.

The Chair: Are there others to amendment A4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just want to be crystal clear in reading this bill and now in addressing the amendment to Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. What the government is in the process of creating through their movement of this bill is an uneven playing field. They are creating conditions upon which they can determine who employees are represented by, and they have, through this bill, created a mechanism for employers to choose to band together, if they so choose, so that employers have the ability to become one large bargaining association, essentially, on the other side of the table, but employees don't.

Simply, what we're trying to do here through this amendment is create more balance. Having been on both sides of the bargaining table – I had to think about that for a second – most recently on the employer side but also having experienced bargaining as an employee, I can tell you that when you actually have balance in terms of the kind of resources you can bring to the table, the number of people you can bring to the table, and the ability to hire outside counsel to support you in your negotiations, you get the best agreements when both sides of the table are relatively in balance.

One of the biggest concerns that has been brought forward to us – and I'm not shocked. I will take the minister at his word, through you, Madam Chair, when he says: I haven't received correspondence about this. I am not shocked when a bill introduced in the final days of the session for most instructors and right before spring session starts for most instructors – this is a busy time of transition for a lot of people working who are graduate students or postdoctoral fellowship students. This is a busy time of year. I'm not surprised that the bill doesn't even mention postsecondary in the title. It's referring to the Labour Statutes Amendment Act. Of course, it touches on a number of different pieces that relate to a number of different types of employee organizations. But I will take the minister at his word, and if what he said isn't accurate, then I certainly would appreciate it if he could correct the record in this House at the earliest possible convenience.

He says that he has received no correspondence at all as it relates to this bill and the questions that have been raised. I will tell you, through you, Madam Chair, that when we have picked up the phone – and I know the minister knows how to pick up the phone. It is well documented; it is in the news. When the minister wants to, he can pick up the phone, he can make a call, and he can talk to somebody about an issue that he wants to give feedback on or get feedback on. That is very well documented in the news. So when we picked up the phone and reached out to graduate student associations, postdoctoral fellowship associations – thank you to my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods and the fantastic staff in the NDP who support her. When we picked up the phone, universally the employee side of the table said that they had grave concerns about this section, that they wanted it out, that they didn't think that it was fair, it wasn't going to create balance, and that they

wanted some – you know, if they could only make one change, this would be the one. They would like to make other changes, too, but the biggest issue is the innate embedding of imbalance between the two sides of the table.

5:30

So we are calling upon the government – and I've been there, when an amendment comes forward and you think: oh, it actually sounds like this might be helpful. There was a time where we actually voted against an amendment, and then later that night I was, like, "I don't know if we did the right thing," and we actually brought the legislation back to committee so that we could amend the amendment. We brought the bill back to committee so that we could bring forward a very similar amendment.

Don't do that. That's too much work. If you're not sure if you're doing the right thing on this, I'd say that you can absolutely move that we adjourn at this section. You can think about it tonight. You can come back and accept the amendment, because I will say that this is about creating fairness and balance in the legislation. That's the intent.

This is the biggest issue that, when we did pick up the phone and speak to a number of different graduate associations, postdoctoral fellowship associations, they highlighted as their number one concern. We think there are other issues in the Labour Statutes Amendment Act as well. You know, clearly, the government doesn't want to address those. After the next election we'll see how things roll, but I imagine we will be in a position in this Legislature that folks can maybe come to the table and bring forward some solutions to the issues that have been seen, Madam Chair, through you, in this piece of legislation.

The biggest one today that I would urge the government to, honestly, like, pull out the earplugs on, pick up the phone, talk to people and make sure that the righteousness that we've heard is actually reflective of the reality that employees, who are incredibly busy during this time of the year – I am confident that they will answer the minister's call if the minister or political staff from the minister's office reaches out and wants genuine feedback about this section.

I have heard the minister say that, you know, he's been an employee and a worker, and I appreciate that. I am confident that he, then, understands the importance of having balance on both sides of the table. To actually be able to bring forward problems and get to the point of resolution, both sides need to show respect and have balance in terms of the power dynamic. Because the government has decided that they're going to determine who it is that represents employees, this is one way to say: well, at least employers will have to represent themselves on a smaller scale. They won't be able to all band together because employees won't have that option in the way the bill is being presented currently. So it really is an intention to create balance. Again, you know, a number of people, everyone we reached out to, all said that this was probably the area of the bill that was so heavy handed in favour of one side of the table over the other. This is one way to create a little bit of balance.

I honestly and sincerely call upon the government. If they're not willing to make a decision on this right now – the easiest decision one can make is to say no. But if you actually think, "You know what? Maybe we should make a couple of calls, and we should see where they stand," and you come back to this place and stand by the statements that were made earlier, that nobody has a problem with this and the only people who have a problem are the NDP – well, first of all, that's not what the actual people this bill is going to impact have told us. There are probably staff watching this debate right now who, if the minister passes a note or, you know, sends a

message, could absolutely make these calls while this bill is still up for debate in committee rather than making a decision that will be very difficult to undo later on.

It can still be undone. Certainly, whatever government happens to be here after the next election can bring forward a variety of pieces of bills, as the current Premier highlighted through his first session. When we were all here that first summer, he definitely brought forward a number of omnibus bills and a number of bills to undo work that previous governments had done, and that can absolutely be done again. I suspect many pieces will be in short order, but this is one that I don't think the government needs to move forward on. I don't think that it actually gets them any significant benefit as it relates to this section. I don't think that there is any benefit in this section other than the heavy-handedness that is moving forward with creating a significant imbalance between the employee and employer sides.

Again, through you, Madam Chair – I appreciate that you've cautioned folks to keep the debate through the chair, and certainly that's my intention – I urge the political staff to the minister to actually pick up the phone. We know they can do it. Give these organizations some calls, and then come back to this place and accept this amendment. It's not a big one, but it is something that universally we were told would create better balance between the two sides of the table, and it's something that I think the minister would be wise to accept. It really is something that I think will address some of the biggest issues that have been highlighted for us as they relate to this bill.

There is a significant trust issue between a lot of these stakeholders and the current government. I know that this is only one minister that these stakeholders work with, but this minister has a chance to set the path on a better direction. This is one of the interesting things. When there's a change in who the minister is, you can re-examine some of the past decisions and undo it. For example, the current Minister of Justice has worked very quickly to undo some decisions that the previous Minister of Justice brought in around traffic court – right? – and was very proud to stand in this place and say: we're undoing that; we're not going to move forward with charging people a hundred bucks to be able to argue their traffic tickets. And I will say that the minister of labour also has an opportunity to say: "You know what? Some of the direction that the last minister took didn't serve Albertans well." It's a new minister. It's a new day. Let's try to repair the relationship. That's definitely what the Minister of Justice has signalled on a number of fronts that he's trying to do as the new Minister of Justice. There's certainly an opportunity for the minister of labour to follow the lead of the minister that is so closely aligned with the Premier and is clearly doing that.

I hope that the current minister of labour takes this amendment and the feedback that we gathered through consultation, picking up the phone and talking to stakeholders, and carries it out in a way that I think would benefit democracy and make this part of the bill a little bit less bad. Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to debate? The hon. Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Madu: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to quickly respond to the comments made by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. You know, I am absolutely committed to the well-being of our postgraduate and postdoctoral fellows that work in our great postsecondary institutions – absolutely committed – because I very much relate with those students who work in those environments. When my wife was doing her master's in law at the U of A, she was the vice-president of academics of one of those grad student associations, and as I said before, I have so many personal friends of mine, relatives who are in this country, in this province pursuing

their graduate and postdoctoral studies. This is a group of individuals that I would want to do everything I can to make sure that there is fairness in their work environment, in their academic pursuits, and in their relationship with their universities. I think that is a shared goal of all of us.

What I reject, Madam Chair, is to impute imaginary problems where there is no problem. As I said before, we are called upon to solve real problems, not to imagine problems that do not exist. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora talks about fairness and levelling the ground and power imbalance. I don't see that in this bill. We are talking about a group of individuals that have an association that would negotiate and bargain on their behalf that is made up of themselves. The problem here, I suspect, that the members opposite have with this bill and the reason for that particular amendment – and don't get me wrong. The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods: I have enormous respect for her. You know, I quarrel with the members opposite, but where I can find an opportunity to work together, we will – I can assure you that – because it is the right thing to do. My one appeal is – I understand that oftentimes there are ideological differences; I get that – that we must choose our battle in a way that serves the best interests of the people that we are advocating for.

5:40

On this one – on this one – I am acutely aware of the implications of Bill 17 on those folks. I don't see how having an employer organization – and I've read division 4. I've read sections 30 and 31 into the record. I don't see how that would all of a sudden create this massive power imbalance that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora is talking about. It doesn't exist. We are not here to pursue imaginary problems that do not exist; we are here to solve real problems. I just wanted to put that on the record, Madam Chair.

I think, you know, we see this, and I was one of those who were watching carefully between 2015 and 2019 in this province, where we saw a lot of disruptions in our economy, in the largest sector of our economy, where there was so much confusion and antibusiness culture, an environment that led investors to withhold billions, hundreds of billions of dollars in investment, because they did not have faith that the government of the day had created a steady environment for businesses to do what they know how to do best. You know, the law firm I used to manage not too far away from here: we had so many start-up companies disappear between 2015 and 2019 that were doing so well prior to the members opposite forming government in 2015; one of the reasons that led me into politics, because as a business lawyer I was having conversations with my clients, taking a look at their financials, and they were closing shops after shops. Why? They would tell you one thing: we don't trust that the government of the day understands what it means to build an environment and society for everyone to do well.

So I urge members opposite, you know, to think hard about how our policies – they may be well intentioned. I'm not going to impute bad faith here. They may be well intentioned, but we must have the capacity to think them through on the other side. Those disruptions between 2015 and '19 that led hundreds of billions of dollars to flee our province prevented employers from making investments in our country, had real-life consequences on the economy of this province and, by extension, on the financials of our small businesses and the bank accounts of ordinary citizens. They do have ripple effects, and unless you're able to track those ripple effects, you ignore them.

When it comes to employees and employers, these are people that we must think about every single day as we do our work. We must think about employers and small businesses. We must think about employees and how we can make sure that they do well in the

workplace, keep them safe so they can go back to their families and loved ones at the end of the day. You can't adopt an approach that sees one as an enemy or sees one as a problem.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

You know, I have sat here for some time now. I have been keeping track of some of the adjectives that the members opposite use to describe employers and businesses. If you are a small business like myself that used to run a small law firm, I was pretty much disappointed between 2015 and 2019 any time I tuned into the Assembly and listened to how they refer to, describe small businesses and employers. You would think that these people must have come from somewhere.

That is a problem that I have with the submissions of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, not so much the amendment that's been put forward. It's well intentioned. But the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, you know, is trying to impute problems that do not exist, and on that particular basis, Madam Chair, I will call on members of this Assembly to vote down this amendment.

The Acting Chair: Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak?

Seeing none, I shall call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:46 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|------|---------|----------|
| Ceci | Gray | Renaud |
| Dach | Hoffman | Shepherd |
| Deol | Nielsen | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|---------|-----------------|---------|
| Amery | Madu | Singh |
| Fir | Nixon, Jason | Smith |
| Frey | Panda | Stephan |
| Getson | Pon | Toor |
| Glubish | Rosin | Turton |
| Horner | Savage | Walker |
| Hunter | Schow | Wilson |
| Issik | Schweitzer | Yao |
| Jones | Sigurdson, R.J. | Yaseen |
| Lovely | | |

| | | |
|---------|---------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 8 | Against – 28 |
|---------|---------|--------------|

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: Back on the main bill. Any members wishing to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question. Hon. members, as you might recall, there has been a request to vote in sections on this bill. That request has been granted. We will vote on block A, block B, and block C. Block A is sections 1(1) to 1(3), block B is sections 1(4) to 1(5), and block C is section 2.

5:50

Hon. members, on the clauses on Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, on the clauses of the bill to be voted on as block A, sections 1(1) to 1(3), are you agreed?

[Sections 1(1) to 1(3) of Bill 17 agreed to]

The Chair: On the clauses of the bill to be voted on as block B, sections 1(4) and 1(5) as amended, are you agreed?

[The voice vote indicated that sections 1(4) and 1(5) of Bill 17 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:51 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|---------|--------------|-----------------|
| Amery | Issik | Schweitzer |
| Ceci | Jones | Shepherd |
| Dach | Lovely | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Deol | Madu | Singh |
| Fir | Nielsen | Smith |
| Frey | Nixon, Jason | Stephan |
| Getson | Panda | Toor |
| Glubish | Pon | Turton |
| Gray | Renaud | Walker |
| Hoffman | Rosin | Wilson |
| Horner | Savage | Yao |
| Hunter | Schow | Yaseen |

| | | |
|---------|----------|-------------|
| Totals: | For – 36 | Against – 0 |
|---------|----------|-------------|

[Sections 1(4) and 1(5) of Bill 17 agreed to unanimously]

The Chair: On the clauses of the bill to be voted on as block C, which is section 2, are you agreed?

[The voice vote indicated that section 2 of Bill 17 was agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:55 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For:

| | | |
|---------|-----------------|---------|
| Amery | Madu | Singh |
| Fir | Nixon, Jason | Smith |
| Frey | Panda | Stephan |
| Getson | Pon | Toor |
| Glubish | Rosin | Turton |
| Horner | Savage | Walker |
| Hunter | Schow | Wilson |
| Issik | Schweitzer | Yao |
| Jones | Sigurdson, R.J. | Yaseen |

Lovely

Against:

| | | |
|------|---------|----------|
| Ceci | Gray | Renaud |
| Dach | Hoffman | Shepherd |
| Deol | Nielsen | |

| | | |
|---------|----------|-------------|
| Totals: | For – 28 | Against – 8 |
|---------|----------|-------------|

[Section 2 of Bill 17 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report Bill 17.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Turton: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills and would like to

report the following bill with some amendments: Bill 17. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried. Hon. members, the House now stands adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, May 11, 2022

Day 33

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Frey
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Amery
Frey
Milliken
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Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
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Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Singh
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Ganley
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Neudorf
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Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Ms Phillips
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Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
Schmidt
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Toor
Turton
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Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Rutherford

Frey
Ganley
Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
Deputy Chair: Member Ceci

Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 11, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Division

The Speaker: Hon. members, prior to calling the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, I would just like to draw the Assembly's attention. As I understand, there was some confusion this afternoon, and that is the last thing I would want here in the Assembly, confusion for anyone. Standing Order 32, I'm sure you're all very well aware, is the standing order that applies specifically to divisions. Standing Order 32(4): "When Members have been called in for a division there shall be no further debate, and despite Standing Order 13(7), a Member must remain at the Member's seat during the division." I know that during committee there was some to and fro about possibly voting from other locations. It is important that all members remain in their seat for the division.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 21

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Sabir moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment May 10: Ms Phillips]

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I concluded my remarks yesterday talking a little bit about the parks pieces of this legislation that I think are broadly not supported by the public certainly given what we know from public opinion polling, from just the very presence of thousands of lawn signs still on people's lawns, particularly in Calgary, and the level of trust this government enjoys, that is to say zero.

Having said that, there are other pieces that are also problematic for managing public lands. There is no question that expanding the power of the minister to set out standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines, objectives, or other rules on public land can certainly lead to situations where in that delicate balance of managing public land, there is a thumb put on the scale by a minister's personal proclivities. Certainly, we have seen over the years a certain amount of distrust with the PCs around this, which is what led to quite a bit of lightning in the sky, Mr. Speaker, around the development of the South Saskatchewan regional plan.

Certainly, there was a great deal of worry among, you know, grazing lease holders and others in terms of the balance between access to public land for leaseholders – that is to say, in particular the grazing leases – and access for guide outfitters, for various hunting enterprises,

and indeed even for the heretofore third rail in wildlife management and fish and wildlife policy, which is, of course, paid hunting.

There is no question that when the minister can only set standards for an existing regulation under Bill 21, the minister can use those tools for anything the minister can set regulations for. That expands their powers in public lands, and you know not only will I say that this is problematic from a consultation perspective given, as I referenced, the very delicate balance. In particular, the biggest balances are usually having to be struck between grazing lease holder access – certainly, road allowance access is always an issue. Access for hunting is always an issue, and then access to public Crown leases for gravel pits and how that interacts with grazing lease holders and others is almost always – there are almost always three or four files burning that are of a great deal of concern to rural MDs, municipal districts, or even towns. Oftentimes smaller towns will have concerns about how these issues are being handled as well.

I want to issue a caution here for the House that if a minister was to take this too far, as certainly it was back in the day the Wildrose's perception of the PCs taking some of these powers too far with the development of the South Saskatchewan regional plan and elsewhere, it can cause quite a bit of a public firestorm and public debate. It can also interfere in a very delicate balance of people trying to make a living – right? – with recreational pursuits. In my mind, the right to make a living and that lease have to take precedence. You know, if there are too many folks calling you up to get access to your land for hunting, then the right to graze your animals has to come first. So it's for that reason that I would issue a caution on this Bill 21, Mr. Speaker.

I mean, the other pieces of this bill are, you know, so anodyne as to be soporific, quite frankly. We have some changing of language around the Railway (Alberta) Act and some of the fairly straightforward changes for the Rural Utilities Act in terms of how rural electrification associations can purchase other REAs, which my only question on that would be: what was the scale and scope of the negotiations with the REAs? But I suspect this was something that they do not mind.

With that, I will conclude my comments.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on amendment REF1 are there others? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to this bill. I believe it's my first time even though it may have been in the House for a while. Of course, we are speaking to the referral. You know, I would like to support this amendment in the sense that once again we see a piece of legislation that has been introduced into the House that makes changes, substantial changes, to a variety of different pieces of legislation without what I would say is appropriate consultation with many of the stakeholders that are being impacted by these pieces.

Obviously, there are some major concerns that I see even just quickly looking at these pieces of legislation and specifically to the changes that are being made through the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. Now, any changes that are done within the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act really should not be done segregated from the act itself. To do this in a piece of legislation that speaks to a variety of other pieces of legislation and not specifically to this act I think is a concern, especially when we look at the fact that there are significant changes being made in removing the maximum licensing requirements when it comes to our residential group homes and foster homes.

Now, again, coming from the fact that I've worked in this field – and, in fact, I used to do licensing – I am concerned with a watering down of what I see as being a legislative requirement when it comes to the services and supports that are provided to children intervention services. There's a reason why there's a one-year maximum on

licences. The reason that those are done is because, of course, we want to ensure that whenever a child is placed in a placement, whether it be a group home or a foster home or even a kinship home, those licences, that are being reviewed on an annual basis, are being done to ensure the most safety for and utmost safety of the children that are in those facilities. To see that there is now going to be a change that would put that in regulation removes the accountability of the director, who, ultimately, is the government, in ensuring that those legislative requirements are being followed.

Now, this has been a very scary year for children in care in the fact that we have seen an increase in the amount of children that have passed away in care, that have died in care. When we see such an increase at a time when the government is watering down the requirements of safety and the basics, I guess, of providing care to children that are in intervention services, I think that there is a serious disconnect, that this government doesn't seem to understand that the very reason that these licences are legislated, that there is a one-year renewal requirement is because of the very fact that we have to ensure that every foster home and every group home that a child is placed in is safe and that every staff that works in those group homes is certified to work in those facilities, that their training is up to date, that medication is locked away appropriately, that all of the safety pieces are put in place, that we don't have too many children in a group home when there shouldn't be more than the licensed requirement.

7:40

Even when we try to place siblings in many of these licensed facilities and they have, let's say, already three children in their home and they're only licensed for four, the director has to approve an additional child to come into that foster home because of the fact that they may have to share a bedroom. They need to ensure that there's appropriate space, that there are enough bathrooms, that the backyard is fenced in. All of those things need to be in place to keep our children safe. It's pretty simple.

When I see section 2 of the act being amended to remove the one-year maximum requirement, it's concerning. I haven't heard from the government how they're going to ensure the safety of these children that are in these placements if they're not going to ensure that this is a legislative requirement. Ultimately, it holds the government to account to ensure that they're doing what they're supposed to do to make sure kids are safe. That's why it's legislated.

To see this put into a piece of legislation that encompasses – I think we're looking at something like 16 different sections and 16 different acts, so 16 other pieces of legislation are being amended while the government is trying to sneak in an amendment to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, a pretty serious piece of legislation. I have a really hard time believing that somehow ensuring children are safe in group home facilities, in services like PSECA – they have to abide by these – looking at specialized foster homes where we have medically fragile children is somehow cutting red tape.

Keeping children safe, making sure that foster parents and staff are trained appropriately to understand the medical needs of a child who may have specialized needs is not red tape, yet it's being stuck in a piece of legislation that has 16 other pieces of legislation in it, pieces of legislation that are dealing with things like parks and looking at pieces of legislation that are dealing with public transportation, pieces of legislation that are looking at whether or not people should report whether or not an animal has an infection. How does that even correlate to the very, very important piece of legislation that keeps our kids safe? Why would the government choose to slide this into a bill that's hundreds of pages? It doesn't make any sense.

The other part about this, too, is that it also adds in that a foster parent as a person can appeal a decision on a renewal or alter a residential facility licence. I'm not sure I understand where this is coming from. I would love the government to explain to me why we would be making sure that foster parents have the ability to appeal a decision on a licence. There is a process that already exists within Children's Services, but I can tell you that through the licensing process it's pretty clear when someone doesn't pass their licensing, and there are pretty serious reasons as to why that would happen. To be able to enable somehow now within this legislation a foster parent to be able to have an appeal process: I'm curious who the government spoke to that made that decision a priority for the government.

The one thing that we do know is that when children are with temporary guardians and they have been in foster homes for a very, very long time, they go to permanent guardianship orders, and if foster parents want to adopt and for some reason they can't – there is a reason as to why they're not being approved for adoption – children's ability to be adopted gets held up for a long time when foster parents have the ability to appeal. I have stories where this has happened. Yes, there's a court process and, yes, there are things that can be done, but sometimes foster parents may not like a decision and will do this to hold up the permanency plan for a child because they want to be that permanency plan. For some reason, the government has decided that that is not in the best interest of the child. This is a very, very dangerous thing to have.

There are ways that this can happen without it being legislated that will support foster parents in going through the appeal process, through a clear and already established process that has existed for a very long time, but does not allow them to somehow start influencing the residential facility licensing process. There are some pretty significant and serious concerns not only around the safety of children in care but also the long-term permanency planning when it comes to whether or not children can be adopted by these two simple changes that are being made within this piece of legislation, this piece of legislation that isn't even talking to the whole act.

I can tell you, given my experience working with the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, that the minute you start moving one piece of that act, it creates a waterfall of effects throughout whole pieces of legislation. Like I've said, it will have on-the-ground, real, practical impacts about the ability to keep our kids safe. The government needs to take this seriously, and if they're not going to take it seriously, let's refer it to a committee. Let the committee evaluate what the outcomes are going to be, whether or not this is actually in the best interest of the child or if someone just happened to have the ear of somebody in the government and decided: hey, I had a really bad situation, and I'd like you to change this. I'm curious. I've never heard this before, I've never seen this before, and I don't understand why the government would even do this.

Like, this government needs to take the safety of our children seriously. I cannot believe – and, I mean, I just looked at this – that the government would even consider removing the one-year maximum on licences. What is it going to be, then? It's going to be stuffed in regulation, that the government can just arbitrarily change their mind and decide? You get a three-month licence? You can have a two-year licence? It can be whatever you want it to be? That doesn't make any sense. There are different levels of licensing.

You know what I do know about licensing, Mr. Speaker? It is that licensing also relates back to the support that is provided to foster parents and residential service providers. What I mean by that is that the more experience you have as a foster parent, the more ability you have to, let's say, take on a child with medical needs, the more financial assistance the government will give you to provide that. You need to have that expertise, you need to have that

understanding to be able to do that. You need to be able to pay for classes and to be able to go do those things. You could be a level 1 foster parent, a level 2 foster parent, a level 3 foster parent, and a specialized foster parent, and where you are on the scale is how much support you get from the government. That's based on your licence.

If you remove the licensing requirement, is that going to remove the financial assistance that is provided to our foster parents? Is that going to arbitrarily change the supports that this government decides to give foster parents because they will just arbitrarily change the licensing requirements? There is a direct financial correlation to this. I'd love the government to help me understand that piece.

I know they're great about their fiscal management and cutting supports when they possibly can in any way they possibly can. And you know what? A really sneaky way of being able to do that would be to mess around with the licensing requirements in foster care, right? Just make everyone a level 1 foster parent, then. You don't need to be specialized. You don't need to understand medical needs. We're not going to compensate you for your expertise and for the fact that these children need extra support. We're going to pay you all the same so that you can't access the education that you need, so that you can't get the medical support you need, pay for maybe the diapers that you need or all the medical formula that you need. Let's be honest; most foster parents pay out of pocket for most of the stuff that they provide to the children that live in their homes. They're not making money off being foster parents. But they deserve to have the support in place.

If you're a level 3 foster parent or a specialized foster parent that takes children in that need that extra support, you need that financial assistance to pay for their needs. So why change it? If it's in regulation, can't you just change the financial formula as well? Will the supports being provided to children in care change with this piece? I can see that happening. I mean, we've seen it happen everywhere else. People with developmental disabilities, people who are on AISH, seniors, all of the people that rely on this government to ensure that they have some financial support have been impacted by the decisions made by this government, and this change can do that. It can take away the ability for licensing and the level of licensing that these foster parents have. It's a real concern.

7:50

I'll be honest. I don't trust this government, so I could see them doing this as a really easy, quiet way of messing around with the licensing requirements, which then would be the financial supports to kids in care, without anybody noticing because, of course, now it won't be legislated. It will just be slid in through regulation. People should be concerned. I want skilled, educated foster parents supporting children in care. I want people working in group homes to have that knowledge and that expertise, and I want to know that every child that is placed is placed in a licensed facility that has met the requirements that the government has set and is accountable to holding in place. This government needs to ensure that happens, and if they're not, they better explain why it's not happening.

The Speaker: On amendment REF1 are there others?

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are on second reading of Bill 21. I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. Let me just double-check my debate sheet. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has the call.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for double-checking. I appreciate that. You know, I imagine that you hear me speak so many times in this House that you were doubting there for a second: oh, I thought he already spoke to this. But, of course, I have not, so thank you very much for recognizing me and giving me the opportunity to now speak to Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, on the main bill.

One of the things that I left off saying while I was commenting on the bill during referral was that the associate minister of red tape and the Minister of Education seem to be at odds on what this particular bill was actually doing. It was quite interesting. It's like the left hand didn't know what the right hand was doing, and they were quite confused. On the one hand, the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction was claiming that private schools will no longer have to produce financial data on what it collects in tuition fees, for example. The Minister of Education was claiming loudly that this wasn't at all true, that audited statements, including tuition fees, would still be required. It was confusing for a lot of people and all the more confusing for all Albertans.

Then the government produced a media handout stating that tuition fee data would not be collected, but the amendments through this omnibus legislation and the associated private school regulation make it quite clear that financial data will be reported. We need to really know what's going on here when it comes to this. How does the minister responsible for the legislation not know what is in it, right? It is precisely this diametrically opposed message from the government that causes Albertans to lose trust in the UCP.

Fundamentally, this bill makes two changes to the Education Act. As opposed to broad enabling regulatory powers on private schools, it lays out extensive details on how private schools can be regulated. Because the list of areas covered here is so extensive, there is no real net impact on the private schools. Their confusion arises because the government told the media in a handout something that turned out to be completely untrue when you read the legislation. It extends the timeline that school boards can spend noncapital reserves with ministerial approval from September 1, 2022, to September 1, 2023. This allows more time to hit the government's noncapital reserve balance limits.

This was one of the issues that, as far as I know, we still don't have clarity on. We have had the Minister of Education get up and say, "Well, no, it's not going to do that," but we still don't know in terms of the media handout that was given out and what the Minister of Education was saying. I have yet to hear concrete information on which way it is, one or the other.

Of course, the bill amends a number of pieces of legislation. As I was stating during the debate on referral, it's 16 different sections of 16 different acts. One of those is section 5 in the Health Statutes Amendment Act. It makes a small amendment to the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2021, to include "and standards" after "regulations" in one section of the act. This is yet another example, Mr. Speaker, of how this government is taking legislation, moving it into regulation, where they will not be held accountable for that inside of this Legislature. That was one of the main issues, I think, that a number of us on this side of the House have. But as I was explaining last night, even, in debate on referral, to me it's perplexing. To me, it's perplexing because this is a way that we weaken our democracy instead of strengthening it.

I can understand that there need to be regulations on certain pieces of legislation. That is not the issue; that's not the debate here. The issue is that so many pieces of legislation that we've had presented in this House by the UCP have this dominant trait, I would say, that most of what actually needs to be decided, most of how it will impact Albertans' lives, most of the decision-making that will actually end up not only impacting people now but well

into the future, for generations to come, is being put into regulation, and it's not even being debated inside of this House. That's the real issue.

I mean, the reason why we have this entity, this body, is so that these issues can be debated. Again, this is yet another example of this type of situation, where this government puts more and more into regulation so that it can't be debated in the House, and with a simple stroke of a pen they can simply just make regulations on certain pieces of legislation as they move forward.

Another example of what is being changed is section 6 of the Highways Development and Protection Act. Of course, there's no particular issue with this. But while these changes are exceedingly minor, if they save a few minutes of cabinet time and, in the view of the government, it makes the system more efficient, then we can support that kind of change. But, again, it gives power to the minister instead of cabinet to designate new freeways and the approval of freeway access locations. So it's not even going to be a cabinet decision; it's going to be simply left up to the minister.

It begs the question, you know: how does the minister actually see this power being used? What measures will be in place to ensure that approvals will still go through a proper process? Let's not forget, Mr. Speaker, that there are processes for these.

I understand that what the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is trying to do is save time, for the most part. There are, like I said, some of the changes that we agree with, and we find them to be, you know, quite reasonable. But then others, as has been debated by members on this side of this House, are quite substantial and that we just don't agree with. To be quite honest, I think that it's characteristic of this type of omnibus piece of legislation, that they would do that.

8:00

I remember that, you know, private members of the government caucus, when they were on this side, would be pulling their hair out or setting their hair on fire, whichever they would prefer, when it came to this type of thing when we were in government, yet now that those same members are on that side of the House, they're perfectly fine with the associate minister of red tape bringing forward this omnibus piece of legislation. Of course, as I was stating last night in debate as well, Mr. Speaker, a lot of those same members were, I would say, staunch advocates of accountability while they were on this side of the House.

You know, I made the argument last night, but I'll make it again, Mr. Speaker. With moving more and more decision-making power into regulations and giving all of that power to the minister, you're creating less accountability. You're creating less accountability to this Legislature and, especially, creating less accountability to the people of Alberta. That is quite concerning. Again, I find it quite hypocritical that while members were on this side of the House, they were screaming so much about accountability, and now that they're on that side of the House, private members of the government caucus don't seem to be quite as concerned about this issue of accountability at all and more and more power going into the hands of ministers and therefore the front bench and the cabinet.

The Municipal Government Act: in section 9 there are a number of positive amendments to the Municipal Government Act, which we support. We support the administrative changes and tweaks to the bill. There's the – while the changes to the MGA make a nontrivial portion of the red tape reduction, they are mostly administrative; for example, specifying how electronic records can be used or how public meetings are called or how many councillors a municipality must have or that the minister may approve changes to CRL bylaws, which would have to be approved by the city as opposed to cabinet.

As a practical matter the most substantive matter here takes up the least amount of legislative space. Amendments would enable municipalities to co-operate and establish one business licence for multiple municipalities. This is actually a really good change. I've heard from a number of business owners that this is an issue that, for them, they found concerning, so I'm glad that the government was actually able to make that change.

Another section is section 10, changes to the Pharmacy and Drug Act. Subsection (4) gives the Alberta College of Pharmacy the power to develop their own standards and enforce them on matters related to pharmacies instead of being addressed through government regulation. Some of these matters include the storage of drugs and blood products, health care products, and devices in pharmacies as well as information management systems and records. Subsection (3) downgrades regulation authority-making ability from cabinet to the minister on matters relating to regulations and bylaws created by the council. Subsections (5) and (6) proclaim sections of previous health statutes amendment acts which dealt with pharmacies.

Section 11: this is where we get into the Provincial Parks Act, Mr. Speaker. This is perhaps one of the most concerning issues that we have within this bill. We agree that there are some things that, hey, are pretty self-explanatory. There are no problems. We have no problems supporting them. But when it comes to parks, the power that the minister of environment has been given is quite substantial. Just to be clear, I'm going to quote directly from the bill, under minister's directives and codes. It says that "the Minister may set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines . . . or other rules relating to any matter in respect of which a regulation may be made under this Act." Any matter. And that is standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines or other rules to any matter. One could easily interpret this as, basically, the minister can do anything that the minister wants to do when it comes to this particular piece of legislation, and that's a lot of power to put into the hands of just one individual, I would say. Is there going to be a check and balance for this in any way?

Now, especially when it comes to the environment and parks, this government has had a horrible track record when it comes to coal mining in the eastern slopes, and the Alberta public – the Alberta public – had an incredible outcry when it came to what this government wanted to do. It was quite astonishing, because essentially the government wanted to open up the parks to coal mining.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to this omnibus bill . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, my apologies. You actually moved amendment REF1, which means that you have already spoken once at second reading.

Are there others wishing to join in the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yeah. I don't think I've had, actually, an opportunity to speak to Bill 21 in any of the readings, so I'm excited to stand up and speak about what, again, as I was earlier saying to the referral amendment, seems to be a bill that just keeps going and going and going on a variety of different things.

The one thing that I – and I'm sure my colleagues have mentioned this in the past through this debate. Even on page 1 of this bill, when it comes to the Animal Health Act, there are some changes that are being made when it comes to the reporting of potential diseases in livestock. Now, I'm not quite sure – and maybe I missed this.

Maybe the minister did speak to this at some point. Why is it moving into regulation? I think that when we look at animal welfare, we want to ensure that there is confidence in our food supply and that there is an ability to react quickly when it comes to potential infections or diseases in livestock, and you would want to make sure that it's in legislation.

Again, when we've heard this government speak to red tape reduction, they've always implied it as a mechanism or a tool that this government is using to make life simpler. And I don't know why, when we're talking about the notification of diseases, we want to make it simpler. It seems pretty important, I would think, to the whole agricultural industry that the notification of diseases happens within legislation and happens within those 24 hours. We've had examples with bovine infections. We have a current issue in Alberta right now with the avian flu, and we see how quickly it's spreading across Alberta. To not have something within the Animal Health Act that has a legislated requirement with a specific length of time in legislation is a real concern.

8:10

I wouldn't know of anybody in the agriculture industry that would have looked at this and thought: yeah, I mean, we should remove that out of the legislation. It gives certainty to our producers so that they know, when there is a potential disease within whether it be a flock or a livestock area, that that notification is happening immediately, CFIA is being deployed as soon as it needs to happen, and there is a protection in place not only for the producers but for the community as a whole. I mean, we know that when we hear about potential diseases, the best thing that Alberta does well is respond quickly so that we can continue to have that certainty and so that people who are looking at importing and exporting our products know that we have everything in place in legislation to ensure that we're responding the way that we need to respond.

I think that by removing this out of legislation and turning it into a regulation, it could give an opportunity for individuals that don't want to import our product to use it as an excuse to say that we're not actually protecting our agriculture industry the way that we should be. We're weakening the protection. Now, I don't think the government would ever want to do that. We know that we are a primary exporter of pork, beef, chicken, all the things, and to have any opportunity to weaken that, I just wouldn't understand why the government would make that choice.

I'm curious, again, hoping that at some point the minister will stand up and explain why we would remove something that's so clearly in legislation, that's so easy to point to our trading partners and say: "No. This is in legislation. This is a requirement. Notification must happen within 24 hours, and these are the steps that are followed if anything were to ever happen. You can trust our food safety." Pretty simple.

I think that's the question, and I won't dwell on it too much because I do think that, I mean, I've said what I have to say. I don't know if I'm going to get a response to any of the questions that I've asked this evening, so I'll put it on the record, and hopefully at another point we can have those conversations. Again, I think that this just speaks to – I'm not totally sure that the government, really, looking at the red tape reduction, has a clear understanding of what the intention of red tape reduction is. My understanding is that it was supposed to make things easier and better, yet this has an opportunity to create some uncertainty.

Again, going back to: when you change one piece, there tends to be a waterfall effect in other areas. I think this might be an example where, if this ever has to be tested and people want to be able to speak to our partners in our trading industries, there might be some

explaining to do, that would have been quite easy to do had we just kept it in legislation.

With that, I think I will close my remarks and sit back down.

The Speaker: Are there others? I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a second time]

Bill 23

Professional Governance Act

[Debate adjourned May 11: Ms Renaud speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. members, before the Assembly is Bill 23. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill, my first chance to do so. I must say that on review of this bill I'm concerned that the bill has even arrived at the House. I don't think it was ready for prime time, and I think that I'm very concerned about what I'm seeing here.

The first thing that I will mention sort of briefly before I go on to my major concern about the bill is the fact that the bill doesn't seem to completely understand the rest of the legislation that is going to be implicated in this bill. I guess my primary example is that there are a number of different pieces of legislation that will affect these PROs, the professional regulatory organizations, and each of those pieces of legislation have different requirements around reporting of disciplinary or other kinds of decisions that are made within the organization with regard to their own members. This bill just complicates the issue and does not provide clarity to the PROs, those organizations, to know what they have to do in the end because the bill doesn't explicitly say it.

It is eliminating rules from some of the other regulations. For example, in this particular bill it indicates that for decisions that are made by the organizations with regard to their members, there is 120 days for the decision to be made and for the participants to be informed of the decision, which is, you know, fine, I guess. I might want to go back and talk to the organizations to find out if that is an appropriate amount of time, because I understand that the government did not go back to those organizations to have that conversation.

But it also is problematic because many of these organizations will be responsible to other acts. For example, the Labour Mobility Act, which we just passed in this House not that long ago, had in it a number of very explicit rules around some of the decisions that are made, and I remember talking about that in the House at that time, about whether or not the length of time for these decisions was appropriate.

In the Labour Mobility Act, for example, it indicates that the organization has 10 days to acknowledge an application. That already is one that is not explicitly mentioned in this act but, I guess, could fit within that act without a conflict at that point. However, the second piece is that a decision needs to be made 20 days after that fact. That is in direct contradiction to the 120 days that's in this act. So we know right away that a PRO, professional regulatory organization, will be responsible under two different acts to make a reporting decision on two different dates, one of them being on 120 days, the other one being on 20 days, a huge difference of more than three months.

I just really don't think that we can pass this, in all fairness. It provides complications and is impossible for an organization to meet both. You know, I guess they'll have to make the decision to meet the limits put in under the Labour Mobility Act and just ignore

the section in this act as being irrelevant to the actual decisions. But that's ridiculous. Why are we passing a bill that actually has a section we know now to be irrelevant? That's not a good way to move forward.

As well, under the Labour Mobility Act, besides the 10 days for the acknowledgement of the application, 20 days for a decision, then there's another 10 days for a written decision, so at maximum the whole thing is 40 days long as opposed to this bill, which is 120 days. I guess reading that kind of thing just makes me very concerned that the kind of discussions have not been held with the organizations and there's not been the time taken to compare this act to the other acts that will also be governing the decisions of various organizations, and it's unfair to put them in these kinds of positions.

8:20

Just one other example, just to put the polish on my point, and that is that the Fair Registration Practices Act actually says that an interim decision can be made in six months, but the final decision is at some reasonable time thereafter. So automatically we have a contradiction, because under the Fair Registration Practices Act we have what is actually an almost unlimited amount of time, just something that's supposed to be reasonable, with an interim decision in six months, yet this bill comes in at about three months, at 120 days. I just really don't think we should be moving forward on a bill that has that kind of glaring contradiction or has not appropriately had the work done to ensure that the contents of this bill are appropriate.

I'm concerned because what this also reveals is that the government has failed to go to the organizations involved, that will be governed by this act, and failed to have those kind of explicit and deep, detailed conversations about the particulars of the act that will allow the government to ensure that they're not actually creating complications and difficulties for members of the public. I certainly think that we should not be moving a bill forward that has not had substantive consultation. In fact, it appears that they've had almost zero consultation on this one.

Most of the people that we spoke to in the various organizations, the PROs, here are suggesting that they really had no idea that this was moving forward and have not had a chance to voice their concerns. I think this is a problem, and I'm not sure why the government is making a decision to move ahead without the appropriate consultation. There are a number of very significant organizations on our list; I think we have 16, 17 organizations, and they govern literally thousands of Albertans in very significant professions. I think that we should be taking the time, so I'm very disappointed to see the government has brought this one forward.

Using the rest of my time now, I want to speak about the fact that there is a very big problem in this bill and one that I think that we really need to go back and have a conversation about. As with many of the UCP bills that have been brought into this House, we see a pulling in of power – and I've had this conversation before in this House – from the citizens of the province of Alberta back into the minister's office and decisions being made behind closed doors, where we do not have a record of conversation and the advice that happens in cabinet. So we have literally a situation where instead of being governed by your peers in these various organizations, you're being governed with no transparency by somebody with no accountability to the decisions that they're making. I think that that's really problematic.

We've seen this time and time again with this government, and I don't know why they would want to put all this power in the minister's hands every single time. We had this conversation about the environment minister earlier today, getting powers to just make

decisions that previously were made in a more transparent, public-oriented way. You know, again we have the same thing happening. It isn't like the powers that the minister is making are sort of somehow supportive powers or powers that would be minimal or related only to legislative aspects; they're actually to the very details of the running of the everyday functioning of these organizations.

In fact, this bill allows the minister the power to determine everything, from the scope of the organization to the explicit details of the bylaws of how this organization will function and how it will govern and influence the behaviours and practices of the members of the organization. In fact, this bill will allow the minister, without due transparency, without consultation with the members, to actually either create or dissolve these organizations. Why the government would want the minister to have that explicit power without any kind of conversation about why and how this should be happening in a public forum is very disconcerting to me. I'm not sure what has happened in the past that has made the government feel that this is a necessary stealing of power from the citizens of this province and moving it into the hands of one single individual in the government.

Now, many of these organizations have been around in this province for dozens of years and decades and have functioned extremely well and have governed their organizations and have been supported by their members with elected members to the boards, who then vote on bylaws, that are then brought back to the membership and get the yea or nay from the membership before they move forward, and if they don't like the bylaws that are made, then the membership can choose to not elect those members to the board again. So there was a democratic process in place for the construction of all of the aspects of these organizations, these PROs, and that democratic process is one that we know in our society is the best way for us to move forward. We certainly in this House believe in a democratic process and believe that we should be moving forward in that manner, yet this government has just subverted that kind of democracy.

It worries me when a government is so willing to subvert democracy for its own power. I am very concerned that that is the direction that they're going. We literally have it written into this bill, the ability of the government to determine the bylaws, and that is therefore the functioning and the scope – that is, the purpose – of these organizations. And I think that's dangerous, to put that in the hands of one person instead of in the hands of the profession that is being governed. You know, I can't imagine that the accountants in this province are thrilled to have no voice now in how their organization will run and who will sit on the board to make these kind of decisions, or at least have the potential to have the minister make those kind of decisions, at all. [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry. Are you wishing to intervene? Sure. I'll take it.

Mr. Schow: Yes, please. I appreciate the comments made by the member. I do disagree, specifically on those based around consultation. I can throw out Bill 6 immediately, and farmers will agree with me that there was very little consultation there.

But sticking to this bill specifically, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford just mentioned the accountants, and Rachel Miller, the chief executive officer of Chartered Professional Accountants of Alberta, said that “based on [her] understanding of the bill, CPA Alberta is confident the new legislation will provide a robust and transparent regulatory framework for the affected professions.” Mr. Speaker, consultation was done on this bill. I keep hearing this talking point from members opposite as if there was no consultation done. It's here in black and white. It's on the Alberta government website. If they care to have a look at that beyond the talking points

sitting in front of them, they might recognize that this bill did have robust consultation, and I take issue with the fact that that member would stand up here and use information that's incorrect.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The existence of one individual speaking to a bill, regardless of their position, does not speak to whether or not there was robust consultation. It's a ridiculous argument. You know, we certainly have one person who is willing to line up with the Conservatives for various reasons. Who knows why? But the point is that when we talk to these organizations, we certainly see that there has not been a substantive use of consultation. And the main point here is that the minister is being given powers that really should not be in the hands of the minister because it subverts democracy, and I notice that the intervention did not speak to that point because, I gather, they concede that point, that that is, in fact, true, that the subversion of democracy occurs.

I think one of the things, in my brief time that I have left, which I think is only a minute or so – two minutes; thank you. I want to point out one piece which I will speak to later on, and that is that the minister is actually being given the power to make decisions about the regulatory model being used by these organizations. Field Law identifies that there are five different areas of possible regulatory models, but for my short time I only want to speak to two, and that is that there is a choice between whether it's a voluntary registration or a mandatory registration for these organizations.

Right now if you are a member of some of these organizations, you must be registered if you are practising in that area. I know that when I was a member of the social work association, if as a trained social worker I was practising in an area that is deemed to be a social work practice, I must be a member or must be registered, so therefore it gave the association the ability to oversee the practice of people in the profession who are using the title and who have the appropriate training. If, however, you moved that to voluntary, then, of course, what happens is that you lose a significant number of your participants because they no longer are required to participate. That can be a very concerning thing.

8:30

We are now in this bill actually giving the minister the ability to undermine the power of these organizations to go from being mandatory to being voluntary. I can tell you that I'm sure I know the reason for that, because when it is mandatory, more people participate, more money in the organizations, they have more power to influence civic democracy, and they speak to the issues of government. If you move an organization from mandatory registration to voluntary registration, you are taking power away from them and the power to speak to government.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this evening and speak to Bill 23, the Professional Governance Act. I appreciated the comments from the member before me, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, and likely will have some similar comments on this legislation. As I'm trying to think back on my time in this House with the particular member, I'm not sure if I've ever voted differently than that member has, so I'm not necessarily seeing that to be the case this time around either. A very insightful and passionate and knowledgeable member.

A few things that I want to touch on. First of all, it's interesting, the – I would say lack of consultation – consultation process that

this government undertook. From what I can tell, even when the technical discussions happened between the department and the opposition caucus, there was an acknowledgement that there wasn't a broad consultation process that took place to have discussions about this legislation regarding PROs. It's interesting that the member across the aisle, you know, stood for an intervention and said that that wasn't the case considering their own department said that it was indeed.

I'm looking back at a document that was e-mailed out to all the members of the Alberta institute of agrology back on February 28. It tells a different story, and it's very interesting. I'm hopeful that the government can maybe provide clarity to the process that took place from the beginning of this proposed legislation to where we are now, because at that time they sent out an e-mail to their hundreds if not thousands of members. Just a few quotes from what they sent out: "This legislation has been drafted in secret without any consultation. No PRO knows how it will affect their operations. The Minister has advised the AIA to prepare to manage major changes while continuing to operate under the current law until the new law is in force."

Now, as you may know, Mr. Speaker, obviously, something changed through that process, and I would appreciate clarification, because when the government announced and likely threw a press release, the AIA was actually one of their stakeholders that was willing to come forward and support this. Great. At some point they went from having no consultation and drafting this legislation without them to showing them the legislation and them being very concerned. There are other comments that I may or may not get to from that document that was e-mailed out to all the members of the AIA.

I would be interested to find out what took place, what consultation or conversations happened to get them from saying that this legislation was drafted in secret without any consultation to, from what I remember, being a validator for this government. Good on the government, I suppose, for getting one of these PROs to go from "There was no consultation process; this was done in secret" to potentially being a validator. But, again, I would like to know the process that took place, exactly how they came so far from their initial comments, because I think it's an important question. Again, is it the case that the only people or, in this instance, the only PROs that get to have a voice at the table are ones that are willing to come out and attack the government? I don't think that is a fair consultation by any means.

You know, I spoke to this on previous bills this week, the lack of clarity from this government and the lack of transparency when they are providing opportunities, or lack thereof, for consultation and how organizations have to be as loud as they can to actually have their voices heard. It's unfortunate, because I think that whenever we are drafting legislation, there should be equal opportunity for everyone. No organization or president of an association or other example should have to necessarily put their name on the line or put their organizations out in the firing line, I guess for lack of better terms, just to have their voice heard, but that seems far too often what happens under this government.

I hear that again and again from organizations that are affected by legislation that this government puts forward, that either there are multiple changes that this government is proposing and potentially they don't have time to necessarily identify all of the problems with one issue or one piece of legislation because they have bigger problems with another piece of legislation, or they're simply afraid to come out against this government because they have seen a pattern of vindictiveness from this government.

It's truly unfortunate because, whether it's on the changes that we're seeing here in Bill 23, the Professional Governance Act, or

any other piece of legislation, every Albertan and every organization that is being affected by legislative changes that are being proposed by the government and by this House should have equal opportunity. It shouldn't matter necessarily how much money their organization has or how close of a friendship they have with the Premier or how many memberships they were able to help the Premier sell; it should be that everyone has an equal voice in the consultation when we're talking about proposing changes to legislation.

That is one of my biggest concerns with this legislation. It is quite clear from organizations that we've consulted with, from organizations that have reached out to their members that there is a pattern and a lack of consultation, and at the end of the day not only does it leave people feeling like they weren't heard or weren't consulted; it also doesn't give them adequate time to prepare for the changes that are being proposed, which is another huge issue with what is being offered in Bill 23 not only with the timeline changes but the absolute power that the minister is proposing be given to themselves and to the government to make changes to, as the previous member said, just a few of the things, bylaws, being able to create or dissolve these organizations, being able to amalgamate them potentially arbitrarily.

We truly don't know. I guess it just depends how the minister is feeling that day and maybe what kind of relationship the minister has with one of these PROs or another. That is truly not how we should be governing. I said that on Bill 21, where the environment minister is proposing that they give themselves massive powers to be able to designate and change essentially any law that pertains to parks. That is deeply unfortunate, and we see this pattern.

I would be interested to find out how many pieces of legislation this government has brought forward that have given such increased powers to the minister, because I remember it truly didn't happen nearly as much under our government. It was for different circumstances, no doubt, but any time that we had put forward changes to legislation where even there was a tiny bit of power being given to the minister from previously, the at that time Wildrose opposition would be incredibly upset. Yet now we have a government who has members from the then Wildrose opposition and many other members in this government that would identify, I'm sure, as closer to Wildrose than they are to UCP – and we'll see how that plays out – but they have been absolutely silent on the many changes that this government has proposed to give ministers more power. That's fine. Well, it's not fine, Mr. Speaker. It's fine for those members now as they sit in government, but I imagine that in the future, if the government changes, they are going to be concerned with the amount of power that they have given ministers under their own watch, because we are allowing those ministers to make changes without coming to this Legislature.

8:40

I raised the point, and I will raise it again, regarding Bill 10 and the changes that the Health minister, I believe, at the time, a minister, was proposing to give the government the ability to change laws without coming before this House. They came back to the Legislature and changed those laws because there was such an outcry from the public, but they haven't seemed to learn anything at all, Mr. Speaker. Here we are again this evening debating Bill 23, Professional Governance Act, and they are proposing the exact same thing, to give the minister absolute power over these PROs, who for so long have, as far as I can tell, done a reasonable, done a good job at self-governance and adhering to the laws that had previously been put in place.

As the previous member asked, I would also ask: why are we here? Are there certain organizations that we are considering

putting under this umbrella legislation that the government or the associations are having issues with? You know, we see 22 professions here that are listed, just a few – for instance, the Alberta Association of Architects is quite different from the Alberta Institute of Agrologists, quite different from the Alberta Society of Professional Biologists. I mean, there are a lot of associations that are going to be affected by this legislation, and again we have a government and a minister that are talking about potentially giving themselves the power to amalgamate some of these associations. I imagine that's the last thing that these organizations want to see. They have quite different roles within the industry, so I'm sure they are concerned about that.

I again would ask: what is the minister trying to address here? What issues have arisen in terms of potentially lack of adherence to bylaws, concerns around timelines for reporting, some of the other changes that are being proposed here around board governance and membership? I mean, there is so much being changed and proposed in this legislation that it's hard to understand what the issue is that the government is trying to tackle and potentially what has taken place within these PROs that has the government so concerned. I would appreciate if a minister or a member that might have some insight into that was willing to stand up.

Again, from the letter that the AIA sent out back on February 28, this legislation was drafted in secret. You know, this isn't a direct quote, but it's quite clear that there are major concerns about the lack of inclusion during the consultation process, the lack of clarity around what the bylaws might look like after the fact. We see this again and again from this government, that they put forward sweeping changes to legislation and not only are they providing information that the minister is going to have so much more power through the legislation, but they're also asking Albertans and asking these associations and organizations to trust them that they are going to get the regulations right.

I would also ask, I suppose, at this point, what consultation process – hopefully, a formal one that is going to be open to the public or at least open to the stakeholders. First of all, who is going to be involved in those consultation processes? Have they already taken place? And is it going to be made available to the general public to have their say on that? Hopefully, we can get some answers on that.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, if I might ask how much time I have left.

The Speaker: A minute and 52 seconds.

Mr. Carson: Perfect. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The idea of mandatory versus voluntary registration, which the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford brought up, is another important issue, specifically around the idea of the money that these organizations receive from these registration processes. Do we expect to see a complete and fundamental change to how much money is being provided to these organizations from these registrations, from these memberships? How is that going to affect them and affect their ability to effectively advocate for their associations, effectively ensure that they have the bandwidth to provide bylaws and reporting requirements that are going to meet the standards that are being put forward by Bill 23? There are so many questions. It seems that the government is putting a lot of pressure on these organizations to adhere to regulations that they haven't even seen and at the same time potentially clawing back thousands and thousands of dollars from these organizations, so I think that they might expect to have answers about how they are going to afford the changes that they are being asked to make.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I have major concerns with Bill 23. I think that this needs to go back to the drawing board because it's

quite clear that this government has not done the proper amount of consultation and that very likely many of these organizations are going to be concerned about the amount of power that this minister and this government are trying to give themselves through this legislation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 23. Well, we support consistency, we support transparency, we support accountability for the professional bodies, for the professional statutory organizations, and, in fact, in all areas of the government, but this bill goes far beyond that. If the government was really serious about transparency and accountability, they would not get the code of silence award from the Canadian Association of Journalists in 2020. The reason for that was that this government is not transparent. This government refuses to be accountable.

For example, they set up an entity, the war room, a \$120 million entity, and they exempted it from FOIP. What that means: the public will pay for that entity, for them stealing logos and doing all kinds of things, but the public will be shut down. The public will not be able to access their records, the details, how they are spending public money. So if the government is really serious about accountability, that's where they will start. For instance, then there was an inquiry, the Allan inquiry, that was delayed or given multiple extensions in terms of time, in terms of money, and the public was not given access to the details. No transparency again.

And it's the same with accountability. This government doesn't want to be accountable to the people of Alberta. What they are doing in the name of transparency and accountability in this piece of legislation goes far beyond that. If we agree to these changes, then self-regulatory organizations will be self-regulatory in name only. This bill is giving the minister power to determine the scope, their bylaws, and even their existence. Knowing the history of the current minister, what could go wrong? If the minister is allowed to determine the scope, their bylaws, and even their existence, I do not believe that the minister will have or the minister's department will have the kind of expertise that a self-governing profession will have, those professionals will have.

8:50

For instance, I'm a lawyer, and it's governed by the Law Society of Alberta. It's a self-governing organization, and I do not believe for a second that any minister in this government or, for that matter, any government will know more about the legal profession or its governance than the professionals themselves, than the law society. There is a democratic process. They elect benchers. They are in regular contact with lawyers that provide them support, that provide them guidance, and they regulate the profession in a way where it maintains public trust and confidence and it remains arm's length from the government.

Similarly, social work. I do know a lot of social workers. I do have a background in that as well. Again, it's a self-governing body. Not for a second would I trust that any minister will have more expertise or is more qualified to govern the profession than social workers themselves.

As my colleague earlier mentioned, we are seeing a trend with this government, that they are trying to strip citizens of their powers and consolidate that power in government so that they can decide whatever they think suits their political needs. That's unacceptable. That is unacceptable. For instance, in this case the minister of labour, previously the Minister of Justice, was caught interfering in

the administration of justice. Why should Albertans trust this minister in particular, that he has any credibility or has more expertise to manage any of these self-governing professions, their bylaws, their scope, or even their existence? I do not believe that Albertans will trust this government, this minister to do any of those functions.

This legislation is unnecessarily confusing and leaves many substantial details to the regulations. We know that when details are within the legislation, then any changes that need to be made have to come through this Legislature. But, no, that's not what this government is doing. Like with every other bill, they're bringing forward a piece of skeleton legislation and giving themselves power to regulate through regulations, schedules, and orders. Mr. Speaker, this is a government which is the least trusted across Canada. The least trusted government. They shouldn't be even asking for more powers. Albertans can't wait to strip them of the power they already have.

Here the government is asking for powers to manage and regulate self-regulating professions. For instance, one of the requirements contained here is that these organizations will now have three timelines to adhere to in approving applications for registration. Why on earth does this government think that they are better positioned to determine the timeline for registration than the professionals? These are the kinds of arbitrary powers, arbitrary measures that they're putting in this legislation, and it's completely unacceptable.

They talk about reducing red tape, and now this bill is piling red tape onto self-governing professions, creating more work without thinking through what the unintended consequences could be.

They did not consult all the professions that are impacted by this piece of legislation. They did not consult them. They can read one quote, but they did not consult all the professions and professionals who are impacted by that. They're just using their majority to ram through these changes so that they can exert control on these self-governing professions. They can control the membership. They can have a hammer to get their way when they need these organizations onside. This is undemocratic, this is unnecessary, and that's why Albertans don't trust this government.

Also, as I said, the government is giving wide powers to the minister with respect to the minister determining the scope of some governing body. I think it would be nice if the minister would get up, list all the organizations that are impacted, and talk about the consultation that the minister or this government had with every single one of the organizations that are impacted by this piece of legislation. It would be nice to know if government has reached out to any of these professions who are impacted by these changes.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Clearly, the government did not consult on this legislation. Reading one quote from a validator does not amount to consultation. It does not give the government authority to dismantle all of these self-governing organizations, to determine their scope, to determine their bylaws, to determine their existence. That's way too broad. That's not something that government is doing to make them accountable, and we do know government's record on accountability.

9:00

So this bill, one, is overreaching into areas where government should not. Two, I do not believe that government has expertise, capacity to determine the scope, bylaws, and existence of these self-governing organizations. Three, government did not consult with these organizations and members of these organizations or Albertans at large. As drafted, this bill is unacceptable.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 23?

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 22 Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity it is my honour to rise today to move that Bill 22, Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022, be read a third time.

I want to start by acknowledging the Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity. I know that he and his office went to great lengths to receive input on the best path forward for this legislation. I thank him and his office for their efforts.

Seeing how the current minister has received input from stakeholders has caused me to reflect on what has happened previously. You see, Madam Speaker, I'm a power engineer; I have been for a number of years. Prior to being elected to represent West Yellowhead, I had the opportunity to run a power plant and also run one of the largest industrial consumers of electricity in the province. For me, through this lived experience I've been afforded an opportunity that few people have. I have personally witnessed both how the generation side and the industrial consumer side of the electricity market works. I've learned how decisions around the electricity market can impact people personally, impact industry, lead to whether companies move forward with investment decisions, and even lead to job gains or losses in our communities.

After I became the candidate for the UCP, I was at an event one evening in a community and met an organization travelling the province to talk about electricity. I asked about their organization, and they told me they were part of a, quote, unquote, think tank that was going into communities telling them why the path forward with the electricity market made sense. Madam Speaker, this was before the election in 2019. It was during a time where, as someone working in industry, I was painfully aware of the changes that were happening under the previous government. I was very much aware of the devastation that was being caused, that would lead to job losses, higher electricity prices, and the electricity grid being subjected to massive instability, you know, like we hear about in certain states that are subjected to brownouts and blackouts.

My response to the young lady who told me that the path forward made sense was simply: oh, you get paid to go around the province and lie to people. We then did have a great discussion about electricity and the market and what the best path forward would and should be, including the need for industry to succeed so they can help other consumers pay for the infrastructure necessary, electricity storage for renewable energies, and an open, competitive market that is driven by investor confidence rather than massive subsidies to companies who otherwise wouldn't be viable. Our discussion also covered the importance of electricity to be reliable and affordable. In fact, I believe that we got to a point where we both agreed that an ideologically driven electricity market was less important than a reliable and affordable market.

After the election I took a keen interest in what our path forward for the electricity market would be. Along with consumers and

industries around the province I was relieved that we stayed with an energy-only market. I was thankful that we started having conversations about the massive costs for consumers relative to building infrastructure to transmit electricity from one side of the province to the other. I was grateful that the minister was focused on weighing out all decisions to ensure that the potential impacts are realized, weighed out, and mitigated prior to making massive changes. If only that approach had been taken previously, perhaps our ratepayers wouldn't be on the hook for 7 and a half billion dollars of transmission line, over a billion dollars of repayment to the Balancing Pool, hundreds of millions of dollars of subsidies and corporate welfare for coal-fired plants to retrofit to natural gas based on an ideological agenda rather than advancing technology around carbon capture and fly ash mitigation.

Oddly enough, the same government that was creating such a mess of the electricity market came to a realization that their decisions were having a massive negative impact, with great instability and drastically increasing costs, and decided to, rather than stopping their agenda or actually stopping to ask for advice or even listen to concerns, slap a price cap on electricity.

Now, I know we have heard from the opposition members that this price cap was the right thing to do, but I want to highlight a couple of things about the price cap. First and foremost, the price cap was not indefinite. It was set to expire at the end of December 2022. That's right, Madam Speaker. They set the cap to expire as Alberta entered an election year. They didn't reverse course on horrible, uneducated, ideological decisions that they knew would increase costs exponentially for Alberta households and industries. No, they decided to instead cap the price and then try to use it for political gain down the road.

Secondly, the price cap wasn't real. You see, even after the price cap was instituted in the first year, the price was above the cap, so the former government stole money out of the taxpayer pocket to pay corporations for the price above the cap. This sort of magic trick to fool the ratepayer and increase taxation for the taxpayer, for me, Madam Speaker, is not only disingenuous; it's downright disgusting. All they had to do was change course.

Nevertheless, Madam Speaker, I'm thankful that our government and our associate minister of electricity have chosen to engage with the public, to engage with industry, to engage with the groups that run our electricity market. I'm grateful that the government is considering the impact of decisions being made now on how it impacts the province now and for the future. I can go on and on about the benefits of modernizing Alberta's electricity grid, but at the end of the day the fact remains that our government listened to what Albertans wanted and is now implementing initiatives to meet the growing needs of consumers, create a low-carbon future through investment from industry, and reduce the harm done by costly subsidies from Alberta taxpayers.

Given recent events this was not a decision that came lightly. This legislation was developed with input from a wide range of stakeholders and consumer groups. It builds off legislation tabled last year. Bill 22 will enable electricity generation for unlimited self-supply with export, an incentive for new investment in the province. It will establish a distribution planning framework. This framework will help Alberta plan for the growing and changing consumer demands of tomorrow, including electric vehicles, renewable power sources, emerging technologies, and other distributed energy resources. We need to act now to make long-term changes central to our province's prosperous future.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'm proud to support this legislation and look forward to continuing to hear how the associate minister will move our province forward to correct the damage that was done

previously and make Alberta a place where affordable, reliable energy is expected for households, communities, and industries moving forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that want to join the debate on Bill 22? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and provide some additional comments at this stage of debate on Bill 22. I think it's fair to say that we've had a chance to review this legislation because we had a chance to review it last fall as well, when it was initially introduced. To the previous number of points that my hon. colleagues, anyway, made around consultations with professional organizations in the area of labour relations, in the area of regulations governing child and youth care, in just simply a number of areas, consultation just simply was not done.

9:10

I think, pointing to the fact that the government has been seized with other priorities – that is to say, focusing on themselves and not the rather boring work of focusing on Albertans – it's almost as if we are not important enough, that this matter of making good legislation for Albertans and talking to them and making sure that, you know, the legislation is solving problems that Albertans understand that they have is not as interesting to the governing party as the palace intrigue that seems to grip much of their attention. So we came to a spot where the consultation was not completed, and the government, rightfully, understood that last fall, when this bill was first introduced. We are glad to see that that piece of work finally has, albeit late, been completed, and here we are at third stage.

Now, I think it's fair to say that based on the fact that this bill is designed, is a specific response to the electrification that comes as a result of decarbonization – that is real and is required. It is urgent, as I have noted in my comments on this bill, because climate change is real. Now, these are not words that the province says very often. In fact, it is that avoidance that oftentimes does create a climate of investor uncertainty. Certainly, oftentimes, as I have my conversations with renewables developers, power market participants of various kinds, and investors of various kinds, both institutional and not, it certainly is increasingly seen as something that does hold back investor certainty and investor confidence given that there seems to be a fundamental misunderstanding of the coal phase-out, the fact that 12 of the 18 plants were phased out by Mr. Harper. The Premier was at the table at that time, in fact, a couple of members of caucus now, the Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche as well.

There seems to be a fundamental misunderstanding about what a contract for difference is. Characterizing it as a subsidy I don't think inspires confidence in anyone given that it's not, and it just makes people look ridiculous in the House.

Given the failure to commit to transparency on the industrial price, as is mandated by section 2 of the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act, that certainly is – that failure of, essentially, courage to stand up to, you know, a climate-denying base within the party just doesn't inspire investor confidence or investor certainty given that the industrial price is so intimately linked to the value of the offsets and the appropriate governing of the offsets market.

It also does not inspire confidence or certainty when there still seem to be elements within the party – we just had it last week, a set of questions around, essentially, what the government was going to do to tell private landowners what to do with their land with respect to solar and wind projects, which was an extraordinary

position for a UCP MLA to take, you know, saying that private property owners don't have the right to execute agreements with those companies or shouldn't have the right, and then there should be all kinds of other regulatory red tape and delays within the AUC process and a frivolous blocking of the AUC regulatory process, frustrating new investment for developers and others.

Certainly, it does not help in terms of investor certainty and investor confidence when a government won't even say the words "climate change," such that industry folks will then observe out loud to me that these folks have no idea what they're leaving on the table when they do that. These are folks that just want to have a regularized, predictable climate for certainty so they can confidently make investments in now, thankfully, electricity storage that can complement in a number of different ways other forms of generation, whether it's in the hydro space or in some of the wind and solar spaces.

Certainly, we do see that even thermal generation, you know, goes down for maintenance and so on quite often. This is the time of year when that happens. There is no such thing as an always-on system of generation, so this piece helps, I think. I think there's no question that it also may work in really interesting ways in our energy-only market, and that's a good thing.

I think that there's also no question that this bill is at least a tacit understanding by some elements of the cabinet that we do need to grapple with the fact that climate change is real even though I understand that that causes a great deal of consternation and division within the caucus. I suppose the folks who are on the other side of that debate are just going to have to come to terms with that, that we're in the 21st century. At least there's the odd person on the front bench and maybe in the policy co-ordination office and elsewhere that actually understands that to be a real thing.

You know, I think there's no question that the Official Opposition will support this bill, and we're glad that the extra consultation happened, but it's really important to point out here that this is the very bare minimum of the job description. Going further to make this legislation and other legislation that we've had before us on the topic of utilities more relevant would be to do something about the extraordinarily high prices that people are paying right now, and there are any number of ways that that can be accomplished.

There's no question that there can be more funding available to and resources available to the Utilities Consumer Advocate to help people navigate contracts and so on to insulate them from some of these price spikes. There's no question about that. There's no question that a cap or some other form of rebate to consumers could and should have been made real, and that policy work should have been done last fall, when anyone who was looking at the electricity futures could tell. Even last summer, when the heat wave came, it was very clear to me that we were going to be having this conversation around affordability by this time, and indeed we were, but the government was just happy to whistle past the graveyard and just, you know, do absolutely nothing to help people.

There's no question that overhauling some of the more, I guess, intricate yet not exactly top-of-mind regulatory aspects of the electricity system is a really important drumbeat of government work. You know, a gold star for showing up in the morning, I guess. But this is the absolute bare minimum, both on the climate change file but also on the overall ensuring that utilities remain affordable. And the energy-only market, which does deliver a number of advantages for welcoming new investment, whether it's foreign direct investment or Canadian investors – there's no question that it does that, but it also subjects the consumer to volatility, and that's where the government's regulatory function has to come in.

The final piece I will say on this is that it has come to my attention more recently that the AUC is quite backed up in many of its processes, in some part due to some of the sort of vexatious and frivolous activity around trying to frustrate development of projects in some municipalities who don't want people to do what they're going to do with their private land and make those choices in a free-market economy. Apparently, that's not a real thing for Conservatives anymore. They're not really interested. You know, I guess it's left to me to make a spirited defence of the free market.

You know, I think that there's a lot of stuff that needs to be cleaned up at the AUC, because you can't have these thousands and thousands of megawatts sitting in a regulatory queue and having just, like, vexatious nonsense getting in the way of new investment, new generation, new jobs, and, ultimately, new economic activity in the province. There is no question as well that landowners benefit tremendously from these projects if they are appropriately sited and if they negotiate a good deal with the developer. There's no question, too, that municipalities also benefit in the form of tax revenues.

9:20

One of the biggest things that happens, especially for rural landowners when they choose to develop their private land in this way, is that it can oftentimes provide, again, a counterweight to the volatility of another commodity, which is whatever they happen to be growing or raising on their farm, but also it can mean that there is succession planning on farms so that communities remain places where people can raise families. That income is really, really important, and it should not be discounted, and it should not be sacrificed at the altar of some kind of Facebook rant that masquerades as a question period question on the relative value of frustrating private land development of wind and solar, as I heard one of the questions come from a government backbencher last week.

I will conclude my comments there. I am pleased to support this legislation, Madam Speaker. You know, it's possible that some observers might think I took a roundabout way to get there, but it is not in my DNA to be overly complimentary to a Conservative, so I will not be in this instance. However, this is an important step forward for the overall management and regulatory framework for Alberta's electricity system.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and offer a few comments as well on Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022, at third reading. I want to thank my friend from Lethbridge-West for her comments. I just want to say that I know that she is not particularly complimentary about Conservatives. I have yet to see the group of people about whom she is particularly complimentary. We live in hope, and I'm sure that one day we'll see some compliments come from the Member for Lethbridge-West. I suspect that I won't be receiving any from her any time soon, though.

You know, I do want to thank her for raising some particularly important issues about what has driven the cost of electricity here in the province of Alberta, because I think she has given a much more honest analysis of what has driven the cost of electricity than the previous speaker, the Member for West Yellowhead. I was shocked listening to the Member for West Yellowhead stand up,

start off his comments about saying that he was a power engineer and that he had all of this lived experience working in the electricity industry, and then he continued to spout all of the misinformation that the associate minister for electricity has been giving about the cost of electricity and what has driven that up over the last couple of years.

As my friend from Lethbridge-West has pointed out, all of those things that the Member for West Yellowhead raised as issues are minor in comparison to what is really driving the cost of electricity right now, and that is market power being exercised by the few electricity generators who are in the market. That's not me saying that; that is the result of an independent analysis done by respected electricity grid policy experts at the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy, particularly Blake Shaffer. The market power that is being exercised right now by the few electricity generators is what is causing the bulk of the increase in electricity prices.

What's incredibly frustrating, Madam Speaker, is that this exercise of market power, or economic withholding, as we used to call it in the good old days, is legal. Our government made an attempt through the Alberta Utilities Commission to crack down on the use of economic withholding to try to make sure that generators couldn't just raise the price of power because they had the power to do so, that they had to demonstrate clearly to the utility regulator that they had a financial need to raise electricity prices. This government has scrapped that. The AUC has walked away from this crackdown on economic withholding. It's now perfectly legal, the way it was before our government was elected. And what is the government doing about it? Nothing.

My friend from Lethbridge-West raises the point about the fact that the Alberta Utilities Commission is overwhelmed with work because we know that an important role that they play is to make sure that the market is functioning properly and fairly and in the interests of electricity consumers. They have the mandate and the power, if they choose to use it, to investigate the behaviour of electricity generators to see if they're charging fair prices, and they don't have the capacity to do that right now even though they should be doing it.

You know, I watched with great interest earlier this year the proceedings of the Alberta Utilities Commission with respect to ATCO generation and their dirty tricks trying to hide inflated costs to contractors and subcontractors by shifting that onto ratepayers. They ended up paying – what? – I think it was a \$30 million fine to the Alberta Utilities Commission for their shenanigans. The only reason we know that that happened, Madam Speaker, was because a whistle-blower at ATCO came forward with all of the information, laid out the case, had all of the e-mails. The paper trail was there, as easy to follow as anything else, so it was an open-and-shut case. When the Alberta Utilities Commission looked at it, it was quite clear that ATCO was up to no good. They issued them a fine, and hopefully that will repair some of the costs that were illegally transferred onto ratepayers because of what went on there.

My question is: what other things are these electricity generators getting away with that we don't know about? The Alberta Utilities Commission should be conducting much more in the way of proactive investigations to understand whether or not the rate increases that electricity generators are foisting upon the people of Alberta are actually legal and warranted. That's what's going on here.

Moreover, let's entertain the hypothetical world where the excuses that the associate minister of natural gas continues to trot out when it comes to the cost of raising electricity – well, he has the power to fix it. He refuses to do so, saying that we spent a billion dollars on power purchase arrangements and 7 and a half billion dollars on upgrading the transmission system. Well, that doesn't

actually reduce the cost of electricity for people today. It's very easy to lay blame for what's going on. Trust me. I know; we've been doing that for the last three years. It's the easiest thing I've ever done in my life. Coming up with solutions that will make a positive difference in the lives of Albertans is much harder, and this government is completely unwilling to engage in that work. They can't even get a simple \$50 cheque out the door.

I was talking to some residents in Edmonton-Gold Bar earlier today. They're at risk of losing their home because they cannot afford the cost of utilities going up in addition to the cost of everything else that's going up: their rent is going up, the cost of groceries is going up, the cost of fuel is going up. Even though the government scrapped the gas tax, somehow gas companies found a way to charge us just as much for gas as the day that the government announced that they were scrapping the tax. The government promised people relief on their utility bills, and now we find out that we have to wait until December and people are giving up hope that they'll ever see any help at all. In one moment the Finance minister and the associate minister of electricity talk about the rebates that are coming, and in the next moment the Finance minister stands up and says: well, we can't give more money to people in this inflationary environment. People are left on their own, I guess, in the view of the Finance minister and the associate minister of electricity. They're certainly not getting the help that they were promised.

I just want to wrap up my comments here by saying that the opportunity for electrification is one of the greatest opportunities that faces the province of Alberta right now as we transition to a low-carbon economy. I believe that this bill starts the work, but there is much more that needs to be done much more quickly. What will happen if we rapidly move to electrify everything in Alberta, transfer everything that's powered by fossil fuels right now onto electrical appliances, electrical vehicles? The end result would be massive savings for consumers.

9:30

An analysis by an organization called Rewiring America found that if the average household switched all of its appliances, all of its machines to things powered by renewable electricity, the average consumer would save \$3,000 a year in utility costs and fuel costs. Those are big savings that people need right now. Moreover, it will create hundreds of thousands of jobs and not just in the electricity sector; in all of the spinoffs as well, the commercial sector – we need to manufacture more of these electric machines – in the transportation sector, even in sectors that you wouldn't think of as being traditionally associated with electrification, things like finance, right? People need to be able to pay for the transition to an electrified home. I think that there are some opportunities for some financial instruments that would be suitable to helping families do that.

Mr. Hunter: Why would we need to do that if it saves them so much money?

Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. The Member for Taber-Warner just – I'll be happy to explain that to him if he doesn't understand the point that I'm making now afterwards.

Mr. Hunter: Well, you could do it now.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, we have an agenda to stick to, and I'd like to honour every member's time and stick to that agenda. Thank you very much.

Anyway, this is important work. People will save thousands of dollars. We'll put hundreds of thousands of people to work. We will

significantly reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions, which is urgently, urgently required. Let's get on with it.

So for that reason, Madam Speaker, I'm voting in favour of this bill. Thank you very much.

Oh, I'm sorry. No, no, no. Sorry. I still have some time left, Madam Speaker. With that time, I would like to move to adjourn debate on Bill 22.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 20

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening to move on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General third reading of Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

This bill proposes a handful of housekeeping amendments meant to keep our province's legislation up to date for Albertans, nothing more. To repeat what was said when the bill was introduced originally, it's the government's responsibility to keep legislation relevant with the times to meet the needs of our province.

Before I continue, I'd like to summarize what was presented at Bill 20's second reading. If passed, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act would amend five pieces of legislation. The amendments would complete the following changes. First, it would change the Corrections Act to make Alberta Parole Board remuneration consistent with other government agencies, boards, and commissions. Secondly, it would alter the Justice of the Peace Act to streamline the process for making JPs part-time or full-time. Thirdly, it would update the Missing Persons Act so that police can complete associated tasks with minimal delay. Fourth, it would change the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act to clean up outdated wording and make language more sensitive to grieving families. Finally, it would update the Youth Justice Act to keep the wording of the legislation in line with changes that the federal government made to Canada's Criminal Code.

Madam Speaker, during debate a number of questions were raised about the victims of crime. As previously discussed, our government is committed to ensuring victims of crime have access to the help they need and when they need it. Bill 20 does not impact this commitment whatsoever. In our work to serve Albertans victimized by crime, we heard first-hand that the previous financial benefits program could take too long to access and didn't always provide enough urgent assistance for those coping with trauma. Albertans told us about gaps in services and supports for victims of crime, and that's why we are developing a new model to make sure victims are supported throughout their involvement in the justice system.

With the closure of the financial benefits program the Criminal Injuries Review Board, which reviewed decisions made under that program, is no longer needed. The changes proposed in Bill 20 align provincial legislation with the closure of this board, nothing more. To be clear, we are finalizing plans to improve programs and services to continue to support victims of crime well into the future. At this time the emergency-based programs have a 45-day limitation to apply, but a victim under extenuating circumstances may apply for an extension.

All victims of crime continue to have access to the many resources offered by local victim service units such as the following, Madam Speaker: information on the criminal justice process and court-related updates, assistance in understanding the

rights of victims of crime, and help accessing referrals for specialized supports and community resources. The minister expects to share more information on this new model that will enhance victims' services later this year.

Madam Speaker, with these points in mind and with no concerns noted on the other portions of this legislation, I would like to underscore that Bill 20 would help update and take care of the noteworthy details of several important pieces of provincial law. Part of providing Albertans with consistent, effective access to justice is looking after the small things, doing the housekeeping work that's necessary to keep things in good working order.

I hope that members on both sides of the House will join me in supporting this legislation. With that, Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 20.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there members to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise to speak to third reading of the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I was listening to the hon. member while she was making her comments in regard to the government's perception of how this is just simply housekeeping. Now, I'm a little concerned that once again we see a piece of legislation that's being introduced in the House that the government just perceives as being housekeeping but, really, is finalizing the decisions that the government made under Bill 16, which was to, basically, abolish the current victims of crime fund and any types of supports that individuals across Alberta could access or need supports if they're ever in a situation where they are a victim of crime.

Now, the obvious issue with this is that we know that since Bill 16 was introduced in 2020, so two years ago, a big percentage of the funding that was allocated through fines and penalties that were leveraged by the courts – of those fines that were paid, that money was then transferred into a victims of crime fund. Now, that's long standing. We know that there's about – there was an expected \$40 million annually that was to be raised and put into that fund, and we know that in 2020, when this was changed, there was about \$74 million of surplus that was in that fund. We know that since that time, that money is now being used to pay for more prosecutors and police officers. That money that was allocated to provide supports to individuals that were victims of crime is no longer available.

Now, the member opposite mentioned that: you know, stay tuned. The government is finalizing a plan about what they're going to do to provide supports for people that have had to access the victims of crime fund. Well, I find that disappointing given that the legislation that was introduced, Bill 16, that made sweeping changes to the victims of crime fund was written and introduced into this House in 2020, two years ago. We still are in a: "Wait and see. We have an announcement coming soon at some point. There will be a new model that will be developed, and the government is finalizing the plans."

9:40

Well, why, then, do we have Bill 20? This current piece of legislation that we are debating this evening that is solidifying the changes that Bill 16 introduced two years ago is now being brought into this House with, once again, no finalized plan, no new model, no vision by this government about how they're going to support individuals that are victims of crime, but: "Hey, let's legislate everything. Let's change it all. Let's solidify the regulations and the changes that we've made under Bill 16 even though we know as a government that they're not ready." Clearly, you just said that. There's no plan yet. It's not ready to roll out, but let's introduce Bill

20. Let's solidify those changes. Let's impact individuals that are currently in need of supports. Let's use this fund to pay for prosecutors and police officers, not counselling services for the very people that need it. And, oh, on top of that, let's not have a plan to replace that so that the opposition can look at it and go: hey, maybe this makes some reasonable sense.

Again, you're putting the cart before the horse. It is an ongoing theme by this government to introduce legislation, to change red tape, as they so call it, to make sweeping changes to programs that support Albertans in their time of need and then have absolutely no vision or plan to fall back on: "We'll make the changes. We'll figure out the consequences later. We'll create a plan, and maybe before the next election there will be something in place." Why would the government introduce these pieces of legislation if they weren't ready? Why do Albertans continuously have to face the consequences of poor planning by this government? That's what it is. It's poor planning.

Someone drafted legislation and said, "Hey, it's ready to go." I'm sure somebody else in the background said: "Okay; but we don't actually have the tools in place yet. Hold on. We shouldn't do this." And cabinet looked at it and said: "No, no, no. It's on the agenda. We've got to push it forward, so we're just going to do it. It doesn't matter if it impacts Albertans. It doesn't matter if it's going to mess up the system. It doesn't matter if people aren't going to get the supports that they need. None of that matters because at some point we'll just keep telling Albertans we have a plan. There's a plan coming. Stay tuned. We're developing a new model. There's another plan. Stay tuned. At some point we'll let you know what it is." Instead of coming out and saying: "Here's our plan. Here's the new model. Oh, and by the way, Bill 20 is going to reinforce the changes that we're making."

That's what good governance is. That's how you make sure that Albertans have supports and the resources that they need when they need them. You don't liquidate a fund and use what is intended to support Albertans to access mental health supports and be able to address the trauma that they've experienced and then go back and go: well, because it's underfunded, we can't actually do that support. Well, no wonder. The money is being taken out to be used for purposes it was not intended for. People aren't being able to access the supports that they need, or they're giving limitations, or there aren't enough services around.

I appreciate that we're in third reading and the government is going to make the choices that they're going to make, but I will again remind the government that at some point it would be great for Albertans to actually have a plan before they legislate so that they know where this government is going, so that they feel confident that the choices that this government is making actually help Albertans, but it doesn't. This is a continuous theme, and this is why Albertans are continuously frustrated with the fact that this government doesn't have a vision, that they can't be trusted in making decisions because they never validate or demonstrate the work and where they're headed. They just expect Albertans to have blind faith: "Trust us. A plan is coming. We're developing a new model. Just trust us."

Well, the reality of it is that when people are in crisis, when they depend on supports, when they know there's a budget assigned, Albertans don't trust it because they know that the government will try to use that fund for something else; a prime example, prosecutors and police officers, not counselling services. Maybe we'll see some supports, but for now we won't.

So I will not be supporting this piece of legislation, because, once again, until I see a plan from this government, until the finalized plan can be presented to Albertans and I can do good consultation and talk to Albertans about whether or not they think that those

services are going to do what this government is implying is going to happen, this piece of legislation is not genuine in the support that needs to be provided to Albertans.

With that, I will close my remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 20? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to this Bill 20. As was mentioned by the mover of the bill, it changes five pieces of legislation. I want to say that out of those five, we take no issue with changes to four of them, absolutely no issue with those changes. They are housekeeping. They are positive changes, and we support these changes.

At the same time, as my colleague from Edmonton-Manning said, this bill is also legislating on the victims of crime fund, the dismantling of that victims of crime fund, that started under the previous, previous, previous Justice minister. So far no efforts have been made to fix those changes, and the reason that the government raided the victims of crime fund was that the government has been slashing the Justice department budget every single year. So far they have cut \$200 million from the Justice department budget, and now they are taking money away from the victims of crime to backfill their reckless cuts.

I think that with the corporate handout, \$4.7 billion, the government even expedited the rollout of that, and instead of over four years, they rolled out that money in two years. But now for victims it's the third year. They are still waiting for the new model. They're being denied support that they need to recover and heal. They've been waiting for over three years. The changes that the government made to the victims of crime fund: not only did they take money away from the victims of crime, diverted it to other initiatives to backfill their reckless cuts; they also reduced the existing supports while they're consulting. They also put in stringent timelines, reducing them from two years to 45 days for victims to get their stuff together and apply for the benefit. Otherwise, you're out of luck.

9:50

It's the third year now, and they are even solidifying the changes that they made to dismantle this fund, but they are still not able to come up with the replacement model. We are talking about victims of serious crimes: those who have been assaulted physically, sexually, those who have witnessed murders, those who have witnessed horrible crimes. Now they are getting less support because of this government's incompetence and this government's indifference. They think it's more important for them to solidify their changes, but victims can still wait. That is unfair. That is unconscionable. Victims should not have to wait for this government to get their act together to put together a replacement plan.

As was earlier mentioned, there is a kind of pattern of behaviour with this government where they are trying to strip citizens of their powers and consolidating power in government. Before the UCP became government, for decades there was a Criminal Injuries Review Board, that was an arm's-length board where victims of crime can go and seek redress. They could talk about the benefits they are getting, what else they can get. They could appeal those decisions and actually get the supports that they need to recover and heal. The government is now disestablishing the Criminal Injuries Review Board altogether. If anybody suggests that it's, say, housekeeping, please do talk to some victims of crime; do talk to organizations supporting victims of crime. Not one organization across this province is onside with the government.

The government did not consult anyone on these changes, and since then we have heard from many victims directly that they are being denied supports. We are hearing from the victims' service organizations how adversely and negatively these changes are impacting them, how adversely these changes are impacting those organizations' ability to help the victims of crime. Not one of them was consulted on these changes. Not one organization across this province stood with the government to support these changes, because these changes should not be supported.

These changes were not made in the best interests of those who benefit from this fund. These changes were made to backfill this government's reckless cuts. This fund was raided to provide for the cuts that this government made to the Justice department. These changes were not made keeping in mind the victims of crime. Instead of stripping the victims of crime of supports that they need to heal, there are many other things that this government could have done.

We have tens of thousands of cases in our court system that are being delayed, one, because of the Jordan decision; two, because of the pandemic; and, three, because of this government's incompetence. They're at risk of being thrown out because of the timeline set in the Jordan decision, thousands of those cases. Many victims of crime may not see a day in the court. They may see their alleged perpetrators walk free because the government did not prioritize issues facing our justice system. They were busy taking supports away from the victims of crime.

Those who were victimized: not only are they not getting supports from this government; they may now also have to cope with delays within the justice system that will further impact their recovery, that will further impact their healing, that will impact their mental health, that will shake their faith and trust in our justice system. They deserve justice in a timely fashion. Instead of taking supports away from them, I think the government should focus on and prioritize the processing of cases in our justice system. That should be the priority for the government instead of disestablishing the Criminal Injuries Review Board. That was an important board where a citizen could go to a fellow citizen and talk about their needs, talk about what they need for their recovery, talk about what they need for healing. They didn't have to come to this government, who doesn't listen.

Madam Speaker, I want to say categorically that the changes relating to the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Youth Justice Act: we support these changes. But we cannot support the changes that are contained in this piece of legislation that relate to the victims of crime fund because these changes are adversely impacting the victims of crime. These changes are negatively impacting their recovery and healing, and victims of crime deserve far better from this government. Supports should not be taken away from them. They should be provided all the support they need for recovery and healing. This bill takes those supports away from victims of crime.

10:00

That's the part of the bill that we are opposed to, and we will certainly be opposing it. I will be voting against it, and I urge all members of this House to vote against these changes. Government should have . . . [Mr. Sabir's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Sabir: I want to adjourn the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Perhaps there's another member that has time left that could move to adjourn debate. The hon. associate minister of mental health.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Private Bills Second Reading

Bill Pr. 2

Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise tonight to move second reading of Bill Pr. 2, the Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022.

For those unfamiliar with this organization, I just wanted to share a little bit about their mandate. Their role is to advise city council on all matters relating to Calgary heritage, evaluate potential historical sites, maintain Calgary's inventory of evaluated historic resources, and promote public awareness of shared heritage.

Madam Speaker, the greatest thing about preserving history is our ability to reflect and learn. Heritage Calgary has over 800 evaluated historic resources. The language that's in this bill reflects that term, an inventory of evaluated resources. Think about that for a second: over 800 evaluated resources.

I actually had the opportunity to explore a little bit on the map earlier today, and actually I had the privilege of working in a number of these heritage sites over my career and also grew up in one of these sites. First of all, First Baptist church, actually, which was built in 1911, was the location where the Mustard Seed was founded. It also happens to be the church I grew up in, was dedicated in, baptized in, and was eventually married in. That's one of the heritage sites they protect.

Then the Mustard Seed moved from the First Baptist church over, actually, to the Northern Electric Co. Warehouse, and there it continues to operate in that heritage site. At about 12 years old is when we moved into that building. I remember running around exploring the unique hallways and crevices at that unique building. After I left the Mustard Seed, I ended up at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Calgary. They operate out of the Rutledge Hangar in Renfrew, which was built in 1929.

So for most of my career I've actually had the opportunity of working in heritage sites, so I can speak first-hand about the need to be able to preserve these great locations. I encourage all members, especially those from Calgary, to go and check out the website and take a look at it. Even in Calgary-Klein I was able to see a number of great heritage sites, including the Tuxedo Park school, which was built in 1920, and the Canadian Martyrs Catholic parish in Collingwood, which was built in 1967 and which is where my kids actually go to do all of their band and choir activities from their school.

Anyway, just a neat thing and an opportunity for us, I think, all members of this House, to go and explore Calgary's heritage and give a big thanks to Heritage Calgary for the work that they do to be able to preserve that. Obviously, that's a lot of sites to keep track of and to preserve for future generations. Heritage Calgary CEO, Josh Traptow, and his team and the board of directors all deserve our gratitude for their work in preserving our history and making these resources user friendly for all Albertans.

You can visit the organization's website and see a map of the over 800 historical resources I was mentioning. They are all plotted on a very user-friendly map, so check it out. Learning more about Calgary's heritage is right at your fingertips, Madam Speaker, so check it out.

Heritage Calgary also offers walking tours to some historic sites. It has annual awards and has a historian in residence program. Its work cannot be overstated. We also need to work to make sure that this not-for-profit organization is fully empowered to fulfill its mandate. I believe that's what this bill is doing. The language in this bill is updated so that Heritage Calgary can continue to run its organization to the best of its abilities.

The instrumental work of Heritage Calgary and the educational value of this organization is another part of its work that I need to highlight. Anyone who takes part in a tour or spends hours getting lost in Calgary's rich history will come away with a bigger appreciation for our beautiful city. If you're ever inclined, head to www.heritagecalgary.ca and check out the interactive map and see which one of the 800 sites you want to learn more about. Take the walking tour and be sure to ask lots of questions.

That's why I support this bill and, more importantly, am a big supporter of Josh Traptow and his team and what they are doing in Calgary to preserve our history. It's my honour to be able to support this organization, and I would like to extend an invitation to this House, all members, anybody interested, to explore Heritage Calgary; a rich history, a storied history is waiting for you to explore. That's why, again, I'm supporting this bill. I encourage all members of this House to vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to speak to Bill Pr. 2, the Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Klein for bringing this forward on behalf of Josh Traptow, on behalf of the Calgary Heritage Authority. I appreciate the passion that you bring forward when you talk about the heritage that Calgary has. I know that something as important as our history and our heritage needs to be talked about and supported. So I fully support this piece of legislation, and I would hope that all members of this Chamber do as well.

I know that it's something that was being asked for, and I'm happy to see a response and to show support for that. I know that over the years I have worked with Heritage Calgary – hopefully, when this bill is passed – and Edmonton Heritage Council in my role as the military liaison for the government. We did quite a few partnership things through the Edmonton Heritage Council, and I have to say that the work that's done through these organizations is absolutely incredible. They really want to continue to raise awareness and tell the story of Alberta. I think that having it in the hands of these organizations makes sense. To be able to show them respect and to provide support to them is something that is so important.

I really appreciate the member for outlining some of the great things that are happening in Calgary and some of the great ways that not just Calgarians but perhaps all Albertans can get involved and explore their city and really look at that storytelling.

The heritage councils, you know, really, really understand the diversity that's brought our province to where it is today, and they're able to tell that story. I would hope that investing in and supporting Heritage Calgary doesn't stop here. I know that there have been significant cuts over the years to our heritage within the budgets, and I think that in order to give it true support and meaning, we need to see continued support and resources. They're incredible storytellers for our province. They want to make sure that

our history is preserved and captured and then available for all to explore.

I think some of the great ideas that are coming out of Calgary and Edmonton really need to be looked at. I know when we talk about the government's vision for this province and being able to tell Alberta's story, I would say that we should look to those that talk about our heritage first. They carry that knowledge, and they share it.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would just say that I am fully in support of this piece of legislation, and I hope that all members of the Chamber are. With that, I will take my seat.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate?

Seeing none, would the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein like to close?

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a second time]

10:10

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A wonderful evening of debate. I'm grateful for everyone's participation. But at this time I do move that the Assembly be adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:11 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, May 12, 2022

Day 34

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, May 12, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Private Bills Second Reading

Bill Pr. 1

Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Calgary-South East has moved Bill Pr. 1, Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022. Are there any others wishing to add comment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is, as always, an honour to rise in this Chamber, and I won't speak too long on this private bill. I do have the honour of serving on the private members' bills committee along with a few of my esteemed colleagues, so we did get the chance to hear from the YMCA and the stellar leader of the YMCA, the president and CEO, Shannon Doram, who does incredible work.

Fun fact: I grew up in Barrhead, Alberta, and when I was about – that's not the fun fact, Mr. Speaker; just wait. That's old news, but it is a fact.

Ms Hoffman: Let us decide if it's fun.

Member Irwin: Okay. Good point.

The fun fact is that when I was around eight or nine years old – wait for it – a family had moved to the area, and that was the Dorams. Shannon Doram was my best friend for about one or two years, and then she and her family – her dad worked at the Distance Learning Centre in Barrhead – moved to Calgary, where she lives now. So, you know, I haven't gotten to see her in many, many years, and then not long ago I saw that she had that role, and I was able to connect with her again. She is an incredible leader of the YMCA.

We are quite proud to support the Member for Calgary-South East's private bill. Basically, what the YMCA wants to do through this private bill is to just sort of modernize their objectives and their operations. You know, I know that many folks in this Chamber – especially in Calgary, there are huge recreational centres, and child

care is one aspect that the YMCA does. They do a lot of really important work in the community, and from what we heard from the committee meeting, this legislation will bring the Calgary YMCA incorporating legislation in line with other areas of the province. For example, the Edmonton area branches have had the ability to own land anywhere in the province for approximately seven years. If you know anything about the YMCA in the Edmonton area, it's the YMCA of northern Alberta, right? They've had a little bit of a different model, so the Calgary YMCA is hoping to do the same.

Like I said, I didn't want to speak too long. I just really wanted to get on the record our support of the great work that the YMCA does.

Ms Hoffman: And the fun fact.

Member Irwin: And the fun fact, which might not have been all that fun in retrospect, but I wanted to share it.

I hope that all members will support the Member for Calgary-South East's bill and support YMCA in modernizing their operations.

Mr. Jones: I'm coming over there.

Member Irwin: We'll handshake it out.

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the time this morning.

The Speaker: My sense is that it would have been much more fun if you had told us just how long, long, long ago it was or if we were to be led by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo in the singing of YMCA.

Are there other members?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the Member for Calgary-South East to close debate should he choose to do so.

Mr. Jones: Thank you for supporting this important bill, and I encourage everybody in the Chamber to also vote in favour. I close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 20

Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate May 11: Mr. Ellis]

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions has some time remaining should he choose to use it.

Are there others wishing to join in the debate for third reading of Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022? Seeing the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this morning and hopefully not be asked to sing. I wouldn't be up to that challenge this morning, and I don't think it would be a rewarding experience for anybody in the House.

I know that Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, that we are considering this morning, proposes to be just making a few small changes to the justice act. There seem to be some larger issues that could have been affected or could have been attempted to be resolved by the government with this legislation. We're seeing lots of challenges in the justice system, Mr. Speaker, that are not addressed by this legislation; for example, legislating on the victims of crime fund. It's not fixing the messes that have been made by the

UCP government on the victims of crime fund, and it had many negative effects on the victims.

I know that if indeed one has been involved in the criminal justice system as a worker or somehow involved as a lawyer or in the process of supplying services to the criminal justice system, it's been self-evident for some time now that it always seems as though the criminal justice system is the last one on the totem pole to get funding. It's probably a result of who, in fact, the criminal justice system serves, and that is those who are most vulnerable, those with the smallest voice, those who are least heard in our society, and more so when, of course, they become convicted in our criminal justice system, their voice is even more muted, Mr. Speaker.

That's a tragedy because indeed anybody who ends up in the criminal justice system is a failure of our society to provide the proper means. There is certainly responsibility on the individual's part, but I think that if we roll back the clock, roll back the movie of the person's life who's involved in the criminal justice system, one will find a litany of repeated stories such as the scourge of mental illness coupled with drug addiction and a cyclical nature of intergenerational abuse. It's also coupled, in many instances, with a pattern of Indigenous suffering, which has been thrust upon that population by things such as the '60s scoop and, of course, the residential schools.

The Justice Statutes Amendment Act certainly has a lot of scope, but it really didn't go all that far. Instead of supporting the victims, the UCP did the opposite thing, and that's not right. We really would love to see the reversal of the changes to the victims of crime fund that are hurting victims and hindering their healing, and that didn't happen. Albertans can't trust the UCP to look after the most vulnerable, and this is another example of that.

9:10

Now, the bill amends a total of five acts, of course: the Corrections Act, the Justice of the Peace Act, the Missing Persons Act, the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, and the Youth Justice Act. Now, on the Corrections Act the compensation rates for the Alberta Parole Board members can now be set by order in council instead of regulation, and it does bring it in line with other ABCs. So that's not a bone of contention, but I know that many other things that could have been done would have been welcomed by this side of the House.

Now, the Criminal Injuries Review Board was winding down since 2016, and the Victims of Crime (Strengthening Public Safety) Amendment Act cut injury and witness-to-homicide benefits, which the board was responsible for. There was a class-action lawsuit, and it was concluded on January 13, 2022. Previously the UCP reduced victims of crime benefits such as injury benefits, so it would be ideal, Mr. Speaker, if indeed the victims of crime fund was used exclusively to benefit the victims of crime. But that's not what the fund is being used for, and the UCP has been, let's say, a little creative with how that fund actually gets used.

In every case, Mr. Speaker, you want to hope that the criminal justice system is one that seeks to minimize recidivism not by necessarily seeing punishment as the priority but by seeing the historical evidence that is so often repeated when a prosecutor or a defence lawyer is talking about the presentence report. I've had the opportunity to be privy to listening to many of those presentence reports as a volunteer intake worker for the provincial Solicitor General's office, and in that capacity, as I mentioned earlier, there was a constant repetition of similar stories that were heard.

Unfortunately, when these stories were being told, they were really rapid-fire tales told by the prosecutor or the defence counsel in arguing for one sentence or another. They were so rapid because the lawyers and the benches are so absolutely smacked with a heavy

load of cases, so the files that the lawyers would be reading from were very cursorily looked over briefly before the case would be heard in courtrooms 65 and 68 and momentarily briefed in front of the judge. The judge would be making a significant decision in a person's life, as far as sentencing, based on probably a lot of research that had gone into the report but very little that actually was able to be transmitted to the judge.

That speaks to the underfunding of the criminal justice system, Mr. Speaker, and that's one of the things that I think we need to pay attention to in this Legislature going forward and starting right now. It's well known by those who are involved in the system, maybe not as much by the public, that the system is chronically underfunded, and this results in poor representation of the accused and a difficulty in having cases heard in a timely manner. That's something that has been ongoing for a long time. I mean, it was in the 1980s that I worked as a volunteer court intake worker for the Solicitor General's department. The same difficulties are being evidenced here today, and there is an attempt by the government to alter the justice system by using Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, to make some changes.

However, there's so much more to do. I hope that the government has under consideration a lot of the reasons for the difficulty in the criminal justice system and is seriously looking at properly listening to those who are bending under the crushing weight of the caseloads they carry and looking to fund more properly and more aggressively particularly the prosecutors' offices as well as taking into mind the environment which those who are facing the system who have not yet been convicted who are particularly in remand in this province are having to face.

I know there's extra time credit given to inmates who are subsequently convicted for time spent in remand, but that is a calculation based on the extra suffering that people in this province are deemed to undergo by simply being in remand. That really speaks to the question of inadequacy in the remand system.

Now, we did finally replace the remand centre in Edmonton and built the centre that's north of the Yellowhead. It is still fraught with difficulties, Mr. Speaker. This morning on the news there was an indication that there are problems with drugs getting into that facility. A judge actually, very uncharacteristically, suggested that the staff there should be checked periodically for drugs. That was a serious condemnation of the environment that we have our particularly young offenders but all those on remand awaiting their trials – the environment that they face.

There are simple explanations and there are complex explanations for that. The underlying problem is that we don't give it the priority as a government or as a society that it deserves. It's a pretty devastating thing to be incarcerated, Mr. Speaker. I've had the opportunity to visit some of the institutions in Alberta. That was offered to me as a matter of my volunteer work. In fact, I remember going to the old Fort Saskatchewan jail, which is no longer functioning.

There were, of course, solitary confinement quarters there, and it was a devastating thing to see. Individuals were two or three stories below ground with a single light bulb overhead, maybe 12 feet high, on a bunk with no mattress, wearing something that resembled a barbecue mitt, and they had a paperback novel to read. That was it. That was life for those who were in solitary.

I'll never forget that day of visitation, knowing that the inmates there, when they first arrived, were double-bunked and perhaps terrified for their life because they didn't know who else they were going to be bunked with, and there were, I'm told by the individuals who worked there, nothing but screams and yelling all night long in those situations where people are first incarcerated.

There are lots and lots of improvements that can be made to our criminal justice system, and this act really nibbles around the edges at it and doesn't go to the heart of the matter. I know that indeed, you know, crime is a big issue all over. Nobody likes to become a victim of crime, but we have to look at the root causes of that and the social causes and the social determinants of a healthy society.

9:20

Part of that becomes evident when we look at the number of folks who are increasingly living homeless or houseless in our cities and not only that; in rural areas as well. The rural areas are not seen, historically, to be sources of homeless people, but you'll find in places like Edson, I believe it was, it was looking at using small modular accommodations to house those who were homeless. They were local people. The funding ran out for that. I mean, that should cause people to really think and wonder what as a society we are prioritizing when more and more people are left on the street. What's the alternative? Having them jailed for petty crimes? I don't think that's a solution that most Albertans think is acceptable, and I certainly don't.

The solution, of course, is embedded in some of the comments made recently by the mayor of Edmonton, who called upon the province to step up and bear its responsibility when it comes to funding housing to prevent the homelessness and the encampments that are about to occur in this city. An increasing number of people will end up in jail with the criminal justice system being their only source.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak for the second time on Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Of course, let me preface my comments by saying that, you know, some of the changes in this legislation do seem positive. As the government has claimed repeatedly that they are just housekeeping – and that's fine. However, there are some very large challenges in the justice system, and I would like to address some of those.

Yesterday I talked a little bit about, touched on a couple of the acts that are amended in this piece of legislation, one of those being the Justice of the Peace Act. The other one I spoke to was the Missing Persons Act. I'd like to touch on again today the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act. As I said yesterday, one of the things that I was very concerned about were the changes around the cuts to witnesses of crime.

I spoke yesterday about – I'm sure that people in this Chamber will remember – the tragedy that happened in 2015 in St. Albert. At 3 o'clock in the morning there were two RCMP officers, Constable Wynn and then an auxiliary RCMP officer, Constable Derek Walter Bond. They were investigating the possibility of a stolen vehicle in the parking lot of the Apex Casino. You know, I'm not entirely sure what happened, but they went into the casino. The end result was, tragically, that Constable Wynn was killed, was murdered, and the other auxiliary RCMP officer was injured. There was a fatality inquiry, and that fatality inquiry really sort of paints a picture of what it must have been like for the people that were there at 3 o'clock in the morning at the Apex Casino witnessing that horrific tragedy, that horrific crime.

The reason that I bring this up is that I did have an opportunity to meet a couple that were witnesses to that crime. They were there at 3 o'clock in the morning at a casino and described what they saw, and their lives were forever changed. Now, I don't presume to know sort of what the diagnosis was, but I imagine that there was some trauma in their lives after witnessing something so horrific. In any

event, I did meet them a couple of years after the crime in MP Cooper's office. He's the Member of Parliament for St. Albert-Edmonton.

They had actually gone to their federal representative to see if there was anything that they could access in terms of financial supports so they could get the counselling that they needed and the financial support that they were – I believe that the husband was no longer able to work. I'm sure you can imagine what that must have been like. Their lives were forever changed. Anyway, there was a lot of difficulty accessing beyond just minimal counselling. Counselling is very expensive, and they needed quite a bit more than just five sessions. They did end up getting a little bit of support but certainly not what they needed.

The reason I'm telling this story is that just a few weeks ago, when I was at a trade show in St. Albert, I actually met this couple again. They came to where I was, and they introduced themselves and said, you know: we met this many years ago after this crime. They told me what life had been like between that time. Sadly, things had gotten much worse. Neither one of them were working. The husband, I believe, was able to finally access AISH benefits as he had a disability – well, actually, a terminal illness as it were. But they talked about how life had just been so tough for them. A lot of things had happened.

Why I bring this up again today is that not only victims of crime but witnesses of crime need our support. So while we're opening up this piece of legislation, I'm incredibly disappointed to see that some of the changes to the legislation previously introduced by the UCP have not been fixed. We've not addressed some of the serious holes that we've identified, that not just victims of crime but witnesses of crime also need support. It is in our best interest as legislators and as – you know, we're concerned about the finances of the province, that we know that this is a long-term investment.

When we invest in the mental health and the health of people, it is a long-term investment. Imagine that we're able to support victims or witnesses as they go through a really traumatic period of their lives. They will not need long-term support from government if we allow them to get the support that they need to heal, to get back their lives or some semblance of their lives or a new direction. Why I'm bringing this up is that it's incredibly disappointing that this piece of legislation that opens up, you know, quite a few pieces of other legislation doesn't deal with some gaping holes. That is one example of the problems.

I want to go back to 2020 a little bit and talk about when we were first debating Bill 16. I was hoping that this government would address some of the problems that we brought up, but instead this legislation is really sort of making those errors – I think they're errors – permanent. I would like to remind this House of some of the comments from Alberta Municipalities at the time that the legislation was proposed. I think that they were right on. They had their finger on the pulse of what needed to happen. Unfortunately, this government didn't listen. They were very organized. I'm sure many offices received the e-mails that were part of that campaign that I know I received. They were very specific about what their concerns were and what they wanted to see. So I'd like to remind members what those were.

They were very clear about wanting the UCP government to reverse the changes to the victims of crime fund and provide ongoing, sustainable funding to victims' services programs. Now, in this legislation I don't see that enshrined, that victims' services programs will be funded permanently and securely. Now, I think that the victims of crime programs, or some of them are victims' services units, are the only ones, I believe, in Canada that are not permanently funded. So they receive grants. They receive annual

grants. Some of them may receive, you know, a couple of years at a time, but that's enormous pressure.

For those of you that haven't worked in the nonprofit sector or have relied on government grants, it's incredibly stressful, and it's very draining in terms of human resources to constantly have to be applying for grants, to have to create sort of new metrics to measure success instead of just focusing on the ongoing work and building on your success year to year. It's incredibly stressful, and I think it's actually a waste of human resources.

Alberta municipalities also wanted to shine a light on the fact that these victims' service units or programs really do rely on fundraising. Actually, some of them in the province – and I'm sorry; I don't have the statistics of which jurisdictions – actually have to fund raise up to 50 per cent of their annual budget. Now, for those of you that haven't worked in the nonprofit sector, fundraising takes an enormous toll in terms of human resources. It detracts from the work that the nonprofit sets out to do.

Imagine you're a victims' service program or a victims' service unit and part of your time is spent just trying to think of: "How are we going to fund raise? How are we going to fund raise hundreds of thousands of dollars? Well, maybe we'll do a golf tournament. Maybe we'll do a lottery. Maybe we'll do a bingo, or maybe we'll sell something." It takes a lot of time and a lot of effort to fund raise, and every time we force organizations to do that, we're detracting from the very important work that they are there to do.

That's our loss. That's a loss of time, a loss of human resources, and I think it's a sad use of – once again, it's just an investment in our future, and I think that, sadly, this government has demonstrated time and again that they don't think long term and long-term investment. Instead, they're thinking in terms of election cycles and what looks good, the bottom line, what it looks like, what looks good on a campaign slogan instead of what is best for the province of Alberta and what is best for Albertans.

9:30

Mr. Speaker, again, this is not my point of view. This is from Alberta municipalities. I will remind you that this is from their campaign from 2020. They talked about, highlighted the fact that there was an increase in the surcharge and that, you know, the pot of money grew substantially. That would have given, I think, the government, you know, the ability to get creative in terms of investing in victims, witnesses of victims, and organizations that support victims, but unfortunately that was not the case.

We all know how that worked out. Bill 16 was pushed through, and as a result I think there was an enormous loss. What they did point out and what I'd like to point out again for this House is that this Bill 16 actually took from a fund that was otherwise protected since its inception 30 years ago. What a legacy for this UCP government, that they raided a victims of crime fund that had been stable and doing its job for 30 years. Why they think they know best, Mr. Speaker, I really don't know when communities – Alberta municipalities, certainly – were saying very clearly that they were opposed to this change. Sadly, this government did not use their opportunity with Bill 20 to correct that error and make things better. They did not do that.

Victims' service programs, victims' service units, or however they are called, are incredibly important. As I mentioned, as Alberta municipalities pointed out, they don't have stable funding. As a result, they're forced to do fundraising. They're forced to have the stress of reapplying for grants or, you know, hoping that things go well with the government and that they get another grant. But they do incredibly vital work that otherwise would cost the government, I think, quite a bit more than victims' service programs.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the vast majority of them are heavily reliant on volunteer hours, and these volunteers are very well trained and provide an incredible service to Albertans. I know that I've said this before: many years ago – probably, like, over 20 years ago; I don't even recall – I did volunteer in Edmonton for victims' services. I went through their training, which is extensive. You know, you have to commit to a certain number of hours every week to work in their program, and I did that for some time. But I actually could not do it because of the stress of that work. It was not something that I was cut out to do, and as a result I stopped doing that.

The service that they provide is absolutely incredible. One of the things they do is court preparation and accompaniment. That was pretty straightforward. It's understanding the court process and sort of demystifying that for people that are going through that, preparing them, you know, telling them it really doesn't look like it does on television: here is the role of defence; here is the role of the judge, you know, all of those things; here is the door you're going to go in; here is where you're going to sit. All of that is incredibly helpful, particularly if it's young people, just being there with them. Sometimes it was giving them a new stuffie, it was holding their hand, and those things are pretty straightforward.

Helping people with victim impact statements: if anyone has ever had to assist someone or write a victim impact statement, that can be pretty traumatic for people. To provide some support for them as they do that and as they have to relive some of that trauma and talk about how that impacts their lives: that's tough, and it's a lot of work. So there is that and helping them with financial benefits, accessing, knowing where to go, also accessing forms around restitution, understanding what that's about.

But what I found the most difficult was responding to incidents if there was an accident or after the police had left. Let's say that there was a robbery at a 7-Eleven. You'd go in after, when everybody is gone, to support people that were perhaps witnesses or were victims of a crime and using all of the skills that you've learned through the training as a volunteer to support people through that and then explain what that process is.

That's a lot of work, and it's a lot of work for volunteers. Why I'm spending the time I am today explaining all of the services from victims' service programs and units is that these are volunteers. Investing in these programs, the small investment the government makes, provides an incredible service and is an incredible cost saving to the government. But this government's failure to see that and failure to invest long term is just a missed opportunity and just another example of the short-sightedness that we have seen time and again in this place. It's unfortunate. It's a missed opportunity, and I think Albertans are the ones that will suffer as a result.

You know, there is a thing called – I don't know that everybody knows it; I actually didn't realize it until quite recently and had a chance to look at it – the Canadian Victim Bill of Rights Act. I think that this needs to be top of mind when we make decisions around the justice system, to look at it from the point of view of the victim, to ensure that when we are amending legislation or when we are introducing legislation, everything that we do supports victims' rights.

I hope that most of us in this place have not been a victim of crime – that's my sincere hope, that we never are if we've not been – but if we are, to know that our government supports us through every single stage: through the investigation stage, through the trial stage, through the sentencing stage, and then through, obviously, dealing with corrections and conditional release and all of those things.

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to my colleagues from Edmonton-McClung and St. Albert for their remarks prior to me speaking this morning. I was speaking to this in committee previously and ran out of time. In the middle of my remarks, what appeared to be the end of my remarks, I was revisiting a recent experience where I was with family members who were absolutely the victims of a crime because their son had been horrifically murdered. I was with the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. The Member for Edmonton-Meadows definitely knows the family very closely, and then also the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was present at the funeral.

What really touched me – I hadn't been to many Sikh funerals before, to be very honest. Most funerals that I've attended in my life, although it seems like I know more and more young people who are dying these days, have been for people at the end of their life – I guess everyone is at the end of their life – after a long life, rather, people who have generally been at least over the age of 60, for the vast majority.

But this was a very young man who was a high school student. The way that the female members of the community vocalized the grief that I think everyone in the room was feeling: they were the ones powerful and vulnerable enough to, I think, really bring about sound through their sharing of emotion, through their weeping, through their vocalization of their grief when the young man left the funeral home. It was incredibly powerful, Mr. Speaker.

Part of why I talk about this experience is because when people are the victims of a crime, in coming to terms with what's happened in their lives, they should be allowed to grieve in whatever way they need to grieve. I want to say that up front. I want to say that not having to worry about things like timelines and statutes and trying to receive some compensation, some recognition for what you and your family have gone through should be the minimum that the government provides to families and to individuals who are the victims of crime. Some survive, and certainly some don't.

I was able to hear very clearly the minister responsible, the present Minister of Justice – I think he's our third Minister of Justice in three years. I had to stop and count for a second. Everyone is still on the front bench, but the chairs have definitely changed. The current Minister of Justice, the present one, talked about how the changes to the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act shouldn't be concerning for folks because the UCP already largely made these changes in practice, and this was about actually enshrining them in law.

9:40

What I will say is that the changes in practice have not been good. They have not benefited the community. They have not benefited survivors and victims. To say, "Oh, don't worry; this isn't significant" when it's actually taking practices that have been broadly critiqued by advocacy organizations and individuals who have to live through these processes and then putting it into law and saying, "Don't worry about it; it's just taking bad policies and actually enshrining them in the law" doesn't give me a lot of solace. It actually implicates all of us because we're being asked to endorse that, right? We're being asked to actually substantiate the bad decisions that the front bench has made through our vote and through our recorded vote in this place.

Some of the sections that relate to the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act that are being changed: there's a section, of course, that I did touch on previously where it talks about replacing "death benefit" with "funeral expense reimbursement." Again, who are we to tell victims' family members who are grieving how they should spend their compensation, that it needs to be tied to a funeral

expense specifically? Not everybody grieves through those more traditional forms.

Then the other piece I want to highlight is that it actually strikes out transitional sections 19 through 23, and this is the bulk of where the controversial changes were. I'm going to go through a couple of them and read some sections where I think we should all in this place be well aware of what we are being asked to endorse by the government in bringing this forward.

On page 17 of the hard copy – it's subsection (18) of the bill, which is removing sections 20 and 21 from the law – section 20(1) says:

A person entitled to submit a request for reconsideration under the former Act and the regulations under that Act concerning a member of the class described in the Class Action Settlement Agreement may submit the application under this section and the application must be dealt with in accordance with this Act and the regulations under this act.

So a person entitled to submit a request for reconsideration, so an appeal process under the former act, and then it explains how you do that. We're saying that we're getting rid of that opportunity for people to ask for reconsideration and for people to appeal.

This is 21(1). I'll skip over to it. It's very housekeeping in terms of the way the language is written. Section 21(1) says:

If a person has applied to the Review Board for a review of a decision of the Director and the review has not been concluded or dismissed before the coming into force of this section, the review must continue to be dealt with in accordance with this Act.

Again, people asking for an appeal, people asking for reconsideration. We're taking out of the legislation that if that is still in the middle of the process and it hasn't been concluded – we're taking away their ability to actually appeal. We're taking away their ability to have the decision reviewed and to have an opportunity to continue to advocate for what they feel is appropriate compensation under the former act.

Again, when I think about all of the things that members on both sides of this House have said while advocating to be in this place and to be in the position to make decisions, I would say that telling Albertans that we're going to make it harder for you to file appeals and to try to get compensation when you have been the survivor of a crime or the victim of a crime or somebody you love has been horrifically killed, for example, saying that we're going to make it harder for you to file an appeal: I don't remember anyone in this House saying that that was one of the things that they wanted to do as it related to justice and the treatment of survivors or victims in law.

Section 21(3):

Where a person has applied to the Review Board for a review of a decision of the Director [and] the review has not [yet] been dismissed nor a decision rendered under section 14.01 before the coming into force of this section and the benefit under review is not referred to in subsection (1), the review is terminated and the Review Board, chair or member designated by the chair, as the case may be, must refer the review to the Director.

Right now there is very definitive "must" language. I know that some people who are in this place have read reports by people who don't like the word "must" because it actually is a directive, that if somebody has applied for a review, applied for an opportunity to have their case reconsidered, it must be elevated to the director. The reason why we say "must" in laws is because we're not coming to this place to say, "You should do this" or "You might do that," and I know sometimes that works its way into bills. I don't love that kind of language. I think that bills, laws should be clear and definitive. I think that people should know what the rules are so that we can follow them. If a person applies for an appeal and it hasn't been heard properly, it must be elevated to the director. I think that's

very clear. I think that's very black and white, and to take that away I think could be an impediment to justice.

[Mrs. Frey in the chair]

Let's go on to subsection (4).

- (4) Where the Director receives a referral under subsection (3), the Director may, as the Director considers appropriate,
 - (a) reconsider the matter, or
 - (b) notify the applicant in writing that the applicant may, within 30 days from the date of notice, apply for judicial review of the decision.

This has the provision of "may" because it's giving a choice, right? You can either reconsider the matter, the director can either review it, or they can notify the person who has applied for the review of an alternate process, a judicial review, expediting or elevating the decision of that to a judicial review rather than it being heard by the director.

These are all things about how people can seek some kind of remuneration and some kind of compensation for the harms that have been inflicted on them as the victims of crime or as the survivors of crime or as the family members of somebody who did not survive a crime, and we're taking away – we're being asked to take away; we haven't done it yet. We're still in third, but we're being asked to take away their rights to have appeals and their rights to have reconsiderations.

The minister might say, "This isn't significant; this is just enshrining what we've already done," but we are asked to enshrine it. We are asked to validate this. We are asked to say: "Yeah, we're good with that. What the past, past Justice minister did is fine." You know, here we are on Justice minister three in three years, and we've seen that this Justice minister has, at least in one situation that's been made public, taken a decision by a former Justice minister – not the former, former Justice minister; just one minister before – to undo one of the bad, bad decisions that were made.

Member Ceci: Who could be next?

Ms Hoffman: Who knows who will be next? Yeah. There are certainly a lot of rumours circulating about who might be best suited to be making these decisions.

The current Justice minister in some regards, or at least in one that's been very publicly referred to even in this House, took the decision by the former Justice minister to bring in fear, attacks for people wanting to appeal a traffic violation, that they'd have to pay – I think it was about \$100 – and they'd have to file within a very short period of time. For a lot of people in Alberta – we know right now that many Alberta households are within \$200 of not being able to make ends meet, so for many families that additional application fee of \$100 to be able to challenge a traffic violation would be the brink of financial instability for them, right? I don't want to go as far as to say "ruin," but I think that for many they would feel a sense of dread and ruin and not being able to pay their bills. We've seen how over and over again over the last few years life under the UCP in Alberta has become more and more expensive.

I do have to say to the current Justice minister that I'm really glad that that decision was overturned. I think it was the right thing. I think that there shouldn't be barriers to people getting their day to have an appeal heard when it comes to a traffic violation, having the opportunity to ask for the decision to be reconsidered, for the evidence to be reviewed. That's what these families and victims had under the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act. The victims of crime compensation fund had appeal mechanisms for people to have an opportunity to make a case about the types of supports that

would benefit them in trying to recover from the impacts of the crime that was inflicted upon them.

9:50

So the current Justice minister has, at least on one occasion, very publicly in this place overturned a decision by a former Justice minister. These decisions that were made by our former, former Justice minister: they're wrong. I certainly don't want to be on record having endorsed the decisions of the former, former Justice minister because I think that they are moving in the wrong direction. I don't think that they reflect the values that virtually all of us campaigned on when it comes to safety and fairness for citizens in the community. I don't think that this bill furthers that call to action for a more just and fair society when it comes to fair and appropriate compensation for victims of crime.

I know that many people in this room, statistically, have probably been a victim of crime. I know that many of us, many more probably, do know other people who have been victims of crime. I think that they deserve to have people on the record in their government, in the Legislature, no matter what party or whether independent, stand up and stand with victims and survivors. Those are the sections that probably, as it relates to the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, have had the broadest criticism publicly, and I think for good reason.

I know I focused the vast majority of my remarks both in committee and now in third on one piece of the bill, the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act, and probably because that's the piece . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, we are on Bill 20, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Are there any other members wishing to speak? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. There have been a lot of really thoughtful remarks from my colleagues and some important questions raised. You know, I know it certainly feels like déjà vu every time we're in this Chamber and we don't hear from the members opposite, from the governing party, particularly on a bill as arguably, to them, critical as Bill 20. So I hope – and I appreciated the comments. Well, I appreciated all the comments today, but the Member for Edmonton-Glenora basically called on this government to think about whether they really want to – I'm putting words in her mouth a little bit here, but my interpretation is whether or not the members in this Chamber would really want to support a bill that brings our justice system backwards and potentially hurts a lot of our constituents.

I hear members in this Chamber talking, as they often do, but not choosing to join debate. I'd love to hear some of those members join debate, particularly on this bill because, as I said, you know, we've asked a lot of what I would call thoughtful questions. We did get – time is confusing. St. Albert, you might be able to help me on this. Was it yesterday we did get the minister responding a little bit . . .

Ms Renaud: Yup.

Member Irwin: . . . on some of our questions around victims of crime in particular? But then I asked some clarifying questions and did not get any follow-up. I got a few heckles but did not get any follow-up and did not get anyone else from that government side joining debate to answer some of our questions and to try to explain how they could possibly justify what we see in Bill 20. Always the optimist I am, I am hopeful that we will hear again from the minister or perhaps somebody else on that side. I know there are some

members on that side who have connections to the justice system. You know, there is at least one lawyer on that side, probably more, who could join debate. So I'm hopeful.

All right. One of the other themes that I see in Bill 20, that aligns with a number of the pieces that we've pointed out in other bills presented to us this session, you know – this was an opportunity in Bill 20. If this government really wants to improve the justice system, improve the remand system, improve supports for survivors, for victims, then they could have done that in legislation. They could have righted some of the wrongs of the past, including the raiding of the victims of crime fund. They could have taken tangible steps to improve the remand system, improve incarceration in this province, but they've chosen not to. They've chosen instead, for the most part, with a few exceptions in this bill, to really just make some housekeeping changes. That's what we've seen in multiple bills this session from this government.

This is a government that's so focused on just trying to save their own seats that instead of putting forth robust, transformative legislation, they're doing a whole heck of a lot of housekeeping. That's frustrating for many of us. Why is that frustrating? Let me tell you a story of what I see in my riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Yesterday morning, as is often the case – I pretty much always take the same route to work every day. That route takes me – well, I don't need to tell you the entire route. That could get – it could be too much for you. Plus, I probably shouldn't exactly identify where I live. But long story short: from my house I head over to 96th Street; 96th Street, if you don't know, is also called Church Street. It goes through the, well, Alberta Ave, McCauley and Boyle Street neighbourhoods. Yeah. My colleague from St. Albert knows because she lived not far from 96th Street when she lived in the Alberta Avenue area many, many years ago. So she knows 96th Street; she knows Church Street. It's called Church Street because there was at one point – and I forget the year. I'm bringing you all more fun facts today. That's a lot of fun facts for one morning. It's called Church Street because at one point – and I believe it was in the '70s, maybe the '80s; I will find out the details – it was in the Guinness book of world records for the most places of worship in a small area. Just countless churches and places of worship along Church Street.

[The Speaker in the chair]

There are still, actually, a number of churches on Church Street, including Sacred Heart, which, if you haven't been before, is an incredible building, a part of the Catholic church, but they really focus on Indigenous supports and reconciliation. It's a really fantastic building although they were hit with a fire, I believe just last year.

Anyways, I digress. But it is – you know, any time if anybody would love to come and visit 96th Street, Church Street, with me, I would love to have you. We have also seen some of the old churches that had been repurposed. There is Rhema chapel, which are Nigerian folks who've taken on a church which was, I believe – oh, gosh. No, I won't speculate. But it was a church that was repurposed, and they took it on. It's kind of really cool just to see the diversity still in a very small stretch.

Also interesting, coming back to Barrhead and my fun facts earlier today, Barrhead, Alberta, was actually also once in the Guinness book of world records for the most churches per capita. They don't have quite as many anymore. I know a few of them have shut down, but kind of interesting. I believe that was 1979. But, again, my memory is terrible, so please do not quote me on that one either.

Anyways, let me get back to some seriousness here. Every day I do take 96th Street to work, to the Legislature. I purposely take that route because it gives me an opportunity to interact with unhoused folks and to see just the real struggles that people I represent face every day. While they may not have homes and while they may be unhoused, they're still my constituents, right? They matter. It's harder when you drive because you don't get to interact quite the same way that I used to, especially when I would run to work every day and I was car free. That was my life for years. I really got to, you know, better hear people's stories. But I still do bike a lot as well. Again, that gives you a little bit more perspective.

10:00

As I was driving to work yesterday, just in front of the Bissell Centre, which is on 96th and about 105th, there were a whole heck of a lot of police cars and, I believe, a couple of fire trucks and ambulances. I thought: "Oh, gosh. What the heck is going on? There's a whole lot of resources." My heart kind of just jumped because I didn't know what was happening. I soon realized, as I was paused there for a bit, that they were clearing out encampments. They were removing all of the tents that had sprung up there. Anybody who spends time in my riding and in my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre's riding as well: you see encampments, and particularly you see a rise in them when the weather gets better.

I understand completely that there are people who are concerned. A lot of times the residents, particularly in Boyle Street and McCauley, who reach out to me concerned about encampments are coming from a perspective that they want to support people. They want people to have housing. They want people to have access to harm reduction supports. Simply clearing out actual humans' belongings, in some cases all they have, clearing them, throwing them into bags, treating them as if their belongings don't matter – there has to be a better way, and we're not seeing it from this government.

We've asked so many times in this Chamber for this government to take permanent supportive housing seriously, to acknowledge that permanent supportive housing can actually save lives. I've talked many times in this House about Ambrose Place as an example of permanent supportive housing that works. To bring it back to 96th Street, not too far from 96th Street in the McCauley neighbourhood, Ambrose Place takes in some of the hardest to house folks, folks who've been on the streets, some people for years, offers them a roof over their head.

I know the Minister of Indigenous Relations has visited. I know there are government members who've seen the great work that Ambrose Place does, the incorporation of Indigenous cultural perspectives so that folks feel like they're safe and they won't be discriminated against in housing, which we know is a very real issue for a lot of folks. We know Indigenous people are incredibly overrepresented on the streets, and you don't have to walk too far along 96th Street to see that.

What an opportunity this government has to invest in permanent supportive housing. Guess what? We're not asking for billions of dollars. The city of Edmonton in their last budget asked for the provincial government to chip in, I believe it was – was it \$6 million or \$9 million? Edmonton-City Centre, you'll probably know. Was it \$9 million?

Mr. Shepherd: Nine.

Member Irwin: Nine million dollars. An absolute drop in the bucket. They refused.

The city is committed. We heard the mayor's address to the chamber of commerce I believe on Tuesday. We heard him talk

about the desperate need for support from this provincial government. It's not about pitting Calgary against Edmonton. It's not about the mayor just wanting to get more funds for pet projects. No; this is about investing in people. This is about not only saving lives but money, too, and the research on permanent supportive housing shows that. But that's evidence, and we know how this government feels about evidence-based decision-making.

Anyways, I now only have three minutes left, and I've only talked about one aspect of housing. I haven't even really tied it back to Bill 20, but I'll do that, Mr. Speaker. We see the impacts of choosing not to house people and choosing not to invest in harm reduction. We see the impacts of that in the justice system. We see that in the overrepresentation of Indigenous folks in the justice system. We see that in federal prisons. Half of the women are Indigenous. The Elizabeth Fry Society, which does amazing work here in Edmonton and sure could use more support from this government, has highlighted some of the real challenges, the need for supports for Indigenous women in particular. But again – why? – this government chooses not to.

You can point to countless examples of this government making short-sighted decisions, making cuts that will have huge, long-term costs. You're not saving money, and you're not saving lives. That comes with permanent supportive housing, with affordable housing. Something recent is cuts to insulin pumps. The long-term costs of people having to seek health care, having to be hospitalized potentially: why continue to make these short-sighted cuts that are going to cost us all so much more in the long term? It's unbelievable, and it's unacceptable.

The remand system: I haven't even touched on some of the concerns there, another area where this government could have made transformative change. We can talk about the absolutely terrible conditions that we heard about in the remand centre when COVID was at its peak, with people getting so, so sick and not feeling like they were having support. Or we could talk about the fact that overdose deaths are happening in the remand centre. Just recently a young person passed away, and he wasn't supported. A judge is calling on this government to take significant action to ensure that no other person dies while in remand, and I haven't heard . . . [Member Irwin's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadows.

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House to add comments to Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. What we are hearing in our communities and what we're hearing from our constituency members and what we are hearing from the ethnic communities, racialized communities and what – I got a chance to meet with Indigenous community members two years ago in Calgary. The community had just lost their member the day before I met them. What these communities are feeling, what they're going through, and what they're asking for: none of that, I see, is being discussed or considered to be debated in this House under this bill. We don't even see, like, that in the last three years the government really cared about this, to discuss those issues. I don't see any other bill before us where the government could answer that. If this bill is not for those questions, areas of concern that people are sharing, do they have another piece of legislation to debate on or to support those people?

This bill does nothing, just taking the very valuable time of this House, using this time for not doing anything for those folks. What we need to do in the justice system right now: it badly needs to expand in some areas that are badly lacking, specifically when it

comes to the accessibility of the justice system for racialized folks, the people who do not speak English or do not speak fluent English. When it comes to justice, it's not even easy for an ordinary person to interpret all the legal language or understand all the legal steps and legal processes, but once it is not in your first language, there is a bigger challenge.

10:10

The justice system lacks the number of translators it needs. It lacks the diversity of professionals it needs. That is the area that my constituents in Edmonton-Meadows, one of the diverse ridings in this province, and the racialized folks – there is even an issue, like I was discussing, that I participated on. I was trying to help the family even after leaving the House yesterday at 6 p.m. Those vulnerable people, specifically the people living on very limited income if they're at the age of retirement, don't really have lots of money to spend to seek the justice that they deserve, and there's not much help on this.

That always has been in the public discourse, the public debate. That's in the media, that's in newspapers, and that's what I have heard the government House members talking about, too. They recognize that there is more that needs to be done. We need more correctional officers. We need more prosecutors. We need more judges. We need more staff. Particularly what I didn't hear was anything from the government caucus members – and they're probably not aware of it – about how we need support in the justice system for racialized communities, racialized folks.

I'm very sad to say this and to have this on the record. I met with the family of Karanveer Sahota, and with my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-City Centre we also met the family of Latjor Tuel. What those family members have been demanding – they are trying to reach government members in Calgary. They couldn't. They came all the way to Edmonton to protest their frustration and communicate with the government members. They came to the Legislature. I don't think any of the government caucus members had the courage or have the courage to go out and even speak to those families who have lost precious family members: the family of Karanveer Sahota, the only child of the family, at the age of 16 – they have a lot of questions – and similarly the family of Latjor Tuel.

On top of that, what the experts and researchers and the community leaders and the members have been asking for, this government continuously keeps ignoring. The family I spoke with in Calgary, an Indigenous family, said: "Our lives, the lives of our family members for them is just a file token. It's just a file number for them. We lost a family member yesterday. We got a file number, and that's it. This is how they value us."

The opposition called for it, the experts called for it: the improvement of law enforcement services and the improvement of the justice system. None of this is part of Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. This is very frustrating.

The community members have called many times on the NDP to echo their voice that we need to improve our law enforcement system, specifically when it comes to dealing with racialized communities, racialized folks. The law enforcement needs to have continued, ongoing antiracism, cultural knowledge, and sensitivity education training, trauma-informed training. That was the concern of the Indigenous family I met with in Calgary. This is sad to see, that for the past three years this government had time and they were privileged and they knew the issues and they talked about these issues, too, they recognized some of them, and they did not even take one step to address any of those issues.

On top of this, the government voted down my colleague's antiracism bill, the very first step, that was not going to do a lot but

had been the first step in the right direction. They voted it down without having their alternate plan. If they had another plan to tackle racism, they could bring it forward; they didn't. They just demonstrated that they're not serious about it. That is true.

That's what these families are telling us. All these three families I'm referring to have concerns that none of the government caucus members or the representatives of this government reached out to their families even though thousands of people showed up at McNally high school to attend the vigil in memory of that young man. Not even a single member. Not even a single member of this caucus had the courage to get out and speak to the family and show some respect for this young man who lost his life.

I know the Minister of Labour and Immigration talks a lot about ideology. This is about ideology. This is about that sort of ideology. If you don't have that much sensitivity, that is what you talk about, when he was speaking about ideology yesterday.

On top of this budget, what did this government do in the last three years? They raided the victims of crime fund, and they were there to support the victims of heinous crimes. I wanted to speak to the 45-day limit. It's not a car accident. I don't know what word I should use for you. None of the government caucus members stood up and spoke to this and answered this question. Victims of heinous crimes could be as young as a child or at different stages of their lives in different circumstances and suffering for their lifetime, and they added the limit of 45 days to come out to seek support. Where are you going with this?

I wanted to share the story that in 2016 one of the, I would say, world powers, India, with a population of 1 billion people – the Chief Justice of India was addressing the premiers' convention in the presence of the Prime Minister. There were so many questions to the Chief Justice around justice being delayed and people suffering. The justice just broke down while addressing the convention. He cried. He said, "Let's see, like, it's not our fault; we wanted to help people; we wanted this country to move ahead," but what had happened was that there were law commission recommendations. They were there from '87 to 2016, 19 years ago. Every single standing committee of the Parliament supported that. Parliament supported that. Law commissions recommended it. What happened? No implementation.

10:20

The 15 judges to 1 million people: how can we address this issue? The law commission said that you need minimum 50 judges. Minimum. Minimum. To do the bare minimum. Nineteen years after, they did not even have one more extra judge to implement the report.

I'm not saying this government is purposely doing this or knowingly doing this, but this is the direction this government is moving to or moving in, and that is dangerous. That is pretty sad for Albertans. Whether it's intended or unintended – we don't want to get into this debate – we know what the outcomes are of not taking actions.

I hoped that I would have something better to say about Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, but unfortunately I cannot support this bill, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to rise here this morning and provide some final, closing comments on Bill 20, Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I know I had quite a lot to say around one section of the bill. Not much to say around the other four, around corrections, justice of the peace, missing persons, and

the Youth Justice Act. As we can tell, mostly just housekeeping items with regard to changes there, which, of course – again I'll reiterate that I'm wondering why perhaps, maybe, the Justice minister didn't just hand this down to the associate red tape minister to present in the big omnibus bill that's still before us here in Bill 21, because that's usually what I seem to see ministries doing. They'll take rather innocuous bills and just kind of hand that down to the ministry, trying to call it red tape.

Then, of course, we do see some changes that seem to come through the red tape ministry that, quite frankly, should have stayed within the host ministry itself. I specifically remember one bill and the minister being asked a bunch of questions about it, and all we kept seeing was fingers being pointed in other directions saying, "Well, go ask that minister and ask that minister," and we didn't really get any answers there. Sometimes that's dismaying, especially considering that Albertans are on the hook between \$10 million and \$15 million over the course of this term for that ministry.

Again, I guess I'll focus some of my last comments here around the key piece that I have considerable concerns about, and that's around the Victims of Crime and Public Safety Act. You know, we've seen changes around the victims of crime fund that – quite frankly, it seems like it was a little bit of a honey pot sitting over there that was just too tempting for the government to leave alone, and they had to get in there and grab some of that money that's actually meant to try to help victims of crime.

I had mentioned that one organization that could've greatly benefited from some funding out of that was the Victims of Homicide. The founder of that organization, Jane Orydzuk: we've had many conversations over the years that I've been her MLA and trying to bring that organization to the forefront rather than simply trying to scramble to find help for their members. You know, I've attended some of those meetings. Some of the stories, their trips through the justice system, the barriers that they face are quite heartbreaking, to say the least. When you have an organization like that, why don't we help them out? In terms of funding it could be mental health supports for some of their members. It could be funding so that they're able to let others know that they're out there to be able to provide supports when families are devastated due to a homicide.

But, you know, over the course of this government's term we've seen many different choices being made: spending tens of millions of dollars to do things like chase down Bigfoot; we see commissions made to develop reports to find out nothing wrong was happening; we look to try to save money by doing things like cancelling insulin pump programs. The feedback that I've recently received on that has been quite profound, actually. As I said, my very own daughter is one of those individuals that are affected by that program. She's worked incredibly hard to try to get that under control, and it was actually potentially in sight for her to be able to gain an insulin pump. Because she doesn't have a company that has that kind of insurance, that change may very well likely put that out of her reach now financially. But, hey, like I said, let's fund pet projects like chasing a cartoon character.

It's unfortunate that we see a bill like this. It kind of hearkens me back to the days in the 29th Legislature when my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods brought in the changes to the labour bill and members, the opposition at the time, losing their minds, calling it an omnibus bill and, you know: "This is ridiculous. How can you do this kind of thing?" When I look at this, technically, according to those definitions back then, this would've been an omnibus bill. I would of course disagree because all of the changes here do reside under the Justice ministry, just like all the changes back then to the labour bill resided under the labour ministry. It's always interesting

once you see the shoe on the other foot and how people react to these things, but I guess we'll continue to try to point these things out, perhaps maybe urge members of the government to stay true to their beliefs, their concerns going forward about the things they held back then and seem to be pushing to the wayside now.

Currently the way that one section here in Bill 20 and the changes around victims of crime – with that alone, I just simply can't support those changes. You know, perhaps if things were done a little bit differently, if maybe members of the government, members of the government caucus would've taken suggestions by the Official Opposition to try to make the bill a little bit better, I would've found myself in a position to support it. Since they've chosen not to, like they've chosen not to on just about every other occasion that the opposition has brought forward some suggestions to make those a little bit stronger – who knows? Maybe one of these days we'll actually get a few more of these through. I would of course urge members of the House to not support Bill 20. At this point, I guess, I'll take my seat.

10:30

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

I see the hon. Member for Grande Prairie could be called upon to close debate as she was the mover.

Mrs. Allard: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. I just wanted to thank everyone for the great debate. I appreciate the comments from the members opposite with respect to the victims of crime act, and I want to assure you that we are taking that feedback. With respect to Bill 20, though, it is truly an administrative bill, and as members opposite have alluded to, it's primarily housekeeping on those five acts.

With that, I will close debate and hope that everyone will support the bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a third time]

Bill 22

Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022

[Adjourned debate May 11: Mr. Schmidt]

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

Ms Pancholi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to give an opportunity for any government member to rise to speak to Bill 22, but it didn't seem to happen. I am pleased to offer my comments today on Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. This is my second time speaking to this bill and having the opportunity to speak to it.

I want to mention that I believe the last time I spoke to it, I made a number of terrible electricity puns and electrical puns. To be fair, I wasn't the only one in the House that night, Mr. Speaker, who was making those puns. There was a hockey game going on, so we were feeling quite electrified that night. Might I add that there is a hockey game happening again tonight, of course, many hours from now, a critical one, so perhaps we're getting that electrical charge a little early today. [interjection] Oh, I'm getting some groaning from my colleague the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but ultimately . . .

Member Ceci: Go Flames.

Ms Pancholi: Oh. Yeah. Well.

A slight digression, Mr. Speaker, if I may. I had a conversation with my son last night, who is, of course, as he should be, a hardcore

Edmonton Oilers fan. I said to my son: what happens if – knock on wood – the Oilers, unfortunately, do not win? I said that we have to cheer for Calgary because it's still an Alberta team. I'm sorry to say that my son was adamant. I'm apologizing to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. He adamantly said that he would never cheer for the Calgary Flames.

But I said to him, I was like: we are Albertans, so we cheer for an Alberta team. I regaled him with the story of me living in South Africa in Cape Town when the Calgary Flames were in the Stanley Cup finals in 2004. Although being an Edmonton Oilers fan, I got up in the middle of the night in South Africa with a couple of other Canadians to watch the Calgary Flames in the Stanley Cup finals that year. We are Edmontonians first in my household but Albertans second.

I will work on my husband – not my husband, on my son. I'll work on my husband, too. I'll work on my son, but ultimately I don't need to worry about it because the Oilers are going to win tonight. Anyways. A brief digression. I appreciate you allowing me to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Okay. On to Bill 22. We have spoken quite a bit on this side about this and actually expressing that overall there are a number of pieces of this legislation that we, at least myself and I think a number of my colleagues, do support. Certainly, there are objectives that are being served here that are going to serve us well in Alberta in the long term despite the fact that, you know, this is a little bit – as I said last time, better late than never. We had seen essentially this legislation come before this House more than six months ago. Of course, it was not given priority by this government, and therefore it did not pass.

That being said, you know, there are certainly some objectives here which we do support and think are important for our electricity grid, and I want to walk through a little bit because we are in third reading of this bill. Just to summarize, we have not seen amendments. We haven't had a lot of fulsome discussion from the other side about their thoughts on this bill. To summarize for those Albertans who are riveted and watching this debate right now, it's important to kind of outline the elements of this bill and why it is important and is going to serve our purposes in the long run.

Bill 22 essentially does have four main areas that it addresses. First of all, I want to address the fact that it really provides a definition for the concept of energy storage in our electricity market. This is important because this is something that has been undefined up until this point. Largely that was because energy storage has not been a big factor within the electricity grid. I spoke about this last time, about how electricity storage is something that we are more and more cognizant of as we know that our electrical demands are going to increase. We see that in terms of – there's obviously a large movement towards electrification of vehicles. I talked about last time how we're seeing that incredible rise in the demand for electric vehicles. That demand is going to need to be met not only in the production of those vehicles but also being able to service those vehicles on the roads.

That's something I know my family has considered as we just purchased a plug-in hybrid vehicle, so we operate it in EV mode quite a bit, you know, because we can. We don't drive the long distances with it. I actually recently just saw an article that talked about how Mercedes-Benz just actually apparently came up with an EV vehicle that will be able to travel a thousand kilometres on a single charge, which is outstanding although it also is going to change our demand on our electricity system. That is promising, being able to travel that far of a distance on a single charge, but we're not there yet, Mr. Speaker. We know that many vehicles still can't quite do that.

Many more Albertans and Canadians are seeking electric vehicles. We know many car companies – I was trying to search for it, and I couldn't find it in my research. I saw an announcement recently of one major car company that said they're planning on going to all EV vehicles by a set timeline, so that's happening. It is happening. There is the demand there. It's been very difficult, I know, for many Canadians to actually get an electric vehicle right now. The demand is so high. Wait-lists are quite high. Because of that, we need to be prepared, and there are a lot of things that are going to create some challenges for us.

As we shift that way, it challenges, of course, our oil and gas sector here in Alberta. What does that mean for us in terms of our production but also the infrastructure required to accommodate the further electrification of vehicles? It's going to require charging stations at certain places. We're going to require more energy storage. We may have philosophical or ideological or value differences around whether or not we want this to happen or not, although I will say that a low-carbon market is – you know, for climate change we need to address it.

Moving towards addressing that through more low-carbon emissions is important. We have to take those steps. We recognize the impact of climate change, so there's definitely some significant value moving away from high-carbon transmission. At the same time, you know, we have to be cognizant about whether or not we're ready to do that, the implications, because there are certainly environmental implications of moving to further electrification as well. Nobody is denying that. So managing all of those. Again, the global market and the way the demand is going, we will see further demands on our electricity system. Moving towards energy storage and talking about that as a key part of our electrical grid is important.

10:40

This bill, as I understand it, essentially does allow for, you know, more companies to be able to – sorry. I should just say it goes back a bit. It addresses the regulatory issues around energy storage projects and actually makes it clearer that, for example, the Alberta Utilities Commission will bring energy storage under their processes and clarifies how storage has to follow the rules and mandates of the electricity market. So that's a little bit different than what was happening before because it wasn't defined or regulated. Essentially, it recognizes that this is going to support more energy storage projects going into the future. A number of pieces of legislation are amended by this bill to allow for that.

The other piece, of course, that Bill 22 does is that it allows for unlimited self-supply with export. You know, what that means, Mr. Speaker, is that self-supply is the electricity that is produced and consumed on-site and then hence not usually supplied through the grid. So somebody is generating that electricity on their own property, and they're not necessarily buying it from the grid. Usually that's treated differently because of the fact that they aren't accessing the grid, but there may be times where they do access the grid. Even if you're a self-supplier – for example, somebody might think about a solar panel on their home. They're able to generate some electricity, but there may be times where they need to still access the grid.

Now this is going to allow for more of that happening for industrial suppliers. This is not meant to address that instance I just described over residential solar panels. That's already kind of allowed, for residences to be able to sell their excess electricity back into the grid, but this is going to allow for larger industrial companies to be able to do that. Again, more and more of, I think, a realization that the grid is going to be supplied in different ways

as we move to different types of electricity generation as well as different types of electricity use.

You know, the bill has a number of other changes. It requires distribution facility owners to prepare long-term distribution system plans which will have to receive regulatory approval. This model is in place for transmission right now, and this can help with planning for the transition to increase electrification as more use electric vehicles, as I just described.

These are all things – you know, when I talk about that these are good ideas, these are good things we support doing, this will definitely address some longer term challenges and opportunities that we face in Alberta, as I described, but I think we also have to continue to be cognizant of the fact that there are pressing needs facing Albertans right now when it comes to electricity rates and natural gas rebates in particular. Yet – let's be clear – Bill 22 does not address any of those, nor has anything coming forward from this government significantly addressed what average Alberta families are facing right now with respect to their electricity costs. This is not going to make a difference for that, and nothing this government has put forward so far is substantially going to make a difference for Alberta families.

We've spoken at length, Mr. Speaker, and I will do it again, about the failure of this government to respond both quickly and effectively to the needs of Alberta families and the rising costs that they're facing. Not only have they failed to respond, but of course they've exacerbated and caused some of the huge increases that families are facing, whether it be in their property taxes, the increased tuition, the increase in their car insurance. In fact, we know that was directly as a result of this government caring more about the lobbyists who within basically a month of this government being elected were knocking on their door saying: lift that rate cap on insurance rates. Sure enough, this government was quick to respond to them and to allow for Albertans' car insurance rates to go through the roof, yet they are not quick to respond at all to the needs of Alberta families.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

We know that the regulations that have now been released around the electricity and natural gas rebates – first of all, there is no clear timeline for the natural gas rebates. We don't even know if that's ever going to happen. Even the electricity rebates, well, that's not going to happen: December, Mr. Speaker. If you're an Alberta family who has been paying hundreds of dollars more every month, yeah, it's no big deal, right? You can wait till December. December is not really, I mean, an expensive month for anybody. It's, like, that's not expensive or anything. So go ahead; wait until December. They hope – they hope – it will come out by December.

As a reminder, Mr. Speaker, you know, we stood in this House and demanded that there be action and rebates issued to Albertans by the end of the month we are currently in, by May. But no, this government couldn't respond that quickly to Albertans. But, as a reminder again, it was only a month before they could respond . . .

Ms Hoffman: They announced it in March.

Ms Pancholi: Yeah. Oh, that's true. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora indicated, of course, that they announced it in March. I don't know how much more time they need to do it.

There are certain things they have that they do do with amazing speed: firing an Election Commissioner, firing 20,000 educational assistants during a pandemic by tweet . . .

Member Irwin: Cutting off people on insulin pumps.

Ms Pancholi: . . . cutting people off insulin pumps. I mean, the list . . . [interjections] I know.

We could go through – I mean, those things can happen just like that, but rebates to average Albertans who are facing rising electricity costs: oh, well, you’re just going to have to wait for that. Oh, and let’s be clear that even if they do get those rebates by the end of December, it’s \$50 for three months, so \$150, which I don’t even think covers the increases that many families have faced in one month, let alone what they’ll be facing by the end of December. Even though we’ve talked about the delay in delivering it, we should also be clear about how paltry a rebate this is and how it’s not really going to be much assistance to Alberta families. Those are some things to highlight, Mr. Speaker.

Overall, this bill is fine. We’ve talked about it. It’s good. There are going to be some good outcomes long term for our electricity grid. It allows for some, you know, more flexibility in addressing the realities of the challenges and opportunities facing our electrical system. But right now if you ask most Albertans – and I did this last time, Mr. Speaker. I can’t remember the bill number now which was the insurance bill that came forward this session; 16, I think it was. I said that my test would be that if I go to a constituent’s door – and it inevitably comes up that the cost of living is hitting them hard. I say: “You know what? There is an insurance bill before the Legislature right now. What do you think it’s about?” They’d be like, “Oh, you’re going to make insurance more affordable for me.” But, no, that’s not what that insurance bill was about. It had nothing to do with that.

I think the same is true of Bill 22. If I went before my constituents and I said, “Oh, I know you’ve been facing really high electricity bills; guess what; there is a bill before this House right now on electricity,” they would think: “Oh, good. There’s going to be that relief that I need to manage.” And then we’ll say, “No, actually, that’s not what this bill is about.”

I think that throughout this session we have seen that this government is not actually responding at all to what Albertans are saying, and it seems like they are not committed to actually helping out the very people that they’re supposed to represent. Luckily for Albertans, Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition and the Alberta NDP are prepared to do that, and we will continue to do that.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre has risen.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 22, Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta’s Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022, at third reading. I can see that, you know, for all members in the House this is a very riveting and scintillating debate. One might say that the atmosphere is electric in the House as we continue this debate. [interjection] Thank you. Thank you. I will not be here all week, but please try the veal.

Mr. Speaker, what we have in front of us today is a bill that is looking to address issues that the government sees within the electricity market. When this bill was introduced, the associate minister for natural gas, also responsible for electricity, said that this bill would be a step towards eventually, at some point, seeing a reduction in costs for average Albertans for electricity. One of the ways this bill does that is by allowing unlimited self-supply – that is, allowing more industries, more companies, others to create and use their own electricity and then sell it back onto the grid – in this way looking to create additional capacity in the system that isn’t dependent on the major power providers, then, to my

understanding, looking to increase competition in the market, the hope being that that will bring prices down.

What we have in fact seen, as noted by economist Blake Shaffer and others in Calgary in a report they released, is that the largest portion, the biggest reason that electricity prices have gone up is simply because the major power companies have decided to put them up because they decided they needed more profit. Now, to be clear, Mr. Shaffer is not necessarily saying that this was gouging on the part of these companies. What he notes is that there was perhaps some calculation on their part that their costs would be increasing or that they had other expenses. But the fact is that over the last few years power companies in Alberta have reaped much higher profits by raising the price of electricity, and they have the ability to do that due to a lack of competition in the market and a decision by this government to remove the cap that existed on electricity prices, thus allowing those companies to simply freely raise those rates as they saw fit.

10:50

That has brought us to the situation we have here. Now, of course, this is a government that came in with a very distinct agenda, Mr. Speaker. I don’t think anyone would argue that this government did not come in saying that they had a lot of things that they wanted to do. Indeed, they had a very large, exhaustive, and lengthy platform laying out many things. Now, to the best of my recollection, that platform didn’t say a lot about what they intended to do in terms of the electricity market. I could be wrong on that point. Maybe these actions here were actually listed in that platform. I don’t recall that being there. But certainly this is a government that has been almost slavish in its focus on the things that it said it was going to do, and it is a government that has shown itself very reluctant, in fact, at times absolutely incapable of pivoting when circumstances change.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Unfortunately, that’s what we have seen in so many respects, and that is what has led, in many respects, to soaring costs for Albertans in so many areas. This government decided it was going to remove the cap on insurance rates regardless of what the impact might be. What is the impact, then? It has been soaring insurance rates for Albertans, Albertans paying much higher prices. The government has offered no solution for this so far. They’ve focused on that thing they said they were going to do. It has been the same with the removal of the cap on electricity and natural gas. As we have seen these prices soar, the government has remained steadfast that they would not take action on that. Instead, what they do is that they say: well, eventually we will do something that may make a difference somewhere down the line.

Certainly, as the critic for health care I have seen that that has been a major issue there, where this government has utterly cratered the health care system. We’re in a crisis, Mr. Speaker. The government says: well, this is not unprecedented. Front-line health care workers absolutely disagree. I can’t even count now the number of doctors, nurses, others who are the front-line people in the system who are standing up and saying: this is absolutely unprecedented, the level of chaos and disruption that has been introduced by this government. When they are questioned about this, the minister stands in this House and says: well, we’re investing in eventual capacity somewhere down the line. No action to meet the current crisis. No action to address the damage that they have done with their multiple attacks on front-line health care workers, utter mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic, that has brought us to this point of crisis.

The relevance, Mr. Speaker, is that that is what we have here in Bill 22. Now, of course, we support the kinds of things the

government is putting forward. We are going to vote – at least I am personally going to vote in support of this bill, but it is a textbook example of a government that says, “You know what? Albertans are dealing with problems now. Too bad. The solutions we’ll bring to the table will eventually maybe increase capacity somewhere down the line,” refuses to acknowledge the mistakes that it’s made that have brought us here, the damage that is done, and slow to take actual action to fix that problem.

Certainly, I agree that offering folks the opportunity to store more electricity, put that back out onto the market, sell that into the market, make use of it themselves indeed is likely to relieve some pressure on the system somewhere down the line. But, you know, the thing is, Mr. Speaker, that the associate minister of natural gas said that the government has no timelines or targets for adding capacity to the grid. They have no sense of when any of these benefits might actually accrue to the system.

That is, again, something that we repeatedly see with this government. Their investments in health care: they like to brag and try to deflect from the fact that they have driven doctors out of the Red Deer regional hospital, utterly cratered their ability to provide service, diverting surgeries, ambulances lined up outside the door because they can’t get into the emergency room. The government says: but, ah, we have put the money in to expand the Red Deer regional hospital in four or five years. Of course, they have not provided any details – no timelines, no specifics – which is what I hear from the health care workers and the folks at the hospital as well as from municipal leaders and others there. They really want to see.

But here we have a bill which indeed may be successful but for which the government can provide no timelines or targets for when it will add capacity to the grid, much like this government was unable to and still is somewhat unable to tell Albertans when they will actually receive the rebate, which is the sole step this government has taken to address the soaring rates of electricity. Today marks 100 days, Mr. Speaker, since the Premier and this government first promised a rebate on natural gas. One hundred days. It was sometime after that that they eventually got around to saying: oh, yes, and electricity, too. At this point Albertans certainly have no idea if and when they might actually receive a rebate on natural gas. Certainly, it won’t be any earlier than October because the government introduced a rebate that does not actually kick in until then.

For anything Albertans have faced over the past winter, this government says, “Too bad,” because, again, it’s not a government that’s interested, apparently, in helping Albertans now. They’re interested in talking about the things they might someday do sometime down the road. As my colleagues have also noted, this is a payment, the electricity rebate, of \$150, \$50 a month for three months, when Albertans have seen their bills double, some triple in size. Fifty dollars per month for three months. Of course, again, that’s par for the course with this government.

In so many areas of policy this is a government that takes a lot away and then wants to pat itself on the back for giving a little bit back. We’ve seen this repeatedly with the Minister of Advanced Education: massive, sweeping cuts to postsecondaries like the U of A, huge cuts that are driving up tuition, cutting staff, gutting that university. But then the minister shows up and wants to be applauded for giving dribs and drabs of little bits of investment back. All this week, Mr. Speaker, every single day there was an announcement from this government of another little trickle of money that they are putting into something after everything they have taken away.

No better example, Mr. Speaker, than one that’s very relevant to the minds of people in Alberta right now, and I can tell you that

every member of this House is receiving hundreds if not thousands of e-mails about the ending of the insulin pump therapy program. Now, when the government made the announcement they were cancelling this program, they were patting themselves on the back, saying: hey, we are going to give people access to far better technology, newer insulin pumps. No details on how that actually is intended to work. No details at all on any of this, really, other than that they intend to force Albertans to move on to external insurance plans, private health insurance, to pay for something that up until now had been covered by government.

Now that they are going to be facing, likely, increased costs – how much exactly we don’t know because, again, the government will not release those details or speak to that. They simply repeat the same talking points over and over and over. Here we have the government taking something major away and then trying to spin that as if they are giving something good back and again, as we have here in this situation, unable to provide an actual timeline or any information on it. No detail on something that is causing very real fear and anxiety and potentially real damage to the health and the income of Albertans and, frankly, to our health care system.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I do not have a problem with the provisions of this bill. These are likely prudent steps to take. Indeed, I will give this government credit. At times it does manage to do that. We have an awful lot of administrative legislation that comes in front of this House. It seems there are some folks in this government that love to spend time consolidating bills and pulling things together and doing that administrative work. As much as that’s not generally my interest, Mr. Speaker, admittedly, yeah, perhaps at times that needs to be done.

11:00

So I’ll give this government credit that it has done some reasonable systemic work and some reasonable groundwork, but oftentimes, as, say, for example, with Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act that we have in front of this House, which is one of those kinds of bills, we have a lot of consolidation, a lot of housekeeping and everything but again absolutely no details. Many big promises about what the government intends to do and the potential benefits down the road but absolutely no detail in getting there. I think in so many aspects this is a government that has utterly lost the trust of Albertans. As I say, it has proven itself unable or unwilling to pivot to changing circumstances around us to the great detriment of Albertans and, I think, damage to a number of our systems here.

So it’s my hope that, you know, Bill 22, these provisions, will indeed have the effect that the government hopes they will have. Indeed, as I said, they are likely to have some effect. I can’t speak to how great an effect they are likely to have in terms of addressing the kinds of costs we have in Alberta’s electricity system, to be clear, a system that has been largely constructed and is still largely functioning as it was set up by previous Conservative governments in the province of Alberta. But I recognize there is indeed work that needs to be done, and I see no reason not to support these particular provisions as one step in moving towards that goal.

Certainly, we’ll be watching closely to see when this government might actually get that rebate out to Albertans. It is only \$150, which is a small drop in the bucket of the costs that this government has raised on Albertans. But, hey, I think Albertan families will welcome any dollar they can get given the number of costs that this government has raised on them. We’ll be watching closely to see when those rebates might get out. Hopefully, it will be earlier than the end date this government has set of October, November, December. I guess we will see. The government said that it likes to move at the speed of business. In this case business does not seem to be moving particularly speedily.

That said, I will be supporting Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes Amendment Act, and watching closely to hopefully see it eventually provide some benefits for Albertans. Thank you.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance to also add some final thoughts here on Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. Again, some of my colleagues have mentioned – I'm not opposed to Bill 22. There are a lot of changes that need to be done in terms of modernizing the language around the electricity grid, specifically for things such as defining energy storage.

It reminds me a little bit of, you know, over the course of time how we've had to adapt to new things. At the risk of maybe dating myself just a little bit, I remember, say, for instance, when the Internet started to become a thing and having to change some of the language to incorporate that. I can almost go as far back as, say, cellphones and things like that, too. That might date me just a little bit too far on that although I still remember buying my very first cellphone in my vehicle for the whopping price tag of \$1,500. It was crazy, but it was very cool driving around with a full-sized . . . [interjection] Oh, the brick phones. Yes. I remember those. You'd try to talk to somebody. We would be, like, literally as far across the aisle as we are now and, you know, you'd be like, "Hello." "What?" Anyway.

Mr. Dach: You weren't driving.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, back then you were allowed to drive, though, with your cellphones. Again, see, things have changed, and we have to update the language to show those things, like we've recently done that you don't talk holding your phone while you're driving your vehicle. It doesn't work out. Usually you'll get a ticket for such things. So, obviously, we always have to be mindful of those changes.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I remember a discussion I had participating in one of the Council of State Governments conferences down in the U.S. and the whole topic around autonomous vehicles and some of the things that legislators were going to have to start thinking about going forward in terms of: how do you legislate these types of things in terms of if indeed something does tend to go wrong? I can tell you that some of the conversation was actually quite frightening, Madam Speaker, the level of responsibility in terms of, you know: how do you come up with that language to deal with the situation? I have to say that by the time I was at the end of that discussion around autonomous vehicles, I was hoping that with any kind of legislation that would need to come forward with that in terms of new technology changes, hopefully I would be retired at that point, and I would leave that to the younger generation to try to work through.

Other than that, I mean, again, you know, requiring distribution facility owners to prepare long-term distribution plans and have them go through a regulatory approval process and sections, of course, dealing with dissolving the Balancing Pool: as I'd mentioned, not really any problems with some of those changes.

But I have to mention my friend from Edmonton-City Centre, who had mentioned some of the opening comments from the minister of gas saying that a step towards reducing on costs for Albertans – it was interesting because I actually forgot that during his opening comments. It kind of reminds me of, you know, when this government was first elected, came in and wanted to stop the direction of the type of market that Alberta had with that.

Of course, the only other jurisdiction in all of North America that shared that same type of market was Texas. We all know the saying that everything is bigger down in Texas, and that was including their electricity bills, which was part of the reason why we had been looking at going in another direction like just about every other jurisdiction. But, of course, that was halted, and sure enough, you know, just like Texas and their big electricity bills, now Alberta shares that same problem. So perhaps the minister probably should have maybe paused for a moment and taken a look around as to what was going on.

Nonetheless, that does bring us to the point, as some of my colleagues had mentioned, that Albertans' energy bills have spiked dramatically. I'd even mentioned in the House one of my constituents that came to my office with a bill for \$500, and he said that was, you know, the second one that he's seen. I'm assuming he's probably seeing two or three more, and he's still of course waiting for a paltry rebate of \$150 that for some reason the minister can't seem to get out the door.

I don't buy the whole argument that he made at the time that, you know, the opposition was simply slowing things down. As we know, that debate has concluded. That bill was passed. Why hasn't that rebate gotten out the door yet? What's holding it up now? It can't be me. The government controls the purse strings. I certainly don't. You know, why are people still waiting for this to be able to help them out?

You know, in the situation of my one constituent, who has now, I'm going to guess, gotten at least three months' worth of bills totalling \$1,500, you're going to help him out with a mere 10 per cent of that, on top of all of the other costs that we've seen Albertans have to face because of the decisions by the UCP government. Rising insurance costs: I've mentioned some of the numbers that I've seen from constituents who have contacted my office over that. Rising school fees that people are facing. Then with all that stress of that and trying to make ends meet, they try to get away, you know, going camping or something. Now all of a sudden they're facing fees for that as well.

11:10

It's actually not even to the point where people are getting nickelled and dimed, because it's much worse than that. You know, I guess with my friend from Edmonton-City Centre talking about a step towards reducing, I would suggest that the minister maybe speed up and take several steps quickly in terms of helping out Albertans, and the first one is: get the 150 bucks out the door already. What is the holdup?

But, again, as I've mentioned, changes around energy storage: we have to keep up with that, and I know that my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud had gone through that section quite effectively around that.

Also talking about allowing unlimited self-supply with export. Now, it's unfortunate, because of the number that was set here of I believe it was five megawatts – if I'm wrong on that, I'm happy to stand corrected. Likely, that's only going to be able to affect industrial producers with that number. It's not really going to allow anybody smaller than that to be able to participate in that. I don't know if that was, you know, maybe just an unintended consequence or why potentially the minister had looked at sort of locking out anybody smaller than that from potentially being able to get energy back onto the grid that they're not using or overproducing on. Unfortunately, we've never really heard any of the answers to these questions. It just would have been nice to have heard a little bit from that.

Also, one of the other comments that I know my friend from Edmonton-Whitemud had brought up was around the delay of this

bill coming forward initially, because we did of course see one iteration of this bill earlier. I believe it was Bill 86. I could be wrong on that. In any case, very similar to what we're seeing here in Bill 22 with a few slight changes. Again, simply asking the minister why that was the case. You know, why the delay in bringing that original bill forward only to then later, six months later, bring forward pretty much almost the same bill? I could almost say that I'm starting to see a habit of delays here with things: delays in legislation, delays in getting rebates out the door, delays in getting Albertans to be able to qualify even for a rebate, as we've seen with natural gas, because those expenses have gone up as well.

It's unfortunate that, you know, we can't seem to get just some of these simple answers so that we can go back to our constituents and explain to them why these kinds of things are happening rather than just, unfortunately, having to shrug our shoulders and say: well, the government won't tell us why; they won't provide an explanation. Unless, of course – the only other thing I can think of is that the answers that they would actually give they know Albertans aren't going to like, which we've certainly seen over the course of the 30th Legislature here. My friend from Edmonton-City Centre and myself in just the previous debate on this bill around the changes, like I said, to insulin pumps: they probably didn't talk to anybody because they knew they would get some significant push-back on that.

Again, I guess when it comes to updating the language, I don't necessarily have any issues. I don't see why this bill can't go through. I guess it's just one more example of a missed opportunity with which to be able to improve the situation for Albertans.

We'll just have to keep waiting, hoping that some of these changes, which will be the step towards reducing the costs, will come a little bit sooner rather than later because, as my colleagues have said, Albertans need that help right now. Well, they actually needed it several months ago, but I guess, for the purposes of the discussion today, they need it right now.

So I would highly encourage the associate minister of gas to, well, step on the gas. You know, you're saving 13 cents a litre now, so let's get that truck moving quickly, get it to the bank, deposit that money, and get it out to Albertans immediately. I guess something is better than nothing.

But, as I said, I don't have, really, any problems with Bill 22. We do need to update things as situations change and new technologies come onboard, new ways of thinking that have just never ever happened before in the past.

I look forward to supporting it, and hopefully, maybe at some point here in the later stages of third reading, we might get a chance to hear from the minister, and in his final comments he'll be able to at least quickly answer some questions that have come up throughout debate so that we can go back to our constituents and provide them with fulsome answers rather than simply shoulder shrugging, saying: well, the government never tells us anything.

Thanks very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this morning to join in debate on Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022, at third reading. From second reading through Committee of the Whole and now at third reading we've had the opportunity to consider Bill 22. Now, we did also have the ability to essentially consider Bill 86 in the fall, when it was first introduced and then not passed at that time. My understanding was that the government needed to do a significant amount of additional consultation and

development on this piece of legislation prior to bringing it back here for our consideration in the spring.

I'm pleased that the government has been able to go and do that additional consultation. Inadequate consultation is certainly a recurring theme when it comes to legislation introduced by this government. It's something I have spoken about a number of times in this place as we have debated a number of different bills this particular session.

As some of my colleagues have noted, in many of the pieces of legislation this session there does tend to be a bit of an administrative nature to them. Here with Bill 22, electricity statutes, as in the title, modernizing is absolutely the name of the game. Let me say early in my remarks, Madam Speaker, that I will be pleased to support Bill 22, but I'm glad I have the opportunity to offer some comments.

Bill 22 is going to modernize by defining energy storage, something that's currently lacking in our current legislation. It's going to make sure that we've got the rules around self-supply and export and allowing unlimited self-supply and export. Self-supply, of course, Madam Speaker, being electricity that's produced and consumed on-site and not supplied through the grid. Bill 22 is going to require distribution facility owners to prepare long-term distribution system plans, that will need to get approval, and will deal with the dissolving of the Balancing Pool.

11:20

Now, during debate on Bill 22 certainly much has been said about the cost of utilities on Alberta consumers. I would like to note, as I prepared to respond to this bill in third reading, that during the committee process there was an amendment introduced, amendment A1, that would have stopped the UCP government from adding more fees onto Alberta families. The amendment essentially suggested that administrative fees would, rather, be charged to the utility companies, to the electricity generators within the system. Now, the fees are coming as a result of the dissolution of the Balancing Pool. The Official Opposition was seeking to limit the costs to Alberta families, given the high costs that have been piled on not only in the utility sector but in a number of other ways. Certainly, this is something I hear about a great deal with my constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods.

But, Madam Speaker, as I reviewed the debate – because we do not always have the opportunity to be in the Chamber for every stage of debate and for every speaker. I am more than happy to be corrected, but it appears that the government and the associate minister of natural gas and no member of Executive Council chose to respond to that amendment and to explain to the Official Opposition or to the public why they were rejecting an amendment that would have saved costs from going to Alberta families. Now, that amendment was discussed across different sittings. There were different people speaking to it, yet the government never chose to respond to that, and I . . . [interjection] Oh, please. Thank you very much.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to briefly intervene. I appreciate my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods raising this issue. Of course, in my debate I noted that I did not have significant concerns with the aspects of this bill, but certainly the one she is raising is one that was of concern. I do appreciate that you brought this amendment forward or that our caucus did. I was just wondering if she could outline a bit of the detail about the kinds of potential costs Albertans could face due to the government's lack of consideration on that.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much to the hon. member. The amendment was brought forward by the Member for Calgary-

Bhullar-McCall, and that specific amendment, which, again, based on my reading of all of the debate through *Hansard* – and for those watching at home: *Hansard* is an excellent source where we can find out more about the debate on individual pieces of bills and who has said what – it was amending section 1(6) specifically to ensure that the administrative fees of the Alberta utilities advocate would not be charged to anyone but the utilities. Now, my understanding from this amendment is that the administrative fees are resulting from the dissolution of the Balancing Pool. At the time the MLA for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall put forward a very reasonable argument that it would not be fair or reasonable for Albertans to be charged with those additional fees.

He and others who spoke to this amendment went on to outline the number of ways in which Alberta families have been hit with additional fees because of the UCP government, starting with, if we just speak about the electricity and energy world, the UCP government removing the rate cap on electricity prices, and now Albertans are paying more. That removal of that rate cap has directly led to the spike in utility prices that Albertans pay. Now, much has been said as to why those prices are spiking, but we know from research by some very learned colleagues, economists, like University of Calgary economist Blake Shaffer, in recent reports that have been widely reported in the media, that the largest factor in the record-high power prices is profits at this moment because, of course, market power is being exercised by the few electricity generators we have in the system and power companies have pulled in nearly five times the profit during winter rate spikes, according to this. The economist Mr. Shaffer was quoted as saying, “Simply put, they have more control of the supply in the market, and they’re charging more.” That is one additional cost that I have certainly heard about when talking to my constituents.

At the same time, the UCP government removed the rate cap and is now, through Bill 22, putting in an ability to continue to put additional charges onto the Alberta public rather than accepting an amendment from the Official Opposition. At the same time as we’re seeing that, we’re seeing natural gas prices increase, we are seeing the UCP government updating the tax code to essentially create a tax on inflation, something that the Premier, when he was a member of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and for much of his time in federal government, spoke against, something he referred to as sneaky bracket creep, and those increases are costing families roughly \$500 more.

At the same time as we’ve seen these electricity and utility prices increasing, we are seeing tuition increasing at universities, and we are seeing inflation impact food prices as well as other costs for families. Certainly, we’ve seen gas prices rising to a huge extent, park fees, school fees, on and on and on. These costs continue to go up. I may be repeating myself, but I have to make the point that it’s insurance costs as well. Again, similar to removing the rate cap on electricity, the UCP government chose to remove the cap on insurance prices that was keeping insurance to reasonable increases for Alberta families rather than 30 per cent or higher increases on insurance.

So we’re in this environment of increased costs, and the Official Opposition brings forward an amendment to stop the government from piling on more fees to Alberta families, and again, reviewing *Hansard* – prepared to be corrected and happy to be corrected – it appears that the government did not deign to rise to explain why they did not support the amendment or how they would be managing costs for families. So in third reading, as we make our final comments on Bill 22 and reflect on the debate that has happened so far, the question I have is certainly: is the government not concerned about the additional costs that they’re layering onto families? This bill, which I support, which is going to modernize the system, may also add costs to families.

Now, in its introduction the minister certainly said that the bill would be a step towards reducing costs and should eventually bring costs down through the modernization pieces we were talking about around self-supply and export, being able to define energy storage, all some very long-term, laudable goals. Unfortunately, not a lot of detail on timelines for when Albertans will have that relief and not a lot of support for Albertans today. We’ve talked in this place about the importance for this government to provide support for Alberta families, and certainly back in March the government did announce natural gas rebates and, following that, announced there would be electricity rebates as well. But here we are 100 days after that announcement, and the government has not provided the support to Alberta families who are experiencing high costs over the past several months and instead have passed legislation that will allow for a very small rebate, \$50 per month – \$150 total – that might be delivered by December. In the case of the natural gas rebate: October, at the earliest.

We’re in a situation where the government keeps layering on costs, and even during the debate on Bill 22, the electricity statutes amendment act, not only did they not accept an amendment that would have ensured additional costs were not layered onto Alberta families; very specifically, they did not speak to that amendment and are proceeding apace with this piece of legislation. Now, that does not change my support for it, but it certainly adds to my disappointment when it comes to dealing with this UCP government. The associate minister of natural gas is certainly known as a colourful individual, very passionate about what he does in this place, and he has certainly been very direct in why he believes costs have increased. But it differs significantly from what the experts have said and from what researchers at the universities have said.

Now, to be clear, in the articles that have been published around profits being the largest factor on record for high power prices, there’s certainly an acknowledgement that there were lower power prices across the last few years, but today for the families, when I’m knocking on doors in Mill Woods, it’s an incredibly stressful time and an incredibly expensive time. We know that there are hundreds of thousands of Albertans who are within \$200 of not been able to make their bills. We know that there are families that are being forced into very tough decisions because it is so difficult to make ends meet and to stretch every dollar.

11:30

Today we are talking about the importance of modernizing our electricity grid, but at the same time, when we’re looking at an electricity statute here at third reading, I have to reflect that it’s unfortunate that it does not do more to support Alberta families. In fact, although the minister says it should eventually bring down electricity costs in the short term, it could also add administrative fees to Alberta families. The government chose not to respond to the Official Opposition’s amendment and to speak to how that would be managed. If our amendment was not necessary, they did not describe why, so I’m left with concerns that this will, even in the short term, add additional costs to Alberta families at a time when they can least afford it.

Now, a big part of why this legislation is necessary is, of course, the decarbonization that is happening in our utilities right now. In response to what we’re seeing when it comes to climate change and its impacts, the ability to really take full advantage of renewable electricity, both in the cost savings that it will provide, not only to individual families but to companies and to Alberta as a whole, as well as the opportunity for job creation, I think, is really important to reflect on in the debate. I had the chance to review some of the comments from the Member for Lethbridge-West and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who really spoke to some of those

opportunities and those benefits that this bill is helping us to take advantage of. So I'm very pleased to be able to rise and reflect again on . . . [Ms Gray's speaking time expired]

Oh, thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on Bill 22? The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm really pleased to rise and debate this afternoon, actually nearing noon, on Bill 22, the Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022. In the spirit of the bill one would have expected to see a real recognition of the transition period that we're in with respect to energy, not only in Alberta but globally.

Of course, in the lifetime that I've lived and, of course, in the lifetime of the perhaps parents or grandparents of hon. members throughout this Legislature, we've seen a historic transition from different energy sources from one to another which have been phased in over time but certainly resulted in massive changes to how we operate our society and how industry operates. I'm speaking, of course, about the transition originally from wood-burning sources of fuel to, ultimately, coal. I know that my own baba had a wood-burning stove. That was her source of heat and cooking in the house. I visited that house as a child, and that was it, a wood-burning stove. That was her source of heat, using wood.

Coal, of course, was something that came afterwards. We had an abundance of coal in this province. We still do, but we recognize there are health concerns with continuing to burn it. Those deposits were found close to the village of Thorhild, actually, where I spent some of my early years. I remember making sure that the coal never got wet because, of course, wet coal will heat and perhaps burn your house down. When the coal delivery happened and I helped my grandfather shovel that coal, because they had a coal-burning furnace, we made certain that there was no water coming in the chute that we shovelled the coal to.

It was a major shift in transition from coal to natural gas when that furnace was converted to natural gas – actually, no; to propane, Madam Speaker. The propane tanks proliferated throughout the province of Alberta. People transitioned away from coal for home heating to propane, and then that succession, of course, became natural gas afterwards to replace the propane in most instances when gas lines were brought throughout the province.

So in our lifetime, Madam Speaker, we have seen – in my lifetime and in the lifetimes of the grandparents and parents of members who are younger in this House, we've seen a major, major transition, and we're undergoing another transition now in terms of our energy sources. There are many new sources of energy being contemplated to move away from the petroleum-based sources of energy production that we have relied upon for over a hundred years, and that's, of course, due to global warming and greenhouse gas production that results from burning fossil fuels.

Now, in bringing forward a piece of legislation, Madam Speaker, that is purportedly modernizing Alberta's electricity grid, as is postulated in the title of the legislation, one would have expected that we would have seen some recognition of this transition and some realization that there are some risks that we are facing with respect to the electricity grid, where we have brought in changes with this bill to assist the grid to accommodate battery power or battery storage, whether it be hydro pumping or other means of battery storage of power. That's certainly one element of the recognition that needs to be made of the new technology and the new movement away from fossil fuel consumption, but it also has a total silence – and this is a shocking silence to me – on the risk of a cyberattack to our grid.

There's nothing in this legislation. I scanned the bill itself. I couldn't find anything that speaks to the risks that electricity grids, not only in Alberta, Madam Speaker, but globally, face as a result of cyberattack. It was not long ago that in the United States, in the infrastructure which moved gasoline from Texas to New York state, a major pipeline was shut down by a malware attack, a cyberattack that caused a shortage of gasoline in the United States. It was a huge, huge issue of concern, and it really exposed the vulnerability that major infrastructure has to the Internet and cyberattacks that might be sourced from there.

I don't believe, based on this legislation that's before us, Madam Speaker, that the government is paying enough attention to the risk of cyberattack, and it can come from not only a malware attack or an Internet attack from a criminal element or a country that has got bad intentions, but it also may come from what's called the Internet of Things. That is something that we are all more and more aware of because everything from your fridge to your stove to, of course, your vehicles are becoming smart. They, of course, require components that are produced around the world; namely, chips, computer chips that don't necessarily have the manufacturing oversight that one would hope they would have and can be potentially embedded with malware software that will trigger on command from the vehicles or the appliances that they are part of, that they're components within.

11:40

I did attend an Internet webinar about this topic, and it was hosted by some eminent scientists in the field. They were bringing forward their concerns about this risk, and I think it's something we have to be aware of, Madam Speaker, that when we're considering the modernization of our electricity grid, we really, really pay attention to the risk from cyberattack that might exist and not only that; the risk from components that may be mass-produced in other countries that are not friendly, necessarily, and pose a risk to the electricity grid in, for example, electric vehicles. That's something that we need to be aware of because they do draw a fair bit of electricity, much more than your, you know, television or your fridge might do at home. If indeed a co-ordinated attack could be made to trigger the components, the software that's embedded in some of the chips in electric vehicles, it could potentially cause a surge in demand, a false surge in demand, or perhaps a shutdown of elements of the grid. That was a very, very informative webinar that I attended.

I wanted to bring it to the attention of the House and the public to have people investigate a bit more fully on their own, to ensure that they put pressure on the government to be very aware of and take steps, when modernizing the electricity grid, when changing the legislation and regulations around the governance of the electricity grid and taking into account the responsibilities that we want the generators of electricity and the transmitters of electricity to have in protecting that grid from cyberattack, that it be recognized in the legislation. It's not, and I was pretty disappointed and startled to see that, Madam Speaker.

There's no mention of protecting the grid against a cyberattack, and there's evidence around us all over the place that this is something that we have to be cognizant of. The transition that we've gone through is more and more technologically advanced, you know, from the burning of wood to coal to petroleum, now to green energy, electrical solar panels. All of these things are more vulnerable to cyberattack because they are actually exposed to the Internet, and that potential meltdown of our grid is something that even the Auditor General mentioned in 2017 in a report saying that more attention had to be paid to cybersecurity in our electrical grid. So I think it's incumbent upon us to make sure that we do pay

attention to this risk and make sure that our grid isn't vulnerable to that threat.

Another element that I wanted to mention. In debate a day or two ago in this House, Madam Speaker, I spoke about and made comments about the phase-out of coal for electrical generation in this province. I commented that, of course, it was something that was done to actually save lives, and it actually did save lives. As early as 2013 there were reports talking about the health impact of the burning of coal in Alberta. It's a report that was put out by I believe it was the Pembina Institute, and it estimated back then, in 2013, that the health impact costs associated with burning coal for electricity in Alberta are close to \$300 million annually. It was actually a report released by a coalition of Canadian health and environmental groups, not the Pembina Institute.

Now, I'll table this later on, but it's a major source of information for those members opposite who were laughing and guffawing when I mentioned that phasing out coal was a health issue and was going to save lives. That is something that they should read. It goes on to say in this report:

"Pollution from coal power contributes to thousands of asthma episodes every year," says Dr. Robert Oliphant, President and CEO of the Asthma Society of Canada. "On average in Alberta, a child visits an emergency department for asthma every 34 minutes, with pollution from coal power being a major contributor to these episodes."

Madam Speaker, when I speak about phasing out coal as a positive for the health of Albertans, I wasn't doing so to elicit laughter from the other side of the House; I was doing so to bring forward facts that are hard and true. We are seeing and we have seen a reduction in health impacts in Alberta, particularly to those

asthma sufferers, and also a reduction in deaths since the reduction and phase-out of coal. It was pretty disappointing for me to hear the smirks and laughter of members of the government caucus when I talked about coal being something that is a health danger. It's well recognized, so I think we should be cognizant of that.

When we're looking at transforming our grid and modernizing our electricity grid, the phasing out of coal in a way where workers are protected and we transition to natural gas, which has at least a 50 per cent less harmful impact in terms of production of greenhouse gases and particulate matter, is a good thing for the health of Albertans as well as modernizing the grid to be less reliant on coal, that is creating a global problem, with greenhouse gases producing global warming.

Those two things are elements I wanted to bring to the debate that I haven't heard people speak about before. The risk to the electricity grid from cyberattack, that this piece of legislation is absolutely silent on, is a very unfortunate and perhaps ill-conceived omission by the government, that I'm hoping we don't regret.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a third time]

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all members of the House for their robust debate. At this point in time I'd like to move that the House be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. today.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:49 a.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, May 12, 2022

Day 34

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Amery, Mickey K., Calgary-Cross (UC)
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Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)

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New Democrat: 23

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 12, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will be led in the singing of *God Save the Queen* by Nicole Williams.

Hon. Members:

God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble Queen,
God save the Queen!
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the Queen!

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, we do have a number of guests, as you can well see. I hope to be able to get through the introductions in a prompt and reasonable manner.

Members, seated in the Speaker's gallery today is one of the families of our retiring pages, Grace Hlibka, who's in grade 11. She's a student hoping to pursue a career in medicine. Seated in the Speaker's gallery are her parents, Laura Hlibka and James Hlibka, along with her grandparents, aunts, and cousins. I would invite you all to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Hon. members, today, as you know, it's a great pleasure of mine to introduce to the Assembly an important group of individuals who play a key role in our democratic process in the province of Alberta. Our constituency staff are often the first point of contact for the people and the communities that we serve. Their jobs can be very rewarding, but they can also be very demanding and difficult depending on if you're the MLA for Calgary-Currie. It didn't really say that, but I thought I would take the opportunity to encourage my friend the Member for Calgary-Currie.

They are here participating in the spring constituency employee learning and development seminar, which is developed each year to help them with their unique roles and requirements in their service. The seminar provides them with an opportunity to network with each other, obtain an overview of numerous programs and services available through the Legislative Assembly Office, and over the lunch hour we had the opportunity to recognize the contributions of these individuals and sincerely thank them for their service to the province of Alberta.

I would like to point out specifically two constituency staff who are here celebrating 25 years of front-line service to this province. I would ask Darlynn Linn from Calgary-Lougheed and Angela Wolgen-Strojwas from Taber-Warner to rise along with the remainder of the 60 constituency office employees to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Members, we have a number of other guests in our galleries today that I would like to welcome, but I ask that you hold your applause until the end of the introductions, and I would invite all guests that I introduce to feel free to rise as I introduce you.

First off, seated in the galleries today are special guests of the Member for Livingstone-Macleod. Please welcome Jay, Brady, and Brianna Maull.

Also joining us today is the cousin of the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, Ron Goble.

We also have 20 guests of the Member for Peace River who are attending the March for Life rally today.

Finally, I'm pleased to introduce students and staff of Spring Glen junior high school from the Cardston-Siksika constituency. If you haven't already done so, I invite you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Nurses

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate National Nursing Week and we take time to stop and show our appreciation for the nurses in our province and in our country, I want to acknowledge that today is a particularly special day as International Nurses Day. The Canadian Nurses Association's theme for this year is We Answer the Call to showcase the many roles that nurses play in patient health care journeys.

Alberta nurses have gone above and beyond answering the call during the last few years while this government has thrown our health care system into chaos with their war on health care workers and the mishandling of the pandemic. But nurses kept showing up to take care of us despite the burnout, despite the exhaustion, despite the workload, despite this government's choices. Even when this government attacked their wages, their unions, even their overtime and paid sick days, nurses kept showing up. I'm in awe of the dedication of Alberta nurses and know that myself and my colleagues will continue to work hard towards a fair deal for some of our hardest working people.

United Nurses of Alberta's 30,000 members have made it clear that the UCP government must acknowledge that there is a crisis, a shortage of nurses, that requires real action, that requires measures to retain the nurses we have now and to recruit and educate new ones. An NDP government would ensure that nurses and health care workers have fair wages, paid sick days, mental health supports, and, more importantly, nurses and health care workers will be able to trust that an NDP government will support them and won't attack their basic working rights.

Nurses have been answering the call over the last three years, and I know that they're tired of the working environment this government continuously tries to make worse for them. I'm tired of it, too. So to all the nurses today and this week: we hear you, we see you, we thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has a statement to make.

Federal Firearms Policies

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Justin Trudeau is at it again. Yesterday his Liberals introduced new rules on the sale and transfer of nonrestricted firearms. We know that this will do absolutely nothing to reduce gun crime and simply represents another intrusion into the lives of law-abiding citizens. This is nothing more than a backdoor gun registry that they did not campaign on and nobody voted for, a registry that Stephen Harper and the Conservative government proudly abolished. On May 18 the Justin-Jagmeet bromance will impose new rules on the sale of otherwise legal firearms that require businesses and individual sellers to wade through countless red tape and needless regulation.

Let's be clear. Sufficient rules already exist to govern the sale of nonrestricted firearms. They already require a seller to verify that a buyer is legally authorized to own a gun by checking that the recipient has a PAL.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government has repeatedly called on the federal government to abandon their nonsensical backdoor firearms

registry. Justin Trudeau should be focused on implementing stronger border measures to cut off illegal gun smuggling at the source. He should bring back mandatory minimums for offences related to firearms trafficking and crime with a firearm, but what is he doing? He is making criminals out of law-abiding families: hunters, ranchers, sport shooters, and collectors. That's what.

Alberta's government will ensure a practical and balanced approach when it comes to firearms ownership that protects our communities from criminals, smugglers, and gangsters while upholding the rights of law-abiding Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, Justin Trudeau's rules have been implemented with almost zero consultation of law-abiding firearms owners. I repeat: instead of targeting real offenders like gun smugglers and gangsters, Justin Trudeau will be making criminals out of otherwise upstanding, responsible people. Conservatives and common-sense Albertans know that law-abiding farmers, ranchers, families, hunters, and sport shooters are not the problem; Justin Trudeau and his Liberal government are.

Social Supports and Assisted Dying

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, ask yourself: how should we in government respond to men, women, and now increasingly children who live in destitution? Do we offer choices that only end in despair or worse?

During the pandemic a *Maclean's* article reported on an Ontarian woman with multiple nonterminal disabilities who lived on the edge of poverty. Frequenting food banks to be fed, Susan's story is one that should make every heart in our Chamber sink: "I have no other reason to want to apply for assisted suicide, other than I simply cannot afford to keep on living." Susan was poor, Mr. Speaker, and for that she died.

In another CTV article from April this year we hear from Sophia, with a sensitivity disability: "The government sees me as expendable trash, [as] a complainer, [as a] useless . . . pain in the ass." Eight days later Sophia died, her life taken in large part because she was poor and had a sensitivity to cigarette smoke and chemical cleaners.

1:40

An Ontario man named Chris with a serious, nonterminal disability also committed suicide. Here his brother is describing his care home: "There was urine on the floor, there were spots where there was feces on the floor . . . if you stood at his bedside and when you went to walk away, your foot . . . literally stuck." When Chris was 35, he took his own life with the help of the government. His brother believes he died because of the squalor in which he lived.

Assisted suicide and euthanasia are on the rise in Canada. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has reported that Canada has found a net savings of \$87 million due to our state-sponsored suicide program before Trudeau's Bill C-7. After that bill, when death need not be reasonably foreseeable, savings increased another \$62 million. Parliamentarians are now looking at expanding our suicide program to include mature minors, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the savings will increase.

Mr. Speaker, ask yourself again: how should we in government respond to men and women and increasingly, unfortunately, now children who live in destitution? Do we offer choices that only end in despair or worse?

Diabetes Management Coverage

Mr. Nielsen: It is estimated that there are over 200,000 Albertans living with diabetes right now. One of them is my daughter. She was diagnosed at the age of six, so I understand the challenges that

people with diabetes face. Many of these can be managed with the use of a simple piece of technology: the insulin pump.

I've heard from countless diabetic Albertans about how this revolutionary piece of technology has given them their lives back. Students are able to go to school with confidence that they don't need to worry about insulin or needing to take a shot. The insulin pump has become for many a fact of life, something that they depend on, so naturally when this government imposed a change with no warning, no details, no consultation, and no regard for the lives of diabetics and their families, there was great concern. Albertans have come to expect this from this government. There is no concern for what this might do to them.

Our caucus has received messages from all corners of the province scared about this change and what it might mean for them or their loved one. The government isn't interested in getting them answers, though. In fact, as we learned this week, at least one member of the UCP cabinet thinks the concerns of Albertans are laugh-out-loud funny. Shameful, Mr. Speaker, but this is typical behaviour from this government, who is better at picking fights than they are at delivering services.

This government went to war with doctors, and it resulted in the health care crisis we are seeing in our emergency rooms and communities around Alberta. This government tried to sell parks from underneath Albertans without any warning. This government tried to tear down the eastern slopes in secret, and this government should never have messed with the essential medical supplies that thousands upon thousands of Albertans rely upon to live their lives.

Albertans need a government that works for them, not who works against them, who picks fights with them, who tries to hide from them. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta NDP is ready to be that government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein is next.

Civil Society Social Service Providers

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Sandwiches are beautiful,

Sandwiches are fine.

I like sandwiches, I eat them all the time.

Recently I had the privilege of taking a tour of Sonshine Community Services. They provide a safe zone for women and their children to escape abusive relationships, and its mission statement says in part: "help women and children transform their lives." Their emphasis on keeping families together during this difficult time is so important, and their intentional inclusion of the broader community in the solution is what will be needed to tackle the challenge of domestic violence.

I thoroughly enjoyed meeting with some of the children and singing one of my favourite songs about sandwiches. After seeing one of the suites, their child care facilities, and meeting with the staff, I came away impressed. Sonshine also offers child care and community counselling.

Mr. Speaker, in March I had the privilege of meeting with representatives of Ruth's House as well. Ruth's House is a safe haven for people in the African community needing to escape domestic violence. This organization focuses on educating other civil society groups as well as prevention and intervention. It warms my heart to see various groups working together to make our communities a safer and happier place for everyone, regardless of someone's background.

Another great civil society organization I've had the chance to meet with recently is Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society. Its goal is to create a space for connections, creativity, and ideas regardless of our individual beliefs and ideals. It's about showing up and saying what needs to be said even when it's uncomfortable.

Mr. Speaker, something these not-for-profits I mentioned have in common is the acknowledgement that the answers to these complex

issues are found in engaging society to build awareness and mobilize resources and that only through broader community involvement can we address complicated and challenging issues like domestic violence. We all have a role. I want all civil society organizations to know that you have my constant admiration and support. I will advocate on your behalf in this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Education Funding and Curriculum Redesign

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, for the past three years I have had the distinct privilege of representing the people of Edmonton-Meadows in this Assembly. I have the honour of attending the grand opening of Thelma Chalifoux school tonight. This school will serve 900 students and was funded and built by the NDP government, that put value in public education and invested to ensure that no matter where in the province you live, quality education would be available. The NDP funded and built hundreds of schools and ensured students and teachers were supported, but sadly while the NDP government lived up to its commitments to public education, the UCP has not.

The UCP has failed to fund new schools that Edmonton needs, leaving one of the largest boards with no schools despite badly needing them. UCP cuts to education funding mean that in Edmonton this year alone there will be 1,700 public school students who are not funded. The UCP plans have meant that there will be a thousand fewer teachers in classrooms since they have taken office. The Education minister fired 20,000 Edmonton workers and made the claim that they weren't working. Despite universal opposition the UCP insisted on forcing its discredited, garbage-pile curriculum into classrooms. Teachers, principals, school boards, parents, the francophone communities, and racialized Albertans oppose it, but still the Premier and the minister proceed, ignoring the feedback they hear. Members of the government even attacked teachers by claiming that their input was not needed to develop a good curriculum.

As I join my community in celebrating a new school that the NDP delivered, I will celebrate as part of a team that defends and stands up for public education. Albertans know which party they can trust with protecting public education in Alberta. It is not the UCP.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Surgical Wait Time Initiative

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Surgical wait times are an extreme concern for all Albertans. I'm sure that all of us can agree that the thought of having to wait months for a surgery is chilling. Alberta has had some of the highest surgical wait times in Canada, which increased every year from 2014 to 2020. During the past two years these wait times have continued to be a problem, which is worrisome for so many Albertans, but unlike the opposition across the aisle, this government has been committed to making changes that will actually reduce these wait times.

The Alberta surgical wait time initiative is a plan to lower wait times so that all Albertans receive surgeries within clinically appropriate timelines. To do this, we are investing \$133 million over three years to upgrade and expand surgical operating rooms. As Alberta has done since the 1990s, we're going to continue to work with chartered surgical facilities to increase access to these much-needed surgeries. So far, Mr. Speaker, this has been working. For cataracts we expanded our capacity by working with chartered surgical facilities to provide 10,000 cataract surgeries in Edmonton, and in Calgary we will have 15,000. By utilizing these clinics, we are reducing wait times and making sure that Albertans get the care

they deserve. In the first three quarters of the fiscal year we had an average wait time of 10 weeks for cataract surgeries, the shortest it's been since 2015.

So, Mr. Speaker, don't let the NDP fool you. They keep claiming their number one priority is Albertans, but when they were in power, wait times for the same procedures were extremely high at 17 weeks. Let's face it. Their union friends would have never allowed them to find solutions that actually work for Albertans because they only find solutions that work for their union bosses. I'm proud to be a part of a government that is taking real action to ensure Albertans get the surgeries they need when they need them.

The Speaker: Hon. members, if I could beg the indulgence of the Assembly for just one brief moment. I just realized and noticed that former member Scott Cyr and his mother have joined us in the gallery today, and I neglected to introduce them. I hope that you'll rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has question 1.

Utility Rebate Timeline

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, Albertans facing sky-high natural gas bills are waiting for help from this Premier, waiting and waiting and waiting. The Premier announced this rebate for Albertans on February 1. It's been a hundred days, and Albertans still have no idea when it will arrive. Albertans don't want spin. They don't want UCP rhetoric. They don't want excuses. They want a cheque, and they want to know when it's coming. Will the Premier rise in this House today and tell Albertans what date the rebate is finally coming?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, thankfully, despite NDP obstruction and delays, we got the legislation passed. It is now law, and the minister is working with the utility companies, some 40 electricity retailers, to get that rebate on to people's bills as soon as possible; we hope in the weeks to come. Let's be clear about this. The NDP tried to stop that bill. They refused to allow us to fast-track it. The real issue is that they are cheering on Justin Trudeau's effort to quadruple the carbon tax to make life even more expensive for Albertans.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have gotten no answer from this government for a hundred days and counting. A recent survey shows half of Alberta households are just \$200 away from not being able to make ends meet. Instead of rushing to help, the UCP are ragging the puck on these rebates. In April the Premier suggested that he would speed it up and get these to families sooner than the fall, but he must've changed his mind because the regulations still say October. Why did the Premier flip-flop? Why is he so slow?

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, Alberta's government has taken unprecedented action to help Albertans cope with the rising cost of living, a cost of living that is rising in large part because of the NDP-Liberal carbon tax grab. Through our immediate April 1 pause of the Alberta fuel tax, that represents a \$1.3 billion annual savings. The electricity rebate plus the forthcoming natural gas cap: all of that together represents \$2 billion in consumer relief, more than any other government by a country mile.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, when the insurance lobby wants to jack up their fees, the Premier says, "No problem," and he rushes to make it happen. In fact, it took the Premier only two days to put

\$4.7 billion into the bank accounts of large profitable corporations – two days – but Albertans get a hundred days of excuses when it comes to their bank accounts. Is the Premier beginning to understand why Albertans can't trust him?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, do you hear the sound of socialism from the other side? A tax cut they characterize as putting money into someone's bank account, when what we're doing is not taking it away from them. They crushed employers, job creators, and Albertans with a huge increase in the business tax rate, in the personal income tax rate, with their carbon tax hike. They drove us into four years of an economic tailspin from which we are only now recovering as we lead Canada in economic growth and job creation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora for the second set of questions.

Private School Financial Reporting

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, every day it becomes more clear that Albertans cannot trust the UCP with public education. Just look at the confusion among the cabinet when it comes to Bill 21. The associate minister responsible for the bill and the Education minister can't even agree on what the bill does. Will the Premier, the guy who's ultimately responsible, tell Albertans why his associate minister of red tape thinks that private schools should be allowed to charge whatever they want for tuition and not even tell the Alberta public?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The items that are in the red tape reduction bill – that is, Bill 21 – really just simplify the process. The information is going to be provided to us, has always been provided to us through the audited financial statements. The member opposite is just trying to confuse the public.

Ms Hoffman: I'm just telling the minister what her colleague the other minister told everybody in Alberta. The Education minister, I guess, says that the associate minister of red tape is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, because public education and private education are all funded by the taxpayers of Alberta, we will be proposing an amendment to ensure that the UCP can't hide how much money private schools are charging. The minister says that they'll still have to tell her; they should have to tell the public. Will the Premier take a stand for transparency and accountability for once and promise Albertans that this information will be disclosed?

Mr. Kenney: Yes. Mr. Speaker, as the minister just said, of course, this information is available through the audited financial statements. But the real reason the NDP is upset is because they hate Alberta's tradition of school choice. They believe that bureaucrats and politicians should make decisions about kids' education rather than parents and families. We fundamentally disagree. The NDP voted against the Choice in Education Act, 2020, that recognized for the first time in Canadian law that parents have a human right to decide how best to educate their kids.

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, every child in Alberta deserves a high-quality education, reasonable class sizes, and a quality curriculum. This is important because right now the UCP is cutting public education, hiking school fees, and forcing a backwards curriculum on Alberta students. At the same time they want to hide how much taxpayers are forced to subsidize some wealthy private schools, some that are already flush with cash. Will the Premier stand up to the red tape minister and admit that Alberta taxpayers have a right to know how much schools are charging in tuition?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again the member opposite shows that she does not understand independent schools. They only get 70 per cent funding. They get zero per cent for capital. While they have over 6 per cent of the population, they only get 4 per cent of the funding. In fact, the average taxpayer is saving money because students are in independent schools.

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

Diabetes Management Coverage

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, only moments ago we heard the Health minister announce that the UCP will be suspending their changes to the insulin pump therapy program. This comes after days of the UCP ignoring the voices of Albertans who spoke out against this policy. We stood with Albertans like six-year-old Conor, who was worried about losing the pump that allows him to go safely to school without worrying about his diabetes. Albertans like Conor deserve an apology for the chaos and fear this government created. Will the Premier offer a full, unreserved apology to the thousands of Albertans with diabetes, like six-year-old Conor, who were belittled and ignored by his government?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. As I indicated to the media earlier today, we are doing a pause on our program. I want to apologize to Albertans due to the confusion, because there are a lot of questions that we actually hadn't answered yet. We're stopping the changes to the program right now. We're going to reach out to Albertans and do a series of town halls and reach out to all individuals involved in the insulin program. There are 4,000. We're going to make sure no one is going to be left behind. The intent behind this was to be able to expand access, and we're going to make sure that we're going to live up to the intent.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister for the apology. You know, this government clearly did not consult as they plowed ahead with this plan that would seriously impact the lives of diabetics. It does not seem that a single diabetic was consulted, not a single organization. This government tried to move fast, and they got caught when Albertans got furious. Now they need to do better. While this policy is suspended, Albertans are understandably wary and want to be sure that government is not going to try to do the same thing again. Will the minister lay out today the details of what consultations he's going to hold? Will he commit that this policy won't move forward until every concern from the community is addressed?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, we did do consultations beforehand. There was a clinical advisory committee in regard to the insulin pump program, but, evidently, given the concerns that were raised by some of my caucus colleagues, by the members across the aisle, and that I heard directly from Albertans who rely on the program themselves, we didn't do enough. Again I would like to apologize for that. We actually are going to be reaching out. We're going to be holding a town hall. We're going to be reaching out to each and every individual person in the program to understand what impact this has on them. Again, we'll make changes as necessary to ensure that no one gets left behind.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, the minister said that they had details they hadn't released yet. I can't understand why this government keeps creating chaos in our health care system since they took office, with these lines outside of children's hospitals, thousands in southern Alberta with no family doctor. This simply does not help. But Diabetes Canada had also put out a letter today calling on the minister, noting that this program could put people in the position of having to choose between an insulin pump, rent, or food. To the minister: will he commit that his rewrite of this program will not put a single person in a position where they are unable to afford an insulin pump?

2:00

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, yes, we are going to ensure that we can protect those who need this, because there shouldn't be a choice between being able to manage this chronic disease and then putting food on the table. We are going to ensure, as we work through this policy program and the changes, that we understand where people have – you know, the vast majority already are in plans that actually can cover some of this, but there are some who are not. We need to identify those and make sure that no one is left behind. I did speak with Diabetes Canada earlier today to be involved in the ongoing consultation. I invited them, and I'm looking forward to speaking with them.

Homeless Supports and Affordable Housing

Ms Sigurdson: The city of Edmonton expects the number of people sleeping outside without support will continue to increase. Currently there are an estimated 800 people sleeping outside on any given night. This number will skyrocket once the pandemic emergency shelters close at the end of this month. The Premier has cut housing supports by more than 15 per cent and callously forced more Albertans onto the streets. To the Premier. We're in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. There are more people facing homelessness because of this crisis. Why is the UCP cutting critical housing supports when so many Albertans have nowhere to go?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Of course, this government is committed to a recovery-oriented system of care to help all Albertans and to work with multiple ministries. The Alberta government is maintaining funding for homeless shelters, nearly \$49 million, ensuring that those who require emergency shelter have a safe place to stay. We provide nearly \$90 million to community-based organizations in Alberta, seven major cities, to fund a range of supports, including supportive housing, intensive care management, and rapid rehousing. This government is committed to that recovery-oriented system of care in helping Albertans.

Ms Sigurdson: This Premier failed to help Alberta's most vulnerable. As a result, the city of Edmonton is forced to spend \$860,000 to hire seven more park rangers, 14 more cleanup crew, and nine more housing and outreach workers to address the anticipated surge in homeless camps due to the emergency shelter bed closures. This is not a solution. Tearing down their tent and breaking up an encampment doesn't create a bed for them to sleep in. Does the Premier understand that forcing the city of Edmonton to clear out the homeless encampments from around the sky palace is not a feasible housing strategy?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, of course, housing is an integral part of the recovery-oriented system of care. Ensuring that people have access to housing is extremely important but also ensuring that people have access to mental health and addictions support. That's why we've created the 8,000 spaces; 8,000 people are getting help that didn't get help under the previous government. That is so important to understand, and we're committing to helping people who are vulnerable on the streets of Edmonton.

Ms Sigurdson: Addressing homelessness is not only a social issue but an economic one. Chambers of commerce are calling on the UCP to take action. When addressing the Edmonton Chamber, Mayor Sohi stated: "Edmonton deserves a fair deal. [Please] work with us... Please stop holding Edmonton's economy back." Instead of working with the city of Edmonton, the Premier ignored their funding requests for permanent supportive housing and left hundreds of millions of dollars from the federal government on the table. To the Premier. Economic recovery needs to be for everyone. Will he commit here and now to work with the city of Edmonton to prevent the surge of homeless camps?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member for the question. You know, over COVID this government had committed to over \$100 million during that particular time. Shelters, especially in Edmonton, are at 52 per cent. This government is committed, again, to helping people with mental health and addictions problems. We are committing to helping the most vulnerable, and I am proud of the work that our Premier has done. I am proud of the work that the minister of social services has done and that he continues to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross is next.

Technology Industry Development

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Technology and innovation continue to be a key focus in Alberta as the sector gains momentum and expands in record numbers. Recently we heard about Calgary-based Neo Financial, who raised \$185 million in their most recent fundraising round and are now part of the one-billion-dollar-valuation club. But we know it's not just companies in the big cities who are developing innovation to help solve provincial, national, and international problems. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: what supports are available for tech companies and start-ups outside of Edmonton and Calgary?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy is firing on all cylinders. Our unemployment rate is at 5.9 per cent, a level we haven't seen in this province since 2015. That being said, we can't stop there. We're going to support entrepreneurs around the province, corner to corner. Our regional innovation networks in partnership with Alberta Innovates are going to be there as a pipeline of mentorship to help innovators take their ideas and make sure that they can have the tangible supports they need to turn it into a business plan and commercialize those opportunities.

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance of supporting Alberta's tech sector throughout the province in all industries, from agriculture to health care and everything in between, and given that there have been numerous investments made by this government through Alberta Innovates to support innovators and entrepreneurs through regional innovation networks, to the minister: what services do these networks provide, and how can Albertans benefit from them?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, right now in Alberta we're seeing a tech renaissance that's happening. Just a few years ago we only had 1,200 tech companies. Now we have over 3,000 tech companies in this province, and the amount of capital that they're raising is growing exponentially. We've broken our record each of the last three years. Now, we're going to support entrepreneurs in every corner of this province by making sure we're there at the early stage, mid-stage, and the later stage of mentorship. These companies can grow from a handful of employees one day to making sure that they're a billion-dollar company with 500-plus employees to a thousand employees. That's the support that we're going to be there with. We're going to have a bright future in this province and a more diversified economy.

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

Mr. Amery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given the growth that we are seeing in Alberta's tech and innovation sector, especially in our big cities but also growing in communities thanks to our investments like the one just spoken about, and given the need to find more talent to fill a growing number of these tech positions, can the minister tell us what work is being done to develop and attract more individuals to fill these roles?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, do you remember those years under the NDP, when Albertans fled and their Energy minister told Albertans to go to another province to get a job? It's bright times in Alberta. We're seeing migration of thousands and thousands of Canadians moving to Alberta for high-paying jobs and an affordable way of life. [interjections] The NDP are heckling because they don't like that. They don't like the fact that Alberta is back and stronger than ever. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Disability Service Provider Funding

Ms Renaud: The Alberta Council of Disability Services launched a campaign called the Perfect Storm. Disability workers are the people that support developmentally disabled Albertans to live in their communities and take advantage of inclusive employment. Alberta's disability workers are chronically underpaid. With inflation at a 30-year high and the average hourly wage at \$18.76 an hour disability workers are leaving the sector in droves or having to get multiple jobs to feed their families. There is a documented crisis in this sector right now. They need an increase to their wages. Will the Minister of Finance deliver this increase?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, on behalf of the minister of social services this government values the dedication that disability service workers have and have shown throughout the pandemic in caring for the most vulnerable Albertans. Last year Community and Social Services expanded the critical worker benefit to all community disability service workers, the funding through the family support for children with disabilities and persons with developmental disabilities. To date we have distributed over \$16 million to over 13,000 workers.

Ms Renaud: Given that the majority of responding community disability organizations are reporting increased costs related to insurance, utilities, employee benefits, IT, accounting, auditing, fees, staff training and recruitment, maintenance, property tax, rent,

and more and given that 61 per cent of reporting organizations are facing these financial pressures and given that the increasing financial pressure on these organizations may result in the rationing of supports or increased costs for disabled Albertans, does the Premier prefer that disabled Albertans face even higher costs or fewer services? Will he respond to the crisis or let someone just spew written notes?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, thank you. The ministry is working with the disability services sector and the partnering ministries, of course, to improve attraction and retention within the sector. We've provided a grant to the Alberta Council of Disability Services to collect and analyze data. The ministry is committing to helping people in this sector. [interjections]

Thank you.

The Speaker: Order.

2:10

Ms Renaud: Given that this side needs way better notes and given that the Alberta Council of Disability Services has unequivocally stated that Alberta's community disability service sector is in an untenable situation right now as a result of consecutive years of stagnant funding, soaring inflation, and extreme pandemic pressure and given that community disability workers are leaving the sector due to fatigue or the inability to support . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. Member for St. Albert has the opportunity to ask the question without conversations happening around her.

You can go back a couple of seconds if you want. You have about 10 seconds remaining.

Ms Renaud: Given that I'm incredibly disappointed that this government is unable to put someone up that actually has some information to offer the community disability sector, will the Premier or the Finance minister answer the question that these service providers are asking?

Mr. Ellis: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. You know, it's a little rich here for the NDP to especially talk about notes when they are in fact reading notes. I will ensure that the member from the ministry of social services is certainly aware of this issue. He is working very hard to rectify any of the issues within this department. I'm proud of the work that he's doing and that he's going to continue to do.

Ambulance Response Times

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, EMS is in crisis in this province, and the government is not listening to workers. Last month we sat down with Canmore-based advanced care paramedic Kristin Buck, who said that the town has gone from having to shut down an ambulance three times in 2019 to 32 times in 2021. There were 133 Albertans who saw a delayed response within the town of Canmore last year, and yesterday, when asked about these issues, the acting minister claimed this was all normal. To the minister: do 32 ambulance shutdowns in one Alberta town sound normal to him?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. This is an important issue. Our

system, our health care system, is facing pressures, including our EMS system. This problem has come to light. There's an increase of 30 per cent in calls, but we are taking action to address this. In Budget 2022 we put in an additional \$64 million. That's to add new ambulances, to hire new staff. AHS announced a 10-point plan to address some of these issues. We recognize there's an issue. We are solving it.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, paramedics and first responders are telling us clearly that this is not normal, and given that Kristin had to file a freedom of information request to get the real facts instead of government spin and given that what she found was that response times are climbing, with more responses over 20 minutes, and given that in March a patient with a heart condition waited 33 minutes for an ambulance, why doesn't the minister stop the excuses, look at the data, listen to Kristin, and take immediate action?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, we are taking action. Earlier this week I was pleased to tour the new integrated operating centre in Calgary. The purpose of this is to be able to smooth out the calls and to direct paramedics to different hospitals within Calgary and the surrounding area. I know this is just one of multiple actions that we need to do to address this issue. A big part of it is hiring more paramedics. We are doing that. We have actually hired several hundred, and we're actually going to hire more. We understand it's an issue, and we are going to correct it.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, it used to be that Canmore EMS responded to most of their calls inside of Canmore, their own community, but given that last year Canmore EMS responded to more calls outside of Canmore than inside of it and that by not addressing pressures in Calgary, this government is causing stress and suffering in every single community around it and given that this week I talked to a Canmore firefighter who said that when they're first on the scene, they now have to ask from which community the ambulance is coming so they know how long they'll be waiting, will the minister listen to front-line workers, offer casuals full-time contracts, as front-line workers have asked for? We clearly need them. What is the holdup?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, we are listening to front-line workers. We are adding resources and adding more people. We understand that there is an issue. That is the reason why we appointed an advisory committee. My colleagues in this Chamber are actually leading the charge in terms of doing that. They have reached out to do surveys of front-line workers as part of that. I am very much looking forward to hearing their report, which will be coming in the next couple of weeks. We've also asked for some quick hits so that we can address these issues. I'm looking forward to being able to make an announcement of that in the next coming days. We understand there's an issue. We are addressing it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Rural Health Care Professional Recruitment and Retention

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the pandemic, understandably, the focus of our health care – doctors, nurses, and specialists – was on the pandemic response and those in critical care. Resources were focused, and the most urgent issues were prioritized. The pandemic highlighted critical system issues and put strain on health care and health workers right across the province. Rural areas in particular continue facing a shortage of physicians, which has left rural Albertans in a vulnerable position. To the

Minister of Health: what's being done to attract nurses, doctors, and specialists to rural areas, and what's the plan to ensure they remain working in these areas rather than relocating, leaving these communities short once again?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Staffing outside the two major cities has been an issue for a number of decades. We've been through a global health crisis that has strained health care in every province. We continue to add doctors, nurses, paramedics, and other health care professionals in spite of the pandemic, and we are going to do more. Budget 2022 maintains the most generous incentives for rural doctors in Canada and funds new initiatives to attract doctors and nurses to smaller communities. We know there's added strain on smaller communities, and we're addressing it as we add capacity right across our health care system.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and, through you, to the minister for that answer. Given that a shortage of doctors and nurses has both immediate and long-term effects on families and communities and staff shortages can snowball, exacerbating the problem further, and given that hospitals in many rural areas are currently understaffed, adding additional pressure on those doctors and nurses that choose to remain to carry that additional load, to the same minister: what strategies are being implemented to ensure the retention of new hires, and how will unexpected staff vacancies be avoided in the future? For example, will there be sufficient flex capacity to bridge vacancies without further service reduction to rural Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the hon. member for these important questions. Budget 2022 includes \$90 million for rural physician recruitment and retention. It also includes two new initiatives. The RESIDE program will support 60 new doctors in rural or remote communities, and the new rural capacity investment fund will provide \$50 million for rural nurses and another \$7.5 million for relocation assistance. But we know that we need to do more. We're working with the AMA and with the rural practitioners program to do an assessment of our programs to help make them more effective and working with my colleague in Advanced Education to be able to train more . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again, through you, to the minister. Given that the issue of service in rural communities is not unique to Alberta, with more than 20 per cent of the Canadian population residing in rural areas but only 9.3 per cent of physicians practising in these same areas, and further given that rural communities experience the largest deficit of health care workers consistently and that this is a decades-old problem, again to the Minister of Health: what strategies are being enacted to guarantee improved health care for those working in rural areas, and what's the plan to stabilize the flux of physician supply in these areas, including in the rural hubs like my community of Grande Prairie?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member mentioned, this is an issue not only being faced in Alberta and in

rural areas but across the entire country. We are fortunate to see a net gain of 99 physicians in the first quarter of this year compared to last year, but we understand that those gains are not where we necessarily need all the doctors. We know that in smaller communities they had losses, and the pandemic has been hard on family physician practices especially in those communities. We are working with AMA to address the pressure on family doctors as part of the work as we work towards a new agreement, and we will continue to focus on solving this problem in rural Alberta.

Calgary Storm Damage Recovery Funding

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, next month marks the two-year anniversary since the devastating hailstorm hit northeast Calgary, and as I drive through my community, I still see houses with hail damage. The UCP government has done nothing to help these people. The Premier once promised to call his friends in the insurance industry, but those calls appear to have been ignored. Thankfully, the city has stepped up with supports to help Calgarians replace their roofs with stronger ones that can resist future hailstorms. Why has the UCP refused to provide similar support to the people of northeast Calgary?

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

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will acknowledge that the hon. member did go and pose for a picture along with the Leader of the Opposition. Congratulations on that. But while they were posing for that picture, members of ours from northeast Calgary went and have been working with people who had hail damage, working to make sure that the insurance claims that they had were honoured, pushing the insurance companies to honour those claims. That is actually more than the NDP did when there were hailstorms when they were in government. We will continue to faithfully work with people that suffered damage through disasters.

2:20

Mr. Sabir: Given that the city has recently ended the hail-resilient roofing rebate program and given that the program was oversubscribed and ran out of money due to its high demand and given that it would cost \$5 million to process the remaining applicants, not the made-up \$2.5 billion figure the UCP keeps citing, and given that this is just one-sixth of the annual budget of the war room, will the government step up and help the people of northeast Calgary, or will they continue to fund their shameful war room?

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the NDP has just revealed the way they look at the world. We have a disaster recovery program that is designed to look after uninsured losses, which is what the design is. What the NDP wants to do is pay for everybody's loss in Alberta that hasn't bought insurance, billions of dollars. You know what? They haven't even put any thought into the extent of what they're asking for, putting the government on the hook to pay for every uninsured loss: roofs, homes, automobiles. They just don't have any idea what they're asking for.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister last week announced \$744 million in flood mitigation for Calgary and refuses to fund \$5 million for hail-resistant roofs in northeast Calgary, why is there a double standard? Why are people in northeast Calgary treated differently, Minister?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, what the NDP doesn't understand is that there is no double standard. Disaster recovery program is for uninsured

losses. The NDP is suggesting that nobody buys insurance and the government replaces every single thing for every single Albertan that's ever lost. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, you had your opportunity to ask your question. Now I'd like to hear the answer.

Mr. McIver: Now, I appreciate that the hon. member that's asking the question posed for a picture once, and he wants to be thanked for that. Mr. Speaker, instead, he's actually suggesting that we put insurance companies out of business and that the government pays for every single loss that everybody has, no matter what. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Utility Costs and Rebates

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, skyrocketing utility prices are crippling Alberta's rural economy. It's having a detrimental effect on families, businesses, and nonprofits. I'm hearing from people across the province who can't afford their monthly bills. Our economy is still recovering from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The rural Albertans I'm hearing from say that their bills are hundreds of dollars higher now than they were under the NDP government. Will the associate minister of electricity rise in this House and tell rural Albertans specifically what he's going to do to address this crisis today? No more talking points. Let's have some action, Minister.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to invite any of the members of the NDP to come and experience rural Alberta at any time. In fact, the Sundre stampede rodeo is about to happen at the end of the month, and I hope they all come and see what rural Alberta is really about. The Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity and this government are working tirelessly to help with bills and to fix the boondoggle that the NDP made with our electricity system and our heating system in this province. We have rebates coming for both electricity and natural gas, and we have fought against Justin Trudeau's carbon tax, that they supported.

Ms Sweet: Well, given, Mr. Speaker, that utility costs were lower when we were in charge and we took action to ensure they never hammered household budgets the way they are right now and given that the devastating effects of these utility costs have left some rural municipalities to call on the Alberta Utilities Commission to launch an investigation and given that we support any inquiry into why costs are so high, does the minister support the call from the mayors of Taber, Fox Creek, and other municipalities, and will he join them in supporting an investigation into these skyrocketing costs?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I love that the NDP talked about when they were in government. When they took government, electricity cost 3 cents. After they were done, they capped it at 6.8, almost triple. Why did it triple? They cut off the cheapest source of electricity. They added a carbon tax. They supported the federal – with these folks across, actually, a stated objective is to have everybody taking the bus because they wouldn't be able to drive. That's actually their goal. Now they're complaining about the cost? They've actually succeeded in making it unaffordable.

Ms Sweet: Well, given that this government continues to do nothing and, again, municipal leaders are asking for an inquiry and given that the Premier promised the natural gas rebate 100 days ago and we still don't know where that is and given that the minister

himself represents a rural riding of Morinville-St. Albert, has the minister forgotten the people who put him in that chair? Does he even care? Explain to the voters of the constituency of Morinville-St. Albert why this government is doing nothing.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, there was an inquiry into what happened with electricity, done by this government as part of our platform, that came back and said that the NDP broke the entire system, did Albertans an extraordinary disservice, and made electricity prices skyrocket. On top of that, they have inside this House filibustered and tried to block natural gas rebates. Shameful. They stood with Justin Trudeau and their boss Mr. Singh in Ottawa, forcing a carbon tax on Albertans over and over, and have defended Justin Trudeau trying to steal Albertans' birthright, which we will not let happen.

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

Antiracism Strategy

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud of this government's work to fight racism and thankful that this government is taking concrete steps to stand up to racism. For example, the discriminatory practice of carding was banned by this government, and we created the hate crimes task force as well as the associate ministry of immigration and multiculturalism to act as an advocate for Alberta's minority communities. To the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism: can you update this House about what this government's initiatives are to make our province a more welcoming place for everyone?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question and also recognizing some of our government's work to combat racism in this province. In addition to banning the horrible practice of carding and establishing the hate crimes unit and community liaison, we have more than doubled the funding to protect places of worship and multicultural places through the Alberta security infrastructure program. By the way, that program is very welcomed by the communities. I continue to do my outreach.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to that minister for his outreach and his efforts. Given that moving to a new city can be overwhelming, especially when you're moving from a new country, and given that according to Stats Canada hate crimes were on the rise from 2019 into 2020 and given that racism can happen in the workplace, to the same minister: can you tell this House about some of the initiatives that our government is undertaking to make sure that every Albertan feels safe and valued in this workplace?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. Under the fairness for newcomers action plan we have created a fairness for newcomers office to work with regulatory organizations to ensure that their processes are up to date, fair, and procedurally correct. One of the best ways to reduce challenges in the workplace for newcomers is through credential recognition. We have also created the Alberta mentorship program. We had the first-

ever Premier's summit for newcomers. We are also bringing forth the newcomers' recognition award.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the minister for his efforts. Given that wiping out racism and hate is an ongoing challenge and given all the initiatives this government has taken and the broader community has taken to make Alberta hate-free through various grants and other programs to reduce barriers for minority communities, to the same minister: what is the government's benchmark to ensure that we are achieving our goals in this area, to create an inclusive and welcoming community?

The Speaker: The hon. associate minister.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. We continue to have discussions with Alberta's Anti-Racism Advisory Council and are nearing completion on more than half of their 48 recommendations. We have been working across multiple ministries on an action plan to reduce systemic racism and to collect feedback to implement more inclusive programs. I'm happy to say that our government has done unprecedented work for our newcomers and racialized communities so that they can thrive, feel safe, and reap their full potential in this beautiful province of Alberta.

Dene Tha' First Nation Concerns

Mr. Feehan: Yesterday I raised concerns about the devastating flooding at the Dene Tha' First Nation in northern Alberta; 1,100 members of the nation have been evacuated from Chateh and have been housed in hotels wherever possible. Unfortunately, housing is not consistently available, and the roads to camping sites such as Rainbow Lake have been cut off by the floods. Last year flooding forced the nation to replace 72 furnaces and hot water heaters, an expense the nation cannot continue to support. A protective berm is needed in the community of Chateh. What is the government's plan to get this berm built as soon as possible?

2:30

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the hon. member for that question. It's a very important question. I'd like to start off by saying that we know it's a difficult time for many residents in northwestern Alberta. Our first priority is to ensure the safety and security of everyone. I do want all Albertans to know that my department is on the ground, working around the clock to undertake significant repairs. I've also had a conversation with the Dene Tha' First Nation Chief, James Ahnassay, and I will be visiting in the coming weeks to have an in-depth conversation about how to enhance critical infrastructure.

Mr. Feehan: Given that on Tuesday I spoke with Chief Ahnassay, who expressed concern that evacuation out of the community is severely hampered by the poorly maintained roads and the dangerously steep approach to the community from highway 58, and given that this road is so steep that in wintertime ambulances have refused to go down the hill and are forced to wait for patients to be brought up to them, will the Minister of Transportation provide the people of Chateh with the necessary resources needed to repair this road into the townsites?

Mrs. Sawhney: Again, Mr. Speaker, we are taking a crossministry approach on this. I have been in touch with the mayor of High Level as well because they are also impacted. Again, I will be visiting with the chief in the coming weeks to make sure that we're having a detailed discussion on the infrastructure that we need to invest in to make sure that they are safe and secure.

Mr. Feehan: Given that in my conversation with Chief Ahnassy he expressed concern that clear-cutting upstream has seriously affected the environment and landscape, which has resulted in the nation experiencing hundred-year floods three times in the last few years, and given that to prevent natural disasters from doing the damage that we are seeing in Chateh now, more needs to be done on climate mitigation and protection, will the environment minister tell the people of Chateh what specifically he will do to mitigate and prevent the community of Chateh from experiencing flooding of this nature in the future?

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government and our largest industries and Albertans all across this province are investing unprecedented amounts in technology to be able to make sure that we can meet our environmental obligations to be able to combat climate change. That's a sharp contrast from that member and the Official Opposition, who dedicated most of their time in government to attacking our largest industry and, in fact, as the Court of Appeal just said the other day, working to help Justin Trudeau steal the birthright of all Albertans.

Mr. Feehan: You took \$50 million a year away from those communities. You stopped the Indigenous climate leadership . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: It's unfortunate to see that . . .

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had his opportunity to ask a question.

Mr. Feehan: Yeah; but it was better than his answer.

The Speaker: Order. Of course, the Speaker would never judge the quality of a question or an answer because we all know how that would end.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, you see it right there. The NDP get mad when we attack their boss, Justin Trudeau.

Mr. Feehan: When you take money away from Indigenous communities.

Mr. Jason Nixon: But this side of the House: we work for Albertans.

Mr. Feehan: You took money from Indigenous people.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

Child Care Access and Affordability

Ms Pancholi: This week Albertans learned that the UCP will fail to meet its promise to reduce child care fees by 50 per cent for families in Calgary, Edmonton, and Lethbridge. Well, the UCP also promised to create 10,000 new child care spaces this year. Thousands of families are on wait-lists right now. If the UCP stands a chance of creating these many new spaces, all UCP ministers, not just Children's Services, need to be working on this. Let's see if any of them are. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation. The UCP's plan for downtown Calgary includes nothing about creating new child care spaces. Why not?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our made-in-Alberta child care plan will provide \$3.8 billion for child care in Alberta over the next five years to support improved access to affordable, quality, and inclusive child care. This new child care agreement is great news for working families with children zero to kindergarten age who are enrolled in licensed child care. It's also great news for our province's economic recovery. Alberta was one of the first provinces to help reduce fees for parents, and families are seeing savings already.

Ms Pancholi: Sounds like that minister is doing nothing.

Given that 40 per cent of the new spaces that the UCP claimed to create last year never actually opened and given that creating 10,000 new child care spaces requires a well-developed strategy, involving nonprofits, school boards, and, importantly, municipalities, and given that I've spent months actively speaking to municipalities across the province about creating child care spaces but they tell me they haven't heard from any UCP ministers on this, will the Minister of Municipal Affairs tell us when he plans to start taking this seriously? Why isn't he talking to municipalities about new child care spaces? Doesn't he care about the families in Calgary?

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, more than 90,000 children are benefiting from our agreement and are seeing reduced fees. Part of the approach is to complement Alberta's existing strong subsidy model that supported thousands of low- and middle-income families across the province. This means that those families who were already receiving the highest subsidy were already on their way to paying much lower fees. The CCPA report made their conclusions based on projections from a phone survey before the child care agreement in Alberta was rolled out. The report also did not take into account Alberta subsidies, an important part of how parents are saving on child care fees.

Ms Pancholi: Well, given I'd understand that I'd be afraid to admit I'm doing nothing as well, like they are all ...

Mr. Jason Nixon: Point of order.

Ms Pancholi: ... and given that creating new child care spaces is meaningless if there are no early childhood educators to staff them and given that there's an extreme labour shortage in this workforce but this government continues to attack the postsecondary institutions where they learn and upgrade their skills as educators and given that failing to address this labour shortage has direct implications on our economy and the ability of families to go to work, can the Minister of Advanced Education tell this House if he's done any work at all with Alberta's postsecondary institutions to increase the number of spaces and access to early childhood education programs? And be specific, please. We'd like to grade your work.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 2:36.

The hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always rich and entertaining to hear the members opposite talk about impacts to the economy.

But anyways, families are paying between \$10 to \$25 a day, and most supports are being targeted to the parents who need it most. Parents are seeing on average a 50 per cent reduction in their fees, but that will vary depending on the fees targeted by . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. The hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is very close to me, but it's difficult to hear her from even this range. I hope that I'll be able to do that with some reduction in the noise.

Ms Fir: Mr. Speaker, no family will pay more than they did before that.

I know that it's painful and difficult for the members opposite to hear about the outstanding work the Minister of Children's Services is doing in child care and the positive impacts that's having for our economy, but they just have to face it.

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

Federal Travel Vaccination Mandate

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to COVID-19, Canada has one of the highest vaccinated populations in the world. However, according to manufacturers of the COVID-19 vaccines efficacy is greatly diminished for the current variants. As such, it behooves most rational-minded people to reconcile the federal mandatory vaccine policies that not only limit freedom of movement but freedom of employment of its own citizens. In fact, the freedom convoy, that had millions of supporters not only in this country but internationally, is asking the same question. Why do we need this mandated? It's simply out of touch with current realities. The response to the concerned citizens? Invoke the Emergencies Act, something that typically is only reserved for war or unless you're fans of the bromance down east. To the Minister of Health: what is being done by the provincial government . . .

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health is rising.

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, thanks for the question, hon. member. This government will always call out federal government overreach. An example of that overreach is the use of the Emergencies Act. It was unnecessary and disproportionate. Vaccine mandates and other public health measures also must be proportionate to the risk at that time. At this time the federal vaccine mandates for travel are disproportionate and pointless. We'll keep advocating for the federal government to align their public health measures with the evidence and with the policies in place here in Alberta and in other provinces.

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

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that the concerns of Canadians, regardless of vaccine status, were over the infringements of rights and freedoms as per our Constitution and given that people had enough of the virtue signalling regarding the COVID policy and given that the federal government had their desired effect of scaring their citizens into conformity and that the federal government has shown its track record of begging for forgiveness after they've done these types of acts rather than seeking parliamentary approval, to the Minister of Justice: what are you and your fellow ministers doing to pressure the federal government to cease these infringements on Canadians' rights and freedoms?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to standing up for Albertans' rights and their constitutional freedoms, no government across Canada is doing more than this one. We want to know: when will the NDP join us in our fight against the no-more-pipelines bill? The Alberta Court of Appeal ruled that it's unconstitutional. We've stood up for Albertans' rights time and time again. When will the failed, failed, failed NDP join us in standing up for the constitutional rights of Albertans? [interjections]

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

2:40

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the minister. Given that the travel restrictions not only within our country but across the U.S. border and internationally have a negative impact on the economy and given that numerous countries have already done away with their restrictions, what is being done by the government of Alberta to have the removal of the restrictions on its citizens travelling for work or leisure in and out of this province who just happen to not be vaccinated from the first vaccination that went around for COVID?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health Canada have been clear. Public health measures must be based on the risk at a given time, and they must be adjusted as the risk changes. Federal travel restrictions are hurting our economy with no proportional public health benefit at this time. We welcome the changes that the federal government made in April. They're a start, but they are not enough. Federal vaccination mandates are out of step with the evidence at this time, and they need to end.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose has a statement to make.

Women's Reproductive Health

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise today and speak to the topic of women's health in recognition of Women's Health Week. I want to first acknowledge the Women's Health Coalition, who has advocated tirelessly on this subject and kindly joined us in the Chamber for question period yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, women's health is crucial, yet there is a serious lack of understanding regarding women's health. There is a shortage of training and knowledge about the challenges that face women, particularly women's reproductive and general gynecological health. Unfortunately, when it comes to reproductive health, 10 per cent of cases concerning men are listed as urgent, yet only 1 per cent concerning women are treated with the same urgency.

Traditionally in medicine, the health of women during their child-bearing years or when they were bearing children was seen as the most important. While the wonder of conception and child birth are amazing things, I can tell you that there is far more to women's reproductive health than just those years.

Mr. Speaker, we must bring women's health into the spotlight. It is time to take action and work to get more health practitioners trained in gynecology. It's time to acknowledge that there are women who experience heavy menstrual cycles every month. It's time to raise awareness that this could be a sign of health complications and make sure doctors are trained to recognize this and provide treatment. It is time to acknowledge that women face challenges like fibroids, endometriosis, polycystic ovary syndrome, and so many more.

Here in Alberta and across the world there is more time to bring awareness to women's health and its importance. I am proud to say that Alberta's government is up to the challenge. We are committed

to making sure that women have access to quality health care in a timely fashion across the province.

This week and all weeks I encourage continued conversation around challenges faced by women in their pursuit of quality health care. Only in hearing the stories and understanding the challenges can we arrive at the solutions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Lobbyists

Mr. Barnes: Hey there. Have you ever wondered why megacorporations have access to the highest political offices in the province, but you can't even get a response to an e-mail? The answer to this quandary is simple: hire a lobbyist.

We all know lobbying is the most simple and proven way to get your way, and thankfully Alberta has some of the most toothless lobbying regulations in Canada. In Alberta we don't even prevent immediate family members from lobbying each other. "But wait," you say, "isn't that a little shady?" To that we say, "Don't you want a sole-source contract?"

If you're looking to hire a lobbyist in Alberta, start with one of the Premier's pet firms. You can even hire the Premier's most recent campaign team, something that is technically legal in Alberta. You know what we say? "Technically legal is the best kind of legal." If you're an Albertan who can't pay your utilities or you're struggling with rising insurance costs, you can stand in line with the rest of the schlubs, or you can do what the rich and the powerful do: hire a lobbyist today.

But wait; there's more. For a limited time only, when you hire one lobbyist, three more work for free on the Premier's leadership review. You may already know that the Official Opposition has been outfundraising the government of Alberta for years. The Premier is getting desperate. As such, you can rest assured that there is no job too big or too small for our crack team of party insiders. Using one of our patented political greasing technologies, we can unstick rusty hinges and pry our way into virtually any Legislature door.

And don't worry about Alberta's pesky financial contribution limits. Our Premier and his cronies have rewrote the rules to ensure there are plenty of loopholes to exploit. If money in politics is like water on pavement, Bill 81 opens all the floodgates. Call now and we'll even throw in a free Best Summer Ever hat and an open for good T-shirt. Lord knows there's no shortage of defunct swag lying around the Premier's office. Operators are standing by.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills I am pleased to present the committee's final report on Bill 207, Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, 2022, sponsored by the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont. This bill was referred to the committee on April 28, 2022. The report recommends that Bill 207 proceed. I request concurrence of the Assembly in the final report on Bill 207.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Speaker has the call. The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has moved concurrence in the report on Bill 207, Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment

Act, 2022. This is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there any members wishing to speak to concurrence?

Seeing none, the deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills has requested concurrence in the report on Bill 207, Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, 2022.

[Motion for concurrence carried]

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of an article that ran today in the *Calgary Herald* highlighting the cruel cut made to the Alberta School Councils' Association by the current government and stating that an NDP government will reinstate their 650,000 annual dollars in funding.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been 58 shootings in Calgary this year, and people are concerned about the proliferation of guns and gun violence, so I am tabling the requisite number of copies of an article titled 'This Is a Tragedy for Our Community': Mother of Five Dead after Road Rage Shootout in Forest Lawn.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with the five requisite copies of a report that shows that the health and climate impacts from coal power cost Alberta millions. Health and environmental groups urge Alberta to improve a phase-out of coal. I mention this in reference to the laughter that emanated from the other side by government members after I said that coal phase-out was saving lives when, in fact, this report clearly shows that it does and that each year 700 emergency visits, 4,000 asthma episodes, and nearly 100 premature deaths are precluded by this move.

The Speaker: Are there other tablings? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings here, again from folks having difficulties with vaccine injuries: one lady unable to find work, the other one unable to travel in the country, which the opposition was heckling and laughing at today in a statement.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order. At approximately 2:34 the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be quick. At the time you just mentioned, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, while the hon. Minister of Environment and Parks was answering a question, said: you took money from Indigenous communities. Making such a claim about a specific member in this Chamber is unparliamentary. I rise under 23(h), (i), and (j) and would ask that that member please apologize and withdraw.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At that time certainly the Minister of Environment and Parks had imputed false motives by suggesting that the anger from the Official Opposition was to do with support for the Prime Minister when, in fact, we're very concerned because under the UCP government \$50 million that had previously been allocated for climate change adaptation to Indigenous communities is no longer there, making the statement that the UCP took money from Indigenous communities correct.

Unfortunately, the member, in the heat of the moment, used the phrase "you." He was talking about the government, and certainly the entire dialogue back and forth was focused on the UCP government's actions, which have resulted in Indigenous communities having less money for climate adaptation. Given that he misspoke, though, and said "you" rather than "the UCP," I certainly withdraw on his behalf although he is also in the room . . .

The Speaker: It makes it difficult, because he will apologize and withdraw.

Ms Gray: There we go. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Feehan: I apologize and withdraw the word "you" and replace it with "your government."

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

At approximately 2:36 the Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

Mr. Schow: Withdrawn.

The Speaker: I consider that matter dealt with and concluded as it has been withdrawn.

Hon. members, Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

27. Mr. McIver moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that:

1. A Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed, consisting of the following members, namely: Mr. Jeremy Nixon, chair; Ms Rosin,

deputy chair; Mrs. Aheer; Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk; Mr. Bilous; Ms Goehring; Mr. Sabir; Mr. Singh; and Mr. Williams, for the purpose of inviting applications for the position of Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner and to recommend to the Assembly the applicant it considers most suitable to this position.

2. Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair.
3. In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may, with the concurrence of the head of the department, utilize the services of members of the public service employed in that department and of the staff employed by the Assembly.
4. The committee may, without leave of the Assembly, sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued.
5. When its work has been completed, the committee shall report to the Assembly if it is sitting; during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs on behalf of the hon. Government House Leader has moved Government Motion 27. This is a debatable motion. Anybody wishing to speak to the motion?

To the hon. minister to close debate.

Mr. McIver: Closed.

[Government Motion 27 carried]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a great week of work this week. I am grateful for everyone's participation, but at this time I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 10 a.m. on Tuesday, May 24, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 2:54 p.m. to Tuesday, May 24, at 10 a.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 3rd Session (2022)

Activity to Thursday, May 12, 2022

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act (\$) (Kenney)

First Reading — 4 (*Feb. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 94-97 (*Mar. 7, 2022 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 140-44 (*Mar. 10, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 230-34 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cQ-0.7]

Bill 2 — Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 312-19 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft.*), 391-95 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve.*), 484-90 (*Mar. 29, 2022 aft.*), 565-71 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve.*), 599-604 (*Apr. 19, 2022 morn.*), 661 (*Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 699-707 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 715-24 (*Apr. 20, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2022 c4]

Bill 3 — Special Days Act (Orr)

First Reading — 124 (*Mar. 9, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 327 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 343-45 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned*), 346 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 375-78 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 379 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 389-91 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; SA 2022 cS-16.3]

Bill 4 — Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022 (McIver)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 163-77 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft.*), 360-66 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 396 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 519-23 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 571-79 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force April 21, 2022; SA 2022 c5]

Bill 5 — Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022 (Sawhney)

First Reading — 202 (*Mar. 16, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 319-26 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft.*), 469-71 (*Mar. 28, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 523-24 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 537-43 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 c6]

Bill 6 — Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022 (Orr)

First Reading — 228 (Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 502-505 (Mar. 29, 2022 aft.), 513-14 (Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole — 562-65 (Mar. 30, 2022 eve., passed)
Third Reading — 594-98 (Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed)
Royal Assent — 767 (Apr. 21, 2022 aft.) [Comes into force April 21, 2022; SA 2022 c3]

Bill 7 — Appropriation Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 272-73 (Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed)
Second Reading — 310-11 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft., adjourned), 327-36 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned), 345 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole — 366-75 (Mar. 23, 2022 aft.), (Mar. 23, 2022 eve.), 395 (Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division)
Third Reading — 411-14 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft.), 419 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent — (Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; c1]

Bill 8 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 297 (Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed)
Second Reading — 311-12 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft., adjourned), 336-43 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve., adjourned), 345-46 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole — 379-89 (Mar. 23, 2022 eve.), 395 (Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division)
Third Reading — 414-19 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft.), 419 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent — (Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; c2]

Bill 9 — Public's Right to Know Act (Shandro)

First Reading — 309 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 447-54 (Mar. 28, 2022 aft.), 455-63 (Mar. 28, 2022 eve.), 643-51 (Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole — 707-13 (Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed)
Third Reading — 745-49 (Apr. 21, 2022 morn., passed)
Royal Assent — 767 (Apr. 21, 2022 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cP-47]

Bill 10 — Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022 (Aheer)

First Reading — 408 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 463-69 (Mar. 28, 2022 eve.), 543-50 (Mar. 30, 2022 aft.), 604-10 (Apr. 19, 2022 morn.), 661 (Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed)

Bill 11 — Continuing Care Act (Copping)

First Reading — 432 (Mar. 28, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 550-56 (Mar. 30, 2022 aft.), 634-42 (Apr. 19, 2022 aft.), 663-72 (Apr. 20, 2022 morn.), 865-71 (Apr. 26, 2022 aft.), 873-79 (Apr. 26, 2022 eve.), 891-97 (Apr. 27, 2022 morn.), 936-42 (Apr. 27, 2022 aft.), 1027-34 (May 2, 2022 eve.), 1074-82 (May 3, 2022 aft.), 1140-43 (May 4, 2022 aft.), 1300-01 (May 10, 2022 eve., passed on division)

Bill 12 — Trustee Act (Shandro)

First Reading — 483 (Mar. 29, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 651-61 (Apr. 19, 2022 eve.), 749-54 (Apr. 21, 2022 morn., passed)
Committee of the Whole — 858-65 (Apr. 26, 2022 aft., passed)
Third Reading — 903-09 (Apr. 27, 2022 morn.), 988-90 (Apr. 28, 2022 aft., passed)
Royal Assent — (Apr. 29, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cT-8.1]

Bill 13 — Financial Innovation Act (Toews)

First Reading — 535 (Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 624-33 (Apr. 19, 2022 aft.), 724-27 (Apr. 20, 2022 eve.), 807 (Apr. 25, 2022 eve.), 850-58 (Apr. 26, 2022 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole — 925-36 (Apr. 27, 2022 aft., passed)
Third Reading — 943-48 (Apr. 27, 2022 eve., passed)
Royal Assent — (Apr. 29, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cF-13.2]

Bill 14* — Provincial Court (Sexual Assault Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022 (Issik)

First Reading — 535-36 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 672-81 (*Apr. 20, 2022 morn.*), 727-33 (*Apr. 20, 2022 eve., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1159-66 (*May 4, 2022 eve., passed with amendments*)
Third Reading — 1167-72 (*May 5, 2022 Morn., passed*)

Bill 15* — Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022 (LaGrange)

First Reading — 592 (*Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 767-76 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*), 825-32 (*Apr. 26, 2022 morn.*), 884-89 (*Apr. 26, 2022 eve.*), 923-25 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1065-67 (*May 3, 2022 aft.*), 1090-95 (*May 3, 2022 eve., passed with amendments*)
Third Reading — 1125-28 (*May 4, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 16 — Insurance Amendment Act, 2022 (Toews)

First Reading — 622 (*Apr. 19, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 807-808 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve.*), 832-37 (*Apr. 26, 2022 morn.*), 879-84 (*Apr. 26, 2022 eve.*), 897-903 (*Apr. 27, 2022 morn.*), 1034-37 (*May 2, 2022 eve., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1067-74 (*May 3, 2022 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 1196-99 (*May 5, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 17* — Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Madu)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 968-75 (*Apr. 28, 2022 morn.*), 1128-40 (*May 4, 2022 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1271-83 (*May 10, 2022 aft.*), 1334-51 (*May 11, 2022 aft., passed with amendments*)

Bill 18 — Utility Commodity Rebate Act (Nally)

First Reading — 693-94 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 735-45 (*Apr. 21, 2022 morn.*), 807 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve., passed on division*)
Committee of the Whole — 808-22 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve., passed*)
Third Reading — 822-23 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve., passed*)
Royal Assent — (*Apr. 29, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force April 29, 2022; SA 2022 cU-3.5]

Bill 19 — Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022 (Glubish)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 948-58 (*Apr. 27, 2022 eve.*), 959-68 (*Apr. 28, 2022 morn.*), 1021-27 (*May 2, 2022 eve.*), 1083-87 (*May 3, 2022 eve.*), 1180-83 (*May 5, 2022 morn.*), 1233-38 (*May 9, 2022 eve., adjourned on amendment*)

Bill 20 — Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Shandro)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1087-90 (*May 3, 2022 eve.*), 1097-1105 (*May 4, 2022 morn.*), 1289-94 (*May 10, 2022 eve., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1305-16 (*May 11, 2022 morn., passed*)
Third Reading — 1365-68 (*May 11, 2022 eve.*), 1371-80 (*May 12, 2022 morn., passed*)

Bill 21 — Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Fir)

First Reading — 788 (*Apr. 25, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1045-52 (*May 3, 2022 morn.*), 1152-58 (*May 4, 2022 eve.*), 1176-80 (*May 5, 2022 morn.*), 1238-44 (*May 9, 2022 eve.*), 1294-1300 (*May 10, 2022 eve.*), 1353-62 (*May 11, 2022 eve., passed*)

Bill 22 — Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022 (Nally)

First Reading — 922 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1039-45 (*May 3, 2022 morn.*), 1105-14 (*May 4, 2022 morn.*), 1145-52 (*May 4, 2022 eve.*), 1172-76 (*May 5, 2022 morn., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1251-56 (*May 10, 2022 morn.*), 1283-88 (*May 10, 2022 aft.*), 1301-03 (*May 10, 2022 eve., passed*)
Third Reading — 1362-65 (*May 11, 2022 eve.*), 1380-88 (*May 12, 2022 Morn., passed*)

Bill 23 — Professional Governance Act (Madu)

First Reading — 1002 (May 2, 2022 aft., passed)

Second Reading — 1245-50 (May 10, 2022 Morn.), 1316-22 (May 11, 2022 morn.), (May 11, 2022 eve., passed)

Bill 201 — Eastern Slopes Protection Act (Notley)

First Reading — 156 (Mar. 14, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills), 432 (Mar. 28, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly), 789-95 (Apr. 25, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; not proceeded with)

Bill 202 — Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022 (Loewen)

First Reading — 110 (Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills), 309 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly), 433-40 (Mar. 28, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; proceeded with)

Second Reading — 1211-13 (May 9, 2022 aft., adjourned)

Bill 203 — Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act (Bilous)

First Reading — 228 (Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills), 693 (Apr. 20, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly), 796-801 (Apr. 25, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; not proceeded with)

Bill 204 — Anti-Racism Act (Shepherd)

First Reading — 408 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills), 788 (Apr. 25, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly), 1002-1008 (May 2, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; not proceeded with on division)

Bill 205 — Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022 (Sigurdson, RJ)

First Reading — 592 (Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills), 922 (Apr. 27, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly), 1008-14 (May 2, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; proceeded with on division)

Second Reading — 1213-27 (May 9, 2022 aft., passed on division)

Bill 206 — Prohibiting Ownership of Agricultural Lands (Pension Plans and Trust Corporations) Act (van Dijken)

First Reading — 988 (Apr. 28, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills)

Bill 207 — Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, 2022 (Rutherford)

First Reading — 988 (Apr. 28, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills), 1400 (May 12, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022 (Jones)

First Reading — 309 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills), 1001 (May 2, 2022 aft., reported to Assembly; proceeded with)

Second Reading — 1371 (May 12, 2022 morn., passed)

Bill Pr2 — Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022 (Nixon, JP)

First Reading — 309 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills), 1001 (May 2, 2022 aft., reported to Assembly; proceeded with with amendments)

Second Reading — 1368-69 (May 11, 2022 eve., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, May 24, 2022

Day 35

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
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Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

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Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
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Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

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Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
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Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
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Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
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Chair: Mr. Cooper
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Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Ms Rosin

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Goehring
Sabir
Singh
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, May 24, 2022

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning, hon. members.

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 21

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: This is the bill's first time in Committee of the Whole. Are there members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity. As we've discussed during second reading of this bill, there are a number of aspects of the bill that we are indeed in agreement with. You know, the majority of these changes that are being proposed in this bill are really administrative, and we agree with a lot of them.

However, there are some and, I would say, one in particular that we're a little bit, well, I would say a lot in disagreement with. Of course, that is the one aspect of the bill which basically gives the minister of environment such widespread powers over parks. Given the track record of this UCP government, it's very hard for us to just assume that everything will be all right with the kind of power that is being allotted to the minister of environment when it comes to this particular file.

What we've seen so far when it comes to Environment and Parks here in the province of Alberta is this government trying to basically sell off parts of our provincial parks system. Of course, Albertans came out very strongly against the mining of the eastern slopes. I would say that it was quite the boondoggle for this UCP government. People from all over the province, no matter where, were in complete disagreement with this proposal by the UCP, which they didn't even bring into the Legislature for us to really debate.

There was no opportunity for feedback from the opposition as they moved in this particular direction, and we had no other choice but to then support the majority of Albertans, who were also saying that they did not want the mining of the eastern slopes for coal. I'm glad that they did, and I'm glad that they came out in such force to actually demonstrate that this was not their will and that they were against this particular proposal by this UCP government.

Therefore, when it comes to this particular issue, it leaves us all imagining the worst because of the track record already established by this UCP government, that demonstrates to us that they cannot be trusted. It's Albertans themselves that are saying that this UCP government can't be trusted when it comes to this particular file and many others, I would say.

Just to be absolutely clear, I'd actually like to quote from the bill. In the bill under Minister's Directives and Codes it says, "The Minister may set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines . . . or other rules relating to any matter in respect of which a regulation may be made under this Act." That can only be interpreted as the minister being able to do absolutely anything the minister wants when it comes to this. Here we have an omnibus piece of legislation that is sneaking this one particular proposal in, and Albertans have already spoken widely against anything that this government would propose with the actual mining of the eastern slopes. I do believe that it's a point of contention. Basically, Albertans don't trust this government.

Essentially, what kind of powers are we talking about, Madam Chair, when it comes to the powers being allocated to the minister of environment on this particular file? It could be, for example, perhaps the power to partially privatize a park. Perhaps it's for restricting access to parks. We've already seen what this government has done with Kananaskis, you know, a very common summer destination for many families and, I would add, many low-income families. They don't have the opportunity to travel abroad. Kananaskis was a summer destination for so many people, one that they could just simply drive to, if they had access to a car, that is, and actually enjoy the mountains here in the province of Alberta. And now this government has decided that, well, if you're going to be able to enjoy these mountains, you're going to have to pay a fee to get in. We're seeing more and more of this government making decisions that are actually restricting Albertans, and we can't be certain that the minister won't do more of this if he's given these widespread powers that have been determined in this particular piece of legislation.

It leaves us on this side of the House very worried that the powers won't be used wisely or with all Albertans in mind. Frankly, I would say that I find it unfathomable that this government would actually do that, restrict access. Now, I understand, you know, that to some of the individuals on the other side of the House it's, like: oh, well, you just pay this small fee. Well, maybe the members on the other side of the House interact with individuals where, yeah, what to them is a small fee, for others is not accessible. That's why it's important that all Albertans be considered when this actually takes place. And I think that it's imperative on this government, being elected into office to actually represent all Albertans, that they would actually consider this.

Now, first of all, it could be with Kananaskis, but then it could be with other provincial parks all throughout Alberta that they would begin starting to charge a fee. We've seen that in order to hold a campsite, for example, they're adding a fee. I understand that the intention behind it was so that people wouldn't hold a campsite and then later on not use it, but this also restricts access for people that may not have the financial ability to actually pay for it, right? They also want to be able to enjoy Alberta's parks. It's one of the few options that they do have when it comes to vacationing in the province of Alberta, so this, in fact, is an economic barrier. And I completely understand. You know, some members on the other side of the House or perhaps all of the members on the other side of the House see it as just a small fee, but, as I was saying, Madam Chair, what some people consider a small fee is, to others, an economic barrier. They'll have to make another decision or go somewhere

else. When they're used to going to Kananaskis, they would then have to consider going somewhere else.

But I think what's most challenging about this particular aspect is that it just gives such an incredible amount of power to the minister of environment. Now, I've spoken at length, Madam Chair, about more power being put into the hands of ministers during this government. I couldn't put an exact number on it, but I would say, you know, that definitely more than half the bills that have been presented inside of this House during this government's tenure have been putting more power in the hands of ministers.

10:10

Like, if it was one bill, okay; perhaps understandable. But then when it becomes four, five, six, 10, 20 bills, all with particular changes made that actually put more power into the hands of ministers, you have to start asking yourself: why is this government so power hungry? A lot of these decisions were made by agencies, boards, and commissions prior to this government coming into power, where Albertans had an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process of different aspects of the business conducted by this government here in the province of Alberta. People were actually aiding. There were councils where debates were had, people had discussions on particular aspects, and together they would reach a decision, and then they would make a recommendation to the minister to actually make a particular change.

But now what we're seeing with this government is that they're taking away those powers from agencies, boards, and commissions, so taking power out of the hands of Albertans that are actually participating in the democratic process, and they're putting that power into the hands of the minister. For me, it just begs a question. You know, the members on the other side like to talk a lot about freedom. They like to talk a lot about small government, and this bill is a testament to their perspective on trying to curb red tape. Yet in the same bill, in which, according to them, they're proposing more freedoms, less regulation, less red tape, they go and put the power in the hands of a minister, where there is no accountability; this coming from a political party that likes to yell about accountability all the time.

You know, for many of the members that are private members of the government caucus on the other side, when they were in opposition, members of the Wildrose would talk about accountability endlessly in this House, that the government had to be held accountable. Yet now those same members are on that side of the House supporting bills that actually create an environment of less accountability when it comes to the powers that this government wields through each of their ministers. It's highly questionable. You can't be speaking out of both sides of your mouth, Madam Chair. You're either for accountability or you're not. Like, there's no other word to describe that than "hypocritical" and flip-flopping on an issue.

I think that Albertans have demonstrated, as we've seen through last week, they're very much wanting to hold those in power accountable. I think that the members on the other side of the House have to listen carefully – listen very, very carefully – when it comes to the desire of Albertans and the fact that they want to hold their government accountable. This is a step in the wrong direction when it comes to this proposed piece of legislation. It's definitely a step in the wrong direction. You know, giving this amount of power over to a minister is not what Albertans have in mind when it comes to strengthening their democracy. Albertans want to have more say in the democratic decision-making process, not less.

The way that things stand right now is – like, we saw this happen a couple of weeks ago when the government decided to take away

insulin pumps from Albertans, and there were a number of examples where this government took away insulin pumps from children that depend on those insulin pumps to actually go to school. Yes, I understand that they were proposing an alternative, but that alternative had not been put in place yet, so these individuals felt that they were being left hanging, hung out to dry, Madam Chair.

A more appropriate and more effective way of moving forward would have been to move from one program to another if that is indeed what this government wanted to do, but it didn't have a solution to a problem. It was actually creating a problem for Albertans. I, for one, am so happy that those Albertans decided to come together. From my understanding I believe it was more than 13,000 e-mails and letters that were actually sent to the Minister of Health to demand that he not end this program of insulin pumps.

There have been multiple examples of this kind of decision-making by this government that actually negatively impacts Albertans, and by putting more power into the hands of ministers, you can bet that you're going to see that. Consulting with a handful of people is not the same thing as consulting on a broad scale with the people of Alberta. It's very easy to go out and be like: oh, well, I consulted with a handful of people. That's what is not being divulged. Yeah, you can go out and, like, ask a handful of people and be like, "Oh, yes, I consulted," but that's not the appropriate way to consult.

A lot of the people that wrote in those letters regarding the insulin pumps stated that they were not consulted. Advocacy groups representing these individuals said that they weren't consulted. It begs the question, then: who did this government actually consult to make this decision? This is becoming more and more of a problem with this government, Madam Chair, where they say they've consulted with certain people, yet the decisions that they're making are having drastic and negative impacts on Albertans. I find it just incredible that they would take away a program that was actually helping children go to school. You take away their insulin pump, and what happens then? And not just children but a number of Albertans.

I can only imagine, Madam Chair, that by putting more and more power into the hands of ministers and not devising an appropriate way of actually consulting, then the government is going to end up running into more instances where they're going to have to backpedal on decisions that they're making, because there is no process where they're actually consulting with a wide group of Albertans when it comes to particular issues.

I can only imagine that the same thing that happened with strip mining of the eastern slopes that was being proposed by this government, that a minister having that much power, wielding that much power, making those kinds of decisions will actually end up in a similar type of situation, where a minister may think, "Okay; well, I consulted with a handful of people; I think this is a good idea," you know, and will actually propose a change in legislation, and because the government has a majority, they can come into this House and actually ram the piece of legislation through as quickly as they want, not taking into consideration any feedback from the opposition. Yet the real opposition, Madam Chair, are those Albertans out there that do not want these kinds of changes being made in their province, and the members on the other side of the House need to consider that.

10:20

It's important that the government be as transparent as possible when it comes to these kinds of decisions, but we're not seeing that. We're seeing a lack of transparency; we're seeing a lack of accountability from this government, making changes that perhaps

are beneficial for friends of theirs, for example the raising of insurance.

The Chair: Are there others that wish to join the debate on Bill 21? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning to you. Hopefully, you had a great long weekend and a rest through the constituency break. I know that I certainly did. It gave me a little bit more of an opportunity to explore Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. As we know, we have a very thick piece of legislation here that is affecting 16 different acts around nine different ministries, which would be the very definition, of course, of an omnibus bill, something that members of the government caucus and members of the government bench, when they served very well in opposition, were extremely opposed to. Yet it seems okay now that we have this type of bill before us.

Nevertheless, here it is. We're seeing changes to some of the different acts: the Animal Health Act; Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act; Cooperatives Act; Education Act; health statutes act; Highways Development and Protection Act; Local Authorities Election Act; Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Act; Municipal Government Act; Pharmacy and Drug Act; Provincial Parks Act; Public Lands Act; Railway (Alberta) Act; Residential Tenancies Act; Rural Utilities Act; and Surveys Act. Those certainly would not fall under one category.

Of course, I always have to mention this when I get the chance because my good friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods, when she was labour minister, brought forward some changes all within labour, one ministry, some great changes that I very highly supported, and members opposite, you know, lit their hair on fire because they thought it was just such an omnibus bill. Yet here we have it. And every time I bring this topic up, there's always deafening silence on the other side around this.

Nevertheless, I will try to push forward here to talk a little bit about Bill 21. Some of the changes that I want to highlight – well, there are many, and I don't think I have enough time with which to bring them up, but I'll certainly try. We're seeing some changes right now around the Animal Health Act. As we know, there are cases of avian flu that are currently starting to grow within our province, which is not a good thing, of course. We are seeing changes around reporting, not necessarily the length of reporting time; it's just simply being moved from legislation to regulation, which of course signals to me that, you know – moving that: is that considered red tape? I don't know. You're simply shuffling it from once place to another unless you intend to change it, in which case, are you going to be increasing that number, or are you going to be decreasing that number? It would be interesting to hear back what the intention is around moving that, what they heard around the reasons they felt that that needed to be moved.

I'd also like to bring up some of the changes around the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. Of course, as we know, Alberta has gone through a very significant challenge this year with the death of children in care. I can't even begin to imagine what the family members have been going through with regard to trying to address that within themselves. When we're seeing some of the changes around that, you know, again: what are the reasonings for doing that? Why would you want to change it to remove the one-year maximum on licences, both new and renewals, especially during the time that we've just seen over the past 12 months? I'm looking forward to hearing a little bit more on that, and hopefully we'll actually hear from the Minister of Children's Services as to why that was handed down to the red tape minister.

The reason I bring that up is that that now takes me to changes around the Education Act. We've very clearly heard one thing being stated by the red tape minister and then something completely opposite by the Education minister. Why did that piece of legislation get handed down to the red tape minister? I mean, if that was the case, you'd think that maybe at least some briefing notes, you know, had managed to filter their way down. It wasn't like it was just a little detail that was missed or maybe slightly misinterpreted; they were completely opposite positions. One said that there will be absolutely no more reporting. Then the other one: oh, no; there will be reporting. Which one is it? Why then is the red tape minister legislating on education matters? I've always had a problem with this.

You know, it's supposedly all about making life easier for businesses to be able to operate, to make things faster, so I'm curious around these changes on education. How will these changes make business move faster? How will this be creating jobs for Albertans here in the province? I'm very much looking forward to hearing from the red tape minister some of those statistics that are available around those things. What kind of improvements has this made? Is there a percentage that we can attach on to that?

I guess, you know, as my good friend from Edmonton-Ellerslie had pointed out, it starts to question this whole notion of transparency. Can we trust the UCP government to work in the best interests of Albertans? Of course, I always will bring people back right to the leader of the UCP, who made a promise way back when to disclose a donors list, yet we're still waiting for that donors list. How am I expected to be able to trust this government to do what's right when the leader can't even manage a simple little thing like that, a promise that was made?

Now, of course, this leads me into some of the changes around the Provincial Parks Act. Now, Madam Chair, again, as I'd mentioned, members of the government bench, members of the government caucus who served in the 29th Legislature: pretty much any time that they saw any kind of authorities being given to ministers, they very clearly communicated that they were in disagreement with that. Again, as my friend from Edmonton-Ellerslie very clearly pointed out, the changes that are being made here with the Provincial Parks Act and Public Lands Act are significant changes allowing the minister to make decisions as they see fit. I can just imagine what those members would have said back then had the NDP government done something like that, you know. You always hear that notion: people lighting their hair on fire. I have a feeling they would have lit their entire bodies on fire when they saw that.

10:30

The reason I'm kind of going down this line of thinking here: my friend from Edmonton-Ellerslie managed to kind of get me thinking a little bit, you know, with the whole lack of transparency – and, of course, that's backed up by that beautiful title that's been bestowed upon this government as one of the most secretive governments in Canada, which tells me that perhaps transparency isn't quite as transparent or is as transparent as mud in this case – and some of the decisions that we've seen the government make over the course of the 30th Legislature. We saw the Lougheed coal policy that was taken out really without any consultation around that, and we know how that worked out. Albertans pushed back and pushed back significantly on that. Then comes the little escapade we went through around parks and how they're handled, being potentially sold off and whatnot, and again we saw that significant push-back from Albertans around that. So this starts to develop a little bit of a pattern.

When I'm thinking about the environment minister and, I guess, some of the tirades that we've seen occur, to move that degree of ability to make decisions like what's being proposed in part of Bill 21 around that causes some very significant mistrust and red flags. You know, for me to sit here and try to say: well, I'm just going to have to trust that the minister is going to make the right decisions – I mean, as soon as it seems like there's any kind of significant push-back, the minister is then, quite honestly, trying to control the narrative. And we've seen that here in the House. Why, then, wouldn't that translate to the public at large? I'm just wondering why, then, the minister, who, as I know, when serving in the 29th Legislature had a significant problem with these types of changes being given to ministers, feels that it's okay now. Was it the case that he didn't actually believe that back then? Or what has changed in the meantime to be able to take that kind of position? Of course, I would also love to hear from others that served during that time and what's changed around that.

You know, I don't necessarily have problems with all of Bill 21. I think there are some other changes that are going okay, but because of some of the major concerns I have, as I just mentioned around parks – and I'm going to take a small bet here that perhaps my friend from Edmonton-Gold Bar might have some significant comments around that. Changes and the conflicting messaging around changes to the Education Act I think are a problem. So I'm faced with that we have some legislation that's fine; some that isn't. They're butting up against each other. I don't think I could support Bill 21 as it's currently written because of those problems. Perhaps, maybe we might see some suggestions to make it a little bit better. Perhaps, maybe then I can get to a point of being willing to support it.

But I certainly look forward to comments from others on some of the questions I've raised here in this brief time. We are in Committee of the Whole, so there's a good chance that I may be popping back up with more to say based on what I hear, but at this time I'm looking forward to what others say, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to rise and offer some comments on Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, and I can confirm for my friend from Edmonton-Decore that I do have some changes to propose to this bill. The member spoke almost as if he had inside information as to what was going to happen this morning, offering betting advice to people who are paying attention to this morning's proceedings. I will move this amendment now. I have the appropriate number of copies. I'll wait for your signal, Madam Chair, to proceed.

The Chair: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A1. Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'd first like to read the amendment into the record. I move that Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended by striking out sections 11(3) and 12.

And just to remind everybody in the House what section 11(3) does, the section amends the Provincial Parks Act to the following:

Incorporation by reference

12.11(1) A regulation under this Act may adopt or incorporate documents that set out standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines, objectives or other rules of any government, board, agency, association or person, including, without limitation, any standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines, objectives or other rules set by the Minister under section 12.12, relating to any

matter in respect of which a regulation may be made under this Act.

(2) A standard, directive, practice, code, guideline, objective or other rule may be adopted or incorporated under subsection (1)

(a) in whole or in part and with or without modifications, and

(b) as it reads on a specific date or as amended or replaced from time to time.

(3) When a standard, directive, practice, code, guideline, objective or other rule is adopted or incorporated under subsection (1), the Minister shall publish it on a public website of the Government of Alberta.

Minister's directives and codes

12.12 The Minister may set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines, objectives or other rules relating to any matter in respect of which a regulation may be made under this Act.

And there are similar provisions being proposed to the Public Lands Act.

This amendment, of course, simply strikes out those two sections of the bill that I just read into the record. There's a very simple reason that I'm proposing to do this, Madam Chair, and that's because Albertans cannot trust the UCP government to keep its hands off our provincial parks or public lands and manage them in the public interest. These two sections that I read into the record give significant power just to the Minister of Environment and Parks to set any policy document that he likes as a regulation affecting provincial parks or public lands.

This follows along with the terrible track record of this Minister of Environment and Parks. We've already seen him, in February 2020, try to sell off or close down hundreds of provincial parks in the province. We've already seen him assess a random camping fee on public lands, where one didn't exist before, driving up the cost of going into our own backyards at any time during the year. We've seen him assess a \$90 Kananaskis Country pass, again, making it more expensive for Albertans to go into their own backyards, where previously no cost existed. We've seen the minister arbitrarily try to alter the water allocation order on the Oldman River system. We've seen him arbitrarily remove environmental protections during the height of the pandemic in the oil sands area.

This minister already has significant discretionary powers that he has used to significantly, negatively affect the quality of public land management, parks management, and environmental protections in this province. The people of Alberta do not trust him to do anything more with our provincial parks and public lands, and that's why we are proposing to remove these sections from the bill.

10:40

Now, I've had a chance to talk to some people with more legal expertise than me regarding what these sections would do, and one of the questions that was posed to them was: does this mean that any small "p" policy or document by anybody can be adopted into the regulations, thus creating different regulations in different areas based on what someone wants in the area? The answer is yes. And is it that the minister still has to decide to adopt these, or can government staff, area managers, do the adopting? This answer from my acquaintance, who is a legal expert, is quite concerning. The minister needs to sign it, but he has no real obligation to understand it, giving the department a lot of effective power. Then he goes on to say that under section 12.11(2)(b) the minister can set the regulations so the incorporated document can be amended later without any ministry involvement at any time. So once the minister has adopted a small "p" policy as a regulation affecting a park or section of public land, anybody in the department can go ahead and amend it at any time and not make anybody aware of it. This is not

the kind of democratic oversight that the people of Alberta expect the government to have over its department.

Allowing department officials to change regulations effectively at any time is a remarkable power to give to the department and one that they should not have. It is widely accepted that the Legislature is the place where we set legislation and orders in council are what govern regulations. Those are the purview of cabinet and only cabinet. Here the minister is taking this job away from cabinet, giving it to himself, and then letting the department officials do whatever they want with it. This should make people extremely uncomfortable.

What is mind-boggling to me, Madam Chair, is that the party of small government, the party that wants no government control over things like provincial parks or public lands, is effectively relinquishing its control to the public service, saying: "You know what? It's not our job anymore to administer parks and public lands. We're going to let the staff do it, and we're not even going to bother to check in on them or use the powers that are given to us as members of cabinet to run the show." That's not right. It's certainly not consistent with the ideology that the government members purport to hold, and it's certainly not something that the people of Alberta are comfortable with.

Madam Chair, I think that this amendment will successfully limit the ability of government to overreach in its powers to regulate provincial parks and public lands, and people should vote for it. What's particularly concerning to me, though, is that this can create an arbitrary set of rules for individual provincial parks or different segments of public land that aren't consistent across the province and could lead, potentially, to widespread privatization of our public parks, the encroachment of industrial activities on public parks.

You know, I'm dealing right now, as the environment critic, with a couple of significant issues that are affecting provincial parks here in Alberta right now. One is the threat to the Big Hill Springs provincial park near Cochrane. There's a massive gravel pit proposed right on the western boundary of that pit. If this piece of legislation goes forward, the minister actually has it within his power now to carve out a segment of Big Hill Springs provincial park as part of the gravel pit. I don't think the people of Alberta realize that that kind of power is being given to the minister here. If members opposite vote against this amendment, what they are essentially saying is that they trust the Minister of Environment and Parks to not turn over a provincial park like Big Hill Springs to a gravel pit operator.

Dealing with another issue right now in Pigeon Lake, the government is entertaining a proposal to allow a massive feedlot on the shore of Pigeon Lake. The Pigeon Lake provincial park is right next door. What's to say – if this amendment isn't adopted and this bill goes forward as originally proposed, the Minister of Environment and Parks could allow manure spreading in Pigeon Lake provincial park from that feedlot. Is that what government members want? Do they want 36 tonnes of manure a day being spread in Pigeon Lake provincial park? That's what this section of the bill would allow.

Those are just two examples, Madam Chair, two realistic threats to our provincial parks that exist right now that could be made much worse if the minister is given this power. I know that all government members have had an earful from the people of Alberta on the need to better protect provincial parks.

Well, here's a tremendous opportunity to show them that they've learned the error of their ways. They should vote in favour of this amendment and stand up for protections of provincial parks like Big Hill Springs and Pigeon Lake. At the very least they don't want those constituency e-mails and phone calls about why a gravel pit

is encroaching on Big Hill Springs provincial park, why manure is being spread in Pigeon Lake provincial park. They don't want those. Moreover, they shouldn't trust the minister of the environment to have this kind of power.

Madam Chair, I sincerely hope that the members opposite give serious consideration to this minister of the environment's track record on protecting public lands, on protecting provincial parks, more accurately on failing to protect those things, that they understand what's at stake here if this amendment is voted down and the original bill is allowed to go through as is. We could have significant degradation of our provincial parks and public lands, and they have no power to stop it once this is in place.

For those reasons, Madam Chair, I urge all members of the House to vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Are there others to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you. I'd just like to seek unanimous consent of the Chamber to move to one-minute bells for the remainder of this morning.

The Chair: Hon. member, we'll have one 15-minute bell, and then we'll have one-minute bells following that. If I could comply to your wishes, I certainly would, but that will be possible after the first bell.

Ms Gray: It was a good try. All right. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Ms Fir: Thank you. I would just like to speak briefly to the proposed amendment. Not surprisingly, the messages being shared by the member opposite are not accurate. Many components, all components, of this bill are about making life better for Albertans and enjoying their use of parks. As it relates to the Provincial Parks Act and the Public Lands Act, the changes are going to support an outcome-based approach and development of locally specific rules and guidelines which address concerns about a current one size fits all. We know the members opposite would like to have one size fits all apply to as many things as possible and have as much control as possible, but this is about moving from one size fits all to more location- and use-specific rules of Crown lands. This approach will manage recreational activities in parks and public lands. It can be complicated and confusing. It's good news. It's about moving to an outcome-based approach where we can provide that flexibility while maintaining protection of Crown lands, and it's about a common-sense solution, tailoring solutions to the need of a specific area.

There would, of course, continue to be public stakeholder and Indigenous engagement on regulations, directives, rules, codes, and standards as required, so I will not be supporting this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

10:50

The Chair: Are there others to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm always pleased to rise. In spite of the minister's, you know, shameful personal attacks on my character, I do want to correct the record on one of the things that she said. She said that the regulations would be put out for public consultation before they're adopted. There is nothing in the bill that does that. There is absolutely no requirement to do any public consultation before any piece of policy is adopted as a regulation, so for the minister to stand here in this place and suggest

that that's true needs to be called out. The people of Alberta need to understand that these changes can be made at any time with no notice and no public consultation whatsoever. I think that's important to get on the record, that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction is completely wrong on that fact.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise in support of this amendment.

You know, Madam Chair, I think, first of all, it is distressing, to say the least, to hear the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction provide the Chamber with some explanation as to the accuracy of what a bill introduced under her name does and does not do – the track record is not great on this topic certainly with reference to other aspects of this bill – when certainly this particular minister had absolutely no idea what this bill, in fact, does around education.

Now, to the substance of her remarks that this section of the act provides flexibility and an ability to sort of deviate from a one-size-fits-all approach to parks and public land management: first of all, I find it interesting that the minister has in fact, in the speaking notes that she read verbatim off her piece of paper, conflated parks and public lands. They are two different management approaches with two different management intents regardless of which parks designation you're talking about within the Provincial Parks Act or even what kind of public land one is discussing, whether it's in the green zone or elsewhere.

Now, there is no question that within the parks act, if we want to focus in on that – because I highly doubt that the minister knows this – permitted uses and activities according to each park designation are already laid out in statute, and those uses and activities are enumerated, then, with further detail in a park management plan. I'm speaking specifically here under the parks act. There are different permitted uses under different classifications within the parks act, and then what happens is that a park management plan is put out to further provide detail to the public on what is and is not a permitted use, activity, lease, and so on.

Oftentimes, because the parks act is a very old piece of legislation within the GOA – to my understanding, it's one of the oldest pieces of legislation within the GOA – it can be a little bit confusing, which is why the parks management plan is so important. In general, for example, in provincial parks one is not allowed to hunt; however, there is an ability already for the minister to allow for certain seasonal hunting, for example, or for certain wildlife management purposes, and they do that through the parks management plan.

The public knows and expects this to be the case, because when they put it out in the parks management plan, it is put out to public consult and an even lengthier period of Indigenous consultation, so any of the flexibility and one-size-fits-all little catchphrases that the minister just read off her piece of paper provided to her by other people can be captured with appropriate public consultation within that park management plan. Certainly, then, operational decisions are made within that rubric by, first, the executive director of operations within Alberta parks and then on down through regional directors and even park rangers, if there are any left. I am reliably informed that the layoffs have been quite severe, and there are fewer and fewer of them all the time.

There is no need for this change, Madam Chair, unless one wants to introduce more range of permitted activities within the current designation or grant leases that may not be in the public interest or may not conform to appropriate levels of oversight in a way that makes it opaque to the public that this is happening without changes to the park management plan, without those public consultation

periods, and without those Indigenous consultations. I'm just going to put it on the record right now that Indigenous nations will be reviewing any of these changes because they are subject to judicial review under Indigenous consultation. If you start changing land-use purposes, activities, designations without Indigenous consultation, there is an equal and opposite reaction from both treaty organizations and individual Indigenous organizations of various kinds.

Now, it seems to me that what we are doing here is putting power into the hands of a minister and a Government House Leader that as recently as last week proved to the public and to this House that he is not trusted by even the majority of his own party members, let alone Albertans. This is a minister that was responsible for the first iteration of pre-pandemic outrage based on his handling of parks and coal mines specifically. His environmental management record sparked absolute outrage in particular throughout Calgary and in particular in the riding of Calgary-Elbow, where the member has just announced his resignation rather than face the music of the public. In no small part when you walk around those streets of that particular seat, you will see no end to parks and coal mining signs. Now going on two, two and a half years of this. This is a source of tremendous shame and electoral peril for this government, for which this environment minister is in large part responsible given that it was also his job to shepherd legislation through this House and in so doing has certainly flushed a great deal of his own credibility among his own caucus members, let alone the public.

To be asked by this House at this time to entrust that kind of power through this legislation in the hands of that Government House Leader is a bridge too far. Certainly, we just saw last week it is a bridge too far for his own party members, it is a bridge too far for a good number of his caucus mates, it is a bridge too far for the Alberta public, and it is certainly, Madam Chair, a bridge too far for sound environmental management in this province whereby we are protecting nature for future generations and for recreational and other uses in a sustainable way for our children and grandchildren. It is for that reason that this amendment should be accepted. This piece of legislation in its current form must be amended to take out this most egregious and vexatious section of it, a piece of the legislation that Albertans do not support. Certainly, management of parks and protected areas should be placed in the hands of someone who merits the trust and respect of the people of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to join debate on the amendment before us. I mean, I think the important role of the opposition is to, you know, scrutinize any legislation that does come through by government and to make suggestions on improvements. Certainly, I know that this amendment brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar goes a long way to improve Bill 21, so I guess I commend all of the members in this Legislature to be in support of it.

11:00

As was already explained by the member previous to me, this is sort of – the amendment addresses the most egregious, I think, part of Bill 21, which is, of course, giving the minister significant powers to sort of do what he will. Sadly – and I really do see this as a tragedy – we've seen time and time again that this UCP government is not trustworthy, oftentimes not competent in the decisions that they make. When this kind of bold action of giving

the minister the significant support – it creates tremendous concern for me, you know, as an Albertan, let alone as a member of this Legislature, and I know that certainly when I speak to my constituents or others that I meet with on a regular basis, they too express this very similar concern.

Certainly, this amendment strikes out section 11(3) and section 12 of Bill 21. I guess the most challenging part of it, certainly for me, is section 12.12, and it says, “The Minister may set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines, objectives or other rules relating to any matter in respect of which a regulation may be made under this Act.” That’s one part that we would like to amend, to actually take that out of the legislation, because that gives sweeping powers to the minister. I certainly agree with that.

We know that this seems to be a little bit of a trend by the UCP. I know that the Minister of Seniors and Housing also has a similar clause in the affordable housing act which gives her tremendous power. She gets to designate what’s affordable housing, what’s not affordable housing without sort of any definition. Oftentimes things are specified more clearly not in this specific legislation but in regulations, which we can’t see until they are produced. Of course, we know that regulations don’t have the power of legislation, and they are easy for the minister to change autonomously, like, unilaterally. Certainly, you know, as a believer in strong democracy this, of course, is a concern. There need to be checks and balances in politics, having things brought before the Legislature instead of being decided by one person, one cabinet minister even, and not even the Executive Council.

I think that that is a significant weakness of the legislation, and I would certainly encourage all members of this Legislature to vote in support of this amendment, which goes a long way to improving this legislation. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to amendment A1?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:03 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|----------|----------|---------------|
| Eggen | Nielsen | Sigurdson, L. |
| Goehring | Phillips | Sweet |
| Loyola | Sabir | |

11:20

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|
| Amery | Luan | Shandro |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Madu | Singh |
| Copping | McIver | Smith |
| Fir | Neudorf | Toews |
| Frey | Nixon, Jason | Toor |
| Hunter | Nixon, Jeremy | van Dijken |
| Issik | Orr | Walker |
| Jean | Pon | Williams |
| Jones | Savage | Wilson |
| Kenney | Schow | Yao |
| LaGrange | Schulz | Yaseen |
| Lovely | Schweitzer | |

| | | |
|---------|---------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 8 | Against – 35 |
|---------|---------|--------------|

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We are back on Bill 21 in Committee of the Whole.

Let’s get a speaker set up, and then members can move freely as they wish. Any speakers to Bill 21 in Committee of the Whole? The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I’m not going anywhere, by any means. In fact, we’ve got some amending to do.

You know, it’s a very good reflection of just how these red tape reduction bills are actually just omnibus bills with no rhyme or reason to them. Bill 21 also contains changes to education and the Education Act, right? When we go from parks to education, it’s like this spinning wheel that’s perhaps a reflection of this government’s agenda for the last three and a half years, taking potshots at parks and schools and hospitals and whatnot.

Anyway, you know, we’re always here, the Official Opposition, to try and help, right? As you might recall, with Bill 21, when it was introduced, the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction told the media that private schools would no longer have to report on the tuition fees they charged. You also may recall, Madam Chair, that later that same night the Minister of Education told the public that her colleague was wrong, that private schools would still have to report on the tuition fees that they collect.

Madam Chair, my good friend and MLA for Edmonton-Glenora has sought clarity on this issue, you know, in the public interest and to help the government as well, so I do have an amendment that I would like to move on her behalf, please. Let me know when you want me to read that.

The Chair: All right. Hon. members, this will be known as amendment A2.

Hon. member, just note that you’re moving on behalf of another member. Please proceed.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Well, thank you, Madam Chair. You can see that we have this amendment which is including some new language.

The Chair: Sorry. Can you start by reading it into the record?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. That’s what I’m going to do.

The Chair: Oh. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I’m just getting warmed up, right? Before noon it takes a few pulls on my chainsaw to get going here.

The hon. Ms Hoffman to move that Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended in section 4(3) in clause (a) by adding the following:

(3.3) The person responsible for the operation of an accredited private school must, within 30 days of the end of each fiscal year, report to the Minister the amount of any tuition fees charged to [the] students during that fiscal year, including all academic and non-academic fees.

Also:

(3.4) For the purpose of subsection (3.3), the fiscal year of an accredited private school is September 1 to . . . August 31.

And then:

(3.5) The Minister must publish the information received under subsection (3.3) on the publicly accessible website of the department administered by the Minister within 30 days.

And then also adding after section 29(4)(a.1):

(a.2) if, in the case of an accredited private school, the person responsible for the operation of the accredited private school does not comply with subsection (3.3).

Madam Chair, this is a way by which we can, you know, clear up some of the confusion from the government side. That confusion spread into the public as well, quite frankly. Regular folks were

very frustrated that they couldn't get clarity from this government as they focused on busily fighting and squabbling with their own internal party matters, and in the meantime here we have some of this legislation left hanging.

This amendment – thank you very much to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora – removes ambiguity, right? Ambiguity is the enemy of reason in this House, Madam Chair. You know, if we can just simply compel private schools to submit information to the minister about tuition fees that they charge, that clears the whole issue up.

Quite frankly, I know that private schools are happy to do so, on the whole. Certainly, I know that I myself as minister of K to 12 education did work closely supporting private schools to have clarity around tuition and everything else, right? I have always worked very closely, for example, with the Edmonton Islamic Academy, who are exemplary in their operations of their private religious school, and we should all be very proud of the example that they provide in regard to both clarity and transparency and education as well.

You know, as well, just to make sure we catch the other side – right? – it is to compel the minister to make that information public online. I think everybody deserves to know that. We know that private schools receive quite significant monies, public money, and any time we see anything that does get public money, then I think we deserve to see what's going on behind that expenditure.

You know, this government, again, has set a trend and a tendency to not do that – right? – anything from the war room to other investments that this government makes. It's very hard to see how and where and why that money is being spent. We don't need that in education. It really is not helpful.

Quite frankly, I believe that this amendment really should be supported by this government as a demonstration that they have no ulterior motives with this particular part of the red tape reduction act. Of course, when it came out, at first it was pure chaos in regard to different ministers saying different things. Once again, you know, we're trying to help out here as the Official Opposition. We're trying to set a good example. I mean, if the government happens to be the Official Opposition next time, this is kind of how you do it, right? Pro tip: look for constructively critical places where you can make legislation better.

This amendment does what the Minister of Education said she would do, promised to do verbally. It's always good to put it in writing, I think, and I think that the public will be better served and that the government will demonstrate their clarity on this issue. Most importantly, the public interest will be better served as well.

I would encourage all members to support this amendment, and I'm curious to hear from other members in this regard. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise this morning to speak to the amendment introduced by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. I have to say that I agree with the previous speaker in wanting to ensure that there's clarity and understanding. We've watched this government create chaos in so many ways, and specifically under this piece of legislation, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, we had the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction saying one thing and then the Minister of Education saying another.

When we're looking at ways to help, I think that this piece of legislation could be amended, and it should be supported. We're asking for some clarity, and I think the Member for Edmonton-Glenora provides that in the amendment request. It will help reduce

confusion, provide some transparency. I think that when we're looking at ways to make legislation understandable to the public, decreasing chaos is the way to go.

When we hear the discrepancy between the cabinet across the way there, I think that this amendment is a way to decrease that confusion and that chaos. If it's their intention to be clear, I think that this amendment is simple, it's straightforward, and it should be supported by the government if they truly have no ulterior motives and want to be able to support the way that they say that they do.

11:30

I appreciate that the previous member, from Edmonton-North West, mentioned the Edmonton Islamic Academy. That was a school that was in my riding from 2015 to 2019, and I can tell you that they do incredible work in the community. Although they're no longer in Edmonton-Castle Downs, many of the staff and the volunteers and the students that attend EIA live in Edmonton-Castle Downs. I've watched over the years as this school provided incredible opportunities for young people, that, you know, they're still benefiting from today. They have a culture in that school where once you're involved, you tend to stay involved. We watched students who've graduated come back and volunteer and provide their experience to the students that are emerging through the academy.

I think that when we're talking about schools within the province of Alberta, we need to be able to provide them with clarity and with understanding, and they should be able to feel that they have a clear understanding of the legislation that is impacting how they do day-to-day business. I think that the incredible people at Edmonton Islamic Academy deserve to know what's happening within this government and what decisions are being made that have an impact. You know, I'm a complete supporter of this school and the education and the community building that they do, quite frankly, and I would hope that all members in the Chamber want to provide that clarity and understanding to all schools in the province of Alberta, and accepting this amendment is a way to do that.

I know that this piece of legislation is quite significant. It has many pieces of legislation that are impacted, all under the statement of red tape reduction, but specifically when it comes to education, we saw complete chaos happen, where we have a minister responsible for red tape and then a minister responsible for Education giving two completely different messages. What this would do is that it would align what the government is saying their intention is, and it will provide some clarity and perhaps reduce confusion that was created by these two ministers on the same piece of legislation.

I think that, you know, Albertans that I talk to are frustrated with this government and with the chaos and consistently opposing messages that are coming. This takes a very important piece of legislation and provides that clarity, and it basically says what the Minister of Education promised would happen, so I see no reason why this government wouldn't want to accept this amendment and remove any ambiguity that's caused by their own government. It's providing some clarity on what the Minister of Education is saying they want to see happen, and I would be very, very curious why any member in this Legislature wouldn't want to accept this amendment and vote in favour of it.

I think that by saying yes to this amendment – it's quite simple; it's straightforward. It's doing exactly what the Minister of Education said that they want to do. It would compel the minister to make the information public online and not be shrouded in secrecy. It would provide an opportunity for transparency to Albertans. You know, in our opinion, on this side, it should be supported. There should be no reason, unless there are ulterior

motives, not to support this amendment. It's a way to make what the associate minister of red tape said and what the Minister of Education is wanting – it provides that clarity and that transparency.

I think when it comes to, you know, the role of opposition, we're listening to frustrated Albertans. We're listening to people that just have had enough of the confusion and the chaos. And this is one simple way that, I believe, this government could reduce that, by supporting the amendment brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

I think that with that, Madam Chair, I would like to conclude my remarks, but I truly hope that everyone in the Chamber supports this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Ms Fir: Thank you. I will not be supporting this amendment. It's not surprising that the members opposite continue to fixate on this component of the bill as a distraction from all the amazing, good content that was in this bill. The Minister of Education already clarified that independent schools are required to report private sources of revenue, including tuition, to the government and that that's required as part of the annual audited financial statements.

What we are eliminating is one specific additional schedule that independent schools currently submit specific to tuition. This has been clarified by the Minister of Education, therefore making this amendment unnecessary. Again, just a distraction by the members opposite from all the amazing components of this red tape reduction bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I find it interesting to hear the minister stand and say that there is open transparency and that that has to be reported, but we are removing one piece where, you know, charter schools don't have to report on tuition. In fact, then, there isn't openness and transparency because not everything is having to be reported and disclosed, clearly, as the minister just indicated, which is why this amendment is so important.

Again, why would the government choose to remove one schedule that does not require the openness and transparency of every financial component of running a school? I don't understand why the government feels the need to do this. What is it about the tuition piece that the government doesn't feel should be reported?

We see – again, I have a Christian school in my riding, and I just went on their website and everything that could be reported – because they're open and transparent, and they did actually end up going under Edmonton public schools. They were an independent school that chose to move into the public system partly because of the fact that they weren't able to keep up with the tuition schedule that they would need to be able to operate outside of the structure of the public schools. They still have, however, the requirement for the fee schedule when it comes to the Christian program fees, and they also still have school fees.

Now, the concern that I have here is that that doesn't necessarily have to be put on every single website. And to not have to disclose what the tuition is for each school I think should speak to the question around: what is going on within this government to ensure that tuition is accessible for all Albertans, to ensure that anybody who would choose and want to go to that school has the financial ability to do that? If that is not publicly reported, there is no accountability to ensure that independent schools are open to all Albertans, because they could potentially create a tuition schedule

that becomes so expensive that not every Albertan has the ability to access it.

The whole argument from this government is that these schools should be accessible to all. It's about giving choice, according to the government. But if individuals aren't able to access those schools because the tuition is so high they can't afford to go there, then it's actually not accessible, which is why all of these need to be publicly disclosed and reported, so that Albertans can make those choices and so that's there's also an accountability there to ensure that every school that is being funded through public dollar, supported through public dollar, is accessible and available to all Albertans.

Again, the minister has been clear – and I'm sure we'll want to hear from the Minister of Education at some point as to clarifying this piece now around the tuition.

11:40

Clearly, what we've heard over the last few weeks from the minister is that everything is open and transparent. Everything was supposed to be publicly disclosed. And now, again, we hear from the minister opposite, the associate minister, saying that, well, everything is disclosed except for the tuition. Again, it's not going to be openly disclosed. Inconsistencies between the Minister of Education and the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction: this is why Albertans are concerned and why Albertans don't feel like they can trust this government, because we keep getting inconsistent responses when it comes to the questions that are being asked.

Why now is this schedule being changed? Last week we were being told that nothing was being changed. Everything was going to be open. Everything was going to be transparent. Albertans would be able to see everything. Now, today, we hear that that's actually not the case. I think, again, that is why it's so important that this amendment be adopted by the government. Be open. Be transparent. If you're going to help through public dollar to support independent schools, then Albertans have a right to know what those fee schedules look like, including tuition fees. Tuition is actually one of the biggest barriers that Albertans face when trying to access these schools, so it needs to be open. It needs to be transparent. If the government chooses not to do that, then what they're saying is that they don't actually believe that these schools should be accessible to all Albertans. Albertans should be able to access them through these fee schedules.

Again I would urge the government to really consider showing Albertans that this is about educational choice, as they say, that this is going to be accessible to all Albertans, that there won't be a financial barrier when it comes to tuition, to accept this amendment and do what they're saying they're doing. If they choose not to, then once again they're validating the very concerns that Albertans have, which are that they can't trust this government to make sure that they have access to the very services that are being supported through their public dollar.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll keep my comments very brief. I think my friends from Edmonton-Manning, Edmonton-Castle Downs have very clearly spoken to why we need to vote in favour of this amendment. You know, I've lectured over and over and over again in this House about language and what's being presented. Obviously, when Bill 21 came forward, the red tape minister believed, with her comments, that the case was that they didn't have to report. Now, she said that the Minister of Education

has corrected that. I want to know why it was misinterpreted to begin with. If we're allowing the red tape minister to bring forward changes like this to different pieces of legislation, as I had mentioned, 16 different acts across nine different ministries, why is that confusion happening? Either the red tape minister is not consulting with the different ministers on legislation that is being changed, or it's the other way around.

Again, it's funny how it always comes down to the language; what's being said, what isn't being said, and, more importantly, what are you saying about it? There was obviously a conflict there. This amendment, that was brought forward by my friend from Edmonton-Glenora and the critic for Education, clears that language up so there's no misinterpretation about it. Again, it's not about us. We know what's now happening in the debate. But if somebody else isn't able to check, for whatever reason, isn't able to ask any one of us what went on during this discussion, this is how confusion begins. I've persistently and consistently seen that from the UCP government bringing this forward.

I would sincerely hope that members opposite will reconsider voting in favour of this amendment. This will clear up the language. There won't be any kind of misunderstandings going forward. There won't be any need for a minister to correct another minister, and hopefully that practice would then even continue going forward. But then, at the very least, maybe one of these ministers would like to stand up here in Committee of the Whole and explain to us who's not talking to the other. I'm very much in support of this amendment going forward, and I think we need to continue this kind of practice to clear up these constant misunderstandings that we've seen with regard to pieces of legislation that are being handed down to the red tape ministry, obviously in some effort to try to justify the \$10 million to \$15 million that's being spent on this associate ministry over the course of this Legislature.

Albertans needs to know that they can trust the decisions that are being made, because clearly right now that trust is almost gone. I'll conclude my remarks there, and we'll see if I'll maybe perhaps get an answer for one of my questions.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to amendment A2?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:46 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|----------|----------|-------|
| Eggen | Nielsen | Sabir |
| Goehring | Phillips | Sweet |
| Loyola | | |

11:50

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|
| Amery | Loewen | Schow |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Lovely | Schulz |
| Barnes | Luan | Shandro |
| Copping | Madu | Singh |
| Fir | McIver | Smith |
| Frey | Neudorf | Toor |
| Hunter | Nixon, Jason | van Dijken |
| Issik | Nixon, Jeremy | Walker |
| Jean | Orr | Williams |

| | | |
|----------|---------|--------------|
| Jones | Pon | Yao |
| LaGrange | Savage | Yaseen |
| Totals: | For – 7 | Against – 33 |

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Are there others to speak to Bill 21? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to speak briefly to this bill. I do understand that this bill has changes which are mostly of an administrative nature, and we can support those changes. But this bill also contains very controversial changes that we cannot support, that Albertans don't support. For instance, the bill gives the Minister of Environment and Parks broad powers to "set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines . . . [and] other rules relating to any matter in respect of which a regulation [can] be made under this Act." That's huge, huge power. In legal terms, if we interpret that, that means the minister can do anything he wants. That's not okay with us. That's not okay with Albertans. Nobody trusts this caretaker government with our cherished provincial parks.

The second thing is that they are also making changes to how private schools report public funds. I think Albertans deserve to know how their funds are spent, how their tax dollars are spent, and this bill will water down that transparency. No wonder this government got an award in secrecy and transparency because of changes like this.

It is for those reasons, primarily these two changes. These are not acceptable to us. These are not acceptable to Albertans. That's why we cannot support this piece of legislation.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I will take my seat.

The Chair: Are there others to speak?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the remaining clauses of Bill 21 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:53 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Lovely | Schulz |
| Barnes | Luan | Shandro |
| Copping | Madu | Singh |
| Fir | McIver | Smith |
| Frey | Neudorf | Toor |
| Hunter | Nixon, Jason | van Dijken |
| Issik | Nixon, Jeremy | Walker |
| Jean | Orr | Williams |
| Jones | Pon | Yao |
| LaGrange | Savage | Yaseen |
| Loewen | Schow | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|----------|----------|-------|
| Eggen | Nielsen | Sabir |
| Goehring | Phillips | Sweet |
| Loyola | | |

| | | |
|---------|----------|-------------|
| Totals: | For – 32 | Against – 7 |
|---------|----------|-------------|

[The remaining clauses of Bill 21 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we rise and report Bill 21.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mrs. Frey: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 21. I wish to table copies of all amendments

considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I see that the clock is on or nearing 12 o'clock. With that, I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 1:30 p.m. today.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:58 a.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, May 24, 2022

Day 35

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Hon. Leela Sharon, ECA, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Hon. Tracy L., ECA, Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., QC, Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,

Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)

Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, ECA, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., ECA, Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
Official Opposition Whip

Ellis, Hon. Mike, ECA, Calgary-West (UC)
Feehan, Hon. Richard, ECA, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
Official Opposition House Leader

Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, ECA, Edmonton-Glenora (NDP)
Horner, Hon. Nate S., ECA, Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Issik, Hon. Whitney, ECA, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
Government Whip

Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UC)
Jones, Matt, Calgary-South East (UC)
Kenney, Hon. Jason, PC, ECA, Calgary-Lougheed (UC),
Premier

LaGrange, Hon. Adriana, ECA, Red Deer-North (UC)
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (Ind)
Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (NDP)
Luan, Hon. Jason, ECA, Calgary-Foothills (UC)
Madu, Hon. Kaycee, ECA, QC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, ECA, Calgary-Hays (UC)

Nally, Hon. Dale, ECA, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaidis, Hon. Demetrios, ECA, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, ECA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre
(UC), Government House Leader

Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
Notley, Hon. Rachel, ECA, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Orr, Hon. Ronald, ECA, Lacombe-Ponoka (UC)
Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
Panda, Hon. Prasad, ECA, Calgary-Edgemont (UC)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, ECA, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
Pon, Hon. Josephine, ECA, Calgary-Beddington (UC)
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UC)
Reid, Roger W., Livingstone-Macleod (UC)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Rutherford, Brad, Leduc-Beaumont (UC),
Deputy Government Whip

Sabir, Hon. Irfan, ECA, Calgary-Bhullar-McCall (NDP),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Savage, Hon. Sonya, ECA, QC, Calgary-North West (UC)
Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, ECA, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, ECA, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader

Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, ECA, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Schweitzer, Hon. Doug, ECA, QC, Calgary-Elbow (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, ECA, QC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, ECA, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
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Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

Executive Council

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Jason Kenney | Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations |
| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

Amery
Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Lovely
Deputy Chair: Ms Sigurdson

Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Walker
Deputy Chair: Mr. Turton

Allard
Carson
Dreeshen
Ganley
Long
Sabir
Stephan

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Cooper
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon
Deputy Chair: Ms Rosin

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Bilous
Goehring
Sabir
Singh
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Singh
Sweet

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Armstrong-Homeniuk
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Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
Stephan
Williams

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

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Lovely
Pancholi
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Toor
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Select Special Committee on Real Property Rights

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Hanson
Milliken
Nielsen
Rowswell
Schmidt
Sweet
van Dijken
Yao

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 24, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Members of the gallery, if you'd like to take your seats, you're welcome to do so.

Members of the Assembly, in just a couple of moments here we're going to take a group photo of the 30th Legislature. We only have a couple of minutes, so if you can please get yourself ready. I'm going to ask a number of you to move into position so that we can see everyone. The photo will be taken from the press gallery down to the Chamber floor. I see that the hon. Member for Camrose has moved and the members along the back row have moved. Well done. I will skip – yes. Please come in. Take your seats. Members, if you can see, it will be at the press gallery. I'm sure that you can see the photographer. Hon. members, please. Thank you so very much. I feel as though we have created some sort of record in which the time that that photo has taken place.

We will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. Please rise and feel welcome to join in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all of us command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Anniversary of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II Address to the Legislative Assembly

The Speaker: Members, we have a number of very important things happening this afternoon, so I would like to beg for your indulgence for just a few brief moments.

Members, we are so very fortunate to do our work in the Chamber, that has seen many historic moments, perhaps nothing as historic as when Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II addressed Albertans from this very spot on this very day in her 2005 visit commemorating Alberta's 100th birthday. It was the first and only time that the monarch had addressed the people of this province from the floor of the Assembly. During her visit a series of stained glass windows designed by Paul and Andre Winter were unveiled, depicting the reign of monarchs throughout Alberta's first hundred years. The centre window at the front entrance of the Legislature Building commemorates the reign of Her Majesty the Queen. The monograms of the royal cypher stand for Elizabeth Regina II and are surmounted by the royal crown. The royal cypher is flanked by wild roses, which were adopted as Alberta's floral emblem in 1930.

Her Majesty reiterated:

During a previous visit 32 years ago I said that “. . . I want the Crown in Canada to represent everything that is best and most admired in the Canadian ideal. I will continue to do my best to make it so during my lifetime, and I hope you will all continue to give me your help in this task.”

Members, I think we can all agree that Her Majesty has honoured her commitment.

As a way of giving thanks, we now have the opportunity to celebrate her 70th year of service during this platinum jubilee year. I invite all Albertans and members to submit a congratulatory message, photo, or other monarch moment to be included in a digital display marking her unparalleled reign. Information about how to participate can be found on the platinum jubilee page at assembly.ab.ca.

May God bless the Queen.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am pleased to introduce a friend to many and a former Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. They call him Mr. Landslide, Dave Schneider, for his massive electoral victory of eight votes in the constituency of Little Bow. He is accompanied by his wife today, Mrs. Sharon Schneider. I invite you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Members, we do have many guests in the gallery, so I would ask that you hold your applause until the end of the introductions, and I would ask that all guests rise as I introduce them.

Earlier today I had the pleasure of meeting a School at the Legislature group joining us from Father Leo Green school in the constituency of Edmonton-Decore. Please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

Also, members, joining us today in the members' gallery, a very special guest and the wife of the Minister of Indigenous Relations, Rose Wilson.

I'm pleased to introduce 10 members of the Memory Keepers Association of 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi of Rwanda. They're guests of the Minister of Labour and Immigration. Please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

Also in the gallery is a group of 20 childhood educators who are the recipients of the minister's award of excellence in childhood development – they are here in recognition of Early Childhood Educator Day, which was Friday, May 20 – two of which just happen to be from the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, one of which is celebrating their birthday today. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also joining us today are guests of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. She's the constituency assistant for the constituency, Ms Naomi Knoch. In the gallery as well are four representatives from Farming Smarter and West-Central Forage Association. They are guests of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

And, finally, members, there are two guests of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, Jonathan Moser, senior vice-president and ESG practice lead of Rubicon Strategy, and Jonathan Stewart, the CEO of Direx. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

Members' Statements

Government Record

Ms Ganley: Alberta has a bright future, but we have to see the world as it is. We have to work together to move Alberta forward. I look around me and I see bright, innovative, hard-working people, and I know that we can achieve it. Alberta can continue to lead today and for years into the future but only if we have a government that looks towards the future and not the past.

For the past three years Alberta's UCP government has grasped at old, disproven economic theories, where diversification is a luxury we can't afford, climate change is a hoax created by a children's movie. They even created a curriculum that is 50 years out of date. This is not what Albertans thought they were voting for, and the current Premier's resignation changes none of it. The drama and the infighting and the disunity that have plagued the UCP are not over. It's only just beginning. To all those Albertans who voted for the UCP and feel let down by their actions and behaviour over the last three years: you deserve better.

Alberta's NDP is working day and night to build a team that will provide the forward-looking, thoughtful, responsive, pragmatic, and unified government that Albertans need. Every one of us will work tirelessly on what matters to Albertans: good public health care and good public education, good-paying jobs for you and for your children into the future, and protection from the rising cost of living. Albertans deserve a government focused on those things, not focused on infighting and empire building. The UCP will try to tell Albertans that they've changed and learned, just like the current Premier claimed when he took office. It won't be anymore true today. We can leave the UCP to their internal battles, and together we can build that bright future.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge has a statement.

Sikh Community

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to be a Member of this Legislative Assembly to represent not only the constituents of Calgary-Falconridge but also as a representative of the Sikh community. In the past two weeks gurdwara committees in Calgary and Edmonton organized Nagar Kirtans to celebrate the foundation of Khalsa Panth and festival of Vaisakhi. I would like to thank the Premier and my caucus colleagues along with thousands of Albertans for their participation in those celebrations. Those are the wonderful events that celebrate the culture and religious practices of Sikhism. These events are an opportunity for more and more Albertans to join with members of the Sikh community in their values of respect, kindness, and selflessness.

Since 1897 Sikhs have called Canada home. By 1906 there were roughly about 1,500 Sikh people in our country, which has now grown to more than half a million. While working hard, the Sikh community has contributed to other communities through their selfless service. I'm very proud of Alberta's acceptance of Sikhism along with other cultures and religions that have been welcomed to this province. Our acceptance of diversity offers a strong motive for Sikhs and other communities to choose Alberta.

As we have faced challenge through the world-wide pandemic, Sikhs have participated by helping other communities through delivering food and providing sewa, service. Today we see gurdwaras in many neighbourhoods of Alberta's major cities, signifying the success of Sikhism in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, Sikhism is a religion and culture of belonging. I'm proud to see that our government has built strong ties with Sikh communities. I know there will be continued success for every community in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Agricultural Innovation Hubs

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All of us in this Chamber know how vital agriculture is to our province. Today I bring a message from our southern rural communities. While we all know

the pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine, and soaring inflation challenge every aspect of our lives, out on the Alberta landscape farmers plant crops with their famous dogged determination or, as I like to refer to it, the Albertan spirit. Farming requires accepting change and adopting practices that sustain soil and water.

Fortunately, in Alberta we have a class of nonprofit associations dedicated to finding the best ways for farmers to adapt to change. They are a network of regionally focused, on-farm innovation hubs across the province. The one closest to me is Farming Smarter, and it is a stellar example of what these associations contribute to our economy and vibrant rural communities. It operates with a privatized approach but focuses on the public good. Farmers trust information coming from these hubs and participate in setting direction and discovering best practices suited to their region. It is a board comprised of farmers, and its commitment to agriculture and innovation will never waver.

While going about the business of changing the way people farm, these hubs invest in people. Farming Smarter grew from one half-time position to 10 full-time specialists and 15 summer student technicians. It became Alberta's strongest regional innovation hub because of strong leadership and strong partnerships. Farming Smarter is a hub of postsecondary student learning, industry professional development, and on-farm research. It connects all prairie ag scientists directly to the landscape. Farming Smarter turns 10 in 2022, and we can expect it to remain on that landscape for decades to come. As long as it thrives, our agricultural industry also thrives.

Recent history illuminated the importance of domestic supply chains and food security. These associations reinforce both. We need to support these rural economic engines, and I urge this House to recognize the value and dedication the innovation hubs bring to our agricultural industry and invest in them. If they win, we all win.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

AISH and Income Support Indexation

Ms Renaud: In 2018 the NDP government introduced and passed legislation called An Act to Combat Poverty and Fight for Albertans with Disabilities, and that was a great day. The progressive legislation provided a one-time increase to AISH and income support recipients while automatically indexing the rates to inflation. Disability and antipoverty advocates had for decades asked the government to inflation-proof benefits so that disabled and low-income adults would be able to manage future increases of rent, food, and utilities. Inflation-proofing benefits was an important step to ending the downward spiral of grinding poverty while restoring a measure of dignity for those who rely on these benefits.

In 2018 all of the current UCP members and ministers, who were then PC and Wildrose members, supported this legislation. They shared personal stories and constituent examples on why indexing AISH and income support was so important. The legislation passed, and the path out of poverty for disabled Albertans was becoming visible.

In 2019, soon after forming government, the UCP summarily cut AISH and income support, immediately halting any progress out of poverty for tens of thousands of vulnerable Albertans. They said that times were tough and fiscal restraint was necessary, so they took it from disabled people while they directed tens of millions to a ridiculous war room, cut taxes for the wealthiest corporations, and bet billions on Trump's re-election. Not one single minister or government MLA stood up for disabled and low-income Albertans, and they all voted to take money from the poor and disabled. They are all complicit. They remain complicit.

Three years later inflation is at a 31-year high, and the cost of food, rent, utilities, and more has devastated household budgets for those already living in poverty. What disgusts me the most, Mr. Speaker, is not the blatant hypocrisy from this party but their selfishness and their weakness. They boast about a balanced budget thanks to record-high commodity prices when they know poverty is deepening. Food insecurity and homelessness are spreading as a direct result of these cuts, and still they do nothing. We will change that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon has a statement to make.

NDP and UCP Government Records

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2019 the people of Alberta spoke clearly that they did not trust the NDP. They could not be trusted to oversee the energy sector as they appointed anti-oil activists and imposed the carbon tax. They could not be trusted to oversee the electricity file as they cost Albertans billions of dollars. They could not be trusted to control government spending as they created deficit after deficit and accumulated over a \$60 billion debt. They could not be trusted to balance the budget but, rather, to tax and spend. They could not be trusted to oversee the agricultural sector after passing Bill 6. They could not be trusted to develop an educational curriculum that would address significant issues in math and language. The NDP could not be trusted to support parental choice or parental authority in our education system, refusing to allow any new charter schools while they threatened to close 27 independent schools. They could not be trusted to protect our democratic institutions as they legislated away secret ballots for union members, disenfranchised the election of Senators-in-waiting, and voted against the right of recall.

1:50

In contrast, this UCP government has passed close to 90 per cent of our campaign promises, bringing forward grassroots legislation like the right of recall, citizen-initiated referenda, and we brought back Senators-elect. The UCP promised to balance the budget: promise kept. The UCP promised to create jobs and lower taxes: promise kept. The UCP government passed legislation that recognized parental decision-making and choice in education while creating more charter schools. The UCP government has defended and expanded the oil and gas industry. The UCP government has introduced the AIOC program, that has done more to help First Nations become full partners in the Alberta economy than any of the empty left-wing rhetoric. The UCP diversified the economy, seeing huge gains in the film industry, the technology industry, the industrial hemp industry, the hydrogen industry, and the list could go on.

Mr. Speaker, as the 2023 election grows ever closer, the people of Alberta will be provided with a clear choice, and I think we know who they can trust.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Electric Utility Rebates Health Care System

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, an Albertan named Bobbi* wrote to me terrified to know her power could be turned off because she's fallen behind on her bills. You see, she's been off work since December

because she needs surgery that, unfortunately, has now been delayed, and to make matters worse, her husband's construction job was shut down in January, around the time her whole family got COVID. Despite all of this, Bobbi has managed to stay on top of everything except the power bill. To the Premier: on what date exactly will Bobbi and her family get the rebate that he promised to them?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the NDP for having decided to stop blocking that legislation. We finally got it through the Legislature after their obstruction. It's now the law. It's received royal assent, and a clear direction has been given to the 40-plus electricity retailers in Alberta to deliver that \$150 rebate on the bills of Albertans as soon as they possibly can. That is our full expectation.

Ms Notley: Well, if only Bobbi could get away with paying her bill as soon as she possibly can.

I'm focused on her and her family right now because no one over there is. For five months this UCP government has been on leadership campaign autopilot, and now we have a health care system that is literally flying into the side of a mountain. The Premier has lost his mandate to pursue radical restructuring, and he simply must reinvest in front-line care and start supporting the front-line workers he's ignored for years. Will the Premier commit to working on health care stability, not chaos, for once in this mandate?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:52.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, regrettably, Bobbi is being forced to pay – her household is being forced to pay \$600, if they're an average household in terms of their expenditures, on the Liberal-NDP carbon tax, the same carbon tax that this Conservative government repealed, the same carbon tax that we fought all the way to the Supreme Court, the same carbon tax that the NDP wants to quadruple. The leader of the NDP wants Bobbi not paying \$600 but \$2,400 in carbon tax, making her family poorer, making it tougher for her to pay her bills.

Ms Notley: Well, that was rather fanciful, Mr. Speaker. That was not what I was asking about. I was asking about health care.

Now, today I wrote the Premier outlining the tenuous nature of his mandate. The fact is that, going forward, Albertans need him to focus on stability and resourcing across the board on every issue rather than ideologically driven policies with consequences that will far outlast this Premier. Now is the time to help Albertans who can't afford their bills, who can't see a family doctor, and who want better from their government. Will the Premier do that, or is he still refusing to read the room?

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted at 1:54.

Mr. Kenney: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that the NDP leader sure didn't read the room of Albertans when she imposed the largest tax hike in Alberta history with the carbon tax, when she increased income taxes, increased taxes on employers, and created a jobs crisis in this province. This is the government that is cutting taxes, that scrapped the NDP carbon tax. While they want to raise the cost of living, this is the government that has scrapped the Alberta fuel tax, that is providing more consumer relief during this time of high inflation than any government in Canada bar none. Why did she and

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

the NDP join into a coalition with Justin Trudeau with no demand for inflation protection for Canadians?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West has the call.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Phillips: Albertans are working harder and harder; they're falling further and further behind. According to the latest figures Albertans took a 4 and a half per cent cut to their wages as weekly pay failed to keep pace with the rise in the cost of living, much of which is being caused by this interim UCP government. Income tax, property tax, tuition, park fees, insurance, utilities: all gone up under this acting government. In fact, economists say that these UCP cost increases are making inflation much worse. So why is this acting Premier, for now, adding more costs and driving up inflation, that leads to wage cuts for Albertans?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, this is the government that eliminated Alberta's fuel tax and has saved Albertans 13 cents a litre, delivering a \$150 electricity rebate, consumer price protection for natural gas. That is the member and the party that wants to make life, especially fuel, more expensive. They want to quadruple the carbon tax in their coalition with Justin Trudeau. Why doesn't the member just admit it? They love to see the cost of living go up. They want to punish people for consuming energy.

Ms Phillips: All kinds of uncertainty in Alberta politics right now but one constant, this Premier's self-importance. Anyway, enough about yesterday's man.

Alberta's unemployment rate is higher than the national average. Calgary has the highest unemployment rate in the country amongst cities, and Alberta has had the slowest wage growth in the country for more than three years. The situation is so bad that even the Finance minister says that he can't afford to pay his bills. If the Finance minister can't afford his own bills while earning almost 200 grand a year, how can this government expect Albertans to pay theirs, and why won't he at least help out with people's cost of insurance? Is it his friends at Wellington who want him to run for leadership?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the party that gave us a jobs crisis and the worst economy in modern Alberta history has a lot of chutzpah to talk about the fastest growing economy in Canada, 165,000 net new jobs created since the beginning of last year, \$70 billion of new investment over the past year, the first balanced budget in 14 years, with record investments in health and education, a government that's kept 90 per cent of its election promises, that beat Justin Trudeau and his no-more-pipelines act at the appeal court two weeks ago and is now acting more than any government to support . . .

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

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, the cost of living is up; so is unearned pomposity.

According to a recent survey half of Albertans are just \$200 away from not being able to pay their bills at the end of the month. That's the highest level in the country. But as Albertans fall further behind, the answer they get from the current Finance minister is to get a better job. Well, we all know the acting Premier is now looking for another job, and the Finance minister has his eyes on the Premier's seat, but not everyone has this luxury. What will the government do to help Albertans falling further and further behind on their bills as

the UCP continues to add up more and more costs on utilities, insurance, taxes, and everything else they can find?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, it's simple. We eliminated the Alberta fuel tax. We're providing both consumer protection on gas prices and the electricity rebate. Why don't they just stand up and admit that it is NDP policy purposefully to make everything more expensive by quadrupling the NDP-Liberal carbon tax? How can they want to quadruple that tax, making it more expensive for people to heat their homes, while pretending to care about the cost of living?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Hospital Emergency Room Wait Times

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans want a government that is focused on fixing the urgent crisis in health care. The UCP's health care chaos has left many families without a doctor, and now those same families are being forced into the emergency room, where they're having to wait longer. According to AHS wait times in Calgary are at the highest point in two years in every single ER in the city. If the Premier is truly focused on the crisis, can he tell us why he spent the weekend trying to explain his resignation status to the people of Alberta rather than dealing with our overwhelmed ERs?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the very important question. There is significant pressure on our emergency rooms, and that's why Alberta's government has added an additional 800 staff in emergency departments, more today than there were under the NDP. We've also added 230 more paramedics than two years ago, and 20 more fully staffed ambulances will shortly be operational in both Edmonton and Calgary. We've also hired 250 additional personnel to increase by 19 the number of baseline intensive care beds in our hospitals, and we're on track by September to add another 31 additional intensive care beds in our hospitals.

2:00

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have watched this government fight with front-line health care workers for two years in the middle of a pandemic. The crisis is worse at Alberta Children's hospital, where the percentage of children seen by a doctor within four hours has dropped by half. Can the Premier put himself in the shoes of those parents and children lined up outside of the ER and tell Albertans what specific action he is taking to ensure that no child waits outside the ER ever again? Is this even a priority over there?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member is right to raise concerns such as those, which are in part a result of the fact that while COVID is not currently a threat to our overall hospital capacity, it's still imposing a real burden. Many kids are getting COVID cases and being taken to the emergency ward. In addition, we've seen a spike in influenza cases, and there's an additional challenge with respect to acuity. Many people who did not present to hospitals or doctors through the COVID period have seen chronic conditions worsen. All of those things combined are placing a unique pressure on the system, which is why we've added \$1.8 billion to the baseline health care budget.

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, Alberta lost 140 doctors last year. There are currently 24 communities with fully or partially closed hospitals, including many with no ER coverage over the long weekend. EMS

red alerts are increasingly frequent, and dispatch is so overwhelmed that they're forced to hang up on calls. The Alberta Medical Association says that ERs are at the breaking point, beds are blocked, and urgent care is now being delivered in the hallway. Is this what the Premier wants his legacy to be? If not, what is he doing to fix it?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, speaking of legacies, one legacy of the NDP government is that they left us with the most expensive health care system in Canada, with some of the longest surgical and diagnostic wait times and the lowest per capita number of critical care beds of all 10 provinces. That is their shameful legacy. I'm proud that this government – as part of our \$1.8 billion record additional investment in health care we've seen the hiring of some 230 additional paramedics. As I said, I believe it's 18 – 20 ambulances will be added both in Calgary and in Edmonton in the next few weeks.

Insulin Pump Program Consultation

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, many people with diabetes gave a deep sigh of relief when the UCP announced that they were pausing plans to cancel the insulin pump therapy program. However, that relief was lost last week after the UCP's inconsiderate, insincere consultation with that community. Instead of a listening ear, the diabetic community was met with scripted talking points, officials dodging questions, and an utter lack of empathy from their government for what thousands of dollars in new costs would mean for them. Will the Premier today admit that this was a sham consultation, apologize to the people who joined in, and tell us how he will truly listen to the diabetic community going forward?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, last week approximately 300 people participated in the town hall with Alberta Health. I don't know why the member would characterize their participation as being a sham. These are people with legitimate concerns and constructive feedback. I know the minister is intently listening to them. As you know, we've expanded access to more modern assistance for people who are coping with diabetes, and the minister has paused certain other changes fully to consult with the community of people living with diabetes.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, selling parks, coal mining in the Rockies, a disastrous curriculum: the UCP has a long history of insincere consultation. In this case they left the diabetic community questioning if the UCP actually plans to listen at all or if this is just a cruel attempt to buy some time before they continue with their original plan to cancel the program. Albertans already don't trust this government with their health care, and this kind of treatment for the diabetic community continues to undermine their trust. Is the Premier or is the minister simply killing time before cancelling the program like they always intended, or will they do better and actually listen to the diabetic community?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for raising this issue. It is an important issue. As I said two weeks ago, we put a pause. We said that we'd consult, and no one will be left behind. I give that commitment to the House. I give that commitment to the people who are affected by this program. I thank those, the 300 people, who participated in the town hall last week. That's the start of consultation, because we are not going to make any changes until we get this right.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, there's a crisis in EMS which the UCP has not addressed. Doctors are leaving the province at record

rates, and the UCP has failed to adequately respond. There are lineups outside hospitals to access an emergency department; health care professionals burning out, not knowing how they can continue; surgeries being diverted and cancelled across the province; over 20 hospital closures in rural Alberta. The UCP has no answers or plans for any of those problems, so I have to ask. To the Premier: why are they focused on taking away insulin pumps for people, a choice that will undermine their health and make every one of those other problems worse?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear. The intent of the changes that we announced was never to take away insulin pumps. We recognize that this community needs the insulin pumps, and we also recognize that this actually helps that community stay out of hospitals. Our intent in making the changes would be able to broaden access to different types of supports for this community. I recognize that we didn't get this right in terms of the announcement. That's why we're going to fix this. We are focused on fixing our entire health care system. We are investing an historic \$1.8 billion additional money into it, and we'll get this right.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein has a question to ask.

Premier's Appearance before U.S. Senate Energy Committee

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canadians and Americans are concerned about the cost of energy. Albertans know that prices are high because of the supply crunch created by Russia's criminal war coupled with failed policies from left-wing governments. We know that Albertans can rise to the world's energy needs and supply responsible and reliable Albertan energy to Americans and abroad. Can the Premier inform this House about his recent trip to testify before the U.S. Senate energy committee?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Together with the ministers of environment and Energy I had the opportunity last week to make an historic presentation before the United States Senate committee on energy to make the point about how Alberta can be the solution to the global energy crisis, particularly for North American energy security. Our American friends are facing record-high fuel prices because of a scarcity, in part because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This province, with the third-largest oil reserves on Earth, can and must be part of the solution to displace dictator oil with responsibly produced Alberta energy.

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Premier for his efforts. Given that Albertans deserve greater market access for their responsible and reliable energy and given that Americans deserve greater access to that very same Alberta energy and given that we know that failed left-wing policies have left this continent's energy infrastructure underdeveloped and increased Americans' reliance on oil from the world's worst regimes – Russia, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia – will the Premier tell us the response that he heard from Senators when he was down in the States?

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, the response from American Senators – I think there were 12 who attended the hearing and heard from

Alberta – was amazingly positive. Democrat Senator Joe Manchin, chairman of the committee, said, “We must work together to chart a responsible path forward that’ll ensure security & unlock prosperity for [both of] our nations.” As he has said, Alberta is a key part of the solution to both North American and global energy security. We were delighted to get our message across at the highest levels of the American Capitol.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the Premier. Given that that is great news and given that the issue of energy security is one with life-and-death implications for people not only in the free world but right across this globe and given that, to paraphrase Senator John Barrasso of Wyoming, energy must be reliable and affordable, otherwise people suffer and sometimes die, can the Premier tell us what the outlook is for increased partnerships between America and Alberta on energy security for those who call this continent home?

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Mr. Kenney: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I informed the committee that there are currently about 300,000 barrels of unused capacity in the continental pipeline system, which we could fulfill this year, in addition to pipeline optimization, rail capacity, the pending completion of the Trans Mountain expansion, all of which could represent well over a million barrels of additional Alberta production. That means jobs in Alberta, it means more revenues for social programs here, and it means displacing OPEC oil. I was very pleased that the committee accepted my invitation to come to Alberta as soon as they can to see how we are leading the world on responsible energy production.

2:10

Violence Prevention

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, this weekend the North of McKnight Communities Society organized a town hall in my riding to address the proliferation of guns, rising gun violence, and increasing concerns about community safety. There have been 58 shootings in Calgary so far this year. The people I heard from feel abandoned by the UCP. They’re too focused on their own infighting to take real action, and they have only spoken out about keeping firearms in the hands of Albertans. Can the Minister of Justice rise in this House today and pledge specific actions to curb guns and gun violence in Calgary and throughout this province?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It is an important question. There has been an alarming increase in violent crimes, particularly in our major urbans in the province, and that is a concern for this government. We will continue to make sure that our municipal police services have the adequate funding to be able to respond, and we will call on our municipalities to make sure that they work within the Police Act to make sure that our independent police commissions are making decisions about budgets to make sure that we have adequate funding for our police services in this province.

Mr. Sabir: Given that we have actually seen violence endorsed by the UCP, given that the members for Taber-Warner and Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland supported the Coutts blockade even after they stockpiled weapons and plotted to kill RCMP officers, and given that they have faced no sanction from the Premier or minister for

their actions, will the minister rise and state for the House record that his colleagues were out of line endorsing the planned violence at Coutts and that he will personally talk to the Premier about removing them from the UCP government?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Mr. Shandro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let’s just say that when it comes to getting advice from the #defundpolice caucus over there, we’re not going to take any advice from them. We’re going to work with our police services throughout this province and make sure that they have the resources to be able to respond to the gun violence that we are seeing in our communities and make sure that we’re supporting those police officers in coming home safely to their families every night.

Mr. Sabir: Given that we have already seen a contestant in the UCP leadership race call for amnesty for those who plotted to kill cops at Coutts and given that members of the governing caucus have demonstrated through their actions that they may agree with her and given that the Minister of Transportation and some of her constituents were at the same town hall this weekend, will the Minister of Transportation rise and condemn any talk of amnesty for the Coutts blockaders, and will she pledge real action to curb guns and gun violence in the communities we both represent?

Mr. Shandro: Completely ridiculous, Mr. Speaker, as we expect to see from the NDP. We continue to see them advocating for ridiculous policies and ridiculous responses to various issues throughout this province. We will continue to work with our police services throughout the province, make sure that they have the resources to respond to the increasing rates in violent crime in this province while they will continue, as we’ve seen, to advocate for defunding the police.

Violence Prevention and Social Supports

Member Irwin: Last week two men were violently killed in Edmonton’s Chinatown in an unprovoked attack. They are remembered as hard-working, kind, and dedicated community members. Their families and many folks in Chinatown are looking for real solutions to improve safety, housing, and help those struggling with addictions and mental health. They don’t want blame or finger pointing between levels of government. Their message is clear: this can’t happen again. To the Premier: can we work together and with the city of Edmonton to help Chinatown?

Mr. Shandro: A really good question, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for that very thoughtful question. Let me just say on behalf of the entire House that our hearts are with the families of the victims of not just the two shootings that we’ve seen in Chinatown, but we’ve seen gun violence outside of pubs on Jasper Avenue and an increase generally in violent crime in Edmonton. That’s why the concerns right now that I would have with Edmonton city council in announcing an effective cut of \$22 million to the Edmonton Police Service budget – it’s a concern, in particular the way that they’re proposing to do it, without even advising or working with the Edmonton Police Commission.

Member Irwin: Given that the communities I represent are home to some of the hardest to house folks – many of them live rough and in encampments. Given that a proven way to help support unhoused folks is through permanent supportive housing – it not only saves money; it saves lives, too – and while the city of Edmonton has attempted to expand permanent supportive housing, they’ve not

received support yet from the UCP. There's never been a more critical time to invest in housing, so will the Minister of Seniors and Housing acknowledge the crisis that our communities are facing and commit today to prioritizing supportive housing?

Mr. Shandro: Mr. Speaker, it's a great question. Thank you for the question, to the member. This is why we need to work – and we call the NDP to work with us – ensuring and calling on our municipalities to make sure that our police services throughout the province are getting the adequate funding that they need to be able to respond to violent crime throughout the province. It is time for us to make sure, in particular when we see increases in violent crime – this is not the time for us to have any municipalities decreasing the funding of police services in this province.

Member Irwin: Given that my constituents have pleaded for help to support the unhoused folks living in unsafe situations in their communities yet haven't had a response and no action from anyone in this provincial government – it's hard to understand the scope of the housing crisis and how many people are living rough unless you get out and you walk on the streets, in the ravine, in the parks, in the river valley – and given that my constituents have invited members of this cabinet to walk with them, on their behalf I want to just ask again: will any minister from this government join my constituents to just truly start to understand the severity of the housing crisis and the very dire need for action?

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

Ms Pon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, hon. member, for bringing us some very important questions, and my condolences to those family and friends who have these tragedies happen in their family. Yes, from my colleagues and across ministries working on their plan to the meetings of the community leaders: they are working on a plan for how we're going to prevent these tragedies from happening again. As Seniors and Housing we are continuing to provide the budget and are looking to work with the municipalities, work with the city, work with the mayor to make sure that we provide affordable housing for the . . .

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

Federal-provincial Relations

Mr. Barnes: For Albertans, this government has failed to achieve a fair deal with Ottawa. Justin Trudeau continues to implement his just transition plan to phase out Alberta's leading industries, an immediate and pressing issue for oil and gas mining and other primary sector workers and rural communities. More than ever Albertans need an intergovernmental affairs minister willing to get tough. To the Premier: now that you've announced plans to step down, will you immediately resign as intergovernmental affairs minister to make way for someone who will stand up for Alberta?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I can say is that this government will be focused on the economy, on the people's business in the weeks and months ahead. From day one we made it a point to position this province for disproportionate investment attraction, job creation, and wealth creation. It's working. Investment is pouring in by the billions. Jobs are being created. In fact, our unemployment rate is lower than before the NDP took office.

Mr. Barnes: Given that I doubt the prospect of a lame-duck Premier writing more useless letters has Justin Trudeau quaking in his boots and given that on April 25 the members of this Assembly approved my motion to deploy every tool at this province's disposal to maximize its ability to achieve a fair deal for Alberta and given that the current intergovernmental affairs minister has achieved no progress towards a fair deal nor has even launched formal negotiations, to the Premier: when will you pass the baton to another member who is actually interested in achieving a fair deal?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was proud to be with the Premier and the Minister of Energy down in Washington last week advancing the interests of this province further than any government in history when it comes to our oil and gas industry with Washington, standing up for the birthright of all Albertans, a sharp contrast from what that hon. member and the NDP have done in their time in government. I will remind you of just a few weeks ago, when we won a historical case in the Alberta Court of Appeal on Bill C-69, standing up for Albertans. That is some significant work by this government, and we're going to continue to do what we need to do to defend the people of Alberta.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that on November 18 this Assembly approved a motion to recognize the results of the equalization referendum and given that the equalization program is up for renewal in just 2024 and given that any changes to the program must be negotiated prior to that deadline and given that Justin Trudeau has a deal with the NDP to keep themselves in office well beyond this current Premier's tenure, to the Premier: isn't your continued tenure as intergovernmental affairs minister now effectively counterproductive to Alberta families' best interest?

2:20

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, while that member has focused on tag lines and Internet memes, this government has focused on getting things done: again, a historical win to defeat the NDP and the Liberals' no-more-pipeline law, Bill C-69, done by this government just a few weeks ago, and just last week again in the Senate for a historical hearing to be able to move Alberta's energy interests forward. That's what this government is doing, real, concrete action, and you're going to continue to see it.

Confined Feeding Operation Proposal

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, a lot of government policy just stinks, and oftentimes it's complete bull, figuratively speaking, of course. But trust this government to turn cliché into reality: literal cow manure, 36 tonnes a day, to be precise, dumped into the Pigeon Lake watershed if the government allows a proposed feedlot on the west shore of Pigeon Lake. There are health risks from existing cattle manure runoff: gastrointestinal illness; skin, ear, or eye infections. Can the minister justify why this feedlot location, where families vacation, people live, and children swim in the lake, is in any way acceptable?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, we're proud in Alberta to have one of the best regulatory systems in the world. Confined feedlots are regulated by the NRCB. I don't – and none of my colleagues – interfere with the regulatory system. We have strong environmental rules. We trust the regulatory system to do their job. No, we will not listen to the NDP's calls to break the law.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that I'm just asking the government to protect Pigeon Lake and given that I have received hundreds of e-mails from folks across the province with concerns about this project and

given that when I was out there door-knocking last week to hear residents' concerns, folks were unanimously opposed to the location of this project and given that users of this area could only find out about the short window for feedback through a small weekly flyer and didn't have time to provide feedback or ask questions – I can't help but feel that this supposed consultation effort stinks – will the minister pause the project, go back into the community, and provide genuine consultation and public engagement?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the authority to do that. Again, unlike the NDP, I will not interfere with an independent regulator. That said, we have very significant water regulations and rules inside this province that will ensure that Pigeon Lake is protected. The NRCB has a good track record of making sure that those rules are enforced. We will let the regulator do the job free of political interference. Again, to the hon. member: he should stop trying to interfere with regulatory agencies inside this province. It is against the law.

Mr. Schmidt: Given that I'll never apologize for trying to protect Pigeon Lake and given that a large community event was held with presentations, speakers, hundreds of attendees, and advocates hoping to find a way to make this project better for the community and given that the information shared could have been of value but, unfortunately, not a single UCP MLA, including the MLA for Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin, showed up and given that it was made clear at the community event that people in Pigeon Lake think that this decision literally stinks, does the Minister of Indigenous Relations and the local MLA even care, or would he rather just hold his nose and avoid talking to people who do care about . . .

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

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, that does not surprise me. It has been my experience that the NDP does not respect the rule of law, but the Conservative Party does. Again, we have strong environmental rules that will protect Pigeon Lake, and we trust the NRCB to do its job, including the hon. Indigenous affairs minister, who works very hard on behalf of his constituents each and every day. He is keeping tabs on what is taking place at the NRCB. But, again, we will not politically interfere with an independent regulator, ever.

Edmonton Downtown Revitalization

Mr. Bilous: Downtowns across the province are struggling, and Edmonton is no exception. The office vacancy rate sits at almost 20 per cent. People have not returned to the downtown core, and I regularly hear concerns from residents and small-business owners about safety concerns. These are big issues to tackle, and the UCP does not have a plan. All they could muster for downtown Edmonton was \$5 million in their last budget. To the minister: why such little support from the UCP for our province's capital city?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, cities around the world are dealing with the challenges of bringing workers back to the downtown offices. Alberta is no different than any other jurisdiction around the world. That being said, right now we're working with our Edmonton metro working group. They're going to give us advice on how best to move forward here in our province. That being said, we want to make sure that our downtowns are safe. As our Justice minister has recently said, we want to make sure that our municipal partners are investing in police to make sure our city cores are safe when people come back to the workplace.

Mr. Bilous: Given that the UCP has finally received the report on revitalizing downtown Calgary and that many of the recommendations for Calgary include support for wraparound services, including housing and mental health and addictions, and given that we're dealing with a housing and opioid crisis in downtown Edmonton that's leading to concerns about safety – in fact, the Edmonton Chamber has identified this as one of their top priorities – will this government finally listen to their own working group and the business community by investing in these services that can help vulnerable Albertans and partner with the city to enhance safety and revitalize our downtown?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, you know, I thank the member for the question. As I've indicated in this House before, this is a very complex problem. A very close friend and ally of the members opposite in the NDP, of course, is a city councillor in Edmonton. He has a couple of policy examples which are to exempt people in Edmonton from minor possession but also trafficking of drugs, so I'd like to know. The member opposite: does he support the policy of supporting drug traffickers? I have some serious concerns, because I'm pretty sure the people of Alberta have concerns about the NDP supporting drug traffickers.

Mr. Bilous: Given that those comments are absurd and offensive and given that the UCP has left money on the table for affordable housing and thrown up barriers for accessing mental health and addiction support and given that the mayor of Edmonton said that the UCP is chronically underfunding these services in Edmonton, which is holding Edmonton's economy back, why is this government failing to support our downtown and holding back Edmonton's economy? And please stop blaming. Take responsibility. You hold the pen to funding; fund them.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs has risen.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows as well as the mayor of Edmonton knows, the funding between the major cities is based on a formula. The formula is applied equally to both cities, and they each get what they get. That being what it says, Budget '22 has \$118 million over the next three years to begin implementation of a plan to put 25,000 more affordable homes in Alberta over the next 10 years. We've got \$588 million as part of our support for LRT projects, \$371 million towards an Edmonton hospital, \$142 million towards the Gene Zwozdesky centre, \$92 million towards the Terwillegar expansion. There's so much more we're doing. We're doing lots for . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Falconridge is next.

Economic Recovery and Job Creation

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary-Falconridge is a constituency in northeast Calgary which is full of people excited to contribute to Alberta's economic recovery. Many of the people in that area of the city are newcomers to our province who are looking for long-term careers to establish themselves and families in Alberta. To the hon. Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: as we work to diversify the economy, what types of job opportunities does that create for my constituents under a UCP government?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to that member for the question. There is good news right now. Our

unemployment rate is down to 5.9 per cent across Alberta, the lowest that it's been since early 2015. People from across Canada are now moving to our province for high-paying jobs and affordable cost of living. Our logistics industry: you could look at warehousing, manufacturing. You look at the film and television industry. On top of that, the tech sector, the first quarter of 2022: \$466 million, a new record for Alberta.

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that Alberta's unemployment rate is now lower than it was when the NDP took office thanks to the UCP government's job-growth policies and given that more people are moving back to Alberta and Calgary to find good employment, to the same minister: what is the UCP government doing to bring jobs back to Alberta and make life more affordable in our province?

2:30

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, it has been the mandate of this government since day one to make sure Alberta has the best possible business investment environment. From making sure that we've lowered the corporate tax rate down to 8 per cent with our job-creation tax cut, eliminating red tape, we're well on our way to getting to that 33 per cent mark that we set. People didn't think it was possible, but we've done it. We're working that way. Alberta is back. We've built up that reputation again. People are putting billions of dollars to work in our province. Thousands of jobs are being created across our province.

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

Mr. Toor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that northeast Calgarians are happy to see those unemployment numbers under the UCP government and given that the NDP drove thousands of jobs out of our province when they were in office as a result of their terrible policies and tax hikes, to the same minister: what are some of the large, job-creating investments in and around northeast Calgary that have brought Alberta back to life?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, one of the industries right now that doesn't get a huge amount of play in the media is the logistics and warehousing industry. Right now Alberta is a hub when it comes to getting goods from the Pacific Ocean across Canada with our access to the port of Prince Rupert and port of Vancouver. We're seeing warehouse after warehouse going up; amazing job opportunities in warehousing as well as logistics that are happening right now across our province. That is just one industry of many. We also have the film and television industry. Right now in our province we've effectively doubled that during our time in office. That's an exciting industry. Lots of career prospects here in diversified industries.

Land Titles Registry Delays

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, typically it should take a few days and, at peak times, maybe a couple of weeks to register land title documents, but currently there is a three-month delay for Service Alberta to register such land titles. This is holding up real estate transactions such as buying or building a new home, and ultimately it's holding back our economy. Meanwhile the UCP is only focused on their internal drama. Why is the government allowing their infighting to hold back our economy? Did they really spend so much time fighting with each other that they completely forgot about the important work of the land titles office?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, it appears as though the member opposite has forgotten everything that I shared with him during our budget process earlier in the year. If he remembered what we talked about, he would know that we approved in Budget 2022 over \$9 million of additional funding to address the challenges in the land titles office. I want to assure all Albertans that we are investing in building capacity in this system so that we can deliver timely results for those Albertans who are looking to purchase or sell real property in a timely manner.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that these land title delays can lead to confusion around where municipal tax bills are sent as we head into tax season and given that this confusion can lead to bills being sent to the wrong owner, which can lead to Albertans being penalized for late property tax payments, and given that this is through no fault of their own – instead, these delays are the direct result of the UCP government's incompetence – is this government prepared to cover late fees if assessments are sent to the wrong owner?

Mr. Glubish: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it perfectly clear that part of the reason why there are delays in our land titles office is because our systems are so old. In fact, they predate the Internet, and what that means is that when the NDP were in government, they did nothing to prepare for future growth in this province. Well, we will not make that same mistake. We are investing in building capacity in our land titles system and modernizing it to prepare for the future because – you know what? – Alberta is back. Our volumes in our land titles office are over 100 per cent higher than they were last year. That's a good sign. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Carson: Well, given that this government already tried to sell off land titles after being lobbied by the Premier's former chief of staff and given that this deal would have provided a 35-year contract to a private company that would have substantially increased fees and given that this deal was in the final stages of closing and the UCP had already started laying off staff, leading to the delays we see today, why is this government more concerned with helping their friends and insiders than Albertan families who are trying to buy their home?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again the members opposite do not have any idea about what the truth is. Yes, it's true that we investigated and did due diligence on a possible transaction that could maybe have added value for Albertans through a concession agreement, and – guess what? – that due diligence showed us that we should not proceed, and we did not proceed.

Mr. Speaker, the member is alleging that we would have done something that would have increased fees, when, in fact, we made it very clear that the fees would be in the control of the government no matter what decision we made. We are always looking out to protect Albertans, unlike the members opposite, who did absolutely nothing to prepare Alberta for the future.

Residential School Gravesite Identification at Saddle Lake Cree First Nation

Mr. Feehan: Last week the Saddle Lake Cree Nation announced that they had uncovered human remains likely belonging to children at the Blue Quills residential school. The lead investigator for the nation obtained records showing that between 1898 and 1931 212 students died at the school. The community discovered what they believe to be a mass grave in 2004 and has requested that the federal government pay for two pieces of ground-penetrating radar

equipment so that their own surveyors can conduct the search. What supports and resources has the Minister of Indigenous Relations offered to the First Nations to help them in identifying this tragedy?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Indigenous Relations.

Mr. Wilson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. This is a very important question right now with what's been going on. We worked closely with Saddle Lake. As you know, we put out our community research grant. They applied for it and did receive it. We don't tell them how to use the money or what it could be used for, but it can be used for the ground-penetrating radar. It could be used for elder groups to talk about the problem or how to move forward with it. That money has gone out the door. They have received it, and we're working closely with the community.

Mr. Feehan: Given that the Saddle Lake Cree First Nation also requested funding for mental health services to support witnesses as people are encouraged to come forward and given that the investigative team believes that there could be more missing children than the 212 who have been accounted for in the records and given that the First Nations have been historically underfunded when it comes to mental health funding, what mental health supports for this community dealing with this unfathomable tragedy has the Minister of Indigenous Relations provided, and will he commit to delivering more?

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, along with the community research grant we did put out mental health grants, which they also received. There was also money set aside through Alberta Health for the general population throughout all of Alberta to help. These are going to be ongoing issues. The trauma that's going to come out of this is going to be huge, and we recognize that. We know it's going to be an ongoing situation. We want to work with these communities to make sure that they're able to get through this difficult time. That's why I travel across the province, speaking with people and trying to work with the communities to help them get through this difficult time.

Mr. Feehan: Given that this work has been traumatic on the team who have uncovered the bodies while digging graves for reburial, including members of the community, and given that the investigation team has predicted that there could be more than the 212 bodies indicated by the available records and given that it is said that in the past many families were afraid or unable to speak out when a child never returned home, what is the minister doing to ensure that Saddle Lake Cree First Nation and any other community can access the resources needed to identify and address any missing children or mass graves on the site of the former residential schools?

The Speaker: The minister.

Mr. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, this is going to be an ongoing issue across Alberta. There were many residential schools across Alberta, and this is going to be a situation that's going to carry on for quite some time, unfortunately. We're working closely – I've worked with the University of Alberta, who have a program there. We're helping them as they help with ground-penetrating radar. We've also worked with some private corporations that are going to be doing the work for free.

Mr. Speaker, this is going to be an ongoing thing. There is a helpline for the survivors. It's a national crisis line. If you need

more information on that, please contact my office, and we'll help you with that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Early Childhood Education

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday, May 20, we celebrated Early Childhood Educator Day. The minister's award of excellence in childhood development recognizes the important work of early childhood educators and providers. I'm proud to note that one of the winners, the Aboriginal Head Start program at the Grande Prairie Friendship Centre, is from my constituency. Early childhood educators are passionate, enthusiastic, and skilled individuals who dedicate every day to care for and educate the next generation, and I thank them. To the Minister of Children's Services: what are you doing to recognize these exceptional individuals?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member noted, this award highlights exceptional early childhood educators and programs right across the province. Last Friday we were able to have a virtual celebration with the award recipients to congratulate them on their win, and today we have a number of them here at the Legislature as well as in the gallery. It is truly a pleasure to be able to thank them for the very important work that they do. I also want to thank all early childhood educators right across the province for all that they do to support kids and families.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again, through you, to the minister for her answer. Given that Alberta's government has recently made many exciting investments related to the federal-provincial child care deal and given that we know quality child care cannot exist without quality educators and further given that the Minister of Children's Services has previously mentioned upcoming early childhood education workforce supports as part of the overall child care plan, a made-in-Alberta plan, to the same minister: what are you doing in the immediate term to support these educators and grow the workforce for tomorrow?

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

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The federal-provincial child care deal has absolutely been a game changer for Alberta families. I am absolutely positive that this would not have been possible without the dedication and passion of early childhood educators right across Alberta. We continue to provide among the highest wages in Canada for early childhood educators, but we know that there is more to do. There is more exciting news to come. We are engaging on exactly what those next steps are right now, and I know that there will be great news when it comes to professional development and additional supports for educators very soon.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again, through you, to the minister for that answer. Given that we know this minister is committed to addressing current issues in the early childhood education, or ECE, workforce and given that we've seen her incredible work on the made-in-Alberta child care deal and given

that early childhood educators are highly skilled professionals whose contributions play an integral role in Alberta's economy and, of course, in the development of our children, to the same minister: what is Alberta's government doing to build a long-term early childhood education strategy to ensure Albertans can access quality child care for generations to come?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Ms Schulz: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our first priority was to roll out these affordability dollars for parents so that parents could be confident in getting their children back into these spaces and increasing our enrolment in all child care spaces right across the province. We also announced \$7 million, doubling the investments we put into inclusive child care training, very important, right across the province in every single type of space. We can double the amount of educators and programs that are able to offer these supports, and we have \$300 million dedicated to supporting our early childhood workforce. On that, I'm excited to say that there's more news to come.

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

Members' Statements

(continued)

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Nielsen: I want to start by offering my deepest thanks and the thanks of the entire opposition caucus to Alberta's EMS and paramedics for their heroic work under tremendous pressures during the pandemic and afterwards. Even when facing stressful situations, fewer resources, and more and more work, they still show up and they go to work saving lives. They are facing burnout, exhaustion but still go out to help Albertans. Albertans appreciate the work and know the sacrifices that these front-line heroes are making and do support them.

The UCP's plan is to continue ignoring the crisis and even, disgustingly, to ask advanced care paramedics to take a pay cut. Our caucus has warned about the increasing number of red alerts, instances where in our largest cities there are no ambulances available to respond to emergencies. We have stood with paramedics to present the data that shows clearly that, under the UCP, ambulance response times have been progressively worsening this past year alone. There is no clearer evidence of this crisis that has developed under the UCP than the image of 14 ambulances waiting outside the Red Deer hospital, waiting to drop off patients for care.

Rather than seeing and hearing the concerns and warnings from the front line, the UCP has chosen instead to ignore the problem in hopes it will simply address itself. The Education minister and the Health minister have tried to dismiss the crisis by claiming that this is a Canada-wide problem, as if that stale talking point somehow provides comfort to Albertans who, thanks to the UCP, now have to worry, if they're injured or in an accident, how long it will take an ambulance to arrive, if one will even arrive. For the past two years the UCP have sat back and watched as this crisis has developed.

The NDP won't do that. We will stand with paramedics. As a government we will work with them to ensure they have the support, resources, and partners to ensure they can do their essential work.

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

Health Care in Northern Alberta

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2019 the value of major projects in the Northern Alberta Development Council region was just over \$60 billion. Northern Alberta is the economic powerhouse in Alberta, and the people who make sure that northern Alberta continues to be an economic powerhouse feel left behind. My constituents are unable to deliver their babies in their hospitals; they have long wait times to see a physician, if they can find one; the emergency rooms are often closed; and, to make matters worse, when my constituents drive to the nearest city to take care of their medical needs, they are often met with potholes and frost heaves. These conditions are getting out of hand, and they are unfair to the Albertans who work so hard to contribute to the prosperity of this province, especially when they are seeing other Albertans receive first-class services often on northern Alberta's dime.

Mr. Speaker, we can't just tell the people of Bonnyville, Cold Lake, and St. Paul to move to a place to get better access. We need these people in these communities. My constituents have rich and very diverse histories in these regions. Also, these individuals run our oil sites, our logging industries, and our farms that are located there. As many of my colleagues have pointed out in this House before, transferring wealth from one area in which it is generated through hard work and responsible fiscal policies to another area that frivolously spends is unfair. Northern Alberta is starting to feel like they are contributing equalization payments to large city centres to pay for public transit and ring roads.

Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. I want Alberta to be prosperous, but it is time that we start to look at the needs of northern Alberta and take action. If we contribute so much to Alberta's GDP, then why can't staff be paid more in our regions so that we have reliable access to emergency rooms, obstetrician departments, and education? Before we look for a fair deal for Alberta, we need to look for a fair deal within Alberta. Let's look at addressing these problems and not leaving the Albertans who run the economic powerhouse behind.

Go, Oilers, go.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Government Record

Mr. Rehn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring recognition to everything this government has done and continues to do, from building and strengthening relationships to being exceptional representatives to Alberta. We are showing that Alberta is a place you can be confident in investing in and a region you can trust. Not too long ago the Premier hosted Senator Manchin for a tour of our oil and gas sector. During the tour the Premier provided a strong voice for our resources and a road map to reducing the world's dependency on dictator oil. Just last week the Premier also made a resounding case for a North American energy alliance as he appeared before the Senate energy committee in Washington, DC.

In the past three years alone we have reached more meaningful accomplishments, created more jobs, and sparked more investments in Alberta than the NDP ever did. We did so by doing something they never did: listening to Albertans. You know what, Mr. Speaker? We will continue to do just that. As elected members of this Legislature it is our duty to advocate for our province and its residents. It is a privilege to do so, that we can never take for granted. Our government has taken this duty very seriously, and the results we've achieved in just three years are remarkable, and it's only the beginning.

By building bridges, the Premier and our government have given Alberta's voice more weight in jurisdictions all around the world. This is paving the way for new opportunities to be explored in our province. It is for this reason that I am extremely proud of our government and its efforts. I eagerly anticipate our province reaping well into the future the fruits of success our government has been able to plant in proving Alberta's voice abroad, and, Mr. Speaker, we are far from finished.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Early Childhood Educators

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday, May 20, was early childhood educator day in Alberta, and I wanted to take the opportunity to highlight the important work of these individuals. Early childhood educators are hard-working and skilled professionals who look after our children every day. The trust we instill in these people is immense, but it is earned. As we know, in many cases early childhood educators love the children in their care as though they were their own.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, early childhood educators provide essential daytime care, without which many parents would not be able to participate in the workforce or go to school. In Fort McMurray, in the region that does not sleep, where energy companies produce Alberta and Canada's revenues 24 hours a day, seven days a week, we need the support of these early childhood educators to provide overnight care for families that have parents working the night shift in Alberta's energy sector. This care is vital to our economy because it enables parents to contribute to the prosperity of this province and nation.

Early childhood educators also play a critical role in shaping the future. The early childhood years are critical for knowledge development and building a foundation for lifelong learning. Through fun, creativity, and learning ECEs shape Alberta's youngest children into leaders of tomorrow. Every year the Minister of Children's Services recognizes the most outstanding in educators through the minister's awards of excellence in child development. We are joined in the gallery today by some of the recipients of this award. I want to take the opportunity to thank all early childhood educators for their important work and for shaping the future leaders of tomorrow. Through you, Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee I am pleased to table the committee's report recommending the appointment of Diane McLeod as Information and Privacy Commissioner for a five-year term commencing on August 1, 2022. Copies of this report will be available online.

Thank you always so much, Mr. Speaker.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice of two motions. First is Government Motion 30, to be put on the Order Paper in my name as follows:

Be it resolved that (a) the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices is the all-party committee of the Legislative Assembly as

referred to in section 131.1 of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act for the purpose of considering a draft amendment to section 8 of the publication ban, court applications and orders, regulations proposed to be made under section 131(1)(d.1) of that act; (b) the committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued; and (c) the committee must submit its report to the Assembly within three months of the day on which it commences its consideration of the draft regulation.

I also rise, Mr. Speaker, to give oral notice of Government Motion 31, also to go on the Order Paper in my name.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee tabled on May 24, 2022, Sessional Paper 117/2022, and recommend to Lieutenant Governor in Council that Diane McLeod be appointed as Information and Privacy Commissioner for the province of Alberta for a term of five years effective August 1, 2022.

The Speaker: I am not sure that it's needed, but knowing that we have an introduction of bills, perhaps the Government House Leader might be willing to extend the Routine.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It will be close, so, yes, I would like to extend the Routine.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Bill 24

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move first reading of Bill 24, which will be the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, as you know and the Chamber knows, a common piece of legislation in a legislative sitting.

This includes amendments that'll be housekeeping in nature that will provide clarity on several acts of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, a fairly simple piece of legislation, and I hope it has the support of all members of the House.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader has a tabling.

Ms Gray: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I have seven tablings, with your indulgence. Opening comment: they are all related to Bill 17, where the sponsoring minister had said that he'd received not a single letter or e-mail and that the concerns being raised by the opposition were imaginary.

My first tabling is strong concerns from the University of Lethbridge postdoctoral association.

My second tabling is an e-mail of strong concerns from the University of Lethbridge graduate bargaining team.

My third tabling is a letter signalling strong concerns from the University of Alberta Postdoctoral Fellows Association.

My fourth: a letter of strong concerns from a six-year academically employed grad student and PhD candidate who previously sat as the VP of the Graduate Students' Association at the University of Alberta.

My next is from the University of Calgary Graduate Students' Association, particularly their Labour Relations Committee. Again, strong, strong objections to Bill 17.

A University of Calgary graduate student has written in to the minister.

As well, from the Athabasca University Faculty Association, again expressing strong concerns with Bill 17.

I table these letters and correspondence for the record.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at points of order, and the hon. the deputy government whip has withdrawn his points of order.

That leads us to Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 17

Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

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

Mr. Madu: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and move third reading of Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

Mr. Speaker, as I have said previously in this House, Bill 17 introduces changes that would improve Albertans' access to bereavement and reservist leaves and maintain the status quo at postsecondary institutions. Proposed changes to reservist leave would better address reservists' need to take time off work to attend annual training by removing the 20-day limit on the amount of time reservists can take for this training. To recognize the pain and grief of those who lose an unborn child, Albertans experiencing the end of a pregnancy other than as a result of a live birth would have access to unpaid bereavement leave regardless of the reason or timing for the end of the pregnancy. Other proposed changes would maintain the status quo at postsecondary institutions by allowing academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellow associations to continue to have exclusive right to represent their members in collective bargaining negotiations.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We have heard much debate on the proposed changes in this bill, Madam Speaker, and I thank all members for their thoughtful contributions.

I am pleased that we have had broad support for the changes to the reservist leave. These changes recognize the vital role reservists play in protecting the country by making sure they can take the time they need for annual training while keeping their civilian employment. They will continue to be required to give their employers four weeks' notice and include the anticipated return-to-work date before taking reservist leave, which can help employers plan for their absence. Once again, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for his commitment to the men and women who put on the Canadian military uniform, members of the Canadian Armed Forces for sharing their views with him and for their service. With these changes, reservists would have the time they need for their annual training.

Madam Speaker, we have had a thorough discussion on bereavement leave. We voted on an amendment that provides a broad approach to address any situation where a pregnancy ends other than as a result of a live birth, regardless, once again, of the reason or timing for the end of the pregnancy. I do want to thank the MLA for Sherwood Park and Ms Aditi Loveridge, the founder and CEO of the Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support Centre, for their

advocacy and help in this regard. I would also like to thank the members of this House and others who have spoken about the importance of making bereavement leave available to any employee who experiences pregnancy loss.

As we have discussed in this House, the legislation does not mention any specific examples of pregnancy loss. Madam Speaker, this is intentional. The legislation uses general terminology to make it clear that any employee experiencing the end of a pregnancy other than as a result of live birth is eligible for bereavement leave. To be clear, this includes miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, and other medical termination and other specific situations that may not have come up while debating this legislation.

3:00

Madam Speaker, this wording, "other than as a result of a live birth," is already used in the Employment Standards Code specifically for maternity leave, where employees whose pregnancy ends within 16 weeks of the due date have access to maternity leave. Including specific examples of pregnancy loss in the legislation raises the risk that we will leave some circumstances out or create confusion for people on whether there is a difference in who is covered under maternity leave and bereavement leave provisions. The length of bereavement leave is also staying the same, at a total of three days per calendar year.

Madam Speaker, the third set of changes in Bill 17 allows academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellow associations to continue to give their members strong representation at the collective bargaining table. During debate on this bill some members commented on whether stakeholders were consulted about this change. I would like to speak briefly about that.

Both the former Minister of Labour and Immigration and the Minister of Advanced Education discussed the exclusive right of these associations to represent their members during meetings with postsecondary faculty associations in 2021. The majority of these associations indicated that they support continuing to give academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellow associations the exclusive right to represent their members. Madam Speaker, academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellow associations have the experience and the expertise to represent their members. They also have existing relationships with postsecondary administrations. Allowing them to continue to have the exclusive right to represent their members will ensure a continuity of experience, expertise, and stability.

Madam Speaker, Bill 17 preserves the status quo at postsecondary institutions while improving employees' access to reservist and bereavement leaves. It allows academic staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows to continue to receive strong representation from their associations, and it allows our brave men and women in uniform and those who have lost a pregnancy to take needed time away from work without the fear of losing their employment.

For these reasons, Madam Speaker, I move third reading of Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to join debate on Bill 17? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in third reading to talk about the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I would like to focus my comments on the changes in the Labour Statutes Amendment Act contained in Bill 17 specifically because in his third reading speech just now the minister has stated as fact that the majority of associations have asked for and want this change while acknowledging during the Committee of the Whole debate that he did not reach out to and talk

to graduate student associations or postdoctoral fellow associations across this province.

I've just finished tabling seven letters that the minister has received in the past week from associations at the University of Calgary, the University of Alberta, the University of Lethbridge, Athabasca University, all making clear their strong objections to these sections. Given that the minister during debate in Committee of the Whole suggested that the Official Opposition was raising imaginary problems and now we know that these were very, very real concerns, Madam Speaker, at this point I would like to introduce an amendment to third reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, this will be known as amendment REC1.

Hon. member, please proceed to read it into the record.

Ms Gray: I move that the motion for third reading of Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be amended by deleting all of the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be not now read a third time but that it be recommitted to the Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering section 2."

Madam Speaker, this amendment is not to prevent Bill 17's final passage. However, I think that this Assembly and particularly this minister did not have the full facts and information while we debated at Committee of the Whole and that there should be an opportunity to return to Committee of the Whole so that this bill can be improved and the concerns of incredibly important stakeholders, who are experiencing an extreme power differential between their employment status and their employers, can be considered and put into the record.

Now, I will remind you, Madam Speaker, that during debate at Committee of the Whole the minister said that he had received not a single letter or e-mail on this particular issue, that he had not heard a single negative report on the bill, that we were referring to "imaginary problems," and that he was "absolutely committed to the well-being of our postgraduate and postdoctoral fellows that work in our great postsecondary institutions." Given that we now have letters from many of these associations suggesting, first, that they were never consulted, that no one had reached out to them to get their input on these sections, and, secondly, that they strongly object to Bill 17 and the impact it will have on them, I find it very problematic that we continue on in third reading without going back to Committee of the Whole, where we can have a more fulsome debate.

Now, I have tabled seven key pieces of correspondence that are representative of the workers in this sector and their perspective on this piece of Bill 17. Certainly, we heard during debate at Committee of the Whole that the minister said that the current arrangement is working and there have not been complaints. I really must stress that people, particularly in the graduate student and postdoctoral sector, were not complaining because they were anticipating being able to have their constitutionally protected rights to collectively bargain upheld once the timelines had passed, timelines that Bill 17 is now going to interfere with.

Certainly, some of the letters included: "Without proper consultation, the UCP Government has put our workers in a precarious situation. We deserve autonomy in the decision of who we choose to represent us." Other letters spoke to how "deeply troubled" they were with "recent assertions that post-secondary associations were consulted prior to the introduction of Section 2 of Bill 17," because, as we now know, they were not, that the legislation "being considered is a testament to the complete lack of consultation with those impacted." Certainly, several of the authors of these pieces of correspondence really wanted to flag that the "bill

was introduced during final exams and during the time when Graduate Student Associations are in the process of rolling over to a newly elected executive" and that the bill was introduced "during one of the busiest times of the year" for graduate students, again, I will repeat, Madam Speaker, after they had not been consulted in any way, shape, or form.

Now, I have tabled these seven pieces. I suspect that the minister may have received more than just those seven pieces, but I want to thank all those who wrote in and copied the Official Opposition so that we could make sure that this was put on the record. This correspondence was received during the constituency break, which I hope gave the minister ample time to review and potentially even reach out to these organizations.

Given how important this is and how seriously this impacts fundamentally important, constitutionally protected rights of freedom of association and to collectively bargain, I believe that this amendment, which would move us back to Committee of the Whole, is entirely appropriate and should be supported by all members, including the minister who has moved third reading and has moved this bill. I hope to hear from said minister, particularly given the divergence of opinions between what he has stated repeatedly through debate – and now we get into third reading – about how widely supported this section is with the evidence that it is not the case, particularly for graduate students and postdoctoral fellowship associations.

For that reason, I move this amendment. I look forward to hearing more of the debate on this particular piece. I encourage all members of this Assembly to support this amendment so that we do not pass Bill 17 in a form that will remove the rights from these workers, workers who deserve to be consulted, workers who deserve to have a government who respects their valuable contributions and is prepared to listen to their concerns.

With that, I will conclude my remarks, and I look forward to the debate. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

3:10

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to the debate? The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will address the amendment put forward by my hon. colleague, but I will do that in just a moment. I think it's interesting that they're now trying to slow down progress on this bill, which is strange because there was a convergence, strange bedfellows in politics perhaps, where we had two different sides of the aisle and two very different sides of the political spectrum within these two coalitions of the NDP and the Conservatives coming together on the amendment we saw in Committee of the Whole.

It's that amendment that I think is why this is so important that we not delay and why we move forward so quickly. I understand – and I'm happy to be corrected by members opposite – that from the labour-intensive, socialist point of view the concern was making sure that workers' rights are concerned and protected in this legislation, so the goal was to say that we need to expand the definition of who could be able to get bereavement leave.

This bill allows parents, particularly mothers who end up having a miscarriage or stillbirth, to be able to take a bereavement leave, and that's important. I agree with the members opposite that it is a basic right that they have to be able to mourn the loss of their children, to be able to recuperate after what is a very trying and difficult time in that family, mother and father's life. The truth is that without the dignity and respect that we show to our most vulnerable, I don't think we're a very strong society at all.

I appreciate that the members opposite come at it from a different perspective, theirs from the strong tradition of solidarity within labour union movements. I appreciate that, but my perspective is more animated instead by my deeply convicted pro-life belief that those stillborn and miscarried babies deserve to be recognized by those mothers. Those mothers have gone through a true and genuine loss, and when they lose that child, they need to grieve, and that is what bereavement is for, to grieve the loss of someone, and there is little more intimate a relationship than there is between a mother and a child in a womb. Every movement, every single moment that mother is aware of the caring, nurturing love that she has for that child in the womb. I think to recognize that miscarried and stillborn babies are valuable to that mother and for us as a society and a Legislature to pass legislation acknowledging that is the least that we need to do.

Life itself is valuable, intrinsically so, and there's not any of us in this Legislature, any law we can pass, that has the competency to change that. It is intrinsic in the nature of life. Madam Deputy Speaker, if any one of us has intrinsic dignity, every one of us might. It's true no matter where you come from. Happily today, sitting above me, we had representatives of Rwanda, and when they underwent the Tutsi genocide that happened – that life is valuable, intrinsically. No matter what tribe they come from, what part of the world they come from, no matter how old or young they are, no matter how sick or valuable they may or may not be to our society, no matter where they are, in a womb or out, that intrinsic dignity is real.

Human life is something that we must always cherish no matter the circumstances, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that is why I was so glad to see the amendment expand to include loss of pregnancy for any reason. That includes abortion. That includes children that were lost in abortion. I believe that those mothers should have that same opportunity for bereavement leave. Whatever they might do with it, I think it's important they have that opportunity. I believe every single life, no matter the cause of the loss of that pregnancy, is real. No matter the circumstance that led there, I think it's important that that opportunity for grief and bereavement is offered, if by any place, by this Chamber, that acknowledges the dignity of that life. We must. We must as legislators say that every life – if any one of us has intrinsic value, every one of us has that value.

I believe that this piece of legislation, as interesting as it might be, created these strange bedfellows that aren't naturally always aligned, especially on these kinds of issues. A socialist, labour union NDP Party along with strident conservatives who believe in the dignity of life such as myself and others, a diversity of views in my caucus, all came together to say that we must recognize this.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we cannot acknowledge the life of the stillborn and the miscarried without also acknowledging the intrinsic value of the miscarried and aborted babies. Those aborted babies are babies nonetheless. I believe that deeply.

That's why I'm so glad to see that the NDP as a caucus unanimously voted in favour of the amendment to protect that right and to acknowledge their existence as children that ought to be grieved, that this Legislature ought to acknowledge that bereavement extends not just to those inside our world today that live outside the womb but those in the womb as well. It is a deeply held conviction of mine that we must protect every single innocent life.

I know it's a fraught topic, Madam Deputy Speaker, but one that we must address and one that I feel compelled to put on the record today. That is my belief, and I believe – maybe I'm in a minority; I don't know – that thousands upon thousands of other Albertans will appreciate that as well. But I think the ones who appreciate it the most are not the ones driven by an ideology, not the ones informed

by a set of beliefs and who come to a place with an abstraction, but the ones who get to benefit day to day from this piece of legislation, that will recognize the value and dignity of all these children before they're born and also recognize the grief that mothers and parents need to go through when they lose a child.

I am proud to say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I will be voting in favour of the legislation. I will not be voting in favour of the amendment, which, I believe, the purpose of is to slow down the passing of this legislation. I believe this will be the most pro-life piece of legislation that I will ever have the chance to vote on in my life, probably the most pro-life piece of legislation this Chamber will pass, and I couldn't be more proud that we're going to do it, I believe, God willing, unanimously, on all sides of the aisle.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. First of all, let me thank the Member for Peace River for his comments. You know, he referred to us as unlikely bedfellows. Noting that we are coming up to Pride Month, I was entertaining the thought of being his bedfellow.

Mr. Williams: I'm married. I'm very flattered, but I'm married.

Mr. Schmidt: Oh. Anyway, we can't be held responsible for our thoughts, Madam Speaker, but it was an interesting picture that I didn't expect the Member for Peace River, of all of the members here in the House, to paint.

I wanted, unlike the Member for Peace River, to focus my comments on the actual amendment that is before us today, and that is to send this bill back to Committee of the Whole to reconsider the changes to the Labour Relations Code that are being proposed here.

Before I get into the reasons why we need to reconsider the changes, I want to provide the House with a little bit of historical perspective that I would have as the Minister of Advanced Education who brought forward the legislative changes that are being amended in this bill before us today. When I was Minister of Advanced Education, we inherited a unique labour relations model in the postsecondary system in Canada, one where academic staff were designated as academic staff by the boards of governors of the universities and colleges where they worked, with no possibility of appeal, one where academic staff were prohibited by legislation from going on strike, where binding arbitration was the only option for settling labour disputes. That was true for graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows had no recognition as employees whatsoever under the Labour Relations Code or the Post-secondary Learning Act or any other piece of legislation that affected the province of Alberta.

We recognized that this was unconstitutional, and we embarked on significant changes to the labour relations model in the academic sector to comply with the Constitution of the country, that allows for employees to freely associate in labour unions and to withdraw their labour if they see fit to do so and, conversely, to give employers the rights to lock out their employees if they saw fit to do so after exhausting all of the other legal channels, putting everybody in a right to strike or a right to lock out. I'm proud of the work that we did restoring those constitutional rights that had never been granted to academic workers in this province, and I'm very pleased to see that those labour relations changes have resulted in some strong negotiations and significant wins for faculty associations in the province of Alberta, all across the province.

3:20

I'm also particularly proud of the fact that we were the first jurisdiction in the country to freely recognize postdoctoral fellows as employees of universities. This was something that no other jurisdiction had done, and by doing so, we granted postdoctoral fellows the ability to form unions and to negotiate for better wages, better working conditions, and, really importantly, extended health benefits. That was something that was very important to postdoctoral fellows that I talked to when I was Minister of Advanced Education.

A lot of the postdoctoral fellows who work in our universities come from outside of the country, earn very little money, and have a really hard time covering those additional health expenses that crop up from time to time. I'm thinking of dental bills, medical bills, prescription drug costs, if you need to get an ambulance, for example. They didn't have the ability to pay for those things. But because our government was the first in the country to recognize postdoctoral fellows as employees, they had the right to bargain as a union for extended benefits, a significant advancement.

There is no shortage of labour exploitation in universities and colleges. By allowing postdoctoral fellows to form unions and negotiate under the Labour Relations Code, we significantly advanced workers' rights on campuses in Alberta. Now, part of the deal when we made these changes was to protect the exclusive bargaining rights of faculty associations, grad student associations, and postdoctoral fellow associations for a period of five years. Now, why did we do this, Madam Speaker? The reason was because none of these associations had any history or experience dealing with a traditional labour relations model, where people could strike or be locked out. They had no strike funds in place. They had no experience running a strike. We gave them a five-year period to effectively get their act together and prepare for a traditional labour relations model as it's practised in other jurisdictions in the province.

But at the very beginning all of those associations understood that once that five-year period was expired, their members would be able to freely choose who was their bargaining agent. That was designed to be an incentive for faculty associations, grad student associations, postdoctoral fellow associations to demonstrate to their members that they could effectively act as their bargaining agents, and if not, then those members would have the right to choose another bargaining agent. That was the deal. Everybody understood that at the time. Now, with these changes that the minister of labour is proposing, that deal has been rendered null and void.

Now, Madam Speaker, when I was Minister of Advanced Education, I was accused of running a plot on behalf of CUPE to turn over labour relations on campuses to that union in particular. Now, nothing was further from the truth, but I will say that larger labour unions have much more resources in terms of people on the ground and money in the bank to support smaller bargaining units in bargaining for better working conditions and wages and benefits. These smaller associations, particularly grad student associations and postdoctoral fellow associations, when they're small, are left at the mercy of the employer. They don't have the collective power to fight back against the potentially unreasonable demands that the employer may make of them during bargaining. So if they so choose, if they see that their employer is taking advantage of them, under the system that we promised them in 2017, when we introduced the legislation, they could choose as of 2022 a new bargaining agent to better represent them. Now that's being taken away from them.

You know, one of the documents that my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods tabled this afternoon was a letter from the postdoctoral fellows at the University of Lethbridge. They said that they represent 30 employees. Thirty employees. Well, these are employees who earn very little money, \$15 to \$20 an hour typically, and they often have a hard time making ends meet. What kind of strike fund can 30 employees who are earning \$15 an hour generate on their own? If an employer makes them fight hard for a good deal at the bargaining table and puts them in a position where their members want to go on strike, they won't have the power to fight back. So it's only fair that in these kinds of circumstances the postdoctoral fellows at the University of Lethbridge have the option of choosing a bigger union to better represent them, give them a fighting chance to bargain a fair deal for themselves.

This government loves to talk about fair deals. Why aren't they giving the postdoctoral fellows at the University of Lethbridge at least the courtesy of an invitation to consult on the changes? Maybe they're perfectly happy with their postdoctoral fellow association as it's constituted, but the minister of labour won't even let them have their voices be heard and is forcing them to stick with their existing association, with no chance of that being removed in the near future. It's absolutely not fair, and it's unconstitutional, Madam Speaker. I am certain that if any group were to challenge the constitutionality of this legislation once it's proclaimed, the Supreme Court would probably uphold the finding that it's unconstitutional.

That's why we are here to propose this amendment to send this part of the bill back to Committee of the Whole so that we can reconsider these changes and at least give the minister and the members of the House the opportunity to hear from the people who are being impacted by these changes to see if this is actually what they want and what additional tools they need to put themselves into stronger positions of bargaining with their employer.

Madam Speaker, it's quite clear to me that the minister made a mistake when he proposed these changes, and I think that the only proper thing to do is admit that he made a mistake, send this portion of the bill back to Committee of the Whole, allow members of the Legislature to hear from the people who are being impacted, and then make a decision on what the right path forward should be.

I urge all members to vote in favour of this amendment and reconsider this section of the bill. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will rise in support of this amendment and having the bill recommitted back to Committee of the Whole to remove section 2. Now, I appreciate the member speaking to the fact that he believes that this is a way to slow down this piece of legislation. It is not the case. In fact, the government could easily send this bill back to Committee of the Whole under this recommittal amendment, remove section 2, consult appropriately, proceed with the bill without section 2 in it, and we can all vote on it and move forward.

Then the pieces that the hon. members were concerned about, with the amendment that both the government and the opposition agreed on in regard to parental leave in relation to loss of pregnancy, would be dealt with. We would be able to support that. We would be able to move this bill forward with those pieces of the labour code in place to support the very concerns that the hon. member was speaking to while removing section 2 out of the piece of legislation and allowing the minister appropriate time to go back

to the seven or so associations that have written him in the last week and fix the legislation as they're requesting be done.

I don't think it's unreasonable to ask that this bill go back to Committee of the Whole, and in fact it would be in the best interests of the government to do so so that they can actually fix the very concerns that the minister is hearing.

3:30

It's not very common to see a group of associations come together and write the minister in such a quick period of time, at the capacity and at the level that this minister has received. Again, as my hon. colleague mentioned, we only received seven of those letters. We don't know if the minister actually has received more correspondence in regard to this section of the bill or not, so there may be more concerns being brought forward, in particular on section 2, that the minister needs to consider and look at with more detail and go back to those organizations and those associations and have those conversations.

But what this speaks to, again, is the very issue that this government continues to see themselves in, which is looking at bills, writing bills that speak to so many different sections that don't necessarily speak to each other. We see this with the red tape reduction legislation all the time, where this government will then introduce a section of a piece of a bill, they will make changes, and then all of a sudden realize that those changes that they have made now impact a whole bunch of other sections in other pieces of legislation that then now have to be amended or fixed because they create a problem over here.

Well, again, this government has done the same under Bill 17, moving and looking at a variety of labour-related codes and regulations, adjusting a whole bunch of pieces, and then realizing that they actually are not even correlated to each other: one is about the ability for bargaining and the right to association, the other piece of the bill is about parental leaves or loss-of-pregnancy leaves, yet they're in there together. Again, I think that what this minister needs to do is to acknowledge that maybe this was an error and that there is more consultation that needs to be done, bring the bill back into Committee of the Whole so that the section can be evaluated and removed.

Then we can all agree that the changes to the employment standards around loss of pregnancy for any reason can be adopted by both sides of this House. We fundamentally both agreed. When the amendment was introduced by the government in Committee of the Whole around pregnancy loss, it was agreed that that was something that we all supported. This actually wouldn't prevent the bill from potentially, because I will not determine the outcome of a vote in the House, moving forward by the end of today. It's an easy fix. You come back, you introduce an amendment, you remove the section, we vote on that, we move forward, go to third reading, decide what the outcome of that is, and done as dinner.

I disagree fundamentally with the government member that stood up and said that this is a tactic to slow things down. It's not. It's just this government's unwillingness to work collaboratively with the opposition on something that really should be fixed, that is very simplistic in the process of really just some parliamentary practice. It doesn't take very long. We're all skilled at being able to move into Committee of the Whole and rising and reporting and coming back and doing all of the things that we need to do. We could get this done today. So I think it's very important that the government really look at the opportunity that is being presented to them with the request to move into Committee of the Whole, to revert back. It gives the government the opportunity to introduce, make a change, continue on, and then the bill could potentially be dealt with by the end of today.

I think that we all agree that the loss-of-pregnancy component that is in this piece of legislation is something that we can all agree on, so of course we wouldn't want to prevent that from happening. We would want to encourage the bill to move forward, and we support that in happening. We believe that bereavement leave needs to be in place as soon as possible, so we fundamentally agree with what the government member was saying only a few minutes ago.

We disagree on section 2. I don't believe that the government was aware to what extent the issue was going to be for them when it was introduced into this House because, of course, as indicated by my colleague, most of the associations that were being impacted were in the middle of exams and were in the middle of doing a variety of different things when this piece of legislation was introduced.

I mean, we could say that maybe that is why the government introduced it when they introduced it, because they knew it was going to be a problem. Instead of choosing to engage and ensure the right to associate was protected, the government decided to do this at a time when people were distracted and the associations were distracted by the work that they do, so they wouldn't be able to be loud and push back on the government the way that they maybe normally would have. There's that component. That could have been the case. I mean, we can't necessarily always trust this government in what they do and why they do the things, and maybe this is an example of that. Or, giving the benefit of the doubt, the government just didn't have a clue what was going on because they didn't consult properly, and now there's a mistake.

Going back into Committee of the Whole: here's an opportunity. This is the opposition trying to help the government do something that makes sense, maybe save their bacon a little bit in regard to this. Bring it back, go into Committee of the Whole, look at section 2, make the changes. Decide what they want to do, whether it's remove section 2 altogether or amend it, which takes longer – but that's up to the government to do – and then we can proceed after it's dealt with. Now, again, I mean, I would be interested to see if the government is willing to do that. I would encourage them to do it, though. I think that at some point humility is best, and sometimes acknowledging that you made a mistake – whether you got caught in the mistake or not, it was a mistake.

Or be honest and stand up and say that there is a fundamental disagreement between the government and the opposition around the right to association, and the government doesn't agree with that; therefore, that was why this was done. If that's the case, the government could be honest and say that, too, but be honest either way. Be honest that you don't agree with the right to association. Be honest in that you slid this through when nobody was paying attention because we didn't really want to deal with it, or be honest and say: we made a mistake; we should probably bring it back and fix it.

It's all about honesty. It's all about showing Albertans that you can be humble and admit when you make a mistake. I would think that we're at a time where this government would like to maybe shift the direction that they've had in the past, and this would be a prime opportunity to do that. There's a little bit more humility, maybe, in this government, and this would be an opportunity to show that humility and acknowledge that mistakes were made, turn over a new leaf. Things are changing. Here's your opportunity to show us today, first day back, that things are different. Probably won't happen. You know, we like to believe that things can change, but we do know that past behaviour is a prediction of future behaviour. The likelihood of things changing is probably not going to happen the way that Albertans would like it to.

I will leave it at that. I will support this recommittal back to Committee of the Whole to support the government in trying to

make better decisions and to fix this mistake. I will leave it with them to decide whether or not they're willing to take that opportunity.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Happy to rise this afternoon, provide some additional comments, of course, with the amendment we have to recommit here to Committee of the Whole, a very sensible amendment given my comments when we were in Committee of the Whole and the changes that were being considered around the labour relations amendment. I know that a previous speaker had spoken about delaying the bill here and moving it forward, and I would remind members that during Committee of the Whole we took steps to try to separate some of that out, try to make changes around those labour relations amendments to try to save the government a lot of hassle, a lot of time, and probably a lot of money. I spoke at length and even quoted some of the federal regulations around individuals' freedom to associate, with their ability to be able to choose their own bargaining agent. This is a federal Supreme Court decision that is very, very clear. You are able to choose who you have bargain with you.

3:40

The problem with the language that's contained right now here in Bill 17 is that it goes against that. As somebody, again, who's been involved in the labour movement for a considerable amount of time, over two decades, dealing with contracts, dealing with my employer, dealing with other employers and their contracts and their language, I can tell you that this change violates that. It will be challenged, and you'll lose, and you're going to cost Albertans a bunch of money, kind of like you cost them a bunch of money betting on Trump, kind of like you cost them a bunch of money putting together a report that found no wrongdoing. I can go on and on.

Now, again, just to address some of the comments earlier around delaying the support of the House around pregnancy leave, I will admit that I feel the language could have been a little bit stronger. I'm kind of taking a little bit of an approach there where sometimes I can't always bargain the best language that I could get, but at least this was something. It was much better than nothing. It could have been better. But, see, if we'd divided these out so we could have quickly moved on that, we could have dealt with the language around the labour relations changes.

As my friend from Edmonton-Mill Woods tabled earlier, the documents from, you know, the Graduate Students' Association, postdoctoral associations very clearly stating that they didn't get proper consultation – my friend quoted this, and I'll redo it again. "I have not heard anyone out there who says that we need to upset the current arrangement."

If we look at what the current arrangement is right now, it was set to expire, thereby then falling in line with the federal guidelines on this. My friend from Edmonton-Gold Bar, who went at length through the history of how this came forward, offering, you know, the types of labour relations language that these associations have never had before – they've never had the ability until the Supreme Court ruling around strikes and things like that. Now all of a sudden they have to try to begin to understand what labour relations is, how bargaining works, creating language, give, take, all that fun stuff of bargaining. It was very purposely put in there, an expiry date giving them a short period of time to get their feet underneath them, at which point then they have to go forward, and if the associations, with the blessing of their members, decide they want to change their

bargaining agent, they can do so, just like every other Canadian is allowed to do in this country. They have that ability to do that.

Unfortunately, I'm sorry to say, this language around labour relations proposed in Bill 17, which is why we need to send it back to committee, violates that. It goes against it. You read the language. It's plain and simple. We can quickly go back to Committee of the Whole, give the minister time to read these letters that were tabled by our labour critic around the consultation process – none of them were consulted. None of them agree with the changes. I'm saving you a bunch of headache, saving you a bunch of time. I'm saving you a bunch of money. Again, this will be challenged. You'll lose. You'll cost Alberta taxpayers that money, because I'm certain it's not going to be coming out of your pockets.

So let's just save all of that headache, quickly move this back to Committee of the Whole – we can fix this; it's not a big deal – and then we can move forward when we've got language that we can support in its entirety in all of Bill 17. But this rhetoric around trying to slow things down? No; that doesn't hold water. We attempted to try to fix this earlier, and the government members ignored that.

Now that we have the proof, I'm hoping members opposite will reconsider. My friend from Edmonton-Manning said that we can fix this quickly. You won't get a lot of push-back. We can change the language so it doesn't violate a person's ability to the right of association and choosing their bargaining agent. Their choice, not ours. It's just that simple.

I'm hoping we will hear some backpedalling a little bit. This is a good amendment, to send it back to Committee of the Whole so we can move forward with a piece of legislation that will in its entirety help Albertans. Again, as I said, I wish the language around the parental leave was just a little bit stronger. I would have been more happy with that, but at least it's a starting point. Maybe in a future Legislature, Madam Speaker, we'll get a chance to make that even a little bit stronger and protect everybody's rights around that.

I will be supporting the amendment for it to go back to committee, and I look forward to hearing more from other members of this House.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to the amendment? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise, first of all, to speak, obviously, in favour of this recommittal amendment and to provide a couple of comments, first of all, as to process. There is no need to dilly-dally on this. We can simply send this piece of legislation back to committee real quick – we could probably do it before 4:30 – and take out the section in particular that deals with this matter in the Labour Statutes Amendment Act on that piece, specifically, with respect to being able to choose a bargaining agent for postdoctoral and other graduate students and other university staff. We can do that and send it back here into third. You know, if Parliamentary Counsel wants to have a look at it during the dinner break, that's fine. We can return at 7:30 and probably get this matter done and dusted by this evening. This is not difficult. We all are capable legislators, and where we fall down in our capabilities, we have Parliamentary Counsel to assist us.

There is no question that this can be done. It can be done expeditiously, and this attempt to use this specious reasoning that somehow, you know, this is frustrating the work of the Legislature is a completely inane assertion and ought to be withdrawn by the member who made it.

I am going to, first of all, begin with the words of a constituent of mine, Dr. Chelsea Matisz, who is the president of the University of Lethbridge Postdoctoral Fellows Association, who has written to the minister, and I know that the ULPA has also spoken to the

Minister of Advanced Education. I don't know if the two ministers have had any chance to talk about this.

Certainly, in our government, when we were making labour standards changes in response to the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour decision in which we affirmed the right, which had been affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada, for postdoctoral and other graduate students and academic staff more broadly to bargain collectively within legislation and removed the prohibitions on free and fair collective bargaining that that had heretofore existed in this province, the Minister of Advanced Education was very much involved in that process and very carefully consulted, which is why we ended up with this time-limited sort of period of time in which, by request, academic staff associations and others had said: you know, can we put the brakes on this for five years until we can figure out what this means for us and how we go about this process of freely and fairly choosing a bargaining agent?

3:50

This is a group of people who, of course, didn't really even know what that meant before that, and now they do. So, certainly, there is no question that we put that in place and that had we not had an expiration date on it, those associations would have had grounds to very, very quickly have that section of the act struck down because without that expiration date it is *prima facie* unconstitutional, which is exactly what we are about to do here. Legislatures ought not do things that are, on the face of it, a Charter violation, and in this case this is, on the face of it, a violation of our section 2(d) rights, as affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police decision of January 2015.

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

Back to Dr. Chelsea Matisz, who is a postdoctoral fellow in neuroscience. She is the mother of a child, as well, who is deaf. She is a neuroscientist who is tremendously committed to the community. She has also had to spend her time during her postdoctoral fellowship, which is an Alberta Innovates fellowship at the University of Lethbridge, advocating for the restoration of PUF funding because she doesn't have anything better to do, being a brain scientist and the mother of two young children, one of whom she has had to go to the wall advocating for within the school system and elsewhere given the amount of supports that have been taken away from that child.

Here we are, where Dr. Matisz has also written a letter saying, "[Look.] this amendment clearly violates the rights of our members to freely associate and choose their representation." They have 30 postdoctoral workers at the University of Lethbridge, many of whom are international, from other areas of Canada, working in research laboratories, and "on top of the production of knowledge that made us pursue academic work . . . [the] members are . . . under extreme pressure to mentor, publish papers, write grants, and teach."

Postdoctoral fellows are, by their very definition, working to further their careers, and they have to do that with a tremendous amount of pressure on them. Having representation is therefore critically important. They do not have time, in Chelsea's representations to me over the last little while, to play lawyer, as she says. She is a literal brain scientist. She has another profession to undertake. Now, Chelsea writes papers such as *Neuroinflammatory Remodeling of the Anterior Cingulate Cortex as a Key Driver of Mood Disorders in Gastrointestinal Disease and Disorders*. She does not have time to mess around in collective bargaining. She would like to pay her dues and have a bargaining agent that she has freely and fairly chosen, her along with the 30 others, to concern themselves with these matters.

Now, it's really important that these folks have representation. We have just seen the extent of that importance at the University of Lethbridge, with some seven, eight weeks of labour disruption in the city, where we had neighbours set against one another. We had the community that had wedges driven within it, all because of an incredible amount of cuts cascading down onto the community and leaving the board of governors in an extremely untenable position, leaving deans and others in extremely difficult positions as they've had to navigate \$20 million worth of cuts to a town of 100,000 people. The economic impact has been devastating.

This is yet another reason why I would prefer folks at the centre for neuroscience to continue to do their work given the amount of disruption that we have already seen to their research agenda, to graduate students' and undergraduate learning conditions, to our scientific labs' general output, and to the reputational damage that has been visited upon the University of Lethbridge by this government's short-sighted cuts, that are in fact getting in the way of our ability to produce scientific research in the public interest, as Dr. Matisz does.

Now, literally this afternoon we could pass a bill that, in fact, conforms to our section 2(d) Charter-guaranteed right of freedom of association. I'm going to remind the House that the courts provide the Legislature with a great deal of latitude. For example, the expiration date that we would have put on the original legislation of some five years: the courts would not have seen that as a substantial interference because, first of all, it was at the behest of the associations themselves, and, second of all, it was time-limited for specific reasons. The court has actually been really clear on this right to freely choose our bargaining agents because

section 2(d) [of the Charter] protects . . .

And I'm reading here from the Supreme Court decision

. . . three classes of activities: (1) the right to join with others and form associations; (2) the right to join with others in pursuit of other constitutional rights; and (3) the right to join with others to meet on more equal terms the power and strength of other groups or entities.

That is, in fact, how the right to collective bargaining has been interpreted by the courts.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, the right to collective bargaining is one that guarantees a process, not an outcome. This is why it is really important to understand that associations, in the first instance, asked us for that time-limited expiration and why now having that be an indefinite thing will constitute substantial interference in the exercise of people's Charter rights.

The degree of choice required by the Charter reading from the court's decision

for collective bargaining purposes is one that enables employees to have effective input into the selection of the collective goals to be advanced by their association.

This does not.

Moreover, accountability to the members of the association plays an important role . . . A scheme that holds representatives accountable to the employees who chose them ensures that the association works towards the purposes for which the employees joined together.

They have to be able to choose those purposes. Now, the court writes that the industry culture and workplace necessarily conditions what is required to permit meaningful collective bargaining.

Whatever the labour relations model, the Charter does not permit choice and independence to be eroded such that there is substantial interference with a meaningful process.

Now, here in this legislation, as it was in the court's decision in January '15 on the RCMP members' interference in their ability to choose their bargaining agent, this is not in this piece of legislation "a case of a complete denial of the constitutional right to associate." In this legislation, as well, workers have the right to be part of an association; it is just this particular association. That is exactly the prohibition that the court strikes down in January 2015. "Not only are members represented by an organization they did not choose . . . they must work within a structure that is part of the management organization." That is what was struck down by the courts some – well, pretty well seven years ago.

So we ought not do things that we know are wrong, like, just generally in life, but also the courts have taken a very, very dim view of Legislatures who serially undertake these kinds of actions, particularly as they concern collective bargaining. In B.C. they did this a couple of times with interference in teachers' negotiations over the course of the Christy Clark government. They brought in some legislation that was clearly struck down over a period of years. They came back in and introduced the very same legislation, which very, very quickly rose through the appeal processes, and the Supreme Court struck it down in, like, two weeks or something. It was really, really quick. They said in there that Legislatures should not do this. So that's where we find ourselves now, where a Legislature is doing exactly this.

I'm going to put it on the record because when this goes to its inevitable constitutional challenge, the *Hansard* will be read by the members of the court, that this government was warned that they are doing something that is prima facie unconstitutional, and they barrelled forward with it anyway. Except what they could do is take this piece out right now and refer it back to Committee of the Whole, solve the problem – bang; done – pass the legislation, and we don't have to go through all of that headache.

And Dr. Chelsea Matisz can get back to being the brain scientist that she's good at, not having to write grouchy letters to a labour minister. This is a complete waste of her time. She should be parenting. She should be publishing articles. She should be restoring the reputation at the University of Lethbridge so we can attract more people like Dr. Chelsea Matisz to an absolutely amazing centre for neuroscience, where research and science in the public interest is happening every day that advances what we know about ourselves and about the world around us. That is what we should be doing with our time in this Legislature. I know that the Minister of Advanced Education has heard that because I told him, and I know that the minister of labour has heard these messages because those letters were tabled and he received them.

4:00

Now it's up to the government to do the right thing. They can write back to Dr. Matisz and say, "No; actually, we prefer that you waste your time," or they can say, "Yeah; absolutely, we pulled this section because it was poorly conceived." That is fine. We've already done that in this Legislature once with the electricity storage bill that came in last fall, that stakeholders didn't like. It was pulled, and it was substantially improved, and it sailed through this House, and we voted in favour of it. We can do that again, or we can persist in this breathtaking hubris and arrogance that is characteristic of this government and this front bench in particular and that has led to its catastrophic and historic comeuppance that was just delivered last week. I guess we can persist in that. See how it goes.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill, and I'm quite happy to follow the extremely well-reasoned arguments from the Member for Lethbridge-West, who has outlined very clearly that the government – if they proceed with the bill as it is in its current state, it is going to be found ultimately to be unconstitutional on a matter which has been before the Supreme Court no less than a half dozen times and had clearly been determined in this country as being a fundamental right, to choose your own representation. We can see here that this government is failing to do this. The argument that they gave for failing to deal with this issue is that they had not heard any complaints. In fact, the minister at one point said in the House, quote: let me confirm that again; there has not been a single e-mail or letter on this particular issue. You know, we were a bit surprised to hear that because, of course, we don't know what letters arrive in the minister's office, yet we've been hearing fairly regularly from organizations that they were concerned about this.

I know that it surprised me, too, because initially when I spoke to this in the House, I said that I hadn't heard some, and then subsequently because I had put that out there, people had gotten back to me and said: no; there are concerns. So I know that people are listening, I know that people are responding, and I can't imagine that they only responded to me and not to the minister.

Subsequently, we learned over this weekend that there were many people who wrote letters to this minister addressing exactly the same issue that had been addressed to me. We know that the critic for labour from the opposition side of the House, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, has actually received a number of carbon copies of letters that were sent to the minister and was able to even, just today, file seven letters that came from organizations such as members of the bargaining units at the University of Calgary, the University of Alberta, the University of Lethbridge, and Athabasca University.

We know that the minister may not have heard something initially about this, as I had not, but we know that subsequently there has been a significant number of people that have been coming forward and saying that this needs to be addressed and expressing their concerns and putting those concerns in writing, as apparently required by the minister.

You know, the minister's arguments for not making changes to this section of the bill certainly have been demonstrated to not be based on substantive truth. As such, it is really requisite upon this minister to go back and correct themselves, as, in fact, I have done on this particular bill, initially saying that I hadn't heard anything, but now I'm telling you that I have. That's exactly what the minister should do, should just follow the lead here on this side of the House and go back and refer this bill to the Committee of the Whole, only so that one section of this bill can be withdrawn to avoid ultimate potential constitutional challenges at the Supreme Court on this particular issue. Seems like a pretty simple thing to do.

Now, I know, of course, that some members on the government side of the House have complained that this somehow delays the legislation. Again, we've seen this sort of false narrative being presented here in this House before. Taking the time in the House to actually review a bill does not actually change the ultimate implementation of the bill in the long run. These things don't happen immediately on the day on which they're discussed. There is a process that takes a while, so putting it back into committee, having committee remove one section, and then going back to the vote: we could even do that in one day, today. It would literally make no change in terms of the day that this bill came into effect.

We've seen this kind of somewhat deceitful argument being presented by the government in the past. We know with regard to the government's attempt to subvert democracy in this House by

forcing the bill discussing the rebates for utilities through in one day without proper consideration for the various three stages, four stages including the Committee of the Whole, in the House, trying to push all that through in the same day, and of course their argument was that somehow the opposition was delaying those rebates. But in truth, anybody watching can tell that even though we didn't agree to that immediate pushing through the House on that particular day, they got through that bill within a matter of days, and it still has not come into effect some weeks later. So they're arguing that we delayed something that they haven't actually done anything with after they got it passed.

Now, even in the House today the Premier was asked about a date on which those rebates will be put out, and in fact the Premier was unable to give us a date. He gave us the classic line of in due time. I think that that tells us that when the government is saying that we are delaying something here in the House, it is not, in fact, a legitimate argument and it does not actually make a difference in terms of the implementation of the actual contents of the bill. It simply is a change in terms of the processes here in this House.

It's quite discouraging to see the government raise yet again these false arguments in which they simply do not want to hear from people in the province of Alberta, in this case people who are represented by these kinds of bargaining committees at places like the University of Alberta, University of Lethbridge, University of Calgary, and Athabasca University. The government is simply saying: we are going to pretend that there is a problem that does not exist in order to not hear you. You know, this seems to be the classic issue here. The government has routinely throughout their time in government really been loath to be open to democratic processes, in fact, have made a number of attempts to be seriously undemocratic in their administration of the business of this House.

I mean, we are still the only place in the country where the government has designed a process for, essentially, the elimination of all bills coming from the opposition side of the House. Everywhere else in Canada, including the House of Commons, opposition members can bring bills forward to the House of Commons. But in this House the government designed this very undemocratic process in which they refuse to see a bill in the House until it has gone to a committee, which they control, and then in the committee they have stopped 100 per cent of the opposition bills from moving forward and have proceeded with 100 per cent with the government-side bills. So we clearly know that they are trying to subvert democracy in this process. It has nothing to do with the efficiency of the House or anything else. It has to do statistically, quite demonstrably – they are using this to actually stop the democratic process that has been part of the Westminster system for many hundreds of years.

4:10

That just seems to be the pattern here with this government, that they don't actually support democratic processes and continually try to bring new procedures into the House in order to subvert democracy. Of course, we've seen this in terms of the number of times this government has brought in closure, which is considerably higher than any other government previously. We see this in terms of trying to, you know, essentially mislead the public by saying that a delay of discussing a bill in the House will actually delay its implementation when indeed that's not true.

I really think the government should take this opportunity to for once just stand on the side of democracy and to actually allow a discussion in the House to occur for the sake of the people of the province of Alberta. They don't even have to agree with things in the end. They can say they disagree, but they should allow democracy to occur. This is something that this government has

been essentially against since the time that they came in. You know, we certainly see this here in the House, and we certainly see that they struggle with democracy on their own side in their own private business. We get very discouraged when we see these kinds of things going on. We get discouraged when we have a Premier that's still under investigation by the RCMP for their behaviour in what should have been a democratic process in terms of getting elected.

It's really too bad because there's much about this bill that we actually would like to support. I know that there was a speaker, the Member for Peace River, who stood up to talk about this amendment and then, of course, didn't speak about the topic of the amendment at all but talked about some of the other parts of the bill that we are fully supportive of. You know, I want to say that moving this back into committee is not because we are against those portions of the bill. We would love to have separated out these pieces so that we could easily support the good things that are coming out of this bill. We certainly would love to support the sections with regard to pregnancy leave and bereavement.

I think it's very important that we recognize that this is a significant shift in terms of acknowledging the suffering of people that have gone through often very traumatic kinds of situations and the need for them to be able to be given time to appropriately grieve. We heard some very good speeches on both sides of the House about grieving and the process of grieving and the process of, you know, having to say goodbye to a family member in the case of a terminated pregnancy for whatever cause. We know that there is consent. This government could go back to the Committee of the Whole, get rid of the egregious parts, the antidemocratic, anticonstitutional parts of the bill, and move on with the good pieces that we obviously have unanimous consent on, which is something that, of course, members of the public are constantly asking us to do here in this House, and that is to work together to provide consent on both sides of the House for a piece of bill. Yet when we try to do that, the government does everything possible to try to undermine us and to stop us from actually contributing to the democratic process here in this House.

I find it very discouraging that we find ourselves yet in this place again with a government that does not wish to engage in the processes that we are all sent in this House to do on behalf of our citizens, and that is to bring ideas forward, to debate those ideas, and to use those ideas to actually inform policy in this House. It's just discouraging to see that the government has decided that they don't wish to have the Westminster system used in its effective way in Alberta like it is being used across the rest of Canada. You know, I think people in the public should come to realize that there have been numerous examples of this government acting in ways which are largely undemocratic, refusing to allow witnesses from the opposition to appear in committee, refusing in committee to allow bills to enter into the House, and then refusing in the House for us to debate all the sections of the bill. What this government would like to do is just be able to come up with its own ideas, ignore the House, and implement those ideas without any kind of a back-and-forth, democratic, opposition-based process, which is not what a democracy is. By its very definition, a democracy requires that you have the ability for voices that are opposed to government policy to be heard, and this government is just choosing to not do that on a regular basis.

I think it would be nice to see the government take an opportunity to come back to the House. You know, it would only take a short period of time here in this House. We could stop this constant request from our side to do this right now. We could go back into committee. We could have that piece finished by 6 o'clock. We

could have legal review done over the dinner hour, and then we could come back into this House later this evening to pass this bill.

You know, it's not a difficult thing to do. It's only the right thing to do.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to the amendment before us, put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, again, recognizing that "Bill 17, Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, be not now read a third time but that it be recommitted to the Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering section 2."

I have had the opportunity to speak to Bill 17, I think likely in second reading, potentially, and I spent the majority if not all of that time discussing the piece around bereavement in this legislation. We again did hear a member of the government speak to that piece this afternoon. I don't plan to reflect on those comments too much other than just thanking the House for their indulgence and the opportunity to speak to some things that are very personal to myself but also again pointing out that the member of government stood up on this amendment and talked about the importance of these changes to bereavement.

I respect and understand where that member was coming from, but the fact is that we have two quite separate issues on the table within Bill 17. Specifically to the changes that we're seeing around freedom of association and the Labour Statutes Amendment Act changes, there are some major concerns that deserve to be addressed, and many organizations that have come forward – and those documents have been tabled, again, as previous members have stated. These associations, whether they're graduate student associations, faculty associations, postdoctoral fellow associations, are raising red flags that this government, first of all, is not respecting the, you know, constitutionally and Supreme Court protected idea of freedom of association but, above that, has not taken the time to consult with these associations through the process, which has left them with so many questions. At the end of the day, they just want the opportunity for fair representation and the opportunity to choose a bargaining agent of their choice.

When we look at some of the comments that have been made, specifically, I believe, from documents that were sent to the Minister of Advanced Education – and, of course, the opposition was included on those documents – the Postdoctoral Fellows Association of the U of A had raised concerns about high turnover, which is quite natural in these situations. From one to four years we'll see many of these people come and go, and they were raising concerns that it makes it really hard to establish a long-term association, I guess, or establish what often needs to be a large conversation that carries on for many years. They, in their documents that they sent, again pointed out the fact that these organizations often need aid from larger, established organizations, whether it's one union or another.

I think it's important that we reflect on some of the comments that have been made, and I will go over some of those, as previous members have. When we are talking about ensuring a sustainable path forward for these associations and their ability to freely associate and also just have their voices heard at the bargaining table and by this government specifically, Madam Speaker, this government has got it wrong, and that is very clear by some of the comments that have been made.

4:20

Looking at the position put forward by the president of the Athabasca University Faculty Association in their communications with the minister, specifically to the comments that the Minister of Labour and Immigration made about how the government has done such a great job of consulting, the president made it very clear that the Athabasca University Faculty Association was not consulted, you know, prior to this legislation coming forward or through the process at all.

That is a consistent message that has been sent again and again to this government, that they don't feel like they've been consulted. When we're looking at the graduate bargaining team from the University of Lethbridge, straight from the letter: "This is a clear infringement of our right to choose representation. Further, this decision is massively out of touch with the needs of, and resources available to, graduate student workers."

I don't think that these associations could be more clear that the government is going down the wrong path, Madam Speaker. Again, from the standpoint of freedom of association, from the standpoint of supporting our postsecondary institutions and graduates and people who are looking to be represented by these organizations, the fact is that again and again what we're seeing consistently from these associations is that this government has not listened to them and should put the brakes on this legislation.

Now, again, as we've heard from many members in the opposition here, we are ready and willing to go back to Committee of the Whole, take the time to get this right. Madam Speaker, we don't need a lot of time. There are some simple ways that we can get this right, move this legislation forward, and pass it so that we are supporting Albertans with the, you know, expansion of bereavement that is being considered through this legislation. The fact is that with how it's written right now, there are concerns.

Again, when we look at the documents that were put forward by students from the University of Alberta, they're, again, concerned about the lack of consultation, the need for freedom of association. There are just so many things that need to be dealt with regarding this legislation and the proposals being put forward that we need to pause this, go back to Committee of the Whole, hear some of the voices that are so desperately asking for this government to listen to them, and ensure that the legislation that is passed, if passed, is going to, first of all, support the associations across this province who are depending on clear, straightforward legislation that is protecting their constitutional right to freedom of association and, again, also ensuring that it is within constitutional parameters.

We've heard many times the discussions about the Mounted Police Association of Ontario versus Canada and the findings of that Supreme Court ruling. Unfortunately, what this government has put forward through this legislation is likely to cause some issues if it were to be challenged. When we are considering legislation before this House, I think that we should be ensuring to the best of our ability that it is going to hold up, that it is constitutional, that it is supporting, in this case, the postsecondary graduates and these associations that are regulated by this legislation. Unfortunately, at this time it doesn't seem to be the case.

We have given opportunities for this government in previous readings of this legislation to get this right. We, unfortunately, haven't been taken up on that offer up to this point, Madam Speaker, but we still have a chance here by supporting that this bill not now be read a third time but that it be recommitted to the Committee of the Whole for the purpose of reconsidering section 2.

With that, again, I appreciate all the comments that have been made by the opposition here this afternoon. I've learned a lot, and I'm sure many members have.

With that, I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to the amendment?
The hon. Member for Edmonton-North West.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to say a couple of last words on this. You know, as I analyze what is happening with Bill 17, I can see once again that this UCP government generally and this Justice minister are trying to be too clever by half and trying to set up a political situation rather than actually dealing with the issues at hand. The two issues are separate but sort of related. They're both labour issues. One, of course, is in regard to bereavement and pregnancy loss. I think that we amended this element of this bill quite well. I actually was surprised. It turned out to be an effort from both sides that bore some pretty good legislation.

Then, you know, with this other part, in regard to postsecondary workers choosing their labour representation, their union representation – again, I know that the Justice minister reached out, just like I was doing in my job as the postsecondary Official Opposition critic, to faculty associations and so forth. There were some issues that needed to be worked through, right? A lot of faculties around the province quite literally had little or no representation for a long time, and their faculty associations were not fully functioning as unions.

Indeed, we never saw a strike at all in the history of the province from faculty until Concordia University had labour action in January and I believe – was it February for the University of Lethbridge, in close succession? These things were historic, and of course they were directly connected to historic cuts by this UCP government in our postsecondary operating grants, more than \$690 million over three budgets. It was a generational and unprecedented loss of funding for our universities and colleges and polytechnics at the very time that we needed them the most, quite frankly, to help diversify our economy, to help to train and to retain a whole new generation of young people coming through from high school, and to offer retraining and upgrading and diversifying of our workforce and to build citizenship as well.

I mean, Madam Speaker, the essence of a good life and of a good society is for us to understand each other and to understand the world around us. That's what universities and polytechnics and colleges do. So all of that – the rug was pulled out from under them, with unprecedented generational cuts to postsecondaries. And some faculties said: "Hey, you know, we need to buttress our – we need to protect ourselves. We need to protect the faculties that we've built – right? – the people we've attracted from around the world, and we need to make sure that we fight back." We saw the beginnings of that with Concordia University and the University of Lethbridge as well.

Anyway, you know, the Justice minister – or the labour minister, I guess, he is now, right? People have a lot of changes over there with the ministries and so forth. You've got to keep a little running tab book. Apparently, he's the labour minister now. He thought that, well, he could pull something clever off by pairing this other legislation around bereavement with faculties choosing their labour representation. But they messed that up, too. They did not read exactly what was going on. They failed to consult people around the province, and then they wrote legislation which was fundamentally faulty and excluded postdocs and other sessional people entirely from the legislation. Even the people that initially said – and I heard the same stories from different faculty associations around the province, who said: yeah, can you maybe change this a little bit? They don't agree with it either because they did such a

poor job of this element of Bill 17 in excluding whole sections of the labour force in postsecondary education and so forth.

The whole thing just isn't working, right? The house of cards, which is too clever by half, I mean, seems to be a fatal flaw of not just this labour minister but this whole government, always trying to game everything all the time. I mean, that seems to be their, you know, default position. Rather than governing, they constantly try to game people, game one against the other, play these things. You know what? It doesn't work.

The air just went out of the balloon last week, and, you know, it seems like quite a sad crowd over there. I mentioned to our caucus meeting at lunch today that rather than looking like the government on the opposite side, it looks like a bunch of people waiting for a domestic flight over there somehow – right? – in the waiting room of the airport, looking at their watches, you know, and looking at the roof or whatever. So I guess there's always cosmic justice in this. If you try to game people all the time or some of the time, then people will realize that you can't be trusted all of the time.

4:30

Anyway, it's a good idea to go back to committee on this thing. We're trying our best to help – again, this seems to be a theme of the day – this government build legislation that, you know, we can be proud of. I mean, there are lots of elements in this bill that are really important. I think that we could work with it if we make some tweaks, bring it back to committee, like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, our House leader, had suggested. I can see kind of the raw material of something we can work with, this Bill 17, in general. Those are my last thoughts on this recommittal.

You don't see recommitments too often, actually. It's kind of an interesting parliamentary procedure, and it's a clever one. Let's go for it. Let's use it. I encourage everyone to vote for it. I guess I shouldn't have said that everybody looks like they're waiting for a plane over there. We need you to vote for this thing. Recommittal: let's do it together; let's do it now.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate on the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment REC1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:32 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

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|----------|----------|---------------|
| Carson | Nielsen | Schmidt |
| Eggen | Phillips | Sigurdson, L. |
| Feehan | Sabir | Sweet |
| Goehring | | |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|--------------------|------------|-----------------|
| Aheer | Guthrie | Panda |
| Allard | Hanson | Reid |
| Armstrong-Homeniuk | Jones | Rutherford |
| Copping | LaGrange | Savage |
| Dreeshen | Long | Sawhney |
| Fir | Luan | Schow |
| Frey | McIver | Sigurdson, R.J. |
| Getson | Nicolaides | Toews |

| | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Glubish Gotfried | Nixon, Jeremy Orr | Wilson Yaseen |
| Totals: | For – 10 | Against – 30 |

[Motion on amendment REC1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: We are back on Bill 17 in third reading. Are there speakers?

Seeing none, I will call the question on third reading of Bill 17, the Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

4:50

Bill 11 Continuing Care Act

The Chair: This is Bill 11's first time in Committee of the Whole. Are there any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to join the debate in Committee of the Whole on Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. Certainly, you know, we in opposition were looking forward very much to this bill coming forward, because the pandemic shone a very bright light on our continuing care system in Alberta, and it did show some pretty disturbing information to us during COVID.

This was, I think, a significant opportunity for the government to actually move quickly and responsibly to make sure that residents of continuing care facilities across our province were supported and protected, because there were a lot of things that didn't go well during COVID, you know, in Alberta. According to the National Institute on Ageing we had the most outbreaks in facilities across our province of any province in Canada. Of course, that's nothing to be proud of. In fact, that's something that is a deep concern. Those outbreaks led to many residents of continuing care contracting COVID, and over 1,600 residents of continuing care facilities in our province died.

That is a great tragedy. Many of those deaths were preventable. Not all of them, but many of them were. We know that they were spread in facilities a lot of times by the very people who were working to support the residents of continuing care facilities, and there are a whole bunch of reasons for that. Certainly, many of the facilities were very ill-equipped to deal with a pandemic. They didn't know what to do. Because of the structure of our continuing care system in Alberta, you know, a large number of facilities are private, for-profit. We know that there is a tremendous amount of financialization in the sector, which means that these facilities are really seen by owners and shareholders as wealth-generating businesses. It's really about the real estate. It's about increasing their investments, being able to pay dividends to shareholders. It's not, sadly, about what it should be about. It's not about service to residents of continuing care facilities. As I said, COVID shone the light on this very brightly.

How do these private facilities, these facilities that are really operating to create profit for their shareholders, make those profits

for them? How do they make sure that that is the goal of it? One of the ways is, sadly, very much to not hire full-time staff. Oftentimes the staff – I would call them precarious. These are precarious workers. They're often vulnerable themselves, and they aren't given full-time jobs. They're only given part-time jobs, often with no benefits, so that they can keep the costs low for staffing.

Consequently, sometimes they work at more than one facility. Maybe they work in a fast-food industry. These are low-wage workers. These are oftentimes racialized people, mostly women, newcomers to our country. You know, English is oftentimes their second language. So these are workers who are often pretty vulnerable themselves, and throughout the pandemic many of them were afraid of even going into work because of the impact it would have on their families. There was just a myriad of issues.

COVID really taught us the importance of having full-time staff with benefits who had support. This is not work that is unskilled. We need to have highly skilled, trained people in these positions. I mean, they're caring for our parents. Certainly, both my parents are in different continuing care facilities. My father has pretty profound dementia, so he's in a secure unit. My mom is in, well, a lodge up in the town I grew up in, in Peace River country. You know, these are our family members, who we want to be cared for.

We were hoping with Bill 11 that that actually was the intent of this bill also, but what we found is that it is framework legislation that really doesn't give us a lot of information. You know, we were hopeful. I mean, it's been quite a bit of time since the facility-based continuing care review was completed. The government did do consultation, and they put together a report, but it's been over a year since that report came out, and now finally this legislation has come out. But guess what the legislation says. The legislation says: "We're not actually going to give you any details that we understand would make the situation better, that we heard from Albertans. We're leaving that all to regulations. Those regulations are going to come out in the spring of 2023."

So we're still waiting. We're still waiting, and people are still in a vulnerable situation in our continuing care system. Thankfully, you know, many people have been vaccinated, of course. Frail, fragile seniors who, of course, weren't vaccinated at the outset because we didn't have a vaccine for COVID-19: many of them did lose their lives. But certainly both my parents have three vaccines each. I have three vaccines, and I think they may be in line for the fourth one, actually.

As I said, sadly, 1,600 people did die in continuing care at the outset, and a lot of it was because of the way these continuing care facilities are run, where profit is the motive. In having staff only on a part-time basis with no benefits, working at many facilities so that they could cobble together some kind of full-time work to make ends meet so that they could care for their own families, sadly, many of them did transmit COVID from one facility to another, and then many residents of continuing care facilities did lose their lives because of that.

We were hoping this legislation would, you know, take bold action and take control of the situation and really address some of the issues that I'm just talking about. Certainly, we know that the facility-based continuing care review said that we actually need 6,000 – 6,000 – more staff in our continuing care system. What's happening with supporting that? What are the postsecondaries doing? What's the government's plan around that? I mean, creating 6,000 more workers is not a simple thing to do, but from their own report we know that many more staff are needed.

We know that we need improved working conditions so that people are supported in their work. You know, sadly, a lot of these staff aren't necessarily – they may be new to Canada. They're not super confident about how the labour system works in Canada.

They may not speak up about their concerns, and then they have such a large number of residents to support, and it's overwhelming for them.

We know that in continuing care facilities, I mean, that is a key thing. Our staff are so important because they are supporting our loved ones to dress themselves, toileting them, helping them in and out of bed, you know, very intimate work.

Certainly, during the time of COVID, when everybody is masked, that can be confusing and just pretty challenging. They have all these new protocols to follow because of COVID, and then that's just an extra burden on the worker without much support. A lot of times family members would help out, but of course the facilities were closed oftentimes to family members coming in. Many times family members would take on responsibilities for feeding their loved ones, helping them with the day-to-day, and certainly just the connection, the social connection.

5:00

That's a difficult thing for the workers, to be able to have that kind of time, to be able to support people. They have so many more people to support, and they have to hurry up. You know, it's very difficult to create a relationship, to create trust with the residents when there's all that kind of pressure. As I said, oftentimes they're just part-time workers, so they have to go to another job. So, yeah, everything is rush, rush.

Improving working conditions to make sure that they have the support they need: that's another recommendation from the facility-based continuing care review that could have been fleshed out more. What does that exactly mean? What does the government think needs to be improved? Certainly, we know – and we've heard this; this is something that I certainly heard a lot when I was Minister of Seniors and Housing, too – that we do need increased full-time staff. We need staff that have stable, full-time, permanent jobs. They need to be supported in that so that they cannot be worried about, you know, not having benefits or rushing to another job, whether it's within the industry or in another industry, and just be able to have that support of full-time benefits. That's also very important because these staff are crucial to the well functioning of any kind of continuing care facility.

Then the fourth recommendation is to increase the amount of home care provided. That's also a very important piece of this, to make sure that people are supported with home care and then also giving more specifics about service to people in continuing care. Of course, the recommendation that I've heard is 4.1 hours a day that staff would support them.

We were hoping for some specificity in this bill regarding some of those recommendations that came out of the facility-based continuing care review. Certainly, you know, I have no issues with any of those recommendations. Sadly, the bill itself does not articulate any of that, and I guess that's sort of a disappointment because I think we need change now. There are still challenges in our continuing care system. They haven't been alleviated. Thankfully, because of vaccination, things have calmed down in those centres, but I think the staff are still precarious.

Certainly, the for-profit model, that whole financialization of the sector continues to be a significant concern for us here in the Official Opposition. We know from many research studies, in terms of positive outcomes for residents, that public and nonprofit facilities are much superior to private facilities. So, you know, with the large number of private facilities, the for-profit motive, it's really a concern that that wasn't addressed more by this government.

We certainly know that, you know, the federal government did give money to these private agencies to support the facilities and

support workers. It came sort of through the provincial government, and there were some challenges with the provincial government, of course, getting that money out the door so that people could be supported. But we also know, too, these private operators weren't being responsible about what that money was intended for. Of course, it was to support staff, to support the residents in a very difficult time. Some of those independent private operators – guess what? – took that money and gave it to shareholders. They gave dividends to them during this time of COVID. So, I mean, that is just flagrantly clear, that with the private operators the goal isn't about seniors' care. The goal is about profit, making sure their shareholders get money. That money: the intention absolutely was to support residents in continuing care facilities and certainly support staff in them. That's very distressing for me, for sure.

I guess some of the other concerns are that, as I said, Bill 11 – we were really hoping that this legislation would take a hold of the issues that we saw really illuminated through COVID-19 and address them. You know, the UCP said, "Yes, it's coming; we're doing that" even though they sort of dragged their feet after the report. More than a year ago it was brought out, the facility-based continuing care review. But I guess it's just another demonstration, very sadly, that we really can't trust the UCP. I mean, they say that things are coming, they say that they're going to revamp the system, but unfortunately that's not really what happened.

You know, there are so many other examples of this that I find distressing. I mean, just recently the CEO of AHS was fired by the UCP. Certainly, we understand that it's to expedite the privatization of health care in Alberta, because she was standing up for public health care, which is where we stand on that issue also, and certainly the whole NDP caucus knows the importance of public health care and wouldn't be doing the many things to dismantle our public health system that the UCP is doing.

Another thing that the UCP did some time ago now is that they took grieving families' right to justice away in Bill 70, the COVID-19 Related Measures Act, so loved ones of residents in continuing care facilities can no longer, you know, go to the court system for justice when they feel like their loved ones hadn't been cared for. Certainly, I remember very well that people couldn't see their loved ones and were frustrated by the decisions of many facilities, and many people died in these facilities. We heard stories of loved ones being left for extended periods of time in their own waste. Certainly, some people died – you know, these were preventable deaths – because of the wide spread of COVID-19 in the facilities.

They wanted justice. They wanted to be able to take these private operators to court, but the UCP decided, "No; we're going to protect these big privates," and they took away the citizens of Alberta's rights to seek justice through the court. I mean, that's another situation where you can't really trust the UCP. It's taking away Albertans' rights even though there is some egregious issue going on. So many grieving families reached out to me during that time, and, you know, it was abhorrent that they weren't given that kind of justice.

I already had mentioned that private operators took COVID funding for shareholders and not to support residents, so, again, that profit motive is so clear.

You know, it goes beyond just health care. Some of the things that we really can't trust this government regarding – certainly, the billions of dollars that were thrown away on a nonexistent pipeline: it was very clear when President Biden said in his campaign that he would not be supporting the pipeline, but regardless, like, money was thrown to a nonexistent pipeline. So that's also a question of competence, a question of trust of this government.

Certainly, we know the fiasco of the energy war room, the waste of millions of dollars, really: for what purpose? I mean, there's just been scandal after scandal coming out of there.

Something that is particularly upsetting to me is that the UCP fired the Seniors Advocate. I mean, I think that especially during COVID the Seniors Advocate and her office would have been very helpful to residents of continuing care facilities because that's the role of the advocate, to support seniors in their . . .

5:10

The Chair: Are there others to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. I would like to thank the hon. member for her very important remarks regarding this piece of legislation. I think that she's got some incredible outreach when it comes to working with seniors. This was her ministry, and I know that many continue to go to her with concerns. There's definitely been no inability to advocate on their behalf, so when I hear the member talk about the concerns that have been raised and are simply not addressed in this piece of legislation, you know, I really take that to heart because I'm hearing a lot of similar concerns.

When we talk about staffing in long-term continuing care facilities, I think that's one of the biggest concerns that I hear from staff, from residents and family members of those that live in these homes. I think that when we talk about the care of seniors, we need to look at what is deserving. I think that having a place where people are stable in their employment, they have continuity of care. They have confidence in the services that they're providing. It simply creates a working space that's supportive of the staff, which then, in turn, has an incredible impact on the individuals that they're working with.

To be clear, they're working with them in their homes. This is where seniors live. It's not an organization that they attend weekly. This is their everyday home, and unfortunately we're seeing staffing issues that are not considering the type of work that these individuals are being asked to do. Like the member had acknowledged, there are many that are without full-time contracts. We live in a place where full-time employment is a requirement in order to be able to pay your bills, and if you can't achieve full-time hours in one space, you're often working multiple jobs, which creates an impact on not just the staff but the individuals that they are providing care to.

I know my experience working in group care: I had the incredible privilege to work with youth in their home. That was the first and foremost thought every day when I went to work: this is my job, but I'm going into their home. Being able to provide a place of safety and security within that context is so important. When you have staff changes that are continuous, when you have multiple staff members coming and going, it creates a space of chaos when it comes to the day-to-day lives of those that you're trying to serve.

I think that this piece of legislation had a real opportunity to take the learnings that we've seen not just in Alberta but all across Canada when it comes to the actual state of what our continuing care is. Unfortunately, none of that is reflected in this bill. I know that at the beginning of COVID we watched other provinces call on the Canadian Armed Forces to come in and assist because there was just so much happening in some of those facilities that they needed additional support. A report came out from that, and I would argue that, yes, it was based on two provinces, but I would think that the same findings could be found in homes in the province of Alberta, because I heard those stories. I heard the horrific experiences of

some individuals that are living in continuing care facilities, things like being simply understaffed.

What that means: when you're working with seniors who are vulnerable, who are heavily reliant on those that provide care for them, it can have devastating impacts on those individuals. It's not a matter of not having enough customer service at an organization or enough people to put clothes on hangers. These are everyday needs that are being dismissed and not because the staff don't want to do the work that's required, but they simply can't. There were things happening where individuals were being left in soiled linens for days. There were situations where people were asking to be assisted to use the washroom and told: no, I just changed you. The impact on an individual's well-being is huge when it comes to not being able to have the staffing in place that can actually meet their needs.

I think this government had an incredible opportunity to really look at the learnings from other provinces and to listen to those that are living in Alberta right now in these facilities and could have made some significant, meaningful change to better the life of seniors living in these homes. Unfortunately, we don't see that in this legislation.

I know that I've heard heartbreaking stories from individuals, nurses, care providers that are burnt out. They signed up to be working in the field of human services, to work with community, to really, truly be of service to those that they work with, and they're at a place where they don't feel like they have the actual capacity to do the work that they want to do. So many nurses have told me that they're simply in there distributing medication and meeting basic, basic needs. They're burning out. They're stressed out. When you put in a pandemic, that we saw unfortunately take so many seniors in continuing care – 1,600 and counting passed away from COVID. You see the impact that that has on the families, the other residents, the staff. When staff are telling me that they're working in multiple facilities and they're afraid that they're bringing COVID from home to home and then back to their family but there's nobody there that could replace them, this has trauma impact on those individuals, the trauma of residents knowing that their friends are being isolated because of COVID.

It's so much bigger than what this piece of legislation does, and I think that when we have a government that took away the opportunity for families to have justice, I'm unfortunately not surprised that we have a piece of legislation that has no action. We actively saw government take away the right for family members to have some sort of justice when it came to their loved ones in care, and this was a real opportunity to have legislation that made an impact, to be able to listen to what the families have said, to listen to those residents that live in continuing care, to listen to the staff, the pleas for actually doing something that has meaningful impact. That's not what this legislation does.

5:20

This UCP has continued to fail residents of continuing care throughout the pandemic, and I struggle to understand why. There are so many stories, that I know every member of this House has heard, of someone that's been impacted by a death of a resident, of an Albertan in continuing care, and some of those tragic deaths could have been prevented. There were decisions made by this government that didn't take into account what the health care providers were asking for, what those that are working in the facilities were asking for, what family members were asking for. Unfortunately, this legislation does nothing to mitigate any of the risk that was identified and to actually make it better for those that are working and/or living in these continuing care facilities.

I know that there's incredible trauma that's happened throughout the pandemic, just so many that are at the front line, and I would argue that those providing care in these continuing care facilities have been exposed to trauma. There's something in the social work profession, in helping services, emergency responders that's called vicarious trauma. That would have an impact on residents as well. It's not just the staff, but it's the residents that are living this day to day. These are their homes.

There needs to be some sort of action to support seniors in their home. We need to look at the staff-to-patient ratios. Right now I know of students that are working in some of these continuing care facilities that are saying that without the students there is absolutely zero possibility of meeting the basic needs of the residents. Students aren't a given, Madam Chair. Students are dependent on the postsecondary institution. It depends on how many students are registered that year. There are so many variables that it's not a guarantee that they're going to have students, and to hear students being put in these situations where they're burning out, where they're questioning whether or not this is the field that they want to be in when they're not supported by government, when they're not seeing real change or real support that has an impact: that, to me, is very, very concerning. I know what it's like to work in someone's home. I know the stress that can come along with the needs that you're expected to do as a staffperson.

To hear those concerns and to have the ability to make change: I'm just so confused why this bill doesn't provide any sort of action when it comes to those pleas. We have a government that says: "Just trust us. All of that will be in the regulations." It's really hard to take them at their word for that because we haven't seen anything that would suggest that this is being taken seriously. We saw – this UCP took away, like I said, the family's right to seek justice. What kind of message does that give to the families right now with this legislation? Just trust us? Based on their record they don't have a voice. They have no right as grieving families to seek justice for their loved ones. That's the track record that this government has.

We saw this government refuse to create an independent office for a seniors advocate. When I have individuals calling my office asking, "Who can we complain to? Who will hear our voice?" well, I know that members of our caucus are being that voice. They're sharing those stories. They're sharing those pleas. I know that the government is being included in that information because I'm CCed on it. I know that they're sending it to the Premier, they're sending it to the Health minister, they're sending it to the seniors minister, yet it's having no impact. I'm just really concerned, when we have a bill that says Continuing Care Act, why it's not taking the information and putting it into action. It's simply not doing anything to actually support the real needs that they're intending or saying that they're supporting.

When we look at the conditions and the standards of the facilities, there is just so much that needs to change. Like, we've heard in debate that, you know, COVID shone a light on some of the glaring – glaring – mistreatment and horrible working conditions and living conditions in continuing care, yet here we are debating a piece of legislation, Bill 11, that has nothing in terms of action. We've been living in a COVID world for two years. We've been hearing stories of those that are impacted and the pleas to make changes, but there's nothing in here that actually makes those changes. The UCP is saying that it provides accountability, but we haven't even seen this government be accountable for the decisions that they've been making. We know that there were promises that the UCP made that they would increase home care, the amount of hours of care for residents that they would receive, increase the proportion of full-time staff, but that's not actually in this piece of legislation, so they're not even committing to their own promises.

It fails to make any substantive or meaningful changes. I struggle when we continuously hear: "Just trust us. It'll be in the regulation." This is an opportunity to have it clear-cut, to have some sort of impact of change, some sort of action, yet it's not in this piece of legislation. I know that Albertans are struggling, and their struggles are falling on deaf ears. It's very concerning when we know, glaringly, what the concerns are: the staffing ratios, the inability to have the opportunity for full-time employment, some of the standards of care. We have the information of what could make it better, yet we're not seeing that being implemented. I struggle with why we have this piece of legislation before us when it's not really doing anything substantive to actually improve working conditions or improve quality of life for those that are living in these facilities.

There's significant risk in continuing the way that we are. We're hearing from so many across the province that have loved ones in these facilities that require significant amounts of care that as a family member they can't provide. They're relying on the support of staff to do that, and still the needs of their loved one are not being met. I have friends that – the whole family, she and her husband and her two adult children, rotates for meals for her great-aunt just to make sure she gets fed. The place where she's living doesn't have capacity to sit with her and feed her the way that she needs. She has some quite significant medical challenges and requires a lot of support, and the staff just simply can't do it, so the family every day, three times a day, rotates to make sure that their aunt is being cared for and fed.

I know that that situation isn't unique. I hear so many stories of concerns with loved ones, especially during the height of the pandemic, when visitors weren't allowed. We were hearing pleas from staff that they needed more support, they needed help, because they relied on family members and other caregivers to come in and support them. Why has that gone unactioned? How can those that are working in health care trust a government that has made no significant change to support them in the work that they do? I just feel so . . . [Ms Goehring's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

5:30

The Chair: Are there others? The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I'd like to thank the hon. members across the way for their comments on Bill 11 and their passion and compassion for Albertans and improving the continuing care system. The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs asked the question: why do we have this before us? I'd like to comment on that because on this side of the House we have the same passion and the same compassion for Albertans, for seniors, those living with disabilities, those in our continuing care system, and that's what this bill is all about. It's about improving it. I want to talk a little bit about what this bill does and what it's intended to do and what it's supposed to do, and then I'll talk a little bit about what it doesn't do and address some of the concerns raised by the other side, because it's really important that we frame this correctly.

What this bill does is that it provides one overarching piece of legislation that will provide consistency and alignment across the continuing care system. It will start a major transformational change to existing policy and practice, and this includes a number of things, Madam Chair. It includes replacing the multiple acts with one piece of modern legislation for continuing care and allows us to bring together not only multiple acts but be able to reform multiple regulations and policies to be able to enable transformation. It will improve transparency and accountability to Albertans regarding how the continuing care system is governed.

It will enable a person-centred, flexible, and innovative system of care for Albertans. It will establish a consistent approach, an alignment of legislated requirements and services across our entire continuing care system. So what will happen, Madam Chair, is that an individual won't have to move rooms because they're going from one level of care to another one. They can stay in the same room and the care can be brought to them, for example.

It's going to address gaps in the current legislation, and this framework is exactly that: it is a framework. Bill 11 brings everything together so that we can start the transformation, particularly in regard to getting the regulation and the policy in place.

I want to just comment a little bit about the intent behind it because it goes to the preamble, which is an important part of the bill because it actually signals what we're trying to accomplish. Many of the things – I think we can agree on both sides of the House that these are important, you know, that we do this to be able to improve our continuing care system. I'll just highlight a few of them.

Whereas the Government of Alberta is committed to ensuring that the delivery of continuing care and the design of the continuing care system in Alberta are based on a person-centred approach;

[where] the quality of life of continuing care residents and clients is the highest priority for the Government of Alberta . . .

[where] family and friends who act as caregivers play a significant role . . .

[and also where] staff who provide continuing care enhance the quality of life of residents and clients and [are] well-trained and supported [and that this is] vital to the continuing care system.

So all of these principles are highlighted in the preamble, and that's the core of what this framework is for.

Now, I do appreciate comments from the other side because it seems to be that the debate is not about what's in the bill and the framework, but it's what's not in the bill. Madam Chair, I've mentioned in this House before, and I'll say it again. You know, some of the items that are being talked about – for example, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview mentioned that the number of continuing care spaces needs to be enhanced. There needs to be some more detail or a framework regarding staffing models or how many hours of care are provided. There needs to be a movement – and this is all highlighted in the facility-based continuing care report – towards home care. Well, all of this is currently covered in regulation and/or policy. That's the appropriate place for that. It never has been in any of the existing acts, right? We do need to update the regulations once we pull it all into one place, and we are committing to Albertans to do that. It's not in the acts as they exist today; it's in regulation and policy, and that's the appropriate place for it, Madam Chair, because as things change, we need to modify this. I point out to members across the way that when they were in government, they didn't put it into an act. That is the appropriate place for it, to be in the regulation and to be in policy.

Madam Chair, we are taking action. Not only does it need to be in regulation or policy; quite frankly, changes to support the transformation of our continuing care system need to be budgeted for, and Budget 2022 does that. We allocated \$1.7 billion for community care, an increase of 7.6 per cent, or \$122 million. We allocated \$1.2 billion for continuing care, an increase of \$16 million, or 1.3 per cent, from the previous year. To the point raised by members across the way, home care: we increased home care by \$81 million, or a 12.1 per cent increase from the previous year, and that is simply just the start.

In addition, we recognize that there need to be more continuing care spaces as the population is aging, and we need to invest in that.

Madam Chair, last year's budget provided for 1,500 spaces to be created this year. In Budget 2022, in addition to that, we added another \$204 million over the next few years to build more continuing care spaces, \$91 million to complete the Bridgeline Riverside continuing care centre in Calgary, another \$142 million over two years for the Gene Zwodzesky centre in Edmonton.

Madam Chair, we are taking action. We understand that we need to transform our system, and the place to take action is getting the framework right – so that's this bill – and then investing into home care, continuing care, community care, which we're doing through Budget 2022, and then updating the regulations, updating the policies associated with this.

I appreciate the passion on the other side of the House in terms of, you know, focus on improving our continuing care system. We feel that same passion on our side of the House, right? That's why we launched the facility-based continuing care review. That's why we budgeted an additional \$200 million in Budget 2022 not only on the expense side but also on the capital side, and that's why we need to move forward with this Bill 11 to be able to start this up. This is the framework that enables transformation, so I would ask members on the opposite of the House to support this as it is and to vote in favour of it so we can get it done, we can get it done quickly, because you're right: we need to move and move now. So let's support this, let's get this passed, let's move to the next stage in terms of regulation and policy, and our government will continue to take action to support seniors and to support those with disabilities.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to rise to continue on some of the comments here around Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. I appreciate the minister getting up and sharing some thoughts. In one of the comments there, I noticed that he pointed out that he doesn't feel that we're talking about the bill and what's in the bill. I've always said that you look at the language. What does it say? What doesn't it say? What are you saying about it? Now, here's the challenge, because we're not talking about what's in the bill: it's because these things will affect what is in this bill.

Let's start with one of the things that he mentioned around that report my colleagues from Edmonton-Riverview and Edmonton-Castle Downs talked about, the facility-based continuing care review and some of the recommendations that were made in that, including staffing. So we're talking about increasing spacing. You know, you had talked about enabling so that if somebody needs a higher level of care, they don't have to move their room. I certainly agree with that.

You had made some mentions around accountability and transparency, and I'm going to challenge you a little bit on that. I feel that the government has struggled with that. There is a reason that the government has been labelled one of the most secretive in Canada, but we'll leave that part of the debate for another time.

One of the most critical things is that you can have the best facilities with the best equipment, with the best intentions, with the best legislation; if you don't have the people to staff it, it will start to fall apart, so all the beginning steps, all the beginning framework will be for naught.

5:40

Here's why I find myself now – you know, the labour hat is coming on – focusing around the staffing side of things. First off, I'm very, very lucky in Edmonton-Decore. I have some very, very good facilities. Can there always be improvements? Absolutely.

I've seen one, for instance, that's really taken that to the next level. But the funny thing is that they're all, every last one of them, always looking for volunteers. Certainly, nothing against – you know, thank God for volunteers and the heart that they bring to things. But if you need volunteers to run your facility, you don't have enough staff right then and there.

Now, my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview had talked about some of the precarious employment, people working part-time. If you want to kind of tie this to a little bit of an economic reason, Madam Chair, when you have people working full-time and they're making a reasonable wage and they're able to participate in the economy, you know, a wage that they can spend on a house, grow their family with, you don't have to worry about people working multiple jobs, which then opens up potentially other jobs for people. But there's this big focus on part-time employment, including in our continuing care.

Nobody could have seen this coming. Well, perhaps maybe we could have if we looked back in history across other pandemics and kind of put two and two together. But when you have employees that have to work at multiple facilities because they can only get part-time, because that facility can only afford to pay part-time, that increases your chance of transmission when this pandemic hit us. This is not saying that facilities weren't trying their best. I have full belief that most really did. Unfortunately, we did see examples where that didn't happen, where they didn't try their best, and people literally paid for it with their lives.

Now, when you have the proper staffing level – again, we can create the framework legislation where, for instance, as the minister mentioned, if you now start to need a higher level of care, you don't have to move rooms. Great idea. I'm fully onboard with that. But if you don't have staff to be able to handle it, you're still going to run into problems.

That brings me to a story that I just heard last week, on Wednesday. I have full permission from my constituent to tell this story. It's actually two parts: one about his father, one about his mother, and the result of the shortfalls in continuing care. Now, had there been a seniors advocate perhaps, maybe there would have been somebody bringing these forward together already. I know that the government felt that folding that into the Health Advocate was a great idea: cutting red tape and saving money. It has negatively impacted seniors. I'm telling you this. I've heard it too many times now, as has my friend from Edmonton-Castle Downs, I've been CCed on the e-mails. It's not working. Seniors, the people that built our province, need that voice. That's not in this piece of legislation. That will help improve continuing care.

Ken, my constituent, recently talked about his mother in one of the facilities. Now, it's ironic because she spent her career in continuing care helping people, trying to make sure they can get dressed, that they can eat, that they can go to the bathroom. To then finally wind up where he visits her one day – and she's in her room. It's dark because the curtains haven't been, you know, opened up. She's got her hands covering her face, and as he walks in, she puts her hands down, realizes it's her son: thank God you're here. She's covered in food because there wasn't enough staff to give her the level of needs that she required.

This is not to blame staff. Staff are doing the best they can. But if you are pulled in too many directions, as my colleagues have mentioned, not only do you get frustration, exhaustion, and everything else that comes with that, but it's ultimately the resident that suffers. You can have all the enabling legislation that you want, Madam Chair, but at the end of the day, if you don't have enough people, you can't execute it.

He talked about his father, who passed away just – I think it was two years ago, plus or minus a couple of months. He got a call

because the facility had to inform him that they forgot about him and that he spent five hours on the toilet because there weren't enough staff. Again, I realize this is not part of the legislation that's in Bill 11, but without it, Bill 11 means nothing. It will not help.

I also heard the story – you know what, Madam Chair? I'm going to sit down for a moment because I think the minister wants to intervene. I'm going to give him that opportunity to speak, and then I might jump back up again.

The Chair: It's Committee of the Whole, so there are no interventions, but you may speak as many times as you like.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the hon. member. I'll make this very short. The hon. member made a comment that the bill doesn't address the issues that the hon. member is raising. I actually ask the hon. member to take a look at part 4, compliance and enforcement, and also part 6, the resident and family councils, because there are elements in this bill, right? Part of the changes about transparency and accountability, especially when you talk about compliance and enforcement, provides new tools so that if there's an issue where a continuing care operator – and I appreciate, you know, that they're working very hard. But if they're not able to provide the levels of service, then not only are there tools to be able to pull their licence, in the worst case, but in other cases we can actually use administrative tools to make sure that they comply and provide the level of care that they are required to under the standards. And there are resident and family councils.

I would ask the hon. member to take a look at that in terms of the context of these issues. There are issues now, but there have been issues before – right? – and we need to have a framework in place to address them going forward.

I want to thank the hon. member for the opportunity to provide a comment even though there is an ability in the Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

The Chair: You guys can talk as long as you want although be aware of the time.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: The proper comment should have been: maybe I'll take my seat to listen to more discussion. I'll have to remember that for Committee of the Whole myself.

Yeah. I appreciate those comments. I know which one he's talking about, especially in terms of the family council. That's something I've certainly encouraged family members to bring forward to these facilities. I've attended some of these meetings. Again, it's coming down to staffing levels. It's not that the facilities don't want to have enough people. That's top of mind. It comes down to the money.

I'm going to be a little bit critical here of the private, for-profit facilities. I don't begrudge them, somewhat, around wanting to make a profit, but they don't wait till the end of the year to see how much money is left and that's their profit. They cut that off right at the hop, right at the beginning: that's our profit for the year, and then what's left over goes into the care. If that happens to run out, that becomes a problem. Then you see these shortfalls in staffing so that they can hit those bottom lines, because they can't actually run out of money and not be able to run their facility. So they calculate these things out.

5:50

You know, you have residents, for instance, with feeding problems. That might be swallowing. There may be other

challenges. Again, you know, I'm hearing a story from Ken about another resident in a facility where a staff member comes in, tries to feed. Whatever the reason, they just couldn't get them to eat. They put the spoon down. They walk away because they have other things they've got to do, and they've got to try to get to those. Then they come back. They pick the spoon up. They try to feed. No success. They put it down, walk away. The next thing you know, you've got the cleaning staff coming in: well, the person didn't eat. They take it away. Now that resident hasn't had anything to eat.

Again, you can have the family councils, you can have the enabling legislation, but when it comes to the people that built our province, that all of us here in this Chamber enjoy, we have to step up. I appreciate that the minister, you know, talked about the money that's being invested in continuing care and in home care, but here's where I'll challenge. As I've always said – I'll be honest; I'm not trying to start a fight; I'm not trying to be disrespectful – if we've got \$30 million a year to go chase after Bigfoot, we have money to spend on our seniors. If we have \$1.3 billion to bet on an election, we have money to spend on our seniors. We can ensure that our staffing levels are high enough so that that level of care is exemplary, so that we don't have residents with food all over them and who haven't been changed and have been there like that for hours, so that we don't have residents that get forgotten about on the toilet for five hours or more.

I appreciate the comments from the minister, but this is why we were bringing such things up, because without them, at the end of the day, like I said, you can have all the councils you want. They're going to keep bringing up the same thing: "There's not enough staff. There's not enough staff. There's not enough staff." That's always – always – what I keep hearing. We need to do better with our seniors, and I feel we had a better chance with Bill 11 to address some of those things.

Again, it's Committee of the Whole. I know there are others that want to jump up and speak to this. I'll reiterate again that I feel that the Seniors Advocate being rolled into the Health Advocate hasn't worked. It's created a bigger problem. That voice of seniors has been watered down because of that. There are absolutely way more, you know, health concerns that the advocate has to focus on – I appreciate that – but not at the expense of our seniors' voice. We could have re-examined that here in Bill 11 to bring more focus around that.

I will give way to some of my colleagues here and let them have a chance to have a say here.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Chair. With the brief amount of time left here this afternoon, I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 11 in Committee of the Whole, and I'm thankful for the comments that have been made previous to me. Of course, I've had the opportunity to speak to Bill 11 previously, but I'm always happy to take another opportunity to share some of my thoughts and concerns in this instance.

You know, I appreciate as well that the minister is willing to stand up, but what we've heard this afternoon is essentially – again, it's been repeated – that this is a framework and that so much more has to come from the regulations. First, we can look at the report that was released in May 2021, which has been talked to at length, the facility-based analysis and how we can improve these situations. Of course, since then the government has come forward with Bill 11 saying that this is addressing many of the concerns in there, and the rest, Albertans and this House – well, not this House, because it will be done through regulations. Alberta seniors, who are disproportionately being negatively impacted and dying because of

the lack of response from this UCP government: well, they have to wait an entire other year to see what those regulations might look like.

I think it's also important to reflect on the fact that this is quite possibly, if it's not called earlier, in the middle of election time, so now we have a commitment from this government that they are going to finish this process in the midst of an election. I truly find it unbelievable, Madam Chair, that this is going to be finalized by the time the next election rolls out, and I think it's truly unfortunate for all Albertans and especially the seniors who are depending on this minister to move forward with this process.

I mean, the minister stood in the House and said: well, some of the really important work, like the preamble, has been finished in this legislation. I mean, if it wasn't so sad, Madam Chair, I would have to laugh at statements like that, talking about person-centred care and family and friends playing a significant role, the minister saying that that's the core of this legislation in the preamble. It's truly unbelievable that in the year since this report has been released, they've only been able to come up with a framework and then have the audacity to tell members of this House that they need to pass this legislation so that they can move forward with the regulations. They've already said that it's going to take an entire year to pass that.

There is no accountability from this government when it comes to many things but in this instance how this government cares for and protects seniors. That, as the previous member stated, is clearly shown in the terrible decision to roll the Seniors Advocate into the Health Advocate office. Since then we've seen no accountability on that file in terms of annual reports coming on behalf of the Health Advocate, and further, of course, the person in this position is a UCP insider. I've talked to countless Alberta seniors who do not have faith in the current advocate, that question day in and day out why they don't have a senior advocating for their interests. It's quite clear, when we see legislation like this coming forward, that it's because this UCP government simply is not interested in listening to them.

We saw the minister talk about things like the resident and family councils and how important they are. The NDP agrees, and that's why we brought forward that process, the opportunity for those councils to take place in these homes. In many instances these seniors and the families felt like their voices weren't being heard, so we brought that process forward. This government and this minister are acting like it's a new process. That's simply not the case. It's the same on many of the issues that are legislated through this, that in so many cases this is simply just bringing together several pieces of legislation and not actually improving them in any way, Madam Chair.

The fact is that this government is telling Albertan seniors that they have to wait another year while day after day we are losing more of those seniors. Families are grieving people in their life that they have lost, and unfortunately this government is unwilling to take any real action on this issue, which is truly disappointing. It's been said again and again in this House that the report, that was previously tabled in May 2021, is a good report. It's something that we should be moving forward on as soon as possible. The government has had a year to make that possible, and unfortunately all we have is a framework, and we are told to wait another year, again, while Alberta seniors are dying. It's truly unfortunate.

We need to do better. Seniors deserve better. They deserve a better government, and they deserve better representatives in the government making sure that their voices are heard. They deserve an advocate, and they deserve to have many things, Madam Chair, not the least being full-time staff to support their needs. Again and again we see that the staff, the health care workers that are taking

care of these families are themselves living in poverty. How can we expect that they are able to offer their best when it comes to supporting . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the clock strikes 6. The committee will be recessed until 7:30 this evening.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, May 24, 2022

Day 35

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, May 24, 2022

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Deputy Chair: Nobody needs to stand, but I guess maybe everybody should be seated. I would like to call the committee to order.

Mr. McIver: Unbelievable respect. That's what it is.

The Deputy Chair: Of course, and I appreciate it.

Bill 11 Continuing Care Act

The Deputy Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments to be made at this time? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has risen.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill 11, which is the Continuing Care Act. I know I've had the opportunity to speak to this bill before, but I'm very excited to get to speak to it again because I ran out of time last time. No one will be surprised to hear that. [A cellphone rang]

What we were talking about is what the bill does do, which is to say that it consolidates several pieces of legislation. Now, I'm a fan of modernizing legislation. I think it's important. Anyone who knew me from the Legislative Review Committee when we were in government will know that I'm oddly nit-picky about very strange things, but I think it's important. I mean, it is the law, right? We talk about it in a very glib manner sometimes in this place, but it is the law, and it needs to be sufficiently modern so that it can handle modern contexts and so that people can apply it out there in the real world, because that's what it does. So it is important that we consolidate regulations.

However, I think that what needs to be considered here is context. We have a context where the long-term care system in this province and provinces across the country, in fact probably in most of the world, has been severely tested over two years of a pandemic. I think flaws have been discovered that maybe were there before but were a lot less obvious. We saw, tragically, a number of people dying and quite a high number of people dying in long-term care, and we shouldn't lose sight of that because those were real people.

Yes, many of those residents were older or they were disabled, but their lives had value and their lives had meaning, and they were cut short in part because of a pandemic but in part because the systems we had in place were not able to adequately adjust to a pandemic. I think that's serious, and it's something that should be treated with the greatest seriousness and also with great speed because this is a problem that's still occurring today. People are still being infected today, and residents of a long-term care home can still have very serious outcomes.

The thing that this bill doesn't do is fulfill the promises that this UCP government made a year ago. It doesn't fulfill the promise to increase home care, it doesn't fulfill the promise to increase the number of hours of care that a resident would receive, and it doesn't fulfill the promise to increase the number of full-time staff. I'd like to go through each of those in detail.

I'm going to begin with the last, actually, the proportion of full-time staff. We saw that an order had to be brought in for single-site

work. That was a good and important thing, but it had to be delayed and modified and with exemptions granted because our system was not able to adequately adapt to it. We have designed a system that is so focused on the dollars you spend on each individual, not on their quality of life, not on whether they wind up in a higher level of care because they didn't receive adequate care in the level that they were in. This is a real thing, particularly when you're dealing with patients who have the early signs of dementia. If they receive appropriate and adequate care, if they are adequately engaged, they are much more likely to be much more functional for a much longer time. They will spend less time in a higher level of care, and we all know that higher levels of care are much more expensive.

That's something that's worth talking about, too, because it often gets lost in this conversation. When people are trying to compare private homes to public homes, they forget that there are different levels of care. There are four levels of care and then dementia care. Dementia care has way, way, way higher staffing needs than the lowest level of care, which is right, right? We're trying to put the appropriate individuals in the right places so that they get the level of care that is necessary for them.

Patients with severe dementia require a lot of care because they are often problematic in terms of that sometimes there is violence. It's not because the person intends there to be but because they are scared and confused and don't understand what's going on. It's often the case, going back to the full-time staff thing, that they're dealing with different people on a day-to-day basis. Can you imagine anything scarier than waking up and not knowing where you are and having someone come to care for you that you don't recognize and that you don't know and routines that are unfamiliar to you? This is the day-to-day life for a lot of these folks.

So the increase in the proportion of full-time staff is important. It's important from a pandemic perspective because we saw a lot of transmission occurring as a result of the fact that we rely on a system where staff are kept to part-time hours to avoid paying them benefits, and then they have to take multiple jobs in multiple different places. That's obviously bad in a pandemic; I think it's bad generally. I think it's bad generally because I think that people at the end of their lives deserve dignity, and part of dignity is knowing the people who are caring for you and not just sort of being, you know, a number in a room that is cared for by whoever happens to be going by. I think that it's important, and I think it contributes to the quality of life and ultimately contributes to a slower decline, which means that people are not put in those higher level care homes, which actually does save money.

I think this could be measured. We don't currently measure it in the system, but I think it could be measured, and it could be demonstrated that it saves money. There are a lot of things that come out of what you do and don't measure. Like, when people started doing social return on investment analyses for a number of social programs – for instance, affordable housing – it's often the case that estimates run between something like \$4 and \$10 in terms of policing costs, judicial costs saved by investing in affordable housing. I think that a similar analysis could be run here.

That proportion of full-time staff is important, and it's important, actually, for another reason. We talk a lot in this place about job numbers and whether they're going up or down. The numbers are reported in a detailed way and an important way for those who are familiar with them, who read them regularly, like most of us in here, but they can sort of be, I think, distorted somewhat for the public. When I see job numbers, as we have recently, where you're seeing the percentage of part-time jobs increasing, I don't always think that that's necessarily a good thing.

It's good to have more jobs, absolutely, but I think that for most people the ideal situation would be to have one full-time job that

you work at that is able to cover your bills, and then that's it. You can choose to work an additional part-time job if you want to choose to work an additional part-time job, and that's fine. But increasingly we see a situation where full-time employment is becoming more and more rare. We see people in the gig economy, and we see things like this, where individuals are being forced to run from here to there to the next place to try to cobble together enough part-time jobs to essentially make a full-time salary, but they still don't get benefits, and that's a problem. It is a shift. It's a shift in our world, and I think it's a shift that government ought to concern itself with.

Now, I'm sure my friends across the way would tend to disagree, but I think government has a role to play in putting in place the incentives that cause the market to create more full-time jobs and fewer part-time jobs, however that is done. Whether it's having everyone have their benefits through their employers, having that sort of money redirected centrally and then everybody getting covered by benefits centrally, or whether having some sort of tax credit for paying for benefits for people, there are lots of different sort of policy solutions that you can have to this. I think that a world where increasingly people are cobbling together, you know, 60 hours out of three jobs to try to make ends meet is not the best-case scenario. It's a situation where our children may have it harder than we did, which is not something any parent ever wants. Many people come to this country – my grandparents did; I'm sure many people here have that same story – to build a life for their kids so that their kids can have better than what they did.

7:40

So, yes, there are three reasons, I guess, in summation, to increase the proportion of full-time staff, and they are better care for the residents; obviously, infection control, as we have discussed; but also that it's just better on a sort of overall view of a society for more people to be able to get by on just one job.

The other thing I mentioned that this bill doesn't deal with is the number of hours of care that a resident would receive. Now, that is relevant for many of the same reasons, because people at the end of their lives deserve dignity, and dignity involves often assistance with things. It often involves, in this case, assistance with, say, bathing and hours of care. I mean, these are very direct impacts. Like, we're talking about the difference between one bath a week and two baths a week, and that's a big deal. If you were the one-bath-a-week person, that would be a big deal in your life. I think that's a legitimate consideration.

So that is another reason that it's important to sort of be handling these things, be handling the number of hours of care, that and because if we do face a situation, like we have, when you're already running your system at absolute maximum capacity, when you are already running your staff to the point where they're borderline exhausted every day, where, you know, you're sort of two minutes of staffing time away from an emergency every day, then when something like a global pandemic hits, you're ill prepared. That is what we saw. This government promised that they would make that change, that they would increase the number of hours of care that residents receive.

Again, this is important to their quality of life. It's important to basics like nails being cut and hair being brushed and to people who require assistance with bathing or eating or any number of other things, but it's also important in terms of keeping people engaged in the world, in terms of having activities like exercise and going for walks. I mean, we all know the benefits that exercise has and having, you know, more individuals to be able to sort of move people and assist them to access exercise programs, to do exercise programs. These are important things. Social programs: also incredibly important. When people stop socializing, there are

measurable impacts on cognition and on cognitive decline, particularly for those in early-stage dementia. Those things can be measured. We know they are important.

If we're measuring not just the dollars per unit but if we are genuinely considering those lives to have worth, which I think we ought to do, then quality of life should be one of those measures. It shouldn't just be: how much does it cost? It should be: what is your value for money? What are you getting for the dollars you invest? That's how we should think of it. We should think of it as an investment. That's how public services should always be thought of, because when you don't think of them that way, you get a sort of gradual chipping away that makes the world generally worse off. Maybe you can handle an individual for a smaller amount of money, but the quality of life that that individual is experiencing becomes lower and lower. I mean, that's one of the many reasons why I think the hours of care should be increased and why I think it's important.

You know, the government is saying: okay; well, we brought in this legislation, and this is going to happen by way of regulations. I mean, this "trust us" thing happens over and over again, but the "trust us" part never happens. They say, "Trust us," and then they never follow through. I don't know. It seems that people continue to be surprised. The UCP continues to be surprised that Albertans don't trust them, but when you keep making promises and you never follow through on them, people will not trust you. That's how it works.

So, yes, that number of hours of care is important. I don't think it can wait till 2023. You know, these recommendations were from a year ago. I feel like at least some of these changes could have been in the legislation. There was no reason that they needed to fall to regulation. In fact, when you're sort of delineating between what ought to go in your legislation and what ought to go in your regulations, basic protections should go in your legislation. The reason that basic protections should go in your legislation is because that is the thing that comes here to this place about which there is a public debate.

Now, I have a whole theory about there being fewer and fewer folks in the media, meaning that information doesn't necessarily flow to the public the way it used to, which is, I think, bad, very bad, for democracy, in my opinion. The theory at least, the purpose of a legislative branch, is that we come here and we debate, and we debate on the public record. There are reporters who take that information, and they take it to the public, and any member of the public can read what I have said here today, can, you know, access – I think probably you could watch it right now online; maybe some people even are. The point is that there is a public debate created about this sort of thing. The protections that you are putting in place for people belong in the legislation because that is what the public conversation is about, and the public has a right to weigh in on that.

Things that go in regulation are details. They're sort of like – you put fees in regulation because they tend to sort of change over time every few years. You tend to put in regulation sort of details of how the mechanism of government will implement things. The public doesn't necessarily have an interest in that level of detail, but what they do have an interest in is the care that their parents and grandparents will receive. This sort of hours-of-care issue is a basic protection, and it should rightfully fall to the legislation, in my view.

Finally, the other promise that is not enacted here is an increase in home care. Yes, we're talking about long-term care. We're not talking about home care. But the two are intimately linked because for a number of people in lower level care beds they actually could just as easily have stayed at home. That's good for a number of reasons, infection control being one of them but also sort of regularity being another one. In home care there are demonstrated

effects. One of the things that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora did, when she served as Health minister, that I was really proud of was to increase home care. When we talk about health system costs, whether in the actual health system itself or in long-term care, home care is the best dollar-for-dollar investment you can make to decrease that.

Generally the most expensive piece of your health care system tends to be the sort of acute care, emergency room, ambulance kind of portion, right? And we need that. It needs to be there for an emergency, but if you can have more home care, you minimize the number of emergencies because it doesn't get to that point. It's the same way that I think the UCP's policy with respect to family physicians and the sort of consistent attack, specifically on primary care physicians, was so problematic, because that just drives things into the acute-care system. Not only does that drive up costs, but if the system – and this is what we're seeing right now. At a certain point the system maxes out on costs. There are no more costs to be driven up because there are no more bodies. There's no one to do the work, so what happens is that you just get people getting sicker or even possibly dying, and that is a really big problem because . . . [Ms Ganley's speaking time expired] Oh, man. Again?

The Deputy Chair: It goes quick.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Actually, if it's okay, it was just – sometimes it's so tight.

Mr. Bilous: I had some very important, timely comments to make, but by all means.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

7:50

Mr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I stand today to voice my support for Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, which will, once again, enhance and modernize public health care while also responding to and meeting Albertans' health care needs. Before going further, let me thank the Minister of Health and the team for supporting and protecting Albertans who have voiced their concerns about the health care system in Alberta.

Mr. Chair, let us be reminded that Budget 2022 is moving Alberta forward by strengthening our health care system, getting more Albertans working, and bringing our finances back into the black. As we move forward, Albertans need a strong health care system with the capacity to manage extraordinary surges and provide an excellent standard of care to all. Budget 2022 provides more than \$22 billion in Health's operating budget, a \$515 million, or 2.4 per cent, increase from the 2021-2022 forecast. Excluding COVID-19 costs, it will grow by a total of \$1.8 billion by 2024-2025 in order to scale up capacity, another year of record-high investment for health care in Alberta.

Record investment in health care means that Albertans will see expanded access through additional ICU beds, new facilities in new communities, and more mental health and addictions care around the province. This record investment also ensures that Albertans across the province have access to the highest quality and most modern services our health care system can provide. Over the next three years Alberta will invest \$100 million per year to provide additional health care capacity on a permanent basis, including adding new intensive care unit beds. The budget also includes a \$750 million COVID-19 contingency this year, which will help address the surgical backlog and ensure the province can cover evolving pandemic-related costs.

Mr. Chair, this Budget 2022 will majorly impact and expand the continuing care programs and services for seniors and vulnerable Albertans. Budget 2022 provides nearly \$3.7 billion in operational

funding for professional health care and support services across the continuing care system, which is a 6.3 per cent increase over last year.

There is no doubt that our health care workers in Alberta are one of the strongest and hard-working members of our society. In honour of nurses' services during the pandemic a one-time lump-sum payment of 1 per cent was made in 2021. Our health care professionals have shown immense dedication in taking care of our loved ones and families and spending countless hours working hard, especially during the past couple of years, and their perseverance and commitment to serving the community is commendable. Our nurses have shown great initiative time and time again, and with the support of the government a new deal, which runs from April 2020 to March 31, 2024, contained a 4.2 per cent wage increment throughout the time of the contract.

Mr. Chair, the Calgary-East constituency has been happier than ever knowing that there are more health professionals working in our health care system than ever before, and they're compensated with a larger budget than ever before. More registered nurses, paramedics, physicians, and other professionals are needed. Alberta Health Services had 30,517 registered nurses as of February 2022, up from 28,735 in February 2019. There are 1,800 more nurses than there existed before the outbreak, under the NDP. Alberta Health Services now employs 230 more paramedics than it did two years ago. Paramedic staffing has climbed by 9 per cent, from 2,659 in December 2019 to 2,891 in 2021. The number of doctors registered with the CPSA in Alberta continues to rise, with a net gain of 33 physicians from the previous year's fourth quarter.

Budget 2022 will support even more growth by setting a new high for health spending. The total number of Alberta Health Services' employees is expected to rise by more than 3 per cent in 2022-2023, from 81,600 to 84,400. As we try to enhance access to care across the system – more surgeries, more diagnostic testing, more EMS calls, more home care and continuing care – those employees will provide more services to Albertans. The actual health care battle was waged by the NDP administration, which stood by and let wait times rise for four years.

Mr. Chair, I would like to share another proud milestone in the Calgary-East constituency. The Brenda Stafford Foundation, BSF, opened the doors of their newest site and welcomed the first residents who now proudly call Clifton House home. The highly anticipated Clifton House first broke ground on construction two years ago, in February 2020, located across the street from the existing Clifton manor long-term care site in Calgary, 47th Street SE. After Clifton's existing long-term care residents have completed their transition, Clifton House will then commence welcoming new supportive living residents from the community in partnership with Alberta Health Services' transition services. I look forward to seeing more supports and investments being made in Calgary-East to support our vulnerable and working members.

Over the years many continuing care stakeholders have asked the Ministry of Health to review Alberta's legislation to address challenges that exist in the system. The legislation review was part of our broader commitment to transform the continuing care system to do everything to ensure Albertans have access to high-quality continuing care. Support from continuing care stakeholders and the 33 written submissions and feedback from 7,000 Albertans that identified issues and recommendations for improvement as well as the input received through the home care and nursing home regulations review were all vital in addressing changes. Again, I want to thank everyone that contributed to this process. This feedback from stakeholders was instrumental in developing the proposed legislation.

8:00

Mr. Chair, Alberta's government is taking steps to protect the continuing care system throughout the province and ensure that the present-day services meet the needs and expectations of all Albertans. Albertans deserve the best quality health care, especially when accessing our continuing care system, one that best reflects present-day practices and services while addressing the ever-changing needs and expectations of those who rely on them. Bill 11 fulfills our government's campaign commitment to address the needs of the current legislation surrounding Alberta's continuing care system as well as the gaps in the current system revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Chair, Alberta's present law for the continuing care system is comprised of several acts and regulations, some of which date back to 1985. This is why the government is introducing a new, streamlined continuing care framework as developed. Introduced and approved, the standards and regulations will be implemented as early as spring 2023. Continuing care in the province has evolved, and existing legislation does not effectively reflect current practices, services, or settings or address Alberta's changing needs and expectations. The Continuing Care Act consolidates all patchwork legislation from previous governments and takes action against the inertia left behind by the NDP in the critical sector of Alberta's health care system.

The proposed legislation will support a system that is more responsive to the needs of clients, residents, and families now and in the years ahead as a foundation to the overarching goal that Albertans receiving continuing care services are supported to have a good quality of life, whether it be through home and community care, in supportive living accommodations or in continuing care homes. The Continuing Care Act will enable system efficiency and improve service delivery for Albertans and support health care accountability and sustainability. It will modernize Alberta's approach to home and community care, supportive living accommodations, and continuing care homes while reducing the red tape surrounding this complex system.

Mr. Chair, Bill 11 will mandate frequent inspections for continuing care homes, assisted living facilities and home and community care officers to guarantee compliance with the act, rules, and standards. Furthermore, Bill 11 will enable new administrative monetary penalties to be imposed on operators who fail to comply with the legislation, establishing broad regulatory-making authority to set out additional details on content in the act as well as to include content in legislation or additional topics such as staffing and the provision of goods and services.

The new legislative framework will enable clear expectations through regulations and policy regarding what services and supports are available to Albertans accessing different levels of care and clarify and standardize which services require client copayments versus which are fully publicly funded. Most other Canadian jurisdictions – B.C., Saskatchewan, Ontario – have more copayment fees in place than Alberta for various goods or services provided in their public continuing care systems. Alberta has a range of seniors' benefits for those most in need, ensuring the most vulnerable seniors can count on a stable source of income and continue to live safely and independently in their chosen communities. Alberta's government made the commitment to maintain seniors' benefits and our financial assistance program to protect eligible low-income clients and residents. Again, Mr. Chair, we need to modernize our existing laws so that Alberta's approach to home and community care, supportive living facilities, and continuing care institutions can better assist Albertans today and in the future.

In Alberta our commitment and promise are to support and strengthen the health care system so Albertans can continue to have access to high-quality, patient-centred health services in a more sustainable and efficient manner. The Continuing Care Act will initiate substantial transforming shifts in existing policy and practices, including replacing many statutes with a single, simplified piece of up-to-date continuing care law, improving Albertans' understanding of how the continuing care system is run by increasing openness and accountability, providing Albertans with a patient-centred, adaptable, and creative health care system now and in the future.

Mr. Chair, Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, should not be delayed any further. The aim is to create a unified strategy and align legislative mandates and services through all of the continuing care system. This will fill loopholes in the present legislation to provide that Alberta has the ability to monitor and enforce compliance with legislative obligations, including standards. Again, Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, will create a more responsive health care system that can better meet the needs of patients.

I would like to once again encourage everyone in this Chamber to support this bill and support all families, communities, friends that need these changes to our outdated health care system. This will timely help our hard-working health care professionals and Albertans to receive the benefits they deserve. I again applaud the minister and the team members that have been involved in the making of these changes and for all of their efforts, that will ensure the protection of Alberta and will ensure that our communities, families, and patients are being protected and safely cared for.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other – I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has risen.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll start off by acknowledging my transgression earlier, where my device went off when my hon. colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View was in the middle of her speech. For that, I will be making a donation to SCARS, one of the foundations of my wife's choice. [some applause] Happy to do that. Apologies to all members of the Chamber for that transgression. [interjection] Yes. As per what happens from time to time, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is chatting in my ear. I will give her credit for helping to identify this animal rescue not-for-profit as the charity of choice.

I also, Mr. Chair, need to acknowledge the fact that I believe with all of my being that the Edmonton Oilers will defeat the Calgary Flames in tonight's game. Miraculously, I feel like the Oilers just scored. I can't put my finger on it, but I can feel it. Can you feel it, Mr. Chair?

8:10

You know, having said that, I will make one last comment before I move on to bill debate, because obviously it's very important, the job that we all do here in the Chamber. But I do just want to acknowledge how proud I am of two Alberta teams to make it to the second round, and, most importantly, Mr. Chair, the economic impact of the Flames and the Oilers going to round 2 and one of the two teams going to round 3 will be significant, significant for our restaurateurs, our hoteliers, the tourism sector that has been hit so hard over the past couple of years because of COVID. So I can't help that I think my frame of reference will forever be through an economic development lens, and not only am I a proud Oilers fan but acknowledging the benefit that it brings to our great province.

The last comment on this, because I could probably go for 15 minutes on this, Mr. Chair, is that our capital city region serves northern Alberta, it serves northwest Saskatchewan and, I would argue, northern Saskatchewan, and because Saskatchewan doesn't have an NHL team, it serves most of the province – I will give southern Saskatchewan to the city of Calgary – and also a number of residents in British Columbia. So the point is that it's great to see all of the benefits of our two great teams squaring off. I will leave hockey for now, but if I get that feeling again, members may see me wave my arms, as the hon. Minister of Health has already witnessed earlier this evening.

It's my pleasure, Mr. Chair, to speak to Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. I have some comments to make. The minister – and I will thank him and acknowledge the fact that he's been very active in this debate thus far on this bill. Granted, though – or maybe, no. I'm not confusing this. I mean, this is a Seniors and Housing bill, but also it is the hon. minister who is sponsoring this bill. There are a number of changes this bill is implementing that I do support.

The fact, as has been talked about in this Chamber, that there are a number of pieces of legislation that will all be pooled or pulled together out of a number of different ministries and pulled into one act does provide a simplicity and an ease of looking at all of the legislation, regulations that surround seniors' housing or continuing care or home care. So, you know, I think, if I may, it brings together legislation from a number of different ministries, and moving forward I do think that there are benefits to that, and it will provide an ease of amendments or future changes to the act. So that's a positive, Mr. Chair, which I will acknowledge.

The challenge or challenges that I have with this bill: there are a number of them, Mr. Chair. Now, the first, which has to be highlighted – and I place this squarely on the government's shoulders. I will not single out an individual minister or member of cabinet, but we have come face to face with a very, very sad reality, which is the number of Albertans in continuing care who have passed away from COVID and throughout this pandemic. It is a tragedy. I know that members of the government caucus have also referred to the 1,600 Albertans who have lost their lives as tragic, and it is. Any time we lose a single Albertan or Canadian to a pandemic or unnecessarily, it is tragic.

I had hoped to see a number of initiatives or programs or supports or actionable items to help address that call to action. Unfortunately, Mr. Chair, I don't see action in this bill that would address that. I think – and I've said this previously in the Chamber – that this bill in its current form misses an opportunity, an opportunity to make substantive and meaningful changes. Now, I want to flag – and I know that the minister has been very responsive, and I suspect that he will rise and address some of the comments and questions that the opposition is putting forward, which, again, I appreciate. My understanding of the UCP's promises a year ago is that a bill or a commitment would increase home care, increase the amount of hours of care that residents would receive, and increase the proportion of full-time staff. Unfortunately, the bill falls short. It falls short of these commitments.

It also leaves much to the regulations. You know, I know that my colleagues have pointed out the fact that we've heard on a number of different pieces of legislation the government imploring Albertans and members of this Chamber to trust them and to trust that through regulation, which is, of course, decisions made behind closed doors by Executive Council exclusively, they'll make the right decisions and make the right changes.

Mr. Chair, I want to point out a number of examples where the government has claimed that Albertans should trust them, starting off – first and foremost, at a time when the world was facing a global pandemic, this UCP government chose to wage war on

doctors and nurses. You know, when I speak to colleagues across the country, they cannot believe that in one breath a government thanks the very front-line workers who – sadly, today we have an unprecedented number of them going on stress leave and needing to go on leave because they've been completely overworked. A way to repay them has been the threat of wage rollbacks for a number of health care officials and, for others, picking a fight with them and driving many out of the province.

My frustration is that there's been a lack of an acknowledgement despite the fact that the opposition has tabled numerous documents showing, in black and white, doctors leaving Alberta and indicating that they are leaving Alberta because of how this government has treated them, and the government stands up and denies that this is happening. You know, to me, Mr. Chair, this is something that is quite unprecedented. I mean, sure, members may embellish or in the past may have embellished in this Chamber, but to have members claim that down is up and black is white when there is evidence of the contrary, again, not the opposition or another member saying, "Trust me" but actual documented proof that's been tabled in this Chamber – it's unbelievable to me that anyone can claim the opposite is true. We've seen a number of doctors leave this province.

8:20

We see the number of red alerts where there are no ambulances available in a city reach record highs in the province's history. The fact that we have children's hospitals with lineups where they have to wait for hours blows my mind. Where are we living? I thought we were living in Alberta. I thought we were living in one of the richest provinces in the country and one of the wealthiest provinces.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Mr. Bilous: Then please explain to me how there's a lineup outside a children's hospital.

An Hon. Member: You're seeing things.

Mr. Bilous: I can't get my head around that. I'm not seeing things. That's documented in the paper. There are photos of lineups of families and kids waiting to be admitted.

Now, I don't believe anyone on either side of this Chamber would ever want to see that. I know there are members on both sides that have families, that have kids, and I'm sure members are feeling as outraged as I am. If I had to rush Olive to the hospital and stand in line for hours, I don't know what I would do. I'd probably lead a demonstration to this Legislature, because it is unforgivable. It's shameful. The point here is that it's preventable. It's preventative. Now, again, I'm not claiming that the government or the minister would ever do that intentionally, but if that wasn't a call to action, then I don't know what is.

Now, I'll be the first to admit that I've had great conversations with the Minister of Health about some of the other cities that are facing doctor shortages, the minister explaining the steps that he's taking to increase the number of doctors. I respect that, and I respect the fact that it takes time. You can't flip a switch and suddenly replace 20 doctors. I get that. My frustration is that we have allowed, this government has allowed the system to get to a point where kids are waiting outside of a hospital. There's another way. There's a better way. I'm not saying that the solution is just throwing gobs of money at the system, but if we get to a point where we can't even address emergency needs of our citizens, there's not a larger or louder alarm system that should be going off for every single member of this Chamber.

You know, there are other examples, Mr. Chair, where this government has made the wrong decision. Now, I don't claim that any government in the history of the world is perfect and makes perfect decisions. I'll be the first to acknowledge that our government, when we were government, made some wrong decisions and walked back policy. I'll give a great example. When I was minister of economic development and trade, we first introduced the Alberta investor tax credit, and the tax credit – when we went back to stakeholders, venture capitalists, Albertans, start-ups, they indicated: hey, we have a bit of a wrinkle here. We worked with them to address the issue as quickly as possible – I'm trying to think of the adjective – where I was more than willing to stand up and admit that we didn't quite get it right and we needed to make changes to do that. We did end up making the appropriate changes.

My point is that not every decision that any government is going to make is going to be perfect, but a great example – so this is a bit of a criticism and at the same time an acknowledgement for government. The decision to remove the insulin pump program was a wrong decision. Many Albertans rely on that, and quite frankly the cost to government was small compared to the value it gave to Albertans. It took many, many brave Albertans to stand up and call on the government to rescind that decision. The criticism is that that decision never should have happened. Now, having been in government, maybe that decision wasn't flagged to the minister as it should have been. Maybe it was a decision that passed through without the proper oversight, but – and here's the acknowledgement – the minister and the government halted that decision in its tracks.

What I will say – and I've said this to members of the government caucus. A decision to halt a program or to backtrack takes courage. It's not easy to admit a mistake, especially when we live in this environment where each side jumps all over the other if one misstep is made. It's unfortunate that we live in that environment. Now, I won't apologize for the job the opposition was elected to do, which is to hold the government to account, to propose solutions and ideas to amend legislation in order to improve it, and to call out the government when faulty decisions are made. That example did erode trust in many Albertans who, whatever the reason was, didn't understand how a program that has existed for so many years, that has been a game changer in the lives of Albertans, was suddenly going to end.

For those reasons and many others, when I speak again . . .

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any members wishing to join? I see the hon. Minister of Health has risen.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to thank colleagues in the Chamber for commenting on Bill 11: the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, the Member for Calgary-East, and the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. This, I believe, shows, quite frankly, the importance of the Continuing Care Act and the importance that we all feel in terms of improving our system for seniors and for Albertans.

I made comments prior to the dinner break, but I wanted to actually just get on the record again and then chat very briefly about why we're putting forward this, because I appreciate the comments made by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View saying that she is a fan of modernizing legislation, you know, recognizes that it is important, that it is the law, and having a framework, a framework that actually pulls the various disparate pieces of legislation together into one piece of legislation, which this does, Bill 11, is important. Similarly, I thank the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in terms of recognizing that it's positive to bring all the

pieces together in one piece of legislation. So we definitely agree on this, and we agree that there needs to be a framework.

8:30

Now, I've also heard the members opposite talk about some of their concerns with the legislation, and it's not actually what's in the legislation. The concern, what they've highlighted, is what's not in the legislation. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View, you know, talked about home care, talked about the number of hours provided to individuals in continuing care centres. They talk about staff and staffing models. Well, Mr. Chair, I'd like to point out that none of these items today are in legislation. These items are either in regulation or they're in policy, and that is actually the appropriate place for these items because these things will change. Having a staffing model in legislation is not appropriate because it will change over time.

You know, having a requirement for home care and being specific about how much you put in: that's not appropriate at that location, in the legislation. Rather, that comes through the policy and comes through how we fund it from a budget standpoint. My colleague from Calgary-East spoke quite eloquently about the amount of funding that we are putting into these elements: additional funding into home care, additional funding into continuing care, additional funding into community care, and additional funding into continuing care spots. It's not only additional funding on the expense side, over \$200 million in Budget 2022, but also on the capital side, well over \$200 million, and that's in addition to the money we've already put in place for an additional 1,500 spots, Mr. Chair.

My comment here is that these elements, the details regarding, you know, what came out from the facility-based continuing care review and was highlighted – the appropriate place actually is in regulation. It is in the policy. That's where it should be, and quite frankly the members opposite: when they were in government, that's where they left it. They didn't change it. So it's appropriate that it be there.

Now, the hon. colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview suggests that – you know what? We cannot – you know, the government says: "We will deal with these issues in regulation. We will deal with these issues in policy. We'll go out and consult and ensure that we get it right as we develop this over time, as we modernize our approach and our framework for continuing care." The members opposite suggest that Albertans can't trust us.

Well, Mr. Chair, I would suggest that they can because we're already making a difference. We're already investing in transformation. We're putting our money where our mouths are: the additional \$200 million on the expense side, as I indicated already, an additional \$200 million plus on the capital side, and we are investing in our entire health care system. My hon. colleague from Calgary-East spoke at length about the investments that are made. So we are focused on making the change, and the appropriate place is in the budget. The appropriate place is in the regulation and is in the policy.

I would urge all colleagues in the Chamber to support Bill 11. Let's get started with the transformation that we need for a positive legislative framework, as recognized by members opposite already. Let's get this going. We're already starting the transformation in terms of the budget. We need to move forward in terms of the regulation. As the hon. members know, how do you do the regulation? Well, you have to do the legislation first. Then you can do the regulation and then make the change. So I would urge everyone to support Bill 11 and to support it soon. Let's get started with the legislative changes that we need to support Albertans and deliver better continuing care.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

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

Mr. Deol: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm pleased to rise in the House and add my comments to Bill 11, Continuing Care Act, with the help of my constituents, particularly, I would say, Albertans but particularly the racialized Albertans who reached my office and wanted to voice their concerns regarding the continuing care system.

I got aware of, like, more of the issues and challenges faced by our continuing care system in 2015, when I got a chance, actually the first time ever in my life – I joined electoral politics and became the candidate in the federal election in 2015 for Edmonton Mill Woods. For the very first time I became aware of the weights of the issues and the arguments made around home care in relation to the weaknesses and capacities and what's more to do in the continuing care system. That's where I heard debate between continuing care and home care as a part of continuing care and where I also got a chance to speak to my constituents and go to three provincial ridings, door-knocking and specifically speaking to the ethnic communities, what they think about this.

I was surprised to hear the challenges and the seriousness of those issues, particularly when it comes to the communities where English is not a first language or they don't speak fluent English. There is I don't know what amount. Like, there's basically little to no support in the majority of the cases in the whole province, probably similar cases in other provinces as well. But particularly in Edmonton, in my neighbourhood, where I spoke with people, they were seriously concerned about the lack of support that their seniors and their family members can get in their own language.

In the case in my community, where people come from India, they are able to communicate in a number of different languages. As residents of the Indian continent they can communicate in Urdu, they can communicate in Hindi, and they can communicate in Punjabi and some other languages. Even being that individual, it was not something that was attractive and seems beneficial, sending that individual to continuing care. Sending the member to continuing care means that you need to have a full-time member of your family online most of the time willing to take a call and support your family member to translate the information. They were lacking the service, not only the lack of, you know, being able to communicate with the staff but sometimes very critical information, the barrier of being able to communicate with the health professionals, with the doctors. So you can imagine the kind of impact that that put on those individuals.

That's why the continuing care services or the system at large is not really popular in the racialized communities, so when it comes to the continuing care system, when we discuss these things in our houses, specifically in the racialized communities, people get scared. People just fear what's going to happen to their remaining life. That is where I came across, through the conversations with my constituents during the door-knocking, the most support, the majority of the support, from the people for the home-care supports, where they were happy. The lack of multilingual staff still exists there, but they were still, you know, comfortable at some level with the majority of the time their family members are around to help communicate with the staff or communicate on behalf of them.

8:40

The majority of the people wanted to stay home not only due to the language, but also it was very important for their mental health,

that will keep them kind of – how would I say? – more positive. They wanted to stay with their family. They wanted to spend more time with their spouses, that they have spent a life with. There are cases where, you know, the husband and wife or the common-law partners are in very different situations. If the one partner needs continuing care, the other one is actually well enough to do it themselves. In such a case they don't want to part ways, and they wanted to live at home.

There's a critical issue for accessing home care due to lack of funding, lack of staff, lack of services. You can imagine how this is impacting the health and well-being of those families. I can just probably say that some of the UCP government caucus members can probably assure my comments on this. There's a general perception in the community that sending your loved ones or your seniors to the seniors' home or continuing care or long-term care means that he's not going to live anymore. He's not going to live very long. His life is not there very long. That is kind of the impact, and these are kind of the challenges.

I have visited personally some of the continuing care system. It was very, very discouraging and sad to see the people in critical need not being able to call staff or, if they call staff, not being able to communicate with staff with the issues they wanted to get addressed, not being able to talk to the doctors. And lack of food of their choice: there are not many choices. The other biggest issue we heard: the lack of, you know, capacity for being able to worship their own faith. There are lots and lots of barriers. We live in a multicultural society, but we have to go a very long way to create this in reality, the society as a plural and multicultural society.

This is sort of the feedback and the concerns I hear from my constituents, I hear from my communities across the province. I would have been happy to support something in this House, but I didn't see anything coming forward like this that I could be happy to go back in my riding and go back to the communities and tell: this is kind of the concern you raised to us, and this is what we're discussing in the House, and we're responsible representatives, and we do not waste the time of our House on, you know, unimportant issues.

Getting the feedback and also the importance of the issue in my community – I just wanted to share this with the House members, that could be probably experienced in other cities as well. In Edmonton my community members, the first generation who moved here, the second generation, probably in the '50s or early '60s, got together. They worked for decades here, they fund raised, they built organizations: that was the plan. If these problems are not being addressed in the system, at least they can come up with something where they can help their community members, where they can feel that they will not feel these barriers. Unfortunately, there were millions of dollars, the work of a number of years. But eventually, I think five, six years ago – I believe it was in 2014, somewhere in there – they ended up going nowhere, actually. There were a lot of bad years. The type of background, expertise, and things that were required – they ended up giving up the project and even handing out all their funds and collections to the agency that became responsible for this. All they got out of this: they could pick or choose, probably, in return, maybe four or five rooms to use out of the facility for the community.

This is a serious problem, and it's turning into a crisis in racialized communities. These are the issues we need to focus on and look at. Unfortunately, what I see in Bill 11: we are basically dealing with some of the administrative pieces of legislation that will probably help, you know, something, streamline a bit better on smooth transitions, but that doesn't even touch the basic problem.

That does not even, like, look at the basic problems that we should have been looking for, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic, what happened in the past two years: over 1,600 people passed away, died, in those continuing cares and the anger and the agitation among those family members.

This government eventually ended up bringing a bill in the House to bar those families and bar those family members from – I will say, you know, they were robbed by that Bill 70, the piece of legislation this government brought in. Their ability to seek justice, what happened to them in the continuing care system: those families were simply wronged. They lost their loved ones, and they were looking for answers. What we should have drawn from that was to improve our accountability system among this, but I don't see anything happening in Bill 11 around that issue.

Unfortunately, I have to say that even if we discuss those legislative changes, it probably is going to help in some way, streamline in some manner. But, as such, it is ignoring the serious, serious matters and concerns in the crisis we are seeing in continuing care, so I have to say on the record that we cannot really support the bill as it is.

The recommendations, particularly – I just wanted to be on the record for saying this. The recommendations came from the facility-based continuing care review. I also wanted to say that the government has had this report of 42 recommendations for over a year on their table. That report actually recommends so many changes, policy changes. The biggest thing in this that they're asking for: increasing the staff, specifically in home care and continuing care. They're also highlighting that by doing this, the government will not only be helping families, helping out seniors, but government will also be saving more money, saving approximately \$452 million annually, not even one-time money.

It is discouraging to see that the government would not see those benefits, that the government did not see the actual problems. It is three years of the UCP ruling. The UCP has only one more year to go if the election is next year. But it is sad to say that they failed to see this problem. By not addressing these issues in Bill 11, it's a clear message that this UCP government is very ignorant and they're not going to care about the seniors issue within this term.

8:50

So, Mr. Chair, with this, I'm going to conclude my remarks by saying that it's sad to see that Bill 11 does not touch on or debate or argue any of the real issues around continuing care. I cannot support this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Next I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-City Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, here in Committee of the Whole. I appreciate the debate that's happened so far. I appreciate that the minister has been present at points in the debate and has offered some thoughts on the record in response.

An Hon. Member: You can't say if he's here or not.

Mr. Shepherd: The minister has been present at points during the debate. I made no observation whether he is currently here as part of the debate, but I appreciate that the minister indeed has made a point of participating and bringing views forward and responding to members.

Just reflecting on some of the remarks the minister made tonight in response to the debate that's taken place so far, the minister talked about modernizing legislation, and indeed that's what he's

looking to do here. They are pulling together many pieces of legislation, consolidating, looking to update some pieces, make some administrative changes, a number of other things, lay the groundwork for other things with the intent to introduce later in regulation, policy. Now, I certainly recognize that that has been the process in many cases, but when I hear this government use the terms "modernize," "streamline," "expand," my radar goes off, Mr. Chair, because we have seen what this government does in so many respects when it throws out those kinds of buzzwords, particularly when it comes to the health care system.

Now, these government members love to, at length, go off on their favourite narrative about our time in government. To condense it, essentially sort of saying that our government had no understanding of how business and the economy operated, went into a complex system, blundered about, made so many mistakes that we apparently tanked the entire economy of the province of Alberta from our lack of knowledge. Now, Mr. Chair, I would say that every bit of that misrepresentation is absolutely true for this government with the health care system. Every single bit of that false, unnuanced narrative is absolutely factual for how this government has approached and handled the health care system with its incredible arrogance and hubris that it came into office to undergo their modernization of the Alberta health care system, their streamlining of that health care system.

Just think of how this government approached modernizing and improving the physician funding framework in the province of Alberta, Mr. Chair. First, by coming in and tearing up the contract with – well, first passing legislation giving themselves the power to tear up the contract with physicians in the province of Alberta, and then immediately going ahead with doing so in February of 2020 and embarking on a clearly antagonistic campaign against physicians in the province of Alberta, clearly with an intent to try to perhaps bully doctors into submission. We've seen how that has resulted. They blundered into a complex ecosystem, attempted to cut all kinds of different things, different payments, different codes, make sweeping changes that their own members had to rebel against.

The then Minister of Health, some of the members sitting in this very Chamber at this moment had to go behind closed doors, largely didn't do it in public, but they certainly had to go back and let the then Minister of Health know that he completely misunderstood what was happening and the potential damage that was going to do for access to health care in their constituencies, largely in rural areas, Mr. Chair. Unfortunately, this government's continued blundering has done exactly that and has indeed deeply damaged their access to care in many rural communities across the province of Alberta.

But this government wasn't done with that, Mr. Chair. They continued, through a global pandemic, to put politics ahead of public health, continually made decisions that compromised our health care system, pushed it to the absolute limits, exhausted front-line health care workers, and as a result we have a building and continuing health crisis here in the province of Alberta.

When this government talks about modernizing and improving, Mr. Chair, we just look at their attempts to modernize the insulin pump therapy program, again using words like "expanding," "offering more choice." The minister talks about, you know, that they will go out and consult on how they modernize legislation. It was very clear that there was no consultation done with the actual diabetic community in the province of Alberta on the changes to the insulin pump therapy program.

In fact, the minister talks about how, you know, they wanted to improve things, make things better, that indeed they had thought this through, yet there was no detail provided when they made that

announcement. If they truly thought that this was a way it was going to make this program better, that it was going to offer more choice and offer more opportunities, you'd think they'd want to be able to lay out in detail precisely how they were going to achieve that, yet diabetics in Alberta had to continue to pound on this government's door and beg for further information and detail, and the minister could not even simply just lay out: these are exactly what costs each level of Albertans are going to face. The government did not want to put that on the record.

Of course, they did pause and they did reverse, as my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview did note. They said that they would go out and consult again, but then we saw what that consultation looked like last week, where we had 300 Albertans from the diabetic community who were basically being told the same thing they had been told before, getting a little bit more detail maybe but certainly not being given the sense that they were actually being heard or that the government was looking at changing its position as much as they had sent a couple of officials to explain the government's position to them again, just assuming that they just really didn't understand it the first time.

So I am concerned, Mr. Chair. When this government talks about transformation, when it talks about modernization, what's going to actually be there in the fine print? What is it we are going to actually see this government choose to do?

The minister talked about the investments this government is making. Mr. Chair, let's be clear. In terms of health care spending this government is still behind where it would need to be simply to keep up with population growth and inflation. When it talks about historic health care spending, of course, we have had historic population growth. We have certainly had historic inflation growth. We've had a historic pandemic, and we have had a historically incompetent government when it comes to the health care system.

Indeed, you know, just earlier today we heard the Minister of Justice express his concerns about what he called effective cuts, Mr. Chair – to be clear, an effective cut being when you don't give the level of increase that was expected – and talk about how that was a bad thing when this government has denied doing that in health care, education, so many other areas. They have made sweeping effective cuts to almost every social service and public service in the province of Alberta.

The fact is, Mr. Chair, as we are debating Bill 11 here, the Continuing Care Act, and this government is saying that it is looking to improve the continuing care system in the province of Alberta and that it will eventually do so and that we should trust them to later come up with the details and show their work, that the context we have is that this is a government that has bungled almost every effort it has made at transformation in our health care system in the province of Alberta to the fact where they have driven out doctors, where, as my colleague from Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview noted, we have lineups outside of ERs for children's hospitals, we have sweeping wait times in other ERs, we still have surgeries that are being cancelled.

9:00

We have this bill, and the minister says: "We need to move forward. We need to get started." Well, Mr. Chair, there have been many opportunities for this government to step up and actually take action, and we haven't seen that. Certainly, we have seen delays in bringing forward this administrative legislation, and I imagine we're probably going to see delays in moving forward with regulations and the other pieces because at this point we essentially have a caretaker government. The lights are on, but it's questionable how many folks are actually home as we move from the obsession

with trying to save the Premier's job to now figuring out which of them is going to take it next.

That said, I think we have good reason to want to look very closely at what this government's intentions are when it comes to continuing care in the province of Alberta, indeed home care in the province of Alberta. In all of these areas we recognize there absolutely needs to be work done. We recognize that there needs to be much better collaboration amongst the various health care workers and various health professions that contribute to looking after seniors in the province of Alberta. But I have very, very serious doubts, Mr. Chair, that this government has the capability of doing that, that this government is not going to fall back on ideology, as it has done in so many other cases, that it's not going to return to its obsession with forcing more private profit into our public health care system, that it's not going to further trample the complexity of the ecosystem that is health care in the province of Alberta.

That said, we are going to have some further opportunity for debate on this bill and further opportunities, I guess, to see what the government has to say, but at this point I find it difficult to see a reason why I would support this government in moving forward and trust in the work that they intend to do.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join debate?

Are you ready for the question on Bill 11, Continuing Care Act?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 11 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Private Bills Committee of the Whole

Bill Pr. 1 Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Chair: Are there any members looking to join debate on this bill? I see the hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Jones: This is the third reading of Pr. 1. Is that what we're on?

The Deputy Chair: Pr. 1. We are on Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022.

All right. If there's no one looking to speak to Bill Pr. 1, are you ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Deputy Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that we rise and report Bill 11 and Bill Pr. 1.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, I believe I see the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has risen.

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 11 and Bill Pr. 1.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much, hon. member.
Does the Assembly concur in the report? All those in favour, please say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 19

Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022

Ms Ganley moved that the motion for second reading of Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate on the amendment May 9: Mr. Feehan]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has risen. For clarity, we are on REF1.

Ms Gray: REF1. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to speak to REF1 and in support of this important referral amendment. We are speaking about Bill 19, the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022. This is my first opportunity to respond to this important piece of legislation, and I’d like to begin by saying that I do so as someone who owns and lives in a condominium, one of the 12 per cent of Albertans who live in condos.

I just looked it up, Mr. Speaker, and one week from today will be my 19-year anniversary of living in the condominium that I own, and I know this because my husband proposed when we moved in. So that date is etched in, but the date of first home ownership is an important one for many, many people, whether you got engaged on that day or not.

Condominiums provide a really important source of affordable home ownership for many, many Albertans. They’re an incredibly important part of our housing options here in the province. During my time, now coming up on 19 years, of living in my condo, at times I have sat on the condominium board. I currently do not, but I really want to emphasize that when we’re talking about condominiums, when we talk about the complexities with condo ownership, so, so often the members of the boards are the owners of these properties. They are sitting on the boards in volunteer positions trying to do their best to protect their investment and the investment of their neighbours, which is, in fact, their homes.

Now, there are many people who do have condominiums as investment properties, but there are also so many Albertans who are living in a condo that is their place of residence. My parents live in a condo in downtown Edmonton, and many, many of my constituents in Mill Woods live in condominiums throughout the Mill Woods neighbourhood. So as I begin my remarks on the Condominium Property Amendment Act and my support for the referral amendment, I certainly want to emphasize that I think condominium living is incredibly important, and it’s important that Alberta have modern and up-to-date legislation to reflect what owners and their boards need. I’m really grateful for all of the people who work on condominium boards and do their due diligence and do their best to support fellow condo owners and their neighbours.

To be very clear, in this province condominium owners have been looking for updated legislation that recognizes their unique challenges for a long time. Since the condominium act was introduced in 2014, a phased process has been going on to update condominium legislation and regulations to better support condo owners. Bill 19 in many ways furthers that conversation and puts into place many things that stakeholders in the condominium world have asked for, yet I support referral amendment 1.

I am supporting referral amendment 1 for a couple of very important reasons to me. First off, I think that this bill should be referred to a standing committee because it is missing some incredibly important things that condominium owners, the stakeholders, including lawyers and other service providers, boards themselves, and the organizations that represent them have asked for, specifically, the need for a tribunal process, something that this government expressed support for, that previous governments have done much, much consultation on, that, in fact, this government had consulted on yet has not been included. I think that’s a really important piece that we are missing in Bill 19.

9:10

Secondly, as we’ve seen in other pieces of legislation, so much of Bill 19 is deferred to regulation. And not just little things, Mr. Speaker. Giant decisions that fundamentally impact how this bill is going to operate in practice and how it will impact condo owners and condo boards have been deferred to regulation, making it very difficult for me as a condo owner and a legislator to look at this bill and to understand how the government intends to draft it and put it into place in a way that will protect, again, owners, boards, and the public.

Certainly, we know that right now, because so much of the dispute process does end up requiring the court system, a system that’s adversarial and, of course, incredibly backlogged right now, we need to be looking at other ways that we can try and make sure that we’re responsive to the needs of those who are on condo boards and for condominium owners, certainly in the case where there are owners who are causing damage, one of the main fundamentals that Bill 19 seeks to address.

I certainly want to recognize how important this is, but so much of this is deferred to regulation, and the dispute tribunal has not even been put into effect, something that many of the stakeholders were expecting and were only just told in March of this year by the minister would not be coming forward because, of course, this government had other financial priorities than setting up a tribunal process. The need for tribunals has been described as urgent. I believe that sending this to committee is going to be the most important part.

Now, there have been lots of questions raised during debate about the process for damage chargebacks, which I think is incredibly important here. We know that the inclusion of damage chargebacks in Bill 19 is bringing Alberta more in line with Ontario, British Columbia, and other jurisdictions, but without that tribunal process there are some serious concerns that we have about how this is going to be developed through the regulations. Certainly, there's a lack of trust for this government, their ability to consult.

Just today, Mr. Speaker, I was speaking about a completely different piece of legislation where entire groups of stakeholders had not been consulted, just as one example, but over and over we've seen and heard one thing from this government and seen another thing take place, a real undermining of trust. You see that when you're out talking to the public, when you're out door-knocking. I think that because the tribunal was not enacted, because so much has been deferred to regulation, because there is such a lack of trust, referral amendment 1, REF1, that we are talking about, would allow us to help the government strike the right balance, make sure that we've got the ability to really look into the chargeback system and understand the potential risks that may be included with it, because the last thing we want to do is to implement something that is going to cause more harm.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Now, again, I'm fully aware that many condominium stakeholders are supportive of the moves forward in Bill 19, and I do hope to be able to support this bill, but in its current form and with so much being left to regulations, there are some real challenges that need to be solved. I think that all parties, all stakeholders have come to an agreement that the tribunal process is something worth looking at. Now, there are other options potentially. There could be reverse onus on condo boards to require good faith and issue fines where boards fail to substantiate proof of chargebacks. We could ensure that we don't simply allow charges without some accessible limits or recourse to appeal. In this current form I have questions about those appeal processes and how we make sure that while we solve the problem of irresponsible owners and tenants who cause damage that incurs costs on to the other owners within a condominium, we also make sure that there are reasonable solutions for any cases where costs are being issued and we make sure that there's fair and due process put in place. Certainly, I would love to hear more about why the tribunal process could not have been brought forward with this given that we've been talking about years and years of consultation and this government has been in power for three years and talking about these issues with condominium stakeholders throughout.

So I rise to speak in favour of having up-to-date, robust condominium property legislation but also in favour of referral amendment 1 because so much has been left to regulations, we're missing the tribunal piece, which so many people have said we have an urgent need for, and I'm very concerned that we can do better and that by sending this to committee, we might be able to help the government improve Bill 19 and address some of the concerns that have been raised through debate in second reading and on this referral amendment.

Mr. Speaker, if I can just get a time check from you.

The Speaker: Four minutes.

Ms Gray: Four minutes. Okay.

I think I've hit the majority of the notes that I wanted to in speaking to this referral amendment, so at this point I will take my seat and look forward to further debate on this particular issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Five minutes and 22 seconds left in second if that's what you were referring to. I'm not sure which time you were checking.

Are there others? The hon. Member for St. Albert, it would appear.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to referral amendment 1 for Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022. It was interesting to hear from my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods. I, too, live in a condo. I haven't lived in mine quite as long as she has, and I don't have a happy anniversary to mark the time. I think I've been there 13 years. Yeah. So this is a topic that is quite important to me as well.

I think, you know, condominiums, or condos, are an important option for Albertans to live in. I think we've been spending quite a bit of time lately talking about the range of housing that needs to be available to Albertans. Certainly, condos are a way for people to afford to get into the housing market. They are often more accessible financially for people. There are certainly pros and cons to condo living, but I'm certainly grateful for the condo association that I live with and the condo that I live in.

As my colleagues have said, I too am grateful for the vast majority of condominium association boards that are made up of volunteers, who give up a lot of time. The meetings are often not super exciting. They're a little bit dry as toast sometimes, but they're essential to keep these associations running smoothly. So I would like to thank all of the condo associations in Alberta that work really hard to make their associations function as best as they can.

I would like to talk a little bit about this piece of legislation and why I think it's important to be referred to a committee to slow down and to take the time to get things right. You know, if there's been a theme of this session or, let's be honest, all of the sessions since 2019, if there's a theme that I find that I'm constantly saying any time we speak to a piece of legislation, it is: it is so unfortunate that this government, this UCP government, seems almost incapable of recognizing maybe when they just haven't gotten it right – maybe they've missed a piece of the consultation, maybe they've forgotten a piece, or maybe they've come into some information a little bit late – and that they just pause, stop, and go back and fix it so that it's the best piece of legislation possible. I think we've only seen a couple of examples where this government has actually caved a little bit to public pressure and made a few changes. Certainly, you know, that was welcome, and we're happy to see that, but we just don't see many examples of that in this place.

9:20

The most recent example that I can think of is – well, it's actually not legislation; it was a policy change – around the insulin pumps. You know, first we heard: “No, no. We're not doing anything. NDP fear and smear.” Then it turned out that, oh, they had made a change that was going to make life more difficult for people with diabetes. So there has been a pause, and that was really only because of public pressure.

I would suggest that we have outlined for this government a few things that really need to be fixed in Bill 19, Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022, and I think we're more than ready to support this piece of legislation. I think it's important. I think

anything that we can do to support condominium associations and also the people that live there or the people that rent there – I think that it's incumbent on us to do that.

One of the things that we really, really wanted to have amended and looked at, talked about is a tribunal. We've been asking this question again and again in debate: why was there no tribunal included in this bill, and when will the tribunal be implemented, or has, you know, the minister decided that one will never come into place?

What we get are answers from the UCP government, things like: "Well, trust us. It'll come in regulation." Well, we've already established – actually, Albertans have already established – that there is zero trust for this government. Zero. None. Zero trust. We have seen example after example after example of corruption, dishonesty. So for this government to say, "Don't worry; we'll get it right in regulation," we don't trust the government. We in the Official Opposition, Albertans certainly don't trust the government. But what Albertans do want is solid legislation that will make life better for them, in this case people that live in condominiums, people that own condominiums, condominium associations.

So for that reason we believe that the bill should be referred to a standing committee so we can create a process where there can be resolution to the shortfalls that we've identified, particularly in instances of damage chargeback, which Bill 19 establishes. I think my colleague mentioned that both Ontario and British Columbia have processes for damage chargeback, but they also have a tribunal process for resolution. We think that's important for a number of reasons. Bill 19 leaves resolution entirely up to regulation. We've established that there is very little – well, I would suggest there's almost no trust with this government. It is one of the least trusted governments – I would say it's probably the least trusted government in Canada.

Mr. Schow: Are you sure about that, though?

Ms Renaud: If you'd like to add to debate, please stand up.

Before creating a process for boards to charge owners, we should also have a clear process for owners to dispute it. Referring this bill to committee would allow us to create the ability to charge damage fees and to ensure that there are limits in place for how this is done. There are a couple of other options worth considering; however, we would like to strike the right balance.

I think that we have seen repeatedly over the last three years that sometimes, in their rush to get a piece of legislation out, there have been some shortcomings and, in some cases, just absolute failure to consult the appropriate people. The example I just talked about was around the insulin pump program. You know, it may well have been a change in terms of policy that perhaps the government thought would not impact people's lives or might make another program stronger. I'm not sure what the motivation was behind that, but I'd like to give them the benefit of the doubt in thinking that there was no malicious intent except a failure to consult. When there is a failure to consult with the actual people whose lives will be impacted by changes to policy or legislation, then chances are you're going to get it wrong. So we would like this government to stop, refer this to committee so that there can be time for consultation, and the committee can make the recommendations for change that will make this a better piece of legislation.

Other possible options worth looking into may include reverse onus on condo boards that would require good faith and issuing fines where boards fail to substantiate proof of chargebacks. We would like to ensure that we don't simply allow charges without

some accessible limits or recourse to appeal. We have heard that many condo owners have been waiting for a tribunal to be set up in Alberta, and then this is just a shortcoming in this piece of legislation. So, again, taking this bill to committee would allow both the government and the opposition time to participate in a process to consult and get things right. Perhaps there are just a few changes to this legislation that could be made to make this a better, stronger piece of legislation.

Now, you know, we talk a lot about unintended consequences, and I think that without taking the time to correct the issues that we've identified throughout debate, there is a lot of opportunity for there to be more unintended consequences that will hurt Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said, there are a number of things that I think are actually very positive in this legislation. There are some common-sense fixes that we've identified, that we've said, you know, absolutely, we're supporting and happy to see them in the legislation. But what we're asking for is that this bill be sent back to a committee so that we can look at this piece of legislation and ensure that it is the best piece of legislation possible.

If I could get a time check, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Six minutes remaining.

Ms Renaud: Okay. Well, actually, I'm good. I think I've covered all of my notes, Mr. Speaker, so I will encourage all members to vote for this referral amendment, send it back to committee, and let's make it the best piece of legislation possible.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak to the referral motion?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion on amendment REF1 lost]

The Speaker: Back on the main bill. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and the Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are now back on second reading of Bill 19, and I will just briefly take the opportunity to say, as a condominium owner and someone who lives in a condo myself, as do 12 per cent of all Albertans, that having up-to-date, solid condominium property legislation is incredibly important. I have been disappointed that Bill 19 does not further the need for tribunals, which all stakeholders and all parties have said is important and would address an urgent need, and how much of Bill 19 is deferred to regulations, requiring us to trust a government that there is a great deal of a lack of trust in.

Certainly, Bill 19 does not answer some really important questions about how we will make sure that everything is implemented in a way that is fair and reasonable given how critically important condominium ownership is for so many Albertans. We are talking about people's homes, we are talking about people's investments, and we are talking about something that is significantly important, so much so that getting it right should be the priority. That was one of the reasons why the Official Opposition and I supported the idea of sending this to committee to make sure we can get this right.

That being said, we're also talking to our stakeholders, and we know that there is much in Bill 19 that is supported by the stakeholders and the condominium industry. But I still have such strong concerns with how much is deferred to regulation. I still have

such strong concerns because the government has not moved forward on some of those critically important pieces. I know we will have more to say on Bill 19 as it continues through the process. We're only in second reading and just starting to talk about these issues.

For now, Mr. Speaker, and given the debate that we've had so far, I would like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 19.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

**Private Bills
Third Reading**

**Bill Pr. 1
Calgary Young Men's Christian Association
Amendment Act, 2022**

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

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill Pr. 1, Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others wishing to speak to third reading of Bill Pr. 1? The hon. Opposition House Leader.

9:30

Ms Gray: Thank you. In third reading I rise only to say how much the Official Opposition supports Bill Pr. 1 and to thank the mover of the bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question or for the hon. Member for Calgary-South East to close debate should he wish to do so.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a third time]

Government Motions

**Select Special Committee
on Real Property Rights Report**

28. Mr. McIver moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly extend the deadline by which the Select Special Real Property Rights Committee must submit its report to the Assembly from June 15, 2022, as set under Government Motion 106 of the Second Session, to June 30, 2022.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(a). Are there others wishing to join in the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 28 carried]

The Speaker: The Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Had some wonderful progress this evening. I'd like to thank all members of the Assembly for their participation. At this time I do move that the Assembly be adjourned until 9 tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:33 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, May 25, 2022

Day 36

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, May 25, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Please be seated.

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Committee Referral for Personal Information Protection Act

29. Mr. Shandro moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that
- (a) the Personal Information Protection Act be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future and the committee shall be deemed to be the special committee of the Assembly for the purpose of conducting a comprehensive review pursuant to section 63 of that act;
 - (b) the committee may, without leave of the Assembly, sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued; and
 - (c) in accordance with section 63(2) of the Personal Information Protection Act the committee must submit its report to the Assembly within 18 months after beginning its review and that report is to include any amendments recommended by the committee.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General has moved Government Motion 29 on behalf of the Government House Leader. Is there anyone wishing to add questions, comments, or further discussion?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 29 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 11 Continuing Care Act

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General on behalf of the Minister of Health.

Mr. Shandro: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased, gosh, honoured to rise and move third reading of Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act.

We have made a commitment to Albertans that the government would modernize and improve Alberta's continuing care system, and that includes our continuing care legislation. Our existing legislation is, quite frankly, ridiculously outdated, which has added layers of complexity and inconsistencies across different aspects of

the continuing care system, multiple pieces of legislation, multiple regs, and a lot of ways in which the operators in continuing care, whether it's AHS or otherwise, have had much difficulty being able to operate in such a system as that. It's been a barrier for providing responsive care and services to Albertans.

Now, the continuing care system has evolved over time, and so have, quite frankly, the needs and the preferences of Albertans who are looking to access the system. New, streamlined legislation is needed to reflect the environment that we're living in today. Bill 11 will establish the legal authority under one legislative framework that will allow the government to make meaningful changes across continuing care now as well as in decades to come, changes that Albertans have been asking for for many, many years. This is the first step to enable the continuing care system transformation.

This legislative framework will maintain what works well in current legislation and apply it consistently across the continuing care system. It will address limitations to our existing laws and bring them up to date under one act while adding stronger protections, greater accountability, and oversight for the continuing care system. This improved legislation provides consistency as well as clarity, and it will ensure that Albertans receive high-quality care and services.

Several members have expressed their concerns that the legislation is scant on detail, and I've stated before, as well as the Minister of Health, that these concerns will be addressed through regulations and standards. Most of the standards that we had before will be kept or increased, but the regulations and the standards documents are the right place for those details.

The Continuing Care Act is the legislative framework that Alberta needs to be able to move forward, and we need flexibility to modify and to change details over time. That allows the government to work very closely with our stakeholders to inform ourselves as to what regulations should be now and in the future.

I want to reiterate and emphasize to everyone here today that Bill 11 requires operators and providers to comply with the act, to comply with regulations, and to comply with any applicable standards or guidelines. It will also maintain the ability for a resident or a resident's family member to initiate the establishment of a resident and family council for the residents of the continuing care home or supportive living accommodation.

Some members have raised concerns that consolidating multiple pieces of legislation under Bill 11 will reduce standards or somehow dilute the legislation. For example, in the Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act an operator must be licensed when they provide services related to safety and security for four or more persons and offer or arrange for at least one meal per day or housekeeping service. This is a very prescriptive definition, and therefore some settings may structure their services in a way to avoid licensing. As such, the definition in Bill 11, the new Continuing Care Act, is broader, and it captures the overall intent of a supportive living accommodation.

The new definition will capture settings that provide safety, security, or personal welfare and the provision of meals or accommodation services. This definition has been expanded to ensure oversight and to be able to protect potentially vulnerable residents in these settings.

As to the development of Bill 11, the government has been transparent and has consulted Albertans throughout the entire process. This began in 2019, even before the pandemic had hit the entire world, quite frankly. We had begun consultations, we had begun public engagement related to transformation of the continuing care system that ended up first being tabled and released in May with a report on how to improve and expand and transform

the continuing care system, which then led us to guidance on how to improve our legislative framework, which we see now in Bill 11.

That public engagement specific to continuing care, as I said, began much earlier but throughout early '21 on the legislation, and we've received written submissions from 33 stakeholder organizations. Their input has been vital, and these stakeholders have been asking for changes to the legislation for decades.

In addition, over 7,000 Albertans provided input to the facility-based continuing care review, which I mentioned, which helped shape the new legislation. Through these engagements Albertans also gave their feedback on their experiences and lessons learned from the pandemic, which has also informed Bill 11.

More importantly, Bill 11 strengthens the compliance and monitoring of the continuing care system. Albertans have demanded more transparency from government to publicly report on continuing care services and settings, and the act will establish a consistent ability for government to request information from continuing care providers or operators.

It establishes the authority to publicly report on information and findings in the public interest such as inspection reports. This will enable Alberta Health to more effectively monitor providers and operators and to enforce compliance with legislative requirements, including standards.

Protecting the quality of care and services for Albertans is paramount. Bill 11 maintains existing enforcement mechanisms and expands these protections. It will permit the government to enforce inspection requirements across all continuing care services and settings. It will also allow the government to appoint an official administrator to operate a continuing care home where there is a significant risk to the health, the safety, or the well-being of residents. It will enable the government to impose administrative, monetary penalties if an operator or provider is not compliant with minimum requirements.

9:10

In closing, let me emphasize the importance of why Alberta needs new continuing care legislation. Having one overarching piece of legislation will provide consistency and alignment across the continuing care system. Because we had previously, Mr. Speaker, many different types of legislation dealing with the continuing care system, it wasn't treating the continuing care system as it is, a spectrum, a spectrum of services for residents and their families. Instead of treating different parts of the continuing care system as silos, this one overarching piece of legislation will now treat the continuing care system as that spectrum.

The new legislation will help start the transformation of continuing care, which includes the recommended actions from the recent reviews of the system. Many of the recommendations from the facility-based continuing care review can't happen, quite frankly, until we have this new piece of legislation, that will enable us to implement the system-wide transformation that's needed. More importantly, the Continuing Care Act will support a responsive, client-focused system that is better able to meet the needs and quality of life of Albertans now and in the years ahead.

Before I complete, Mr. Speaker, because this is a piece of legislation that began with me in my previous role, there are so many folks in the Ministry of Health who were included in the review of our facility-based continuing care system and of the home care that we provide to Albertans and on this piece of legislation, but one fellow in particular I want to shout out and make sure that he's mentioned in *Hansard*. He is a fellow who just retired recently. He was the assistant deputy minister for the ministry who oversaw all this work, and I just want to thank John Cabral for his leadership in the ministry, for his wisdom, for his guidance, for his advice that

he had provided to me when I was the Minister of Health. That work continues now through his successor, Evan Romanow, and Andy Ridge as well, because there have been some changes in how the divisions within the ministry have been set up. But I just want to, in particular, thank John Cabral for all of his work on this. This is for him.

I ask for your support for third reading of Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The Member for Lethbridge-West.

Ms Phillips: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide some comments at this stage of debate. I've spoken to this piece of legislation a number of times. I'm going to start with what's good about it, building on what the minister was just saying, and then we can take it from there. We probably won't stay in that space.

There's no question, as the Minister of Justice was just detailing, about the ability to ensure that those inspection reports are publicly posted, the ability for the government to appoint an administrator should something fall down at a particular facility. The ability to levy administrative penalties, in my view, is almost always a good thing when you are looking at enforcement actions of various kinds across government activities simply because it is more efficient, more direct, and can be, I think, more effective in terms of ensuring compliance wherever you're looking at an administrative compliance role for government, whether it's in occupational health and safety or elsewhere.

In that sense there are certainly, I think, statutory, legislative efficiencies to be achieved by having one piece of legislation. I think that to the extent that this bill reflects some of those concerns of stakeholder groups and of family advocates and patient organizations and seniors advocates over the years, this is a piece of legislation that is fine on the face of it for what it does. We've discussed at length what the legislation does not do, and we can get to that in a moment, but I think that in the sense that there are some positive things in the bill, I suppose the government should be commended for showing up to work to do the bare minimum at this point. Like, I'm not sure the people in the streets are going wild over legislative actions that streamline several different acts into one act. It doesn't seem to show up on the list of top issues for the public.

What does is health care. That shows up as a pressing concern by the public, and there are really two reasons. You know, I think the government would like to assure itself that it's all COVID, it's all because of COVID, and COVID is behind us, so they say, so there's no problem anymore both in terms of the perception of the leadership of the province – that was certainly the very facile explanation that was provided: oh, people were just upset because of COVID, COVID was very divisive, everyone was very sad about COVID, and the government was between a rock and a hard place because of COVID, da, da, da, da, da. We heard this all the time.

This is both not the root of the problem for the government's current leadership travails, and it is also not the root of the problem in terms of the management of the health care system. Indeed, the problems with respect to health care in this province were preceded by COVID by an interminable war on doctors that persisted through the pandemic and the absolute belligerence faced by other front-line health care workers, whether they were within the Health Sciences Association or paramedics or paramedic firefighters or in emergency response or folks who work in hospitals such as respiratory therapists and occupational therapists and others or registered nurses, LPNs, and health care aides.

All the way through the health care system – and in this I include the continuing care system – there has been a studied disrespect and a persistent approach that there is something inherently wrong with the public health care system and the people who work in it and the people who need to access it that can be solved by continued belligerence and yelling, sometimes metaphorical and sometimes actual and real. That preceded the pandemic, and that affect, that ethos, that approach is woven through the three years of this single, truncated term of this Premier's leadership.

That's where we get to the issue of health care action. I heard the Minister of Health yesterday, and I think it's a fair point that he made that we over here, when we were discussing this legislation, were just discussing what was not in it. Yes, that is to a large extent a true thing that he said, so you know he cannot be faulted for that. But when you have just lost 1,600 continuing care residents from a pandemic, when you consistently had workers saying that there were not enough workers, when you consistently had families indicating that the one-site rule was not appropriately staffed and resourced in order to keep patients safe, when you consistently had a patchwork of approaches – and this would not be rationalized by this legislation. It would not be addressed by this legislation in terms of the ability for families to continue to do visitation.

All of these things, all of the incredible amount of isolation that happened for elderly people through COVID in large part because these facilities did not have the resources, a.k.a. the staff, to be able to take creative solutions, whether it was outdoors or whether it was other ways to have human connection during a pandemic, so people suffered. Elderly people suffered. Many of them died, as we've discussed, and we've had no review and no reckoning with that. But even those who did not perish or become severely ill suffered a great deal of isolation. There is no substitute for human interaction, particularly of families and loved ones, and a lot of that cascaded out of resourcing. That was horrible to watch. I watched it first-hand. It was heartbreaking, and in many cases it was completely unnecessary.

9:20

Here we get to the actual health care action contained within this bill. Now, the Minister of Justice earlier, in his comments speaking to third reading on this bill, indicated that it had been a lengthy process, the facility-based review – and that is true; that is also a true fact – and that a number of Albertans engaged in that process. Also very true, indicating, I think, the level of concern for people living in continuing care, the 1,600 who died and the many, many who suffered otherwise and the people who care for them.

You know, that review indicated a number of promises from a year ago: to increase home care, the amount of hours and care that residents would receive, and increasing the proportion of full-time staff. None of those things are addressed in this bill, and as I have said, the minister has sort of indicated in one of the stages of debate, because we've been discussing this bill at length – I can't remember when – that those things are properly subsumed to regulation.

Now, I do not agree. I think that legislation can set out at least some of your targets, metrics, or goals. We do in fact have legislation that does this across the GOA. There is nothing stopping us from doing it here and from indicating intent to begin to repair some of the war on health care that has been precipitated by this government since it took office.

That's where we see no indication of metrics, goals, standards. We now have a government that is not likely to develop those metrics, goals, standards, ratios, any of those things that underpin a properly functioning continuing care system and, in fact, were also part of the recommendations in both Ontario and in Quebec in response to the crisis in continuing care that happened through

COVID. They did reviews. They had the courage to do reviews, and some of the recommendations were, in fact, around staffing ratios and so on.

We see no movement or even indication that that's going to happen in this province, and no one on any side of any political debate can seriously say with a straight face that this government is going to have the bandwidth to develop such regulations and get them through the legislative review process and then cabinet. Are you kidding me? I mean, this is a group of people that, as my friend from Edmonton-North West said yesterday, looks like they're just busy looking off into the distance in an airport lounge, just waiting for something to happen at this point. This is not a group of people that is seized with the importance of governing, none whatsoever; they are seized with the importance of their own futures.

We're not going to see those regulations, and that is why having at least some indication that the government takes the recommendations of the facility-based review into consideration and that it intends to resource those recommendations appropriately could have been properly situated within this legislation.

Now, we have heard over the course of this debate that the minister would like to keep people out of the acute-care system. Again, a laudable goal, I think one that we share, that the acute-care system should be for folks who are in need of acute care. Continuing care is oftentimes diametrically opposed to that. Fine. Fair enough. But here we do not see any indication of increased resources for home care, which is part of the minister's intent. So, too, do we not see increased staffing ratios and so on in assisted living and long-term care facilities, which, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that in fact that lack of care means that people end up back in the acute-care system. I lived this last summer. I watched it happen in real time. The fact of the matter is that it is nice to articulate a goal, but in government there is really only one group of people that can take action on it, and they are in this Chamber, and they're not doing it.

The other way to keep people out of acute care is of course to have a family doctor around every once in a while, which we certainly do not have in Lethbridge. I'll leave that to another conversation, but you know it was astonishing to me last week, when Alberta Health Services provided a presentation to the community, when they said to a community where, like, half of the people don't have a GP: well, it's not so bad here because it's worse up north. Well, then, I feel very, very poorly for folks up north and the crisis that has been created by this UCP government and the fact that they don't seem to be addressing it down south or up north or anywhere else, really.

Now, there is no question that there is unfinished business in this legislation, and we heard it in the minister's final comments at third reading just now. We heard that the facility-based review "helped shape" this legislation, not that its recommendations were fulfilled at all, because they aren't. The facility-based review recommends 6,000 new staff be hired, and we see absolutely no workforce action plan to fulfill that particular recommendation. We heard that the lessons learned from COVID informed this legislation. Well, there could not be a more bureaucratized phrase. You know, I've been in this place long enough, seven years, to know government talk when I hear it, and when we're informing from lessons learned, that means that we're kind of – sure, we heard the words that you said, but we're not actually doing the thing.

The final thing I heard, which I think actually did signal doing the thing, was that the focus is a client-focused system. Now, those are not the kind of words that, if the civil service fed them up to me, would come out of my mouth, because there is no way on this planet or any other that I think of elderly people who live in assisted living or long-term care, who are in need of our respect and our care, as

clients. It should be a citizen-focused system. That is what we are trying to build here, because people who give their lives to building this province ought to be cared for in a way that puts their dignity at paramount. They're not customers. That to me is – thank goodness there isn't more in this legislation, I suppose, to sympathize with the minister's point on that particular topic. Thank goodness they are distracted with their own internal drama and their *Days of Our Lives*, you know, little soap opera over there, that they can't do more damage in this sector.

Another thing that isn't in this legislation that could be is an independent seniors advocate. Of course, the province fired them; one of their first acts. I'm not quite sure why they felt so threatened by such a thing, but here we are. So, you know, when the minister says – and I have acknowledged what's good about this legislation in terms of the inspection reports, the ability to appoint an administrator, the ability to levy administrative penalties. It would seem to me that the system would have a better early warning system had that independent seniors advocate been in place. That is an unfortunate thing, indeed.

We exit the conversation around this legislation, Mr. Speaker, as we exit this session, which is this is a piece of, essentially, drumbeat-of-government legislation. It is the actual bare minimum. It is job-description legislation. Congratulations for coming to work, guys. But, really, at the end of the day, there is not substantive action on the things that both matter to Albertans and that there is a moral imperative to take action on. That is, in fact, the fundamental failing of this legislation, and it's, in fact, the fundamental failing of this government. In its short tenure, its truncated term, especially, you know, the barely, not even three-quarter-term Premier – we'll see how long he stays; I guess he'll get to meet the Pope, and then he can go. I suppose that was the reasoning for him staying.

But, you know, we end up with a piece of legislation that is fine on the face of it but with so much work remaining undone, work that should be focused on three things: health care and restoring health care, affordability – we didn't even discuss that, but one of the first things this government did was that it also deindexed the amount of assistance per person who was living in long-term care such that that is also being eaten away by inflation, because our most elderly and vulnerable residents are also victims of this government's war on their pocketbook via inflation – and the restoration of trust.

9:30

Certainly, without a reckoning around what happened during the pandemic and what has happened system-wide in the health care system and to our services, this government has in fact obliterated its trust with Albertans and certainly even with its own party members and supporters, and this legislation does not aid in repairing that trust as well.

With that, I will conclude my comments on this legislation, Mr. Speaker, and leave the House with an entreaty to, when discussing matters of long-term care and assisted living, think not only of the contributions of seniors and elderly people and vulnerable people but also the moral imperative to do better.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on Bill 11 for third reading are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise this morning to add some final comments around Bill 11, Continuing Care Act. Actually, I have a lot of comments and probably not enough time to get through them all, but I will do my best to try to hit as many of those throughout the debate. I've taken quite a few

notes and scribbles along the way, thoughts that occurred during comments from others and so forth.

Obviously, in listening very intently when the minister opened up debate here for third reading, as you can imagine, I heard all of the right buzzwords coming out all the time, things like transparency, accountability, you know, consultations. So I think it would be appropriate to remind this House of some of the connections around these different words that we've heard and the government's actions to date. While I can appreciate that they want to promote transparency, I would suggest that the government needs to try harder to do that considering they still own the incredible label of one of the most secretive governments in Canada. If you're going to want to promote something like transparency, then you actually have to walk that walk, not just make the talk.

Then when I heard things like accountability. Well, Mr. Speaker, as we know, earlier in the 30th Legislature – I guess maybe not that early – at one point in time, when we were starting to look at some of the consequences and effects that COVID had racked on the continuing care facilities and some of the consequences that happened there, one of the things that the government moved to change around accountability was to move the definition of negligence to gross negligence. Now, anybody knows that when it comes to language and the difference between negligence and gross negligence, it is very, very difficult to prove gross negligence. You pretty much have to be able to show that there was absolute intent to create a problem. While I feel that most operators did their absolute best, to then slap on that gross negligence and deny the families any chance to question those actions, I think, was misinformed by the government.

That now leads me to the consultations. My friend from Lethbridge-West had also talked a little bit around this. One of the things that, you know, the minister had said in the opening remarks around third reading here was that consultations have informed Bill 11. When I look back at some of the consultations that the government has said that it's performed, maybe I would draw attention to one of the most recent failures of consultation, and that would be around insulin pumps. The community was very, very clear that they were not heard on this issue. Again, that's just one very recent example, and I know that there has been failure around consultations informing Bill 11.

You know, I appreciate that there were submissions that were made by – I think the number was 33 – different operators. I appreciate them putting in those submissions and their thoughts about how to make the system better to care for the seniors that not only built this province but built this country and looked after all of us as we were growing up in it. Now it's incumbent upon us, of course, to return that exact same thing.

While I appreciate that there were some attempts to reach out to families and get their thoughts, I think there should have been much more effort in that department to really, truly get an idea of what's going on. I mentioned some of these during some of the debates that I had, in somewhat a little bit of a back and forth, with the Health minister during Committee of the Whole yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

One of my constituents, who had I talked to about his experience with one parent and the continued experience with another parent – so just to remind, this constituent's father had passed away roughly two years ago. This would be, of course, on the watch of the UCP government. He ended up getting a call to say: well, you know, we're sorry; we accidentally forgot that your father was on the toilet for the past five hours. It was due to a lack of staffing. So you have an individual that's trying to look after him and was just overwhelmed with everything that was going and then a shift change, and the next thing you know: somebody's looking for his

father and finally finds him in the bathroom and figures out that he had been there for the past five hours. I'm certainly not blaming any of the employees.

The reason I'm bringing this up – this is where I'll probably focus a lot of my comments, as I did in Committee of the Whole. Because the government has – I believe my good friend from Edmonton-Riverview said that it was a little over a year now that they've had that report, the facility-based continuing care review. They had it for a year, and in that report it says that the entire system needs at least 6,000 more employees, okay? So if you've done your consultations and you have this report and those consultations reflect what is in Bill 11, I'm sorry; I don't see anything about how to solve this 6,000 staff shortage that we see. I don't see any framework about increasing the funding to facilities so that they can accomplish that.

Now, I see facilities in my very own riding of Edmonton-Decore always looking for volunteers. Bless their hearts for what they do, but it's not enough. As I've said before, if you're looking for volunteers, you clearly don't have enough staff. I'm not blaming the operators. They're doing what they can, but it's not enough.

9:40

That then leads to the second story from this resident, whose mom, ironically, served her entire career in continuing care and now is there. He goes to visit her one morning. She's in her room, a dark room, because somebody hasn't had the time to open the blinds or turn on the lights. She has her face in her hands. She's so glad to see her son because she's covered in food, and nobody's been able to clean her up and change her clothes. Again, I'm not blaming the staff. There's not enough.

Now, the government loves to pat itself on the back for all this historic funding it's been talking about. Well, if there's all this historic funding, why are we still seeing volunteers being called for? Again, it's a persistent and consistent thing I keep seeing. Things are not matching up with what I'm hearing from the government.

That then leads me to this whole thing around full-time versus part-time. You know, we certainly see some part-time jobs being created. The problem with a part-time job is that it usually comes with a part-time salary, and part-time salaries don't necessarily pay a mortgage or are enough to build a family, which means somebody ends up having to work two part-time jobs, which is part of the problem that led us to the high transmission rate when COVID first broke.

The reason I'm bringing this up, Mr. Speaker, around Bill 11 is because I don't see anything about addressing that. Again, we heard in some of the opening comments around consultations informing Bill 11, around what we've learned from the pandemic informing Bill 11. If that is indeed the case, it starts to fall back to staffing.

You shouldn't have staff needing to go to different facilities so that they're making enough money to be able to pay their bills. I'll spare everybody in this House a tirade on bills going up and what people are having to pay. But if we have indeed been informed by COVID, then going forward, we should be preventing any such thing, but it's still the case. We have staff that are jumping between facilities. Again, I'm not blaming providers. They're doing what they can. But for seniors who have built our province, built our country, looked after all of us, this is our A game that we've apparently been informed of? That's why I've been so critical about Bill 11. Sure, I can concede the fact that if we've got a bunch of pieces of legislation that are better off under one piece of legislation, that's fine. I can accept that, but there is so much more.

Now, I know the Minister of Health had pointed me to a section around the family councils and whatnot. I've attended some of those within the facilities in Decore, and the same thing keeps coming up, which, funny enough, brings me right back to what I've been talking about most of this time: staffing, people not getting the help they need. Residents that somebody comes in to feed and may have feeding problems, may have other challenges on top of that: they try to feed them; no success. They put the spoon down. Then they go and they leave for a while. Then they come back. They try to feed again: "Oh, you're not eating? I'll come back." This goes on for several hours. The cleaning crew comes in, and they go, "Well, you didn't eat" and take your food away. Now that senior hasn't eaten at all. This is not what they signed up for.

And this is why Bill 11 should have gone much further than simply just first steps, as the minister had originally said in opening comments when this debate started. If this has indeed been informed by consultation, by what's happened in COVID, this thing should be at least twice as thick as it is. To say, "Well, trust us; everything will be done in regulation" – I would say that the trust of this government by Albertans is pretty darn thin, and they've lost patience with you.

We can do better, Mr. Speaker. We should have done better. We seem to have money to chase things like Bigfoot and to write all kinds of reports. We need to step up.

The Speaker: Hon. members, third reading of Bill 11. Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join debate on Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, in third reading. As my colleagues have already said this morning, and certainly yesterday I had the opportunity to debate this in Committee of the Whole and happy to reiterate some of the concerns about this legislation, the ND caucus will not be voting in favour of it. As has been said, COVID-19 really shone the light on our continuing care system in Alberta and all the significant problems with it. You know, it was a devastating tragedy, where 1,600 seniors living in continuing care in our province died. Many of those deaths were preventable.

There was much to be done, and much could have been done but, sadly, was not. That has a lot to do, I think, with the slow movement of this government. One of the things that we petitioned the government on at the outset, for at least two months before they moved on it, was to restrict staffing to one facility. We know that that was one of the significant concerns regarding the spread of COVID-19.

How come this is an issue? How come people are working at so many different facilities? That's really the question underneath that. Like, how is that happening? That has a lot to do with the private facility operators maximizing, you know, their profit. That's what they're focused on. It's not about seniors' care for a lot of these private facilities; it's really about making enough so that they can give dividends to their shareholders. The great tragedy in that meant that they weren't focused on the care of seniors. They were focused, again, mostly on this very select group of people who happen to be their shareholders.

Of course – I've spoken about this before, and I will again – just the whole financialization of the continuing care sector created a lot of the difficulties and continues to, Mr. Speaker. You know, an example that I like to share is the AgeCare facilities. There were four in Calgary back in 2020 that were sold off to Axiom, Montreal based. It's really a wealth-generating company. It's all about the real estate. It's all about the profit. It's not about the seniors' care. Guess what happens when these facilities are sold off to companies

like this? The focus is not about serving seniors, serving the residents in those facilities but, rather, generating this profit.

And guess what? They give employees just, you know, part-time jobs that have no benefits and have extremely high expectations of them. Certainly, if there's a union, they try to bust that union because, of course, unions fight for workers. They care about workers being supported, and they want them to have those full-time jobs. They want them to have the support to be able to care for their families, have health care benefits, extended health care, be able to have vacation, and several details that we all know about and that they should have.

9:50

You know, if you take care of your workers – guess what? – they do a better job. They're not so focused on just surviving, but they are able to be more stable and are able to contribute and come to work feeling supported and happy. And guess what that does? That supports them to be able to give better service to the residents. Sadly, that's not the way it is in the system. In spite of the Herculean work of many of the health care aides – just let me acknowledge so many of them. Despite sort of all this swirling around them and the pressure on them and cobbling together working at several different facilities so that they can make a living wage – I mean, these are low-wage workers, Mr. Speaker. They are people making close to minimum wage if not minimum wage. Oftentimes they're racialized. Mostly they're women and newcomers to Alberta or Canada, and oftentimes they feel like maybe they can't speak up about their concerns. They're concerned about losing their jobs if they do. It's really taking advantage of people who are doing their best to serve people instead of supporting them.

It really disturbs me, and I think that this UCP government hasn't acknowledged that ever. They sort of like to skate over this issue of financialization in the continuing care system. Certainly, when they did, you know, respond to some of our calls to have a one-site rule about staff, because of the spread of COVID-19 really significantly in continuing care facilities across the province, there were so many exemptions to that, because of the strong lobby of these private providers, that it became almost like it didn't really matter, the order by the chief medical officer of health. There were so many exceptions to that health order that there was a significant question of whether it really made any difference at all; why bother?

[Mr. Reid in the chair]

That just showed time and time again all sorts of decisions made by the UCP government that, you know, put seniors at risk, sadly. As we know, more than 1,600 lost their lives in Alberta. Certainly, it's been said time and again that many of those were preventable deaths. I mean, I think this is one of the fundamental things that needs to be looked at in our continuing care system that isn't, certainly, in this legislation at all. There's no willingness of the UCP to look at much of the research regarding this. We look at private, we look at nonprofit, we look at public, and we know the outcomes for residents are far superior in nonprofit and public continuing care facilities. Outcomes are much less positive for residents in private facilities. I mean, that alone should be pushing the UCP government to look at these issues, but sadly they're not.

Because of what we've just been through, COVID-19, which shone this bright, bright light on the continuing care system, you know, we were really hoping that Bill 11 would be addressing this fundamentally, looking at the concerns in that system and really providing some better outcomes for seniors. Instead, we have framework legislation, and the government tells us repeatedly: that's fine; we have another year or so, and we're going to put those kinds of details in regulations.

We all know that regulations and legislation are different. Regulations can be shifted by the minister whereas legislation has to come before the Legislature, and it has to be for all parties, so it's more public and we know what's going on. This is another way that it's kind of behind closed doors and can be shifted and changed, you know, by the minister himself or herself. The transparency obviously is absent, so that is definitely a concern regarding having things mostly in regulations.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, that is a deep concern to me is just: where's the urgency? Where's the urgency of this government? You know, 1,600 people died in continuing care. It's like: okay; we did the facility-based continuing care review over a year ago or about a year ago. Now we have this legislation, and now we have to wait another year.

I mean, this government is going through some of their own internal challenges. They now are looking for a new leader. I mean, it's a caretaker government. They're not going to be doing anything over this next year to really move this forward. I don't have faith that that's going to happen. There's just too much internal strife and upset. It's very disturbing because we are not seeing a government that is actually governing in the best interests of people in Alberta and certainly of vulnerable residents of continuing care facilities. So here we are waiting again. There just is no urgency on the part of the UCP to see this as a significant issue.

I must say, Mr. Speaker, that I have had a deluge of calls, meetings with people from across the province concerned about this and often grieving because of the loss of their parent and just the state of affairs in some of these facilities and how the parents were cared for or not. My colleague from Edmonton-Decore just gave some very specific examples of, really, neglect in the sector and not support for residents in continuing care. Of course, this isn't what any of us want, but what's missing with the UCP is that they just don't see this as an urgent matter. They feel like: okay; we did this, and we've got this information, and now we have this legislation. Years are passing. Years are passing, and what does that mean? The system is not improving, you know. It's not getting better, yet we know very clearly – I mean, I commend the government on the facility-based continuing care review because it gave us some really specific concerns that need to be addressed, and that's great. They have the information. The UCP has the information, but still it's kind of like we're in quicksand.

We know one of the major things that came out of the facility-based continuing care review is that we need to support staff, and we need to actually create significantly more staff. Six thousand more staff are needed. That is the government's own information. That's their information. They got that from their consultation on what is missing, what needs to improve in the continuing care system. Are we hearing things about working with postsecondaries, support to actually enhance training? This is skilled work. This is not just anybody can just sort of get a job and think that they know how to support seniors in continuing care. This is skilled work, and we do need to have programs to support them, so what is the UCP supporting postsecondaries to do?

We know that what the UCP is doing with postsecondaries is devastating them, dramatically cutting their funding and all the time saying, "Well, compared to the rest of Canada, tuition is average," or something like that. Meanwhile these institutions: their funding has been cut by millions and millions of dollars. The U of A here, which is in my riding: 50 per cent of the cuts from postsecondary were at U of A alone. It was a devastating, devastating hit to them. You know, the U of A is doing the best they can to keep functioning, but there's just no question that we're losing professors, we're losing grad students. People are going to other places because the quality of the education system at the University of Alberta, and

across our province but particularly at the University of Alberta, is being devastated by the UCP.

10:00

One of the things that we know about postsecondary, especially in a time of challenge – and let's face it; we've been through a time of challenge – investment in postsecondary actually is, you know, really value-added because over the longer term it helps to diversify the economy, make sure that we have the qualified workers to be employed in our province. Instead, the UCP does the opposite and they attack the postsecondary institutions.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to add to debate this morning? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to interject on this particular bill. As I'm sure you know, because you've been in the House during debate on this bill, I've spoken to it at all readings: second reading, Committee of the Whole, and now on third reading. In order to summarize all the, I'll say – I'm trying to put it in a nice way – evaluation of this particular bill, I would say that for me the most fundamental piece is that this government continues to put seniors and families on one side and then the interests of private, for-profit care operators on the other.

Now, I can understand, because the members on the other side are advocates for free market, laissez-faire, government stays out of processes. But I continue to insist, Mr. Speaker, that when it comes to continuing care, this is not the place for the market to apply all of its rules, because we're talking about the care of seniors in our community. Now, you've heard me go on endlessly about, you know, with all due respect to the members on the other side, that when you apply market rules of supply and demand, there are always going to be individuals that are going to be left out, not being able to afford – and that's the key message here – the care that they actually need.

Now, for seniors, who have dedicated their lives to contributing to the Alberta economy and society as a whole: every senior deserves to have good quality of care in this province as they continue to age. Every senior. Now, what happens when you apply private, for-profit care operators into the system and that's the only option available? Well, then, of course, you're going to have people who just cannot afford that kind of care.

Now, I've talked to many of my constituents where they're paying \$5,000 a month, some up to \$7,000 a month, for their parents to be in a private, for-profit care home. To be quite honest with you, Mr. Speaker, I find this just incredibly exorbitant. Incredibly exorbitant. While members on the other side may think, "Okay; well, that's affordable," there are a lot of people here in the province of Alberta who cannot afford that. What happens to them? What happens to the people who are priced out of the market? That's an honest question. What happens to those people? And what is the role of this government when it comes to taking care of those people? As far as I understand it, we're here to govern on behalf of all Albertans, not just the ones that have the pretty pennies.

Now, the government did its facility-based continuing care review. There were a number of issues that came out of that, specifically seniors and their families advocating for more accountability in the system so that they could get proper care, an increased quality of care inside these homes. Okay. Let's imagine that, well, the market system is here to stay and that's it. There's no option around it. At least those private, for-profit care operators need to follow the instruction and regulation of this government when it comes to the quality of care of these individuals. That's

what the facility-based continuing care review was all about, Mr. Speaker. If we're going to maintain this for-profit model here in the province of Alberta, then at least, bare minimum, it needs to measure up to an improved standard of care for everybody who needs to access continuing care in the province.

I'll highlight again that the members on the other side like to decrease or get rid of regulations rather than impose regulations. Now, I get it. There are some regulations which, you know, they like to call red tape, which I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, I've heard out of your mouth as well in debate here in the House. Yes, there are examples of things that provide, I would say, barriers or obstacles, but then there are regulations that are focused on health, safety, and care. Those aren't red tape, Mr. Speaker. You cannot call those red tape. If a private, for-profit care operator comes to the government and says: "You know what? You could get rid of this regulation and that regulation and this regulation" but it has to do with the care and health and safety of individuals, that's not red tape. On the other side of that regulation is actually the health and safety of individuals, and in this aspect our seniors, the ones that are in continuing care.

I think it's very important that – here was an opportunity. Here was an actual opportunity for the government to take the facility-based continuing care review that they did and then actually bring into force some of the issues that were being highlighted in that.

Now, as the Member for Edmonton-Riverview highlighted, a lot of the workers in this industry happen to be racialized women. I know a lot of these racialized women. A lot of them call Edmonton-Ellerslie home. I've had the opportunity to meet with them and talk to them about the working conditions inside of these private, for-profit care homes. They've highlighted for me extensively how when they compare the work that they do to others in the health care system, they don't get the same amount of benefits. They don't get the same amount of pay.

You know what? I just don't get it, why members on the other side of this House seem to think that with new Canadians coming here to Alberta, coming here to Canada, who are racialized, it's okay to pay them minimum wage when they're doing a very similar job to someone in the rest of the health care system. You're the ones that decided to change the rules. It was Conservatives that brought in for-profit care here in the province of Alberta and then stripped the regulations of making sure that these individuals were paid in a fair way when it came to their counterparts in the public system. That's on them. They continue to advocate for paying these workers the minimal amount with no benefits.

10:10

You know, a lot of these racialized women – of course, as you know, Mr. Speaker, it's not just women; it's also men, right? The majority of them all racialized, coming from different countries, but now they call Alberta home: they tell me that they're too afraid to speak up for themselves. In some of these private, for-profit care homes I've heard of people just being too afraid because they are threatened that they will lose their job. If you become a squeaky wheel, you're going to lose your job. That's the reality that's happening in these private, for-profit care homes. It's our responsibility as a government to do what's fair and just and right, to make sure that an individual working within that system does not have to fear that they will lose their job simply because they're speaking up for their rights. That responsibility is on each individual inside this House.

To strip regulations that would take away the right of an individual to actually speak up – you know, a lot of the time, Mr. Speaker, I've heard straight from their own mouth: instead of advocating for themselves, they're advocating more for the people

that they care for. That's the reality. That's what I hear from these individuals when they come to see me. They're speaking up for the rights of the people that they're caring for because they see how – because this private, for-profit care model tends to do the bare minimum in order to provide the care that is needed by these individuals.

I want to remind this House that we have a very solid example when it comes to this government siding with private, for-profit care operators over seniors and families when they introduced Bill 70, the COVID-related measures act, which was much more about protecting private, for-profit care operators than it was for seniors. Now, over this pandemic we have had over 1,600 deaths of seniors in continuing care facilities. Again, I stress that this government should have taken the opportunity to present a bill in this House that actually dealt with what was covered in the facility-based continuing care review and brought something of substance into this Legislature for us to vote on.

To not have done so, I would say, is shameful, Mr. Speaker. I don't often use, you know, the shame and blame approach. I'll be a hundred per cent honest with you; I don't like it. I don't think it's very productive. But in this case, the government having done its review, the government having gone through COVID, 1,600 deaths of seniors over the course – more than 1,600 deaths of seniors during this pandemic, and the government has decided to do absolutely nothing to address the recommendations in the review? I'm sorry, but that's shameful.

Now, in the facility-based continuing care review they focused on addressing the issue of staff-to-patient ratios, but we hear nothing from this government when it comes to that.

We talked about mandating minimum care hours so that all people in continuing care can actually get an increased and improved quality of care that they deserve, and then, of course, I was talking about, when it came to the experience of mostly racialized women that actually work in this sector, actually improving the care and working conditions for individuals that are working in this particular field, Mr. Speaker.

I believe I've highlighted a number of issues where this government has been lacking. I'll honestly say that it's very difficult for me to support this bill because I just do not see it addressing the issues that are so desperately needed by those living in care here in the province of Alberta. Those people deserve better, Mr. Speaker. They deserve a government that will stand up for them, a government that will actually work when it comes to implementing change that they desperately need here in the province of Alberta. That's what Albertans deserve, that's what seniors deserve, and the majority, those racialized women, also deserve better.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen to add to debate.

Mr. Carson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this morning to speak to Bill 11, and I have appreciated the comments so far. Of course, this is my third opportunity, I believe, to speak to this legislation, and I always appreciate the opportunity.

Obviously, I want to echo many of the comments and concerns that my colleagues have shared and also just reflect on some of the things that we've heard through this debate, the lack of action from this government through the pandemic and even before the pandemic hit our province and our country. The fact is that this government has failed to take action to support seniors in our province, whether we are talking about in these continuing care or long-term care facilities or whether we are also acknowledging the

opportunities and the importance of supporting seniors where they're at when we look at home-based care.

Unfortunately, through this pandemic we have seen how a failure to move towards more home-based care and to keep seniors in their homes and in their communities has made the pandemic worse in terms of mortality rates, worse in terms of supporting seniors with their mental health and their feeling of belonging. Instead of moving towards more home-based care and investing historic levels of dollars, which we should be doing, especially right now through the pandemic, we are seeing quite the opposite and not only when we talk about direct investments in home care but when we reflect on the bigger picture of the priorities and decisions of this government, whether we look at the decision of this government to deindex the Alberta seniors' benefit, making the decision to drop dependants from having the ability to access medical and medication coverage under somebody who may be a low-income senior, the decision to make cuts to programs like SHARP, the seniors home adaptation and repair program. These are all programs that keep seniors in their homes, in their communities.

Unfortunately, this government has gone in the completely opposite direction. What we are seeing in some cases is families being forced into situations and scenarios where they don't necessarily want to be and, with that, through this process and through this legislation itself, again, an unwillingness to strengthen the protections, to ensure that the standards are brought up. Instead, we're told that we have to wait another year to see that process of the regulations play out.

We have Bill 11 before us, which this government is calling a framework. The minister stood yesterday and, I'm sure, many times before that to talk about how proud he was of his government and himself and of the preamble that was in the legislation, committing to strengthening this process. But within the legislation itself we do not see any increased standards for these facilities other than some small changes around transparency.

10:20

I can appreciate that the minister has made some commitment to increase transparency around financials, but there is a much bigger picture that needs to be looked at here, not only how we take care of those seniors but how we take care of the workers who are providing supports for those seniors. I said yesterday – and we've heard it many times this morning – that if we are creating a system where the health care aides and the workers in these long-term care facilities are themselves living in poverty, are themselves having to go to multiple jobs, working 60-plus hours a week, they aren't going to be fully focused, necessarily. They will do their best – and I know they do; I've met many of these workers, who put everything they have into supporting seniors in these homes – but, unfortunately, if they are working upwards of 60 hours a week, they are often concerned about their own survival.

We've had many opportunities through this process and before the pandemic to ensure that we were strengthening standards, to ensure that we were supporting these workers financially, whether we're talking about top-ups, whether we're talking about mental health supports and respite care, and unfortunately this government has heeded none of that advice from the members of the opposition, from the workers in these facilities. What we've seen instead is a continuation of the same old, and through this pandemic what it means is a higher mortality rate for seniors and, as we've heard, even higher for seniors in these for-profit long-term care, continuing care facilities.

A year ago we had the facility-based continuing care review come forward. I'm happy about the work and what was provided through that process. Unfortunately, this government has made

little movement to ensure that these processes and concerns that were addressed through this review are actually implemented. Instead, we have a bare-bones framework come before this Legislature in Bill 11 and are told that seniors in our communities and the families who support them have to wait another year to see what those regulations might look like. It is simply not enough. As I said yesterday, Albertans and seniors deserve better. They deserve to live with dignity. They deserve to be taken care of by people that are also being taken care of in turn, Mr. Speaker. They deserve the full support of the system, and unfortunately they are not getting that right now.

With that, again, Mr. Speaker, I want to leave a bit of time for my colleague here, but I have appreciated the opportunity to speak to this. In this case I do not see myself being able to support this legislation. I think that the government has spent too much time infighting and concerned about who is going to lead their party into the next election, and that is to the consequence of the seniors who are looking for support in our province.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to rise and join debate? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and offer a few comments on Bill 11. I want to, first, start off by thanking my colleagues from Lethbridge-West, Edmonton-Decore, Edmonton-Ellerslie, Edmonton-Riverview, and, of course, Edmonton-West Henday for offering their comments and, you know, pick up on a thread that my friends from Edmonton-Ellerslie and Edmonton-West Henday wove through their comments, and that's on the issue of affordability, if I could frame it that way, right?

Both my friends from Edmonton-Ellerslie and Edmonton-West Henday talked about the poor working conditions and low wages that people working in the long-term care sector work under. It's especially important, in this incredible inflationary environment that we find ourselves in now, to make sure that people who are working in long-term care stop falling further and further behind. You know, I've mentioned a number of times in debate on issues around long-term care and health care, broadly speaking, that my oldest daughter works in a long-term care facility as a health care aide. Fortunately, the wage top-up meant that she didn't start at the usual starting wage for long-term care workers in this province, but she's only making \$22 or \$23 an hour for incredibly hard work and can only find work 20 or 25 hours a week. That's not enough for her to live on. She's 20 years old, and the only way that she can make ends meet is by continuing to live at home with her mom and her dad.

Now, you know, Mr. Speaker, I'm fortunate enough to be able to afford to continue to help her with her living expenses, but many of the people who work in the long-term care sector don't find themselves in such fortunate circumstances. As my friend from Edmonton-Ellerslie mentioned, a lot of long-term care workers are new Canadians, so they not only have to make enough money to establish themselves and set their families up in their new lives here in Canada, but many of them have significant financial responsibilities to their families at home. I know that many new Canadians really struggle because they find it hard to keep up with the cost of living here at home, but they're also expected to send money back to families in the Philippines or Cameroon or other countries around the world that new Canadians come from.

I know from personal experience, Mr. Speaker, that one of the things that is really stressful for those families is that their families

at home don't understand that \$20 an hour doesn't go very far here in Alberta, right? They just hear that dollar amount and think that that has the same buying power as it does at home, so they're under continual pressure to send money home to support their cousins or their uncles or all kinds of family members who put these expectations on them to provide financial support. We can't continue to operate a long-term care system successfully by underpaying and overworking all of these people, who are highly trained, very good at their jobs, provide essential services. We just can't afford to do that.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, the affordability for the seniors living in these long-term care centres is something that is also growing increasingly important. As I mentioned, even though wages aren't going up, the cost of living in these long-term care centres is absolutely going up. As my friend from Edmonton-West Henday pointed out, so many of these centres are for-profit centres that absolutely will not let their bottom lines shrink because the price of gas and the price of electricity are going up. No, no, no. "Shareholders have got to be paid first, so we've got to make sure that not only do we keep the staff wages low, but we keep jacking up the prices for the people who are living in those long-term care facilities, and we'll keep cutting corners," because profitability is the number one objective here in these for-profit long-term care centres. The people who pay the price for that, who pad the bottom lines, are the seniors in care and the people who care for them. That's absolutely not fair, and it places a tremendous burden on the families who have members in care.

You know, it was heartbreaking to hear my friend from Edmonton-Decore tell the story about the fellow he knew whose father was left on the toilet for five hours. I bet they don't bring that up at the shareholder meetings. Maybe they should. Maybe that should be a requirement, that the kind of neglect that seniors experience in these long-term care facilities should be the number one issue at the annual shareholder meeting for long-term care facility providers so that the people who are making profits understand exactly the price that people are paying to make sure that somebody is getting a good return on their investment.

That's not a price that I think people should be paying. I think it's immoral that people are making a profit by leaving somebody's father on the toilet for five hours. It's absolutely wrong. This government refuses to even acknowledge that that's happening, and they say that they're making some significant advances in the legislative framework around long-term care facilities by creating this framework legislation.

10:30

Anyway, I have, unfortunately, exhausted my time, and I can see the intent stares from House leadership both on my side and the government side. You know me, Mr. Speaker; I am not one to ruffle feathers in this House, so I will conclude my comments by saying that I don't support this bill, and I urge all members in the House to vote against it.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any other members wishing to rise and add to debate this morning on Bill 11?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: I see the hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 8 and Standing Order

9(1) in order to proceed immediately to Committee of the Whole on Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

**Bill 205
Human Tissue and Organ Donation
(Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022**

The Chair: I see the hon. Member for Highwood rising to speak.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the House as well for allowing us to move into the Committee of the Whole today with respect to my private member bill, Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. Bill 205 starts the very important work of setting a solid foundation for improved human tissue and organ donation systems here in Alberta. I have engaged with many individuals that have years of experience in the organ and tissue donation field as well as many families who have been directly affected by organ and tissue donation here in the province. Many of these individuals have shared with me recommendations that will help create a stronger foundation for Alberta's organ and tissue donation system.

Of those recommendations that have been proposed, this bill addresses areas that really stood out to me in making the biggest difference and improving our current system and closing the gap between us and leading jurisdictions across the world. Of those recommendations, it was clear that we need to continue to build and strengthen our current online registry, where individuals can register their intent to donate, and I will remind all people: it is important that we have these conversations, and if you wish to be an organ and tissue donor, please visit the Alberta registry to sign up and proclaim your intent to become an organ or tissue donor.

It was also clear when I spoke to doctors, surgeons, and AHS representatives that there are many opportunities for the province to continue to improve our online registry awareness and continue to educate people about our system and how to become an organ donor. As I mentioned previously in this House, when it comes to organ and tissue donation, the chances are extremely low. Only 1 to 2 per cent of opportunities exist within our entire health care system across Canada. It's essential that we continue to provide improvements to our system and our donation registry system and continue to educate Albertans as well that when it comes to choosing to be a donor, there are many options available.

When it comes to donor choices, Albertans should know that within that, they have the ability to be very prescriptive of what organs they wish to donate as well as if they want to be a tissue donor. So it's important that we continue to heighten the education and awareness around this issue, and I encourage families to have this very important discussion.

However, with that being said, one of the most important components or, I believe, the most important component of Bill 205 is the change from mandatory consideration to mandatory referral. Mandatory referral is now being reviewed in many jurisdictions and

is being credited as one of the most impactful changes to improving organ and tissue donation opportunities.

I'll also note that the top-performing organ and tissue donation jurisdictions in the world all have some form of mandatory referral. To be clear, mandatory referral will not create language that contradicts other health legislation which assumes that an individual does not consent unless they have specifically indicated their consent. I want to be clear on that.

Mandatory referral, simply put, will substantially decrease missed donor opportunities in Alberta. This became clear through many of the seminars that I attended over the time in which I was working on Bill 205. Clarifying the process in which donors are referred to Alberta organ donor organizations and the timeline in which this is done presents one of the greatest opportunities to ensuring appropriate time to properly identify potential donors and refer those donors. It's critically important that we do all we can to ensure that our organ donation organizations within the province have the time to be able to properly assess medical suitability for donation and communicate with the families of that loved one.

Now, organ donation organizations within the province, known as ODOs, are highly skilled in both communicating the importance of organ donation and in how it can help the grieving process. With that, they also understand the many factors that prevent individuals from donating their organs, and they are careful about overpromising and underdelivering with the affected families. This is crucial, that we have the specialists in this field working with those families. This is one of the times when they're experiencing one of the worst times of their lives as they're grieving, and we want to ensure that they're communicating with the best individuals possible when it comes to this.

Ultimately, I believe that, all of us, this is what we want, to improve opportunities for organ and tissue donation and respect an individual's choice to donate while simultaneously making the extremely traumatic situation easier for those families and making sure that we work with them through this critical time.

We also need to continue to educate and provide awareness about the benefits, and within this bill there are also changes that will ensure that the most updated and informed information is provided to residents in the province through our registries.

With that, Chair, I do want to comment that after review and since tabling the bill, I've worked and continued to work on this bill. At this time I would like to move an amendment which will clarify some of the wording that was necessary as well as some changes to the agency. Now, I've worked with my stakeholders . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, maybe take the amendment first, and then I'll let you speak to it.

Mr. Sigurdson: You bet. Sorry. I apologize, Chair.

10:40

The Chair: Hon. member, do you have a signed copy of this amendment from Parliamentary Counsel?

Mr. Sigurdson: I do, Chair. It was in that pile. It was on the very top with the paper clip, and it was the signed copy.

The Chair: I'm missing the last page, probably of the original. Okay. We have it.

Hon. members, please note this is a six-page amendment. I think there is some agreement in the House that not reading it into the record in its entirety is going to be okay. Members will receive a copy on their desks before we vote. Is that not amenable? It's

amenable. All members will receive a copy before a vote is to take place.

Hon. member, this will be known as amendment A1. Please proceed with your remarks.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Chair. Sorry for getting ahead of myself. Of course, I'm pretty excited about the chance to be able to get into the Committee of the Whole and continue the work on this bill and the progress on it.

Of course, this amendment corrects and addresses some of the language issues that needed to be done in order to make sure that it aligns appropriately with the current legislation within Alberta and also addresses a couple of small changes with relation to the agency to ensure that it works within the current Alberta health care system that we have within the province. As well, it makes a small change to the enforcement date, of course, to align with the next fiscal year, which I think will allow the appropriate time for the government to be able to build and be able to work with this, implement it, and get these changes in place in time.

Of course, we all understand the importance of this bill and we want to see it happen as quickly as possible. But, of course, there are some changes in here that are pretty substantive, so I wanted to ensure that we had the appropriate time to do so within our current health care system. At this time I look forward to additional comments with relation to it.

I, of course, move this amendment, and I will reserve the rest of my time to the House. Thank you.

The Chair: Any members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise this morning to speak to Bill 205, the amendment. I just want to start by saying that we strongly support organ donation and the steps that will improve donor participation rates in Alberta. I think that, looking through this amendment, this very long amendment, it addresses some technical issues to ensure that this bill works well. There's nothing in this amendment that changes the intent of this bill, so we're absolutely happy to support it. We recognize that the private member does not have the same resources as a government does to make bills. I believe that this bill was supported in the Private Bills Committee in principle and that the technical issues that were brought up in that meeting have now been addressed through this very lengthy amendment. It's very much appreciated that that feedback was provided and acted on.

I just want to say that, unfortunately, through this new process with private members' bills the UCP seems to not apply the same principle to the NDP bills that are being brought forward at all, most notably with Bill 204, the Anti-Racism Act. It's very concerning that there seems to be somewhat of a double standard, and I'm just disappointed that that is the case. However, saying that, we're happy to support this amendment because we support increasing organ donation and want to ensure that this bill works. I just would like it noted that perhaps the UCP should apply the same position to opposition bills.

With that, Madam Chair, I would just like to encourage all members of the House to support this amendment, and I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Chair: Have all members who wished to receive a copy of the amendment received a copy? If anyone has not – okay.

Are there any members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, we will vote on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Are there any speakers to the main bill as amended? Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 205 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the Committee of the Whole rise and report Bill 205.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 205. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed, please say no. That is carried. The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise again to request unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 8 and Standing Order 9(1) in order to proceed immediately to third reading on Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Bill 205

Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am really excited to see Bill 205 reach third reading in this House. It has been an honour to see the constructive and positive dialogue happen from both sides of this House on Bill 205, the Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. I've previously stood in this House to speak on why Bill 205 is absolutely critical, and I've told stories of many individuals who nobly helped save the lives of strangers and, as well, of those who received the gift of life themselves. Today I want to take time to thank the individuals who have been instrumental in helping me get this bill to this House and to this stage.

Over the past year and a half I have had countless conversations with medical specialists, nonprofits, transplant institutes, organ donation advocacy groups, business community members, Alberta

Health Services, Alberta Health, registered donors, and recipients, and through this entire process, Madam Speaker, I've truly been touched. When I entered into starting work on this bill, I myself was a little bit ignorant of the process of human tissue and organ donation. What I found over the process was that I didn't have to go very far to find individuals where this really impacted their lives, either being donors or recipients.

10:50

Now, through that, the Alberta ORGANization Group is one group that has been instrumental through this entire process, and two specific individuals, that I do want to speak about today, really were there through the duration of this process and always helped me when needed, answered questions, and did a great job of continuing to help educate me on this. Both Greg and Linda Powell have been there day in, day out, working with me on this. Of course, they formed a patient-led organization with an interest in organ donation. Greg and Linda Powell have, you know, really been experts in this field and bringing this up, and they continue to work in this field. I think the province is very lucky to see the fruits of that labour that they've done over the years. It's through their guidance that Bill 205 hits some of these major areas that are needed to help modernize our system and continue to improve our system for the future.

With that, Flavia Robles and all the individuals within the Kidney Foundation have been an instrumental resource as well for Bill 205. She provided insight into how to develop a system that will be able to both improve the lives of Albertans and, with that, the impacts of what this means, so it really was beneficial to have her input as we worked through this.

I also want to thank the Alberta Transplant Institute for the seminars they put on. These were very, very interesting. They bring a lot of specialists from around the world and within our country to be able to talk about the impacts of tissue and organ donation. With that, they connected me with those experts in the field who helped explain both the legal aspects and ethical foundations of an effective system and, as well, highlighted a lot of the international best practices.

I also want to thank Canadian Blood Services for their continuing advocacy and providing publications on their best practices.

More importantly, Madam Speaker, I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for – I think one of the initial conversations that I had with Cindy Krieger and her very impactful story about her daughter Morghan. It really did move me, and it drove me to continue to work as hard as I could to make sure that this bill made it to the Assembly and then had the best chance of, you know, being a bill that could be something this House would be willing to support and pass as legislation.

As well, the Woolfsmiths and their incredible story about their very, very young child that passed and how many lives that that child's gift of life went on to save: it really, truly did touch me. With that as well, the Boulets' tireless work and advocacy. It's these families and their resilience during the most difficult moments in their lives where we understand how important an effective system is.

It really is our responsibility here as legislators to make sure that we do support that by making changes that will help those 700 individuals, as of today, that are waiting for these life-saving procedures. With individuals having to wait seven years, as an example, just to receive a kidney, it's clear that we do need to make changes and we do need to continue to have this very important conversation.

With the amount of support I've received from nonprofits, organ donation advocacy groups, medical specialists, and the thousands

of Albertans who wrote letters of support, I'm very humbled today and honoured to be moving Bill 205 in third reading. I really do believe it'll modernize our system and help improve the future of tissue and organ donation in Alberta, because, really, this bill is about one thing: it's about saving lives and saving lives through reducing wait times.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will sit, and I will hear comments from the House. Once again, just very excited to be in third reading. Thank you.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Very happy to rise this morning to be able to add some very brief comments here in third reading of Bill 205. You know, when it comes to organ donation, I don't think there's any debate whatsoever. That gift can potentially change another person's life; it can even save that life.

I think back to the time, you know, when my daughter was younger and she was facing a couple of open-heart surgeries. I remember talking to the doctor at the time, and I said, "What happens if this doesn't work?" He very abruptly said, "Well, we'll have to probably transplant her heart." As you can imagine, that was a shocking moment in time, and it gave me only a very tiny little brush with the thought that I might have to consider that. Now, obviously, the good news is that that's all it ever was, just that brief moment of a brush. For families that do actually have to face that, having that support, that knowledge base to be able to work through that process, I think, is paramount.

You know, I've had the opportunity to work with the Member for Highwood on this even before we fully started to review it in the Private Bills Committee, that I also participate in, so I got the chance to see some of the work that the member had done on this. As we all know, private members don't have a lot of resources in terms of being able to do this, so I was quite taken aback by the amount of consultation he was able to achieve, the feedback. Certainly, as the bill moved forward, the correspondence that I got in my office was very positive.

You know, again thinking back to my time and my experience, I can't even imagine what families face around organ donation, not only giving that gift but also receiving it, so having the opportunity to tap into people that can guide them very well through that process: I wish it was available way back when, when my daughter was facing this stuff.

I was obviously surprised when we ran into a couple of hiccups after the committee review, and the amendment now, that we've just recently passed, clearly is able to address those, clear up any confusions or misunderstandings or any conflicts that might have occurred across the different pieces of language and acts.

Now we have a bill that I think will serve Albertans very, very well and will help those Albertans, when they do face this, have that knowledge base and guidance, so I'm very happy to rise today in support of Bill 205. I certainly look forward to seeing how that's going to help more Albertans get through potentially what will be a very, very difficult time in their life. I will thank the Member for Highwood for bringing this piece of legislation forward, for all the work he's done on it and, certainly, the work that we've continued throughout the process so that we understand it. It's certainly made our ability as opposition to be able to go out and do our quick background work on it very, very easy, so I appreciate that.

Thanks, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this morning to speak in third reading to Bill 205, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022. I've had incredible opportunities to speak in the House about the importance of human tissue and organ donation over the years. I can tell you that this is something that is very personal for me. One of my dearest friends, Christine Post: her son at eight years old got very, very sick, and it was determined in a very short time frame that he required a heart transplant. He was very, very sick. Initially they thought that it was the flu, but fortunately they were able to diagnose him with idiopathic dilated cardiomyopathy, which was very, very scary, hearing those words, and very unknown to the family. Ultimately, it meant that in order for Austin to live, he needed a heart transplant.

11:00

Now, we know that organ donation is life-saving. We also know that there are some significant barriers that can cause someone to not be able to donate. This was learning that we went through very quickly and in a traumatic way. One of the key things that this experience taught me was the importance of talking about organ donation, and I think that this piece of legislation is a wonderful step towards that. What it means for so many people is that it starts a conversation about the intent to become an organ donor, and when we look at how many lives can be saved through donation, it's quite significant.

I know that through this path with Austin and his journey we talk a lot about the importance of organ donation, and one of the key things that is important to know is that when you identify that you would like to be an organ donor, that's one of the first steps. There are a whole bunch of other processes that have to happen, and I think that this legislation will absolutely create space to allow those intentions to come through. One of the most important pieces that is still required is to talk to your loved ones about your intentions of becoming an organ donor. I know that we have a space where you can register to become an organ donor, but if your loved ones aren't aware of your intentions, ultimately they're the ones that make that decision, so being very clear with your family and your friends about your intentions is so important.

It was because of the incredible gift of the donor for Austin's heart that he was able to be a recipient. He went through a very fast process of getting his heart, which is uncommon. It's not often that this process happens so quickly, but because of this he's been a huge advocate for organ donation, heart transplant awareness, research regarding pediatric hearts.

I think that when we have the opportunity in this Legislature to be able to talk about such important issues, it's important that we support pieces of legislation that truly can make a difference, a life-saving difference. It's a huge gift that the families can provide to save so many lives. I know that there are so many people in this province that are on wait-lists and are in desperate need of donation, and so many people in this province are registered to be organ donors. This piece of legislation, I believe, will truly have an impact in creating a space for more life-saving opportunities.

With that, Madam Speaker, I would like to just conclude my remarks and say how much I appreciate the member for bringing this forward, and I would hope that all members of this Chamber support this legislation. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll just take a few minutes. Thank you to all of our colleagues in the House that have spoken to this. To our colleague from Highwood: we know that this has been quite the journey for you. I'm also . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt. Just direct your comments through the chair.

Mrs. Aheer: I apologize. Sorry. He's sitting right here. It's very difficult. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

We also very much appreciate – like I've mentioned before, when I had the opportunity to speak to this bill, the member and I share in common some friendships with people who have actually gone through the process of donating the organs of their loved ones to people and knowing and hearing from the people that now have those hearts beating inside of people that they've met.

I just wanted to take a moment to thank the member and, through you, Madam Speaker, thank the House for the opportunity for the stories that have come from our colleagues that are very touching, and it is true, you know, as we all stand in this House and understand the legislation that needs to come forward, that so many of us wish that had been available many, many years ago, especially because many of us have been touched by these particular situations.

Thank you again to our colleague from Highwood. Thank you so much to the House for the opportunity to be able to debate this and talk about it and for making the legislation stronger together.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate?

Seeing none, would the hon. Member for Highwood like to close?

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll just quickly close by saying thank you to everybody that I spoke to this within the House. This is, I think, a very monumental stage for us to continue to move forward with conversations surrounding this very sensitive issue but as well an issue that we need to bring more to the forefront, and we need to continue to have these conversations with our families and friends.

I hope everyone here – and I'll say it again – makes the incredible decision to become a tissue and organ donor. It really is truly impactful to so many lives. It is the gift of life, and it is something incredible.

Thank you again, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the House.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that the Chamber be adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:08 a.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, May 25, 2022

Day 36

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Allard, Hon. Tracy L., ECA, Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., QC, Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,

Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)

Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
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New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 25, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, we have a number of visitors joining us today in the Speaker's gallery, some who have joined us and some who will join us momentarily. I see the hon. Member of Parliament for Peace River-Westlock, Arnold Viersen, and he's accompanied by summer intern Shona Arsenault. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I would also like to note that joining us in just a couple of moments will be the Member of Parliament for Sherwood Park-Fort Saskatchewan, Garnett Genuis.

Also in the gallery, a very familiar face to many in this Assembly, is the former member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and the onestoried Leader of the Official Opposition. I'd invite him to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. Dr. Raj Sherman.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Members, joining us in the galleries today is Mark Allard, the vice-president for North America of Methanex Corporation, and he is a guest of the hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat.

Also joining us, please welcome Matt Osborne, president of the Alberta professional firefighters and paramedics association. He is a guest of the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Statement by the Speaker

Page Recognition

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have an important statement to make this afternoon that I would like to make before we continue with our usual business. I would like to call forward all of the retiring pages who are here today to please join me at the dais. Some of our retiring pages are not with us today.

But as many of you will know, as a long-standing tradition of the Assembly the pages have coauthored a letter, which I will read to you today. The following will be a quote from their letter.

Mr. Speaker,

As we approach the end of Session, many of us will be moving on from the Page Program. We, the retiring Pages, would like to express our thanks for the opportunities given to us in serving the Legislative Assembly. Pages often come to the Assembly with the aspiration of assisting in the democratic process . . . and it has been our honour to do so.

We would like to give a special thanks to Kaitlynn Church and the rest of the Sergeant-at-Arms' Office for their care in overseeing the Page Program [and] to the Bills and Journals Clerks in 315, whose procedural knowledge is essential to the execution of our duties, and to the members of the Legislative Assembly Security Service, whose humour make [the] long days feel short. Finally, we express our gratitude to the Members of the Legislative Assembly . . . for their dedication in the service of their constituents, and to [the] Table Officers and the Speaker for their leadership in facilitating democracy in [the great province of Alberta].

However, we have found that the greatest joy in serving the Assembly has been the chance to work alongside our fellow Pages. We each come to the Program as eccentric students eager to engage in the political process. Through quiet mornings, hectic afternoons, and long [long] evenings, the Page Program brings our group of oddballs together and gives us a special shared experience in which we ground invaluable friendships. It is . . . the opportunity to make these friendships that we express our deepest gratitude to the Assembly.

Yours sincerely,

Joel White – Supervisory Page, Wade Sigurdson – Supervisory Page, Juliana Concini – Page Peer Mentor, Ayesha Irfan, Ayrton Alvarado, Faye Klamerus, Georgia Phillips, Grace Hlibka, Lily Semonis, Olivia Taylor, Saira Camminga, Savina Banh, Zaeem Ahmed, [and Macy Yau].

[Now, to you and through you, Mr. Speaker, a third-party, independent member, let me just say to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview: I love you, mom.]

To be fair to Wade, I added that part after.

Pages, please rise. Hon. members, join me in thanking our pages. [Standing ovation]

Members' Statements

Dog-friendly Restaurant Patios

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, summer is just around the corner, and with summer comes patio season. This year grabbing a drink and food in Alberta is going to be just a little bit nicer for some of our four-legged friends. No longer shall my dog Kai and other furry friends need to be left home when families go out to enjoy the summer weather and great food Alberta has to offer.

Starting today, Albertan restaurants no longer need to go through a lengthy approval process to allow dogs onto patios. Albertans elected a government committed to cutting red tape, and we took that promise seriously. By establishing a ministry of red tape reduction, we have been able to lead Canada in reducing unnecessary government bureaucracy. This change will make it easier for Albertans to support our restaurant industry while they are out with their dogs this patio season, and we're doing this all without compromising food safety. Nonservice dogs are allowed on patios only and must be on a leash or in carriers at all times. Cutting this piece of red tape will allow our public health inspectors to focus their efforts where they are needed most and remove some of their burden.

It's policies like these that, when put together, demonstrate just how much this government is working and doing to make the lives of Albertans easier. I know that my dog Kai, an Australian cattle dog, will be very happy to join me and my family when we go to get a bite this summer out on one of the fabulous Sherwood Park patios. Mr. Speaker, Albertans should know that they have a clear choice: Conservatives on this side, who are working to make their lives simpler for Alberta families, or the socialists on the other side, who want to make life more complicated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

NDP Provincial Election Candidates

Ms Pancholi: Real leaders know that they're only as good as the people they surround themselves with, so let me tell you about some of the people on our NDP team: health care leaders like registered nurse Diana Batten in Calgary-Acadia, who knows what it takes to manage a health crisis, as does front-line paramedic Cam Heenan from Leduc-Beaumont, who is ready to fix EMS, and Dr. Luanne Metz in Calgary-Varsity, a world-renowned medical researcher and neurologist.

We have leaders focused on diversifying our economy and creating good jobs in our energy sector, like energy analyst Samir Kayande in Calgary-Elbow and sustainable energy expert Nagwan Al-Guneid in Calgary-Glenmore.

We have leaders who know how to collaborate with local voices to build stronger communities, like former councillor Druh Farrell, running in Calgary-Bow, and former councillor Rob Miyashiro in Lethbridge-East and former councillor Karen Shaw in Morinville-St. Albert. Karen also brings first-hand experience as a cattle farmer and successful entrepreneur, as does Richard Bruneau in Camrose. Richard is Métis and through his experience as well as the experiences of Indigenous candidates like Jodi Calahoo Stonehouse in Edmonton-Rutherford and Marilyn North Peigan in Calgary-Klein, we will walk a real path of reconciliation.

1:40

When it comes to our parks and natural spaces, conservationist Sarah Elmeligi from Banff-Kananaskis is there to ensure that they are never ever converted into coal mines.

We'll build good schools and properly support students with Rosman Valencia in Calgary-East and educational assistant Julia Hayter in Calgary-Edgemont.

We'll take action to make sure life is more affordable with antipoverty advocate Janet Eremenko in Calgary-Currie and support small businesses with entrepreneurs like Gurinder Brar in Calgary-North East and Parmeet Singh in Calgary-Falconridge.

Mr. Speaker, I haven't even gotten to the group of people here with me in this House, a group dedicated to Albertans, united, focused, and ready to make life better. On our team we don't have to fight over the leader; we stand behind ours. The NDP is ready, and we are focused on what matters to Albertans. We can't wait to be Alberta's next government.

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

Addiction Treatment and Recovery

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2011 I started working at the youth shelter, where the goal was to keep kids alive for the night. Of course, staying alive was a starting point, but it certainly wasn't where we wanted to stop. Thankfully, our leadership at the time had the vision to shift our thinking to provide more for youth than simply keeping them alive. Recognizing their strengths and their resiliency, we knew our youth were capable of so much more, so we created opportunities to build off those strengths and to help them go on to grow and thrive in their communities.

I've recently met with homeless service providers, and I've heard stories of people being revived in the street, in Dumpsters, in camps, and inside the shelter. There is an instinct to focus completely on keeping people alive and getting people housed. "Housing first" is still a common phrase among service providers in Alberta. Overdose prevention sites and digital overdose response systems are available in most major municipalities. These can be good initiatives, and they can be a part of a comprehensive system, but they cannot be the end goal.

We often hear the saying that we need to meet people where they're at, but we can't simply leave them there. That is why this government is focused on providing a path out of addiction and into recovery, and we've taken multiple steps to create those opportunities. We've created 8,000 newly funded treatment spaces. We've removed barriers to for-fee addiction treatment. We've built recovery communities. We've created the opioid medication treatment on demand through the virtual opioid dependency program, and we've worked with service providers across this province to build a

system that helps people build a better life for themselves. Last week I was able to attend the groundbreaking event for the first recovery community in Lethbridge, that will provide 200 additional annual treatment spaces for Albertans. The excitement was huge.

Mr. Speaker, addiction continues to plague our community. The pandemic has made things worse, but there is hope in recovery. It is possible for everyone, and it is up to us to provide those opportunities for people. This government is focused on making sure people can recover from addiction and build stronger, healthier, and safer . . .

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

Calgary Beltline Area Protests

Member Ceci: After almost two months of relative peace and quiet Calgary's Beltline residents were once again disrupted by protesters over the weekend. The noise, the verbal abuse, and the views of many of these people put a chill on the entire area. Residents can't enjoy their weekend in peace, and businesses suffer from reduced foot traffic, yet the UCP government is once again silent.

It's like déjà vu. In fact, one business owner in the Beltline asked on Twitter if they were in a time machine. Just like a few months ago, the UCP has refused to act or speak out against protesters. The so-called party of law and order refuses to stand up to lawlessness, just like they did at Coutts. Instead of standing up to those who shut down our border for two weeks or more, some members of the UCP caucus chose to stand with these criminals.

In fact, the outgoing Premier tried to court many of these people in an effort to save his own job. Now that he failed to do so and was shown the door by his own party, the UCP will be caught up in several more months of internal drama instead of focusing on the priorities of Albertans. This could mean several more months of Beltline protests while our provincial government sits idly by and the residents and businesses continue to suffer. If so, this would be a failure of the government to protect the most basic right of Albertans, the right to peace and security.

We cannot allow this to continue. We need a government that will end the chaos not only in our streets but with our governing party itself. Albertans are tired of the drama and infighting within the UCP. In fact, they're just plain tired of the UCP. It's time for a government focused on what matters to Albertans. It's time for an NDP government.

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

Clifton House Seniors' Village in Calgary

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to discuss an exciting development happening in my constituency. On April 4 Clifton House, a seniors' village located in Forest Lawn, southeast Calgary, had its grand opening. Clifton House will eventually be home to a total of 175 residents and provide both supportive living and long-term care services. This will help to better support residents to age in place as their care needs develop over time.

Clifton House is located across the street from Clifton Manor, a long-term care site built in 1972. Clifton Manor's existing long-term care residents will slowly relocate to Clifton House. Clifton Manor will then be decommissioned, with long-range plans for redevelopment. The eventual redevelopment will include additional supportive living and long-term care continuing services along with affordable housing solutions for independent seniors.

The new Clifton House and the eventual redevelopment of Clifton Manor illustrate the importance of evolving with the times.

Let Clifton House be a symbol for the necessity of modernizing the continuing care system. Our seniors deserve to have facilities that allow for progression. They deserve to reside in facilities that are constantly striving to give them the best care possible.

The residents of Clifton House deserve legislation that is as modern as their new facility. Bill 11, the Continuing Care Act, will now give them just that. Bill 11 will address the cracks in the legislation left from previous governments and finally reflect present-day practices and services while still allowing for the flexibility needed to address changing needs and expectations. This government will continue to strive to have our continuing care system embody that brighter future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Homelessness

Mr. Dach: Having a place to call home, a real roof over your head, a place to hang your hat is something most Albertans take for granted. For an increasing number of Albertans, however, having a stable place to call home is a distant dream.

People become homeless or houseless in Alberta for a multiple number of reasons. People don't choose to become destitute. We as a society have a responsibility to address the root causes and provide real solutions both in housing and compassionate, properly funded wraparound services to treat the underlying mental illnesses and addictions issues; sadly, something we have not seen this UCP government willing to do.

Realtors in Alberta have always fought to sustain the dream of affordable home ownership or rental in the real estate marketplace, but for too long tackling the crisis of the homeless population has been outside the scope of professional realtors' responsibilities. This needs to change, because it's a human right. Housing is a human right. Stable, affordable housing is a first step towards independent living free of mental illness and addictions. Housing the homeless is an ongoing and urgent priority and an investment which we must make as a society to support those who experience homelessness.

As an honorary life member of the Alberta Real Estate Association I call upon every one of the nearly 11,000 area members to step up and embrace a leadership role to eliminate homelessness in Alberta. Realtors have unmatched ingenuity when it comes to housing people. I call upon Alberta realtors to share their ingenuity, experience, and ideas to solve homelessness in their community with me and all Albertans. Visit albertasfuture.ca to upload your vision to help lift people out of homelessness in your corner of Alberta.

I look forward to hearing from the voices of professional real estate in Alberta. Working together, we can tackle the homelessness crisis.

Sexual Violence Awareness

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, on May 17 I had the honour of participating in two walk-and-run events to raise awareness about child abuse and sexual violence, with the Zebra Child Protection Centre and the Saffron Centre. These centres provide critical services for children and families who have been affected by abuse and sexual violence. These centres provide resources such as advocacy, education, counselling, and legal support for survivors.

After these events I decided to do more research into sexual violence as May is Sexual Violence Awareness Month, and, Mr. Speaker, I was floored with what I found. Let me share some statistics for members of this Assembly. Since 2008 14,403 cases of sexual assault against children have been recorded in Alberta;

1.8 million Albertans have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. Two-thirds of women and one-third of men in Alberta will become a survivor in their lifetime. Children, Indigenous women, individuals with accessibility needs, and people from the LGBTQ community are more likely to face sexual violence in their lifetime.

Alberta's government has taken action to respond to on-campus sexual assault, sexual assault against children, and sexual assault and social context training for judges. We need to continue to support prevention services in conjunction with response services in this province.

I call on the government to continue its efforts to address this epidemic of sexual violence with more prudence and action. Albertans need the vital resources provided to them by organizations like Zebra and the Saffron Centre, yet we need to move more swiftly and adequately to prevent sexual violence in a way that is survivor-centric.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has question 1.

Personal Income Tax and Benefit Deindexation Insurance Premium Costs

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, this divided Conservative government is collapsing, and as we heard yesterday, the current Premier has no plan to change direction, so maybe the next one will. Now, for years the Minister of Finance has defended the Premier's decision to raise taxes through bracket creep. Now Canada's inflation rate is at a 30-year high. Food costs are up 10 per cent, shelter up 7 per cent. By the time the next election rolls around, Alberta families will lose around \$700 per year to bracket creep. To the Finance minister: will he reverse his own bad policy, or will he continue to defend his boss's legacy?

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, we inherited a fiscal train wreck from the members opposite. Had we not sat down and provided real, sustainable fiscal management, Albertans would have very few options in the future. We made some tough decisions, but we've put this province on a sustainable fiscal trajectory with a balanced budget. And, yes, we will be re-evaluating the question of reindexing our personal tax system.

Ms Notley: Well, I hope so, Mr. Speaker. You know, the Minister of Finance walked into a multibillion-dollar oil revenue windfall, and his plan so far is to make inflation worse, not better.

Now, when the price of goods rises at rates like this, it's those who earn the very least who are most impacted. The minister's decision to freeze benefits as inflation rises means less support for working parents, for seniors, and for Albertans on AISH. Does the minister plan to launch his campaign on a record of taking \$3,000 a year out of the pockets of Albertans living with severe disabilities?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government took responsible decisions to ensure that our programs were sustainable in the future. We did all of that by not reducing our support for those on AISH. We maintained our AISH funding . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The Finance minister.

Mr. Toews: . . . which is by far and away the largest in the country. That's important to every member on this side of the House because it's important to Albertans.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, they took \$3,000 a year out of the pockets of severely disabled Albertans. When push comes to shove, we've seen whose side this minister is on.

Now, when our opposition raised the voices of hundreds of thousands of Albertans paying through the nose for their car insurance because of this government, the minister defended that decision to take the cap off and then went on to go to bat for big insurance companies and their big, fat profits. Why does the Finance minister think he's up to leading the province if his first instinct is to make regular Albertans pay more, lose more, while shovelling more money to profitable corporations?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only members in this House who made Albertans pay more are the members opposite, when they introduced the largest tax increase in the province's history, the carbon tax. That's driven up the cost of groceries. It's driven up the cost of fuel. It's driven up the cost for seniors heating their homes. We've suspended the fuel tax. We're bringing relief to utilities, and we're positioning this economy for growth and investment attraction.

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

Government Policies

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the Premier has a historically low approval rating because he's the leader of Team Bad Ideas. For instance, we have a cost-of-living crisis, yet the Finance minister keeps taxing inflation. The Education minister is raising school fees. The Advanced Ed minister is hiking tuition. The Energy minister can't deliver utility rebates for love or money, and the parks minister is obsessed with turning K Country into Pay Country. Now that the captain of Team Bad Ideas is out, is there anyone over there who will pledge to reverse these onerous hikes on Albertans today? If not, I will.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, Albertans would have no confidence in the members opposite because the members opposite, when they were in government, increased costs for every Albertan. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. I heard the question; now I'll hear the answer.

The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Moreover, Mr. Speaker, they raised taxes on businesses. They raised taxes on individuals. They brought in the carbon tax. They sent tens of billions of dollars of investment out of this province, creating a jobs crisis of epic proportion. We've reversed those policies. Investment is returning, jobs are returning, and the budget is balanced.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, now that the captain is out, here's another question for the team. We have a crisis in health care: overflowing ERs, severely delayed EMS response, doctors leaving, and front-line health care workers exhausted. They need support, resources, and stability, yet the divided Conservative health priorities under the last guy are wage rollbacks for specialists, more private surgical care, and taking insulin pumps from diabetics. Is

there anyone over there who will pledge to cancel that absurdly out-of-touch agenda and start fixing front-line health care?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, our agenda is to fix health care, and we are delivering on that agenda. We are investing \$600 million this year, \$600 million next year, \$600 million the year after that; \$1.8 billion additional funding. That's expense funding, and that is the highest level ever that we're investing in health care.

I was pleased to be able to make an announcement today in regard to expanding capacity with EMS. We are adding 19 new ambulances by September in Calgary and Edmonton. We made a commitment of \$64 million to do 20 over two years. We're accelerating that because we need to provide service for Albertans . . .

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, none of these folks can claim that the Premier's resignation is about change or renewable and then continue with these bad policies, as that answer demonstrates. Again and again, it's the entire team that has to go. Prove me wrong. Is there a single leadership candidate, amongst the 20 or 30 of you, who feels that children have been failed by this backwards curriculum, who doesn't want to mine the Rockies, who believes that standing up for a woman's reproductive rights is the Premier's job? Will they stand right now and say so, and if not, why should anyone in this province believe these guys can change?

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, it's a well-known fact that women's reproductive rights in this province are the same today as they were yesterday and as they will be tomorrow.

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

Health Care System Capacity

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, thanks to the UCP's war on health care, hospitals are partly closed today in Spirit River, Beaverlodge, Grande Prairie, McLennan, High Prairie, Wabasca, Whitecourt, Edson, Lac La Biche, St. Paul, Drayton Valley, Rimbey, Rocky Mountain House, Wainwright, Hardisty, Consort, Sundre, Three Hills, Hanna, and Bassano. Albertans are waiting longer than ever for an ambulance, and children and families are lining up down the street to get into emergency at our children's hospitals. Will this Premier agree that this crisis in health care, created by his government, has gone far beyond the impact of COVID-19?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises some serious issues, and I want to speak to them. But before I do that, I want to comment on their comments on the war on health care. Quite simply, that is not the fact. We are investing in health care. As indicated earlier, we're investing \$1.8 billion over the next three years, the highest amount ever in health care in the history of this province, more than the investment by the previous government. We are hiring more health care professionals: AHS, 2,800 this year over next; nurses, 1,800 over the last two years; paramedics, 230; and even more. I'll talk about . . .

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

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this government went to war with health care workers, which is why tens of thousands of Albertans can't find a family doctor, leaving them nowhere to go but the emergency room if it's open. The Alberta Medical Association says that emergency medicine is now at a breaking point. Despite this crisis in health care the minister stands up once a week, tells Albertans that everything is fine, nothing to see here. Will this

Premier commit to reporting this afternoon and every week on doctor departures and recruitment, ambulance wait times, and cancelled or diverted surgeries? If not, what is it that he has to hide from Albertans?

2:00

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, we put an additional \$1.8 billion in the system, the highest amount ever. I have indicated in this House that there is some strain on our health care system. We recognize that. But this is not unique to Alberta, and it's not unique to this particular time. There has been strain on our system at other times, particularly when we're dealing with influenza A. Right now we're dealing with challenges through COVID, influenza A, and a health care deficit. But here's the good news. We are coming on the downside of the sixth wave. We're going to see pressures released, and we're investing . . .

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

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, this minister is so tone deaf that it is no wonder Alberta's front-line health care workers are exhausted thanks to him and his government. But despite that, this government decided to go ahead and fire a trusted and experienced leader in Dr. Verna Yiu, someone who actually earned the trust of Albertans by telling them the unvarnished truth at the height of COVID-19 about the state of our health care system. Albertans have yet to hear a word from this government's new interim CEO. Will this minister commit to bringing him to his briefing this afternoon so Albertans can hear directly from the new head of AHS about the crisis this government has created in our hospitals?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I fully appreciate that the system is under strain, but the other side has indicated that we've put the system in crisis. Those are simply not the facts. The facts are that we are investing in our health care capacity a huge amount of dollars, and we're investing in people in terms of our health care capacity. We are actually having results. The other side left us with a huge backlog of surgeries, and we are focused, through the Alberta surgical initiative, to get those wait times down. Cataracts, which is the first area of our focus: we have reduced that to the lowest median wait times it has been even under the previous government.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this government's attacks on postsecondary schools have been driving up tuition costs and literally driving students out of the province. Students are leaving at an alarming rate, students who would otherwise be starting families, businesses, buying houses, launching innovation, and helping to build our communities, but the UCP seems more concerned about balancing budgets on the backs of Albertans instead of planning for the future. What is this UCP government's message to the students that they have driven literally out of this province?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have increased investment in Advanced Education in Budget 2022. Our forecast for the current year was \$5.250 billion, up \$300 million for the current budget year. Moreover, we're investing \$600 million in skills, talent, ensuring that every Albertan has the ability to participate in the new economy, the strongest economy in the nation.

Mr. Eggen: Well, Mr. Speaker, Jordan Dewever, a student who was directly impacted by this government's budget cuts to postsecondary, chose to attend another school in another province because tuition in this province was much higher and this government's actions caused the U of A rankings to go down. More and more students are being faced with this, directly contributing to the skills and labour shortages that we're seeing here in the province now, and it'll only get worse in the future without action immediately. Does this Premier understand the very weight of the terrible decisions he's made with the cuts to postsecondary? Does he understand how he is compromising all of our economic . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education is rising.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and on behalf of my colleague I know that in Budget 2022: \$235 million in new funding over three years to Advanced Education, which included \$171 million over three years to create 10,000 new spaces at our universities, colleges, and polytechnics. Alberta remains below the national average for tuition costs. According to Stats Canada the average undergraduate tuition is \$6,567; the national average, \$6,693, so still below.

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, this UCP government must be held accountable for the damage that they have inflicted on postsecondary. We have not seen the level of 18- to 25-year-olds leaving this province since the 1980s. I have prepared a bill, coming out this afternoon, that will make sure that the UCP wears the long-term impacts of cuts to postsecondary, to our economy, and to our society. Will someone in that UCP government agree to sit down to discuss this bill we're bringing forward this afternoon and commit to a full study of the economic impacts of the devastating cuts to postsecondary being made by this UCP government?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the member opposite is bringing forward a bill, but how hypocritical of the member opposite when they imposed the biggest tax hike in all of Alberta with the carbon tax, not to mention all of the other things that they put in place.

Mr. Speaker, we are doing tangible things to in fact increase postsecondary: \$171 million to create 10,000 new spaces, \$12 million to support existing scholarships, \$15 million to create new bursaries for low-income students, \$8 million to create new microcredential courses, \$6 million to create more internship opportunities, and so on.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray–Wood Buffalo.

Emergency Medical Service Response Times

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has heard the concerns of Albertans with regard to the increased pressures being placed on emergency medical services. The party opposite continues to say that we're doing nothing to address the pressures on EMS. Budget 2022, however, included a \$64 million increase to the EMS budget for AHS. In typical fashion, the opposition is once again attempting to mislead Albertans. That money should be making its way into the system, so it's a simple question. Are we taking action to address the pressures on EMS or not?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We absolutely are taking action. The dollars are real, and our commitment is real, and the claims to the

contrary are simply false. I announced just this morning that AHS is using the dollars in Budget '22 to put 19 new ambulances and five support vehicles on the streets by the end of September. That includes five new ambulances in Edmonton and four in Calgary by the end of June and five more each in both cities by the end of September. To do it, they've created a hundred new permanent positions and extended 70 temporary positions. Tomorrow we'll be hearing more about the steps to address pressures . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the reply. So it is a given that the claim that this government is not taking action in regard to EMS is false, plain and simple. But the opposition also claims that this government is somehow causing the pressure in the first place. I don't think there's any argument that the system is under some real pressure, but the question is: why? Why are we seeing so many patients flooding into EMS and emergency systems overall?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The pressure on the system is real, but the claim that any one government is causing it just ignores the reality. COVID-19 is impacting every province and other countries. In England, for example, they're dealing with long EMS response times for the same reasons that we are: a surge in calls starting last summer and pressure on the hospitals that delays transfers into emergency. A big factor is care that was deferred earlier in the pandemic. In 2021 emergency visits dropped by a quarter across the province. We'd never seen anything like it. On top of COVID, a late flu season and other factors are driving demand. We're responding by increasing capacity.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister again for the reply. It is a given that the increase in call volume that is affecting emergency medical services was not caused by government policy, obviously, and our government is taking action to address this. But what about the system overall? EMS can't manage the situation on its own. What are we doing to resource the whole, entire health system to support EMS and the patients who rely on prehospital care?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, the member is right. Response times are too long, and we need to get them back down within our targets. EMS can't fix all that on their own. We need to add capacity to the whole system, and that's exactly what we're doing. There are 800 more staff in emergency than in 2018, under the previous government; 1,800 more RNs in AHS in total; 230 more paramedics than just two years ago, before the new crews hit the streets; 1,500 new continuing care spaces opening this year. All of this is supported by a budget that is \$600 million higher this year than last year, higher than ever before, and a total increase of \$1.8 billion over the next three years.

Education Funding

Ms Hoffman: The current UCP government is sabotaging public education, and they're failing to fund growing school divisions and provide them with the necessary supports for disabled students, infrastructure, and staff. The Calgary board of education is dealing with the UCP's cuts to funding, and their funding cut means that

five-year-olds with speech and language delays are getting more than a million dollars less from this government. Why is the current government cutting kindergarten children's speech support in our largest school district when kids need more support, not less? When the minister puts her pin on in the morning, is she thinking that children are the first to face her cuts? Because they are.

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We added \$700 million over the next three years to increase funding overall. I've got an \$8.4 billion budget, of which \$1.4 billion goes to support special-needs children and all the other supports for those most vulnerable within our education system. School divisions have authority. They get 98 per cent of the funding. They oversee their budgets, and they are making those decisions.

2:10

Ms Hoffman: Given that the minister should read her budget or at least the *Calgary Herald* and given that the CBE will have 1,500 more students in September but their budget is going to be less and given that grants to infrastructure maintenance and renewal were also hard hit by the UCP, with a 40 per cent slash to overall funding for this area for the CBE – the end result: they're laying off staff – and given that the UCP is so focused on each of their own individual jobs, will they at least apologize to all the people being laid off in Calgary because of this government's cruel cuts?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, I wish the member opposite would have spent the six hours that we had in estimates actually reading my budget, the Education budget, and understanding it, because there are more dollars allocated than there ever have been before. In fact, even though we only have 716,000 students, bums in seats, we're actually funding 730,000 students. We have been because we have been holding them harmless. Every school authority knows this, and they have appreciated it.

Ms Hoffman: Given that the strain of growing enrolment has Edmonton public also projecting a funding shortfall for 1,700 students and given that the Ross Shep school council was told by the Education minister that more funding would be provided to Edmonton public in the future, why did the Education minister tell the Ross Shep school council that there would be more funding for Edmonton public in the future when the minister clearly failed to deliver on those 1,700 unfunded students? Will the Education minister apologize for failing to support Edmonton staff, students, and families and families all across this province?

Member LaGrange: Mr. Speaker, again, the member opposite does not do her homework. It is unfortunate, because the member opposite, if she did her homework, would know that in 2020 the Edmonton public school division projected 4,700 more students than they actually had in their classrooms. We funded those 4,700 students because we were holding harmless. In 2021 they had 2,000 students fewer than they actually projected, which we funded. We continue to fund more students than they actually have.

Natural Gas Rebate Timeline

Ms Ganley: It has been over a hundred days since the UCP promised Albertans a natural gas rebate, a hundred days of Albertans struggling to pay their bills.

An Hon. Member: What's the price of natural gas?

Ms Ganley: Today the price of natural gas is above \$9. That's more than \$2.50 above where the natural gas rebate is supposed to kick in. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Ganley: But Albertans will have to wait until at least October to see any relief. This UCP government has waffled back and forth on whether Albertans can expect relief earlier. Once and for all, can the associate minister tell Albertans when these rebates will kick in?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're going to help people at the pumps. We're going to help people with their home heating and electricity. We are listening to Albertans. But we also want to make sure we focus on helping people with affordability by making sure that they have jobs. Right now the unemployment rate is 5.9 per cent. Now, why is that number relevant? That number is the exact same as before the NDP chased away jobs, thousands of jobs, and told people to go get a job in British Columbia. Never the NDP. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Ganley: Given that the UCP promised electricity rebates for January through March but have completely failed to deliver so far and given that Albertans are, right this very minute, choosing between paying their utilities and buying groceries – they have no patience left for this incompetent government – and given that Albertans have a right to expect their natural gas rebates in a timely fashion, can the associate minister commit to this House that Albertans will see rebates for October in the month of October?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about electricity markets. Let's talk about why costs are so high. It's the members opposite when they were in government. They brought in the carbon tax. [interjections]

The Speaker: Oh, my goodness. All I can hear is the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, they brought in the carbon tax, increasing the cost of utilities. They prematurely went from coal to gas, costing Albertans 1.3 ... [interjections]

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: They prematurely transferred ...

Mr. Feehan: The biggest failure ...

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

Mr. Toews: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite cost Albertans \$1.3 billion by prematurely going to gas from coal. On top of that, they added \$7.5 billion of transmission costs that all Albertans are paying for.

Ms Ganley: Given that this UCP government has plenty of promises but absolutely zero follow-through and owes Albertans some transparency in terms of these rebates – and we've written to the Auditor General for just that – and given that Albertans are still waiting for their electricity rebates from January, one more time. The price of natural gas is above \$6.50. Can Albertans expect to see a rebate in their hands in October? Yes or no?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, everyone in this Chamber knows that the NDP did everything that they could to stonewall passing legislation to provide assistance to people in their homes. Let's not

forget every single cost that the NDP put onto Albertans. But right now there's hope for Alberta. Right now Alberta is back on the economy. Canadians are moving here in numbers we haven't seen in decades. After the NDP chased away people, chased away opportunities, there's hope now for the future of Alberta. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Government Policies

(continued)

Mr. Loewen: Our big tent is like a big family. We haven't always gotten along. A good patriarch needs to provide a table where we can all come together, hash things out, and make sure every member feels respected and heard. Alberta's next Premier will need to refocus this government on the things that build trust, consensus, and unite Albertans. It's time to focus on some of the good work ministers have delivered. The Minister of Transportation has focused on enhancing traffic safety and has provided timely responses to my office's inquiries. Can the minister tell us about her transportation plans going forward?

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you to the member for that question. Mr. Speaker, we have worked hard to ensure Alberta's highway network is as safe as it can be for the travelling public. Alberta's government recently passed Bill 5, which provides protections for all roadside workers. We heard Albertans loud and clear when they told us to get rid of speed traps and fishing holes. We did just that. We are holding municipalities accountable for their use of photoradar, ensuring it's not a cash cow. Our recent budget invests \$30 million to help fill a shortage of commercial drivers, including supports for women.

Mr. Loewen: Given that in this modern world Albertans are concerned about connectivity and given that from the ability to stay in their local community while attending online classes to the wave of online business opportunities and to simply be able to take a hands-free call on highway 43 without the risk of it dropping, providing rural Internet is one of the most important things for this government to accomplish to unite Albertans, to the Minister of Service Alberta: during your travels around the province consulting Albertans, what did they tell you about their need to be connected?

Mr. Glubish: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm really pleased to inform this House and remind this House of Alberta's historic \$390 million commitment that we announced as a part of Budget 2022. It is a part of Alberta's broadband strategy to ensure that every single Albertan and Alberta business will have access to high-speed, reliable Internet over the next five to six years. We also have been able to track \$390 million of matching funding from the federal government to go dollar for dollar for every single dollar that we'll be putting to work. I'm especially excited to say that in the very, very near future we'll be announcing the first tranche of projects in collaboration between the Alberta government and the Canadian government. Stay tuned.

Mr. Loewen: Given that every time we eat a meal in Alberta, we need to thank our farmers and given the difficult years we've had from drought to flooding, prairie fires to hail, from increased input cost due to inflation to the reduced availability of goods to declining bee populations and the inflexible federal regulations preventing us from importing replacement hives, to the minister of agriculture. Albertans must unite behind our agriculture sector as they fight to put food on our tables. Can you tell us about your work to support this economy?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development.

Mr. Horner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. That member has always been a great advocate for the beekeeping industry. Historic drought from last year. We're very proud of the \$360 million AgriRecovery program that was rolled out not only for livestock producers but also for beekeepers. We continue to work with the federal government and, through them, CFIA. We've asked them for an updated risk assessment rating for the importation of northern California bees into the province. That industry has been rather decimated as of late. They're looking at bringing in bees from Italy. We're looking at all sources and continuing to work on the BRM suite.

Heritage Funding

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, throughout the term of the UCP government we have seen cuts across all ministries, including cuts to the very heart of who we are as Albertans. Since the UCP took office, cultural industries have taken a hit, particularly in the area of preservation of our history. In this area, funds available to heritage have decreased by 27 per cent. Despite a change in the minister for this portfolio there has been no change in direction, putting preservation of our history at risk. Can the Minister of Culture please tell this Assembly which parts of our history are disposable?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Culture.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A great opportunity for me to really affirm those many organizations and institutions in our province that preserve our history and our heritage. I've been working with many of them. Quite frankly, the work they do is amazing, and we will continue to support them.

Ms Goehring: Given that one of the sites bearing the brunt of this government's budget cuts was the Ukrainian cultural centre heritage village, which reported having to cut its hours of operation because of the UCP cuts, and given that Ukraine has been invaded by Russia and that promoting our Ukrainian culture in Alberta is more important than ever – if nothing else, it demonstrates support to the community – can the minister commit that the next time he visits Ukrainian Village, he'll bring along an apology and a commitment to actually fund this vital cultural site?

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, you know, this government's position is to work co-operatively with all of our different cultural groups in this province. We gave \$11.35 million to the Ukraine aid with regard to the war, additional money for them to bring in and support immigrants to Alberta. The fact that they just want to politicize it and turn it into an angry yelling thing is ridiculous. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

Ms Goehring: Given that the lack of provincial oversight and reduction in funding for historical resources means many of these rural sites are now at risk and that once they are gone, they will be gone forever and that the loss of historical sites and resources has negative impacts on local economies and tourism and given that just one year of the \$30 million war room would have ensured stable funding for heritage sites, is this government really going to continue trying to create a fight with Bigfoot when it could be

focused on supporting and promoting Alberta's diversity and rich cultural communities?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, of course we want to promote Alberta's culture, and this government is doing that, but we also want to promote and defend our largest industry and our largest employer. This government will never apologize to the NDP for standing up for the oil and gas industry. Unfortunately, when they were in government, they sold out our birthright to the Justin Trudeau Liberals in Ottawa. We will not do that; we will stand proudly with our largest industry and make sure that Alberta continues to lead the way in this country and world-wide on being the best energy provider anywhere on the planet.

Post-COVID Long-term Health Effects

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has been hard on so many Albertans, with over 4,000 having lost their lives to this deadly disease and hundreds of thousands being infected and getting sick. Alberta needs their health care system to be there for those who are sick and recovering and those who are still sick, but it's been estimated that between 5 and 30 per cent of people infected with COVID-19 could develop long COVID symptoms for years to come. That means potentially tens of thousands of Albertans who need support to fully recover from this pandemic. So what is this government doing, in the midst of the crisis it created, to support those who are dealing with long COVID?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Long COVID is an issue. We understand that. It can take many different forms. My department is undertaking a study on long COVID to better understand the effects of the pandemic on Albertans' physical and psychological health. We also offer supports both through Calgary and Edmonton sites and online, virtually, to be able to deal with long COVID. We understand it's an issue. We're investing in it, and we're going to support the health of Albertans.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that this government was reluctant initially to even acknowledge the existence of long-haul COVID and the impact it put on those afflicted with it and given that AHS estimates that 1 in 5 Albertans who were infected with COVID-19 could go on to have long COVID, which includes serious symptoms like brain fog, heart palpitations, sleep disturbances, and more, and given that there are currently only a handful of locations that provide care for long-haul COVID patients in Alberta, what specifically is the Health minister doing to ensure that everyone in Alberta, rural areas, all communities that are impacted by long-haul COVID can be treated promptly?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, while more research needs to be done to understand the extent and the impact of long COVID symptoms, our government and Alberta Health Services have tools and supports in place for affected Albertans. There are four specialized referral clinics for long COVID in Alberta, and AHS is establishing further supports, including physical therapy and occupational therapy. AHS has also established a post-COVID task force that has developed a number of resources to support health care providers when assessing patient symptoms for long COVID and determining their rehabilitation supports that they need to be able to address this issue.

Mr. Shepherd: Given, Mr. Speaker, that this government has continually put our health care system under severe stress with their

best summer ever, their privatization agenda, their war with doctors, and so much more and given that, despite the boasts of the Premier, many Albertans, including rural Albertans, are losing access to primary care and family doctors and given that we're seeing huge pressures on our emergency rooms and hospitals and given that this creates a worry about people not being able to have their serious long-haul COVID diagnosed and treated, can the minister tell this House what advice he has for the potentially tens of thousands of Albertans impacted by long COVID who don't have access to a family doctor, can't get into a hospital? What does he suggest they do?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, as previously indicated, we understand that this is an issue. We have four clinics. Also, we're looking to provide supports to health care practitioners across the province to be able to provide supports to Albertans. We are also making significant investments and expanding the capacity in our health care system, particularly in rural Alberta. Budget 2022 included \$90 million to support rural health care and family physicians. That includes the rural, remote, northern program; rural medical education; the clerkship program; the health professions action plan; the locum program; and the rural physician on-call program.

Federal-provincial Relations and Constitutional Reform

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, last October a very clear majority of Albertans endorsed the equalization referendum. A few weeks later MLAs passed the required constitutional resolution to give force to that referendum. Indeed, the 62 per cent yes vote is as good a result as any government ever received in Alberta. Albertans obviously want something done about equalization. Can the government tell Albertans if the Prime Minister and other Premiers have been informed that Albertans want constitutional negotiations on equalization to begin?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and other Premiers are meeting this week, and this will be one of the things that our Premier will raise to continue the fight with Ottawa. But that is only one of the paths that we have to be able to fight to defend our province. We cannot depend on Ottawa to protect the future of Alberta. I, for example, just returned from Washington – we'll be back there in a few weeks – where we're working with our own diplomatic corps to advance the interests of this province. There are several ways that we can continue to fight back, including just recently winning on Bill C-69 in the Alberta Court of Appeal.

Mr. Jean: That's right, Mr. Speaker. This government has done some good work on promoting Alberta's energy industry in the U.S.

But given that the most important thing we can do to help our energy industry is to get constitutional fairness in Canada – as the Premier has admitted, Canada is broken: equalization, perpetual underrepresentation in Parliament, and laws that are designed only to hurt Alberta. Constitutional negotiations can fix all of this. Will this government show that it understands the anger of 62 per cent of Albertans and demand that the rest of Canada join us in constitutional negotiations?

2:30

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government has been building a coalition all across Canada to defend our constitutional rights. Alberta has been a leader in that in the last several years and will continue to be. Again, I want to reiterate that it's a great show

of leadership by our province to stand up to Bill C-69, the no-more-pipelines law. While the NDP wanted to support their close ally Justin Trudeau and shut down the birthright of Alberta, we went to the Court of Appeal and won, and it has been made clear that Ottawa can go home and Alberta will set the course for our future.

Mr. Jean: Constitutional change is never easy, but it also isn't impossible. Given that once negotiations start, other provinces would also want to make constitutional changes – COVID has shown that across Canada health systems are broken. Many provinces will not be able to afford to fix them because they can't print money like the feds can. Since there is good reason to believe that constitutional talks can lead to improvements to Canada, why won't we act on the strong mandate Albertans gave us in the equalization referendum and demand constitutional negotiations immediately?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. The Premier is meeting with his counterparts tomorrow in Regina, bringing up these exact issues. There is much work to do, but we've made some progress. On fiscal stabilization the cap has been lifted from \$60 to \$170, meaning an additional \$500 million for Alberta every year that program triggers. But the cap needs to be removed, and we will continue to advocate with our counterparts across the country for fairness in the federation.

The Speaker: I might just remind the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche that I appreciate it may be your first question since you've returned to the House, but questions after 4 ought not to be delivered with the use of a preamble, and I think the House would agree that that was a perfect example of a preamble.

Emergency Medical Service Response Times

(continued)

Mr. Nielsen: This government is unwilling to take responsibility for the crisis they've created in the health care system. For months we've heard stories and reports of EMS workers at the point of burnout because of the pressures they've been under for years, made worse by this government's attack on front-line workers. Albertans are rightly concerned about how long it will take an ambulance to arrive. Real concerns and a real crisis deserve more than the minister's empty talking points. Can the minister explain what he considers to be an acceptable wait time for an ambulance? Ten minutes? An hour? What if it never comes?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We are taking real action to be able to address the increase, the 30 per cent increase, in call volumes that we've had since last August. This issue has not only affected our province, but it has affected provinces across the entire country. We are taking real action. This morning I was able to announce that we're creating a hundred new emergency medical service positions and extending 70 temporary positions, which will put 19 ambulances on the street in Calgary and in Edmonton by September. This is a commitment that we made as part of Budget 2022, an additional \$64 million to be able to build capacity within our EMS system.

Mr. Nielsen: All that and you still have 60 ACP positions not ready for this weekend.

Given that this government's so-called solutions are designed to kick the ball down the road rather than actually address the crisis the government created and given that the Minister of Health shamefully attempted to downplay the parking lot medicine that occurred under his watch rather than immediately acting to ensure that such a thing never happens again in Alberta and given that this government has had three years to ensure that world-class EMTs and paramedics have the support they deserve, does the minister regret the failures of the Premier and the previous Health minister that have led us to this point?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, that's simply absurd. We are investing in our EMS system. We have added 230 more paramedic positions over the last two years in addition to the 170 we just talked about recently. We have put more vans on the street. We know that there are challenges with the entire system. That's why under my ministry we appointed an advisory council. This council not only includes AH and AHS, but it includes unions. It includes representatives of the private sector and the public sector and not-for-profits to actually solve the problems. I'm looking forward to their . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Nielsen: Given that all front-line health care workers like paramedics went above and beyond during the pandemic and given that for all front-line workers this government sought to fight with them rather than support them and is even now seeking to cut the pay of advanced care paramedics and given that this is an insult and a sign that this government's word can't be trusted, will the minister rise in his seat and tell the Finance minister that now is the worst time to cut the pay of paramedics? If he won't, is it because he's hoping to keep his job in the next UCP cabinet?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all health care workers for stepping up during COVID and during these very challenging times. Our government is not only investing in expanding capacity in health care; it's investing in people. I was very pleased that AHS and UNA have been able to reach an agreement. I look forward to the ongoing negotiations that are going on between AHS and HSAA, and I'm optimistic that they'll be able to get a settlement. We are investing in our people. We are adding positions, 2,800 additional positions, in AHS. We are putting money where our mouth is with an additional \$1.8 billion over the next three years.

Disability Service Provider Funding

Ms Phillips: For months we on this side of the House have been raising the concerns from Albertans about the impact of cost-of-living increases. Disability service workers are already struggling with the impact of inflation, and now the agencies they work for are being hammered with insurance costs and higher utility bills. Many agencies fear that they may have to reduce services. These are financial problems with a financial solution, so I'm asking the Minister of Finance to commit to two things: meet with the disability service workers association and take a proposal to Treasury Board for an upward adjustment to agency contracts to reflect inflation pressure on wages and the skyrocketing cost of utilities and insurance.

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, through you, to the Member for Lethbridge-West for raising this important issue. I believe that everybody in this House is concerned about the

most vulnerable in this province because Albertans are concerned with the most vulnerable. We will follow up on that specific advice, but we've also included increases in Budget 2022: a \$40 million increase for those on AISH, a 5 per cent increase for the disability services line in Budget 2022. We are committed to ensuring that the most vulnerable are protected in this province.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that during this pandemic disability service workers went above and beyond in an incredibly difficult situation and given that at a time when we should be lifting burdens from the front lines, who stepped up so much during the pandemic, this government is doubling down on adding costs and making it harder and harder for Albertans with disabilities to get the services they need – the Minister of Finance has a budget surplus due to the price of oil – will the minister make a commitment today to adjust agency contracts for utilities, insurance, and labour costs and meet with the disability services workers to communicate with them on this?

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for this question. Supporting the workers in the disability sector is important for us, and our office has worked with the Alberta Council of Disability Services. We're fully aware of some of the challenges that the workers are facing. We're working on a comprehensive strategy. We're looking at the credentials. We're looking at the training opportunities. We're also looking at any other ways that we can help to raise the bar and the standard for that sector there.

Ms Phillips: Well, given that this is a moral issue and also a financial issue and given that the Community and Social Services minister's awareness is not quite cutting it and given that it is Treasury Board that makes these decisions and the Minister of Finance is also the President of Treasury Board, will the Minister of Finance commit to a one-time upward adjustment to agency contracts for utilities and insurance and a cost-of-living escalator for the wages of front-line disability services workers, and will he personally meet with Sue Manery, director of the disability service workers association, to discuss the pressures faced by the agencies and those who provide critical caring work to people with disabilities?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I appreciate the member opposite raising this issue. In Budget 2022 we've included a 5 per cent increase in our disability services line. We've included an increase for those that are on AISH. We recognize that there are real affordability challenges for Albertans today. That's why we brought in an electricity rebate, that's why we brought in the natural gas price protection mechanism, and that's why we've suspended the fuel tax. I'm confident that my colleague the Minister of Community and Social Services will deal with the specifics of this issue competently.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Kindergarten to Grade 6 Draft Social Studies Curriculum

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A strong, well-rounded education is paramount to setting up children for success. Math,

grammar, and science prepare children and inspire them to create a better world while social studies ensures that children are taught valuable history and provides exposure to new cultures that ultimately broaden their perspectives. To the Minister of Education: can you provide an update on the development of the new social studies curriculum? [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order.

The hon. the Minister of Education.

2:40

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. He's absolutely correct. A strong, well-rounded education helps set our children up for success. That's why we have spent the last year listening to feedback from all Albertans on the draft K to 6 curriculum. After hearing about some of the concerns that there were around age appropriateness, content load, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit content as well as cultural and religious content, we released a new draft social studies design blueprint, which lays out a plan for future content changes. We are listening, and we're continuing to make changes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that social studies can teach children about Canadian multiculturalism and given that a strong social studies curriculum would assist Albertans in upholding multicultural values and given that there are numerous cultures within Alberta to learn about, to the Minister of Education: can you tell Albertans about some of the cultures and religions that will be included in the updated social studies curriculum?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have heard plenty of feedback from Albertans on the inclusion of culture and religion in the draft K to 6 curriculum, and we have made changes based on that very good feedback. As I said before, every student will see themselves reflected in Alberta's new curriculum. When we eventually release a revised draft of social studies, there will be opportunities for teachers and students and others to explore a multitude of cultures and religions, and it will allow flexibility for classrooms to explore the diversity of all students.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that there will be multiculturalism taught in the new social studies curriculum and given that there is a growing population of Hindu Albertans, who have a vibrant culture that deserves to be taught in schools, and given that I strongly support including the teaching of the Hindu religion and Indian civilization in the curriculum, can the Minister of Education update Albertans on the status of the Hindu religion and Indian civilization being included within the social studies curriculum?

The Speaker: The hon. the minister.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. Like I said, the draft K to 6 social studies curriculum is currently in the draft design blueprint stage. I was honoured to meet with representatives from Alberta's Hindu community several times, and I'm proud to say that their feedback is being looked at and incorporated into the work that we're doing on the blueprint and into the curriculum as well. We want to make sure that the

students leave school with a deep appreciation for the rich multicultural fabric of our province and how this diversity has helped shape Alberta into what it is today. We are so blessed in Alberta to have so many ethnic groups here, and we are so proud to have them in . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order, members. Prior to departing, if my eyes don't deceive me, I believe the former Minister of Energy and Member for Drayton Valley-Devon, Diana McQueen, has snuck into the gallery. I hope you'll join me in welcoming her.

Hon. members, in 30 seconds or less we will continue to the remainder of the daily Routine.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Tourism

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and acknowledge Tourism Week, which is happening all across Canada from May 29 to June 4. As the parliamentary secretary for small business and tourism and one of the MLAs representing our mountain parks and the MLA representing the most beautiful constituency in the province, I've had the privilege of connecting with many outstanding tourism operators throughout the province. The tourism industry is a crucial economic driver for many communities in every corner of our province. In 2019 the Alberta tourism industry contributed \$8.4 billion to the province's GDP.

While we know the last couple of years have been difficult for the tourism industry, tourism operators are resilient. In fact, we are currently only second to B.C. in tourism recovery in Canada, and like the rest of the economy, tourism is still on the rebound. Total tourism spending is expected to return to prepandemic levels in the next couple of years. With the help of this government we will ensure that that happens. We've expanded Travel Alberta's mandate to a destination management organization and increased its budget by \$63 million over three years. We're investing \$3.75 million in new Indigenous tourism experiences to change perspectives and preserve culture, language, and traditions. We also continue to reduce red tape and regulatory barriers to foster growth in the tourism industry.

The growth of the tourism industry will be felt all across this province, from small rural communities to our big cities and everything in between. The future is bright for this industry, and we continue to hear all the time of new investments from the private sector to enhance Alberta's visitor economy. With the border restrictions decreasing and the beautiful weather upon us, many Albertans, Canadians, and international tourists will be visiting and taking advantage of the many sites Alberta has to offer. I encourage all people to visit and support our excellent tourism operators.

As we celebrate Tourism Week, I'd like to acknowledge the contributions of the tourism industry and everyone involved in our visitor economy to Alberta's economy, culture, and social well-being.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Brooks-Medicine Hat has a statement.

Health Care System Capacity

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Across this province Albertans are recovering from a tumultuous two years of a pandemic that wreaked havoc on our communities and families and left the health care system overwhelmed and vital health care workers exhausted.

As the MLA for Brooks-Medicine Hat I have watched as physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists, surgeons, and others worked around the clock to help those who need it most. Our health care system has been pushed to its limits, and because of a glaring lack of capacity in our system we see a dire need for reform, modernization, and transformational change.

Through historic investments in health care and capacity building, Alberta's United Conservative government is doing the work to ensure that Albertans have the care that they deserve. We need to look for more solutions, and we need to continue to build capacity. I was proud to stand with the Minister of Advanced Education in Lethbridge as he announced new dollars for Medicine Hat College so that they can train and educate more hugely needed health care aides. Another solution is to invest in infrastructure in the services that rural Albertans rely on, and this is why I was proud to stand with the Premier and the Minister of Health as we announced sustainable, predictable funding for HALO air ambulance, an essential service that was woefully ignored by previous governments.

While these are great steps to address health care challenges that are facing my constituency, there is still so much more that can be done. I know this because the constituents in Brooks-Medicine Hat have come to me with solutions every day. Mr. Speaker, no matter where you live – urban, rural, north, south, or somewhere in between – you should have access to timely, quality health care when you need it. The time for transformational change is now. We cannot continue to do things a certain way because that is the way that they have always been done. We need to look for long-lasting, meaningful solutions.

I look forward to welcoming the Minister of Health to Brooks-Medicine Hat this summer as he tours the province, consulting with rural Albertans and those who are on the front lines and know their communities best. Local decision-makers know best what their communities need, and I am grateful that the minister is planning to come down to Brooks-Medicine Hat to learn straight from them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future's final report in relation to its review of the Lobbyists Act pursuant to Government Motion 86, agreed to by the Assembly on June 15, 2021. I would like to thank all of those who made presentations and made written submissions to the committee as we conducted our review. The report will also be posted shortly on the committee's internal website.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 208 Post-Secondary Funding Assessment Act

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise and request leave to introduce a bill: Bill 208, the Post-Secondary Funding Assessment Act.

Yes. This bill would require the Minister of Advanced Education to conduct an economic impact analysis and publish the results in the Legislature whenever operating support for postsecondary decreases by more than 2 per cent so that Albertans may understand

all of the effects of these choices. The UCP has cut more than \$690 million from our postsecondary system, and young people are leaving the province at record rates. This is a necessary bill to allow Albertans to understand the long-term impacts of cuts to postsecondary, to our economy, and to our society in general. I hope that all members of this House will support this important effort by supporting Bill 208.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with section 20(1) of the Auditor General Act it is my pleasure as chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices to table the following reports from the office of the Auditor General. One, Alberta Indigenous Relations, Alberta Labour and Immigration: Indigenous Economic Participation; and First Nations and Metis Leaders' Insights.

Two, Alberta Community and Social Services: Family Support for Children with Disabilities.

Three, Assessment of Implementation Reports: Alberta Health Services, Travel Alberta; AHS Controls over Expense Claims, Purchasing Card Transactions and Other Travel Expenses; and Travel Alberta: Managing the Risks of Cloud Computing.

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

2:50

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: I see the Member for Central Peace-Notley has risen. I'm not sure as we haven't called an order of business. Do you have something to say?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. I'd like to request that Standing Order 8(2) be waived and that the Assembly revert to Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders pursuant to Standing Order 8(1) to resume consideration of Bill 202. This precedent was set earlier today with a private member's bill. This morning the Legislature shut down an hour early, so there's obviously plenty of time to pass Bill 202 also.

Thank you.

The Speaker: For clarity's sake, this is a request for unanimous consent to do aside with those standing orders as mentioned?

Mr. Loewen: Yes.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Government Motions

Committee Referral for Publication Ban (Court Applications and Orders) Regulation

30. Mr. McIver moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that
- (a) the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices is the all-party committee of the Legislative Assembly, as referred to in section 131.1 of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, for the purpose of considering a draft amendment to section 8 of the publication ban (court applications and orders) regulation proposed to be made under section 131(1)(d.1) of that act,
 - (b) the committee may, without leave of the Assembly, sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued, and

- (c) the committee must submit its report to the Assembly within 3 months of the day on which it commences its consideration of the draft regulation.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(i) this is a debatable motion. Are there others wishing to join in the debate, have questions or comments?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 30 carried]

Information and Privacy Commissioner

31. Mr. McIver moved on behalf of Mr. Jason Nixon:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee tabled on May 24, 2022, (Sessional Paper 117/2022) and recommend to the Lieutenant Governor in Council that Diane McLeod be appointed as Information and Privacy Commissioner for the province of Alberta for a term of five years effective August 1, 2022.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a debatable motion pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(b). Are there other members of the Assembly wishing to add questions or comments to the debate?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 31 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 21

Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Ms Fir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move third reading of Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

This bill is our sixth red tape reduction bill so far and moves our province one step closer to reaching our goal of cutting red tape by one-third. It makes common-sense changes that will save Albertans and Alberta businesses time and money by digitizing forms, streamlining reporting requirements, and making it easier to do business across the province, and it takes our province one step closer to cutting red tape by one-third.

[Mr. Milliken in the chair]

For instance, we've made changes to the Animal Health Act, which will give the government flexibility to respond to large events such as the avian flu, which is currently impacting poultry producers in our province. As it stands, it is legislated that notifiable diseases be reported to the Chief Provincial Veterinarian within 24 hours, and it must be reported by phone, in person, or by fax. To be clear, we are not removing the requirement for reportable and notifiable diseases to be reported. Within regulation it is currently required, and that is not changing. The changes we are proposing will allow the minister to adjust the 24-hour requirement based on certain circumstances. For instance, if there is a rapidly spreading disease amongst livestock in the province, the minister could shorten that timeline to better control or monitor the spread.

We are also allowing producers across the province to report notifiable diseases more easily, which is a key pillar of our red tape reduction strategy. By allowing producers to use modern methods of reporting, like e-mail, we're helping to save them time while

strengthening the channels of communication, which is vital as we take action in preventing the spread of disease.

These are common-sense changes that support producers in our province, yet the members opposite try to politicize it. The changes to the Animal Health Act will strengthen our ability to respond to extraordinary circumstances in a timely manner, which is to the benefit of producers and their livestock.

Bill 21 also takes steps to ensure uninterrupted services for rural Albertans. The proposed changes in this bill will allow rural electrification associations, or REAs, to purchase one another. The move to allow REAs to purchase one another is based on feedback gathered during stakeholder engagement sessions in spring 2021. Electricity-sector stakeholders participated in the engagement, and our reforms are focused on that sector for the time being. In fact, Dan Astner, the president of the Alberta Federation of REAs Ltd., said:

We are encouraged by the proposed changes that will support REAs and increase the likelihood of ongoing sustainability. Rural Electrification Associations played a significant historical role in powering rural Alberta; we appreciate innovative industry opportunities that they may continue to play a beneficial role in a dynamic rural Alberta economy.

This is a change that REAs have been asking for for years, and we are proud that we were able to bring it forward and support rural Albertans.

But we didn't stop there. The proposed amendments would also enable rural utility associations to deliver other services such as providing fibre-optic services if allowed in regulation. The changes would support the long-term sustainability of rural utility associations, benefiting rural residents and businesses who depend on them for services, and facilitate rural economic development and diversification.

Now I will address changes to the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. The amendments being brought forward in this bill are focused on renewals, not new licences. The option to provide a longer term licence renewal will be based on the track record of the facility or foster parent. If they are consistently maintaining the high safety standards, there is an option to provide them with a licence renewal of up to three years. These changes would help staff spend less time processing annual licence renewals from facilities in good standing, would continue to fully comply with the terms of their licence and more time working with facilities who may need more help, resulting in increased safety for children in care.

After the renewal Children's Services staff will use existing practices of engaging with facility owners to ensure they continue to meet the required standard of care. For foster care providers this includes meeting with the caregiver in the home at least every three months, completing an annual evaluation, including an environmental safety check, and conducting a reassessment of the home if the foster family encounters a significant life event that may impact its continued ability to provide care.

For child and youth facilities this includes conducting annual site visits, completing the environmental safety check, and regularly reviewing the facility provider file for any signs of concerns and to ensure facility documentation is up to date. As the Minister of Children's Services has stated in this House time and time again, our government is committed to the safety of children in our care.

3:00

We've also proposed some changes to the Education Act by eliminating one very specific additional schedule that independent schools currently submit, specific to tuition. As clarified numerous times, Bill 21 does not remove the requirement for independent

schools to report information related to private sources of revenue, including tuition, to Alberta Education. This will continue to be required as part of the audited financial statements they provide annually and is in addition to a new requirement for them to publicly disclose financial statements to parents by either posting those online or by sharing them with parents directly, which means these schools will now be more accountable to the parents who choose to pay tuition.

Bill 21 also makes amendments to the Provincial Parks Act and Public Lands Act, which will result in more flexibility when managing our provincial parks and public lands while maintaining standards and protecting the environment. Despite what has been said by the members opposite, there will continue to be public stakeholder and Indigenous engagement on regulations, directives, rules, codes, and standards as required. These changes are limited to setting technical, operational, or administrative requirements and guidelines.

We are also making changes to the Pharmacy and Drug Act to give the Alberta College of Pharmacy the flexibility in its oversight of pharmacies which will allow for a more pointed response to changes in the health care environment such as natural disasters, pandemics, or drug shortages. Given the many obstacles we faced in the last two years due to the pandemic, the changes prepare our health care system for the future, ensuring Albertans continue to have access to the services they require.

Now, one part of Bill 21 that I'm particularly excited about and that I'm sure municipalities and businesses across the province are excited about are the changes to the Municipal Government Act. These amendments could be a game changer for mobile businesses across the province. Right now businesses are required to get a business licence for each jurisdiction they operate in, costing them time and money. However, the proposed amendments will allow municipalities to work together to only require one licence for multiple jurisdictions. This would be a significant change for businesses like food trucks, photographers, mobile pet groomers, and many others who take their business on the road. Paul McLaughlin, the president of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta, said:

Supporting a healthy business community is a priority for municipalities in local and regional economic development efforts. Reducing red tape and barriers to utilizing intermunicipal business licences and other regional approaches to economic development is an important step in allowing municipalities to play a larger role in growing their local and regional economies.

While some of the members opposite can't face it, cutting red tape makes a tangible difference for Albertans and Alberta businesses, and this is a great example of how we can get government out of the way and support our province's economic recovery.

We're also making other simple, common-sense changes that will make life easier for Albertans. For example, we've made changes to the Residential Tenancies Act that will allow Albertans to receive their security deposits back via e-transfer. Prior to this proposed change Albertans had to either get their security deposit back in person or by a cheque in the mail. I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but I think most Albertans have, for the most part, limited their use of cheques and handling cash. Almost everything we do now can be done online, so giving tenants and landlords the ability to streamline this process and use modern technology is a win-win.

Now, Mr. Speaker, one aspect of Bill 21 that is important to all Albertans is the change to the Local Authorities Election Act. These amendments take important steps to protect the private information of Albertans who choose to run for office and their donors. As it stands, there is no legal obligation for a municipality to redact

private information such as home address or phone number. While it's common practice to redact this information, these changes are ensuring that it must be done while still requiring that the donors' names and the amount donated are still disclosed. It's about striking the right balance between privacy and transparency.

As many of us in this Chamber have been doxed, we understand just how important this change is. People shouldn't fear their safety because they ran for office or donated to a candidate. There is no reason that information like a person's home address or phone number should ever be publicly disclosed. I know that on this side of the House we strongly support the privacy of Albertans. I'm not sure if the members opposite can say the same, given their action of hacking the private information of Albertans, but I do hope they support this part of the bill.

Bill 21 also brings forward changes to the Railway (Alberta) Act. The Member for Edmonton-McClung spoke at length about how these changes could impact short-line rail operators and how this wasn't asked for. To be perfectly clear, this change has nothing to do with short-line rail operators. The proposed amendment is to support heritage railway operators, which are not the same thing. Heritage railways operate in whole or in part within a historical park, contain rolling stock or structural facilities manufactured in 1965 or earlier, operate at 30 kilometres per hour or slower, and travel fewer than 240 kilometres per day. They aren't hauling grain, as the member opposite suggested, which is exactly why we brought these changes forward. It doesn't make sense to have heritage railways following the same operating rules as larger industrial railways that haul things such as minerals and agricultural products. These changes will not impact the safety of Alberta's rail lines, but what they will do is help bolster Alberta's tourism industry.

The safety of Albertans is and will continue to be of the utmost importance. Despite what the members opposite may think, cutting red tape isn't about removing safety standards; it's about making Alberta a better place to live, work, and raise a family. The more red tape we cut, the more we ensure Alberta is the destination of choice for investors. We're committed to making Alberta the freest and fastest moving jurisdiction in North America by getting government out of the way so that our businesses can continue to invest and create jobs, fuelling the province's economic recovery.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members to support this bill. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. associate minister.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise this afternoon and provide some final comments here in third reading on Bill 21, Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. I know the minister is very, very excited about the bill and some of the red tape bills that have come before it and all the red tape they've been cutting.

I would have to argue that there are aspects along the journey that, I would suggest, are not red tape reduction. Maybe that's why we're on the second associate minister for this ministry. As I've mentioned before, as fun as it sounds, when Albertans were able to go out and cut their own Christmas tree, they still had to fill out all the forms to do that. They just saved the \$10. I would be very hard pressed to call that red tape reduction.

What I'm not hard pressed to say is that Bill 21 is yet another piece of omnibus legislation, something that I know the former Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction was very much against when serving in opposition in the 29th Legislature. So it was always

interesting to see these pieces of legislation come forward in omnibus form, that which he supposedly said he was very much opposed to seeing. Of course, with Bill 21 it's unfortunate that we maybe haven't heard some of those comments reiterated about this current one that we have in front of us.

Nevertheless, as was mentioned, we have 16 different acts that are being affected, none of which, you know, can be grouped together all in one group because they encompass nine different ministries, so it's the perfect example of omnibus legislation. But this is what we've come to expect from the red tape ministry, something that has been costing Albertans and will cost Albertans by the end of this Legislature somewhere between \$10 million and \$15 million.

It's been very, very difficult to establish, really, who's in charge of red tape reduction. Is it the minister in each ministry? Is it the associate minister? Is there collaboration? The reason I bring that up around the collaboration, of course, is what we saw in terms of the confusion here in the bill that's before us around the proposed changes to education and statements when the bill was first released by the red tape minister and then quickly corrected by the Education minister.

3:10

I'm certainly willing to provide, you know, kudos where it's due. That was cleared up, but the fact that it happened to begin with tells me that perhaps the language that's contained in Bill 21 around those changes to education was confusing to begin with. So looping back around to the collaboration: was there collaboration between the red tape minister and the Education minister? Was this all led by the Education minister and then just simply handed down, like we've seen many pieces of legislation that have been handed down, to the red tape ministry to bring forward?

I mean, at one point in time we saw the former red tape minister present a piece of legislation to the public, and when reporters started asking all kinds of questions about it, as they should – I just thought they were great questions. Nothing nefarious about it or trying to lead him astray. All we kept getting was pointing fingers around: "Well, you'll have to ask that minister. You'll have to ask that minister, and maybe you should ask that minister over there." If it's your bill, you should be able to answer the questions to it. That's why, when I saw that confusion around the different statements at the beginning of seeing this bill, I couldn't help but start to ask questions, and it did take us a little while to get those answers.

One of the things that led us off here in the opening remarks in third reading here for Bill 21 – one of the things I heard was "common-sense changes." This is a buzzword, of course, that we've heard on a bit of a regular basis. I bring that up because I want to start to direct our attention around some of the changes with public lands and parks. My friend from Edmonton-Gold Bar, who is the environment critic, had some very significant concerns with regard to that piece of the proposed legislation.

For one, there is significant leeway that is being provided to the environment minister around making decisions about how these lands could potentially be used. One of the, I guess, examples that caught my attention very, very quickly was the proposed feedlot at Pigeon Lake. You know, some of the background information that I was hearing around the consultations that he has done with residents in that area – they are very, very engaged on this issue. There are certainly significant concerns potentially about contamination of Pigeon Lake itself, and we really haven't seen some good answers provided around that.

It's unfortunate. Obviously, Committee of the Whole is usually the best time to be able to kind of walk through those types of

things, and all it was was answers like: well, the NDP just hate business, and they don't want to see the province grow and create jobs. No. We're asking these questions because these are the questions that are coming up by Albertans in the area that's being affected by this.

When you couple that with these almost unprecedented changes that are being proposed for what the minister can do, the minister can pretty much bypass almost everything around that. I think Albertans are very rightly concerned around that. If there are ways that we can, you know, create a safe environment for that lake, reduce if not eliminate any potential contamination, I don't think there's anything wrong with having that open discussion around that and including the residents in that area for that instance.

You know, we always hear, again, one of the buzzwords, around consultation. A lot of times it seems I'm either seeing a model of consul-told or we're only listening to the people that tell us what we want to hear. I mean, the MLA responsible in that area wasn't even in attendance. I heard it was standing room only for a Saturday night of a long weekend. That's just how engaged the residents are on this. Kudos to them for paying attention to this.

We've also seen some changes, as was mentioned earlier, around the Animal Health Act. I don't know if it's just bad timing, coincidence – I don't know – as we're seeing cases of avian flu growing in the province and then some of the changes that are being suggested. Of course, the minister has said that there are no changes in terms of the reporting timelines, that it's just simply being moved into the regulations, which means, then, that changes could be made after that without actually coming into the House for any kind of review or debate. Certainly, from what I've seen in previous actions by this government, I can't help but have to call that into question as to what the purpose potentially might be.

You know the example, of course: the removal of the Lougheed coal policy and trying to move forward with coal mining in the eastern slopes, which potentially would put a lot of Albertans' drinking water at risk. We've certainly seen an example, just to the west of us, where there was a significant leak and the hazard that that has created. We certainly don't want to repeat such a thing, especially since, as we know, there's been some significant investment in southern Alberta around irrigation, something that's critical to those areas and the farming that goes on down there. It would be an absolute shame to have all of these changes and upgrades there only to find out now that the water that they're going to use is contaminated. Again, Mr. Speaker, you can't help but have to start to ask the questions, at least to do my due diligence.

I do want to share the changes around the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act and the potential extension of the renewals up to three years. I know, from my past, that when there are changes that are being extended, sometimes it allows for an area of a window where, if we have people that, for instance, are being checked on a yearly basis now and they know they're not going to get checked for three years, things can slowly become lackadaisical. So I have to voice that concern around that. My hope is that those changes will continue to be very closely monitored, especially here in the beginning, when they start, because, as we know, in this province we've gone through a very significant past year with regard to the death of kids in care. I would highly caution the government, moving forward on that, to stay on top of that.

I know we've seen some other changes, which, again, I'm not necessarily against. One of the highlights in the opening remarks by the red tape minister was around the changes to the Railway Act. Again, if there are fingers being pointed to one of my colleagues, blowing it out of proportion, I would have to question, then: was the language clear enough so that there wasn't any room for interpretation? Over the course of this 30th Legislature I've

persistently and consistently seen that instead of having the best language we could have, the clearest language we could have – again, not about us. It's got to be about: 20 years down the road, when we're all gone, when we're not here to answer any questions, can somebody read that same language and come to the same conclusion, without even having to go back and read the debate and listen to the debate, and understand what's going on? If we're not actually hitting that mark, then we haven't created the best language that we possibly can.

3:20

Obviously, my colleague, in his critic role, was reading through that and, again, started to ask questions and probably through his consultation had those questions come up, so just trying to perform our duties as opposition, making sure that there's clarity around these kinds of things.

Changes around the MGA: I would probably tend to agree with the red tape minister that these changes allowing licences to cross municipal borders would definitely be a good thing. I think municipal governments will be pleased to be able to do that, but it's probably one of those cases where, you know, the municipalities are happy to get good news when it seems they tend to get a lot of bad news: the big-city charters being ripped up, funding that they need for critical infrastructure projects or addressing things like homelessness and houselessness falling considerably short.

As I've argued even earlier today, you know, when we seem to have \$1.3 billion to bet on an election or tens of millions of dollars to chase a cartoon Bigfoot, then I would suggest we probably have money to supply these kinds of things and allow municipalities, who are the front line, who are dealing with, you know, the people – and I still get calls, nonetheless, about potholes or their back lanes and things like that. So definitely probably some good news for municipalities. I'm sure they're going to say: hey, how about giving us some more of this kind of treatment, because we kind of like that?

Changes around the Pharmacy and Drug Act. Again, one of those: any kind of good news we can get. Our health care system is in crisis. The past couple of years, through the pandemic, have been very, very taxing on Albertans, on Canadians, on the entire planet. But, again, let's not forget where we came from. We started things like ripping up the contract for doctors, going after nurses, going after other health care professionals. We saw changes to things like diagnostic imaging, where instead of a chiropractor or a physiotherapist or an audiologist being able to order these things directly, they now have to go through the extra step of going to their family physician, getting that X-ray ordered, then eventually going back to have it read, and then, hopefully, that can get shared with their other health care professionals, for instance their chiropractor, and then they can finally get the care that they need. That in itself is the definition of red tape.

When that change was made, I did of course ask the former red tape minister what the thoughts were around that. Was there any consultation with the ministry? I got absolutely no answer, so I can only conclude that for our \$10 million or \$15 million, as I mentioned earlier, we're not getting any communication; hence why I'm coming back to Bill 21 and why I question the communication between the Education ministry and the red tape ministry.

It's, again, one of those cases where we have a sandwich where some of the layers are good, but some of the other layers aren't. There are, I guess, significant barriers that I have with regard to that. It's not something where I can simply say: well, because there are all these other good things, let's just ignore the bad. I can't ignore the bad. I simply can't. You know, for that, I find myself

unable to support Bill 21 here in third reading. I would suggest to other members of this House that they not support it as well, but I certainly look forward to hearing their comments through the course of third reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasure to rise at third reading of Bill 21, the bill that speaks to all the other bills and impacts all the other bills. I have always really struggled with the red tape reduction philosophy of putting legislations together that are not related to each other whatsoever into one big piece of legislative change. We see in this piece of legislation 16 different pieces of legislation that are being changed, different sections within those pieces of legislation, and many of these pieces of legislation never talk to each other or will ever meet the same ministry. I think that that is a problem.

It is a problem for a variety of different reasons, the first reason, obviously, being the fact that when you look at this bill, you know that it's very, very thick. It does not give a lot of confidence, I would say, in the willingness of the government to be open and transparent about what they're actually trying to do. You have to go through pages and pages and pages of this bill to find the piece of legislation that is being changed, to look at that section of the piece of legislation that is being changed, then go back and find the other legislation that it is changing and look at it in that way.

That is not typically how legislation is drafted or how it typically works. Usually you would see a bill that is just a small, little piece of a bill, and you would see the pieces of legislation that are being changed. It would only be one piece of legislation. It's very easy, then, for people who want to look at that legislation to be able to compare it to what is being changed. This does not do that.

What I don't understand, when we look at this bill, is how we move from pieces that deal with municipalities, with the local authorities act, to looking at the Cooperatives Act, which deals with co-operatives, to looking at the Education Act, to looking at impacts to the Children's Services legislation, to looking at things that deal with Environment and Parks, the tenancies act, surveying, pharmacies, provincial parks, public lands. None of these bills are supposed to talk to each other and be in the same piece of legislation.

There are reasons why we have different ministries. There are specific expert areas that you need to be able to look at and work on, and when you look at legislation, you need to be able to look at the fact that – when you look at the Provincial Parks Act, when you make a change to it, it will have a waterfall effect through the whole piece of legislation. It will impact regulations. Therefore, having public lands and provincial parks together makes sense. But having the tenancy act in the same piece of legislation that deals with where people are going camping does not make any sense.

The question then becomes: why is the government choosing to do it this way? Well, the government will say that it's housekeeping. I think what Albertans will say is that it's about trying to hide transparency and being honest with Albertans about what they're actually trying to accomplish. I think the parks changes specifically would be a prime example of that. When we look at the changes under Bill 21 with the Provincial Parks Act and the Public Lands Act, there are significant changes that are given to the minister to be able to arbitrarily change what is going on in our parks.

The minister has said: well, all it does is allow me to be able to put up sign locations and warning signs without having to turn it

into a big thing. I think I disagree. In fact, I might agree with him in the sense that it could be about putting up signs and that he doesn't want to have to go through the process of consulting with those areas that are being impacted and going through a thorough consultation, because as the minister he would know.

3:30

But a sign could say something like, "ATVs are not allowed in this area; off-road vehicles are not allowed in this area," or the sign could say that they are. Well, that makes a significant change. We could go from not being able to ride an ATV through a creek because the sign says "No" to the sign all of a sudden being removed, and all of a sudden you can ride your ATV through a creek that you weren't allowed to ride it through a little while ago. That's an interesting change that the minister could make.

The minister could also decide to put up a sign that says, "This area now has a fee that you must pay to camp here" whereas a couple of days prior to that, that area may have been considered part of the Crown land that was not necessarily needing to have a fee attached to it. The minister could say that this is about signs. It could just be about signs, or it could be about signs that say some very interesting things that change the whole landscape of that area that is specifically impacted in the area that comes to provincial parks, Crown land areas.

I think that we can fundamentally agree on signs. I think the intention of those signs: we will both probably disagree as to what the intention of that is. But this bill will now give that power to the minister to be able to do that, so there may have been some honesty from the minister in regard to the sign locations and being able to put up signs. The full intention of what those signs would have meant maybe was not as open and transparent as I think we would have liked to have happened. I think this is where the fundamental problem happens with this bill. The government will implement a small change, and they will rationalize that small change with a very simplistic argument and then expect Albertans to just trust them with it: "Trust us. Trust me that I'm just going to put up a sign and the sign will not have a significant impact on the area."

The struggle that I think Albertans have and has been very clear, especially when it comes to the development in areas that protect our waterways and our parks, is that Albertans can't trust this government. We saw it clearly with coal. We've seen it with the Kananaskis pass. All of a sudden there's a fee that is now being attached to camping in Crown land areas, with the understanding that that \$90 fee, that a family now has to pay to be able to use Kananaskis, would help to hire more fish and wildlife officers and enforcement of those areas to ensure that if there were parties happening or people weren't being respectful to the landscape, those areas were being cleaned up appropriately, that that land was being protected, and that people that were being found to disrespect the landscape would face fines.

What we've heard most recently, I believe – and my colleague from Lethbridge might be able to help me out – is that I think we've lost something like 16 fish and wildlife officers most recently, layoffs, which is counter to the argument that we heard from the government when the Kananaskis pass was introduced. In fact, the \$90 Kananaskis pass: the government generated a lot of revenue off those passes last summer – during COVID the only thing you really could do was get outside – with that commitment, and in fact we saw a clawback in the staffing supports that the government promised that that pass was going to be used for.

Again, I think that some of the stuff in Bill 21 – I mean, I want to be fair to the government, because I believe that, you know, I can stand here and criticize forever. I mean, I could, and as opposition I try to be helpful at some point. I want to be fair that Bill 21 has

some good stuff in it, but the struggle is that this piece is really bad. How does the government expect the opposition to vote in favour of a bill that actually has some good things in it, and then they slide in this really, really bad thing?

This is the problem, again going back to what I was saying at the beginning of my argument, when you stick a whole bunch of bills together and a whole bunch of pieces of legislation, 16 pieces, and you say: okay; opposition, you need to now vote in favour of this because you should, and look at all the good stuff that's in here. Well, the problem is that with all the good stuff that's in here, with this one piece that's really bad when it comes to Environment and Parks, it just kind of annihilates the opportunity to try to be supportive and work with the government. It's put this one piece in there, which is why you shouldn't put 16 pieces of legislation into one bill, because the minute that you do that, you take away any opportunity to be able to actually get the support that you need, well, that you should want, and be able to say that these things are good.

The co-operatives piece: there's some weird language in there. I'm not really a big fan of the fact that we would be encouraging more foreign investment in co-operatives. I mean, the whole intention of a co-operative is to try to have local investment and be really – like, to support the co-operative movement in Alberta should be about bringing Albertans together to build co-operatives. I guess that piece I'm not a big fan of, but there are some other pieces to support the co-operatives that I actually like, and I would have been happy to look at an amendment for that at one point if it hadn't been that it was part of a bill that had already 16 other pieces of legislation in it.

The licensing requirements that the minister actually spoke about I also find very curious and interesting because the associate minister during her speech was talking about: "Well, yeah, it's going to be a licensing requirement for foster parents and group homes under Children's Services. Like, for children in care it will now be every three years, but don't worry because the checklist will still be required to happen, and the home inspections will still be required, and all of these things will still be required." Okay. I worked with licensing when I was a social worker in Children's Services. I understand the process. I used to do home assessments for new foster parents. That's part of the licensing requirements. The only thing that would be changing, then, is that the sign-off by a licensed staff, the staff that is part of the licensing unit, would be done every three years.

The issue I have with that: if the checklist is still happening and the annual checks are still happening, and if there's a life change, like a new child is added or there's a new marriage or whatever, that is part of licensing, and that would be updated. If all of that is still happening, then why is the government changing it from one year to every three years? Everything that is required for a licence is actually going to still continue to happen.

It goes back to my prior argument that I made when we were in second reading, which is: it's about money. If you don't change the level of a licence for a foster parent or a group home, you don't have to pay the same amount of per diem to a foster parent or a group home staff because you will say that they don't have the same licensing requirements, because licensing is from level 1 to level 3 or specialized if you have a medically fragile child in your foster home. You get paid as a foster parent a little bit more a day based on your licensing level because your education level is higher usually, because you have more complex needs of the child in your home. Therefore, your odds are that you probably would be buying and spending things on children above and beyond what you normally would.

Let's be fair. Foster parents are not in this to make money, but they do deserve to get the supports and compensation in the sense of what they will be putting out for their kids, right? Like, if you're still buying diapers and stuff for a child that may be typically toilet trained – usually over the age of three is kind of the age level we always kind of assessed it at – then there should be supports for that. And, yes, there could be extra financial supports by the province provided to that foster parent, but there's also some expertise and understanding and training that is required to be able to support a child that may have a developmental delay.

If the licensing requirements are changing in this legislation, in Bill 21, but all of the checklist requirements, the annual inspections, all of the things, as the minister just clearly indicated in the speech – then the only thing that is not changing is the level that a foster parent will move through their licensing requirements, and I have a real problem with that because what that tells me is that we're not going to honour the expertise of foster parents and of group home staff, which means they're not going to be compensated appropriately. Once again, we can't trust this government to do the right thing.

3:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-West Henday has risen.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 21, and I have appreciated the comments from my colleagues so far today. Of course, I've had a few opportunities to speak to Bill 21 but always happy to speak a little more about issues that I see coming up. Specifically, I just want to take some time to speak to the comments made by the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction.

Obviously, this is a piece of legislation that they have put forward. Unfortunately, as many of my colleagues have said before me, I find myself in the same situation, where we are faced with another piece of omnibus legislation, where there are some things, potentially many things in this legislation that we can support. Maybe they are administrative changes – maybe they are not particularly large changes – and in certain instances, like we see with the changes to the Local Authorities Election Act, for instance, changes that are essentially procedurally happening already. But for one reason or another the government feels the need to put that into legislation, and that's fair enough. Absolutely, I can see why there might be some interest there in ensuring that these best practices are moving forward, protected in legislation – then that's understandable.

But I do have some concerns particularly, again, with some of the comments that the Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction made specific to that issue, talking about how the opposition doesn't believe in the strengthening or the protection of Albertans' private information, and for a few reasons in particular. I mean, when we look at the history of this government and some of the decisions that they've made and actions that they've taken – and a first instance that I want to point to: looking back at actions of the previous Health minister.

We've said it previously on the record that we were very concerned with the actions that that previous Health minister had taken when in that office, using the powers of that office and of the department to gain access to the personal information of a physician, I believe, in our province and with that information, first of all, if I'm remembering correctly, using it to call that person because of a disagreement of facts or beliefs and, because of a social media post that was made, berating that physician, Mr. Speaker, and, further to that, whether through access of that office or because

maybe the minister already knew where this person lived, actually showing up to their house. So when we want to talk about protecting the private information of Alberta citizens – and for this government to act like they have a clean slate or a clean track record on this issue: I think that there's nothing further from the truth in that respect.

Further to that, when we look back at other decisions that this government has made, reflect on decisions back in, I believe, August 2021, there were discussions happening in the Legislature and in the province regarding the Babylon app offering virtual visits for Albertans to be able to access health care services over their phone. That's a reasonable request. I think, especially through the pandemic, that many Albertans are potentially accessing that, and that's fair enough. But through every step of the way, when we introduce new processes like this, we need to do our best as a government to protect the private information of citizens.

Unfortunately, through that process of allowing Babylon to start providing those services in our province, the Privacy Commissioner, from the very beginning, made it clear that not only did the government not come to the Privacy Commissioner's office, and neither did the company themselves come to ensure that they were following correctly the Health Information Act and Personal Information Protection Act – neither of those things happened – but further to that, as they continued to operate in our province, they did not ensure that they were, again, following the rules that have previously been put in place to protect the private information of citizens in our province.

Again, when we look at some of the articles that were discussed and some of the concerns that the Privacy Commissioner had flagged, particularly flagging that Telus was collecting more personal information than was necessary and using facial recognition without the patient's consent, we have a clear track record from this government of not doing everything that they can to protect the personal and private information of citizens across this province. Further to that, we saw, going through the process of the ministry process of providing vaccine passports, if I remember correctly, the compromised information that was raised through that process as well.

Again, the government is trying to move forward with initiatives which, whether we agree or disagree on them – fair enough – are not protecting the private information of citizens. For the associate minister to say that, you know, we don't support the need to protect that information is simply ridiculous, and further to that, I don't believe that they've been doing everything that they can. It's truly unfortunate because, again, some of these processes may be revolutionary, may be successful and an important piece of our health care system or our election system moving forward, but this government has failed again and again to ensure that through those processes they are protecting the private information of Albertans.

When we look at the changes, as I mentioned earlier, to the Local Authorities Election Act, I don't see any real issues with this amendment that is being proposed. It simply codifies in the legislation what already occurs in most instances and in practice and potentially even duplicates some of the protections that are already taking place in legislation. I would ask, as I'm sure has been raised before, if the government is actually seeing in certain jurisdictions in Alberta that there are these concerns of personal information being shared, if that has actually been the case, or if they're simply trying to create solutions for issues that don't actually exist.

That seems to be the case historically in other pieces of red tape reduction that we've seen come before this House, the government making amendments to legislation often on the administration side of things and procedural side of things and potentially tightening up

inconsequential parts of legislation that are already out there but then also connecting it to completely unrelated changes that are more consequential and that Albertans are rightly concerned about but being upset that not everyone can support their legislation at the end of the day because they have made such major changes and consequential changes to other parts of the legislation. We've heard that throughout this debate.

When we look at the changes in section 12 to the Public Lands Act, the fact is, Mr. Speaker, that based on the history and the decisions of this environment minister and the actions that that minister has taken, people simply do not trust this government or this minister. The entire conversation around the Kananaskis pass, the K Country charges that this government is putting onto Albertans to enjoy the natural environment that Albertans have always held so dearly to their heart: they're being told by this government that they should have to pay to access such opportunities. It's truly unfortunate because beyond that, this government has not provided any clarity that this money is actually being reinvested into the places that they are collecting this money from.

3:50

Again, Mr. Speaker, the same goes for other changes that are included in here around the Provincial Parks Act. It really goes to the heart of this discussion because this government and this minister have talked about the idea that they're struggling to be able to make changes to park signs or road signs in parks and that we need to make such substantial changes to the powers that are provided to the minister. We've seen this before, and I've talked about this. We had similar conversations around Bill 10 and the powers that the government was trying to give themselves to be able to pass legislation and create it without even coming before this House at all, and we do see hints of that again in this legislation with the environment minister trying to give themselves a massive amount of power and so much more legislative authority over this process than they already have.

Mr. Speaker, there are, as has been stated, a lot of acts that are being touched on in this legislation, 16 sections amending 16 different acts, everything, as we've heard, from the Animal Health Act to the Education Act to the Cooperatives Act to the Municipal Government Act to the Rural Utilities Act, and the list goes on. Unfortunately, as the Member for Edmonton-Manning stated, as best as we can, it makes the most sense to be able to vote on these things separately. If these are substantial changes, which we are seeing in the case of the Public Lands Act and certain other pieces in here, we should have the opportunity to vote on these as separate pieces of legislation, because the changes that are being proposed are so substantial.

Looking further at changes to the Municipal Government Act in section 9, another opportunity where we see positive changes that I and my colleagues would very likely support if it was a stand-alone piece of legislation or amendment to that legislation, unfortunately because of the depth of changes that we're seeing from this legislation on so many different acts, it's going to truly be hard to support that even though we believe in some of the things that are being proposed in this legislation.

I think that it's also important to comment, as the Member for Edmonton-Decore did, that while we are talking about changes to the Municipal Government Act and how the province interacts with our municipalities across the province and the support that we are providing to them, this government also has a terrible track record on that front. The Member for Edmonton-Decore talked about the big-city charters and the decision of this government to go back on a substantial commitment that they made in the previous election

and in the session under an NDP government to support those proposals that we had put forward when we were in government to support municipalities in a historic way, to provide sustainable funding, to change the relationship and how that funding is shared between the big cities in our province. Unfortunately, the government went back on that decision.

Further to that, the conversation around abandoned oil wells and how we are going to reclaim those operations across our province. Hundreds of millions of dollars, billions of dollars, Mr. Speaker, have been left to municipalities to try and figure out. Unfortunately, even though we have seen legislation come before this House, it's been very clear from stakeholders and municipalities across the province that we simply have not seen enough action on this, that the UCP government has not made any substantial or real commitments to ensure that that tax liability is not going to be left with municipalities, is not going to be left as a burden on taxpayers across this province.

We have seen many opportunities for this government to take substantial action on issues like these. Unfortunately, instead, what we get are piecemeal pieces of legislation like Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, which touches on many important pieces of legislation but is stopping short of actually doing some of the very important work that needs to be done across this province to ensure the long-term sustainability of our big cities and our smaller municipalities across the province.

With that, Mr. Speaker, as I've said time and time again in my opportunities to rise on Bill 21, I do have substantial concerns with this legislation. While there are some, maybe even several, amendments or sections in this legislation that I see myself being able to support, there are just as many more consequential pieces that raise concerns with me, that make it very hard for me to support.

With that, I think I will take my seat, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this legislation again. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to provide comments at this late stage of both getting on in the day but also of the session on third reading of Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. As discussed, this is a piece of legislation that amends 16 other statutes. You know, the red tape reduction associate ministry thingy: really, the only job here is to bring legislation into the House. It's the only real identifiable task that I can see, so it's really important that we understand what the legislation does do and does not do. Certainly, on introduction day it's really important to know what is going on in the legislation, and that was not a bar that was met with this particular bill.

When we review the acts that are in this legislation – I was just going back and looking at everything that we had, all of the business of this session. We are now on Bill 21, so I was going back through, you know, from 20 on down, and really observing that most of this is not a free-standing piece of legislation. In fact, when you look through at what is done with this particular legislation, the Animal Health Act changes, for example, in the main positive, could have either been free standing or could have been bundled with another piece of legislation that came in.

The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act changes. I think we've heard from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning just what kind of potential risks they're introducing into the children in care system, so there is no question that that piece should stand on its own, and I along with, I think, the majority of Albertans would

agree with my assessment that I do not believe that the appropriate level of diligence and care has been exercised in terms of putting this into an omnibus piece of legislation.

The next section concerns the Cooperatives Act. There is no question that likely those changes could have been bundled with the Financial Innovation Act, Bill 13, or some other piece of legislation. It seems to me that that would have been the most appropriate place to put it.

The Education Act changes. You know, one day they're claiming loudly and vocally that private schools will no longer have to produce financial data and it was a big change, and then later on we had another minister saying loudly and vocally: that's not true, and it doesn't really change a whole lot. So it would seem to me that there were other Education Act amendments, and this could have been put with those that were before the House this time around or at least in Bill 15 anyway.

There was a health statutes amendment act that seemed to be administrative in nature. There was also the Continuing Care Act that this piece of legislation could have been bundled with.

There are the Highways Development and Protection Act changes within this legislation that seem to be administrative in nature, so those could have been bundled with the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022, that was brought in under Bill 5.

The Local Authorities Election Act in section 7 simply codifies in legislation what already occurs in practice and deals with campaign disclosures from municipal and school board elections, so it could have been bundled with the MGA changes that, in any case, come before the Legislature pretty well every session.

The Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Act changes certainly allow the minister to appoint an administrator and so on. This could have been bundled with some of the other changes under residential tenancies or the condos if it is, in fact, the Service Alberta minister that is responsible for this. I cannot remember the *desi reg* on this, but certainly we also had the Finance minister before the House with changes to some motor vehicle pieces under the Finance portfolio.

4:00

Then we come to section 9, which is the Municipal Government Act. Pretty well every session some MGA changes have to come before this House, and the Municipal Affairs minister brings these changes to this House, at least historically has been the case, so there's really no need for a Red Tape Reduction minister here in this bill. It's just simply giving her something to do.

The Pharmacy and Drug Act changes: here, again, these could have been bundled with either the Continuing Care Act or the other health statutes amendment act, and that would have been more appropriate and certainly could have been done, therefore not doubling up on the House's time.

The Provincial Parks Act: there's no question that given the level of trust with the environment minister from the public and the fact that he has imperilled so many Calgary seats by his actions and in southern Alberta – but those should have been free-standing changes if he wanted them, similarly with the Public Lands Act changes, and he should have shepherded them through this House. But, of course, hiding them under the cover of the Red Tape Reduction minister at least provides some level of political inoculation for someone who has certainly not done his own government any favours.

The Railway (Alberta) Act, section 13 of Bill 21: certainly, these changes are, again, somewhat perfunctory in nature, really not objectionable and could have been bundled with the transportation safety act.

The Residential Tenancies Act, section 14: there is one small change here that could have been put with the Service Alberta

minister when he brought in legislation around condominiums, and there was some other business that, I believe, he had before the House this time around. But there's no question that there was no need for a free-standing minister on this, or Red Tape Reduction minister. The Minister of Service Alberta could have handled it.

The Rural Utilities Act: you know, we did have an electricity storage bill before the House, and this could have gone in there and had the same associate minister bring it through. Really, no need for a free-standing minister here. The whole exercise, the sort of kabuki theatre, of having a Red Tape Reduction minister: absolutely no need for her work there.

Section 16, which is the changes to the Surveys Act – again, I would have to refresh my memory as to the *desi reg* here. It looks like survey plan with land titles, so I think that's Service Alberta, but sometimes some of these things fall under Municipal Affairs. I think, again, you know, just sort of figuring out the lines of authority here on the fly, it would seem to me that bundling that with the residential tenancies and condos bill could have been appropriate.

All of this is to say, Mr. Speaker, that I've just gone through this significant piece of legislation that amends 16 acts, found absolutely no need for a Red Tape Reduction minister in any of this business of government, and, more to the point, have also identified that, essentially, this has been a *Seinfeld* session, a session about nothing.

There is no question that there's decent work to be had in some of this sort of administrative, or what Dave Hancock used to call evergreening, legislation. He used to say that really euphemistically, and then the Klein government would bring in something that people didn't like, but that was his way of doing it. He had some very memorable phrases. You know, this is all extremely perfunctory work that I've just identified and really nothing to get a gold star about in terms of getting up in the morning and going to work.

When I look through all of the other legislation, I've identified where this bill could have easily been tucked into other business that came before this House, with a couple of exceptions, where it would have been in the public interest to have a free-standing debate on them, that is to say the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act changes and the parks and Public Lands Act changes.

When you look back over the business before this House, really, too, here you do not see a focused agenda, focused on health care, affordability, and restoring trust in government; not at all. In fact, it took this crowd until Bill 18 to introduce electricity rebates despite the fact that the Premier at the time announced them on February 1. There is no question that what we have here is a bit of a government on autopilot, which is actually an insult to autopilot. Really, we exit this session with a Premier who has pulled a George Costanza, quit and then showed up the next day to his job, and a legislative session that has essentially been about nothing. I will remind the House of the finale of the *Seinfeld* show.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments on this bill, for which there is no need to have a minister. There's no need for an extra ministerial salary. There's no need for the fleet car. There's no need for any of it. This is a ministry of performance art, where the heavy lifting, such as it is – it's sort of a medium lifting, sort of fair-to-light lifting – could have easily been accomplished by other members of the front bench. You know, congratulations for making changes to the heritage railways. People must feel really good about their political legacy.

With that, I will provide my concluding comments on this piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will attempt to be brief in my remarks regarding this particular bill during third reading here. Of course, as has been expressed by many of my colleagues on this side of the House, when it comes to Bill 21, the Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022, there is so much here that we do agree with. The fact is that there are substantial changes that we could potentially support, but because the associate minister has decided to create other additions – and even in debate during Committee of the Whole we actually introduced an amendment to take those aspects out of the bill, yet the members on the other side decided to vote against that amendment. Even though we were saying, “Hey, you know, we can all get along here if you just take this one aspect of the bill out, and then we can all vote on this very happily and go home,” the members on the other side of the House decided to hold steadfast to their initial proposal, which demonstrates for everybody following us at home that this government doesn’t like to play.

Mr. Hunter: How many amendments did you pass when you guys were over here?

Member Loyola: You know, Mr. Speaker, it’s tragic . . .

The Acting Speaker: I’ll just remind all members of this House – and I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member – that if other members do wish to speak, there is the opportunity for at least three interventions of one minute each.

The individual with the call at this time, though, is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] No; it’s quite fine.

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, the government has demonstrated and the private members of the government caucus have also demonstrated that they’re just unyielding when it comes to actually making compromises on the bills that they have presented here in the Legislature. You know, proposed legislation after proposed legislation we have – some of them it’s been, like, “We want to refer this to committee,” but there have been other bills that we have debated inside of this House where we’ve actually wanted to make slight changes, slight modifications, that if the members on the other side of the House would have agreed to, it would’ve been easy to pass them, no problem whatsoever.

Now, of course, when it comes to this particular bill, it’s 16 sections which amend 16 different acts, and it is the prime example of an omnibus piece of legislation, which so many members on that side of the House used to light their hair on fire when we did it, when we were in government. But here they are doing it themselves, right? It’s quite hypocritical. It’s quite hypocritical that you would get up and debate and you would say that you don’t agree with omnibus pieces of legislation, that it’s not appropriate, yet here they are doing it themselves.

4:10

Now, the other aspect of this particular bill is the absolute centralization of power in the hands of the minister of environment when it comes to that particular piece. That’s the one piece that we wanted to amend, but the members on the other side of the House decided to vote it down. Just to be clear, I want to quote specifically from this bill, where it says, under directives, that “the Minister may set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines . . . or other

rules relating to any matter in respect of which a regulation may be made under this Act.” When interpreting this, you could only assume that it basically allows the minister to do anything that they want and without having a check and balance, because it’s saying that it could be done in regulation.

As we know, regulations do not need to make it into the House or need to be debated, so we’re talking about substantial changes – substantial changes – that could be made to regulation here in the province of Alberta and the opposition would not be allowed to debate it, not one bit. It would just be simply done by the minister. It wouldn’t need to be debated. In that case, then, why have a democracy at all, Mr. Speaker, if the people in government are just going to make changes any way they want through regulation and don’t need to be debated here in the House at all?

When it comes to the entire ministry of environment, this associate minister, through this piece of legislation, is basically giving the minister of environment free access. You don’t even have to deal with our democratic processes. You could basically do anything that you want, and it can be done through regulation and doesn’t have to be even debated inside of the House. That is what is happening here and what we’re so strongly opposed to.

Now, we made a slight amendment, a small change. We suggested an amendment, but this government decided to vote it down. Just take this one aspect out, and we would have agreed to support this bill. I find it hypocritical, because members when they were on this side of the House would never agree to something like this. They would never agree to something like this. They would go on and on about transparency and accountability, yet now they’re doing the exact opposite. They’re not being transparent. They’re not being accountable. There are changes that could be made by the minister of environment that wouldn’t even have to be debated inside this House, and who knows what those changes could be.

If we actually – well, this government will vote this through. I’m sure they will, regardless of our opposition.

Mr. Schow: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order has been called. I see the hon. Member for Cardston-Siksika.

Point of Order Anticipation

Mr. Schow: Now, Mr. Speaker, we know that in this Chamber there’s a long-standing tradition of not presupposing the outcome of a vote. The member opposite from Edmonton-Ellerslie clearly just said that the government will vote this through. We as representatives of the people are here to ensure that their voices are heard. We consult on them and vote based on a number of factors, but presupposing the vote is certainly out of order in this Chamber, and I ask that member, who is a veteran member of this Chamber, to retract, apologize, and move on in a manner that is conducive and in accordance with an elected representative.

The Acting Speaker: Was there a standing order in that? I would honestly recommend that the hon. member include a standing order in order to create the point of order.

Mr. Schow: Somewhere in section 23.

The Acting Speaker: Section 23 in totality: I’ll accept it.
I do see the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think you cautioned the government side that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has the

floor, and still the government members were heckling the member and not letting him speak freely. Again, this is not a point of order without citing anything, just Standing Order 23. What's in 23? It's a long standing order. I think the member used House procedure, the standing orders, to again disrupt my hon. colleague while he was talking on important aspects of this piece of legislation. That was not a point of order but another attempt to disrupt my hon. colleague from speaking freely in this House.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I believe that the correct standing order is 23(e). Am I correct? I am correct. I did, unfortunately for the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall, accept 23, generally speaking.

What I would do is just ask that the hon. member withdraw the comment about presupposing the will of the House, and then we can continue along with his comments.

Member Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I withdraw.

Debate Continued

Member Loyola: What I meant to say is that most likely, given the track record of this government – every bill that they have presented inside of the House, they have passed. You know, regardless of amendments being made on this side of the House, they have not accepted one amendment by the Official Opposition during their tenure in government.

Mr. Williams: Will the member give way?

Member Loyola: Unfortunately, no. I do not accept. I'm going to wrap up here. That's why I don't accept your intervention.

This is the concern that we have before us and why we are not supporting this bill: it gives just too much power to the minister of environment, and we don't know what that minister could do. Perhaps he could partially privatize some of our parks or restrict access to some of those parks. The point is that we don't know. The minister will be able to set in regulation any change that the minister desires, and none of that would actually have to enter into the Legislature as a proposed piece of legislation and therefore wouldn't be debated at all. We would have absolutely no way to counter anything that the minister of environment would wish to do in that particular instance.

That is, like I said, Mr. Speaker, the crux of my argument and why I will not be supporting Bill 21. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to be one of the final speakers on this piece of legislation. Of course, I stand to oppose this egregious legislation, and I will try to take some time to explain why it is fundamentally horrid and should be rejected by all democratic citizens in the province of Alberta. This follows up on the extremely well-articulated arguments by the Member for Lethbridge-West, who has quite clearly demonstrated that you don't need to create an omnibus bill when you actually have ministers who have responsibility for each and every single section within this bill. You could simply have those ministers bring this information forward.

It begs the question: why would you not have the minister responsible bringing forward these pieces of legislative change? The answer, in my mind, would be that it is because you are trying

to bury something, hide something within that legislation, and put in things that sound good and sound acceptable and then slip in the poison pill, slip in the thing that is so egregious that nobody would ever pass it if it was actually introduced by itself in this House.

That's exactly what we see here. We see that there are certainly times at which we could agree with sections of the legislation. Some of them are minuscule changes and could have happened in any other place. Some of them are useful changes that we could certainly have supported had they appeared in the appropriate ministry and been brought forward. But what we have here is the government making one of their, again, repeated antidemocratic moves, shifting the decision-making away from the democratic process of the House into the process of the cabinet, making decisions by writ and not being responsible to the people of the province of Alberta and transparent through the process of this elected forum here in this House.

4:20

That section, of course, that we all see and that has been spoken to quite clearly by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is the decision to give completely unwieldy powers to the minister of the environment when not only is this unnecessary, but it is dangerous and unsafe in this province. We have spent many years in this province creating a very reliable set of strictures around environmental regulation and processes by which people can speak to the environmental needs in this province. We have plans for all the areas of the province, that are created by local people and built up. Within them there are regulations that prevent people from making buildings or doing other things unless they fit with the plan.

The South Saskatchewan plan, for example, was very clear that the First Nations in the area could not build a gas station along the edge of their own community in spite of the fact that they would just be taking the small section between the roadway and their bridge. They still couldn't do it because the South Saskatchewan plan did not allow it to happen. So what we had is that we had a process that was being upheld by everybody and being respected by everybody, and when they didn't agree with it, such as in the case of the people from the Stoney Nakoda nations, they asked for a change of the plan and have been patiently waiting while that plan is slowly being re-examined and looking at: could we change the line of the South Saskatchewan plan just by a few hundred yards so that they could have a gas station in their home community?

That's what we want to see in this province. We want to see people being patient and changing the plans after due consideration. All of that has just been wiped out by this bill. What this bill has done – and let me be really clear when I say this. This bill has allowed that “the Minister may set standards, directives, practices, codes, guidelines or other rules relating to any matter in respect of which a regulation may be made under this Act.” That is an absolutely ridiculous breadth of power by this government, to give the minister the ability to change everything without bringing it back into this House.

I can only ask: why is it that they would wish to do this thing at this particular time? Why would they wish to take the democratic process out of this, the protection of the environment, and put it in the hands of an environment minister that has a horrendous record on the environment, an environment minister that stands up and talks about everything but the environment in this House, is not known in any way to try to protect the environment, in fact, has tried to sell parks in this province, has tried to mine the eastern slopes in this province, has tried to sell water against the wishes of people downstream in this province? We see this happening all the time.

So I have to ask: why is it that they would take this kind of legislation and create the power for a minister who clearly is not interested in the environment and is clearly not going to go forward? The answer, in my mind, must be that there is some advantage to the minister somewhere along the way, that there are groups to which he is a party and groups with which he wishes to curry favour, that he wants to be able to change the legislation without having to come into the House. He wants to be able to do this of his own right. For example, were he to be a member of, let's say, an ATV club who wanted to change their trails up into the Rocky Mountains and not obey the environmental regulations that are presently in place, they'd simply go to this minister and say: "Hey, you're part of the club. Why don't you change the rules so we can run our ATVs anywhere we want? We can rip up the environment, and there won't be any actual consequence here." That's the kind of thing that becomes available here. Now, I would expect that this minister would never choose to do that, but why would you create legislation that allows a minister to do that, to curry favour in particular areas?

One of the other things this bill does is that it allows there to be a variation in rules from one site to another site, so there's no consistent, overall pattern of environmental legislation here. There's no desire to protect the environment. What they're wanting to do is be able to go to individual groups and curry favour and say: we are going to change the rules just in your little area so that you can do these terrible things that nobody would want to have happen, but because we're going to do it in a small area, we think we can get away with it. That's what's happening here. We are moving from the democratic process of designing environmental legislation that protects all of Alberta with the same rules and allowing a minister to find little favourites along the way, to change the rules here and there for clubs that they belong to and clubs that they want to curry favour with, and as a result they will be able to forward their own ambitions, perhaps politically or whatever else they may have, but not protect the environment.

The worst thing that we can do is start to say, when we're trying to protect an environment which is literally world-wide, that we can change the protections in individual places and not worry about the consequences for the larger world and the environment around all of the province of Alberta. So this is very . . . [interjection] No. It is very suspicious to me that they would do this kind of thing, because it absolutely tells us that they're not really interested in the movement that we have had moving forward.

Mr. Williams: Discussion?

Mr. Feehan: I would love discussion if I ever thought you'd bring something forward, but not today.

Mr. Williams: Hon. member, please give way. I request again.

Mr. Sabir: Point of order.

Mr. Feehan: I can't, because I've never heard you offer something for discussion. I must . . .

The Acting Speaker: Hon. members, although I wasn't quite sure I was able to hear it, I do believe that a point of order was called by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall . . .

Mr. Sabir: Yes. Under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) . . .

The Acting Speaker: Please, sir, I still have the floor. Once I sit down, then, of course, you get your opportunity to make your arguments.

Please, hon. member.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Sabir: I am rising under 23(h), (i), and (j). I understand that a member can get up and ask for an intervention, and I'm pretty sure that the member who was trying to intervene was the one who brought this provision in the standing order, but I do not believe that using that kind of language, raising one's voice in this Legislature, is good for the order in this House. That's not the way listed in the standing orders to intervene, and I think the member was clearly offside of the piece of the standing order that he brought forward.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader has risen.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that this point of order reaches the threshold that you would need to rule against the hon. Member for Peace River. If there was a problem with the decibel level that he raised his voice to, then I would encourage him to direct similar comments to the Member for Edmonton-McClung and the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. On numerous occasions through the last three years those members have had, well, I would just say unparliamentary outbursts that raised very high decibel levels.

Mr. Feehan: You mean like your environment minister swearing at the chair?

Mr. Schow: I do have the floor, hon. member. You're welcome to stand and finish your remarks.

Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j) clearly says:

Makes allegations against another Member;

That did not happen.

Imputes false or unavowed motives [against] another Member;

That did not happen.

Uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

That also did not happen.

While I recognize that interventions are a relatively new feature in this Chamber, I would encourage all members, if your interventions are rejected, to simply in a parliamentary way sit down and accept the rejection. This is not a point of order, Mr. Speaker, and let's move on.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River has indicated that he has something new to add to this debate.

Mr. Williams: I withdraw unreservedly any unparliamentary volume that may have offended members opposite, and I ask only for substantive debate in the Chamber. I cannot wait to receive an intervention soon.

Mr. Feehan: Keep waiting.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: Are you looking to add to the debate on the point of order?

Mr. Feehan: No. Sorry. Waiting for my return.

The Acting Speaker: I can see how this could potentially fit within (j) anyways. That said, I think that part of this – the direction that I thought it was going to go, actually, would have been to use an intervention to join debate without having been called upon by the member who currently had the floor. I think that this just stems from

a discussion that we were having in this House where the hon. member mentioned that he welcomes discussion after moments prior saying no to an intervention. However, saying no to an intervention is his right.

I think that I would just caution the whole room today that – of course, I listen to these debates with great interest. As such, if the volume can stay to a level where I can hear the person with the floor, that would be very much appreciated.

If the hon. member could please continue with his comments.

Debate Continued

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, of course, can increase my own volume enough to overshout anybody, as people will know in this House.

I think I'll summarize my final point here, and that is that this is a government that has totally failed on the environment the people of Alberta. They have no plan moving forward. They have taken out all of the plans that have been put forward by previous governments in this province, and they are doing absolutely nothing to protect the environment for our children in the future. As greenhouse gases increase, it will be on this government's soul for having failed to do anything about it whatsoever. I think this legislation is part of the plan to subvert the future well-being of the environment of this province.

With those final words, I will end for today. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I believe the individual who caught my eye was the hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the previous speakers. For the record I will accept interventions. We want to try to wrap things up here for those who believe in democracy. For those folks at home and for the fans in the stands, thank you so much for joining us here and seeing how your tax dollars are being spent while we talk about your future. The last time I checked my clock, it was about \$500 a minute of your future that we're spending right now. So I hope you understand that we should be spending this fulsomely and talking about it.

What we do have here, folks at home and in the stands, is a red tape reduction bill. Now does anybody know what red tape is? We do on this side. We campaigned on it. It's unnecessary bureaucracy and, quite frankly, lengthy regulations that slow down progress. When the fact that we have an environment minister allowed to make changes in regulations because it gives him the freedom to do so – one of the litmus tests that we have here, when I look at this regulation and this law, is if I would trust you guys on the opposite to actually do it. That's always my weather mark.

Now, here's a question that I often ask my kids: why does a mouse like cheese? Because a mouse is a mouse. A mouse likes cheese. Why does a socialist like red tape? Because they're socialists. They like to wrap things up, slow things down. There's another saying out there, too. It's like: to catch a thief, you have to think like a thief. To see how a socialist might use regulations and abuse them, maybe I can listen to some of those arguments and put them in replay back there. This is what we committed to. We're going to save those kids, that are now exiting the room, \$500 a minute of their future cost savings by going through this and actually saving the economy, getting things done.

As far as the environment, we all love it. It's called where we live. I would suggest that most folks that have worked in major industries and lived in rural Alberta have their livelihoods tightly captured to the environment, and we definitely respect it. Again, the litmus test: would I trust you with this regulation? Absolutely.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd love to conclude my remarks and thank those kids for coming in upstairs and seeing how their future tax dollars are being spent. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I do believe I see that the hon. Member for Central Peace-Notley has risen.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I would like to speak to this Bill 21 and talk about red tape. There's nothing that we dislike more than red tape. I think maybe we could just get back to the definition of red tape. By definition it's rules and regulations that are excessive, unnecessary, redundant. They're rules and regulations that hinder decision-making, and they delay or create inaction.

We obviously are in a society now where we have a fairly fast-paced society, and I think we need to be able to respond to a society that's fast paced. Our business world relies on things to happen fast. There's often a joke that government operates at the speed of government. Of course, that's somewhat a derogatory term. I think that's something we could change, and one of the ways we can change that is by reducing red tape. Now, reducing red tape will help municipalities, businesses, and all Albertans to be able to get through processes so they can actually get work done, actually get to the work of the people that they represent.

Now, part of this bill is going to help municipalities move forward with economic development and revitalization by speeding up the review and approval processes for municipal community revitalization, freeway designations, new freeway access locations, and help communities get on the road to economic growth. When I look at that, I look at different projects like the industrial gateway project that the MD of Greenview is proposing south of Grande Prairie. That's a process that's been delayed a bit, and I know that the previous government had some delays in there, and now we're making some progress, finally, with that. There are businesses that are coming in and wanting to do business and set up business there, billions of dollars of investment, but because of delays, namely of the previous government, there have been billions of dollars of investment lost. Those investors went elsewhere with their money and with their investment. We need to be conscious of that and how red tape slows down production.

Look at the community of Fox Creek. I believe it was seven or eight or nine years that it took to be able to purchase a piece of provincial government land right adjacent to the town so they could develop it. That went through multiple governments where they weren't able to get that process done in time – of course, it's done now – but, again, lost millions and millions of dollars of investment. At the time that they applied for that land, I believe they said that there were about 70 businesses that were looking for property to develop in that community, and by the time they got the land, the list was zero. Those companies had gone elsewhere and done business elsewhere. We have to be able to be conscious of this.

I did have one municipal employee describe the process like this. This is what it was like going through the approval processes. It was like you wanted to make a cup of coffee, so you went to the government and said: "I want to make a cup of coffee. What do I need?" And they say, "Well, you need coffee grounds." So they go and they get the coffee grounds and come back, and it's like, "Okay; well, we're ready to make this cup of coffee now." "Well, do you have a coffee pot?" "Well, no." "Go get a coffee pot." So they go and they get a coffee pot, and they come back and they say, "Okay; we're ready to make this cup of coffee." "Well, do you have water?" It's like: "Well, I thought that was kind of given; where we're making a cup of coffee, we'd have water. But, no, we'll go get

water.” So they go get water and come back, and then they say, “Well, did you get cream?” And they’re like: “Okay. Is there anything else that we need to make this cup of coffee so when we go back, we can bring it and make this cup of coffee as fast as possible? We’re going back and forth lots here now.” “Nope; nothing else you need.” So they go, they come back with the cream, and then they say, “Well, did you get the sugar?”

This is the process of working through government bureaucracy and red tape that we need to stop. We need to be able to get past these processes. When businesses and municipalities come to government and they ask, “Okay; what do we need to do to get this project approved?” they need to be told that up front so that they can work immediately at that, bring the full package forward, and make it happen. That’s why reducing red tape is so important, because we can avoid situations like that, where governments and municipalities are held back in their desire to get projects done.

Part of this bill also talks about the REAs, rural electrification associations, which is something kind of near and dear to my heart because my family was always involved in the rural electrification associations in our community. To be able to give them an opportunity to become more sustainable over long-term periods: I think this is very important, to have this in this bill.

Part of the bill deals with making it so livestock owners and veterinarians can report animal diseases by e-mail. Again, this is something that’s long overdue. It’s good to see it in this bill here now because, obviously, in this day and age we should be able to take care of this business in a way that we deal with business elsewhere. So I think this is good, to be able to do that by e-mail and, of course, all the other means that were used before.

4:40

Having landlords be able to use e-transfers to return security deposits to tenants: again, just simplifying the process so people can do business quickly, efficiently, effectively and be able to carry on with other things.

Alberta foster parents can exercise their right to appeal government decisions affecting their foster home licence. My daughter has foster children, so when I see that and I see that the process is becoming, you know, more effective, more efficient in allowing foster parents to have some say in decisions that are made that affect not only their home but the children that they’re taking care of, I see some really good things in this bill that I really like.

It’s a fairly extensive bill. It’s a thick bill. But, again, you know, things like the Animal Health Act, being able to report animal diseases to the government by e-mail: good work there. The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, the changes there so that they can now appeal decisions made by a director: again, good work there.

Lots of good things in this bill. I’d like to, you know, commend the minister on this work. I think this is good work. This is what we’re here to do. When I look at some of it, though, I see some of it maybe would be fitted more for a miscellaneous statutes amendment act but, again, still needs to be done. Having it in here: great. Let’s get this work done. Let’s be able to, you know, allow businesses and municipalities and the people of Alberta to be able to move forward and not be hindered by government. Is there more work to do? Yes, of course, there’s always more work to do when

it comes to red tape. I think sometimes in government we take two steps forward, one step back. Again, we’ve just got to keep looking at it, keep listening to Albertans where they see issues, and see if we can stop these delays.

One thing that always comes to mind for me is the transfer of grazing leases. That’s been an issue for quite a while. The previous government wasn’t able to clean that up. You know, when you purchase a grazing lease in Alberta, it can take almost a year to transfer that grazing lease to the new owner. You could purchase it, let’s say, at an auction sale or something. The auction sale company does their business with it. The real estate agents take care of their business. The lawyers do their business. The finances are all taken care of. And then you wait for a year for the government to actually transfer that grazing lease from farmer A to farmer B. That’s something that we obviously need to work on. I think this government has been exploring that and working on trying to improve that situation, but these are the things that slow down business and slow down people’s lives.

Again, when we look at the definition of red tape, it’s excessive, it’s unnecessary, it’s stuff that’s redundant. It slows things down. It hinders decision-making. All those things are so important to – as a government I think it’s incumbent on us to be able to make life easier for Albertans, not make life more difficult and create barriers for process. I know that sometimes government fears making a decision in case it’s wrong, so they try to kick the can down the road and, you know, hope something changes or something comes to light that’ll help make the decision easier, but sometimes we just have to make decisions. We have to move on, and I think that’s what Albertans expect.

We need to be able to have these municipalities, when they have a project that needs to be done – if they want to replace a culvert and they’ve got to go to Environment to get permission to do that because there might be some effect on a waterway or something, that process needs to be laid out very clearly. They need to be able to get through it quickly and efficiently because time is money. The more time people spend going through these bureaucratic processes, that delays the work that needs to be done and causes other problems down the road.

Again, good work on reducing red tape. Lots more to do. Look forward to this government doing more of that.

I’ll leave my comments there. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members wishing to join?

Seeing none, I will offer the hon. Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction the opportunity to close should she so choose. That is waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

The Acting Speaker: Now I see the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to also thank all members for their participation this afternoon, but at this time I move that the Assembly be adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:45 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, May 25, 2022

Day 36

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, May 25, 2022

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 24

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise on behalf of the Government House Leader today to move second reading of Bill 24, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

The Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act improves clarity in our laws, Madam Speaker. It allows lawmakers to make minor changes in the law and to correct anomalies, inconsistencies, outdated terminology, and errors to provide clarification in provincial law.

This bill would make minor amendments to 19 acts, which include – I've been asked to make sure the House is aware of all 19 of these acts, so bear with me, everyone – the Dairy Industry Act, the Family and Community Support Services Act, the Health Professions Act, the International Trade and Investment Agreements Implementation Act, the Interpretation Act, the Legislative Assembly Act, the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act, the Marriage Act, the Metis Settlements Act, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Personal Information Protection Act, and the Post-secondary Learning Act, as well as the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act, the Recall Act, the Safety Codes Act, the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Education Act, the Societies Act, the Surface Rights Act, and, finally, Madam Speaker, the Vital Statistics Act. [some applause] Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker, while all of these amendments are minor in nature . . .

Member Irwin: Could you say that again?

Mr. Ellis: You want me to repeat that?

. . . they would add clarity and consistency to our laws. Thank you, Madam Speaker, very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you very much. Just on behalf of the Official Opposition we appreciated the government working with us on this particular piece, and we are pleased to support the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

The Deputy Speaker: Would the hon. minister like to close debate?

Mr. Ellis: Waived.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a second time]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Pitt in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 10

Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: This is Bill 10's first time in Committee of the Whole. Are there members wishing to join the debate? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Member Irwin: Sorry. I thought the lovely member across the way – but maybe we'll be hearing from her shortly, so I shouldn't assume.

It is an honour to rise. In fact, it feels like it's actually been a little while since I've spoken in the Chamber. I don't want to presuppose anything, but I may not have a whole lot more opportunities to do so.

As I like to do the first time when I speak in the Chamber, I just acknowledge – you know, we had the opportunity earlier today, many of my colleagues and I, to stand in support of paid sick days outside of the Legislature. There was a really good rally, and it was an important reminder of the fact that we are still in a pandemic. We as legislators should acknowledge the fact that the pandemic has laid bare many of the challenges that health care workers have seen and many of the gaps in our health care system. Shout-out to all those workers on the front lines not just in health care but in education and retail and anywhere on the front lines.

I will just speak briefly tonight to Bill 10. I did have the chance to speak to Bill 10 in I believe it would have been second. It feels like a while ago now. Time is awfully confusing here, both inside and outside the Chamber. I'll restate a few of my remarks. I said then that we absolutely, you know, on this side of the House believe that female genital mutilation – the intent of this bill is an important one. I appreciate very much that the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore has had a number of conversations on this bill. I know that she took some of the questions and comments that I had for her, mostly, I think, actually, offline. We mostly spoke outside the Chamber. I know that she did take some of that feedback to heart.

If she's willing to talk a little bit to the bill today, I did just want to ask a little bit more around the consultation piece on the bill. One of the things that I don't want to say I struggled with but that I questioned is just that, you know, it's not – the member can correct me, but I believe she said, at least it was in a media report, that there were no cases reported of FGM here in Alberta, something to that effect. I guess my question is: who did you consult with on this? What made this be a priority piece of legislation for this government?

I want to frame this positively because, as I shared in second when I spoke to this bill, I remember when I was a high school social studies teacher in rural Alberta. I remember this was actually one of the human rights abuses that we talked about. One of my students even did a bit of their presentation on this topic, so it's something that a lot of people don't necessarily know is happening globally. However, again, I would love to learn a little bit more about the Alberta context and why it is that of – again, I want to frame this not as criticism but just as questions. You know, there are so many issues facing women and gender-diverse folks in this province. I've said this – again, I know I'm a broken record. I want

to not frame this as criticism, but I've talked to a lot of women and a lot of folks across this province. I do every day, and I'm proud of that. Quite honestly, this is not an issue that I've heard to be a concern.

I've heard a whole heck of a lot of issues, particularly surrounding women's health. I think that was something that we've said in our early comments on this bill as well. You know, when we heard that there was something coming to do with women's health, I was intrigued to see what it would be. I was a little bit surprised that there wouldn't be perhaps something that would address the challenges that women and gender-diverse folks experience when accessing obstetrical care, as an example, across this province. We know countless communities – I know that my colleague from Edmonton-City Centre has named a whole bunch of them – where women and folks who need those services are not able to access them. I mean, maybe that couldn't be addressed through legislation, but it could certainly be addressed through tangible action by this government. That's one example.

Another example. I note the Associate Minister of Status of Women mentioned this as well, just talking about something I talked about back in, I think, March – oh, time is confusing – Endometriosis Awareness Month, right? That's an issue that, I'll be honest with you, I didn't know enough about until I met with some women and some folks who struggle with it and just hearing how incredibly debilitating that women's health issue is.

My questions, I guess, primarily for either the Associate Minister of Status of Women or the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, would be to just talk a little bit about the consultation process. What led this to be a bill that would be a priority of this government?

You know, I said it multiple times in this Chamber in this session: this government had an opportunity with so many pieces of their legislation to really make transformational change. A great example would be the Continuing Care Act. I believe that's Bill 11. The pandemic has really exposed some of the huge gaps in the continuing care system. What an opportunity for this government to be leaders and to try to really address some of those challenges. No. Instead, they presented a piece of legislation that's very much mostly housekeeping changes, administrative changes, right? We saw that with a number of other pieces of legislation this session. I think there are members, no doubt, on both sides of this Chamber that would question the seriousness or the gravity of the pieces of legislation that came forward this session.

7:40

With that, again I want to make it very clear that, you know, we are in support of this bill and we are in support of having these sorts of difficult conversations. We all want to be in this Chamber leaders, I'm certain, when it comes to standing up against human rights abuses such as FGM. But I still do have a few questions, so I'm hoping that we can get a few answers from that side of the House.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, and thank you so much to the member across the way for the questions. Really great questions, actually. One of the most transformational things that happens in this place is actually being able to bring pieces of legislation like this, that elevate many of the things, many of the topics that the member spoke about. In my lifetime, especially coming from – I'm part of a very beautiful culture on one side, the Southeast Asian culture. I'm very lucky. There are so many beautiful things about my culture, but there are also things that call into question the equality and equity for girls and women.

A lot of the legislation that we bring through this House – and I think that the opposition could equally agree – not only comes from the people that we speak to but elevates the discourse around many, many discussions. When we're talking about sexual assault, domestic violence, and – in this particular case, FGM stems from many discussions around child marriage and honour beatings and honour killings and situations that still occur.

Just to add some clarity, Madam Chair, for the member across the way, we are coming into something called the cutting season. Now, the cutting season is something that happens in other countries whereby they call it vacation cutting. Because we don't necessarily know – you can imagine that the cutting of the clitoris, the sewing of the labia, and all of the sort of practices that go along with this are not something that one would speak about.

I think about so many things that I've learned. The member had talked about this under other situations regarding surgeries and transformational changes that happen. A lot of the things that we talk about in this House, Madam Chair, a lot of us don't have a lot of information about. We wouldn't have been able to learn about those things or start the process of education had we not had the opportunity and the privilege to be able to bring those things before the House. Any time we can save any little girl from any situation, especially in Canada – in Canada we believe we are a country that believes in the safety and security of girls and women. We say that when people enter our borders. We tell people, when they come to Canada, that their daughters will be safe.

However, with a practice like this – and I'd also like to just mention that this legislation is not led by western philosophy; it is led by the diasporas around the world that are changing. They are changing the world for their girls in countries where millions – 200 and some million girls have been cut and have lost babies or have died as a result of having labour with closure of the labia minora.

In Africa there is a report that is called the Maputo protocol. The Maputo protocol is a protocol across Africa that is about protecting and promoting the rights of women and girls across Africa. The Maputo protocol in section 14 talks about women's rights over their body and reproduction rights and many, many things that are very important to all of us in this House and in Canada. But the most important piece about that protocol is what they're doing across the diaspora and through Africa to help elevate the rights of girls and women.

The language and everything that is in this bill that has been used – and you'd asked about consultation. I'm not sure, to the MLA, if we had actually sent this list of consultations. I'm happy to share that with you. But if you don't mind, I'll read – like, it's two pages long of consultations. I'm happy to share . . .

The Chair: Through the chair.

Mrs. Aheer: Sorry if that's a prop. I apologize, Madam Chair.

The Chair: No, no. Just speak through the chair.

Mrs. Aheer: I won't go through the entire list.

Member Irwin: No. That's fine.

Mrs. Aheer: But I'm very happy to share – yeah. I can send it over to you if you like. Okay.

The Chair: Hon. members, speak through the chair.

Mrs. Aheer: Yes. Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair.

One thing I wanted to actually talk about with the member, through you, Madam Chair, is that we'd actually had some

interesting conversations with folks after the legislation came forward. Some of the colleges had actually reached out to us to go: why are we doing this, and how does this impact us?

The conversations that we had were so amazing because we were able to explain what the situation was, knowing that a lot of these colleges are dealing with new Canadians, and the ability to have an open conversation – quite often the colleges are the people that are working with these folks that already have really, really solid protocols for sexual assault and domestic violence and many other things and are able to have another tool in their tool kit should they hear something about this. Imagine if under the circumstances they had heard through their discussions that they're having with folks that this situation was occurring and the ability not only to help a little girl but even to help a family in this situation.

The member had mentioned about the opportunities of other legislation coming forward. There is a lot of transformative legislation that can happen in this place, but until we start these difficult conversations and are willing to actually have it within this space – it's difficult for all of us, and we all come from very different places, with a lot of really important things that need to be spoken about. The member had spoken about that with the LGBTQ2S-plus community and transformational change that has to happen in there, the gender-reaffirming surgeries that we had actually spoken about, which is super important.

We just want to make sure that all of that important work has its place to be able to talk about that and that we're talking about this, that we're talking about little girls that are having an action put against them that is against their will in this country and, when they are sent overseas to have this procedure done, the incredible number of medical situations that can occur to their little bodies as they grow and have to deal with this and, on top of that, supports for survivors and potentially help to have reconstructive surgery when needed in order to be able to put their perfect bodies back the way they wanted them if that's what they choose to do.

I'm trying to remember the other questions that were asked. I apologize. I did write some of them down.

I wanted to also say that the member had mentioned about the seriousness and the gravity. I think that suggesting that one situation has more seriousness and gravity than another one puts us into a situation where we're choosing. I think all of the discussions that we're having in here as a result of this discussion show the seriousness and gravity of how it is that we protect our public and how as a Legislature, when we say that we're going to protect girls and women, we're going to protect girls and women.

If I may say, I've met hundreds of women in this province. Was the actual procedure done in Alberta? Not as far as we know. Are procedures being done in North America? Yes, they are. In fact, in the United States, because federal legislation was only available and state legislation was not available, girls were continuing to be cut in places like Michigan, because the federal legislation and the state legislation didn't align.

I also wanted to mention the many networks that are organizing around the world globally to end this practice, again, just to reinforce that this isn't us as a western culture trying to impose our ideas onto a different culture. This has been led completely by the cultures that are trying to change and alter the way that girls are being treated. You can imagine: just put yourself into a situation for a moment in a different country whereby your value is being measured over whether you will be promiscuous or dirty. Those are the languages that are used when a girl is not cut or sewn up. This isn't in any way to point fingers at anybody. This is thousands of years of cultural practice that have come into play that have determined the go-forward. That girl that is going to a different group, going to a different family is worth – her value is increased

because she has been cut. Everything that goes along with that facilitation of her marrying into, you know, the neighbouring family or whatever that is is about elevating her value.

7:50

Imagine if we as a western nation are able to help our counterparts across the world to show what the value of a girl is and find other ways to show coming of age and opportunities to really develop how it is that we treat girls and how it is that we see that development and the importance of their development and who they are, that we do not need to alter them for them to be clean or not promiscuous. Those are just a couple of those things.

Imagine for a moment the labia minora being sewn up and that there's only a tiny, little hole for a girl to menstruate and urinate through. And then, on top of that, you add in the aspect of intercourse or anything like that when she's of age and she gets married and what that's like for that person. And then you add, on top of that, that she gets pregnant and delivers a baby and has to be opened and then sewn shut again. It doesn't need to happen here, and we don't need to know a direct example of that to know that it's happening and that there are girls and women who are impacted by that. We know that. We've talked to the doctors; we've talked to the organizations. We know that this is happening. We just don't know how to prevent it yet.

This legislation is enabling legislation to help all of us learn a little bit more about how we can be there for our people, whether you're a person who just got off the airplane yesterday and are starting your life in Canada and, hopefully, Alberta or if you've been here for seven, eight, 10 generations.

One of the things that was very profound for me that I read – there's an organization called Our Daughters. In it one of the women – her name is Ifrah. She started this organization, and the entire mandate is: let's make sure that our daughters don't suffer the way that we did. Again, it is led by the associations and the women, these powerful women, in cultures who are coming forward to defend their daughters.

I think that as a multicultural society, a beautiful province that wants to fling her doors open to everybody and anybody who wants to come here and be successful, not only do we look at health care, but we have to look at racism, we have to look at bigotry, and we have to look at the way that women are marginalized in the system. We have to look at so many different things.

But if we have the tools to be able to make ourselves better and to understand it and to be able to ask the questions – I spoke to one of the doctors. Oh, gosh, this is going back four and a half years ago. They had mentioned that they had seen a woman, several women, actually, that had been altered, and if you can imagine, they were able to ask questions about abuse like ligature marks and other things that are on women's bodies if they've gone through physical abuse. They were able to ask questions about that, but they were not comfortable asking about an alteration of the labia or a cut of the clitoris, because they didn't know how to ask the question. These are professionals who probably have every conversation imaginable with a person when they're on the table, but they were terrified to ask the question, too, because they didn't want to be offensive or, you know, talk about something that they didn't know about. We need and have responsibility, because we know that this is happening, to make sure that we have the opportunity to educate people.

If it's one girl or if it's 10,000 girls, it doesn't matter. What matters is that we elevate the discussion around that protection, and that will lead to other legislation, some of what the member was talking about, which I think is really important, but also around other cultural practices that countries are trying desperately to end

like child marriage, like honour beatings, and like honour killings. I wish I could tell you that I hadn't had experience with that in my own families, but unfortunately, like most families, we have history in our own of these kinds of behaviours.

So it's very, very personal for me, and it's really, really important that as a person from a Southeast Asian background I'm able to share these experiences with you and that we can pass legislation that I think will elevate all of us and, hopefully, lead to other pieces of legislation that are equally transformational and that understand the seriousness and the gravity of all of the things that we're dealing with.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Are there others wishing to join the debate?
Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill 10 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

Bill 24 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: Are there members wishing to speak?
Seeing none, I will call the question on Bill 24, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

[The clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? That is carried.

Private Bills Committee of the Whole

Bill Pr. 2 Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022

The Chair: Are there speakers to the bill? I see the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you. We are discussing Bill Pr. 2, Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022, in Committee of the Whole. I stand in support of Pr. 2, something that we know is supported by the city of Calgary and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, but I was also thinking that this was a bill that would be amended, as was recommended by the committee. An amendment to Pr. 2, I think, would follow the recommendations of the committee and improve this piece of legislation. Specifically, I believe we're looking for an amendment that would address liability of the authority with respect to loss or damage.

Having said that, with that amendment this particular piece of legislation is really going to make some very straightforward changes to change the legal name of the Calgary Heritage Authority to Heritage Calgary, to clarify the definition of heritage resources and the activities of the authority, and to modernize its governance framework. As I mentioned, again, there is agreement between the

stakeholders involved as well as support from the city of Calgary and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

This piece of legislation will also, through various sections, change some of the definitions, including adding the words "director," "executive director," "inventory of evaluated historic resources," "board," and expanding the concept of heritage resource with specific categories of items to be included such as buildings, historical landscapes, culturally significant areas.

I want to thank the committee that reviewed Pr. 2 as well as the petitioner, the general manager on behalf of what is currently the Calgary Heritage Authority, for bringing this forward. This piece of legislation was discussed at the committee, and I'm very pleased that all parties are in support of it, particularly with the one amendment that will improve this piece of legislation.

On behalf of the Official Opposition I'm very pleased to have spoken briefly to this Pr. 2.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the hon. Opposition House Leader for her great remarks. I appreciate that.

I'd like to rise now and move an amendment. Would you like me to read that?

The Chair: No. I would like your copies and the original.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Okay. Here you go.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.
Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Perfect. Thank you, Madam Chair. Essentially, the amendment that I'm moving on Pr. 2 is to clarify the extent of the authority's limitation of liability. It is important to ensure that petitioners are not being granted powers or rights that would be extraordinary when compared to what is provided to other entities under the public law of Alberta.

Some of the parts of subsection (2) limit the liability of directors in relation to the authority. Others, however, relate to liability of directors in dealing with third parties. From a legal standpoint it is important to ensure that organizations are not entirely limited from liability. Otherwise, their acts, omissions, even if caused through an employee or director, could result in significant damage, loss, or injury to a third party that has no legal recourse to be compensated.

With that, I move this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there others to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question on amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

8:00

The Chair: Are there any members wishing to speak to the bill as amended? The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Member Ceci: Thank you very much. Just briefly, Madam Chair. I'd certainly agree with the comments made by my colleague on this side just a few minutes ago. The general manager: I certainly know that person, and I believe that the petition to make the changes that are identified here will assist in not only governance but ultimately, I believe, in the protection of important historical resources in Calgary, something that – many people in Calgary believe not enough protection goes on. I know that there has to be some remuneration to property owners if this action is taken but not if the provincial government takes the action.

In any event, the city of Calgary will be better served by a more streamlined and better functioning entity, and I certainly want to support that happening not only for the protection of built structures but other significant structures in the Calgary area.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak?

If not, I will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill Pr. 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that the Committee of the Whole rise and report Bill 10, Bill 24, and Bill Pr. 2.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mrs. Frey: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: Bill 10 and Bill 24. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill Pr. 2. I wish to table copies of amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

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

Private Bills Third Reading

Bill Pr. 2 Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022

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

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Excellent. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to rise today to move third reading of Bill Pr. 2, Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022.

One thing I really appreciate about Heritage Calgary is that they maintain the sites and its inventory but in some cases find a way to

come up with new and creative uses for some of these facilities, and I just wanted to share a quick story about how a church that was built in 1911 made the decision to use their building to provide shelter and food for the homeless many years later. They took in a 15-year-old boy who went on to found an organization that impacted thousands of people. That organization eventually outgrew that church and moved to another heritage site, the electric warehouse, which was used to help thousands more.

Most of us could not imagine Calgary without the Mustard Seed and would lament the loss of these structures on our landscape. These buildings are not just part of our past, but they're also part of our future and who we are as a people. The preservation and celebration of our past builds a future and a culture for our children.

As I have previously spoken to this bill, I didn't want to talk too long on it, but I wanted to give this one example of the importance of preserving these historical buildings. With that, I will sit down.

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

Member Ceci: Thank you. I certainly want to support Bill Pr. 2. I'm also conscious that there are many other structures in Calgary that the Calgary Heritage Authority, now going to be called Heritage Calgary, I think, has taken issue with and wants to see preserved and has met with resistance. They try and negotiate as best possible to save as much as they can. One of those buildings, older structures, is the Calgary brewery site in Inglewood, where there is a rather large development plan for it, and hopefully some of it will be saved for the future generations to understand what the industrial landscape looked like in Calgary in the 1900s, early 1900s.

But with this private bill before us, Bill Pr. 2, I certainly want to say that the members of the opposition support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others wishing to speak?

Seeing none, would the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein like to close debate?

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: No. I'm good.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Schow: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank everyone for their participation tonight. I would argue that we have record progress and record speed. With that, I would move that the Assembly be adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow, which will be Thursday, May 26, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 8:07 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, May 26, 2022

Day 37

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

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Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

Party standings:

United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
Counsel
Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
Director of House Services

Nancy Robert, Clerk of *Journals* and
Committees
Janet Schwegel, Director of Parliamentary
Programs
Amanda LeBlanc, Deputy Editor of
Alberta Hansard

Chris Caughell, Sergeant-at-Arms
Tom Bell, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Paul Link, Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms
Terry Langley, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms

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| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Adriana LaGrange | Minister of Education |
| Jason Luan | Minister of Community and Social Services |
| Kaycee Madu | Minister of Labour and Immigration |
| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
| Jason Nixon | Minister of Environment and Parks |
| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
| Prasad Panda | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Josephine Pon | Minister of Seniors and Housing |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Rajan Sawhney | Minister of Transportation |
| Rebecca Schulz | Minister of Children's Services |
| Doug Schweitzer | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Travis Toews | President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

Parliamentary Secretaries

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| Martin Long | Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Tourism |
| Jacqueline Lovely | Parliamentary Secretary to the Associate Minister of Status of Women |
| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
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Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
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van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

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Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Carson
Dang
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Gotfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
Sabir
Smith

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Milliken

Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

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Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

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Deputy Chair: Ms Rosin

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Bilous
Goehring
Sabir
Singh
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
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Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Singh
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Mr. Hanson
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Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, May 26, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

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

Ordres du jour.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 10

Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Can I just check: are we moving then, today, into third reading?

The Speaker: Correct. You're moving.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, sir. I just wanted to make sure I was in the right spot.

It is with great honour that I rise today to move the third reading of Bill 10, Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022.

First of all, I have few people that I would like to just take a moment to thank. As the former minister for the status of women it's my absolute privilege to have worked with the present Associate Minister of Status of Women on this bill. It takes an entire House of people to bring these kinds of things together, and when you're able to do this work together, it just feels incredibly special. It's one of those moments that I won't forget in a very long time, so thank you so much, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the present Status of Women associate minister. I am absolutely and beyond grateful – and to the Minister of Health as well.

There has been so much consultation and work that's gone into this. It's been a passion project for many of us, but mostly I would just like to be very clear in understanding that we are supporting leaders in their fight against female genital mutilation globally, including women affected by this in the diasporas that have really led this discussion and have created organizations and foundations, including – and if you have a moment to take a look at these foundations, it's extremely enlightening to understand the work that is going on globally – Dear Daughter campaign, the Irfaa Foundation, and broader networks like End FGM and End FGM Canada.

With the summer holidays that are coming up – and we're all looking forward to spending time with our families – for some girls: they will be shipped off for the cutting season. Bill 10 offers a chance for all of us to have a discussion and raise awareness around issues of female genital mutilation, and subsequently we'll give

voices to all of those who have suffered and to understand the practice but, hopefully, to be able to end this practice.

Bill 10 will offer supports to victims, including supports for necessary protections for children at risk and supports to manage the resulting physical and psychological trauma for girls and women who have underwent FGM.

When a society displays that it understands and it empathizes with girls and women who have undergone this practice, it actually elevates a whole bunch of discussions around sexual assault and domestic violence, around the protection of girls and women, child marriage, honour beatings, and honour killings. That elevation and that discussion raise all of the discussions that are so important to so many people in this province. When we display that empathy, we will be able to show not only support for people who are coming forward, the stigma and the terrifying positions that some of these women and families have found themselves in, but be able to support them on their journey to healing and well-being and to potentially even be able to come forth and speak about it.

That's been one of the most profound moments for me in this journey with speaking to women who had actually undergone this process and hearing from them not only the trauma that they've gone through but also the questions that they had about their own selves and their families and what to do in the future for their own daughters. What we're seeing now is that this movement of women and men and folks across the world is that they're paving a way so that it doesn't happen to their daughters.

I also want to thank ministry folks, past and present, that are in the ministries right now. Also, a dear friend of mine, Giselle Portenier, who, as you know, has a documentary in the name of her daughter, and it was, again, another one of those moments in my life that profoundly changed the way that I look at things.

It was sort of a moment in time for me four and a half years ago, when human trafficking, female genital mutilation, and all of these – we know that it's happening, we know that it's going on, but we actually started honest and forthright discussions about these issues. As you know, for all of us in this House these conversations and the legislation that have been brought forward in this House, that we've all shared and worked on, will hopefully work towards prevention but give us all tools in our tool kits to be able to help not only survivors but work in the area of prevention of these horrible things that are going on after decades and even centuries of suffering under harsh practices inflicted onto women and girls. These are in the name of cultural practices, patriarchy, and traditional gender norms. It's really time to change the status quo and to stand in support of women and girls and in their quest for equality and justice.

I would just like to thank again the folks in this House and also the opposition for their wonderful contributions to this, for asking such very, very important questions, and for the robust debate. I've learned so much in the questions that folks asked in here, pushed even harder for us to find and get details and to make sure that we were able to make sure that this legislation was what it was and that the intention is extremely honourable for the work that needs to be done. Thank you again, because this is one of those moments where we stand together. When we say that we're going to protect women and girls, we're actually going to do that. In Alberta we are the first province in Canada to bring legislation forward like this. We were the first province to do the proclamations and the declarations about female genital mutilation. Again, very, very grateful for the opportunity to stand here after 11 years of working on this. It's been very emotional, and I'm very honoured.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there others? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to third reading of Bill 10, Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. Let me start off by thanking the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for bringing forward this piece of legislation. Certainly, it's an important piece of legislation. It's important to raise awareness about this practice and violation of basic, basic human dignity and right.

In this day and age, Mr. Speaker, there are still, according to WHO, World Health Organization, 200 million girls and women alive around the globe who have been put through this horrible, horrible practice; 200 million women. As the member mentioned even in her remarks this morning, in some way, shape, or manner it's still happening in Canada as well, that girls and women are shipped over to their countries to undergo this torture. I think the said bill is important to raise awareness, but at the same time this bill doesn't go far enough to provide tools to the relevant departments, be that law enforcement, be that some other department, to find out: who are those people who are co-ordinating that practice, and why is it that women and girls are shipped off to undergo that practice in this day and age? Nonetheless, it is a good piece of legislation. It gave us as legislators an opportunity to discuss this practice here and an opportunity for all Albertans to learn about this basic violation of human dignity and rights of women.

9:10

Speaking of human rights and women, when we talk about human rights, when we talk about women's rights, when we talk about women's dignity, when we talk about their equality, when we talk about justice about them, then we shouldn't be selective. We should be supporting all of their rights, and we should be supporting their equality and their ability to control decisions impacting them as well.

Three weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, three or four weeks ago now, the Supreme Court of the United States overturned Roe and Wade. That was a decision that was in place for almost five decades protecting a woman's right to get an abortion, protecting the basic woman's right to their bodily autonomy, and in this Chamber many times my colleagues asked the current Associate Minister of Status of Women and the Health minister whether they will get up and affirm women's rights to their bodily autonomy and condemn the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States. The answer we were getting was that it's a decision of a court of a foreign jurisdiction that we don't have any influence over and all that.

Here this morning we were listening to the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore on how it's important to be a part of a global cause even though this practice is criminally banned here in Canada, but it's important for us that we be a part of a global moment for a basic human dignity and women's right issue. I wholeheartedly agree that we should. We cannot stay on the sidelines. We cannot stay silent, that if it's not happening here, it doesn't impact us. I totally agree with the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore that events happening around us, violations of human rights happening around us, violations of women's rights happening around us: it's important that we weigh in and we stand against those violations.

It's critically important, and it is for that reason that we ask this government to take a clear stance on the Supreme Court of the United States issue as well, because that impacts women's rights across North America, but we didn't hear a word about that, because then it's an ideological consideration for this government.

Again, when we are talking about basic human dignity and rights, then we should talk about that by rising above and beyond our partisan interests.

Mr. Speaker, you may recall this, that back in 2018, when the NDP was in government, we brought forward a bubble-zone legislation.

The purpose of that legislation was to put a bubble zone around facilities that provide abortion services so that women seeking those services can do so without any harassment, without any intimidation, and be able to exercise their right over their bodily autonomy in a harassment-free manner. In this Legislature, with members of this UCP – the PC and Wildrose; I think that at that time they had merged – every time that issue came to a vote, they ran out of this Legislature; 13 times.

There was also an issue of human rights. That's an issue of women's rights. We should not put partisan qualification on women's rights. We should stand for all of their rights. This practice of FGM is a horrible violation of their bodily autonomy and their rights. We should stand against that, and based on the same principle, when there is an attack on women's right to exercise their bodily autonomy – it doesn't matter where it happens – we should also stand against that. Instead of dodging questions – that somehow on decisions of some foreign jurisdiction, of some foreign court, that this government has no control over, we should not say anything – I think we should stop peddling those kinds of double standards. Violation of one's human rights, regardless of where they are, is a violation of every human's rights.

The second thing. I also want to mention – and I guess that was just recent – that 21 kids were shot in Texas. Mr. Speaker, I will explain why it relates to this debate. They were killed mercilessly. In 2020 the leading cause of death of kids in the United States was no longer motor vehicle accidents; it was shootings. Those are the stats publicly available. Most parties of conservative leanings, whether they are in the States or in Canada, will passionately engage in debate against abortion based on their right-to-life arguments, and they will stand against a woman's right to choose, a woman's right to exercise bodily autonomy in their decisions. But now that so many kids are getting killed – and that will impact us as well. There was a gun found in Bowness high school just a week ago. I'm glad that the administration and police were able to safely handle that situation.

9:20

When we talk about these issues, we get so partisan about access to abortion services and women's right to exercise their own will in their own decisions that we will go as far as blocking these efforts and not say anything about what impact Roe versus Wade will have in Canada.

We will never engage in debate around proliferation of guns. That is actually killing more kids in the United States than anything else. That certainly is happening in Alberta, too. In Calgary alone there were 59 shootings this year alone, and more than 50 per cent of those guns are not lawfully obtained or anything. Those things are also impacting people's rights, are impacting Albertans' safety and security.

But back to this bill, I would say that it's an important piece of legislation. It will certainly help us raise awareness around this practice. As I said, it doesn't go far enough to create means and tools so that we can find out who those groups are who are sending girls and women back to those countries where they can still be subject to this kind of inhumane treatment, inhumane torture. We should do everything in our capacity to block these practices and uphold basic human rights, basic women's rights, and basic dignity of all girls and women.

Whenever there is an issue, whether it's happening here or somewhere in our neighbourhood, somewhere around the globe, that impacts basic human dignity, we should rise above our partisan interests and speak in favour of human rights and human dignity without any qualification.

With that, I will take my seat on this side of the House. I will be supporting this piece of legislation, and I hope my colleagues will do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this very, incredibly important bill. I'd like to thank the member for bringing it forward and for shepherding it through this House and ensuring that it passed in an efficient and speedy manner.

You know, there is really nothing that I would support more than the central argument of this particular bill, and that is the ultimate right for people to have bodily integrity and not to have other people assault their bodily integrity and take that away from them.

I'm sure everyone in the House knows that I spent many years working in the area of child sexual abuse, and that again is the core issue of that area of concern. You know, the resulting trauma from having your bodily integrity violated is really one of the most fundamentally abusive experiences that anyone can experience, whatever the cause, whatever the nature of the assault is.

As a result of that, we have come, thankfully, to a place now in modern society where we understand that that has to be underneath everything else that we do. We certainly can make rules and regulations and ask people to engage in things, but your bodily integrity is something that must be maintained. It's a complex argument, isn't it? It's a very difficult line to walk sometimes because sometimes it's very clear for us.

When I was working in the area of child sexual abuse, it was very clear to me that one should not rape a six-year-old child. Nobody would disagree with that. But by the time I got up to working with kids that were 16 years of age, suddenly there were arguments: "Well, maybe there was some reason that this should happen or not happen. Maybe we should treat it differently." What was happening was that people were losing the underlying argument about human bodily integrity being the fundamental issue here, and I sometimes find the same thing happening with female genital mutilation.

For me, it's absolutely clear: there's absolutely no circumstance where a nonmedical procedure should be done to anyone's body. I think it's fundamental that we respect that integrity of the human body. But we see groups coming forward saying, "But it's part of our culture, part of our faith" or whatever else, and I just really want to spend a few moments trying to talk about that. First of all, it isn't part of any religion, for no one at all. It isn't a doctrine of faith for anyone. It simply is a cultural practice. It's a habit done by a group of people sometimes using religion as the shield for doing it, and we have to be very careful not to allow that kind of imposition of cultural habit or excuse to suddenly make us forget the fundamental question here, and that is the question of bodily integrity.

You know, I think that we are in a difficult place here in this province because we are trying at the same time to welcome people into our province, to celebrate the various attitudes and cultural practices and belief systems from around the world because we know that that kind of plurality of ideas and expressions of self actually lead to a better society. But at some point, sometimes we have to be able to say that you cannot claim our desire for multiculturalism, our desire for a diverse society as a right to take away some fundamental underlying right, and that's essentially what's happening here in the area of female genital mutilation.

We then have a very difficult argument, because we need to be able to say: we welcome you, whoever you are, however you express yourself, and we accept that you may want to do things in a way that is different than we do things. But there's a point at which we have to say no. There's a point at which we have to say that we understand that it may be a habitual practice in a place where you come from, but it cannot ever find root as a habitual practice or a practice ever under any circumstances in a place that has an underlying philosophical belief system in the integrity of the human person and the human rights that are associated with that person.

I think that legislation of this kind is very important because it signals very strongly that we have drawn that line, that we have said that while we're open to all kinds of diversity, there are some things we simply cannot because they are a violation of human rights. We understand that human rights imply the ability to choose how you live your life, but at some point, if your choice of human rights violates the rights of another person, then we can no longer support your choice. It's a difficult line to draw, but I'm glad that this member has been focused on what is important and has worked through that and gotten us to a place where we can say that this is a clear statement about the underlying value of humanity and the underlying value of an individual to determine control of their own body.

9:30

I really think that we have to take a little bit of time to look at: why would this even exist in this world? Unfortunately, I simply have to say that this is a reflection of a history that we all share in this world of a culture of patriarchy and misogyny. The purposes of this practice, even in the places that are doing it, are not for the benefit of the person who is subject to the female genital mutilation but, rather, for the benefit of the male segment of society so that they can fulfill some fantastical belief about the purity of the person that they're going to marry or the daughter that they're essentially going to sell off to another community, to another person. It's a reflection back to the idea that somehow women are the chattel of men and that women's only existence is to satisfy the needs and desires of men, including the needs and desires to marry a woman who is deemed pure within a culture. This kind of absolute patriarchal violence towards women is completely unacceptable.

It's really important for us in this House to be absolutely clear that the issue isn't just female genital mutilation, but it is the philosophical ideas that lead to that kind of thing becoming a possibility. Those ideas were encapsulated in patriarchy and misogyny. It's very important for us as citizens and government representatives in this province to take a very clear stance against patriarchy and misogyny, to understand when it is being played out in our society in any manner, whether it's directed towards female genital mutilation or any of the other violations of women's rights, and to exorcise that horrendous approach and that dictation of what is right or wrong to women and who they are, how they express themselves, and to the integrity of their body.

It is important that we continue the process of rooting out that horrendous philosophical idea that somehow men can make decisions over women and over women's bodies, the same way we have done that with saying that slavery is illegal and wrong because it is taking control over someone else's body, the same way we have said that child sexual abuse is wrong because it is violating the integrity of that person's body. Whenever we see an expression of that patriarchy in any area of society, it is requisite upon all of us to stop it and to eliminate that expression in all of its various forms so that we can stop that which is underpinning these kinds of

horrendous things such as female genital mutilation. That's hard to do because, like most people, individuals who are involved in the patriarchy believe that they have come to that place by a birthright. They have that right because of just who they are: that's the way it's always been, that's the way my dad was, that's the way my grandfather was. They cite history and tradition as somehow being correct and therefore being inviolate in terms of assault from those of us who understand that that kind of attitude is really and completely unacceptable.

I want to spend my last few minutes calling on, particularly, the men in this House and the men in society to work very hard on an antimisogynistic set of laws and practices in this House and in society to ensure that we root out that which supports the violence of female genital mutilation. We've got a long way to go. It has only been in the last 100 years that we've even begun to recognize some of the ways in which this is going on. We still have many traditions that seem small and minor, but in fact they're actually a reflection of that.

You know, still at most weddings the father gives away the bride. It's a fascinating expression that she does not give of herself freely to a partner, but her father gives her away. Now, I understand that there's family tradition around what that's about and so on, but I also want people to reflect on the fact that that says, on some level, that that father owns that daughter and is giving that daughter away, that the daughter is not freely choosing to do that. I think that those are the kinds of things that we have to start to change.

There's nothing wrong with a family coming together and celebrating the marriage of a daughter, but to believe that somehow this is not her choice but, rather, the family selling the daughter off is one that we have to be very careful about. This is a minor example, but it's just an example about how you don't think about the things that are part of the patriarchy. They just seem kind of normal and natural and kind of even fun and nice, yet when you examine "What is the root of that? What is that a reflection of?" you realize that we have to do more self-reflection and understanding about the ways in which patriarchy is inherent in our society, and we have to begin to act in a way that does not do that. This is not a new concept. When I was married, I didn't choose to have that sort of father-giving-away-the-bride kind of thing happening; instead, both parents came together to celebrate the union of their children.

This kind of thing has been happening for a long time but not by everyone, and it's time for all of us to get together to focus on the horrendous, traumatic abuse that exists in areas such as female genital mutilation and child sexual abuse and understand that there are ways in which our culture supports that kind of mentality and that our job is not only to stop the outcome but to stop the inputs, and that is inputs through a philosophy of misogyny and patriarchy. All of us here in this House are in positions where we can choose to do that in a way that would lead the community that we serve.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore has the call.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's definitely a privilege to be able to rise this morning to add a few comments to Bill 10, the Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022. Of course, I will also start by thanking the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for bringing this forward, for all of her work – you know, I think what was said was shepherding this through the House – for her passion on the subject. But I also want to thank her because she has also given me an opportunity to

reflect where we've been, to think about where we're going, and also given me the opportunity to reaffirm something.

You know, perhaps the member might remember that I got a chance to do this back in the 29th Legislature, and it all revolved around my time as I was learning how to be a relief rep for my union, and the individual that was teaching me taught me something very, very critical. She was the embodiment of a mentor, somebody who today I still consider a mentor to me. Up until my opportunity to work with her, essentially, I always felt that when it came to women's issues – I mean, what could I say? I'm just a man. Like, I can't have an opinion about that. She taught me that that was wrong. She taught me that I can actually have an opinion on these things, because by not having one, my silence promoted that, I guess, complicity in things.

9:40

You know, I was able to be able to stand up with confidence and say that these things that are holding women back, that are making their lives more difficult: I can actually say that they're wrong. I have that permission now to do that. Because of this bill, you've given me the opportunity to be able to reaffirm that yet again, like I did back in the 29th Legislature. That's very exciting.

Now, upon the reflection – and I know my friend from Edmonton-Rutherford had talked about this a little bit. I mean, we've certainly come a long way with regard to women's rights, equality, equal pay, but we're not there. There's still an incredible amount of work to do, and it's incumbent upon us to be able to support those types of things with things like the strongest language possible that, you know, there's no doubt about it, there's no room for interpretation where people can sometimes get creative. You know, I'm very much in favour of the language that I see within Bill 10 because it's clear. It's saying: "No. This is wrong, full stop." There's no room for interpretation around that, and that's the kind of thing that I like to see.

With all that work that has yet to still happen – and, you know, fingers crossed, I'm hoping that maybe I'll even see that work completed in my lifetime. It's funny how here we are in the 21st century. There are signs that fights that have already happened to try to advance women's rights now may be at threat yet again. We're seeing that south of the border. I honestly thought that maybe those discussions were finally done. We're there. We've arrived. But now we seem to be backsliding, and it's incumbent upon all of us in this Chamber to make it absolutely clear that we won't stand for that. It will not be allowed to fall back. Bill 10 allows us to do something like that.

Now, you know, as was mentioned earlier, Roe versus Wade: I mean, that was a Supreme Court decision and enshrined in legislation, and now all of that is at risk. Fingers crossed again, I hope this will never ever become at risk. If it does, those that come after us, I hope, will fight as hard to protect it as we're trying to do today with this piece of legislation and others going forward.

Standing with the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore, you know, I am going to continue to ask the government to do everything they can, for instance with the health care system, to fund it as fully as possible so that women and girls have every single opportunity to access the health care they need when they need it, and that means doctors in rural Alberta, no doubts about what they're able to access, no hurdles to get around. Anything less, I think, will do a disservice to Bill 10, and we can't allow that. We just absolutely cannot allow that.

I don't know if there's a lot more that I can actually add to that. Again, I do want to thank the Member for Chestermere-Strathmore for bringing this forward. There's much more work to do. Again, maybe I'll reiterate the call that my friend from Edmonton-

Rutherford made. As the men in this room we must stand united behind women to make sure their rights are upheld, that we get to actual equality, because we're not there yet. We don't have that. Women are not equal, and they should be. My gosh. We're in the 21st century already. We have to step up to fight.

Not only do we have to do that; we also have to be willing to call out those that don't. Hence my recommitment to being able to say: I can have an opinion. It is all right. I can stand and say: female genital mutilation is wrong, period, full stop. No other excuses apply.

I really appreciate the opportunity available to add those comments, to be able to stand with the member in support of Bill 10. I would certainly urge every member of this House to stand firmly in support of it. My hope is that, going forward, again, hopefully maybe in my lifetime, we will actually see full, one hundred per cent equality and the chance for women to shine the way they should have many, many, many years ago. I look forward to that time.

Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to be able to add some comments around this.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing and hearing none, I am prepared to call on the hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore to close debate.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you so much to everybody today who contributed to this debate. I thought I would close out our debate today by reiterating some of the very important parts of the legislation that are very strong and have enhanced the legislation that came before us with respect to the prohibition and the procurement and the performance of female genital mutilation. Some stuff that had come up earlier when we were talking was about what this legislation actually does in order to draw that line in the sand, and thank you so much, through you, Mr. Speaker, to my colleagues across the way for those comments. It is so important to have clarity.

I'd also like to say that I stand with women and I stand for women's reproductive rights, and I will do everything that I can from my side to make sure that as we go forward on all of those issues, we are working collaboratively every single moment on all of that. I am so grateful for this debate.

The approval of the proposed legislation, should we pass this today, will expressly state that:

1.11(1) A regulated member shall not procure or perform female genital mutilation.

(2) A person who has been convicted of a criminal offence related to the procurement or performance of female genital mutilation is not eligible for registration as a regulated member under this Act.

Requiring that notice, information, or a complaint alleging the procurement or performance of FGM be automatically referred to a law enforcement agency.

Prohibiting a complaint alleging procurement or the provision of FGM made against a regulated health professional to be referred to an alternative complaints resolution.

Requiring that a regulated member's practice permit and registration be cancelled immediately after the regulated member has been convicted of a criminal offence related to the procurement or performance of FGM.

Prohibiting a person to apply for reinstatement of their practice permit and registration if the practice or the registration have been cancelled as a result of a decision of unprofessional conduct based in whole or in part on a conviction associated with the procurement or provision of FGM.

Requiring that a regulated health professional, while acting in their professional capacity, or a college if they have reason to believe that a regulated health professional has procured or performed FGM.

Requiring that if the governing body of a similar profession in Canada, the U.S., or another performed FGM, that the college cancel the regulated member's registration.

Requiring a college council to adopt standards of practice respecting FGM. Standards of practice would address matters ranging from education or training related to the prevention and prohibition of FGM, supporting its victims in securing or providing further supports that may be necessary to protect a child at risk, and also how to manage the resulting physical and psychological trauma to support a victim.

I'm so grateful to have been able to share this time with you. I also wanted to state that we have come a long way. Legislation like this helps us to keep building and to be adding to the discussion around the safety of our girls and women not only in Canada but globally. This gives us all a little bit more permission today in Canada to say that the things that we believe in and we stand by, we are going to legislate on to make sure that they are protected.

9:50

I would like to end with this. The exercise of being able to come before this space for legislation is not about pointing fingers or having a western philosophy imposed, what we believe is something we need to change on another culture or their practices. Some of these practices have been going on for thousands of years. It's taken the entire globe to come forward and have a discussion around this to decide where we need to go and what needs to happen, particularly in women's equality and equity and standing up for women's rights globally.

The most important thing that we can do is elevate the discussion and have those educational tools but also strengthen existing legislation to give people the opportunities to make sure that there are outcomes that lead towards prevention, that lead towards maybe saving one little girl from this happening to her but that also strengthen legislation so that there are consequences for this behaviour. In Canada we have the opportunity to do that. When we talk to folks in Africa or other nations, they're dealing with this from the perspective of their culture and how they're trying to fix this, and I respect that so much. I've learned so much from them.

Thank you again for the debate. Thank you for the opportunity. I'm absolutely blown away and honoured to have had the opportunity to bring this before the Legislature.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a third time]

Bill 24

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022

The Speaker: The hon. chief government whip on behalf of the Government House Leader.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on behalf of the Government House Leader today to move third reading of Bill 24, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022.

As noted previously in the House, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act allows lawmakers to make minor changes to laws to correct anomalies, to correct inconsistencies, outdated terminology, and errors, or to provide clarification in provincial laws. I want to thank everyone for their support yesterday, through

you, Mr. Speaker, and urge all members to vote in favour of third reading.

The Speaker: Hon. members, third reading of Bill 24, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022. Are there others wishing to join in the debate? Questions, comments, or otherwise?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call on the minister to close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

Ms Issik: Mr. Speaker, I move to adjourn the Assembly until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:54 a.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, May 26, 2022

Day 37

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Milliken, Nicholas, Calgary-Currie (UC), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Allard, Hon. Tracy L., ECA, Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., QC, Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie,

Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)

Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, ECA, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
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Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
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Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
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Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
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Issik, Hon. Whitney, ECA, Calgary-Glenmore (UC),
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Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)

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United Conservative: 61

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

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| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 26, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of *God Save the Queen* by Ms Brooklyn Elhard. I'd invite you to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble Queen,
God save the Queen!
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the Queen!

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I'm not sure what it is, but I feel like there's a little enthusiasm and anticipation in our voices this afternoon, for good things that lie ahead, I'm sure.

Hon. members, I am pleased to introduce to you for a final time – well, I would never presuppose a decision of the Assembly, but it's certainly the last time I'm going to be introducing them. They are the retiring pages. We had the opportunity to celebrate them today over the lunch hour and read their letter to the Assembly yesterday, but I have invited them to have a different perspective on QP today. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I invite you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. [Standing ovation]

Hon. members, also joining us in the galleries today are a group senior high school students and teachers from the Calvin Christian School in the constituency of Cardston-Siksika. I would ask that you rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Also seated in the members' gallery today is Indra Ramayan, a guest of the Minister of Indigenous Relations. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I also have noticed a number of legislative staff members. All of us in this Assembly know that without those keen and capable and willing staff members, we are unable to do our roles. So if you are a legislative staffer and you're in the gallery today, please rise and receive the thanks of the Assembly.

Finally, seated in the members' gallery today are the family of Emma Hopper, the director of research and policy for the United Conservative caucus. Please join me in welcoming her parents and brother: Christopher Hopper, Michelle Hopper, and her brother Benjamin Hopper. Please rise, if you're able, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview's 10th Anniversary Reflections

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, for the past 10 years I've had the honour of representing the people of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in this Chamber. I'd like to offer my congratulations to the members for Calgary-Hays and Cypress-Medicine Hat for also reaching this milestone of service. It has been and continues to be a thrill to be able to rise in this Chamber to highlight our constituents' concerns, raise their issues, and to be their representative in the House. That

is why each and every one of us was sent here, to stand up for our constituents and be their voice.

But we don't get here by ourselves. As I reflect on the last 10 years, I want to take the opportunity to thank the many people who helped me get here. I want to acknowledge first the people of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, who for the past three elections have put their trust in me to stand up for them. While we all claim to represent the best constituencies in Alberta, I have to tell this House that I actually do represent the best constituency. A heartfelt thank you to the dedicated volunteers who worked so hard over the past 16 years to send me here, and the same to the team of staff that I've had the honour of working with over the past 10 years, both in my constituency office and here at the Legislature.

I want to thank the stakeholders, small businesses, entrepreneurs, and community organizations who I've worked with these past 10 years to serve Alberta and the people of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I also want to thank my caucus colleagues, truly the hardest working caucus in the country. Importantly, I want to offer my thanks to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, a strong, compassionate, brilliant leader who I look forward to calling Premier after the next election. The last 10 years in this Assembly have taught me that it's critical that each and every member say thank you to each and every person who enabled us to have the opportunity and entrusted us to do this important work.

I'd like to close with the words of Margaret Mead. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

30th Legislature, Third Session, Reflections

Mr. Jeremy Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the spring session wraps up, I want to look back at the accomplishments of this Assembly. First, we marked a milestone in Alberta's recovery plan by passing Budget 2022. Our Minister of Finance presented a balanced budget for the first time in over a decade and delivered on a key commitment of this government to control spending and get our province's finances back on track. It's important for everyone to remember that the budget would not have been balanced if we had stayed on the same reckless spending trajectory of the NDP.

Alberta's government also continued to attract massive investment in aerospace, logistics, venture capital, manufacturing, and so much more while positioning Alberta for further investment in hydrogen, tourism, hemp, and film and television. To confront the rising cost of living driven by record inflation, the government eliminated the 13-cents-per-litre fuel tax and passed legislation to provide rebates on electricity bills. We know that Albertans are struggling with rising costs and recognize there's still more that needs to be done. Alberta's government continues to build on its strengths, support entrepreneurship, and promote diversification, through Alberta's recovery plan, into new and emerging sectors to attract investment and create more good-paying jobs for Albertans, which is helping to drive our unemployment rate to the lowest that it's been since 2015.

I also want to congratulate my friend and colleague from Highwood on passing the human tissue and organ donor act, Bill 205. Raising awareness and creating a mandatory referral process will save lives. I'd also like to congratulate and thank my colleague from Chestermere-Strathmore for championing Bill 10 and getting that important piece of legislation past the finish line. The Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022, brings up an uncomfortable topic, female genital mutilation. I

admire her work on this, and as a man I acknowledge that we need to have these conversations no matter how uncomfortable they may be.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, our government has fulfilled close to 90 per cent of our campaign promises.

Catholic Education

Mr. Rowswell: Today is World Catholic Education Day. Mr. Speaker, I'm so grateful to live in a province where diversity is celebrated and where families can send their children to a school that permeates faith in daily education. Catholic education has a long history in this province and, in fact, were the first schools in Alberta. As society changed, so did education. We now have public, francophone, independent, public charter, and home education as well, but throughout the years Catholic education has held fast and stayed a pillar of community and faith across the province. Alberta's government supports school choice and has proven over and over that we are committed to maintaining that long-successful tradition of school choice in our province.

Mr. Speaker, when the members opposite were in office, they made a systematic effort to dismantle educational choice in Alberta. In their dogmatic view, public schools are the only schools worth funding. The NDP may preach tolerance and respect for diversity, but we've seen how empty their talking points were. Unlike the members opposite, who would defund everything except public schools, we believe that it is parents' right to choose the type of education that is best for their child. That's why this government passed the Choice in Education Act, which reaffirms that parents have the right to choose the kind of education they feel is best for their children, and that includes Catholic education. Parents, teachers, and students of faith can be assured that Catholic education will remain Alberta strong under a UCP government.

1:40 Racism and Hate Crime Prevention

Mr. Deol: Mr. Speaker, for months we have seen the tragically increasing instances of hate crimes in Alberta. Between January and March 2022 Edmonton police investigated 23 hate-motivated crimes. This has almost doubled from 2021. People have been assaulted, harassed, threatened, and abused. This must stop. Every Albertan has the right to feel safe and secure in every city, town, village, community, and neighbourhood in Alberta. We need our government to do more to ensure that this will happen.

We need a government that takes action, but sadly, when given the opportunity to take a meaningful step forward, the UCP took us backwards. Bill 204, created after months and months of consultations and work with stakeholders and racialized Albertans and which addressed the need to collect race-based data, was shot down by the UCP, who refused to even allow the bill to be debated.

What's more, for over a year the recommendations of the government's own antiracism advisory committee have been sitting on the government's desk, with little action to get these completed. These are critical recommendations that would break down barriers to accessing the justice system, and so much more than this government is allowing remains.

This government needs to ensure that there are no structural barriers based on race, language, background, or any other criteria. This government needs to ensure that no Albertan is left behind or unable to access the institutions that work for them. But for over a year now racialized Albertans have been watching and waiting while this government fails to do what is required of them. Now, with the Premier's resignation and the months of infighting that we are facing, that means that these critical recommendations will

continue to be delayed and ignored. While the UCP fail to step up and address this issue, the Alberta NDP remain focused on tackling the root causes of racism.

Thank you.

United Conservative Party and Premier's Leadership

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, in spite of the centennial crises Alberta has faced, we've accomplished more in these last years than we've seen in generations: the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, with genuine reconciliation. We see a leading model for genuine care and treatment for those suffering from addiction and the opioid crisis. We see school curriculum and school choice embedded deep into our legislation and into the identity of Alberta. We have a roaring economy in the film industry, in fintech, in agrifood. We see forestry having its best year ever. Oil and gas is back. The truth is that we even have a balanced budget for the first time in 14 years. The Oilers are going to win the cup. Alberta is on a roll.

The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that we have done this together as Albertans, as legislators, as a United Conservative movement. We have done this together, and we owe our Premier a debt of gratitude and thanks for the sacrifices he has made for the sake of this province.

Mr. Speaker, the legacy of this Premier is going to be opportunities for generations of families for decades to come, and I could not be more proud to be saying that today. The truth is that it is easier to destroy something good than it is to create it. It is easier to tear something down than build it up, and there are members in this Legislature who have made their career, quite literally, out of tearing down our province and our movement. The saddest part is that they're not necessarily members of the NDP. I'm asking every one of us, as we go forward as Albertans into this new season for what we are called to do, to consider how we can build, how we can be like the example of the Premier, who led in selfless service for the good of the province, who can try and build something up rather than tear it down.

I believe the only risk that we have as Conservatives and Albertans is from the inside. The NDP will come out, and they will try and destroy us. That is baked in. The question is: will we as Conservatives take up this obligation we have for the betterment of Albertans and work together united?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Canadian Armed Forces in Edmonton

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about the Edmonton Salutes Committee, which was established in 1997. I've been honoured to work with this dedicated team since 2015 in my former role as the Alberta government liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces and currently as a community member at large. The committee's mandate is to promote and recognize our local military community contributions, both at home and abroad.

The Edmonton Salutes membership is drawn from the city of Edmonton, corporate Edmonton, surrounding municipalities, and the government of Alberta. Military members from the 3rd Canadian Division support group, HMCS *Nonsuch*, and the Canadian Forces recruiting centre, prairies and north detachment Edmonton, representing army, navy, and air force, each have a seat at the table. The committee has collaborated to promote and support initiatives such as the freedom of the city parades and ceremonies commemorating the centennial battles of victories and soldiers' sacrifices;

collaborating on the development of the former CFB Edmonton location, which is now the Griesbach neighbourhood; supporting the Military Family Resource Centre and other organizations seeking to recognize the military in the capital region; and supporting the arts by sharing experiences and honouring our Canadian Armed Forces stories in a variety of mediums.

I've been able to participate in troop deployments due to the hard work of this committee, and we were able to support soldiers as they departed to and/or returned from the Middle East and eastern Europe.

Times have changed, as have the needs. The MFRC, as a result, has really shown the character of doing more with less. As a result of COVID, it is estimated that the overall budget was cut by 15 per cent. The loss in fundraising dollars has been due to the inability to host fundraising events. With that in mind, I'm excited to share that the MFRC gala is returning, after a hiatus due to COVID, on June 4 and will be held on the eve of CAF Day. They are seeking donations, sponsorships, and auction items and, of course, hoping that individuals will be able to purchase tickets and attend. Let's show the MFRC our support.

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

Government Record

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I was door-knocking in Calgary-Currie, and someone asked me: why do the NDP get to make these claims that never seem to come true, and when they get it wrong, they never apologize? I said: good question. The NDP did say that we would be blowing up mountains for coal mines and selling all of our parks, but none of that happened. We've all seen the lawn signs, and this will likely surprise you: the only government that sold a park since 2015 was actually the NDP. So the only ones actually trying to go breaking our parks was the NDP.

Health care and education. All they say is, "Cuts, cuts, cuts," but in the real world we are spending at record levels on both health care and education. The NDP also say that people are moving away in droves, but the data shows net migration into the province. They just ignore the data and keep getting it wrong. They said that we would fire nurses and cut their salaries, but we are hiring nurses, and we gave them a raise, something they never did. And when it comes to collective bargaining, the deal we struck with the nurses is evidence of a government that bargains in good faith.

Over the last three years what has come true? Well, we balanced the budget at \$70 oil. In April 2019, when we took over, oil was at 70 bucks, and there were billions in structural deficit. We brought back more jobs than we had before. Film productions are now part of traffic reports in Calgary. Under the NDP \$37 million was a good year for tech investment. Guess what? Under us \$500 million in the first quarter of this year alone, or just close to that.

So if you are looking for a responsible government, one that attracts investment, balances the budget, with sustainable support programs, then the choice is clear. It is not the NDP opposition, that always seems to cry wolf. Their track record of getting things wrong makes them the least trustworthy opposition in Canada. I think the NDP owe Albertans an apology for their alarmist fearmongering.

Thank you. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order.

Health Care Worker Education Funding

Mrs. Allard: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is back. Alberta's unemployment rate is at the lowest level since 2015. We're seeing rapid growth in every area of the province, from oil and gas to diversified high tech,

film and television, and agriculture. While this is an exciting time to be in Alberta, it also brings challenges. One of those is a shortage of skilled talent. Employers, students, and regional leaders across the province, including in my constituency of Grande Prairie, are concerned that today's training programs will not meet the needs of our workforce for tomorrow.

That's why I was pleased to join the hon. Minister of Advanced Education yesterday with representatives from Northwestern Polytechnic and Northern Lakes College in Grande Prairie to announce an investment of more than \$850,000 in new funding to create more than 340 new seats in health care related programs at their respective institutions. In particular, Northwestern Polytechnic will receive approximately \$417,000 to create 95 seats in the bachelor of science in nursing university transfer program, 48 seats in the practical nurse diploma program, and 48 seats in the health care aide certificate program: real answers to real problems. This supports both the health care system as a whole and the Grande Prairie region by training local staff to work at the newly opened Grande Prairie regional hospital.

These new seats are thanks to a total of \$171 million in targeted enrolment expansion funding under the Alberta at work initiative. Mr. Speaker, with this funding Alberta's postsecondary institutions will create nearly 10,000 additional seats in high-demand programs right across our province. Over 120 proposals were submitted to the minister by 23 institutions and scored against a rigorous evaluation method that included alignment with workforce and regional needs and learner demands.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, the targeted enrolment expansion is the largest enrolment expansion in Alberta's history, and that happened under the UCP government. The investment announced yesterday will help Northwestern Polytechnic and Northern Lakes College expand their operations and enable them to continue the great work they do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Government Record

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Albertans have struggled through this pandemic, sacrificing their vacations, cancelling family dinners, and not seeing their loved ones, the UCP government spent their time flying to a tropical paradise.

While front-line workers fought tooth and nail to keep the health care system working and from crumbling in the midst of a pandemic, the then Health minister fired 11,000 of them and said that they could make their way to the unemployment line. If that wasn't enough, this government introduced a huge job-killing budget just like the one that cut over 300 public servants and 750 postsecondary education jobs as well as massive cuts to services that all Albertans depend on.

Rather than helping Albertans struggling with surging energy prices, they decided to spend tens of millions of dollars on a war room that couldn't be audited and had nothing to do but embarrass Albertans and draw eyes to what they thought was an anti-oil movie about Bigfoot.

At the end of the day, Albertans know that it doesn't matter who the next UCP leader is; the UCP is bad for Alberta and bad for Albertans. It's not focused on the things that matter to Alberta families. It's focused on itself and distracted by its internal disarray and infighting. Albertans are tired of being dismissed by this government and watching our province crumble under so-called leadership.

Albertans know that this government will never truly support them, and they are working, organizing, and fighting together. They are ready for change. Albertans will not let this government damage this province any longer, and they are out of chances to give this government that has only failed them at every turn. They've seen again and again what matters to this province, and it's obviously not the UCP. So we are ready to send them out and send them packing.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I wondered if the Government House Leader might be willing to make a request for unanimous consent to proceed to the remainder of the daily Routine. That will be followed by question period, which will still allow a 50-minute question period. Who knows what would be happening after QP, but perhaps you might be willing to . . .

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do suspect that most of us know what's going to happen after QP. If the House is interested, I would move for unanimous consent to finish the Routine so that we can do a full question period and then go home for the summer.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling, just regarding Bill 17: a letter from the vice-president of the University of Alberta Graduate Students' Association.

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, we would typically be at points of order, and I'm only hoping that we can have a real quality question period that provides an opportunity for just what the Government House Leader suggested to happen.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has question 1.

Government Record

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, as we get ready to break for summer, the government should acknowledge that this sitting has been an absolute disaster: a no-help budget, more health care chaos, multiple failures to support Alberta families. The UCP refused to act on inflation, leaving Albertans with less. Instead of quick rebates, Albertans are suffering through a months-long saga of bureaucracy and buck-passing, endless political knife sharpening, like the member's statement we just heard from the Member for Peace River, culminating in the Premier's resignation. Why did the government spend so much time on themselves and no time helping Albertans?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government over the last three years that has passed 137 pieces of legislation through this House, has worked tirelessly to defend our constituents, and in this session has removed the gas tax in the province to help people with inflation, brought in electricity rebates, gas rebates, and has stood up to Ottawa repeatedly while they have sold out Albertans to their Justin Trudeau boss inside Ottawa.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, this government is collapsing, and they're taking our health care system with them. ERs are so blocked that

children are lining up outside of the hospital. We have more hallway medicine. EMS is in crisis. Doctors are leaving, and front-line workers are exhausted. Instead of support and stability, the government fired the AHS CEO, threatened wage cuts for respiratory therapists and health specialists, and they're working overtime to take insulin pumps away from diabetics. When the government stood up in an unfinished room filled with unstaffed hospital beds, were they surprised workers weren't standing with them? Because I wasn't.

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of the work that our government is doing right now in investing in our health care system and investing in additional capacity. I've mentioned in this House numerous times that the system is under strain. It's under strain here in the province of Alberta, and it's under strain across the entire country given COVID, given the influenza A, and given the backlog of care that we've experienced because of COVID. But we are responding to that. We are investing significant dollars, the most dollars ever, into our health care system: \$600 million this year, \$1.8 billion over three years. We are investing in our health care system.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, empty rooms do not save lives.

For four months straight the UCP government has failed to act on what matters. Utility rebates: failure. Stronger health care: failure. Modern curriculum: failure. Protecting the mountains: failure. Supporting tech companies.

Some Hon. Members: Failure.

Ms Gray: Fighting racism.

Some Hon. Members: Failure.

Ms Gray: Helping downtown Calgary.

Some Hon. Members: Failure.

Ms Gray: Standing up for women's rights.

Some Hon. Members: Failure.

Ms Gray: Upholding the public trust.

Some Hon. Members: Failure.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, with this many failures, just who is really focused on supporting Albertans? It's Alberta's NDP.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, while the NDP focuses on theatre, this government is focused on defending Albertans. You want to know the greatest failure that has happened in this Legislature and in this city? It's the failure of the NDP to stand up for Alberta, to stand up for our industries, to stand up for our children, to stand up for our grandchildren. Shame on them as they stood time and time again in this Chamber, with their close allies in Ottawa. Albertans can rest assured this government is united and we're going to continue to stand up for them.

The Speaker: Now I know how a teacher feels on the last day of school.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Government Policies and Cost of Living

Ms Ganley: The UCP have sat in this House for 13 weeks this spring, and Albertans are worse off. The UCP passed a budget that

will charge Albertans billions of dollars in income taxes through bracket creep. They reduced the value of benefits to families, to seniors, to Albertans living with disabilities; jacked up the price of tuition and interest on student loans; removed the price protection on car insurance, and now it's more expensive. Why did the UCP spend this entire session making life more expensive for Albertans?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That simply is not accurate. We have spent this entire session putting Albertans' interests first. We have brought forward a sustainable fiscal budget, a balanced budget for 2022. We positioned the economy for investment attraction and growth, creating tens of thousands of jobs, the lowest unemployment rate since 2015, since the NDP were in office.

Ms Ganley: And then there are utilities. The UCP removed the price protections on electricity, and bills soared. Natural gas prices have hit a 30-year high. The UCP spent literally the entire session of this Legislature failing to get rebates out the door. Even now they're prepared to scatter for the summer with their work still not done. We can't get a straight answer on when Albertans will see their natural gas rebate. So let's try one more time. To the Finance minister: when will Alberta families see the natural gas rebate?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the member opposite, because in Budget 2022 we were clear. The natural gas rebate period would be October 1 to March 31. So I know that the Minister of Energy is working with utility companies to ensure that Albertans receive the natural gas rebate October 1, should natural gas prices trigger the rebate. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Ms Ganley: There is no more help coming for Alberta families under this UCP. After spending the whole spring scheming and plotting against each other, they're now going to spend the whole summer scheming and plotting against each other some more. We need a new government. I'm going to continue to demand that this government do its job, but since it's clear they have zero sense of responsibility, I have a message for Albertans. The NDP is a unified team. We are energized, we are ready to lead, and we are always focused on what Albertans need, including money in your pockets.

2:00

Mr. Jason Nixon: Mr. Speaker, what you just saw there was fear. Do you know what the NDP knows? The United Conservative Party is united. We are going to continue to work each and every day for Albertans, and we're going to elect a new leader who will be the new Premier of this great province, and we will fight each and every day to make sure those socialists will never be on this side of the House again.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has the call.

Public-Private Partnerships for School Construction

Member Loyola: The P3 school model is a proven failure in Alberta, but this UCP government loves to go back to the well of failed experiments. At Bessie Nichols school, one of the previous P3 failures, the private contractor wouldn't give the school control of

the thermostat during the coldest days, citing cost overruns. Let the kids freeze to make a buck: that's the model. But earlier today this government celebrated bringing in more P3 school contracts. They love the P3 model. To the Premier: as Albertans are already showing you the door, does this government really have to burden Albertans with more failed experiments that hurt our children?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, this morning I joined the MLA for Leduc-Beaumont in announcing the start of construction for five P3 high schools together with the local school boards, who agreed with me that we addressed their genuine concerns. We are fixing those past shortcomings, and we strengthened the contracts. They were happy with that.

Member Loyola: Albertans know that P3 school contracts are terrible for kids because they've seen the evidence first-hand. At Johnny Bright elementary school students were forced to walk through huge mud pits as high as their knees because the private contractor wanted to save a buck and wouldn't fix the drainage issues. Yet after a disastrous history with P3 school projects, this UCP government decided to strap the taxpayer to another bad deal. No wonder they're the least trusted government in the country. To the Premier: Albertans don't trust this government on P3 contracts or anything else, so why barrel ahead with something they don't want?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, Albertans trusted this Premier's campaign commitment of building more infrastructure under public-private financing . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. I heard the question, and we'll hear the answer.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans trusted this Premier's campaign commitment to build more infrastructure under the P3 model, so they are seeing the value when we adopted the process to determine the value for money for all the investments. Albertans liked it. That's why we are implementing that.

Member Loyola: P3 school contracts got a failing grade throughout their history in Alberta, so no wonder this failure of a government is clamouring to bring them back. This is a government that looks over the abyss of disaster and then decides to jump, and you've got to ask why. Perhaps there is something in these contracts for the current Premier's friends and insiders, but there's certainly nothing here for Albertans. Will anyone on the front bench stand up for Albertans, say no to these terrible P3 deals, and stop selling out our kids and the taxpayers?

Mr. Panda: As I said, everybody on the front row here ran on that commitment to implement P3s, and Albertans gave us the mandate. Mr. Speaker, for that side profit is a bad word. They want to please their union bosses, who actually are okay with these P3 contracts as we addressed their concerns and we are hiring local skilled labour. Even their union bosses are onside.

Ministers' Offices Human Resources Policy Review

Ms Hoffman: On November 3 the current Premier announced that Jamie Pytel, the former Edmonton Integrity Commissioner, had been tasked with conducting a review of HR policies for government staff following the serious accusations of misconduct. It has now been over 200 days since the review was started. It is critical that the concerns raised by this former staff member, that resulted in the report being commissioned, are addressed. To the Minister of Finance, who is responsible for the public service and who is

rumoured to be looking at becoming the next Premier: has he seen the report, and will he commit to publicly releasing it and implementing all of its recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For – I don't know – probably the sixth time I will say it again, that Ms Pytel's report will actually be submitted and the recommendations will be made public. We've said that all along, and that's exactly what will happen.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: The allegations raised by a former UCP staffer have been extremely serious, and that's why ensuring this report with all of its findings and recommendations needs to be released publicly – to date the report has not been released, nor have any of the findings or recommendations. To the Minister of Children's Services, who stated that she's looking at standing to be the next Premier: has she seen the report? Will she commit to publicly releasing it and implementing all of its recommendations?

Ms Issik: Okay. So I think this will be the seventh time, Mr. Speaker. The report will be submitted, and the recommendations will be made public, and there will be no comment from me or any other minister or member on a case that's before the courts.

Thank you.

Ms Hoffman: The Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Labour and Immigration have both stated that they're looking at becoming the next Premier. It's important to Albertans that they know that regardless of who sits in the Premier's chair next, the serious concerns of harassment made by a former UCP staffer are addressed. Will the Minister of Transportation or the Minister of Labour and Immigration or any other minister looking to become the next Premier stand up in this place, tell us if they've seen the report and if they will release it publicly and commit to implementing all of the recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've said also many times how seriously we take the issue of sexual harassment and that sexual harassment should not happen in any workplace – not in any workplace – anywhere, especially in Alberta, period, full stop, end of sentence. We've made that very clear. They can keep going on about this report, but they've already asked, and I've already answered.

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

Technology Industry Development

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we can all agree that Alberta is a province of innovators and entrepreneurs. Where we may disagree in this Chamber is on whether or not we see and celebrate the development, growth, attraction, and success of our innovation and technology ecosystem. To the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation: what specifically can you point to that is a clear indication that all members of this Assembly and all Albertans should celebrate our tech and innovation sector?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, our tech sector in the province of Alberta is booming. Let's give this some context. Under the NDP in 2017 tech venture investment was \$37 million. Remember that number: \$37 million under the NDP. In the first quarter alone of 2022: \$466 million of venture capital. The city of Calgary was on

par with the well-known tech hub of Vancouver. Alberta is booming in tech, and we're looking forward to doing more.

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

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. Given that the left continues to downplay the growth and successes in this space and given that they cannot seem to stop themselves from criticizing the incredible investment we're seeing – I wonder if they don't understand how important this huge growth is – to the same minister: what do these increasing levels of venture capital investment indicate about Alberta's ecosystem?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, it means jobs, jobs, and more jobs for Albertans and people looking for prosperity and opportunity. Right now the city of Calgary has the fastest growing tech labour force – get this – in all of North America. That happened under this government because we made the right investments in talent, in accelerators, in venture capital partnerships. Our government believes in diversification, and we have gotten the job done for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Neudorf: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the minister's answer. Given that opportunity breeds opportunity and given that when tech professionals are looking for work, they want to have options and further given that the world is fighting over tech talent right at this moment, can the minister please share how Alberta is setting itself apart and what we are doing to funnel as much tech talent as possible into our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Schweitzer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question. Right now – this is just a good-news story for our province – the unemployment rate in Alberta is 5.9 per cent. We haven't seen that level since before with other Conservative governments. Not once – let me say this; not once – under the failed NDP did they ever get the unemployment rate below 6 per cent. They failed Albertans. They failed to diversify our economy. This government has diversified Alberta's economy, and it's coming roaring back.

2:10 Support for Persons with Disabilities

Ms Renaud: There are alarming problems in disability services for children and adults. Alberta's Ombudsman has said that the AISH appeal processes are unfair and troubling as disabled appellants are not automatically accommodated. Accommodation in an AISH hearing at the very least should include the ability for an appellant to have a qualified advocate assist them during the appeal, but now appeal panel members, known as director's representatives, will be allowed to decide if they consent to the disabled appellant having a representative at the hearing. Why is the minister creating even more barriers for people with disabilities?

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

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Taking care of the most vulnerable Albertans is important for this government. Giving them a fair chance to have a chance to hear about their case, challenging the administration through the appeal panel is important. With COVID online, remote hearings have been introduced in the process, but with COVID ending, we're incorporating the online and in-person processes together. With the

recommendations from the panel the department took the full acceptance of all the recommendations, and we're going to implement that.

Ms Renaud: Given that the Auditor General of Alberta has confirmed what we knew to be true, that the family support for children with disabilities, FSCD, program does not have effective oversight, and given that thanks to the AG report we now see that things like timely assessment, timely agreements have deteriorated under the UCP and given that we know the minister is hiding the wait-list, claiming that eligible families aren't waiting, that they're just in various planning stages, will the minister commit now to transparent reporting on all eligible families who are not yet receiving services, or will he continue to hide information from Albertans?

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, it always surprises me how much the opposition critic doesn't do her homework and throws out all kinds of statements like this. This review covers the first two years that were under the NDP, so the latter part of this review is us. We're cleaning up the mess created by the NDP government. We're on top of that. We know there are some inconsistencies happening there. The department is committed. We're going to uplift the policies, guidelines. We're going to do training. Within 90 days we're going to implement all of those actions.

Ms Renaud: Given that the UCP has made life more difficult for disabled Albertans by cutting AISH and income supports but continue to mislead Albertans by saying that benefits are the highest in Canada, a deliberate untruth, and given that the UCP has slowed processes for disabled children and their families to receive FSCD supports – then they hide the wait-list data – and given that the UCP is in the process of making fair AISH appeal hearings even more difficult for appellants, will the government finally stop insulting and misleading with their spin and listen to disabled Albertans and their families? They need help, not spin.

Mr. Luan: Mr. Speaker, I can never be surprised by how the opposition critic will spin issues like this, confuse Albertans. Here are some facts. The \$1,685 per month AISH benefit today is the highest among provinces in Canada. On top of that, we added \$12 million to the disability budget, \$1.4 billion . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. The minister needs the opportunity to be able to answer, and the Speaker should be able to hear him.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Luan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current budget for AISH added \$12 million more; \$1.4 billion is the highest in Alberta's history. On top of that, we introduced prenatal benefits, again . . .

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

Arts and Culture Funding

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, this government continuously claims that they support our arts and culture sector. However, they haven't seen them put their money where their mouth is. The federal government announced that they will provide Alberta \$17.5 million for the major festivals and events support initiative and the tourism relief fund, yet members of our arts and culture industries have had to fight this UCP government for any ounce of support to get out from under the pandemic. Will the minister explain why the federal government had to come save Alberta's festivals and culture events and this government couldn't?

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, that is more fork-tongued doublespeak from the NDP. It never ends. The reality is that the Culture budget this year for the department is up by \$38 million. Only in a deranged mind is an increase of \$38 million a decrease. So they need to start to speak the truth and speak it clearly, because we support the cultural industries. We're the only ones who put in a bill to support them, and we will continue to do so.

The Speaker: Out of an abundance of caution and a hope for no points of order in the remainder of question period, I might remind members to ensure that even in the boisterousness of the last day of session our language needs to be parliamentary, and we ought not be making accusations about other members.

Ms Goehring: Given that the stabilize program this government designed to help festivals and culture events through the pandemic could not be used for any retroactive costs organizations incurred throughout the pandemic and given that we have said many times in this House that the arts and culture industries were one of the hardest hit, being first to close and last to open, and given that retroactive funding is what our festivals, artists, venues, culture events, and tourism sector asked for, will the minister explain why he ignored these sectors and the professionals within them and commit to matching the federal dollars so we can support artists properly and help them grow in Alberta?

Mr. Orr: Oh, Mr. Speaker, the NDP are living in the past. The reality is . . . [interjections] They totally are because the reality is that now if you talk to the arts and culture sector, you talk to the booking agents, you talk to the artists – I talked to a band member this morning; I've talked to various arts groups – they're overwhelmed with bookings. People are filling the venues. The artists have got more bookings than they can handle. We provided \$37 million in stabilize funding, and it's worked. Alberta is back, so are the artists, and they're doing well.

Ms Goehring: Given that the federal government provided Alberta this money to help tourism projects adapt their products and services to create new experiences in hopes of attracting more visitors to the province and given that debt from the pandemic isn't all these organizations have to worry about – they're facing higher utility prices, taxes, and insurance under this government – and given that the tourism association of Alberta said that it could take up to 10 years to rebuild our tourism labour force, meaning we needed to start helping this sector yesterday, will the minister give our arts, culture, and tourism organizations a fighting chance, match the federal investment, and allow these groups to use the funding to climb out of debt from the pandemic?

Mr. Schweitzer: Mr. Speaker, we're working with Travel Alberta by providing them an additional \$63 million to jump-start the tourism industry and get it back to where it was before the pandemic. I find it disingenuous that the NDP failed the film and television industry and have the audacity to come in here and claim that they support the arts and culture community. They failed the film and television industry. This side of the aisle has more than doubled that industry, and they're on their way to becoming a billion-dollar-a-year industry because of the policies of this government.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Sigurdson: Back in January this government launched the Alberta Provincial EMS Advisory Committee to produce suggestions that will improve our emergency care system. Since January there

have been countless meetings discussing solutions to improve our air ambulance, rural dispatch, paramedic support, ground ambulance, and workforce planning, but many Albertans are concerned about the current issues that are still affecting EMS response times. To the Minister of Health: based on the current recommendations of the APEAC committee can you advise on any items being implemented to reduce response times?

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

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that important question. I'd like to thank all members of the advisory committee for their ongoing hard work. The EMS advisory committee has identified 10 points of immediate action that will help address concerns. One initiative involves Strathcona county emergency services launching a pilot project leveraging the flexibility within the county's integrated fire-EMS model. This adds two community response units to provide advanced life-support care within the county. These community response units will be in addition to the four ground transport ambulances currently serving Strathcona county.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. EMS workers are highly trained personnel who help save lives, but their job is associated with high levels of mental, physical, and emotional stress. These stresses can contribute to high rates of burnout, clinical depression, and physical conditions that hinder the EMS provider's ability to work in the field. One major goal of APEAC is to address these high levels of burnout. To the Minister of Health: can you please inform this House as to what is being done to provide real support to those front-line workers?

2:20

Mr. Copping: Thanks again to the member for the question, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's front-line EMS workers rose to the challenge these past few years, and I want to thank them for their dedication to Albertans. The EMS advisory committee also recommended a pilot project in Spruce Grove, which we are implementing immediately and we announced earlier today. This allows two licensed paramedics to respond as a medical first response and change to an active-duty ambulance and transport a patient to hospital when an AHS resource isn't available. This will reduce pressures on local EMS and improve response times when it's most critical.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for that answer. The current problems that exist are issues that have been building for years, and it is clear that we need our EMS system to provide stronger support to Albertans today and into the future tomorrow, so to the Minister of Health: what system changes in addition are being put in place to ensure greater accountability and transparency to make sure that our system is improving and will continue to improve in the years to come?

Mr. Copping: Thanks again to the member for another great question, Mr. Speaker. Again, stemming from the recommendations from the committee and from AHS, we are piloting a temporary exemption to allow emergency medical responders to staff more ambulances throughout the province. That means that, when necessary, two EMRs can transfer nonemergency patients without needing a paramedic onboard. Additionally, EMRs can now join an

advanced care paramedic to respond to emergency calls. This change puts us in line with other western provinces. I want to thank the member and all the committee members for their continued hard work, and I look forward to receiving their interim reports and their final report so we can continue to improve EMS services for Albertans.

Mr. Dang: Mr. Speaker, remember March 2020? Members of this House across party lines came together to praise health care and essential workers. Soon after the UCP government turned their backs on them and waged a war against Alberta's health care workers, and now as Alberta is recovering from the pandemic, the very same heroes are running on empty. This government's horrendous treatment of health care workers has literally driven them out of this province, so much so that this UCP government is struggling to hire more paramedics, but that's not going to be enough to solve the crisis in the province's emergency response system. Will the Minister of Health stand up today and accept that Alberta's emergency response system is struggling because of the bad decisions made by him and his UCP government?

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Health.

Mr. Copping: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we've spoken in the House before, the health care system is under strain, including our emergency response system. It's not only under strain here in Alberta; it's under strain across the entire country. Not only COVID; we've had issues dealing with care that has been postponed, and we also are dealing with the opioid crisis. We understand there are issues, and we are investing to address those issues. As I just spoke earlier, not only did we put in Budget 2022 \$64 million additionally into emergency responses, but we're actually receiving recommendations from the advisory committee, and we're acting on them.

Mr. Dang: Given that there are currently 20 central Alberta communities with fully or partially closed hospitals, putting more pressure on surrounding communities and urban hospitals, and given that so far the only thing that this UCP government has promised central Albertans is that they will not pull back the extended temporary services until next March, can the minister promise that he will do what is right and necessary and finally offer every paramedic they're hiring permanent, full-time positions with benefits?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, we are doing what is right, and we're doing what is necessary. We are investing in capacity in our entire health care system; that is, \$600 million this year, \$1.8 billion over the next three years. This is in all aspects of it. We are focusing on EMS, as I indicated, \$64 million. We just announced yesterday an additional 19 units by September for EMS in Calgary and in Edmonton, and that's on top of the units that we've already announced, and we've already staffed in Airdrie and in other smaller communities across the province. I'm looking forward to further recommendations from the advisory committee. We will . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Given that people living in these communities can see that it is not working and given that the situation is worsening daily, with more areas without any ambulances able to respond to emergency calls, and given that according to the Health Sciences Association of Alberta the current measures the government is taking so far are inadequate and far too slow, will the minister promise to do at least the bare minimum? Will he provide Albertans

with a clear, transparent, and up-to-date information portal about doctor recruitment and ambulance wait times?

Mr. Copping: Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to invest in our health care system, including emergency medical services. It's not just EMS. EMS is only one part of our system, and if EMS, when they go to the emergency department, can't off-load immediately in the emergency department, then that actually backs up our EMS system. We are addressing this by investing in the entire system. That includes continuing care, an additional \$200 million in Budget 2022 into continuing care to provide more spaces, which will help the flow through in our emergency departments. We are hiring more staff than ever: 800 more staff in emergency departments than four years ago under the previous government. We are investing in capacity in our health care system. We will deliver.

The Speaker: Now it's time for the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Keystone XL Pipeline Provincial Equity

Ms Ganley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March of 2020 Albertans woke to the news that the UCP government had bet \$7.5 billion on Trump winning the White House. This gamble came despite ongoing legal and political risk to the Keystone XL project, and ultimately the project was cancelled and the UCP lost \$1.3 billion of Albertans' money. Now we find out the UCP set up numbered companies in Delaware the day before the \$7.5 billion bet was made. Why is the government now in the business of setting up numbered companies in Delaware?

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

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The KXL project was certainly a project that was worthy of investment given the potential for wealth creation for future generations of Albertans – \$20 billion of wealth creation for future generations of Albertans – and I want to compare it to the crude-by-rail venture that the members opposite implemented when they were in power. They risked \$2.8 billion of Alberta's money, all of it failed, all of it lost, to move potentially a few barrels of oil.

Ms Ganley: Given that the project was cancelled, which means that the government still hasn't approved a single new pipeline despite its promises to do so, and given that the government has now filed a NAFTA challenge over the cancellation of the KXL but the lawsuit is based on the existence of the numbered companies and given that the numbered companies had to catch up on their unpaid taxes before the challenge could even proceed, is the UCP's entire legal strategy based on these numbered shell companies that can't even pay their taxes?

Mr. Toews: Again, Mr. Speaker, with respect to KXL we've been very transparent with Albertans. We were transparent on the risks, on the opportunities. We structured the deal so any losses would be limited, and we were transparent there. But what I want to say, and what I will not apologize for, is a government standing up for the oil and gas industry. We are seeing Trans Mountain go forward. We've seen Enbridge line 3 get completed. We've seen a whole group of optimizations, increased capacity. We're exporting record barrels of oil out of this province.

Ms Ganley: Given that TC Energy actually protected their shareholders in the deal and they have now said that the Keystone

XL won't be revived and given that the Premier continues to talk about trying to revive the Keystone project after losing \$1.3 billion, even saying he would contribute more of Albertans' money to the project, why weren't Alberta taxpayers protected like TC's shareholders in this deal? How much more of Albertans' money is this government going to risk on the project?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to stand up for energy workers right across this province. The members opposite destroyed KXL. They destroyed Energy East. They destroyed Northern Gateway while they were in office. We're supporting the energy industry. We're exporting record barrels of oil every day, and on top of that we're seeing a more diversified economy. The economy is growing. Oil field workers are going back to work.

Energy Industry Surface Rights Payments Grazing Lease Renewal System

Mr. Long: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's Surface Rights Act allows companies interested in pursuing energy projects to rent land from private landowners to remove minerals, oil, and gas, perform mining or drilling, or construct related facilities. Despite these rental agreements, several of my constituents have informed me that many companies have failed to pay rent on wells and pipelines on their private property. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: who can my constituents contact for support related to unpaid rent by these companies?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's important that the hon. member's constituents contact the Land and Property Rights Tribunal, who have the power, underneath section 36 of the Surface Rights Act, to compel companies to pay for their obligations when using surface access on his constituents' land. Further to that, they also have the ability to be able to have the government pay to compensate for surface rights disturbances when companies can't, and then the government will take over that debt with those companies. That's the best place for his constituents to go for relief.
2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister. Given that the landowners have the onus of printing, completing, and submitting recovery of compensation forms to obtain payments for contractual agreements already in place and given that this is only a first step for the Surface Rights Board to provide the operator with a deadline to respond and does not terminate the lease and its associated responsibilities for abandonment and reclamation, to the same minister: how will you ensure this cycle of exploitation and abuse by companies against private citizens does not continue?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Municipal Affairs are working with the Alberta Energy Regulator and the Surface Rights Board to make sure they have adequate resources to be able to make sure that landowners can get access to justice and to have a fair process. The Surface Rights Board is there for both companies and for landowners to make sure that rules are followed. One of the greatest challenges that we had when we came into government was that this important board was underfunded. We worked with Treasury Board to get them proper resources. I'm proud to say that double the applications are moving through the surface rights system, and the ministers are

going to continue to make sure that farmers and landowners have access to justice.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you again, Minister. Given that the Surface Rights Act also encompasses grazing lease applications and given that the current application processing time for lease transfers or applications is over two years and given that the onus is on the applicant to keep checking back to see where the application is in its process, once again to the Minister of Environment and Parks: what can be done to reduce these application processing times to allow landowners and lease seekers to maximize the proper use of the land?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, the grazing lease renewal system was broken, no doubt about it. It was based entirely on a paper-based system that in some cases was a century old. Over the last couple of years the Alberta Environment and Parks department has been working to digitalize that system. It is now inside a digitalized system while we worked with our friends in red tape. I'm happy to say that, unlike under the NDP, when you were waiting two to six to seven years to get a lease renewed, now you're waiting about 30 days underneath this government.

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

Harcourt House Artist Centre in Edmonton

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For almost 35 years Harcourt House has been at the heart of Edmonton's visual arts community, providing affordable studio space for hundreds of artists, including Barbara Paterson, whose iconic statues of the Famous Five were created there and now sit on Parliament Hill and Calgary's Olympic Plaza. Their gallery has showcased thousands of Alberta artists. Their programs have provided arts education for thousands more, including Albertans living with disabilities. But two weeks ago the Minister of Infrastructure gave them six months' notice to vacate the building they've called home for over three decades, a move that could effectively end their operations. My question to the minister is simple: why?

Mr. Panda: The member opposite brought the issue up to me previously. Based on that, we actually extended the lease a couple of times. As you know, Mr. Speaker, these publicly owned properties: we had to look at what the best use of those properties is in the interest of Albertans. We haven't made the decision yet, but we're going to make those decisions very soon.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, given that in January of this year the board at Harcourt House requested an extension of their lease and given that in early March officials in the department said that that wouldn't be a problem, that they'd send the paperwork in a few weeks, but that was followed by months of silence before Harcourt received the minister's six-month notice in early May and given that it's a sharp pivot and an impossible timeline, one that will leave 42 artists with no place to work and Harcourt with no place to provide already funded programs, workshops, and exhibitions, to the minister: for the sake of the organization, the artists, all who depend on them, will you meet with them to discuss an extension?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the officials in the Ministry of Infrastructure have been in discussion with the renters of the building. We were very co-operative with them, and we extended the lease a

few times. We also offered them alternate offers. We hope they come to the table with a reasonable offer.

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, given that forcing Harcourt House to vacate their home of 34 years with six months' notice is effectively a death blow for the organization and the good work they do for the visual arts community and given that with soaring resource revenues we know this government is in a position to realize a multibillion-dollar surplus this year and given that the Minister of Culture recently toured the building, commented that its condition was much better than he had been led to believe, why is the Minister of Infrastructure rushing to sell this property so quickly at such great cost to Edmonton's visual arts community? The building is fine. This government is not short of cash. Why can they not extend this lease?

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the facts are that its six months' notice is not true. We have been talking to the renters of the building for years. Also, the building has deferred maintenance, so Infrastructure is conscious about the safety of the occupants. Also, if the occupants wanted to buy the thing, they can bring, you know, a reasonable offer so taxpayers' money is protected.

Support for LGBTQ2S-plus Albertans

Member Irwin: The last few months have been incredibly challenging for all Albertans, well, years, in fact. Isolation, loneliness, struggles with mental health: these are just some of the feelings that many of us can relate to. Members of Alberta's 2SLGBTQ-plus community, particularly youth, have found the pandemic especially challenging, but there is hope and there is joy on the horizon. As we near Pride Month, it's a time to celebrate, to come together safely but to also remember that Pride began as a protest. The fight continues until all members of our community are welcomed and loved. Can the UCP tell us how the Premier plans to celebrate Pride Month?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Issik: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm actually looking forward to Pride Month. We're planning to actually put flags up in both Edmonton and Calgary. I'm planning to actually do a number of round-tables and meet with a number of stakeholder groups. I actually plan and hope to go to some fun events, too. I'm really looking forward to Pride Month. I think it's a great time for everybody to really come together and understand our 2SLGBTQIA community, and I'm really happy about it.

Member Irwin: Given that just yesterday the Minister of Education stated that all students will see themselves in curriculum and that this is a minister and government that have shown from the outset that they're okay with a curriculum that marginalizes and omits diverse perspectives rather than uplifts and amplifies them and given that one of the very first acts of this Education minister was to make life harder for queer and trans kids through ramming through Bill 8, or Bill Hate, Minister, can you just explain to the House: how will 2SLGBTQ-plus students see themselves in curriculum? Please be specific.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are very proud of the fact that our schools are safe and warm and welcoming communities that welcome everyone. They're very inclusive. We did pass the Education Act, which does have comprehensive

LGBTQ2S-plus legislation in it. As well, in our K to 6 curriculum we are teaching our children not to bully, to be inclusive. We also teach them about different family structures in the new curriculum. In fact, there are instances where families look different: sometimes there are two moms, sometimes there are two dads, sometimes there are other family structures. We include everyone because we believe in everyone.

Member Irwin: Given that it's soon to be Pride Month and that while we want to celebrate, there's a lot of work to be done – we know that queer and trans youth face many barriers, including mental health challenges, substance use, suicide as well as an increased risk of homelessness, with as many as 30 per cent of unhoused youth identifying as queer or trans – and given that organizations that support these youth report more challenges than ever when trying to support these young people yet this government refuses to adequately fund this vital grassroots work, will the Minister of Community and Social Services commit in the House today to prioritizing funding for organizations that support unhoused youth?

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for the question, because we support many organizations that, of course, help people in the trans community, the LGBT community, and we're proud to support them. We're going to continue to support them. I know I was out there with the minister of social services in the community of Chinatown today, and one of the biggest things, the biggest questions they had to me, the leaders within the community, was: who was their MLA? They didn't know who their MLA was. That, to me, is one of the bigger issues in the community of Edmonton right now. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order. Order. Order. [interjections] The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo will come to order. [interjections] Order.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

2:40

Oil and Gas Export

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Oil is in demand and an important resource for our international partners, and Alberta can help that demand. Alberta energy plays a key role in Canada's economy and should be a key resource in exports to other regions, just like the United States. I know that the Minister of Energy and the Premier recently travelled to Washington, DC, to discuss America's need of oil and other critical minerals which Alberta has. To the Minister of Energy: as a result of these discussions with U.S. officials, what progress can we expect to see that will benefit our oil and gas sector?

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very proud to be in Washington recently with the Minister of Energy and the Premier, standing up for our energy resources. Most importantly, what we have learned is that we cannot trust Ottawa, unlike what the NDP has tried to do, which is make a coalition with Justin Trudeau and the federal Liberals in Ottawa. We can't trust Ottawa to defend this province. Instead, we've built our own diplomatic corps in Washington, and we continue to fight for our largest industry and make clear to our largest customer that we are here to

be able to provide the energy needs to the world. Unlike what the NDP have betted on, oil and gas in Alberta is not done.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for his answer. Given that Alberta's oil and gas sector contributes an extensive amount to Canada's 3.7 billion barrels per day of oil exports and given that the overwhelming majority of oil exported comes from Alberta and given that 96 per cent of oil leaving Canada heads to the United States, to the same minister: how important would a North American energy alliance be for North American energy security and the betterment of Alberta's oil industry?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would be absolutely critical for all of North America. It would make sure that we have energy security on our continent. Both governments, on the Canadian and the American side, would not have to use dictatorship countries to be able to provide our energy needs. This is why the Conservative government in Alberta continues to stand with our oil and gas industry, because we can provide clean, affordable energy to the entire world. Unfortunately, the NDP and the Liberals want to take our birthright and bury it in the ground, but rest assured that they're never going to get on this side of the House. We're going to continue to provide the world . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Reid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the relationship between Canada and the United States should be strong when it comes to oil exports and given that Alberta is working hard to drive impact and create positive change such as a sustainable, low-carbon global economy, including getting to net zero by 2050, and given that one of the safest ways to move large amounts of oil safely is through pipelines, can the minister share with this House why projects like Keystone XL should continue to be a topic of conversation between the United States and our Canadian officials?

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is one of the most shocking things about the left when it comes to oil and gas transportation. They continue to block pipelines, which is the safest way to be able to move oil and gas products across the continent and the world, and instead try to force it into trains and other transportation methods which are significantly dangerous for the environment at times. It makes no sense, and it shows yet again that the Liberal-NDP coalition in Ottawa wants to shut down the oil and gas industry and let dictators provide our energy needs inside North America, but we're not going to let that happen. We're going to continue to make sure that we provide energy to the world.

The Speaker: Hon. members, this concludes the time allotted for Oral Question Period.

Statement by the Speaker

Remarks at the End of the Spring Sitting

The Speaker: Prior to calling on the hon. the Government House Leader, I would like to make a brief statement about the legislative session. As of May 24 the session had 35 days. House sittings: there were 68 of them counted separately, morning, afternoon, and evening; approximately 218 hours of sitting. That's the equivalent of watching *Gone with the Wind* 53 times. There were 20 evening sittings although a special thank you goes out to all members on behalf of the Legislative Assembly staff as there was no sitting that

went past midnight, which was the first time since the 28th Legislature, Third Session, 2014 to 2015.

The number of words transcribed was 1,742,987. When you consider that for this session and for the first time in over 20 years we had American sign language interpretation in the Chamber, not only is that a lot of transcribing; that's a lot of fast-moving sign as well.

With the Legislature Building and the galleries being reopened for the Third Session, we welcomed many visitors and guests. Joining us in the Speaker's gallery, there were 21 different groups of visitors, including ambassadors, elected officials, former members, and their families. Compare this to only 14 visitors introduced during the record-long Second Session of the 30th Legislature. We also had the privilege to take the opportunity to introduce 115 different guests throughout our proceedings, as all of you know, some with easier names to pronounce than others.

There have been no fewer than 215 seating plans published since 1906, but this session, for the first time, recognizes the new designation Honorary Member of Executive Council, as established by the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act, which appoints members to Queen's Counsel.

Hon. members, on behalf of my office I'd like to say thank you, but more importantly on behalf of all Members of the Legislative

Assembly I'd like to say thank you to the table officers, the pages, *Hansard*, 315, the bills and *Journals* clerk as well as all staff of the Legislative Assembly Office, that go above and beyond during the extra long, difficult days that a legislative session brings.

With all that said, the hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to quickly echo your comments, I believe, on behalf of all 87 members of the Legislature. Through you to the table officers, the pages, the entire team of the Legislative Assembly Office, the Sergeant-at-Arms, security: thank you for all your hard work this session. They got us through another one.

Mr. Speaker, as well, through you to all members of the Chamber – opposition, independent, and government members – thank you for all your hard work this session. I wish you all the very best this summer. Travel safe. I look forward to seeing everybody in the fall.

With that, I am happy, Mr. Speaker, to advise you and the Assembly that pursuant to Government Motion 23 the business for the 2022 spring sitting is now concluded.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 2:48 p.m. pursuant to Government Motion 23]

Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 3rd Session (2022)

Activity to Thursday, May 26, 2022

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act (\$) (Kenney)

First Reading — 4 (*Feb. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 94-97 (*Mar. 7, 2022 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 140-44 (*Mar. 10, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 230-34 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cQ-0.7]

Bill 2 — Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 312-19 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft.*), 391-95 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve.*), 484-90 (*Mar. 29, 2022 aft.*), 565-71 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve.*), 599-604 (*Apr. 19, 2022 morn.*), 661 (*Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 699-707 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 715-24 (*Apr. 20, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2022 c4]

Bill 3 — Special Days Act (Orr)

First Reading — 124 (*Mar. 9, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 327 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve.*), 343-45 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve.*), 346 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 375-78 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 379 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 389-91 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; SA 2022 cS-16.3]

Bill 4 — Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022 (McIver)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 163-77 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft.*), 360-66 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 396 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 519-23 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 571-79 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force April 21, 2022; SA 2022 c5]

Bill 5 — Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022 (Sawhney)

First Reading — 202 (*Mar. 16, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 319-26 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft.*), 469-71 (*Mar. 28, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 523-24 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 537-43 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 c6]

Bill 6 — Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022 (Orr)

First Reading — 228 (Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 502-505 (Mar. 29, 2022 aft.), 513-14 (Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole — 562-65 (Mar. 30, 2022 eve., passed)
Third Reading — 594-98 (Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed)
Royal Assent — 767 (Apr. 21, 2022 aft.) [Comes into force April 21, 2022; SA 2022 c3]

Bill 7 — Appropriation Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 272-73 (Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed)
Second Reading — 310-11 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft.), 327-36 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve.), 345 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole — 366-75 (Mar. 23, 2022 aft.), (Mar. 23, 2022 eve.), 395 (Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division)
Third Reading — 411-14 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft.), 419 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent — (Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; c1]

Bill 8 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 297 (Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed)
Second Reading — 311-12 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft.), 336-43 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve.), 345-46 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole — 379-89 (Mar. 23, 2022 eve.), 395 (Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division)
Third Reading — 414-19 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft.), 419 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent — (Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; c2]

Bill 9 — Public's Right to Know Act (Shandro)

First Reading — 309 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 447-54 (Mar. 28, 2022 aft.), 455-63 (Mar. 28, 2022 eve.), 643-51 (Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole — 707-13 (Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed)
Third Reading — 745-49 (Apr. 21, 2022 morn., passed)
Royal Assent — 767 (Apr. 21, 2022 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cP-47]

Bill 10 — Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022 (Aheer)

First Reading — 408 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 463-69 (Mar. 28, 2022 eve.), 543-50 (Mar. 30, 2022 aft.), 604-10 (Apr. 19, 2022 morn.), 661 (Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole — 1501-1504 (May 25, 2022 eve., passed)
Third Reading — 1507-11 (May 26, 2022 morn., passed)

Bill 11 — Continuing Care Act (Copping)

First Reading — 432 (Mar. 28, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 550-56 (Mar. 30, 2022 aft.), 634-42 (Apr. 19, 2022 aft.), 663-72 (Apr. 20, 2022 morn.), 865-71 (Apr. 26, 2022 aft.), 873-79 (Apr. 26, 2022 eve.), 891-97 (Apr. 27, 2022 morn.), 936-42 (Apr. 27, 2022 aft.), 1027-34 (May 2, 2022 eve.), 1074-82 (May 3, 2022 aft.), 1140-43 (May 4, 2022 aft.), 1300-01 (May 10, 2022 eve., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole — 1438-45 (May 24, 2022 aft.), 1447-55 (May 24, 2022 eve., passed)
Third Reading — 1461-69 (May 25, 2022 morn., passed)

Bill 12 — Trustee Act (Shandro)

First Reading — 483 (Mar. 29, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 651-61 (Apr. 19, 2022 eve.), 749-54 (Apr. 21, 2022 morn., passed)
Committee of the Whole — 858-65 (Apr. 26, 2022 aft., passed)
Third Reading — 903-09 (Apr. 27, 2022 morn.), 988-90 (Apr. 28, 2022 aft., passed)
Royal Assent — (Apr. 29, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cT-8.1]

Bill 13 — Financial Innovation Act (Toews)

First Reading — 535 (Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 624-33 (Apr. 19, 2022 aft.), 724-27 (Apr. 20, 2022 eve.), 807 (Apr. 25, 2022 eve.), 850-58 (Apr. 26, 2022 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole — 925-36 (Apr. 27, 2022 aft., passed)
Third Reading — 943-48 (Apr. 27, 2022 eve., passed)
Royal Assent — (Apr. 29, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cF-13.2]

Bill 14* — Provincial Court (Sexual Assault Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022 (Issik)

First Reading — 535-36 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 672-81 (*Apr. 20, 2022 morn.*), 727-33 (*Apr. 20, 2022 eve., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1159-66 (*May 4, 2022 eve., passed with amendments*)
Third Reading — 1167-72 (*May 5, 2022 Morn., passed*)

Bill 15* — Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022 (LaGrange)

First Reading — 592 (*Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 767-76 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*), 825-32 (*Apr. 26, 2022 morn.*), 884-89 (*Apr. 26, 2022 eve.*), 923-25 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1065-67 (*May 3, 2022 aft.*), 1090-95 (*May 3, 2022 eve., passed with amendments*)
Third Reading — 1125-28 (*May 4, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 16 — Insurance Amendment Act, 2022 (Toews)

First Reading — 622 (*Apr. 19, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 807-808 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve.*), 832-37 (*Apr. 26, 2022 morn.*), 879-84 (*Apr. 26, 2022 eve.*), 897-903 (*Apr. 27, 2022 morn.*), 1034-37 (*May 2, 2022 eve., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1067-74 (*May 3, 2022 aft., passed*)
Third Reading — 1196-99 (*May 5, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 17* — Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Madu)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 968-75 (*Apr. 28, 2022 morn.*), 1128-40 (*May 4, 2022 aft., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1271-83 (*May 10, 2022 aft.*), 1334-51 (*May 11, 2022 aft., passed with amendments*)
Third Reading — 1427-38 (*May 24, 2022 aft., passed on division*)

Bill 18 — Utility Commodity Rebate Act (Nally)

First Reading — 693-94 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 735-45 (*Apr. 21, 2022 morn.*), 807 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve., passed on division*)
Committee of the Whole — 808-22 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve., passed*)
Third Reading — 822-23 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve., passed*)
Royal Assent — (*Apr. 29, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force April 29, 2022; SA 2022 cU-3.5]

Bill 19 — Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022 (Glubish)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 948-58 (*Apr. 27, 2022 eve.*), 959-68 (*Apr. 28, 2022 morn.*), 1021-27 (*May 2, 2022 eve.*), 1083-87 (*May 3, 2022 eve.*), 1180-83 (*May 5, 2022 morn.*), 1233-38 (*May 9, 2022 eve.*), 1456-59 (*May 24, 2022 eve., adjourned*)

Bill 20 — Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Shandro)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1087-90 (*May 3, 2022 eve.*), 1097-1105 (*May 4, 2022 morn.*), 1289-94 (*May 10, 2022 eve., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1305-16 (*May 11, 2022 morn., passed*)
Third Reading — 1365-68 (*May 11, 2022 eve.*), 1371-80 (*May 12, 2022 morn., passed*)

Bill 21 — Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Fir)

First Reading — 788 (*Apr. 25, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1045-52 (*May 3, 2022 morn.*), 1152-58 (*May 4, 2022 eve.*), 1176-80 (*May 5, 2022 morn.*), 1238-44 (*May 9, 2022 eve.*), 1294-1300 (*May 10, 2022 eve.*), 1353-62 (*May 11, 2022 eve., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1403-13 (*May 24, 2022 morn., passed*)
Third Reading — 1487-99 (*May 25, 2022 aft., passed*)

Bill 22 — Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta's Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022 (Nally)

First Reading — 922 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., passed*)
Second Reading — 1039-45 (*May 3, 2022 morn.*), 1105-14 (*May 4, 2022 morn.*), 1145-52 (*May 4, 2022 eve.*), 1172-76 (*May 5, 2022 morn., passed*)
Committee of the Whole — 1251-56 (*May 10, 2022 morn.*), 1283-88 (*May 10, 2022 aft.*), 1301-03 (*May 10, 2022 eve., passed*)
Third Reading — 1362-65 (*May 11, 2022 eve.*), 1380-88 (*May 12, 2022 Morn., passed*)

Bill 23 — Professional Governance Act (Madu)

First Reading — 1002 (*May 2, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1245-50 (*May 10, 2022 Morn.*), 1316-22 (*May 11, 2022 morn.*), (*May 11, 2022 eve., passed*)

Bill 24 — Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Nixon, JJ)

First Reading — 1426 (*May 24, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1501 (*May 25, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1504 (*May 25, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 1511-12 (*May 26, 2022 morn., passed*)

Bill 201 — Eastern Slopes Protection Act (Notley)

First Reading — 156 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 432 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly*), 789-95 (*Apr. 25, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; not proceeded with*)

Bill 202 — Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022 (Loewen)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly*), 433-40 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; proceeded with*)

Second Reading — 1211-13 (*May 9, 2022 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 203 — Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act (Bilous)

First Reading — 228 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 693 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly*), 796-801 (*Apr. 25, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; not proceeded with*)

Bill 204 — Anti-Racism Act (Shepherd)

First Reading — 408 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 788 (*Apr. 25, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly*), 1002-1008 (*May 2, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; not proceeded with on division*)

Bill 205* — Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022 (Sigurdson, RJ)

First Reading — 592 (*Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 922 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly*), 1008-14 (*May 2, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; proceeded with on division*)

Second Reading — 1213-27 (*May 9, 2022 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 1470-71 (*May 25, 2022 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1471-73 (*May 25, 2022 morn., passed*)

Bill 206 — Prohibiting Ownership of Agricultural Lands (Pension Plans and Trust Corporations) Act (van Dijken)

First Reading — 988 (*Apr. 28, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill 207 — Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, 2022 (Rutherford)

First Reading — 988 (*Apr. 28, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 1400 (*May 12, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly*)

Bill 208 — Post-Secondary Funding Assessment Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 1486 (*May 25, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022 (Jones)

First Reading — 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 1001 (*May 2, 2022 aft., reported to Assembly; proceeded with*)

Second Reading — 1371 (*May 12, 2022 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1455-56 (*May 24, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 1459 (*May 24, 2022 eve., passed*)

Bill Pr2* — Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022 (Nixon, JP)

First Reading — 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 1001 (*May 2, 2022 aft., reported to Assembly; proceeded with with amendments*)

Second Reading — 1368-69 (*May 11, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1504-1505 (*May 25, 2022 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1505 (*May 25, 2022 eve., passed*)

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Province of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, September 15, 2022

Day 38

The Honourable Nathan M. Cooper, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Third Session

Cooper, Hon. Nathan M., Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (UC), Speaker
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie-East (UC), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

Aheer, Hon. Leela Sharon, ECA, Chestermere-Strathmore (UC)
Allard, Hon. Tracy L., ECA, Grande Prairie (UC)
Amery, Mickey K., KC, Calgary-Cross (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Hon. Jackie, ECA,
Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, ECA, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, ECA, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP)
Copping, Hon. Jason C., ECA, Calgary-Varsity (UC)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South (Ind)
Deol, Jasvir, Edmonton-Meadows (NDP)
Dreeshen, Hon. Devin, ECA, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (UC)
Eggen, Hon. David, ECA, Edmonton-North West (NDP),
Official Opposition Whip
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Feehan, Hon. Richard, ECA, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
Fir, Hon. Tanya, ECA, Calgary-Peigan (UC)
Frey, Michaela L., Brooks-Medicine Hat (UC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., ECA, Calgary-Mountain View (NDP)
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UC)
Glubish, Hon. Nate, ECA, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (UC)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (UC)
Gray, Hon. Christina, ECA, Edmonton-Mill Woods (NDP),
Official Opposition House Leader
Guthrie, Peter F., Airdrie-Cochrane (UC)
Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UC)
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Horner, Hon. Nate S., ECA, Drumheller-Stettler (UC)
Hunter, Hon. Grant R., ECA, Taber-Warner (UC)
Irwin, Janis, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (NDP),
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Jean, Brian Michael, KC, Fort McMurray-Lac La Biche (UC)
Jones, Hon. Matt, ECA, Calgary-South East (UC)
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Long, Martin M., West Yellowhead (UC)
Lovely, Jacqueline, Camrose (UC)
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Madu, Hon. Kaycee, ECA, KC, Edmonton-South West (UC)
McIver, Hon. Ric, ECA, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Milliken, Hon. Nicholas, ECA, Calgary-Currie (UC)

Nally, Hon. Dale, ECA, Morinville-St. Albert (UC)
Neudorf, Nathan T., Lethbridge-East (UC)
Nicolaides, Hon. Demetrios, ECA, Calgary-Bow (UC)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (NDP)
Nixon, Hon. Jason, ECA, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre
(UC), Government House Leader
Nixon, Jeremy P., Calgary-Klein (UC)
Notley, Hon. Rachel, ECA, Edmonton-Strathcona (NDP),
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Pancholi, Rakhi, Edmonton-Whitemud (NDP)
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Phillips, Hon. Shannon, ECA, Lethbridge-West (NDP)
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Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)
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Government Whip
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Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
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Sawhney, Hon. Rajan, ECA, Calgary-North East (UC)
Schmidt, Hon. Marlin, ECA, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Schow, Joseph R., Cardston-Siksika (UC),
Deputy Government House Leader
Schulz, Hon. Rebecca, ECA, Calgary-Shaw (UC)
Shandro, Hon. Tyler, ECA, KC, Calgary-Acadia (UC)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-City Centre (NDP)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, ECA, Edmonton-Riverview (NDP)
Sigurdson, R.J., Highwood (UC)
Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UC)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)
Toews, Hon. Travis, ECA, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (UC)
Toor, Devinder, Calgary-Falconridge (UC)
Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UC)
van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)
Williams, Dan D.A., Peace River (UC)
Wilson, Hon. Rick D., ECA, Maskwacis-Wetaskiwin (UC)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (UC)
Yaseen, Hon. Muhammad, ECA, Calgary-North (UC)
Vacant, Calgary-Elbow

Party standings:

United Conservative: 60

New Democrat: 23

Independent: 3

Vacant: 1

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Teri Cherkewich, Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig, Senior Parliamentary
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Philip Massolin, Clerk Assistant and
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| Jason Kenney | Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Relations |
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| Jason Copping | Minister of Health |
| Mike Ellis | Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions |
| Tanya Fir | Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction |
| Nate Glubish | Minister of Service Alberta |
| Nate Horner | Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development |
| Whitney Issik | Minister of Environment and Parks |
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| Ric McIver | Minister of Municipal Affairs |
| Nicholas Milliken | Minister of Infrastructure |
| Dale Nally | Associate Minister of Natural Gas and Electricity |
| Demetrios Nicolaides | Minister of Advanced Education |
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| Ronald Orr | Minister of Culture |
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| Brad Rutherford | Minister without Portfolio |
| Sonya Savage | Minister of Energy |
| Tyler Shandro | Minister of Justice and Solicitor General |
| Rick Wilson | Minister of Indigenous Relations |
| Muhammad Yaseen | Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism |

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| | |
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| Nathan Neudorf | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Parks for Water Stewardship |
| Jeremy Nixon | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Community and Social Services for Civil Society |
| Searle Turton | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy |
| Dan Williams | Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Culture and for la Francophonie |

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Mr. Rowswell
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jones

Allard
Eggen
Gray
Hunter
Phillips
Rehn
Singh

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Neudorf
Deputy Chair: Ms Goehring

Armstrong-Homeniuk
Barnes
Bilous
Frey
Irwin
Rosin
Rowswell
Sweet
van Dijken
Walker

Select Special Committee to Examine Safe Supply

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Deputy Chair: Mrs. Allard

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Frey
Milliken
Rosin
Stephan
Yao
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant
Vacant

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Amery
Carson
Dang
Frey
Gottfried
Hunter
Loewen
Reid
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Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Allard
Ceci
Dach
Long
Loyola
Rosin
Shepherd
Smith
van Dijken

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Schow

Allard
Deol
Goehring
Gray
Long
Neudorf
Sabir
Sigurdson, R.J.
Williams

Select Special Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Search Committee

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Deputy Chair: Ms Rosin

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Bilous
Goehring
Sabir
Singh
Williams

Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills

Chair: Mr. Rutherford
Deputy Chair: Mr. Jeremy Nixon

Amery
Irwin
Long
Nielsen
Rehn
Rosin
Sigurdson, L.
Singh
Sweet

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mr. Smith
Deputy Chair: Mr. Reid

Aheer
Armstrong-Homeniuk
Deol
Ganley
Gottfried
Loyola
Neudorf
Renaud
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Armstrong-Homeniuk
Lovely
Pancholi
Renaud
Rowswell
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Dach
Feehan
Ganley
Getson
Guthrie
Lovely
Rehn
Singh
Turton
Yao

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, September 15, 2022

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray. Lord, the God of righteousness and truth, grant to our King and to his government, to Members of the Legislative Assembly, and to all in positions of responsibility the guidance of Your spirit. May they never lead the province wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideas but, laying aside all private interest and prejudice, keep in mind their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all. May Your kingdom come and Your name be hallowed. Amen.

Statement by the Speaker

Queen Elizabeth II

April 21, 1926, to September 8, 2022

The Speaker: Hon. members, I was deeply saddened to learn about Her late Majesty's passing. Our heartfelt condolences go out to the entire Royal Family. Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was the emblem of public devotion. As the longest reigning British monarch she leaves behind a legacy of service through over 600 royal patronages across the Commonwealth, including 36 charitable organizations in Canada. For the vast majority of us, we have never known a life without Her late Majesty as monarch.

Her example of a life of service to others and poise under unrelenting pressures may have even influenced some in this Chamber to pursue a life of public service. As one reign succeeds another, we are witnessing a historical moment as a new sovereign takes his place as our King. For the moment we mourn the loss of a beloved monarch and celebrate the life of a remarkable woman, a woman who on her 21st birthday addressed the Commonwealth and dedicated her life, "whether it be long or short," in service of others.

May Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II rest in peace. I ask you to take a moment of silent reflection and prayer as we remember Her late Majesty. Rest eternal grant unto Her late Majesty, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon her.

Members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem, followed immediately by *God Save the King*.

Hon. Members:

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

Hon. Members:

God save our gracious King,
Long live our noble King,
God save the King!
Send him victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the King!

The Speaker: Please be seated.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to ask the Chamber for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7 in order to allow our Assembly, Alberta's Assembly, to proceed immediately to Government Motion 32, an address to His Majesty King Charles III in memory of our late sovereign, Elizabeth II, in order to pay respects to her.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. the Premier.

Address to His Majesty the King

32. Mr. Kenney moved that an humble address be presented to His Majesty the King as follows:

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, wish to express the deep sympathy felt by this Assembly for the great sorrow which Your Majesty has sustained by the death of the late Queen, Your Majesty's mother; extend to all the Royal Family the deep sympathy of this Assembly in their grief; assure Your Majesty that Her late Majesty's unstinting dedication over a reign of 70 years to the service of our great province and its people and to the service of the countries and peoples of the wider Commonwealth will always be held in affectionate and grateful remembrance; and express to Your Majesty our loyalty to You and our conviction You will strive to uphold the liberties and to promote the happiness of the people in all Your realms now and in the years to come.

Mr. Kenney: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give thanks for the life and to mourn the death of our late sovereign lady Queen Elizabeth the great. While her portrait gazes over our proceedings today, as it has done for decades in this place, it is difficult to conjure the words adequately to express the grief that so many of us suffer at her loss. I must say very personally that her death has hit me harder than I expected, as though I have lost a grandmother or a long-time friend, so it is truly a serendipitous honour that my last speech in this place as Her late Majesty's first minister is to honour her remarkable life and legacy.

Dying in her eighth decade on the throne, the Queen was a constant and reassuring presence throughout our entire lives. Indeed, the reign of Elizabeth II as our head of state spanned 70 of the 117 years, or 61 per cent of the time, that Alberta has existed as a province and nearly half of the history of the Dominion of Canada. Through all of those years hundreds of members of this Legislature swore an oath of allegiance to the Queen, to her heirs and forebears. Thousands of laws have been passed by this Assembly that were adopted by and with Her late Majesty's consent. Her Executive Council governed under her authority, and our courts dispensed justice in her name.

Her first British Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, was prophetic when he said upon the accession of the then 24-year-old Princess Elizabeth to the throne that it was the beginning of a new Elizabethan age. Mr. Speaker, that age has finally drawn to a close. For so many of us, it seemed as though it might go on forever. Such was her devotion to duty that she seemed utterly unstoppable. Indeed, when I first met the then Prince of Wales and now King Charles 25 years ago, I said to him, "Your Royal Highness, I very

much look forward to the day that you'll be the King of Canada," and he responded to me with a wry smile, "Well, with the way that my mother is carrying on, I doubt that day will ever arrive."

1:40

Just consider this. The first British Prime Minister of her reign, Winston Churchill, was born in 1872, and her last British Prime Minister, who was invited to form a government just 36 hours before her death, was born in 1972. Her first Canadian Prime Minister, the great Louis St. Laurent, was born in 1882, and her last Canadian Prime Minister was born in 1971. Her life bridged such vastly different worlds, from the Victorian to the postmodern, from the days of horse-drawn carriages to the space age, yet she mustered the wisdom to navigate the century that incorporated exponentially more change than any other in human history. Through those tumultuous cultural, political, scientific, and social upheavals she was the lodestar, the bedrock of our institutions, of our common life, and the guarantor that certain virtues and customs worthy of continuing would persist. She gave us that comfort and certainty not by wielding practical political power but by her own constant example of duty, service, humility, dignity, and, yes, faithfulness.

Through her graceful example she told us to honour and protect what the great poet T.S. Eliot called "the permanent things." As the personification of the Crown she stayed true to her coronation oath and naturally revered tradition as "the democracy of the dead," in the words of G.K. Chesterton. But she also understood that tradition must evolve because, as the composer Gustav Mahler said, "Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire." So she led the modern evolution of the monarchy, preserving what was essential while adapting to change and new public expectations.

Mr. Speaker, in losing Her Majesty, it also feels that we close the chapter on the greatest generation. The stoicism of our late Queen was characteristic of the generation that rose up from every corner of the British Empire to defend civilization from Nazi barbarism during the Second World War. Princess Elizabeth could have fled to the safety of Canada when Britain was under threat of invasion, or she could have secluded herself in the royal estates, but instead she beseeched her father, King George VI, to be allowed to serve, becoming Second Subaltern Windsor of the Auxiliary Territorial Service, and there she demonstrated her famous practicality as an army truck mechanic, learning skills that held her in good stead for the rest of her life, particularly bombing around on Balmoral in her Land Rover.

I don't believe, Mr. Speaker, that the Queen ever called herself a feminist, but she didn't need a label or a theory to break barriers and prove her ability in areas previously reserved to men. She demonstrated that and her great boldness when the late Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia visited the Royal Family at Balmoral. The Queen suggested that they go on a drive through the estate together. Prince Abdullah reluctantly agreed, only to find that the Queen put on her wellies and jumped in the driver's seat, bolting out of the yard at full speed, careening around tight corners, and speeding down narrow country lanes while speaking excitedly and pointing out key features of the estate. Apparently, the Prince became white-knuckled and terrified and through his translator begged Her Majesty to slow down. Of course, in her own mischievous way the Queen made a powerful statement for the women of Saudi Arabia, who were prohibited from driving.

Since her passing, Mr. Speaker, we have heard much about that dry sense of humour, which I observed first-hand during her last visit to Canada, during which I had the high honour of being her minister in attendance at various events. On one occasion I accompanied Her Majesty and His Royal Highness to, to be honest, I'm sure her favourite Canadian event, the running of the Queen's

Plate, the greatest thoroughbred race in North America. She presented the award to the winner of the great Queen's Plate, named after her great-grandmother Queen Victoria, and then came back to the viewing stand.

She was scheduled to watch one more race and then depart for the Royal Canadian Air Force jet to take her back to London, but, Mr. Speaker, that one race turned into a second race. It turned into a third and a fourth race. Now the royal party was running nearly 40 minutes behind schedule. One could see Prince Philip getting a little agitated. I observed as he approached Her Majesty and said, "Ma'am, we are now 40 minutes late for the flight," and I heard her distinctly say, "Philip, I have the distinct impression that the airplane will wait for me."

Beneath that wry exterior was a woman of great intelligence and substance. All of her Prime Ministers remarked at how astonishingly well informed she was about matters ranging from the economy to global affairs. She was the Commonwealth's greatest diplomat. Former Prime Minister Harold Macmillan once said, "I was astonished at Her Majesty's grasp of all the details sent in messages and telegrams." Mr. Speaker, for those who work in Whitehall, ministers are often known not to return their red boxes, their ministerial homework, with the work completed, but Her Majesty, who was known as reader number one, always returned her work completed on time. She took her role, in every respect, seriously.

Mr. Speaker, let it be said that one of Her late Majesty's greatest achievements was the creation and the preservation of the Commonwealth, this great family of nations, which has lived through many stresses and strains, an incredibly diverse collection of nations which share a common history connected to Britain and the English language. Across the world was spread her territorial family, a group of wildly diverse nations, vast and tiny, rich and impoverished, republics and monarchies, that she charmed and cajoled and nudged to remember what bound them together and what together they might achieve. We have her to thank for its vitality today.

Mr. Speaker, the constant throughout the Queen's life was, of course, a profound and unshakable sense of duty. As she famously said on her 21st birthday to a global radio audience, as you cited earlier, "I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service . . . God help me to make good my vow, and God bless all of you who are willing to share in it." Later in life she said, "Although that vow was made in my salad days, when I was green in judgement, I do not regret nor retract one word of it."

Mr. Speaker, that sense of duty continued until the very end, when she commissioned her 15th British Prime Minister to form a government while, we now know, she was deathly ill, hours from her deathbed. Indeed, the only thing that could stop Queen Elizabeth II from performing her duty was death itself, which as a woman of profound Christian faith she undoubtedly embraced as the passage to her ultimate destiny, to be united with her Lord, the King of Kings.

Mr. Speaker, we in Alberta have been blessed in so many ways. One of those ways is to be the inheritors of the great traditions of Westminster parliamentary democracy and the constitutional monarchy, which she personified for most of our province's history. On her several visits to our province she demonstrated a great love and admiration for this place and for its people, for its First Nations, for newcomers from every corner of the world.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, her name will live on. In this place her name will live on forever in schools and streets, roadways and buildings, and,

indeed, Mount Queen Elizabeth and the Queen Elizabeth Ranges of our majestic Rocky Mountains.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, many of the functions of the Legislative Assembly occur in what we have known since 1954 as the Federal Building, which was acquired by the government of Alberta, refurbished, and is an important extension of the work that we do here. Your Honour will know that when it was commissioned, the 10th floor was named after the Windsor family after Her late Majesty's family and its various members. I believe it is fitting that we extend that recognition of her service to our province, so in the weeks to come, that will be formally renamed the Queen Elizabeth II building.

Mr. Speaker, why do so many experience an unexpected grief at the loss of a woman that most people never met personally, who was perhaps a distant image on a coin or a stamp or in television reports? How can we explain the impact that her passing has had on so many here and around the world? The queue is miles long for people to pay a brief moment of respect at her catafalque at Westminster Hall.

Mr. Speaker, I think the answer is twofold. Firstly, people around the world have a sense of turning a chapter in history, of being part of history in observing her death but also because we live in a world where there is, sadly, much darkness, where there is evil, violence, instability, exploitation, the denial of human dignity. We see it now in a spectacular way in Vladimir Putin's appalling invasion of Ukraine. So when we look at our late Queen, what we see is the counterpoint, the opposite, the contradiction to that darkness and division which characterizes too much of modern history. What we see in her is dignity, faithfulness, and, yes, goodness. We join with our fellow Albertans, Canadians, subjects and citizens of the Commonwealth spanning the globe, and countless others in paying tribute to a truly good, dutiful, and faithful woman.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said, the late Queen was a woman who held a quiet but deep Christian faith, so I join with countless people here and around the world in praying for the repose of her soul and the consolation of her family. She would have meditated many times on the parable of the talents, so I hope and believe that she will finally hear the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant. [You have] been faithful over a few things; I will make [you] ruler over many things. Enter . . . into the joy of [your] lord."

Thank you, Your Majesty. May God save the King.

The Speaker: The hon. the Leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise on behalf of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition to remember and to commemorate the life of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. I offer my deepest condolences to King Charles and the Royal Family for their loss and to all Albertans who are mourning this loss.

Elizabeth II is the only Queen of Canada many of us, including myself, have ever known. Her reign of more than 70 years is the longest of any British monarch, and it's extraordinary to reflect on the massive global changes that have occurred over that time. When a 25-year-old Elizabeth ascended the throne in 1952, telephones were rotary dial, computers were the size of refrigerators, and no one had heard of Elvis Presley or the Beatles. She reigned through countless moments in world history: the moon landings, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the extraordinary rise of digital communications, just to name a few.

In Canada she oversaw pivotal moments, as many have already mentioned in talking about her over the last few days, such as the repatriation of the Constitution and the adoption of the Charter in

1982. Of course, as we all know, this effort also involved securing within that constitutional document provincial dominion over our natural resources, something, of course, very important to Canada and very, very important to Albertans, something that could only happen in a peaceful democratic setting that encouraged thoughtful, open debate, negotiation, and resolution. It was under her gaze that this example of positive political development was able to take place. Through these seismic changes Queen Elizabeth remained a symbol of stability, continuity, and liberal democracy for the United Kingdom, for Canada, and for the Commonwealth nations around the world.

Now, we must also recognize, Mr. Speaker, that the British Crown can evoke some very different reactions from Indigenous people in our land, who have been and continue to be subject to colonization and the consequences of colonization, and it also can evoke different reactions from other citizens of the country with roots in jurisdictions that also struggled with the consequences of conflict with the Crown. And those who still endure the harms of colonialism will have a different view on the institutional monarchy itself. Those Canadians have a right to voice these perspectives. We must honour those perspectives, we must listen to those perspectives because I believe as well that the example that Queen Elizabeth herself demonstrated is that that is exactly what she would do and she would call on us to do.

That being said, we are here to recognize and memorialize Queen Elizabeth herself and the personal attributes that allowed her to contribute to the well-being of our Commonwealth throughout the term of her reign. She made her first visit to Alberta before she became Queen, in 1951, and she would visit five more times, most recently in 2005.

Now, I don't have quite the level of personal stories that our Premier has, but I will say that in 1978 she did come to Alberta and to Grande Prairie to turn the sod on the construction of the hospital that still bears her name there. I was fortunate enough to have dinner with her during that visit. Mind you, I was 14 at the time, and there were 500 of our closest friends and neighbours in the room, so I don't know that I made much of an impression on our head of state that evening. My mother and father, however, did get a chance to meet her properly. My dad used his audience to lobby unsuccessfully for her to visit our hometown of Fairview, which was celebrating its 50th anniversary that year.

But it was, honestly, my mother who treasured that opportunity the most, up to her dying day. I want to talk to you a little bit about why that was, because if we examine Queen Elizabeth through my mother's eyes, you can understand the admiration that she invoked so broadly not only in Canada and the Commonwealth but around the world. My mother was born in the U.S., and she was involved in what some folks might today refer to as radical, woke, left activities. She travelled in the same circles as Abbie Hoffman, she attended peace marches, and she travelled throughout the southern United States to register Black voters before moving to Alberta in 1962. Later in life, while living in Alberta, she pursued a degree in liberation theology. She visited Nicaragua after the Sandinista revolution and South Africa during apartheid, where she met Desmond Tutu. Notwithstanding all of that, she was 13 years old when she watched Princess Elizabeth ascend to become Queen of the entire Commonwealth. For her generation, watching that and being nearly of the same age was a revelation. It captured her imagination, and I know this because she spoke to me about it a lot.

2:00

Like so many other young women at the time, her admiration of the Queen never waned throughout the remainder of her life. As a woman coming of age in the late '50s and early '60s, Queen

Elizabeth provided the strongest example of a woman leader to a generation of women who didn't really have much else to look for in the way of female western democratic leaders at the time. She was so much an icon that my mother also tried very, very hard to emulate the Queen's fashion sense. Let me tell you: now, there were some hats that I believe might have worked well at Ascot or Queen's Plate but didn't work so well on main street in Fairview. There was a little bit of explanation that I would periodically have to make to folks.

But I tell you this story to illustrate the broad appeal that Queen Elizabeth had to so many regardless not only of their politics but of their country of origin. At the time of marrying my father, my mom couldn't maintain dual citizenship, so she happily became a Canadian citizen. She used to talk to me about that. She was a big political geek, and I was quite young, and she used to tell me how proud she was to be part of a constitutional monarchy. At the age of seven I nodded my head and waited for her to move on to the next topic; nonetheless, she would argue that in the U.S. the President was more distanced from the people because in principle, in the absence of a monarchy in the U.S., it meant that the formality and the celebrity and the dignity of the role were attributed to the President and therefore somehow removed them from the kind of democratic accessibility one would hope to see in their democratic leaders.

My mom believed very strongly that the presence of the monarchy in Canada inherently released politicians from that formality and the ceremony that might otherwise have distanced us from our constituents. Now, I think that political scholars and monarchists and republicans and others, constitutional scholars, will debate that point, but I just remember my mother believing it very strongly as part of her overall value that she tried to share with me and our family about her respect for the Queen. What is true is that there is no question at all that Queen Elizabeth ensured our democracy would rest on stability, on dignity, and on integrity and the rule of law, that not only her role represented but her conduct within that role represented.

Now, that was evident in her 1978 visit, when the Royal Family opened Commonwealth Stadium and kicked off the games here in Edmonton. The Queen attended a banquet hosted by Premier Peter Lougheed where she gave a televised national address about the importance of a unified Canada. She said the following:

Encouraged by wise government both at the federal and provincial levels, Canadians have cherished their diversity. They exhibit a highly individualistic approach to life while at the same time adhering to the ideal of a firmly united people.

She went on to say:

I'm delighted to find that the people of Alberta, in developing their enormous natural resources, are determined to remember that material strength does not solve all man's problems and that ultimately it is the quality of life that we all live that matters. All this has been achieved in Alberta by people of many different ethnic origins working together, and it is in the interests of Albertans, like all Canadians, to continue to build a society where the individual can find full expression in an atmosphere of tolerance, co-operation, and harmony.

Here we are, 44 years later, continuing to practise and honour those Canadian traditions in this place.

Of course, Canadian unity has been repeatedly tested, and when Elizabeth II was here in 1990, she acknowledged a, quote, sense of anxiety about Canada's future and spoke of a united Canada, quote: which I trust I shall see in future years when I come again. She went on to say:

I am not just a fair-weather friend, and I am glad to be here at this sensitive time. The unity of the Canadian people and their will to

live together will be tested in the months ahead. Knowing Canadians as well as I do,

she said,

I cannot believe that they will not be able, after a period of calm reflection, to find a way through present difficulties.

She was right about that, and I believe she's still right today.

In preparing to make this statement, I was also kind of pleased to stumble across an article written about the Queen's last visit to Alberta in 2005. Now, during this trip highway 2 became Queen Elizabeth II highway, or the QE II, as we all refer to it, and the Provincial Museum of Alberta became the Royal Alberta Museum. She also made a trip to Jasper, visited Commonwealth Stadium, attended a centennial celebration at the Saddledome, and took a helicopter tour of the oil sands.

But what caught my eye – it will make no surprise to folks here – was a story about a minor kerfuffle regarding invitations to dinner with the Queen. Apparently, there was a misunderstanding about whether the opposition leader, Stephen Harper, was invited, and that led to a bit of a shakeup in the seating chart, because who did Premier Ralph Klein find himself sitting next to? Well, none other than Jack Layton. Apparently, Premier Klein wasn't very happy about this at first, but – wouldn't you know it? – they found common ground and spent the evening discussing the sponsorship scandal. We talk about Queen Elizabeth as a unifying force, and indeed in that moment she managed to get even Ralph Klein and Jack Layton to break bread together.

During her visit the Queen also addressed the Alberta Legislature for the first time in the province's history. In her address in this very room she left Albertans with this sound advice, and I quote: "During this visit, as we honour the spirit of those who built this great nation, it is timely to remind ourselves that we can indeed make a difference for those who will in turn come after us. If we strive in our own lives and in our own way to leave the world around us a little better than the way we have found it and to maintain the highest standards in everything we do, we can legitimately take pride in our contribution." End quote. I believe that all of us in this House today can agree that Queen Elizabeth was utterly tireless in holding herself to the high standards she described that day.

These visits left a lasting legacy in our province and many memories for Albertans. Her presence can be felt and seen around the province, as the Premier has outlined. Looking back, these visits took place at pivotal times in our history. While she avoided giving her opinion on political matters, she still had strong convictions, and people took notice when she did express an opinion. Prime Minister Brian Mulroney said that Queen Elizabeth II was a, quote, behind-the-scenes force on ending apartheid. Here in Canada she firmly believed in a united Canada.

She has been described by those who knew her as compassionate, humble, and wise. During her visits she left us with wise words about diversity, tolerance, co-operation, and national unity. These words are just as true today as they were then. These are themes that all members who have the privilege of sitting in this Chamber and those who may sit here in the future would do well to remember. It's a reminder that there is more that unites us than divides us as Albertans and Canadians. The Queen was known for her dedication and her service to people. Indeed, her disciplined, diligent, careful, unwavering, unending focus on duty serves as the embodiment of what public service looks like.

Some of us on both sides of the aisle have served in Her Majesty's government. Some of us, again on both sides of the aisle, have served in Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, and that framing of the role of the opposition is an important reminder. However vehemently we disagree in this place, we are loyal to Alberta, loyal to Canada, loyal to the democratic, legal, and political traditions

which flow from the Crown. We should all follow the Queen's example: service and duty. These traditions have been a profound source of stability in Canada, and even when we have our differences, it's these democratic principles and respect for the rule of law that allow us to resolve those differences peacefully.

For generations Queen Elizabeth was a source of that kind of stability, sometimes in uncertain times. Her passing makes familiar things feel different. It changes the words of our national anthem. But the immediate and peaceful transfer of the Crown to a new monarch should also remind us of the fundamental political stability that makes us Canadian, that makes us members of the Commonwealth.

It is my honour to wish all the best to King Charles III on behalf of our caucus, His Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Government Motion 32, a humble address to His Majesty the King. Are there others? The hon. Member for Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

2:10

Mr. Getson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the other speakers so far on Motion 32. It's with great humility and, quite frankly, sadness that I'm rising to address the passing of our Queen and wishing the best in optimism to our new King.

I never met the Queen. I never saw her at a parade. Being a farm kid, that was pretty far off in the distance. But my grandmother was the daughter of a British officer from the British Expeditionary Force, and grandma always had a corner of the house that was kind of dedicated to the Queen, royalty, and such, everything that was related to what happened with the Queen and the family and how it was relevant to Canada. I think it's with that that some of those inherent things have stuck with us over the years, you know, humble beginnings in farm kids and otherwise. This is hitting me kind of hard, as if my own grandmother passed, and I think that's kind of a surprise for a bunch of us, how much this lady actually meant to all of us here.

Being 25 years old when she stepped into that position and carrying that role with such dignity and grace for over 70 years is outstanding. Folks in my generation have never known a sovereign other than the Queen, and I think it's with that, part of that duty and loyalty, that there were a couple of us in my family – my brother, my youngest brother, signed up to be part of the Royal Naval Reserve because of it. I got to swear an oath as an MLA.

I don't have a ton of interactions with that, but what I did was that I reached out to folks in my community, and I couldn't imagine then seeing on social how many stories came forward and how much of an impact she really had. If I may, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to retell a few of those. One is Edward Gallagher. He's a former military officer. He wanted to send a story and wishes to the King on behalf of himself and his family. It was on March 8, 1983. It was just shy of his 21st birthday, and he was attending the Royal Roads Military College. He actually commanded an honour guard for Her Majesty the Queen, and he had tea with her. He says that the visit lasted for 15 minutes in total, but he remembered like it happened yesterday. Hers was a life of service unmatched. Ed shared a number of photos with us as well, and it had a profound effect on this gentleman for the rest of his life of service in our community.

Retired Sergeant Cole Rosentreter, Canadian airborne. When I asked him for any thoughts as well – and he'd served in Afghanistan – he said that a lifetime of service is what he offered to the Queen, and he would offer it again without a second thought. He says: I cannot lead you in a battle, I cannot give you laws to administer justice, but I can do something else; I can give you my heart and

my devotion to these old islands and all the peoples of our brotherhood of nations.

Retired master sniper, Canadian pathfinder, airborne Sergeant Ben Klick:

As a monarch the Queen was an eternal constant, a reminder that our loyalty is not to the transient politicians or temporary administrations but to the nation, the people, and their ideals. As a person she was the living embodiment of selfless service and a standard that we all aspire to. Those who met the Queen may say that when you meet people, you get a sense of how important they are. When you met Her Majesty, she made you feel how important you were. This is leadership, and we'll miss her.

Retired Lance Corporal Glenn Brooks from the Australian airborne:

It's times like these when the multitude of humble servants like myself who served that wonderful monarch stand by, silent and respectful. I have no words that could add weight to her passing of our loss. I appreciate the offer. In my own way I met with her for a few seconds in Sierra Leone in 1994. It touched me forever and made me realize who I was and what I was doing and what my duty was.

Master Corporal, combat engineers, Chance Burles:

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth was always a constant in our lives. Her face was adorned on our money, her photo in every school, in every office, ever present, watching over us as a picture of service and duty that reminded us to hold ourselves to a higher standard. When I first joined the military, I swore in her service. I pledged my allegiance to her. Once in the military her presence was felt even without ever having her being there, on the insignia, the Queen's crown. They lived by the Q and Rs, the Queen's regulations and orders. Even the grass was off duty because it was the Queen's. Her presence was ever there. With her loss we reach the end of an era, one in which she presided over great changes and upheaval. As the times changed, the technology changed. She showed us that change was not a bad thing, but we should always hold the touchstone that made us who we are. We see only as we do as we stand on the shoulders of giants. She was one of those giants. Thanking Her Majesty for always being there.

Another lady that I know was an officer in the Canadian navy, actually, and she also swore two oaths, one as a servant to the people of the province. In her words, it was her honour to serve us in both. What she wrote was:

Queen Elizabeth II personified the duty of selfless service. Her steadfast devotion to service was a living embodiment of what it means to sacrifice yourself for the good of others. Her Majesty was once a serving member in the Armed Forces herself, having served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service during the Second World War. True leadership is not just shown in words but by actions and being unshakeable in her duty, loyalty, and the dedication of those who selflessly serve with honour. Her Majesty the Queen was the daughter of a royal naval officer, she married a royal naval officer, and her two children had very long naval careers.

You can tell that there was a propensity to naval and an affinity from Andrea.

Having served in Aberdeenshire, where Her Majesty and the Royal Family spent a portion of their time every year, many who served there felt more of a personal connection with Queen Elizabeth II. Her Majesty showed an unwavering devotion to the Armed Forces members and remarkable care and commitment to our families. She was the Armed Forces' honorary mother and grandmother, who commanded a unique respect through her wisdom, compassion, and unimpeachable example.

There's more here, but obviously, with respect for others that have things to say, I'm going to wrap this one a little shorter. Andrea Petzold thanks the Queen for her service. She says:

Thank you for your 70 years of service, Ma'am. It was an honour to have served you.

To paraphrase a traditional goodbye of the Royal Navy, fair winds and following seas, weary traveller. Your duty is done. Lay down your heart and rest.

God save our Queen, and long live the King.

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today to commemorate the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. During my first term as MLA I had the pleasure of serving in the role of the government of Alberta's liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces and now act as His Majesty's Loyal Opposition liaison to the Canadian Armed Forces. As such, the relationship between the Crown and the military holds a special place in my heart.

Queen Elizabeth's relationship with the military was expansive and ever-changing yet still retained a level of warmth and care for those who served. Much of this is due to the times in which she lived and the impact on her as a young girl. The Queen came of age during World War II. For so many at the time, it would have been shocking for young women to go and train as mechanics and drivers, yet that is exactly what she did. In 1945, at the age of 19, Princess Elizabeth joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service, the women's branch of the British Army, and became the first female member of the Royal Family to actively serve in the military. She was also the last surviving head of state to have served during the Second World War.

Upon becoming the sovereign, she developed and maintained a meaningful relationship with the Canadian military, many of whom served in the Queen's Guard. Recently members of the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery United Kingdom Public Duties Contingent provided their public duties for a month in 2021 as the Queen's Guard at the four royal residences and important locations in the London district, including Buckingham Palace and the Tower of London.

Honouring our local talent for the multiple mount and dismount ceremonies, the Queen's Guard was accompanied by the 36-person Royal Canadian Artillery Band, based here in Edmonton. As commander-in-chief of the Canadian Armed Forces Her Majesty sought to comfort and motivate military personnel at challenging times. In a particularly thoughtful gesture Queen Elizabeth also invited the 20th Field Regiment of the Royal Canadian Artillery to Edinburgh in honour of its 100th anniversary. Today that regiment consists of the 61st Field Battery, stationed in Edmonton, and the 78th Field Battery, based out of Red Deer, and is an active reserve unit in Alberta and serves as the ceremonial salute regiment for the province. It was deeply important to her to provide comfort and support when remembering those who had been deployed away from their families, a matter close to her heart as a military spouse herself and with many of her children and her grandchildren having served, most particularly Prince Harry, in Afghanistan.

The Queen supported veterans of the Armed Forces through her many patronages, including lending support to her grandson Harry's creation of the Invictus Games, an international multisport event held for wounded, injured, and sick servicemen and servicewomen, both serving and veterans. In fact, she even participated in a skit, joining Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, in response to a challenge issued by the Obamas in relation to the Invictus Games, a video that went viral and continues to be used in the form of GIFs, clips, and memes today. And it is this level of warmth and kindness, something rarely attributed to this particular monarch, that allowed her to use her love and connections with military persons for public good by giving back to those people she

so respected and ensuring all knew they were cherished by not only herself but by the monarchy itself.

2:20

As the NDP critic for Culture I cannot help but admire the Queen's dedication and contribution to sports and culture in Alberta. In 1951, while still Princess Elizabeth, she made her first visit to Alberta and watched a CFL game where Edmonton beat Winnipeg in the western semifinal. Calgarians were so excited for her visit that the Calgary Stampede put on a special fall edition of the show. It must have been a success as she would go on to visit three more Stampedes over the decades. In 1978 Queen Elizabeth opened and attended the Commonwealth Games in Edmonton, a monumental event that included building the brand new Commonwealth Stadium.

Opening sporting events in Canada became somewhat of a tradition for the Queen. She opened the Olympic Games in Montreal in 1976, the year that I was born, and officiated at the opening of the Commonwealth Games in Edmonton and then in Victoria in 1994, which is the year my oldest was born. The Queen also opened the 2012 Summer Olympics and Paralympics in London, making her the first head of state to open two Olympic Games in two countries. An avid equestrian and breeder of horses, she visited Spruce Meadows and inaugurated the yearly Queen Elizabeth II Cup.

Her Majesty also opened the museum of the regiments at Canadian Forces Base Calgary and visited the provincial museum of Alberta when it was renamed, in her honour, the Royal Alberta Museum.

In addition to her love of sports, the Queen actively participated in philanthropic efforts, and she left a legacy among her family to do the same. She was patron of more than 600 organizations and charities and helped raise over £1.4 billion for her patronage during her reign. She sought to bring people together through sport, culture, and philanthropy. So, too, did she encourage the values by which she lived on the world stage. In speaking to the United Nations, she stated: over the years I have observed that some attributes of leadership are universal and are often about finding ways of encouraging people to combine their efforts, their talents, their insights, their enthusiasm, and their inspiration to work together; we all must take these words to heart and strive as leaders to work together for the benefit of the people we serve.

Rest in peace, Your Majesty.

God save the King.

Mr. Schow: Grief and gratitude. That is what fills my heart today: grief for the loss of our Queen, Elizabeth II, but gratitude for her lifetime of service; grief for the Royal Family as they have lost a valued family member and matriarch but gratitude for her work on behalf of countless families around the world outside the walls of her own home; grief that we may no longer know her renowned compassion and good humour but gratitude for the example she set as a world leader and the time she spent through her 70-year reign as Queen visiting cities around the globe.

Edmonton, Alberta, is one such city. In 1978 Queen Elizabeth visited Edmonton to open the Commonwealth Games. It was her third trip to our capital city, and her time spent in Edmonton is well documented. She attended a banquet hosted by Premier Lougheed at the time and visited several other landmarks during her stay. But this was a unique visit because the mayor of Edmonton at the time was Cec Purves, my wife's maternal grandfather. So I asked him: what was she like? And this is what he had to say: the Queen is only five foot, four inches tall, but when she entered a room, her

personality and presence commanded the attention and respect of everyone present.

She was reserved, but once she got more comfortable, she would show you her tremendous sense of humour. During her stay she kept a strict timeline and waited for no one. In one instance she was at an event with then Premier Lougheed. At one moment he got distracted, speaking with someone else, and instead of waiting for him, the Queen left him behind. In another instance, while walking through the massive crowds of people as she toured Edmonton city centre with then Mayor Purves, her husband, Prince Philip, was lagging behind. He was zigzagging back and forth through the crowd talking with people as he could. He did that so much that the Queen had to turn around, and finally she snapped: Philip, stop dawdling.

But the compassionate side of the Queen, which was one of her most notable traits, was also on display one evening at a dinner at Government House hosted by then Premier Lougheed and with Mayor Purves. As the dinner was about to begin inside the building, a large crowd of people had formed outside the building, and she had no intention of going outside, but Mayor Purves and Premier Lougheed asked and tried to convince the Queen to go out on the balcony for a moment, and she did. She went outside and she waved, and the crowd below was delighted. As a politician I have learned that some of the smallest things we do can have the largest impact. That is no different for a monarch.

Today we grieve the loss of Queen Elizabeth II, but we are grateful for her life of service and the impact that she had on the world. May she rest in peace.

God save the King.

The Speaker: The hon. the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Yaseen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a solemn day in Alberta as we recognize the passing of Her Majesty the Queen and pay tribute to her life in the Alberta Legislature. I am honoured to rise and speak as the Associate Minister of Immigration and Multiculturalism as well as the MLA for Calgary-North, offering condolences on behalf of my constituents.

Queen Elizabeth II's reign was the longest of any other British monarch in all of history. For most people throughout the world, she is the only monarch they have ever known. Mr. Speaker, she has been the bedrock upon which governments of Alberta and Canada have relied for the past 70 years. As elected officials we have had the honour and responsibility of governing under her authority, and now we have that same authority and responsibility under the authority of King Charles III. As every bill from this Legislature until this date became an act in Her late Majesty's name through royal assent by the Lieutenant Governor, future bills will now become acts through His Majesty's name.

Perhaps even more important than the Crown's link to our Legislature is the Crown's work in society. The Queen was an incredible example of selfless service, especially through her charitable work. She was the patron of 600 charities throughout the world and, when you include her family, almost 3,000 charities world-wide. Her favourite charities were those that focused on the community and service issues, closely followed by her support for education and training causes. As the former executive director of England's Charities Aid Foundation, John Low, has said – and I quote – she has done more for charities over the past 60 years than any other monarch throughout the world. Unquote. Prior to my election I could have never predicted, Mr. Speaker, the demands of serving in the public eye and representing a constituency.

2:30

This has been the most demanding job of my life, beyond anything I experienced in the private sector, including charitable work, but it is one that I am honoured to be doing. Despite my experience, I cannot imagine the demands that the Queen faced in overseeing England and the many other countries in the Commonwealth. Between the demands of her family, her country, her ceremonial roles, her charitable work, and her Commonwealth tours, I am not certain anyone could maintain the same level of calm under that amount of pressure. As we reflect upon the Queen's life here in this House today, I cannot help but feel gratitude for the example of leadership she has set. May she always be remembered for her unparalleled service to Canada and to the world.

In his inaugural speech King Charles III said:

As the Queen herself did with such unswerving devotion, I too now solemnly pledge myself, throughout the remaining time God grants me, to uphold the Constitutional principles at the heart of our nation. And wherever you may live in the United Kingdom, or in the Realms and territories across the world, and whatever may be your background or beliefs, I shall endeavour to serve you with loyalty, respect and love, as I have throughout my life.

In the same way that both Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and His Majesty King Charles III committed to a life of selfless service, let us do our work as legislators and government in the same way. I will always be grateful for her life of service and now the service of King Charles III. May God save the King.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Government Motion 32. The hon. Member for Calgary-Bhullar-McCall.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful to rise to join the Premier, the Leader of the Official Opposition, and my legislative colleagues in commemorating the life and reign of Queen Elizabeth II. As the most well-travelled head of state, the Queen made a number of state visits, including being the first reigning monarch to visit Australia and New Zealand. She was also the first British monarch to visit the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Ireland.

[Ms Rosin in the chair]

Her reign covered a time period of constant change for the monarchy, with many countries gaining independence and self-government. I represent a very diverse riding, and I have many constituents from a Southeast Asian background and, in particular, from the subcontinent, where the British Empire once extended, as well as having constituents who have served in the British military. Many of these communities and constituents have strong opinions around colonization and their relationship with the Crown, and they voiced their feelings, but I will leave that for another day.

Today we gather to recognize the life of service led by Queen Elizabeth II. Today we were all reminded of the words she spoke on her 21st birthday, making a commitment to the British people: "I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong." And a long and devoted life it was. During her long reign Queen Elizabeth II remained a symbol of stability, continuity, dedicating her life to those people whose lives were touched by the monarchy. This includes the complex and unique relationships found between the Crown and Indigenous people. As Albertans, as treaty people, we live here because the Crown entered into these relationships with the Indigenous persons for whom these lands were home.

When I was practising Indigenous law, the concept of honour of the Crown regarding treaties was of vital importance. In all its dealings with Indigenous people, from the assertion of sovereignty to the resolution of claims and the implementation of treaties, the Crown must act honourably. So as the foundation of the relationship between the Crown and the Indigenous people, in order to honour the Crown, Queen Elizabeth II and King Charles III, we must ensure treaty obligations are fulfilled as intended. We are all treaty people, from those who live here to those who represent the signatories of the treaties. As we recognize and pay respect to Queen Elizabeth II in her role as monarch, we must also acknowledge the need for reconciliation and the significant work we have yet to do.

I offer my deepest condolences to King Charles and the British people and all those who are mourning the loss of the Queen. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I see the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Toews: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my humble honour today to stand in the Legislature and pay tribute to the remarkable life of Queen Elizabeth II. Our late monarch inspired the world with her strength, her poise and grace, and the deep, abiding sense of purpose that she carried throughout her life. Hers was a life of unwavering service to country, the Commonwealth, and her people. That steadfast purpose was a constant throughout her 70-year reign despite immense technological, geopolitical, and societal change.

[The Speaker in the chair]

During World War II she gave her first public address to boost morale and served as an active member of the Armed Forces, where she trained and worked as a mechanic. At the age of 25 she became Queen and in front of 20 million people world-wide publicly devoted her life wholly to duty and service to her country, not a ceremonial post but a calling, a vocation that she carried out with humility and dedication.

The Queen's annual Christmas message was an encouragement to millions each year. For 69 of her 70 years as sovereign she met people in their homes, pulling back the curtain on her public life and sharing a deeply personal piece of herself, her family, and her faith. Two years ago, during a time of great fear and grief, she gave her first-ever Easter address, speaking a much-needed message of hope and the light of Christ over a troubled world.

Just two days before her passing she personally met and appointed Britain's newest Prime Minister, still honouring her vow and discharging the duties of her office. Her dedication to family and country, the Commonwealth, and to people around the world exemplified service above self and inspired that in others. There may not be a public figure in my lifetime to whom these words apply more: from the Gospel of Matthew, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise today as someone who has been a subject of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II his entire life. I think that's true for the vast majority of citizens in Alberta and across the Commonwealth. I'm also proud to rise today as someone who is a subject of Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Canada. This has been her title in Canada since 1953, when the government of Canada changed her title to that. I think it's very important for us to recognize today that she has been the Queen of Canada and that King Charles is now the

King of Canada, a separate title. We are not just subjects of the United Kingdom but our own proper monarchy, which we have a direct connection to.

Now, I'm not a royal watcher, admittedly, Mr. Speaker. I don't follow the tabloids. I cannot name the entire Royal Family. There are many, many reasons that across the entire Commonwealth there are monarchists. There are many, many reasons why we appreciate Her Majesty the Queen. For me, it's a cultural connection to the institution of the monarchy. It's a connection to tradition, particularly the institution of the monarchy.

2:40

But I must say, as Canadian public commentator Ben Woodfinden said publicly recently, that I was surprised by how much it affected me when I learned of her passing. Of course, many of us knew and expected this to come soon, at 96 years old, but still it hit me hard. In many ways she was a silent grandmother there for so many of us throughout so many of these important experiences that Canada went through. Referendum debates on separation for Quebec, amendments to our Constitution, visits to Alberta, the naming of Commonwealth Stadium: these were important parts of our public life that we lived together, and the Queen was always a part of it, not just as the monarch is, not just as a monarch there who was carrying on an institution that goes back over a thousand years, but as somebody that we felt like we knew. Her Christmas addresses are what hit me every year. I appreciate so deeply that message. I didn't when I was younger, but as I got older, I came to very much appreciate it.

There's something to be said about the fact that she is a unifying figure from an institution of our past, not the idea of hope in the future, what we will be together later on – these are good things to be unified around – but it's from the depths of our history, the very, very deepest part of who we are in western civilization. That's what unites us. That's rare, Mr. Speaker, and something I think we should be celebrating in her life. In the 70 years of her reign she was always a unifier. Stories we heard from both our Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition celebrate these moments of unity together, coming together in our public life, again, through the monarch.

I think this is important. I think that institutions, by definition, are formative, Mr. Speaker. They form. They form people who go through them. It's not just people that they form; they form our society. They form us as a people all together. That is what the monarchy has done to Canada. In her history from the very beginning, even before her formation as a dominion in 1967, it was the monarchy that formed us, that made us unique in North America. We are not American, happily so. We are Canadian, proudly a part of the Commonwealth, previously subjects of the British Empire, now proud sovereign citizens loyal to Her Majesty the Queen both in government and in opposition. This is formative.

But there are few monarchs in history that are able to say that they formed the monarchy itself. In her reign in Alberta and in Canada and in the United Kingdom and the entire Commonwealth she shaped what that institution is to us, in our eyes. I mean, we were communicating with telegraphs, very often, at the time that she ascended to the throne. She has been the monarch since 1952, in February, when she, you know, took over because her father passed away, and in her reign we've heard a lot of the history that has happened, throughout the great moments of parliamentary debate and prime ministerial interactions.

But in my constituency here in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, in 1950 and all the way through until the winter of 1951, Alberta and my constituency in particular went through the greatest forest fire in Canadian history, even to this day. Three million acres burned down in the Chinchaga fire. After that fire, as it was extinguished

in the winter of 1951, Queen Elizabeth became the Queen, rose to replace her father on February 9, 1952. In that entire time, silently growing in the forests of northern Alberta along with Her Majesty the Queen, along with our province, have been the trees, this forest that continues to grow. I can think of no better analogy, in common one to one, than with this organic growth, continuing up, sustaining us in the north, for sure, and our economy, providing for us warmth – there were still people breaking land and burning wood stoves for many, many years during her reign – as that forest supplied for us resources that we needed. A part of who we are, the very environment in which we lived every day, were these trees that grew up along with Her Majesty the Queen, along with us.

It's not just my life that has been lived. My father, born in 1950: his entire memorable life has been under Her Majesty the Queen. I'm told that my grandmother on my father's side met Her Majesty the Queen when she came to Alberta and visited her long-term care facility – old folks' home they used to call it – when Her Majesty was here. Of course, that is the one interaction my family had with her. In Her Majesty's service to those who built our province and came before us, that seems so fitting, doesn't it?

It seems so right that the one interaction that I have of any kind of grasp at some sort of tangible connection to her is through her honouring my grandmother because of what she did before. She could have been hanging out with Prime Ministers, but, no, she was in the forests; she was hanging out with the common people in service of them. Those stories are so common. When you hear them on the news today – it seems like a 24-hour newscast – there are stories of people with these, and there are so many of them because she did it every single day of her life in service. She formed us in the institution of the monarchy. She formed us as a people, in her small way. I'm grateful to her for that.

I want to end in a prayer, a prayer that we have all uttered so many times that we forgot it was a prayer, but I think we should all mean it very seriously today when we say it. God save the Queen. God save her soul.

God save the King.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms Rosin: Mr. Speaker, it is with grief and sadness that I rise today to speak to the life and the legacy of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. While this opportunity may be one of the greatest in my career in this House, it is also one of the most difficult, for what can one individual of this Chamber say to pay the proper respect to the woman who so dutifully served us for 70 years of her 96-year life? Never in our past has there been nor in our future will there ever be anyone like our Queen. Ascending to the throne at just age 25, having never been intended for it, she grew to become the longest serving monarch in our Commonwealth and the longest serving female head of state in world history. She also grew to become my personal hero. Her photo hangs in my house, her portrait in my office, reminding me daily of the leader that I and every member of this Chamber could only ever aspire to be.

In her life Queen Elizabeth served as a mechanic in the world war, she studied constitutional law, reigned over 15 British Prime Ministers, and addressed the U.S. Congress and remains the first and only monarch to ever do so. She travelled tens of thousands of kilometres for duty, drove the Saudi Arabian King around Britain at a time when it was still a punishable offence for women to so much as drive back in their home country. She participated in high-level tactical and political conversations with some of the most iconic leaders of our lifetime. She held over 50 ranks in the British military, gave assent to over 4,000 British acts of Parliament, and served as a constant beacon of grace, joy, goodness, and civility around the world. In the present-day context much of this may seem

ordinary, but in the context of a young woman thrust into public service at such a young age and in the mid-1900s, it is extraordinary. She was extraordinary, Mr. Speaker.

For 70 years Queen Elizabeth's smile warmed our hearts. Her compassion touched our homes, her words gave hope to even the darkest of situations, and her elegance gave a generation of young girls a standard to look up to. She brought the Crown out of Buckingham Palace and into our living rooms and connected millions of citizens around the world in a way that only she could. So many of us, myself included and many that we've heard in the House today, felt as though we knew her, as though we had a personal, albeit undeserved, relationship with her. Known for her wit and for always being one of the most well-researched and well-educated conversationalists in the room, Queen Elizabeth II grew to become not simply our figurehead but our head of state and not just a title that she was bestowed but one that she earned.

Over 70 years on the throne Queen Elizabeth II upheld the Crown uncompromisingly, always putting the institution, our values, our traditions, our customs, and the preservation of our way of life ahead of herself and her family, no matter the personal cost. Duty was the highest priority in her life, second only to her love of Jesus Christ. That she met with Britain's new Prime Minister in the final 48 hours of her life is the most beautiful and perfect exemplification of her constant, lifelong, unwavering commitment to the higher purpose for which she was called. Having such a figure of grace and stability as our sovereign is something that many of us as Canadians may have taken for granted over the years. The beauty of the institution that is the Crown is that our people and our democratic institutions are silently bound by respect for our history, a loyalty to our nation, and a duty to uphold a common foundation of morality.

The Crown is not just the head of state; it is synonymously the head of church, which, although largely symbolic to this day, quietly instills in our governments, our justice system, and us a basic set of principles that are not often so found in the American republic, which is guided by the politics and populism of the day. The Crown transcends politics, allowing us quietly, perhaps even subconsciously, the freedom to govern ourselves by justice and virtue rather than by public approval.

2:50

We may not always realize it, but under Queen Elizabeth II's grace and discipline the Crown profoundly bound us to one another through a love and a recognition for who we are and where we come from. Her Majesty's passing is now an opportunity for us to reflect not only on the woman who was but on the importance of renewing our respect for the unifying influence of the institution that gave our country life.

While the face of the monarchy has changed, the tenets of what it represents have not. My mother and I recently went to Britain in June to celebrate Her Majesty's platinum jubilee, her 70th anniversary on the throne. We woke up at 4 a.m. to camp out at the parade route. We joined the thousands of people in the streets to watch the air flyby. We attended her famous horse derby. At the time it seemed like a moment in history that we went to celebrate and be a part of, but looking back, it almost feels serendipitous that we chose to be there that day. Mr. Speaker, it's with immense sadness that we say goodbye to Queen Elizabeth II. Our world will unquestionably never be the same because of her, but it is also unquestionably a much better place because of her.

Upon her visit to Alberta in 2005, while addressing this Chamber, Queen Elizabeth referred to our province as a land where "freedom reigned" and where "great opportunities" lie ahead. Well, Mr. Speaker, I haven't been to heaven myself, but I certainly hope that

after all she sacrificed and gave this world and our Commonwealth for 70 long, dutiful years, she can now say those very same things about her forever home. During that same visit she stated that she wished for “the Crown in Canada to represent everything that is best and most admired in the Canadian ideal. I will continue to do my best to make it so during my lifetime,” she iterated. Your Majesty, you’ve done that and so much more.

God save the Queen.

Long live the King.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Strathmore.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you so much. Mr. Speaker and hon. members, I’m truly humbled. It is such a privilege to be able to speak today to honour Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Did you know that she visited Canada most out of all the Commonwealth countries, 22 times? I would like to just take a moment to thank both our Premier and the Leader of the Opposition for their wonderful speeches and stories. It’s really what regular folks like me want to hear and love to hear, those stories and the influences and impacts of those who were actually fortunate enough to have met her. I really believe it brings her closer to all of us.

She was also extremely committed to reconciliation. She honoured the painful history of our First Peoples and what they endured, and she spoke quite often about the work that remained to heal.

I rise today, like so many others of my colleagues, to honour the legacy of our departed sovereign Queen Elizabeth II. Up until last week – others have said this, but I think it bears repeating – Queen Elizabeth was the only sovereign that many Albertans and Canadians had ever known. She had been at the centre of the postwar world in a constant government and in a culture for an entire human lifetime. That consistency is something that is likely needed more now than at any point during her long reign, a steady hand, a kind word, a commitment of decency and dignity and decorum in a world where it seems like it’s coming undone.

We know that Her Majesty provided all of us with an example of a life of service and a profound commitment to our institutions. Up until her final days she fulfilled her responsibilities, including free, fair democracy. I, for one, am so honoured to be able to honour that legacy and show everyday Albertans and Canadians and globally that our government and its institutions are worthy of this respect because they put the people ahead of themselves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker and fellow members and to the people of Alberta, for the time to honour the legacy of what for me is one of the most important leaders of our last century. I would just like to end with a quote. When Queen Elizabeth began her last visit to Canada, she talked of coming home. Of course, she said that in New Zealand and Australia and many other places as well. She said: “Canadians have, by their own endeavours, built a country and society which is widely admired across the world. I am fortunate to have been witness to many of the developments and accomplishments of modern Canada.” And then she said this when she arrived in Halifax in 2010: “As Queen of Canada for nearly six decades, my pride in this country remains undimmed. Thank you again for your welcome. It is very good to be home.”

May she rest in peace.

God save the King.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North East, followed by the hon. Member for Camrose.

Mrs. Sawhney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m greatly honoured to rise today to speak on this day of remembrance. Today I wish to pay homage to Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. God rest her

soul. Her late Majesty was an unwavering presence in our lives for as long as many of us have been alive. She reigned with gracious glory for over 70 years, and it is for that very reason that her leadership and dedication to the Commonwealth will be dearly missed.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has helped shape our history in many ways. From her service in the Armed Forces in World War II to her unprecedented dedication to humanitarian efforts across the globe, Her Majesty was indeed a Queen that loved to serve people. Throughout her life Queen Elizabeth II was involved in over 600 nonprofit organizations across the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, from the British Red Cross to the Royal College of Nursing. Much of her humanitarian work centred around helping people around the world and bettering the ability for health care workers to provide such essential services.

It is estimated that the Queen raised over \$2 billion in humanitarian efforts over her course as head of state. This would make her the most charitable and influential monarch to raise money for nonprofits in the history of the monarchy. Her late Majesty’s dedication to charity work did not only assist millions of people from across the globe but also changed the narrative of what a monarch should be. In a 2012 interview with *The Guardian* chief executive of the CAF John Low summed up the Queen’s charitable work by stating that Her Majesty’s work has set an example for all of us; by giving time and money to people in need, she proved herself to be more than just a monarch but a true leader.

Just recently Her Majesty donated substantial relief to the Disasters Emergency Committee. That funding directly supported Ukrainian refugees suffering from brutal attacks by Putin’s war machine. Throughout her life she also contributed to other disaster relief efforts. Her Majesty donated to the 2015 Nepal earthquake relief and provided funding for the 2014 Ebola crisis and relief efforts for the 2019 Idai cyclone. It is clear that the Queen’s gracious and giving spirit helped so many people across the world.

Mr. Speaker, the elected officials who stand here to serve Albertans: she has set an admirable example for all of us. No matter on what side of the Chamber you stand, we are all here to represent our constituents and work towards better communities and lives for all. Queen Elizabeth’s presence and devotion to the public service will be dearly missed, so now it is up to all of us to carry the torch into the future. May we all learn from her actions, and may we all follow in her footsteps.

She was a true trailblazer for the monarchy, and her spirit of giving back will never be forgotten. While we mourn the loss of our Queen today, let us also celebrate her life, love, and dedication to the Commonwealth. May God rest her soul.

And may God save the King.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Camrose, followed by the Minister of Infrastructure.

Ms Lovely: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, in great sadness, we gather here to extend our sincerest condolences and reflect on Her late Majesty’s extraordinary life and reign. This is a period of mourning for the people of Canada, the Commonwealth, and the world. Earlier this year I had the fortune to observe a momentous occasion, Her Majesty’s platinum jubilee, which marked her 70 years of faithful service, the longest of any British monarch in history. Her unwavering fidelity and devotion to her country and the Commonwealth was acknowledged world-wide. Over the course of 70 remarkable years she presented herself with timeless decency, integrity, and grace. Her late Majesty was a beacon of

stability and leadership as she dedicated a lifetime of full-hearted duty.

3:00

Her late Majesty was an exceptional woman whose achievements and milestones serve as inspiration to women across the globe. At the young age of 25 she became only the sixth woman in British history to ascend to the throne. She has since been a driving force and one of the most influential women in the world. She dedicated selfless service to the military and trained alongside other women in the Auxiliary Territorial Service. Her wisdom and composure have contributed to her respected, admired, and wildly esteemed legacy around the world.

When I was only six years old, I wrote a letter to Queen Elizabeth. As a little girl I was captivated by Her Majesty's grace and poise. To this day I can still remember the excitement and surprise I felt when I opened a letter from the lady-in-waiting. I was over the moon. It is a memory I have and will continue to cherish, look back on fondly. Throughout her 70-year reign Her late Majesty has been an inspirational figure to many Albertans and Canadians such as myself.

Queen Elizabeth II has always kept Canada close to her heart. From 1952 to 2022 the Queen made 22 official visits to Canada, where she made sure to visit every province, territory, and coast of our vast nation. Alberta was honoured with six visits from Her late Majesty throughout her life. She toured Edmonton, Calgary, Banff, and Lake Louise, leaving Albertans with lasting memories.

She was an exemplary woman who has been with us through many hardships and exhibited care and compassion when the world needed it most. For many people she was an anchor of stability and hope and faith during unprecedented times. Her life of public service had a profound impact on a global scale, and she has touched the lives of millions. She will always be remembered for her commitment and dedication to her duty and her people. Her legacy will live on, and she will continue to be a role model for many generations to come.

It has truly been an honour to have taken my oath to the Queen and to have had the privilege to serve Albertans and Her Majesty. God save the King.

The Speaker: The hon. the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Milliken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is always an honour to rise and speak in this House. It is especially so today to speak in support of this motion, Government Motion 32. Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was an ever-present force of stability and tradition in our nation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Madam Speaker, the day was June 30, 1990, when my family and I, along with my grandpa and grandma Craig, went to Calgary to see the Queen inspect her two regiments there, of which she, the Queen, was colonel-in-chief. They were the King's Own Calgary Regiment and the Calgary Highlanders. There she presented the Calgary Highlanders with their new colours. The Highlanders, I believe, were actually the last Canadian regiment to change their colours from the Union Jack to the Canadian flag. And this, of course, was the ceremony to do just that.

My grandpa, grandpa Craig, marched in that ceremony with the King's Own Calgary Regiment, to which the reserve unit in Red Deer was attached. My grandpa remained in the reserves after World War II. He was there, I believe, as a medical officer. My grandpa actually said several times, with amazement in his voice, that the Queen walked within three feet of where he was marching.

I, however, remember sitting up in the stands at McMahon Stadium and, of course, as a 10-year-old boy, spotting and pointing out my grandpa and, of course, watching the Queen with admiration, surrounded by family at such a special event. These are great memories that I have not thought about for years, so in somewhat odd fashion I would like to take this opportunity to thank Her late Majesty for reminding me of these cherished memories of time with my family and my grandparents.

Her late Majesty, of course, again visited in 2005. I also, though, had the opportunity, as was previously mentioned – when she opened the games in Victoria in 1994, I got to see her there as well. However, I would just say that Her late Majesty's presence is felt in many ways, sometimes through personal memories and stories, such as what I shared, and then also sometimes through the buildings, roads, parks, and, of course, pathways that bear her name throughout Alberta. Albertans and their families experience and enjoy these sights every single day.

On that note, and as we heard from the Premier, our government will be honouring Her late Majesty by renaming one of the buildings here on the Legislature Grounds. The Federal Building will soon be officially recognized as Queen Elizabeth II building, and I am honoured to play a small role in that process through my ministry.

Madam Speaker, I'm not trying to speak on behalf of people, other colleagues in this Legislature, but I am certain that we all join His Majesty the King in solidarity in expressing our deepest sympathy for his loss. Her late Majesty's contributions to this province and, of course, to our nation are immeasurable, and her memory will be an eternal one.

Again, Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak, and of course God save the King.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Long: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege to say a few words today in remembrance of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The Queen and the Royal Family have always had a special place in my heart. Growing up, I was fortunate to have a grandmother who was an avid monarchist, who collected every picture, magazine, postcard, and newspaper featuring the Royal Family. So, for me, from a young age the Queen wasn't simply a symbol or a person; because of the Queen I was able to have a special connection with my grandmother as she revealed her memorabilia to me whenever I would visit.

My grandmother would actually have a birthday cake for me whenever I visited her as a child, no matter what time of the year it was or how far away my birthday was. It was sort of awkward. I remember visiting my grandparents in December at Christmastime. I have three siblings who were all born in December, yet my grandmother would have a birthday cake for me because I was somewhat special to my grandmother. I never got confirmation about why that was or why my grandmother would call me and not my siblings to wish me a happy birthday, but I do suspect that it was because I shared a birthday with Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, August 4.

You know, one of my fondest childhood memories is actually watching with my parents when the then Prince Charles and Princess Diana drove past us in a red convertible on a visit to Nova Scotia. I was five years old at the time. I was much too small and much too short to see past the massive crowds that had formed, but my dad told me that if I wanted to see Princess Diana, I would have to stand up on his shoulders. I was a little bit scared of such a thing, but he's like: the only way you can see them is if you stand on my shoulders. So he hoisted me up and I stood on his shoulders, and he

had a hold of my feet and told me to stop shaking so I wouldn't fall. Again, it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity as a small child to see the royals drive by.

Later in my life I had the opportunity to spend some time in the United Kingdom, and with my Royal Family connection just ingrained in me since a child, it was natural to be huddled by the fire on a blustery Christmas day in Scotland with a priority to watch the Queen's Christmas Day address.

When I think of Her Majesty, the one word that comes to mind above all else is "service." As we know, on her 21st birthday, when she famously declared, "My whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong," you know, those are words that we can all hope to aspire to as we serve Albertans. Her life of service did start before that, when she served in World War II as the first female member of the Royal Family to serve in uniform full-time. Over the course of her life and her reign as Queen she lived up to and exceeded her 1947 declaration of service, dedicating her life to the service of Britain, the Commonwealth, and, indeed, the world.

Throughout her life Her Majesty demonstrated her affinity for our province, visiting Alberta five times as Queen and once as Princess. Her love of our province and people is matched by the love that Albertans have for her. She personified the ideals of dignity, grace, decency, and humanity that we all strive to emulate, so for many of us she was a symbol of stability in an ever-changing and often uncertain world. For most of us she was the only monarch we ever knew.

I think that the reason that I, my grandmother, and so many around the world loved her so is because she wasn't just a Queen; in her we saw a mother, a grandmother, a sister. She played all these roles and more, not just in her own family but to us all. We can all relate to her as if she was family, and in this way she was. She will be remembered by us all for being the great Queen that she was, yes, but just as much if not more for the great person that she was.

Although her life was long and fulfilling, I know that I'm not alone in wishing it was just a little bit longer.

May Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II rest in peace and glory. Long live the King.

3:10

The Deputy Speaker: The Associate Minister of Status of Women.

Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to join my fellow Albertans and people across the Commonwealth in mourning the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Throughout her life Her Majesty provided courageous leadership and diplomacy as an exemplary female head of state to Canada and the 55 other member states of the Commonwealth. During her remarkable 70-year reign she was a constant in an ever-changing world and the only monarch that most of us have ever known.

As a child I was privileged to meet Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh as they toured my constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville on August 2, 1978. It was a special day that I will always remember. Being in awe of her natural beauty and extreme kindness, I remember that she wore an emerald green dress and a hat, which made her look very regal. I also remember that many of us were extending our hands out to her. She did not reach out to all, but she did take the time to say hello to myself and a few of my young friends.

Throughout her reign Her Majesty the Queen has been a role model for young women in leadership since her coronation at the age of 27. I take great inspiration from her as Alberta's Associate Minister of Status of Women. Her Majesty has exemplified

diplomacy, wise counsel, and unfailing public service. She has surpassed barriers and preconceived notions of what it means to be a woman in leadership throughout her entire life. On her 18th birthday in 1944 Princess Elizabeth, as she was then known, insisted upon joining the army, where she volunteered as a truck driver and mechanic during the Second World War. She provided wise counsel to 15 Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom, 13 male and two female, including the incoming U.K. Prime Minister, Liz Truss, meeting with each Prime Minister on a weekly basis to discuss state matters.

She had been the head of the world-wide Anglican Communion and the Church of England for decades before female priests and bishops were officially recognized in these churches.

In addition to being the longest serving British monarch, Her Majesty was also married for over 73 years – wow – and the greatest length of time of any British sovereign. She married her much-loved husband, Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, on November 20, 1947, and they remained devoted to each other throughout their lives. The Duke of Edinburgh passed away in April of 2021 after 73 years of marriage to Her Majesty. We can now take solace that they have been reunited.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth will always be remembered in our hearts as the epitome of the slogan made popular while she was serving in the Second World War, Keep Calm and Carry On.

Thank you, Your Majesty, for your incredible 70 years of service and devotion to Canada and the Commonwealth. We will do our best to live up to the example of servant leadership that you have provided for us all. May you rest in peace, Your Majesty.

May God bless His Majesty King Charles III and Queen Consort Camilla along with the Prince and Princess of Wales, William and Catherine, as they begin their new roles. God save the King.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is with great sadness that I stand to speak to Motion 32 today. In our Confederation of provinces we have inherited a democratic government where the power of government is established in a constitutional monarchy. As a high school teacher I would often have students who had never been taught that the portrait of Queen Elizabeth II in my classroom was not the portrait of a foreign monarch but that of the Queen of Canada. I would try and help them understand why in Canada we continue to have a monarch, the value of having the Queen as our head of state. I would point out how she and her representatives, the Governor General and Lieutenant Governors, could in a nonpartisan fashion represent the government of Canada, the provinces, and therefore all Canadians regardless of political inclination or loyalty.

The long and often proud history of our ties to Great Britain are embedded in our relationship to the Crown. I would try and help my students to understand that the Queen, while a figurehead as far as the real exercise of political power, was nonetheless a binding influence in our country, one that provided a very strong and real sense of stability in our nation, where sometimes geography and language and culture and religion could stress the bonds of unity.

I'm old enough to remember the Union Jack flying from every school and government building in this province and country. I remember Dominion Day as a child rather than Canada Day, I remember singing *God Save the Queen* in school and at Cub Scouts, and I remember burying my grandfather, a Canadian and World War II veteran, with his flag of choice draped over his coffin. That flag: the Union Jack. I always believed that while all of the political benefits of being a constitutional monarchy had merit, it was the Queen herself and the way that she acquitted herself as our monarch

that spoke the loudest as to why we should support this ancient institution in our very young country. It was her long reign, characterized by her devoted service to the Commonwealth and her subjects in Canada, that made her more than just our monarch but someone that we loved and could admire.

For this Canadian, I found it almost impossible to comprehend how she crafted an ancient institution based on a power imbalance of monarch and subject into a modern, dynamic institution based on a servant-leadership relationship with her government and her people. With every visit to Canada she showed us that we could be proud of her and the institution that she represented. We were a monarchy. With every visit to Canada and to Alberta and, indeed, to this very Chamber, she reminded us of her grace and dignity as our monarch and her very real humanity. With every walkabout, with every flash of wit, with every visit to a farm or every time she opened up a ceremony, she reminded us that underneath the long history and tradition of being a Queen, she was also a mother, a wife, a real person who also had to face the everyday struggles and disappointments that come with a long life. She was our monarch, and she was also one of us.

The Queen has passed. Her long and distinguished reign is over, but there is still comfort in being able to pay tribute to Queen Elizabeth II and then, with heartfelt gratitude, repeat what has been said before over the many years of our democratic history as a constitutional monarchy: God save the King.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others?

Mr. Toor: Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak and commemorate the life of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. My colleagues have already spoken some wonderful and heartfelt words about the Queen. I would like to use this opportunity to reflect on Her Majesty's platinum jubilee, which we just celebrated in this Chamber last June. This year Her late Majesty became the first British monarch to celebrate a platinum jubilee after 70 years of service. If you stop and think about it, 70 years is an immense amount of time. She has seen the world go through technological changes, political changes, and social changes. We celebrated her then for years of service and steady presence throughout those times of change; we celebrate her now for those same reasons and the life she lived.

She celebrated her silver jubilee in 1977 and golden jubilee in 2002. It was during her golden jubilee celebrations that she made it clear that she was the sovereign for all her people and for our different religions. This shows that God's love stands the equal measures to the whole of humanity. It is a resonant echo of Sikh teachings, that shows the important commonalities between our different faiths. Dedication to duty and respecting others are the fundamental values of the Sikh community.

3:20

She made everyone she met feel comfortable and respected. She was beloved throughout the world, and that was certainly the case right here in Canada and Alberta. She visited our beautiful province six times, five times as the Queen and once as a princess. She even honoured this very Chamber with her presence in 2005, the first time a reigning monarch had visited our Legislature.

Her late Majesty was a dedicated sovereign who helped shape our history during her 70 years on the throne. She was our longest serving monarch. I hope that Albertans find some time in this mourning period to commemorate the remarkable life of Queen Elizabeth II and her long and dedicated service to the Commonwealth.

Time to rest now, Ma'am. Thank you for everything.

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

Mrs. Frey: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today with a heavy heart and with the utmost respect and reverence to remember the late Queen Elizabeth II. Growing up, I remember dreaming of princesses and royalty, like most little girls do, and because of that I developed a deep fondness for the Royal Family. Although as a little girl I had never been to the United Kingdom, I felt a sense of connection to the late Her Majesty and felt an affinity for her that I haven't ever felt for the likes of any celebrity or any public figure. Her regality was unreal to a young girl from Medicine Hat whose only crown was made of plastic, yet she was as real as anyone could be, close in our minds and hearts yet thousands of kilometres away.

It was not until I sat down to collect my thoughts today that I really understood the magnitude of what she gave of herself to us. We in this place, as public office holders and MLAs, pledged our service to Her Majesty to serve faithfully and dutifully. It's a large undertaking, a contract that must be entered into with respect for those you serve and a reverence to make decisions prudently. I took that oath in 2019 at the age of 25. In contrast, at just 25 years old Her Majesty took on a duty that not even she expected to take, the consequences of which not one of us could ever fathom. She pledged her life and all she was and was to become in service to us for 70 years.

In a touching tribute by the Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson she was referred to as a changeless human reference point, and I think that sums her up quite well. Through global chaos, turmoil, changes in government, changes in lifestyle, politics, fashion, and everything else in between she was constant. She remained in her perfect way the picture of elegance, a personification of grace, and an embodiment almost of omnipotence, one that I fear our world will never see again.

What is truly astounding is that in all of this pomp and circumstance, in her regality and effervescence, she maintained a sense of relatability with even the least of those that she served. On the day of her passing, snippets of her sense of humour and wit were shared across social media platforms. Whether it was jumping out of a helicopter with James Bond or cutting a cake with a sword or sharing a marmalade sandwich with Paddington Bear – that one always seems to get me – with seemingly small trivial endeavours in the grand picture of her reign she endeared herself to us all.

Her stable and enduring presence was a testament to her deep and abiding faith. One of my more favourite quotes from the late Her Majesty is when she said: "Each day is a new beginning. I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give [the] best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God." I believe that all of us, Christian or not, can relate to that and uphold those values.

As we reflect on the life and reign of Her Majesty and welcome in a new era with King Charles III, we do so with the knowledge that her remarkable life of public service and dedication to country has left an impact. As the longest reigning monarch, Canada's Queen, my Queen, we are learning the lesson that she so elegantly taught us: grief truly is the price that we pay for love.

May God bless the Royal Family at this time, bring comfort to all she served, and may God save the King. Long live the King.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others to speak to Government Motion 32? The hon. Minister of Education.

Member LaGrange: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What do you say to honour someone who has given so much to her country, to the Commonwealth, and to the whole world? A life of self-service

and sacrifice should always be remembered. Queen Elizabeth II was a role model to so many. As a woman of faith, integrity, and quiet dignity she was a steadfast leader. I trust that much will be written and said about such a noteworthy person, but for now I just want to say: thank you, oh good and faithful servant of the people. May you rest in peace, and may God bless your son the King.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Are there others?

Seeing none, I am prepared to call the question.

[Government Motion 32 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. the Government House Leader.

Mr. Jason Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, absolutely, that deserved a round of applause. I'm sorry I interrupted that. Go ahead. [applause]

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, through you to all members of the Assembly from all parties for taking the time today to come back to Edmonton. This was a very historical moment, and I appreciate everybody's efforts. I hope you all travel back safely to your constituencies. As such, I will move that the Legislative Assembly adjourn until Monday, October 31, 2022.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:27 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 30th Legislature - 3rd Session (2022)

Activity to Thursday, September 15, 2022

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

* An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at 780.427.2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter number until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

Bill 1 — Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Recognition Act (\$) (Kenney)

First Reading — 4 (*Feb. 22, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 94-97 (*Mar. 7, 2022 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 140-44 (*Mar. 10, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 230-34 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cQ-0.7]

Bill 2 — Financial Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 312-19 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft.*), 391-95 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve.*), 484-90 (*Mar. 29, 2022 aft.*), 565-71 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve.*), 599-604 (*Apr. 19, 2022 morn.*), 661 (*Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 699-707 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 715-24 (*Apr. 20, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2022 c4]

Bill 3 — Special Days Act (Orr)

First Reading — 124 (*Mar. 9, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 327 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve.*), 343-45 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve.*), 346 (*Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 375-78 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 379 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 389-91 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; SA 2022 cS-16.3]

Bill 4 — Municipal Government (Face Mask and Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination Bylaws) Amendment Act, 2022 (McIver)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 163-77 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft.*), 360-66 (*Mar. 23, 2022 aft.*), 396 (*Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 519-23 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 571-79 (*Mar. 30, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force April 21, 2022; SA 2022 c5]

Bill 5 — Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2022 (Sawhney)

First Reading — 202 (*Mar. 16, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 319-26 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft.*), 469-71 (*Mar. 28, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 523-24 (*Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 537-43 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — 767 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 c6]

Bill 6 — Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2022 (Orr)

First Reading — 228 (Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 502-505 (Mar. 29, 2022 aft.), 513-14 (Mar. 29, 2022 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole — 562-65 (Mar. 30, 2022 eve., passed)
Third Reading — 594-98 (Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed)
Royal Assent — 767 (Apr. 21, 2022 aft.) [Comes into force April 21, 2022; SA 2022 c3]

Bill 7 — Appropriation Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 272-73 (Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed)
Second Reading — 310-11 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft.), 327-36 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve.), 345 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole — 366-75 (Mar. 23, 2022 aft.), (Mar. 23, 2022 eve.), 395 (Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division)
Third Reading — 411-14 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft.), 419 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent — (Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; c1]

Bill 8 — Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2022 (\$) (Toews)

First Reading — 297 (Mar. 21, 2022 eve., passed)
Second Reading — 311-12 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft.), 336-43 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve.), 345-46 (Mar. 22, 2022 eve., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole — 379-89 (Mar. 23, 2022 eve.), 395 (Mar. 23, 2022 eve., passed on division)
Third Reading — 414-19 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft.), 419 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed on division)
Royal Assent — (Mar. 24, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force March 24, 2022; c2]

Bill 9 — Public's Right to Know Act (Shandro)

First Reading — 309 (Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 447-54 (Mar. 28, 2022 aft.), 455-63 (Mar. 28, 2022 eve.), 643-51 (Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole — 707-13 (Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed)
Third Reading — 745-49 (Apr. 21, 2022 morn., passed)
Royal Assent — 767 (Apr. 21, 2022 aft.) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cP-47]

Bill 10 — Health Professions (Protecting Women and Girls) Amendment Act, 2022 (Aheer)

First Reading — 408 (Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 463-69 (Mar. 28, 2022 eve.), 543-50 (Mar. 30, 2022 aft.), 604-10 (Apr. 19, 2022 morn.), 661 (Apr. 19, 2022 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole — 1501-1504 (May 25, 2022 eve., passed)
Third Reading — 1507-11 (May 26, 2022 morn., passed)
Royal Assent — (May 31, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on May 31, 2022; SA 2022 c9]

Bill 11 — Continuing Care Act (Copping)

First Reading — 432 (Mar. 28, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 550-56 (Mar. 30, 2022 aft.), 634-42 (Apr. 19, 2022 aft.), 663-72 (Apr. 20, 2022 morn.), 865-71 (Apr. 26, 2022 aft.), 873-79 (Apr. 26, 2022 eve.), 891-97 (Apr. 27, 2022 morn.), 936-42 (Apr. 27, 2022 aft.), 1027-34 (May 2, 2022 eve.), 1074-82 (May 3, 2022 aft.), 1140-43 (May 4, 2022 aft.), 1300-01 (May 10, 2022 eve., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole — 1438-45 (May 24, 2022 aft.), 1447-55 (May 24, 2022 eve., passed)
Third Reading — 1461-69 (May 25, 2022 morn., passed)
Royal Assent — (May 31, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on Proclamation; SA 2022 cC-26.7]

Bill 12 — Trustee Act (Shandro)

First Reading — 483 (Mar. 29, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 651-61 (Apr. 19, 2022 eve.), 749-54 (Apr. 21, 2022 morn., passed)
Committee of the Whole — 858-65 (Apr. 26, 2022 aft., passed)
Third Reading — 903-09 (Apr. 27, 2022 morn.), 988-90 (Apr. 28, 2022 aft., passed)
Royal Assent — (Apr. 29, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cT-8.1]

Bill 13 — Financial Innovation Act (Toews)

First Reading — 535 (Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed)
Second Reading — 624-33 (Apr. 19, 2022 aft.), 724-27 (Apr. 20, 2022 eve.), 807 (Apr. 25, 2022 eve.), 850-58 (Apr. 26, 2022 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole — 925-36 (Apr. 27, 2022 aft., passed)
Third Reading — 943-48 (Apr. 27, 2022 eve., passed)
Royal Assent — (Apr. 29, 2022 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force on proclamation; SA 2022 cF-13.2]

Bill 14* — Provincial Court (Sexual Assault Awareness Training) Amendment Act, 2022 (Issik)

First Reading — 535-36 (*Mar. 30, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 672-81 (*Apr. 20, 2022 morn.*), 727-33 (*Apr. 20, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1159-66 (*May 4, 2022 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1167-72 (*May 5, 2022 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*May 31, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on Proclamation; SA 2022 c15]

Bill 15* — Education (Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline) Amendment Act, 2022 (LaGrange)

First Reading — 592 (*Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 767-76 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft.*), 825-32 (*Apr. 26, 2022 morn.*), 884-89 (*Apr. 26, 2022 eve.*), 923-25 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1065-67 (*May 3, 2022 aft.*), 1090-95 (*May 3, 2022 eve., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1125-28 (*May 4, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*May 31, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on May 31, 2022, with exceptions; certain sections come into force on Proclamation; SA 2022 c7]

Bill 16 — Insurance Amendment Act, 2022 (Toews)

First Reading — 622 (*Apr. 19, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 807-808 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve.*), 832-37 (*Apr. 26, 2022 morn.*), 879-84 (*Apr. 26, 2022 eve.*), 897-903 (*Apr. 27, 2022 morn.*), 1034-37 (*May 2, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1067-74 (*May 3, 2022 aft., passed*)

Third Reading — 1196-99 (*May 5, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*May 31, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on May 31, 2022; SA 2022 c11]

Bill 17* — Labour Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Madu)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 968-75 (*Apr. 28, 2022 morn.*), 1128-40 (*May 4, 2022 aft., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1271-83 (*May 10, 2022 aft.*), 1334-51 (*May 11, 2022 aft., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1427-38 (*May 24, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*May 31, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on May 31, 2022, except section 2, which comes into force on July 1, 2022; SA 2022 c13]

Bill 18 — Utility Commodity Rebate Act (Nally)

First Reading — 693-94 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 735-45 (*Apr. 21, 2022 morn.*), 807 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 808-22 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 822-23 (*Apr. 25, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*Apr. 29, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force April 29, 2022; SA 2022 cU-3.5]

Bill 19 — Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2022 (Glubish)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 948-58 (*Apr. 27, 2022 eve.*), 959-68 (*Apr. 28, 2022 morn.*), 1021-27 (*May 2, 2022 eve.*), 1083-87 (*May 3, 2022 eve.*),

1180-83 (*May 5, 2022 morn.*), 1233-38 (*May 9, 2022 eve.*), 1456-59 (*May 24, 2022 eve., adjourned*)

Bill 20 — Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Shandro)

First Reading — 766 (*Apr. 21, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1087-90 (*May 3, 2022 eve.*), 1097-1105 (*May 4, 2022 morn.*), 1289-94 (*May 10, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1305-16 (*May 11, 2022 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1365-68 (*May 11, 2022 eve.*), 1371-80 (*May 12, 2022 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*May 31, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on Proclamation, except sections 3 and 5, which come into force on May 31, 2022; SA 2022 c12]

Bill 21 — Red Tape Reduction Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Fir)

First Reading — 788 (*Apr. 25, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1045-52 (*May 3, 2022 morn.*), 1152-58 (*May 4, 2022 eve.*), 1176-80 (*May 5, 2022 morn.*), 1238-44 (*May 9, 2022 eve.*),

1294-1300 (*May 10, 2022 eve.*), 1353-62 (*May 11, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1403-13 (*May 24, 2022 morn., passed*)

Third Reading — 1487-99 (*May 25, 2022 aft., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*May 31, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on various dates; SA 2022 c16]

Bill 22 — Electricity Statutes (Modernizing Alberta’s Electricity Grid) Amendment Act, 2022 (Nally)

First Reading — 922 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1039-45 (*May 3, 2022 morn.*), 1105-14 (*May 4, 2022 morn.*), 1145-52 (*May 4, 2022 eve.*), 1172-76 (*May 5, 2022 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1251-56 (*May 10, 2022 morn.*), 1283-88 (*May 10, 2022 aft.*), 1301-03 (*May 10, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 1362-65 (*May 11, 2022 eve.*), 1380-88 (*May 12, 2022 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*May 31, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on Proclamation; SA 2022 c8]

Bill 23 — Professional Governance Act (Madu)

First Reading — 1002 (*May 2, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1245-50 (*May 10, 2022 morn.*), 1316-22 (*May 11, 2022 morn.*), (*May 11, 2022 eve., passed*)

Bill 24 — Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2022 (Nixon, JJ)

First Reading — 1426 (*May 24, 2022 aft., passed*)

Second Reading — 1501 (*May 25, 2022 eve., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1504 (*May 25, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 1511-12 (*May 26, 2022 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*May 31, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on May 31, 2022, with exceptions; SA 2022 c14]

Bill 201 — Eastern Slopes Protection Act (Notley)

First Reading — 156 (*Mar. 14, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 432 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly*), 789-95 (*Apr. 25, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; not proceeded with on division*)

Bill 202 — Public Health (Transparency and Accountability) Amendment Act, 2022 (Loewen)

First Reading — 110 (*Mar. 8, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly*), 433-40 (*Mar. 28, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; proceeded with*)

Second Reading — 1211-13 (*May 9, 2022 aft., adjourned*)

Bill 203 — Technology Innovation and Alberta Venture Fund Act (Bilous)

First Reading — 228 (*Mar. 17, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 693 (*Apr. 20, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly*), 796-801 (*Apr. 25, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; not proceeded with on division*)

Bill 204 — Anti-Racism Act (Shepherd)

First Reading — 408 (*Mar. 24, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 788 (*Apr. 25, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill not proceed reported to Assembly*), 1002-1008 (*May 2, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; not proceeded with on division*)

Bill 205* — Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Mandatory Referral) Amendment Act, 2022 (Sigurdson, RJ)

First Reading — 592 (*Mar. 31, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 922 (*Apr. 27, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly*), 1008-14 (*May 2, 2022 aft., debate on concurrence motion; proceeded with on division*)

Second Reading — 1213-27 (*May 9, 2022 aft., passed on division*)

Committee of the Whole — 1470-71 (*May 25, 2022 morn., passed with amendments*)

Third Reading — 1471-73 (*May 25, 2022 morn., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*May 31, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on April 1, 2023; SA 2022 c10]

Bill 206 — Prohibiting Ownership of Agricultural Lands (Pension Plans and Trust Corporations) Act (van Dijken)

First Reading — 988 (*Apr. 28, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), (*May 11, 2022 aft., committee recommendation that Bill proceed reported to Assembly, debate on concurrence motion to take place on the next available Monday*)

Bill 207 — Traffic Safety (Tow Truck Warning Lamps) Amendment Act, 2022 (Rutherford)

First Reading — 988 (*Apr. 28, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 1400
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Bill 208 — Post-Secondary Funding Assessment Act (Eggen)

First Reading — 1486 (*May 25, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*)

Bill Pr1 — Calgary Young Men's Christian Association Amendment Act, 2022 (Jones)

First Reading — 309 (*Mar. 22, 2022 aft., passed; referred to the Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills*), 1001
(*May 2, 2022 aft., reported to Assembly; proceeded with*)

Second Reading — 1371 (*May 12, 2022 morn., passed*)

Committee of the Whole — 1455-56 (*May 24, 2022 eve., passed*)

Third Reading — 1459 (*May 24, 2022 eve., passed*)

Royal Assent — (*May 31, 2022 outside of House sitting*) [Comes into force on May 31, 2022]

Bill Pr2* — Calgary Heritage Authority Amendment Act, 2022 (Nixon, JP)

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**Alberta Hansard 2022
(30th Legislature, Third Session)
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Abbreviations

Political parties

| | |
|------|---------------------------|
| Ind. | Independent |
| NDP | New Democratic Party |
| UCP | United Conservative Party |

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The vote on the budget in the Legislative Assembly is scheduled for the evening of March 21.

Listing by date:

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| Education | Families and Communities | March 9 afternoon (3 hours) |
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Note: Main estimates for 2022-2023 were considered in
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[https://www.assembly.ab.ca/assembly-
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Note: Main estimates for 2022-2023 were considered in Resource Stewardship Committee,
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Note: Main estimates for 2022-2023 were considered in Families and Committee,
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Note: Main estimates for 2022-2023 were considered in Alberta's Economic Future Committee,
<https://www.assembly.ab.ca/assembly-business/committees/EF>

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Note: Main estimates for 2022-2023 were considered in Families and Communities Committee,
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